2019 Networking Meeting at SBL, San Diego, 22 Nov

Co-chair Marlon Winedt called us to order and introduced the performance of Ruth 2 by Travis West and Abby DeZeeuw. Travis read Ruth 2 in English. Abby performed Ruth’s parts; Travis played other parts. The audience was invited to position themselves as gleaners and the room as the field. The performance began with a soundless pantomime of Naomi and Ruth looking for food, Naomi’s desperation before Ruth’s offer to go to the fields that kicks off the story of Ruth 2.

**Group Responses and discussion of performance**

1. Communicated well the fear of a young woman going alone into the fields as well as the fear of starvation that motivated such a desperate decision.
2. Performance of Ruth’s exchange with Boaz was public, overheard by gleaners. This was a new question that several audience members had not considered.
3. Performance forces interpretive decisions
4. Pain of Ruth’s loss of husband expressed by her facial expressions and body posture in 2:11 as Boaz was speaking.
5. Connecting phrases, e.g., “he said” were not a distraction. (Questioned whether to omit or not in performance.)
6. Nathan presented suggestions for how ancient and modern performances may be connected:
7. Translations (LXX, targum, Peshitta, Vulgate) show various ways of handling syntactical and lexical difficulties of 2:7c-d. This correlated to Travis & Abby’s difficulty internalizing 2:8-9.
8. Cultural norms for a young woman entering a landowners field may be correlated to Nathan’s experience in modern Ghana, where “One cannot enter to glean behind the harvesters unless one has express permission to do so. If you enter before he has gone through the field twice, you are harvesting his grain.” Does the syntactical/lexical difficulty reflect a cultural and ideological “hesitation” in the tradition?

**Evidence for ancient performances from early translators**

Nathan Esala concluded about relationships between ancient performances (translations) and our modern performance (below is quoted from Nathan’s handout):

1. Translators are using cultural frames as they re-imagine and re-create a communicative event (like performers).
2. Translators seem to have audiences with prior knowledge of this narrative through other versions.
3. Inevitably there are gaps between contemporary frames received textual detail (often expressed in shorthand) and their relation to the plot.
4. Translators who had audiences with knowledge of earlier versions dealt with “gappy” details in the narrative with expansive clarifying strategies explaining the details of the tradition they received (repeating details despite ambiguity).
5. Another strategy was to clarify by reducing detail, that is, cutting of detail that could lead to inferences that the translator judges to be wrong (Peshitta).
6. The audience of the Vulgate knew the LXX. The translator (Jerome) had a “unique” knowledge about source text versions that his audience did not have (Vulgate—Targum/MT). This extra knowledge gets weaved in to help clarify gaps, but may also open up more gaps in the process.

7. Sacred text reception affects character/narrative portrayal. Ruth could be in danger in the field (Ruth 2:9, 12, 15, 22). Translators/performers seem to downplay this possibility.

8. (Re-)opening of “gaps” is possible with [modern] sectors of audiences who may share affinities with sectors [e.g., old men; old women; young men; young women; insiders/outsiders; etc.] or characters in ancient audiences [e.g., comparing sectors in modern Ghanaian villages to sectors described/implied in Ruth]

Table Discussions: In what senses do modern performances relate to ancient performances?
Can modern audience responses help us better understand ancient audience responses?

1) Ancient and modern performers and audiences may detect and fill the same “gaps” in the text
2) Difficulty of modern performer internalizing a passage (e.g. Ruth 2:8-9) may replicate ancient performer’s struggle
3) Difficulties in the text invites reflection on emotion
4) Modern performance better enables access to potential emotional dynamics
5) Modern performances help to better understand the unity, coherence of a work
6) Modern performances comparable to use of modern social sciences two decades ago (e.g., Mary Douglas on purity); now accepted methodology for not only heuristics but saying something about ancient social dynamics [comparison of modern Ghanaian village to Bethlehem]
7) Modern performances demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between performance and understanding.
8) Modern performances illuminate the many interpretive decisions implied in a text and the possible range of decisions
9) Was there a “director” position in ancient communities comparable to a director of drama?

Planning for next year:

The assembled group would like to see (1) more time for networking, especially to introduce newer scholars; (2) some performance experience. There was also a discussion of whether or not to focus on a book or a section in a book.
Steering Committee meeting notes (2020 SBL in Boston):

*Nathan Esala, Marlon Winedt, Carolyn Alsen, Travis West, Jeanette Mathews, James Maxey, U-Wen Low, Megan Wines, Peter Perry*

Thanks to Marlon and Nathan for serving as co-chairs for the last two years. Many affirming words about last year (cultural epistemologies) and this years event!

We welcomed U-Wen Low (Alphacrucis, Australia) and Megan Wines (PhD student from Loyola, Chicago) to the Steering Committee.

We decided the theme for next year would be Performance as Exegetical Tool and Cultural Epistemology, with focus on the book of Revelation.

Performances of the Book of Revelation: Megan Wines and U-Wen Low agreed to perform two short pericopes from Revelation in two ways each, followed by large group Q & A with them about the exegetical payoff for the same performer to try different performances, and to reflect on different cultural meaning-makings in each experience. We discussed the need to be more precise and granular about what we mean that a performance “worked” (or “didn’t work” or “was effective” (or not).

Structured Networking: We also decided that we would begin with a longer networking time. At some point(s) the co-chairs would invite the group to move and meet someone they did not know and discuss their work.

New Co-chairs: Travis West and Megan Wines agreed to be co-chairs for the 2020 meeting in Boston. Peter Perry agreed to provide support with website, facebook, etc.