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Narrative and Performance Criticisms

A Difference of Degree or Kind?

Edited by
Christopher W. Skinner and Zechariah P. Eberhart

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About the Editors

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Preface

Narrative Criticism and Biblical Performance Criticism are natural bedfellows. At risk of oversimplification, both are interested in identifying and analyzing the communication event(s) that occur(s) when people engage with the Bible. Both approaches are driven less by the question of "what" a text means, but rather "how" a text communicates meaning, "how" authors and/or performers convey such meaning, and "how" audiences come to assess it. Despite these similarities, among others, there are also significant differences between the two—differences which have at times been conflated by scholars operating outside of (and at times, even inside) these two distinct approaches to understanding the Bible. This reprint invites us back into this broader conversation of method, as it continues the work of Iverson and others (2014), and adds much needed nuance to conversations within both narrative and performance criticisms.

The first four essays attend to particular assumptions within each approach and highlight the need for a more robust framework in thinking about those differences. Elder complicates the media landscape of the ancient world. He calls attention not only to our often too simplistic assumptions about the ways texts were engaged with in antiquity but also, because of this diversity, the necessity for the researcher to clearly state how they envision such media operating within their analysis. Wines explores the role of gender in performance, and specifically how the temporal and ephemeral nature of performance complicates the ambiguous portrayals of masculinity and characterization in certain narrative constructions. She challenges the "both/and" that is sometimes upheld in assessments of Jesus's masculinity in Mark and highlights the necessity of choice on behalf of the performer. In a similar vein, Low's contribution focuses on the role of performers in meaning making, and how embodiment of characters challenges a purely narrative understanding of "how" characters operate in biblical texts. Who tells the story is sometimes as determinative as the story itself. Finally, Eberhart considers the object of study, and attempts to name the distinct objects being analyzed by critics in each group. Such a distinction is not simply splitting hairs, but is essential for avoiding methodological and terminological conflation, as well as identifying the unique contributions of each approach.

The two essays on the Hebrew Bible are quite different in approach, yet each articulates potential ways in which performance can shed light on the task of biblical scholarship. Mathews' essay draws upon anecdotal evidence derived from her experience translating and performing Ecclesiastes in a modern context. She seeks to demonstrate how performance transcends "narrative" approaches in a number of ways, including its ability to attend to all genres of biblical literature, its capacity to "reconstruct" the experiences of ancient audiences, but also its emphasis on the need for community to interpret scripture. Homrighausen, responding to approaches like Mathew's which allude to performance's capacity to offer insights into antiquity, is skeptical. They see the value of performance not as a tool for historical reconstruction, but rather as analysis in reception. Homrighausen demonstrates this value in an examination of characterization in Purim performances of Esther.

The final three essays attend to matters of performance within New Testament interpretation. Wheatley discusses the ritual importance of baptism for ancient audiences, and how assumptions within both narrative AND performance considerations are necessary for understanding how audiences experienced these ancient reading events. Wheatley suggests that when read aloud, Mark's baptismal scenes create a ritual bridge between text and performance as they evoke a participatory experience from the hearers. Whitenton's essay demonstrates how considerations of the performance event, and the relationship between lector and audience, can shape our understanding of characters'

speeches and their function. He demonstrates how the questions about Jesus's authority in Mark 11 have a different purpose and function entirely differently in performance than they would for a reader. In our final essay, Shiell considers the Christ hymn in Philippians 2. Drawing upon insights from ancient letter writing and rhetoric, he illuminates how a performance approach adds depth and breadth to the rhetorical situation of the letter and how doing so reveals the "function" of the hymn within that larger communication act. The hymn plays a key role in bringing about the changes Paul seeks within the community.

Christopher W. Skinner and Zechariah P. Eberhart
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Article

Between Reading and Performance: The Presence and Absence of Physical Texts

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Abstract: In New Testament scholarship, there is a division between practitioners of performance criticism and those who engage the sociology of reading and reading cultures in the ancient Mediterranean context. The former, as the name of their methodology implies, tend to emphasize the performative nature of engaging textual traditions and downplay the importance of the physical document in a performance event. The latter stress the importance of the physical text in a reading event. This article reaches across the division between performance and reading, suggesting that written manuscripts play different roles in different kinds of performance and reading events. It surveys primary source evidence of two types: one in which the physical text is absent from or de-emphasized in the performance event and another in which the document is explicitly present and figures prominently in the reading event. The article concludes by suggesting that performance critics ought to be more explicit about what role they imagine physical documents to have in hypothetical performance events and that those engaging the sociology of reading ought to be more attuned to the performative potential of communal reading events.

Keywords: performance; performance criticism; reading; communal reading; solitary reading; sociology of reading; New Testament; orality; textuality; literacy

1. Performance Criticism and the Sociology of Reading

The fundamental principle of performance criticism is that texts, and especially biblical texts, were predominantly encountered through oral events in the ancient world. Performance, rather than private reading, was, according to performance critics, the default medium for experiencing written discourses for the majority of individuals in Greco-Roman antiquity (Iverson 2021, p. 189). Per performance critics, biblical traditions were transmitted through embodied storytelling and oral discourse, a premise predicated on the supposition that most people in antiquity lacked the ability to read literary texts (Rhoads 2006, p. 4). As its name implies, performance stands at the center of performance criticism.

Yet what constitutes a performance is ill defined. The tendency amongst performance critics has been to adopt expansive definitions. David Rhoads, for instance, defines performance as "any oral telling or retelling of a brief or extensive tradition—from sayings to gospel—within a formal or informal setting of a gathered community, involving trained or untrained performers, under the assumption that each rendition was a vibrant retelling of that tradition" (Rhoads 2006, p. 119). Kelly Iverson follows the performance theorist Richard Schechner's comprehensive definition, which states that "performance is an activity conducted by an individual or group in the presence of and for another individual or group" (Schechner 2003, p. 22, n. 10; Iverson 2021, p. 8)". Both definitions permit a wide range of activities to count as performance. While Whitney Shiner does not define performance, he includes the following as types of oral performances in antiquity: private readings, public readings, storytelling, novels, drama, pantomime, poetry, epic, reading in worship, scriptural chant, and early Christian speeches (Shiner 2003, pp. 37–56).

What is excluded from these definitions and examples of performance is solitary reading. A person reading a text to themself, either silently or aloud, is expressly not a

performance, per these definitions. Performance always involves more than one person. In this respect, performance criticism is a reaction and corrective to the chirographic and post-Gutenberg biases that have dominated biblical studies. Rhoads diagnoses the perspective that performance criticism aims to redress: "Our own cultural experience of the Second Testament texts in the contemporary Western world has been private and silent reading by individuals or public reading that has fragmented the text into lectionary lessons in the context of parish worship and teaching" (Rhoads 2006, pp. 119–20). The point of opposition for performance criticism is solitary reading, which becomes a cipher for reading in general. The binaries between performance and reading are presented by Iverson: "Performance is a face-to-face, personal experience while reading involves a degree of distance; performance is a corporate and communal experience while reading is solitary; performance is transient and ephemeral while reading is grounded in the permanence of the written word; performance is a multimodal, sensory experience while reading is primarily an imaginative experience" (Iverson 2021, p. 183). While Iverson is adamant that the performance perspective does not entail a return to the Great Divide approach to orality and literacy, he does appear to make a strong distinction between performance and reading (Iverson 2021, p. 185).

The distinction proceeds from the tendency to construe reading as an individualistic, private, and solitary affair. This kind of reading is normalized in modernity to a greater extent than it was in antiquity, and it is precisely the perspective that performance criticism has aimed to correct. Yet it is not the case that reading in our present context is exclusively or even primarily a solitary event. People read all kinds of texts in communal contexts. It is also not the case that persons in antiquity could not or did not read silently to themselves in solitary settings (Knox 1968, pp. 421–35; Gavrilov 1997, pp. 56–73; McCutcheon 2015, pp. 1–32; Elder 2024, pp. 7–78).[1] "Reading," in both ancient and modern contexts, is a far more expansive enterprise than is usually acknowledged by performance critics. More than just a cognitive act, reading, as William A. Johnson puts it, is "a highly complex sociocultural system that involves a great many considerations beyond decoding by the reader of the words of a text." Johnson continues, "Critical is the observation that reading is not simply the cognitive processing by the individual of the technology of writing but rather the negotiated construction of meaning within a particular sociocultural system" (Johnson 2010, p. 12). Innumerable factors are at play with respect to the negotiated construction of meaning in any context, including what kind of text is read, who it is read by and who else is involved in the reading event, where it is read, and why it is read.

In Greco-Roman antiquity, Second Temple Judaism, and early Christianity, there were a variety of settings and purposes for reading. Persons read to themselves silently. They read in small, medium, and large groups. They read privately and publicly. There was not one single, normalized manner of engaging texts in these contexts (Elder 2024, pp. 5–121). Aside from solitary reading, all of these would theoretically fall under the umbrella of performance as defined by Iverson and Rhoads. They also fall within the bounds of the examples offered by Shiner.

What, then, sets apart reading from performance? I propose that the key factor lies in emphasis, particularly in terms of whether the physical text is a crucial component of the reading or performance event. While performance critics do acknowledge the potential presence of texts in the performance of biblical discourses, the extent to which they emphasize the bearing that the text has on an event varies among them. Rhoads tentatively suggests, "Frequently, perhaps more often than not, no written text was present to the event" (Rhoads 2006, p. 118).[2] In contrast, Iverson writes, "I have no objection with the concept of a 'lector' or 'public reading.' However, I use the terms performer or performance to emphasize the oral dynamics of these communication events" (Iverson 2021, p. 12, n. 46)". A text may have been present at an event, but, according to most performance critics, it was of subsidiary importance and simply a conduit for the oral experience.

Those in biblical studies who focus on reading events and cultures, what is sometimes called the sociology of reading, tend to center the text itself. In *The Gospel as Manuscript*,

for example, Chris Keith argues that it was the gospels' existence as physical, written artifacts that imbued them with authority, specifically in the act of public reading (Keith 2020, pp. 163–200). He critiques those who underplay the gospels' textual media dynamics, tracing what he calls the "oral-preference perspective" back to Werner Kelber's *The Oral and the Written Gospel* (Keith 2020, pp. 82–85; Kelber 1983). Those adopting this perspective, per Keith, "focus upon the texts' effects upon oral tradition or the manners in which texts still function like oral tradition" (Keith 2020, pp. 167–71). While acknowledging the potential performative aspects of communal reading, Keith asserts that more significance lies in the physicality of the text itself and the act of reading from it than in these performative features.

This divide between performance and reading lies at the center of the debate: on one side, there are those who prioritize the oral aspects of the event, valuing them over the written text, while, on the other side, there are those who emphasize the significance of the physical text itself. The proponents of the former viewpoint, largely performance critics, argue that textuality serves as a foundation for orality, providing support and structure to the oral performance. Conversely, advocates of the latter perspective, largely those interested in reading events and cultures, argue that orality serves to enhances the significance and interpretation of the written text in the communal reading event.

On both sides, the reconstruction of reading or performance events is usually theoretical. Based on assumptions about how texts were experienced, and sometimes based on ancient comparanda, theoretical events by which biblical texts *might* have been experienced are imagined. But we need not be dependent on imagined performance or reading events. There is primary source evidence indicating how texts of all sorts, including a variety of early Christian texts, were experienced in antiquity.

My aim in this essay is to marshal and engage some of this evidence to demonstrate that there were different kinds of performance and reading events that took place in antiquity and that these different kinds of events had different features. There was not one normative way to engage a text or tradition, and different texts functioned in different ways in different reading and performance events. The focus in what follows is the significance of the physical text in each scenario, specifically evaluating whether the written document serves as a foundation for the event or whether it assumes a subsidiary role. The central question is whether the physical manuscript is ancillary or central to the given event. The first section of the essay engages instances where the physical text is absent or relatively insignificant in the performance arena and the second section engages primary sources in which a physical document is present and of relative importance to the reading event.

2. Physical Documents Absent from or Ancillary to a Performance Event

2.1. Pliny the Younger

According to Pliny the Younger in *Ep.* 2.19, there is one type of discourse that is best performed without the text present: court speeches. In this letter to Tuccius Cerialis, Pliny entertains the recipient's request for him, Pliny, to give a reading (*recitem*) of one such speech. He agrees to do so, but expresses hesitancy and the reasons for his hesitancy:

> I know very well that speeches when read lose all their warmth and spirit, almost their entire character, since their fire is always fed from the atmosphere of court: the bench of magistrates and throng of advocates, the suspense of the awaited verdict, reputation of the different speakers, and the divided enthusiasm of the public; and they gain too from the gestures of the speaker as he strides to and fro, the movements of his body corresponding to his changing passions. (Hence the loss to anyone who delivers his speech sitting down—he is at a real disadvantage by the mere fact of being seated, though he may be as gifted generally as the speakers who stand.) Moreover, a man who is giving a reading has the two chief aids to his delivery (eyes and hands) taken up with his text, so it is not surprising if the attention of his audience wavers when there is no adventitious attraction to hold it nor stimulus to keep it aroused. (Pliny the Younger 1969, text and trans., Radice)

This particular speech that Pliny agrees to read, like his other court speeches, exists as a written artifact after it is delivered, since obliging the request is possible. Because he believes a communal reading will not do the speech justice, Pliny hesitates, though, as we shall see, his reluctance may be feigned. Pliny avers that a speech is best experienced live in performance. In this letter, Pliny emphasizes several aspects of speeches that performance critics often identify as the key elements that differentiate a performance from solitary reading.

According to Iverson, there are five foundational aspects of performance events that differentiate them from the modern act of reading: proximity, community, transience, perception, and participation (Iverson 2021, pp. 21–52). Each of these foundational aspects is present in the selection above.

Proximity refers to the "corporal context" shared by persons in a performance event (Iverson 2021, p. 22). There is a physical co-presence between the performer and their audience. Pliny calls attention to the various persons that share in the social biosphere of a court speech: the performer, the bench of magistrates, the advocates, the other speakers, and the public. And these people are not simply present at the event—they affect it and alter the experience and interpretation of the discourse. Iverson theorizes that performance communities work with a collective consciousness (Iverson 2021, pp. 26–32). He writes, "Performance unleashes dynamics that allow for, and even encourage, communal responses that shape (individual) interpretation" (Iverson 2021, p. 31). This is what it means to say that performance is characterized by community. The other individuals and groups present at the performance event—in Pliny's case, the magistrates, speakers, and public—affect how it unfolds.

Transience refers to the fact that the event unfolds in limited space and time. "The permanence of the written text functions as a physical resource that enables readers to dictate certain aspects of the interpretive process. The transience of the spoken word challenges audiences to keep in step with the unfolding performance" (Iverson 2021, p. 36). Hearers cannot stop to scrutinize a performance in the way that readers can a written text. Later in this letter, Pliny states that a speaker should not expect their audience to labor over and carefully consider the logic of the argument. He writes, "There are certainly very few members of an audience sufficiently trained to prefer a stiff, close-knit argument to fine-sounding words." A stiff, close-knit argument is the stuff of discourses that are read in a solitary event, not speeches that are performed, because the later are transient.

Pliny refers to the "warmth" (*calorem*) and "spirit" (*impetum*) of a speech. These come from the event itself. They correspond to the concepts of perception and participation of performance criticism (Iverson 2021, pp. 36–52). Whereas silent, individualized reading happens imaginatively in the mind, a performance is perceptually perceived by audience members, who also influence, or participate, in the event as it unfolds. Perception and participation have a profound impact on audience members' emotions and sensory experiences of the discourse (Iverson 2021, pp. 53–137). Pliny notes that the audience is influenced by "the gestures of the speaker as he strides to and fro [and] the movements of his body corresponding to his changing passions." It is precisely for these reasons that Pliny would rather *not* read the speech communally. The social biosphere of a reading differs from that of a performance.[3]

One chief reason that it differs, according to Pliny, is because, at a reading, the text is present. While the presence of the text is wholly appropriate for certain kinds of events, when it comes to a court speech, it detracts from the discourse's effectiveness. This is because the reader's attention is on the text. Their "hands and eyes" (*oculi manus*) are occupied with the written artifact.

Pliny's letter indicates that a written discourse could be performed without the direct aid of the text. While, in their "original performance," court speeches were delivered without text, they were both pre-written and circulated textually when they were subsequently released for publication. In another letter, *Ep.* 1.20, written to Tacitus, Pliny claims that it is best for the pre-written and the spoken version of a speech to align with one another

because the text “is the model and prototype for the spoken version” (*est enim oratio actionis exemplar et quasi* ἀρχέτυπον).[4] After the performative event, however, the textual artifact of the speech could be revised. Despite his comments and supposed misgivings about reading a speech that are outlined in *Ep.* 2.19, Pliny claims to have given readings of speeches to revise them for publication. For Pliny, publication of his speeches expressly did *not* come in the form of the public or communal reading of them.[5] Publication happened when he ceded control over the speeches and allowed them to be read privately by other individuals.

In *Ep.* 7.17, Pliny writes, “Personally, I do not seek praise for my speech when it is read aloud, but when the text can be read after publication, and consequently I employ every possible method of correction.” In the letter, Pliny confronts criticism he has faced regarding his practice of delivering readings of speeches. Interestingly, some of these critiques closely resemble his own reservations about the act of reading a speech aloud, as expressed in *Ep.* 2.19.[6] Apparently, his reservations were not all that strong, were feigned, or Pliny was of different opinions at different points in time, because, in this letter, he indicates that reading speeches was a normal practice for him.[7] It was a tool he used to revise them. He describes his revision practices step-by-step: “First of all, I go through my work myself; next, I read it to two or three friends and send it to others for comment. If I have any doubts about their criticisms, I go over them again with one or two people, and finally I read the work to a larger audience; and that is the moment, believe me, when I make my severest corrections, for my anxiety makes me concentrate all the more carefully” (Pliny the Younger 1969, trans., Radice).

What all this suggests is that there are multiple receptive contexts for Pliny’s court speeches. First, they can be delivered without the direct aid of the text. This is their “original” performative context. Subsequently, however, they can be read communally by their author. The purpose of the event is different in each case. In the first, the pre-written text supports the oral discourse. The speech is elevated over the written artifact, and so the presence of the written artifact at the speech is unhelpful. In the second, the emphasis is on the text and its revision. The written artifact is read from with the intention that it will be revised based on the oral event. After the textual publication of the speech, there are further reading events of it, though most of these would have been private and solitary, not communal. The presence or absence of the text in these various events depends on the social situation, the purpose for which it is engaged, and the kind of text that it is.[8] Yet even in the less performative receptive modes, namely Pliny’s communal readings of speeches and the private reading of them upon publication, there is a memory of their original, performative form codified in the text itself. This is on display in Pliny’s lone surviving published speech, the *Panegyricus*. Based on the content of his court speeches, which was an established spoken and written genre in Pliny’s context, the fact that the written artifacts were textualized instantiations of an oral, performative event would not have been lost on their reading audiences.

2.2. 4 Maccabees 18

4 Maccabees 18:10–18 also indicates that there were multiple receptive modes for written texts, in this case Jewish Scripture.[9] In the selection, the mother of the seven martyred sons from 2 Maccabees 7 praises the way that their father engaged scriptural traditions with them. The author, through the speech of the mother, imagines the different ways that these traditions were engaged in a familial setting. A variety of verbs are used, some of which suggest direct textual mediation between the father and his sons, while others imply non-textual means of engaging the traditions:

> While he was still with you, he taught (ἐδίδασκεν) you the law and the prophets. He read (ἀνεγίνωσκέν) to you about Abel slain by Cain, and Isaac who was offered as a burnt offering, and about Joseph in prison. He told (ἔλεγεν) you of the zeal of Phinehas, and he taught (ἐδίδασκέν) you about Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael in the fire. He praised (ἐδόξαζεν) Daniel in the den of the lions and blessed him. He reminded (ὑπεμίμνησκεν) you of the scripture of Isaiah

> (τὴν Ησαιου γραφήν), which says, 'Even though you go through the fire, the flame shall not consume you.' He sang (ἐμελῴδει) to you songs of the psalmist David, who said, 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous.' He recounted (ἐπαροιμίαζεν) to you Solomon's proverb, 'There is a tree of life for those who do his will.' He confirmed (ἐπιστοποίει) the query of Ezekiel, 'Shall these dry bones live?' For he did not forget to teach (οὐκ ἐπελάθετο διδάσκων) you the song that Moses taught, which says, 'I kill and I make alive: this is your life and the length of your days. (NRSV)

It may be, as David A. deSilva suggests, that the author of 4 Maccabees, who demonstrates advanced Jewish and Greek paideia, is projecting their own educational experiences onto those of the seven brothers. He writes, "The author envisions the home as the primary locus of training in the practices, stories, and convictions of the Torah and the Jewish canon" (DeSilva 2017, p. 237). Whether they are projecting experiences or are imagining them altogether, the author of 4 Maccabees understands texts and traditions from the Jewish canon to have been experienced in multiple different ways.

Most of the verbs in the passage need not imply that a text was present and mediated in the pedagogical act. The only verb that assumes textual mediation is "read" (ἀνεγινωσκέν), which has three objects: "Abel slain by Cain" (τὸν ἀναιρεθέντα Αβελ ὑπὸ Καιν), "Isaac who was offered as a whole burnt offering" (τὸν ὁλοκαρπούμενον Ισαακ), and "Joseph in prison" (τὸν ἐν φυλακῇ Ιωσηφ). While all of the other stories, traditions, and texts alluded to existed in writing, the verbs imply different kinds of "performances" of them: "teaching" (ἐδίδασκεν), "telling" or "speaking" (ἔλεγεν), "glorifying" (ἐδόξαζεν), "reminding" (ὑπεμίμνῃσκεν), "singing" (ἐμελῴδει), "recounting" or "speaking proverbially" (ἐπαροιμίαζεν), and "making credible" or "confirming" (ἐπιστοποίει). The length of each discourse referred to as the object of these verbs varies. Some are individual sayings, such as the Isaianic verse (Isaiah 43:2), the Solomonic proverb (Proverb 3:18), and the question of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 37:3). In the case of the songs of David and Moses, the entire hymn appears to be in mind, though only a line of each is paraphrased.[10] The author of 4 Maccabees adds paraphrased excerpts of these traditions for rhetorical flourish, not because they presume the father only engaged a limited portion of the tradition.

Notable from 4 Maccabees 18 is that the verbs used have a natural correspondence with the kind of text that is engaged. One sings hymns, recites proverbs, and reads stories. There were different kinds of performances and readings in 4 Maccabees' context, and physical, textual instantiations of the tradition had various functions in these different kinds of readings and performances.

2.3. Conclusions

In summary, Pliny the Younger's letter to Tuccius Cerialis sheds light on the distinctive nature of court speeches and the limitations of communal readings of them, and 4 Macc 18:10–18 reveals different receptive modes of engaging written texts, particularly Jewish Scripture. Pliny emphasizes the importance of the performative context. The presence of the text during a communal reading hinders the speech's impact as the reader's attention is divided between the text and the audience, lacking the atmosphere and dynamics of a live performance. While Pliny initially expresses hesitancy about reading court speeches communally, other letters reveal that he did engage in readings for the purpose of revising his speeches for publication. The various receptive contexts for Pliny's speeches demonstrate their multiple forms of engagement, from the original performative context without the text to communal readings for revision and private readings upon publication. The different receptive modes in 4 Macc 18:10–18 imply diverse forms of performance and reading, with some involving direct textual mediation while others rely on non-textual means. The verbs used align with the nature of the texts being engaged, emphasizing the various functions and performances associated with different kinds of texts.

In both Pliny's letter and 4 Maccabees 18, the presence or absence of the documents during different receptive contexts indicates the nuanced relationship between oral perfor-

mance and textual mediation. The performative aspects of speeches and the diverse modes of engaging written texts demonstrate the complexity of reception and the significance of the social situation and purpose for which texts are encountered. In the next section, we consider cases in which the text is explicitly present at the reading event and thus serves an important, physical role within it.

3. Physical Documents Absent from or Ancillary to a Performance Event

3.1. Solitary Reading

When a text is read in a solitary setting, the document itself is necessarily the central element to that event. It is a myth, and a very persistent one in New Testament scholarship, that texts in antiquity were always or usually read communally and not in solitary contexts.[11] Paul J. Achtemeier, in his highly influential article, "*Omne Verbum Sonat:* The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," writes, "Late antiquity knew nothing of the silent, solitary reader" (Achtemeier 1990, p. 17).

Not all, nor even most, texts were engaged communally in antiquity. Consider, for example, the tens of thousands of extant documentary papyri, which represent only a fraction of the overall volume that would have once existed. The vast majority of the non-literary papyri, which consist of documents such as receipts, ledgers, various ephemera, wills, letters, testimonies, and petitions, were not written for communal reception. Rather, they were written for individuals or simply to offer permanence to human thought.

The documentary papyri are of course not literature proper. The point, however, is to de-romanticize ancient reading practices. If literate persons could and did read documentary papyri in non-communal settings, then they could also read literature in non-communal settings. And they did.

There is abundant evidence of the solitary reading of literature of various sorts in this context (Parker 2009, pp. 196–98). There are many occasions of solitary reading narrated or alluded to in antique texts. Because this essay's interest lies in early Christian reading and performance, we consider two cases in which a biblical text is engaged in a solitary context, though there are at least forty other instances of solitary reading in Greco-Roman, Second Temple Jewish, and early Christian sources.[12] The purpose of evoking these two occasions of solitary readings is to dislodge the notion that reading Scripture was always communal or performative.

In Acts 8:26–40, the Ethiopian eunuch reads to himself from Isaiah. Acts 8:28 narrates the reading event, making it clear that it is solitary:

> ἦν τε ὑποστρέφων καὶ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ ἅρματος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεγίνωσκεν τὸν προφήτην Ἠσαΐαν.
>
> "And as he was returning home he was sitting in his chariot and was reading the prophet Isaiah".

Philip, instructed by the spirit, overtakes the chariot and hears that Isaiah is being read. Philip's questions to the eunuch reiterate the fact that the reading was not communal. Questioning the eunuch, Philip uses two second-person singular verbs: "Do you comprehend [γινώσκεις] what you are reading [ἀναγινώσκεις]"? Then, again, in Acts 8:32, a singular form of "read" (ἀνεγίνωσκεν) is employed by the narrator as they indicate that the specific passage (περιοχή) from Isaiah being read is LXX Isaiah 53:7–8. In total, four different singular forms of the verb "read" appear in Acts 8:28–32, making it clear that the eunuch is reading to himself, not communally.

Initially, the written artifact is not subordinate to the event at hand; rather, it is central to it, fostering direct engagement between the individual and the text. The reader does not act as a textual mediator. However, as the narrative progresses, the solitary reading of Isaiah serves as a springboard for another explicitly oral event. Acts 8:35 suggests that this particular Isaianic passage served as the starting point from which Philip "proclaimed the good news [εὐηγγελίσατο] about Jesus" to the Ethiopian eunuch. Reading transitions into verbal instruction. Thus, an interface between reading and orality emerges, bridging the

divide, but the event's oral and performative aspect does not pertain to direct engagement with the text or its mediation.

A similar dynamic is at play a few centuries later in Chrysostom's instructions at the beginning of a homily on John 1:14. Here, he requests that his hearers sit down in their homes (οἴκοι καθήμενος), take the text in their own hands (μετὰ χεῖρας λαμβάνων ἕκαστος), and read the entire portion (ἀναγινωσκέτω συνεχῶς) of the gospels that will be read aloud in a communal setting later in the week (τὴν μέλλουσαν ἐν ὑμῖν ἀναγνωσθήσεσθαι τῶν Εὐαγγελίων περικοπὴν).[13] Chrysostom advocates for two distinct approaches to engaging with the text. The first approach is a direct and individual one, which aligns with the type of reading that performance critics suggest was uncommon in the ancient world. The second approach, on the other hand, is communal. The first approach assumes both the necessary literary skills to read gospel texts, a proficiency not shared by all of Chrysostom's listeners, as well as personal access to gospel texts. Although the encouragement may not have been applicable to everyone in Chrysostom's audience, it must have been relevant to a significant portion of them, as he states that the request is neither burdensome nor challenging (βαρύ τι καὶ ἐπαχθές).

The second mode of engaging the gospel, which is communal in nature, stems from the first. In other words, the initial type of reading serves as a preparation for the second. The purpose of solitary reading is to equip individuals for engagement in communal reading. Chrysostom's comments indicate a preference for the second mode of reading over the first.

The account of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 and Chrysostom's encouragement share several significant similarities relevant to early Christian reading and performance events. First, both demonstrate that the solitary reading of scriptural texts was practiced in the first few centuries CE. Moreover, personal ownership of or access to these texts was known. Second, neither account assumes that the text is read sequentially or in its entirety. Instead, only a specific portion of the larger discourse is engaged. Acts 8:32 reveals that the eunuch was reading a "section" (περιοχή) of Isaiah, while Chrysostom mentions a "pericope" (περικοπή) of the gospel. Both terms imply the selection of a specific portion of the text, rather than reading the entire discourse.[14] Third, in both cases, solitary reading serves as a catalyst for another action. In the case of Acts 8, it leads to Philip evangelizing the eunuch orally, while, for Chrysostom, it paves the way for the communal reading of the same text, which likely involves accompanying oral teaching or instruction. The text takes the central focus, but only until it relinquishes its place to a different form of oral engagement. When this shift occurs, the discourse being directly interacted with is no longer the scriptural text itself. Therefore, in accordance with the perspective of performance critics, there is indeed oral activity, but it does not entail a recitation of the biblical text.

3.2. Justin Martyr 1 Apology 67 and the Acts of Peter 19–20

The pattern of reading transitioning to another oral activity is also evident in two written accounts that reference communal reading of gospel texts in the second century CE. The first comes from Justin Martyr, who describes early Christian gathering practices in *1 Apol.* 67. According to Justin, during the weekly gatherings, the "memoirs of the apostles" (ἀπομνημονεύματα τῶν ἀποστόλων) or the "writings of the prophets" (συγγράμματα τῶν προφητῶν) are read aloud to all those assembled from the nearby cities and countryside, for as long as time permits (μέχρις ἐγχωρεῖ). Once the reader concludes, the leader of the gathering proceeds to provide verbal instruction (διὰ λόγου) to the gathered group.[15]

Justin does not specify the exact amount of text that is read during these gatherings. In comparison to Acts 8 and Chrysostom, it appears that he envisions a more extensive portion of text, although his comments do not imply the sequential reading of an entire gospel or prophetic text. While the reading of the scriptural text constitutes the first and perhaps most significant activity, it is not the sole focus. Instead, the reading of the text transitions into verbal instruction, which entails the encouragement to emulate "these good things" (τῆς τῶν καλῶν τούτων μιμήσεως) outlined in the prophetic or gospel text

that is read. Several other activities follow the reading and instruction: communal prayer, thanksgiving offered for the bread, wine and water that is then shared, and an offering taken for orphans, widows, the sick, needy, aliens, and refugees.

In Justin's account, no reading event, whether real or imagined, is expressly narrated. Rather, he explains what happens at a typical Christian religious gathering. Communal reading is but one part of such gatherings. Justin's testimony is illuminating insofar as it indicates which texts are typically read: "the memoirs of the apostles" (ἀπομνημονεύματα τῶν ἀποστόλων), which are gospel texts, and the "writings of the prophets" (συγγράμματα τῶν προφητῶν).[16] It is notable that gospel texts are read alongside prophetic ones in the mid-second century.[17] This likely is both in imitation of and springs from Jewish synagogue reading practices.[18] It is likewise notable that other genres of New Testament texts, namely acts, letters, and the apocalypse, are not mentioned by Justin. This does not mean that such texts were not read communally during early Christian gatherings, since a lack of evidence is not itself evidence. However, on those occasions when it is reported or narrated that New Testament texts are read communally in the first few centuries CE, the text read is always a gospel text.

Whereas Justin reports how one kind of reading event functions within early Christian gatherings, the Acts of Peter 19–20 narrates an early Christian gathering and the reading of a gospel text that occurs during it, though this gathering does not appear to be as formalized as those that Justin describes.[19] Like *1 Apology*, the Acts of Peter are commonly dated to the second century CE (Schmidt 1930, pp. 150–55; Elliott 1993, pp. 390–92; Bremmer 1998, pp. 17–18; Klauck 2008, p. 84). In the text, Peter is urged to come to a "service" (*ministerium*) in the house of Marcellus, in which the widows and elders will pray with him and everyone present will receive a piece of gold for their service.[20] Upon arriving at the house, Peter heals a blind woman and then enters into the dining room, where he sees the gospel being read (*introibit autem Petrus in triclinio et uidit euangelium legi*). Peter himself "rolls up" (*ineuolues*) the gospel scroll and speaks to the gathered group. He begins by stating that they ought to know the manner in which "the holy scriptures of our Lord should be pronounced" (*scitote, qualiter debeat sancta scriptura domini nostra pronuntiari*) and implies that he himself is a writer of said scripture with the verb *scribsimus* ("we have written"). Peter then states that he will "explain to you that which has been read" (*nunc quod uobis lectum est iam uobis exponam*) before offering a first-person account of the events of the transfiguration, which is presumably the passage from the gospel reading that Peter happened upon. Following Peter's explanation, various events and actions unfold. There is communal prayer and a transfiguration-like experience where the gathered group witnesses a dazzling bright light and blind widows perceive Jesus in different forms, which leads to the miraculous restoration of their sight. Peter then exhorts the audience to understand the Lord and he ministers to the virgins.

Once again, the reading of the gospel text is depicted as a discrete action within the larger context of the gathering, rather than being the sole or central event. It serves as a catalyst for other actions to unfold. The narrator provides only a brief description of the reading, stating, "When Peter came into the dining room, he saw that the gospel was being read" (*introibit autem Petrus in triclinio et uidit euangelium legi*).

While the reading event is subsidiary to the other activities, several aspects of the account are worth noting. First, the narrator assumes the regularity of reading gospel texts to a gathered group. The mere mention of this event in passing implies that communal reading from gospel texts was a familiar practice. Second, the Acts of Peter bestows the gospel text with the status of Scripture. This establishes a connection with Justin's description of reading the memoirs of the apostles alongside prophetic texts. The text is read because of its scriptural significance.

Third, like the eunuch's reading in Acts 8, Chrysostom's instructions, and Justin Martyr's description, the Acts of Peter 20 appears to depict only a select portion of the gospel being read, namely the transfiguration account. The narrator does not explicitly note that the transfiguration and only the transfiguration is read, but the content of Peter's

teaching in the passage, as well as the narrative events that surround the reading, implies as much.

Fourth, and most important for our purposes, the author of the Acts of Peter depicts the gospel physically existing and being read from in scroll or bookroll form, as Peter "rolls up" (*ineuolues*) the document before offering his account of the transfiguration. In this way, the physical presentation of the text matters and indicates something about its status. The author imagines a gospel tradition to be engaged from a physical document that is read from, not performed from memory.

4. Conclusions

In what precedes, I have marshalled various occasions in which the physical text played different roles in various kinds of antique performance and reading events. It was possible for a written tradition to be orally declaimed without the presence of a written manuscript. However, the primary source evidence cannot support the claim that this was the standard way that textual traditions were engaged in antiquity. Certain kinds of discourses, especially speeches, were more likely than others to be engaged without the direct aid of the written text, as indicated by Pliny in *Ep.* 2.19.

The survey of events in which the physical text was featured during a reading indicates that Scriptural texts were very often present and an important component of such events. In fact, the primary sources suggest that reading from a physical artifact was more common than engaging one from memory, an act that does not frequently happen in such sources. The default assumption ought to be that a manuscript was present and read from when a written tradition was engaged.[21]

This is not to imply, however, that New Testament texts were never engaged in a performative context. Broad definitions of performance allow for the presence of the text, and even direct reading from it, during a performative reading event. Reading from a written artifact in a communal setting is itself a performative act. Moreover, the scarcity of direct evidence of non-textual performances does not imply that there were no such performances of New Testament texts.[22] The kind of performance event, whether textually mediated or not, was influenced by the kind of text engaged.

It is thus crucial for both performance critics and those engaging the sociology of reading New Testament texts to remain attentive to textual presence or absence and its respective impact on the reading or performance event. By acknowledging the possibility of the text being present or not, we open ourselves to a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between performance and textuality. The absence or presence of the text changes a reading or performance event, opening different interpretive possibilities in both cases. This being the case, it is essential for performance critics to consider and state whether or not the text was present and read from when constructing a hypothetical performance event. It is likewise crucial for those engaging the sociology of reading to be attuned to the performative potential and elements of reading events, even when the text was present and directly read from.

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Notes

1 While it is often taken as evidence that persons usually read communally and aloud in antiquity, the account in *Conf.* 6.3.3 of Augustine happening upon Ambrose reading silently to himself is actually direct evidence that persons in antiquity read in such a manner. As Gavrilkov and Carsten Burfeind have demonstrated, Augustine is not surprised that Ambrose has the ability to read silently but that he is reading in such a manner in a certain social context (Gavrilov 1997, p. 63; Burfeind 2002, p. 139).

2 (Rhoads 2006, p. 118). Elsewhere, with Joanna Dewey, he writes, "The direct experience of written scrolls was not unimportant, but it was limited and peripheral, especially in the first century" (Rhoads and Dewey 2014, p. 12).

[3] In *Ep.* 6.15, Pliny offers a negative example of participation that he had observed. As Passennus Paulus began a reading, he was jocularly interrupted by Javolenus Priscus to the audience's great delight, which resulted in the "chilly reception" of Paulus's reading.

[4] Text and translation, Radice LCL. Pliny further states in the letter, "The perfect speech when delivered is that which keeps most closely to the written version".

[5] In *Dial.* 3.1–3, Tacitus also alludes to the practice of giving recitations as a means for revision, though he indicates that, on this particular occasion, Curatius Maternus's reading of his tragedy did not result in significant revisions. Maternus remarks, "you will find [the written work] just as you heard it read." (Tacitus 1914, trans. Peterson, LCL).

[6] The primary critiques that Pliny addresses are the notion that it is unnecessary to read a speech that has already been delivered and the inherent difficulty of providing a reading that captures the aura of the speech as it was delivered.

[7] Pliny also addresses or alludes to the practice or reading speeches in *Ep.* 3.18; 5.3; 5.12; 9.34.

[8] Earlier in *Ep.* 7.17, Pliny indicates that there are several other kinds of texts from which communal readings are offered, even though this is not their natural receptive mode. These include history, tragedy, and lyric poetry.

[9] For some time, the consensus, following Elias J. Bickerman, was that 4 Maccabees was a product of the mid-first century CE, written between 20 and 54 CE (Bickerman 1945; reprinted Bickerman 2007). Tessa Rajak has argued that the work is better understood as a product of the Second Sophistic, specifically suggesting the decades of the revolts against Rome in the late first and early second centuries as an apt chronological context (Rajak 2017, pp. 70–79).

[10] The NRSV reproduced above implies that multiple songs of David are mentioned in 4 Macc. 18:15, though the Greek is simply "he sung you the Psalmist David" (τὸν ὑμνογράφον ἐμελῴδει ὑμῖν Δαυιδ).

[11] Brian J. Wright, for example, claims that "virtually all literature during this time period was composed to be read communally" (Wright 2017, p. 59). Similarly, Paul J. Achtemeier claims that "all material in antiquity was intended to be heard" (Achtemeier 1990, p. 18).

[12] With respect to Greco-Roman texts, see Cicero, *Fin.* 3.7–10; Plutarch, *Cat. Min.* 68–70 [792–94]; Appian, *Bell. civ.* 2.98–99; Dio Cassius, *His. rom.* 43.11.2–5; Horace, *Sat.* 1.6.122–23; Seneca, *Ep.* 65.1; Martial, *Epigr.* 2.6; 3.68.11–12; 3.86.1–2; 11.16.9–10; Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 6.16; 6.20. With respect to Second Temple Jewish and early Christian texts, see 1 En. 13:7–10; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.214; 4.160–67; *Embassy* 1.83; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 20.43–45; Cyril, *Catech.* 4.36; John Chrysostom, *Hom. Jo.* 11.1; Origen, *Hom. in Gen.* 11.3; Hippolytus, *Trad. Ap.* 41.5; Clement; *Strom.* 7.7; Tatian, *Or. Graec*. 29; Tertullian, *Apol. 31*; Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 28; *2 Apol.* 3; *Dial.* 10, 18. For a more thorough review of the evidence of solitary reading from Greco-Roman, Second Temple Jewish, and early Christian sources, see (Elder 2024, pp. 38–54).

[13] John Chrysostom, *Hom. Jo.* 11.1 (PG 59:77); I am dependent on Harry Y. Gamble for this reference (Gamble 1995, p. 233).

[14] LSJ s.v. περικοπή and περιοχή.

[15] It appears that Justin has in mind specific titles and roles for these gatherings, as he refers to both "the reader" (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων) and "the leader" (ὁ προεστώς).

[16] In the context immediately preceding, *1 Apol.* 66, Justin indicates that the "memoirs of the apostles" are gospels: "For the apostles in the memoirs created by them, which are called gospels, thus handed down to us what was commanded of them" (οἱ γὰρ ἀπόστολοι ἐν τοῖς γενομένοις ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἀπομνημονεύμασιν, ἃ καλεῖται Εὐαγγέλια, οὕτως παρέδωκαν ἐντετάλθαι αὐτοῖς τὸν Ἰησοῦν).

[17] It may be the case that "the writing of prophets" refers to more than just prophetic texts and also includes the Law and perhaps the writings. See (Keith 2020, pp. 187–88).

[18] Communal reading of Scripture, especially Torah, was a principal activity of the synagogue, especially on the Sabbath. Anders Runesson lists the following texts in which Torah figures in a synagogue setting: Philo, *Dreams* 2.127; *Creation* 128; *Hypothetica* 7.11–13; *Embassy* 156–57, 311–13; *Moses* 2.215–16; *Spec. Laws* 2.60–62; *Contempl. Life* 30–31; *Good Person* 80–83; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.289–92; *Ant.* 16.43–45, 164; *Ag. Ap.* 2.175; Mark 1:21, 39; 6:2; Matt 4:23; 9:35; 13:54; Luke 4:15, 16–30, 31–33, 44; 6:6; 13:10; Acts 9:20; 13:5, 14–16; 14:1; 15:21; 17:2–3, 10–11, 17; 18:4–6, 26; 19:8; John 6:59; 18:20 (Runesson 2001, pp. 91–92, n. 91). Justin's description indicates that Christian gathering practices were similar to and likely grew out of Second Temple Jewish Sabbath reading practices.

[19] It is clear in the narrative that the events described in *Acts of Peter* 19–21 occur on the day before the Sabbath.

[20] Text, Lipsius and Bonnet (1891); translations of the Acts of Peter are based on Elliott (1993), and are sometimes slightly emended.

[21] This is not to suggest that traditions were never engaged from memory in communal settings. Engaging a tradition in one way at one time does not preclude engaging it in a different way at a different time. However, as far as I can tell, there is little to no direct evidence of engaging any New Testament text from memory in a communal setting.

[22] The Gospel of Mark is a particularly good candidate to be considered a discourse that was performed without the aid of the text for three reasons. First, Mark expressly declares itself to be "orally proclaimed news" from its first five words: ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ("beginning of news about Jesus Christ"). The term with which Mark labels itself, εὐαγγέλιον ("gospel"), along with its corresponding verbal form, εὐαγγελίζω ("to proclaim good news"), had an explicitly oral connotation in the first century context and earlier. See Bauer and Arndt (2000) s.v. εὐαγγέλιον, εὐαγγελίζω; Liddell and Scott (1945) s.v.

εὐαγγέλιον, εὐαγγελίζομαι. For a review of the primary sources, see (Dickson 2005; Bird 2014, pp. 9–11). Second, Eusebius of Caesarea in *HE* 2.16.1 implies that the Gospel of Mark was non-textually mediated. Following a reproduction of Clement of Alexandria's claims about Mark's composition scenario, Eusbeius writes that Mark "was the first to be sent to preach in Egypt the Gospel which he had also put into writing." Eusebius applies a verb associated with the oral lifeworld, κηρῦξαι ("to preach, proclaim"), to Mark's written text, "the Gospel which he had also put into writing" (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, ὃ δὴ καὶ συνεγράψατο). Third, Mark's Gospel continues to find success in the oral medium. It works well as a performance delivered from memory, as demonstrated by the likes of Max McLean, Phil Ruge-Jones, and Thomas Boomershine, amongst others.

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Article

Mas(c/k) of a Man: Masculinity and Jesus in Performance

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Abstract: While both narrative and performance criticisms take whole-story approaches to the texts they are engaging with, performance critical approaches are uniquely suited to considerations of the body, and particularly of gender. Alongside the growth in performance critical analyses of the gospels that place prominence on the embodied, performed dimension of the texts, when thinking about gender it becomes critical to examine the ways in which masculinity is constructed in and through performance, particularly in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. This article is an examination of the masculinity of Jesus as it is presented in the Gospel of Mark, as it argues that the Gospel of Mark presents a seemingly "unmasculine" depiction of Jesus that performers (as well as later interpreters) would have had to make performance choices about in their own depictions of Jesus for a given performance event. While narrative approaches have more space to hold multiple interpretations in tension with one another, performances of the texts would have necessitated making singular choices that would impact an audience's understanding of the text.

Keywords: performance criticism; gender; masculinity; Jesus; drama; rhetoric; Gospel of Mark

1. Introduction

Since the beginnings of the official subdiscipline of performance criticism with David Rhoads' 2006 two-part article "Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies" (Rhoads 2006a, 2006b), performance criticism[1] has become a developing field that places primary emphasis on the importance of the oral world of biblical texts. Since then, there have been 19 volumes in the Wipf and Stock Biblical Performance Criticism series as well as a number of other texts outside the series that have worked to expand the ever-growing field of literature about and surrounding performance and biblical texts. As many scholars of the early performance critical movement came out of narrative criticism, the two have been consistently linked.[2] While both narrative and performance criticisms take whole-story approaches to the texts they are engaging with, performance critical approaches are uniquely suited to considerations of the body, and particularly of gender. While much of the performance critical literature has touched upon the ways that *bodies* are critical to performance, and thus to the meaning of a story, a point I certainly will not contradict, what is lacking in current performance critical examinations is the consideration of the ways that bodies are *gendered*. The body is never a neutral site of meaning; this is particularly the case in performance, and especially the case in the ancient world, where a man's status as a "man" was itself up for debate.

With the growth in performance critical analyses of the gospels that place prominence on the embodied, performed dimension of the texts, it then also becomes critical to examine the ways in which masculinity is constructed in and through performance. As the central figure of the New Testament—Jesus—is male, this article seeks to interrogate the ways in which the masculinity of Jesus was constructed to interact with societal norms of what a "man" should look like. Jesus, as an incarnate, *bodily* man, necessarily had to exist within, and be presented in terms of, masculinity. This masculinity is often left aside as scholars discuss the ways his *humanness* and his divinity interact and meld together. To be a human male is necessarily to present a type of masculinity, and if we are to assert the *humanity* of Jesus then it is also critical to examine the *masculinity* of Jesus.[3]

As this article will work to demonstrate, trying to pin down one type or another of masculinity for Jesus is a difficult task, as his characterization seems to resist a clear-cut masculinity "type". While a story exists solely on the page, it is possible for this multiplicity of interpretive options to exist simultaneously; but this only works if the story is being received in a literary capacity. The growing movement of performance criticism insists that the gospel stories would have been performed,[4] and so I would posit that this would also require a performer to make a choice about the type of masculinity the character Jesus embodies in comparison with the other characters around him. While this choice could change across different performance events, within one performance a performer typically needs to choose a "type" of masculinity for a given character (in this case Jesus) or risk having a muddled, confusing performance.[5] Theoretically, this need to make a choice would have been one that existed for every performance, as an ancient performer navigated what type of masculinity their version of Jesus embodied,[6] and this article will illustrate how Jesus's masculinity as it is depicted in the Gospel of Mark relates to the understanding of masculinity in his historical context as an itinerant, Palestinian man in the first century CE. This article is therefore proposing more broadly how a more thorough understanding of the presentation of Jesus's masculinity, and how it fits into the broader social context, should be taken into consideration by performance critical scholars (especially those who use modern performance to influence their thinking). This article will begin with a brief overview of how masculinity is a constructed social entity, focusing on both the hegemonic masculinity of the Greek and Roman worlds, including how masculinity construction is tied up with performance, via rhetorical education and dramatic depictions, and then will examine what the Hebrew Bible can tell us about masculinity ideals for Jewish men. In the second section of the article, I will use the Gospel of Mark the hallmark text for many performance critical analyses, to illustrate how differing understandings of masculinity could yield different performances of the gospel.

2. Constructing Masculinity in Antiquity

While modern cries against the feminization of Jesus urge a return to a "biblical masculinity", the gender ideologies found in antiquity do not map so easily onto modern ones.[7] To lay the groundwork for examining how audiences of the New Testament could have understood the masculinity of Jesus in the stories they were hearing, it will first be important to delineate exactly what concepts of masculinity and understandings of gender were at play in the ancient world. This section will first examine the ways in which masculinity was understood in the Greek and Roman worlds (including a discussion of masculinity in Greek and Roman performance modes), and then move on to an examination of how that hegemonic masculinity[8] was either reflected or challenged in Jewish understanding.[9] Finally, it will look at the ways that these masculinities were presented and/or created in performance through a look at rhetoric and drama.

2.1. The Body and Understandings of Gender in the Greek and Roman Worlds

Discussions of the relationship of the physical body and gender have become more common as the movement for LGBTQIA+ acceptance has worked on challenging the gender norms related to bodily expression that have been predominant for generations. This "new" insistence on a more fluid understanding of gender, while taking on a different form, is not necessarily an entirely novel concept, as gender in the Greek and Roman worlds of antiquity also operated on a spectrum rather than in a harsh dichotomy.

In her book *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, Colleen Conway begins by illustrating how the concept of masculinity, rather than being biologically determined for the Greek or Roman man, was something that had to both be earned and maintained. While being born physiologically male was a good start, it was not necessarily a guarantee that one would achieve the status of "man". Rather, "ancient masculinity was constituted more by the shape of one's life than the shape of one's body" (Conway 2008, p. 16). The body lacked any sort of definitive stability, and a man was always at risk of losing his

"manliness", constantly trying to avoid the perils of a "slide into effeminacy"(Conway 2008, p. 17). Thomas Laqueur's popular contention (based in Aristotle's argument that women are incompletely formed men) that ancient thinkers understood the female body as being entirely different than a male one, as half-baked, or unfinished male ones (what has been called the "one-sex theory") has historically been popular in examinations of gender and early Christianity. However, his model has been problematized in more recent scholarship that highlights the existence of a two-sex (but no less hierarchical) one.[10] Helen King and Meghan Henning both point instead to the importance of bodily fluids as being a critical piece of gender determination for many ancient thinkers. Women were understood to be more cold, soft, and spongey, with men being understood as hotter and drier (Henning 2021, pp. 26–27; King 2016, p. 44). However, Henning also highlights that even with the two-sex model, the potential for the shifting nature of a body was always present:

> …the two-sex model demands that any change in the equilibrium of the perfect male body did not merely indicate a slide down the hierarchical scale to femininity. Any such change also represented a full-scale incursion on that body's perfection, and a more immediate shift in status from a perfect male body to the precarious existence of the weak, porous, cold, and more often dysfunctional female body. (Henning 2021, pp. 27–28)

So, if it was not one's biological makeup that determined who became a man, how did one achieve the status of a "man"? It was through one's actions: men were expected to "act like a man". Judith Butler has become renowned for their argument that gender itself is performative, with people fulfilling culturally determined roles of what it means to be either a man or a woman.[11] This was no less the case in the Greek and Roman worlds than it is today, and the role of a Greek or Roman man relied on two major aspects that one had to adhere to in order to be a good "man": (1) taking an active role (especially in terms of one's private sexual life, but also more broadly in one's public social life) and (2) exhibiting a display of self-control and restraint (regarding passions, as well as how one treats others) (Conway 2008, p. 22).

2.1.1. Active Role

In its most basic form, the requirement of a man taking an active role was tied to the idea that a man should be impenetrable. He was expected to be the penetrator in sexual activity: "penetration of a vagina, an anus (whether it be male's or female's), or a mouth (again either a male's or female's) was considered the proper sexual role for a *vir* [viz., "man"]. Romans did not distinguish between homosexual and heterosexual in the same way as modern Westerners do" (Stewart 2016, pp. 94–95). In addition to its sexual dimension, this impenetrability also meant that a man was also expected to be able to protect himself from being penetrated, pieced, hit, etc., in any form of assault.

This active role was also understood and constructed on the understanding of the male's active role in creation. Men were believed to have the generative "seed" that was planted in a woman who merely served as a growing vehicle, or "field", for child-creation rather than contributing biologically to the child. These two roles (active-male, passive-female) perceptibly impacted the ways in which gender was spoken of; for instance, Philo points to how "the female gender is maternal, passive, corporeal and sense-perceptible while the male is active, rational, incorporeal and more akin to mind and thought" (*QE* 1.8).

2.1.2. Self-Control and Restraint

While the meaning of the need to take an "active role" is relatively straightforward, the concept of exhibiting self-control and restraint is both more complicated, and at times in direct conflict with, the tenants of an active male sexuality. The ways in which men were expected to exhibit control was often tied up with the understanding of the virtues,[12] with self-control being on most (if not all) virtue lists. By the first century BCE, the virtues encompassed four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, self-control, and courage (Stewart 2016, p. 96). While all four virtues were important, Conway highlights how ancient authors

upheld self-control as central: "Moderation, or self-mastery, was frequently discussed in terms of mastery of the passions, especially lust and anger, but also self-restraint in eating, drinking, and luxury in general"(Conway 2008, p. 24). In fact, self-control becomes so central that it surpasses the active/passive binary in determining ideal masculinity, with sexual attractions for one's own wife serving as a potentially emasculating desire if not controlled (Conway 2008, p. 25).

The control of anger is particularly interesting, because anger can be looked at in one of two ways: either it should be understood as a loss of control, and therefore an antithesis of what it meant to be "manly", or it should be viewed as a display of one's convictions, which would instead make the display of anger a "manly" act. This has serious and problematic implications when one holds the God of the Hebrew Bible up to these ideals, as frequently throughout the text God is described as being angry.[13] In *On the Unchangeableness of God*, Philo works to alleviate this dissonance by reframing it in terms of the need for instruction and discipline, but he is not alone in trying to reframe anger as something that could potentially enhance one's masculinity rather than something emasculating, as later Christian writers like Lactantius and Basil attempted to similarly alleviate this tension. Lactantius frames divine anger in terms of God's kindness, and re-masculinizes God through pointing to how God, unlike mortal men, has *control* over his anger: (Conway 2008, p. 28)

> And so, lest those things be done which the lowly and men of mediocre station and even great kings do through anger, his temper ought to be moderated and suppressed, because of the danger that being without control of his mind he might commit some unpardonable crime. God, however, is angry, and not for the present moment, since He is eternal and has perfect virtue and is never angry unless rightly. (*Ir.* 21)

So, the argument becomes that anger is only justifiable for God because of God's self-control, and even *kings*, who were supposed to be the ultimate man in the Greek and Roman worlds, lack the necessary self-control to keep anger responsibly in-check. Again, we have here an instance where self-control becomes the ultimate sign of masculinity and is able to trump any other considerations. It is also in the contradicting depictions of the possibilities of righteous *or* uncontrolled anger, like the contradiction of sexual self-control and mandate of generativity, that hegemonic masculine ideals again seem to be at odds with themselves (Conway 2008, pp. 27–29).

2.2. *Masculinity in Performance*

When thinking particularly about performance and masculinity, in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds there are two major aspects that are relevant here: (1) the construction and defense of masculinity in rhetoric, and (2) the feminization of the male body onstage, but particularly in Athenian tragedy. For both rhetoric and drama, the body itself, and particularly the *male* body, is the vehicle for and place of performance. To lose sight of this is to misunderstand the ways in which gender is constructed in and through performance.

2.2.1. Constructing Masculinity in Rhetoric

A training in rhetoric was the final stage of education in the Greek and Roman worlds, and it is this final stage in which boys were taught, quite literally, how to be good men. In fact, "in this period school exercises were not what separated the men from the boys, but what made boys into men" (Gleason 1995, p. xxii). Maud Gleason highlights the way in which masculinity was not an achievement earned, but something that was constantly being battled for and defended in the rhetorical arena. Additionally, there was also a specific connection between the concepts of a good man (*vir bonus*), being a good speaker, and authority.[14] Not only did the learning of rhetoric help to establish a man's masculinity, but:

> Rhetorical performances were the means by which men of power showcased their power and laid claim to its legitimacy, both by attempting to dominate other elite men through persuasion and invective, and by instructing non-elite members of society about their inferior status. (Myers 2015, p. 195)

While most academic interactions with rhetorical texts today handle them as textual objects, both Gleason and Erik Gunderson center the fact that this rhetorical performance was a *bodily* one. A man had to perform with his whole self: controlling voice, facial expression, gesture, etc., to win his rhetorical matchups.[15] This reinscribing of masculinity in and through rhetorical performance serves as an excellent example of what queer theorist Judith Butler calls the "sustained and repeated corporeal project" of gender construction (Butler 1988, p. 552). Since gender, and thus masculinity, is not tied to any inherent traits of a person, it is through this rhetorical sparring that men became, and stayed, "men".

2.2.2. Drama and Unmanning the Hero

If rhetoric was the arena in which orators became men, the stage was where masculinity was questioned and shifted.[16] Athenian drama was made by men, performed by men, for audiences that were likely predominantly male.[17] The plays often served as a reflection of society, but with tragedy's tendency to feature female primary characters, there was always a sort of gender-play at work. To begin, men literally cross-dressed to play female roles (of which there are many in Athenian drama), and then even within the dramas the masculinity of the male characters was always at stake in relation to these (often quite powerful) female characters. In Euripides' *Bacchae*, the effeminate Dionysus convinces king Pentheus to cross-dress to spy on the wild women of Thebes (*Bacchae* 811–45, 912–46), and Pentheus ends up entirely dismembered at the end of the play (*Bacchae* 1100–42); in *Alcestis*, Admetus's wife, Alcestis is the one who dies a noble death in the place of her husband (*Alcestis* 990–1005); in Sophocles' *Antigone*, Antigone is consistently challenging the kingly degrees/power of Creon (*Antigone* 44–47, 245–47, 441–70); and in *Trachiniae*, we see Heracles slowly unmanned as he suffers a long and gruesome death (*Trachiniae* 963–1278). This is in no way an exhaustive list of the ways in which gender ideologies were explored and played out on the Athenian stage, but as Katrina Cawthorn has pointed out in *Becoming Female: The Male Body in Greek Tragedy*, "the tragic (female *and* male) body is essentially in a state of transition, subject to becoming other" (Cawthorn 2008, p. 6). Jeff Jay has explored the ways in which the Gospel of Mark exhibits a tragic "mode" throughout the narrative. My later section on the crucifixion will serve to show that as part of this modality, the broken, abandoned body of Christ on the cross is not something to skip over in the quest to maintain or examine the masculinity of Christ, but if Mark is truly operating within a tragic mode, it is precisely the devolution into a feminized, pierced, broken body that completes the tragic narrative. As Cawthorn puts it:

> To some extent Athenian tragedy as a genre can be read as ultimately failing to settle on a note of safety, as failing to leave male culture intact…the tragic hero often remains feminized, and this effect is further reinforced by many of the plays finishing on a note that is unsettling, and disturbingly for male culture, open-ended.[18]

Masculinity in tragedy creates a touchpoint for making sense of the otherwise unmanly death of Jesus, especially if there is an understanding that Mark would have been presented in performance (even if that performance event falls under a different performance genre than a theatrical one).

2.2.3. Performance Is Not a Genre

Yet, while these ancient performance parallels are useful for thinking about the ways in which gender and performance interact in antiquity, they should not be used as direct correlations to the ways that we think about the performance of biblical material. There are no dramas in the bible, and so to try to read biblical material as if it were a drama

(whether ancient or modern) is to read the texts out of their genre categories. Biblical scholars have long debated over what the genre of a gospel is, worked to find the types of rhetoric in Paul's letters, and argued over what exactly an "apocalypse" is; all working with the concept of literary genre. When performance criticism began, there was an overwhelming push to see these texts as something that grew out of an "oral world" and, thus, would have been "performance". However, "performance" is a medium, not a genre. To lump all genres of performance into one bucket and call it "performance" does a disservice to our understandings of the function, rules, and parameters of certain types of performance. To use our two previously mentioned categories of rhetoric and drama, in antiquity a performance by an orator was distinct from those by the actors in the theatre. Even within theatrical performances there were subgenres (tragedy, comedy, pantomime, etc.), the importance and prevalence of which shifted throughout time. Within these different performance genres, then, there operate different rules of engagement, and this was especially true in regard to proper gendered action.

2.3. *Jewish Understandings of Masculinity*

While understanding the ways in which Greek and Roman culture upheld certain aspects of masculinity as normative, it is important to note how Greek and (particularly) Roman masculine ideals made up the *hegemonic* masculinity present at the time the gospel texts were written. As Jewish men, Jesus and his disciples would also (and perhaps more so) have needed to adhere to the ideals of manliness put forth by their own Jewish community. Rather than existing as two separate spheres of influence, Jewish men of Jesus's time would have had to carefully balance the influence of the dual expectations of Roman hegemonic masculinity and Jewish communal masculinity. This section will examine what the Hebrew Bible tells us about how Jewish men understood their roles as "men".[19]

Just as the texts of the Hebrew Bible are multifaceted in time, location, genre, etc., so too do they present a range of potential options when seeking to identify what qualifies as correct or appropriate "masculinity", or what will determine a "good man" from a lesser one. Additionally, the different social locations of the various men in the Hebrew Bible will present or attempt to conform to differing masculinities: the masculinity of David will look different than that of Abraham, or that of the prophets (who all seem to exhibit their own types of masculinity). The wide range of genres and eras present in the Hebrew Bible requires us to "zoom out" to see if there are common traits that men are expected to have or adhere to across social location, time, and genre. In general, Susan Haddox pulls out an emphasis on honor, potency, and wisdom as the three overarching characteristics of Hebrew Bible masculinity.[20] David Clines, across his body of work, has similarly created a list of what he sees as "traditional male characteristics": strength, violence, bonding, womanlessness, solitariness, musicality, beauty, persuasive speech, honor, binary thinking, and objectifying.[21] While there is an extensive amount that could be said about the variety of constructions of masculinity in the Hebrew Bible, for the sake of space I want to narrow the focus to three threads that are most relevant to this study of the masculinity of Jesus: (1) how the masculinity of God is constructed and how men relate to that masculinity; (2) what connotates a kingly masculinity, with a specific look at David; and (3) how the prophets seem to exhibit an alternative masculinity to the masculinities presented elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

2.3.1. A Masculine God

The unquestioned masculinity of God necessarily creates questions about how other, earthly, men are to relate to God. This issue is the central focus of Howard Eilberg-Schwartz's *God's Phallus*, where he focuses on the difficulties for men in worshipping a male deity since they necessarily need to become feminized to appropriately worship God.[22] Haddox points to criticisms of Eilberg-Schwartz' emphasis on the marriage of God to the people of Israel as an image that only frequently appears in the prophets, and there is little other evidence that an emphasis on natural complementarity would have been necessary. However,

she does draw out that "In a society in which masculinity was a common representation of power, Yhwh had to be perceived as the most masculine. Everyone else was in a subordinate position" (Haddox 2016b, pp. 183–84). This necessary subordination of everyone else to God is seen in the interactions of Moses and God (where Moses cannot even look at God in Exod 3:4), Abraham and God (where Abraham is willing to sacrifice his only son because God asked it of him in Gen 22:1–19), Jacob and God (where the wrestling of Jacob with the angel in Gen 32:25–33 leads to a bodily injury[23]), etc. The unquestioned masculinity of God is also seen in Hellenistic Jewish thinking, particularly in places like Philo's discussion of the gendering of the virtues, where he states:

> As indeed all the virtues have women's titles, but powers and activities of consummate men. For that which comes after God, even though it were chiefest of all other things, occupies a second place, and therefore was termed feminine to express its contrast with the Maker of the Universe who is masculine, and the feminine always comes short of and is lesser than it. (*Quaest in Ex* 1.8) (Satlow 1996, p. 26)

This dynamic will also be seen in the relationship between Jesus and God. It is in this necessary subordination of all to God that makes up one of the primary characteristics of what "biblical" masculinity looks like in the Hebrew Bible, and this submission to God, like the Greek and Roman emphasis on self-control, often eclipses and overrides any other masculine behavior (Haddox 2016a, p. 8).

2.3.2. Kingly Masculinity

In terms of the masculinity of a king, the Hebrew Bible constructs masculinity very similarly to the ways in which masculinity was constructed in the Roman world.[24] In his study of the masculinity of David, David Clines sets forth six characteristics of masculinity that David exhibits.[25] First, as is prevalent across masculinities, the necessity of a man to be strong is tied to the identity of being a warrior or solider, with strength being tied to violence. In David, this capacity for violence is fully fleshed out, as he is depicted as having a death-toll body count of around 140,000 (Clines 1995, pp. 216–17). Men were expected to not only be strong, but to put that strength to use on the battlefield. Clines also points to how Hebrew does not have a separate word for courage or bravery; rather, the words that often get translated into modern English as "courage, courageous" are derived from the root חזק ('be strong') (Clines 1995, p. 218). Second, when not on a battlefield, kings could display their power in other capacities, and the power of persuasion and gifted speech was one of the most primary. "To be master of persuasion is to have another form of power, which is not an alternative to, and far less a denatured version of, physical strength, but part of the repertory of the powerful male" (Clines 1995, p. 220). Third, David is described as beautiful, a feature often attributed to great men, but one we will not see in our discussion of Jesus, as the New Testament entirely lacks a physical description of him.[26] Fourth, David is depicted as having close friendships with other men, fulfilling a category Clines refers to in modern terms as "male bonding", where friendships with men are privileged above all other relationships in a man's life. Fifth, while David has a number of wives, so is not technically without a woman, there is a certain lack of necessity of women for David that leads Clines to highlight that this tenet of masculinity points to the idea that "real men can get along fine without women" (Clines 1995, p. 226). Finally, Clines highlights David's musicality as another characteristic of masculinity.

2.3.3. The Prophets and Alternative Masculinities

While the depiction of warriors and kings in the Hebrew Bible seem to slot into a hegemonic masculine ideal fairly easily, the picture in the prophetic writings is a little more complex. The prophets are often men whose bodies are not their own, but as belonging to God, and as such are subjugated to torture or ridicule and emasculation. God is depicted as having total control over the prophet's body, often using the physical bodies of prophets

to perform sign-acts that hinge on the way in which the prophets' male bodies will be understood. This is seen, for instance, in the humiliating/shameful exposure of Isaiah's buttocks in Isa 20:1–5 in a treatment that would be associated with prisoners of war. This display of nakedness is used as a sign of the humiliation Israel will face if they ally with Egypt against Assyria (Graybill 2016, p. 3). The central metaphor of Hosea is a marriage that Hosea is forced into with a prostitute on God's orders. Ezekiel's body is consistently the vehicle through which his prophecies are delivered. Rhiannon Graybill's work has pointed to the ways in which this embodied capacity of the Hebrew Bible's prophets queers ideas of masculinity.[27] Yet, the prophets continuing to obey and perform that which God asks of them is still in line with the central aspect that Haddox points to as being critical to Hebrew Bible masculinity: complete and total submission to God.

3. Jesus's Masculinity, Performance, and the Gospel of Mark

For a case study to examine what a performance critical consideration of masculinity may look like, I have chosen the Gospel of Mark to focus on, both due to its complicated depiction of Jesus's masculinity and also because it has been the center of much of the performance critical work conducted thus far.[28] And while works like Whitney Shiner's *Proclaiming the Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark* highlight many facets of performance that are tied up in masculinity (i.e., honor/shame, authority, competition, etc.), masculinity as a component of performance is often something left unsaid.[29] This section will show that the ways in which the interpreter-performer understands and constructs the type of masculinity Jesus exhibits will necessarily impact the way in which they present his character.

The complicated nature of the characterization of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is especially present in masculinity studies on Jesus. While Jesus starts the gospel on a high note, as the audience is told that this is the "beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, [Son of God]" (Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ]),[30] the gospel ends with his broken body, pierced on a cross, and crying out as being abandoned (Mark 15:34, 37). This is not alleviated (as in other gospels) with a resurrection scene, and the gospel itself ends with the message of the resurrection in the hands of fearful women. In order to illustrate how there exists a multiplicity of ways to read (and, thus, perform) Jesus's masculinity in Mark, this section will be a close examination of three of the ways in which to understand masculinity in the crucifixion: in the frame of (1) noble death traditions, (2) the tragic hero, and (3) prophetic masculinity. Ultimately, rather than focusing only on the ways in which Greek and Roman ideals influence and shape the ways in which the masculinity of Jesus is constructed in Mark, I want to show that as a text forged in a Jewish community under the hegemonic masculinity of the Roman world, how masculinity as constructed in the Hebrew Bible would still have been present in constructions of masculinity for Jewish writers. While this article is not attempting to put forth any of these interpretations as "correct", by drawing out various options I hope to illustrate that if we are to take seriously that Mark would have been a story primarily performed for an audience rather than silently read, a performer must have had to (or, in the case of modern performances, must continue to) make choices about their depictions of Jesus's masculinity.

3.1. Crucifixion: The Unmanning of Jesus?

As has been mentioned, Mark's Gospel is the only one of the four gospels that does not include a resurrection appearance. The last time we see Jesus, he has cried aloud from the cross, died, and his body is handed between Pilate and Joseph of Arimathea for burial. From the tears he sheds in Gethsemane where he begs God to take the cup from him to his suffering and death on the cross, there is nothing particularly "manly" about the way he dies in the Gospel by hegemonic masculine standards.[31] This section will examine varying ways of understanding his unmanly death, as I first look at a solution that has early traction for making sense of the death of Jesus,[32] the model of understanding the crucifixion as a noble death. Then, I engage with two alternative models I see: the tragic model and the prophetic model (in line with the ways in which Graybill has understood prophetic

masculinity from the Hebrew Bible). Additionally, as I discuss each, I will posit potential performance choices that would be influenced by each understanding.

3.1.1. A Noble Death

One method of explaining away the otherwise "unmanly" death of Jesus via crucifixion is to frame it as being in line with noble death traditions in the Greek and Roman worlds. Noble deaths, as an extreme example of self-control, were ones in which men, often in battle, died in place of/for the men around them.[33] In fact, as Conway illustrates through her example of the suicide of Otho as described by Suetonius, an otherwise feminine man could claim his masculinity via a noble death (Conway 2008, p. 29). The ability of a man to die bravely and often on behalf of others seems at face value to be a good option for understanding the death of Jesus. In fact, in 10:45 he even tells us that the reason he has come is to "give his life as a ransom for many" (δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν). However, when the time comes, a far different picture emerges. Beginning with his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus seems unwilling to fulfill this role as he asks (begs?) God to "take this cup from me" (παρένεγκε τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο ἀπ' ἐμοῦ). While he swiftly defers to God's will, "but not what I wish, but what you wish" (ἀλλ' οὐ τί ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλὰ τί σύ 14:36),[34] when compared with other Jewish examples of noble deaths, like 4 Maccabees, it falls far short of the manly ideal.[35] In 4 Maccabees, the brothers are depicted as nobly dying for the law, each giving a reasoned speech about their deaths and facing death bravely without groaning. This juxtaposition also highlights two other feminizing aspects of the crucifixion narrative that pose problems for the noble death model: the relative silence of Jesus during his trials, and then the cries he emits from the cross. In a culture where a man's ability to speak well and defend himself literally made the man, Jesus's silence during his trials can be interpreted either as a manly stoicism *or* feminine silence.[36] Similarly, Jesus's cries from the cross seem to indicate that he is not "taking it like a man". The question of whether men could cry out in pain is explored by Cicero, who indicates that typically a brave, wise, "manly" man will not cry out in pain.[37]

Placing these difficulties aside for a moment, what would a performance that centers the understanding of Jesus's death in Mark as a noble death look like? I posit that noble death performances would necessarily be performances that rely on communal understandings that the (seemingly unsatisfactory) end of Mark is not the end of the story. A noble-death Jesus would be consistently strong and stoic. He would comfort his disciples even as he tells them they will desert him (14:25–31). His distress and trouble in 14:33 could be posed as being distressed for/about his disciples rather than for himself, which would then also frame the desire to not leave his disciples to serve as a motivator for his asking God to take the cup, before he realizes/remembers that it is through his death that they will ultimately be saved. Jesus's silence (14:61a) is a stoic self-control as he refuses to stoop to the level of those giving false testimony about him, and only speaks to indicate his authority as "the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One" (ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ; 14:61b) before prophesying of his future coming and power (14:62). Before Pilate, Jesus gives little to no answers, only delivering a cool "you say so" (15:2) before giving no further replies. This then amazes Pilate with Jesus's display of (manly?) stoicism. Jesus then moves on to the endurance of his various physical trials, until he reaches Golgotha where, shortly before he is nailed to the cross, he is offered wine mixed with myrrh (an ancient anesthetic)[38], which he refuses. Jesus is able to endure this without the help of any anesthetic. The cries from the cross would necessarily have to be delivered in line with the athletic strength cries that Cicero cites, where athletes in intense competition shout to push themselves.[39] Conway highlights the way in which scholars like Robert Gundry have understood the cry just in that way (Conway 2008, p. 102). While absent an embodied performance illustration due to the medium of journal articles, hopefully this has given a sense of the ways in which the text could be pushed to present a Jesus in line with noble death traditions.

3.1.2. A Tragic Hero

In his *Tragic in Mark*, Jeff Jay has worked to show the ways in which Mark exhibits a "tragic mode", and argues through the illustration of the tragic mode in other Jewish and Greek and Roman literature, that "Mark's evocations of tragic drama were quite intentional and intelligible to many early recipients".[40] Particularly in relation to the end of the gospel, Jay highlights the ways in which the tragic concept of a *deus ex machina* has been used to understand the potentially unsatisfying end of the story (Jay 2014, pp. 198–204; see also Yarbro Collins 2007, pp. 92–93). While a full examination of Mark and tragedy is beyond the scope of this article, the work of scholars like Jay allows for the reading of the masculinity of Jesus in Mark as in line with how masculinity is presented in tragedy. The suffering of Jesus in the passion narrative has been linked to the way in which Heracles' suffering is depicted in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, as both stories end with the gruesome death of the central (deity-fathered) male.[41] Just as Jesus is characterized throughout the Gospel of Mark as being a strong,[42] virile,[43] leader of men who meets a thoroughly unmanly death, so too does Heracles, the paragon of masculine strength, meet his end at the hands of his wife, and the play features a groaning, weeping, suffering Heracles onstage. Cawthorn highlights that this is not an isolated incident in tragedy, and that tragic male heroes are frequently unmanned through suffering: "Suffering plays a key role in both creating and skewing these masculine/feminine associations of the sexed body and remakes the male body into something else" (Cawthorn 2008, pp. 10–11).

Thus, a performance of the end of Mark that was leaning into the "tragic mode" of the narrative would be one that necessarily plays with the ways in which the suffering of Jesus should not be relegated to the back seat, but rather leans into the cries from the cross as a Jesus in pain, as it is this pain and death that serves ultimately as the salvific vehicle. A performer could then heighten the miraculous (*machina*-esque) nature of the tearing of the Temple curtain in two and the appearance of the angel at the empty tomb. A tragic understanding of the Gospel of Mark opens up space for Jesus to safely appear less masculine than many interpreters would usually be comfortable with. As Heracles' status as a masculine figure in Greco-Roman imagination is not hindered by his depiction as a suffering, groaning, feminized figure onstage, so too is there space here for the same to be true for Jesus.

3.1.3. Prophetic Model

For the most part, when scholars talk about masculinity as it relates to the study of Jesus, they are quick to jump to the hegemonic Roman ideals of masculinity as their starting point.[44] While I do agree that the hegemony of the Roman masculine model would have influenced and impacted the way in which Jesus is depicted, I also want to take seriously the influences of the Hebrew Bible on masculinity formation for Jewish men. The discussions surrounding the authorship of Mark and debates about if he was Jewish or Gentile serve as a good indication that in the Gospel of Mark, there is a fusion between Roman/Hellenistic ideals and Jewish ones (Yarbro Collins 2007, pp. 1–6). Adela Yarbro Collins, in her commentary on Mark, concisely indicates this fusion: "The author of Mark has taken the model of biblical sacred history and transformed it, first, by infusing it with an eschatological and apocalyptic perspective and, second, by adapting it to Hellenistic historiographical and biographical traditions"(Yarbro Collins 2007, p. 1).

This section suggests that the same sort of hybridization that Yarbro Collins sees in the genre forms of Mark is also seen in the ways in which masculinity is depicted. It is at this point that I turn to prophetic masculinity as a model for understanding the end of the Gospel of Mark.[45] Like the failed masculinity depicted onstage in Greek tragedy, Graybill wants to highlight that so too can "prophecy can be read as a series of failures of masculinity—or, alternately, as transformations to the very representation of "masculinity" as a category" (Graybill 2016, p. 14). Just as Greek tragedy shifted and adjusted hegemonic Greek ideals of masculinity, so too do the prophets present a shifted and adjusted version of the masculinities of the Hebrew Bible.

From the very beginning of the narrative, the presence of the Hebrew prophets is felt in the quotation from Isaiah (1:2–3).[46] The story begins with a theophanic baptism scene that, while not as dramatic, is reminiscent of the various calls of the prophets (cf. Jer 1:4–10; Isa 6; Ezek 1–2), and throughout the narrative Jesus primarily teaches through action, mirroring the sign-acts of prophets like Ezekiel. Like Ezekiel's eating of bread baked on human dung (Ezek 4:12), so too does Jesus eat in "unclean" or problematic situations (cf. Mark 2:15, 18). We find Jesus asleep in stormy waters (4:38) like Jonah (Jon 1:5) and he raises dead children (5:35–42) like Elisha (2 Kgs 4:8–37). The Markan "apocalypse" of chapter 13 calls upon images found in Daniel, and scholars regularly point to how Jesus can be understood as the "suffering servant" depicted in Isaiah.[47] Framed in light of Jeremiah's constant complaints (largely found in Jer 12–20) about his prophetic role, Jesus's asking God to remove the cup from him in Gethsemane is not a question that is completely out of left field (Graybill 2016, p. 15). Perhaps most importantly, Jesus even self-identifies as a prophet (6:4).[48]

So, what does a performance of Jesus as a prophet look like in terms of masculinity? The prophetic texts illustrate in imaginative detail the masculine ideal of total submission to God as greater than any other tenant of masculinity. Like the prophets, Jesus's body is entirely under the control of God, and perhaps we could even read his life as an extended prophetic sign-act, where instead of having the sign explained after the fact, we receive it beforehand in the institution of the eucharist. As Jesus breaks the bread and pours into the cup, he presages his broken and leaking body, but, as his passion predictions (8:31–9:1; 9:31–37; 10:32–45) indicate, he will be raised from the dead to come again and judge in power (13:26; 14:62). Yet, while none of this is in his control, as instead his body is being used as a sign-act to increase the people's faith in God, an understanding of the necessity of the completion of a sign-act in line with what Jesus has predicted/explained will happen can help to alleviate the tension of an ending that does not feature the bodily appearance of the resurrected Jesus. Performances that kept (or keep) in mind the prophets will draw on existing performance traditions of those texts (or ones described within the texts, which are often two modes that are not identical).

4. Conclusions

As the earliest full narrative of the story of Jesus, later changes made by other evangelists and redactors of the Markan text itself should indicate that the masculinity of Jesus presented in the Gospel of Mark left further generations of Jesus followers wanting. It is for this reason that Mark should hold a special place in the examination of gender in critical scholarship. The author chose to depict a Jesus who, although he begins his story as the "stronger" one, the Son of God, ends his story like a tragic hero, alone, abandoned, and suffering, with the news of his resurrection left in the hands of fearful women. When moving from narrative analyses (where a multiplicity of interpretations can often comfortably exist simultaneously) to performance ones, it becomes necessary to begin to make choices. How to handle this "unmanning" of Jesus is something a performer must deal with if they are to perform the gospel, as multiple masculinity options cannot exist simultaneously in performance without the risk of creating a muddled picture of Jesus that would not deliver successfully in performance.

This article has only begun to scratch the surface of the multiplicity of ways in which the masculinity of Jesus can be constructed and interpreted using the same material. I first laid the necessary groundwork for an examination of masculinity by detailing the varying ways one could be or become a man in the Greek and Roman worlds. Being a man was not a given, and to adhere to the hegemonic norms it was necessary for men to earn and maintain any masculinity they possessed or risk a slide into effeminacy. As this paper was concerned with masculinity in performance, I also examined the opposing performance fields of rhetoric (where boys became men) and drama (where men became women) to point to how gender in performance also contains a plethora of options. Then, since the Gospel of Mark is a text that came out of a Roman *and* Jewish context, I explored specific

formations of masculinity as they are presented in the Hebrew Bible, with a particular emphasis on God's masculinity, kingly masculinity (via David), and alternative prophetic masculinities. Ultimately, it became clear that submission to God is the most defining feature of a masculinity constructed out of the ideals of the Hebrew Bible. Finally, I examined ways of performing the Gospel of Mark through three different models of masculinity: noble death, tragic heroes, and prophetic masculinity.

While Conway's full-length analysis of the masculinity of Jesus across the New Testament (from the Pauline corpus to Revelation) provides a useful overview of Jesus's masculinity across the New Testament literature, she specifically chooses to focus solely on Greco-Roman ideals of masculinity. Further study of the masculinity of Jesus should take more seriously the ways in which the communities producing and consuming the gospel texts would have been a mixed group of Jewish and Gentile persons, and so the ideals of masculinity would also have been mixed. Deeper study of the ways in which Hellenistic Jewish writers, like Philo, handle masculinity, as well as constructions that would be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, could continue to fill in the picture of the ways in which the hegemonic, dominating Roman empire forced their masculinities upon the people they dominated (with domination itself being an indicator of masculinity). This article has sought to show the benefits of bringing together research on the constructions of masculinity found in the Hebrew Bible and the hegemonic masculine ideals of the Greco-Roman world (as most Hebrew Bible scholars focus on Hebrew Bible masculinities and New Testament scholars focus on Greco-Roman ones). Just as the early Christian communities blended cultures, so too will we see blended understandings and framings of masculinity as we explore the ways in which Jesus's masculinity is depicted and performed in the gospels and broader tradition.

Finally, current studies of the masculinity of Jesus often leave out considerations of performance, even though, as this article has sought to show, masculinity was often tied up with various genres of performance. While narrative approaches have more space to hold multiple interpretations in tension with one another, performances of the texts would have necessitated making singular choices that would impact an audience's understanding of the text. Masculinity studies are particularly enhanced by considerations of performance because of this relationship between masculinity formation in the Greek and Roman worlds and performance (particularly via avenues such as rhetoric).

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Notes

1 For the purposes of clarity, when I talk about performance criticism, I mean the process of interacting with ancient texts in which the primary emphasis is placed upon the oral contexts of a work's historical situation through an active study of (1) the cultures/groups that the work grew out of, (2) the world contained within the work/narrative (this becomes less relevant with performance critical discussions of epistolary material), and (3) the ways in which the work has been received and re-received as/in performance throughout history. This does not necessitate attempts to re-create ancient performances, but neither does it preclude them. Peter Perry has helpfully pointed to the ways in which scholars working on performance critical questions seem to have fractured into six avenues (though I will note that there are scholars whose work easily falls under one of these avenues who do not even consider themselves to be performance critical scholars), creating a vast field of study with fluid edges. Peter Perry (2019).

2 See, for instance, studies like Kelly Iverson (2014).

3 Graybill helpfully asserts that in specifically working to talk about the masculine, scholars recognize that there is not "feminine" and "neutral" (as the field has often treated the two categories), but rather that "another important component of this work is gendering the masculine in order to break the link between masculinity and neutrality"; there is no "neutral", especially not in dealing with texts for and by men from patriarchal societies who hold very strict and detailed ideals about masculinity. To not speak of the gendered nature of masculine things is to ignore a large part of the gender dynamics at work. Rhiannon Graybill (2016, p. 12).

4 By "performed" here, and "performance" in general, I take a rather wide definition, understanding *performance* as any action that is framed and presented to affect some sort of engagement of its audience.

[5] Performers are often encouraged to make bold choices, as anything between can read as wishy-washy and thus fall flat for audiences. For a performance to be successful and engaging, these types of bold or clear choices would have to be made.

[6] This to say that multiple options are always available to the performer, but that only one can be actualized in performance at once. This does not exclude the possibility of a performer changing their performance in reaction to audience receptions.

[7] The idea of a "rugged" masculinity for not only Jesus but Christian men overall is explored in texts like Will Moore (2022) and Kristin Kobes Du Mez (2020), and a quick Twitter search of "biblical masculinity" brings up accounts like @MichaelBrynkus and @BiblicMasculin (among others) that spout patriarchal, often highly problematic takes that they package as "biblical masculinity" for their audiences.

[8] "Hegemonic masculinity", a label coined by Tim Carrigan and expanded upon by Raewyn Connell in her book *Masculinities*, is typically tied up with institutions of power, and often is held up as more of an ideal to strive for than a masculinity that is attained by specific men. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination or women" (Raewyn Connell 2005, p. 77). Susan E. Haddox goes on to provide a list of characteristics that cross-cultural studies have determined to be typical components of hegemonic masculinities: military might, bodily integrity, honor, virility, provisioning, and spatiality. Susan E. Haddox (2016b, pp. 179–83).

[9] While I do not have the space to delve into postcolonial theory within the scope of this article, Colleen Conway is right to highlight that postcolonial theories and the ways in which indigenous peoples and cultures subordinated under an imperial power often exhibit a type "of 'mimicry,' in which the indigenous subject reproduces rhetoric and ideologies of the dominant power" can be seen to be at play, as the early Jesus movement had to navigate between Jewish understandings of masculinity while also simultaneously adopting pieces of Greco-Roman masculine ideals as they sought for greater cultural acceptance, and so it is important to examine both the hegemonic culture (Greco-Roman masculine ideals) against and with Jewish/Palestinian culture. Colleen Conway (2008, p. 8); the word and analysis of colonial "mimicry" she borrows from Homi K. Bhabha (1994).

[10] Thomas Laqueur (1992). For examples of scholars who problematize his understandings of ancient conceptions of the body, see Helen King (2016); Meghan Henning (2021, pp. 23–49).

[11] As this article will be moving into discussions of gender *in* performance, I want to be clear that what Butler is talking about is rather the performative aspects of the construction of gender, rather than the representation of gender in performances. The latter half of this paper will be examining the ways in which specific cultural productions (literary, oral, theatrical, etc.) reinforce or challenge these performatively constructed notions of gender. Judith Butler (1988, pp. 519–31); Judith Butler (1990).

[12] The Latin word, *virtus*, translated frequently into English as "virtue", is etymologically connected to the word for man, *vir*. This etymological link between positive masculine traits and the word for man is also seen in Greek with the word ανδρεία, courage, which has the ανδρ-root. Conway (2008, pp. 24, 29); Stewart (2016, p. 94).

[13] Cf. Gen 6:7, Deut 9:8; Exod 32:10–11; Num 11:1–2, among many others. Conway (2008, p. 27). This could, however, answer some questions about the textual variant in Mark 1:41, where σπλαγχνισθεὶς (moved with compassion) replaced ὀργισθεὶς (anger) as the tradition worked to move from the more complicated masculinity presented in Mark to one where the masculinity of Jesus is less in question.

[14] Erik Gunderson (2000, pp. 6–7). Gunderson points to the ways in which the ideal speaker and the ideal man are related and conflated in various treatises, including (but not limited to) the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero's *De oratore, Orator* and *Brutus*, and Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria.*

[15] Gleason (1995, p. xxii); though the book itself explores embodiment throughout. Gunderson (2000, pp. 59–86).

[16] There is a consistent wariness of orators not to stray into the realm of the theatrical, for being "too theatrical" risked becoming a worse orator, and thus losing one's masculinity. For an in-depth exploration of the relationship between orators and actors, see Gunderson (2000, pp. 111–48).

[17] For intersections of Athenian drama and Judaism, see Jeff Jay (2013, pp. 218–53). The section on Tragic Heroes below will talk more about Christianity/the Gospel of Mark and drama.

[18] Cawthorn (2008, p. 17). That the ending of Mark is unsettling for its male audience can be seen not only in the way the other evangelists handle the ends of their gospels (with the post-resurrection Jesus making appearances in all of them), but also in the ways in which more "satisfying" endings were added onto the Gospel of Mark itself.

[19] While this paper has chosen to narrow the focus to primarily the texts of the now-canonical Hebrew Bible, a greater examination of the plurality of Jewish masculinities (Hellenistic Jewish ideas through Philo and Jospehus, or Rabbinic masculinities) could also serve as fruitful avenues of exploration.

[20] Susan E. Haddox (2016a, pp. 6–7). Haddox's work is largely centered on the texts of what is now the Hebrew Bible, rather than an examination of Jewish ideals of masculinity more widely.

[21] David Clines (1998, p. 354). While the scope of this article does not allow for a deeper dive into the origins of all these facets Clines highlights as indicative of masculinity, his work more broadly on the topic of masculinity across Hebrew Bible and New Testament texts is impressive.

22 He focuses a little too much on the marriage metaphor, and I have doubts about his centrality of heteronormativity in his worry of the homoeroticism of males worshipping a male deity (see Eilberg-Schwartz 1994). Haddox highlights some of these issues as she draws out the threads she finds important (Haddox 2016b, pp. 183–84), and I think a queer engagement with Eilberg-Schwartz's work would be a fruitful endeavor in making heads or tails of the complexities of gender relations to/with God/the divine.

23 Even if you discount interpretations that understand "hip" as a euphemism for "genitals", as Eilberg-Schwartz does (Eilberg-Schwartz 1994, p. 156), a disabled body was also inherently a feminized body.

24 That this form of masculinity was expected of the kings of the Roman world is evident in Conway's discussion of Caesar Augustus. See: Conway (2008, pp. 39–49).

25 I have chosen to focus on the ways in which David's masculinity is characterized due to the Son of David/Davidic line resonances and statements about Jesus throughout the gospels. There is certainly more to cover in terms of the ways in which various other kings depicted meet or do not meet the categories set out in David Clines (1995, pp. 212–43). In her overview of the field, Haddox outlines other studies on similar warrior/kingly figures in the Hebrew Bible. See Haddox (2016b, pp. 186–93).

26 In her study, Conway points out that while physical descriptions of beauty are present in other accounts of extraordinary men in antiquity (her project uses Augustus, Moses, and Apollonius as examples), we do not have a physical description of Jesus (Conway 2008, pp. 149–50). This is a departure from both Greek and Roman ideals *and*, as Clines would have us understand, ideals from the Hebrew Bible as well.

27 I will return to Graybill's work in the final section of the article as I discuss the crucifixion of Jesus.

28 For instance (and this list is by no means exhaustive), see: Boomershine and Bartholomew (2015); Whitney Shiner (2003); Richard W. Swanson (2005); Antoinette Clark Wire (2011); Joanna Dewey (2014).

29 While a narrative treatment rather than specifically a performance treatment, this same phenomenon of talking about masculine traits without mentioning/considering the ways in which masculinity is at play is also seen in the way in which the characterization of Jesus is talked about (particularly in the discussion of authority) in Rhoads et al. (2012, pp. 104–15).

30 Unless otherwise noted, for biblical quotations the Greek text is from the NA28 and English text is the NRSVUE.

31 For a close analysis of the features of this unmanly death (particularly how it relates the changes to it made by Matthew and Luke), see Susanna Asikainen (2018, pp. 156–84).

32 The reinterpretation of Jesus's death as a noble or vicarious death is seen as early as Paul, where he uses language of Christ dying for "our sins" or "all" frequently throughout his letters. See Conway (2008, pp. 70–73).

33 See examples like Homer, *Iliad* 15.494–97; Plato, *Symposium* 178d4–179b5 (instance of dying for love); Horace, *Carm.* 3.2.13–16; Diogenes Laertius, 5.7–9 among others.

34 Slightly revised from the NRSVUE translation.

35 For an extensive exploration of the masculinity via noble death as presented in 4 Maccabees, see Moore and Anderson (1998, pp. 249–73).

36 This also seems to be in conversation with the traditions around the death of Socrates. For the sake of space, this article has not delved into the ways in which masculinity was reframed and reformed by various schools of philosophy, but there is certainly interaction with various philosophical schools' ideals of masculinity. For an engagement with the philosophical schools as they apply to masculinity and Jesus, see Asikainen (2018).

37 Conway cites Cicero's *Tusc*, 2.22.55 and then also indicates how scholars like Robert Gundry have taken Cicero's wiggle room in allowing for men to cry out in strength (like athletes on a racecourse) to read Jesus's cry as a further display of strength (an opinion I have also heard among Markan scholars in SBL Mark session debates about how to understand the differences between 15:34′s use of βοάω compared with 15:37′s "ἀφεὶς φωνὴν μεγάλην").

38 For myrrh as an ancient anesthetic see Tat-siong Benny Liew (2003, p. 111); Rhoads et al. (2012, p. 111).

39 This is still seen today, I think specifically of rock climbers, many of whom scream as they reach for difficult holds and moves. Adam Ondra is particularly known for his on-the-wall screams and is arguably one of the best climbers currently climbing.

40 Jay defines mode as "a 'selection or abstraction' from genre, which it nonetheless 'evokes' because it incorporates samples of a genre's internal repertoire, especially its motifs, moods, and values, which are all means by which a mode may 'announce itself'". Jeff Jay (2014, p. 13).

41 For work on the comparison of Jesus and Heracles, see: David Aune (1990, pp. 3–19); Herbert Jennings Rose (1938, pp. 113–42); Courtney J. P. Friesen (2018, pp. 243–61).

42 Cf. Mark 1:7 and John the Baptist's assertion that one "stronger than me" (ὁ ἰσχυρότερός μου) is coming after him and 3:27 and the parable of the strong man.

43 Tat-siong Benny Liew suggests that the consistent agricultural metaphors in Mark about seed sowing (particularly the parable of the sower [4:1–20]) all work to construct Jesus as a virile, manly man who "sows" (all sexual–generative allusions intended). Liew (2003, pp. 100–3).

44 See Conway (2008); Stewart (2016); Myers (2015), Liew (2003) among others.

[45] This article does not have space to directly deal with the larger understanding of Jesus as the suffering servant from Isaiah (cf. Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12); this is also something that lends weight to the understanding of Jesus in terms of prophetic masculinity. The connection of servanthood/enslavement and prophecy is also seen in interpretations of the parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:2; cf. Jer 7:25; 25:4; Josh 14:7; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:4–6). Eric Thurman (2003, p. 156).

[46] Textual variants change ἐν τῷ Ἠσαΐᾳ τῷ προφήτῃ to just τοῖς προφήταις, likely in recognition of the fact that the quote is actually a blend that also includes text from Exodus and Malachi. (Yarbro Collins 2007, p. 133).

[47] Cf. Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12

[48] While this list is in no way exhaustive, I want to illustrate a few of the potential prophetic resonances that audiences may (or may not) have heard.

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Article

Who Tells the Story? Challenging Audiences through Performer Embodiment

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Abstract: Visualising a character in a narrative is a highly individual act; cognitive narratology suggests that individuals may construct character models depending on the information (frames) available to them. However, many of these frames are formed from knowledge defined by positivist historical criticism, meaning that construction tends to follow broadly similar patterns. Performing and therefore embodying a character shifts the role of interpretation from audience to performer; an audience engages with the nuances of each performer's embodiment of a character in a shared experience of a temporal performance event. This shift of interpretive responsibility to the performer allows them to challenge audiences in ways that an author may not be able to. Embodiment of a character through performance will inevitably challenge readers' cognitive constructions of the same character to different degrees—for example, gender, ethnicity, bearing, tone, or even action may differ—potentially creating dissonance for audiences. This dissonance may help interpreters to discover their own assumptions about the performed texts, in doing so creating new avenues for interpretation. Such is the promise of performance: by viewing embodied narratives, audiences are challenged to view alternative interpretations and subsequently reconcile differences between their constructions and those of the performers.

Keywords: narrative criticism; performance criticism; biblical performance criticism; biblical interpretation; cognitive narratology; rhetoric; oral tradition

1. Introduction

The call for papers for this Special Issue put forward a question to writers: "are the differences between Narrative and Performance Criticisms simply a matter of degree or of kind?" To best illustrate and subsequently discuss these differences, I suggest an approach which explores how each criticism engages with character construction. Recent shifts within narrative criticism via cognitive linguistics toward recognising variance of interpretation between sets of readers is a helpful move toward promoting diversity in character construction, yet one that has the potential to re-centre existing hegemonic interpretations of texts.

In contrast, I will argue that the embodiment of a character by a performer challenges audiences to move beyond their mental models for said characters. By confronting an audience with characters whose embodiment may highlight differences between interpretations, performance can provide an additional frame which informs an audience member's construction of a character. Performance criticism thus moves the primary responsibility of textual interpretation from the "reader" to the "performer" or indeed performing company, whose interpretation of the text creates opportunity for generative dialogue and a move away from established interpretations and entrenched ideas. Performance criticism thus complements narrative criticism, creating a feedback loop whereby a performer's embodiment of the text may be informed by narrative criticism, and subsequently an audience member's construction of a character is informed by witnessing a performance.

To make this argument, I will first discuss the recent development of a cognitive-narratological approach within narrative criticism as set out in the 2021 Special Issue of *Biblical Interpretation*, noting the approach's strengths and weaknesses. I will then very briefly outline the different modalities of biblical performance criticism (BPC), noting that scholars have tended to compare narrative criticism to the analytical mode of BPC—an understandable move given these are closely related fields in many ways. I turn to the heuristic and practical modes of BPC to discuss the possibilities which arise when physically performing the text, focusing on the performer as interpreter, as well as the performance event as an arena for meaning-making.

2. Narrative Criticism, Cognitive Linguistics and the Cognitive-Narratological Approach

Narrative criticism is interested in readers and how they respond to texts. David Rhoads, a key figure in both narrative criticism as well as BPC, defines narrative criticism as the "analysis of the storyworld of a narrative" as well as the "analysis of its implied rhetorical impact upon readers" (Rhoads 1999, p. 265). Leif Hongisto later points out that this approach encompasses historical reading, but includes the "additional perspective of the participation of the reader" (Hongisto 2010, p. 17). There is an interplay between narrative and reader; in her introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, Danna Fewell points out that narratives are embodied stories which help "carve us out from the rest of reality", in effect working to impose structure and form upon the chaos of life (Fewell 2016, p. 5). Narratives help readers to make sense of the world, to give meaning to it, and the characters within narratives act as focal points around which readers and their communities may shape identities (Fewell 2016).

However, not all readers are the same, and scholarship is increasingly beginning to recognise that previous attempts to construct an "implied" or "intended" reader often reflect the scholar and more broadly the field rather than an actual person—or as Cornelis Bennema puts it, a "heuristic construct of the modern critic" (Bennema 2021, p. 433). In a more recent development, Jan Rüggemeier and Elizabeth Shively suggest a "cognitive-narratological approach" to characterisation in New Testament (NT) narratives (Rüggemeier and Shively 2021). They point out that this "cognitive turn" has occurred within narrative criticism to explain how readers think about and engage with texts beyond the written text; they are particularly interested in how readers construct mental models of characters based on a variety of different factors. In other words, this development in narrative criticism recognises that different people read and interpret narratives in very different ways—as such, it is important to begin to understand the factors that affect an individual's construction of a character.

Rüggemeier and Shively argue that characters are constructed on the basis of different sources of input, these being textual cues, mental models of persons, and cultural frames, the latter two of which will vary greatly from reader to reader (Rüggemeier and Shively 2021). Taking this a step further, Bennema helpfully suggests a range of possible readers, and goes on to construct four hypothetical readers, showing that their interpretations of the character of Peter vary greatly depending on what textual information is available to them (Bennema 2021). Importantly, Bennema acknowledges the importance of "real world" knowledge in constructing characters, pointing out that readers inevitably draw on their own knowledge of human behaviour and "socio-cultural schemata" (Bennema 2021).

This seems like an exciting development, as the cognitive-narratological method being developed in narrative criticism seem to acknowledge that every reader will have their own, unique understanding of a character within the text, formed from a complex mixture of their textual and historical knowledge, as well as paratexts, the reader's own social location, their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, etc. However, this is quickly diminished as Bennema argues that "hermeneutical control" needs to be retained through knowledge of the 1st-century world. This seems an impossible prospect, and in responding to Rüggemeier and Shively as well as Bennema, Suzanne Keen highlights that "actual

contemporary readers" simply do not have enough knowledge to read any biblical text according to these guidelines (Keen 2021, p. 462). As a result, she argues, these actual readers tend to be simply erased by narrative critics.

On the other hand, Bonnie Howe and Eve Sweetser take up Keen's argument that there exists an unbridgeable gap between the first century and 21st, and that the point of cognitive linguistics is to recognise that readers will always need to "construe" an interpretation based on their own knowledge and experience (Howe and Sweetser 2021). They point out that despite the fears of unregulated, decontextualised interpretation of texts, interpreters cannot simply reframe the text however they want, as the text itself sets narrative frames of its own within which the story occurs. Nevertheless, outside of these text-specific frames, they remind us, a reader can construct a character however they want—or as they put it, "nothing generally stops a reader from visualising a character with blue eyes, if the text doesn't describe the character's eyes as brown" (Howe and Sweetser 2021).

The cognitive-narratological approach thus moves scholars away from constructing an idealised "reader" and toward recognising that every person interprets the text differently, resulting in a vast array of possible constructions of a character. This is an important move; however, it seems unlikely that a wide variety of readings will flourish. This is for a complex set of reasons. Firstly, as Jeremy Schipper and other narrative scholars point out, characters in the biblical narrative tend to be "underdescribed" (Schipper 2016, p. 389). Schipper convincingly argues that this results in normativised constructions of characters by readers unless explicitly described otherwise—specifically, the prevailing assumption that characters are "nondisabled", meaning that disability is utilised as a plot point rather than as a natural part of a character's being. Schipper's argument naturally extends to characteristics other than disability and attractiveness; the lack of description surrounding characters mean that certain norms can be easily overlaid onto them.

A helpful additional consideration is Stephen Moore's somewhat technical summation of Scott Elliott's critique of characterisation in narrative criticism, as an "unproblematized reflection of the post-Cartesian Western concept of individual interiorized human subjectivity" whereby the "naturalized, reified, undeconstructed concept of self predetermines not only narrative-critical construals of literary characters in the gospels and other ancient narratives, but also construals of the historical persons assumed to underlie these characters, not least the historical Jesus" (Moore 2016, p. 40). In other words, Moore suggests that readers have a tendency to unconsciously and anachronistically apply ideas concerning self-identity to characters in biblical narratives, in doing so making assumptions about them—their motivations, interior life, and resultantly other characteristics.

Taken together, these critiques point out that readers have a tendency to construct characters if not in our own image, then certainly in the way we would like to see them—or more insidiously, how we have been told we *should* see them by decades of scholarly work. Because the text does not give us lengthy descriptions of Jonah, we can project an image upon him—and this image by and large conforms to what society considers "normal", which preferences certain ideas of physicality, ethnicity, beauty. Because the text does not tell us about Judas' thoughts, we assume that his motivations are selfish rather than altruistic, as we judge his actions by modern standards of morality. Our constructions are thus influenced in large part by our own norms; this applies not only to lay readers but also to academics.

This is concerning. The scholarly guild by and large continues to insist on creating scholars in its own image, trained in "classical" methods of biblical studies which prioritise historical positivism and Western traditions (Tolbert 2013)—or, as Greg Carey more pointedly puts it, "whiteness constitutes one fundamental constituent of that [interpretive] centre" (Carey 2013, p. 5). The assumed sets of knowledge from which many biblical scholars work preference English, French, and German, causing what Hedges calls a "Euronormative" bias in the academy (Hedges 2020). Many scholarly interpretations unknowingly assert these assumptions and norms upon the biblical texts—echoing Bennema's call for hermeneutical control—such that the assumed default position of an

interpreter is that of a white male, with scholars who do not fit this position expected to identify their social location (Tolbert 2013). This means that it is rare for diverse (or non-white, or non-positivist) biblical interpretations to occur, and when they do, they are at risk of being stifled for being insufficiently rigorous, or as Carey points out, consistently minoritised and treated as an interesting diversion from real work.

Though the cognitive-narratological turn is important and helpful in challenging this status quo by acknowledging that readers may well interpret the text differently based on their social location, it does not do enough to influence or challenge reader constructions, meaning that certain biases will continue to be perpetuated. Given the ongoing dominance of Western traditions within the academy (even the dominance of English as the primary language of the guild), interpreters are continually pushed toward white-centred constructions of characters. At the same time, as the dialogue within the Special Issue shows, there is still significant impetus toward the need for an "educated" reader, with a sense that lay (non-Western educated) readers will simply do a bad job of interpreting the texts because they do not have the right cultural frames to approach the text "correctly". Thus, the problem falls into a perpetual cycle: one needs to be in the guild to challenge dominant paradigms, but in order to come into the guild, one needs to learn to think a certain way based on dominant paradigms, and is therefore less likely to challenge dominant paradigms.

This is a problem which I suggest BPC may help to address by relocating the conversation away from individual interpretation to communal viewing. I do not wish to suggest that the cognitive turn within narrative criticism is unhelpful or unnecessary; far from it, I suggest that BPC complements these important developments in narrative criticism by shifting focus: rather than the onus of interpretation resting upon readers, whose constructions of character tend to live within their imaginations, performance places the burden upon the performer/s, with two helpful outcomes: (1) the creation of a temporal performance event whereby characterisation becomes less ambiguous as it spills out from the performer's imagination into reality, allowing a central locus for understanding and subsequent re-readings, and (2) the physical embodiment of characters, which confronts audiences with interpretations which may be radically different to their own. Performance also defies normativity and may allow for creative imaginings which challenge existing biases.

3. The Analytical Mode of Biblical Performance Criticism

In his comprehensive survey of BPC, Peter Perry points out that BPC can be grouped into three distinct "modes": the "analytical", the "heuristic", and the "practical" (Perry 2019). Each of these modes utilise different epistemologies, with different goals in view: the analytical mode casts a performance-oriented lens on historical-critical analysis of texts with the goal of uncovering links to ancient performances, the heuristic reflects upon contemporary performances of biblical texts and their effect upon both performer and audience, and the practical is a catchall term which captures practically oriented performances (such as in liturgical settings). Perry notes also that the discipline is rapidly diversifying (Perry 2019)—however, as a result of this diversity, one of the challenges facing scholars is BPC's lack of a systematic "method". This is both a strength and weakness, and is celebrated by BPC scholars as it allows for a greater variety in approaches. Space does not permit a full discussion of BPC as a field, and interested readers should look to Perry's survey for guidance.

Perry argues that BPC is in effect the result of a convergence of several different historical-critical sub-disciplines (Perry 2016), incorporating elements from form criticism, oral criticism, rhetorical criticism, and narrative criticism. Indeed, it could be argued that BPC is a direct descendant of narrative criticism thanks largely to the figure of David M. Rhoads, whose co-authored *Mark as Story* (Rhoads and Michie 1982; Rhoads et al. 2012) would, among other key texts, set the scene for the discipline of narrative criticism (Moore 2016, p. 28). Rhoads is also widely acknowledged as one of the seminal scholars within the field of BPC, beginning perhaps with his recorded one-person performance of Mark

from the 1970s and including several journal articles from the 2000s on the then-emerging discipline. Indeed, his narrative-critical work points to the need for performers and their own role in interpreting texts for an audience (Rhoads 1999, p. 278).

The analytical mode of BPC utilises largely the same set of tools available to the historical-critical scholar, with one key difference: BPC is interested largely in recovering performance elements within the biblical texts. This largely happens in two ways: either by highlighting features of the text which might act as performance markers, or by theorising how the text might have been transmuted from performed material to a written (and therefore static) medium (Mathews 2014). BPC therefore draws upon historical-critical work in ancient media, orality, memory, theatre studies, and other disciplines in order to study the interplay between performance and text. The analytical mode of BPC relies upon careful historical-critical work, and indeed this performance-oriented (or perhaps media-oriented) perspective offers new avenues of research.

Of course, there are different approaches within this mode depending on one's perspective on "performance" and "composition"; for example, Larry Hurtado and Kelly Iverson have debated the interplay between orality and silent reading in the 1st century CE (Hurtado 2014; Iverson 2016). Here, we can locate one key distinguishing feature of BPC: nowadays, most performance critics will insist upon the "fundamental orality" of the biblical texts (Rhoads and Dewey 2014, p. 10), to the point of arguing that these texts were intended to be performed before an audience—and some go so far as to theorise "performance events" in the 1st century CE (de Waal 2015; Eberhart 2023; Shiner 2003; Whitenton 2016). Space does not permit a full exploration of these arguments, but an important consideration that results from this insistence on actual performance is the performance's effect upon the audience—similar to narrative criticism's interest in the narrative's effect upon the reader.

Aside from the focus on orality, the analytical mode of BPC is functionally similar to narrative criticism, albeit with a slightly different focus—rather than honing in on characters and readers (though these are by no means ignored), BPC is interested in exploring the interplay between performance and text—how texts might have been composed for or in performance, how performance-related media are connected to texts, and the way texts are interpreted. For example, Tom Boomershine shows that the performer of John's Gospel directly addresses audiences whilst embodying Jesus, in doing so appealing to them as though they were Jews to believe in Jesus' messiahship (Boomershine 2022b). This way of thinking about the audience, he argues, suggests that the text is addressed to diaspora Jewish communities across the Roman Empire. BPC therefore allows for new perspectives to emerge.

I suggest that there is room also for a mindset which falls between the analytic and heuristic, and indeed is also accessed in each mode: where the scholar is able to use both their own expertise as well as textual frames to speculate on how performers might embody characters in different ways, and the resultant changes in interpretation—for example, as Holly Hearon does in exploring characterisation in John, or Mathews in engaging with various Hebrew Bible texts (Hearon 2014; Mathews 2012, 2019). A helpful way of thinking about this mindset might be to borrow a phrase from William Doan and Terry Giles: the "performance mode of thought", a mindset which acknowledges the oral, performed origins of texts and seeks to draw conclusions from said orality (Doan and Giles 2005, p. 5). This mindset is employed to some extent by all BPC scholars and practitioners; it allows scholars (and performers) to theorise and suggest outcomes from an informed perspective, and it guides performers in making performative choices. This is akin to a historically informed narrative inquiry which constructs characters within the bounds of cultural frames.

On the other hand, the remaining two modes of BPC are quite different, as they focus on actual rather than theoretical performances. As a result, we see interpretation move from theoretical construction to grounded reality as scholars and performers begin to make decisions about *how* they will embody particular characters.

4. Performing Texts: The Heuristic and Practical Modes of BPC

Both the heuristic and practical modes of BPC are centred around *performing* the text, albeit in different ways: Perry argues that the heuristic mode is primarily undertaken by scholars to draw out audience and performer reflections on a performance, whereas the practical mode is more of a catchall term that encompasses various other ways the text might be performed in a non-scholarly setting (Perry 2019). Two definitions of performance are helpful considerations: firstly, from a theatre studies perspective, Richard Bauman points out that "performance usually suggests an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience" (Bauman 1994, p. 41). Secondly, from a BPC perspective, Perry defines performance as "a communication event re-expressing traditions for an audience" (Perry 2019, p. 1).

Notable across both definitions are two key elements: the communication and the audience. In simplest terms, performance involves a person or people communicating *something* in a particular way to an audience. From a narrower BPC perspective, this "something" is almost always the biblical text. The text itself is a known quantity; what is of particular interest is the communicator (the performer/s) and the audience.

Here, we find a common factor across all modes of BPC: all are interested in the effect upon the audience. Where the analytical mode aims to recreate the impact upon the 1st-century audience, and present hypothetical reconstructions of 1st-century performance settings, the heuristic mode assesses the impact from live performances of the text with audiences contemporary to the scholar (though this, too, is changing as filmed performances become increasingly accessible online). Scholars will stage performances to "study the pluriformity of meaning-making" (Perry 2019, p. 11); these staged performances create interpretive opportunities that silent reading simply does not. The practical mode, of course, is the lived experience of texts being contextualised into everyday life.

The heuristic mode tends to be rather difficult to locate within scholarship, and more often occurs in a pedagogical or academic setting where scholars have the opportunity to lead classes through a close reading of a text, or perform the text for their peers. When it is recorded and written about in scholarly literature, it is almost inevitably undertaken by "scholar-performers" who draw insights from both performing as well as historical-critical approaches (Perry 2016; Rhoads 2010; Maxwell 2022; Barbarick 2022; Winedt 2022; Boomershine 2022a; Swanson and Fitzsimmons 2022; Agnew and Swanson 2020).

The practical mode, in contrast, happens all the time wherever Christianity is practiced—in pulpits, in small group settings, in church halls and on the streets. Practitioners need no formal training or qualifications to perform the text; indeed, the text is widely available to all people and so can be picked up and acted out by just about anyone. We see a range of variance, then, between types of practical performances: from the simplified Christmas nativity or Easter scenes which often eliminate distinctions between gospel texts to present a single narrative, to formal lectionary readings in liturgical settings, to selected quotations at wedding ceremonies.

5. The Performer as Interpreter

Whenever a biblical text is performed, performers make interpretive choices in how they represent characters. This is something that Rhoads addresses even in his narrative-critical work, arguing that the performer in effect embodies a character in order to "clarify the differing points of view", in so doing effectively becoming the character and drawing out "emotive dimensions" of the text (Rhoads 1999, p. 278). Given the narrative frames of the text, these choices are to some extent limited (though as we will see, many remain); however, some choices remain which need to be made by the performer in a way that they feel best represents the character in the narrative they are portraying.

One way that performers undertake this task is to move beyond simple character studies or even reconstruction of textual worlds; they choose to embody and therefore *become* the character (Whitenton 2016; Iverson 2013; Eberhart 2023; Boomershine 2011). Performers feel the characters' emotions, see with their eyes, and experience the narrative events as though firsthand. To describe this process, scholar-performer Sarah Agnew

describes an approach that she titles "embodied performance analysis" (EPA). This aims to bring the "whole human person" to the task of interpretation (Agnew and Swanson 2020); notably, this is not dissimilar to the aims set out of cognitive narratology. Agnew argues that this type of immersion in the text will allow scholars to eventually achieve an "intuitive understanding" of the text (Agnew and Swanson 2020, p. 21). In doing so, the performer begins to visualise how they will perform the text, beginning to make interpretive decisions based on their existing frames as well as their embodiment of the character.

Not only does the performer embody the character insofar as they immerse themselves in the narrative, but the performer also embodies the character for the audience—the performer is tasked with translating their own mental construction of a character to physical action and dialogue, inhabiting the character in front of an audience (Iverson 2013; Boomershine 2011, p. 124). This moves the narrative from being a hypothetical construct in which interpretation occurs in the reader's imagination, to becoming a fixed reality centred around a particular point in time, with the performer/s taking on the task of interpretation. There are a number of different aspects of interpretation required beyond the narrative frame, as Agnew hints above—performers need to make careful and deliberate choices about how they represent the characters, and each choice represents an interpretation. Not all choices are conscious or free, either—some are dictated by necessity, or context, or the performer's level of engagement with the text. As Agnew points out, some choices are intuitive.

On a macro level, there are choices to be made about setting, the number of performers, clothing, language, adherence to particular translations of the text, set design, lighting, and audience size. On a micro level, there are choices concerning inflection, gesture, positioning within scenes, location on stage, voice, etc. Every one of these choices affects the way the audience will perceive and understand the performance, and represents the performer's attempt to faithfully embody a character before an audience. When a character is performed, audiences must find ways to reconcile the performer's interpretation of the character with their own, or to reject it. In cognitive-narratological terms, each performer's interpretive choices creates a model of a character which may either contribute toward or challenge audience members' own mental models of said character.

To provide an example, I turn to a public lecture given by my esteemed former colleague Rikk Watts in 2018. In this lecture, Watts pointed out to the audience that there were several different ways one might choose to perform Jesus' calming of the storm in Mark 4:35-41, each of which would reflect a performer's Christology and at the same time might inform an audience member's Christological models. A performer might interpret Jesus as stern, fully in command, and pitch their voice and actions accordingly—in this embodiment, Jesus would slowly stand after being awoken, raise his arms, and use a loud but controlled voice to call out for silence. The disciples' fear and subsequent reaction would therefore be closer to a sense of awe at the majesty of Jesus' power.

On the other hand, Watts pointed out, one could also interpret Jesus as a person who had just been awoken from a deep sleep. Such an embodiment would portray Jesus as frazzled, annoyed, raising his voice to exclaim "shut up!" to the storm, at which point calm would descend. The disciples' reaction would therefore be genuine terror—first from being shouted at by their teacher, but moving swiftly to a realisation of Jesus' true power in that his wild command for peace was heeded by the wind and the sea. Both interpretations of Jesus are valid within the narrative frame of the Markan pericope, within the broader narrative of the entire Gospel, and within the cultural frames of the 1st century CE. However, each interpretation clearly contributes to a very different mental model of Jesus.

Whilst both of these interpretations could certainly be drawn out from a narrative-critical reading of the text, I suggest that most people would tend to construct a Jesus who is in control, whose admonishment is gentle and perhaps a little vexed. The physical embodiment of the character—especially when one shouts and gestures—challenges an individual's self-imagined model by centring someone else's interpretation of the character

in a way that brooks no argument. This embodiment completely removes most interpretive choices from the audience, and forces them to confront the reality of a Jesus who reacts the same way that everyone else does when awakened by panicked companions.

I suggest that performance therefore creates two opportunities that narrative criticism may not: firstly, the performance event creates a unique temporal experience where every audience member is responding to a shared frame (i.e., the performance frame) rather than coming together to compare mental constructions, allowing for a fixed reference point in which some interpretive ambiguities have been resolved; secondly, the performer's body and choices in embodying a character allows them to directly contest existing audience mental models, thereby forcing re-evaluation of meaning. To reinforce the implications for both possibilities, I will briefly engage with a performance of Philemon.

5.1. Case Study: An Afro-Caribbean Performance of Philemon

At the SBL Annual Meeting in November 2022, participants in the Performance Criticism of Biblical and Other Ancient Texts (PC-BOAT) seminar experienced a performance of Philemon by Marlon Winedt, a Black Caribbean scholar (Winedt 2022).[1] Winedt's performance was a simple one: in front of a group of scholars in a conference setting, he stepped in front of the assembled audience and delivered the epistle with occasional consultation of notes, without props or any other scene-setting. Winedt did not simply recite the text, but decided to fully embody Paul's oration, which he had translated himself. He pointed to audience members as Paul named members of the congregation, including them in the performance; he pitched his voice and used facial expressions to indicate irony and sarcasm. He used his own body to illustrate the text, most notably in verse 12 (which Winedt chose to translate as "as if I am ripping out my own insides to send back to you!").

Performing in front of a scholarly audience, Winedt's performance was able to draw out certain aspects of the text: firstly, humour, which Paul (via Winedt) uses to draw in and disarm his wider audience. Secondly, the sense of social responsibility which Paul leverages to coerce Philemon was highlighted as Winedt pointed to members of the audience and made them participants in the oration, including Paul's witnesses to the epistle in verses 23 and 24. Thirdly, Winedt chose to highlight Paul's sense of emotion and passion regarding Onesimus, raising his voice and gesticulating at appropriate points. Finally, Winedt's own social location as a Black Caribbean performing an epistle addressing slavery added a significant dimension to the text which I will go on to discuss.

5.1.1. The Shared Experience(s) of a Performance Event

When viewing a performance, the audience is presented with the performer's interpretation of characters in the text; as the performer actively makes choices, certain interpretive ambiguities are erased. In the case study above, significant interpretive decisions were made by the performer: Winedt chose to depict a Paul who was using every rhetorical tool available to coerce Philemon into going above and beyond his duties in setting Onesimus free, rather than a Paul who was punishing Onesimus by forcing him to return to Philemon. Winedt also made it clear that he viewed this epistle as intended to be read aloud in a communal setting by his choice to include the audience in his performance, foregrounding his assumption of orality as well as community engagement with the text.

Since performance creates a shared starting point, discussion among the audience can move quickly beyond basic issues to reflecting on what has been presented to them. Certain historical-critical issues will have been settled or bypassed by the performer either before or during the performance, and other ambiguities are made clear by the performer's interpretive choices, meaning that audiences are free to focus on who the characters are, and what they are doing—that is, their embodiment by the performer. For example, Iverson (2013) argues that the storyteller "lures" the audience into participation through embodiment, and even chastises them. We find here a substantial difference between narrative criticism and performance criticism—where narrative criticism tends to be a solitary affair

conducted between a text and a reader, performance almost always takes place before an audience and so creates an opportunity for group interpretation or discussion.

Instead of the text, the performance event becomes the main object of inquiry. Any discussion that results is sharper and more focused given there is a shared reference point, rather than audience members having to find the language to translate their imaginary character models to others. Though this type of discussion can still fall prey to Euronormative biases, it creates opportunity for other voices to join the conversation. A feedback loop occurs between performer, text, and audience, which both Perry (2016) and Mathews (2012, 2020) adapt from Dwight Conquergood's (2002) work on performance studies to acknowledge the interplay between all elements. In interpreting the text, the performer adapts their performance to the audience, who likewise respond to the performer, influencing and affecting one another.

5.1.2. The Embodied Challenge

Embodiment via performance confronts an audience with character models which are inherently different to their own, and in a way that is experiential and grounded in reality. Instead of hearing their chosen voice for a character, an audience must listen to the performer's voice; even if they have always constructed certain characters with normative characteristics, an audience must reckon with a performer's body. Even if an audience member completely rejects these alternate models, the performance has inserted new data into the frames they use to construct mental models. This, alone, is a helpful and important act.

In Winedt's performance, we are presented with a dark-skinned Paul who is passionate, resourceful, and who is willing to use his social capital to achieve results for some measure of justice. This may confront an audience whose previous mental model of Paul may have been a white authoritarian leader, who was happy to be complicit in the ongoing oppression of Onesimus. Some interpreters may never have seen Paul in the way Winedt presented him, and may not have possessed the right frames to envision him thusly. Winedt's embodiment of the character therefore provides them with a new reference point, or data, which needs to be incorporated into or rejected by their existing mental models of the character.

Embodying a character can raise important questions regarding social norms and classes which may have been mentally smoothed over by readers for whom Eurocentric reading has been normalised. This happens on several different levels, ranging from decisions made about context and setting, to the body of the performer. Take, for example, a Paul who is embodied by a performer identifying as gender nonconforming—a choice which is certainly justifiable according to modern readings of the Pauline corpus. A reader might hypothetically be able to imagine such a Paul, but may also find it difficult to consistently draw out interpretive nuances or implications especially if they are distant from this portrayal. When performed, however, differences in interpretation are highlighted not only by the performer's choices, but also because of their social location and identity. Paul's engagement with gender issues takes on a more personal, immediate, and radically different tone when performed by a queer person; they may, for example, choose to highlight that Galatians 3:28 uses "and" (καὶ) to signify gender exists across a spectrum (male *and* female) in contrast to the remaining items on the list which are designated as binaries (Jew *or* Greek) using "or" (οὐδὲ). This take on Paul has implications not only for a performance of Galatians, but the remainder of Paul's letters and perhaps even Acts.

The challenge of embodiment can be further heightened when performers with intersecting identities play roles which are textually "underdescribed" yet are themselves intersectional. The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 might be embodied by a non-white, gender nonconforming performer; such a performance would highlight that Philip baptises a person who not only challenges gender heteronormativity, but is of a different skin colour to him, and who is already in a position to read the scriptures. This challenges not only our interpretation of characters, but also our theology: what might it mean to see a non-white,

gender nonconforming character be baptised, and go on their way without being told to repent or change their ways?

Embodiment thus can challenge almost every aspect of a person's mental model of a character, from socio-economic through to gender, ethnicity, sexuality, status, and disability. In their portrayals, performers challenge audience interpretations on more than just the words of the text; they can challenge inherent assumptions held about the characters, and therefore their motivations. This has the potential to affect more than a single text, as characters are not always isolated to a single text (as Bennema has shown), meaning that an impactful performance may entirely shift the way a person understands a character, and therefore the way they interpret their words.

Other examples abound. The parable of the Good Samaritan, and indeed much of the biblical text, takes on different dimensions if it is performed by sets of actors from historically opposed people groups. The performance of Lamentations or Genesis is given additional resonance when performed by Indigenous people historically displaced by settler colonialism. Jesus and his disciples are understood very differently when embodied by white men in contrast to people of colour.

In BPC, *who* performs and *how* they perform become the focus of interpretation as much as the text they are performing, and these performers can radically reshape others' understanding of the texts. Given the aforementioned "underdescribing" of characters in the biblical texts, numerous possibilities exist within textual frames, waiting to be leveraged by the right performers. Performance represents a method for creating interpretations and visualisations of texts that cannot be controlled, and cannot be sequestered in the same way that books, journal articles, or presentations can. Performance moves the act of interpretation away from the act of reading, and toward a more participatory medium of interpretation, with the potential of itself being understood as text.

6. Conclusions: From Imagination to Interpretation

Neither narrative criticism nor performance criticism is rendered redundant by the other; van Oyen argues that performance criticism can only happen on the basis of narrative criticism as both exist in a mutually interpretive relationship (Van Oyen 2016), and to a certain extent this is valid. As we have seen, the analytical mode of performance criticism stems from, and largely continues to draw upon, principles laid down in narrative criticism, but subsequently other modes of BPC move the narrative beyond the boundaries of the reader's mind to embody the characters in a performance event. Placed together, the two approaches generate increasing possibilities for interpretation—though this requires readers to draw upon the totality of BPC rather than just one aspect or another.

A performance-oriented interpretive strategy places an important burden on performers as the interpreters of texts. Here, the criticism I addressed to the cognitive-narratological method remains unresolved in many ways, as the onus for "hermeneutical control" and appropriate knowledge has simply shifted from reader to performer. Nevertheless, there is sufficient leeway within the texts for significant variance in embodiment given the "underdescribed" nature of many characters; the average performer has no need for the formal bounds of narrative criticism in order to interpret the characters, instead bringing their whole selves to bear in a way that draws out unique nuances.

Performance has the power to confront audiences with embodied interpretations of characters which conflict with their own mental models. By embodying characters and making key interpretive decisions, performers and their performance events become the main objects of interpretation, decentring the text. Herein lies an opportunity for audiences to be challenged in ways that readers may not be, as performance moves the narrative out of the realm of imagination and into a temporally bound, shared reality. Performance can subvert dominant interpretations of characters and in doing so cause interpreters to rethink their existing mental models of characters.

By giving freedom to performers, and by making them and their performances the primary object of inquiry, BPC creates a new set of interpretive opportunities as it foregrounds

mental models of characters that are inherently different to our own, which can often be shaped by Eurocentric norms and other invisible forces. Rather than being confined to an individual's imagination, performance generates creative friction before a gathered audience, forcing them to reckon with this difference. To an extent, even radical difference creates opportunity rather than chaos, as audiences are moved to explore a performer's motivations and interpretive frames—and therefore, their own. Performance thus contests dominant paradigms, subsequently unlocking the potential for further imaginative attempts based on these contestations. The obverse may also hold true: audiences may reject interpretations too divergent from their own; even this generates opportunity for discussion by inserting new data into interpretive frames.

Performance criticism is by no means a silver bullet, and neither is performance itself. Though the performance event creates a shared experience from which meaning-making can be derived, the nature of performance ensures that each performance event will be uniquely contextualised to its audience. This creates a possibility that different sets of audiences may be faced with different performances depending on context; this variability helps underscore the fact that performance is a different medium entirely to text on page. Moving forward, BPC needs to more carefully engage with theatre studies to better understand the techniques that performers use to make decisions about how to play a character, as much of this work is carried out by practitioners in the practical mode rather than scholar-performers. Kelly Iverson's *Performing Christian Literature* (Iverson 2021) begins to engage with some of these questions. Given the positioning of BPC within the scholarly guild, it is not immune to the guild's Eurocentrism, and needs to keep finding ways to prioritise non-white performers and their interpretations.

Ultimately, narrative criticism and performance criticism are perhaps best deployed in tandem for the best possible outcome. Given the performer's role as interpreter, it is helpful for performers to engage with narrative criticism to aid their interpretive efforts, as doing so alerts them to some of the possibilities within the textual frames. At the same time, narrative critics should pay close attention to how performers are embodying characters in ways that fall outside their imagination.

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1 Winedt's performance can also be viewed on the Biblical Performance Criticism website: https://www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org/index.php/47-performance-video/490-performing-philemon-a-rhetoric-of-accommodation-or-of-crypto-revolution (accessed on 12 July 2023).

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

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

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

1. (Mis)Guided Assumptions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.1. Autographic and Allographic Paradigms

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.2. Script and Scripture as Metaphors for Ancient Textuality

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Conclusions

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

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

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Notes

1 Cf. David G. Horrell, who says the study of the Bible "whatever else it may be, is the study of literature" (Horrell 2002, p. 22). Cited also by Kelly R. Iverson (2021, pp. 16–17).

2 These two are important distinctions between narrative and performance approaches, as the solitary experience of reading is not and should not be understood to be the same as the more corporate experience of an audience in performance. For more on this as a point of distinction between performance and narrative approaches see among others: Rhoads (2006); Iverson (2018, pp. 51–65, esp. p 60); Whitenton (2016a).

3 Similarly, within this literate model, the reader is the primary interpreter of text, for oneself; this is fundamentally different from a performance model, where the performer is a mediator of the message for an audience. For more on this important feature see among others: Shiell (2004); Giles and Doan (2009); Ruge-Jones (2009, 2014); Boomershine (2011); Iverson (2013).

4 Of course, there are exceptions to this, as for instance a semiotic approach to language may challenge this as an assumption inherent to our understanding of textuality. However, the phonological ties between reading comprehension and hearing are closely bound. For a brief summary of the role that the inner voice plays in our comprehension during reading see among others: Besner (1987). See also Musselman (2000).

5 For further discussion on the presence and absence of an inner voice in reading see among others: Vilhauer (2016, 2017).

6 For some, this may recall Genette's oft-cited axiom: ". . .a text without a paratext does not exist. . .". (Gérard Genette 1997, pp. 3–4). My intention is certainly not to challenge this notion, but rather and far more simply, to highlight that certain texts may have additional paratexts than others.

7 Scribal habits and the varying levels of accessibility for ancient texts has been well documented and need not be reproduced here. Much has been made of the "accessibility" of ancient texts, and some performance critics have perhaps exaggerated how difficult it would be for ancient persons to read these texts. My intention is not to wade into these waters here, nor is it necessarily to make a case for modern printing as "necessarily" more accessible. More simply, I use this to point out how certain advantages of modern printing illuminate how much we often take for granted in the reading process.

8 This is not to suggest that the "meaning" will not change, as meaning depends on a number of contextualizing factors. What I wish to emphasize here is that the words themselves do not change, a key contrast between the stability of texts and the transience and variability of performances. For more on transience of performance see among others: Iverson (2014); Whitenton (2016b, 2019); for more on the potential variability and decision making necessary for performers see among others: Boomershine (1987); Iverson (2011); Eberhart (forthcoming).

9 This does not mean that the presumed medium of experience might not change at some point in the future, as I will suggest below is what happens to ancient texts. This is perhaps one area that performance criticism, moving forward, may wish to explore. With technological advances and applications that convert text to audio, and vice versa, some "written" texts are likely already being composed by means of oral dictation. It is also likely that in the near future, if not already, the majority of audiences will engage with this text audibly—though, it is important to point out here that oral dictation was not the composition technique of this article, nor is an aural reception necessarily the default medium of experience envisioned by the majority of authors writing in academic journals today.

10 For more on the different type of communication events imagined by literary/narrative and performance criticisms see Perry (2016); Iverson (2021).

11 Throughout this article I will use the terms performance critics and performance criticism to refer to those who consider performance characteristics and dynamics as essential to understanding biblical messages. When referring to performance critics outside of biblical studies, I will qualify that reference by indicating their field of study. Such a decision is practical and necessary for the purposes of writing, and yet unfortunately, this could suggest something that I am not. To clarify, I am not suggesting that performance criticism is a cohesive and fully established approach, nor that performance critics all share the same, or for the most part similar, assumptions. This simply is not true. Some performance critics may agree with some of the things I attribute to them, some may not. While there are some characteristics agreed upon by "most" performance critics, by and large it is still an emerging area of study. Because performance criticism is broad in both its application and influence, and because it is an inherently interdisciplinary approach, it may still be some time before there is a "uniform" sense of performance criticism. For more on the diversity of views and applications of performance criticism, see among others Perry (2019).

12 For more on ancient literacy and how insights on it inform biblical performance criticism see among others: Eberhart (forthcoming). For more on illiteracy rates in antiquity see: Harris (1989); Bar-Illan (1992); Hezser (2001). For a more recent and complex treatment of various reading practices and events in antiquity see: Johnson (2000, 2010); Johnson and Parker (2009).

13 For studies on ancient rheotric and a cultural preference for oralilty see Shiner (2003); Shiell (2004).

14 Much has been made about "reading aloud" in antiquity, particularly in light of Augustine's claim in *Confess.* 6.3.3. Additional examples of reading aloud in antiquity include: Pliny, Ep. 1.5.2,4, 14; 1.13.1–3; 1.15.2; 1.16.6; 1.20.9–10; 2.3.4; 2.10.2–3, 6; 3.1.4, 8–9; 3.5.10–12; 3.7.5; 3.15.4; 4.19.4; 4.27.1; 5.3.1–2; 5.17.2–3; 5.19.3; 6.15; 6.17.1; 6.21.2; 7.4.3, 9; 7.17.1–4; 7.25.4; 8.1; 8.21; 9.34; 9.36.3–4; Dio Chrysostom, *Disc.* 8.9; 18.6–7; NT examples include: Acts 8:28–30; 15:31; 1 Thess. 5:27; Col 4:16; 1 Tim 4:13; Rev. 1:3, 22:18. For Early Christian references to a "reader" or lector: 2 Clement 19:1; Tertullian, *Praescr*, 41; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.43.11. etc.

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

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

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

17 Some examples include Moloney (2002); Malbon (2009); et al.

18 For further discussion on "root" metaphors and how they shape and dictate our thinking about ancient texts see: Mroczek (2016).

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

20 Some of what follows is adapted from a chapter in Eberhart (forthcoming).

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

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

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

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

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

26 For a brief but helpful history, see: Cooper (1984).

27 The standardized "version" comes from an edition printed by Ludwig Nohl in 1867.

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

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

30 Vatri (2017, pp. 37–46). The terms "script" and "scripture" are not unique to Vatri, but rather are borrowed from Nagy (1996) and expanded upon here.

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

32 *Poet.* 1462a.

33 *Poet.* 1462b. 2–12.

[34] Compare this, for instance, with the work of David Olson. Olson suggests that the illocutionary force of in an oral context stems not from the lexical forms of a word, but rather it is something that is imbedded within the act of communication itself. Because illocution is a product of the communication event, writing is able to record the locutionary act (what is said), but leaves the illocutionary force (ultimately, what it means) underspecified (Olson 1994, pp. 92–97). For a helpful discussion of the importance of Olson's work to the task of performance criticism, see: Iverson (2011).

[35] *Poet.* 1461b.

[36] *Poet.* 1459a.

[37] Poet. 1462b. There is some debate here as to what type of reading Aristotle has in mind. If he has in mind reading aloud, such a statement perhaps carries less weight than if he were juxtaposing silent reading with performance.

[38] Ps. Plutarch, *Moralia, Lives of the Ten Orators.*

[39] Ps. Plutarch, *Moralia, Lives of the Ten Orators, 841F*. According to Plutarch, Lycurgus is responsible for shaping much of Greek knowledge about texts. In addition to this claim about the Greek playwrights, Plutarch also suggests that Lycurgus is responsible for the Greeks knowledge of Homer, bringing copies of the poets work back with him from his journey through Asia. Plutarch suggests that some of the people were aware of the poem, and some even "chanced" upon portions of the text, due to trade, but Plutarch suggests that "their fame is due above all to Lycurgus, who was the first to make them known here" (Life of Lycurgus, 4).

[40] Ps. Plutarch, *Moralia, Lives of the Ten Orators,* 841F. For more on the potential political significance of Lycurgus "canonizing" act see, Duncan and Liapis (2018, esp. pp. 188–90).

[41] For a similar "implied" understanding of the failures of a text to communicate a presumed message, see the classic example of Pliny, 9.34 and the anxiety Pliny wrestles with over whether or not he or someone else should perform the message. The implication here is that the message could change based on performance. Pliny fears that his own performance will not convey what others are capable of.

[42] For the continued use of Sophocles plays in the theater during this time see: Finglass (2012, pp. 10–11). John P.A. Gould (2012), says "Successful in his lifetime, Sophocles continued to be a powerful presence in the Greek tragic theatre in the following century. His plays seem to have been frequently revived, and the leading parts in them were taken by great actors of the period, such as Polus and Theodorus (Dem. *De fals.* leg. 246–7; Epictetus *Diss.* fr. 11[)]".

[43] My use of performance text here is not intended to be technical, but descriptive. For more on how a similar trajectory may be observed with other performed texts see: Eberhart (forthcoming).

[44] Cf. Foley (1995). Here, Foley describes a similar transition in oral traditions with textual remains. He discusses how the illocutionary force of tradition and performance is retained so long as there is still an "umbilical of metonym". In other words, so long as someone is present who is familiar with that tradition. However, as the text becomes further removed from the oral tradition, as the so-called umbilical withers, the "conduit of extratextual meaning" is lost. At that point, the text itself becomes the conduit of meaning as that is all that remains.

[45] Of course, it is possible that this construction in itself is anachronistic. It is plausible that within an oral milieu Matthew or Luke also knew Mark—or oral traditions similar to Mark—as performance and not only as text (see for example Rhoads 2010, p. 166; Rhoads and Dewey 2014, p. 18; Swanson 2014, pp. 182–84, who raise questions about certain textual assumptions in discussions of the Synoptics relationship to each other). A much more substantive and detailed investigation of the Synoptic relationship by means of performance is needed before such a view could be adopted here, and therefore stands outside the bounds of this particular project. For the sake of this argument, I will assume that Matthew and Luke are treating Mark as "scripture" and that this is the earliest "reception" of Mark that we have as such.

[46] Nailing down a *precise* geographic location of Matthew's and Luke's writing is of little importance to my point here. What is significant are the *relative* locations which have been suggested. To my knowledge, I am not aware of any proposals which argue for the same originating location for any of the Synoptic gospels. Even in cases of overlap between arguments more generally, the specific arguments make a distinction between the geographic locations of each author. For example, Rome (loosely defined) has been suggested as a location for each of the Synoptic gospels. However, I am not aware of any single argument that makes the case for Rome as the same location for any two of these gospels, let alone all three. It is this relative evaluation of the location of production which is more important to my argument than any specific argument concerning geographic locations.

[47] Note, I am not suggesting here that the works of Matthew and Luke denote the "end" of Mark's reception as script, or that there is a clearly identifiable break between these two types of reception. Such a view reinforces a divide between "orality" and "literacy" that is more problematic than helpful. I merely concede here that the works of Matthew and Luke may indicate a point in which Mark appears to be used as scripture.

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Article

Performing Ecclesiastes: Text as Script

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Abstract: All biblical scholars are committed to the interpretation of ancient written texts, but Biblical Performance Criticism (BPC) reminds interpreters that performance helps us better understand Scripture. A distinct difference between Narrative Criticism and Performance Criticism is the broader application of Performance Criticism to poetic and prose texts that are not grounded in narrative. The ambiguity of prose and poetry that does not readily identify speakers is open to a range of performative interpretations. Furthermore, audiences are necessary for performance and contribute to meaning-making. The embodied experience of performers and audience alike contribute to the interpretation of biblical texts. This article reflects on a performance of Ecclesiastes translated as a script of a television talk show, claiming that embodying and performing Scripture is itself a method for interpretation. Through the performance of Scripture, we are reminded that interpretation is shared and dynamic within the community of faith.

Keywords: Biblical Performance Criticism; performance; Ecclesiastes; Qohelet; embodiment; translation; interpretation; audience

1. Introduction

As a teacher and scholar of the Hebrew Bible, I take great satisfaction in assisting others in exploring the biblical literature and seeing lives transformed by renewed appreciation for those texts. I have become convinced that performance helps us to better understand Scripture. I share the conviction that biblical traditions in their earliest transmission were orally communicated through a variety of formats.[1] The renewed emphasis on orality and performance through the discipline of Biblical Performance Criticism (BPC), I would argue, is one way to bring the Bible back to life for contemporary audiences.

In this volume of essays, we are investigating the similarities and differences between Narrative Criticism and Performance Criticism, and for me a critical difference is the effectiveness of BPC as a method for use with both narrative and non-narrative genres. Poetry and epistles have as much potential for performance as gospels and novellas.[2] While there is much overlap between the methods of Narrative Criticism and Performance Criticism, the latter by its very definition emphasizes the importance of audience, since performance implies a gathered audience, whereas narrative's 'implied reader' is most readily thought of in the singular. As David Rhoads notes:

> We know from ancient sources that audiences contributed to performances. A silent reader is mainly receptive. The silent reader negotiates meaning but does not change the words on a page. The responses of an actual audience can affect the words of a performer or the way lines are delivered. A performer might have shortened or lengthened what was performed depending on the interest of the audience. *We cannot speak about performances, therefore, without talking about involvement of audiences*. (Rhoads 2018, p. 170. Emphasis added)

An inherent focus on the audience takes us back to that goal of assisting others to be impacted by the Bible. I am utilizing a method of BPC that begins with a translation of the text in order to draw out its intrinsic performative features, followed by a performance of that text in the form of a script that aims to gain new insights about the text from its

performance. The script is faithful to the underlying text, albeit presented creatively as a script for a group of contemporary actors. With this method, the experience of the actors and the responses of the audience contribute to a new interpretation of the text.

In this essay, I will offer four distinct advantages of Biblical Performance Criticism, illustrating my points with reflections on a performance of Ecclesiastes in which my translation of the Hebrew text took the format of a television talk show. I will propose that performing Scripture offers insights into the experience of the earliest biblical communities; that performing Scripture prioritizes embodiment; that performing Scripture is itself a method for interpretation; and that by performing Scripture, we are reminded that interpretation is shared and dynamic within the community of faith.

2. The Script of Ecclesiastes

Performative-sensitive translations of biblical books can emphasize and celebrate the drama intrinsic to the original composition, offering clues to the aural experience of the original audiences. I translated Ecclesiastes and casted it as a script for performance by several actors. In the discussion that follows, I will describe the reactions of the actors and audience as they experienced this biblical book in this unique format as a performed dialogical script. A few introductory comments about the book will assist in framing the context.

Ecclesiastes is a fascinating book. It shares with other wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible a commitment to observation as the primary source of inspiration. To be 'wise' is to reflect on patterns in human action and the natural world and to generalize about the human condition and the world around on the basis of these observations and life experiences (see Fyfe 2019). The conventional wisdom traditions, especially the book of Proverbs, accept wisdom as God's gift (Prov 2:6), and emphasize the importance of teaching and learning from others (Prov 13:20, 12:15, 19:20, 21:11; Job 8:8). By contrast, the writer of Ecclesiastes seems to be sceptical about conclusions drawn by others. He *does* adopt the method of observation, using the verb *rʾh* ('to see') eighteen times in the scroll, but rejects the conclusion that this leads to wisdom:

> And I have seen all of the works of the God, that the human being is not able to find the work that is done under the sun, which though the human being toils to seek it, he will not find it. And although he says he wants to know it—the wise man—he is not able to find it. (8:16–17)[3]

As well as exploring the theme of wisdom, the book of Ecclesiastes discusses creation, society, wealth, pleasure, work, justice, righteousness, wickedness, relationships, vows, youth, age, and death, concluding that all these things are *hebel*. This Hebrew word, traditionally translated as 'vanity' but in my translation as 'dross', is a key word in the book. Its broad semantic scope includes futility, absurdity, insubstantiality, ephemerality, elusiveness, and the waste vapour of expelled breath. The word 'dross' was chosen both in order to convey the meaning of worthlessness and due to the lingering sibilant sound at the end of the word that contributes to its ephemeral connotation.

There are many references to God in Ecclesiastes. Yet God (always Elohim, never YHWH) is distant, unable to be fathomed. Unusually, the definite article is nearly always used with Elohim. The God is creator and provider but allows good gifts to be taken away (6:2). The God gives work and toil for humankind to busy themselves with, but that toil is ultimately pointless, like chasing the wind (1:13–14). The God judges, but the same fate of death comes to all whether they lived righteously or not (9:2). No prayers, complaints, or laments are addressed to this God. Yet, surprisingly, a theme of joy in life is also found in this book. Four times we hear there is nothing better than to accept the gift of The God to 'relish, and drink, and enjoy toil' (2:24; 3:12; 3:22; 8:15).

The author of Ecclesiastes is traditionally identified with Solomon on the basis of the opening verse ('The words of Qohelet, son of David, king in Jerusalem'), but the consensus of critical scholarship is that Solomon could not have been the author (Fox 2004, p. x). The most prominent view is that a narrator frames the book (1:1–11, 12:9–14) and the body

of the book represents the words of a single figure, although there have been attempts to characterize the book as a dialogue between a representative of wisdom and antiwisdom, or between a teacher and student (Krüger 2004, p. 17). David Penchansky refers to three 'voices' in Ecclesiastes, but still claims to want to make one of these voices the 'authentic' voice (Penchansky 2012, p. 50). The jumble of themes and frequent contradictions are variously explained as representing different views of the author in the different eras of his life; evidence of redaction; incorporation of portions of texts from other hands; or intentional poles of meaning (Krüger 2004, pp. 14–19).

Knut Heim's recent commentary on Ecclesiastes (Heim 2019) is written from the perspective of BPC. He argues the text of Ecclesiastes is the written record of a speech composed to be performed before live audiences in the third century BCE, in the context of socio-political, economic, and religious challenges presented for the inhabitants of Judea living under foreign rule by the Egyptian-based Ptolemaic dynasty of the Greek Empire. Heim views the book of Ecclesiastes as a satire ('resistance literature') in which the foreign regime is critiqued in the style of stand-up comedians.[4] Humour and ambiguity are deliberate ploys utilized to disguise the critique that could otherwise lead to reprisals—for Heim, this explains the contradictions and other unusual features of the book.

Heim assumes a historical performance as the background for Ecclesiastes. Along with other proponents of BPC, Heim is committed to understanding the biblical worlds as oral–aural cultures in which, perhaps, only fifteen percent of the population were literate and, even less in rural settings (Rhoads 2023, p. xi). The original transmission of these traditions was, therefore, most likely 'performed' in the sense of being conveyed orally by embodied communicators to audiences in shared spaces. Many texts still bear the oral imprint that attest to this early transmission tradition.

As I translated the book of Ecclesiastes, I was also looking out for performative features within it. For me, the contradictions and differing perspectives made the best sense as three different voices.[5]

The predominant perspective is that of a jaded seeker of wisdom who views all things as 'dross'. This voice is characterized by the repeated catchphrases 'all is dross' and 'herding wind'—any idea that is explored ultimately circles back to these assertions. Frequent pairing of the phrase with the word 'evil' ensures that the connotation is more negative than positive (1:13–14; 2:17, 21; 4:3–4, 8; 6:2; 8:10). These phrases are combined with the observation that there is ultimately no difference between a wise man and a fool, or between a human being and a beast, since all share the same fate of death. The outlook for this voice is predominantly pessimistic. Another characteristic of this voice is the use of first-person pronouns—an unusual feature in Hebrew prose. All but five of the twenty-eight first-person pronouns that occur in the script are spoken by this voice.

Alongside this voice is another that commends enjoyment of life and describes good things as a gift from The God (2:24; 3:10–11a, 13; 5:18 [MT 5:17]; 8:15; 9:7). Some phrases attributed to this optimistic voice share vocabulary with other voices, but are coupled with a positive outlook. For example, the first voice observes 'evil' under the sun (4:1, 3; 5:13 [MT 5:12]; 6:1; 10:5), while the optimistic voice views life under the sun as a blessing (5:18 [MT 5:17]; 8:15; 9:9). The first voice asks what advantage can be found in toil (3:9), and the second claims the task that God gave is 'beautiful in its time' (3:10–11a). This voice is also inclined to aphorisms and pithy sayings that can sound shallow when out of the right context (4:6, 9–12; 6:9a; 7:1a, 9–12; 9:4; 11:1–3).

The optimistic voice includes references to The God, but a third voice that also frequently refers to The God characteristically uses language of judgment rather than gift, with frequent use of the word *yrʾ*, a word that has connotations of both fear and worship. This voice exhorts others to be 'God-fearers' (7:18; 8:12). References to judgment by The God nonetheless affirm the judgment as just (3:17; 7:18; 8:6,12; 11:9; 12:14), which contrasts with the first voice that has no confidence in the reward of the righteous and punishment of those who do evil (3:16; 7:15; 8:14). A predominance of imperative verbs used by this third voice contrasts with the first voice, which is less willing to demand agreement from others.

In distinguishing these three different perspectives, I concluded the book was best viewed as a conversation. Even if we were to assume a single orator as the *persona* of Qohelet, he is having a dialogue with himself, evidenced by the circling around similar themes and the presentation of contradictory views on the same topic. The concept of multiple voices in conversation over the meaning of life is one that has great potential for performance. The idea of Qohelet as a literary persona can readily be expanded to conceptualize several literary personae sharing the same stage. The framing 'narrator' voice could be incorporated into this vision as a moderator of the conversation.

My translation and performance reading of Ecclesiastes, *Reading the Megillot* (Mathews 2023), is a contribution to the 'Reading the Old Testament' series of Smyth and Helwys. Authors in this series are invited to introduce 'cutting edge research in a form accessible to a wide audience.' Through the lens of BPC, I translated each of the five books in the Megillot and creatively imagined each work as a different type of performance, based on the content and style of the material. Ecclesiastes, with its discernible multiple voices, was scripted in the format of a television talk show with the title *Words* (*dibrēy*, the first word of the Hebrew text). The script became a conversation between three different personae, moderated by a host. Such shows that we know from contemporary popular culture range in content from light to serious and are often broken up by musical items (and advertisements if on commercial television channels). After breaks, the dialogue resumes, often with some repetition of ideas. The conversation is free-flowing, and a good host maintains interest by astutely drawing out the views of guests and guiding the discussion, reiterating their points, and keeping material up his sleeve if needed to give the audience variety. Importantly, guests with different views are tolerated and value judgments are rarely made by the host of the show.

The lack of punctuation in the underlying Hebrew text allows for the freedom to imagine the flow of the conversation, giving permission to break the dialogue into questions and responses. When read as a dialogue, there are no obvious clues to identify the different speakers outside of the content of their speech. This forms a contrast to narrative texts where the narrator introduces speakers by name or with the narrative formula 'then s/he said'. In the script I created, the text was divided between a Host, the keynote speaker Qohelet, and two other panellists: the Optimist and the Pietist. While translating the text, I found three sections that did not readily fit one of these three perspectives. Moreover, the three sections are especially poetic, identified by parallelism and a heightened use of metaphor, prompting Robert Alter's description of the genre of Ecclesiastes as 'evocative rhythmic prose that occasionally scans as poetry' (Alter 2019, p. 673). Drawing on the talk show format, these sections became performances within the performance of Ecclesiastes in my script, envisaged as two musical items (3:1–8; 9:11) and a formal poetry-reading by the persona of Qohelet (12:2–7). The themes of each of these poems are discussed elsewhere in the scroll but have an independent style that invite this 'guest appearance' portrayal. The Masoretic notations that dictate the recitation of Hebrew texts suggest pauses at these points in the script, further justifying the shift to a new mode of presentation within the structure of the talk show.

It seemed opportune to use the occasion of a book launch of *Reading the Megillot* (Mathews 2023) for a performance of the script of Ecclesiastes, chosen from the five Megillot scrolls because its format was simple to stage.[6] The cast was made up of members of my family and friends, none of whom were professional or even experienced actors, and, although we had several rehearsals, they did not learn the lines but read from the script. Qohelet, the Host, and the Pietist were played by men and the Optimist was played by a woman. The musical items were performed by a mother and daughter who composed original music to accompany the words. The performance was a little less than an hour in length. It was recorded and is available to view on YouTube.[7] Experiencing and reflecting upon this performance has highlighted aspects of BPC that I wish to focus on in the remainder of this essay.

3. Four Advantages of Biblical Performance Criticism

3.1. Performing Scripture Offers Insights into the Experience of the Earliest Biblical Communities

I have already asserted that the earliest biblical communities operated in an oral-media culture in which oral transmission of traditions was normative. Current debates amongst biblical scholars suggest that it is more accurate to speak of an oral–scribal culture in which there was an interplay between oral performance and written composition.[8] Undoubtedly, the same material was performed on numerous occasions with different audiences, at some point written down, and then used as the basis for further performances, perhaps being modified over time as audiences responded in different ways. In discussing this process, David Rhoads speaks of a 'paradigm shift from narrative in print to narrative in performance' (Rhoads 2018, p. 160) as a way of highlighting the fluidity of composition. A 'print medium mentality' (Rhoads 2018, p. 157) assumes that a single author composed a fixed manuscript for readers, whereas it would be more accurate to reconceive biblical writings as witnesses to multiple oral performances. Small variations in ancient witnesses suggest that it was not until well after the biblical period that written compositions became fixed. Experiencing Scripture in oral performance, therefore, gives contemporary audiences a better sense of how they were originally heard—in gathered communities at the same place and the same time.

Another feature that distinguishes BPC from Narrative Criticism is the scope of the biblical material in focus for analysis. Whereas Narrative Criticism generally hones in on pericopes or units, training its adherents to recognize 'beginnings and endings' (Amit 2001, pp. 33–45, 58–61), BPC regularly engages with complete biblical books. Hearing an entire work in one performance is an unusual experience for many contemporary readers of the Bible, but it was the normal way in which Scripture was heard in the ancient world. Contemporary audiences for the Megillot in Jewish communities should be acknowledged as an exception to this, since the five books of the Megillot are read in their entirety at their relevant festivals. It would be true to say, however, that for many in the audience of *Words*, it was the first time they had encountered the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole. The repetition of words and ideas in the script (discussed in detail below) became more obvious and the flow of the dialogue, circling round similar themes, was experienced as typical of the nature of conversation within the talk show format. When I was translating the book, I was intrigued by the link between the content of the book and its literary structure. Repetitions and contradictions and a lack of logical flow of thought appeared to mirror the message of the book, expressed consistently in the voice of Qohelet, that nothing is solid or able to be pinned down. Seeing and hearing the book in performance, however, allowed that jumble of ideas to be perceived as a more natural conversational phenomenon. The division of the script among characters ensured that where contradictions began to be perceived as points of tension, the conversation was steered in another direction by the Host or one of the three guests. The musical items and recited poem were a welcome break from the discussion, but the themes of time (the songs) and decay (the poem) were reminiscent of the matters discussed by the panel of guests at other points in the talk show.

Feedback received from a member of the audience was that it was easier to hear the words spoken from a script than to read them on the page. This person admitted to never reading the book in its entirety before, assuming it was 'repetitive and a little boring', but the experience of hearing the script engendered for them a renewed interest in reading Ecclesiastes. The earliest audiences of this material would likewise have encountered the ideas spoken aloud and in the context of a gathered community, in which repetition, interjections, and perhaps even questions for clarification would have contributed to imprinting ideas and engendering interest in pursuing those ideas in later conversations.

My script of Ecclesiastes was based on my highly literal translation of the Hebrew text. Schleiermacher characterized the problem of translation in this way: 'Either the translator leaves the writer as far as possible in peace, and moves the reader towards him; or else he leaves the reader as far as possible in peace, and moves the writer towards him' (quoted in Barton 2022, p. 18). My translations do not 'leave the reader in peace' because

I want to hear more closely what original audiences would have heard. For example, I characteristically follow Hebrew sentence structure where verbs precede subjects. This results in a script that does not sound quite natural to English speakers. Like modern versions of Shakespeare plays that retain Shakespeare's sixteenth-century English, however, audiences adapt after a short time and are able to understand the awkward-sounding script. Each of my cast commented on the difference between reading the script silently to themselves and speaking it aloud, where pacing, emphasis, and gesture aided in conveying the meaning, an observation that was confirmed by audience members. Furthermore, by placing the script in a familiar genre, a television talk show format, a secure scaffold was provided for an audience to do the work of moving towards an unfamiliar text without too much discomfort.[9]

Wordplay is a feature of biblical Hebrew that is often lost in translation. The key word of this script, *hebel*, is echoed in similar-sounding words in other parts of the book, and I tried to carry this through in my translation so that contemporary audiences would hear the same echoes as ancient audiences. Thus, translating *hebel* as 'dross,' I translated *tᵉbahēl* as 'drivel' (5:2 [MT 5:1]), *hibbēl* as 'dismiss' (5:6 [MT 5:5]), and *ʾēbel* as 'drooping'. The Optimist had a line that in Hebrew is obviously wordplay: *tôv šēm mišemem tôv* (7:1a). I decided to retain the Hebrew phrase so that audiences could hear the wordplay in the original, but the Optimist helpfully also spoke the phrase in English ('A good name is better than good oil'). One of Qohelet's lines—another phrase with obvious wordplay with its repeated K, S, and L consonants and the î vowel—is translated to illustrate the wordplay with the line 'like the crackle of the nettle under the kettle' (7:6a). This line was effectively performed by the actor playing Qohelet in a high-pitched 'witchy' voice, to which the rest of the panel responded by laughing in delight, only to be pulled up short by Qohelet's next line 'This is the laughter of the fool—also this is dross' (7:6b). My translation was influenced by that of Michael Fox: 'For the levity of the fool is like the crackling of nettles under a kettle' (Fox 2004, p. 45). By translating the Hebrew word order more literally, however, the 'laughter of the fool' came after the aphorism, heightening the effect.

Rhyme is not a common feature in Hebrew prose or poetry, so when it is there I have tried to replicate it in the assumption that an ancient audience would have been aware of its aural effect also. In the first musical item, several pairs include rhymes in the Hebrew text, mirrored in my translation where 'a time to weep and a time to laugh' (3:4a, NRSV) became 'a time for weeping and a time for leaping' and the pairs 'seek/lose, keep/throw away' (3:6, NRSV) became 'a time for seeking and a time for ceasing; a time for keeping and a time for releasing'. The script signals an end to the show with the rhyming phrase 'End of Words. All has been heard'—a translation of the Hebrew in which the final syllable of each word is stressed: *sôf dā***vār***/hakol niš***māᶜ**. With this 'wrapping up' of the conversation, the words that follow from the lips of the Pietist come across as a desperate attempt to have the last word. The performance of these words in this way supports a common assumption that the book has a 'concluding editorial' (Bandstra 1995, p. 459), and I will return to a further discussion of this interpretation below.

3.2. Performing Scripture Prioritizes Embodiment for Both Performers and Audiences

When Scripture becomes a script to be *performed*, audiences will be cued by more than just words on a page. Embodied actors are the focus of attention, where pace and timing, the sounds of words, repeated and exaggerated themes, gestures, and interactions with other actors and with the audience will all contribute to an audience's perception and understanding of the biblical tradition.

For the audience, Scripture literally becomes alive in the bodies of the performers: in their words, movements, expressions, and other non-linguistic signals. For the actor, reading Scripture is not an abstract, intellectual exercise, but instead becomes a series of decisions about how to convey the words of the script, often internalized, via breath and voice, posture and movement (Perry 2016, p. 39). Audience and actors alike become involved with Scripture in a finite time and space. As Peter Perry expresses it, 'Performance

criticism helps readers of the Bible reconnect the body (including emotions) with the mind in experiencing the text' (Perry 2016, p. 147).

Here, I think, is another essential difference between BPC and Narrative Criticism. A key feature of narrative is the omniscient narrator, disembodied from the story but guiding the reader by determining which information is conveyed and which is held back. Naturally, these decisions are the author's, but they are conveyed through the narrator's voice, the one telling the story. A written script provides the material that is to be conveyed, but rarely the stage instructions that guide *how* it is to be conveyed. When a performance of a narrative portion of Scripture includes a narrator within the cast, that embodied narrator will lose their objectivity and will be subject to the same decisions about *how* to narrate the tale, as are the other actors in *how* to perform their part. Meaning is conveyed not only through words, but also through other aspects of face-to-face communication, including non-linguistic sounds, intonation, pacing, volume, gestures, facial expressions, direction of gaze, and so forth.

In our performance of *Words*, the four performers were seated beside each other in a curved arrangement of comfortable chairs. In this way, they could be seen by each other but also by the audience, and they could direct their comments either to each other or to the audience. The *how* choices that were made were a combination of direction from myself as the one who had decided the divisions within the 'script' and the discretion of the actors who were bringing the words to life. Several times in the script where imperative verbs occur, these verses were interpreted as direct address to the audience. For example, the Optimist's appeal 'Rejoice, young man, in your laddishness, and let your heart be good to you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart and in the desires of your eyes' (11:9a) was followed by the Pietist also addressing the audience: 'And know that over all these things The God will bring you into judgement!' (11:9b).

Much of the interaction between the panel was conveyed non-verbally, including agitated movement to indicate a wish to offer a different viewpoint, frequent 'mmm' vocalizations by Qohelet that forged links between comments, or slight gestures with the head or hands towards another character to emphasize a point. The Pietist was seated between Qohelet and the Optimist and characteristically held his hands in a prayer pose, enabling him to use subtle hand gestures. This was particularly effective when he gestured first towards Qohelet and then towards the Optimist while speaking the line 'A heart of wisdom is in a house of drooping, but a heart of foolishness is in a house of joy' (7:4). Kelly Iverson examines the ability of non-verbal communication to affect audience experience and, thus, the interpretive process. This is another area where BPC and Narrative Criticism diverge. As Iverson notes: '. . . unlike the writer, the performer possesses a variety of tools to enhance and clarify the communication exchange, including facial expressions, gestures, body language, voice intonation, movement, and so on' (Iverson 2021, p. 94). And I would add that the use of silence, a powerful tool in storytelling, is extremely effective in performance but can only be implied or inferred in narrative.

The embodiment of texts has the potential to draw out humour, as in the example just given of the Pietist's gestures. Humour is an inherent aspect of many biblical texts that is often unnoticed due to the expectation that the Bible is a serious document (Perry 2023a, p. 2). Qohelet's speech that describes his quest for pleasure is an exaggerated litany of excessive uses of wealth in which humans are listed along with buildings, gardens, and animals as possessions sought for pleasure: 'slave and maidservants, sons of the house . . . tenors, sopranos . . . even concubines' (2:7–8). The Host, listening to this, reacted with appropriate facial expressions, including a look of titillation at the mention of 'concubines' that encouraged the audience to respond with laughter. Another humorous part of the script is a series of proverb-like sayings commencing with the statement 'A dead fly makes odious the flowing oil of the perfumer' (10:1). This comment in the mouth of the Pietist was spoken with an appropriate unctuousness, but was followed by a quick exchange of short statements predominantly between the Pietist, Optimist, and Host. This banter,

which played out as eager 'one-upmanship', was concluded with Qohelet's deflating '*fools* make many words' (10:14)—drawing appreciative laughter from the audience.

Repetition is a characteristic of biblical literature, significant in all forms of poetry and prose, including narrative. While conceding that repetition may reflect underlying oral traditions, Robert Alter nonetheless writes eloquently about the use of repetition as part of the narrative art of the Bible (Alter 1981, pp. 88–113). I find it unfortunate that translations can mask such repetition by not employing lexical consistency, so in my translations I take care to use the same English translation for the same Hebrew words and roots in order to ensure such repetition is clearly evident. Repetition is especially obvious in carefully translated biblical traditions that are embodied and performed, because audiences hear the same words over and over within a short space of time. Performers can emphasize this by stressing the words or adding characteristic expression as they are used. In Ecclesiastes, there are a number of catch phrases, the most obvious being 'Dross of dross.' In the script of *Words*, the word 'dross' is used in twenty-nine of Qohelet's lines. It was not long before the audience was reacting to the word each time it was repeated, and by the end of the performance several members of the audience spontaneously joined in Qohelet's final line 'Dross of dross, *all is dross*.' The Optimist also spoke this word in two of her lines. In the longer speech, addressed to the audience, she acknowledged that while life is dross, it can still hold enjoyment:

> Go, relish with enjoyment your bread, and drink with a good heart your wine. For he has already accepted your works—the God that is! At all times let your clothes be white and put oil on your head—let there be no lack. See through life with a woman you love, all the days of your life of *dross*, which were given to you under the sun, all your days of *dross*, for this is your portion in life and in your toil which you are toiling under the sun (9:7–9)

Each mention of the word dross was spoken slowly and accompanied by a nod towards Qohelet, acknowledging that he had introduced the word but that it was possible to use this concept with a more positive nuance.

Concomitantly, the phrase 'relish, and drink, and enjoy toil' was the Optimist's distinctive slogan. The translation of 'relish' for the Hebrew root *ʾkl* was a word that stood out due to its repetition in a number of lines outside of the Optimist's catchphrase. In a reverse exchange, it became a source of sarcasm for Qohelet, who could repeat the idea but stress its futility, especially in this speech:

> There *is* an evil which I have seen under the sun, and much of it over the human being: a man to whom the God gives wealth and possessions and glory and nothing lacking for his body and for all which he desires for himself, but the God will not empower him to *relish* it, instead, a different man will *relish* it. This is dross and an evil illness! (6:1–2)

The Optimist reacted with frustrated sighs that embodied and emphasized the different attitudes that are integral to the book of Ecclesiastes. On the one hand, life is a gift to be enjoyed. On the other, humans cannot trust The God to be other than arbitrary in the distribution of this gift.

A seven-fold repetition of the word 'found' (*mtsʾ*) within a few verses in Ecclesiastes 7 explores the question of whether wisdom can be found. In my script, the same word is spoken by the Host, Qohelet, and the Pietist, with the Host initiating the series by posing the question 'who can find it?' (7:24c). In the exchange, Qohelet claims 'I found, I myself, more bitter than death is the woman, she who snares and her heart traps and her hands fetter' (7:26a), to which the Pietist responds 'Good is the one before The God, he will escape from her but the sinner will be captured by her' (7:26b). The theme is continued by Qohelet, who claims 'One human being in a thousand I have found, but a woman in all these I have not found' (7:28c). These verses engender much debate in commentaries as to whether the author of the book was inherently sexist or whether the verses are referencing Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly—a common trope in the book of Proverbs (see Wolfe 2020, pp.

108–9 for a summary of the debate). The fact that our cast included a woman added an unexpected but fascinating dimension to the performance of these words, noticed in the first rehearsal, because it lifted them from theoretical philosophizing to embodied reality. The three male actors were joined together in the exchange with the female actor excluded from it and, via their glances and gestures, objectified by it. Our female Optimist rolled her eyes a few times during this exchange but, in the way the script was fortuitously divided, *she* was given the last line: 'Except, see, *I* found *this*. That The God made the human being upright' (7:29a).

Biblical Performance Criticism, therefore, embraces and prioritizes the embodied experience as integral to interpretation. This contrasts with Narrative Criticism and is, in fact, a departure from all traditional interpretive methods. As Sarah Agnew has commented,

> Most often . . . the physical, emotional and relational experience of a theologian is relegated to the background, with a cursory acknowledgment of 'bias' before a supposedly disembodied, rational and objective discussion. (Agnew 2020, p. 17)

By contrast, BPC advocates embodied, emotive, audience engagement with biblical traditions[10] as integral to the process of interpretation, to which I now turn.

3.3. Performing Scripture Becomes a Method for Interpretation

As I will argue in this section, BPC will never claim that one performance or one audience can determine the interpretation of the Bible. Rather, 'performance as rehearsal' or 'performance as experiment' better describes the method of BPC. A performer takes a script and tries out different possibilities of delivering that text to convey meaning. Some work better than others. Audience responses to performed texts influence the next performance. These experimental performances themselves become ways to explore and compare interpretations of texts, and, as Peter Perry claims, 'performance opens some interpretations and closes others' (Perry 2016, p. 146). This sentiment is expressed more fully by David Rhoads:

> Performance both limits and expands interpretation. On the one hand, performance limits interpretations because, in a performance, the performer has to make interpretive choices about how to deliver every line and act out every scene. By presenting one way of understanding the story, these choices exclude other interpretive choices. . . On the other hand, multiple performances expand interpretations because the narrative can be performed in many different ways. Mainly, however, performance expands and amplifies interpretation because it is in a different medium. (Rhoads 2018, p. 167)

In other words, new insights about the biblical tradition emerge as practitioners enter into performance and engage with audiences. Let me give three examples of this method at work.

My introduction to the world of BPC was my doctoral work in the book of Habakkuk. I translated the book with an eye on aspects of performance embedded in the text, then wrote and analysed it as a script (see Mathews 2012a, 2012b). In an early attempt to 'perform' the script with a local church group, I assigned several voices (the prophet, YHWH, the Chaldean king) and asked the remaining participants to serve as a chorus to read the third chapter, the theophanic psalm. In that 'experiment', I discovered that the 'chorus' became the dominant voice of the performance, simply due to the increased volume of many voices chanting together. The transmission of the book in that manner seemed unbalanced. Performance critic Peter Perry took my script and performed it himself before several church audiences. This experience became part of his research and preparation for writing *Insights from Performance Criticism* (Perry 2016). He retained the hymn-like communal participation of the third chapter by teaching a two-line refrain from the beginning of Habakkuk 3 to his audience and inviting them to chant the refrain at key points in the script. The result, more effective than my own attempt, was that the audience was included in the performance (as warranted by the script) without being permitted to dominate.

A second example of rehearsal as interpretation also comes from Perry's rehearsals of the script of Habakkuk. As he internalized the script, Perry came to a different understanding of how the script is divided in the first chapter of the book, where there is a dialogue between Habakkuk and YHWH. Most often, the verses are understood to be the prophet speaking in verses 2–4, YHWH in verses 5–11, and the prophet again in verses 12–17. This was how I had divided the speakers in my script also. Whilst rehearsing the chapter, Perry became convinced that the identity of the speakers should be re-assigned, so that other than verses 1 and 5a, the entire chapter should be understood as speech of the prophet. He explains:

> God's speech is usually taken to continue until [verse 11]. . . The problem is that God's introduction is positive. God calls the audience and the nations to attention. God invites them to be astounded, which sounds like they will be impressed with the solution. God announces that this is a 'work being worked in your days,' as if it is a satisfactory response to Habakkuk's complaint. . . After building up the audience's expectation of a positive solution to injustice in Judah, I had trouble announcing the Chaldeans as 'hurtful and hasty' (1:6b). . . Instead of a statement, I made 1:6b into a rhetorical question the prophet speaks in shock to God's revelation that God had raised up the Chaldeans. (Perry 2016, pp. 96–97)

Peter's rehearsal and engagement with my translated script has had an impact on my own view of Habakkuk, and I would now agree that it is the prophet who speaks those words.

My last example is from the Ecclesiastes talk show. The participant with the most natural acting ability was the friend who played the Pietist. In the view of the rest of the cast, his performance, along with the musical items, were the highlights of the evening. Wearing a long white surplice retained from earlier involvement in an Anglican Church where he served on occasion as an acolyte, his mannerisms and gestures were appropriately pious and his subtle expressions were entertaining. Following the performance, a member of the audience (himself an Anglican clergyman) initiated a conversation with me about this friend's performance of the Pietist, questioning whether it had become too much of a caricature of the type one expects to see in a contemporary post-Christendom world where faith and the church are frequently ridiculed. I welcomed the exchange and agreed his question was important. If my script of Ecclesiastes intended to convey three equally valid perspectives on the themes of the book, a caricatured performance of one of those perspectives could result in an unbalanced portrayal. This exchange, in fact, illustrates a key advantage of performing Scripture: by engaging with the performance, even in disagreement with the portrayal, audience members can participate in the interpretation of Scripture themselves! In the performance of texts, for both actor and audience, new interpretation results. The issue is not 'which performance is the correct performance', but 'what is worth trying that will elicit reactions and a better understanding of the Scripture?'

One of my first experiences of BPC as a method of interpretation was a session at the 2011 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in which Tom Boomershine performed Mark's Passion Narrative and then engaged with a panel of respondents. Whilst the performance was memorable, so also was the panel discussion in which Boomershine was challenged about his performance choices and the conversation about interpretation and cultural sensitivities that ensued. The value of the occasion was not on the performance per se, but on the new light shed on the interpretation of Mark's Passion Narrative that resulted from the performance and subsequent conversation between the performer and audience.

Performance allows for, indeed demands, a range of interpretive choices, each of which can be argued as consistent with the underlying script. In our performance of *Words*, we chose to portray the final line in a humorous way. There is scholarly discussion about the structure of the book of Ecclesiastes, with many agreeing that the final lines are an editorial addition (Enns 2008, p. 124). A common view is that an editor wished to align the content of the book with a more conventional perspective on wisdom. As Barry Bandstra notes,

> The Jewish community struggled with Ecclesiastes. Because of its somewhat troubling observations, they perceived the need to retrieve the book from heresy and give it an orthodox patina. The editorial history of the book [including the concluding editorial] gives evidence of their efforts. (Bandstra 1995, p. 458)

In my translated script, the final lines are 'The God you must fear, and his commandments you must keep. For this is for every human being. For every deed The God will bring into judgment along with every hidden thing, whether good or evil' (12:13b–14). Similar thoughts are expressed elsewhere in the book and have been allocated to the Pietist in my script. The choice we made for staging was to have the Host announce the end of the show ('End of *Words*. All has been heard') and then walk off stage with Qohelet and the Optimist accompanied by a reprise of one of the musical items. Rather than leave with the others on the panel, the Pietist was to stand up to face the audience and raise his voice to be heard over the music as he said his final lines. He would then look around and notice the others had left the stage and walk off himself, conveying embarrassment. This staging deliberately reflected the scholarly view that the final words are an editorial comment. They thus undermine the 'anti-wisdom' expressed elsewhere in the book by ensuring the last word is that it *does* matter how one behaves because judgement is to be expected. By mildly ridiculing the final line, our performance choice prioritized scepticism (all have the same fate no matter their behaviour) and optimism (even if you will be judged, life is still meant to be enjoyed) over pietism (fear The God and watch out). Even so, in our performance the actor playing Qohelet occasionally appeared bored and disengaged, in contrast to the Pietist, who remained engaged right to the end. This in itself gives insight into the editorial process, in which editors do not remove different perspectives but keep a watch to ensure that the 'right' message is ultimately conveyed. In another performance, there would be the opportunity to portray a very different interpretation by staging the final line of the script differently. One could infer that since all earthly existence is 'dross', the only lasting reality and source for hope is God and God's commandments. One could imagine the Pietist speaking these words in a gentle, persuasive tone while the other three participants stayed to listen and indicate assent. Such a performance would leave a very different final impression.

Interpretation is, therefore, an iterative process, aided by experimentation within performance and following performance in response to audience reaction and feedback. More than this, however, the act of performance contributes to scholarship by directly addressing critical questions of the received tradition.

I stated earlier that I am convinced that we can hear different voices in the text of Ecclesiastes. This is a critical question of this book—whose perspective is represented? Unlike narrative, where characters are defined and speech is easily attributed to individuals, the speaker(s) of Ecclesiastes are not easily identified. Performing the book as more than one voice is a way to test the idea that there is more than one speaker, and, arguably, it is effective. I have tried out the script with several different audiences, and each time hear the response that it 'works' in that it makes greater sense of the book. Another critical question is the identity of Qohelet. The traditional identification of 'Qohelet, son of David, king in Jerusalem' (1:1, 12) as an aged King Solomon is generally dismissed by contemporary scholarship, as discussed above. The name Qohelet is never elsewhere identified with Solomon and there is linguistic evidence in the book of a date of composition much later than the ninth century BCE, when Solomon is recorded as king in Israel. Yet, hearing the words of Qohelet performed, along with several other references to 'king' in the script (4:13; 5:9; 8:2,4; 9:14; 10:16–17), suggested that Qohelet was an important and respected character for the ancient Jerusalem community, akin to a past president or noble statesman. Having experienced a performance of Ecclesiastes, I am even more convinced that Qohelet is the literary persona of a radical, intellectual, philosophical representative of the social elite, debating points with other literary personae who represent alternative views. Even if this interpretation of the book is convincing, there is still debate to be had over the way I have divided the speeches between the four personalities. I welcome responses

from the players themselves and the audiences if there are different views on this, for example whether it is appropriate for one character to borrow the catchphrase of another as described above, or if this serves better as a way to identify that line as belonging to the character who characteristically speaks it. Often, I have divided a given verse amongst two or more speakers—do such divisions, especially if they are contrary to verse divisions in the Masoretic Text, defy the received tradition and therefore weaken the thesis of different voices? These and other issues illustrate the need for ongoing interpretation via performance.

3.4. Performing Scripture Is a Reminder That Interpretation Is Shared and Dynamic

As already noted, the very term 'performance' implies an audience. An early advocate of Performance Criticism, Erving Goffman (1959, pp. 15–16) claimed that all activity is performance, including everyday actions. The concept of self-reflexivity suggests that all performers are aware of the difference between the self and the role; therefore, all performance includes an audience, albeit at times only the self as audience (Mathews 2012a, pp. 27–28). More often, however, BPC emphasizes performance as a communication event in which traditions are re-expressed for a gathered audience. Meaning-making is therefore communal and participatory.

Several studies have shown how audiences are more affected by the emotions raised by performance than by ideas portrayed in the performance (Cousins 2016; Perry 2016). Nonetheless, the audiences are involved in the performance, if only by having their emotions raised! And, at best, I share Perry's expectation that performance helps readers of Scripture reconnect the body with the mind as they experience the text (Perry 2016, p. 147). A number of audience members of *Words* indicated that, while they did not fully comprehend the conversation, they were planning to rewatch the performance and/or read the book of Ecclesiastes as a result of feeling engaged in a new way by the content of the book via performance. Audience engagement is also elicited as self-recognition when audiences identify with the ideas or attitudes expressed in the performance. Unlike narrative, where the reader remains largely an observer, performance draws the audience in. They are invited to and expected to react to what they are seeing. In BPC, where the content of the performance is Scripture, practitioners are committed to reinforcing and shaping the identity of themselves and their audiences. Performance is not merely entertainment, but an engaging way to encourage encounters with the traditions of Scripture.

Recognizing that performance is an embodied experience, we also recognize that performances, performers, and audiences are dynamic. No performance will be the same as the next, nor will an audience in one setting be the same as the next. Prominent events or social issues will impact the way audiences hear a performance. The aforementioned discussion of the role of women in *Words* was an especially sensitive issue at the time it was performed. In contemporary Australian society, respect for and safety of women has been widely discussed due to continuing revelations of sexual abuse within the Australian Parliament House. During the week of the performance of *Words*, the issue was again front-page news. As a result, embodied attitudes towards the female cast member became more prominent and any hypothetical identification of Woman as personified Wisdom or Folly, as is suggested in some commentaries (for example, Bartholomew 2009, pp. 94, 267), would have been far from the mind of our *Words* audience. Nonetheless, the live question of women in society was responded to in this ancient wisdom tradition by allowing the 'wisdom' of a female speaker responding with dignity to the debate about women with the line 'The God made the human being upright' (7:29a) [the generic word *ʾadām* implying both genders]. In his proposal of Ecclesiastes as a performance addressed to a third century BCE audience, Heim argues that the warning against women who trap and snare would have been relevant in the context of Greek colonization, where young Jewish men were being won over by foreign ideas and values (Heim 2023, p. 49). Heim's discussion and the recent performance of *Words* underscore that the context of an audience will inevitably shape both performance and interpretation.

If the authors of biblical traditions were performers of those traditions in their first iterations, we can imagine them offering their words in the context of embodied, gathered audiences. They, along with their audiences, were making meaning of their traditions. A telling moment comes in Ecclesiastes where the Optimist relates a story of a poor man who used his wisdom to deliver a city under siege. Qohelet's response is 'and no human being remembers that man—that poor one!' (9:14–16). With our assumption that Ecclesiastes reflects the ruminations of an elite sage, we must wryly acknowledge along with Qohelet that it is only the powerful in society whose words are remembered. And yet, ironically, the story of that poor man *has* become enshrined as Scripture, albeit via the words of the author(s) behind the book of Qohelet, which were preserved, no doubt, due to repeated performance.

4. Conclusions

All biblical scholars are committed to the interpretation of ancient written texts, and BPC reminds interpreters that when these texts are understood as 'scripts', significant components that are not present in silent reading come to the fore. Audiences are influenced by the way the script is performed as well as the reactions of others around them. Moreover, the context—emotional, social, and political—contributes to shared interpretation. Meaning-making emerges from the dynamic relationship of performer, audience, text, and setting. When biblical texts are 'performed' in contemporary settings, new light is shed on familiar material and a greater connection is forged between our world and the biblical world.

Reflecting on a performance of Ecclesiastes scripted in the form of a television talk show with a host, three guests, and a musical duo, I have proposed that BPC has several advantages over Narrative Criticism as a means of engaging biblical texts. It links contemporary audiences to the earliest biblical communities, who experienced the traditions as complete works performed before gathered audiences. For contemporary audiences, a performance-sensitive translation aids in hearing repetition, word play, and pacing to give insights into the experience of the original audiences. And whether ancient or contemporary, audiences become more than just viewers when engaged by Scripture in embodied form. They are invited to see something new in the biblical tradition, and they become involved in its interpretation by both appreciating and disagreeing with the choices of the performers. Performance is itself a method of exploring interpretation that is shared and dynamic, contributing to the concept of multiple meanings held within the biblical tradition.

Performing Scripture as script adds insight and emotional impact for an audience, reminding us that when Scripture is incarnated in actual times and places, it becomes even more relevant for faithful communities.

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Notes

1 David Rhoads discusses how 'biblical performances' could range from short oral communications in domestic, liturgical, or public settings to longer traditions that were written down and then shared through public presentations. (Rhoads 2023, p. xiii).

2 Recent publications that have applied BPC to non-narrative texts include Levy (2000) on Song of Songs and Proverbs; Doan and Giles (2005) on Hebrew prophetic literature; Giles and Doan (2009) on poetic portions embedded in Hebrew literature; Oestreich (2016) on the Pauline letters; Agnew (2020) on the book of Romans; and the aforementioned volume on humour and performance edited by Perry (2023c), which includes chapters on Ecclesiastes (Heim 2023), Hebrews (Whitlark and Carman 2023), and John's Apocalypse (Perry 2023b). Admittedly, narrative criticism has been effectively applied to non-narrative genres also, such as Eugene Boring's commentary of 1 Peter (Boring 1999).

3 All translations are my own and, unless otherwise noted, all verse references are from the book of Ecclesiastes.

4 Heim's argument is based on the work of Stuart Weeks (Weeks 2020).

5 It will be obvious in the ensuing discussion that my view is heavily influenced by David Penchansky's *Understanding the Wisdom Literature* (Penchansky 2012, pp. 50–63), where he postulates three voices in Qohelet: Pessimistic Qohelet, Fear God Qohelet, and Enjoy Life Qohelet.

6 Prior to the publication of *Reading the Megillot* (Mathews 2023), my script of Lamentations as Performance Poetry had been effectively enacted by a theatre group that incorporated music and visual art in a more elaborately staged event.

7 www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJdvwXJmtbA&t=17s (accessed on 9 June 2023).

8 See, for example, the work of Niditch (1996) and Carr (2005), as well as collected essays edited by Kelber (2013) and Schmidt (2015).

9 My colleague, the Revd Dr Jane Foulcher, discussed translation in these terms in her launch speech for *Reading the Megillot* (Mathews 2023). The script of this address can be found at www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org (accessed on 9 June 2023).

10 Kelly Iverson similarly notes the neglect of emotions in biblical scholarship and devotes a chapter of his monograph *Performing Early Christian Literature* (Iverson 2021) to the emotional experience of audience engagement.

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Article

"Right on, Vashti!": Minor Characters and Performance Choices in the Synagogal Megillah Reading

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Abstract: Every Purim, synagogues read the biblical Book of Esther aloud in liturgy, a tradition that exemplifies how synagogue performance practices elaborate on, revise, and refine minor characters in the text. This paper studies four such minor characters in performance from the second century to the present: Haman's sons, Zeresh, Harbona, and Vashti. These characters evince ways in which performance practices of biblical texts construct moral and psychological assessments of characters in the story, through the interaction of audience, performer, text, and liturgical framing. Further, biblical characters are performed differently in ways which parallel textual interpretation of biblical texts as well as changing social trends and values. In performance, the narrative-critical work of characterization comes alive.

Keywords: biblical performance criticism; performance criticism; Book of Esther; megillah; Purim; minor characters; Haman; Vashti; narrative criticism

1. Introduction

In performance, characters come alive. When telling a narrative, a performer embodies textual characters by enacting their speeches, bodily movements, and displays of emotion. The way such embodiment happens depends on the performance genre: for example, ancient Roman conventions of political oratory and theatre differed greatly.[1] Yet as Schechner quips, "Performances exist only as actions, interactions, and relationships" (Schechner and Brady 2013). The meanings in a performance event are found not just in the performers' choices. Rather, characters are constructed in the meaning-making that happens in the interactions between audience, text, performers, and situation (Perry 2019; Iverson 2021; Hearon 2014). Performers and audiences collaborate to interpret the text in real time.

Here, I show how performers and audiences interpret biblical characters through a look at how performance traditions of the Book of Esther in synagogue liturgy flesh out, script, and embody minor characters: Haman's sons, Harbona, Zeresh, and Vashti. Though the biblical text itself treats these bit players as mere narrative props for the main characters' story, performance traditions embellish the script and embody them in diverse ways. Further, the ways synagogue performances depict these characters parallel broader theological and political issues from which Jewish communities use this biblical text to engage. Performance reveals the fact that narrative criticism is inseparable from the real readers who inevitably bring their own lenses to ancient texts.

The Book of Esther provides a wide array of minor characters, figures relatively ignored in the text who sometimes grow in reception, including in performance (Grossman 2012; Branch and Jordaan 2009). Jewish tradition almost unanimously loves the heroes (Esther, Mordecai) and hates the villain (Haman). But minor characters provide more varying examples of characterization in performance. Such characters—the servants, soldiers, messengers, and, most often, the women—typically remain unnamed and exist only as the 'supporting cast' for the main characters' stories.[2] As Reinhartz writes:

> The ways in which we construct anonymous characters, delight in, or deplore the contrast or coherence between role designations, and engage with the permeability of personal identity involve us in the text as more than innocent bystanders. In allowing ourselves the freedom to engage the characters and bring them into proximity with others and with ourselves, we not only construct their identities but also our own. (Reinhartz 1998, p. 91)

These minor figures are underdetermined by the text, which allows readers to fill in the narrative gaps in ways that engage their own interests. While formalist narrative criticism tends to ignore these figures, the narrative-critical 'turn to the reader' emphasizes that readers co-construct characters in dialogue with the text—allowing for readers' empathy, imagination, and diverse but valid interpretations (Rüggemeier and Shively 2021; Dinkler 2019). While none of these minor figures in Esther ever becomes major in Jewish tradition, they do grow larger.

2. Characterizing the Synagogal Esther Performance Tradition

In his survey of biblical performance criticism, Peter Perry argues that current research needs more "specific descriptions of ancient performances" (Perry 2016, pp. 158–59). Esther provides a useful case study for this task. Every year, during the springtime month of Adar, Jews traditionally celebrate Purim, a carnivalesque holiday on which Jews feast, drink, and listen to the oral performance of this humorous biblical text in synagogue. The Book of Esther (or just "the megillah" in Jewish tradition) is performed liturgically in synagogue every Purim—an observance suggested by the text (9:28) and described as early as the Mishnah (c. 200 CE; m. Meg. 1:1). We can thus speak of a synagogal tradition of the Esther performance, first articulated in late antique sources and continuing to the present.[3]

Three main sources provide data on the synagogal Esther performance tradition. First, sources used in Jewish law (*halakhah*), such as the Mishnah, the Jerusalem Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud, attest to late antique practices and debates. Medieval law codes and responsa (individual rabbinic legal opinions) attest to the fixed and mandated aspects of Purim observance—though Jewish movements since the eighteenth century vary widely in how they keep these traditions. Such sources attest to both practices mandated by binding law (*halakhah*) and non-binding customs observed by particular communities (*minhag*). Second, some written sources of biblical interpretation, such as *targumim* (late antique Aramaic biblical translations) and *piyyutim* (liturgical poems), reflect synagogue performance to varying degrees. Most importantly for performance, the lockdowns mandated by COVID-19 led many synagogues to livestream, record, and post their communal Purim celebrations. I watched six such recordings from 2020 to 2022 (see Appendix A). I avoided recordings of services fully on Zoom, with no in-person communal component; while Zoom is a performance space, I wanted to see audience–performer interactions and the use of physical space and staging in ways which reflect typical Jewish practice.[4] That said, the videos largely focus on the performers, and reveal less about audience responses beyond what can be heard. These recordings do not represent how all Jews today celebrate Purim: all are American, and none are Orthodox. But they do provide fascinating windows into performance choices.

Rabbinic sources, past and present, explain how Esther is to be performed in Purim. Every Jew must listen to the Book of Esther being read in a communal setting (y. Meg. 1:1, b. Meg. 2b), once by night and once by day (b. Meg. 4a), in order (m. Meg. 2:1). It is traditionally chanted (cf. b. Meg 32a), though less liturgically traditional or informed communities may merely read the Hebrew. Though rabbinic law is clear that Esther must be read from a written scroll (y. Meg. 4:1:9; b. Meg. 19a), some level of memorization is required since the *te'amim* (cantillation marks) and vowels are not in the liturgical scroll.[5] At various times, communities have abbreviated the reading: the Babylonian Talmud records a debate over how much of the text needs to be read to fulfill the obligation (m. Meg. 2:3; b. Meg. 19a), and some communities omit Esther 8–9 due to its violence (Boeckler n.d.). The reading can be done by one person or by a group of readers taking turns, as in all the

videos I watched; it is not impossible that multiple readers could perform simultaneously (b. Meg. 21b). Unlike with Torah reading, the megillah can be interrupted (m. Meg. 2:2). Traditionally, only men could read the megillah to the whole community (m. Meg. 4:5–6), though this has changed dramatically in recent decades (Kresh 2014; Homrighausen 2023). Further, the reader may stand or sit (m. Meg. 4:1).[6] Over the centuries, various customs have arisen around the megillah reading, such as certain verses read more loudly or quietly, more quickly or slowly, or chanted in a different tune (Jacobson 2017; Beer 2018; Boeckler n.d.; Birnbaum [1891] 1976).

Liturgical performance of the megillah theologically frames the biblical text in what Elsie Stern describes as "the synagogue Bible" (Stern 2012). The synagogue Bible includes paratexts, choices of lections, and performance choices, such as translation. Rabbinic sources specify blessings to be read with the megillah (b. Meg. 21b; Mass. Sof. 14:4–7), which emphasize miracles and divine deliverance in the Purim story. Other biblical texts are chanted alongside Esther, concerning the commandment to blot out the memory of Amalek (Deut 25:17–19 in m. Meg. 3:4; Exod 17:8–16 in m. Meg. 3:6; 1 Sam 15:1–34 in b. Meg. 30a). Beginning in late antiquity, liturgical poems (*piyyutim*) were written for Purim, which may have been inserted before, during, and/or after the reading.[7] These paratexts emphasize a deeper narrative: Jews as an eternally persecuted minority who must find creative means to survive—diplomacy or violence. The synagogue Bible's framing of Esther also emphasizes God as the one who saves and enacts vengeance.

Audience experiences of the megillah reading vary depending on how well congregants understand the language in which the megillah is being read. Though the megillah is traditionally read aloud in Hebrew, Jewish law has allowed for vernacular reading since late antiquity, instead of or in addition to the Hebrew. If Esther is translated orally as it is read, the translation is usually read by a different person to distinguish between the Hebrew original and the Aramaic translation.[8] These translations begin with the Greek Esthers, and, between the fifth and ninth centuries CE, Aramaic translations created for vernacular reading and synagogal use. Both the Greek and Aramaic Esthers greatly expand the text, present God explicitly at work in the story, and depict Jewish characters as Torah-observant in a way not seen in the Masoretic text.[9] Though extant written targums do not flatly transcribe late antique oral performances in late antique synagogues, especially in the case of Esther, they still reflect oral delivery. In the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue and B'nai Israel Esther performances, Hebrew and English alternate: in the former, different readers choose to either read the English or the Hebrew, and in the latter, each chapter is first chanted in Hebrew then read aloud in English. Since the mass printing of Bibles enabled by moveable type, congregants who do not know the Hebrew can follow along silently from a copy of the megillah in translation.

Starting as early as the sixteenth century, Ashkenazi Jewish communities also wrote Purimspiels, vernacular plays that parody the Book of Esther or other biblical narratives (Rozik 2013; Freedman 2011; Belkin 1999). Historically, such plays were performed separately from the megillah reading, often in settings such as private homes (Belkin 2009). In recent decades, however, some communities have brought them into the liturgy, interspersing Purimspiel scenes between sections of the megillah (Freedman 2011, pp. 102–3). In several Purim recordings studied in this article, community members also interjected musical numbers or comedic skits between chapters of the biblical text. Such comic interludes bring out the drama of the story, 'translate' it for audience members who do not understand the Hebrew, and likely help audience members (especially children) pay attention.

Visual and material aspects of the performance also add to its meaning. Traditionally, the scroll itself is part of the visual display of the reading: its handling, its unrolling, its symbolic value.[10] Visualizations of Esther on painted on synagogue walls are also part of its performance, such as the Purim panel at the third-century Dura-Europos synagogue in modern-day Syria (Fine 2005). For a modern parallel, the Hebrew Educational Association megillah reading incorporates a slideshow of Esther-related internet memes that mock the

pretentious and evil enemies of the Jews and relate the story to current events.[11] Furthermore, in many communities, it is customary to wear costumes and masks to heighten the sense that Purim is an alternate world in which one can express and enact ideas and desires that are verboten the rest of the year. Even in traditional Jewish communities, in which gender separation permeates communal life, men dress up as women for Purim and play-act women in Purimspiels (Ben-Lulu 2018; Fishbane 2018). Such tongue-in-cheek gender-bending makes for good comedy, especially around villainous women, such as Vashti and Zeresh.

Audience response forms an essential part of the synagogal Esther reading. A very popular and old tradition is for the audience to make loud noises to drown out the name of Haman, the Jews' enemy, every time the cantor reads it.[12] In some communities, the congregation repeats verses after the reader chants them to emphasize their significance (Beer 2018). Some Jewish communities encourage drinking on Purim (Fishbane 2018, pp. 79–90; Rappeld 1998). For them, the nighttime reading of the megillah may feel very different from the morning reading!

Although the synagogal megillah performance tradition largely parallels the Torah reading tradition, it is generally laxer and allows for more creative license and theatricality (Summit (2016). See also description in Ben-Lulu (2018, p. 146)). This freedom extends to performers and audience alike. Performers often heighten the drama of narrative moments by reading narrative discourse in a different voice. In the Romemu service, the reader for chapter 4 performs the first verse about the Jews' mourning the genocidal decree in a slow, pained voice. Performers can also dramatize characters by embodying them in different voices and body language (*ethopoieia*). (Lieber 2023, pp. 230–88) One journalist describes a megillah reader:

> Cash acts out the different roles when she reads, using different voices for each character. She sang me a few sample lines of text. Her Esther sings in a girlish soprano, while Haman's voice is aggressive and scratchy and Ahasuerus sounds dopey.[13]

This technique can be seen in the Romemu service's reading of chapter 3. The reader, while chanting the Hebrew text, swaps hats to switch characters, and pantomimes some of the actions, such as Mordecai refusing to bow (3:2). To visualize Haman's desire to kill the Jews, he dons his Haman hat and holds a fake gun up to a star of David in his other hand. In the B'nai Israel performance of chapter 4, the reader pantomimes crying as the Jews mourn their imminent death under Haman's decree. Other times, performers interject. In the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue service, the English reader interjects that Esther went before the king "in her Gucci dress." In the Reform Temple of Forest Hills service, a puppeteer interrupts the cantor throughout chapter 2 with a puppet of Mordecai attempting to talk to the cantor.

Biblical scholars are trained to separate layers of tradition, such as texts, translations, commentaries, and interpretive traditions. But the synagogal megillah reading blurs the boundaries between biblical text, liturgical paratexts, and performance choices. For most premodern Jews, when literacy was lower and books scarcer, the synagogue Bible *was* the Bible. In the twenty-first century, many communities still pour immense energy, creativity, and time into performing the megillah at Purim.

3. The Sons of Haman

Perhaps the earliest elaborations on minor characters in the synagogal Esther performance are traditions around the sons of Haman. These figures do next to nothing in the biblical text itself yet become a site of mockery and playfulness in the performance. The performance of Haman's sons highlights the importance of audience responses in creating characterization.

In the Book of Esther, the sons of Haman appear solely to die alongside other enemies of the Jews (9:7–9). Because they are killed in the first skirmish, they do not seem to be innocent bystanders, but Jew-haters along with their father.[14] By naming them in a list,

the narrator paints them as faceless and anonymous, like the palace courtiers (1:10, 1:14). Given that these sons do nothing and receive no individual treatment, it is odd that their individual names appear in the text at all—especially since biblical narratives often omit names of characters who display far more individual characterization and agency than these ten sons (Reinhartz 1998). Their names must serve a purpose. In this case, it is comedy: these multisyllabic Persian names sound odd to the Hebrew ear (Berlin 2001; Radday 1990). After being killed (9:10), they are then hung (9:14), as a shame for them and perhaps a warning to others.

The synagogal performance of Esther mocks these men and their names. The Palestinian Talmud records a tradition: "The names of the ten sons of Haman and 'ten' must be recited in one breath" (y. Meg. 3:8). The recitation of these names would stand out for the synagogue audience. The names sound quite foreign to a Hebrew or Aramaic ear, and many have more syllables than a typical Hebraic biblical name. The Babylonian Talmud explains the custom: "For what reason? Their souls all departed together" (b. Meg. 16b). This comment emphasizes the miracle that all ten sons died at the same time—just another of the extreme coincidences in the story of Purim. A medieval midrashic compilation on Esther, the *Lekach Tov* compiled by Tobias ben Eliezer (c. 1100) clarifies:

> All these names, the reader of the megillah must pronounce in one breath, and must speak the *vav* of Vaizatha with elongation, just as the *vav* of Vaizatha is written elongated; thus "and he shall be impaled on it" (Ezra 6:11), because all of them were impaled on one pole.[15]

The sons' names are recited in one breath to emphasize that they all died at once from their wickedness. This practice develops these characters beyond the biblical text and removes any doubt that they deserved to die. Some congregations even join in chanting these names (Birnbaum [1891] 1976, pp. 99–100; Beer 2018, pp. 25–26). In his guidebook for cantors, Joshua Jacobson writes that

> Before beginning to read these verses, the *ba'al keri'ah* [cantor] takes a deep breath. It is customary to read the twenty-one words which include these ten names and the following word (עשרת["ten"]) before taking another breath! For that reason, most *ba'aley keri'ah* [cantors] will read these twenty-one words quite fast, even chanting them on a monotone rather than taking the time to articulate the proper *te'amim* [cantillation tropes]. (Jacobson 2017, p. 661)

Cantors mark these names as odd not only by reading them in one rapid breath, but by suspending the musical quality of chant entirely. Perhaps, the cantor suggests, these men do not deserve beautiful chant!

This aural focus on Haman's sons most likely stems from the well-known practice of audience participation of booing or jeering every time Haman's name is mentioned in the recitation of the scroll, a fulfillment of the commandment to "blot out the name of Amalek" (Exod 17:14).[16] Both Talmuds attest to some kind of verbal curse of Haman. The Babylonian Talmud records an infamous tradition that one should become so intoxicated on Purim that one cannot tell the difference between "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordecai" (b. Meg. 7b). The Jerusalem Talmud connects cursing Haman to cursing his sons:

> Rav said, "One has to say, 'Haman be cursed, his sons be cursed.'" Rabbi Phineas said, "One has to say, 'May Harbona be remembered for good.'" (y. Meg. 3:8; cf. Mass. Sof. 14:3)

Neither source explains who does the cursing or at what point in the service. Cursing Haman's sons may relate to Purim intoxication, a custom which rabbinic authority and popular custom has alternately condoned or condemned across Jewish history and cultures (Fishbane 2018, pp. 79–90; Rappeld 1998). Given how late in the scroll the ten sons of Haman appear—the ninth chapter!—one suspects that those hearing the megillah while drunk might be fairly plastered by this time. Drunkenness may beget mockery and gaiety. From a narrative-critical perspective, this performance tradition further cements the

impression that Haman's sons are not so much independent characters as accessories to their father—and to his crimes. In the conventions of Roman theatre, we can imagine them portrayed as stereotyped characters with one fixed emotion (Shiner 2003, pp. 90–92).

While reading Haman's sons differently is constant in Jewish history, performers and audiences vary in how they perform it and the meanings they ascribe to it. Some suggest rage, as in one Purim service in 1930s Berlin: "Never had I heard such applause in a synagogue when the names of Haman's ten sons were read, describing their hanging from the gallows… Every time we read 'Haman' the people heard 'Hitler' and the noise was deafening." (Quoted in Horowitz 2006). Another option: comedy. All ten drawing their last breaths in unison is outlandish enough to seem comical. Cantors can 'ham it up' to make body humor of the deep breaths and rapid recitation required to say the names in one breath. In the Romemu performance, the reader dramatically paused before the ten names, read them in a rapid monotone, and received cheers, laughter, and applause when finishing. A third option has emerged more recently: a desire to read through them quickly to downplay the Jews' violence in the story, which some Jews have rejected in recent decades. The rapid reading of the names reminds hearers that one should *not* gloat over the deaths of their enemies.[17] In the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue performance, before the reading, a rabbi explains the meaning of the grogger (a noisemaking device used whenever Haman's name is read); his explanation suggests a certain discomfort with the custom's history.

While Haman's sons are barely present in the biblical text, in performance they come alive in the history of Purim—even as they are assimilated closely to their father. They can become the target of rage, gaiety, or discomfort at Jewish fantasies of violence. This spectrum of responses can coexist in one audience. Just as narrative-critical readers of the Bible emphasize the significance of diverse readers and diverse readings, the meanings ascribed to liturgical acts need not be uniform throughout the congregation.

4. Zeresh

Like her sons, Zeresh is mostly assimilated to Haman both in the biblical text and its performance. Unlike her sons, the biblical narrator records her speech. Performers can thus embody her character via speech and gesture. Purim performance, like Jewish textual traditions, typically mock her. However, some performance traditions depict her more sympathetically as Haman's victim rather than accomplice.

In the biblical text, Zeresh appears explicitly only twice. The first time, Haman returns to his home, angry that Mordecai will not bow to him. He sends for his friends "and Zeresh his wife" (5:10), to whom he recounts his great prestige, his many sons, his wealth, the honor of being invited to dine privately with the king and queen—and the fact that all he cares about is Mordecai refusing to honor him. Zeresh and Haman's friends advise him to "Make a tall tree, fifty cubits, and in the morning speak to the king and let Mordecai be hung up on it, and go with the king to the drinking party rejoicing" (5:14, my translation). The Hebrew syntax suggests that Zeresh serves as chief advisor in this scene. She comes off as "a woman who is determined, brutal, and devoid of scruples," a moral match for her husband (Macchi 2019). Zeresh tells Haman what to do, which is ironic in light of the Persian elite men's concern that every man is supposed to run his own home (Day 2005, pp. 97–98). She validates his insecurity and rage, rather than providing wise counsel.

Even more ironic, when she next appears—after Haman is forced to lead Mordecai through the streets with honor—she and his wise friends warn him: "If from the seed of the Judeans is Mordecai, whom you have begun to fall before, you will not be able to overcome him, for you have already fallen before him" (6:13). In 5:14, Zeresh is the main agent telling Haman to build the gallows; in 6:13, the syntax suggests that the wise friends are the main advice-givers and she is less active. Her words echo other biblical Gentiles who predict Israel's victory over its enemies, such as Rahab (Josh 2:9–14).[18] Perhaps she speaks more for the narrator than for herself: her words seem uncharacteristically insightful, and she does not explain why she says the Jews are undefeatable.[19] If she knows so little of her husband's genocidal plans that she did not even know he was targeting the Jews, then she

seems ridiculously ignorant. By contrast, Day finds her more sympathetic, one no longer willing to "play the role of the 'good wife'" (Day 2005, p. 113). The text does not specify her fate. Was she executed along with her sons (9:7–10)? Was she handed over to become property of Esther, with the rest of Haman's house (8:1)? Day reads Zeresh through a feminist lens as another victim of her husband. But the narrative does not itself seem to cue the reader into caring for her, given that the reader is not told what happens to her (Day 2005, p. 129).

Classical sources vary in how they treat Zeresh (Kadari 1999; Bronner 1995). At times she is unsympathetic, an adulteress with many lovers.[20] Other sources depict her as wise—though is it sagacity or devious cleverness?[21] One targum tells us her fate: she fled and was reduced to begging.[22] It is not clear whether this fate should elicit pity or *schadenfreude*.

Late antique performers fleshed out Zeresh's characterization by embodying her character like an actor (*ethopoieia*) (Lieber 2023, pp. 234–37). and through adding longer speeches to her brief biblical utterances (*prosopoeia*) (Lieber 2023, pp. 230–88; Shiell 2004, pp. 89–90, 170–79). The targums elaborate on her praise of the Jews, placing a lengthy recounting of Jewish history in her mouth in which she recalls many times when Jews prevailed against their enemies.[23] We can imagine a performer rendering this as a sudden change of heart on her end—or for comedic effect, like Balaam's talking ass (Num 22:28–30). One late antique piyyut both narrates Zeresh's grief at her sons' death and voices her sorrow in her own words (Lieber (2018, pp. 109–12). See discussion in Münz-Manor (2012)). Each stanza ends with the refrain: "Alas for her, for what happened to her/for the fate of her son X," with each stanza ending with a different son. At the end of the poem, she kills herself. Lieber reckons this poem "emotionally complicated," with Zeresh a "strikingly sympathetic, tragic figure"—yet, as she wonders, "it could have been delivered in tones ranging from ambivalently compassionate to unironically gleeful." In this poem, Zeresh presents herself as Haman's victim. The performer's delivery of the poem would impact whether the audience sympathizes with her claim of victimhood or mocks it. Just as many interpreters read the biblical Book of Esther as rife with irony—the narrator saying one thing and hinting at another—so these paratexts suggest a tongue-in-cheek quality to how some performers portray Zeresh (O'Connor 2003).

Other performance traditions around Zeresh are much less ambiguous. Some audiences respond "Cursed is Zeresh" after the megillah reading or to make noise at the name of Zeresh, building on the cursing and noise-making mentioned above in connection with Haman and his sons.[24] Cantor and scholar of Jewish liturgy Annette Boeckler explains: "Haman's wife, Zeresh, was as bad as he was; for the sake of egalitarianism some make noise when mentioning her name, as well." (Boeckler n.d.; Jacobson 2017, pp. 660–61). Contemporary performers at times embody her character through changes in voice and body language when they voice her words. The Hebrew Educational Association reader for chapter 5—a man in costume as a woman—imitates her in an annoyingly nasal voice. The B'nai Israel readers make her loud and whiny in both 5:14 and 6:13. In the latter, although the Hebrew syntax of 6:13 suggests that Haman's friends were the primary speakers of the advice to build gallows, the performer erases them and makes Zeresh the sole speaker of that line—thus enlarging her role. Further, the B'nai Israel performance features a musical interlude between the chanting of chapters 5 and 6. In the song, a duet between Zeresh and Haman, she fully endorses his plan—"Have yourself some fun!"—and his assessment of the Jews—"They're disturbed!" This Zeresh woman is just as wicked as her husband.

From this brief data, it seems that Zeresh in the biblical text is a kind of 'initial draft' that readers, performers, and hearers can elaborate on, refine, and revise.[25] The performer of targum or piyyut can choose how they enact the script—how they depict Zeresh. Other times, audiences characterize her through their engaged replies. In performance, Zeresh fluctuates between good and evil, between flat wicked stereotype and complex sympathetic figure. These fluctuations may correlate with different attitudes towards gender,

power, and victimhood. Performers embody her speech to characterize her, to dramatize her—and perhaps, to ironically poke fun at her even while seeming to sympathize with her.

5. Harbona

Compared to Zeresh, Harbona's character is even scarcer in the text. In performance, he becomes more prominent—and more praised.

Harbona only appears twice in the Book of Esther. He is one of seven courtiers sent to bring Vashti before the king (1:10); the word used to describe these courtiers, *saris*, is often translated as "eunuch" but the term is not quite that specific.[26] Biblical narrators typically omit royal servants' names, so including his name reveals the storyteller's intentional choice (Reinhartz 1998). The intent may be humor: as with the names of Haman's sons, Berlin notes that "the sound of the multisyllabic, foreign-sounding names is amusing" (Berlin 2001, p. 85). Harbona underscores the king's lack of agency: he cannot even summon his own wife for himself (Bechtel 2002, p. 23). In his first appearance, he is not an independent character—just one of a pack of courtiers.

Harbona disappears until 7:9, when he returns as an individual acting on his own: he gives Ahasuerus the idea to hang Haman upon his own gallows. The narrator does not explain why Harbona jumped in at this crucial moment: Did he detect which way the king's favor had swayed and wished to ingratiate himself? Perhaps he favored Esther and was working on her behalf in the palace intrigues, as Hathach may have (4:5–9) (Levenson 1997). He could have known that Haman was technically innocent of the crime Ahasuerus accuses—trying to sleep with Esther—since he seems to have been in the palace courtyard during Ahasuerus's garden stroll. Does he hasten Haman's hanging to prevent him from defending himself and reentering the king's favor? The narrator does not ask or pry.

Synagogue performance renders Harbona as a morally positive character. In the Jerusalem Talmud, in the same passage that discusses the names of Haman's sons, the text continues: "Rebbi Phineas said, one has to say, 'May Harbona be remembered for good'" (y. Meg. 3:8). This source does not clarify where the saying "May Harbona be remembered for good" is placed in the performance. Some Ashkenazi traditions insert it after the singing of the piyyut *Shoshanat Ya'akov* after the megillah reading, along with the congregational response "Cursed be Zeresh" (Hammer 2005, pp. 220–21). None of the Purim performances I watched elaborated on Harbona in any other way.

In Purim liturgy, the morally ambiguous and minor Harbona becomes the model of a righteous Gentile who risks himself to help the Jews. If Haman and his family's names are to be blotted out, Harbona's name is to be remembered and for good. Why does Harbona receive such praise? Other classical Jewish sources depict him negatively.[27] My gut feeling: many Jews see themselves in Harbona. He first appears as a face in a crowd, one of a comical crowd of funnily-named courtiers—then unexpectedly speaks his mind and individuates himself. Like Esther and Mordecai, he refuses to assimilate and risks his life to be a true individual in a foreign palace.

6. Vashti

Vashti's treatment in Jewish thought has changed a great deal in recent times. While I found no evidence of premodern synagogal performance traditions around her, Jewish textual tradition has by and large characterized her as immoral and cruel. However, since the 1970s, some feminist Jewish thinkers have recast her as a victim. They have introduced new performance practices in how cantors narrate and embody her and how audiences respond to her. Like Zeresh, Vashti becomes a Rorschach test for Jewish understandings of gender, power, and victimhood.

The biblical text, contrary to later Jewish interpretation, provides no sense that Vashti did anything wrong in the narrator's eyes.[28] The king commands his attendants to bring her, not to request her presence (1:11); the narrator conditions the reader to discern Ahasuerus' evil intent by divulging that he was "glad of heart with wine." The narrator does not psychologically explain or morally evaluate her action directly, only revealing through

dialogue that she has offended the king and, in his courtiers' eyes, all the men of Persia (1:16). This charge is so ludicrous that we might question whether the narrator intends readers to accept it at face value. Though the narrator avoids fleshing out Vashti's character or explaining her motives, he does indirectly characterize her through comparison with characters that are more explicitly described: the drunken king, the corrupt courtiers (Fox 2001, pp. 164–69). As with Harbona, her agency highlights the king's ironic powerlessness. When he punishes her, he implicitly admits that her act of defiance may empower other women (Beal 1999, pp. 12–14). At worst, Vashti is a stubborn and impolitic woman who is "motivated by sense of rank" (Fox 2001, pp. 164–70). At best, she might be called "prophetic" and proud of defying her husband (Day 2005, p. 43).

While traditional Jewish interpretation vilifies Vashti, some recent Jewish readers rehabilitate her reputation and claim her as a hero. Classical Jewish interpreters shame Vashti as a wicked queen whose punishment by Ahasuerus (and indirectly, by God) was right and just.[29] These traditions narrate that she degraded her Jewish maidservants by forcing them to work nude on Shabbat. Her lack of piety highlights the explicit piety that rabbinic readers see in Esther. By contrast, in 1976, Jewish feminist Mary Gendler proposed that "Vashti be reinstated on the throne along with her sister Esther," seeing the former as a source of "dignity, pride and independence" (Gendler 1976). For Gendler, the Esther as presented by much Jewish tradition is a flawed figure, a woman who chooses luxury over female empowerment. Vashti, by contrast, claims her bodily autonomy, says "no" to the king, and becomes a feminist hero. Rather than a victimizer, she is a fellow victim of Ahasuerus's patriarchal system.[30] Still, other readers, including some who identify as feminist, object that Vashti complies with and benefits from power structures that oppress minorities and women (Suskin 2007; Krisch 2018).

Feminist appropriation of Vashti generates new performance traditions. In the Hebrew Educational Alliance performance, a slideshow projects memes commenting on the story as it is chanted in Hebrew. The memes for Vashti clearly imagine her as a feminist hero (Figures 1–5), paralleling her with the #MeToo movement and women's marches. They suggest that Vashti is no oppressor of other women, but one who "compar[es] notes with the other women in the king's herem" with whom she stands in solidarity (Figure 1). They lampoon Ahasuerus via Mel Brooks' depiction of King Louis XVI in *A History of the World, Part I*, pairing Ahasuerus's disturbing search for a queen with the French monarch's lecherous "It's good to be the king!" catchphrase (Figure 5). Similarly, in a musical duet performed between chapters 1 and 2 of the B'nai Israel reading, Vashti refuses Ahasuerus as she proclaims, "I suddenly am woke!" Ahasuerus, for his part, boasts of his desire for a woman who is merely pretty, obedient, and "not insane."[31] On the audience side, feminist ritual innovators have created a Vashti flag to be waved celebrating her name when it is read in the megillah (Cohen 2002). In one Reform synagogue's Purim I attended in 2020, the audience was instructed to cheer "Right on, Vashti!" whenever her name was read.

Like Zeresh, Vashti may arouse different emotions and characterizations in a diverse audience. One audience member might love her. Another might revile her. Their views will, in part, derive from the performers' choices. All can be faithful to the narrative—they merely apply different scripts and values to it. In one script, she is an enemy of the Jews, no different from the Persian men of the palace in vanity or avarice. In another, Vashti is neither a Jew nor an oppressor of the Jews—but she is oppressed by patriarchy, making her Esther's Gentile ally who chooses a different strategy of empowerment. Like Zeresh, she can be read as a woman who suffers from men's bad decisions. However, it is much easier to make Vashti a Gentile feminist hero than Zeresh. Zeresh's cruelty to Jews is in the biblical text while Vashti's only appears in postbiblical Jewish traditions. In both text and performance, Vashti perfectly exemplifies that these minor characters are initial drafts that readers build on and flesh out.

Figure 1. Hebrew Educational Alliance Purim Performance. Used by permission from Hebrew Educational Alliance.

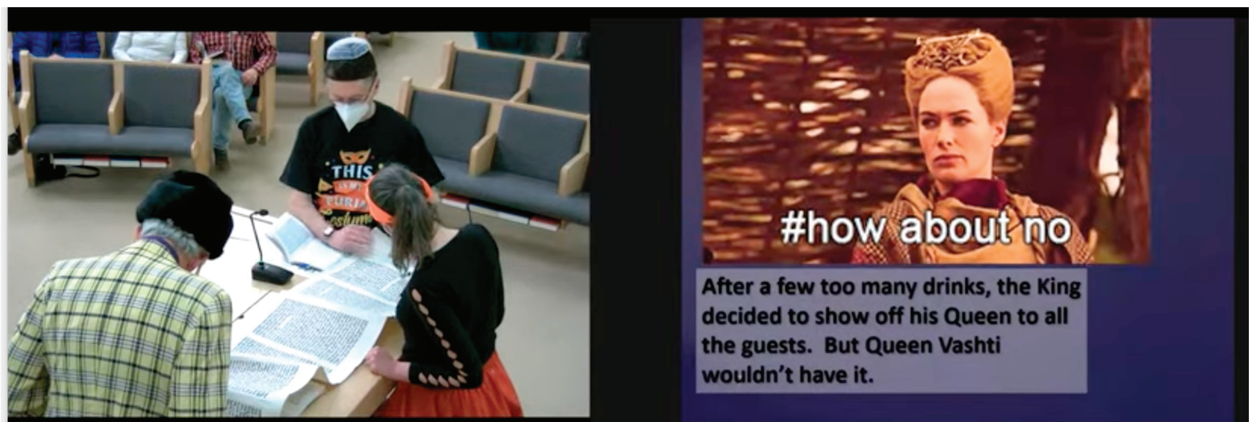

Figure 2. Hebrew Educational Alliance Purim Performance. Used by permission from Hebrew Educational Alliance.

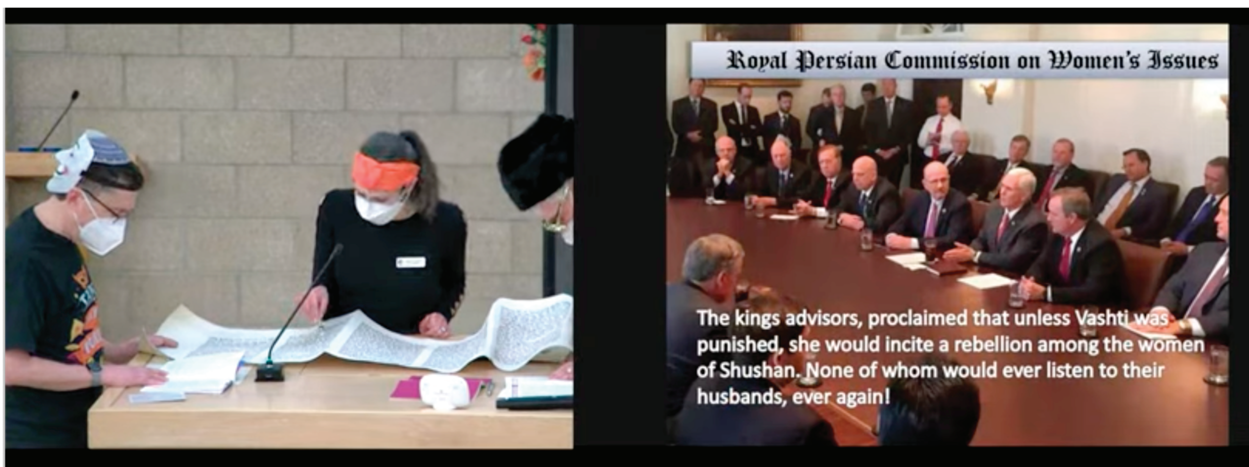

Figure 3. Hebrew Educational Alliance Purim Performance. Used by permission from Hebrew Educational Alliance.

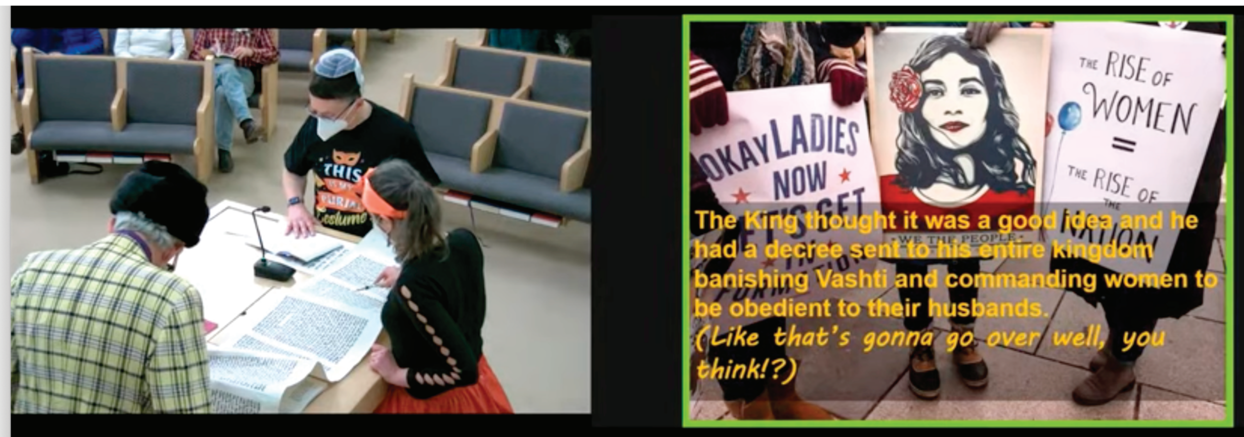

Figure 4. Hebrew Educational Alliance Purim Performance. Used by permission from Hebrew Educational Alliance.

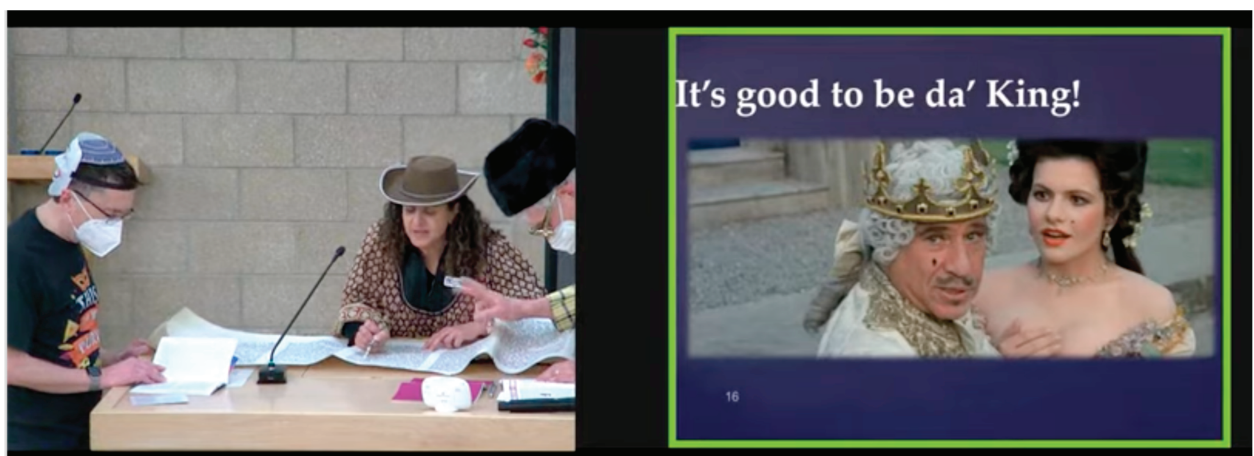

Figure 5. Hebrew Educational Alliance Purim Performance. Used by permission from Hebrew Educational Alliance.

7. Conclusions

As scholar of Jewish liturgy Laura Lieber writes: "A script is merely an artifact until a performer brings it to life… it is performance that gives the narrative life and the characters voices and bodies" (Lieber 2015). Far from the stereotype of the scholar as a solitary reader discerning the truth of written texts, acts of interpretation in performance are dialogical and messy. Traditions around Haman's sons and Vashti suggest that audiences need not agree on how they morally evaluate and psychologically understand biblical characters and the performance practices treating those characters. Zeresh shows how performers invoke irony and ambiguity in the gap between what the text says, what paratexts say, and how both are voiced and embodied. By contrast, Harbona suggests that, at times, morally ambiguous characters are made into simplistic good guys. All of these performance traditions reveal how performance traditions can make minor characters into jumbo shrimp, if not whales. In real performance events, performances and audiences make choices regarding characterization, treating the biblical figures as 'initial drafts'. Changing foci and views on these characters in turn reflect the broader scripts that performers and readers bring to the book itself and to its larger questions. In performance, characters and characterization alike come alive.

As a coda, I suggest that the way I employ performance criticism can relieve a major issue in the subfield: the dearth of evidence for performance traditions in ancient Israel. Biblical scholars, like all ancient historians, try to grasp the long-gone past. We hope to reimagine and reconstruct. Proceeding from the assumption that "oral performance was

the original foundation for written texts of Scripture," performance critics seek to, in the words of Jeanette Mathews, "get behind the written script to analyze the whole performance event and not just the aspects that have been transmitted in written composition" (Mathews 2020).

Yet as a Hebrew Bible scholar dipping his toes into this New Testament-dominated subfield, I rapidly became discouraged: we simply lack the quantity of data for performance cultures in ancient Israel that we have for the cultural matrix of early Christ-followers within Second Temple Judaism and the Greco-Roman world.[32] To know how ancient Israelites translated written tradition to oral performance, we must know about Israelite performance practices, traditions, and spaces. Unfortunately, we know quite little (Miller 2015, 2011). When Giles and Doan (2008) explain that "just as a playwright's script gives clues about the actual performance of the play, so too, clues of oral presentation and performance remain embedded in the Hebrew Bible," we must ask: How do we know we are discerning the right clues? How do we know we are interpreting them correctly? Such persistent and basic methodological issues cannot be ignored. And while I affirm performance as a mode of creative scholarship, it is not historical reconstruction. Jeanette Mathews' staging of Esther as a pantomime, for example, is imaginative, funny, and should be staged in a Purim service (Mathews 2023). But it is a different kind of project. She does "not aim to reproduce a drama as it may have played out in ancient Israel."[33]

I suggest that we turn from re-imagining performance in ancient Israel, or performance 'behind' the text, or 'original' performance, and instead turn to performance as a mode of reception. Indeed, Peter Perry argues that one of the biggest lacks in current performance criticism is "specific descriptions of ancient performances" (Perry 2016, pp. 158–59). Late antique Jewish sources provide a large amount of data for these descriptions, as do contemporary videos. Let us take up the challenge.

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Appendix A

1. Romemu; Renewal; New York, NY; 2022; accessed on 13 March 2023; https://youtu.be/tR_SBuCFhaE
2. Hebrew Educational Alliance; Conservative; Denver, CO; 2022; accessed on 13 March 2023; https://www.youtube.com/live/GPF9YxfAdAY
3. Congregation B'nai Israel; Conservative; Tustin, CA; 2022; accessed on 13 March 2023; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3UAQX_Y9VA
4. B'nai Jeshurun; unaffiliated; New York, NY; 2020; accessed on 13 March 2023; https://www.youtube.com/live/sjdCgC5uDYI
5. Stephen Wise Free Synagogue; Reform; New York, NY; 2022; accessed on 13 March 2023; https://fb.watch/kUFgbl8j8l/
6. Reform Temple of Forest Hills; Reform; Forest Hills, NY; 2022; accessed on 13 March 2023; https://www.youtube.com/live/-sQLdzwGe50

Notes

1. Perry (2016), for example, divides New Testament scholars into those who see earliest Christian communities' oral performances of Gospel traditions as fundamentally dramatic, akin to Roman theatre, and those who see early Christian performance as more staid and formal akin to lectors reading literary texts at elite private gatherings. On different Greco-Roman performance genres and venues as they might apply to Jewish and Christian performances of biblical traditions in the Roman world, see Nässelqvist (2016); Shiell (2004); Shiner (2003); Lieber (2023).
2. Reinhartz (1998); Hens-Piazza (2020). See also the fall 2022 issue of *The Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies* on "Unnamed and Uncredited: Anonymous Figures in the Biblical World."
3. Scholars have applied performance studies to Purim celebrations, but generally, they focus on the meals and festivities rather than the liturgical megillah reading. See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1990); Epstein (1987, 1994, 1995); Shoham (2014); Levine (2020).
4. Jewish communities reacting to COVID-19's lockdowns discussed keenly the ways in which liturgy differed (Ben-Lulu 2021), as seen in the discussion of this issue in the Rabbinical Assembly's 2021 *teshuvah* (an answer to a question of Jewish law) on reading the megillah under COVID precautions (Reisner 2021).
5. On lectors needing to prepare to read a written text, see Shiner (2003, pp. 103–9). This 'reading' is thus also, in part, memorizing (Wollenberg 2017).
6. For a closer look at the significance of sitting and standing during the reading of the megillah and the sefer Torah, see Gray (2020). Some later halakhic codes rule that the reader must stand.
7. On piyyutim, especially for Purim, see, see Lieber (2010, 2018); Grossman (2019). Probably the most well-known *piyyut* for Purim today is *Shoshanat Ya'akov*; see Sacks (2009).
8. On the role of Targums in late antique liturgy, see Flesher and Chilton (2011); Graves (2007); Smelik (2007). On Esther specifically, see Smelik (2013); Flesher and Chilton (2011, pp. 297–302). Both surveys conclude that the texts under consideration are complex and disharmonious enough to suggest differences in how Esther translations were used liturgically across different Jewish communities in late antiquity. However, later medieval consensus favored allowing the vernacular: Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Megillah, 2.3–4. Evidence of medieval vernacular megillah reading can be found in Birnbaum (Birnbaum [1891] 1976, pp. 91–92).
9. On the Greek Esthers, see Boyd-Taylor (2015); Cavalier (2012). Helpful discussions on the theological foci of the Esther Targums can be found in Grossfeld (1991); Ego (2000); Flesher and Chilton (2011, pp. 246–52).
10. B. Meg. 19a; see also Metzger and Metzger (1988). On the iconicity of the scroll, see Homrighausen (forthcoming).
11. On the role of visuals in Purim liturgy, see also Leitner Cohen (2022).
12. On audience response in ancient performance traditions, see Lieber (2023, pp. 147–60); Shiner (2003, pp. 143–52). On drowning out Haman's name, see n. 39 below.
13. Kresh (2014). See also the Romemu service video, especially the readers for chapters 3 and 4.
14. Bechtel (2002). Here I disagree with Day, who suggests they may have been innocent (Day 2005).
15. Hebrew text found in Buber (1886). Translation mine. Tobias ben Eliezer's comment that "the *vav* of Vaizatha is written elongated" alludes to another tradition of word-image interplays in Esther scrolls around the sons of Haman, including illustrated megillot which elaborate a great deal on the hanging (Carruthers 2020).
16. This commandment has been instantiated in a dizzying variety of local customs, which have at times made Purim services raucous and loud (Golinkin 2011; Fishbane 2018; Sperber 1989). Other examples can be found in Kaplan (2023); Goodman (1964).
17. Beer (2018, p. 25); Klein (1979); Jacobs (1961). On Jewish discomfort with the violence of Purim, see especially the controversial Horowitz (2006).
18. See also Judg 5:20–21, 3 Macc 3:8–10 (Fox 2001).
19. Moore (1971); Beal (1999); Macchi (2019, p. 213). The Greek versions supply a reason for her statement: she declares that God is with Mordecai, so Haman will not prevail (6:13).
20. Panim Aherim 72.
21. B. Meg. 16a; EsthRabb 9:2.
22. TgRishon 9:14.
23. See both TgRishon and TgSheni on 5:14 and 6:13, as well as Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer 50:9.
24. On "cursed be Zeresh": *Shulkhan Arukh*, Orah Hayyim, 690:16 (Hammer 2005). On blotting out Zeresh's name, see Golinkin (2011).
25. I draw this language for interpreting minor characters from Gina Hens-Piazza, who employed it in a graduate seminar.
26. "סָרִיס," *DCH* 6:197–8; see also Tadmor (1995).
27. TgRishon 1:10; EsthRabb 3:12, and other sources mentioned in (Merino 2002).
28. Material from this paragraph and the next two is lightly modified from Homrighausen (2023, pp. 147–48).

29 See, e.g., b. Meg. 12b, and other sources mentioned in Shemesh (2002); Bronner (1995, pp. 188–90).

30 Other positive assessments of Vashti among Jews include Hammer (1997); Pollack (2018); Friedman (2018); Cohen (1996). See discussion in Sinensky (2020).

31 See also the Purimspiel described by Freedman (2011, pp. 111–12, 119–22).

32 The literature here is extensive. Perhaps the largest collection of data can be found in Wright (2017). On Gospels/Acts, see Iverson (2021); Keith (2020); Nässelqvist (2016); Shiell (2004); Shiner (2003). On Paul and ancient epistolary conventions of oral delivery, see Oestreich (2016); Doering (2012). On the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Williams et al. (2023); Miller (2019); Brooke (2015). On early rabbinic traditions, see Graves (2007); Hezser (2001).

33 Mathews (2023, p. 37). If we follow Perry's delineation between analytic and heuristic modes of biblical performance criticism, Mathews falls more on the heuristic side: Perry (2019, pp. 10–12).

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The Ritual Bridge between Narrative and Performance in the Gospel of Mark

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Abstract: The abundance of ritual descriptions in the Gospel of Mark suggests a discourse about ritual between the narrator and early audiences of the Gospel. The prominence of the ritual of baptism at the beginning (Mark 1:9–11) and anointing at the end (16:1–8), and the recurrence of themes introduced in Jesus's baptism at turning points in the Gospel (9:2–8; 10:38–39; 15:38–39) suggest broader ritual—and specifically baptismal—significance in the narrative. Recent changes helpfully differentiate narrative- and performance-critical interpretive approaches as text-oriented (narrative) and audience-oriented (performance), but these hermeneutical methods also work in concert. This article combines cognitive studies of narrative immersion with observations about the role of ritual in group identity formation and the impartation of religious traditions to analyze the narration of ritual acts in Mark. Giving attention to the use of internal focalization and description of bodily movements in ritual narrations, this article argues that depictions of rituals in Mark involve the audience in ways that deliver audience-oriented interpretations through text-oriented means. This analysis shows how Mark's ritual narrations are conducive to evoking the audience's experience of baptism, familiar to audience members as described in the undisputed Pauline epistles, the only descriptions of the rite that clearly antedate the composition of Mark. Publicly reading these narrated rituals creates an audience experience that neither requires the performance of the ritual in the context of the reading event nor an "acting out" of the ritual depicted in the narrative to create a participatory, communal experience of the text.

Keywords: Gospel of Mark; Pauline epistles; ritual studies; baptism; narrative criticism of the Bible; immersive narration; cognitive narratology; performance criticism of the Bible

1. Introduction

The Gospel of Mark is shot through ritual descriptions (see McVann 1988, 1991, 1994; LaHurd 1990, 1994; Standaert 1997, 2010a, 2010b; Duran 2008; Bobertz 2016; Wheatley 2023). Throughout, Jesus casts out unclean spirits (Mark 1:21–28; 3:11; 5:1–20; 6:7; 7:24–30; 9:14–29), heals people through anointing and hand-laying practices (1:31, 41; 5:25–34, 41; 6:5; 7:31–35; 8:23, 25; 9:27), undergoes baptism (1:9) and anointing (14:3), and converses with disciples and leaders about ritual purity (2:16; 7:1–23).[1] More than any other canonical gospel, the narrator of Mark provides detailed descriptions of Jesus's motions, practices, and words in narrating how Jesus performs his miraculous acts.[2]

This attention to ritual practices in Mark suggests a discourse about ritual between the narrator and early audiences of the Gospel. The Gospel's narrative structure places ritual in the foreground, beginning the Gospel with the narration of Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:9–11) and drawing it to a close with the story of a group of women coming to Jesus's tomb to perform burial anointing rites (16:1–8). Furthermore, themes from the baptism of Jesus recur at significant turning points in Mark (9:7; 10:38–39; 15:38–39), suggesting a broader thematic significance to baptism in the narrative (Scroggs and Groff 1973; Marcus 2009, pp. 635, 754, 1066–68; Klumbies 2018, p. 50; Wheatley 2023, p. 469). However, the Gospel, according to Mark, is not a manual for guiding the performance of rituals, nor a detailed record of ritual practices, even if some may have used the Gospel towards

these latter ends; it remains primarily a narrative text for conveying "the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God" (1:1).

As a textual narrative, Mark has been the subject of numerous narrative-critical studies, especially in the decades since the publication of Rhoads and Michie's pivotal *Mark as Story* (Rhoads et al. [1982] 2012). The advent of performance criticism has brought additional attention to how oral/aural aspects of the Markan text are well suited to rhetorical effect on audiences in public reading events (Boomershine 1988; Iverson 2014, 2021; Malbon 2002; Shiner 2003; Hartvigsen 2012; Whitenton 2016). However, the boundaries between narrative- and performance-critical readings of the Gospel are blurry.

Holly Hearon distinguishes between these approaches by describing narrative criticism as an approach to the gospels as texts to be read, in contrast to the performance-critical emphasis on "a storyteller who embodies the world of the story, translating it into real time and space" (Hearon 2014, p. 77). This division between treating a text as a book to be read or a script to be performed helps define these disciplinary differences, but this distinction oversimplifies a spectrum of nuanced modes of audience engagement that narrative criticism and performance criticism alike elucidate (see Section 2 below).

Kelly Iverson's (2021, p. 52) characterization of a performance event, in contrast to individualized reading, as a "proximate, corporate, transient, perceptive, and participatory activity" describes aspects of performance that this article uses as a basis for discussing features of the Markan text well-suited for audience engagement. This article begins from the general consensus among Markan scholars that the Gospel's earliest receptions occurred in public reading contexts rather than among individual readers (e.g., Best 1983; Boomershine 1988; Beavis 1989; Marcus 2000, p. 67; France 2002, p. 9; Shiner 2003; Boring 2006, p. 26; Collins 2007, p. 608; Hartvigsen 2012; Whitenton 2016; Keith 2020a). However, this article presses against performance-critical appeals to aspects of ancient performances that are, to use Iverson's words, "transient", such as reader gestures or inflection, inaccessible to historical inquiry. Recent performance critics incorporate evidence from ancient sources to reconstruct ancient reading events (Shiner 2003, pp. 49–52; Hartvigsen 2012; Whitenton 2016), approaching Mark in ways that bridge audience-oriented and text-oriented interpretive strategies, also incorporating insights from cognitive narratology (see, esp. Hartvigsen 2012, pp. 3–4; Whitenton 2016, pp. 15–20). Following Whitenton (2016, pp. 20–31), this article approaches the earliest performances of the Gospel of Mark as likely taking place in early Christian meal gatherings, with a diverse audience of insiders and outsiders to the community present. To Whitenton's hypothetical but historically probable reconstruction, this article adds emphasis on the ritual dimension of these gatherings, addressing a ritual familiar to most in the audience, baptism.

This article analyzes Mark's use of internal focalization and the narration of bodily movements in scenes that resonate with baptismal rites, arguing that depictions of rituals in Mark evoke the audience's familiarity with baptism for rhetorical and ethical effect. Focusing specifically on Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:9–11), the healing of the Gerasene, the hemorrhaging woman, and Jairus's daughter (5:1–43), and healings of sense perception (deafness and speech (7:31–37; 9:14–29), blindness (8:22–26; 10:46–52)), this analysis shows how Mark's ritual narrations are conducive to evoking audience experience of the narrated ritual in reference to baptism. By evoking cognitive frames associated with baptism in the audience, the Markan narrator reinforces the ethical and theological agenda of the Gospel in reference to audiences' and Jesus's baptism.

Many ritual studies of Mark rely on theoretical frameworks to explain ritual relationships with narratives (e.g., McVann 1988, 1991, 1994; see LaHurd 1994) or vague (e.g., Duran 2008) and conjectured ritual contexts (e.g., Standaert 1997; Bobertz 2016). This study approaches an audience-oriented reading of Mark in a text-oriented interpretive strategy rooted in descriptions of the baptismal ritual that antedate Mark's composition. It is impossible to know the degree to which members of ancient audiences of Mark would have been baptized, but the prevalence of baptism as a rite of initiation into Christian groups is attested strongly throughout many early Christian documents (e.g., Gal 3:26–4:7;

1 Cor 1:13–17; 12:13; Rom 6:3–5; Col 2:12; Matt 28:18–20; Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12–13, 36–38; 9:18; 10:47–48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16; 1 Pet 3:12; Did. 7:1–4; 9:5; Herm. Vis. 3.7.3 (15:3)). However, following commonly accepted dates for the composition of Mark (ca. 65–75 CE, prior to Matthew and Luke-Acts), only the undisputed Pauline epistles provide historically prior points of comparison for Markan narration of rituals (see Wheatley 2023, pp. 474–75).[3] Whether or not individual audience members had been baptized, they would plausibly know of the rite, either from seeing or hearing of it in the community. For baptized audience members, this rite fundamentally structured their identity formation as individuals, members of the community, and as the interpreting audience of Mark (Wischmeyer 2011).

This article analyzes how Markan uses of sensorimotor description and internal focalization sound notes that resonate with descriptions of baptism in Mark 1:9–11 and the descriptions of baptism in Paul's undisputed epistles (Gal 3:26–4:7; 1 Cor 1:13–17; 12:13; Rom 6:3–5). Applying Rutger Allan's characterization of immersive narration to these passages in Mark shows how these texts would be conducive to evoking the audience's prior experience of baptism for rhetorical and ethical effect. This interpretive strategy provides an audience-oriented reading of the Gospel, based on text-oriented analysis, supplemented by historical depictions of baptism prior to or internal to the Gospel. This approach advances the thesis that ritual provides a bridge to audience experience without appealing to aspects of the rite or reading event that are inaccessible to historical inquiry, such as a public reader's presumed inflections or gestures or the conjectured practice of the ritual in the immediate chronological context of the reading event (contra Standaert 1997, 2010a, 2010b).

2. Narrative, Performance, and the Role of Ritual

Before undertaking this study of narrated rituals in Mark, it will be helpful to add nuance to Hearon's distinction between narrative and performance criticisms that have developed since her study and to outline how studies of ritual fit with these forms of criticism. The recent presentation of New Testament literary criticism by Michal Beth Dinkler (2020) and Kelly Iverson's (2021) study of performance, audience experience, and the gospels provide helpful overviews of current scholarship on these distinct approaches to New Testament texts. Furthermore, sociocultural (W. A. Johnson 2000, 2010) and cognitive studies of ancient reading (Nässelqvist 2016) and its interrelation with ritual practices in Assmann (2006) and Uro (2016) show the promise of analyzing the role of rituals in communities in which the Gospel of Mark would have been publicly read.

Dinkler (2020, pp. 23–27) uses Meyer Abrams' (1953) basic taxonomy of literary approaches to simplify the complex web of literary methodologies applied in New Testament studies, oriented around "four poles of interpretive prioritization: An *author* composes a *text* for a *reader* about the *universe*" (Dinkler 2020, p. 23, emphasis original). Leaving aside considerations of author and universe, Dinkler categorizes narrative critical studies of the New Testament as "work-oriented, objective approaches" that "deal with the literary text as an object of study in its own right" (Dinkler 2020, p. 25). Narrative approaches, according to Dinkler (2020, p. 28), focus "mainly on the world of the story" and presuppose literary unity to the text. These differ from reader-focused interpretive strategies such as Abrams' "pragmatic, audience-oriented approaches [that] take as their main focus the literary text's effects upon its audience(s)" (Dinkler 2020, p. 25; see Abrams 1953, p. 26). These approaches "place greater emphasis on the audience's constitutive role in meaning-making as a social construction" (Dinkler 2020, p. 29). Taking these two foci of text- and audience-oriented approaches as a guide, narrative criticism focuses on a literary work as text to be read, based on how the words and stories work together to convey a complete story to the reader(s). Audience-oriented criticism provides greater emphasis on the impact the text has on the reader(s), but these two approaches can also work in concert.

In relation to literary criticism, performance criticism employs an audience-oriented interpretive strategy. Kelly Iverson uses the definition of performance by Richard Schechner, who says, "performance is an activity done by an individual or group in the presence of and

for another individual or group" (Schechner 2003, p. 22 n. 10; Iverson 2021, p. 8). Iverson (2021, p. 8) adapts this to emphasize the communal aspect and the presence of an audience, saying, "performance is a communal affair that typically involves more than one audience member". He characterizes performance as "a proximate, corporate, transient, perceptive, and participatory activity that, in many respects, is discernable from the modern reading experience" (Iverson 2021, p. 52). Performance criticism focuses on the presence of an audience in a reading or re-enactment of a text and often places additional emphasis on the reader or performer(s) of a text as agents who interpret the text through their vocalization and bodily expressions in the reading or performance event.

One challenge with performance criticism of early Christian texts is that the ancient performances it attempts to analyze are, as Iverson (2021, p. 52) describes them, "transient", that is, not directly accessible to modern interpreters since they occurred in times and spaces no longer present, with audiences who left little record of these events. Iverson (2021, p. 107) uses depictions of nonverbal visual behaviors in the gospels and Acts such as facial expression, eye movement, gestures, and posture, as well as movement in space and bodily and facial appearances, to indicate the value of nonverbal communication in the New Testament era (Iverson 2021, pp. 113–14). While this and other ancient evidence indicate a range of possible bodily and vocal expressions contemporary to the composition of the gospels, it is not necessary that attentive public readers of these texts would "attempt to reproduce the nonverbal cues described in the narrative" (Iverson 2021, p. 115). Iverson and Larry Hurtado debate over the degree to which people reading engaged in affective interpretation of texts for their audiences (see Hurtado 2014; Iverson 2016, and the rejoinder in Hurtado 2016). Iverson (2016, pp. 192–98) ultimately offers a modest set of bodily movements (e.g., sitting, standing, hand extension) comprising the majority of ancient depictions of reading events, even if he suggests further overlap between theatrical and oratorial performances.

The precise vocal and nonverbal elements of each transient public reading event of the gospels in early Christianity remain beyond the scope of critical inquiry, but sociocultural studies of ancient reading practices, coupled with cognitive studies of narratology and ritual, provide means for understanding how audiences encountered narrative texts in antiquity. W. A. Johnson's (2000, 2010) sociocultural studies of elite cultures of reading in Roman antiquity show that ancient reading was a communal experience quite different from modern, solitary, silent reading practices, involving "the negotiated construction of meaning within a particular sociocultural context" (W. A. Johnson 2010, p. 12; see also Iverson 2016, pp. 192–98). Johnson's work has spurred studies of early Christian and Jewish reading by Chris Keith (2015, 2020a, 2020b) and others (L. A. Johnson 2023; Krauß et al. 2020; Nässelqvist 2016; Pokorný 2013) that have shown that early Christian groups publicly read the gospels, epistles, and other scripture as a central part of their group identity-formation, in ways that included increasingly ritualized bodily actions.

Within the sociocultural contexts of early Christianity, ritual practices were central to the identity formation of groups who publicly read the gospels. The earliest extant evidence of reading practices within groups of Jesus's followers, the Pauline epistles, commend the public reading of the epistles themselves (Col 4:16) and also describe already-established ritual practices that are central to the identity formation of the readers (baptism: Rom 6:3–5; Gal 3:27; eucharist: 1 Cor 11:20–26, 33; preaching: Gal 1:7–9; 1 Cor 15:1–11; recounting traditions about Jesus: Rom 14:14; 1 Cor 7:10–11). William Johnson sees cultural forces such as "inherited traditions" shaping "the rules of engagement" with texts for a reading community and how "the reader's conception of 'who s/he is,' that is, to what reading community s/he thinks to belong, is an important, and determinative, part of the reading event" (W. A. Johnson 2000, p. 603). Jan Assmann sees rituals as essential to the oral transmission of texts prior to writing: "Festival and ritual are the typical forms in which societies without writing institutionalize the expanded context of cultural texts. Ritual ensures the retrieval of communication, the communicative presence of the text" (Assmann 2006, pp. 105–6). Assmann defines these "cultural texts" as texts with a "binding nature"

uniting author to reader, functioning as "*formative* texts" that "formulate the self-image of the group and the knowledge that secures their identity" (Assmann 2006, p. 104, emphasis original). These "cultural texts... define the identity and cohesiveness of society. They structure the world of meaning within which communication takes place" (Assmann 2006, p. 104). In the early stages of the shift from oral to written texts, ritual continues to bind the community to the text: "Despite the growing quantity of written matter, early written cultures are decisively based on such ritual coherence" (Assmann 2006, p. 124). Sandra Huebenthal highlights the significance of table-fellowship rituals of early Christianity for framing audience identity formation and the Markan form of collective memory of Jesus (Huebenthal [2014] 2020, pp. 82, 453–66, 509). Borrowing insights from cognitive studies of ritual, Risto Uro has shown that "rituals convey religious knowledge" and "facilitate the *transmission* of religious traditions" (Uro 2016, pp. 67–68, emphasis original). This ritual form of communication is concerned with "the body and its interaction with the environment", that can be analyzed through cognitive studies of "embodied and extended cognition" (Uro 2016, pp. 67–68).

This approach to ritual as an embodied mode of communication, subject to cognitive analysis, suggests its value to performance-critical interpretations of Mark, as well as the salience of other cognitive studies of how audiences experience narrative texts. Especially when analyzing a text as filled with descriptions of rituals as the Gospel of Mark is, querying how Mark's narration of ritual practices engages audience experiences of the narrated events enables rooting an audience-oriented reading of the Gospel in concrete practices contemporary with its composition. This "ritual bridge" transcends distinctions between narrative and performance criticisms of Mark.

3. Immersive Narration and Ritual Description

Scholars of ancient narrative, incorporating cognitive studies of how readers encounter textual narratives, highlight experiential aspects of the narrative that "can lead to a collapse of the distance between the story world and the reader's own world in terms of both time and space" (Grethlein et al. 2020, p. 4). One aspect of experiential narration significantly attested in cognitive studies is narrative immersion. Immersion involves a "feeling of being drawn into the represented world, and of witnessing what goes on there [. . .] [to] stimulate [the recipient] to experience that world almost as if it were a slice of real life" (Grethlein et al. 2020, p. 4). This account of immersive narrative arises from cognitive studies involving three realms of immersive experience: spatial, temporal, and emotional immersion (Ryan 2015, pp. 85–114; summarized in Allan 2022, p. 274). People in the fields of classical and early Christian narratology have recently analyzed these phenomena in ancient Greco-Roman and early Christian texts, including Homer and Thucydides (Allan 2020), Lysias (Allan 2022), Apuleius (Tagliabue 2021), late Imperial period Greco-Roman works (Webb 2009), and *The Shepherd of Hermas* (Tagliabue 2019). Cognitive narratological analysis of immersive narration offers a promising path forward for analyzing how audiences would experience a publicly narrated ritual such as Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:9–11).

Rutger Allan (2022, pp. 276–78) proposes six literary features that contribute to the experience of immersion in a narrative world (see also Allan 2020, pp. 18–19; Tagliabue 2021):

1. Spatial detail;
2. Sensorimotor details that evoke "experientially rich" cultural frames or personal memories and embodied mental images of the scene;
3. Slow narrative pace without deviation or compression of chronological order;
4. Shift to internal perspective or direct speech inviting vicarious experience of the scene;
5. Arousing emotional involvement or identification with character or plot;
6. Focusing attention on the scene without drawing attention to scene-external elements of narration, text, or the outside world.

These elements can interrelate, leading to greater immersive quality, or they can be interspersed with literary devices that create distance, leading to a mixed character in a

narrative. Ryan (2015, pp. 68–69) outlines four degrees of immersion (see also Allan 2022, p. 278):

1. "Concentration": readers remain subject to external distraction;
2. "Imaginative involvement": readers retain faculties to transport into or remove themselves from the story world;
3. "Entrancement": readers are so absorbed in the narrative world that external stimuli lose effect;
4. "Addiction": encompassing "the loss of capacity to distinguish textual worlds (. . .) from the actual world.

Ascertaining the degree to which an ancient audience would experience immersion in a narrative is historically impossible, and different audience members would be more subject than others to immersive elements in a text. One can still surmise that a text with more immersive features and a relative absence of distancing elements will be more conducive to audience immersion. Moreover, audiences whose cultural frames, personal memories, and emotional involvement with the narrative overlap significantly with the story world of the narrative will be more open to experiencing immersion in the text.

The degree of similarity between Allan's description of immersive narration and ritual practices themselves makes narrated rituals in Mark fitting places to undertake an audience-oriented interpretation of the Gospel rooted in the historical probability of their familiarity with the baptismal rite and the textual presentation of baptism in Mark 1:9–11. Ritual practices involve space (e.g., baptism: font, river; eucharist: room, table/altar), sensorimotor experience (experiences of touch, taste, smell, sound, movement), progress through time (before/after the ritual), and personal experience. Furthermore, rituals evoke emotions in participants in varying degrees (see Whitehouse 2004, pp. 63–85), inviting participants' focus on the performance of the rites. Overall, examining the narration of rituals in Mark provides a way to undertake text-oriented analysis of the Markan narrative sensitive to its reception and an audience-oriented reading of Mark that privileges narrative features of the text over conjectured aspects of performance. The remainder of this article presents this audience-oriented analysis of baptism-like elements in Mark.

4. Immersed in the Text: The Baptism of Jesus in Mark 1:9–11

The Markan narrator presents the opening of the Gospel as a new beginning, enacted in baptism, foretold in the scriptures. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, Mark 1:1) unfolds "as it is written" (1:2), concerning "John baptizing in the wilderness" and "proclaiming a baptism" (κηρύσσων βάπτισμα, 1:3).[4] The baptism John proclaims is not about the ritual itself but the person and rite it anticipates. John speaks of "one coming after me who is stronger" (1:7), "who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (αὐτὸς δὲ βαπτίσει ὑμᾶς ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ, 1:8). The narration depicts more than a ritual; it conveys an anticipation of divine action. This anticipation goes beyond the scene, extending to the audience through immersion in the narrative.

Beginning in Mark 1:9, the narrator uses features Allan (2020, 2022) and Tagliabue (2021) identify as conducive to the reader's immersion. The narration of Jesus's baptism in Mark 1:9–11 includes several spatial details (Nazareth, Galiliee, Jordan river, "rising from the waters", the heavens) that "evoke a 'sense of place'" (Allan 2022, p. 276), whether the geographical places or a ritual space used for baptism. The narration of Jesus's arrival "in those days" (ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις, 1:9) conveys an "iconic temporal organization" (Allan 2022, p. 277), using Septuagintal language that conveys an apocalyptic, biblical significance to Jesus's arrival (Palu 2012, pp. 147–50; see also Maloney 1981, p. 86; Marcus 2000, p. 163). The narration of Jesus's arrival also introduces a series of temporal markers (καὶ εὐθὺς, 1:10a, 12a) with an absence of "deviations from chronological order" (Allan 2022, p. 277). Within the narration of time in Mark 1:9–11, the words καὶ εὐθὺς ("and immediately", 1:10) introduce immediacy into the timeframe of the story that makes clear the chronological narration "approximates narrated time" (Allan 2020, p. 18).

This immediacy also marks a transition in perspective, including direct speech that invites the audience's vicarious experience of the scene. The focalization shifts from the external narrator, "Jesus came (. . .) and was baptized" (1:9), to Jesus's perspective ("he saw", 1:10b; Marcus 2000, pp. 164–65) within the immediacy of "*proximal* ('here' and 'now') deixis" (Allan 2020, p. 19, emphasis original; so too, Marcus 2000, p. 159). For a moment, the narrator seems to disappear, giving way to a form of narration that places the audience in Jesus's experience of the events: "a voice occurred from heaven" (φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, 1:11a). This internal perspective is conducive for "the recipient to vicariously experience ('view') the situation from a spatio-temporal or cognitive-emotional viewpoint located in the scene" (Allan 2022, p. 277). The audience sees what Jesus sees ("he saw", 1:10b), and they hear what Jesus hears (Marcus 2000, pp. 164–65; Hartvigsen 2012, p. 123).

The audience hears an affirmation of divine sonship with Jesus, "you are my son, the beloved, which whom I am well pleased" (σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα, Mark 1:11b). This recalls baptismal rites that predate the composition of Mark (cf. Gal 3:26; 4:5–6; Rom 8:15). This recall can "activate experientially rich cognitive (culturally based) schemas/frames or personal memories" (Allan 2022, p. 276), namely the experience of the baptismal rite in which audience members may have participated (Marcus 2000, pp. 164–65). In Paul's description of baptism in Gal 3:26–27, those who are baptized become "sons" (υἱοί, see Johnson Hodge 2007, pp. 69–70) by virtue of being "baptized into Christ" (εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Gal 3:27) and "through faith in the Anointed One, Jesus" (διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, Gal 3:26). Paul describes this transformation into sons in reference to the reception of the Spirit, who produces a cry of "Abba, Father" in recipients (Gal 4:6). Elsewhere, Paul ascribes the Abba cry to the Spirit, who "co-testifies with our spirit that we are children of God" (αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν ὅτι ἐσμὲν τέκνα θεοῦ, Rom 8:16). As a ritual Paul presents as being so intimately bound with the identity formation (Gal 3:26–29) and ethics (Rom 6:1–4) of his audiences, baptism has significant potential as "personal memories" and a "cognitive (. . .) schema" (Allan 2022, p. 277) to activate emotional and sensory immersion in audiences.

With respect to sensory immersion, the Markan narrator's focus on concrete objects and sensory details, such as Jesus "rising from the water" (ἀναβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος), seeing the heavens "torn" (σχιζομένους), and the Spirit descending "as a dove" (ὡς περιστερὰν, 1:10) aids immersive reading. These "sensorimotor details", whether concrete or metaphorical, associated with the "experientially rich cognitive (culturally based) schemas" of baptism and beliefs about Jesus, are conducive to an immersive experience, especially when coupled with description of sights, sounds, and actions (Allan 2022, p. 276). The narrative proceeds in a style that "directs the recipient's attentional focus firmly to the represented scene", absent of emphasis on "'offstage' elements such as the narrator, the text itself as a medium, and the extradiegetic discourse world" (Allan 2022, p. 277). The overall effect has a high likelihood to "give rise to an affective response (. . .) arousing feelings of identification and empathy" with Jesus (Allan 2022, p. 276).

The Markan narrative elsewhere indicates a preoccupation with the characters' identification with Jesus and his death and resurrection, metaphorically characterized as a baptism: "Are you able (. . .) to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? (. . .) The baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized" (δύνασθε (. . .) τὸ βάπτισμα ὃ ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι βαπτισθῆναι; (. . .) τὸ βάπτισμα ὃ ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι βαπτισθήσεσθε, Mark 10:38–39; so too, Wischmeyer 2011, p. 749). Jesus also characterizes discipleship in reference to death: "take up one's cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Furthermore, at Jesus's death, the narrator recalls some immersive elements from the baptism of Jesus: "torn" (σχίζω, Mark 15:38), "son of God" (υἱὸς θεοῦ), and reference to the Spirit (ἐκπνέω, 15:39; see Motyer 1987; Ulansey 1991). Overall, emphasis on baptism as identification with Jesus, through participation in his death in discipleship, reinforces an immersive reading of Mark 1:9–11 throughout the remaining narrative, focused toward engendering an interpretation of baptism similar to Paul's in Rom 6:3–5, as well as Gal 2:19–20, 3:26–4:7; Rom 8:11–17 (Wheatley 2023, pp. 474–75; so also, Scroggs and Groff 1973).

Although one might surmise that a public reading of Mark may be more conducive to an immersive experience of the text than silent reading, the immersive reading proposed above does not require any further "performative" aspects of vocalization, gestures, or re-enactment to assess its potential to affect an audience. Neither does it postulate the performance of the baptismal rite in the context of the reading event. Admittedly, audience members who had previously experienced a baptismal rite, whether through participation or observation, would be more primed to activate the cultural frames and memories evoked in Mark's references to baptism than those unfamiliar with baptism. However, the similarity of Mark 1:9–11 and Mark's other references to baptism with the rite Paul assumes his audiences in Galatia, Corinth (1 Cor 12:13), and those in Rome he has yet to meet suggests that Mark either knows Paul's rite, or that Paul refers to a rite known widely enough to extend beyond his immediate influence. The narrator and earliest audiences of Mark might know this rite from non-Pauline sources, but the Pauline evidence provides a *terminus ante quem* for a baptismal rite associated with the gift of the Spirit, divine sonship, and identification with Christ (including his death) prior to the composition of Mark.

In this way, the baptismal ritual provides an aid to audience immersion in the Markan narrative that can be postulated with attention to the Markan narrative and the sociocultural background of the ritual practices of early Jesus followers. This ritual bridge between text-oriented narrative readings and audience-oriented performance readings of Mark offers a set of circumstances in which audience engagement can be analyzed without the introduction of conjectured elements of live performance, other than the public reading of the text, based on narrative elements internal to the text. In the next two sections, further evidence of baptism-related narratives in Mark is analyzed with attention to their immersive features, their relation to baptism, and their possible effect on audiences.

5. Healing, Perception, and Ritual in Mark 5

Although the Gospel of Mark also has no explicit description of exorcism or hand-laying practices accompanying baptism, the narrator depicts Jesus's touch and exorcisms in contexts that resemble Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:9–11) and early Christian baptismal rites (e.g. Ambrose, *Sacr.* 1.5.18; Tertullian, *Bapt.* 5.4; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procat.* 14; *Trad. ap.* 41). Although the narrator does not explicitly name these healings as rituals, the three stories in Mark 5—healing the man with the legion (Mark 5:1–20), the hemorrhaging woman (5:25–34), and Jairus's daughter (5:21–24, 35–43)—abound with ritualized elements that are conducive to audience immersion in the experience of characters' healing, in ways evocative of the baptismal rite (see Jensen 2021). As in the sense-perception healings considered below, each narrative in Mark 5 describes spatial details and movements that evoke ritual practices in reference to the healings Jesus accomplishes, concentrating sight perception (ὁράω, 5:6, 14, 16, 22, 32; θεωρέω, 5:15, 38), salvation (σώζω, 5:23, 28, 34), and touch (ἅπτω, 5:27, 28, 30, 31; χείρ, 5:23, 41) (see Marcus 2000, pp. 364–65). Additionally, the repetition of language of faith (πίστις, 5:34; πιστεύω, 5:36) and references to people as son (υἱός, 5:7) or daughter (θυγάτριον, 5:23; θυγατήρ, 5:34, 35) resonate with baptismal themes elsewhere (cf. πίστις, υἱός, Gal 3:26; βαπτίζω, 3:27). Additional concern with uncleanliness (ἀκάθαρτος, 5:2, 8, 13; χοῖρος, 5:11, 12, 13, 16; cf. 5:25, 35), associated in Mark 7:1–5 with ritual washings (κοινός, 7:2, 5; ἄνιπτος, 7:2; νίπτω, 7:3; βαπτίζω, βαπτιζμός, 7:4) underscores possible baptismal figuration in Mark 5 (so too, Standaert 2010b, p. 398; see also 1 Cor 6:11). Setting these scenes after a set of sea crossings demonstrating Jesus's power over the waters and death (4:35–41; 5:21; cf. 6:45–52, see Malbon 1984, p. 377) strengthens a baptismal theme.

This resonance recapitulates numerous elements of the baptismal rite in ways that could evoke baptism in varying degrees for the audience. Like baptism, these healings share a *telos* of transformation related to baptism-associated elements, water, touch, and faith, that bring about changes in body, spirit, and perception, illustrating expected effects of the baptismal rite (see also McVann 1991; cf. Mark 2:1–12, with a similar set of baptismal resonances, absent water). Furthermore, in Mark 5, Jesus does what early Christians

understood baptism to do: he breaks the power of evil (cf. Gal 4:3; Rom 6:6), defeats the forces of death (Mark 5:13, 39, 42; cf. Rom 6:6), clothes restored people in new garments (Mark 5:15; cf. Gal 3:27; 1 Cor 15:53–54; Rom 13:14; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), provides an internally healing and illuminating touch (5:28–30, 41; cf. Eph 1:18; Heb 6:4), creates new sons and daughters (Mark 5:23, 34, 35; cf. Gal 3:26; Rom 8:15–16), and brings resurrection (Mark 5:41–42; Rom 6:5; 8:17).

The narrator uses spatial detail, sensorimotor details, a slow pace, and an absence of scene-external elements in Mark 5 to create an immersive experience for the audience. The spatial details described in Mark 5 include Jesus's movements relative to the sea (Mark 5:1, 21) and the boat ("out of the boat", ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου, 5:2a; "in the boat", 5:18, 21), the location of the Gerasene "out of the tombs" (ἐκ τῶν μνημείων, 5:2b) and "among the tombs" (ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν, 5:3a, 5a), the topography of the Gerasene region ("hillside" 5:11, "steep bank" 5:13), and the location in Jairus's house (5:38, 40). The rich sensorimotor details in these scenes include characters falling at Jesus's feet (5:6, 22, 33), the rushing of swine into the sea (5:13), the healed Gerasene sitting (5:15), concerns with hand-laying (5:23, 27–31) and grasping with the hand (5:41), and descriptions of internal sensations of the hemorrhaging woman and Jesus (5:29–30). Each story proceeds with a slow pace that introduces details as they are relevant to the story, with a bare minimum of departures from chronological order or scene-external narration. The Gerasene and hemorrhaging woman stories insert background detail at the beginning (5:4–6, 25–26), preventing a departure from chronological narration once inciting action begins. The only departure from chronological order takes place in the inversion of the events of Mark 5:7–8, in which the response of the demoniac, "What do I have to do with you, Jesus Son of God Most High" (translation following Marcus 2000, pp. 187, 343; cf. 1:24), precedes the exorcism formula that occasioned it, "Come out, unclean spirit, from the person" (5:8b).

The inversion of chronology in Mark 5:7–8, along with the emphasis on the sea and touch, is compatible with a baptismal reading of these stories (so too, Bobertz 2016, p. 53). Beginning with Mark 5:7–8, the re-ordering of chronology places the dialogue and movements of the characters in greater continuity with the ordering of events of Jesus's baptism. Jesus exits the water (5:2a; cf. 1:10a), encounters a spirit (5:2b; cf. 1:10c), who tears things open (5:4b; cf. 1:10b), descends (5:6; cf. 1:10d), and attests to Jesus as God's son (5:7; cf. 1:11; Gal 4:6; 8:15–16). Jesus's passages through the sea (5:1, 21 cf. 4:35), over which he has just exerted dominion (4:39, 41), and in which he sends evil forces of death to drown (5:13) evokes the Exodus sea crossing (Marcus 2000, pp. 348–49), using language Paul employs to liken the Israelites' sea-crossing to baptism (διέρχομαι, θάλασσα, 1 Cor 10:1–2, cf. 4:35, 41; 5:1, 13, 21). Similarly, as in the healing stories considered above, the emphasis on touch also correlates to early baptismal rites associated with the gift of the Spirit (Acts 8:17; 19:5–6). Although none of the passages from Mark 5 are explicit depictions of baptism, their language and immersive narration together have the potential to strengthen the evocation of the audience's memories of the "experientially rich cognitive (culturally based) schema" of baptism begun in Mark 1:9–11 (Allan 2022, p. 276).

The narration of Mark 5 conveys further immersive effects, using language that is conducive to an affective response. Each episode begins with the narration of background details that heighten the emotional impact of the following story. The narrative of the demoniac begins and ends with details that fit Allan's criterion of "steering the recipient's emotional evaluation of the characters and their behavior (such as admiration, sympathy, pity or contempt)" (Allan 2022, p. 277). In Mark 5:3–5, the description of the demoniac "who had his dwelling in the tombs" (5:3a), unable to be restrained by chains (5:3b), breaking any chains or shackles used to bind him (5:4) communicates a sense of desperation to demoniac's "terrible plight" (Marcus 2000, p. 350). The demoniac's continual "crying and cutting himself with stones" (5:5) adds emotional resonance that steers the audience towards pity, or perhaps fear or disgust, towards the man's situation (Bolt 2003, p. 143). The use of language for urgent request (παρακαλέω) that repeats in the Gerasene (5:10, 12, 17, 18) and Jairus (5:23) stories, coupled with the Gerasene's enthusiastic proclamation

of Jesus's healing power (5:19–20) further contributes emotional weight to the narrative. Jairus's repeated request (παρακαλεῖ αὐτὸν πολλά, 5:23a), coupled with the description of his "little daughter" (θυγάτριον, 5:23) who "has it terminally" (so Marcus 2000, p. 356) intensifies the emotional impact of the story, further heightened by the suspense-inducing delay brought by the intercalated narrative of the hemorrhaging woman (Marcus 2000, p. 365). The introduction of the hemorrhaging woman as "suffering many things from many physicians, spending all she had, and benefitting in no way, but rather growing worse" (5:26) evokes sympathy that interrelates with Jairus's daughter's desperate situation (Marshall 1989, pp. 104, 133; Marcus 2000, pp. 366–67). The woman's "fear and trembling" (5:33) in response to her healing and Jesus's questions adds emotional detail that can enhance the audience's affective response. The conclusion of the healing of Jairus's daughter is filled with emotion, with its interruptive news of her death (5:35), the description of the "tumult, crying, and much wailing" Jesus saw at the house (5:38b), contrasted with their "laughing" (5:40a) and being "overcome with amazement" (5:42b). These emotional descriptions create an "artful and pathetic" scene (Marcus 2000, p. 370) that likely evoked "reverent awe and grateful homage" in audiences, following characters' responses (Marcus 2000, p. 373; so too, Hartvigsen 2012, p. 236).

The narration of the characters' perspective is particularly poignant in Mark 5, providing a powerful prompt for audience immersion in ways that correlate to the narration of Jesus's baptism. As in the narrations of healed perception considered below, the narrator uses a high concentration of direct speech and dialogue throughout (e.g., Mark 5:5–13, 23, 30–34, 35–41), that gives immediacy to the proceedings. However, shifts to various internal perspectives throughout these narratives create the strongest immersive effect (see Allan 2022, p. 277). Beginning with the Gerasene, the narrator shifts from the background narration of 5:2–5 to describing the scene from the demoniac's perception, "Seeing (ἰδών) Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down to worship him" (5:6). The narrator unfurls the rest of the interaction between Jesus and the demoniac from the perspective of what the demons heard (5:8–9) and saw (5:11–12), immersing the audience in a spirit-influenced perception of Jesus's identity (5:7) and power (5:12–13; cf. 1:24–25; 3:11), much like an inversion of Jesus's baptism (1:10–11). After the exorcism, the narrator shifts the perspective to the townspeople, who "came to see (ἰδεῖν) what is was that happened" (5:14b) and "saw (θεωροῦσιν) the demoniac seated, clothed and in his right mind" (5:15a). This experience transforms them from bystanders into "those who saw how this happened (οἱ ἰδόντες πῶς ἐγένετο) to the demoniac" (5:16), much like the centurion at the crucifixion who "seeing (. . .) how Jesus expired" (ἰδών (. . .) οὕτως ἐξέπνευσεν, 15:39). Similarly to the demoniac, Jairus, "seeing (ἰδών) (Jesus), fell to his feet" (5:22b). The narrator focalizes sight through these characters, modeling transformational perception of Jesus that produces change in the Gerasene and Jairus and resistance in the demons and the townspeople (Marcus 2000, pp. 352–53). So too, at Jairus's house, the narrator shifts perspective to Jesus's hearing ("overhearing what they said" 5:36) and vision ("he saw a tumult" 5:38), focalizing the scene through his supernatural perception. Just as the description of Jesus's vision of the opened heavens and descending Spirit follows his baptism, focalizing the disclosure of his identity as God's "beloved son" (1:10–11), the narrator characterizes the encounters with Jesus of faithful people and unclean spirits alike with perceptive vision, conveyed to the audience in immersive ways that are conducive to their vicarious experience. Characters' perception produces faith (5:34, 36) that brings salvation (Marcus 2000, pp. 360–61; Black 2023, pp. 238–39).

The narrator's shifts in perspective become most immersive in the story of the hemorrhaging woman's encounter with Jesus in Mark 5:25–34, where the woman's touch creates a union between Jesus's and her perception, characteristic of the immersive experience of Jesus's baptism the narrator provides in Mark 1:10–11. After the narrator's background narration, the focalization of the scene shifts to the woman's hearing ("having heard (ἀκούσασα) about Jesus", 5:27). The narration of the entire scene proceeds with a series of circumstantial participles, leading up to the first indicative verb, describing when she

"touched (ἥψατο) his garment" (5:27) (Marcus 2000, p. 366). The description of her inner supposition that follows depicts this act of touching as an exercise of faith, "For she said, 'If I but touch his garments, I will be saved'" (5:28; cf. "Your faith (πίστις) has saved you", 5:34) (Marcus 2000, p. 368). The narrator portrays the result of this faithful touch as an instantaneous (εὐθύς, 5:29a, 30a), simultaneous, internalized perception in the woman's body (ἔγνω τῷ σώματι, 5:29b) and in Jesus ("knowing in himself (ἐπιγνοὺς ἐν ἑαυτῷ) that power had gone out from him", 5:30b). Jesus's circumspect gaze (περιβλέπω, 5:32) gives way to the woman's inner self-perception, "knowing (εἰδυῖα) what had happened to her" (5:33b). The narrator offers the audience an immersive viewpoint of the woman's perception of her healing and Jesus's sensation of power flowing out of him in a reversal of roles: her suffering has become his experience (see Moss 2010, pp. 514–18). By virtue of immersive narration, her healing also becomes the audience's experience (Hartvigsen 2012, pp. 239–43). Her physical contact with Jesus brings about a narrative identification between the two that brings about his experience of her flux and her experience of salvation. As in Jesus's baptism (1:9–11) and Paul's baptismal rite (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15), the woman becomes a daughter (θυγάτηρ, 5:34; cf. υἱός, 1:11; Gal 3:26; 4:6–7; Rom 8:14) by contact with Jesus through faith (πίστις, 5:34; cf. Gal 3:5, 25–26) (see Marcus 2000, p. 369). As a result, she experiences a form of perception that the narrator elsewhere equates with the influence of spiritual forces (πνεῦμα, 1:10; 1:24–25; 3:11; 5:6–7; cf. ἐκπνέω, 15:39). Paul predicates similar knowledge of self and of God to the gift of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:9–16; Gal 4:9), given in baptism (Gal 4:6; 1 Cor 12:13).

Together, the correlation of these elements conducive to audience immersion in the narrative with settings (water), bodily movements (touch), language (son, daughter), and perspectives (hearing, sight) that are common to the baptismal rites contemporary to the audience suggests that the narrator uses the audience's experience of baptism as a cultural schema that can bind them to the world of the text. This ritual, immersive bridge can aid in persuading the audience towards adoption of the ethics and ideas (see Allan 2022, p. 275) conveyed in the Gospel, such as faith, identification with Jesus's mission, and following his "way" of suffering and death (see Section 6 below). This immersive identification with Jesus and the characters he heals also reinforces interpretations of who Jesus is and what the baptismal ritual accomplishes by connecting memorable narratives to the perceived effects of baptism: it drowns evil and sin (5:13; cf. Rom 6:3, 6, 11), clothes in new garments of wholeness and life (Mark 5:15; cf. Gal 3:27), brings internal wisdom and healing from uncleanness (Mark 5:15, 29; Rom 6:4, 19; 12:3), restores perception (Mark 5:29–30, 33; cf. 4:11–12; 1 Cor 2:9–16; Gal 4:9), and provides hope of rising from the dead (Mark 5:41–42; cf. Rom 6:5, 8).

6. Ritual, Immersion, and Healing Audience Perception in Mark

Markan depictions of Jesus's healing of sight (Mark 8:22–26; 10:46–52) and hearing (7:31–37; 9:14–29) also include details that evoke ritual acts in ways that are conducive to audience immersion. As in the emphasis on what Jesus sees and hears in his baptism (1:10–11) and the perspective of those Jesus heals in Mark 5, the Gospel of Mark portrays visual and auditory perception throughout in thematized ways connected to understanding Jesus and his message (4:11–12, 21–25) (see Lawrence 2011; Marcus 1984). In Mark, the disciples misunderstand Jesus, resulting in Jesus questioning their understanding, asking, "Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?" (ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντες οὐ βλέπετε καὶ ὦτα ἔχοντες οὐκ ἀκούετε; καὶ οὐ μνημονεύετε, 8:18; cf. 4:12; Isa 6:9), and "Do you not yet understand?" (οὔπω συνίετε, Mark 8:21b). In this context, the stories of Jesus's restoration of visual and auditory perception, specifically the immersive narration of language and bodily movements associated with baptism, suggest that the ritual elements of these narratives facilitate the audience associating certain acts in baptismal rites with illuminated perception.

Each of the scenes of Jesus's healing sight and hearing uses several of the features Allan (2022) characterizes as conducive to audience immersion. The narrator focuses on spatial

details that lend verisimilitude to the narratives, in reference to the setting (e.g., "towards the Sea of Galilee", 7:31; "away from the crowd, alone", 7:33; "in Bethsaida (. . .) he led him out of the village", 8:22–23; "falling upon the ground, he rolled around", 9:20; "leaving Jericho (. . .) sitting beside the roadside", 10:46). The scenes all include "experientially rich" sensorimotor details (Allan 2022, p. 276), such as where Jesus "put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue, and looking up to heaven he sighed" (7:33b–34a), Jesus leading the blind man of Bethsaida by the hand and applying touch and saliva to his head (8:23) and touching him a second time (8:25), Jesus taking the demon-possessed boy by the hand (9:27) after he was convulsing and rolling on the ground (9:20, 26), and Bartimaeus "throwing off his cloak, leaping up" (10:50). Each story uses a slow narrative pace and the absence of deviations from chronological order, focusing attention on the scene without intrusive scene-external narration or references to the outside world.

The narration of these healings includes elements that Allan describes as "[giving] rise to an affective response" (Allan 2022, p. 277) from the audience. Between the request for healing in 7:32 and the description of the man's healed state in 7:35, Jesus's actions in 7:33 and his prayer-oriented gestures and speech in 7:34 create suspense. Furthermore, the description of the audience as "overabundantly amazed" (ὑπερπερισσῶς ἐξεπλήσσοντο) and their response, "He has done all things well: He even makes the deaf to hear and the unspeaking to speak" (7:37) further invite the emotional involvement of the reading audience (Marcus 2000, p. 480; Hartvigsen 2012, p. 294). The two-stage healing of Mark 8:23–25 engenders curiosity and suspense, related to the nature of Jesus's healing power and meaning of the person's response, "I see (βλέπω) people that I perceive (ὁρῶ) as trees walking" (8:24b). These "plot-driven emotions" (Allan 2022, p. 277) can engage the audience's emotional involvement in the characters, in vicarious identification with the event, and in the development of the plot. The longest of these narratives, the healing of a boy with a spirit in Mark 9:14–29, has the highest number of emotionally evocative elements, including the desperation of the father's requests (9:18, 21–22, 24), the violence of the boy's convulsions (9:18, 20, 26), Jesus's strong responses to the father and the spirit (9:19, 23, 25), and the disciples' inability and lack of understanding (9:18, 28–29). Similarly, the persistence and volume of Bartimaeus (10:47–48) and his vivid response, "leaping up" (ἀναπηδάω, 10:50), gives emotional depth to the scene (so too, Hartvigsen 2012, p. 382).

As in the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9–11), the narration of character perspectives in these healing scenes is particularly conducive to audience immersion in the narrative. Allan lists "scene-internal" narration, "a shift to direct speech, dialogue, or free indirect speech" as aspects of immersive narrations of perspective (Allan 2022, p. 227). This is apparent in the shift from the scene-setting narration in Mark 7:31–32 to the "private" setting in which Jesus puts his fingers in the man's ears, spits, and touches his tongue (7:33). As in the baptism of Jesus, the narrator then describes Jesus's perspective, "looking up into heaven" (ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν, 7:34a, see also 6:41), followed by Jesus's sigh and use of a command that the narrator reports and translates from Aramaic "'Ephphatha', that is, 'be opened'" (7:34b). While this use of Aramaic may lend immersive verisimilitude to the narration (as described in Allan 2020, p. 18; see also Hartvigsen 2012, p. 293), this direct speech and the narrator's use of "an embedded focalizer" is a specifically immersive mode of narration (Allan 2022, p. 227). In this first healing story, as in the baptism of Jesus, the narrator provides the audience with Jesus's perspective, looking up into heaven, contributing a sense of immersion in Jesus's apocalyptic experience (see Lincicum 2015).

A similar but more complex set of perspective shifts in Mark 9:14–29 create a rich tapestry of immersive tropes for the audience to experience. The Markan narrator begins from the perspective of Jesus, Peter, James, and John, descending the mount of Transfiguration to encounter the other disciples and the crowd, "And coming to the disciples, [Jesus, Peter, James, and John (cf. 9:2, 9)] saw (εἶδον) a great crowd around them" (9:14a). The focus quickly shifts to the perspective and awe of the crowd, "And immediately all the crowd, seeing (ἰδόντες) him, were overcome with awe" (9:15a). The following narration in 9:16–20 does not directly focalize any one character's perspective, but the narrator re-

lays direct dialogue between Jesus and the tormented boy's father (9:16–18) and Jesus's rhetorical speech to the crowd (cf. αὐτοῖς, 9:19), both conducive to audience immersion (Allan 2022, p. 277). Sandwiched between this immersive dialogue and its continuation in 9:21–24, the narrator introduces a surprising shift to the perspective of the unclean spirit: "And seeing [Jesus] (ἰδὼν αὐτόν), the spirit immediately convulsed [the boy]" (9:20a). The story's turning point comes with a shift to Jesus's perspective when "Jesus, seeing (ἰδών) that a crowd was running together" rebukes the spirit (9:25a). The narrator's use of the ὁράω-εἶδον verb complex throughout this passage, akin to Jesus's vision of the torn heavens (εἶδεν σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανούς, 1:10b), conveys a sense of spiritual perception, as characterized in contrast between βλέπω and ὁράω in 4:12 (Marcus 1984, pp. 570–72; Hilgert 1996, p. 187; see also Mark 5:6, 14, 16, 22; 6:33, 49–50; 9:1, 8; 13:26, 29; 14:62; 15:39).

Thus, coming to the stories of Jesus's restoration of characters' sight, there is reason to question whether the narrator uses embedded focalization through the sight and hearing of healed characters to provoke audience identification with those Jesus heals in Mark 8:22–26 and 10:46–52 as models for transformed spiritual perception, in contrast to the disciples (8:17–21; cf. 4:10–12; 8:31–33; see Malbon 1984, p. 373; Marcus 2009, p. 600). In Mark 8:22–26, the only embedded focalization in the scene takes place after Jesus's manual application of saliva on the man: "And looking up (ἀναβλέψας), he said, 'I see (βλέπω) people that I perceive (ὁρῶ) as trees walking'" (8:24). Jesus's ritualized actions bring about the perspective shift the audience experiences with the healed man. The man mirrors Jesus's heavenward sight from 7:34, then progresses from mere sight to more perceptive vision (Marcus 2009, pp. 599–601; Lohmeyer 1963, p. 159; Best 1981, pp. 134–39). This progression continues after the second application of Jesus's hands, where the narrator describes the full restoration of the man's sight (ἀποκαθίστημι) with two words for seeing that convey penetrating vision (διαβλέπω) that brings about the fully perceptive sight of "all things clearly" (ἐνέβλεπεν τηλαυγῶς ἅπαντα, 8:25; see Marcus 1999). Similarly, in Mark 10:46–52, the narrator focalizes the scene through Bartimaeus's sense of hearing: "And hearing that it is Jesus the Nazarene, he began to call out and to say, 'Son of David, have mercy upon me'" (10:47). Bartimaeus's hearing produces faith that leads to his regaining sight (Lawrence 2011, pp. 391–93), again using the same word to describe Jesus's look to the heavens (ἀναβλέπω, 10:51, 52; so too, Hilgert 1996, p. 191; Palachuvattil 2002, p. 30; Marcus 2009, p. 594). As examples of healed perception conveyed through the embedded focalization of their sight and hearing, the man in Bethsaida and Bartimaeus become models for the audience to be immersed in the experience of Jesus's transformation of their perception.

Several of these immersive elements focus on ritual action. The description of Jesus's sensorimotor movements, specifically related to touch, the application of saliva, and grasping the hands of those he heals, suggest a relation to healing rites, anointing, and possible baptismal rituals practiced in early Christianity. In Mark 8:22–26, as in 7:31–37, Jesus accomplishes healing through the application of saliva and touch together (so too, Standaert 2010a, pp. 595–96). This combination of touch with the application of liquid to the head suggests a reference to an anointing ritual that conveys the power of the Spirit (see Marcus 2000, pp. 473–74). Elsewhere, the narration of touch correlates with those who understand Jesus's power in the Gospel of Mark. Mark 6:5, 13 places Jesus's hand-laying in parallel with his empowerment of the disciples to anoint, suggesting an analogy between these ritual practices in the Markan story world (*pace* Standaert 2010b, pp. 449–50; France 2002, pp. 250–51). Overall, the Gospel contains more instances involving the laying on, or touch, of Jesus's hands in acts of healing (Mark 1:31, 41; 5:23, 41 (cf. 5:27–32); 6:5 (cf. 6:2); 7:32–33; 8:23, 25; 9:27) and blessing (10:16) than the other synoptics (see note 2 below). As a gospel that begins with the announcement of Jesus as the Anointed One (χριστός, Mark 1:1) who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:8), which Paul associates with anointing (2 Cor 1:21–22; cf. Mark 1:10) and Acts attributes to the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17; 19:5-6), there is reason to surmise that Mark portrays Jesus's touch as a vehicle for spiritual anointing in baptism (see Jensen 2012, p. 93). The narrator puts several of the

Gospel's turning points in the context of anointings (1:1–11 (e.g., 1:1, 10); 8:22–30; 14:3–9; 16:1–8). Anointing and touch signify the disclosure of Jesus's identity and mission (see Wheatley 2023). This association between touch, anointing, and spiritual perception is clear in the context around Mark 8:22–26, where Jesus's two-stage healing of a man's sight occurs between his implication of the disciples' spiritual blindness (8:17–21) and Peter's partial perception of Jesus as the Anointed One (8:27–30 (χριστός, 8:29), cf. 8:32–33).

The correlation of immersive narration and detailed description of ritual actions in these passages has the potential to "activate experientially rich cognitive (culturally based) schemas/frames or personal memories" (Allan 2022, p. 276) in the audience. Attention to the use of Jesus's hands and saliva in the first three healing stories (Mark 7:31–37; 8:22–26; 9:14–29) correlate to ritual practices associated with baptism in Mark 1:1–15 and in early Christianity (see Marcus 2000, pp. 476–81). In Mark 10:46–52, the inclusion of details regarding the command for Bartimaeus to rise (ἐγείρω, 10:49; cf. Rom 6:4), the casting off of Bartimaeus's garment (ἱμάτιον, Mark 10:50; cf. 14:51–52; Gal 3:27;) (see Jensen 2012, pp. 167–72), the statement "your faith has saved you" (Mark 10:52b; cf. 5:34), and reference to following Jesus "on the way" (10:52c; cf. Acts 9:17–18) all correlate to early descriptions of baptism as spiritual illumination (see Marcus 2009, pp. 760, 765–66). Further emphasis on hearing that leads to illumination through faith (10:47, 52) recalls Paul's language about how the Galatians "received the Spirit (...) through the hearing of faith" (τὸ πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε (...) ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως, Gal 3:2b), which culminates in baptismal reception of the Spirit (Gal 3:25–4:7). The Markan narrator presents Jesus characterizing baptism in reference to death just before healing Bartimaeus (Mark 10:38–39; cf. Rom 6:3–5; 8:15–17). For baptized audience members, these immersive narrative reminiscences of baptism activate personal memories of baptism and reinforce baptism as spiritual illumination joining them to Jesus in the way of his death and resurrection. These ritual details provide bridges between the narrative text and the audience's experience of the passage.

7. Conclusions

In summary, examining how the narration of Jesus's baptism and other baptism-like narratives in the Gospel of Mark facilitate audience immersion shows how audience experiences of rituals and the narration of ritual acts aid vivid audience experiences of the text. Consideration of known community ritual practices can supplement other sociocultural factors to be weighed in undertaking audience-oriented readings of Mark. The cognitive basis of immersion theory and the identification of narrative features that facilitate audience immersion allows scholars of ancient texts to analyze elements of texts that remain accessible to present-day scholarship to assess their immersive effect. Correlating these texts with historical evidence of coeval identity-forming practices of ancient reading communities, such as the depiction of baptism in the Pauline epistles and Mark 1:9–11, provides a text-oriented analysis with audience-oriented results that obviate hypothetical appeals to the performance of the ritual in the context of the reading event. The socio-cognitive basis of this reading strategy allows greater access to seemingly "transient" aspects of the audience experience of Mark as publicly read without abandoning the clear gains of emphasizing the "proximate, corporate (...) perceptive, and participatory" (Iverson 2021, p. 52) aspects of public reading events. Indeed, Iverson's (*ibid.*) emphasis on the "corporate", "perceptive, and participatory" elements of performance overlap with emphasis on shifts of perspective and experientially rich details that Allan (2022, pp. 276–77) uses to characterize immersive narration.

As Risto Uro has shown, rituals, in their execution, can "convey religious knowledge" and "facilitate the *transmission* of religious traditions" (Uro 2016, pp. 67–68, emphasis original). However, the foregoing study of the narration of Jesus's baptism and baptism-like healing stories in Mark shows that the *memory* of the experience of rituals, long after their execution, remains as a rich schema that narrators can continue using to evoke, reinforce, and—one might postulate—even reshape religious knowledge and the transmission of traditions. Through the use of immersive narration, including sensorimotor details related

to memories of baptism, such as passage through or proximity to water (Mark 1:9; 5:1, 21; 7:31; 8:22 (cf. 8:13)), the application of hands or liquid to the head, body, or garment (5:23, 27–28, 30; 7:32–33; 8:22–25), grasping of the hand (5:41; 9:27), changing garments (5:15; 10:50), and use of ritualized forms of speech (son/daughter, 1:11; 5:34 (cf. 5:23, 35); 9:17; 10:46–48; "Talitha cum", 5:41; "Ephphatha", 7:34; "your faith has saved you", 5:34; 10:52), the narrator of Mark enables "an embodied mental simulation (. . .) of the sights, sounds, touches, smells, emotions, and actions in the described scene" (Allan 2022, p. 276) related to the memory of baptism. The Markan narrator's use of shifts to internalized perception in key moments (1:10; 5:6, 20, 27, 29–30, 33; 7:34; 8:24–25; 9:20, 25; 10:47) intensifies the immersive effect, aiding audience identification with Jesus and characters whose healing transforms their perspective. Further use of emotion-arousing language to "[steer] the recipient's emotional evaluation of the characters (. . .) arousing feelings of identification (. . .) or by engendering plot-driven emotions" (Allan 2022, p. 277), engages the audience with developments in the characters and story, modeling their faith, their perception of Jesus and his power, and their transformation.

Admittedly, not all of the ritually tinged actions enumerated above are exclusive to baptism or observable in Paul's descriptions of baptism or in Jesus's baptism in Mark 1:9–11. However, the resonance of language and actions observable in Mark 1:9–11 or Paul's interpretations of baptism, such as sonship (Mark 1:11; Gal 3:26; 4:5–6; Rom 8:14–16), the gift of the Spirit as an anointing (2 Cor 1:21) that testifies to divine sonship (Mark 1:10; Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15–16), and identification with Jesus in baptism (Gal 4:4–7 (cf. Gal 2:19–20); Rom 6:3–5; 8:17), and water strongly suggests their baptismal association in the healing scenes examined above. If arguments for the representation of baptism in the healing scenes analyzed above are convincing, there is reason to consider that the remainder of the actions resembling later forms of baptismal hand-laying or evocative of baptismal exorcisms or healing formulas may be common to baptism more broadly, as in Acts and other early Christian literature (see Wheatley 2023). Alternatively, some of these scenes may describe baptismal practices unique to Markan circles or Jesus traditions ripe for baptismal re-contextualization. Conversely, some of these possible baptismal links could be from Jesus traditions of these healing stories, absent any baptismal signification.

Nevertheless, the overall picture presents related actions and language that correlate strongly with early Christian baptism. The narrator links audience members' memories of baptism with the narration of Jesus's own perception of receiving the Spirit, his attestation of divine sonship, and the characters' transformation into people with faith to perceive their own salvation through Jesus's ongoing work by the Spirit. By bridging the audience's experience of baptism with the narration of Jesus's baptism and healing stories in Mark, the narrator reinforces themes in the text that cohere with interpretations of the baptismal ritual current at the time of the Gospel's composition: Jesus "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8), and the audience can hope to receive transformed perception that will reassure them of his presence as they follow him (cf. 8:34; 10:52) and proclaim the gospel in their contexts (5:20), for "there, you will see him" (Mark 16:7). The ritual bridge between the public reading of the text and the text itself allows examination of narrative features of the text to illuminate aspects of audience experience in a way that foregoes the conjecture of further performative actions or rituals being performed in the immediate context of the reading event.

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Notes

1 In addition to these, the Gospel depicts other rituals throughout, including Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:9), exorcisms (e.g., 1:21–28; 5:8–13), anointings (e.g., 6:13; 14:3; cf. 8:23), a ritual meal (14:16–26), and burial practices (15:46–16:1; cf. 14:8). Following Risto Uro, I define these actions, the performance of healing "rites", and the discussion of "ritual" practices under the general term "ritual" to refer to "particular ritual enactments located at specific times and places" (Uro 2016, p. 6, n. 1; cf. Grimes 2014, pp. 192–93), in early Jewish and Christian contexts typically comprising "death, burial" and related practices, "purification, conflict resolution, and forgiveness", and "meal practices" (Uro 2016, p. 6, n. 2).

2 To take hand-laying as an example, assuming Markan priority, Matthew omits most of Mark's references to hand-laying, and those the evangelist includes (Matt 8:15; 9:18; 19:13, 15) are taken from Mark (1:31; 5:23; 10:16, respectively). Despite the prevalence of hand-laying in Acts, Luke has only one non-Markan example of the practice (Luke 13:13). The other two instances of hand-laying in Luke (Luke 4:40; 5:13) come from Markan usage. In the first (Luke 4:40) the evangelist conflates Mark 1:32–34 with Mark 6:5, and in the second (Luke 5:13), Luke repeats Mark 1:41.

3 Due to the contested authorship and dating of 1 Peter and James, this methodology does not treat 1 Pet 3:18–22 or James 5:15 as reliably datable prior to the composition of Mark to attest to pre-Markan baptismal or anointing practices. See Allison (2013, pp. 13–18) and Davids (2014, pp. 41, 110–12).

4 Author's translation. So throughout, unless otherwise indicated.

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Questioning the Questions around Jesus's Authority in Mark 11:27–33: A Performance Perspective

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Abstract: The rise of performance criticism prompts questions about its relationship to other disciplines, most notably narrative criticism. While narrative critics traditionally focus solely on the textual elements within their cultural context, performance critics adopt a broader understanding of the term "text", encompassing not only the cultural context but also performative aspects, such as the setting for public reading, the involvement of a skilled performer, and dynamics introduced by a diverse performance audience. This article demonstrates the distinctiveness of a performance-critical approach through a reappraisal of Mark 11:27–33, showing how such an approach yields different interpretive results when compared to traditional narrative criticism. More specifically, whereas traditional narrative readings generally conclude that Jesus is merely evading his interlocutors, I argue that a performance-critical approach suggests that many ancient listeners would have concluded that the lector-as-Jesus was insinuating, for those with ears to hear, that Jesus's authority derives from God and was granted at his baptism.

Keywords: performance; ancient rhetoric; questions; inference; baptism; Gospel of Mark; Jesus; audience analysis; cognitive narratology

1. Introduction

The rise of performance criticism prompts questions about its relationship to other disciplines, most notably narrative criticism[1]. Certainly, there are similarities, yet stark differences remain, particularly those swirling around the nature of the text and audience and the audience's experience of that text. These shifting configurations result in tangibly different readings of ancient narratives. Traditional narrative-critical readings of the confrontation between the Jewish leaders and Jesus in Mark 11:27–33 illustrate these divergences particularly well.

The scene begins with leaders of the Jewish religious establishment confronting Jesus with a question about the origins of his authority: "By what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you the authority to do them?" (11:28)[2]. Jesus agrees to answer them on the condition that they answer a question about the origins of *John's* baptism (11:29–30). Trapped, they refuse to answer him, so Jesus says he will not answer them either (11:31–33). Three questions receive no direct answer in the episode, which has led scholars to almost universally suggest that Mark's Jesus uses his counter-question as an evasive tactic.[3]

While the use of questions as a means of evasion is by no means unusual or implausible, these scholars underappreciate the importance of the performance context for (re)imagining early Christian textual experiences. Narrative critics have classically confined themselves to the words on the page, typically situated in their cultural context, whereas performance critics have moved beyond thinking only about the words on the page to include a contextualized analysis of what we might call the performative context, including the setting for a public reading, accounting for a trained lector (or "reader" or "performer"), a diverse performance audience, and so on.[4] My own work in performance criticism has led me to scour both ancient rhetoric and cognitive sciences to try to best

account for how audiences might have been practiced at "hearing between the lines" in performance events.[5]

In this article, I return to what many scholars seem to view as a nonquestion: the rhetorical function of Jesus's counter-question in Mark 11:29–30. I argue that when we appreciate this episode's performative context, including clues from ancient rhetoric and modern cognitive studies, it becomes quite likely that early listeners would have thought Jesus answered the Jewish leaders' questions through his own question. More specifically, in an ancient performance, we ought to expect that many hearers intuited from the lector that Jesus received his authority from God during his baptism by John. Indeed, while Jesus's interlocutors failed to understand, we ought to expect that at least some audience members would have intuited Jesus's answer-as-question without much effort at all. Along the way, I will demonstrate that performance criticism explores a different (albeit related) set of questions than its older disciplinary sibling of narrative criticism.

My approach to performance criticism works from a hypothetical performance, so in this article, I first address the composition of the hypothetical performance audience and the factors influencing their participation with Mark's Gospel.[6] I then turn to the mechanics of questions in ancient rhetorical and cognitive perspectives before offering a performance-critical reading of Mark 11:27–33. Ultimately, I argue that many—if not most—ancient audience members in a hypothetical performance would understand the lector-as-Jesus as insinuating that he gained his authority and power from God when he was baptized by John. However, I begin with a brief sketch of the methodological commitments of narrative criticism that will help set performance criticism in relief.

2. Performance Criticism in Narrative-Critical Perspective

Narrative criticism tries to explore the story world of the Gospels rather than reconstruct the historical world that gave rise to these texts. In order to do this, narrative critics typically apply some version of Seymour Chatman's narrative communication model that links implied author → narrator → narratee → implied reader.[7] There are real authors and real readers, but they exist outside the text and thus beyond the purview of pure narrative criticism, which tends instead to focus on the characters within the narrative, their conflicts, and the development of the plot. The implied (or idealized) author and reader emerge from a close reading of the narrative itself, with the implied reader always understanding the message conveyed by the implied author. It is an exceedingly clean operation. For their part, narrative critics are free to scour a narrative for hooks, inclusios, intertexts, and intratexts, importing the significance of key terms from one episode to another. They can do this because the text is a static finished product, with all the variables that gave rise to meaning now lost to history. Narrative critics have made enormously important contributions to the study of ancient Christian narratives, none of which do I mean to diminish with this necessarily brief overview. However, I cannot help but notice key differences between narrative criticism and performance criticism.

As the name indicates, performance criticism is interested in narrative texts as stories that were read aloud.[8] The introduction of this key difference sets off a cascade of changes: Chatman's model must be revised (at the least) to something like author → performer → narrator/characters → audience. Historical reconstruction will be essential to understand the most likely performance context, audience composition, and so on.[9] Most performance critics agree that early Christian performances probably took place after a communal meal at a gathering loosely modeled after the symposia (Shiell 2004, pp. 102–37). These performances were probably done by a single trained lector (not a cast), who delivered the text aloud before their audience. Sometimes (perhaps especially initially), even long narratives (like Mark's gospel) were likely performed in their entirety, while most were probably performed over several meetings simply for the sake of convenience (Nässelqvist 2015, p. 110; Whitenton 2017, pp. 29–31). Because audience members listened as another person read the text, they could not pause the performance to reflect or make the complex connections narrative critics often do. This observation does not rule out interpretive sophistication on

the part of ancient audiences (or performance critics), but it does often mean that it would take place only after the performance event and typically in a communal context.

The shift away from a text-based implied audience toward a historically reconstructed performance audience leads to questions of audience composition.

3. Audience Composition

While narrative critics often assume a single implied audience based on internal cues, these textual features do not necessarily reveal the actual audience(s) for whom the narrative was performed (see further, Hartvigsen (2012, pp. 13–14); cf. Holmberg (1990, pp. 118–44)). Embracing a performative approach destabilizes the idea of a homogeneous audience, prompting us to consider real, individual listeners with unique perspectives. This shift aligns with depictions of audiences in early Christian literature and is supported by empirical and theoretical research from sociology and psychology.[10]

For this article, I adopt a heterogeneous hypothetical audience for the Gospel of Mark. This audience comprises both "insiders" and "outsiders", encompassing Jews and Gentiles residing in the Roman Empire during the late first century of the Common Era. I also assume that these audience members are present for a complete performance of Mark's Gospel, which took place after a communal meal.[11] Further, each audience member's experience of the Gospel performance is influenced by their own context within the wider Greco-Roman world, their familiarity with the cultural memory rooted in the LXX (or lack thereof) and circulating Jesus traditions, and their individual experiences. In keeping with an uneven relevant prior knowledge, I also assume that while some audience members have experienced the entirety of Mark's gospel before, others will have heard Mark, in its entirety, for the first time in this hypothetical performance.[12]

In sum, the diverse intersection of the story with their individual experiences, values, and beliefs will ensure that the rhetorical texture of the performance would elicit unique responses from each audience member. Of course, this means that my approach is necessarily speculative, as is all historical work. Yet, my approach differs from traditional narrative readings by striving to acknowledge and accommodate the probable diversity among real audience members at a hypothetical communal textual experience.

4. Factors Influencing Audience Participation

Experiencing a narrative, especially in an oral–aural setting like a performance, involves an imaginative and creative process where the boundaries between the real world and the narrative world become blurred. This phenomenon, known as the "diegetic effect", describes how the narrative world permeates the real world and envelops the audience (Tan 1994, pp. 10–13).[13] From a neuroscientific perspective, the internal simulation of the narrative, facilitated by mirror neurons, is triggered by the story itself (Oatley 1994, pp. 53–74; Cupchik 1997, pp. 11–22; Slater 2002, p. 172; Ronning 2003, pp. 236–38; Hartvigsen 2012, pp. 69–71; Whitenton 2019, pp. 17–18). The story engulfs audience members in the narrative world, thus changing their perspective from that of "outside observer" to "invisible witness". As such, they are part of the narrative world, which subjects them to its values, beliefs, biases, and so on. As invisible witnesses, even engaged audience members remain unable to act within the narrative, although they bring the narrative world into the real world if they are changed by what they experience in it (Tan 1994, pp. 10–26).[14]

The lector's delivery and the audience's compulsory mental simulation of the narrative forge audience identification with characters and their goals. As a result, audience members often consider how they would respond in a particular scenario or how they might answer a question voiced in the narrative. The lector may induce audience identification through glances, gestures, pausing, intonation, and the like.[15] While much of the action in performance occurs with an "on-stage focus", as though between characters in the story world, the performer is also able to engage the audience through an "off-stage focus", thereby directly involving the audience in the unfolding narrative.[16] Unlike traditional

narrative criticism, performance criticism understands the positionality of its diverse audience members as dynamic and malleable, dependent on a combination of prior knowledge, experience, and the delivery of the lector.

I now turn to the rhetoric of questions and to their role in persuasion.

5. The Rhetoric of Questions

5.1. The Rhetoric of Questions in Ancient Rhetorical Theory

Rhetoricians have long valued questions for their persuasive power. Both questions and counter-questions, or asking a question in response to a question, featured prominently in ancient Greek and Latin rhetoric.[17] Across our extant sources, questions were far more than ways to extract information. They also emphasized points, directed audiences to connect the dots on their own, and invited further reflection on a complex topic. In short, (counter) questions were a vital part of the rhetorical toolbox for directing audiences and winning debates.

In the 4th century BCE, Aristotle taught that questions could effectively shut down an opponent's argument and recapitulate or even amplify one's own (*Rhet*. 3.18.1, 3.19.5). In the same section, Aristotle addresses the value of questions for helping an opponent to convince themselves of the argument. As an example, he quotes Plato's *Apology*, in which Socrates used questions (and counter-questions) to defend against accusations that he was an atheist: "Is there a man, then, who can admit that the children of the gods exist without at the same time admitting that the gods exist?" (*Rhet*. 3.18.3 [Freese, LCL]; cf. Plato, *Apology* 27d–e). If the audience answers Socrates's question, they will have their answer to the question of Socrates's atheism. Thus, for Aristotle, questions were neither purely evasive nor only inquisitive. In fact, they could exert persuasive power over an audience by luring them into convincing themselves of the speaker's point of view. A few centuries later, Ps-Demetrius's *On Style* (2nd or 1st c. BCE) stands with both feet in the Aristotelian stream. For Ps-Demetrius, questions (τὸ ἐρωτῶντα) provide a distinctive means to express points to the audience with unique advantages over statements. He writes that "it is forceful to express some points by asking the audience questions rather than by disclosing one's own view" (*Eloc.* 279).[18] It is not always in a speaker's best interest to tell an audience something plainly. Ps-Demetrius illustrates this use of questions with Demosthenes's speech *On the Crown* (330 BCE), where the famous orator uses questions to prove his point to Aeschines that Philip was an unjust king and the one responsible for breaking the peace (*Cor*. 71). The result is that "Demosthenes forces his listener into a sort of corner, so that he seems to be cross-examined and unable to reply" (*Eloc*. 279 [Innes, LCL]).[19] In sum, indicative statements might invite a retort, whereas strategic questions leave an opponent unable to reply without supporting their opponent's point.

In Latin rhetoric, Rhetorica ad Herennium (1st c. BCE) commends the skilled use of interrogation, in which questions are used at the close of an argument to reinforce one's points over against the speaker's adversary (4.15.22). As in Ps-Demetrius, interrogation works so well because it forces the listener to fill in the information for themselves rather than more passively receiving an indicative from the speaker. For Quintilian (1st c. CE), any teacher worth their salt would set questions before their pupils. In addition to instruction, teachers were supposed "to ask frequent questions and test their students' judgement". Unsurprisingly, questions kept the students' attention and facilitated more effective teaching than merely lecturing (*Inst.* 2.5.13). Outside of the classroom, Quintilian taught that a would-be orator ought to make liberal use of questioning their audience, whether to (1) emphasize a point, (2) get an opponent to confirm something, or (3) engage in pondering a complex idea.[20] Quintilian also specifically recommended counter-questions as a way to stir the emotions of the audience and refocus attention on a vital aspect of the speaker's argument (9.2.12–13). For Quintilian, such counter-questions come close to amounting to a confession because they convey the speaker's answer in the form of a question (9.2.14). These answers-as-questions may slightly obscure an answer but only as a means of increasing persuasive power.

For ancient rhetors and rhetoricians, questions and counter-questions were powerful tools because they could back one's opponent into a corner, forcing them to admit to defeat. Counter-questions, in particular, could also redirect the conversation back toward the interlocutor with all the information they need to answer their original question. In a performance event, where a speech or narrative was read aloud before an interested audience, questions and counter-questions served the same function, along with increasing listener attention and participation. As we shall now see, modern empirical research suggests that these ancient scholars were not far from the mark.

5.2. The Rhetoric of Questions in Cognitive Perspective

Research from the cognitive sciences and adjacent disciplines explains the rationale for ancient rhetorical approaches to questions. Alice Freed (1994, pp. 621–44) places all questions on a scale, with "information sought" on one end and "information conveyed" on the other (see further, Koshik 2005, p. 1; Schegloff 1985, pp. 28–52; Heritage and Roth 1995, pp. 1–60). Communication theorists often delineate between a question as a locutionary act, its illocutionary force, and its perlocutionary force. The "locutionary act" refers to the actual utterance, whereas the "illocutionary force" is the intended effect of the locutionary act. The "perlocutionary force" refers to the psychological consequences of a speech act upon a listener (e.g., persuading, convincing, scaring, inspiring, moving to action, etc.). While some questions genuinely seek to uncover unknown information, others convey a sentiment, invite a behavior, or imply an answer to a question (see Koshik 2005, pp. 1–2; cf. Schegloff 1985, pp. 28–52). The latter make up "rhetorical" questions, which move beyond information seeking to exerting power over the addressee through claim making.[21]

Mounting empirical research shows that questions either assist or inhibit persuasion by increasing attention in audience members.[22] When listeners hear a question, their minds instinctively engage in central processing (rational reflection) to find a suitable response. Questions enhance persuasion if the listener's central processing complements the arguments from the speaker. If not, the question actually triggers the audience member's own competing viewpoints, biases, or more prominent aims and hampers the persuasive impact. In other words, questions affect persuasion by stimulating central processing pathways to make listeners more aware of the speaker's arguments and their relative strength.[23]

To sum up, ancient rhetors and modern researchers agree that questions can be useful teaching tools to convey information to listeners through audience inference by peaking their attention and participation. However, questions can also inhibit persuasion if they raise counter arguments beyond an acceptable threshold. With this in mind, we are in a better position to assess how ancient audience members might have experienced the dance of questions in Mark 11:27–33.

6. Moment-by-Moment Account of Inferences in Response to Mark 11:27–33

Performance-critical readings broaden the focus from the written words on the page to the dynamic interplay between the lector and their audience. The preceding episodes frame Mark 11:27–33 as a scene fraught with tension in which hostile opponents scrutinize Jesus, who answers with forceful but guarded precision. Since entering Jerusalem with ironic pomp and circumstance, Mark's Jesus has caused quite the stir, and the temple incident provides enough stimulus for the chief priests, scribes, and elders to start plotting his murder (11:15–18).[24] For his part, Jesus has already set himself in opposition to the Jewish religious establishment by his symbolic cursing of the fig tree (11:12–25).[25] Thus, engaged audience members may infer contention and even aggression behind the questions in Mark 11:28: "By what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you the authority to do them?"[26]. Not only have these characters consistently been cast in a negative light thus far, but they are strongly associated with the temple establishment, which Mark's Jesus has just castigated as a "hide out for robbers" (Mark 11:17) (see, e.g., Mark 2:1–12, 21–28; cf. Hartvigsen 2012, pp. 400–1). They thus appear hostile from the outset.[27]

As audience members hear Mark 11:27–33 read aloud, their brains will cobble together meaning through the raw materials of the actual words and the scripts and schemas present in their mental lexicons (just as you, dear reader, are doing right now). By paying attention to the probable direction of these inferences, we will be able to shed new light on these old questions. In the context of Mark 11:27–33, audience members eavesdrop and ponder the exchange from their own situatedness. In what follows, I offer a plausible moment-by-moment account of audience inferences in response to Mark 11:27–33. I argue that because our hypothetical audience members have the benefit of having heard the preceding Markan narrative in performance—and most will not share the same hostility to Jesus as his interlocutors—the exchange will lead many—perhaps most—to the conclusion that Jesus received his authority from God at his baptism (cf. 1:9–11).

6.1. Questions about Jesus's Authority (11:27–28)

Audience members listen in as members of the Jewish leadership (the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders) confront Jesus with a question about his authority as he was walking in the temple. Sympathetic audience members may notice feelings of antipathy at the arrival of the Jewish leadership, especially if their (re)introduction primes recent conflicts between them and Jesus (cf. 11:15–19).[28] Their questions will set off a cascade of sense making based on a combination of the preceding narrative and each audience member's prior knowledge: ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιεῖς; ἢ τίς σοι ἔδωκεν τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην ἵνα ταῦτα ποιῇς. In particular, the repetition of the "authority" language will easily trigger relevant associations from earlier in the narrative (and perhaps from extradiegetic prior knowledge) (see, e.g., 1:22, 27; 2:10; 3:15; 6:7). The reference to Jesus's authority will also reliably activate related entries in people's mental lexicons, establishing connections with episodes that demonstrate his authority, even if they do not explicitly mention the term ἐξουσία (see, e.g., 1:9–11; 3:7–12; 4:35–41; 5:1–20; 6:45–50; 8:27–33; 9:2–13).[29] Likewise, the mention of "these things" (ταῦτα ποιεῖς), referring to Jesus's ongoing actions, will likely activate connections either with his disruptive behavior in Jerusalem, especially the temple commotion (cf. 11:15–17), or all of Jesus's actions depicted in the narrative so far.[30] While we might expect diversity among the audience on this point, the proximity of Jesus's actions in the temple suggests those as the predominant referent, especially since the audience has just heard that the Jewish leaders began to plot his murder after the incident in the temple (cf. 11:18–19).

When the audience hears the second part of their question (ἢ τίς σοι ἔδωκεν τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην ἵνα ταῦτα ποιῇς;), they may appreciate that the emphasis falls on τίς σοι ἔδωκεν τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην because τίς σοι is frontloaded and ἔδωκεν τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην employs homoioteleuton. Homoioteleuton refers to the repetition of sounds (here, a ν sound in ἔδωκε<u>ν</u> τὴ<u>ν</u> ἐξουσία<u>ν</u> ταύτη<u>ν</u>) at the end of consecutive words in a sentence, creating a rhyme that is aurally pleasing (cf. Demetrius, *Eloc*. 26–27; Quintilian, *Inst*. 9.3.77; Rhet. Her. 4.20.28.) (Noticeable on its own, the lector could have emphasized this shift in aural intensity by modulating tone and dramatic pausing at the homoioteleuton). As a result, the emphasis falls on the circumstances during which Jesus received his authority.

Given the cognitive studies described above, as audience members hear these questions read aloud, their brains will begin searching for a response of their own. Most audience members will hear these questions as side-participants with varying levels of identification with Jesus.[31] Based on knowledge of the preceding narrative alone, some in the audience will likely automatically intuit that Jesus received his authority from God as his anointed (Mark 1:1), who is greater than John (1:7), who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:8), whom the heavenly voice declared "my beloved son" (1:12), and whom even unclean spirits hail as "the holy one of God" (1:24). In fact, it is difficult to imagine anyone in our hypothetical audience *not* inferring that, in Mark's Gospel, God granted Jesus his authority on the basis of the prologue (1:1–13) alone.[32]

Because a performance does not stop for reflection, the audience will only have a second or two to intuit the origin of Jesus's authority (and even then, perhaps only

automatically as part of the compulsory sense-making process). However, as we shall see, Jesus's response will (re)activate the prologue, which has already been primed for many in the audience.

6.2. Jesus's Counter-Question (11:29–30)

The lector now changes characters and voices Jesus's response: ἐπερωτήσω ὑμᾶς ἕνα λόγον, καὶ ἀποκρίθητέ μοι καὶ ἐρῶ ὑμῖν ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιῶ· The sentence exhibits a heightened aural intensity through its rhythmic repetition of "o" sounds and the energetic use of verbs for asking and answering (note the placement of ἐπερωτήσω, ἀποκρίθητέ, and ἐρῶ). The sentence's dynamic phrasing and length contribute to its auditory impact, providing the lector with the opportunity for a particularly engaging delivery that might contribute to a sense of momentum for audience members. Some audience members may note the contrast between the Jewish leadership's two questions and Jesus's single question (ἐπερωτήσω ὑμᾶς ἕνα λόγον), which underscores that Jesus is the one in control in this exchange, even if he did not start it. Finally, the placement of καὶ suggests a sequential relationship between their answer to his question and his answering of theirs but does not specify how that answer might take place. The speech act could be translated as something like, "I will ask you a question and you answer me. Then I will tell you by what authority I do these things" (11:29). If this utterance activates Jesus's penchant for speaking in veiled or coded language for some engaged audience members, they may intuit that the forthcoming λόγον will mean more than it says (cf. Mark 3:20–4:34; 7:14–23; 8:14–21).[33] For such audience members, the continued parabolic speech after this episode will only confirm their suspicions (cf. 12:1–37). Jesus's earlier parabolic speech divided those who could understand the deeper meaning from those who were left at the surface. In this context, such audience members might infer that, for those with ears to hear, Jesus's question may itself provide the answer to the questions posed by the Jewish leadership. In the second or first century BCE, Ps-Demetrius called this "allusive verbal innuendo" (τὸ ἐσχματισμένον ἐν λόγῳ) (*On Style*, 287–298), which flatters listeners with their own intelligence by luring them to supply missing information on their own.[34] It is important to emphasize that Jesus's counter question may function in this way for audience members, regardless of how Jesus's interlocutors experience the question in the story. In performance, the story takes place both in the narrative and between the lector and their audience. Mark's Gospel is replete with this rhetoric of inference, which relies on an expectation that the audience will complete meaning to which the characters may be oblivious (cf. 8:14–21; see Whitenton 2017). This is the context in which the audience hears the lector deliver Jesus's counter question: τὸ βάπτισμα τὸ Ἰωάννου ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἦν ἢ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων; ἀποκρίθητέ μοι. (11:30).

As they hear this line, their minds will automatically pull from impressions formed about John's baptizing from the prologue (1:2–11). The prologue itself will still be fresh on the minds of many in the audience because it was activated by the Jewish leadership's original questions about Jesus's authority. Importantly, therefore, both the original question and the counter question will have activated the prologue and, more specifically, Jesus's baptism by John. Thus, Jesus's counter question revolves not around John per se but John's *baptism*. For sympathetic members of the performance audience, this question is so obvious as to nearly need no response. John's baptismal activity is rooted in his prophetic call from God to "prepare the way of the Lord" (1:3) and is inextricably linked to Jesus's own divinely sanctioned activity (Whitenton 2017, pp. 115–26).

For those audience members appreciating the rhetoric of inference in this exchange, the fact that Jesus responds to a question about the origins of his authority with a question about the origins of John's baptism may spark the insinuation that Jesus's authority and John's baptism are intertwined. As we have already seen, many audience members will have already inferred that Jesus's authority comes from God in ways that primed the voice at Jesus's baptism. However, Jesus's strategic counter question may plant the seed for audience members that God granted Jesus his authority specifically when he was baptized

by John. These audience members may recall or recognize that Jesus only exercises his authority (confronting unclean spirits, healing the sick, forgiving sins, calming storms, feeding thousands, walking upon the sea, and so on) after the bird-like Spirit flies down *into* him (εἰς αὐτόν) at his baptism (1:10).[35] For these audience members, Jesus's counter-question may itself become the answer to the Jewish leadership's question. Jesus's authority derives from the divine visitation during his baptism.

The way the lector delivers Jesus's counter-question will play an important role here. If the lector offers a telling gaze to the audience when they deliver the line, τὸ βάπτισμα τὸ Ἰωάννου, it may help audience members pick up on the hint otherwise muted by the letters on the page. Moreover, if the lector were to shift their gaze to audience members as they deliver the line, ἀποκρίθητέ μοι, some audience members would hear this question as addressees with a personal responsibility to respond. While we cannot know that a lector ever delivered these lines in a leading manner, it is certainly plausible that our hypothetical lector might do so. Certainly, lectors were expected to pore over manuscripts in preparation for delivery in order to bring out the richness of the text to the performance audience.[36] That they would do so here would make sense and fits well within the proposed performance-critical reading.

We must remember that in a performance, sense making tends to happen nearly automatically or it must wait for post-performance and, most likely, communal reflection. Such reflection would likely take place in the form of conversations with others, where, under the influence of leaders, audience members could construct or modify cognitive frames that would then be used to interpret future hearings of Mark, as well as other texts. For now, however, there is simply no way to pause the performance. If audience members reflect on the counter-question in a sustained way, they will miss the rest of the scene. We ought to expect that some will have done exactly that, just as people "check out" during stories or movies today. For most, however, any sustained reflection will take place after the performance event. For now, we continue with the dialogue between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, picking back up with their response.

6.3. The Deliberation (11:31–33)

The line that the Jewish leadership are διελογίζοντο πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς may trigger, for many audience members, the earlier episodes in Mark where characters carefully considered the implications of an action or question (cf. 1:27; 2:6, 8; 8:11). In this case, because they are already primed to think of the Jewish leadership as antagonistic to Jesus, they will likely intuit that the Jewish leadership is attempting to be strategic with their answer. Such an inference would be confirmed by the content of their dialogue, which weighs the political fallout for responding either ἐξ οὐρανοῦ or ἐξ ἀνθρώπων. As the lector delivers the specific dialogue among the Jewish leadership, sympathetic audience members may feel frustration with the Jewish leadership, but they will also probably experience feelings of superiority if they had automatically and confidently answered that John's baptism is ἐξ οὐρανοῦ.[37] Those feelings of superiority would surely grow as they hear the Jewish leadership admit defeat: οὐκ οἴδαμεν. Engaged audience members will likely conclude that the Jewish leadership is lying when they say, "we do not know". Instead, they may conclude that it would be far more accurate to have said, "we do not want to say", since their deliberations only weighed the ramifications of the potential answers.

The lector-as-Jesus's line, οὐδὲ ἐγὼ λέγω ὑμῖν ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιῶ, reminds audience members of the agreement and primes the question and counter question in their minds. Sympathetic audience members who understood Jesus's counter-question as a covert answer to the original question about the origins of his own authority may feel a sense of enjoyment at understanding what the Jewish leaders have missed. Despite being so close to Jesus, these characters missed what was right in front of them.

The relentless pace of the performance (and the inability to pause or rewind) may prevent some listeners from processing this episode in such detail during the performance itself. Still, the deliberations of the Jewish leadership model—and thus guide—deliberations

among audience members (11:31–33). Thus, rather than merely conveying the concerns of the Jewish leadership, the perlocutionary effect of these speech acts is to continue the listeners' own reflections upon the origins of John's baptism in relation to the question of the origins of Jesus's authority. In the end, the *characters* in the story are left between a rock and a hard place by Jesus's question, while the *audience members* are prompted to consider the relationship between Jesus's authority and John's baptism.[38]

In sum, when the lector delivers Mark 11:27–33, listeners are engaged and drawn to consider their own answers to the questions about Jesus's authority and John's baptism. Their elevated status allows them to fully grasp the strong connection between Jesus's earlier baptism and his authority, both established in the preceding narrative and emphasized in this episode, whether during the performance event or through later reflection.

7. Concluding Remarks

When read through a performative-critical methodological lens, Mark 11:27–33 moves beyond a tense exchange between Jesus and representatives of the Jewish leadership. Instead, the narrative event unfolds as a multilayered experience wherein the interaction between Jesus and the Jewish leadership exerts a distinct force on audience members who align themselves with Jesus, in contrast to the characters portrayed within Mark's Gospel. In particular, the initial questions posed by the Jewish leaders prompt the audience to contemplate the source of Jesus's authority. Next, Jesus's response, in the form of a counter-question, draws upon the established practice of utilizing questions to encourage listeners to persuade themselves. In so doing, the lector-as-Jesus skillfully connects Jesus's authority to the time Jesus was baptized by John. The lector thus primes the audience to side with Jesus, having prepared listeners with the preceding narrative to answer the questions accurately, unburdened by thorny social dynamics faced by Jesus's interlocutors. As a result, many audience members would likely conclude that Jesus's authority and power were conferred in a special way at his baptism. While intimations of such a reading are evident in select narrative approaches to Mark 11:27–33, it only reaches maturity when viewed through the lens of performance.

Narrative criticism offers invaluable tools for understanding ancient Christian stories, but it does not go far enough to encompass the complexity of early Christian narrative experiences. In particular, traditional narrative criticism omits the oral–aural dimensions of a text, including attention to the heterogeneity of audiences, continuous pacing of a performance, potential nonlinguistic elements of delivery (pausing, intonation, gestures, etc.), and research from cognitive studies. The wording of a text matters, but so does how that wording is delivered and how that wording is received and by whom. Performance criticism may have emerged from traditional narrative criticism, but it eclipses it in the ways it attempts to do justice to all that we currently know about early narrative experiences.

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Notes

1 On the rise of performance criticism and its relationship to narrative criticism, see, e.g., Hearon (2011, pp. 211–32) and (Iverson 2014).

2 ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιεῖς; ἢ τίς σοι ἔδωκεν τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην ἵνα ταῦτα ποιῇς.

3 For the counter-question as an evasive tactic, see Heil (1992, pp. 232–33); Dowd (2000, p. 128); Donahue and Harrington (2002, pp. 335–36). See further, Tilly (1994, pp. 62–63); Best (1983, p. 135); Hurtado (1983, pp. 177–78); van Iersel (1988, p. 148; 1998, pp. 361–64); Juel (1990, p. 161); Evans (2001, pp. 204–5); Boring (2006, pp. 325–27); Yarbro Collins (2007, pp. 539–40); Marcus (2009, pp. 798–801); Beavis (2011, p. 173); Black (2011, pp. 248–50); Hartman (2010, pp. 476–77); Focant (2012, pp. 464–69); Garland

(2015, p. 499). Breaking from this trend somewhat, John Paul Heil has insisted that Jesus's counter question enables the Jewish leaders to correctly answer their own questions about the origins of Jesus's authority (Heil 1992, pp. 232–33). More recently, Kristen Marie Hartvigsen (2012, p. 401) agrees that, "Through his question, Jesus seems to imply that John's baptism originates in heaven.".

[4] For a thorough discussion of theories of performance criticism, see Shiell (2004, pp. 34–136); Hartvigsen (2012, pp. 1–98); Nässelqvist (2015, pp. 15–180); Whitenton (2017, pp. 1–96); Iverson (2021); Eberhart (2023, pp. 28–79).

[5] For my own previous work related to performance criticism, see Whitenton (2016b, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021). I am by no means alone in my integration of ancient narrative and cognitive sciences. See, most recently, Shively and Rüggemeier (2021), as well as Shively and Rüggemeier (forthcoming). See also the public-facing collective site, https://diegesis-in-mind.com/ (accessed 26 July 2023). On "hearing between the lines," see Maxwell (2010, pp. 27–118), who addresses the exploitation of narrative gaps in both ancient and modern literary theory, as well as in Hellenistic narrative literature.

[6] These sections draw from Whitenton (2016a, pp. 275–80).

[7] For a further discussion of Chatman's model of narrative communication, see Chatman (1978, p. 151). For an application of Chatman's model in narrative criticism of the gospels, see Malbon (2011, p. 45).

[8] On the history and development of performance criticism, see Iverson (2021, esp. 1–15) and Eberhart (2023, pp. 28–79).

[9] On historical reconstructions of plausible performance settings, see, e.g., Nässelqvist (2015, pp. 63–118) and Whitenton (2017, pp. 15–65).

[10] In antiquity, we find evidence in Paul's actions and writings to support the existence of diverse audiences. Acts portrays Paul addressing Jewish people, God-fearing proselytes, and Gentile "outsiders" (Acts 13:13–52). Furthermore, Paul acknowledges the potential presence of unbelievers in house church assemblies in Corinth (1 Cor 14:22–24). These texts may not directly represent the social reality or a specific audience of Mark's Gospel, but they offer valuable insights. See Iverson (2011, pp. 181–206, here 205–6); cf. Aune (1987, p. 60). The social structures of Mediterranean life during the early centuries of the Common Era indicate the presence of intricate and dynamic audiences in household church gatherings. Apart from the more obvious distinctions in education, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and religion among audience members, their individual personal experiences, which shape their identities, ensure that each listener responds uniquely rather than as a collective entity. Even within a group characterized by common traits, individuals will differ in their values, aspirations, ideas, opinions, and life experiences. Rejecting the notion of a unified reading public, we cannot assume that all members of a group will have identical reading experiences or respond collectively. See Bortolussi and Dixon (2003, pp. 9–10).

[11] Others have similarly conceived of performance contexts around a communal meal. See, e.g., Shiner (2003, pp. 49–52); Hartvigsen (2012, pp. 11–12); Nässelqvist (2015, p. 103); Whitenton (2017, pp. 20–31); Eberhart (2023, pp. 18–25).

[12] The question of whether complete performances of the gospels took place is challenging to definitively address and cannot be adequately covered here. Although concrete evidence regarding the extent to which gospels were publicly read in first- and second-century Christian communities is scarce, a reasonable conclusion about early Christian practices suggests that at times, a gospel may have been read in its entirety, while on other occasions, only selected excerpts were chosen to accommodate time constraints. See further, Nässelqvist (2014, pp. 97–98).

[13] This phenomenon finds precedent in Aristotle's exploration of mimesis within the realm of tragedy, where the audience experienced a catharsis of, for example, pity and fear in response to these emotions evoked by the tragedy itself. On the meaning of catharsis in Aristotle, see Janko (1987, pp. xvi–xx); Cuddon and Preston (1998, p. 115). Keith Oatley's (1994, pp. 53–74) theory of mimesis, as simulation offers a compelling and complementary rationale for how we become so engrossed in a narrative. Drawing from Aristotle's concept of mimesis, Oatley proposes that audience members naturally engage in mental simulation of a narrative as it unfolds, creating an internal imaginary version of the story. This phenomenon becomes particularly vivid during performances (as opposed to private reading), even in more subdued formats like public readings, because the lector's delivery guides the audience to envision the events.

[14] Those who become deeply involved in the narrative may become a "side-participant" or even an "addressee" (Hartvigsen 2012, pp. 63–64; cf. Clark and Carlson 1982, pp. 342–43). That is, listeners may experience the narrative in a more informational capacity in which they do not necessarily experience compulsory obligation to abide by the suggested actions in the address ("side-participants"). Alternatively, they may identify so closely with the character(s) that they hear words addressed to the characters as literally addressed to them ("addressees"). Naturally, these categories are fluid, blending together to varying degrees for each individual audience member based on their unique perspective. On the fluidity of audience positionality, see Oatley (1994, pp. 53–74).

[15] For a thorough discussion of the nonverbal elements of delivery in performance, see Giles and Doan (2009, pp. 21–22); Ruge-Jones (2009, pp. 29–43, here 35–36); Boomershine (2011, pp. 115–42); Iverson (2013, pp. 2–19, here 15–16).

[16] We see this technique frequently in modern performances of Mark's Gospel, like those by Max McLean and Tom Boomershine. See, e.g., Max McLean's performance of the entire gospel from memory in his "Mark's Gospel on Stage with Max McLean" (Worcester: Vision Video, 2010). Boomershine has likewise performed a number of scenes from Mark's Gospel, which are available at https://tinyurl.com/mvzfumbx (accessed 26 July 2023). Both McLean and Boomershine present a performance of Mark that, in certain aspects, surpasses the expected style of a first- or second-century lector. However, it is important to acknowledge that a skilled lector of that time may have delivered the gospel with a more meticulous and captivating approach

than these contemporary performers. While the analogy is imperfect, these modern interpreters embody an essence similar to what we encounter in ancient rhetorical theory. See Shiner (2003, pp. 172–75). In his first-century treatise, On the Sublime, Ps-Longinus discusses a rhetorical tactic whereby a lector could draw their audience into the performance by addressing them directly through a shift from the third person to the second person ([Subl.] 26.1–3). Likewise, an author ought to tailor the length of the address, style, and delivery so as to prepare the audience to actively participate in the performance event. See further, Aristotle Rhet. 3.9.6; Quintilian, Inst. 11.3.2 (cf. 6.1.30); see also, Cicero, De Or. 2.178; 2.188; 2.191,193; 3.216.

17 The tendency to use questions and counter questions for strategic rhetorical benefit also pervades Rabbinic Judaism. See, e.g., b. Sanh. 65b; Gen. Rab. 27.4; Tanch B 9 (97a). As in the Greek and Roman sources, the use of questions and counter questions in Rabbinic Judaism stimulates critical thinking, encourages active participation, and fosters a deeper understanding of the text or topic under examination. For questions and counter questions in Rabbinic Judaism, see Strack and Billerbeck (1922, pp. 861–62). Cf. Shae (1974, pp. 13–14).

18 δεινὸν δὲ καὶ τὸ ἐρωτῶντα τοὺς ἀκούοντας ἔνια λέγειν, καὶ μὴ ἀποφαινόμενον.

19 Ps-Longinus's *On the Sublime* (1st c. CE) similarly commends questions as figures that provide "much greater realism, vigour and tension" (*[Subl.]* 18.2 [Fife, LCL]). After providing a flurry of examples of the skillful use of questions from loose quotations of Demosthenes's *Philippic* 4.10 and 44, Ps-Longinus argues that the "inspiration and quick play of the question and answer" create both a "loftier" and "more convincing" speech; indeed, "here a bare statement would have been utterly inadequate" (*[Subl.]* 18.1–2 [Fife, LCL]).

20 Other objectives include vilifying, cultivating pity, and pressuring or stopping an opponent from pretending to misunderstand (Inst. 9.2.7–11).

21 Colloquially, some people think of rhetorical questions as only those questions that do not require a response (e.g., "You don't want to be grounded, do you?"), although even these questions usually elicit some response. This is even a problem within the scholarly literature; see, e.g., Han (2002, pp. 201–29); cf. Koshik (2005, p. 2); Wang (2006, pp. 529–48). For empirical evidence, see Freed (1994, pp. 621–44).

22 Roskos-Ewoldsen (2003, pp. 297–322). By way of practical application of the persuasiveness of rhetorical questions, note that Howard (1988, pp. 89–112) found that twenty percent of advertisements analyzed from top consumer magazines contained some form of a question—usually rhetorical questions.

23 For futher discussion on the role of questions in persuasion and their affect on central processing, see Petty et al. (1981, pp. 432–40); Leonard and Lowery (1984, pp. 377–84); Swasy and Munch (1985, pp. 877–86); Munch and Swasy (1988, pp. 69–76); Munch et al. (1993, pp. 294–302). Cf. Roskos-Ewoldsen (2003, pp. 311–14).

24 On the irony of the political welcome of Mark's Jesus, see Whitenton (2017, pp. 218–24).

25 For similar readings of the symbolic cursing of the fig tree, see Hooker (1991, pp. 261, 265); Moloney (2002, pp. 226–27); Boring (2006, p. 319); Yarbro Collins (2007, pp. 533–34); Beavis (2011, p. 171); Hartvigsen (2012, p. 399).

26 ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιεῖς; ἢ τίς σοι ἔδωκεν τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην ἵνα ταῦτα ποιῇς.

27 Although they have different aims, form critics have long marked this episode as the beginning of a series of "controversy stories".

28 On assessing emotional response to narrative, see Oatley (1994, p. 57). For detailed emotional response cues, see Tan (1994, pp. 7–32); Hogan (2003, pp. 140–66). In ancient narrative in particular, see Hartvigsen (2012, p. 76); Whitenton (2016a, pp. 280–85).

29 To be sure, audience members may or may not be aware that these episodes are primed. We saw above that the vast majority of sense making is an unconscious, automatic process. Only when coherence cannot be maintained do people become aware of their struggle to make sense of a text. On content addressability and its function for audiences in the presence of a lack of verbatim correspondence, see Hogan (2003, p. 43).

30 For a temple referent, see Yarbro Collins (2007, p. 539). For a global referent, see Dwyer (1996, p. 167).

31 If any audience members are known as wonder workers or healers, perhaps they will hear these questions as addressees and ponder the question with regard to their own lives, when they believe they received the authority to do such works and by whom.

32 On the framing importance of the prologue in Mark's Gospel, see Whitenton (2017, pp. 104–8).

33 By "parabolic speech", I do not mean to wade into debates about "parables" in Mark and their origins. Instead, I refer to the pregnant language in Mark through which the author intends to convey something beyond a plain meaning. On such parabolic speech in Mark, see Beavis (2011, pp. 74–75).

34 "For when [the listener] infers what you have omitted, he is not only listening to you, but he becomes your witness and reacts more favorably. For he is made aware of his own intelligence through you, who have given him the opportunity to be intelligent" (συνεὶς γὰρ τὸ ἐλλειφθὲν ὑπὸ σοῦ οὐκ ἀκροατὴς μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ μάρτυς σου γίνεται, καὶ ἅμα εὐμενέστερος. Συνετὸς γὰρ ἑαυτῷ δοκεῖ διὰ σὲ τὸν ἀφορμὴν παρεσχηκότα αὐτῷ τοῦ συνιέναι.) (*On Style* 222). From the fourth century BCE onward, we find ancient rhetoricians who capitalized on the persuasive value of leaving some things unsaid. Theophrastus (Frag. 696) spoke of omitting material as recruiting listeners as "witnesses" to your own side by leading them to discover your point on their own (see Fortenbaugh et al. 1992). Centuries later, Demetrius writes, "you should not elaborate on everything in punctilious detail but should omit some points for the listener to infer and work out for himself" (*Eloc.* 222). Rhetoric ad Herennium also shows

awareness of this idea in its discussions of a figure called emphasis, through which one "leaves more to be suspected than has been actually asserted" (Rhet. Her. 4.63.67 [Caplan, LCL]). Similarly, Seneca refers to speech that is intentionally "full of innuendo, into which one must read more meaning than was intended to meet the ear" (*Ep.* 114.1 [Gummere, LCL]). Clarity may have been essential, but the masters of persuasion knew that too much clarity could be counterproductive. See also, Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.3.83, 9.2.71, 78, 96–97. See further Whitenton (2017, pp. 65–87). Across Greek and Latin authors, emphasis was aimed at increasing persuasive power in general, but it thrived in particular contexts. In the most detailed discussion on the topic, Quintilian (1st c. CE) prescribes emphasis for hostile encounters and delicate topics (*Inst*. 9.2.67–99). In hostile encounters, a skilled speaker could omit vital material to prevent self-incrimination while encouraging listeners to convince themselves through their own inductive powers (cf. Demetrius, *Eloc.* 222). Alternatively, when discussing delicate topics, speakers could adhere to proper standards of decorum and avoid unseemliness through circumlocution. While a speaker could strategically omit material in many ways, well-placed questions could be used to box an opponent into a corner where the only way out would spell self-defeat.

35 Dixon (2009, pp. 759–80). See *Il*. 18.616–617; 19.349–350; *Aen*. 4.238–241, 252–58; 9.20–21; cf. Cic. *Top*. 20.77. See further, Whitenton (2017, pp. 130–36). Scholars are divided over whether the audience would more likely understand εἰς αὐτόν to indicate that the Spirit was descending, "to," "into", or "upon" Jesus. However, as Dixon notes, the evangelist does not use εἰς with a verb of motion elsewhere to denote movement toward a personal object. For a thorough discussion of the scholarly opinions on this important prepositional phrase, see Dixon (2009, p. 771 n. 41). Similarly, Boring (2006, pp. 43, 45); Edwards (1991, p. 293). See further, Whitenton (2017, pp. 134–35).

36 Cf. Quintilian, *Inst*. 10.1.20–21. See further, Whitenton (2017, pp. 53–56).

37 On emotional response to narrative, again see Oatley (1994, p. 57). For a detailed discussion of emotional response cues, see Tan (1994, pp. 7–32); Hogan (2003, pp. 140–66). In ancient narrative in particular, see Hartvigsen (2012, p. 76); Whitenton (2016a, pp. 280–85).

38 Audience members inferring that Jesus received his authority from God at his baptism from John might find confirmation in other episodes, such as Jesus's healing of the bleeding woman in 5:24–35 and his transfiguration in 9:2–7, where his divine power leaks out of him unexpectedly and is dramatically revealed for audiences, respectively. On Mark 5, see Moss (2010, pp. 507–19). On Mark 9, see Whitenton (2017, pp. 200–7).

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Article

Singing to "Lord Jesus Christ": A Prose Hymn and Its Philippian Recipients

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Abstract: Religious audiences frequently hear prose hymns as a part of their ceremonies. The "Lord Jesus Christ" hymn in Philippians 2.6–11 is one such example. The Philippian hymn fits an audience's performance expectations compared to other Greek and Jewish prose hymns and performances. A slave lector likely recited or sang the hymn when delivering the epistle and directly addressed at least four named recipients. This article examines the narrative links between the hymn and the address in 4:1–3. Utilizing performance-critical methods, we explore how this hymn likely functioned for the ancient audience. The reading of the "Lord Jesus Christ" hymn localized the worship of Jesus in Philippi, encouraged financial giving to Paul and Timothy, taught moral lessons, and prepared the audience to address their conflict "in the Lord".

Keywords: performance; narrative; Philippians; hymn; prose hymn; rhetoric

1. Introduction

The Epistle to the Philippians contains a hymn that was likely known to the recipients before they first heard the epistle delivered in its current epistolary form. Religious ceremonies in the ancient world routinely featured prose hymns such as this one; but few, if any, scholars have examined the connections between the "Lord Jesus Christ" hymn and the named recipients in the epistle. Minear and Gordley discuss the hymn's function in the epistle, and Oestreich discusses the direct address (Minear 1990, p. 214; Oestreich 2016, p. 126; Gordley 2011, p. 378), but only Wright notes the potential connection between the hymn and the recipients (Wright 2017, pp. 166–67).

We can surmise that one reason why most studies of the Philippian hymn overlook the connection between the hymn and the recipients is because of the longstanding debate over the integrity of the epistle (Rahtjen 1960, p. 169; Garland 1985, p. 143). Arguments regarding its separate parts and the thematic links throughout have failed to reach a consensus among scholars. The hymn's origin, authorship, and composition are also matters of great debate because Paul and Timothy likely borrowed familiar lyrics (Schenk 1984, pp. 207, 208; Cullmann 1963, pp. 174–81; Bauckham 1999, p. 61; Bockmuehl 1998, pp. 116–17). This essay does not attempt to resolve these questions, but instead treats the epistle's delivery as a reading event and treats the hymn as a form of media featured in the recitation. How might these named recipients, two of whom are in an unresolved conflict, respond when the reader addresses them directly?

Four, possibly five, recipients are mentioned. They are the beloved brothers and sisters in the colony, including a courier named Epaphroditus; two co-laborers named Euodia and Syntyche; an unnamed *syzygos*, who is the senders' fellow companion; and another co-laborer named Clement. Because the senders were absent, an unnamed lector, possibly Epaphroditus himself, delivered the epistle orally. This essay imagines how the recipients named in the epistle could have responded to the hymn's performance when directly addressed in chapter 4.

To guide this study, we will use the method of performance criticism to examine the hymn and the direct address in 4.1–3. This emerging field of biblical studies pays careful

attention to the delivery of ancient media by examining how texts were read aloud and heard by an audience. This method builds on the work of other disciplines, recognizing that issues related to historical context, authorship, date, setting, gender, orality, and rhetoric inform how an interpreter examines a performance (Rhoads 2006, p. 119). The message from senders to a group of receivers was incomplete in ancient epistolary literature without delivery to a recipient and, in most cases, multiple audiences. There were examples of private readings in personal correspondence. For the most part, however, a public reading to a group was required. The senders or authors were usually absent during the public recitation, and the audiences did not have multiple copies of the text. In light of these issues, Paul's epistles provide a fascinating window into the process of communication, including the role of the courier and the names of people in the audience (Johnson 2017, p. 79; Oestreich 2016, p. 83). Paul's letters contain evidence that they were sent to be read aloud (1 Thess 5.27; Col 4.16; Gal 4.20; 1 Tim 4.13–16; Shiell 2023, p. 796). This essay argues that Philippians would have been delivered similarly to Paul's other epistles. We may not know how the hymn itself was delivered. However, we can reconstruct a hypothetical performance of a prose hymn, like others in the ancient world, and link the hymn to the gathered audience. We will discover that reciting the hymn prepares the listeners to resolve conflict among the co-laborers.

2. Prose Hymns in Antiquity

Before we turn to a discussion of the Philippians, we will survey the conventions of hymns in the ancient world, note a few examples of prose hymns in performance, and explain how prose hymns like Philippians 2.6–11 functioned for their audiences. A hymn was primarily a song for the gods (Plato *Leg* 700b; Menander Rhetor *Hymns to Gods* 1.2.1). They could also praise people and encourage others to do the same. (Pindar *Partheneion* 10–11; Theon *Progymansmata* 9.109). They fell into two categories: third person (*er still*; he or her) addressed about a god directly or second person (*du still* "Thou/You") addressed to a god. Poets and orators composed hymns independently and sang, chanted, or recited them for festivals and religious ceremonies. (Aune 2003, p. 222).

Prose hymns like Philippians 2.6–11 were familiar in the ancient world. They were embedded in narratives, letters, speeches, and apocalypses. Rhetorical schools used them in their curricula to train orators, and poets inscribed them publicly. Plato's *Symposium* (1.2.6) provided the model that the orator Menander followed in the third century C.E. Influenced by Plato, Menander classified seven kinds of hymns: summons, dismissals, philosophical, mythical, fictive, precatory, and deprecatory (*Hymns to Gods* 1.2.6). Closer to the time of Philippians, four prose hymns to Isis dating to the first century B.C.E. were found inscribed on columns in the Egyptian village of Medit Mahdi (Isidoros *Paean* 4.38–40), and Aelius Aristides composed prose hymns in the second century C.E. (Furley and Bremer 2001, p. 49).

First-century C.E. rhetorical schools taught orators the conventions for composition and recitation to gods and humans and treated them as *encomia* (Theon *Progymnasmata* 9.109). There were places marked in the text to pause for the audience to clap (Plato *Laws* 700b). Orators, philosophers, and poets also reinterpreted or applied older hymns in their settings. Quintilian noted the following:

In praising the gods, our first step will be to express our veneration of the majesty of their nature in general terms: next we shall proceed to praise the special power of the individual god and the discoveries whereby he has benefited the human race. . . Even gods may derive honour from their descent, as for instance is the case with the sons of Jupiter, or from their antiquity, as in the case of the children of Chaos, or from their offspring, as in the case of Latona, the mother of Apollo and Diana (*Inst.* 3.7.7–9 [Butler, LCL]).

For example, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus encouraged singing Cleanthes' hymn to Zeus while farming and eating. He wanted to establish an office for someone like himself to sing on others' behalf (Epictetus *Discourses* 1.16.18–21). Seneca quoted the same hymn in his letter on obedience to the universal will and followed Cicero's use of Cleanthes' hymn (Seneca *Ep.* 107.10–12). Likewise, early Christian speakers and audiences recited hymns in

their gatherings (Eph 5.19, Col 3.16; Pliny *Ep.* 10.96). Ignatius repurposed a third-person Greco-Roman star hymn in his epistle to the Ephesians (Ignatius *Ephesians* 19.2–3). Without naming Jesus directly, he celebrates his incarnation as a star shining in heaven with the celestial bodies singing in chorus around the star (Gordley 2011, p. 353).

2.1. Examples of Performances

Greco-Roman performances of poetry and hymns, often used interchangeably, were part of religious festivals. In Apuleius, the performance of a hymn publicly in procession preceded vows to Isis (Apuleius *Met.* 11.9.5). In another example, organizers of the festival to Adonis chose a woman one year in advance to perform a prose hymn to Aphrodite. (Theocritus *Idylls* 10.96–103).

The audience interacted with the performer, and an attendant even requested hymns for someone to sing on their behalf (Asmis 2007, p. 421). For instance, the poet treated Aeneas, possibly a trainer, as a medium to rouse the chorus. The poet says, "You are a faithful herald, a message stick (*skytala*) of the lovely-haired Muses, a sweet mixing-bowl of loud sounding songs" (Pindar *Olympian* 6.89–90; see also Bion *Lament for Adonis* 15). Greek hymns could also be sung as prayers or spoken slowly and deliberately in a conversational tone, either by the performer or the audience, or both (Furley and Bremer 2001, p. 3).

In Hellenistic Judaism, Philo commented on the Theraputae's practices, which were modeled after the singing at the Red Sea. They composed psalms and hymns in various meters and tunes (*V Contempl* 29). Before eating, a solo singer performed a hymn, and the audience was silent. Others followed by singing a hymn that the person composed in order of rank. In the end, everyone sang together (*V Contempl* 79–80). After the feast, they sang together, in various ways, some pre-composed hymns, others that everyone knew, and some antiphonally (*V Contempl* 84; see a similar pattern of solo singing after a meal in Tertullian *Apology* 39).

2.2. Functions of Performances

Prose hymns functioned in five significant ways. Like other hymns in antiquity, prose hymns blessed and praised gods. They also localized a deity in the community where the hymn was performed, taught moral lessons, encouraged financial investment, and demonstrated the god's continual involvement in human relationships.

2.2.1. Devotion to Gods

First, orators performed prose hymns to audiences to express personal gratitude and devotion to gods (Aristophanes *Peace* 947–998). For example, Aristides asked the gods for personal favors. (Aristides *Asclepius* 42.2–3; Parker 2016, p. 68). Praising a god was designed to work in both ways. Hymns pleased the gods, and they reciprocated by showing their pleasure by blessing the speaker and the worshiping community (Epictetus *Discourses* 1.16.18–21; Asmis 2007, p. 421) In Revelation 4–5, the reader described a divine assembly where hymns are sung to God. John had an audition (an auditory vision) and visited a heavenly throne room where hymns are continually sung to God, and the response included weeping, kneeling, and acclamation (Rev 4.8, 11; 5.11–12; 1 Enoch 39.12; 2 Enoch 18.9).

2.2.2. Localize Divine Presence

Second, the performance located the deity in that community. The hymn connected the people to divine work in the past by reinterpreting an older hymn for that location. For instance, Epidaurus inscribed a hymn to Asclepius by the poet Isyllus in the fourth century B.C.E. Isyllus wanted Asclepius to show his pleasure by healing people who worshiped at the site. The hymn established the deity's work in the city. He urged the audience to trust Asclepius for healing in Epidaurus to guarantee that pilgrims would come and worship there (Lozynsky 2014, pp. 145–46).

In the first century B.C.E., three hundred years after Isyllus, Isidoros followed a similar pattern. He localized the worship of Isis in the Egyptian town of Medinet, viewing himself

as a performer and interpreter of ancient Greek traditions to his community (Isidoros *Paean* 4.38–40). He inscribed below each hymn, "Isidoros wrote it". (Lozynsky 2014, pp. 135–36).

Aristides appeared to have similar motivations in Pergamum in the second century C.E. He expressed his gratitude for the sacred wells of Asclepius and described the superior healing power of its waters compared to other sites (Aristides *Regarding the Well in the Temple of Asclepius* 39.2–3, 16–17).

In Jewish and early Christian literature, hymn singing and music located God in the place where they worshiped (2 Chron 5.11–14 LXX; Acts 16.25). By implication, the apocalypse connected the divine assembly noted above to the seven cities addressed in Rev 1.4–3.22.

2.2.3. Economic Investment

The third function, closely associated with location, was economic investment. To further solidify the gods' association with the site and to encourage tourism through pilgrimage, prose hymns encouraged the audience and the region to contribute money for building projects. As Isyllus did for Epidaurus, noted above, local priests and authorities cited the oracle at Delphi and leveraged the message for economic gains for Delphi. They invited other communities to help them complete their project so that more pilgrims would travel to the site. Their generosity to the area contributed to Delphi's and the giver's success. Philodamus invited god's grace and favor on the people and encouraged the people to complete the construction of the temple (Philodamus *Paean to Dionysus* 107–112; Lozynsky 2014, pp. 156–58).

2.2.4. Moral Lessons and Character

Fourth, prose hymns taught moral lessons and shaped character. For instance, a third-person hymn performed at a festival in Sparta began with a moral lesson before the song. Two maidens were chosen for the performance (Alcman *Partheneion* frag. 35–41). The hymn contained a pithy saying called a *gnomai*, followed by the moral lesson, and then the performance itself (Lozynsky 2014, p. 84). Similarly, in the Stoic tradition, reciting Cleanthes' hymn expressed a person's devotion to fate, their willingness to reform their lives, and desire to follow wherever fate led them, even if it led them through suffering (Seneca *Ep.* 107.12–13; Asmis 2007, p. 421).

In early Christian literature, hymn singing fits a pattern of worshiping Jesus as God. For example, Clement of Alexandria invited the congregation to sing a hymn to God as a shepherd so that he will guide them to their eternal home with wisdom for the present (Clement of Alexandria *Pedagogue* 3, lines 1–10; cf. John 1.1–14; Col 1.15–20). Early Christian apocalypses recorded visions of heavenly singing to Jesus (*Ascension of Isaiah* 7.16–17; 8.17–18). Ignatius utilized the star hymn as part of a larger argument to warn the Ephesians against following false teachers who denied Jesus's humanity (Ignatius *Ephesians* 16.1; similarly, *Ephesians* 7.2; *Polycarp* 3.1–2; cf. 1 Tim 3.16; Gordley 2011, p. 378).

2.2.5. Conflict Resolution

Fifth, and most significantly for the hymn in Philippians, prose hymns praised gods for their continued involvement in resolving conflict. The model came from Plato, and Aristides imitated him. In Plato's Symposium, the hymn to Eros described how God reunited people in love. The hymn referred to the myth that Zeus created people by slicing them into different parts from one another. Eros fused lovers who longed to be together and find each other. (Plato *Symposium* 189c–193d; Russell 1990, p. 213.) Similarly, a hymn in Lysistrata ratified a peace treaty between Athens and Sparta and summoned the gods and the people to come out and dance for joy to celebrate the reconciliation between enemies (Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 1262–1294; Furley and Bremer 2001, p. 339).

Imitating Plato, Aristides attributed similar actions to Dionysus. Former enemies came together and were friends again (Aristides 1981, p. 415). He wrote the following:

> Nothing will be so firmly bound, not by disease, not by wrath, or by any fortune, which Dionysus will not be able to set free. But the sick man will be easier and the one-time enemy will be a drinking companion, and the old man will grow young and drink at the urging of the god. (*Oration* 41.8 [Behr])

Dionysus is not the only god who resolved conflicts. Aristides venerated Athena as superior to other gods for her work with people, cities, and relationships. She persuaded people to give up a solitary life and "assemble and dwell together in the compass of a single, common settlement". (37.13). In this prose hymn, he included a rhetorical *sorites*. Each vice or virtue is built on the other, like a stair step. In an oral reading, the audience listened and was linked together by the performance. Listening to the hymn, they would view Athena's work as ongoing in Aristides's home of Baris, where he delivered the speech (Aristides 1981, p. 409). Aristides wrote the following:

> She is the one who wards off our truly universal enemies and sets in order the private war in each of us, since she rids us of our persistent and congenital foes, by which homes and cities are overthrown before the sound of a trumpet, one would say, and she gives each of us a true and proper victory, which is far different from the Cadmean victory and is truly Olympian. Through her agency, folly, wantonness, cowardice, disorder, faction, crime, scorn of the gods, and all such conduct that one could name is banished, and there enters in its place intelligence, moderation, courage, concord, good order, success, and honor of the gods and from the gods. In sum, through Athena's efforts all is an 'Assembly of the gods'. (*Athena* 37.27 [Behr])

Similar effects occurred among Hellenistic Jews and early Christians. Even though evidence of hymn singing in Christian and Jewish gatherings is limited, the examples we have here follow a similar pattern and focus on the connection between the divine and the human (Gordley 2011, p. 273). Hymns united the audience, shaped character, and improved the soul (Philo *Agr*. 80–83; *Spec. Leg.* 1.342–343; *Virt*. 72–75; *V. Mos.* 2.256). Through song, the mind and voice connected to the music of the heavens (*Som*. 1.35, 37) and induced harmony among the audience. For example, in Philo's retelling of the Song of the Sea, he indicated the power of singing in harmony with each other and indicated Moses as the people connected to God (*V. Mos.* 2.256–257; *V. Contempl.* 80–88; Ignatius *Ephesians* 4.2, where singing is a metaphor of harmony in the church and deference to the bishop; Leonhardt 2001, pp. 159, 166).

Following his healing from blindness, Tobit described about his experience. Through an amanuensis, he praised God by combining the Exodus Song of the Sea and Moses' hymn in Deut 31 LXX (Tobit 13.1–8). Tobit praised God for divine kingship and focused on praising God in the present. Gordley wrote that the psalm "paints a grand picture of reality which has the potential to offer hope to an audience in difficult circumstances" (Gordley 2011, p. 216). As Tobit was restored, the book promised that Jerusalem would also be. By recalling the memory of Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness, the hymn in Tobit also warns the listeners. What happened to the Israelites could happen to them (Gordley 2011, p. 218).

Early Christians would have known a similar tradition. Hebrews uses Psalm 95 to warn the audience against falling away and encourages them to endure their wilderness experience (Heb 3.7–4.7; Col 1.15–20). In the Gospel of Luke (1.26–38), the evangelist reinterprets Hannah's prayer (1 Sam. 2.1–10 LXX) for Mary's situation. Luke connects Mary to Hannah and shows Mary as an example of obedience to a divine call. She sings a hymn to reflect her devotion to God and God's response to her obedience.

To summarize, prose hymns were performed by a solo orator, artist, or poet or as a community in the ancient world. They anchored communities to the past and brought a god's actions into present circumstances. Through the performances, they incurred favors from a god, localized the deity, expressed their commitment, and expanded the influence of the worship site through finances and travel. Hymns affected their relationships with others because the performance invoked a god's involvement in ratifying peace treaties,

reconciling enemies, and unifying communities. Hellenistic Jews and early Christians adapted these traditions, including the divine assembly. They connected earthly hymn singing and veneration of God to heavenly worship. As the heavenly worshipers sang and bowed to God or Jesus, so did the earthly participants.

3. The Hymn in Performance in Philippians

With this background from the ancient world in mind, we turn to the hymn in the epistle to the Philippians. We will set the historical context for a performance and discuss how such a performance might affect the audience addressed in 4.1–4.

3.1. Worship in Philippi

Even though it is impossible to know how Philippians 2.6–11 was performed in Philippi, we can assume the audience would have recognized 2.6–11 as a prose hymn based on the evidence from the ancient world. They had several options for worship in Philippi and would have likely heard or observed the hymns that were performed. During the time of Paul's visit and the delivery of the letter, locals erected shrines to Diana/Artemis, the goddess of the hunt, and there was an active Isis cult in Philippi (Fiorenza 1975, pp. 36–37). The emperor Claudius deified and venerated Augustus's wife, Livia, in 42 C.E., following her death in 29 C.E. The Romans erected a monument to Livia and four priestesses in the late second century C.E. (Abrahamsen 1995, pp. 79–80).

3.2. Literary and Performance Context of the Hymn

The hymn and direct address in chapter four are linked lexically and thematically by the humble mindset preceding the hymn (1.7; 2.2, 5; 3.15, 19; 4.2, 10) and the memory and veneration of Christ Jesus as Lord within the hymn (1.1; 2.5, 11; 4.1, 2).

Although not directly mentioned in the hymn, the theme of *phronesis* immediately precedes the hymn in 2.5 and provides the context for the attitude and mindset addressed in 4.2, 10. This theme is prominent in Philippians and forms the basis for Paul and Timothy's attitude toward the Philippians (1.7) and their feelings about the senders (4.10). *Phronesis* in 2.2 means communal decisions in an attitude of humility that is analogous to Jesus's mindset and obedience. Rather than thinking solely about private practical decisions, *phronesis* involved working together to make decisions that were grounded in the orientation that Christ Jesus has. As most commentators note, a verb must be supplied in verse 5: "Have this mindset in you which [is] also in Christ Jesus". If we read this hymn similar in the way we read others in the ancient world, it makes sense to view Christ Jesus's activity as ongoing (Bockmuehl 1998, pp. 109, 124). The singing of the hymn engenders the mindset. Jesus's decisions were not just historically in the past; the hymn brought his work into the present through the performance. This mindset helped them accomplish the purpose of the epistle, "standing firm together in the faith, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel" (1.27; Brawley 2015, p. 241).

The second literary link between the hymn and the direct address is the memory, veneration, and response to Jesus's servitude and exaltation. The greeting (1.1–2) from the slaves of Christ Jesus to the saints in Christ Jesus prepared them for this connection and previewed the choice that Jesus makes in the hymn in 2.7. As mentioned in the introduction, Paul and Timothy co-sent the epistle through a courier named Epaphroditus. Even though Paul and Timothy were physically absent, the letter substituted their presence and served as a "spiritual embodiment" for Paul and Timothy (2 Cor 3.1–3; 1 Thess 1.4–10; 2.1–14a; Holland 2006, p. 16). Epaphroditus himself is an example of the value that Paul and Timothy wanted the Philippians to exhibit. Epaphroditus demonstrated a life of self-sacrifice, placing others' needs above his own. He almost died in the mission (Phil 2.27, 30, Bockmuehl 1998, pp. 173–74). He mediated Jesus's, Paul's, and Timothy's lives in the performance. It is possible that Paul was seeking to avoid a potential conflict over misinformation about Epaphroditus's fate or the financial gift by sending him back quickly to allay these concerns (Phil 2.28; Mayer 1987, p. 188; Buchanan 1964, p. 160; Silva 1988, p. 160). By

welcoming Epaphrodtius, the Philippian church exhibited hospitality, but they were not yet in harmony with one another prior to the letter's delivery. Epaphrodtius's presence brought the Philippians comfort and prepared them to receive Paul and Timothy's challenge favorably (Holloway 2017, p. 144).

Timothy can be viewed as a collaborator with Paul (Pliny *Ep.* 5.3; 3.18.4–10) in its composition and a witness to its content. He validated and confirmed the message (see a similar role of co-senders in Acts 15; 1 Cor 4.17; 5.9–13; Stirewalt 2003, p. 43). They greeted the audience as slaves of Christ Jesus (compare Acts 16.17). Philippians and Romans (1.1) were the only letters where Paul used this title for himself and the only letter where his co-sender was also considered a slave of Christ Jesus. The Greco-Roman view of slavery was well known (Diogenes Laertius *Lives* 122–123; Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse* 4.80; 69.2, where enslaved people were considered foolish, weak, and prone to misbehavior; Philo *Spec. Leg.* 2.13.48; 2.39.226–227; *Hyp.* 7.1–9; *Dec.* 165–167). Despite their inferiority, enslaved people were often the media for communication. When the author was absent in household readings, slaves read their messages on their behalf (Quintilian *Inst.* 10.3.18–20; Cicero *Brut.* 22.87; Nepos *Atticus* 25.13–14; Seneca *Ep.* 15.6; Col. 1.7; 4.8–12, where Tychicus, Onesimus, and Epaphras are fellow "slave(s) in the Lord". For a visual analog, see the painting from the house of the tragic poet from Pompeii, contemporaneous with Philippians. An enslaved person in the foreground reads to an audience of six people from an open scroll (Shiell 2004; Ling 1995).

The phrase "saints in Christ Jesus" connected the greeting, hymn, and direct address. The senders used the rhetorical figure *conduplicatio*, repeating "in Christ Jesus" to create a shared identity, and leaving a "deep impression on the hearer" (Cicero *Rhet. Ad.* 4.28.38). The theme "in Christ Jesus" is prominent in Paul's writings and especially this epistle (1.26; 2.5; 3.3, 14; 4.7, 19, 21; Novakovic 2020, p. 2). The phrase "saints in Christ Jesus" is unique in the ancient world but is used twice in Philippians, first in the opening salutation (1.1) and second in the benediction greeting in 4.21, as a greeting from "the brothers and sisters" and "saints" in Caesar's household (4.22). The audience is considered "saints in Christ Jesus". By addressing them this way, Paul and Timothy invoked memories of Daniel 7.7–22, where humans are "holy ones/saints of the Most High". They received an "everlasting kingdom" and constituted a people of the Most High (Dan 7.27).

In summary, the audience would recognize the implications of a prose hymn used in delivering an epistle. Paul and Timothy introduced themselves as enslaved people to communicate through a slave lector about a king who became an enslaved person for the king's saints in that city. The senders humbly submitted to the audience as divinely appointed messengers of the Most High and greeted an intimidated, divided community with grace and peace. The hymn called for these "saints in Christ Jesus" to join with a divine assembly and surrender to an enslaved person named Lord Jesus Christ. They were to work to stand firm in this Lord and work out their differences with each other in this same Lord (4.1–4).

The reaction to this message would likely evoke tears or grief. Two examples from the ancient world and an additional Pauline reference provide parallels. Philostratus indicated that the emperor was moved to tears when he heard Aristides's epistle and its description of Smyrna's destruction (Philostratus *Vitae Sophistatrum* 582). When the King of Israel received a message from a slave, the King of Israel tore his garments in a gesture of grief (4 Kingdoms 5.7 LXX). It was undoubtedly likely that the first impression would not be one of gladness, but closer to awe and wonder. Similarly, Paul's "letter of tears" to the Corinthians would have been delivered with deep emotion and affection for the recipients (2 Cor 10–13; Johnson 2017, p. 67). By doing so, the memory and veneration of Christ Jesus as an enslaved person and Lord set an emotionally moving tone to address the audience in 4.1-4 and exhorted them to stand firm, agree, and rejoice in the Lord.

3.3. A Performance Event in Philippi

Based on readings of epistolary literature and other similar performance events in the ancient world, we can imagine how the epistle to the Philippians would have been delivered orally. Paul typically relied on the letter carrier to communicate messages and embody Paul's presence (2 Cor 7.6–7; Johnson 2017, p. 65). As Glenn Holland notes, "In his letters, he invoked his authority in order to exhort, argue, interpret, and reassure *as if he were present* when the letter was read, that is through the actual performance of his words". (Holland 2006, p. 16). The courier Epaphroditus or a reader mediates the spiritual presence of Paul and Timothy to the Philippians, providing additional comments on the senders' condition and the contents of the epistle (Col 4.7–9). The reader draws the audience together like a "message stick" (Pindar *Olympian* 6.89–90; Ovid *Tristia* 3.4.55–60; *Ex Ponto* 1.8.33–38). The reader also performs the hymn. Like the preparations for the festival to Adonis, the letter suggests that Epaphroditus has been selected ahead of time to be prepared (Theocritus *Idylls* 10.96–103).

This reading could be delivered by one or multiple lectors (Acts 15.30), and the content could be paraphrased and improvised. (Snyder, 156; Jub. 13.10–15; Theon, *Progymnasmata* 66–67; Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* 4–6; Philostratus *Vitae sophistratum* 582–583). Because of the size of homes, a group of no larger than fifty people gathered in a private setting to listen, likely following a meal. The group functioned like a reading circle similar to the gathering noted above from the house of the tragic poet in Pompeii. They listened, responded, offered feedback, and likely, in the case of the hymn, recited the hymn with the reader (Oakes 2009; Starr 1991; Johnson 2010; Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.11–14; Pliny, *Ep.* 1.9; 3.1.4–5; 34; Nepos, *Atticus* 14.1; Gellius, *Noctes atticae* 2.22.1; Philo, *Somn.* 2.127; *QE* 2.34; 1QS VI, 6–8; CD XIII, 2–4). The event included hymn and psalm recitation (Eph 5.19; Col 3.16), greetings, kissing (Rom 16.16; 1 Cor 16.20; 2 Cor 13.12; 1 Thess 5.26), and instructions to those in the room (Col 4.17; Philm 22; Heil 2011). As noted above, the reaction to the Philippian hymn would likely be sobering rather than exhilarating and set a tone for constructive work among the community.

3.4. Performing Philippians 2:6–11

If we accept that active worship sites, including the one to Isis in Philippi, performed hymns, a local listener would recognize the kind of hymn included in Paul and Timothy's epistle as a prose hymn to Lord Jesus Christ. Based on Menander's system, the melody in Philippians is a third-person mythical hymn. The hymn was an encomium to Lord Jesus Christ, designed for "beauty and dignity not archaic and grandiose words, but harmonious arrangement and figures of style" (*Hymns to Gods* 1.2.4; 1.6.6).

The beginning of the hymn is marked by a relative particle *hos* in verse 6 and ends in verse 11 before the transitional particle *hŌste* (2.12). The center of the hymn is the focus, in which the phrase "death on the cross" is repeated. Gordley notes that the hymn does not conform to any Greek metrical pattern and should be considered "rhythmic prose" (Gordley 2011, p. 277). As such, we can render the hymn to emphasize the descent of Jesus as a servant, followed by God's and the people's response.

Who in form of God being
Not take advantage of consider to be with God
But himself emptied
A form of a slave taking
In likeness of humanity becoming
And in appearance being born as humans
He humiliated himself
Being born obedient unto death

DEATH ON A CROSS

Therefore also God him exalted
And gave him the name

Above every name
So that at the name of Jesus
Every knee would bow
Of things in heaven and earth and under the earth
and every tongue confess that
Lord Jesus Christ
To glory of God Father

Just as Moses assembled a divine assembly from earth and heaven to hear his hymn (Deut 31 LXX; *Virt.* 73–79), now the Philippian "saints" gather "of things in heaven and earth and under the earth". As noted above, the reader is the "message stick" in Philippi, rousing the Philippians like a chorus to participate in five ways (Pindar *Olympian* 6.89–90): to bless and praise God, locate the worship of Lord Jesus Christ in the community of Philippi, encourage giving from the Philippians, teach a moral lesson by warning the audience of the consequences of ongoing conflict, and assist the audience in conflict resolution.

3.4.1. Bless and Praise Lord Jesus Christ as God

First, the prose hymn blesses and praises Lord Jesus Christ as God for his obedient servitude, reminding the audience of what they already believed and presumably have sung before (Gordley 2011, p. 277). Like Epictetus (*Discourses* 1.16.18–21), Paul and Timothy reuse a known hymn, bless God for his providential work, and express gratitude to God. Like the writer of Tobit and the Gospel of Luke, Paul and Timothy praise God and the people. Performing the hymn tunes the congregation to a new mindset that Paul describes in 2.5 (Minear 1990, p. 214). They invite the citizens to recite a hymn together, recount certain deeds of Jesus, and honor God.

The focus is primarily on the humble obedience of the divine figure, especially his death (Isaiah 53.1–12 LXX). Structurally, the hymn descends to the nadir of "death on a cross". Jesus dies a scandalous death reserved only for non-Roman citizens, a shocking ending for Romans and Jews (Deut. 21.23; Cicero *Pro Rabirio* 5.10; *Verr*. 5.66): "Christ's death by crucifixion was the ultimate in human degradation". The poem's structure emphasizes this manner of death and evokes a dramatic reaction. The phrase "even death on a cross" is the climax of the hymn, a rhetorical figure used to give "repeated outbursts of emotion". (Quintilian *Inst. Or.* 9.3.43, 44, 54–55). As Bockmuehl notes, "It has the effect of an arresting musical syncopation, marking the end of the downward narrative but leaving one on the edge of one's seat for what comes next" (Bockmuehl 1998, p. 139).

Like other Jewish and Greek hymns, there is a divine response. God does not allow for this shameful but voluntary death to be the conclusion. Just as Jesus chooses to humiliate himself, God vindicates Jesus by "super-exalting" him to a high position (2.9; Bird and Gupta 2020, p. 84). This word, *hyperypsōsen*, used only here in the New Testament, echoes a similar expression for worshiping God in Psalm 96:9 LXX. God exalts the one who did not exploit his status (Psalm 96.9 LXX; Thompson and Longenecker 2016, p. 72). Like the suffering servant in Isaiah 52.12–13, God vindicates Jesus's humiliating death. Jesus's voluntary suffering qualifies him to exercise authority over everything (Bauckham 1999, p. 58). Although Paul asserts the power of the resurrection in other epistles, here, the mention of the resurrection is absent. Instead, they learn the significance of God's action to vindicate Jesus for obedience amidst unjust suffering (Bockmuehl 1998, p. 141).

God also graces Jesus with a name that is familiar to Jews. The verb *eucharisato*, a form of "grace," signifies that Jesus's status is not a reward for his suffering, but a mutual gift between God and Jesus (Migliore 2014, p. 93). God grants Jesus the "name above every names" (YHWH), the same name for God in Isaiah 45.22–23, which is the only God to whom all shall bow (see also Psalm 99.3; Deut 28.58; Neh 9.5; and Bauckham 1999, p. 58). The Philippians may have heard a similar statement about Isis as the lord (*kyria*) above all gods (Isidoros *Paean* 4.8–10; Fiorenza 1975, pp. 36–37). The hymn venerates Jesus as the

God of the first commandment before whom the citizens of Philippi should have no other gods. The hymn shifts the audience's understanding of who can be a "lord".

3.4.2. Locate Worship of Lord Jesus Christ in Philippi

Secondly, the hymn locates this worship in Philippi. The performance of the hymn as part of an epistle addressed to the "saints in Christ Jesus" in Philippi anticipates a response now in the community and the future by all creation. When his name is announced, they surrender and confess, embodied in kneeling and speech. The aorist subjunctive of *kampsē* and *exomologēsētai* indicates that the gesture of kneeling and the confession of the name have already begun. Paul and Timothy may have been looking to the future, but Jesus's death begins the invitation to surrender. The Philippians and the cosmos participate in what will one day be universal. The hymn presupposes that just as the Philippians show homage now, all creation is doing so and will do so in the future, including heavenly beings, earthly creatures, and even the dead, presumably because they will be resurrected (Rev. 5.13; Fee 1995, p. 224).

This performance transforms the Philippian mindset about voluntary humiliation and worship of Jesus as God. The humiliating death and exaltation of Jesus change the audience in ways that are foreign to the ancient world. Such a transformational act of sacrifice changes how people relate to this God and each other. The audience hears that "only the Servant can also be the Lord" (Bauckham 1999, p. 61).

Just as every knee bows, every tongue means that each person will acknowledge openly or declare who the Lord is (2.11; 4.1, 2, 4; Fee 1995, p. 225). "Lord Jesus Christ" is the literal order of the confession in this hymn, emphasizing *Lord* in the first position. The politically and theologically loaded term signals a public declaration of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ rather than the local Roman authorities or other gods. Jesus is elevated above the cosmic powers, and only in Philippians does the New Testament indicate that everyone who worships Jesus will call him Lord (Thompson and Longenecker 2016, p. 73).

3.4.3. Financial Giving

Because Lord Jesus Christ is worshiped in Philippi, the hymn singing enables the third function: thanking the Philippians for their financial gift and inviting them to contribute more to Paul and Timothy's mission (4.15–20). Unlike Delphi, the construction of a temple for pilgrimage is not a concern in Philippi (Philodamus *Paean to Dionysus* 107–112). Paul and Timothy are focused on finances for their mission. The hymn functions more like Aristides's praise to Asclepius for his power through the sacred wells in Pergamum (Aristides *Regarding the Well in the Temple of Asclepius* 39.2–3, 16–17). The senders use the hymn to thank the audience and encourage ongoing work in that place and elsewhere. They assure them that the Lord Jesus Christ's work is present in their community, express gratitude for their gift, and assure them of God's continued favor because of their financial commitment (4.15–20).

The administration of this financial gift and the attending Issues are tied to the "overseers," addressed in the greeting (1.1), who are likely Euodia and Syntyche (4.1–3). In the ancient world, overseers, who functioned as guardians of the agreements between the gods and the people (Plutarch *De Camillo* 5; Josephus *Wars* 4.543), were sent after a colony was established to help constitute and organize the community and ensure that the laws and processes were put in place (Aristophanes *Birds* 1022–1054). Plato preferred women as overseers to young married people (*Leg.* 2.784a). They were caretakers and watchers to ensure that the community was protected (Josephus *Ant.* 10.4.1), they were inspectors on God's or others' behalf (Philo *De Migratione Abraham* 24), and they were money managers to ensure that funds were distributed correctly (4 Kingdoms 12.11 LXX; 2 Chron 34.12, 17; Porter 1939, pp. 105–12). Based on the preceding evidence, we can reasonably assume that these overseers administered the funds that the Philippians sent to Paul and Timothy through Epaphroditus. The hymn's performance aligned well with the audience's expectations of generosity toward God and the co-senders.

3.4.4. Moral Lessons

The fourth function is to teach two moral lessons: one is about the kind of obedience that is necessary for life in the colony, and the other is an implied warning about the dangers of disobedience. As noted before, just as Tobit achieved through his amanuensis, Paul and Timothy repurposed an existing song for a new context (Tobit 12.20). Tobit praised God to inspire the people to greater devotion. The Philippians 2 hymn achieves something similar by using a rhetorical figure of *ekphrasis*, a description envisioning an obedient humble lifestyle that is necessary for the Philippians as saints of the Lord Jesus Christ. The visualizations of Jesus's descent and "death on a cross" and Paul's imprisonment produce vividness with emotional excitement/*pathos* because the images correspond to what is practical or truthful about their circumstances (Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.11.1411b.20). Ancient orators and novelists used these emotions to change an audience, help them refocus their lives toward the good, and connect (Ovid *Tristia* 3.4.55–60; *Ex Ponto* 1.8.33–38; Webb 1997, p. 117). A listener has faith or belief (*pisteis*) in a person to emulate because they hear about the virtues that are honored in the community and can be shared with their neighbors and benefit others (Aristotle *Rhetoric* 2.11.4; Shiell 2011, p. 14).

The prose hymn and the epistle help the audience visualize and reorient their mindset about Jesus's humiliating choices, his manner of death, the attending responses to Jesus, and Paul's condition in prison. Jesus's and Paul's circumstances are not shameful, but virtuous, obedient lives worth exalting. Jesus's circumstances function as an analogy to the Philippians' situation. Even though they will likely not face crucifixion, the imagery of "rebirth" or "becoming" obedient suggests a path that the citizens of Philippi can choose to follow. In 2.7–8, the participle *genomenos* is repeated, once referring to humanity, and once referring to obedience. If the Philippians are willing to adopt this mindset, their obedience will lead to a rebirth (2.12–15).

This *ekphrasis* also warns the audience. If they stand firm together, they can avoid losing their colony. Like the prose hymn of Moses (Deut 31 LXX), the audience is on notice. Anyone who aligns themselves with the "dogs" (3.1–4) or divides the group will suffer the same consequences as the Israelites entering the promised land.

3.4.5. Resolve Conflict in the Lord

Lastly, the hymn's performance in Philippians sets the stage for the direct address in chapter 4. The hymn is not a detached refrain, but a medium to resolve the present conflict "in the Lord" (Gordley 2011, p. 285). Paul and Timothy list three activities "in the Lord," connecting ("so that") their practical work to the hymn's confession to "Lord Jesus Christ": standing firm (4.1), agreeing (*phronein*) (4.2), and rejoicing (4.4). Each phrase is mentioned as the lector directly addresses the audience of beloved brothers and sisters and names three people: two overseers, Euodia and Syntyche, and Paul's anonymous genuine companion (*syzygos* Oestreich 2016, p. 87). Considering what we have learned about hymn singing and conflicts, this audience could easily connect the hymn to the issues in 4.1–3.

To stand firm in the Lord, the reader directly addresses the "brothers and sisters" (vocative) first. The rhetorical effect binds the siblings to the words and each other (4 Macc 13.19–27) and causes the audience to submit to the senders' wishes (Longinus (*Subl.*) 1.4). As Longinus notes, the use of multiple figures at once "often has an exceptionally powerful effect, when two or three combined to cooperate, as it were, to contribute force, conviction, beauty". (Longinus (*Subl.*) 20.1 (Russell, LCL)). They are invited into the struggle to maintain virtuous living while dealing with the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche (Longinus (*Subl.*) 26.1–2; Shiell 2011, p. 50). The words are not only linked together rhetorically, but the rhetorical effect of the reading also links the senders and listeners together. Everyone is involved in the process, whether or not they want to be. Verse 1 uses repetition to heighten the emotional intensity by addressing the audience twice as "beloved" (Symon 2007, p. 230). The people are Paul's and Timothy's joy, completed through the people's harmonious relationships (Matt 25.23). But their joy is incomplete (2.2) because they do not share the same mindset (2.3, 4.2). By thinking together (2.2) in the

Lord, they complete Paul's joy (4.1, 4). The performance tunes their ears to achieve what Paul and Timothy want in 1.27—strengthen cohesion in the Lord (Oestreich 2016, p. 126).

Verse 2 addresses three individuals to "agree in the Lord". Euodia and Syntyche are likely two "bishops/overseers" addressed in 1.1 who, like Lydia in Act 16, host the church and administer the financial resources given (Osiek 2000, p. 112). Their "struggle along with Paul" indicates their prominence and roles in constituting and organizing the colony and administering finances (Plato *Leg*. 2.784a). They ensure that monetary resources are distributed correctly, and they watch over and guard the new community (Phil 1.27; 3.1, 4.10–18). By listening to or singing the hymn, they are prepared for Paul and Timothy to address them directly in the reading of Philippians.

The direct address can be interpreted in two ways: a foundational admonition to the colonists to resolve the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche or an aside to the prominent women before the remaining instructions unfold. The reader decides the emphasis.

In the first interpretation, Euodia and Syntyche's unresolved conflict affects everything in the community. Now that the group has sung together as citizens of heaven, the following verses explain how they stand firm in this way. The reader could emphasize the phrase this way, "So that the siblings can stand firm, I need these two people to be single-minded. The church's unity depends on their peace". The alternative interpretation views the conflict as one—but not the primary issue—in the church. The emphasis here is "Therefore, I admonish you to stand firm in this way. Resolve your conflict. Everyone else, rejoice in the Lord".

By singling out these persons, the reader addresses and names the people that are necessary to unify the church and keep them together during suffering. This scene is an example of a first-century intervention. We should imagine a reader looking directly into their eyes and personally pleading with people in the room with the first-person singular "I appeal" (4.2), repeated like "beloved" in 4.1 for emotional intensity. The reader defuses tension publicly by facing the women, praising them, and appointing a fellow companion: "Yes-- I ask also you, genuine fellow companion, intervene with them" (4.3). The word "yes" indicates that the recipient of the request is expected to say "yes". The companion does not have an option. The work of intervention is not merely "helping" these women, which most English versions have. This word is usually used in the New Testament to "arrest," "seize," or "conceive". Here, Paul and Timothy want intense assistance, much like the disciples dragging in the catch of fish in Luke 5.7–9 (Thompson and Longenecker 2016, p. 123). In other words, this is a gesture to "take hold" of these leaders to try to help them get along for the sake of the colony. The companion can work with the beloved siblings to address the rift and hold the parties accountable. By structuring the presentation in this way, Paul and Timothy put public pressure on the group to figure out how to get along and put pressure on the church to participate in the reconciliation process.

The third activity is the repeated "rejoice in the Lord", emphasizing joy's role in the intervention (3.1, 4.4). Instead of turning to the past and reminding them of the wrongs that Euodia and Syntyche committed, the epistle reminds them of Lord Jesus Christ's present work through the hymn and turns their attention to a future that is focused on the joy that is found in restored relationships. They foster recognizable gentleness, believing that the Lord is near. Just as Jesus's presence is wherever "two or three" are gathered to resolve a church conflict, his presence is with the Philippians in their joyful gentleness toward each other (Matthew 18:15–20).

Their decision to engage in these ways enables a divine work similar to the Greek prose hymn tradition. The Lord Jesus Christ becomes an Eros and Dinoysus-like figure, reuniting people in love and unity (Plato *Symposium* 189c–193d; Aristides *Oration* 41.8). Like Athena, he brings peace to a divided community and trains people to live morally (Aristides *Oration* 37.13). The performance suggests that this decision to confess to the Lord Jesus Christ in chapter two begins to harmonize the relationships, making it possible for these three actions (stand firm, agree, rejoice) to occur.

To reinforce their thinking, in 4.8–9, Paul and Timothy use a combination of rhetorical figures: *sorites*, a stair step or ladder effect; *gradatio*, or a chain link effect; and *asyndeton*, the repeated use of whatsoever (see the impact in Longinus above). They set up two *sorites*, a virtuous and praiseworthy stair-step process, similar to Aristides' hymn to Athena (*Oration* 37.27). The reading creates a chain link effect or *gradatio* among the concepts and the people with the *asyndeton* "whatsoever". One concept builds upon the other.

In this context, Paul and Timothy use the performance of the hymn and the subsequent address to develop a virtuous and praiseworthy mindset and a practical way to put these thoughts into action (Phil *Sacrif. Abel.* 27; Phil *Leg. Alleg.* 1.64; Cicero *Rosc. Amer.* 27.75; Dio Chrysostom *Disc.* 4.89–90; 69.1–3; Wis. 8.7; 1QS 4.2–6). Just as God responded to Jesus's humiliation (2:6–11), now, God responds to the Philippians' work "in the Lord" and establishes peace as a guardian and a governor (4.9; Novakovic 2020, p. 109). The hymn becomes a rhetorical tuning fork, identifying the dissonance in the audience and preparing them to be brought into harmony with one another. Singing together, they reunite a divided church and express their commitment to standing firm in one Spirit (Minear 1990, p. 204). God's peace keeps watch over the colony as they feel, think, and discern together as they intervene, pray, and offer thanksgiving (Osiek 2000, p. 116). This kind of prayer does not lead to more worry; it leads to confidence. The audience surrenders to Christ's peace, and God's protection gives them peace. This peace is closely attached to singing amid suffering (2.6–11). Just as the joy of the Lord is a safeguard (3.1), joy, singing, and peace are also connected (Acts 16.25). The chanted hymn in Philippians 2, the intervention in chapter four, and the actions "in the Lord" activate the peace of God to guard the community (Bowens 2020, p. 260).

4. Conclusions

Ancient authors and orators communicated through prose hymns, and religious audiences routinely participated in their performances. The epistle to the Philippians contains one such example of a prose hymn that is utilized similarly to other Greek and Jewish hymns. The "Lord Jesus Christ" hymn venerates Jesus for his obedience and the manner of his death. Paul and Timothy utilize a solemn and emotionally moving performance of the hymn through Epaphroditus or a lector to encourage reconciliation, indirectly warn them of the consequences of fragmentation in the community, address the conflict between two prominent women in the epistle, and encourage continued philanthropy from the audience. The hymn values what the ancient world would have considered shameful actions and honors Jesus's sacrifice as a model for virtuous living. Unique among ancient authors, Paul and Timothy utilize the hymn to name the persons in conflict and authorize other recipients to mediate. The performance of the hymn with the direct address illustrates how the audience perceived Jesus's ongoing work in the community and the hymn's role in reconciling fragmented relationships. The singing to "Lord Jesus Christ" fosters a new mindset of humility toward one another. The performance helps the audience recall the biographies of Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, linking them together. The Philippians have the confidence to stand firm in the Lord together (4:1) in this life and in the next (1.6; 2.1; 3.3, 10–11, 21; 4.7, 19).

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