Performance Criticism:
An Emerging Methodology in Biblical Studies[1]

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Summary: This paper argues for the centrality of performance in the life of the early church, a point that traditional scholarship has not addressed. In light of some emerging trends, it proposes that we establish "performance criticism" as a discrete discipline to analyze the performance event as the site of interpretation, including the dynamics of performance, the influence of place and circumstance, and the experience of an audience. Performance criticism could draw upon resources from many disciplines of biblical scholarship: historical criticism, narrative criticism, reader-response criticism, rhetorical criticism, orality criticism, social science criticism, speech-act theory, discourse analysis, and ideological criticism. In turn, performance criticism has the potential to transform all these methodologies in fresh ways. Performance criticism could also draw upon the modern fields of oral interpretation of literature and theater studies. A discipline of performance criticism would enable us to construct performance scenarios of the early church. Equally important, it would inform our understanding of the meaning and rhetoric of the New Testament writings. Such a discipline might also engage the interpreter in the actual performing of texts in Greek and English. Finally, performance would breathe new life into biblical studies and into the experience of the Bible in the modern world.

Introduction

In spite of the explosion of new methodologies in biblical studies in recent decades, we are only now beginning to assess the importance of performance in the (re-)constructions of early Christianity and in our interpretations of the writings of the New Testament. Consider the following. A performance was an integral part of every early Christian experience of the compositions that now comprise the writings of the New Testament. The New Testament writings were either written "transcriptions" of oral narratives composed in performance or they were composed in writing (perhaps orally by dictation) for use in oral performance. These compositions were presented orally. Always there was a performer or storyteller. Always the performances were heard/ experienced rather than read. Always there was a communal audience. Always there was a physical location and a socio-historical circumstance that shaped the performance and the reception.[2] Frequently, perhaps more often than not, no written text was even present to the event. Why have we not given greater attention to the performance dimension of the ancient world and to the experience of biblical performances by ancient Christian audiences? The purpose of this article is to propose "performance criticism" as a research method to explore and investigate this dimension of early Christian life and literature.

When you think of the New Testament writings as performance literature—either as transcriptions of prior oral compositions or as written compositions designed for oral performance, as the ancients did, you wonder why New Testament scholars do not function

[1] I am grateful for the feedback of various members of the Bible in Ancient and Modern Media, participants in the Network of Biblical Storytellers, and several members of the Context Group:, especially Adam Bartholomew, Tom Boomershine, Richard Davis, Arthur Dewey, Joanna Dewey, John Elliott, Robert Fowler, Holly Hearon, James Maxey, Jerome Neyrey, , Phil Ruge-Jones, Whitney Shiner, and Richard Swanson.

[2] I use the word "always." Of course, there would have been a few exceptions of personal, private reading, but they are irrelevant to the point being made here.

more like musicologists or drama critics. Interpretation of music and drama is done primarily by performers and critics. Can you imagine a musicologist who does nothing but sit in libraries and study the score of a composition without ever hearing a performance of it? Would it not seem strange for interpreters of drama, including ancient Greek drama, to analyze a play apart from various interpretations of it in performance? Similarly, does it not seem odd that biblical critics interpret writings that were composed *in or for performance*—as gospels, letters, and apocalypses were—without ever experiencing performances of them and without giving some attention to the nature of the performance of these works in ancient and modern times?

When viewed this way, we realize that performance should be an important site for the interpretation of the biblical writings. Performance is the place where interpretations are expressed, interpretations are tested, and interpretations are critiqued. Theoretically, at least, this should place oral performance at the center of New Testament interpretation and make it an integral part of New Testament research. We have lost their dynamic of performance ever since the first centuries of the early church. Although other art forms have been used to express the Bible, such as painting, sculpture, and music, this has been much less the case with theater and oral interpretation.[3] As we have sought to recover the story dynamics of biblical writings in the wake of what Hans Frei called "The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative,"[4] so now we need to address the "eclipse of biblical orality."

In this essay, I wish to argue for a focus on ancient performance as an object of study and for contemporary performing as a method of research into the meaning and rhetoric of the New Testament writings. How might we rethink early Christianity with performance as an integral part of communal life in an oral culture? How might the experience of contemporary performances inform our interpretation of texts?

Gap in New Testament Studies

Until recently, the performance event has been somewhat of a blind spot in New Testament studies. Historical critics have affirmed the role of oral tradition going back to Jesus but they have not imagined the precise mode/dynamics for passing it on. Form critics have not focused on the actual proclaiming by tradents of the tradition. Genre critics have not asked how the rhetoric of a particular genre works in performance. Narrative critics have seen the role of the narrator as a feature of the written text rather than as the voice of a performer, and they have not considered multiple implied audiences. Reader-response critics have seldom dealt with the aural impact of the text's rhetoric or the phenomenon of a communal audience. Rhetorical critics have treated species of argumentation and types of proof but have done little with memorization and delivery. Orality studies have focused on the ethos of oral cultures and are only recently turning their attention to the act of performing itself. Linguistic critics have only begun to include the role of sound and the rhetorical impact of features of discourse upon hearers. Ideological criticism has not considered oral performance/audience as part of the power dynamics of the text. Gender studies have only now addressed the differing dynamics of storytelling and performance by males and females.

In some ways, the neglect of a focus on performance is understandable. How can we (re-) construct something as elusive and fleeting as an ancient performance? How could we

[3] See *Faithful Performances: The Enactment of Christian Identity in Theology and the Arts*, edited by Trevor A. Hart and Steven R. Guthrie (Ashgate, 2005)

[4] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven Yale University Press, 1984). See also Donald Juel, "The Strange Silence of the Bible," *Interpretation* 51 (1997) 5-19.

distinguish ancient from modern sensibilities in relation to performance? How could we ever overcome the language barriers and the cultural differences? How would we develop criteria to create and evaluate performances? How could we critically assess something so subjective and emotional? Besides, we have written texts in hand and we know how to interpret them; so what difference would it make in our interpretations of them that they were performed? And what could we possibly learn from modern performances of a New Testament text?

Our own cultural experience of the New Testament texts in the contemporary Western world has been private and silent reading by individuals or public reading that has fragmented the text into verses and lectionary lessons. In scholarship, we have fixed our attention on written texts so exclusively that we have not even thought about experiencing whole texts in a theater setting or listening to the Greek New Testament as a way to interpret. We have not reflected much on the holistic, communal experiences of oral performance in the early church. Seldom do we interpreters consider doing a performance ourselves as an act of interpretation. But now, fortunately, we have begun to turn our attention to the phenomenon of performance in an oral culture and to the experience of the texts in performance.

Emerging Discipline.

Performance criticism is an emerging discipline. The methodology was first explored and has been kept alive for several decades by the section in the Society of Biblical Literature on "The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media," which led to many sessions that either sponsored performances or dealt with the dynamics of performance in an oral culture. These sessions also resulted in the production of several *Semeia* volumes on orality, each of which includes some treatment of performance. Scholars of the Gospels and Pauline writings have begun to talk about hearers rather than readers and to identify oral features of the narratives and the letters—scholars such as Thomas Boomershine,[5] Joanna Dewey,[6] and Elizabeth Malbon.[7] B. B. Scott and Margaret Dean made a "sound map" of the Sermon on the Mount to chart repetitions and rhythms in the Greek sounds.[8] John Harvey has identified oral patterning in Paul's letters.[9] Pieter Botha has written several seminal articles on the role of oral performance in the early church.[10] Richard Horsley has interpreted Q (along with Jonathan Draper) and

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[5] Thomas Boomershine "Peter's Denial as Polemic or Confession: The Implication of Media Theory for Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 39: 47-68.

[6] Joanna Dewey "Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark," *Interpretation* 43 (1989) 32-44; "Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecasts and Echoes for a Listening Audience," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53 (1991) 221-231; "Mark as Oral Narrative: Structures as Clues to Understanding," *Sewanee Theological Review* 36 (1992) 45-56; and "The Gospel of Mark as an Oral-Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation," in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament*, edited by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar McKnight (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 145-161.

[7] Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Echoes and Foreshadowing in Mark 4-8: Reading and Rereading," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (1993) 211-230.

[8] Bernard Brandon Scott and Margaret Dean. "A Sound Map of the Sermon on the Mount," *SBL Seminar Papers*. 672-725. See also Margaret Dean "The Grammar of Sound in Greek Texts: Towards a Method of Mapping the Echoes of Speech in Writing," *Australian Biblical Review* 44 (1996) 53-70.

[9] John D. Harvey, *Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998). See also Davis, Casey. *Oral Biblical Criticism: The Influence of the Principles of Orality on the Literary Structures of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*. JSNTSS 172. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,)

[10] See, for example, Pieter Botha "Mark's Story as Oral Traditional Literature: Rethinking the Transmission of Some Traditions about Jesus," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 47 (1991) 304-331; "Paul and Gossip: A Social Mechanism in Early Christian Communities," *Neotestamentica* 32 (12998) 267-288; and "The Verbal Art of the Pauline Letters: Rhetoric, Performance and Presence." In *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992*

Mark in the context of an oral culture.[11] Whitney Shiner's book, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, has made a breakthrough in seeking to construct ancient performance scenarios of the Gospel of Mark from a plethora of Greco-Roman sources.[12] Antoinette Wire and Holly Hearon have explored the patterns of informal storytelling of women in the Jewish and emerging Christian communities.[13] Other resources could be mentioned (see attached bibliography). In addition, each year, a handful of papers at the SBL annual convention deal with orality and with performance features of biblical texts. Recent conferences have dealt with the role that performance plays in social memory. In terms of contemporary performances, there are now videotapes for viewing in English oral performances of some writings of the New Testament.

My own journey in this emerging discipline of performance criticism has primarily involved translating, memorizing, and performing biblical works before live audiences. To be sure, I have done the performing with English translations. Nevertheless, the experience has enabled me to perform for audiences of various kinds and has gotten me in touch in an immediate way with distinctive interpretive and rhetorical dimensions of various New Testament texts. My performances have included the Gospel of Mark, the Sermon on the Mount, selections of Jesus' teaching on wealth and poverty from Luke, scenes from John, Paul's Letter to the Galatians, Philemon, the Letter of James, I Peter, and the Book of Revelation.

The experience of translating, memorizing, and performing these works has placed me in a fresh medium, an entirely different relationship with these texts than that of a silent reader and even quite distinct from the experience of hearers in an audience.[14] By taking on the persona/voice of the narrator or speaker in a text, I enter the world of the text, grasp it as a whole, reveal this world progressively in a temporal sequence, attend to every detail, and gain an immediate experience of its rhetoric as a performer seeking to have an impact on an audience. I have gotten in touch with the emotive and kinetic dimensions of the text in ways I would not otherwise have been aware. As I practice performance, the words come off the page and become sounds in my inner hearing before I speak. Eventually, I am no longer see words on a page or hear sounds in my head. Rather, I imagine the scenes in my mind and I tell/show what I "see/hear" to a living audience before me. My students who learn texts for performance also speak of the enlivening of their imagination, a new capacity to identify with the different characters, and a fresh sense of the emotive dimensions of the text.

The audiences of these performances are also experiencing the text in a fresh medium. When I perform in contemporary settings, people speak of a second naivete, as though they were experiencing the story or letter for the first time. They comment on the new insights

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Heidelberg Conference, edited by Stanley Porter and T. H. Olbricht (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 409-428.

[11] Horsley, Richard with Jonathan Draper. *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999, and Horsley, Richard. *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Story* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

[12] Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003.

[13] Wire, Antoinette. *Holy Lives, Holy Deaths: A Close Hearing of Early Jewish Storytellers*. Leiden: Brill, 2002. Hearon, Holly E. *The Mary Magdalene Tradition: Witness and Counter-Witness in Early Christian Communities*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004.

[14] For further personal reflections on this process, see Rhoads, David. "Performing the Gospel of Mark," in *Body and Bible: Interpreting and Experiencing Biblical Narratives*, edited by Bjorn Krondorfer (Philadelphia: Trinity International Press, 1992) 102-119. Republished in David Rhoads, *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) 176-201.

that come from hearing in contrast to reading, how unique it is to experience the whole story/letter at one sitting, how they get drawn into the world of the story, and how the story/letter/apocalypse impacts them in new ways. There emerges a relationship between performer and audience that assists in the act of interpretation. I have gotten many insights into texts by attending to the responses of these audiences—both during performances and also in discussion afterward. In this way, performing and hearing have become major tools of research for me in the study of the New Testament. They have become the primary means by which I come to interpret the meaning and rhetoric of a text.

The challenge of performance criticism is to draw these and other strands together to form a coherent discipline that is able to give a comprehensive account of the oral dynamics of performance events in the early church. To understand performance, however, we need to see it in its context of an oral culture.

Oral Culture as Context for Performance

Manuscripts may have been essential for the spread of Christianity, but, in contrast to our general perception, manuscripts of Christian writings were absolutely *not central* to the experience of the early church. Rather, performances were central to the life of the early church, while texts as such were peripheral. I am defining performance in the broadest sense here as any oral telling/retelling of a brief or lengthy tradition in a formal or informal context by trained or untrained performers—on the assumption that every telling is a lively recounting of that tradition. In order to grasp the centrality of such performances, we need to reflect on the first century as an oral culture.

Scholars seem to be in agreement that the first century Mediterranean world was basically comprised of oral cultures. So what do we know about oral cultures in general that would assist us in understanding this first century context?[15] In societies in which there was an extensive class of peasants (and no middle class), very few people could read or write. For almost everyone, speaking and hearing and observation were the primary media of interaction. Education that involved reading and writing was available almost exclusively to elites, and writing materials were scarce and expensive. In the Roman world, as little as five to eight percent of the people (and perhaps less) were able to read; a much smaller percent were able to write; and even fewer could do either with facility.[16]

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[15] On oral cultures in general, see David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Random House, 1996); Ruth Finnegan, Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); John Miles Foley, editor. Oral Traditional Literature: Festschrift for Alfred Bates Lord (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1981); J. Goody, The Interface Between the Written and the Oral. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987; Susan Niditch, Oral World and Written Word. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996); and Walter Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (London: Routledge, 1988).

[16] Meir Bar-Ilan, "Illiteracy in the land of Israel in the First Centuries C. E." In *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*. Volume 2. Edited by Simcha Fishbane and Stuart Schoenfeld with Alain Goldschla(e)ger. (Hoboken, NJ: KYAV, 1992) 46-61l; Pieter Botha, "Greco-Roman Literacy as Setting for New Testament Writings," *Neotestamentica* 26 (1992) 195-215; A. K. Bowman and G. Woolf, editors. *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Susan Cole, "Could Greek Women Read and Write?" in H. P. Foley, editor, *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1981); Joanna Dewey, editor. "Orality and Textuality in Early Christian Literature," *Semeia* 65 (1995); Harry Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995; William Harris, *Ancient Literacy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986; Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000)

Walter Ong argues that in order to conceptualize such an oral culture, we have to envision a world very different from our print culture. Without entering into the obvious complexities of actual cultures, the following features reflect a profile of the overall dynamics of an oral culture. An oral culture is a world in which sound is the overwhelmingly predominant medium. Everything that one learns and passes on is done in the context of conversation in a situation. Communication in traditional cultures of orality is therefore relational, because it occurs in interaction between people. Sustained thinking takes place in conversation. Because speech is relational, the interaction is empathetic and participatory. Speech can bind groups together. Oral societies are collectivist cultures in which the focus is on group identity and on individuals only in so far as they are embedded in groups and situations. The values and beliefs that are shared are formed and maintained by the community in interaction with each other. Intelligence and ethics are not abstract but oriented to concrete situational and operational frames of reference like crafts, practices, and rituals. People learn by observation and by apprenticing in specific contexts. The focus of people is public/social and outward toward others rather than private and introspective. Speech is experienced as an event that is dynamic and operational. Speech, particularly rhetorical speech, is often agonistic, because it regularly occurs in contexts in which there is an in-group and an out-group.

In oral cultures, what is "known" is primarily what is shared and remembered by the community through social interaction. Skilled/ experienced performers are the primary tradents of this socially-shared memory, with diverse styles of performance being expressed among both men and women. Such tradents are faithful to the past (retentive) and fluid in the retelling (inventive). Preserving social memory is an important means to generate and sustain community. To facilitate the social memory, it is important to create powerful speech that is memorable—resulting commonly in such forms of speech as proverbs, stories, repetitions, alliterations, contrasts, epithets, and formulas. These features of an oral culture provide a context in which to interpret the New Testament writings as performances.

When we seek to imagine performances in oral cultures, we moderns need to shift our thinking from written to oral, from private to public, from "public readers" to performers, from silent readers to hearers/ audience, from individual to communal, and from manuscript transmission to oral transmission. In an oral culture, stories, rhetorical speeches, and letters were composed in or for oral/aural events, most often in mental preparation for performance and in the course of performance itself—as music is composed and revised "by ear." The New Testament writings are transcriptions/ transpositions of such oral utterances into writing, a written accounting of one of many performances of an oral composition given over time.[17] As transpositions to writing, they were employed not to replace orality with literacy but to enhance orality. The writing of gospels and letters stimulated oral composition, served social memory, and enabled oral compositions to spread more easily from one geographical location to another. Hence, the early church experienced their traditions as part of their oral world, and manuscripts themselves were peripheral rather than central to the life of the early church. For us, manuscripts are like the few archaeological fragments that remain from an oral culture, fossil imprints of what were once flesh and blood performances.[18]

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[17] The word "transcription" (as an exact repetition of the oral) is somewhat misleading insofar as the scribe doing the transcriptions would most likely have put their own stamp on the composition, just as the performers did. To convey this dynamic, I have also used the word "transposition."

[18] I owe this analogy to Dennis Dewey from a paper he delivered at the Symposium on Memory and Culture at Rice University, 2003.

Ancient Palestine has been called a "manuscript culture" or a "scribal culture." But this epithet is thoroughly misleading—as if the culture were characterized primarily by manuscripts and scribes. On the contrary, ancient Palestine was a *traditional oral culture* in which there were some scribes and a limited number of manuscripts that primarily served the dynamics of orality. This is not to deny that the presence of manuscripts made a difference. Once manuscripts become a factor in performance, the dynamics change. Scholars are still assessing the complex dynamics of the impact of written texts in a primary oral culture.[19] Nevertheless, in regard to performances in a primary oral culture, manuscripts as such were of limited help, because they were so difficult to read (with no spaces between words, no punctuation, and no lower case/upper case distinctions). Some practicing performers may have read aloud in private in order to fix the contents of a manuscript in memory for public oral performance. When performers would then "read" a manuscript in public before an audience, they would be doing so under adverse circumstances, usually in low light. Because of the nature of manuscripts, the performers would, for all intent and purpose, need to have the contents memorized ahead of time. Straight reading in public, therefore, would have been somewhat awkward and not very effective rhetorically. It is probable that the term for "public readers" in the New Testament actually referred to performers who had a written text before them but who did not depend upon it as public readers might do today.

In fact, it is likely that most public performances were not dependent on manuscripts at all. Performers would have composed short and lengthy pieces of tradition in the course of preparing and telling, much as contemporary stand-up comedians prepare their material by ear as a means to get just the right sound, to formulate precisely the most effective wording, and to perfect their timing. Comedians prepare for lengthy televised monologues by practicing their material first before many diverse audiences in nightclubs and other venues. Ancient performers composed and recomposed their material in the context of numerous performances before diverse audiences and in the context of differing social circumstances.

Performers who made use of a manuscript would not have memorized the written text as though it were a modern theater script to be mastered for performance. Rather, the performer was expected to "improvise" on the composition. Written texts were fixed and silent. By contrast, oral performances were fluid and living. That contrast may have been part of the background to Paul's saying that "the letter kills but the spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). There may be some question about how much the performer was free to improvise or needed to be faithful to the written manuscript, say, for example, with a manuscript like one of the letters of Paul. Studies of performances in living oral cultures suggest that performers composed and re-composed, shaped and reshaped, the stories *in performance*. The performers had the responsibility to put their own take on the story, fit it to the immediate audience and situation, and even adjust it to the responses of the audience in the very course of performing. At the same time, the commitment to the tradition and the polished nature of the compositions over time may have discouraged performers from recomposing freely. Nevertheless, the performance was living and changing, while the manuscript was a touchstone for the performer. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that similar fluidity existed even in the written traditions of Judaism and early Christianity and that this fluidity in written texts was the

[19] Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) and Richard Goode, "Orality and the Function of Written Texts in the World of the New Testament," paper delivered at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, 2004.

result of scribes who did not copy slavishly but who functioned like performers—recomposing the tradition as they wrote.[20]

In an oral culture, the audiences and the tradents were the primary transmitters rather than the scribes. Most people may have been able to retell the stories and letters with various capacities, whether in formal or informal contexts. Even very long narratives could be reproduced (and recomposed) orally. Trained performers who heard the compositions of others did not have to be literate to perform. Many of them quickly memorized the "frame" of a story, into which they would then add, omit, and vary details in order to make the content and its rhetoric situation-specific. People with gifts for memory and oratory stand out in such a culture and may have received training from a mentor. Just as there are people with photographic memories in print cultures, so there are people with audiographic memories in oral cultures. Some people in an oral culture are able to hear a lengthy narrative and repeat it with great faithfulness, much as some pianists and other instrumentalists are able to hear musical compositions once and reproduce them with astounding accuracy and even new flair.[21] So, the transmission and reception of the text did not go primarily from manuscript to manuscript but from audience reception to audience reception. Again, oral compositions facilitated this process of reception and transmission by including features that enhanced memory. They were episodic, redundant (with variation), additive, aggregative, genre-driven, with parallels and contrasts, chiastic patterns, plot markers, mnemonic hook words, and featuring memorable stories, proverbial sayings, and vivid analogies. The surviving transcriptions bear the vestiges of these oral performances. We are now able to identify many oral features of extant written texts. Our challenge is to figure out how they worked orally.

This picture of performance in an oral culture reinforces a conception of the social nature of tradition. Communities regularly appropriated and re-appropriated the oral compositions as their means to build, maintain, and change the identity of the community. In such a context, the spectrum of people who engaged in oral performance extended from "trained storytellers" on one end of the spectrum to folks engaged in "informal gossip" on the other end of the spectrum.[22] The traditions ranged from lengthy, formal, public performances to individual stories or clusters of stories told among family and friends. The role of storyteller could pass from person to person within a village, a group, or a family. In the early church, every early Christian was probably a performer/ storyteller in some sense at one time or another in informal contexts in which the passing of the tradition was an extemporaneous and spontaneous response to particular situations—indeed a lively interjection into ordinary conversation. Male and female kin and village folk with a knack for storytelling would be sought out by their acquaintances.

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[20] See R. F. Person, "The Ancient Israelite Scribe as Performer," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998) 601-609 and David Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[21] On memory, see Alan Baddeley *Essentials of Human Memory*. Hove: Psychological Press, 1999; Daniel Boorstin, "The Lost Art of Memory," in idem, *The Discoverers*. New York: Random House, 1983, pp 480-497; Alan Searleman and Douglas Herrmann. *Memory from a Broader Perspective*. New York.: McGraw-Hill, 1994; Francis Yates *The Art of Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966; See also books by Parry-Lord, Roselind Thomas, Ruth Finnegan, and Mary Carruthers.

[22] *On gossip in the New Testament, see On gossip, see Pieter Botha, "Paul and Gossip: A Social Mechanism in Early Christian Communities," Neotestamentica 32 (1998) 267-288 and Richard Rohrbaugh, "Gossip in the New Testament," in Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible, edited by John Pilch (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 239-259.*

Formal, public performances in synagogues and market places and houses were common, because they were the entertainment/ educational/ religious/ political occasions for gathering in the life of a community. In these contexts, there were people who were especially trained or, at least, accustomed to performing these lengthy oral compositions and to performing them well. They also seem to have been skilled at performance according to certain conventions of storytelling that made it easier for the audiences to understand what was being said. Communities/ audiences may not have stood for it any other way. In fact, it is hard to imagine the spread of Christianity without the presence of engaging and powerful performances by effective storytellers and rhetors. The apparent appeal of Apollo and the super-apostles may attest to that. On the other hand, there is a strain of performance in the New Testament that relishes the idea that ordinary people without rhetorical and storytelling skills could be vehicles for the powerful effects of the Spirit in their speech. Paul's own efforts to play down his oratorical ability surely has something to do with this phenomenon. In Corinth, his lack of oratorical display may have been deliberate (I Corinthians 2:1-5). On the other hand, he seems to have made a dramatic performance in Galatia (Galatians 3:1). What could a focus on performance as such contribute to our understanding of these dynamics?

The early Christian writings that have survived are to be seen, then, in the larger context of this oral ethos. Many scholars think that the Gospel of Mark was composed orally and then written down on some occasion in its performance life. We have to consider that Matthew and John may have been composed the same way or perhaps dictated orally to a scribe. Q may have been a (composite) oral composition that was never written down. If Matthew, Luke, and John were in fact written before they were performed, they were in any case composed not for private reading but with oral performance as the expected medium—an approach to writing that would have been the primary factor in determining style, content, and rhetoric. The writings would have served to facilitate oral performance, and in so doing may also have served to exercise some controls on the compositional liberties of the performers. We imagine that a manuscript was a means to transfer the Gospel story for oral performance in another location, although the sending of a performer may have been the primary means of spreading the stories. Furthermore, it is likely that all the Gospels and Acts were composed with the expectation that they would be performed in their entirety on each performance occasion. Nevertheless, we might well ask: Were new genres and/or new lengths of composition, new styles and fresh rhetorical strategies, accessible with the presence of writing and manuscripts?

Also, we know that the letters of Paul were composed orally by Paul and recorded by a scribe. Much thought and oral practice probably went into the preparation of these compositions. The written transcription facilitated the transmission and confirmed the composer and his message (compare, for example, Galatians 6:11 and Philemon 19). The letters were carried by hand and then delivered orally—presumably performed by heart or performed as a "reading" in a public setting before a house church or other gathering. It is likely that the emissary who delivered a Pauline letter was the one who performed it for the community. Such a person would have been familiar with the community and present when Paul composed the letter. It is also likely that Paul gave instructions to the man or woman (some suggest that Phoebe performed Romans) on how the letter was to be performed—emphases, emotions, gestures, pauses, pace, and so on. In any case, the focus was on the performer and on the performance—and not on the written text. The performer may have elaborated on the text in

light of the immediate context.[23] The community always experienced the letter in the person of the performer. That is to say, Paul sent a *person* to represent him, not primarily a letter. As an ambassador or commissioned agent of Paul, the performer reading the letter *was* (the voice of) Paul. It may even be the case that the performer sought to "personify" Paul in his delivery of the letter (or considered it an advantage not to do so, a la Corinth!), so that it was as if Paul himself were right there. We can imagine that scenario best when the letter makes a personal appeal (Philemon and Galatians 4:12-20) or when the performer is characterizing the grief or the joy (Philippians) the sadness or the sacrifice that Paul has made on behalf of the recipients (I Thessalonians and II Corinthians). Letters were then likely told or read on other subsequent occasions to the same assembly (by other performers) and (copied and) passed on to be presented orally to Christian assemblies elsewhere. There the performers may have adapted the letters/ compositions to divergent audiences in different circumstances.

The Catholic Epistles were presented orally to many congregations over a wide area, again perhaps adapted to each new situation. The authors themselves may actually have anticipated such adaptation. In the epilogue of Revelation, John's threatened curse against any change of wording in his prophecy was no doubt addressed to a situation in which performers were expected to improvise on the text at hand (Revelation 22:18-19). Most likely John's warning was ignored! And the fact that all the letters that we have in the New Testament were copied and preserved suggests that they attained widespread aural reception. Revelation may have been performed as part of a liturgical event. If so, that writing would have been repeated often in the same locations. Because the letters embedded within Revelation were directed to "seven" churches—symbolic for all congregations in Asia Minor—it is likely that Revelation was performed before many diverse audiences. Again, written texts assisted in circulation. At the same time, because of the nature of performances, all these narratives, letters, and apocalypses may just as well have circulated orally, without the aid of a text, even after they were written down..

As such, oral performances were an integral and formative part of the of the oral cultures of early Christianity and the primary medium through which early Christians received and passed on the compositions now comprising the New Testament. Thomas Boomershine has argued that it is "media anachronism" for us to interpret these texts in a written medium that is different from the oral medium in which they were first composed and performed. Ever since the work of Marshall McCluhan, we have known that the medium is part of the message, if not the message itself. Certainly, as McCluhan argued, the medium is also a "massage." Studying these texts in an exclusively written medium has shaped, limited, and no doubt distorted our understanding of them. Interpreting the New Testament writings without taking account of the dynamics of oral performance has surely led to misconceptions and misjudgments about their meaning and rhetoric. To study these texts now as oral compositions that were performed in an oral culture can potentially transform our experience of the writings of the New Testament and our picture(s) of early Christianity.

Such a medium shift will entail work in communications theory and media studies in order to clarify what happens when we make a paradigm shift from a written to an oral medium. As many have argued, there are distinctive cultural dynamics that go with different media. Also, the brain processes information and remembers it differently in different media. In an oral culture, people think with their feelings and remember with their bodies in a way that is

[23] William Doty has suggested that the letters might be notes for a performance. The tightness of the arguments in Paul's letters may count against this.

different from the visual learning associated with print. Other insights should alert us to some of the paradigm shifts we need to be aware of when we study performance in an oral culture and experience performances as means of interpretation.

So, what difference does it make to study the texts in the medium in which they were originally expressed? What difference does it make that we take performance into account when we imagine the life of the early church? What difference does it make that the New Testament texts bear vestiges of oral performance? How might we develop "scenarios of audience reception" from the portrait of oral cultures as a basis for interpreting these writings? What impact might our own contemporary efforts at performing and hearing these written texts have on our interpretation of them? In addition to these generic probes, many specific questions also present themselves. Who were these performers and storytellers? How did they read/ present/ perform/ tell these compositions? In what venues and circumstances did they perform them? Who comprised the audiences? What differing roles did women and men play in passing along the traditions? What role did social class play in the style and venue of the performance? In short, how might a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of performance impact the study of the New Testament?

Clarifying the Object of Study: The Performance Event

It will be helpful to clarify the object of study. By "performance event," I mean to designate the whole complex dynamics of a performance in the ancient (and contemporary) world, including the following components: the act of performing, the "composition-in-performance;" the performer; the audience; the social location of performer and audience; the material context, the cultural/historical circumstances, and the potential, implied impact upon the audience. I am focusing here primarily on public performances for gathered groups (either a closed Christian group or an open occasion accessible to all), but I am also to a lesser extent including informal storytelling and the lively sharing of traditions by women and men in small group conversations and family settings.

In a performance, meaning is not words on a page as understood by a reader. Rather, meaning is in the whole event at the site of performance—sounds, sights, storytelling/speech, audience reaction, shared cultural beliefs and values, social location, and historical circumstances. One purpose of performance criticism is to ask: How do all these factors contribute to a range of meanings and potential rhetorical impacts? What follows in this section are several observations about each of the key components of the performance event along with some questions for performance criticism to pursue.

The Composition-as-performance. First, the composition-as-performance is not a written text but an oral presentation. It is a living word, with a life of its own as distinct from its writing. The story is not on the page. It is in the mind and body of the performer. On the one hand, when the telling is fluid and free, the performance is not an interpretation of a written text; it is a composition in its own right—an original composition or an oral re-composition of an earlier oral version or an oral version of a written composition. Performances will differ with each re-telling because the performer is different (even if the same person), because the audience is different (even if the same people), and because the context and circumstances are different.

On the other hand, even if the performance is a close telling of a written text (say, a letter of Paul by his emissary), it still has a life of its own as a performance—because a performance is much more than the sounds of the written words. Each performance is a unique interpretation of that written text, "filled out" with tone, movement, bodily expressions, and so on. A contemporary memorized performance of a biblical text, for example, is an

interpretation, just as a commentary or a monograph is an interpretation. It is an embodied interpretation. In this scenario, the text is also off the page, and the events are in the imaginative enactment of the performer. As scholars who are also critics of performance, what categories/criteria might we develop as a basis to reflect upon and to critique performance as interpretation?

Furthermore, the contents, the genre, and the rhetoric of a composition-in-performance will shape and limit the nature of the performance. For example, from my own performing, I have learned well the influence of genre on performance. Story genres with characters make demands on performers that are different from letters performed as speeches of rhetoric. Performing the fast-paced narrative of Mark is very different from performing the lengthy teaching sections in the Gospel of Matthew, such as the Sermon on the Mount or the Woes on the Pharisees. Long narrative scenes from the Gospel of John are most like theater and lend themselves to a dialogue between two performers. The rhetorical genre of Paul's angry and passionate letter to the Galatians makes different demands on a performer than the reflective letter to the Philippians. The performance of James evokes the image of meditations by a sage who is examining gems of wisdom. The First Letter of Peter invites a tone of dissimulation as it seeks both to honor and to subvert human figures of authority. The apocalyptic genre of the Book of Revelation expresses intensely almost every emotion in the human repertoire as it excites the vivid imagination of the audience in warnings and with visions of horror and hope. The awareness of the way genre shapes performance should surely be a factor in our interpretations of these writings in first century settings. What could performance criticism learn about the ancient styles of performing as they are influenced by genre? In turn, how could performances and performance studies inform our conception of different genres and how they work? How would an understanding of genre-in-performance influence our conception of early Christian communities?

***The Performer*.** Second, the *performer* embodies the text. The performer *is* the medium that bears the potential meanings and impacts of the story upon the audience in a particular context. Every aspect of the performer's appearance, movements, and expressions are part of the story. The presenter is performing, not just telling. In this regard, it is misleading to make a contrast between "written" and "oral," because the category of "oral" is much too limited to capture the dynamics of performing, as if performances involved only speaking. It is not as if the performer is a disembodied voice that expresses only sound. It may well be that an audio recording is different from a written text, but this is not what the ancient performers were like. The performer is expressing composition in action: the movements, the gestures, the pace, the facial expressions, the postures, the movement of the mouth in forming speech, the spatial relationships of the imagined characters, the temporal development of the story in progressive events displayed on stage, and much more. The performer is acting out, that is, showing, the characters and events of the story. Or the performer is personifying the dynamics of the argument that is being presented. In addition, the performer's voice/body generates "seeing." As such, the act of hearing by the audience is in a sense also "visual," because speaking/hearing/acting stimulates the "imaginative seeing" in a vigorous way that is not replicated by silent reading or by sound alone. Consider how the author of *Revelation* wrote down what he "saw" so that the performer en-acted it in such a way that the audience would "envision" it. So we need to talk about the holistic presentation of a performance by a performer to an audience and not just the sound of the speaking. How could performance criticism develop the dynamics of "a performance" as a basis for interpretation?

The performer is doing interpretation by placing him or herself in the position of the narrator and taking on the voice/persona of the text and seeking to project the possible meaning(s) of that text. By placing oneself in that position, the exegete enters the world of the text through a fresh medium, not as silent reader, nor as audience, but as the speaker of the text. As the living medium, the interpreter becomes acutely aware of his or her bodily self and social location in ways not otherwise so apparent.

In one sense, the performer was an entertainer. Unless the performer could captivate an audience and hold its attention, the narrative and its power could be lost to them. At the same time, it was important that the audience trust the performer. It may be that the performer as a person needed to embody the values, beliefs, and actions enjoined by the story/text being performed, because the performer was seeking to have the values and beliefs of the story embodied in turn in the actions and dynamics in the communal life of the audience. That is one reason why there was a suspicion of writing in antiquity—because you could not really understand what the words meant apart from knowing the person telling them in a certain way![24] As such, an audience probably did not separate the story from a particular performer or from the social location of that performer. The early Christians had no un-embodied experience of the story. The performer, as medium, was always an integral dimension of the composition. We might well ask: Would a community trust a story apart from the integrity of the person telling it or apart from that person's authority in the community? This relationship between teller and tale may have been crucial both for informal storytellers as well as for those who performed extended narratives before a gathered audience.

In other words, unless the performer has integrity in relation to that which is being urged upon the audience, the audience will not receive the story or act on the letter being presented. Note, for example, how Paul would prefer that Timothy deliver (and therefore perform) his letter to the Philippians, although he had to settle for Epaphroditus, because Timothy was the only one who knew how to look out for the interests of others rather than of his own—which is the main theme of *Philippians*. Or imagine how incongruous it would have been for a wealthy person to perform the Letter of James. (Consider any performance by someone whose social location is radically different from the content of the composition or of the social location of the audience). Perhaps the choice of Phoebe as a female to perform Romans was a brilliant move that avoided taking sides (despite her own ethnicity) in an agonistic struggle between male Judeans and male Gentiles that might have been exacerbated by a performer who was either a male Judean or a male Gentile? Furthermore, not only integrity and social location but also knowledge gives authority to a performance. Unless the performer knows the audience—its culture and beliefs, its situation and needs—and addresses this circumstance with appropriateness, the audience will not give credence to the performance or to the contents of the performance. How can performance criticism incorporate the role of the performer into an assessment of meaning and rhetoric?

The Audience. Third, the *audience* is crucial to the meaning/impact of a performance. Meaning is negotiated between the performer, the composition, and the audience. We cannot separate audience from performance. They are in an interwoven, symbiotic relationship. A performance

[24] Alexander, Loveday. "The Living Voice: Skepticism towards the Written Word in Early Christian and in Graeco-Roman Texts." In *The Bible in Three Dimensions.* Edited by D. A. Clines (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990) 221-247; Botha, Pieter. "Living Voice and Lifeless Letters: Reserve Towards Writing in the Graeco-Roman World," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 49 (1993) 742-759; Botha, Pieter. "Mute Manuscripts: Analyzing a Neglected Aspect of Ancient Communication," *Theologia Evangelica* 23 (1990) 35-47.

does not work until the audience works it out—irony, humor, riddles, catharsis, force of an argument, and so on. As such, a performance is an interactive event. A composition is changed and a performance is shaped by the response of an audience. My own experience with performing confirms this. When the audience laughs early on, I change the way I say later lines in order to evoke this response again. What could we learn about the meaning and rhetoric of texts from potential audience responses?

A performance is shaped in part, then, by the makeup and personality of the audience. In this regard, the performance will have different meanings for different audiences. What something means in one context with one audience will have a different meaning with a different audience in a different context. We can appreciate this point when we remember that the audience is communal. Such an audience might collectively affirm or resist, cheer or jeer, stay or leave, with a variety of emotional and ideological responses to the values, beliefs, arguments, and depictions presented. We can see instances in the New Testament where members of an audience leave (John 6:60-71) and 8:59) or fall asleep (Acts 20:7-12) or threaten to kill (Luke 4:28-30; John 8:59) and where the composition reminds hearers to "Stay awake!" (Mark 13 and Revelation 16:15). In the contemporary world, we have an almost completely individualistic experience of biblical writings, because we read or study them in private. Even when do we hear them in a group, we tend to process them as individuals and not as a group. We need some communal experiences of these writings in order to understand the dynamics of "group response" to a performance. How might such a communal experience enable us to understand the ways in which performance events created and impacted early Christian communities?

The social location of the audience is, therefore, significant. This has been illustrated for me often. I could not believe how the women prisoners of a local jail grasped James' warning against the poison of the tongue. When I performed Mark to a medium security prison for men, the warning against what comes out from the heart—illegal sexual acts, theft, murder, expressions of greed, and so on—took on new significance. Proclaiming the violence in Revelation against oppressors differs radically if the makeup of the audience is part of an oppressor group or an oppressed group. The Gospel of Luke sounds very different to the poor than it does to the rich. The importance of social location to meaning and response must have been as true also of ancient audiences, especially audiences from divergent cultures—a gentile audience compared to a Judean one or an audience in Asia Minor compared to one in Palestine or Rome or an urban audience in contrast to a rural audience.

Furthermore, a single audience may be comprised of people from diverse social locations. So when we interpret a text as oral composition, we are dealing not with a single ideal reader or homogeneous audience but with multiple hearers in a communal audience from somewhat diverse social locations. As such, a performance will have different meanings and impacts to different people in the same audience. Consider how Paul's letter to Philemon affected in different ways Philemon, Onesimus, and the other members of the house church as they all experienced this letter together in a gathered community. The performance of a composition might divide an audience. Paul may have composed letters designed to have generate division with an assembled audience, as, for example, he wanted to exclude the Judaizers from Galatia (Galatians 1:6-9). And Paul may have composed letters to avoid division, particularly, for example, in Corinth and Rome. Imagine how Paul composed and then had someone perform the Corinthian correspondence so as to retain the attention and increase the commitment of people coming from different points of view and social/cultural places in

the assembly itself. The unity of this community and its loyalty to Paul's gospel were at stake in such complex rhetoric. It did not always work. Recall how Antoinette Wire re-constructed the suppressed voices of women prophets in Corinth who resisted Paul's message—because, not able to break free of his own social location, Paul did not apply the Gospel appropriately to their social location.[25] Imagining all these different letters being performed to gathered audiences that included both (or several) parties in a conflict helps to sharpen our understanding of what was at stake and what might have happened as a result of the performance. No doubt the Gospels also were composed with complex audiences in mind.

The composer or writer of every biblical work was probably well aware of the complex nature of their intended (and unintended) audiences. Certainly the performer was! I am acutely aware of the makeup of the audience when I perform. A performance is between one giver and many receivers. As such, the performer/ storyteller can imagine a range of implied audiences and may compose/perform to take account of that situation. We may do well to imagine how peasants, slaves, and elites, women and men, Pharisees Jews and Romans, as well as others in an audience would have experienced, say, Mark or I Peter—as a way of understanding their potential meanings and complex rhetoric.[26] The multi-valence of a text and its rich potential for multiple valid meanings becomes quite obvious when we consider complex and diverse audiences. How might performance criticism determine the intentional or potential polyvalence of a composition based on composite or divergent audiences?[27]

The material context. Fourth, the *material context* is important. The "place" itself makes a difference in performance. Like genre, contexts raise expectations; as such, they foster or inhibit certain audience responses. For me, it makes a difference in the audience response if I am performing in a church or a university or a theater or a prison or an open place. For example, people laugh more in secular compared to religious settings. In performing the passion narrative of Mark successively to different groups of inmates in a jail, I found myself orally retranslating the story with language they would best connect with their context—such as "bound over" for "handed over" and "perjury" for "false witness." Location must have been significant also in regard to ancient settings for performance—such as in a synagogue or at a village market place or in an ancient theater or in a house or out in an open space between villages. How might performance criticism determine ways in which the location of a performance may have contributed to its meaning and reception?

The socio-historical circumstances. Fifth, the *socio-historical circumstances* also make a difference. Imagining specific socio-historical circumstances for a performance event intensifies our understanding of "reception." For example, what danger might the Roman prisoner Paul have been inviting for the Philippians when he wrote a contra-imperial letter to a Christian community in this Roman military colony? How could performance criticism help us to imagine concrete scenarios for the audience reception of this letter in performance in the Philippian community? When I performed the Sermon on the Mount in a Latvian pulpit before the break-up of the Soviet Union (with KGB in the congregation), every word (such as "blessed are the meek" and "love your enemy") took on new meanings. Likewise, imagining the performance and audience reception of Mark's Gospel in s specific location (such as Galilee) in

[25] Antoinette Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets* ( ).

[26] Peter Oakes does an exercise with students in which he assigns a different social location to everyone and then discusses their reactions after they have heard the performance of a letter.

[27] On the issue of multiple valid meanings, see especially Charles Cosgrove, Editor, *The Meanings We Chooses: Hermeneutical Ethics, Indeterminacy, and the Conflict of Interpretations* (London: T & T Clark, 2004).

the immediate aftermath of the Roman Judean War of 66 to 70 CE. opens up new possibilities for interpreting the echoes and associations of that war resonant in the whole Gospel. When I performed the Book of Revelation after the 9/11 attack on the world trade center, the narration of merchants and sailors watching and grieving the burning of Rome portrayed in Revelation 18:9-18 took on fresh meaning and power. Judean hearers of Revelation may have had the recent burning of Jerusalem in 70 CE in mind when they were invited by the performer of Revelation to watch the burning of Rome in their imagination.

In understanding meaning and rhetoric in biblical performances in antiquity, we need to imagine differing audiences under divergent circumstances in specific locations hearing each composition in performance—persecution, conflict, oppression, war, social unrest, poverty, prosperity, and so on. True, we say the same things about the crucial importance of context for interpreting the New Testament as written documents. However, when we talk about the aural power of a composition *in performance* to diverse communal audiences in particular contexts, we are now speaking in fresh ways about echoes and associations, about a richer meaning potential of a text, and about a greater intensity and immediacy of experience.

Rhetorical effect/impact. The final factor in the dynamics of the performance event is the potential *rhetorical affect/impact* upon an audience. By rhetoric, I mean the impact of the entire composition-as-performance. In performance, there is no separating form and function, content and rhetoric, story and discourse, meaning and impact. The whole experience of performance integrates what a text means with what it does as it is embodied in the presentation received by the audience. In general, meaning has to do with ideas, beliefs and values; however, in performance, meaning is to be interpreted in terms of relationship—the performer seeking to transform an audience with a story or speech and/or impel them to action.

Here, then, we are not just talking about tradents passing on a tradition in some neutral way, because, given the nature of the New Testament texts, the rhetoric of a performance seeks to change the world, shape communities, generate something new. Hence, we need to imagine that the rhetorical impact takes place not only in the immediate responses of the audience during the performance, but also in the subsequent attitudinal, behavioral, and relational changes that may have taken place in the community as a result of the performance. The transformation that takes place in the community, in some sense, itself constitutes an interpretation! As such, with performance, we ask in fresh ways not only what a composition *means* but also what it *does* in performance What is the impact of a performance in terms of persuasion, subversion of cultural values, transformation, impulse to action, change of behavior, emotional effect, ethical commitment, intellectual insight, political perspective, formation of a community, shape of new world? Put another way, what does a story or a letter lead the audience to become—such that they are different people in the course of and as a result of experiencing the performance? Given the modern immunity to the Bible, it may be difficult to replicate such transformations in an audience as a result off its performance; so we may need to imagine the implied transformations. Performing them helps us to do this.

Also, as an oral composition in performance, *how* does it have that impact? How does the composition work to make certain consequences happen? How, for example, does John as composition-in-performance not just lead people to believe in Jesus but evoke in the audience the actual experience of eternal life? How is the audience of an oral performance led to identify with characters in a Gospel so as to accept one point of view and reject another? How is the audience addressed by the characters in the story? To grasp these power dynamics, we can reflect on the performative power of words, particularly in the Hebrew culture. Also, we

can take into account the social location of performer and audience in understanding the potential effects on an audience of a performance event.

From all these elements of the performance event, we can develop "audience scenarios" as a basis for interpretation.[28] The question for performance criticism is this: How can we find rigorous ways to analyze all these elements of the performance event together so as to transform the ways we interpret the written texts we have before us and the ways we reconfigure our image of the early church?

Methodological Approaches

There are a number of methodologies in New Testament studies that can help to bring rigor to the discipline of performance criticism and that together can offer checks and balances on interpretation. In fact, I would argue that developments in a number of disciplines are already converging into what I am here calling "performance criticism." As such, I am proposing that performance criticism stand on its own as a methodology with many partners. One might think that performance criticism should be sub-discipline of orality criticism or rhetorical criticism or narrative criticism or discourse analysis. In some sense, performance studies are a sub-discipline of these methodologies. However, precisely because performance criticism would be an eclectic discipline bringing together many different methods already present to New Testament studies as well as adding other research methods (such as oral interpretation and theater studies), therefore it would be important to treat performance criticism as a discrete discipline. Unless we bring all the insights from many methods together under one umbrella, the capacity to assess the performance event will be fragmented and limited. Performance criticism can draw on many disciplines, both within New Testament studies and from secular methodologies, and can adapt those disciplines for use in constructing scenarios of performance and in gaining fresh insights for interpretation. At the same time, performance criticism would not just be an added discipline alongside others. Rather, because performance criticism involves a paradigmatic change of medium, the study of performance may also be able to inform other disciplines and to transform their strategies, methods, and results as well.

What follows are some reflections on the contributions various disciplines can make in the development of performance criticism.

Historical Criticism. Performance critics can benefit from historical criticism as a means to recover all we can know about performers and the sites of their performance in the first century life. We may point to the role of scribes in memorizing a text and then reading it aloud, the work of rhetors in giving public speeches, the entertaining role of the rhapsodist or cantacleer or storyteller, the public role of philosophers in competing for the attention of the people in the market places, the tradents who passed on the community genealogies and stories, as well as public figures in the Jewish synagogues and sanhedrins and in the Roman senates and local tribunals. Add to this the official proclaimers to the public, the readers in synagogues, the priests and levites in the temple in Jerusalem, the priests of the imperial court at Rome, the public announcements of ambassadors or (gospel) proclaimers, and the attendants of the various temples throughout the Roman world. Furthermore, the Jewish educational system seems to have been based on reading and listening to the Torah. The Greco-Roman education was thoroughly focused on the rhetorical practice of giving speeches as a preparation for public

[28] Compare Bruce Malina'a concept of a "reading scenario" in Bruce Malina, "Reading Theory Perspective." In *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*. Edited by Jerome Neyrey. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 1991) 3-23.

life. Oral performance was an integral part of virtually every aspect of ancient life. What do we already know and what more can we learn about these figures?[29]

Historical criticism can also help to recover from ancient sources how rhapsodists (literate storytellers and poets as entertainers) and other performers may have gone about their craft of performance—where, under what circumstances, to what audiences, in what manner, and to what end. Such performances comprised ancient entertainment in the market places and the public theaters, in the houses of the wealthy and in the courts of the powerful. We can add what we know from studies of ancient theatrical performances of drama—characters, projections, audience responses, and so on. Not to be forgotten are the informal "performers" who tell stories in market places, social gatherings, and at home. And we can assess the role of gossip in the shaping and guarding of social memory and mores. We can construct plausible scenarios for the contexts, audiences, and styles of all these ancient performances.

In turn, historical criticism could benefit from a focus on performance criticism. Efforts to reconstruct the life of Jesus may benefit from attending to the performative dimension of words in the culture of Jesus and in the transmission of his words and actions in the early church.[30] Also, re-constructions of the early church—church order, worship, the spread of the gospel, and the dynamics of communal relationships—would also perhaps benefit from attending to the dynamics of performance events.

Form Criticism and Genre Criticism. We know how form and genre work to provide a standard frame for the telling and retelling of stories with variation. We also know that they aid memory. We know how form and genre serve to set up expectations for a reader so that readers know what details to look for and how to interpret them—and that expectations may then be confirmed or subverted. Because we work mostly with written medium, we tend to imagine these dynamics in a spatial way on the page. Performance criticism seeks now to ask how all these dynamics work orally in performance. This raises many questions. How, from a performer's point of view, do forms and genres aid memory? What would be the performance techniques to display a particular form or genre and to make it work? How do forms and genres raise and then subvert expectations in a temporal sequence of hearing? What would be the performance impact of a type-scene repeated with variation? How might the form or genre *be* the message/massage in an oral medium? How does the form of a healing story or a conflict story, for example, evoke emotions as a means to persuade? How does the genre of wisdom in James or an apocalypse such as Revelation *work* as a composition-in-performance to affect an audience? Might a contemporary performance be a means to test the plausibility of a proposed genre?

Narrative Criticism. Analysis of narrative can be extremely helpful once we re-configure the overall narrative from a private reading scenario into the context of a public performance event for an audience. For example, how better to understand the role of performer than through an analysis of the role of narrator—and vice-versa! First century people never knew the narrator as

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[29] Farone, C. A. *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. Reviewed by D. C. Smythe in *Helios* 30 (2003) 77-96; Hargis, Donald. "The Rapsode," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970) 388-397; Havelock, Eric. *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963); Lord, Albert Bates. *The Singer of Tales.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) 2nd edition by S. Mittchell and G. Nagy 2000; Shiner, Whitney. *Proclaiming the Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003); Renault, Mary. *The Mask of Apollo* (New York: Random House, 1966); Renault, Mary. *The Praise Singer* (New York: Random House, 1978)

[30] See Werner Kelber, "Orality, Scribality, and Oral-Scribal Interface, Jesus-Tradition-Gospels: Review and Present State of Research," Paper presented at SNTS, Halle, 2005.

a feature of the text. The narrator was always the flesh and blood performer. Furthermore, understanding plot, characters, and settings is crucial for performance. The performer is seeking to develop suspense, to get the audience to identify with certain characters and to distance themselves from others, to show the gradual escalation of conflicts, and to emphasize turning points and climactic events. How does all this work in an oral performance scenario? Also, it makes a difference when we think of forecasts and echoes in the aural mode rather than the literary, print categories of foreshadowing and retrospection. The type scenes, verbal threads, patterns of repetition, parables, pithy sayings, and other so-called "literary" devices take on new significance when experienced as features of oral discourse. Experienced as oral performance, the narrative is more like a fugue. How would such a change of medium affect our interpretations?

Through narrative criticism reconceived, then, we could develop comprehensive interpretations of a narrative for performance. In my own performing of Mark, an overall interpretation of Mark informs the way I understand and deliver every line in temporal sequence, taking account of what the audience knows and when they know it. Such a partnership with narrative criticism works in two ways. Understanding the narrative gives clues as to how performances might be carried out. In turn, the act of performance is a key means to interpret the meaning and rhetoric of the narrative (see below). Furthermore, diverse narrative interpretations could be tested for their cogency and power through actual performances. And we may decide that some of our interpretations simply cannot be performed.

Reader-Response Criticism. Once we reconfigure reader-response criticism as audience-response criticism, this methodology can be crucial in determining more precisely the ways a composition-as-performance works to have an impact upon an audience. Because the writings were composed to be performed, they yield clues and suggestions for performance: descriptions of how people cried out or screamed, when people were amazed or confused, when they gestured by kneeling or beating their breast or when they lay hands on someone, when they wept or repented or looked at someone intently. All these may be taken as "stage directions" for the performer to modulate the voice, act out a gesture, or express an emotion. Add to this the nuances of speech suggested by sarcasm or irony or rhetorical questions or commands or appeals—the many aspects of "the rhetoric of indirection."[31] Length of sentences and number of clauses can imply direction for performance. And, in contrast to seeing quotations from the "writings" as inter-"textual" allusions, audience response criticism could suggest how aural echoes of Israel's stories and traditions worked for performers and audiences.[32]

Performance criticism could recover all the clues for performance available in a text. In turn, the responses of actual audiences may lead us to notice aspects of the texts and deal with nuances of interpretation that silent, private readers are likely to miss. For example, when I performed the Markan passion narrative at a county jail, an inmate led me to reinterpret the rhetorical impact of the dialogue between Jesus and the High Priest by asking (rather urgently) if the high priest (the judge) ever found out that Jesus (the supposed criminal) was really innocent!

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[31] Robert Fowler, "'Let the Reader Understand:' Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark" (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

[32] For a treatment of such echoes of Israel's history in the Gospel of Mark and how they can evoke comprehensive images and scenarios, see Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) and Alberto de Mingo Kaminouchi, *"But It Is Not So Among You": Echoes of Power in Mark 10:32-45* (London: T& T Clark International, 2003).

Rhetorical Criticism. Rhetorical criticism of the writings in the New Testament would be a key facet of performance criticism.[33] After all, we have now fairly conclusively determined that each letter had embedded in it a speech that reflected the structures, stylistic techniques, and modes of discourse of ancient classical rhetoric.[34] Other writings, including some narratives, also bear features of classical rhetoric.[35] Did the performers, particularly performers who were not from among the elites, know the classical conventions for learning and performing?

It is difficult to know how much of the classical rhetoric filtered down to the popular level. There were three species of rhetoric: deliberative (persuading/dissuading); forensic (defending/accusing); and epideictic (praising and blaming). These species are often mixed in any given composition. There were five main areas to classical rhetorical criticism: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. There were also steps to develop a rhetorical speech. Most attention has been given to identification of species and to the arrangement of the argument in the letters, with less attention given to argumentation (ethos, pathos, and logos) and style. It will be helpful to distinguish between the classical rhetoric in the education of elites and the more popular styles of rhetoric for those with less (formal) education. All of these dynamics are crucial for shaping the performance of these speech-letters. In turn, the experience of actual performances of these letter-speeches, even in contemporary languages, could greatly transform the current discipline of rhetorical criticism. How can we make good judgments about these speeches apart from the oral medium for which they were composed?

Until recently, there has been almost no attention given to memorization and delivery or to the implied rhetorical impact of the letters upon an audience. What clues are there in the written text to suggest the process of memorization? Did performances vary less with speeches and letters than with narratives? What features of speeches are stage directions for performance? Did performers personify arguments and emotions? What gestures did they use to express certain emotions?[36] What can we learn about a letter by performing it? When I memorized Galatians for performance, I chose to adapt for performance the translation of Hans

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[33] On rhetorical criticism in general, see J. Hall and R. Bond. "Performative Elements in Cicero's Orations: An Experimental Approach," *Prudentia* 34 (20020 187-228; George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) and *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980. On performative aspects, see J. Hall and R. Bond. "Performative Elements in Cicero's Orations: An Experimental Approach," *Prudentia* 34 (20020 187-228; Olbricht, Thomas. "Delivery and Memory," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period—330 B. C. to A. D. 400*. Edited by Stanley Porter. Leiden: Brill, 2001. Full bibliographical resources can be found in Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003).

[34] Stanley Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) and M. L. Stirewalt, *Paul the Letter Writer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

[35] Vernon Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, PA, Trinity International, 1996).

[36] There is considerable information about gestures from rhetorical handbooks and from art. See Gregory Aldrete, *Gesture and Acclamations in Ancient Rome*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999; Alan J. Boegehold, *When Gesture Was Expected: A Selection of Examples from Archaic and Classical Greek Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999; Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, editors. *A Cultural History of Gesture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992; Anthony Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Roman*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. http://pub.princeton.edu/titles/7681.htm/; J. Hall, "Cicero and Quintilian on the Oratorical Use of Hand Gestures," *Classical Quarterly* 54 (2004) 143-160. On the New Testament, see Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003) and Botha, J. E. "Exploring Gesture and Non-Verbal Communication in the Bible and in the Ancient World: Some Initial Observations," *Neotestamentica* 30 (1996) 253-266.

Dieter Betz in his Hermeneia Commentary on Galatians.[37] After all, this was the foundational work on rhetorical criticism in New Testament studies, and the translation reflects the rhetorical analysis. I had occasion to tell Betz at one point that I had memorized his translation (with modifications) for performance, and I asked him if he had thought about the oral impact of performance when he made his translation. He said it had not occurred to him at the time. In a way, given our preference for print, this is not surprising. In another sense it is astounding to think that we would analyze letter-speeches without ever hearing or performing them. Years later, Betz heard my performance and was very appreciative, and he was persuaded that the performance confirmed his interpretation. Recently, when I performed I Peter for a group of colleagues, John Kloppenborg noted that it was much easier to grasp the rhetorical organization and developing argument of the letter in performance than in print. How can we do rhetorical analysis without experiencing and reflecting on the potential performance of a letter? Or without performing it ourselves?

Ancient rhetorical handbooks and other ancient writings contain descriptions and directions for memorization and performance. In *Proclaiming the Gospel*, Whitney Shiner has gleaned from ancient sources a vast amount of information on the nature of performances: shouting, whispering, tearing the hair, beating the breast, crying, laughing, gesticulating in every manner. He then explicated specific passages in Mark in terms of the possible scenarios for performance. In so doing, he illustrated graphically that ancient speeches and storytelling were anything but sedate. Intensity was perhaps the main feature of ancient rhetoric. His book has shown the possibilities for constructing some ancient performances by correlating conventions of performance gleaned from handbooks and from clues within the texts themselves about the way these stories/ speeches may have been performed.

Orality Criticism. Orality criticism has been one of the most exciting developments in biblical studies. Orality critics seek to understand from oral cultures, ancient and modern, the ethos of orality, the relation of writing to culture, the responsibilities and practices of tradents, the dynamics of social memory, the power dimensions of oral communication, and the gender dimensions of orality.[38] This study of living cultures leads to a study of oral culture in antiquity—both Greco-Roman[39] and Jewish.[40] Now there seems also to be a special focus on

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[37] H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

[38] Farrell, Thomas. "An Overview of Walter Ong's Work." In *Media, Consciousness, and Culture: Exploration of Walter Ong's Work*. Edited by Bruce E. Gronbeck, Thomas J. Farrell, and Paul Soukop. Newbery Park, CA, 1991, 25-43; Foley, James Miles. *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988; Foley, John Miles, editor. *Oral Traditional Literature: Festschrift for Alfred Bates Lord*. Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1981; Lord, Albert Bates. *The Singer of Tales.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) 2nd edition by S. Mittchell and G. Nagy 2000; Goody, J. *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987; Ong, Walter. *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967); Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1988); Rienking, David. Orality and Literacy. [online] Available at http://www.coe.uga.edu/reading/faculty/dreinking/ONG.html.

[39] Draper, Jonathan A., editor. *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Antiquity*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004; Havelock, Eric. *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963); Lord, Albert Bates. *The Singer of Tales.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) 2nd edition by S. Mittchell and G. Nagy 2000.

[40] Coote, Robert. "The Application of Oral Theory to Biblical Hebrew Literature," *Semeia* 5 (1976) 51-64; Coote, Robert. "Tradition, Oral, OT," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Supplemental Volume. Nashville: Abingdon, 1976; Gerhardsson, Birger. *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*. Lung: Gleerup, 1961; Jaffe, Martin. *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral*

performance, thanks in large part to John Miles Foley.[41] This has put the spotlight on the performers of tradition and the way in which performers compose as they perform for different audiences.

Studies of living oral cultures give us real life examples of the bearers of oral tradition in diverse cultures: the means by which they pass along their stories and traditions; the venues, audiences, and cultural contexts in which they perform; the nature of the performances; the storytelling techniques employed; the devices used to aid memory; the typical oral features of the stories; the impact of the performances upon audiences; and how the performer creates an impact.[42] These studies can also inform us about social memory in an oral culture—how people recall, how a community keeps traditions alive, the process of revision, the new configurations, the dependence on a "frame" as an aid to memory and composition, how collective memory helps to maintain community, and so on. Consider also the extensive studies done on folklore tradition.[43] From these, we can learn about the fluidity and changeability of oral compositions. Further, we can learn of performance from practices in those religions of the world in which scripture is regularly memorized and performed?[44] In all these examples, we can employ what we learn about performance in living cultures as a basis to construct by analogy the dynamics of ancient performances. From this process, we might discern facets of ancient rhetoric and performance previously unexplored.

Social-Science Criticism. Performance criticism can employ cultural anthropology to grasp the dynamics of performance in the context of the features of ancient Mediterranean societies—pre-industrial, agrarian, collectivist, with honor as the core male value, oriented by issues of purity and defilement, with an economy of limited goods, and certain defined roles for men and women. How, for example, might social science criticism enable us to understand the agonistic dynamics of the face-to-face encounters involved in performance? How, for example, did Paul save face for Philemon and still lead him to do something (free a slave) that would (ordinarily) bring dishonor in the society? Or how might the reversals of society projected in Luke play out with a mixed audience of rich and poor and slaves? How might the approach to purity in Mark shape the make-up of the assembly hearing the Gospel? How do the dynamics of a collectivist culture help us to understand how audiences as a group might have responded during a

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Tradition in Palestinian Judaism: 200 BCE to 400 CE.; Neusner, Jacob. *The Memorized Torah: The Mnemonic System of the Torah*. Chicao, CA: Scholars Press, 1985; Wire, Antoinette. *Holy Lives, Holy Deaths: A Close Hearing of Early Jewish Storytellers*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2002.

[41] Bauman, R. *Story, Performance and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; Fine, Elizabeth and Jean Haskell Speer, editors. *Performance Culture and Identity*. Westport, CN: Praeger, 1992; Ben-Amos, D. and K. Goldstein, editors. *Folklore: Performance and Communication*. The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton and Co., 1975; Fine, Elizabeth and Jean Haskell Speer, editors. *Performance Culture and Identity*. Westport, CN: Praeger, 1992; Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance, and Social Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; Foley, John Miles. *Singer of Tales in Performance*. Bloomington: Indianapolis University Press, 1995; Foley, James Miles. *How to Read an Oral Poem* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Okpewho, Isidore. *African Oral Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana Univeristy Press, 1992; Turner, Victor. *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1986; Zumthor, P. *Oral Poetry: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.

[42] Foley, John Miles. "The Traditional Oral Audience," *Balkan Studies*18/1 (1977) 145-153.

[43] Jordan, Rosan and Susan Kalcik, editors. *Women's Fokflore, Women's Culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985; Mills, Margaret A. "Domains of Folkloristic Concern: Interpretation of Scriptures." In Text and Tradition. Edited by Susan Niditch. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990; Ben-Amos, D. and K. Goldstein, editors. *Folklore: Performance and Communication*. The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton and Co., 1975.

[44] Graham, William. Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

performance? How might the male-female dynamics displayed in a letter or speech work itself out in an assembly in which men and women were both present for the performance? Placing the New Testament writings in situations of performance changes the way in which we see these and other cultural dynamics at work.

Speech-Act Theory. Contemporary speech-act theory, when applied to an oral culture,[45] will help us to understand the Israelite view of words as powerful and effective actions by which "words go out and do not return empty." Here words create reality: naming gives power over; prophesing generates events; blessing and cursing bring about what they pronounce; and a pronouncement effects a healing in the speaking.[46] In the Gospels, Jesus announces, proclaims, names, heals, pardons, exorcizes, prophecies, blesses, curses, and warns, among other things—all with words that are understood as actions. How do these word-actions work in an oral composition, and how do they work in relation to an audience hearing them? Many of these verbal actions are expressed by grammar and syntax—such as permissives and prohibitives and performative presents. The Israelite view of words combines with the notion of personal causation to reflect a world in which all words and actions are expressions of personal power of some kind. How can we use speech-act theory to grasp the performative, functional, power dynamics of such language? Recent speech-act theory analyzes not just sentences but whole pieces of literature as speech-acts. How can speech-act theory assist performance criticism to unpack the functional dynamics of Gospels and letters as speech-acts in performance?

Linguistic Criticism. Linguistic criticism has always been an integral part of our work as exegetes, but recently there have been efforts to systematize it as a discipline.[47] Linguistic criticism deals with pronunciation, morphology, grammar, syntax, semantics, and discourse analysis. However, until recently, apart from issues of pronunciation, it has not dealt with the oral/aural dimensions of the language.

There are at least three areas for exploration in linguistic criticism that will be especially fruitful for performance criticism. First, discourse analysis gives a thorough scanning of the grammatical and semantic patterns of a text and, in so doing, identifies the many stylistic

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[45] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975 (1962); Eugene Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 1:1-42* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991); Richard Briggs. "The Use of Speech Act Theory in Biblical Interpretation," *Current Research in Biblical Studies* 9 (2001) 229-276; Richard Briggs, "Getting Involved: Speech Acts and Biblical Interpretation," *Anvil* 20 (2003) 25-34; Richard Briggs *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation: Toward a Hermeneutic of Self-Involvement*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001; F. G. Downing, *Doing Things with Words in the First Christian Century*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000; and Dietmar Neufeld, *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An Analysis of I John* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994). . See also the functional approach to language in Michael Halliday, The Social Function of Language.

[46] On the power of words in Hebrew language and culture, see an earlier work by Thorlief Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960). But see the objections of Thistleton, Anthony C. "The Supposed Power of Words in Biblical Writings," in *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1974) 283-299.

[47] David Alan Black, with Katharine Barnwell and Stephen Levinsohn. *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992); Stephen Levinsohn. *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on Informational Structure of New Testament Greek*, second edition. (Dallas: SIL, 2000); Stanley Porter and Jeffrey Reed, eds. *Discourse Analysis and the New Testament: Approaches and Results* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); Stanley Porter and Jeffrey Reed, eds. *Discouse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Reed, Jeffrey. Ed. "Discourse Analysis." Pp. 189-218 in Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament, ed. Stanley Porter. (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

features and configurations of discourse that provide structure to a text. However, only recently have discourse critics begun to ask about the oral impact of these linguistic features. What, for example, would have been the impact of chiastic patterns or chain sentences or parallelism or transitions upon the temporal, aural experiences of hearers. The Sermon on the Mount and the Letter of James seem, for example, to be prime compositions for such an analysis. Some work has been done on sentence structure, but little has been done on rhythm and pace. Almost nothing has been done with word order—foregrounding and back-grounding, emphasis, elision, chiasm of sounds, hook words, mnemonic devices, audible parallelisms and transitions, verbal threads, and so on. Other oral/ aural features of texts will include clues for performance, such as repetition, parallelism, chiastic patterns, onomatopoeia, hook words, and mnemonic devices. In addition, there are descriptions of sound, movements, emotions, actions gestures, dialogue, all of which may imply certain conventions of performance. Finally, the same may be said for questions that express irony, sarcasm, or accusation. How do all these work as part of an oral/aural experience? There is much to explore here that will help us to understand the texts and their rhetoric much better.

Second is the impact of sound itself upon a hearer, such as the use of guttural sounds, alliteration, and assonance. One significant aspect relates to the sounds of the composition. Some work has been done on repetition of words, but little has been done on repetition of sounds. Many rhetorical features depend on sound. Some work has been done on alliteration and the use of symbols and tropes, but almost nothing has been done about the way the sound of the Greek may contribute to the persuasive (rhythmic) or dissuasive (discordant) dimensions of the rhetoric. I suspect that the lure of the Gospel of John in drawing hearers into the experience of eternal life comes in part from the lilt of the Greek, a kind of rhetoric of attraction. Conversely, the (harsh) sounds of the Greek in the description of the whore and the beast in Revelation may constitute a rhetoric of repulsion.

Third, the fracturing of grammar and the disjunction of style may have had an impact upon hearers. The Aramaisms in the speeches of Acts and the broken grammar of the Book of Revelation may have had a political impact upon hearers as a form of resistance to the style of the elites.[48] Hearing these and other similar texts may help us to understand them better.[49]

We may best be able to get at these features of texts by listening to them. Years ago, Tom Boomershine listened to his own recording of the passion narrative of Mark over and over as the basis for his innovative literary study.[50] He also memorized the passion narrative in Greek and chanted it. Despite our uncertainty about how ancient Greek was pronounced, much can be gained by listening to any consistent system of pronunciation. In this manner, one can discern many oral/aural features of performance.[51]

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[48] See Allan Callahan, "The Language of the Apocalypse," *Harvard Theological Review* 88 (1995) 453-470.

[49] For example, Bernard Brandon Scott presented a paper at the SBL annual convention in 2004 in which he showed how Luke varies the style of the speaking characters in the birth narrative so as to make anti-imperial commentary on Roman elites.

[50] Thomas Boomershine, "Mark the Storyteller: A Rhetorical-Critical Investigation of Mark's Passion and Resurrection Narrative" (PhD Dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1974).

[51] On the sound of Greek, see S. G. Daitz, "Further Notes on the Pronunciation of Ancient Greek," *Classical World* 95 (2002) 411-412 and Mark Edwards, *Sound, Sense, and Rhythm: Listening to Greek and Latin Poetry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

In this regard, we now for the first time have a CD that contains the entire New Testament spoken in Greek.[52] This is very helpful. For performance criticism, we will need additional recordings that attend not just to the sound of the Greek but that will also take into account performance dynamics of the rhetoric. In a way, it is astounding that we have not had audiotapes of New Testament writings in Greek as a scholarly way to understand the role of sound in the meaning and rhetoric of New Testament writings (and as a pedagogical tool for teaching and learning New Testament Greek). Regarding the teaching of Greek, the sooner we incorporate the oral dimensions of the text into the training of the next generation of New Testament scholars, the sooner these dimensions will become an integral part of our research and understanding of the biblical texts.

The Art of Translation. The field of translation studies has worked mainly with the distinction between literal, word-for-word translations and translations that aim for dynamic equivalence. However, it is now incumbent upon translators to make a further distinction, namely, the distinction between translations for reading and translations for performance and for oral cultures. The American Bible Society is now beginning to take orality into account.[53] Nevertheless, to date, I do not know of a single version of the New Testament that was made for oral performance.[54] True, there are translations made for public reading in church; but this has more to do with public appropriateness, issues of justice, and the public acceptability of a translation in a contemporary context than with preserving oral dimensions of a New Testament writing for performance. The act of translating for oral performance itself is a discipline that leads one to notice aspects of the text often overlooked—repetition, word associations, rhyme and rhythm, historical presents, word order, verbal threads, alliteration, and so on. Such translations are often forged out of the experience of performing or translating for performance, which is one of the reasons it should be incumbent upon some New Testament scholars to engage in doing their own performances.

Performance criticism must include translation for performance in English or in another living language. Such translations will differ from translations for reading. For example, translation for performance can include historical presents. One can shift back and forth from past to present tense in oral performance in a way that seems very awkward in writing. Furthermore, one can notice the word order. Again, one can preserve word order in oral narration that does not make sense or is misleading in a text for reading. Such word order in the translation can bring out the suspense and emphases of the original. Seeking to replicate onomatopoetic words and the sounds of the Greek sentences as they relate to the content being presented would be helpful. The lengths of sentences, clues to punctuation, along with contractions and elision are features that are crucial for performance. The repetition in English

[52] Audio Greek New Testament, a reading of the Westcott and Hort's edition of the Greek New Testament by Marilyn Phemister, available online through the Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

[53] See the proposals by James Maxey in "New Testament and African orality: Implications for Exegesis and Translation," Paper presented at Pietermaritzburg Conference, 2005. Other references include Carla Bartsch, "Oral Style, Written Style, and Bible Translation." *Notes on Translation*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1997): 41-48; A. Brenner and J. W. van Henten, editors, *Bible Translations on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century*, London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002; E. M. Fry, "An Oral Approach to Translation," *The Bible Translator* 55 (2004) 506-510; Philip A. Noss, "The Oral Story and Bible Translation." *The Bible Translator*, Vol. 32, no. 3 (July, 1981): 301-318; Ernst R. Wendland "Duplicating the Dynamics of Oral Discourse in Print." *Notes on Translation* 7 (1993) 26-44.

[54] Consider some aspects of may translation of Mark in David Rhoads, Janna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999)

of the same words in Greek, even when they have somewhat different nuances of meaning, become important in translation for performance, because they serve to maintain echoes of verbal threads and motifs. Parallelism and chiastic patterns become significant dimensions of translation, because they contribute to rhythm and pace. We may be able to learn about these matters from scholars who have translated other ancient texts for their oral/aural features, such as the translators of Greek drama and poetry. Determining how to preserve oral features in translation leads us to notice those features in the original language.

Ideological Criticism. Ideological criticism seeks to make explicit the power dynamics of the text and to reveal whose interests in society are served by the text and whose interests are violated, denigrated, and neglected. I am using ideological criticism here as a term that also encompasses feminist criticism, womanist criticism, third world movements, post-colonial criticism, and other liberation theologies. The dynamic of social location in a given society—gender, social status, race, ethnic group, economic level, class, education, religio-political affiliation, urban-rural origin, and so on—has become a key means to understand the dynamics of power and powerlessness. There have also been efforts to show the power dynamics of the conflicts that arise between those who have the capacity to read, write, and copy manuscripts and those who do not.[55]

These categories come into sharp focus when they are imagined in relation to a concrete event of performance in the ancient world. What was the social location of the performer? What happens if the social location of the audience is the same or different? How does the very fact of orality in a peasant ethos serve to counter the literate culture of elites? How does the venue of a performance affect issues of power? Whose interest does the composition serve? How will people from different social locations in an audience interact with text and performer? How might a composition-in-performance subvert the values of an audience? How do the personal and confrontational dimensions of performance affect all these relationships? I am convinced, for example, that Mark is re-socializing hearers at the primary level and en-culturating them into the alternative power relationships of the rule of God. Might performance criticism help us to understand how a "transposition" of the social location of an audience might take place?

The dynamics of social location may be clarified and intensified by real experiences of audiences in our own time, particularly audiences comprised of people from diverse cultures and differing social locations. Intercultural criticism is exploring the insights that come from people of diverse cultures reading the New Testament—wealthy, oppressed, colonial powers, colonized countries, people of different genders, races, and ethnic groups, the sick and the healthy, criminals and addicts.[56] Diverse experiences of and reactions to the text can tell us a great deal about the original rhetoric of these compositions-as-performance. Readings from diverse cultures can also tell us about the possibilities and problems of appropriating the texts for our own time.

Theater Studies. Theater studies may be a helpful partner for performance criticism in New Testament studies.[57] We can apply to the New Testament what we know from studies of

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[55] See Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), among other works on literacy and orality.

[56] For a discussion of the importance of social location for interpretation, see the "Introduction" and Appendix 1 (along with an extensive bibliography on Intercultural Criticism) in David Rhoads, editor, *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

[57] On the application of drama theory to biblical studies, see especially William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Style* (T & T Clark, 2005). For the New Testament, see Gilbert Bilezekian, *The Liberated*

theatrical performances of drama in the ancient world—characters, styles of acting, voice projection, gestures, audience responses, special functions of theater, and ancient theories of drama. The relationship between New Testament writings and ancient drama/theater has been explored in limited ways. Up until now, scholars have explored formal literary correspondences to Greek and Roman theater. The theater critic Shimon Levi has written extensively on the Bible as theater. He has done so, not because it is religious literature, but because it is gripping drama. A few scholars have compared the dynamics of the Gospel of Mark to the dynamics of Greek tragedy. Mary Ann Tolbert has identified the Markan audience as the same audience that attended performances of popular novels.[58] For years, Barbara Bowe has taught the Gospel of John as theater. In fact, if you look at some of the extended dialogues in John, the narrator says nothing more than "he said"/"she said," and the scenes are best experienced as dialogue between two performers. In addition, one commentator on the Revelation of John has laid out how it would have been performed in the theater at Ephesus with suggestions for full casting, settings, and elaborate props.[59] What can performance criticism learn from classical theater studies about the theatrical dimensions of New Testament texts? What can we learn about the meaning and rhetoric of biblical stories by acting them out as theater?[60]

And what can we learn from theater critics about their methods and procedures? It is hard to imagine an interpreter of Greek plays who has not experienced performances of the plays themselves, if only in English. Who would be a valid Shakespearean critic who had never seen one or more interpretations of the plays as performed? We have argued that the New Testament writings/compositions were meant to be performed. So how could we benefit from theater critics who use their experience of performance as a basis for their understanding of the meaning and impact of a play? What could performance criticism learn, for example, from critics of Greek and Roman drama? A research group at Oxford University annually seeks to recreate an authentic performance from Greek theater, in Greek. In New Testament studies, how might we create a comparable experience of the performance of a gospel or a letter?

Performance Studies. Performance studies represent the contemporary field of oral performance/interpretation of literature.[61] Much can be learned from performance studies about the historical, theoretical, strategic, and technical dynamics of performance. And much can be garnered about the skills and methods of contemporary performance as a means to interpret.

Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977); Jo-Ann Brandt, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel*; W. Doan and T. Giles. "Masking God—Application of Drama Theory to Biblical Texts" in B. Fiore, editor. *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Bible Societies*, volume 22. Buffalo: EGLMBS, 2002. Jeffrey Crafton, *The Agency of the Apostle: A Dramatistic Analysis of Paul's Responses to Conflict in 2 Corinthians*. JSNTSS 51. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991; Shimon Levy, *The Bible as Theatre*. Brighton. Sussex Academic Press, 2000 and *Theatre and Holy Script*. Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 1999.

[58] Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary Historical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989).

[59] Get this citation.

[60] See P. Erlenwein, "Bibliodrama: A Modern Body-Mind Hermeneutics," *Asia Journal of Theology* 16 (2002) 327-340; Hecht, A. "Bibliodrama and Exegesis,"*Dei Verbum* 66/67 (2003) 6-10; Krondorfer, Bjorn. *Body and Bible: Interpreting and Experiencing Biblical Narratives*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1992; and especially Richard Swanson, *Provoking the Gospel: Methods to Embody Biblical Storytelling*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004 and Jana Childers, *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

[61] On the whole idea of narrative as performance, see Maclean, Marie. *Narrative as Performance: The Baudelairean Experiment* (New York: Routledge, 1988) and Alla Rene Bozarth-Campbell, *The Word's Body: An Incarnational Aesthetic of Interpretation.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997 (original, 1979)

Clearly there is the danger of anachronism of styles and techniques of this contemporary discipline when we seek to apply them to ancient performances. Nevertheless, biblical study has traditionally drawn in judicious ways on modern methods of criticism to analyze ancient literature. Surely the contemporary techniques of oral presentation recommended for performance can assist us in understanding the range of possible ways ancient performers may have performed/embodied a composition. Contemporary practices of on-stage/offstage focus, narrative asides, subtext, blocking, voice range (pitch and volume), gestures, character presentation, non-verbal communication, among other things may alert us to hitherto unnoticed dimensions of the biblical texts.[62] Surely, efforts at contemporary performance will give us experiences of performance to stimulate our imaginations about the biblical world. In any case, they will enable performers to find meaningful, powerful, and engaging ways to present the biblical materials in the contemporary world.

Summary. When one sees the magnitude and diversity of the subjects and methods of performance criticism, one can see how important it is that the discipline be eclectic and that it partner with many other fields of biblical study. Cooperative study and research will be important to the development of the discipline. Clearly, the discipline will require the gifts and interests of many different people—historical re-constructions, linguistics, literary interpretation, translation, anthropology, and performance. And it will be important for performance criticism to engage people from diverse socio-cultural locations.

Performance as a Method of Research

I would argue for the act of performing as a methodological tool for interpretation. We can never recover a first century audience, but we can experiment with twenty-first century ones. This performance approach involves a shift in our traditional methodologies of studying these writings. If the biblical writings were composed for performance, then we are talking about interpretive performances as art. The performer is an artist, and the performance is an artistic expression,[63] even if, as in my case, the performer is clearly not trained. If we are speaking of art, we are talking about such matters as stage presence, the knack for entertaining and engaging an audience, a skilled use of voice, the capacity to bring different characters to life, the means to evoke emotions, the ability to project suspense and develop a plot, and so on. In this model, both performer and audience/critics are interpreters of the artistic rendition and its faithfulness to the ancient tradition as we know it from the text. The artist interprets by performing, and the critic interprets by commentary on the performance. But what if we combined the two, so that the exegete learns not only from hearing/seeing a performance but also from the act of performing? In a sense, both the process of interpreting and the test of an interpretation would be in the performing.

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[62] There are many fine guides to performance dimensions of texts and techniques for performance, such as Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1986; Linda Degh, *Narratives in Society: A Performer-Centered Study of Narration*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakaternia, 1995; Michael Issacharoff and Robin Jones, eds. *Performing Texts*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988; Charlotte Lee *Oral Interpretation of Scriptures*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974; Norma Livo and Sandra Rietz. *Storytelling: Process and Practice*. Littleton: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1986; Sara Lowry and Gertrude E. Johnson. *Interpretive Reading: Techniques and Selections.* New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1942; Ronald J. Pelias, *Performance Studies: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts.* New York: St. Martins Press, 1992; Leland Roloff, The Perception and Evocation of Literature. Scott Foresman and Co. 1973; and Schechner, R. E. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2002.; Whitaker Long, Beverly and Mary Francis Hopkins. Performing Literature. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982.

[63] See Jana Childers, who makes this point in relation to preaching and reading scripture, in *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

The act of performing helps the interpreter to discern the possible meanings of the text. By playing the lines in a narrative—taking the roles of the characters, moving in imagination from place to place, interacting between one character and another, recounting the narrative world from the narrator's perspective and standards of judgment—the interpreter/ performer is led to make judgments about the potential meanings and rhetorical impacts of a composition. I often discover new meanings of a line/episode/point of argumentation and its potential impact on an audience in the course of preparing for performance and in the act of performing itself. As such, performance expands the possibilities for interpretation. Performances can also challenge and tests interpretation. And the enactment of different performances of the same text will prevent one from judging the value of this procedure based on one performance only.

The performer has to make basic decisions about her/his own approach. The performer needs to distinguish between then and now—either to perform in Greek or in one's native language. I prefer to perform in English, because it gives me real-time experiences of a performance event. I find it most helpful to do my own translations and to refine them though performance. Also, the interpreter must choose either to seek to replicate the style of an ancient performance or to express a contemporary style of performance. I prefer to work with a contemporary style of performing for a contemporary audience. We can learn much from this about meaning and rhetoric, and the audience will not be put off by the "bombastic" sensibilities of ancient performing—which was due in part to the conditions under which some compositions were performed (size of crowd, background noise, poor acoustics, and so on). The performer also needs to decide whether to do a text-based performance (absolute memory) or a fluid performance in which one composes and recomposes in performance. Fluid compositions are important to give us a sense of how ancient performers composed. Nevertheless, I prefer to do memorized performances, because they are the closest we have to the actual composition of at least one occasion of an ancient performance, and I am eager to use contemporary performance as a way to understand it in its ancient context. These are my preferences, but I am convinced we need to experience different styles of performance and diverse interpretations.

"Acting Out" the Composition. As I have experienced it, the role of the performer is not just to memorize the text and repeat it. Rather the performer acts it out. To do a faithful interpretation, the performer needs to bring out or fill in what is missing from the text as a written transcription of the oral performance—sounds, gestures, pace, pitch, volume, movement, and so on. Just as punctuation needs to be supplied to a Greek manuscript and vowels need to be provided for a Hebrew manuscript as a basis for determining interpretation, so in similar manner the performer supplies what performance dimensions are missing from the written transcription.[64] To make this point, all we need do is recall the title of a recent article, "How Do You Report What Was Said with a Smile—Can We Overcome the Loss of Meaning When Oral-Manuscripts are Represented in Modern Print Media?"[65] The performer seeks to restore what is missing from the written transcription we have before us.

[64] I owe this analogy to Pam Faro. Add to this the oft quoted statistic from a study that claims communication is 80% body language, 10% tone, and 10 percent content, although, of course, this applies to ordinary language in a print culture.

[65] Bobby Loubser, "How Do You Report Something That Was Said With a Smile? – Can We Overcome the Loss of Meaning when Oral-Manuscript Texts of the Bible are Represented in Modern Printed Media?" *Scriptura* 87 (2004) 296-314.

In this regard, the text itself offers various "stage directions" for voice, movement, body language, and emotions, and it suggests other performance features by virtue of grammar, syntax, and devices of discourse, such as irony and innuendo, descriptions of characters by word and action, movement, and so on. By means of repetition, the text suggests occasions when the performer is to show the audience connections between one episode and another. For the rest, it may be necessary for the performer to fill in gaps in a narrative or in an argument that seem to make the best sense of the text—gaps of causation and consequence, connection and continuity. Often these connections fill gaps in the text so that the performance makes sense. These connections might be forecasts of what is to follow or echoes of what has already been said or done. Often, in narrative, connections are implicit and not explicit, due to assumptions made of the hearer or to the nature of (oral) narration. The performer needs to be aware of these gaps and know where it is appropriate to fill the gaps in order to make sense of the narrative—not by adding to the text but by what seems to be implied for performance. The same is true of the connections between a series of arguments or teachings in a letter.

Nevertheless, this latter procedure is somewhat circular. You hypothesize/infer certain ways to fill the oral/performing gaps, and then you use these inferences in performance to see if that interpretation makes sense of and illuminates the story/speech in the telling. For example, the episode of Jesus healing the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1) implies that the Pharisees do not bring charges against Jesus because he healed the man without touching him and therefore without doing work on the Sabbath. When I perform this, I cannot add this information verbally, but I can suggest Jesus was about to touch him and then hesitates and does not touch him. By acting out implied gaps of information, a performer may clarify (or create!) the unity of a composition and perhaps resolve some gaps and fissures with tone and non-verbal expressions.

The Whole World of the Text. The very act of memorizing and performing enables the exegete to know the text in detail and to know it thoroughly. When you memorize, it is not easy to screen out the smallest details or to consider them inconsequential. Such a thorough grasp of the text leads the performer to decide anew what is important to emphasize in a text. By knowing the whole text, the performer knows all that is in the text as well as what is *not* in the text.

Furthermore, the act of memorizing the whole text and performing it enlivens the imagination of the exegete to be aware of the "fictive world" created by the narrative or the letter. No longer is there an atomistic approach to the text. Rather the exegete becomes immersed in the whole world of the text of a Gospel or of a letter—imagining its characters, settings, and events, its past and future, its cosmology of space and time, its cultural dynamics, and its socio-political realities. It is like walking through an imaginary door into a different reality or imaginatively crossing a border into another culture. By such an immersion into the text, the performer can interpret each line in the context of the developing story.

Performance makes it absolutely clear to the performer-exegete that the text is an act of communication and that grasping the rhetorical impact is essential to understanding the experience. The performer seeks to engage the audience, present the world of the composition to an audience, draw the audience into that world and lead them through it, persuade the audience to overcome their resistance to it, and thereby embrace the values of the author. In performing, the exegete becomes acutely conscious that every performance of every line is an interpretation designed to have a rhetorical impact. There is no escaping the choices one needs to make both to understand and to present the story/ letter to an audience.

The idea of interpreting a text by means of a performance leads the interpreter to experience new dimensions of interpretation and rhetorical force not commonly dealt with by exegetes. What follows is an accounting of some features of performance that can contribute to the understanding and interpretation of a text.

Personification. With a narrative, the performer takes the role of the narrator. And, as the narrator, the performer also takes the role of all the characters as they act and speak in the narrative—through voice, tone, pace, posture, facial expressions, and so on. With his voice alone, the actor Jim Dale has brought more than 200 characters to life in the tapes of the Harry Potter books. The Gospel of Mark has more than 70 characters. The dynamic of characterization leads performers to put themselves in a position to think about what drives each character, what their manner of relating is, what each character is looking for, what their "desires" are, what their beliefs and values are, and what they are willing to do to accomplish their goals—as the author has portrayed them. Such personification makes it clear that characters are not reducible to plots functions. Nevertheless, the acute awareness in performance of such diverse points of view in characterization leads the interpreter-performer to understand more sharply the developing plot, what is at stake in the conflicts, the diverse points of view encompassed by the overarching point of view of the narrator, and the power dynamics of the text. In performing a letter, the performer becomes aware of certain dynamics in fresh ways by seeking to personify the speaker—their personal appeals (Galatians and Philemon), self-descriptions of the author/composer (II Corinthians), depiction of the audience and other characters (Philippians), along with descriptions of events and emotions (Revelation). As commissioned agent of the sender/letter-writer, the performer *becomes* the sender in the act of presenting the letter. How might the personification of these dynamics in performance shape our interpretation of these passages and the letters as a whole?

Onstage/offstage focus. Much contemporary oral interpretation of literature encourages performers of narratives to distinguish an onstage from an offstage focus. When one is telling *about* the story, the performer directly addresses the audience offstage. When, however, the performer *portrays* the role of a character and speaks as that character, the performer addresses another imaginary character onstage as if inside the world of the story, with the audience "overhearing" what is being said onstage—much as an audience would observe one character in a play addressing another character onstage. Such a distinction helps to clarify for the audience when the narrator is speaking and when the narrator is speaking the part of a character. Distinctions between characters can also be shown by voice, pitch, pace, accent, posture, facial expressions, among other things. In this scenario, the narrator is the force that primarily leads the audience to identify with various characters and distance themselves from others.

On the other hand, Tom Boomershine has argued that, in ancient performances, the performer always addressed the audience and made distinctions between characters without using onstage focus at all. The difference is significant. In the latter scenario, the audience is addressed when a character speaks. Hence, for example, when Jesus directly condemns the Pharisees, the audience "becomes" part of the drama by playing the Pharisees for Jesus. When Jesus teaches/ berates the disciples, the audience becomes the disciples being addressed. In this way, then, the audience is led to identify with *all* the characters at one time or another. Such a different dynamic leads to a distinctive rhetorical impact on the audience. The composition will mean something different for an audience when this audience becomes all the characters in the story.

It will be helpful to tell the biblical narratives both with and without the onstage/offstage focus, as means to understand better the dynamics of the story and its rhetoric. This issue is also interesting when applied to letters, in which the speech is all made with an offstage focus and in which the audience then plays a major character in the narrative dynamics of the letter.

Subtext. One of the most significant features of performance is that of the "subtext." The subtext refers to the message that the performer gives in *the way* a line is delivered. This is a level of exegesis largely unexplored in biblical studies. Yet all performers have to decide what they will convey by *how* they say a line. There is no way to do a performance without conveying such a message with each line, no matter how badly or ill-informed it is done. It is a common exercise in oral interpretation to take a simple line and attempt to say the same line in as many different ways as possible by changing the subtext.[66] By changing the subtext, one changes the meaning. There are many clues in a text that suggest how a line can be delivered, and the immediate clues are assessed in relation to the composition as a whole. Consider, for example, Jesus' manner of relating to the disciples in Mark (for example, the line "Don't you understand yet?" in Mark 8:17)—patience, impatience, sarcasm, disappointment, disdain? To look for clues in the text that suggest the proper subtext of a line is to see a dimension of the text in performance that may otherwise be overlooked.

Non-verbal communication. These include gestures, posture, bodily movement, "winks" to the audience, walking or moving around, as well as facial expressions such as smile, frown, raised eyebrow, grimace, look of surprise or amazement, and so on. In the context of performing a story, they seem to be myriad. These represent the body language, the kinetic dimensions of performance. In some cases, the body language is clearly suggested by the text. When you perform any text, it is amazing how many gestures are described or implied in the world of the text. And it is surprising how much movement from place to place (on stage) is suggested in every text. In other, less explicit matters, non-verbal expressions may be inferred from the text and used to convey the meaning and subtext to a line.

The key is this: non-verbal communications do not just reinforce or illustrate verbal communication; rather, they are an integral part of the verbal communication itself, and they often are the means to determine its meaning. When I scowl or laugh or show impatience with my body or look puzzled or shrug my shoulders or throw up my hands, I am conveying the meaning of a line just as much as the tone and pitch and volume (the subtext) of the words convey it. How, for example, do we use our bodies to show that a line is ironic or humorous or derisive? Again, these non-verbal expressions do not just accompany the composition. They are an integral and indispensable means by which the meaning is determined and conveyed.

Emotions. The experience of performing recovers the emotive dimensions of a text. The realization of the emotive dimensions of a text is a common response to my performances of New Testament texts. Many, if not most, of these emotions are explicitly referred to in the text or strongly implied by the rhetoric. The range of emotions expressed and described in Mark's Gospel or the Book of Revelation, for example, is astounding—fear, amazement, awe, horror, puzzlement, anguish, grief, frustration, determination, anger, joy, love, and much, much more. Galatians expresses Paul's love for the Galatians, his anger at their abandonment of the gospel he preached, his sense of personal betrayal, and his eagerness to bring them back to grace. I used to think some passages in Galatians were personal and others were impersonal arguments.

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[66] See for example the exercises suggested in Ronald J. Pelias, *Performance Studies: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts*. (New York: St. Martins Press, 1992).

After performing it, I have come to realize that every line represents a personal appeal in which Paul considers the stakes to be extremely high. How might performance alert us to the emotional dimension, not just to the ethos or pathos of a text but also to all aspects of a text as the "personal" expression of a composer? In other words, how might performance bring to the fore the emotive dimensions of meaning and persuasion? And how can we integrate critical thinking as a means to assess appropriate emotional responses?

Humor. There is humor that performance brings out through subtext, voice articulation, and non-verbal expression. We can infer humor from grammar, syntax, irony, sarcasm, contrasts, parallels, inconsistencies, plays on words, conflicts, misunderstandings, revealing insights into human nature, and much more. Humor is more pervasive in the New Testament than we have judged to be the case. And performing the text brings it out. I have on occasion gotten "on a roll" with humor in the Gospel of Mark that leaves the audience laughing repeatedly. The dialogues of misunderstanding between Jesus and other characters in the Gospel of John can be hilarious when seen as a sort of Abbott and Costello repartee about "Who's on first?" with characters speaking past each other. Irony represents wry humor that must be conveyed with great subtlety. Humor is a significant part of performing. It engages an audience, gives insight, creates community, and is an effective means of persuasion. What will it do for our interpretations of a text if we restore dimensions of humor by means of performance?

Temporal Experience. In addition, performing a text from beginning to end enables one to experience the text in a temporal way. We are used to thinking of the text as a spatial display on the page and to identifying texts by chapter and verse (again, a spatial display). In so doing, we have lost the sense of time that is such an integral part of the rhetoric of a text. In interpreting a written text, we often collect references across a text without regard to what comes in sequence. When you perform a text, you become aware of the temporal sequence of what the hearer knows and when they know it, when something new is introduced, and how an earlier part prepares the hearer for a later part. You become aware of the fact that episodes in a Gospel are usually not interchangeable.[67] Their location in the sequence of the story is appropriate and often critical to the developing plot.

In this regard, there seems to be a developing logic to a story or letter or apocalypse that is difficult to explain—an inner logic (deeper than hook words, connections, and transitions) that enables the performer to recall what comes next in the narrative or in the course of an argument. Interestingly, I have found that this temporal coherence of a text may be found not in the text itself, but in a particular sequence of implied impacts on an audience as they experience the temporal movement of the composition—like the steps in a combination lock as the sequential drops of the tumbler prepare for a final "unlocking." First the hearers must know this before they are prepared to experience that, which in turn enables the audience to accept what then comes next, and then leads them to the ultimate place the performer wants them to be. In experiencing Galatians, for example, an audience must go through a sequence of appeals and arguments before Paul is "confident that you will take no other view." In Revelation, the hearers must first know what Jesus expects and that he can see into their hearts (the letters); then they must know the evil nature of Rome (the beast) before they are prepared to reject Rome; then, they must grieve their own loss of Rome and thereby detach from it before they can embrace the New Jerusalem. The expressions of worship throughout Revelation prepare them to be attached to the New Jerusalem when it comes and thereby able

[67] On this point, see the chapter on "Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman in Mark" in my *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

to withdraw from Rome and be willing to die for adherence to the God of a new heaven and earth. In other words, there is a dynamic to the cognitive and emotional catharsis the hearer is being led through—a rhetorical dynamic that gives continuity to a text located in successive responses of the audience and that is difficult to discern without the experience of doing the performance yourself.

Rhetoric and Audience. Performance enables one to be especially aware of the significance of audience and context in a concrete way. We exegetes often talk about ancient audiences and imagine their reactions. To perform a text is to become aware of the audience and its impact upon performance in a very specific way. The setting matters. To perform in a university or in a church or in a prison or on the street corner or at a homeless shelter or in diverse cultural contexts leads the performer to perform texts in different ways. The texts take on different meanings spoken to people in different social locations. People identify with different characters, connect with different sayings, desire differing outcomes for the plot, and so on.

There is no better way to be in touch with the rhetorical impact upon an audience than to perform it to a live audience. The performer is clearly seeking to present a world to the hearer, to draw the audience into that world, and to persuade the audience to take on the point of view about life presented in the text. In the course of this, the performer becomes aware of what the text leads the audience to know, what the text leads the audience to feel, what the text leads the audience to decide, what the text leads the audience to value, and what the text leads the audience to become. Mark does not just give people the reasons not to be paralyzed by fear; rather, the rhetorical dynamics of the Gospel leads people to *have* courage.

The larger impact of all of these upon an audience is crucial to the dynamics of performance. Of course, all of this is part of that particular performer's interpretation of the text. Other performers will interpret the text differently and justify their interpretation. The point is that the exegete as performer gets in touch with the fact that there are rhetorical dimensions to every line in the text all of which contribute to the overall impact. The performer has to make interpretive decisions about the text related to the rhetoric at every point—decisions the exegete of a written text may not be so clearly in touch with. Nevertheless, one cannot talk about rhetoric without taking into account particular audiences and settings.

Performance as test of interpretation. Finally, performance can be a test of the exegete's interpretation. We often give interpretations of the text without ever asking: Could the lines be read in such a way that the hearer would understand the meaning you are giving to it? I am not here talking about the fact that modern hearers would have to know certain cultural information to understand a line. Rather, I am asking whether the line can even be said at all in such a way as to express a certain interpretation. For example, some Markan scholars understand Jesus' words about the poor widow in the temple to be a criticism of the widow for contributing to a corrupt temple that is doomed to destruction. However, I cannot figure out a way to perform that line so as to convey that meaning of it. Or how could one convey the Jesus cry of abandonment on the cross (from Psalm 22:2) so as to express hopefulness? Take your interpretation of something and test it by saying the lines in such a way that you actually bring across to an imaginary audience, ancient or modern, that meaning of the text. Of course, the text has a range of possible meanings and a range of possible performances. Nevertheless, performance may be one way to test the limits of legitimate/ viable interpretations. As such, performance can provide criteria for making critical judgments in adjudications over interpretation

Performance and Critics. Through all these steps of performance criticism, the performer/exegete will be providing performances that allow other critics to participate in performance criticism by experiencing one or more interpretations of the text in performance. I have heard biblical scholars say that the experience of hearing a text fundamentally changed their way of thinking about this literature. As such, experiencing the text-in-performance provides a significantly fresh medium through which to encounter the text and address interpretive issues. Critics may be struck by the way a performer says a line and comment: "I just never thought of it that way before." When hearing the text, one cannot stop and reflect and look back, as one can do when reading. The story keeps moving and one gets caught up in it and carried forward by it. The critic can take it all in and decide whether it makes sense or that one or another thing should have been translated or performed a different way. In this way, together, performers and critics can work to expand the range (in some cases) and to narrow the range (in other cases) of plausible interpretations of meaning and rhetoric.

Practices and Procedures of Performance Criticism

It may be helpful to list the practices and procedures of Performance Criticism as we have developed them.

1. Clarify the nature of oral cultures, including ancient ones, along with the role of performance and the dynamics of oral language in them. Clarify the role of manuscripts and scribes in a primary oral culture, especially in relation to performance.
2. Fill out the historical picture of the ancient world in terms of performances—the various types of performers (including male and female), training, venues and contexts, audiences, social location, and so on.
3. Develop a model of the "performance event" with all its components, and construct some performance scenarios from the early church. Identify the role and importance of performance in the history of early Christianity.
4. By using many methodologies and by listening to the Greek, discern the distinctly oral features of the New Testament writings and the implied aural impact of every part of each writing as well as of each writing as a whole.
5. In light of the above practices, (re)interpret the writings of the New Testament and their rhetoric in the original oral medium. Be aware of what may be implied and prescribed for biblical interpretation by the paradigm shift to an oral medium.
6. Conduct performances in Greek or in a translation prepared for performance. Develop the theories and practices of theater and oral interpretation along with commentary from the insights of the performers and of the critics of such performative interpretations.
7. Contribute to the renewal of other biblical methodologies from insights gained in performance criticism.

Conclusion

I have proposed a new methodology in biblical studies as a means to address the neglected performance dimension in early Christianity. The proposal is to take seriously the oral/aural medium through which early Christians experienced the writings and traditions we now have in the New Testament. Taking seriously this medium requires that we understand the ancient ethos of orality and that we look at the people, places, and circumstances involved in concrete performance events. In this way, performance criticism can help to re-construct the oral/performance dynamics of the early church. And it can put exegetes in touch with oral dynamics of texts that have been long neglected and that will reshape our interpretations. In the

process, performance criticism can make use of traditional disciplines (re-configured to oral ethos and to performance) as means to understand the performance event. Performance criticism can also seek to develop a language for making critical judgments that can serve as criteria for faithful interpretations. Finally, performing before contemporary audiences can sharpen our interpretive skills and provide new insights.

I do not assume this will be easy. Performance criticism involves a paradigm shift. It will not do simply to take the methodologies we have developed for analyzing print and apply them to oral composition. We need to accompany the media shift with methodological shifts. And it will be difficult to exercise the same rigor with these methods that we have done on written texts. At the same time, taking orality into account may broaden and/or narrow interpretive options, provide a more accurate understanding of early Christianity, and clarify the ways in which meaning may have been distorted by a focus on print culture.

In this regard, then, attention to performance has the potential to transform our whole understanding of the New Testament. Performance criticism could serve other disciplines and revitalize traditional interpretive approaches: linguistic criticism could benefit from analyzing the aural sound of a text; narrative criticism and reader-response criticism could reappraise the New Testament narratives in light of performance scenarios; rhetorical criticism could be renewed by interpreting every speech/letter in the concrete context of a performance event; historical constructions of early Christianity will look different with performance and performative language as integral parts of communal life and relationships in an oral culture; and commentaries on biblical writings could incorporate insights from performance criticism. Furthermore, performance criticism would introduce new methodologies to New Testament studies—performances studies and theater studies—both of which can teach us much about the rigors, realities, and results of performance. And bringing all these together might further enrich them all and provide greater interpretive control.

Performance criticism can serve to make us aware of the oral/aural dimensions of ancient texts, teach us about the dynamics of performance, and enable us incorporate these insights into our understanding of the texts and our constructions of early Christianity. This essay has sought to offer a prolegomenon to the development of such a discipline.

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