

# Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part II

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## Abstract

In Part 1 of this article, I sought to depict performance criticism as an emerging discipline in Second Testament studies. I explained how the first-century Mediterranean area comprised predominantly oral cultures, that writing primarily served orality, that performances were central to early Christian communities, and that the Second Testament writings were basically “remnants” of oral performances. I proposed an outline of the key features of the performance event in an effort to encourage us to interpret Second Testament writings in the context of such performance scenarios. Part 2 comprises two sections. In the first section, I want to lay out the eclectic nature of performance criticism and identify the contributions of many potential partners in the enterprise. These partners include traditional methodologies, recent methodologies, and new approaches to biblical studies related to performance. In the second section, I will lay out the insights and benefits that come from my personal experience of performing biblical materials and of incorporating these experiences into the methods of interpretation that comprise performance criticism. My hope is that performance criticism may not only add to the tools of research in the field but also that the paradigmatic shift in medium from written to oral may bring changes in the way Second Testament disciplines in general pursue their subject matter.

The overwhelming experience of the earliest Christians was oral/aural in the context of a predominantly oral culture. Virtually all of the Christian traditions were shared in formal and informal contexts of storytelling and letter-sharing, for most people without a direct connection to manuscripts. Indeed, most Second Testament writings were not even penned until the last two decades of the first century. It is difficult to get at the broad, popular storytelling level because our written remains are mostly from literate circles, whereas the vast majority of peasant folk were not literate. Even when the traditions were written down, they were put to writing in the service of orality. Letters were dictated as performances and then were used as scripts for performance. The gospel traditions were composed orally and eventually written as aids to performance. It was the sounds and the actions of performance that were paramount, and the marks on the page were designed either to record the sounds or to remind performers of the sounds and the actions that the writing denoted. Clearly, taking a flesh and blood perfor-

mance and putting the sounds alone in script was a reduction of the event.

If an early Christian had been asked about a letter from Paul or a story of Jesus by “Mark,” they would have thought of the flesh and blood performance rather than a manuscript, much as we think of the music and not the score when we mention Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony or much as we

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think of our experience of the play performed rather than the script when we refer to Hamlet or Medea. For early Christians, the Gospel of Mark, for example, was not a text; it was an event. Perhaps, if performances of Second Testament writings had been kept alive through these many centuries, we would think of the Gospel of John or the First Letter of Peter primarily in terms of our experience of various performances of them.

We may not have any access to these ancient performances, but we do have the collected writings of the Second Testament. How are we to see them as “oral literature”? When we interpret the Gospel of Mark, are we interpreting the (manu-)scripts or are we interpreting performances—insofar as we are able to (re-)construct them or re-enliven them! If the Second Testament texts are like fossil remains of live performances, how will our study of them as performance literature shape our understanding of the meaning and rhetoric of these texts? The challenge of performance criticism is to learn everything we can learn about performances of early Christian traditions and to interpret, as best we can, the texts before us as “performance literature.”

### Methodological Approaches

There are a number of methodologies in Second Testament studies that can help to bring rigor to the discipline of performance criticism and that together can offer new insights and provide checks and balances on interpretation. In fact, I would argue that developments in a number of disciplines are already converging into what I am referring to as “performance criticism.” I propose that performance criticism stand on its own as a methodology with many partners. One might think that performance criticism should be a sub-discipline of orality criticism or rhetorical criticism or narrative criticism or discourse analysis. In some sense, performance studies are a sub-discipline of all these methodologies. However, precisely because performance criticism is an eclectic discipline bringing together many different methods already employed in Second Testament studies, it would be advantageous 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 Second Testament studies and from secular methodologies (such as theater studies and oral interpretation of literature), and can adapt those disciplines for use in constructing scenarios of performance and in gaining fresh insights for interpreta-

tion. At the same time, performance criticism should not just be an added discipline alongside others. Rather, because performance criticism involves a paradigmatic media shift from written to oral, the study of performance should—in a kind of cross-pollination—also inform other disciplines and transform their strategies, methods, and results as well.

What follows are some reflections on the contributions various disciplines can make to the development of performance criticism and the ways in which they in turn might be informed by performance criticism.

#### *Historical Criticism*

Performance critics can benefit from the contribution of historical criticism to recover all we can know about performers, their methods, and the sites of their performances in first-century life. We can learn about the role of scribes in memorizing a text and then reading it aloud, the work of rhetors in giving public speeches, the role of the rhapsodes (literate storytellers and poets as entertainers) or cantacleers or storytellers, the philosophers orating in the market places, the tradents who passed on the community genealogies and stories, as well as leaders 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 outside the synagogues and temples throughout the Roman world who announced the feats of the gods. From historical criticism, we can also learn of the Jewish educational system (limited to some male children), which seems to have been based on reading/recalling and listening to the Torah, and the Greco-Roman education (limited to children of elites), which focused on the rhetorical practice of giving speeches as a preparation for public life. Also investigated by historical criticism is the broader world of ubiquitous, informal “performers” who told stories in market places, social gatherings, and at home (Scobie). The role of women in storytelling is of special interest here (Hearon; Wire; Dewey 1996). Oral performances—formal and informal—were an integral part of ancient life. What do we already know and what more can we learn about these figures? (Draper 2004a; Hargis; Havelock; Lord; Nagy). And what are the limits of our knowledge?

Historical criticism can also help to recover from ancient sources how rhapsodes and other performers may have gone about their craft of performance—where, under what cir-

cumstances, to what audiences, in what manner, in what locales, and to what ends. 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 drama—characters, styles of performance, audience responses, and so on. We can compare/contrast the nature of performance occasions among elites in contrast to peasants and reflect on the power dynamics relative to each. We can assess the role of performance-as-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. How might historical criticism bring all this information together to give us a comprehensive framework from which to proceed?

In turn, historical criticism could benefit from performance criticism. For example, efforts to (re-)construct the life of Jesus may benefit from attending to the performative dimension of the words/actions of Jesus in an oral culture and to the performance of traditions related to his words and actions (Wansbrough; Kelber). Recently, James Dunn has sought to re-frame the quest for the historical Jesus in light of an analysis of the oral nature of the traditions of the first century. He emphasizes that Jesus may have initiated the same oral tradition on more than one occasion; that the traditions about Jesus already began during his lifetime; that the striking words of Jesus and the oral stories about him would have had a deep and lasting impact upon hearers and thus aided memory; and that the relationships among the synoptic gospels can best be explained by a combination of literary and oral factors. He rejects form criticism's "literary" portrayal of the developing oral traditions as a linear progression from an original form; instead, he argues for multiple originating events with a diversity of oral responses. These and other developments could benefit further from careful analysis of the performance occasions of the oral traditions. Also, historical (re-)constructions of the early church—church order, worship, the spread of the gospel, and the dynamics of communal relationships—could also be reconfigured by attending to the dynamics of performance events.

### *Form Criticism and Genre Criticism*

Form and genre criticism have versed us in such forms as aphorisms, miracle stories, and pronouncement stories and such genres as letters, gospels, histories, speeches, and apocalypses in all their many forms (Bailey; Sweeney and Ben Zvi; Wansbrough); and we know how they work to provide

a standard frame for the telling and retelling of stories with variation. We know that they are an aid to memory. We also know how forms and genres serve to set up expectations for a reader so that readers know what details to look for and how to interpret them—and how those expectations may then be confirmed or subverted. However, because we work mostly with the 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 as structures for performance. Originally, all of these were oral rather than written forms and genres. This raises many questions. How, from a performer's point of view, do forms and genres aid memory? What would be the techniques employed by a performer to display a particular form or genre and to make it work its effect on the audience? How do forms and genres raise and then subvert expectations in a temporal experience of hearing? How do they generate and maintain interest? What would be the performance impact of a type-scene repeated with variation? How might the form or genre *be* the message 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 the Letter of James or an apocalypse such as the Book of Revelation *work* as a composition-in-performance to have a significant impact on an audience? How might giving and hearing contemporary performances serve as a helpful means to test our analyses of forms and genres? Such question might inform both the work of performance criticism and the work of form/genre criticism as well.

### *Narrative Criticism*

Narrative studies are an obvious partner to performance 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 a communal 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 a feature of the text. The narrator was always the flesh and blood performer; and the narratee was always a flesh and blood communal audience. Furthermore, plot, characters, and settings are crucial for performance. The performer is seeking to develop suspense, to get the audience to identify with certain characters and 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, the “sound” of forecasts and echoes in the aural mode is a different experience 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 (Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie; Dewey 1989; 1994). When experienced as oral performance, the narrative is 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. Furthermore, diverse narrative interpretations could be tested for their cogency and power through actual performances. And some of our interpretations might be called into question, because they simply cannot be performed in any meaningful or effective way.

#### *Reader-Response Criticism*

Reader-response criticism is also a natural partner of performance criticism. Once we reconfigure reader-response criticism as audience-response criticism or hearer-response criticism in a communal setting, 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 when 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, to act out a gesture, or to express an emotion or to offer “cues” for the audience to respond. 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” (Fowler). Length of sentences and number of clauses serve as directions for the pace and rhythm of performances.

And, in contrast to a text-based approach that evaluates quotations from the “writings” as “inter-textual” allusions, response criticism could suggest how aural echoes of Israel’s stories and traditions worked for performers and communal audiences. For example, an oral quotation from a First Testament writing may have functioned in an aural context to evoke in the audience their collective social memory of a whole scenario in Israel’s history, much as a reference to Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech may evoke collective memories of the civil rights movement as a whole (Horsley 2001: 53–78).

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) really was innocent!

#### *Rhetorical Criticism*

Rhetorical criticism of the writings in the Second Testament can be a key facet of performance criticism. Extensive work has been done on the rhetoric of the Second Testament, especially the letters. We have now fairly well determined that each letter had embedded in it a speech that reflected in significant ways the structures, stylistic techniques, and modes of discourse of ancient (classical) rhetoric. Some critics have begun to reflect on the oral dynamics of rhetoric in Paul’s letters (P. Botha; Loubser 2001; Dewey 1995; Richard; cf. Stirewalt). Other writings, including some narratives, also bear features of classical rhetoric.

In Second Testament studies, most attention has been given to identification of types of rhetoric (forensic, deliberative, and epideictic) and to the arrangement of the arguments in the letters, with less attention given to the nature of 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 or no formal education. All of these dynamics were crucial in shaping the performance of the epistolary speeches in the Second Testament. 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 exegeti-

cal judgments about these “speeches” apart from the experience of the oral medium for which they were composed?

Only recently has any attention been given to memorization and delivery (Hall and Bond; Olbricht 2001; Shiner with bibliography; Shiell) or to the implied rhetorical impact—the “process of persuasion”—of the letters upon a communal audience. What clues are there in the written text to suggest the process of memorization? How much did oral performances vary when repeated from occasion to occasion? Did performances vary less with speeches and letters than with narratives? What features of speeches are stage directions for performance? Did performers “embody” arguments and emotions? We have extensive knowledge of gestures from ancient statues and rhetorical handbooks. What gestures did performers use to express certain emotions or to make certain points? (Aldrete; Boegehold; Bremmer and Roodenburg; Graf; de Jorio; Corbeill; Hall; Shiner; Shiell; J. E. Botha 1996).

When I first memorized Galatians for performance, I chose to adapt the translation of Hans Dieter Betz in his *Hermeneia Commentary on GALATIANS*. After all, this was the foundational work on rhetorical criticism in Second 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 he was persuaded that the performance confirmed his basic 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 performances of a letter? Or without performing a letter ourselves?

Ancient rhetorical handbooks and other ancient writings contain descriptions and directions for memorization and delivery. 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 of 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; and the evocation of emotions was the primary means of persuasion. Shiner’s book has shown the possibilities for constructing some ancient performances by correlating conventions of performance gleaned from handbooks, from statuary and other artistic depictions, from ancient descriptions of performances, and from clues within the text itself about the way these stories/ speeches may have been performed. William Shiell has done similar work on the Acts of the Apostles. How can we use all the information available to us to (re-)construct the dynamics of ancient performances, including what it was that the ancients meant by “reading”?

### *Textual Criticism*

Some developments in textual criticism are relevant for a reconstruction of performances. Copyists were obviously people who could read and write and who therefore may also have been performers of the texts they copied. Recent studies have shown that the textual tradition was much more fluid than previously thought and that this fluidity of the textual tradition may have been shaped in part by the fluidity of the oral tradition (Gamble; Parker; Person). As such, scribes may have copied a text with somewhat the same freedoms with which they would repeat a performance. What can we learn from the textual tradition about oral tradition? Also, second century texts already show signs of aids to facilitate reading—the extension of a line into the margin to mark the beginning of a paragraph; some indications of sentence designations; and breaks in the text to suggest a pause in reading (Hurtado). The very presence of such “readers’ aids” may suggest that it was difficult to read texts without these markers; and such markers may provide clues as to how the texts were presented in public performance. In turn, textual critics might assess their subject matter somewhat differently if they were to think of manuscripts as performance literature.

### *Orality Criticism*

Orality criticism has been an exciting development 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 traditions, the dynamics of social memory, the power dimensions of oral/written communication, and the gender dimensions of orality (Foley 1995; 2002; Lord; Goody; Ong 1967; 1988; Draper 2004b). A particular aspect of this study involves

analysis of the complex interface between oral and written media in various cultures (Finnegan 1988; Goody). This study of living cultures leads to a study of oral culture in antiquity—both Greco-Roman (Draper 2004a; Havelock; Lord) and Jewish (Jaffee; Mendels; Niditch; Neusner). Now there seems also to be a special focus on composition and performance (Foley 1995; 2002; Ben-Amos and Goldstein; Fine; Finnegan 1992; Okpewho; Joubert; Nagy). This emphasis has put the spotlight on the performers of tradition and the way in which traditions compose as they perform for diverse audiences in different cultures.

Studies of living oral cultures give us real life examples of the wide variety of the bearers of oral tradition in diverse cultures: the means by which they pass along their stories and traditions; their faithfulness to traditions and their creativity in passing them along; 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. Studies of performance are being illuminated by studies of social memory in an oral culture (in which people know only what they remember)—how people recall, how a community keeps traditions alive, the process of revision, the nature of fresh oral configurations, the dependence on a “frame” as an aid to memory and composition, how collective memory helps to maintain community, and so on (Kirk and Thatcher; see BIBLICAL THEOLOGY BULLETIN 36/1 [Spring, 2006]—an entire issue devoted to the subject of social memory). Consider also the extensive studies done on folklore tradition (Jordan and Kalcik; Fine; Ben-Amos and Goldstein). Further, we can learn about performance from practices in those religions of the world in which scripture is regularly memorized and performed (Coward; Graham; Nelson). In all these examples, we can employ what we learn about performance in living cultures as a basis to (re-)construct by analogy the dynamics of ancient performances. This information can be supplemented by what we know of oral traditions from such early Christian writings as *The Didache* (Milavec) and *The Shepherd of Hermas* (Osiek). From this process, we may 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 a 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 might social-science criticism enable us to understand the agonistic dynamics of the face-to-face encounters involved in a performance event? How do the dynamics of a collectivist culture help us to understand how audiences as a group might have responded during a performance? How, for example, did Paul save face for Philemon and still lead him to do something (free a slave) that would bring dishonor to him in the society? Or how might the reversals of society portrayed in Luke’s Gospel play out with a mixed audience of rich and poor? How might the dynamics of purity and defilement in the Gospel of Mark or the Letter of James have led the assemblies hearing these compositions to adopt new understandings of themselves and of those outside their groups? How might the male-female dynamics displayed in a letter-speech such as I Corinthians work in an assembly in which men and women were both present for the performance? Placing the Second Testament writings in specific scenarios of performance changes the way in which we see these and other cultural dynamics at work.

#### *Speech Act Theory*

Contemporary speech-act theory (Austin), with its analysis of the performative dimensions of language, should help us to clarify the functional dynamics of biblical language (White; J. E. Botha 1991; Briggs 2001a; 2001b; Upton; but see the cautions of Thistleton). Especially when applied to an oral culture, speech act theory will help us to clarify and analyze the Israelite view of words as powerful and effective actions by which words go out and do not return empty. In the biblical understanding, words create/generate reality: naming gives power over; prophesying generates events; blessing and cursing bring about what they pronounce; and a pronouncement effects a healing in the speaking. In the Gospels, Jesus announces, proclaims, names, heals, pardons, exorcizes, prophesies, blesses, curses, and warns, among other things—all with words that are understood as actions. Many of these verbal actions are expressed by certain forms of Greek grammar and syntax—such as permissives and prohibitives and performative presents. How do all these word-actions function in an oral composition, and how do they work in relation to an audience hearing them? Furthermore, the Israelite view of words combines with the notion of personal causation (that all events are caused by a person or personal force) to reflect a world in which all words and ac-

tions are expressions of personal power of some kind. How might the Hebrew experience of words differ from the Hellenistic-rhetorical experience of the power of words? How can we use speech-act theory in performance to grasp the power dynamics of Second Testament language?

Speech-act theory analyzes not just sentences but whole pieces of literature as speech-acts (Pratt). This gives us another tool along with classical rhetoric and literary rhetoric to grasp the effective power of biblical oral compositions. How can speech-act theory assist performance criticism in unpacking the functional dynamics of gospels, letters, and apocalypses as speech-acts?

### *Linguistic Criticism*

Linguistic criticism has always been an integral part of our work as exegetes, but recently there have been fresh efforts to systematize it as a discipline. Linguistic criticism deals with pronunciation, morphology, grammar, syntax, semantics, and discourse analysis. However, until recently, apart from issues of pronunciation, linguistic criticism 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 of written texts. First, discourse analysis gives a thorough scanning of the possible grammatical and semantic patterns of a text and, in so doing, identifies the many stylistic features and configurations of discourse that provide structure to a text. Only recently have discourse critics begun to ask about the oral dimensions of these linguistic features (Davis; Harvey). What, for example, would have been the impact of chiasmic patterns or chain sentences or parallelism or transitions upon the temporal, aural experiences of hearers. The Sermon on the Mount (Scott and Dean; Dean) and the Letter of James seem 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. Only a little has been done with word order (Kwong; Porter)—foregrounding and back-grounding, emphasis, elision, chiasm of sounds, audible parallelisms and transitions, verbal threads, and so on. Other oral/aural features of texts will include clues for performance, such as repetition, parallelism, onomatopoeia, hook words, and mnemonic devices. Finally, the same may be said for the incredible diversity of questions expressing irony, sarcasm, incredulity, and accusation, among many other things. How do all these work as part of an oral/aural, temporal experience?

Second is the impact of sound itself upon a hearer, such

as the use of guttural sounds, alliteration, and assonance. 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.

Third, the fracturing of grammar, the disjunction of style, asyndeton, and the juxtaposition of styles may have had an impact upon hearers. The Aramaisms in the speeches of Acts and the broken grammar of the Book of Revelation (Callahan) may have had a political impact upon hearers as a form of resistance to the oral style of the elites. Also, the alternating of style may be part of the message of a composition. At the 2004 Society of Biblical Literature convention, Bernard Brandon Scott made a presentation in which he showed how Luke varies the style of the speaking characters (to reflect elites and peasants) in the birth narrative of his Gospels so as to make anti-imperial commentary on Roman/Judean elites. “Hearing” these and other similar texts in new ways may help us to notice and to understand these dynamics of Second Testament compositions.

We may best be able to get at these discourse features of texts by listening to them. Years ago, Tom Boomershine listened to his own recording of the passion narrative of Mark as the basis for his innovative literary study. He memorized the passion narrative in Greek, chanted it into a tape recorder, and listened to it over and over. Despite our uncertainty about how ancient Greek was pronounced (Allen; Edwards; Stanford), much can be gained by listening to a consistent system of pronunciation. In this manner, one can discern many oral/aural features of performance.

In this regard, we now for the first time have a compact disk that contains the entire Second Testament spoken in Greek (Phemister). 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 the performance dynamics of the rhetoric. In a way, it is astounding that we have not had audiotapes of Second Testament writings in Greek as a scholarly way to understand the role of sound in the meaning and rhetoric of Second Testament writings and as a pedagogical tool for teaching and learning Second 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 Second Testament scholars, the sooner dimensions of sound will become an integral part of our research into and our 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/ functional equivalence. However, it is now incumbent upon translators to make a further distinction, namely, the distinction between translations for reading and translations for performance (in literate as well as oral cultures). Bible translation societies are now beginning to take orality into account (Elliott; Maxey; de Vries; Fry; Wendland 1993; 1994). Nevertheless, to date I do not know of a version of the Second Testament that was formulated specifically for oral performance (cf. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie; see Scott; Cosgrove). True, there are translations made for public reading in church; but this has to do with public appropriateness, issues of justice, and public acceptability more than it has to do with preserving oral dimensions of a Second Testament writing for performance. When we focus on translations for performance in an oral culture, we may well ask: if the Second Testament texts are scripts of live performances, are we then translating the texts or are we translating performances—insofar as we are able to re-construct and re-experience them? Could it be that, in some sense, a performance is a most appropriate form of translation?

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. We may also 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. Translations for performance are forged out of the actual experience of performing—by the translator or by performers in translation. These translations can also be informed by the responses of actual audiences in the communities to whom they are addressed. Sometimes oral features of the original text can be carried over into the translation. At other times, translators may make use of oral features of the culture/language into which the text is being translated. This will no doubt involve the development of some new tools and models for doing the “art” of translation.

Translations for performance will differ in many ways from translations for reading. For example, a translation for

performance can include historical presents. One can shift back and forth with facility from past to present tense in oral performance in a way that seems very awkward in writing. Furthermore, 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 the emphases of the original. Seeking to replicate onomatopoeic words and the sounds of the Greek sentences as they relate to the content being presented would be helpful in translations for performance. The lengths of sentences, clues to punctuation, places for pauses and stops, along with contractions and elision are features that are crucial for performance. In the translation of a given text, the choice to use the same (say, English) word in translating repeated occurrences of the same Greek word, even when they have somewhat different nuances of meaning, becomes important for performance, because such repetitions serve to maintain echoes of events and motifs. Parallelism and chiasmic patterns become significant dimensions of translation, because they contribute to rhythm and pace.

Furthermore, might not translations be organized on the page so as to reflect the rhythms, pauses, and pace of a translation? And, as Charles Cosgrove has suggested, translations could well have notations for performance, similar to notations on musical scores for pitch, tempo, and volume. What about adding footnotes that offer suggestions for performance? We are only beginning to explore these possibilities for translation. And the developing work of those who translate for performance will surely sharpen the analysis of those doing linguistic work on biblical texts.

### *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—nationality, gender, social status, race, ethnic group, economic level, class, education, religious community, political affiliation, urban-rural origin, and so on—has become a key means to understand the dynamics of power and powerlessness in relation to Second Testament writings.

There are many levels of ideological conflict in the context of a performance event: the conflicts between groups and individuals within the narrative world of the text; the ideological

power differential between the performer and the audience as well as among groups in the audience; and, in the modern world, the ideological difference between those who interpret and translate officially and those who do not. The key is to understand the power dynamics of these conflicts and their relation to each other in a setting of face to face performance. Performance critics recognize that performers will adapt their compositions to different audiences and that audiences may embrace or resist their performances.

There have 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 (Horsley 2001; Draper 2004a; Bowman and Woolf; Haines-Eitsen; Morstein-Marx). In a predominantly oral culture, these different groups often bear the so-called great tradition (literate elites) and the little tradition (non-literate peasants). In particular, James C. Scott has shown how peasants use language in an oral culture in subtle ways to resist and critique the powers-that-be with “hidden transcripts”—purporting to be expressions of loyalty but which in reality are means of subversion that are obvious to those “in the know” (Horsley 2004). Many of these hidden transcripts in Second Testament writings may best be discerned in the act of oral performance, in which the subtext—expressed by tone, pace, gesture, facial expressions, body language, or accentuation—may convey messages contrary to the surface script. For example, through repeated opportunities to perform I Peter before different audiences (especially ones that have experienced oppression of some kind), I have become convinced that this letter consistently subverts the earthly powers in subtle ways while at the same time overtly appearing to urge unconditional allegiance to them.

The categories of social location 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 as or different than the performer? 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 interests does the composition serve? How will people from different social locations in an audience interact with composition and performer and each other? How might a composition-as-performance successfully subvert and transform the values of an audience? How do the personal and confrontational dimensions of performance affect all these relationships? I am convinced, for example, that the Gospel of Mark is re-socializing hearers at the primary level and enculturating them

into the alternative power relationships of the “empire” of God in contrast to the Empire of Rome. Might performance criticism help us to understand how such 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 cultural locations reading/hearing the Second Testament—wealthy, oppressed, colonial powers, colonized countries, people of different genders, races, and ethnic groups, the sick and the healthy, among others (Rhoads 2005 with bibliography). Diverse experiences of and reactions to the performance of a text can tell us a great deal about the original rhetoric of these compositions-as-performance. Responses from diverse cultures can also tell us about the possibilities and problems of appropriating the texts for our own time.

### *Theater Studies*

Theater studies is a helpful partner for performance criticism in Second Testament studies. We can apply to the Second Testament what we know from studies of theatrical performances of drama in the ancient world—characters, styles of acting, voice projection, gestures, audience responses, dynamics of genres, special functions of theater, and ancient theories of drama (Beckerman; Levy). The dramatist Shimon Levy has written extensively on the Bible as theater. He has done so, not because the Bible is religious literature but because it contains gripping dramas. The relationship between Second Testament writings and ancient Greek and Romans drama/theater has been explored in limited ways. A few scholars have compared the dynamics of the Gospel of Mark to the dynamics of Greek tragedy. For years, Barbara Bowe has taught the Gospel of John as theater (cf. Brandt). 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. Some years ago, a commentator laid out how the Revelation of John would have been performed in the theater at Ephesus with suggestions for full casting, settings, and elaborate props. Even if Second Testament writings are not theater as such, many of them are theater-like. What can performance criticism learn from classical theater studies about the theatrical dimensions of Second Testament texts? What can we learn about the meaning and rhetoric of biblical stories by acting them out as theater or by doing

improvisation with them? (Swanson; Lecoq; Spolin).

It is hard to imagine an interpreter of Greek plays who has not experienced performances of the plays themselves, if only in English. We have argued that the Second Testament writings/compositions were meant to be performed. What could performance criticism learn from critics of Greek and Roman drama? How could we benefit from dramatists who use their experience of performance as a basis for their understanding of the meaning and impact of a play? A research group at Oxford University annually recreates an authentic performance from Greek theater, in Greek. In Second Testament studies, how might we create a comparable experience of the performance of a gospel or a letter?

### *Oral Interpretation Studies*

The contemporary field of oral interpretation of literature focuses on the study of performances and seeks to appreciate performance for its own sake as art. 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 (Degh; Issacharoff and Jones; Lee; Pelias; Schechner; Long and Hopkins). 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 studies have 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 expand our grasp of the meaning-potential of texts. They can also 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 also alert us to hitherto unnoticed dimensions of the biblical texts. Efforts at contemporary performing will give us experiences of performance to stimulate our imaginations about the biblical world. At minimum, opportunities to perform will enable performers to find meaningful, powerful, and engaging ways to present the biblical materials in the contemporary world.

### *Summary*

It should be clear that performance criticism should be

seen as a discrete discipline in its own right so as to be able to focus on the event of performance and so as to bring together many methodologies into a comprehensive analysis of the performance event. 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. Collective, 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-constructionists, linguistic analysts, literary interpreters, translators, anthropologists, and performers. And it will be important for performance criticism to engage interpreters from diverse socio-cultural locations and those with various first hand cultural experiences of performance in an oral culture. Because of the eclectic nature of performance criticism, there may be benefit to a new kind of commentary, one oriented toward bringing together the insights of many disciplines so as to put flesh and blood on the skeletal remains of the text—by filling in and by filling out the many performance/orality dimensions of these Second Testament “scripts.”

### **Performance as a Method of Research**

For thirty years, I have been translating, memorizing, and performing some Second Testament writings, first the Gospel of Mark, then Galatians, Philemon, the Sermon on the Mount, and selections from Luke and John, and more recently, James, I Peter, and Revelation. Based on my experiences, I would like to argue for the act of performing as a methodological tool for interpretation. As Whitney Shiner has remarked, “to understand performances and performers, one has to perform.”

We can never recover a first century performance event, but we can experiment with twenty-first century ones. This performance approach involves a major shift in our traditional methodologies of studying these writings. If the biblical writings were composed for performance, then we certainly should use performances to interpret these writings. The act of performing helps the interpreter to discern the possible meanings of the text. By performing—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 must make judgments about the potential meanings and rhetorical impacts of a composition in order to play a line at all. 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 even in the act of performing itself. Performance expands the possibilities for interpretation and allows us to act out different exegetical interpretations. Performances can also test interpretations, whether they will “play.” The enactment of different performances of the same text will prevent one from judging the value of this procedure based on one performance only.

In what follows, I share some dynamics that I have learned through performing that are helpful in the effort to comprehend the meaning and rhetoric of Second Testament writings—acting, presenting the world of the text, personification, onstage/offstage focus, non-verbal communication, emotions, states of consciousness, humor, temporal experience, and rhetoric.

### *The Performer as Artist*

The performer is an artist, and the performance is an artistic expression (Bozarth-Campbell), 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 reception and 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? Becoming the “voice” or “embodiment” of the narrative or letter places the exegete in a media relationship with the text that is quite distinctive. In this way, both the process of interpreting and the test of an interpretation would be in the performing.

The contemporary performer of these ancient scripts 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 through performance. 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 the biblical composition in its ancient context. Also, the interpreter must choose either to seek to replicate the style of an ancient performance or to express a contemporary style of performance and to do so in the service of being faithful to the composition. 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 audience, performance arena, background noise, poor acoustics, and so on). These are my preferences, but I am convinced that 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, facial expressions, glances, pace, pauses, pitch, volume, movement, posture, body language, proximity to audience, and so on. In some cases, the directions for these elements of performance are explicit or at least implicit in the text. In other cases, the performer simply has to supply them based on her/his interpretation. Trained storyteller Pam Faro has pointed out that 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 needs to supply what performance dimensions are suggested or absent from the written transcription. To make this point, all we need do is note 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?* (Loubser 2004). The performer seeks to restore what is missing from the written script we have before us, which can be a significant amount. Consider the oft-quoted statistic from a study that claims communication is 80% body language, 10% tone, and 10%

content—although, of course, this was referring to ordinary language in a print culture.

As we have suggested, 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, such as showing the connections between the episodes in a series-of-three episodes in the Gospel of Mark by performing them at the same spot on the stage. For the rest, it may be necessary for the performer to fill in gaps in a narrative or in an argument with body language that seems to make good sense of the text—making connections of causation and consequence, connection and continuity. 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.

As with most exegesis, 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 are not able to bring charges against Jesus because he did not touch the man and therefore did not work on the Sabbath. When I perform this, I cannot add this information verbally, but I can suggest that 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* the possible meaning of a composition and perhaps resolve some gaps and fissures with tone and non-verbal expressions. Indeed, by voice and body language and staging, the performer may serve to *create* the coherence of the composition.

### *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 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 and its sequence of events and pattern of argumentation, the performer can interpret each line in the context of the developing story as a whole.

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 performer/composition and accept the composition’s way of seeing the world. In performing, the exegete becomes acutely conscious that every performance of every line is a speech-act 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 specific features of performance that can contribute to an 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—by personifying them through voice, tone, pace, posture, facial expressions, and so on. With his voice alone, the actor Jim

Dale has brought more than two hundred characters to life in the tapes of the Harry Potter books. The Gospel of Mark has more than fifty different speaking voices and many more characters. Personifying the characters enhances entertainment. More than that, it is a form of interpretation. The dynamic of personification 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 composition/ performer has portrayed them.

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Non-verbal expressions . . . are an integral and indispensable means by which the meaning of the words is determined and impact of the rhetoric is conveyed.

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Such personification makes it clear that characters are not reducible to plot functions. At the same time, 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 by seeking to personify the sender—their personal appeals (Galatians and Philemon), self-descriptions (II Corinthians), depictions of the audience and other characters (Philippians), along with descriptions of events and emotions (the letters in 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*

Contemporary oral interpretation of literature encourages performers of narratives to distinguish an onstage from an offstage focus. When one is telling the story, the performer directly addresses the audience offstage. When, however, in the course of telling, the performer *personifies* 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 in direct speech. 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, and facial expressions, among other things. Thus, the narrator uses personification in onstage/offstage focus as a means to keep the narrator distinct from the characters and thereby also as a means to lead the audience to identify with some characters and distance themselves from others.

By contrast, 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 this latter scenario, the audience is always addressed, even when the characters speak. Hence, for example, when Jesus directly condemns the Pharisees, the narrator-as-Jesus addresses the audience directly—and thereby 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. For example, as Boomershine argues, this approach may have worked to undercut anti-Judaism in a composition like the Gospel of John—since the audience is led to identify at one point or another with *all* the characters. The composition will mean something different and have a different impact for an audience when this audience becomes all the characters in the story.

It will be helpful to tell and to hear 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 performance collapses the onstage/offstage dichotomy—in that the audience becomes a major character (recipients of the letter) throughout the whole presentation.

#### *Subtext*

Perhaps the most generative feature 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. 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)—inquiry, patience,

impatience, sarcasm, disappointment, disdain, resignation? There is no way to do a performance without conveying a subtext message with each and every line, no matter how badly done or ill-informed it is. For the most part, subtext is conveyed through the use of the voice. 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 with the use of tone, pace, body language, accentuation, pitch, and so on (see Pelias for this and other exercises). This is an exercise well worth doing, just to see how important the subtexts are and what a difference they can make. By changing the subtext, one changes the meaning and the impact of a line. The subtext is not an add-on. Rather it is integral to and determinative of the meaning of a text. 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. To look for clues in the text that suggest appropriate subtexts for every line is to see a dimension of the text that may otherwise be overlooked.

#### *Non-verbal Communication*

Non-verbal expression can also convey the subtext. Non-verbal communication includes 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 physical gestures are described or implied in the world of the text—touch, lay on hands, shake, kneel, fall at one’s feet, put arms around, run, look up, look around, weep, wash hands, eat, and so on. 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 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 potential meanings of a line just as much as the tone and pitch and volume 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 of the words is determined and impact of the rhetoric is conveyed.

#### *Emotions*

The experience of performing recovers the emotive dimensions of a text and makes it clear that emotions are often the primary means of persuasion—conveyed by text, subtext, verbal, and non-verbal communication. A common response by audiences to my performances of Second Testament texts is the surprising realization that these texts have strong emotive dimensions. Many, if not most, of these emotions are explicitly referred to in the text or are 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 more. These emotions may be conveyed by shaking the head, gritting the teeth, laughing, cringing, weeping, and so on. The issue is this: How does the performer express these emotions in such a way as to evoke them in the audience also? 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. After performing it over and over, I have come to realize that every line—whether it be ethos, pathos, or logos—represents a personal, emotional appeal in which Paul considers the stakes to be extremely high. 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?

#### *States of Consciousness*

On occasion, I as a performer have gone into a kind of “zone” in the telling. I invest myself so much in a gospel or letter that I get “lost inside the story.” I attain a kind of oneness with the telling and a oneness with the audience. On occasion, I have had people tell me that they were mesmerized by a performance at various points or that they were caught up in a way that transcended their ordinary experience. I have had people tell me on occasion that you could have heard a pin drop and that the whole audience was rapt

by the story. I do not attribute these experiences to my capacity as a performer but rather to the nature of the story I am telling and to the dynamics of performing itself. I wonder if performance events may lend themselves to evoking altered states of consciousness (Loubser, 2005; Pilch).

These quite limited experiences have led me to reflect on more dramatic descriptions of audience responses to speeches in the Second Testament—the speaking in tongues /baptism in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in response to Peter’s preaching (Acts 2:37-47) or Paul’s description of people experiencing the Spirit in response to his proclamation (Galatians 3:1-5; I Thessalonians 1:2-10). Such experiences in the ancient world were seldom individualistic. Rather, it seems to me, there was a communal audience response in a performance event—the utter amazement at hearing about the healing of a blind man or the wails at seeing Jesus’ last moments depicted before them or the joy and surprise of the narrative of Jesus’ appearance from the grave may have spread through an audience like wildfire—in a way that caught the whole group up in a transformative experience. In this regard, the study of performance events may help us to explain better how Christianity came to be such a powerful force that spread so rapidly in the ancient world and that captivated people’s allegiance even in the face of persecution.

### *Humor*

There is humor in texts that performers can bring out in the act of performing. We can infer the potential for humor in the text from fractured grammar, unusual 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 Second 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 series of failures of the disciples in Mark can be tragic and hilarious at the same time. The dialogues of misunderstanding between Jesus and other characters in the Gospel of John can be very humorous when seen as a sort of Abbott and Costello repartee about “Who’s on first?” with characters speaking past each other. Such irony can reflect wry humor that is conveyed with great subtlety or an absurdity that is acted out through exaggeration. Humor is a significant part of performing. Humor entertains, engages an audience, gives insight, establishes a bond between performer and audience, creates community among those who get the humor, maintains interest, and is

an effective means of persuasion. What will it do for our interpretations of a text if we bring forth 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 chapters and verses (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 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, how an earlier part prepares the hearer for a later part, and how a later part clarifies and elaborates an earlier part. You become aware of the fact that episodes in a gospel are usually *not* interchangeable; their location in the sequence of the story is appropriate and often critical to the developing plot and integral to the meaning and impact of episodes that precede and follow (Rhoads 2004: 63-94)..

In fact, there seems to be a developing logic, a step-by-step process of persuasion, to a story or letter or apocalypse that is difficult to understand without being experienced—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 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” (Galatians 5:10). 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 enable them to withdraw from Rome now and to be willing to die in allegiance 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 from beginning to end—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.

### *Rhetoric and Audience*

Performance enables one to be especially aware of the significance of audience and context. 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 and immediate way. The setting of the audience matters. To perform in a university or in a church or in a prison or on the street corner or at a homeless shelter leads the performer to perform texts differently. Social location of the audience matters. 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. The context matters. What is going on in people's lives and in the larger world at the time brings issues and resonances to the experience of the performance.

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 draw the audience into the world of the composition 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, what the text leads the audience to do, 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 dynamic of the gospel seeks to evoke in the audience the actual capacity to *have* courage and to *act* on that courage.

Furthermore, performance generates community. The shared event gives the audience an experience of solidarity. The performance makes a community of the audience in relation to the performer through inside information, irony, humor, drama, the evocation of emotions, and much more. More than that, Second Testament compositions addressed such communal issues as factions, lethargy, fear of persecu-

tion, apostasy, and misunderstandings, and they sought to bring to the community unity, inspiration, corporate courage, loyalty, and clarity. Also, in generating a new way of being in the world, the composition/performer seeks to lead a community to see itself as an alternative way of thinking about the world and of being in the world. The performance is world-creating. I have found that the post-performance conversations I have with an audience give me an opportunity to reflect on all these factors and to reinforce them.

Each performance is an expression of that particular performer's interpretation of the text. Even if the words spoken are exactly the same, the text is still fluid in its diverse performative incarnations. The same performer will enact the text in different ways on different occasions with different audiences. Other performers will interpret the text differently and support their interpretations. The point is that the exegete as performer gets in touch with the fact that there are rhetorical dimensions to every line in the developing composition, all of which contribute to the overall impact of each performance.

### *Performance as test of 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 (Mark 12:41-44) 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—in which Jesus lifts her up as a model (12:43-44)—so as to convey a negative meaning to it. Or could one convey Jesus' cry of abandonment on the cross (Mark 15:34 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 interpretation 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 viable interpretations. As such, performances can provide criteria for making critical judgments in adjudications over interpretation.

### *Performance and Exegetes*

Through all these steps of performance criticism, the performer/ exegete will be providing performances that allow other biblical critics to participate in performance criticism by experiencing interpretations of the text in the role of audience. 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 composition-in-performance provides a significantly fresh medium through which to encounter the text and address interpretive issues. Exegetes may be struck by the way a performer says a line in a particular way and comment: “I 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 whether one or another thing ought to have been translated or performed a different way. In this way, together, performers and exegetes-as-audience 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.

- Explain the features 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 predominantly oral culture, especially in relation to performance, and understand the various ways in which oral and written media can interface in a particular culture.
- Fill out the historical picture of the ancient world in terms of performances—the various types of performers (male and female), training, venues and contexts, audiences, social location, and so on.
- Assess the oral context of the writings in the Second Testament and seek to place them in their context in the ancient oral culture.
- 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.

- By using many methodologies and by listening to the Greek, discern the distinctly oral features of the Second Testament writings and the implied aural impact of every part of each writing as well as of each writing as a whole.
- In light of the above practices, interpret the writings of the Second Testament and their rhetoric in the original oral medium. Be aware of what may be implied and prescribed for biblical interpretation by the scholarly paradigm shift to the study of an oral medium.
- Conduct performances in a translation prepared for performing before an audience. 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.
- Attend to the power dimensions of all dynamics of performance.
- Contribute to the renewal of other biblical methodologies from insights gained in performance criticism.

### **Conclusion**

I have sought to identify an emerging methodology in Second Testament studies as a means to address the neglected dimension of performance in early Christianity, and I have sought to formulate some organizing principles and procedures for this methodology. The proposal is to take seriously the oral/aural medium through which early Christians experienced the writings and traditions we now have in the Second 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 will sharpen our interpretive skills and provide new insights.

I do not assume that 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. Performance in an

oral culture presents serious challenges to biblical scholars trained in written texts. We need to accompany the media shift with methodological shifts and the development of new methods, skills, and models. Yet by taking orality into account, we will broaden and/or narrow interpretive options of Second Testament texts, provide a more faithful portrayal of early Christianity, and clarify the ways in which our exclusive focus on the Second Testament as print may have distorted our interpretations.

Therefore, attention to performance has the potential to transform our understanding of the Second Testament generally. Performance criticism could serve many 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 Second Testament narratives in light of performance scenarios; rhetorical criticism could be renewed by interpreting speeches/letters in the concrete context of a performance event; historical constructions of early Christianity will look different with performance; and commentaries on biblical writings could incorporate insights from performance criticism. Furthermore, performance criticism would introduce new methodologies to Second Testament studies—such as theater studies and oral interpretation—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.

This essay has sought to offer a prolegomenon to the development of a discipline. Those who read it will agree with some things and disagree with others and have much to add. Conversation from these agreements and differences will only enhance our collective efforts to discover in what ways performance may become an integral and meaningful part of Second Testament studies.

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