

Article

Shifting Gears or Splitting Hairs? Performance Criticism's Object of Study

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Abstract: In keeping with the call of this Special Issue, this article is but one voice in the midst of a much broader conversation, attending to whether the differences between narrative and performance criticism are a matter of degree or kind. Narrative and biblical performance criticisms are natural bedfellows. The two appear genealogically related as they share similar founders, attend to similar features, and to a degree share similar interests with regard to interpretation. In fact, their interests appear to be so closely aligned at several points that attempts to distinguish between these two approaches run the risk of simply “splitting hairs”. Yet, our recognition of these distinctions is essential for highlighting the unique contribution of each approach. In what follows, I suggest that the differences between performance and narrative criticisms are rather (at least theoretically) a “shifting of gears”, a progression toward a more complex understanding of how biblical texts work in various contexts and how we as scholars may approach them as objects of study. While the object of study in narrative criticism is relatively well established (again, at least theoretically), this is not necessarily the case for performance criticism. In short, by way of contrast, I will suggest that for performance criticism, its object is *similar to yet distinct from* the object of study of narrative criticism. Such a claim is by no means groundbreaking, especially among the performance critics, nor should it necessarily be viewed as controversial. Rather, in exploring the contours of each approach, this contribution aims to provide additional theoretical credence to certain areas within this conversation. In doing so, this inadvertently has implications not only for our thinking in this particular volume, but also perhaps more broadly for biblical studies.

Keywords: performance; performance criticism; narrative criticism; gospel of mark; script; scripture



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1. (Mis)Guided Assumptions

Traditionally, scholars have approached the *Bible* as...well, a text.¹ To most, this decision may seem commonsensical and relatively benign. Nonetheless, it is a decision, and upon further reflection it is by no means an insignificant one. As an example of how determinative textuality can be of our thinking, let us consider some of its assumptions. You are probably reading this article by yourself. This does not mean that you are physically by yourself, as you may be reading this in one of a number of different locations—a library, a coffee shop, a crowded train, at the dining room table seated beside your partner, etc.—but likely, by way of proximity, you are the only person who is benefiting from your particular reading.² Because you are reading the text “by” yourself, you are also reading this text to yourself.³ Unless you are a speed-reader who has worked intensively to overcome the vocalization techniques most of us adopt as children, an internal voice likely accompanies some, if not all of these words.⁴ It may be your own inner voice that you hear, or if you know me personally you may even hear these words in my voice.⁵ Yet, despite this “audible” component and the illusion of dialogue, your reading is best described as a silent and relatively solitary experience. The text with which you are engaging is considered a complete work, even if it is not the first draft, and even if multiple lines and paragraphs appearing in earlier drafts have been sacrificed on the editor’s chopping block. In this

particular case, this text has additional paratexts, information outside of the prose which informs your understanding of it.⁶ Not only do obvious paratexts (or peritexts) such as footnotes and a bibliography frame this reading, but also, less obvious details—i.e., a publication date, a specific title, its appearance in a specific issue of a specific journal, a specific author’s name attached—have an effect. All of these, to a certain degree, frame, inform, and dictate one’s reading. Here, words appear in neatly defined and artificially straight lines.⁷ They appear in a particular order, and from that order, presumably, you as a reader can determine meaning from those words. You can read this article in the morning or at night, in one sitting or multiple, and yet each time you return to it the prose itself will not change.⁸ All of these are assumptions or features of reading a text. . . well, as text.

Notice, however, that the preceding paragraph is not instructive. There are no instructions provided detailing the specifics of your engagement, as such guidelines are not necessary for a text composed within a literate milieu. Each of the scenarios above is plausible, and yet, despite a recognition of a variety of settings in which one can read this text, the way(s) a reader and text interact with each other is largely considered to be uniform or—less controversially and more realistically—similar in outcome. Of course, this does not mean that each reader takes away the exact same message, but more simply, it suggests that the reading event is at least theoretically replicable, even if not fully conveyable. The medium of experience is not necessarily restricted by the materiality of this text, but it can be presumed based on a number of social cues and expected rules of engagement.⁹ In short, nothing says that one “must” read this article silently or alone, nor that one “cannot” read it aloud, together with or in the presence others. Such a restriction would simply be absurd. Rather, and more simply, due to a number of practical and social reasons, it just seems far less likely a reader would do so.

We might continue discussing the assumptions of textuality and literacy ad nauseum. The above is by no means an exhaustive description of the reading process, but it is hopefully illustrative of how determinative “textuality” *can* be of our thinking. Behind this brief thought experiment, and this admittedly crude description of what is in actuality a far more complex relationship between author, text, and reader, we find at its core two key assumptions regarding literacy and textuality: (1) there is an object—physical, digital, or otherwise—with which an audience can/must engage, and (2) there is an assumed and/or implied mode of engagement. At the intersection of these two pillars lies a “communication event”.¹⁰ What exactly occurs within that communication event may be articulated or conceived of in a number of ways, but at the end of the day I suspect most would feel comfortable saying that some communication occurs within this interaction—either via the text, by means of the reader’s engagement with it, or some combination therein.

As reductionistic as the illustration above may be, it informs our work here in two helpful ways: First, it offers us a point of contact with which we can compare performance throughout this work; second, it provides us with a functioning model (though admittedly, a poor one) for how biblical texts have been viewed and engaged with historically. There is a text, and with that choice/designation of this object certain assumptions about literacy and textuality become ingrained (whether consciously or unconsciously). Some of these assumptions are determined by genre markers, others by a broader and more general sense of textuality itself. These assumptions necessarily dictate and limit our engagement with and our understanding of what is in reality a far more complex object. Similar to the opening paragraph, we tend to view, think about, and engage with this textual object within a particular (mostly modern) framework of textuality. At some point, we also begin to presume (again, whether consciously or subconsciously) certain things about how audiences *should* engage with it. Somewhere, between the writing of the text by an author, and in the direct interaction of texts by readers, meaning emerges. Exploring this complex interaction, broadly conceived, is what lies at the core of most literary approaches to the *Bible*.

But what happens when biblical texts are experienced. . . well, not as texts? Informed by a number of insights, primarily historical, though some more modern and others theoretical,

performance critics have sought to reconsider and ultimately to challenge the chirographic foundations which have traditionally informed our thinking on and engagement with the *Bible*.¹¹ Historical considerations, such as the literacy rates in antiquity,¹² a cultural preference for orality,¹³ examples of reading “written” texts aloud,¹⁴ what we know (and do not know) about early Christian gatherings,¹⁵ as well as a number of other insights, call into question traditional notions of textuality, and its ability to assess ancient audiences’ experiences. These historical insights compel us to question certain assumptions we hold about these texts and our understanding of the communication event they invite: What happens when supposed certainties, such as the medium of reception and mode of engagement, can no longer be assumed? What happens to that communication model when one or both of those pillars are missing? Such questions may seem counterintuitive at first to some readers, while others may find them off-putting, particularly in light of the relative stability we find within the friendly confines of the textual model above. Because these questions tend to challenge modern literate sensitivities, we may initially balk at their legitimacy and question their utility. However, it is not only the performance critics who are beginning to find the modern concept of textuality to be a problematic (or at least, a limiting) paradigm for considering the ancient textual landscape. In fact, an increasing number of scholars, many of whom hold no ties to performance criticism, are growing frustrated with the metaphor “books”, both with its assumptions, and how it frames our thoughts about ancient text, but also its inability to grasp and/or grapple with the complexities of ancient textuality. For both the performance critics, and for others facing these questions, this default setting has become untenable, opening up additional space(s) for us to consider and test alternative metaphors.¹⁶

Despite these historical insights, and a mounting frustration with the deficiencies of modern literary metaphors, the field more broadly remains relatively the same. For instance, it is now widely recognized that the primary (and perhaps implied) mode by which ancient audiences experienced biblical texts was not by way of reading, but rather through hearing and seeing in performance. In fact, a number of studies of the Gospel of Mark have started referring to audiences as “hearers” rather than readers.¹⁷ And yet, despite its broad acceptance, this historical reframing has made relatively little impact thus far in terms of interpretation or approach. Why is this so?

In light of the call of this journal, such questions invite further reflection. As a way of framing the following discussion, I would like to suggest that at least part of the congestion stems from a perceived lack of clarity with regard to the object of study in performance criticism. Since narrative criticism has developed and established a relatively clear sense of its object of study (though, as will be shown below, it is not beyond critique and/or without its limitations), the problem seems likely one-sided. Because the field of biblical studies more broadly defaults to chirographic frameworks, this may lead to a certain object confusion. What I mean is that it is reasonable and understandable to think that narrative and performance critics are studying the same object, simply with different foci—in other words, that both are studying texts “as text”. If that is the case, performance criticism is nothing more than a subset of narrative criticism, as the differences between the two approaches are merely a matter of degree and not kind. This, however, at least theoretically, is simply not the case. Instead of freeing the field from chirographic assumptions, which was at the core of early performance approaches, the recognition of the aural experiences of ancient audiences has led to a loggerheads of sorts—a methodological impasse, sustained in part by shared terminology, but perhaps also a lack of reflection upon the “root” metaphors which frame our thinking.¹⁸ In what follows, I will consider why such a distinction is necessary, explore how such distinctions may aid us in alleviating certain methodological stagnation, and hopefully offer a way forward through this theoretically challenging but not insurmountable impasse.

2. Splitting Hairs? The Gospel of Mark as an Object of Study

The Gospel of Mark has long been considered a prime testing grounds for both narrative and performance-oriented approaches.¹⁹ As such, and for the purposes of this investigation, it will provide a helpful test case for illustrating some of the differences between narrative and performance criticisms, and more specifically their configuration of the object of study. At times, these differences can be elided, if for no other reason than the predominance of chirographic assumptions in our field, and more practically, limited and/or shared terminology. At other times, these differences have become exaggerated (i.e., the “great divide”), leading to a number of issues, not least of which is an overshadowing of the nuance and inherent value of each approach. The following may appear obvious to some, while to others it may seem nothing more than splitting hairs. Such dissections, however, are essential for illuminating the theoretical differences between these two approaches.²⁰

Let us begin with a relatively simple question: what is the Gospel of Mark? *Prima facie*, this question may seem ridiculous. Yet, as alluded to above, how one decides to answer it is significant, as this carries a host of assumptions about the object, both consciously and subconsciously. The question as to the nature of the Gospel of Mark is empirically simple, yet theoretically complex. On the one hand, it is indisputable that the Gospel of Mark is a text, one which has traditionally been known by this title. It is a text that most scholars now presume was the first of the four canonical Gospels to be written. As a text, it still exists in writing, as it can be read in a number of modern translations and languages, as well as accessed via traditional publication or a number of other digital means. One might further qualify this object with adjectives like “biblical” or—within a Christian theological context—“canonical”, though doing so does not necessarily physically or materially change it.²¹ As a so-called biblical and/or canonical text, it is still subject to literary analysis the same as any other text, yet each qualifier provides additional layers—one text among a number of other biblical and early Christian texts, written earlier than some, later than others, and it happens to be one which (even if eventually) was included within a canon. Each of the above designations, while external to a physical object, situates it within a specific literate milieu. Thus, one can say that the Gospel of Mark is a text, which for various reasons over time has come to possess a relatively robust literary appointment.

In answer to our question, what is the Gospel of Mark, we can at least identify or name one way of approaching this as an object of study—as text. But is this the only way we might conceive of it as an object of study? And what does the identification of it as a text mean for one’s approach to studying it? This first question will necessarily remain with us throughout the remainder of this discussion. As for this second question, one could seek to explain the Gospel of Mark as an object of study in light of modern literary assumptions. Such assumptions force us to consider and explain the Gospel of Mark’s composition and use within a context analogous to our own. For instance, if at its most basic level the Gospel of Mark is a text, as a text, we can presume that it was written to be read. Considering the social circumstances of the first century in which it was written, it would not be difficult to assume that it was likely composed for a select group, consisting of—at least arguably—socially elite persons. If pressed, one could also say that the Gospel of Mark was considered biblical and canonical in its earliest iterations, though in different (less textualized) ways. For example, the Gospel of Mark demonstrates knowledge of materials found within texts which (even if eventually) are found in the Hebrew *Bible*. The Gospel of Mark also (presumably) engages with previous oral traditions about Jesus. As a written text, therefore, first-century readers could measure and compare Mark’s Gospel (a new material object) against other biblical sources (texts and public readings) and oral traditions (similar in content, yet different in form) which preceded it. Each of these explanations are historically plausible, relatively simple to envision, and none are without historical precedence. They also, rather conveniently, fit within modern categories—perhaps a little too well.

Notice that when pressed slightly, the core literary assumptions which stand at the base of this configuration start to bend. While it is plausible that the Gospel of Mark was written only for elite readers, it also seems unlikely.²² Mark does make use of the Hebrew Bible (or LXX), but it is not exactly in the way one might expect an author to do so if that author were looking at and engaging with physical copies of a text (cf. Mark 1:2–3). Oral traditions certainly functioned canonically, and Mark likely engaged with them; but these are materially absent from modern literary canons. Thus, even canonicity, often thought of primarily in literary terms, must be reconsidered in this model. As an object of study, the above designation is certainly fair and a helpful rendering of the Gospel of Mark as a modern literary object. The closer we get to it, however, its plausibility as a historical object becomes less certain. When we try to envision this modern literary object in a first-century context, we are left with more questions than answers.

Rather than continue to shove square shaped answers into a triangle shaped framework, perhaps there is another way forward utilizing a slightly more complex approach. While it is true that the Gospel of Mark is a text, the oral milieu in which it was composed, coupled with “textual” features which do not lend themselves neatly to a literary paradigm, suggest the need to consider a more complex sense of this as an object of study—one which can be imagined within, as well as fits within, what we believe to be its historical context. But where do we begin?

These and similar problems are by no means unique to biblical performance critics. Classicists have wrestled with some version of this issue in a variety of ways, with varying degrees of success.²³ The limits of utilizing a purely literary framework for thinking about ancient texts (or really, any text pre-Gutenberg) as objects of study may be demonstrated in a singular reference to the Homeric epics. When a classicist sets out to examine the Homeric epics, to what exactly are they referring? They may be referring to something “behind” the text(s), such as the performance tradition from which the text(s) emerges. They may use it to refer to a particular version of the performance tradition, an early or perhaps “original” text(s), which may be understood as a version or one hypothetical instantiation—though perhaps representative—of that tradition within a series of performances. The object of study may be a hypothetical and admittedly reconstructed text, a text whose democratic reconstruction is by no means original, yet may be widely regarded as the best representation of earlier versions. It may also refer to various manuscripts, or to a single, authoritative, compiled version. In some sense, we may say that as an object of study the Homeric epics are all of these things, and perhaps more, but the key distinguishing mark here is that it is not simply a reference to a text. To refer to the Homeric epics without the use of additional qualifiers obscures their history in reception and the unique object(s) in view within each of these designations. Far from splitting hairs, each mode and/or medium we encounter, and our configuration of each as a communication event, might be considered a distinct object of study that requires a specific approach.

It is certainly true that Homeric epics are more obvious sites of potential object confusion and frustration, as these continue to be recast, produced, and performed in multiple media in modern contexts. However, such a recognition does not make it any less true that a similar object confusion can be found in studies of the Gospel of Mark. Whether or not one may or *should* speak of such a varied and complex object in reference to the Gospel of Mark is a certainly a worthwhile question, and perhaps something that is perhaps too quickly assumed within this particular investigation; yet, regardless of how one should answer it, this is something that already *does* occur within scholarship. The Gospel of Mark has been understood and configured as an object of study in a number of ways including: (1) the remains of oral tradition (what the text contains or represents); (2) the story, or the contents of a text (what a text says/means); (3) an “original” text (what the text was); (4) the material remains of an earlier version of the text (what the text has been); (5) the material or physical representation of the text (what we consider the text to be now); (6) the story as independent of the text; or (7) some combination of the above. To these we might add a

number of others, and in some sense, none of these are mutually exclusive—yet, as objects of study, it is significant to note that each might be considered as a distinct object.

While each of these could individually be considered the Gospel of Mark, one thing becomes clear: each of these examples are simultaneously both Mark and not Mark. Each is distinct, as each represents an object—whether material or theoretical—which has been conceived of, studied, and/or identified as the Gospel of Mark. Yet, our question “what is the Gospel of Mark?” remains unanswered, as none of these examples, in and of themselves definitively or completely answer it in a satisfying way. While these questions and categorizations may evade *universal* solutions, such questions are not insignificant for *particular* investigations. If we can conceive of the Gospel of Mark as existing in related yet distinct media and modes, whether in a historical or modern context, it is essential to articulate which mode or which experience is being envisioned, where in time, and to flag why or how that object is distinct from others.

2.1. Autographic and Allographic Paradigms

Given such complexity and the many potential configurations of the Gospel of Mark as object of study, specificity in relation to what is being examined and/or imagined becomes a more necessary focal point. As the metaphor of “books” becomes less favored and arguably less tenable for our thinking about the ancient textual landscape, other types of art, by way of analogy, may provide a way forward. Insights from aesthetics as to the ontological nature of art, music, and literature could potentially clarify our thinking in this regard—specifically, the categories of autographic and allographic arts.²⁴

An autographic object is one that exists (or once existed) and may be regarded as a singular entity. Take, for example, a painting. A painting is a solitary work, easily defined as a physical object, capable of being located both in space and time. It can be observed, held and/or touched, and is bound by its materiality. A painting can be present only in a single location at a particular time. It is material, and thus is capable of being destroyed or rendered obsolete. As an object of study, one can reference a painting without the need for additional qualifiers. One can speak about its artist as sole creator (authority/authorship), identify a painting’s point of origin, locate that originating point within a specific reference to time (temporal), or pinpoint its particular location at this moment (geographical). All of these distinctive features may be presumed within a general reference to a painting.

If someone wanted to study *The Starry Night*, there would be no ambiguity as to what they are assessing. One might speak of *The Starry Night* in very specific and defined ways—its creator (van Gogh), its material (oil, canvas), its place and date of production (the asylum in Saint-Rémy, 1889), and its current location (Museum of Modern Art, New York) can all be presumed. While it is true that the geographic location may at times change, even if only temporarily, or we may think about the painting within different eras, the physical object itself remains unaffected. While many copies of *The Starry Night* exist, there is only one object that might be referred to as “the” *The Starry Night*. As a potential object of study, *The Starry Night* has no need for additional qualifiers. Unlike the Gospel of Mark, when one says they are going to examine *The Starry Night*, so long as the person to whom they are communicating is familiar with the painting, there is no uncertainty as to what is being referencing.

In contrast to an autographic object, an allographic object is far more difficult to define. They are conceptually more fluid, requiring a more complex configuration. Take for example a piece of music.²⁵ A piece of music is not a solitary, easily identifiable, or even necessarily a physical object—though physical features might accompany it (i.e., a score, a recording, etc.). If someone were to study Beethoven’s *Für Elise*, additional qualifiers would need to be supplied in order to know exactly what is being studied.

Such difficulty in defining this object begins with its complex compositional history.²⁶ While composed by Beethoven, it was unpublished during his lifetime, and did not appear until 40 years after his death. There are no known performances of the piece by Beethoven, though it would not be illogical or unfair to assume that he did in fact play (and change)

this piece throughout its uncertain compositional history. Copies of the score exist, though the original is now lost.²⁷ The score that currently exists was reproduced from a score discovered among the possessions of a Therese Malfatti. The title by which it is currently known is not necessarily original, as it derives from an interpretation of an inscription—which may be a misreading from Beethoven’s poor handwriting.²⁸ The material boundaries of what constitutes *Für Elise* are fraught, its autographic sense beyond recovery.

In addition to its complex compositional history, *Für Elise* is not limited by its materiality or even to a particular medium. One may experience or set out to study *Für Elise* in a variety of media. In a performance, a text may be present, but is not necessary. Performers may have the score in front of them, or they may play the piece from memory. It does not mean that the score was not vital to what eventually became performed, only that at the moment of performance, the score as object is decentered as the audience does not engage with it directly. While the score may guide a performer, similarity to the score is not the only marker of success. Performers may alter the score, experiment with tempo, alter keys, add instruments, etc., but it would still be recognized—at least by some and in some sense—as *Für Elise*. In performance, it exists for those who are hearing, even if only temporarily, yet it cannot be destroyed. Every copy of the score could be gathered into one location and burned, and yet, so long as one person could remember enough to play, or one person had memory of hearing it, it would continue to exist absent its materiality. Unlike *The Starry Night*, *Für Elise* can and often does exist in multiple places concurrently. For instance, *Für Elise* could quite plausibly be performed on stages in Miami, Boston, New York, and Toronto (7 p.m. ET), while simultaneously being rehearsed by performers in Chicago, Austin, and Guatemala, prior to a performance (6 p.m. CT), and also be practiced by students in Los Angeles, Spokane, and British Columbia (4 p.m. PT). Existing simultaneously in seven US states, multiple countries, and across three time zones, no single performance is exactly like the other, nor does any single performance have authority over the others—though admittedly some may be more similar to the score (as traditionally rendered). It also exists in multiple printed forms. Musicians could read or study the piece without actually performing it, or necessarily even hearing it performed, analyzing and reading only notes.

The hypothetical situations in which we might consider *Für Elise* as an object of study are virtually unending. While by no means exhaustive, the above illustrates some of the difficulty in universally identifying it as an object of study. An unqualified reference to *Für Elise* tells us relatively little about what exactly is being discussed/imagined, as each qualifier is necessary in determining what exactly is being assessed. So how do we account for such complexity and variability in an object?

Despite the difficulty of answering this question universally, it would certainly be unreasonable to suggest that *Für Elise* cannot or should not be studied. Each of these potential objects of study, while independent, is an important piece for understanding *Für Elise*. For instance, there are particular overlapping features within each of these modalities. Categorically, each performance of the piece is recognizable (at least to some) by its namesake. Because each performance may be referred to by this same title, each is *similar to yet distinct from* its past and concomitant performances. Performances are related to scores, and vice versa, but it is essential to recognize that each performance does not equal the score. Each performance is a unique iteration and must be understood in terms of its particularity. In a very real and practical sense, we find in *Für Elise* an example of Plato’s token and type, or idea and form.

In conversation with both paradigms, Peter Kivy seeks to locate “literature” along this spectrum (Kivy 2006, pp. 4–5). He argues that while autographic is plausible, it is the allographic paradigm that is the more natural paradigm for literature. An allographic paradigm better describes the ways in which multiple persons experience texts in similar yet distinct ways. Reading is a performance of text, brought to life in the minds and thoughts of individuals. To be certain, Kivy’s argument and binary approach are simply too broad to apply *universally* for all literature; however, for the sake of this *particular* investigation

and for thinking about the Gospel of Mark as an object of study as performance and as narrative, it could be immensely helpful.

Does the Gospel of Mark fit more closely with one end of this spectrum than the other? One might argue that the Gospel of Mark could be considered an autographic art. Presumably, even if only for a while or at one point in time, there was a single, material, composition that we might refer to as the Gospel of Mark. However, barring a faith and field-altering archeological discovery, that object in its material form is no longer accessible to us. We could theoretically suggest that the version of Mark we are utilizing for a reading is an autographic object, but when and where we locate that object is a necessary component of it. In other words, this would likely be acceptable for the purposes of modern interpretation, but does this really equate to the object first-century audiences encountered? If we are asking the question of its “materiality” in the earliest reception, a reconstructed text may be considered to be representative, but it should not be mistaken as equal to a historical and material object. In short, considerations of Mark as an autographic object are equally as hypothetical, contingent, and limited as the above scenarios of *Für Elise*.

Rather than attempting to assess the Gospel of Mark within an autographic paradigm, an allographic paradigm may better represent the type of object that both narrative and performance critics have in mind. The Gospel of Mark might be assessed in terms of its materiality and literariness, yet it is by no means bound to it. Considering the emerging consensus about ancient literacy rates, coupled with the evidence for public and aural experiences of “texts” in antiquity, the allographic paradigm is also well-suited for thinking about and exploring the various modalities in which ancient audiences (as well as modern) might have experienced this object. Due to this plurality of experiences, and the differences within each modality, a more definitive or nuanced understanding of which modality is under consideration is essential.

As an object of study, then, the Gospel of Mark is complex. It might be understood as both text and not text. It is written down, exists as a text, and might be considered a complete narrative. As such, for narrative critics, the Gospel of Mark is a textual object, a complete narrative, something that can be experienced and interacted with by readers (whether ancient or modern). Yet, as argued by most performance critics, this configuration of the object is most likely not the same object experienced by most first-century audiences. Rather, the primary experience of the Gospel of Mark by its earliest audiences is as performance, a complex and multi-faceted event, with a wide range of factors that affect audience interpretation—including but by no means limited to oral, aural, and visual components. Thus, while an object similar to that of narrative criticism’s object may be physically present at these events, performance critics argue it was not the primary object engaged by audiences. If an ancient audience was asked this question, what is the Gospel of Mark, the performance is likely what they would have in mind, not text. This performed event, albeit hypothetical, reconstructed, and broadly defined by the modern scholar, is the object of study of the performance critics.²⁹

The Gospel of Mark exists in and as performances, not only in antiquity but also into the modern era via liturgical use. While it is technically true that both narrative and performance critics use the same raw materials as a starting point—most likely something like the NA28, a hypothetical, reconstructed, democratically commissioned, yet recognized in some sense as an “authoritative” text—their conceptions of the object of study are entirely different. If the Gospel of Mark might be experienced in various modalities or media, each particular investigation must account for which modality, mode, and experience it is assessing and how that distinct configuration of that object affects their analysis of it. While an allographic paradigm helps us to attend to some of these complexities in relation to clarifying an object which is more fluid in nature, it does not specifically aid us in our understanding of ancient textuality. Thus, a “root” metaphor (or a set of metaphors) which captures (at least to some degree) the potential and plurality of the object in its ancient context is warranted. At the very least, the metaphors offered below have the potential to

distinguish the performed event of performance criticism and the textual object of narrative criticism as *similar to yet distinct from* each other.

2.2. Script and Scripture as Metaphors for Ancient Textuality

Alessandro Vatri, in his 2017 volume *Orality and Performance in Classical Attic Prose*, utilizes the terms script and scripture in an attempt to delineate between two uses of texts in classical Athens.³⁰ For Vatri, a script is something composed for, and then even if eventually actualized in, oral performance. A scripture is a text that, despite its original purpose, is actualized in individual readings (Vatri 2017, pp. 37–38). While subtle, Vatri's distinction between scripts and scriptures is important, as it is not related to the "performability" of a written text (arguably, a feature inherent within all texts) but rather on the intended reception or use of that text. These categories have the potential to differentiate two types of uses, which ultimately result in two completely different areas of study. Thus, while the object (materially) may be the same, our understanding of its intended purpose, eventual use, and thus the communication event, changes everything.

In contrast to Vatri's approach, which is far more technical in nature, my aim here is less ambitious. Rather than attempt to establish authorial intention (something arguably undeterminable) or identify clues as to a text's "intended" reception (something by no means foreign to biblical performance critics, but outside the scope of this particular investigation), I seek rather to explore the potential value of these terms as "root" metaphors.³¹ I suggest that they may be useful for differentiating, conceptualizing, and exploring a variety of ancient receptions, and thus, aid us in conceiving of how audiences experienced these different objects of study historically. Where Vatri sought to tease out textual elements that pointed to a text's intended afterlife, these terms may more simply be employed as a way of explaining various receptions (real and hypothetical) of a text. In other words, a script may be considered a script (a metaphor for use, not a genre claim) so long as it is used as a script. In the same way, an author's intentions for their text need not be explicitly expressed, nor is there need for a text to demonstrate its awareness of its own textuality, in order for that text to be received as a scripture (a metaphor emphasizing textuality, not a canonical reference). Again, such distinctions may seem like splitting-hairs, but the implications are nonetheless important.

To better illustrate the importance of scripts and scriptures as potential metaphors for conceptualizing ancient textuality, and in particular the challenges in antiquity of authors controlling the modes of reception post-publication, it may be helpful to first consider the reception of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. Much like the Gospel of Mark, there is much we do not know about the immediate reception of this play. While the play (as a genre) was certainly written for one purpose, over time, the text (as object) begins to take on a life of its own. Within a century after its introduction to the stage, the primary medium of experience begins to shift, or at least begins to be contested, with varying implications for interpretation. By the 3rd century BCE, *Oedipus Rex* appears to be experienced simultaneously as script and scripture.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle sees *Oedipus Rex* as the quintessential drama, a seismic development from the epic poetry of Homer, not only in terms of its value for entertainment, but perhaps most importantly its narrative mimesis. Aristotle signals this shift by assessing it as a different genre, a "drama" and more specifically a "tragedy". One of the primary reasons for this distinction is the many features of the play that Aristotle identifies as affecting audiences.³² *Oedipus Rex* does things to an audience that the Homeric epics were unable to do. Jumping ahead slightly to the conclusion, Aristotle suggests that tragedy clearly conveys its effects in both its reading and in its performance.³³ In and of itself, this passage may suggest that the cultural understanding of texts in antiquity was that performance and text are equal; that texts somehow retain and, indeed, capture elements of speech within them, thus communicating the same message in either medium.³⁴ Such a reading of *Poetics*, ironically enough, is misleading given the larger context in which Aristotle is assessing these dynamics. Here, Aristotle is discussing which genre is superior, epic or drama.³⁵

Previously, Aristotle compared the performative nature of both genres, and he stresses the importance of mimesis for audiences of both.³⁶ Mimesis is what makes plausible the various elements within the narratives, both functionally (in terms of meter) and rhetorically (in terms of the audience's ability to relate to characters, situation, plausibility, etc.). As such, the text of the drama itself—and here, Aristotle appears to presume something like an “ideal” text, or a similar concept within literary criticism—provides a complete interpretive picture. Due to its concise nature, as well as the development of characteristics of the narrative from its predecessor (plot, characterization, diction, thought or spectacle, and lyric poetry), the plot of the drama can be understood just as easily as poetry in reading the text. It is the simplicity of the plot which makes drama accessible as text.

If Aristotle were to finish his thoughts here, it would seem as though he equates reading with one's understanding of the drama, at least theoretically. Not a few lines after this, however, Aristotle speaks to the “vividness” (ἐναργής) of both reading and performance.³⁷ What makes drama superior to epic is not its readability, but rather its performative features. While Aristotle seems to suggest that a drama communicates similar ideas whether in an individual reading event or in the drama's public performance, what makes drama superior to epic are its effects on an audience in performance.

To complicate this matter further, Ps. Plutarch provides an analogous account of the dual nature of the play at around the same time in Athens.³⁸ Lycurgus, an Athenian logographer and lawmaker, is more famously remembered as commemorating statutes to the three great playwrights (Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides), but also, and importantly for our purposes, commissioned the rewriting of authoritative versions of their plays.³⁹ The plays were to be preserved in the public archives, but also, and more tellingly, Lycurgus makes it illegal for actors to depart from the authorized text in public performances of these plays.⁴⁰ Ps. Plutarch states that the plays were to be read to the performers to ensure the authenticity of their representation.

This decree, if its indeed historical, has contrasting implications for understanding how texts were viewed and used in antiquity. Theoretically, it presupposes that some viewed the role of text as determinative of performance—i.e., that reading an “authoritative” text reveals and/or concretizes certain performance characteristics. Practically, however, it suggests the exact opposite.⁴¹ Apparently, various actors/performers were performing the plays in different ways. Whether it was because they were accessing different versions of a text—thus explaining Lycurgus's commissioning of authoritative versions—or whether it was due to interpretive decisions, the performances varied. While Aristotle suggests that the “actions” of the drama are attainable through reading the text, the edict of Lycurgus suggests that in practice, this is not always the case. There is a disconnect between the words in a text and the ways in which the actions implied by those words are performed on the stages.

Nearly a century after its original staging, and in light of these two points of contact, we might infer the following about Sophocles's play: likely, it functions in the same time period as both script *and* scripture.⁴² For its original use, the text was a script, something from which the actors and orators took their cues to engage in public performances. Once that script was removed from its original performance context (the stages at Dionysia), its use by different audiences becomes subject to a number of different modes of reception. Aristotle appears to treat the work of Sophocles as scripture, a text that can be studied and is intended for readers, an individual's interaction with a physical and material text. Ps. Plutarch's account of Lycurgus suggests that he also wants to make this so, by commissioning authoritative versions of the plays as a means of controlling performances. While the predominant experience of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, even at the time of Aristotle and Lycurgus, is probably still as script (with audiences experiencing this play via performance), both Aristotle and Lycurgus have sought to use it, and indeed in some senses have used it, as scripture.

3. Shifting Gears: The Gospel of Mark as Script and Scripture

Observations concerning the reception of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* certainly do not provide us with any direct parallel to the afterlives of biblical texts; however, by way of analogy, we might imagine a similar process of transmission occurring within the reception of the Gospel of Mark. We have little knowledge of how the Gospel of Mark was received between the time of its composition and its first known reception. As such, this silent period leaves room for further speculation. I suggest here that the Gospel of Mark follows a similar trajectory to that of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, and perhaps more broadly a number of other performance texts.⁴³ Over time, after moving to different locations, with different audiences, the use of these performance texts transforms into something other than their original or implied purpose. After it is written, and as it is disseminated to various locations, its mode of experience and primary medium of reception change in similar ways to those of Sophocles's text. While the specifics of this transition are admittedly speculative, it is certainly plausible that a similar transition occurred with the Gospel of Mark.

This reconstruction of the reception of the Gospel of Mark reinforces the importance of identifying when and where one is locating their object of study. In its earliest reception, as argued by the performance critics, the Gospel of Mark was most likely and primarily experienced as oral event, heard by the majority of audiences, performed by a public reader for the community. As such, the "textual" object of Mark was not the locus of authority, but rather as script, its materiality and presence served as one piece of a performance event. The text as object is decentered, as the performance itself functions as the object of interpretation and understanding. As the text was copied, disseminated, and moved beyond its originating location, the text finds a new life and new level of importance as text within its reception. No longer seen as a script, and as only part of the meaning making process, the text becomes for different audiences the primary means of generating meaning.⁴⁴ At this later point in time the text achieves a place of prominence and is both experienced and regarded by some audiences as scripture.

Assuming it is plausible that such a process occurred with Mark, one needs to identify where within this continuum of uses, between script and scripture, they are locating their object of study. Both might be considered "early" receptions of Mark, but when referring to the "earliest", either scenario might be assumed. On the one hand, one might conceive of Mark as being written for an illiterate audience, with the intention of an aural reception. Given the oral milieu in which it was written, and assuming the literacy rates are as low as have been suggested, it is *plausible* that the majority of Mark's intended audience experienced the contents of Mark's script through some means other than a written and material object. Conversely, the earliest *demonstratable* evidence we have of Mark's reception is its use as scripture. Matthew and Luke both appear to use Mark as a written source for their own works.⁴⁵ When we talk about Mark's earliest reception, both of these uses are potential sites of investigation.

This is where, arguably, the value of comparison might be most beneficial. Mark existed for a number of years prior to its first demonstratable reception. It is possible that the use of Mark as scripture is not something we should (or necessarily can) assume from the beginning, but rather is something that progresses and occurs over time. For example, Matthew and Luke are generally understood to be "readers" of Mark in a location distant from where Mark was written.⁴⁶ It is possible that as Mark's Gospel moves outside of its originating location, it is subject to different types of usage, ultimately finding a "textual" life in the reception by Matthew and Luke.⁴⁷ In the same way that a gap exists between the composition of Sophocles's play and its eventual use as scripture by Aristotle and Lycurgus, we might also conceptualize a similar gap and similar transition in Mark's reception, caught between these two distinct uses.

Suggesting these two different types of reception of Mark among its "earliest" audiences is certainly a historical contribution of sorts, however, it is arguably of more importance theoretically. The metaphors of script and scripture highlight the complexities of conceptualizing ancient textuality, as well as the limitations of the "root" metaphors

in use currently within biblical studies. While the majority of these metaphors are useful for contemplating the second of these receptions—biblical texts as scripture—they tend to obscure the first—both their lives as script, but more importantly the performances that accompanied them. While narrative criticism does a fine job of attending to the scriptural side of the Gospel of Mark, it is this obscuring of its life as script that performance criticism seeks to disclose. Not only do the dual metaphors of script and scripture help to illuminate a variety of receptions of Mark in the ancient context, but also, in terms of the questions raised within this Special Issue, they help us to distinguish more clearly between the objects of study in narrative and performance criticism. While both sides are necessary for contemplating this complex object that is the Gospel of Mark in an ancient context, and indeed at times these two approaches may be complementary, it would be a mistake and a loss to our field to confuse similarity with congruency.

4. Conclusions

Performance and narrative criticisms take on different objects of study. This may seem so obvious there is little need to state it. And yet, due to a number of reasons, this distinction has not always been clear. The terms “script” and “scripture” are by no means unique to this work, nor to the field of biblical studies, yet I have suggested here that they are helpful metaphors for conceptualizing not only ancient receptions of Mark, but also, the theoretical differences between these narrative and performance approaches. Often, the terms script and scripture possess a generic or a technical sense, and, to a certain degree, rightfully so. However, their usefulness as root metaphors may arguably be of greater importance. As dual metaphors, they have the potential to uphold both literary and performance experiences by audiences, and in doing so continue to open doors to a more complex understanding of ancient textuality more broadly, and biblical texts more specifically. In line with the call of this journal, I have suggested that these dual metaphors may also aid us in further distinguishing between the objects of study in narrative and performance criticisms, as things that are *similar to yet distinct from* one another.

To return to our example above, both narrative and performance criticism undertake analyses of the Gospel of Mark. Both criticisms say they are assessing the Gospel of Mark, using the same terms and even the same raw materials; yet, what each side means by that appellation is entirely different. The Gospel of Mark as an object of study is complex. Narrative criticism’s object of study may be better understood through the metaphor of scripture, a text received as a text, which carries with it a host of assumptions about literacy and textuality, including implied rules of engagement. While materially the same, the object of study for performance criticism is theoretically distinct from that of narrative criticism. It is not limited by the same chirographic assumptions. As such, this object is better understood through the metaphor of a script, a text to be sure, but one whose material presence and form is supplemental to the performance event. By engaging the Gospel of Mark through the metaphor of a script, this aids us in conceptualizing an ancient text whose primary use was. . .well, not as text. Therefore, the object of performance criticism is not a scripture, a text intended to be read, but rather the object is the performance event, something *similar to yet distinct from* the script. Some may see this dissection as nothing more than a splitting of hairs, and to a certain extent, if we only consider the material remains of these objects, this may be true. However, when we attend to the theoretical differences between these two approaches more fully, this instead signals a shifting of gears—a difference of kind, not merely degree—and ultimately leads us to a more robust sense of what it means to study and understand the Gospel of Mark—as both script *and* scripture.

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Notes

- ¹ Cf. David G. Horrell, who says the study of the Bible “whatever else it may be, is the study of literature” (Horrell 2002, p. 22). Cited also by Kelly R. Iverson (2021, pp. 16–17).
- ² These two are important distinctions between narrative and performance approaches, as the solitary experience of reading is not and should not be understood to be the same as the more corporate experience of an audience in performance. For more on this as a point of distinction between performance and narrative approaches see among others: Rhoads (2006); Iverson (2018, pp. 51–65, esp. p 60); Whitenton (2016a).
- ³ Similarly, within this literate model, the reader is the primary interpreter of text, for oneself; this is fundamentally different from a performance model, where the performer is a mediator of the message for an audience. For more on this important feature see among others: Shiell (2004); Giles and Doan (2009); Ruge-Jones (2009, 2014); Boomershine (2011); Iverson (2013).
- ⁴ Of course, there are exceptions to this, as for instance a semiotic approach to language may challenge this as an assumption inherent to our understanding of textuality. However, the phonological ties between reading comprehension and hearing are closely bound. For a brief summary of the role that the inner voice plays in our comprehension during reading see among others: Besner (1987). See also Musselman (2000).
- ⁵ For further discussion on the presence and absence of an inner voice in reading see among others: Vilhauer (2016, 2017).
- ⁶ For some, this may recall Genette’s oft-cited axiom: “. . . a text without a paratext does not exist. . . .” (G  rard Genette 1997, pp. 3–4). My intention is certainly not to challenge this notion, but rather and far more simply, to highlight that certain texts may have additional paratexts than others.
- ⁷ Scribal habits and the varying levels of accessibility for ancient texts has been well documented and need not be reproduced here. Much has been made of the “accessibility” of ancient texts, and some performance critics have perhaps exaggerated how difficult it would be for ancient persons to read these texts. My intention is not to wade into these waters here, nor is it necessarily to make a case for modern printing as “necessarily” more accessible. More simply, I use this to point out how certain advantages of modern printing illuminate how much we often take for granted in the reading process.
- ⁸ This is not to suggest that the “meaning” will not change, as meaning depends on a number of contextualizing factors. What I wish to emphasize here is that the words themselves do not change, a key contrast between the stability of texts and the transience and variability of performances. For more on transience of performance see among others: Iverson (2014); Whitenton (2016b, 2019); for more on the potential variability and decision making necessary for performers see among others: Boomershine (1987); Iverson (2011); Eberhart (forthcoming).
- ⁹ This does not mean that the presumed medium of experience might not change at some point in the future, as I will suggest below is what happens to ancient texts. This is perhaps one area that performance criticism, moving forward, may wish to explore. With technological advances and applications that convert text to audio, and vice versa, some “written” texts are likely already being composed by means of oral dictation. It is also likely that in the near future, if not already, the majority of audiences will engage with this text audibly—though, it is important to point out here that oral dictation was not the composition technique of this article, nor is an aural reception necessarily the default medium of experience envisioned by the majority of authors writing in academic journals today.
- ¹⁰ For more on the different type of communication events imagined by literary/narrative and performance criticisms see Perry (2016); Iverson (2021).
- ¹¹ Throughout this article I will use the terms performance critics and performance criticism to refer to those who consider performance characteristics and dynamics as essential to understanding biblical messages. When referring to performance critics outside of biblical studies, I will qualify that reference by indicating their field of study. Such a decision is practical and necessary for the purposes of writing, and yet unfortunately, this could suggest something that I am not. To clarify, I am not suggesting that performance criticism is a cohesive and fully established approach, nor that performance critics all share the same, or for the most part similar, assumptions. This simply is not true. Some performance critics may agree with some of the things I attribute to them, some may not. While there are some characteristics agreed upon by “most” performance critics, by and large it is still an emerging area of study. Because performance criticism is broad in both its application and influence, and because it is an inherently interdisciplinary approach, it may still be some time before there is a “uniform” sense of performance criticism. For more on the diversity of views and applications of performance criticism, see among others Perry (2019).
- ¹² For more on ancient literacy and how insights on it inform biblical performance criticism see among others: Eberhart (forthcoming). For more on illiteracy rates in antiquity see: Harris (1989); Bar-Illan (1992); Hezser (2001). For a more recent and complex treatment of various reading practices and events in antiquity see: Johnson (2000, 2010); Johnson and Parker (2009).
- ¹³ For studies on ancient rheotric and a cultural preference for orality see Shiner (2003); Shiell (2004).
- ¹⁴ Much has been made about “reading aloud” in antiquity, particularly in light of Augustine’s claim in *Confess.* 6.3.3. Additional examples of reading aloud in antiquity include: Pliny, *Ep.* 1.5.2.4, 14; 1.13.1–3; 1.15.2; 1.16.6; 1.20.9–10; 2.3.4; 2.10.2–3, 6; 3.1.4, 8–9; 3.5.10–12; 3.7.5; 3.15.4; 4.19.4; 4.27.1; 5.3.1–2; 5.17.2–3; 5.19.3; 6.15; 6.17.1; 6.21.2; 7.4.3, 9; 7.17.1–4; 7.25.4; 8.1; 8.21; 9.34; 9.36.3–4; Dio Chrysostom, *Disc.* 8.9; 18.6–7; NT examples include: Acts 8:28–30; 15:31; 1 Thess. 5:27; Col 4:16; 1 Tim 4:13; Rev. 1:3, 22:18. For Early Christian references to a “reader” or lector: 2 Clement 19:1; Tertullian, *Praescr.* 41; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.43.11. etc.

However, this evidence for reading aloud has at times been used somewhat uncritically to suggest that reading was “only” done aloud, which is certainly not true and has raised a number of critical responses.

See among others [Malherbe \(1983\)](#); [Shiner \(2003\)](#); [Shiell \(2004\)](#); [Aliken \(2010\)](#); [Nässelqvist \(2016\)](#); [Whitenton \(2016b\)](#); [Wright \(2017\)](#).

For a more robust conversation of metaphors in play, see [Eberhart \(forthcoming\)](#). For examples of works positing alternative metaphors for understanding ancient textuality see among others: [Breed \(2014\)](#); [Mroczek \(2016\)](#); [Larsen \(2018\)](#); [Miller \(2019\)](#); [Keith \(2020\)](#), etc.

Some examples include [Moloney \(2002\)](#); [Malbon \(2009\)](#); et al.

For further discussion on “root” metaphors and how they shape and dictate our thinking about ancient texts see: [Mroczek \(2016\)](#).

Without exaggeration, the Gospel of Mark might be considered ground zero for both approaches, as groundbreaking works for each approach emerge in relation to it: See [Rhoads and Michie \(1982\)](#); [Shiner \(2003\)](#). While Shiner’s work is “technically” not yet performance criticism, as Rhoads will introduce the term a few years later, it is arguably the most influential work on what has become performance criticism.

Some of what follows is adapted from a chapter in [Eberhart \(forthcoming\)](#).

Of course, when the Gospel of Mark is included within a canon, it does change physically or materially as it is now part of some other “text”. However, the importance of this distinction is that the material referred to as the Gospel of Mark does not change.

This still seems to be the general view of Mark in New Testament studies, primarily based on analyses of Mark’s grammatical simplicity and upon reconstructions of Christian origins. More recently, however, the notion that the gospel authors are writing for a “more common” audience has been challenged. For an argument in favor of the Gospels as products by and for the literary for elite, see [Walsh \(2020\)](#).

Some of the shared problems between classicists and biblical scholars include textual pluriformity, complex textual histories of their primary sources, situating those texts within their ancient literate and textual landscape, accounting for oral traditions and performances, et al. Cf. The discussions of the object of study in [Porter \(2019\)](#) and [Kozack \(2017\)](#), who address some of these issues when approaching characterization in the epics through performance.

My primary conversation partner here is Peter Kivy, from his work [Kivy \(2006\)](#); for the language of allographic and autographic, Kivy is drawing on the work of [Goodman \(1968\)](#). For works which employ these categories of autographic and allographic as a way of thinking about the ontology of biblical texts, see among others: [Hendel \(2015\)](#); [Nati \(2022\)](#).

It is worth noting that several biblical performance critics also cite the musical score as a potential analogue for understanding the role of texts in the ancient world. For example, see [Boomershine \(1987, esp. p. 54\)](#); [Rhoads and Dewey \(2014, pp. 1–26, esp. pp. 14–16\)](#). This may, at least in part, stem from the work of early Shakesperean performance critic J. L. Styan who uses the language of “text-as-score” as a parallel construction of the “the plays as blueprints for performance” ([Styan 1997, p. 235](#)). The musical score will also serve as a useful analogue for Alessandro Vatri, whose work is discussed further below ([Vatri 2017](#)). More recently, Yii-Jan Lin has proposed music, more specifically jazz, as an analogue or metaphor for understanding the role of textual criticism. See [Lin \(2020\)](#).

For a brief but helpful history, see: [Cooper \(1984\)](#).

The standardized “version” comes from an edition printed by Ludwig Nohl in 1867.

The “original” title was “Bagatelle No 25 in A Minor”, though references to its recipient Therese have shaped the title in its reception.

The idea of the performance event (or sometimes referred to as the performance setting) is crucial to biblical performance criticism. While the proposed event is always and ultimately hypothetical, it serves a necessary heuristic function. Many possible performance events may be reimagined within the ancient world, and yet the event described at the beginning of this work will be the framework through which our understanding of the potential of the script in performance is based. Ultimately, each performance scenario which might be reasonably argued for has the potential to create new sets of meaning within the performance event. For more on some of the various ways in which the performance event might be configured see among others: [Shiner \(2003\)](#); [Whitenton \(2016b\)](#); [Iverson \(2021\)](#); [Eberhart \(forthcoming\)](#).

[Vatri \(2017, pp. 37–46\)](#). The terms “script” and “scripture” are not unique to Vatri, but rather are borrowed from [Nagy \(1996\)](#) and expanded upon here.

This is not to suggest that a more technical approach would not also be fruitful. In fact, there are numerous ways in which this sort of close attention to the text reveals insights into the relationship between texts and their oral performance. For example, sound mapping has proven to be a boon in the field of performance criticism, aiding scholars in thinking about how sound matters in performance, and how texts might be composed specifically for their audience’s ears. See for example, [Lee and Scott \(2009\)](#); [Nässelqvist \(2016\)](#); [Boomershine \(2012\)](#); [Lee \(2018\)](#). While different than sound mapping, for helpful examples of how scholars have sought to identify “oral” or “performance” features specifically within Mark’s text, see: [Wire \(2011\)](#); [Elder \(2019\)](#).

Poet. 1462a.

Poet. 1462b. 2–12.

- 34 Compare this, for instance, with the work of David Olson. Olson suggests that the illocutionary force of in an oral context stems not from the lexical forms of a word, but rather it is something that is imbedded within the act of communication itself. Because illocution is a product of the communication event, writing is able to record the locutionary act (what is said), but leaves the illocutionary force (ultimately, what it means) underspecified (Olson 1994, pp. 92–97). For a helpful discussion of the importance of Olson’s work to the task of performance criticism, see: Iverson (2011).
- 35 Poet. 1461b.
- 36 Poet. 1459a.
- 37 Poet. 1462b. There is some debate here as to what type of reading Aristotle has in mind. If he has in mind reading aloud, such a statement perhaps carries less weight than if he were juxtaposing silent reading with performance.
- 38 Ps. Plutarch, *Moralia, Lives of the Ten Orators*.
- 39 Ps. Plutarch, *Moralia, Lives of the Ten Orators*, 841F. According to Plutarch, Lycurgus is responsible for shaping much of Greek knowledge about texts. In addition to this claim about the Greek playwrights, Plutarch also suggests that Lycurgus is responsible for the Greeks knowledge of Homer, bringing copies of the poets work back with him from his journey through Asia. Plutarch suggests that some of the people were aware of the poem, and some even “chanced” upon portions of the text, due to trade, but Plutarch suggests that “their fame is due above all to Lycurgus, who was the first to make them known here” (Life of Lycurgus, 4).
- 40 Ps. Plutarch, *Moralia, Lives of the Ten Orators*, 841F. For more on the potential political significance of Lycurgus “canonizing” act see, Duncan and Liapis (2018, esp. pp. 188–90).
- 41 For a similar “implied” understanding of the failures of a text to communicate a presumed message, see the classic example of Pliny, 9.34 and the anxiety Pliny wrestles with over whether or not he or someone else should perform the message. The implication here is that the message could change based on performance. Pliny fears that his own performance will not convey what others are capable of.
- 42 For the continued use of Sophocles plays in the theater during this time see: Finglass (2012, pp. 10–11). John P.A. Gould (2012), says “Successful in his lifetime, Sophocles continued to be a powerful presence in the Greek tragic theatre in the following century. His plays seem to have been frequently revived, and the leading parts in them were taken by great actors of the period, such as Polus and Theodorus (Dem. *De fals. leg.* 246–7; Epictetus *Diss.* fr. 11[)]”.
- 43 My use of performance text here is not intended to be technical, but descriptive. For more on how a similar trajectory may be observed with other performed texts see: Eberhart (forthcoming).
- 44 Cf. Foley (1995). Here, Foley describes a similar transition in oral traditions with textual remains. He discusses how the illocutionary force of tradition and performance is retained so long as there is still an “umbilical of metonym”. In other words, so long as someone is present who is familiar with that tradition. However, as the text becomes further removed from the oral tradition, as the so-called umbilical withers, the “conduit of extratextual meaning” is lost. At that point, the text itself becomes the conduit of meaning as that is all that remains.
- 45 Of course, it is possible that this construction in itself is anachronistic. It is plausible that within an oral milieu Matthew or Luke also knew Mark—or oral traditions similar to Mark—as performance and not only as text (see for example Rhoads 2010, p. 166; Rhoads and Dewey 2014, p. 18; Swanson 2014, pp. 182–84, who raise questions about certain textual assumptions in discussions of the Synoptics relationship to each other). A much more substantive and detailed investigation of the Synoptic relationship by means of performance is needed before such a view could be adopted here, and therefore stands outside the bounds of this particular project. For the sake of this argument, I will assume that Matthew and Luke are treating Mark as “scripture” and that this is the earliest “reception” of Mark that we have as such.
- 46 Nailing down a *precise* geographic location of Matthew’s and Luke’s writing is of little importance to my point here. What is significant are the *relative* locations which have been suggested. To my knowledge, I am not aware of any proposals which argue for the same originating location for any of the Synoptic gospels. Even in cases of overlap between arguments more generally, the specific arguments make a distinction between the geographic locations of each author. For example, Rome (loosely defined) has been suggested as a location for each of the Synoptic gospels. However, I am not aware of any single argument that makes the case for Rome as the same location for any two of these gospels, let alone all three. It is this relative evaluation of the location of production which is more important to my argument than any specific argument concerning geographic locations.
- 47 Note, I am not suggesting here that the works of Matthew and Luke denote the “end” of Mark’s reception as script, or that there is a clearly identifiable break between these two types of reception. Such a view reinforces a divide between “orality” and “literacy” that is more problematic than helpful. I merely concede here that the works of Matthew and Luke may indicate a point in which Mark appears to be used as scripture.

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