The Sounds of Biblical Texts

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The development of an audio-visual translation is based on an identification of the original sounds and images that formed the sensory matrix of the original recital of the texts. It is based on the assumption, as Paul Achtemeier has recently argued, that the original texts were always read aloud, generally in public readings in which the audience was invited to see the event in their imagination. [1] A dynamic equivalent translation seeks then to find the equivalent sounds and images in the language and culture for which the translation is being developed.

To study the biblical texts as sounds is to restore them to their original medium: sound. But, for scholars of the modern world, the process of mastering a new medium of biblical translation is a revolution. We, as products of the twentieth century, have been trained to study biblical narratives primarily in the media world of silent print. The skills that are needed in this medium are those of objective textual analysis, facility in the use of basic methodological and reference tools, and the integration of the results into a translation that will be experienced as a text, sometimes read aloud, but generally read in silence.

The purpose of this essay is to outline some of the basic features of the sounds of biblical texts in their original context. I will address this analysis to our multiple roles as potential reciters and storytellers as well as translators of this material. Because the primary focus of my research has been on biblical narrative, I will deal only with the sounds of narratives. Many of the observations are applicable to other materials, while others are not. The proposals here are made in a spirit of invitation to further research rather than as final conclusions. Source research on the sounds of biblical texts is at an early stage in which hypotheses are needed in order to begin the process of investigation and testing of conclusions.

Finally, I will concentrate in this essay on the analysis of dimensions of the sounds of biblical texts other than those identified by Kenneth Thomas in his essay, "Texts Oral and Choral." While there are inevitably points of congruence, I have decided to focus on basic elements that are not dealt with there.

THE UNITS OF SOUND

The first step in the analysis of the sounds of biblical 'material is the identification of the semantic and episodic structures of the narratives. This makes it possible to organize beginnings and endings.

The content of an episode is a unified part of a larger event or speech. The episodes of speeches tend to treat a particular theme or topic while the episodes of stories describe an aspect or moment of the event. The episode is, therefore, a chunk of the story which can be remembered as a single piece. A biblical story is built by connecting a series of episodes which function as modules or building blocks. The individual stories are then tied together to form longer stories such as

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the stories of Abraham, the exodus, the reign of Saul, and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Specific Characteristics of the Episode

This description focuses on Mark's passion and resurrection narrative which has been the subject of my most detailed research on the episode. All of the references in the following section unless otherwise marked are to the Gospel of Mark.

1. Parallelism--The limits of the episode are often marked by parallelism. The most frequent type of parallelism is synonymous or antithetical parallelism between the parallel members of contiguous episodes. For example, the last lines of the two interrogation episodes in the Sanhedrin trial (14.55-56, 57-59) are in synonymous parallelism as are the two demands for Jesus' death (15.12-13, 14). But there are also frequent parallelisms within an episode, often "ring" or circular parallelism (e.g., 14.26-29, 50-52). As this text will reveal, most of the episodes in the narrative have some element of internal or contiguous parallelism which marks either the beginning or the end of the episode.

2. Number of sentences--The majority of episodes have two or three sentences; a small number have four. The episodes of a particular story tend to have the same number of sentences, as in the arrest story (14.43-52), Peter's denial (14.66-72), and the death of Jesus (15.33-41). There are two major variations in this pattern. Sometimes a particular episode has one sentence more or less than the other episodes of the story; thus, the anointing (14.3) is the only two-sentence episode among the otherwise three-sentence episodes of the plot section (14.1-11). This type of variation may either reflect an absence of concern about regularity or variation for the sake of surprise or emphasis. The second major variation is a change in episode length--such as from three-sentence episodes to two-sentence episodes--which is then maintained for several episodes up to the end of a story or section. This type of variation occurs, for example, in the trial before the Sanhedrin (14.53-62, 63-65) and in the Pilate trial (15.1-11, 12-20).

The importance of this general regularity in the construction of the episodes is only partially clear. Oral reading reveals that a kind of rhythm is established by episodes with the same number of sentences. The regularity of the patterns of sentence beginnings and endings creates this rhythm. The changes in rhythm often appeal to create emphasis or to build up to a climactic ending.

Characteristics of Episode Beginnings

1. Appositives and genitive absolutes--These two constructions, whose function is to give additional information, usually occur at the beginning of an episode (e.g., 14.3, 66; 15.21, 42).

2. Settings of time and place--These introductory descriptions are usually found in

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the first sentence of an episode though occasionally they occur in the second (15.22, 25; 16.2).

3. εὐθυς --This particle occurs at the beginning of an episode in every instance within Mark's PRN.

4. Verbs of motion--There are three exceptions to the general pattern of the presence of verbs of motion at the beginning of the episodes:

a. In speeches, there is no correlation between verbs of motion and the limits of the episodes.
b. Verbs of motion occur on occasion in pairs, a second sentence with a verb of motion following the first (e.g., 14.53-54; 16.1-2).2
c. A verb of motion infrequently occurs in a climactic sentence at the end of an episode (e.g., 14.16; 15.20).

5. Circumstantial participles after κδι or δε --This construction has a pattern of usage which is similar to that of the verbs of motion. These participles occur most frequently in the first sentence of an episode and sometimes in pairs (14.1718, 39-40, 66-67). When used in the concluding sentence of an episode, they always describe climactic moments of surprise or shock (14.52, 72; 15.8, 37).

6. Purpose clauses «(ἵνδ)--This constructıon has the same pattern of usage as the verbs of motion. The majority of instances occur in a first sentence. Its usage in speeches is without any necessary correlation to the episodes; and it is used twice in climactic sentences (15.15, 20).

Characteristics of Episode Endings

1. Extremes in sentence length--The final sentence of an episode is often very short or very long (e.g., 14.5b, 62, 72c; 15.40-41; 16.8d). In general, extremes in sentence length occur at the ends of episodes. The one exception to this is that short sentences occur in speeches without any necessary correlation to the episodic structure (e.g., 14.8a, 41c, 16.6c).

2. Ellipsis and asyndeton--These constructions for shortening sentences usually occur in final sentences. However, as with sentence length, these features also have no correlation to the endings of the episodes in speeches.

3. ἤρξδτο plus the infinitive--This grammatical construction almost never occurs in the first line of an episode (15.18 is the only exception). Within the PRN, it occurs an equal number of times in second (14.33, 65, 69) and final sentences (14.19, 71; 15~8). This construction is, therefore, only a possible indication of an ending.

4. As stated above, both circumstantial participles after and κδι and δε purpose clauses are characteristic of climactic endings.

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In summary, the episode, in addition to being limited by subject matter, is marked by formal patterns of grammatical usage, parallelism, and sentence length.

THE LINKAGE OF EPISODES BY VERBAL THREADS

The episodes are tied together by verbal connections which link the episodes to one another. A verbal thread is a repetition or variation of two or more words. It is then a repetition of sounds which are either identical or similar. A verbal thread is often the verbal component of parallelism between sentences in an episode or a story. Verbal threads have several patterns or functions which can be more specifically identified.

Quotations **--** One type of verbal thread is a quotation of an earlier statement in the narrative or some phrase from earlier in the tradition. Stories in the Gospels, for example, frequently quote phrases from the Old Testament.

Phrases **--** The most frequent verbal thread is the repetition of two or more key words from an earlier statement in the story. This kind of verbal thread generally provides the connections between the major motifs of the longer stories in the tradition. Thus, the motifs of the hardening of Pharoah's heart, the murmuring of the people of Israel, and the announcement and fulfillment of the passion prophecies are structural elements in the biblical narratives in which they occur.

Key Words **--** Occasionally, a key word can function as a verbal thread by establishing a connection with an earlier element in the story. In the Gospel narratives, for example, the name, Christ, links the story with the traditions of the anointed ones of Israel such as David and Saul and with the major events of the narrative itself (Peter's confession, the trial before the Sanhedrin, etc.).

Structural Verbal Threads **--** In some instances, the verbal threads in a later story are connected with phrases drawn from the beginning to the end of an earlier story. Such a series of verbal threads weaves a structural link between the two stories. Thus, Mark's story of the preparations for Passover (14: 12-16) has structural connections with the preparations for the triumphal entry (11:1-6) and with the preparations for the first Passover (Ex. 12:21-28). Also the story of Elisha raising the son of the Shunnamite woman (2 Kings 4:8-37) has extensive structural connections with the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17:8-24).

I will analyze a section of the Yahwist's creation story (Gen. 3:1-13) and of Mark's passion narrative (Mark 14:66-72) using the RSV translation. You might want to do your own hypothetical analysis before reading the analysis here. If you do, I would suggest the following process: 1) read the story aloud and underline any verbal threads or repeated elements in the story; 2) mark characteristic episode beginnings and endings such as descriptions of time and place, a new theme or character; 3) make a decision about the episodes of the story and mark them. If you do not, please look at a typical biblical text while reading the analysis. A text of each story arranged in episodes and with the verbal threads underlined and connected will

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follow a brief summary of the major episodic and semantic connections.

AN EPISODIC ANALYSIS OF GENESIS 3:1-13 AND MARK 14:66-72

The Genesis story has several clear marks of episode beginnings. The serpent is introduced as a new character (3:1) and the Lord God is reintroduced into the story after the eating of the fruit (3:8). The description of the woman's examination of the fruit describes a new time in the story (3:6) as does the introduction of the Lord God walking "in the cool of the day." (3:8) The beginnings of the conversation episodes are clearly indicated by the parallelism in each conversation. The first is begun by the serpent and the second by the Lord God. Thus, the episode beginnings, other than those which introduce the new characters, are the statements of the serpent and the Lord God (3:4; 11; 13).

The verbal threads tie the episodes together. Only a few of the many can be pointed out. The first episode is tied together by the phrase "You shall not eat of ... tree ... of the garden"(3:1-3). The first episode is connected to the second by the antithetical parallelism: "lest you die/you will not die." The endings of the second and third episodes are also in antithetical parallelism: " ... your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"(3:5)/"the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (3: 7). The endings of the last episodes are connected by the same words, "I ate"(3:12-13).

Thus, the story written in episodes would be as follows:

> Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made.
>
> He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?"
>
> And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the frui t of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"
>
> But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
>
> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.
>
> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.
>
> And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of

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> the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.
>
> But the Lord God called the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."
>
> He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."
>
> Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?"
>
> The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." (Gen 3:1-13)

The story of Peter's denial has similar marks of episode beginnings and endings. The descriptions of time and place occur in the naming of the courtyard (14: 66), the gateway (14: 68b), "after a little while" (14: 70b) and the crowing of the cock "immediately" (14:72). The new characters who are introduced are the maid (14:66), the bystanders (14:69, 70b), and the cock (14:72). As can be seen, there are conflicting marks of episode beginnings in the second episode, with both a new place and a new character, "the bystanders," being described. But, in the context of the synonymous parallelism between the endings of the first two episodes, "he denied it" (14:68, 70), the second episode clearly begins with Peter going out into the gateway. The other verbal threads are also easily identified: the maid and "one of them" (14:69,70). Furthermore, the last episode has a major verbal thread which connects the end of this story with Jesus' prophecy of Peter's denial earlier in the story: "Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times" (14:30).

Thus, the story of Peter's denial in episodes:

> And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the maids of the high priest came.
>
> And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him, and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus."
>
> But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean."
>
> And he went out into the gateway.
>
> And the maid saw him, and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them."
>
> But again he denied it.

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And after a little while again the bystanders said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them. For you are a Galilean."

But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak."

And immediately the cock crowed a second time.

And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times."

And he broke down and wept. (Mark 14:66-72)

The content of the episodes follows the basic sequence of events: the three denials and Peter's response. In the Genesis story, the same is true. The episodes describe the serpent's question, the serpent's challenge, the eating of the fruit, the Lord God's arrival, and his questioning of the man and the woman. The structure of the episodes, therefore, can be retrieved by remembering the sequence of events. And the verbal threads provide a series of semantic associations that reinforce and enrich the connections between the episodes.

VOLUME

One of the ironies of listening to the sounds of biblical narrative in pulpit reading is the degree to which readers will frequently ignore the explicit instructions in the story about how it is to be told. For example, in the story of Jesus' crucifixion, Mark reports that Jesus "cried with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'" (15:34). This is the recital equivalent of a "ff" (very loud) sign in a musical score. But I have rarely heard the story read with any marked increase in volume for Jesus' words. This instruction is widely used in biblical narrative to indicate the volume of the statement which follows (Jotham's parable, Judges 9:7; the medium at Endor, I Samuel 29:12; II Samuel 18:28; Daniel 6:20; Mark 1:27; 5:7; 15:34; Luke 1:42; 4:33; 8:28; 23:46; John 11:43; Acts 7:60; 14:10; 16:28; 26:24). These instructions are explicit evidence of the wide range of volume that was used in the telling of biblical stories.

But there are other implicit indications of volume. Thus, in the story of David's cutting off Saul's robe in the cave (I Samuel 24), there is a conversation between David and his men inside the cave, which must be told in an extremely quiet, whispering tone in order to convey the atmosphere in the cave. This is followed by David and Saul calling to each other apparently from some distance. These speeches need to be told in a loud voice to concretize the character of their communication. And the contrast between the intense quiet of the conversation in the cave and the equally intense volume of the shouted conversation outside is part of the story's power. Thus, not only are there explicit instructions about the volume of the story at some points, but there are also implicit indications at many other places in the biblical narratives.

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In addition to volume, there are also explicit indications of tone: anger, grief, trembling, love. After the cleansing of the leper, for example, Mark reports that Jesus "sternly charged him" (Mk. 5:6-7); this is only one of hundreds of instances in which the attitude or tone of a direct address is explicitly described. And, once again, there are even more instances in which the tone is implied, but not directly stated. These indications of the volume and tone of the stories are like the stage directions in a play or the volume markings in a musical score. They are markings which help to direct the telling of the story.

TEMPO

Biblical narratives are generally recited as if there were no variations in the tempo or speed of the words. But one of the functions of the episode and of variations in sentence length is to vary the tempo. The principle is relatively simple. A sentence is marked by the pause to take a breath. In some long sentences, it may be necessary to take a breath at a half-way point as well.

But, in sound, the beginning and ending of a sentence are marked by the pauses to breathe. If there are two or three words in a sentence, that sentence will naturally be said more slowly than a sentence in which there are thirty or forty words. While it may not be possible to say the whole sentence in one breath, the effect of a long sentence is to speed up the tempo in which the words are read. The singing of canticles is an example of this practice. If only one or two syllables are sung on a note, they are sung deliberately. But, if fifteen or twenty syllables are to be sung on a note, the speed increases.

The same is true of the episodes and sentences of biblical stories. Episodes and sentences that are short tend to be slow, while episodes and sentences that are long are faster. And this variation in tempo supports the meaning of the story. That is, there is a correlation between the speed of the elements of the story and their over-all effect. The parable of the prodigal son is a clear example of this. The following is part of the parable arranged in episodes:

> And he arose and came to his father.
>
> But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.
>
> And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."
>
> But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and "let us eat and make merry.
>
> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

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And they began to make merry.

Now his elder son was in the field.

And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant.

And he said to him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound."

But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him.

But he answered his father, "Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!

And he said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found. (Luke 15:20-32)

As the episodic analysis makes clear, there is a direct correlation between the length of the episodes/sentences and the atmosphere. Thus, the two longest sentences/episodes are the verbal explosions of, first, the father's joy and second, the elder son's anger. The length of the sentences/episodes suggests that Jesus told them quite rapidly in order to convey the intensity of their speeches. The final sentence of the celebration episode, however, is climactically short and, therefore, slower: "And they began to make merry." As a result, there is a major pause before the introduction of the elder brother.

In the elder brother half of the parable, the episodes are shorter (two sentences rather than three) as are also the sentences. Thus, there is a marked contrast between the father's announcement of the celebration and the elder son's coming in from the field and hearing the feast in progress. The slower tempo makes it possible to build the suspense about what will happen next. The shortest episode in the parable describes the elder brother's anger and the entreaty of the father. Both are full of emotional conflict. The slow pace of the episode makes it possible to fully register the emotional dynamics of this confrontation. The verbal thread which connects the ending of both halves of the parable (dead/alive; lost/found) also poses the major issue of the parable: how will those who identify with the elder son respond?

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There is no substitute for reading the parable aloud in order to experience the impact of the changes in tempo in conveying the dynamics of the parable. But the function of the episodes and sentence length in relation to tempo can be seen as well as heard. In this parable, the tempo changes are rather abrupt. But, in other stories, the length of the episodes/sentences can create a gradual change in tempo. The ending of Mark is a good example.

In the RSV, Mark 16:8 is punctuated as only one sentence. But an episodic analysis of the resurrection narrative in Mark suggests that it should be punctuated as four sentences in two episodes:[2]

And they went out and fled from the tomb.

For trembling and astonishment had come upon them.

And they said nothing to anyone.

For they were afraid.

These episodes are markedly shorter than those which precede them. And, as can be seen as well as heard, they get shorter and shorter. In the original Greek, the degree of this shortening is even more striking. The final sentences have six, six, four, and, finally, two words. This indicates that Mark built to a climax by progressively slowing down and emphasizing each word more and more emphatically as he came to the provocative end of his story.

Thus, by observing the relative length of the sentences and of the episodes, one can identify some aspects of the tempo of biblical stories.

PAUSES

The ending of Mark, like the ending of Jonah, is a classic instance of the so-called "pregnant pause." This phrase describes that moment of silence which is full of ambiguity and life. The creation of these moments of silence in which the implications of the story resonate through time is a characteristic feature of biblical narrative. Eric Auerbach, in his comparison of biblical narrative style with the Homeric narrative style, argues that thoughts and feelings in the Homeric style are completed expressed. But, in biblical narrative, thoughts and feelings are generally unexpressed and are rather "suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches."3 As Auerbach has recognized, the suggestiveness of silence in biblical narrative is at the heart of its distinctive style. Auerbach discusses two stories, the binding of Isaac and Peter's denial, and they will serve well for a discussion of the pause in biblical narration.

The central section of the binding of Isaac, analyzed in episodes, is as follows:

Then Abraham said to his young men, "stay here with the ass; I and the lad

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will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac, his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife; so they went both of them together.

And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son."

He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

Abraham said, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son;"

So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac, his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I."

He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." (Gen. 22:5-12)

As can be seen, the pauses at the end of the first two episodes come after the poignant refrain, "so they went both of them together" which concludes the episodes. The thoughts and feelings of both Abraham and Isaac are only suggested in the silence that follows this verbal picture of father and son, each of whom deeply loves the other, going up the mountain to the sacrifice.

But the most graphic and dramatic pause is after the shortest phrase in the narrative. In Hebrew, there is a half pause midway through each sentence. If the pause were indicated with a comma in English, the sentence would be: "Then Abraham put forth his hand and took the knife, to slay his son." In Hebrew, this second half of the sentence, "to slay his son" is only two words; furthermore, the whole sentence is the shortest in the narrative. The shortening of the sentence builds the climax. The pause between the episodes is, therefore, the moment of ultimate suspense as the knife is poised to kill Isaac, Abraham's only son. The thoughts and feelings are never expressed but, by being unexpressed, are all the more present. The function of the pauses, therefore, is to provide time for the emotion of the moment to be felt by the audience and shared with the storyteller.

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In Peter's denial, a similar function of the pauses between the episodes can be heard (see above for the story in episodes). In this case, the first two episodes end with the key phrase, "he denied it."(Mark 14:68, 70) The pause marks the number of denials so that the audience can count them in the interim. The third episode does not repeat this phrase but instead ends with Peter's vehement statement, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." In this climactic third pause, the prophecy is fulfilled. The silence between the episodes anticipates the crowing of the cock for the second time. The final episode of the story ends with an extremely short sentence, in Greek only three words; if connected with hyphens in English: "And breaking-down, he-wept." Peter's feelings are not described, but are only suggested by his action. It is in the silence of the pause which ends this story that the unexpressed thoughts and feelings suggested by these climactic words can be felt and known. The pause marks the end of the story in time. And, in the silence, Peter's past and the listener's future converge in the only time that ever is in story: now.

AMBIGUITY

Dealing with ambiguity is one of the problems created by the pauses of biblical narratives. And learning to allow or even to heighten ambiguity is one of the most difficult tasks for the translation and recital of biblical materials. Many biblical stories, including most of the truly great ones, end with ambiguity. But we have tended, as modern interpreters of the Bible, to focus on those elements of the Bible as a whole and of the individual stories that are clear. We are trained to look for the relatively unambiguous instances of historical evidence or theological doctrine in the various stages of the history of the biblical tradition. Only such instances will count as evidence for the reconstruction of a historical sequence of events or a trend of theological thought. A clear and relatively unambiguous meaning is best for evidence in almost any theological or historical argument. Anything else is of minimal value.

However, many of the biblical forms of speech, including many of the parables of Jesus, may have as their goal a profound and multi-faceted ambiguity. In such material, the meaning is left unresolved precisely because it may require the listener to enter into the story and choose a meaning. Often, in biblical interpretation, we try to make the story clear and unambiguous. As a result, there is an almost irresistible temptation for translators to seek to clarify things that are ambiguous rather than to respect and honor the enormous fertility of the narratives. And in the recital of the texts, the temptation is move too quickly to the next episode without allowing time for the ambiguity to be pondered. Somehow, the image of a biblical story or song as a mother-to-be, nine and a half months pregnant, is uniquely appropriate. And I have witnessed, though not experienced other than in giving birth to books, that such ambiguities are both uncomfortable and hopeful.

The time when this temptation to end the discomfort of ambiguity is greatest at the end of a story. The temptation is to tell the story in a way that reduces rather than heightens the ambiguity and to be uncomfortable with the discomfort it creates for the listeners. In preaching or oral interpretation where additional comments are

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appropriate, this temptation is related to the tradition of "the moral" for which the opening line is: "Now the moral of the story is..." But, rather than a moral, it may be a truth. This is the danger of the way in which the stories have been interpreted in preaching. The stories are read and their meaning then described in the sermon. But, in fact, the effect of this discomfort with ambiguity is to reduce the meaning of the stories to whatever element of their meaning may be selected by the interpreter. Generally, the meaning will then become whatever is most compatible with the doctrinal orientation, whether conservative or liberal, of the storyteller. For translators and readers, the temptation is to try to minimize the tension rather than to heighten it.

Examples of this acid test for a prospective biblical reciter are legion. The toughest tests are those narratives that are truly ambiguous. For example, the second story of Jesus walking on the water in Mark ends with two narrative comments explaining why the disciples were amazed: "For they did not understand about the loaves but their hearts were hardened" (Mark 6:52). Later, in the Gospel, Jesus again questions the disciples about the loaves:

> Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand?
>
> Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?
>
> And do you not remember?
>
> 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."
>
> "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?"
>
> And they said to him, "Seven."
>
> And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?" (Mark 8:17-21)

Neither the disciples in the story nor Mark's audience could have fully understood. Indeed, even a partial answer to the questions that are posed here is reserved until the Last Supper (see Mark 14:22-25). Only there does Jesus state that the bread is his body. The significance of the seven and the twelve baskets, however, remains ambiguous and is never fully clarified in the narrative.

And, even as the ambiguity about the bread is cleared up, new elements of ambiguity are introduced. For example, why does Jesus take a vow not to drink wine until the Kingdom comes? Who are "the many" for whom his blood is poured out? And, if the Gospel ends at 16:8, profound ambiguities are introduced at the end of

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the Gospel: did the women tell the story? Why were they afraid? Mark is not the only narrative of the New Testament to end with ambiguity. The same is true at the end of Acts. Paul is in Rome and the possibility of his imminent execution is implied, but the story ends on this note:

> And he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered. (Acts 28:30)

What happened to Paul after the two years? The details of his martyrdom remain shrouded in mystery.

Thus, a reader/storyteller needs the strength to resist the temptation to jump in and reduce the ambiguity. It takes a great deal of confidence in the power of the stories themselves to come to the end of a parable or a narrative and to allow the ambiguity to be. However, if one recognizes that this combination of clarity and mystery is the goal of the story, it can be honored and even celebrated. To delight in the riddle of God's government over all creation, to invite others to revel in the enriched mystery of God's gracefulness, to enjoy exploring the ambiguities on the playground of God's time and space - this is required to recite the Bible appropriately.

NARRATIVE COMMENTS

One of the principle ways by which a storyteller establishes community with the audience is by giving them "inside" information, some of which may not even be known by the characters in the story. The most direct way of doing this is a narrative comment. A narrative comment occurs when the narrator interrupts his description of the story's action and makes a comment to the listeners. In effect, the narrator says, "Hold it! Let me tell you something that will help you understand what is happening." As a result, narrative comments draw the audience and the narrator closer together. Like the commentary segments on news programs, these comments are an opportunity to stand back and comment on the current events of the story.

Narrative comments in biblical narratives are relatively brief in comparison to the modern novel, in which narrative commentary can extend for pages. The briefest form is a parenthetical comment or appositive, marked by commas, such as: "he saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon…" (Mark 1:16), or "Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God… " (15:43). These brief comments provide supplementary data about the persons and places of the stories.

Another type of narrative comment is what might be called background. This form of narrative commentary often occurs at the beginning of a sentence or as a separate episode prior to a major narrative action. Descriptions of time and place are often in this form. Thus, in the midst of the story of Jonathan's single-handed attack on the Philistines, the narrator interrupts the story to give geographical background

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information:

> In the pass, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on the one side and a rocky crag on the other side; the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh.
>
> The one crag rose on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba. (I Samuel 14:4-5)

The degree of detail reported here provides an opportunity for the narrator to draw a verbal picture for his listeners and to make clear the heroic scale of Jonathan's exploit. To use another contemporary analogy, this is the type of commentary that tour guides provide for tourists. And the bond that is established between the narrator and the listeners is like that which is formed between a group of travelers and a good guide.

A similar form of narrative comment is translations. The evangelists often translate Aramaic or Hebrew terms into Greek; for example, "he said to her, ' Talitha cumi,' which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (Mark 5:41); "Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" (Matt. 27: 46) Just as a translator is a welcome friend when one does not know the language being spoken, so also are Mark and Matthew helpful to their audiences when they translate foreign words.

A frequent form of narrative commentary in the Gospels is an explanation of something surprising or puzzling in the story. Thus, Luke explains why Jairus, an elder in the synagogue, fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house: "For he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying"(Luke 8:42). Later, in his version of the same tradition, Mark explains why the woman with a flow of blood touched Jesus' garment: "For she said, 'If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well'" (Mark 5:28). From these comments, a story-teller now can identify the elements of the story which the ancient audiences found surprising and in need of explanation. Also, to recognize narrative comments and to use them as opportunities to establish close communication with the audience is a key to the art of the biblical storyteller.

NORMS OF JUDGMENT

A primary factor in the relationship between the storyteller and the audience is a series of implicit negotiations about norms. This is complicated by the fact that, in telling an ancient story, we, as contemporary translators and reciters, are in effect identifying with ancient storytellers and making their norms our own. But this creates the possibility of alienation between the reciter of a biblical story and contemporary listeners who do not share the norms of the biblical narrators and audiences.

This is a familiar problem for translators but it is heightened in oral recital because of the intimacy of relationship established between a speaker and audience

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that is different than the relationship to a text. The norms of the narrative are communicated in large part by the tone and attitude of the reciter in the telling of the story. Many of these normative dimensions of language are eliminated in the leveling that takes place in texts. But in spoken language attitudes and norms are inevitably communicated in the recital. The issue is then to find not only the most closely equivalent word but also the most equivalent tone and attitude.

Let me give a concrete example. I remember telling the story of the Gerasene demoniac, in which the legion of demons enters a herd of swine (Mark 5:1-20), to a local church in Ohio in which there were a lot of farmers. As I was describing the herd of swine feeding on the hillside, it occurred to me that it might be difficult for some of those farmers to rejoice at the report of two thousand hogs plunging headlong into the sea and being drowned. For that reason, I explained to them that pigs were unclean animals for the Jews and that the swine in this story were like rats. With this background, I was then able to tell the story with appropriate enthusiasm.

In this instance, I recognized the difference between the norms of the ancient, predominantly Jewish, audience of Mark and the norms of the audience now. I solved the problem by explaining their norms. Such comments may in some instances be necessary for an oral translator to make it possible for a contemporary audience to find equivalent meaning in the story rather than, for example, sympathizing with the pigs or the farmers who lost them. In other instances, it is important to be aware of the differences in norms. When appropriately done, narrative comments are an opportunity for building a close relationship with the listeners.

Thus, in telling Mark's story to this congregation, I was in danger of uncritically identifying with Mark's norms that pigs are unclean animals at whose death we can rejoice. If I had, it would have created distance between me as the storyteller and my audience since they in no way shared Mark's evaluation of swine and the desirability of their mass destruction. In telling biblical stories, therefore, it is essential to be aware of the norms of judgment that are operative in the story itself and in the relationship between oneself as the reciter and the listeners. Negotiating those norms in a variety of ways is another dimension of the translation and presentation of the scriptures in an oral medium.

This dimension of biblical storytelling is only a somewhat more complicated instance of a fact known by every translator and storyteller: there are certain boundaries that you cannot cross without losing your audience. The limits of what is acceptable to the audience establish the boundaries within which the story can be told. All good comedians know this tension and live their lives walking a tightrope between what is outrageously funny and what is simply vulgar, offensive, or dumb. A reciter of biblical stories must be aware of those fine lines of ethical evaluation.

As the Gerasene demoniac story shows, the norms which are implicit in biblical narratives are often in radical discontinuity with the norms of both our culture

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and our religion. In biblical narratives, for example, there is a steady and relatively consistent norm that the people of Israel have been chosen by God and that everybody else is the enemy. Much of the time it is easy to identify with that norm and enter into that world. Thus, it is generally no problem to identify with David against Goliath and to rejoice at David's victory. But, even in this story, David's cutting off Goliath's head and bringing it to Jerusalem verges on the vindictive and grotesque. The story of Jael, who drove a tent peg through the head of Sisera as he lay asleep in her tent so that, as the New English Bible translates, "his brains oozed out on the ground, his limbs twitched, and he died" (Judges 4:21), may be more difficult. And, in the context of massacres of innocent civilians in violation of the rules of modern warfare, the constant motif in Joshua 10 and 11 that the people of Israel, in city after city, "put its people and every living thing in it to the sword ... " is potentially offensive. The ancient concept of the ban in which the utter destruction of every living thing in a defeated city was a religious obligation is no longer a shared value in many parts of the world. It may be that we can come to understand it, perhaps even sympathetically, but most Jews and Christians no longer share it. It is an ancient norm. The same is true in relation to many of the cleanliness laws. We no longer believe that a woman who is in the midst of her menstrual period makes everything that she touches unclean.

The problem for a modern biblical reciter is, therefore, that the norms of the ancient storyteller, with which you are inevitably identified through reciting the story, are often in radical discontinuity with both your own norms and those of your audience. One way of dealing with this problem is to ignore the stories in which those discontinuities are more extreme. Thus, the stories of the assassination of Eglon (Judges 3:15-30), the daughters of Lot tricking their father into getting them pregnant (Gen. 19:30-38), the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine whom he then cut in twelve pieces and sent to the twelve tribes (Judges 19) - these are among the many biblical stories that are rarely told or read and are not included in children's Bible story books. This strategy, however, only reinforces our schizophrenic attitude towards the Bible. These same types of stories are acceptable in other settings. But the Bible is to be a source of great religious truths rather than a source of real human experience.

There are better ways of approaching this problem of the discontinuity between the norms of biblical stories and our own. One approach is to recognize these differences and to seek to understand the norms and values of the biblical stories as deeply as possible. If the norms are understood, the values of the stories can be related to elements of contemporary experience that people do understand. Thus, while pigs may not be unclean animals to most Christians today, rats or roaches are. When the connection is made with animals that are culturally repulsive in our context, people can understand the norms of the story more sympathetically.

In many biblical narratives, however, this problem is particularly severe because of the ways in which persons today regard the characters of the stories. In Christian churches, it is extremely difficult, for example, for the parable of the Pharisee and the publican to be heard appropriately. The norm of virtually any

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Christian audience today is that the Pharisee was the villain; tax collectors are primarily associated with agents of the Internal Revenue Service who, while hardly popular heroes, are people trying to do a hard job conscientiously. It is very difficult for us to share the norm of Luke and his audience that the Pharisee was a faithful and pious believer and the tax collector was a traitor and profiteer. And, while associating the Pharisee with a good Methodist, Presbyterian, or evangelical and the tax collector with a government employee running a dope ring for the Mafia may help, it never fully works. There is no substitute, therefore, for seeking to understand the norms of the stories in their original cultural context. But, at the same time, it is necessary to search for correlations with which contemporary audiences can sympathetically and appropriately relate to the norms of the story. I do not have an answer about an appropriate strategy for multimedia translators to this problem.

A translator/storyteller needs, therefore, to have a four-way antenna in order to perceive the various levels of interaction that are generated in telling a biblical story. One interaction is the relationship between the ancient and the modern storyteller. When you learn a biblical narrator's tale and repeat his words, you inevitably establish a relationship with that person and his norms. A modern storyteller must understand and, as much as possible, identify with the norms of the ancient storyteller. But there will inevitably be points of difference that need to be recognized.

A second interaction is the relationship between the norms of the original storyteller/audience and the present-day audience. There is a much greater degree of distance here. A storyteller must be aware of and deal with those differences. This involves both knowing as much as possible about the original audience and its norms as well as being sensitive to the norms of the present audience. Furthermore, with different biblical stories in different periods of Israel's history, the norms of the ancient storytellers and audiences differ. So also, different audiences now will have different attitudes. It is for this reason that every translation of a biblical narrative needs to be nuanced for the cultural norms of the audience. Different things happen as different storytellers and audiences now interact with the biblical storytellers and the implied audiences to whom they told the stories. The issue, therefore, is not whether the interaction exists but only how one will deal with it.

Finally, there is the relationship between the storyteller and the present audience. In one sense, the biblical storyteller and audience are implicit in the biblical story itself. Therefore, the story becomes the context for an interaction between a modern storyteller and audience. In most instances, the storyteller will be far more committed to and interested in the biblical stories than the audience. Often a modern audience is somewhat skeptical about the biblical stories and of anyone who would tell them. Another possibility is that the audience has a sentimental attachment to Bible stories and will listen with an underlying commitment to saying, "Isn't it nice that this person is telling the stories of the Bible from memory?" In either case, the norms the audience brings to the story must be overcome or left behind before the story can be authentically heard.

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A concrete example may help to clarify the dynamics of these levels of interaction. In the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30), Jesus goes to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Mark's listeners would have known that this was enemy territory. "The territory of Tyre and Sidon" does not have those connotations for most audiences today, although the current conflicts between Israel and Lebanon can provide an analogy. Therefore, the storyteller must enable the modern audience to make that judgment.

The woman comes in and falls at Jesus' feet. Mark explains, in a narrative comment, that she was a Syro-Phoenician, a Greek by birth. He thereby establishes with his audience that, in some sense, this woman was Jesus' enemy. When she asks Jesus to heal her daughter, his initial response is hostile: "Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (Mark 5:27). And, in the context of the Syrians' persecution of Jews under Antiochus Epiphanies (see I and II Maccabees), his response to such an apparently arrogant request is fully appropriate. There are several levels of complexity here. The ancient audience's attitudes towards Syrians is one dimension that has already been noted. The other is attitudes toward dogs. Dogs in the first century were not affectionately regarded like dogs in the movies of the modern age such as Lassie. While the beginnings of domestication had taken place, dogs were widely despised and even regarded as unclean.

Once again, the modern storyteller must somehow make this clear so that the present audience can share the ancient audience's norms. The woman responds by accepting the insult and saying, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Jesus' response to her humility and acceptance of the justice of his implicit accusation is wholly positive: "For this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter" (Mark 5:29) .

A final dimension of this story is that Mark's audience may have had mixed reactions to this act of kindness to one of the enemies of Israel. The controversial character of the story is quite clear in Luke's story of Jesus' synagogue sermon in which a similar proclamation of the extension of the blessings of the Kingdom to a woman in Sidon almost causes Jesus' death (Luke 4:16-30). Thus, a storyteller now needs to deal with the interaction between the various norms that are operative in the telling of this story in order to communicate the conflict and reconciliation in this conversation. All of this happens in the nuances of tone and attitude that are conveyed through the sounds of the words.

DISTANCE

The dynamics of distance in a storytelling event are the patterns of relationship between the various persons who are involved in the story: the narrator, the characters of the story, and the audience. In the relationship between the narrator and the audience, narrative comments and elements of humor tend to draw

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the narrator and the audience more closely together. Likewise, a slow and boring style in which there is an excessive appeal for seriousness can create a growing alienation between the storyteller and the listeners. As has been discussed earlier, this relationship is full of dynamics that can partly only be learned by telling stories. For the moment, therefore, it will suffice to observe that this is a crucial relationship. Unless the storyteller and the listeners get together, the story will not be fully heard.

But the dynamics of distance in relation to the characters of the stories can be clarified. And, since the primary dynamics of relationship between the narrator and the listeners focus on the characters of the story, it is of major importance. A biblical storyteller needs, first of all, to be able to identify the dynamics of distance in the characterizations in the original telling of the story. Once there is a clear understanding of the dynamics of distance that were intended, one can seek to facilitate those relationships in the telling of the story to an audience now.

How then does one identify the dynamics of distance in characterizations? In the story of David and Goliath, the distance relationships to the characters are crystal clear. This is the description of Goliath:

> And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.
>
> He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze.
>
> And he had greaves of bronze upon his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders.
>
> And the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him.
>
> He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle?
>
> Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul?
>
> Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me.
>
> If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us."
>
> And the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together."
>
> When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. (I Sam. 17:4-11)

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The description has two parts. The first is a description of his offensive and defensive weapons. His height is intimidating and the size and quality of his offensive weapons are awesome by the standards of the day. Furthermore, the description of his defenses makes it clear that he is invulnerable to attack. In the context of the warfare of the ancient world, therefore, he is described as the ultimate war machine.

The second part of the description is his defiant speech in which he challenges a man of Israel to fight with him. This speech aims at total intimidation. And the final sentence describes the effect of the characterization: dismay and great fear. As is implied by the repetition of the challenge for forty mornings and evenings (I Sam. 17:16), no Israelite was willing to fight with Goliath. The effect of this characterization is to create distance in relation to Goliath. He becomes an extremely hostile and intimidating character who is truly an enemy.

David's characterization is precisely the reverse. He is introduced in the story as the youngest son (17: 12), who is criticized and mocked by his elder brother, Eliab (17:28-29). David demonstrates great courage in his conversation with Saul (17:31-37). His preparations for the battle are both comic and ominous. After trying on Saul's armor (17:38-39), he puts on his shepherd's clothes and selects five smooth stones. The comparison between the five stones and Goliath's war machine is almost pathetic. The appeals in the story are, therefore, to sympathize with David. This identification is increased by his confident response to Goliath's mockery (17:45-47). Thus, the preparations for the battle in the story are complete. The appeals for alienation from Goliath and for sympathy with David, the boy of faith, are in place. And, as can be witnessed in the telling of this story to any child, the dynamics of distance in these characterizations are polar opposites. This was my youngest son's favorite story for years. The recognition of these characteristics of the story makes it possible to bring these narrative forces into play in the telling of the story.

Similar characterizations of the good and the bad, the hero or heroine and the villain and villainess, are widespread in biblical narrative. Moses and Pharaoh, Samson and Delilah, Esther and Haman, Jael and Sisera, Shadrach/Mishach/Abednego and Nebuchadnezzar--all of these are highly polarized characterizations in which the dynamics of distance are similar to David and Goliath. These extreme polarities in characterization are equally present in contemporary movies. The "western" in American movies is a classic instance of a good guy and a bad guy with escalating appeals for identification with a good guy and alienation from a bad guy leading up to a gun fight in which the bad guy is killed. The names change but the basic narrative structures remain the same.

In many biblical narratives, however, the dynamics of distance are much more ambiguous and have more than one dimension. The characterization of David is a graphic example. Thus, the story of David and Bathsheba is full of highly ambiguous dynamics of distance. One of the most striking things about the story is the degree to which the dynamics of distance in the story of David and Bathsheba maintain a high

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degree of identification with David in his attraction to Bathsheba. No negative norms or appeals for alienation from David are injected into the description. Having committed adultery with Bathsheba and gotten her pregnant, David brings Uriah home from the battle. When Uriah admirably refuses to sleep with his wife in order to keep his vow of abstinence during the battle, David arranges his death. All of this is described with a high degree of objectivity.

In the confrontation between Nathan and David, however, the listener now knows that David is the object of Nathan's parable and that David is guilty. This creates a high degree of distance from David. Furthermore, the norms of judgment in relation to David in this part of the story are extremely negative. David does repent and a whole new series of appeals for identification with him are made. But David is, in no sense, a wholly sympathetic character. In oral recitation, all of these dynamics are conveyed through the voice of the storyteller.

The dynamics of distance are often quite complex in a biblical narrative. Therefore, a brief description of the things to look and listen for in relation to biblical characterizations may help to facilitate the analysis of the dynamics of distance in the stories.

Preparation or Introduction - The introduction of a character establishes the initial relationship. If the introduction is positive and sympathetic as in the case of David, who is introduced from the perspective of the prophet, Samuel, (I Sam. 16:12) as a young man who was "ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome", the relationship tends to be maintained. This is directly analogous to the function of introductions to friends or the introduction of a speaker.

Norms of Judgment - The evaluation of the character's words and actions in relation to the operative norms of the story influences the relationship to the character. If the norms require a negative evaluation of the character's actions or words, that will tend to create alienation from the character; so also, the judgment that a character has acted or spoken rightly tends to draw the audience closer to the character.

Narrative Point of View - The perspective from which the character is described by the storyteller controls the degree of insight into a particular character's motives and feelings. An inside view in which the character's perceptions or feelings are described is a powerful means for creating sympathy and identification with a character.

Narrative commentary - since the audience tends to give the narrator great authority, a narrative comment about a character has a great influence on the distance relationship. The narrator's sympathetic description of David and his comments about his motivations, therefore, greatly increase David's attractiveness as a character.

Comments by Characters in the Story - If an enemy, like Goliath, makes a

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derogatory statement about a character such as David, the effect will be an increase in identification with David. So also a positive comment about a character by a hero, such as Jonathan's statements about David, will have the same effect. Likewise, Samuel's condemnation of Saul is a clear example of the power of a respected character in the story to influence the relationship to another character in the story.

Recurring Elements - The motifs or recurring elements in a characterization also influence distance and establish a character's basic profile. Thus, the priests in Mark are always seeking to kill Jesus while he is always healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and suffering in obedience to God's will. Observing the repeated notes that are sounded in relation to a character will help, therefore, to clarify the dynamics of a particular characterization.

The great translators are those who are able to recreate in modern situations the equivalent dynamics of distance that were present in the original stories. As a multi-media translator being aware of these dynamics in relation to the characters of the story is one of the most important elements of the art of translation. Biblical stories have richly nuanced and highly complex characters. In fact, the depth and the complexity of the characters is one of the greatest strengths of the Bible.

HUMOR AND DELIGHT

We tend to think of laughter in relation to comedy and jokes. There are virtually no jokes or comedy in biblical narrative. There is, however, a high degree of humor and delight in biblical storytelling. Thus, while the story of Baalam's ass (Numbers 22) is extremely funny, it is neither a joke nor is it comedy. There is great delight in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and in Jesus' victories over the demons, but it is not comedy. These stories instead appeal for celebration and for sharing delight in the actions of God.

The spirit of biblical storytelling is a spirit of good humor and joy in the telling of the stories. Thus, Miriam's singing after Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the celebration of the people of Israel at the victories of David, and the delight of the crowd in Jesus' healings are all connected by a common spirit. The sheer delight and enthusiasm that is generated by remembering and looking forward to the victories of God over the powers of evil is at the heart of biblical storytelling. The invitation that is implicit in these stories is an invitation to rejoice in God's actions.

An instance of this delight in the Gospels is in the characterization of the crowd in the early sections of Mark's Gospel. For example, at the end of the story of the paralytic, the crowd's response is "We never saw anything like this!" (Mark 2:12) It is an expression of utter delight and joy. They whoop for joy. The response that is invited is like laughing at children who are having a wonderfully good time playing together. Another instance is when the crowd chases Jesus and the disciples around the sea and are waiting for him when he comes on shore (6:32-34). The humor of this is conveyed in the tone of the reciter's voice. And while some listeners will resist, it is very difficult to remain sour and dour in such an atmosphere.

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The issue in audio and video translations will be to give people permission to respond with laughter and delight. The Bible is associated with seriousness. Thus, even when an appropriate appeal for delight is given, some persons will reject it and remain serious. In general, however, my experience of the recital of biblical narratives is that persons respond warmly to suggestions of good cheer.

These are then some of the basic characteristics of biblical narratives that become critical factors in an audio translation. If a different person performs the text than does the translation, it will be necessary to develop either some form of annotation that will indicate these oral dynamics or to work with the person directly as they are making the recording. The latter is preferable. The training of reciters will be as important in this process as the actual translation of the words because much of the meaning is conveyed in the nuances of tone and attitude. As a conclusion, therefore, I want to discuss a major issue in the preparation for recital of the Bible in audio and video media.

IDENTIFICATION IN BIBLICAL RECITAL

The tradition of literacy has valued the treatment of the biblical text as an object which is to be treated in a distanced and objective manner. As a result, most audio recordings of biblical translations in English have been read in a highly objective and distanced manner, usually by actors with a British accent. This approach needs to be evaluated in the context of the values of oral and electronic media culture. The conclusions about this issue will shape the selection and preparation of those who will do the recordings of the translations. Once again, I will focus on the recital of biblical narratives.

One concrete sign of this broader issue is whether it is important for the translation to be recited from memory. And the answer to this question is unequivocally "Yes." While the text may be present when the recording is made for accuracy, the quality of the recital will be fundamentally different if the text has been thoroughly internalized in memory. This was a necessary requirement for the recital of the early biblical texts because there was no punctuation or line divisions and in the case of the Hebrew, no vowels. If the text had not been thoroughly internalized, it was impossible to do a smooth reading.

The broader issue is that becoming a reciter of biblical texts is more than becoming familiar with the words and exploring the story in its original context. It is possible to learn the story, study it intensively in the ancient world and tell it in an antiquarian manner. In order for any biblical narrative recital to be a dynamic equivalent of the original recital, a reciter must identify with the story being told.

This difference between the media worlds of orality and literacy has been explored extensively in recent research. Eric Havelock has provided an excellent description of the educational experience of oral culture and of a storyteller in ancient Greece who was required to learn the history of the people:

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> This over-all body of experience (we shall avoid the word 'knowledge') is incorporated in a rhythmic narrative or set of narratives which he memorizes and which is subject to recall in his memory. Such is poetic tradition, essentially something he accepts uncritically, or else it fails to survive in his living memory. Its acceptance and retention are made psychologically possible by a mechanism of self-surrender to the poetic performance, and of self-identification with the situation and the stories related in the performance. Only when the spell is fully effective can his mnemonic powers be fully mobilized. His receptivity to the tradition has thus, from the standpoint of inner psychology, a degree of automatism which however is counter-balanced by a direct and unfettered capacity for action, in accordance with the paradigms he has absorbed.[4]

In order to develop a thinking self who could critically separate himself from his memories, Plato, according to Havelock, "had to destroy the immemorial habit of self-identification with the oral tradition."5 Thus, Havelock demonstrates that intellectual detachment from the oral tradition was an essential part of the transition from oral to writing culture.

Havelock's description clarifies both the need for identification with the story and the fundamental difficulty in doing that for educated persons today. The identification of the self with the story is essential to effective recital. The difference between a story which emerges from out of a person's deepest self and a story that is merely a set of recited words is the difference between meaning and boredom, a living story and a dead one. It is necessary, therefore, to rediscover what Havelock calls "the immemorial habit of self-identification with the oral tradition."6 In other words, the story must be not just a biblical story. It also must be my story.

The problem is that contemporary methods of critical biblical study place a high premium on detachment. Walter Wink has defined the problem in relation to objectivism which he calls, "the academic ideal of detached observation of phenomena without interference by emotions, will, interests, or bias." If Havelock is right, this ideal can be traced back to the formation of the original academy by Plato and to the formation of the world of knowledge that characterized writing. That is, in order to explore the processes of identification with the story, it will be necessary to modify this tradition of detachment and objectivity as an ideological posture. It needs to be seen, as Wink has suggested, as a stage in an on-going dialectic of identification or fusion with the story, detachment or distancing, and a return to communion.

The problem of objectivism as an ideology is blatantly clear when biblical traditions are recited, particularly from memory. Anyone who has heard someone coldly and dispassionately reciting the words of the Bible from memory knows the problem. In contrast, I remember someone telling me about Dr. James Muilenburg's reading of the 23rd Psalm at the funeral of Dr. Wilhelm Pauck's wife in James Chapel at Union Theological Seminary. My friend reported that Muilenburg read it with utter simplicity and intensity, repeating each word lovingly and with a certain sense of awe. Each

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nuance of the Psalm was full of emotional meaning and multi-faceted memories, first for him and, through him, for the whole congregation. The recital of the Psalm was a moment of comfort and grief, affirmation and mourning, solace and celebration. That is the difference between mere repetition and the full reliving of the Word of God.

As this story makes clear, the identification with the story begins with the self but must also include the community. The storyteller tells the story out of both personal and communal experience. Given the need to discover both individual and communal connections, how does one explore the various levels of identification? The general answer is that the story is connected with similar experiences. Thus, Havelock describes the response of Socrates to a question about death:

> You ask me how should one confront death? Well, you remember Achilles after the death of Patroclus; how his mother came to him--she was a goddess, you know--and what he said to her about his duty and what she said to him and how he replied again to her.[8]

The same could be said in the context of the communities of Israel. They also faced the crises of their lives by remembering the response of David to the deaths of Jonathan or Absalom or the response of the disciples to the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is, they thought about the experiences of their lives by remembering similar experiences in the stories of the oral tradition. The patterns of identification were determined by the connections with the common experiences of life.

Identification with the feelings of the characters is one dimension of the process. The exploration of points of connection follows the same pattern as Socrates, but in reverse. For example, when have I felt grief such as that of David at the death of Jonathan or Absalom or of the women at the tomb? When have I expressed defiance such as David when he confronted Goliath? When have I felt compassion for someone who is afflicted such as Jesus felt for the leper? For me to tell the story of Saul pleading with Samuel or of Jesus in Gethsemane, I must identify with them to some degree. The mechanism of that identification is the connection between my story and their story. It is certainly true that I cannot feel what they felt. Yet, if I am going to tell their story as my own, I must make it my own by pouring the experiences of my life into the mold provided by the story. Furthermore, feelings associated with the words of the characters will be presented through my telling of the story. The only question is what those feelings are (boredom, indifference, anger, love) and whether they are appropriate or inappropriate to the story.

A similar dynamic is implicit in the exploration of communal identification. When, for example, have we as a community grieved over a fallen leader like David or Jesus? My first memory is the funerals of Martin Luther King and John Kennedy. When have we as a community felt compassion for victims of senseless injury or illness? My first association is the people of Lebanon, Vietnam, and Cambodia. These points of communal connection can be in relation to family experiences, a congregation, a nation, a racial group, or humankind. But, regardless of the group that is chosen, the identification of communal experiences with the biblical stories will

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help to provide a point of identification with the story.

The most difficult character with whom to identify is Jesus. There are special dynamics in relation to the characterization of Jesus. In describing exercises that can involve the more intuitive and emotional aspects of ourselves, Walter Wink has also cautioned against exercises that involve identifying with Jesus because of the tendency to identify with the hero in a story. The result is, as he says, "a kind of messianic inflation."[9] This is a danger with role plays and other types of single identification exercises. But, in the recital of a biblical narrative, the storyteller presents all the characters. Furthermore, the storyteller never ceases to be, first and always, the person who she or he is. There is never any pretending that the storyteller has become the character. Rather the storyteller presents and tells about the character. These processes of identification or character discovery are done with all the characters, not just Jesus. Indeed, in story-telling, persons often do not identify sufficiently with Jesus to make him a human and believable character. Thus, while a messianic identification can be a problem, the character of story in contrast to drama creates an entirely different set of dynamics.

Another way of exploring modes of identification with the story is through music. I often find that listening to Beethoven or Stravinsky or Shostakovich can help me to discover the dynamics of the story. Thus, to search for the music that expresses the story is a way of searching for the way in which the story is to be told. It is often hard to generate the emotion of the story out of oneself or out of identification with one's own experiences. The emotion arises in the interaction between the story, myself, and the context in which I am telling the story. Somehow, music provides a natural and freeing context in which the emotion of the story can be both discovered and expressed. The music creates an atmosphere and a rhythm for the story.

Thus, one dimension of becoming a reciter or oral translator is identifying with the stories as my stories. This process involves the exploration of the full range of connections between my story and the biblical story. Before a reciter can make the stories alive for someone else, they must first be alive for the reciter. The issue is integrity, the integrity of the storyteller and the integrity of the stories. If the stories have been made an integral part of the storyteller's own experience, that will be evident. If there is discontinuity and an absence of real integral part of the storyteller's own experience, that will be evident. If there is discontinuity and an absence of real connection, the story will be phony and unreal.

The other danger, of course, is that the reciter will become maudlin and overly sentimental in the process of identification. An appropriate emotional distance is the goal. But at this point in the history of the recital of biblical translation, the problem is the literary tradition of objectification.

THE SPIRIT OF MULTI-MEDIA TRANSLATIONS

The motivation of those who have recited the Bible in the past has been to

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honor and make present the actions and words of God. They had experienced something of supreme significance and value. Through reciting the Bible, therefore, the possibility was created that God's words and deeds might be remembered and made present. Thus, the recital of the Bible was told in a spirit of awe and wonder at the power and grace of God. The recognition is always present that the power is in no sense controlled by the person or even by the story. The spirit of biblical recital is a spirit of anticipation and hope in which the future is left radically open. The word of God is told as a gift given first by God and then by the reciter to anyone who chooses to receive it.

Translating and reciting the Bible involves listening. It is like sonar. Sonar operates by sending out sounds which bounce back; the unknown object or the right direction is determined by listening to those echoes. So also, a biblical reciter is guided by the waves of resonance that are reflected back as the energy of the story reaches out and encounters time and space. Whether the biblical narrative is told to a person or a group, whether physically present or absent, the words are sent out into an unknown void. Even if the person is known intimately, the reciter does not know how this story will affect the listener. The direction of the story is shaped then by listening to the reverberations that come back from those who are listening. Those resonances also echo through time reflecting the responses of those who have heard the story in the past and those who will hear it in the future.

There are occasions when time collapses during the recital of biblical texts. The ancient events and the future of the cosmos are concentrated in the present moment of the recital. The clouds part for a moment and the mysteries of the past and the future are dimly but truly perceived. These moments of revelation are the promise of the translation of the Bible into the electronic media of the modern world and are potentially a true experience of God's action in history.

The most appropriate word to describe those moments is communion. In the midst of the deepest pain, there is a sense of

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