

Special Section on Postgraduate Work in Religious Studies

Edited by Jay Johnston

University of Western Sydney

This special issue is the result of a generous opportunity: the chance to submit work-in-progress to a Journal issue specifically focused on postgraduate research. On behalf of the contributors and myself, I would like to thank the Australian Association for the Study of Religion for its generosity in making this opportunity available. It has been a great privilege to be the Guest Editor and I am especially grateful for the support and guidance of Kathleen McPhillips (who seems to have only narrowly survived my barrage of emails about referencing and style conventions). I would also like to extend an enormous thank you to the many anonymous referee's whose careful and critical suggestions provided a wealth of feedback to the contributors.

No single theme unites the essays herein, rather they span an eclectic wealth of research areas. Using a large stroke of the brush, I note that collectively the essays represent concerns that can be considered of central importance to contemporary debates in Religious Studies and interrelated fields, with several papers embracing a transdisciplinary focus. The concerns traverse historical and contemporary representations of divinity, considerations of relations — embodied and discursive — with the sacred and reinterpretations of religious texts and societies, all undertaken with care to rethink assumptions about audience and context. If collectively they represent a microcosm of the larger postgraduate macrocosm, then one can only assume that current postgraduate work is marked by a rich and relevant diversity.

The issue, for most contributors, is their first foray into the process of peer review submission and I would like to thank them for their patience with the editing process. Happily, by the time it is published, several of the contributors will have completed their research projects — leaving the wilderness of postgraduate-land behind. My hope for all is that the Journal's contents mark the first, or a continuing step, on a highly successful and prosperous path of academic and publishing activities.

Reading¹ and Hearing² Biblical Texts

W. Bede Waterford

Griffith University

Studies and experiments undertaken over the past fifty years have shown that the types of interpretations readers make are often different from those of listeners. My thesis contains ten studies where I applied theories based on such research to segments of the Greek text of Mark's Gospel. I demonstrate in these studies that the types of interpretations readers are likely to make are different from the types of interpretations people hearing the text read are likely to make. I verify my assessments by citing interpretations made by scholarly readers, and by literary analyses of the Greek text. An abbreviated version of one of these studies is set out below. In this particular study the text is Mk 8:14-21. The outcomes of my research are significant, as biblical scholars often overlook the likelihood that the interpretations of listeners will be different from their interpretation as scholarly readers. The issue is important as even in this literate era more Christians hear the biblical text than read it.

"To pass from hearing literature to reading it is to take a great and dangerous step" (R. L. Stevenson, *Random Memories*, 1925:5).

My research, about the differences between reading and listening to biblical texts, evolved out of a series of personal experiences. As I listened each year to the Passion Narratives I became more and more conscious of the moods and inferences in texts that I had failed to notice when reading them. When listening to tape recordings of Mark's Gospel I became aware of dispositions attributed to the characters that I had not detected in my readings. My inquiries as to whether other people were similarly affected resulted in the research recorded in my thesis. I seek to show that the types of interpretations people make when reading biblical texts are different from those they make when they listen to the text being read.

There has been considerable research over the past fifty years into the procedures by which people process and interpret oral and written languages. Theorems have been developed to explain the results of these studies. Some scholars claim that when reading we are likely to discern the 'meaning in the words,' but when listening we are more likely to discern meaning 'from the context' in which the utterances are made (Olson, 1977:260). Researchers also claim to have identified other differences. Some assert that ability to read is almost essential for analysing and understanding presentations requiring cognitive thought (Ong, 1982b:11). Others maintain that we are more likely to notice the affective aspects and moods in scripts when we hear them read (Coger & White, 1967:4). In

my research I apply theories, such as these, to biblical texts in order to identify the different types of interpretations readers and listeners are likely to make.

Only a few scholars, such as Walter Ong (1987) and Joanna Dewey (1994), have applied the results of research into oral literature, and differences between reading and listening, to their biblical studies. Most biblical scholars do not even mention listeners in their books and articles. The results of my research will be additional support for the assertions by scholars such as Ong and Dewey, but, more importantly, it will demonstrate some of the likely outcomes consequent upon hearing rather than reading biblical texts.

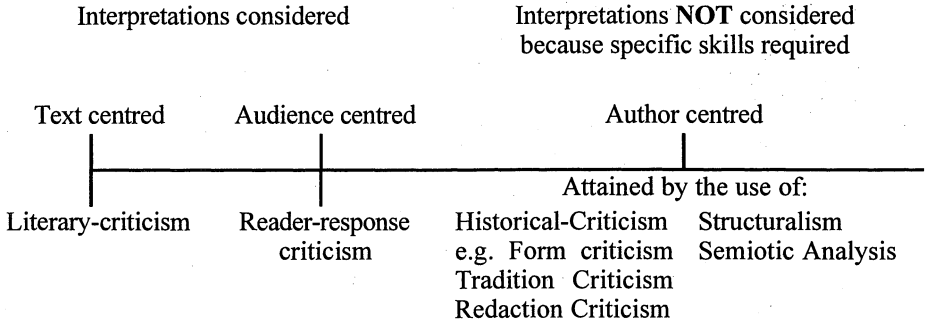
Having considered several ways of testing the hypothesis, I decided to conduct several studies where I apply various theories about the differences between reading and listening to biblical texts. By this method I am able to identify the types of interpretations likely to be made by readers, and those likely to be made by listeners. I carry out ten separate studies, with texts varying from two to twenty-three verses. Several theories are applied in each study, and often more than one assessment can be made. There is consistency in the results across all the studies. I also cite interpretations of biblical scholars as confirmatory evidence for my assessment as to the types of interpretations likely to be made by readers. Because very few biblical scholars indicate that their interpretations are made from the perspective of listeners, I verify the assessments as to the types of interpretations listeners are likely to make by means of literary analyses of the texts.

None of the interpretations, or types of interpretations, identified in my studies are claimed to be better than any other. It is the type and the range of interpretations people make that are pertinent in this research, not the relative value of the arguments, or the evidence upon which scholars base their opinions.

The research is specifically about the types of interpretations likely to be made by everyday contemporary readers and listeners. I focus on types of interpretations rather than on specific ones as the potential for multiple interpretations is too great, and a change in the medium would increase rather than reduce the profuseness of these interpretations.

Nevertheless, I do not consider in my studies every type of interpretation that could be made. There is no point in including in the research those types that can **only** be made by scholars trained in the use of complex investigative methods. For example, I do not include interpretations that claim to identify the parts of a text which are the author's redaction and those parts are from his sources. However, I do include the types of interpretations that can be made by **both** 'everyday' reader or listener, **and** by biblical scholars using complex investitive methods. I therefore include interpretations such as those based on literary analysis and reader-response criticism. While scholars might use such methods to inquire into textual features like plot, characterisation, literary and rhetorical styles, and the creative role of readers, their findings and opinions tend to clarify and elaborate on the types of interpretations 'everyday' reader or listener make, rather than promote different types of interpretations.

The table below gives an approximate idea of the interpretations that are included and those that are excluded:



The biblical text used for the research is a large segment of the Greek text of Mark's Gospel, Mk 6:30-8:26. This passage contains many stories, two of which are about Jesus feeding large crowds with a few loaves and fishes. Another story refers back to these two events. The passage is about one eighth of Mark's Gospel, and is therefore of sufficient length for selecting a different segment for each of the ten studies.

The methodology is proving to be appropriate for the type of research I am conducting, as all the possible objections to the methods or types of evidence can be satisfactorily answered. For example, it might be objected that I am applying the theories about modern languages to an ancient one. However the theories I apply are ones that they been developed by, or proclaimed by, scholars who carried out their studies in several ancient languages as well as modern languages.

The theories I use in my studies are those based on the research of studies and experiments by eminent scholars in many academic disciplines. My method can be briefly described as the application of such theories to segments of the Greek text of Mark's Gospel. The results are verified by interpretation obtained by traditional interpretative methods. An abbreviated study using these methods is set out below. In my ten studies I investigate a range of issues on which readers and listeners might differ. In the study below I seek to ascertain whether the themes and parts of the story readers are likely to consider most important are different from the themes and/or parts of the text listeners are likely to consider to be most important.

An extract from my study of Mk 8:14-21

This text is about a conversation between Jesus and his disciples. The setting is in a boat or small sailing ship, which in the prior verse was stated as travelling *to the other side*, that is away from a location where Jesus was confronted by a

group of Pharisees. The prior story prepares narrative audiences for the warning about the yeast of the Pharisees in this story.

The study is based on the Greek text in the 4th edition of the Greek New Testament published by the United Bible Societies. It is identical with the 26th edition of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Nestle-Aland). The translation of 8:14-21 in the *Revised Standard Version*³ is:

8:14 Now they had forgotten to bring bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.¹⁵ And he cautioned them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisee and the leaven of Herod".¹⁶ And they discussed it with one another saying, "We have no bread."¹⁷ And being aware of it, Jesus said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?¹⁸ Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?"¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him: "Twelve."²⁰ "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?". And they said to him: "Seven."²¹ And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

The word *ἄρτους* (*loaf* or *bread*) occurs twice in the first verse and at 8:17 and 19. It is also implied, but not mentioned, at 8:20. However, it is unlikely that many readers or listeners would consider this motif to be the major theme in this passage.

One Loaf

The statement 'they had only one loaf' seemingly contradicts information in the prior sentence that the disciples had forgotten to take *ἄρτους* (food). Some readers may try to reconcile the possible contradiction by seeking a symbolic meaning for *one loaf*, or blending of sources. Confirmatory evidence that they may try to do so is provided by the actions and comments of biblical scholars (Manek, 1993:13-14; Gundry, 1993:411-416). Even if listeners discern that there is a possible contradiction they can only momentarily consider how to resolve it. They have to give their attention to the next segment that is being read. Listeners are more likely to speculate as to whether Jesus will alleviate the disciple's concerns by means of a miracle.

The Leaven of the Pharisees and the Leaven of Herod

At 8:15 Jesus warns his disciples to beware of 'the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod'. Readers are able to analyse texts (Ong, 1982b:11), and they tend to focus their attention on specific words and phrases (Hildyard and Olson, 1982:22). When reading this passage they are likely to try to discern what is meant by the phrases 'the leaven of the Pharisees, and the leaven of Herod.' Interpretations and comments by biblical scholars confirm the above assessment.

For example G. H. Boobyer (1953:86) and Robert Guelich (1989:423) try to ascertain what leaven means.

On the other hand, listeners usually process what they hear collectively, in order to take into account the context in which the statement is made (Olson, 1977:259-260; Tanner, 1982:2). Listeners would intuitively discern that Jesus' statement fractures the natural flow of the story. There is a break in the flow of thought between verses 8:14 and 15, and again between 8:15 and 16. The arrangement serves to depict Jesus talking about one issue, while his disciples are talking about another. The discontinuity emphasizes "the differing thoughts" of the characters (Grundy, 1993:411). Listeners are more likely than readers are to notice this because of the alliteration and rhyme in the verbs *διεστέλλετο* (he was ordering) and *διελογίζοντο* (they were discussing) intimating that Jesus is repeating his warning, while his disciples are continuing with their own discussion.

Because the disciples ignore Jesus' warning, 'leaven' ceases to be an issue in the rest of the story. While people tend to remember words in the texts they read, they can usually only remember the gist of stories they hear (Hildyard & Olson, 1982:20). Listeners are more likely to recall that Jesus and his disciples were talking at 'cross purposes' than remember specific words in Jesus' warning. The subsequent verses confirm any inclination they have in this regard. These verses record that the disciples continue discussing their food shortage, and that Jesus responds very assertively. Listeners are inclined to take the tone of utterances into account in discerning both what has been said, and the meaning of what has been said (Wilkinsons et al, 1974:16-17).

Not understanding

There are several direct and indirect references in the story to the disciples' lack of understanding. The words *οὐ συνίετε*; (do you not understand?) occur at the beginning and end of 8:17-21, and the concept of not understanding is linked with not seeing, not hearing and not remembering. The last two thirds of the story consists of a succession of questions, most of which are rhetorical. Grundy observes that "the questions gain greater emphasis from their occurring together and asyndetically in a long series" (1993:409). Readers are likely to ponder over what the disciples failed to understand, and many are likely to consider this theme to be an important one. Some of the headings given to this passage in English translations and in commentaries on this Gospel confirm the above assessments.

The headings of this passage in translations and commentaries are possibly a good indication of the proportion of readers who would think Jesus' warning to be the crux of the story, and those who would consider the crux of the story to be failure of the disciples to understand.

- The *New International Version*, *Jerusalem Bible* and *Today's English Version* have headings like 'The Yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod.' Guelich's heading is: 'Warning against the Leaven of the Pharisees and

Herod' (1989:417). B. H. Branscomb claims that the saying about leaven is "the kernel of the section" (1937:140).

- Hooker and Nineham entitle their expositions 'The Blindness of the Disciples' (Hooker, 1991:192-6; Nineham, 1963:212). Robinson's heading is: 'The Failure of the Disciples' (1994:301).
- Grundy's heading is: 'The Superadequacy of Jesus' Miraculous Power' (1993:407).

The headings in some commentaries do not designate any particular theme. For example Cranfield has: 'Conversation in the Boat' (1963:259), and Taylor has: 'The Mystery of the Loaves' (1966:363). However, most of the headings do specify a theme, and in doing so, indicate the themes the authors considered to be most important.

Listeners are also likely to consider the failure of the disciples to understand to be an important theme, but perhaps not in the same way as readers do. Listeners would tend to associate this lack of understanding with other aspects of the story. In order to discern what has been said, listeners need to be conscious of the context in which the remarks are made (Olson, 1977:264; Tanner, 1982:2). As indicated earlier in this article, listeners would be conscious that the concern of the disciples for their own needs resulted in their not paying attention to Jesus' warning. Cranfield asserts that the disciples' failure to understand is due to their being "so wholly preoccupied with their own anxieties as to be quite incapable of attending to what Jesus was trying to say to them" (1963:262).

Listeners learn of the disciples' non-comprehension through a series of rhetorical questions that imply that Jesus is frustrated at their failure to understand. The mood and tone of discord is particularly arresting when the questions are heard. This assessment is confirmed by the comment made by Chrysostom in an era of almost universal orality. He asks, "Can you hear the intense displeasure in his voice? For nowhere else does he appear to rebuke them so strongly" (Oden & Hall, 1998:108).⁴

Two of the last three questions asked by Jesus are about the abundance of leftovers when he fed the crowds. They are also by far the longest questions Jesus asks. They are accentuated by being the only ones to which the disciples respond. Each response, being only one word, contrasts with the length of the questions. Most listeners will consider these questions to be an important segment of the passage, as people expect the key message to be at, or near, the end of verbal announcements (Boyd, 1997:60-61). This assessment is confirmed by the title Heil gives to his commentary: 'Jesus Interrogates His Disciples about the Overabundant Feedings' (1992a:170). Heil often interprets biblical texts from a listener's point of view. In his concluding paragraphs to an article written in the same year as his commentary he refers to listeners or listener three times, and does not mention readers at all (1992b).

Jesus' questions and his disciples' answers remind narrative audiences of prior stories where Jesus demonstrated his power over nature by feeding large crowds. The story itself attests to the difficulty Jesus has in getting the attention of his disciples, and his inability to get them to understand. Listeners interpreting the

story as a whole are likely to connect these two almost contrasting views of Jesus: his power over nature and his inability, or reluctance, to make his followers understand him. Because listeners tend to interpret stories as a whole, they are also likely to connect the disciples' failure to understand with their concern for their own needs. The following literary analysis tends to support that assessment.

The extract below gives some idea of the repetitions, rhymes and balanced clauses 8:16-18:

ὅτι ἄρτους οὐκ ἔχουσιν . .	why food not they have . .
ὅτι ἄρτους οὐκ ἔχετε;	why food not you have?
οὐπω νοεῖτε;	not yet do you perceive?
οὐδὲ συνίετε; . . .	and not do you understand? . . .
ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντες οὐ βλέπετε;	eyes having not you see?
καὶ ὠτα ἔχοντες οὐκ ἀκούετε;	and ears having not you hear?
καὶ οὐ μνημονεύετε, . .	and not you remember . . ?

There is a negative in every one of the phrase recorded above. There is also a negative in the question at 8:21: 'Do you not yet understand?' The inclusion of the word οὐπω (*yet*) insinuates that Jesus expected an improvement in their understanding. The sounds οὐ-ετε occur in six of the negative verbs. Five of these verbs link the concepts of 'not understanding not seeing, not hearing, and not remembering.' The question at 8:17 is likely to be particularly noticed by listeners because of the repetition and balance in the question.

οὐ-πω νοεῖτε	not yet you know
οὐ-δὲ συνίετε;	and not you understand?

The next question is πεπωρωμένην ἔχετε τὴν καρδίαν ὑμῶν; (have you a hardened heart) and is similar to the narrator's statement at 6:52 that the disciples' 'heart remained hard.' The successive questions induce a tone of discord and impute that Jesus is frustrated with the disciples' failure to understand. People are more attuned when listening than when reading to notice moods in scripts (Coger & White, 1967:4).

The two questions at 8:19-2 are much longer. They have the same syntax, and many words that are the same, as the following extract indicates:

ὅτε τοὺς . . πόσους . . κλασμάτων πλήρεις . . ἤρατε;	
When the . . how many . . full of broken pieces did you pick up?	
ὅτε τοὺς . . πόσων . . πληρώμ- κλασμάτων ἤρατε;	
When the . . how many . . full of broken pieces did you take up?	

Listeners to the story are likely to notice in particular these two questions, because of their additional lengths, the rhymes, rhythm, repetitions of sounds, and their position at the end of the story.

The repetitions, balanced clauses and formula, like construction of the successive questions, intimate that they may formerly have been part of the oral traditions of the early Christian community. However, this research is based on the

canonical text and, as indicated earlier in this article, I am not considering interpretations associated with the history of the text.

This extract from my literary analyses of the story shows that the rhetorical devices are almost wholly in the latter part of the story. It shows that the cumulative effects of these features is to focus the attention of listeners on the latter verses. The analysis also shows that the mood of frustration indicates that Jesus is unable to make his disciples understand, and this inability is contrasted with events where he was shown to have power over nature.

The extracts from my study set out above shows:

- that most readers will consider the reference to *one loaf* contradicts the prior statement that they had forgotten to take food, and seek to reconcile the apparent contradiction by seeking a symbolic meaning for *one loaf*.
- that most readers will focus on Jesus' warning to beware of 'the leaven of the Pharisees, and the leaven of Herod,' and then try to ascertain what is meant by the two references to 'leaven.' Most readers will also consider this the most important part of the story. Listeners, conversely are likely to be influenced by the way the warning disrupts the natural flow of thought in the story, and so discern that Jesus and his disciples are concerned about different issues.
- A large proportion of readers will also consider the disciples' failure to understand a very important concept. On the other hand, listeners are likely to link the disciples' failure to understand with the disciples' concern for their own needs, and Jesus' inability, or reluctance, to compel people to make them do what he wants them to do.

Consistency in the results of my ten studies means that the overall research conclusively demonstrates that those listening to biblical texts being read discern different messages to those who read the texts silently. Such results show that people tend to read biblical texts for information, concentrating on details in the stories. On the other hand, those listening to such stories are more attuned to, and likely to be influenced by the moods and attitudes of the characters and point of view of the narrator. The research also indicates that listeners are more likely than readers to consider stories symbolic and utterances ironic.

My research shows how important it is for those involved in biblical studies to be aware that the types of interpretations listeners make may be different from the types of interpretations they make in their scholarly reading of the text. These findings are of considerable significance for those working with, and making claims about biblical text, particularly those making claims about the Markan Greek text. Contemporary biblical scholars too often base their claims only on how the text was or will be read, without considering that most narrative audiences interpret them as listeners.

Of course many of the features and themes mentioned in the extract of the study, and in my other studies, will only be discerned by listeners if the translation is both suitable for being heard, and imparts moods similar to those present in the Greek text. In my thesis I critique three widely read contemporary

English translations, and compare them with two translations made in prior centuries, and with the Greek text. Space does not permit discussion of the issue here beyond saying that the results are consistent with the assertions of scholars, such as Basil Rebera (1992), who claim that modern translations of the Bible do not meet the specific needs of listeners. Those who translate and publish these texts are probably now well aware of the deficiency. The significance of my research is in demonstrating how crucial it is for those involved in selecting texts to be used in liturgies to select texts that have been translated for listening audiences. The issue is extremely important as even in modern literate communities more Christians listen to biblical texts being read, than read such texts for themselves.

Endnotes

1. Except where specifically mentioned, the terms *read* and *readers* in this paper refers to people who read texts privately and silently.
2. Throughout the article the words *listeners*, *listen* and *hear* are used in the restricted sense of listening to speech or hearing speech. Although the word *auding* is used by some scholars to define the process of listening to languages, the word is not in common use, and I do not use it in my thesis or in this article.
3. The translations referred to are all in the 1974 publication: *Eight Translation New Testament*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House.
4. Chrysostom was commenting on the parallel passage in Matthew's Gospel.

References

- Boobyer, G.H. 1953. The Miracle of the Loaves and the Fishes in Mark's Gospel. *Journal of Theological Studies* 6:77-87
- Boyd, A. 1997. *Broadcast Journalism: Techniques of Radio & TV News*. fourth edition. Focal Press, Oxford
- Branscomb, B H. 1937. *The Gospel of Mark*. Hodder and Stoughton, London
- Coger, L I. and M R White. 1967. *Readers Theatre Handbook: A Dramatic Approach to Literature*. Scott, Foresman and Co, Glenview, Illinois
- Cranfield, C E B. [1959] 1963. *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. second impression with additional notes. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Dewey, J. 1994. The Gospel of Mark as an Oral-Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation. In *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament*, edited by E. Malbon and E V. McKnight, 145-161. Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield
- Guelich, R A. 1989. *Mark 1-8:26: Word Biblical Commentary 34a*. Word Books, Dallas
- Gundy, R H. 1993. *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids
- Heil, J P. 1992a. *The Gospel of Mark as a Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary*. Paulist Press, New York

- 1992b. The Progressive Narrative Pattern of Mark 14,53-16,8. *Biblica* 73: 331-358
- A Hildyard and D R. Olson. 1982. On the Comprehension and Memory of Oral vs. Written Discourse. In *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literature*. edited by D Tannen, 19-33. Ablex, Norwood, NJ
- Hooker, M D. 1991. *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*. A & C Black, London
- Manek, J 1964. Mark viii 14-21. *Novum Testamentum* 7: 10-14
- Nineham, D E. 1963. *The Gospel of St. Mark*. A & C. Black, London
- Oden, T C. and C A. Hall (eds). 1998. *Mark: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament II*. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois
- Olson D R. 1977. From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and Writing. *Harvard Educational Review* 47.3: 257-281
- Ong, W J. 1982a. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Routledge, London
- 1982b. Oral and Traditional Literatures. *Pacific Quarterly Moana*, 7.2: 8-21
- 1987. Text as Interpretation: Mark and After. *Semeia* 39:7-26
- Rebera, B A. 1992. Translating a Text to be Spoken and Read: A Study of Ruth 1. *The Bible Translator* 43:230-236
- Robinson, G. 1994. *A Change of Mind and Heart: Good News According to Mark*. Parish Ministry Publications, Sydney
- Swete, H B. 1913. *The Gospel According to St Mark*. third edition. MacMillan, London
- Tannen, D. (ed.) 1982. *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literature*. Ablex, Norwood, NJ
- Taylor, V. [1950]. 1966 *The Gospel According to St Mark*. second edition. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids
- Wilkinson, A., L. Stratta, L. and P. Dudley. 1974. *The Quality of Listening*. Macmillan, Basingstoke