

Jonah as a Performance

Performance Critical Guidelines for Reading a Prophetic Text

*Jeanette Mathews, Charles Sturt University, Australian Capital Territory**

Abstract

Biblical Performance Criticism is becoming an established discipline in Biblical Studies, and is an approach that is well suited to prophetic literature due to the embodied nature of prophetic messages, the assumption that there is an audience for the message, and the necessity for re-enactment in the light of new experience. This approach, however, lacks clear methodological guidelines. This paper proposes four methodological guidelines for reading biblical books as performances (performance-oriented translation; embodiment; dynamism; re-enactment), then applies those guidelines to the book of Jonah in order to highlight artistry, analysis, and activism in the performance of Jonah. A performance-oriented script of Jonah is provided as an appendix.

Keywords

Jonah; biblical performance criticism; performance; translation

Introduction

Biblical Performance Criticism (BPC) is no longer an emerging discipline in Biblical Studies. It is the focus of a book series,¹ of several sessions devoted to the Bible in Ancient and Modern Media at the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, and of an active online community of scholarship and praxis (www.biblicalperformancecriticism.com). Development of a methodology is still in progress, however, especially for non-narrative texts. This article contributes to that methodological quest as it seeks to read the book of Jonah via the lens of Biblical Performance Criticism.

* Jeanette Mathews (jmathews@csu.edu.au) teaches Old Testament and biblical languages in the School of Theology of Charles Sturt University. She is based in Canberra, where she was a pastor at Canberra Baptist Church for ten years before moving to St Mark's National Theological Centre to study and teach. Her research is in the area of Biblical Performance Studies and she is the author of *Performing Habakkuk: Faithful Re-enactment in the Midst of Crisis* (2012). She is committed to upholding, transmitting, and improvising the biblical traditions in all their wondrous diversity for new settings in our own times and places.

¹ See the *Biblical Performance Criticism* Series published by Cascade Books, edited by David Rhoads.

Biblical Performance Criticism and Prophetic Literature

BPC has its roots in orality studies, recognising that the earliest transmission of biblical texts was by oral delivery. According to David Rhoads, the discipline of BPC:

seeks to re-imagine ancient Israel and the early church as predominantly oral and memory cultures, to construct scenarios of ancient performances as means to interpret anew the traditions of the Bible, to reconsider the disciplines we use to study the Bible to take account of orality, and to develop steps in a process of performance analysis of biblical texts. (Unpublished paper)

Like Performance Studies in the broader academic world, BPC aims for a “bracing dialectic” between theory and practice.² The community promoting BPC are committed to the use of performance as a *method* as well as a *subject* for study, claiming that interpretation of biblical texts is enhanced by performance of those texts themselves (Rhoads 2010, 157). Nonetheless, this study is predominantly theoretical in focus, seeking the performative clues that give support for Shimon Levy’s claim that biblical material is *intrinsically* theatrical (2000, 2).

Dwight Conquergood helpfully uses the alliterated terms artistry, analysis, and activism, “three crisscrossing lines of activity and analysis,” to remind us of the commitment to both theory and practice in Performance Studies (2004, 318). These terms have influenced my own approach to BPC, as will be seen below.

The dramatic quality of biblical narrative literature is evident, but I suggest that prophetic literature that includes both prose and poetry is particularly open for analysis via BPC. Prophetic literature in general is obviously dramatic in that it is focused on characters in particular settings who are clearly inviting audience reflection and participation. On the other hand, prophetic literature is often written in poetic form which is terse and complex and there may be little in the way of plot development. In prophetic literature, character analysis is more complex than in narrative literature. Prophetic literature is frequently available to us in first person address and characteristically includes speech on behalf of the deity, resulting in some ambiguity when seeking to identify actors. This is especially difficult when the conventions for introducing direct speech that is common in narrative literature are lacking. Prophetic speeches can be analyzed as performative speech acts, a key concept arising from Performance Studies (Austin 1975; Houston 1993), since they are intended to bring about the message in the very speaking of them. But the prophets were clearly more than orators. They embodied their message, sometimes in highly provocative performances and often within their own life experiences.

The fact that the prophetic material of the Hebrew Bible has been preserved beyond its original context is suggestive of re-enactment, another important aspect

² Conquergood states that “[scholars of Performance Studies] are committed to a bracing dialectic between performance theory and practice. We believe that theory is enlivened and most rigorously tested when it hits the ground in practice. Likewise, we believe that artistic practice can be deepened, complicated, and challenged in meaningful ways by engaging critical theory” (1995, 139).

in Performance Studies. The reception and interpretation of texts in contexts beyond the original setting inevitably results in new performances, with different actors, audiences, and even differing interpretations.

The book of Jonah has been effectively analysed as rhetorical narrative (Trible 1994), but in fact combines several genres since it is found amongst the prophetic literature and is presented as a narrative with a poetic insertion. New insights may be gained, therefore, by approaching it via BPC.

Proposal of a Methodology

Although BPC overlaps with a range of other methodological approaches to biblical literature, there are important distinctions. A focus on performance will naturally intersect with some aspects of Narrative Criticism, especially characterisation and dialogue. But there is a greater attention to characteristics that are inherent to live performance, such as extra-linguistic features of speech and audience participation. Recognition of the importance of the audience differentiates BPC from Narrative Criticism, the focus of which is on an individualised “implied reader.”³ Rather than analysis of plot structure, BPC gives attention to “scenes,” marked by changes in actors and setting, which together form a “script.” The invitation to re-enactment is more intrinsic to BPC than narrative analysis: there is a difference between telling a story (narrative) and offering a model that invites re-enactment (performance).

With these differences in mind I suggest that prophetic texts can be examined via BPC by application of several performance-based “guidelines” that have been distilled from a study of performance criticism across a broad range of disciplines. Like the general schema of Performance Studies outlined by Conquergood, I suggest three broad aims in this proposed BPC methodology. The first aim is to notice the *artistry* of the text. How has the author and later redactors shaped the material to marry the message with its transmission? Second, the text must be *analysed* to draw out the dramatic aspects implicit in it that might otherwise have been overlooked. The third aim embraces *activism*: how has the text been shaped to invite re-enactment? If Scripture is to be understood as a performance, our study of it should not remain a purely academic exercise but should have an impact within our community. The audience should be transformed, responding to the challenges of the text in their own context.

There is some similarity between my approach to prophetic literature and that of Paul House (1989) who proposed the idea of “closet drama” in his monograph on the book of Zephaniah. House notices classical dramatic characteristics in Zephaniah such as dialogue between characters, plot development constructed around conflict and resolution, unity in place, action, and time (106). The main area of distinction between BPC as I envisage it and House’s closet drama is the role of the audience. House argues that a closet drama such as Zephaniah was not necessarily meant to be staged. He says “the author is thereby able to concentrate on poetry and content without worrying about how the play will affect an audience” (50). And yet, as already noted, audience impact is an essential aspect of BPC.

³ Hence Maxey’s assertion “it would be more appropriate to call biblical performance criticism audience-response criticism” (2012, 11).

Although actual performance of my “script” of Jonah (see Appendix) would undoubtedly shed a new interpretive lens on my analysis, my aim in this study is to discover the influence that performance might have had on the creation of the text itself. Identification of the intrinsic dramatic features in the text forms a basis for interpretation, performance, and re-enactment.

Guidelines for Applying Biblical Performance Criticism to Biblical Texts

I believe it is necessary to develop hermeneutical guidelines for BPC, that is, a set of basic understandings that are common to interpreting scriptural texts as performances.⁴ The four guidelines I have used in order to highlight artistry, analysis and activism in the performance of Jonah are:

1. Performance-Oriented Translation
2. Embodiment
3. Dynamism
4. Re-enactment

Guideline 1: Performance-Oriented Translation

BPC aims to reclaim biblical traditions before they were products of a print culture. In the recent history of Biblical Studies the dominant way to view texts has been as written manuscripts to be interpreted silently and in private, broken into verses for scholarly analysis. For proponents of BPC, recognition must be given to the original oral and community contexts for transmission of texts, treating the writings as “remnants of *oral events*” (Rhoads 2010, 157; italics original). If texts were composed to be viewed and heard, they were composed as “scripts.” We should therefore notice the elements that are effective to the ear and do our best to replicate these in our own translations. Translation of biblical texts takes place along a continuum between “formal” and “functional” modes, with valid reasons for preferring either mode, but I believe that in order to elicit embedded performative aspects of texts we need to lean to the formal end of the spectrum. It hardly needs stating that translation is not a precise science. In moving from biblical Hebrew to modern English, many words resist just one single English equivalent, and interpretive fluidity is necessary. Despite this limitation, consistency of lexical translation is desirable. The same Hebrew word should be translated with the same English word throughout the target text as far as possible. In addition, highly iconic translations that pay attention to rhetorical features such as repetition or word order and attempt to replicate word play in the original language will aid in recreating the original oral event underlying the text. Performance-oriented translations are also sensitive to linguistic and syntactic forms that are not easily transferred into the target language. For example, if singular and plural second person verbs in the original Hebrew are clearly delineated, invitations to audience participation are more clearly seen. Performance-oriented translation should also aim to highlight “readymades”—

⁴ The work done by Norman Habel and The Earth Bible Team to develop a set of hermeneutical principles for reading biblical texts from the perspective of the earth in light of environmental crises has influenced my approach to developing methodological guidelines for BPC (Habel 2000, 42-53).

terms or phrases that have connection to other parts of scripture and so evoke other settings and potentially reshape the conventional meanings of those words and phrases.

My performance-oriented translation of the book of Jonah is included as an appendix to this paper. Let me highlight a few examples of this guideline at work in my translation.

Repetition and Word Play in Jonah

In Jon. 1:9, the prophet is asked a series of questions about his origins, to which he replies “I am a Hebrew . . . I worship the Lord, the God of heaven” (NRSV and many other translations). The verb *yārē’* (ירא), translated “worship” in v. 9, is also used by the sailors in Jon. 1:16. Surprisingly, however, the NRSV and many other versions translate v. 16 as “the men *feared* the Lord.” A few versions translate “fear” in both verses, and in my view this seems to be the point of the author: the prophet of YHWH who should “fear” YHWH does not, running away from his commissioned task; whereas pagan sailors who have no relationship with YHWH do, in fact, fear him. Notably, *The Message* uses “worship” in both contexts. The phrase “And the men were afraid [with] a great fear” is repeated exactly in Jon. 1:10 and 1:16, but in v. 16 the object of their fear has been identified as YHWH. Using the same words in translation drives home this sense of progressive revelation of “YHWH the god of the heavens who made the sea and the dry land” (1:9). That the sailors and the prophet are indeed relating to the same god is underscored by reference to the “sacrifices and vows” made by the sailors in 1:16, words repeated by the prophet in his psalm as the appropriate liturgical response to YHWH (Jon. 2:10).

There are several other repeated words that should be noted and rendered consistently:

- The verb *yārad* (ירד), translated “[he] went down” is used three times within two verses (1:3 [x2], 1:5), signifying a deliberate movement to the depths by the prophet in his attempt to flee the “god of the heavens” (1:9).
- The verb *tūl* (טל), translated “hurl” (1:4, 5, 12, 15; all *hifil* stems), is used for comic effect as several characters imitate each other: YHWH hurls a storm on the sea, sailors hurl cargo overboard, Jonah instructs the sailors to hurl him overboard with the cargo and finally, reluctantly, they do so. It is notable that in the prayer of Jonah a different verb is used to describe his entry into the sea (*šālak*, שלק, translated “throw,” Jon. 2:4).⁵ The piety of the poetry is deliberately disassociated from the comedy of the narrative. Humour is often an integral part of performance, and should be maintained in translation of biblical material where possible.
- The verb *mānāh* (מנה), translated “he appointed” (2:1; 4:6, 7, 8), is used four times with YHWH as the subject. YHWH sequentially “appoints” a fish, plant,

⁵ Many other translations, though using the same translation in 1:5, 12, 15, use a different verb for God’s action in v 4: “hurled” (NRSV); “cast” (NIV); “sent out” (KJV). In the KJV, the translation for the remaining three identical verbs is “cast” but the different verb *nāpal* (נפל, v. 7) is also translated “cast.” Note the CEB has translated, as I have, “hurl” for all four instances of *tūl*.

worm, and wind in an attempt to persuade the reluctant prophet. Tribble contrasts the appointment of the fish with the triple appointment of natural objects in chapter 4, “skewing the symmetry to accent the longer passage” (1994, 208). My point, however, is that the repetition of the verb used in chapter 2 later in the story draws connections between the various ways in which YHWH acts towards the prophet, and the same translation should be used to highlight this.⁶

- The root *rā'ā'* (רעע, “evil”) (1:2, 7, 8; 3:8, 10; 4:1 [x2], 6), is used in adjectival, nominal, and verbal forms, but importantly, is used in relation to both the Ninevites and the prophet Jonah. The Ninevites repent from their evil but it is unclear whether Jonah is delivered from *his* evil.

Repetition and word play can also be noted and replicated at the morphological level. Verbs and nouns of the same root are easily replicated in English: “And the men *feared* YHWH with a great *fear* and they *sacrificed* a *sacrifice* to YHWH and they *vowed* *vows*” (1:16); “*call* out to her the warning *call*” (3:2); “Jonah *rejoiced* because of the plant with great *joy*” (4:6).

More care can be taken in translation to emulate the recurrence of consonants and vowels in Hebrew words that are associated, such as the interplay between *šēl* (צל, shade) and *nāṣal* (נצל, to deliver) in Jonah 4:6. My translation attempts to replicate this sound play by rendering “shade” and “save” respectively: “. . . to be shade over his head to save him from his evil.”

Rhetorical devices in the original text including alliteration, assonance and consonance, onomatopoeia, and ideophones will all have greater impact if translation seeks to mirror the word play. The repeated phrase *hōlēk wəšō'ēr* (הולך וסער) in Jon. 1:11 and 1:14, containing two active participles with similar sounding vowels, is usually translated adverbially where the first participle indicates the second action is continuous and increasing. Hence translations such as “[the sea was] growing more and more tempestuous” (NRSV). I have chosen to retain the double participle with similar sounding words in the phrase “[the sea was] stomping and storming” (1:11, 14).⁷ Similarly, the similar sounding vowels and consonants in the phrase *hiššēbāh lēhiššābēr* (חשבה להשבר) in Jon. 1:4 has been translated “bashed to bits” to replicate at least a little of the alliteration and sibilance of the original Hebrew.

Reproducing such techniques in English translation takes effort and imagination but will help us recapture the impact of the original oral presentation of the text.

The Significance of Word Order in Jonah

⁶ Note the translation in the NRSV: YHWH/God “provided” a fish, “appointed” a bush and worm, and “prepared” a wind.

⁷ Tribble’s translation “the-sea (was) going and storming” uses a more generic translation of הלך but misses the opportunity to replicate some sound play (1994, 142).

Word order in the original Hebrew should be noted when different to what would be usual or expected. For example, it is noticeable when a proper name precedes a verb, since the usual sentence structure in Biblical Hebrew is verb—subject—object. Jonah’s self-confession in 1:9, usually translated “I am a Hebrew” is literally “Hebrew I am.” If translated the latter way, the ethnic identification of the prophet is placed at the forefront, serving as a reminder to the original audience that this prophet is supposed to be one of them. In the same verse the self-identification continues with a confession of faith that could be understood as an answer to the sailors’ question about his occupation (they had not asked about his religious identity). Again the placement of the verb after its object suggests the name of YHWH the god of the heavens is the significant part of the sentence “YHWH the god of the heavens I fear.” Certainly the claim of Jonah to “fear” YHWH contrasts with his earlier attempts to remove himself from YHWH’s presence. This statement is paralleled in structure by the description of Jonah’s action in 1:10 (“from the presence of YHWH he was fleeing”) and the prophet’s confessional statement in 2:8 where he claims “YHWH I remembered.” In each case YHWH as object is forefronted over the prophet’s action.

I have commented elsewhere on the way the final word in a prophetic script can give importance to the conclusion of the script and therefore the lingering impact of the performance (Mathews 2012, 174-75). The book of Jonah ends with a speech of YHWH contrasting the prophet’s compassion for a transitory plant with his own compassion for an ignorant metropolis. The final words in this interrogatory speech, however, are *bēhēmāh rabbāh* (בהמה רבה), “a lot of livestock” (4:11; cf. 3:8). Whilst these words highlight YHWH’s compassion for the least in the Ninevite community, they form a rather comical conclusion to the book. Both Jonah and the audience are left to ponder the question—should YHWH have compassion for livestock, especially Assyrian livestock, or not?

Readymades in Jonah

The term “readymade” was first used in connection with the arts by Marcel Duchamp, who selected ordinary manufactured objects (readymades) and repositioned them to create an artwork, one of the most famous being a porcelain urinal entitled “Fountain”. Readymades are identifiable in musical performance, such as “riffs” that can be recognised out of context or well-known portions of music used in advertisements to create particular emotional response from the viewer. The term has also been used in linguistics where constructed discourse relies on pre-patterned phrases. Rather than learning language as building blocks, from the part to the whole, we learn to break down from the whole to chunks, and can then rearrange and vary these chunks for new situations. According to Ian Mackenzie, written literary composition shares its properties with spoken language and relies on a store of institutionalised utterances. By producing variations on what is expected, an author can create surprise or humour for their readers and listeners (2000, 173-79).

In Biblical Studies, the term “ready-made” has been used in relation to fixed word pairs in Hebrew poetry (see Watson 1984, 137). I expand this term to include any word or phrase that relies on an audience’s stored knowledge and

expectations in order to engender elements of surprise or disquiet when heard in new or unexpected situations.

The book of Jonah begins with *wayēhiy* (וַיְהִי), “and it happened,” a typical narrative introduction, but the phrase *dēbar yhwh* (דְּבַר יְהוָה), “word of YHWH,” that immediately follows is a readymade—the formulaic phrase used in the majority of the books making up the Book of the Twelve that introduces prophetic speech and action. Right at the beginning of this performance the audience is unsettled—are they to expect a story or a prophetic oracle? Jonah’s response of immediately fleeing the presence of YHWH signals that this is no ordinary prophetic account: an audience might expect verbal protest to the prophetic call (a typical element in the prophetic call narrative) but never outright disobedience.

As one might expect, the second chapter of Jonah with its liturgical overtones has a number of readymades, but again the new context—“a great fish”—adds an element of surprise, perhaps subtly leading the audience to expect an element of lampooning. Despite two references to *hēykal qādšekā* (הַיְכָל קֹדֶשׁ), “your holy temple” (2:5, 8), which surely functions as a readymade to signal prayer and worship, the text tells us that Jonah’s prayer takes place “from the insides of the fish” (2:2). Moreover, the text’s second reference to sacrifice and vows (2:10; cf. 1:16) also takes place within the fish. Another readymade in this chapter is the time span of “three days and three nights” (2:1). Although the actual phrase only occurs in one other context in the Hebrew Bible (1 Sam. 30:12), the motif of “three days” is frequently used in relation to noteworthy journeys, such as Abraham’s journey to Moriah to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22:4), Moses’ request of Pharaoh for time to sacrifice in the wilderness (Exod. 3:18; 5:3; 8:27; 15:22), the Israelites’ journey from Sinai (Num. 10:33), and so on (Landes 1967). Significantly, Jonah’s journey across Nineveh also takes three days (3:3). Both uses of this readymade in light of its use in other traditions would signal to the audience that the prophet’s experiences ought to be life-changing. This message is underscored by a further liturgical readymade—the mention of *sukkāh* (סֹכֶת), “booth” (4:5). Booths were used in the joyful harvest festival of Sukkoth to recall YHWH’s provision for the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness (Lev. 23:33-43). When Jonah builds a “booth,” the audience is led to expect an attitude of thankfulness. The subsequent petulance of the prophet is more arresting due to the use of this readymade.

Other readymades in this composition include deliverance (2:10) and loving kindness (2:9, 4:2). The phrase describing the nature of YHWH in Jonah’s prayer of 4:2 (“mercy and compassion, slow to anger and of much loving kindness”) is a readymade found several times elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Exod. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13). The phrase is used surprisingly and humorously in this context by being put in Jonah’s speech as an accusation against God rather than an affirmation of God’s character, and in its message that YHWH’s nature is extended beyond Israel to her bitter enemy.

Translating for performance

Performance-oriented translation will be sensitive to where natural divisions occur, marked by changes in speaker or setting. The almost exact repetition of the opening line (Jon. 1:1) in Jon. 3:1 divides the narrative into two parts, but changes

in location and actors offer further division into scenes. I have therefore translated Jonah in two acts, each of which contains two scenes. There is a prologue at the beginning of each act, but there is no closure to the performance, shown by the blank epilogue. The resulting open-ended presentation of the performance is significant from the BPC perspective, as discussed more fully below.

Note that this translation follows the verse division found in the Masoretic Text in which chapter 1 ends with the sailors' vows in v. 16 and chapter 2 commences with the appointment of the fish. Although versification in most English translations includes the appointment of the fish as v. 17 in chapter 1, almost all commentaries divide with the MT, including the appointment of the fish at the beginning of the second scene.

Guideline 2: Embodiment

Embodiment is a key concept in Performance Theory and is what defines theatre amongst the arts (Weber 2004, 297). Performance is characterised by liveness and presence. Embodiment is also a particular feature of prophetic literature. The prophets are commissioned both to speak and *act* to communicate YHWH's message. They were not merely channels for mediation but embodied communicators. Knowing is achieved by doing rather than by mere observation. Conquergood describes this as "participatory knowledge" in contrast to propositional knowledge (2004, 311-12). The most arresting example of participatory knowledge in the book of Jonah is the psalm that describes in poetic form the experience of being cast into the depths of the sea (2:3-8). Even though the metaphorical nature of the description is evident, the strength of its impact is in its testimony of the knowledge of YHWH as embodied experience.

The message actually proclaimed by Jonah in 3:4 is famously brief: just five words in Hebrew. It is highly probable that there is deliberate humour in the brevity of the prophetic word and the excessive response by the people of Nineveh, but the plot of the story requires something in Jonah's delivery of his message, perhaps extraverbal cues, that struck a chord with his audience. Tribble points out that Jonah's statement is "unstable," since it lacks a standard prophetic formula and the verb *hpk* (הפך) can have both negative and positive connotations for the Israelites (1994, 180).⁸ The repetition of the root *hlk* (הלך), "journey," emphasises the action taken by the prophet along with his ambiguous words. Furthermore, the aforementioned readymade "three days" suggests that, like his earlier journey of three days, something significant is happening for the prophet as well as for his audience. The very physical reaction—the fasting and donning of sackcloth—of the whole of the city, from king to beast, is a reminder that meaningful repentance is more than words, underscored by the assertion that "God *saw their deeds* . . . and relented from the evil which he had said he would do to them" (3:10).

The principle of embodiment can also make us alert to other actors in the performance of Jonah, even non-human creatures or entities. Although the only

⁸ For example, it is used in passages of judgement against Jerusalem but also in relation to the miracles surrounding Israel's exodus from Egypt (see Hamilton 1980, 221). A possible English translation that would capture this ambiguity would be "turned upside down" so I have used "upturned" in my translation in order to replicate the brevity of the Hebrew announcement.

actors named are Jonah and YHWH/God, other actors are given voice and agency and so have important roles to play. Scene 1 of Act 1 has several speeches and questions attributed to the sailors and their chief. As we have noted, these men become models of piety in contrast to the disobedient prophet. But other agents are present in this scene also: the ship “thought itself to be bashed to bits” (1:4) and the sea “was stomping and storming” (1:11, 13). In Scene 1 of Act 2 the people of Nineveh, the king, and his nobles all take part in the action, fasting and covering themselves with sackcloth, but so do the livestock (3:7-8, 4:11)! The four entities that were the objects of YHWH’s appointing all become subjects of active verbs: the fish “vomited up Jonah” (2:11), the plant “went up over Jonah . . . to save him from his evil” (4:6), the worm “attacked the plant” (4:7), and the sun “attacked the head of Jonah” (4:8). These can be understood as actors in their own right, especially when we hear YHWH ironically pointing out Jonah’s emotional response to the fate of the plant, lending possibilities to interpretations of this book that move beyond androcentrism.

A focus on embodiment as a feature of this prophetic book reminds us of the bodily nature of oral performance. Scripture originated in living bodies, and was transmitted through actual communities. For scripture to remain relevant it must be faithfully re-enacted by its readers/hearers. Imagining Jonah as a performance encourages us to discern and live out its message in our own context. This might mean, for example, recognising faith of outsiders as equivalent to or surpassing our own faith.

Guideline 3: Dynamism

Another guideline in viewing texts as performances relates to movement and openness that are integral to the scripts as they have been preserved and transmitted. Conquergood suggests that within the discipline of Performance Criticism there has been a shift in understanding performance as mimesis to poiesis to kinesis.⁹ Another way of describing this movement in the change of perspective is from performance as *imitation* to performance as *creation* to performance as *dynamism*. The principle of dynamism in performance captures its nature of “crossing boundaries and troubling closure” (Conquergood 1992, 84). It is focused on the doing of the thing rather than the end product.

When alert to this perspective we can easily identify examples of dynamism in the book of Jonah. Like many narratives, Jonah makes use of the *wayyiqtol* verbal form. Literal translation of the *waw* as a conjunctive gives a sense of movement to the script, highlighting the paratactic style of Hebrew narrative. Movement is also conveyed by person shifts. Prophetic literature typically includes shifts from non-threatening third person forms to second person forms which encourage a sense of immediacy and often prompt audience involvement (De Regt 2001, 214-31). Within the book of Jonah there is an alternation between third person and second person address. All of Scene 1 of Act 1 is conveyed in third person narrative, but in Scene 2 the prophet’s prayer begins with a third person report (2:3) then quickly shifts to second person address for the majority of the chapter until the last sentence. At the beginning of Act 2 the narration continues in

⁹ The persons associated with these moves are Auerbach (mimesis), Turner (poiesis), and Bhabha/Conquergood (kinesis).

third person perspective but the dialogue of Scene 2 involves first and second person verbs, ending with a direct question of YHWH to Jonah which effectively draws the audience of the drama into the dialogue, leaving us to answer the question posed at the end of the script. This, then, is a wonderful example of an open text, signalled in my script by the unfilled Epilogue. Different interpretations can hang on the answer to that open question and performances could therefore be quite varied.

Ambiguity in the script is another aspect of dynamism. I have already spoken of the lack of clarity surrounding the prophetic oracle Jonah gives—has he given a true or false prophecy? The Deuteronomic criterion for a true prophecy is that the word spoken by the prophet proves true (Deut. 18:21-22), yet Jonah’s pronouncement did not come to pass. The ambiguity resulting from this uncertainty of his legitimacy as a prophet and the undisputed, albeit late, canonisation of the book within Israel’s prophetic literature has led to much speculation about the purpose of the book from the rabbinical period onward.¹⁰

The phrase *’ir gēdōlāh lē’lohīm* (עיר גדולה לאלהים), “a great city to God” (3:3), is rarely translated literally, but commentaries discuss the possible meaning of the Hebrew phrase since it is not clear whether it is a reference to Nineveh’s size (“an exceedingly large city”) or value (“a city great in God’s estimation”).

The variation in names referring to the deity adds another level of ambiguity. The deity is clearly a major character in the drama, but do the different names “YHWH,” “God,” “YHWH-God” (4:6), and “the God” (4:7) suggest different facets of the same character? A student translating this book in a Hebrew class postulated that “YHWH” acts to save and “God” acts to judge. If this is tenable, the use of both names in 4:6 is particularly interesting, since it is unclear from the open-endedness of the script whether Jonah is being offered salvation or judgement by YHWH. Faithfulness in rendering the Hebrew variations will add complexity to the character and be open to several different meanings, just as interpretive variations result in very different performances of the same script.

The principle of dynamism enables us to resist seeing texts as closed canons. Prophetic texts are especially open because there is evidence of editorial hands that have reworked material for new settings. This is the thrust of the fourth guideline below. Sensitivity to the dynamism of performance enables us to appreciate how past and present merge in prophetic texts as meaning is left deliberately open. In the performance of Jonah we are invited to participate as audience to the text, hearing those second person forms addressed to ourselves, compelling us to resolve the epilogue one way or another.

Guideline 4: Re-enactment

For over two millennia the biblical literature has been heard, read and studied in ever new situations. It is the same material repeated on each occasion, but the new occasion prevents us from understanding scripture as mere repetition. Re-enactment is repetition with difference. Re-enactment as a concept integral to

¹⁰ As James D. Nogalski (2011, 401) notes, this ambiguity also underlies the “historical” prophet Jonah mentioned in 2 Kgs 14:25 who is presented as a legitimate spokesman for YHWH according to the text but the favourable prophecy he offers relates to the expansion of the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam II, a northern king who is otherwise evaluated negatively in the ongoing tradition.

performance reminds us that new settings, new actors, and new audiences will all contribute to a text's reception. Prophetic texts are re-enacted texts *par excellence*, an insight long celebrated by redaction critics. Whatever the "original" words of the prophets, they were consistently adapted to new situations so that their message needs to be understood on several levels. Christian communities found that prophetic words from centuries earlier were relevant to their understanding of the message and mission of Jesus Christ, and re-enactment of prophetic messages for Jewish and Christian communities today is what enables these texts to remain relevant.

Scholarly debate exists in relation to the integrity of the text of Jonah as a whole. The genre, style, and perspective of the prayer-psalm in Scene 2 of Act 1 differ markedly from the rest of the narrative, leading to speculation that it was a later addition to the story. I think this is likely, and it is intriguing to speculate which circumstances and audiences felt it necessary to inject a pious prayer into a comedic narrative. Yet the symmetric nature of the book as a whole suggests that the psalm addressed to YHWH is an important counterbalance to the conversation between Jonah and YHWH in the final chapter, since the former expresses faith and gratitude in the character and nature of YHWH while the latter questions those same principles. The different emphases in the passages may prove more or less compelling for particular audiences. An individual in crisis would relate positively to the psalm's message of salvation from calamity, but if that crisis is resulting from the cruel hand of an enemy, the community of faith might well question the justice of YHWH's lack of intervention (cf. Hab. 1:13). Many commentaries have emphasised the graciousness and compassion YHWH shows for the outsider, a challenge to Jewish exclusivism (and, by extension, any Christian supremacism). By contrast, Chesung Ryu's postcolonial re-reading of Jonah positively interprets the prophet's silence at the end of the script as the only possible protest to be made on behalf of the powerless Judahites in the context of an all-powerful Assyrian Empire (2009). Since we cannot be sure which emphasis was intended in the original performance of Jonah, both re-enactments should be seen as valid. Such re-enactment is not a new concept, as shown by the rabbinical tradition of the biblical text as "black fire on white fire," a phrase from Midrash Tanhuma (400-600 CE). Black fire is understood as the actual letters of the text and might be considered its literal meaning, while white fire is the spaces between the letters—the ideas we as readers bring to the text, which may shape a new meaning (Rojtman 1998, 2).

I suggest that reading and interpreting scripture as performance results in equal authority being given to the script and the context in which it is read. In an anti-semitic context, we would need to hear Jonah's silence as expressive of the pain of a covenant people feeling abandoned by the God of the covenant while others prosper. In modern day Palestine, we would need to hear God questioning Jonah's anger at compassion being shown to those outside of the covenant. In our context of Islamophobia, we need to be reminded that when we try to prevent God's compassion from being shown, we who are followers of that God might be hurt by our own actions. And we need to recognise that God hears the voices of all who call on him for mercy: pagan sailors (Jon. 1:14), wicked Ninevites (Jon. 3:9), and recalcitrant prophets (Jon. 2:3).

Conclusion

I have become enamoured with Conquergood's challenge that for performance studies to reach beyond the academy there must be a threefold emphasis on analysis, artistry, and activism. *Analysis* takes place when methods sensitive to performance are combined with historical-critical and literary methodologies to draw out both the historical and theological issues underlying the original prophetic compositions and the ongoing impact in new settings. For me, paying attention to *artistry* means replicating, as much as possible, the compositional choices reflected in the original text via performance-oriented translation. *Activism* ("hitting the ground in practice") picks up the guideline of dynamism, but is perhaps most closely aligned to my concept of re-enactment: allowing the ancient texts to continue to impact today's audiences.

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Appendix: Jonah in Two Acts

Act I

Prologue: Jonah 1.1-2

¹ And the word of YHWH happened to Jonah son of Amittai saying,

² "Get up, go to Nineveh the great city and call out against her that their evil has come up in my presence (in my face!)"

Scene 1: Jonah 1.3-16

³ But Jonah got up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of YHWH and he went down to Joppa and he found a ship going to Tarshish and he gave its fare and went down in it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of YHWH. ⁴ And YHWH hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm in the sea and the ship truly thought itself to be bashed to bits. ⁵ And the sailors were afraid, and they cried out, each man to his gods, and they hurled the wares which were in the

ship into the sea to make [the ship] lighter for them. But Jonah went down to the far part of the vessel and he lay down and he fell into a deep sleep. ⁶ And the chief of the riggers approached him and said to him,

“What are you doing sleeping? Get up, call out to your gods. Perhaps the gods will consider us and we will not perish.”

⁷ And they said each one to his neighbour,

“Let us cast lots so we will know on whose account this evil thing is against us.”

So they cast lots and the lot was cast upon Jonah. ⁸ And they said to him,

“Tell us please why this evil thing is against us? What is your occupation and from where do you come? What is your country and from which people are you?”

⁹ And he said to them,

“Hebrew I am and YHWH the God of the heavens I fear who made the sea and the dry land.”

¹⁰ And the men were afraid [with] a great fear and they said to him,

“What is this you have done?”

Because the men knew that from the presence of YHWH he was fleeing because he had told them. ¹¹ And they said to him,

“What should we do to you so the sea will quieten from over us?”

Because the sea was stomping and storming. ¹² And he said to them,

“Lift me up and hurl me into the sea and the sea will quieten for you. Because I know that on account of me this great storm is upon you.”

¹³ But the men rowed to return to the dry land but they were not able to because the sea was stomping and storming over them. ¹⁴ And they called out to YHWH and they said,

“Please YHWH please do not let us perish on account of the life of this man and do not give us the blood of the innocent one because you, YHWH, as you like, you do.”

¹⁵ And they lifted Jonah and hurled him into the sea and the sea stood still from its raging. ¹⁶ And the men were afraid [with] a great fear of YHWH and they sacrificed a sacrifice to YHWH and they vowed vows.

Scene 2: Jonah 2.1-11

¹ And YHWH appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the insides of the fish for three days and three nights. ² And Jonah prayed to YHWH his god from the insides of the fish,

³ and he said,

I called out from my distress to YHWH/ and he answered me//

- From the belly of Sheol I cried out/ you heard my voice.
⁴ And you threw me down deep in the heart of the waters/ and a current surrounded me//
 All your breakers and your waves/ over me they passed.
⁵ And I said to myself, I am cast out/ from before your eyes//
 Yet will I again look/ upon your holy temple?
⁶ Waters overwhelm me up to my throat [life]/ Deep surrounds me//
 A reed is wrapped around my head.
⁷ To the roots of the mountains I went down; the underworld with its bars is around me forever//
 But you brought up from the pit my life / YHWH my god.
⁸ As my life was weakening over me / YHWH I remembered//
 And my prayer came to you / to your holy temple.
⁹ The ones paying regard to idols of worthlessness//
 Their loving kindness they will forsake.
¹⁰ But with a voice of praise/ let me sacrifice to you//
 That which I vowed I will fulfil/ Deliverance is YHWH's.
¹¹ And YHWH spoke to the fish, and it vomited up Jonah onto the dry land.

Act II

Prologue: Jonah 3.1-2

- ¹ And the word of YHWH happened to Jonah a second time, saying,
² “Get up, go to Nineveh the great city and call out to her the warning call which I am speaking to you.”

Scene 1: Jonah 3.3-10

³ And Jonah got up and he journeyed to Nineveh according to the word of YHWH. And Nineveh was a great city to God, a journey of three days. ⁴ And Jonah began to go into the city, a journey of one day, and he called out and said,

“Yet forty days and Nineveh is upturned.”

⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed in God and they called for a fast and they put on sackcloths, from the greatest of them to the smallest of them. ⁶ And the word reached the King of Nineveh and he got up from his throne and he made his cloak pass from himself, and he covered himself with a sackcloth and he sat on the ash-heap. ⁷ And he had it cried out (and he said) in Nineveh by order of the King and his nobles saying,

“Human or livestock, herd or flock, let them not eat anything, let them not graze, and water let them not drink. ⁸ Let them cover themselves with sackcloths—human and livestock—and let them call out to God with strength. And let them turn back, each one from his evil way, and from the violence that was in their hands. ⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent, and he may turn from his burning anger and we will not perish.”

¹⁰ And God saw their deeds, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the evil which he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

Scene 2: Jonah 4.1-11

¹ And it was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and he himself was angry. ² And he prayed to YHWH and said,

“Please YHWH, is not this my word I spoke when I was in my country? Therefore I acted to flee to Tarshish because I know that you are a god of mercy and compassion, slow to anger and of a lot of loving kindness, and relenting over evil. ³ And you, YHWH, please take my life from me because better is my death than my life.”

⁴ And YHWH said,

“Is it good for you to be angry?”

⁵ And Jonah went out from the city and he sat down east of the city and he made for himself there a booth (*Succah*) and he sat under it in the shade until he could see what would become of the city. ⁶ And YHWH-God appointed a plant and it went up over Jonah to be shade over his head to save him from his evil. And Jonah rejoiced because of the plant with great joy. ⁷ And the God appointed a worm at the going up of the dawn on the following day and it attacked the plant and it withered. ⁸ And it happened at the rising of the sun God appointed a scorching east wind and the sun attacked the head of Jonah and he covered himself and wished for himself to die and he said,

“Better is my death than my life.”

⁹ And God said to Jonah,

“Is it good for you to be angry over the plant?”

And he said,

“It is good for me to be angry, to death!”

¹⁰ And YHWH said,

“You were compassionate over the plant which you did not toil over nor make it grow (which is a son of the morning to become and a son of the night to perish). ¹¹ So should I not be compassionate over Nineveh the great city where there is in it more than 120 thousand flesh who do not know between their right hand to their left, and a lot of livestock?”

Epilogue