Performing the Gospel

Orality,
Memory,
and Mark

*Essays Dedicated to Werner Kelber*

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2006
Fortress Press
Minneapolis
Interfaces of Orality and Literature in the Gospel of Mark

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Werner Kelber's work on orality and literacy in Mark inaugurated a new discussion of orality in New Testament scholarship. The discussion about orality and the New Testament has changed considerably since the appearance of his 1983 book, The Oral and the Written Gospel. One of the major changes is a result of the publications by John Miles Foley in the intervening years, including the application of many of Foley's insights by Jonathan Draper and Richard Horsley. Another has been the use of the Progymnasmata, with special focus on the chreia, in analysis of New Testament texts. The changes call for a return to the Gospel of Mark with different eyes. In 1994 Kelber himself reformulated the position he had presented in his 1983 book, articulating a more nuanced view concerning the relation of the oral and the written during first-century Christianity than his previous work had asserted. Careful study of Aelius Theon of Alexandria's Progymnasmata, a rhetorical manual most likely written during the time of the writing of the New Testament Gospels, shows that writing and speaking were closely intertwined in the act of performing a composition like the Gospel of Mark. As I stated in 1993,

A presupposition that culture-transmitting traditions invite, in fact require, continual reformulation, just like speaking does, guides
The Synoptic Gospels, in particular, show how first-century Christian writers composed in a *progymnastic* manner, rather than in a mode of scribal copying or oral transcribing. The amount of verbatim similarity, in a context of substantive variations, shows that they composed without returning either their eyes or their ears to a manuscript source as they composed. They had learned, as the first exercise in Aelius Theon’s *Progymnasmata* instructs, that it was appropriate to compose both orally and in writing either “in the same words or in others as well.”

Whitney Shiner’s *Proclaiming the Gospel*, appearing exactly twenty years after Kelber’s book, exists as a rich resource into the nature of reading and writing performances in Mediterranean antiquity and the nature of the Gospel of Mark in the context of those performances. He has helped to establish the case that while it is true, in one sense, that a written text “is but the dead, fossilized remains of my living voice,” oral tradition also lies “dead” in an oral storyteller until he or she gives voice to the tradition. A reader gives voice to a written text, much as a storyteller gives voice to an oral text. The difference, as Quintilian said, is that “we can reread a passage again and again if we are in doubt about it or wish to fix it in the memory.” But both oral tradition and written tradition are dead until they are given voice in performance. Speed reading in twentieth-century American culture often sets a goal to move people away from creating an inner voice that vocalized the words. The reader was supposed to learn from the pages by sighted quickly through them. The data from antiquity make it virtually certain that there was no reading based on sighted quickly through the pages in antiquity. There would be sighting for location, but reading would then be a matter of voicing the text, even if it was a matter of voicing it to oneself.

One of the problems that still haunts the investigation of orality in early Christian literature is an imprecise use of the terms “orality” and “oral culture” in analysis of New Testament writings. As Foley states, “Orality alone is a ‘distinction’ badly in need of deconstruction, a typology that unfairly homogenizes much more that it can hope to distinguish; it is by itself a false and misleading category.” A major problem is a failure to distinguish the kinds of orality that exist on a spectrum from cultures in which people are unaware of writing and written texts to those in which written texts are immediately accessible both in their hands and in their minds. It is helpful, as a heuristic starting point, to distinguish between seven different kinds of speaking, reading, and writing cultures: (1) oral culture, (2) scribal culture, (3) rhetorical culture, (4) reading culture, (5) literary culture, (6) print culture, and (7) hypertext culture. Among these alternatives, the most accurate definition of the early Christian “tradition biosphere” is rhetorical culture rather than oral culture. “Rhetorical culture features comprehensive interaction between spoken and written statement... In practice this means that writing in a rhetorical culture imitates both speech and writing, and speech in a rhetorical culture imitates both speech and writing.”

In this essay I will focus on two portions of the Gospel of Mark that refer in some way to “the writings.” In certain ways, this is a sequel to my 1997 study of orality in the context of rhetorical composition in the *Gospel of Thomas,* in which I described the inner principle of the *Gospel of Thomas* as a two-step process: (1) If there is something about Jesus you do not understand, find a saying of Jesus. (2) If there is something about a saying of Jesus you do not understand, find another saying of Jesus that will shed light on the first saying you found. In the language of Foley, using the work of Dell Hymes, M. A. K. Halliday, and others, this inner principle of the *Gospel of Thomas* is a register. Tradition exists in culture in registers. Foley, using Hymes, first defines “registers” as “major speech styles associated with recurrent types of situations.” Then he introduces Halliday’s definition:

A register can be defined as the configuration of semantic resources that the member of a culture typically associates with a situation type... Since these [semantic] options are realized in the form of grammar and vocabulary, the register is recognizable
as a particular selection of words and structures. But it is defined in terms of meanings; it is not an aggregate of conventional forms of expression superposed on some underlying content by "social factors" of one kind or another. It is the selection of meanings that constitutes the variety to which a text belongs.\textsuperscript{19}

The tradition register of the Gospel of Thomas is a wisdom register. In contrast to the registers functioning in the New Testament Gospels, there is no appeal to "the writings" (scripture) in the wisdom register operative in the Gospel of Thomas. One of the dynamics of the register in the Gospel of Thomas is a startling saying in logion 52:

52.1: His disciples said to him, "Twenty-four prophets have spoken in Israel, and they all spoke of you." 2: He said to them, "You have disregarded the living one who is in your presence, and have spoken of the dead."\textsuperscript{20}

The sayings of the twenty-four prophets in Israel who spoke of Jesus are present in "the writings" to which all the New Testament Gospels refer. Here in the Gospel of Thomas is the view of a written text that Kelber presented in his 1983 book. From the perspective of the register in the Gospel of Thomas, the voices of the "scribed" prophets are dead. The "living one" is the Jesus who is speaking directly to them. The irony, of course, is that a primary medium in the Gospel of Thomas for the voice of the "living one" is a list of sayings of Jesus that are present in writing! Even in the oral environment from which the Gospel of Thomas emerged, written versions of Jesus' sayings played a dynamic role.

In other words, early Christianity was a rhetorical culture, with interplays between writing and orality present in virtually every sector of its activity. In contrast to cultures in which people have never seen, or even heard of, language in written form, early Christians knew and saw various kinds of writings. They both heard and made reference to writings, even if they themselves were unable to read any of them. In this rhetorical context, there were significantly different interfaces of orality and literature in different environments of communication. A significantly wide variety of interfaces are present among the Synoptic Gospels themselves, and even more interfaces are present in the relation of the New Testament Gospels to the Gospel of Thomas.

In contrast to the Gospel of Thomas, the registers operative in the New Testament Gospels function in relation to the following principle: If you do not understand a saying or action of Jesus, find some verses in the writings that can help you understand it. This means that the major registers of tradition operative in the New Testament Gospels are present in the tradition of the Hebrew Bible. Since there are many ways the registers of the writings function in the New Testament Gospels, I focus here on two instances in the Gospel of Mark and their parallels in Matthew and Luke.

In the first instance the narrator of Mark begins the story by reciting from "the writings" (1:2-4). After this initial recitation by the narrator, Jesus steps into the role of reciting from the writings in various places in the story. One example of Jesus' recitation from the writings is after the parable of the vineyard owner who sent servants and his son to get the produce from the vineyard. This is only one example of a special aspect of the Gospel of Mark: after the introduction in Mark 1:1-8, only Jesus and his interlocutors recite from the writings. The Markan narrator does not recite from the writings to support assertions in the narration of the story. In contrast, both Matthew and Luke at various points recite from the writings to explain to the reader "what was fulfilled" in the words and deeds of Jesus. Matthew and Luke sometimes expand on the internal function of the writings as they are present in Mark. At other times, they recite from the writings in a manner that makes the writings external to the narration of the story itself. Thus, there is an array of interfaces between orality and literature among the Synoptic Gospels. The Gospel of Mark is singular, however, in keeping references to the writings internal to the narration of the story of Jesus after Mark 1:1-8.

I will limit my focus to the initial recitation of "what is written in the prophet Isaiah" by the narrator in Mark 1:2-4 and one instance in Mark in which Jesus recites from the writings. I will not attempt to analyze the manner in which recitation from writings is embedded at many points in Markan narration itself.\textsuperscript{21}

John the Baptizer as "the Voice" in the Gospels

Mark 1:1-8 as Narration with Internal Literary Voice

In Proclaiming the Gospel Shiner discusses the beginning of the Gospel of Mark in a section on "vocal effects" and a chapter on "including the audience."\textsuperscript{22} I would like to revisit those opening verses of the Gospel of
Mark in the context of excellent observations Shiner makes about how they might function in an oral performance. My approach is guided in particular by information from Aelius Theon’s *Prognemastike*, which emphasizes the deep relationship between speaking and writing in the context of composing written instances of *chreiai*, narratives, and fables.

One of the most noticeable features of the opening verses of Mark (1:1-8) is their nature as "run-on" statements. Oral performance regularly continues on and on, with very long sentences containing short clauses and statements. Once the sentence at the opening of Mark starts, either with "Beginning" (ἀρχῇ) or with "Just as" (κατὰ), it continues paraistically with "and" (καί) through John’s statement that ends in 1:7-8. This produces the following run-on string containing four sets of five statements as follows:

Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ Son of God, (1:1)

(A1) as it is written in Isaiah the prophet,
(A2) “Behold I send my messenger before your face,
(A3) who will prepare your way, (1:2)
(A4) a voice of one crying in the desert
(A5) prepare the way of the Lord,
(A6) make straight his paths,” (1:3)

(B1) came John baptizing in the desert,
(B2) and preaching a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins, (1:4)
(B3) and all the Judean country came out to him
(B4) and all the Jerusalemites,
(B5) and they were baptized by him in the Jordan river,
(B6) confessing their sins, (1:5)

(C1) and John was clothed with camel hair
(C2) and a leather girdle around his waist
(C3) and was eating locusts
(C4) and wild honey (1:6)

(D1) and he preached saying,
(D2) “He who is stronger than me is coming after me,
(D3) of whom I am not worthy
(D4) stooping down to loosen the thongs of his sandals. (1:7)
(D5) I baptized you with water;
(D6) but he himself will baptize you with holy spirit.” (1:8)

It is noticeable that Shiner stops this recitation at the end of what is "written" in Isaiah the prophet, even though there is no conjunction to indicate any kind of "stop" at the end of it.23 Nestle–Aland punctuates the Greek text quite well here, placing only a comma after the *autou* at the end of the recitation. For the narrator, the recitation of "what is written" flows immediately, without any break, into the recitation of the narration.

Here we see the first interface of orality and literature in the Gospel of Mark. For the composer, that which is written outside the text has an internal relation to that which is being recited in the text. In other words, that which is outside the text is inside the text through recitation of it in a continuous stream with recitation of the narration in the text. This is a manifestation, I propose, of a particular aspect of the early Christian prophetic register in the Gospel of Mark. The precedents for this internal function of that which is written lie especially in the writings that are called in the Christian Bible the “major and minor prophets.” These writings contain, on the one hand, words of God from outside the text that are now inside the text. Words of God flow into words of the prophet in a manner that makes it almost impossible at certain points, in a book like Isaiah, for example, to determine exactly what voice is speaking. In addition, narrative that presents the story of the prophet merges with words of God and words of the prophet in an ongoing flow of narration. This is the register that is operative at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark. The narrator presents Isaiah the prophet telling the story of “the beginning of the Gospel” by showing God speaking to Jesus, telling Jesus how John is coming “before his face, preparing his way” (Mark 1:2).24 From the perspective of Markan narration, Isaiah continues with a description of the messenger as "a voice" of a person crying in the desert (Mark 1:3). This prophetic narration then continues with a description of John preparing the way by baptizing people and preaching (1:4-6), which ends with a recitation of what “a voice” said (1:7-8). There is no break between what is written and what is oral in the Markan narration in these verses. The narrator’s narration, the narrator’s recitation of a blend of Exod 23:20 and Mal 3:1, the narrator’s recitation of Isa 40:3, the narrator’s description of John and of how people came to him, and the narrator’s recitation of what John preached flow continuously forward into one another. The narration ends with a recitation (1:7-8) of the content of "a voice" to which Isaiah referred (1:3). Markan narration reaches its first "stop," then, when "the voice of John the baptizer" ends in Mark 1:7-8.
Matthew 3:1-6 as Narration Supported by External Literary Voice

There is a great contrast here between Mark and both Matthew and Luke. The other two Synoptic Gospels show a conscious relation to writings outside their narration that produce a manner of setting off the writings from the recitation of the story itself. For example, Matthew has many “formula quotations” while Luke reflects on other writings that recite the story of “the things that have happened among us” (Luke 1:1-4). This difference shows itself in the way Matthew and Luke incorporate the information in Mark 1:1-8 in their Gospels.

Matthew starts by referring to the narration that follows as a “book” of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham (1:1). This book orientation also exhibits itself when Matthew recites information about John in 3:1-6. Matthean narration unfolds in the following manner:

Now in those days came John the Baptist

(A1) preaching in the desert of Judea (3:1)
saying,
"Repent;
for the kingdom of God has come near," (3:2)

(A2) for this is what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet
saying,
"A voice of one crying in the desert,
pREPare the way of the Lord,
mAke straight his paths." (3:3)

(B1) Now John himself had his garment from camel hair
and animal skin around his waist,
and his food was locusts and wild honey. (3:4)

(B2) Then Jerusalem went out to him,
and all Judea
and all the surrounding country of Jordan, (3:5)
and they were baptized in the Jordan river by him
confessing their sins. (3:6)

Matthew makes the recitation of the writings a narrational argument that presents the reason why John spoke in the manner in which he did.

The first thing Matthean narration presents is “John speaking.” The second thing it presents is “the reason” the voice spoke, namely a recitation from Isaiah that asserts that a voice was coming. After narrating what the voice said and presenting the reason why the voice came and said what it did, the Gospel of Matthew narrates things that happened around John. Instead of having the narration about John flow directly out of the recitation of what Isaiah said, as Mark does, Matthew creates an argumentative unit: Because God said “through Isaiah” that a voice cries in the desert preparing the way of the Lord, John came “speaking,” rather than “baptizing and preaching” (Mark 1:4). Once the narrator has told the reader why John came speaking, then the narrator can continue with narration that describes how John looked, who came out to him, and what John did when they came out. This narration continues, then, with a longer presentation of “the voice” in Matt 3:7-12. In this way, Matthean narration begins with “a voice” (3:2) and ends with “the voice” (3:7-12). Once Matthean narration has presented the voice of John the Baptist, it can introduce Jesus, namely, “he who is coming after me,” to the reader (3:13-17). This sequence creates, of course, a strange content for John’s speech at the beginning of the unit: John speaks what Jesus speaks later in Matt 4:17! Matthew needed content for John’s voice to open the unit, followed by the rationale for the voice from the writings. The result was the creation of a new content for John’s voice, namely, the same content conventionally given to Jesus’ voice in early tradition.

In Matthew, then, the early Christian prophetic register has a different interface between orality and literature than the manifestation of the prophetic register in Mark. At this point in Matthean narration, recitation from the writings is external to narration of the story, serving as outside authoritative support for the importance of the story the narration is telling. In contrast to Mark, the writings in Matthean narration are not internal to the orality of the narration of the story. Rather, the orality refers to writings that lie outside the text and recites words from the writings as authoritative commentary on the story itself.

Luke 3:1-6 as Narration Supported by Literature

Luke 3:1-6 has a significant relation to Mark 3:1-6, since Lukian narration also recites “what is written” in a manner that places it outside the narration of the story. The difference is that Luke presents what is written as literature rather than as the voice of God through Isaiah. Instead of actually reciting what the voice said, Lukian narration simply asserts that John came “preaching” (3:3). Luke focuses on John’s voice at the beginning,
rather than on John’s “baptizing and preaching,” the emphasis of Mark 1:4, as the narration flows out of the recitation of what is written in Isaiah the prophet. The Lukano narration (3:3-6) unfolds as follows:

And he came into all the region around the Jordan,

(A1) preaching a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins, (3:3)
(A2) as it is written in the book of words of Isaiah the prophet, “A voice of one crying out in the desert:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight. (3:4)
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth; (3:5)
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” (3:6)

After this eight-line recitation of Isa 40:3-5, Lukano narration continues with the statement of the voice to the multitudes in Luke 3:7-9. In Luke, in contrast to Matthew, the aggressive statement by John that “they should not begin to say to themselves” that they have Abraham as their father (3:8) calls forth questions from the multitudes (3:10), from tax collectors (3:12), and from soldiers (3:14). In Luke, then, the voice engages in dialogue with various groups of people, setting the stage for Jesus’ confrontation of multiple groups of people throughout the story. This leads to a summary statement by the voice in 3:15-17, followed by the narrator’s summary and transitional narration in 3:18-20 that subtly introduces Jesus in 3:21-22 “among those who were baptized.” In the Lukano sequence, “a voice from heaven” has the final word as it tells Jesus he is the beloved Son, in whom God is well pleased (3:22).

In summary, Markan narration that introduces John the Baptist to the reader shows the manner in which the story that is narrated flows naturally out of that which is written. In contrast, that which is written lies outside of Matthean and Lukano narration of the story. In their Gospels, that which is written provides argumentative support for the story that is being narrated. Therefore, recitation from the writings regularly interrupts the narration of the story to provide special explanations to the reader. In the Gospel of Mark the interface of written and oral in the prophetic register is internal to the narration of the story itself. In other words, the narrative voice contains within itself an interface between oral and written. In contrast, in Matthew and Luke there is an interface in the prophetic register between two levels of narration: (1) narration of the story and (2) narration of written texts that lie outside the story.28

Reading about “the Stone” in the Gospels

The next passage in my analysis features Jesus confronting others in a manner that implies that Jesus himself had read a certain portion of the writings. This takes us to another interface between orality and literature in Mark, namely, oral statements by Jesus in which he implies that he has first-hand knowledge of certain portions of the writings by reading them himself.

“Have You Not Read about the Stone?”: Mark 11:27—12:12

In the Gospel of Mark, Ps 118:22-23 occurs in the speech of Jesus in a manner that displays Jesus’ knowledge of the writings in the presence of chief priests, scribes, and elders. These Temple hierarchies, among whom specifically are “writings,” come to Jesus while he is walking in the Jerusalem Temple and ask him a question about his authority to do what he is doing (11:27). As the story unfolds, Jesus’ speech in Mark highlights Jesus’ knowledge of “writings he has read” by featuring a rhetorical question that flows directly out of Jesus’ presentation of the parable about the vineyard owner. The unit begins in Mark 11:27 and moves directly into Jesus’ teaching in parables as a way to respond to the question by the Temple hierarchies about his authority (12:1). When Jesus completes the parable (12:9), he continues directly with a question to the chief priests, scribes, and elders that is designed to answer their question about his authority to do the things he is doing. Here I will quote only the last part of the unit.

(A1) “What then will the owner of the vineyard do?
(A2) He will come
(A3) and destroy the tenants
(A4) and give the vineyard to others. (12:9)

(B1) Have you not read this writing,
(B2) ‘The stone that the builders rejected,
(B3) this has become the cornerstone; (12:10)
(B4) this came from the Lord,
(B5) and it is amazing in our eyes?” (12:11)
(C1) and they wanted to seize him,
(C2) and they feared the crowd,
(C3) because they knew
(C4) that he had told the parable against them,
(C5) and leaving them he went away, (12:12)

(D1) and they sent to him some of the Pharisees
(D2) and some of the Herodians,
(D3) to entrap him in his talk. (12:13)

In this unit in Mark, the issue in relation to the parable is what the owner of the vineyard will do when his servants are rejected and his son is killed. The issue, therefore, concerns action. Toward this end, Jesus asks a rhetorical question and answers it himself (12:9), then presents an authoritative recitation from the writings in the form of a rhetorical question that insinuates that the chief priests, scribes, and elders have never read a certain portion of scripture that judges their actions as shameful. In this context, the Gospel of Mark includes not only Ps 118:22 about the stone, but also v. 23 in Jesus’ speech: “this came from the Lord, and it is amazing in our eyes” (12:11). The additional lines from Psalm 118 focus the attention on the Lord in relation to actions through which people reject and actions through which things that are rejected are reclaimed for very special roles, namely, to function as a cornerstone or keystone. In Mark 11:28 the chief priests, scribes, and elders ask Jesus by what authority he is doing the things he is doing. Jesus’ authoritative recitation from the writings is an answer to them. What he is doing comes from the Lord, and it is an amazing thing!

Much of the scholarly debate about the recitation of Ps 118:22-23 in Mark 12:10-11 has centered around the possibility or implausibility of its authenticity in speech of the historical Jesus. Here I wish to focus on the manner in which something from the writings is presented as an internal part of the orality of Jesus’ speech. Jesus’ rhetorical question leads to an answer he himself gives, in which he embeds a recitation from the writings that contains in itself a reference to the Lord who authorizes marvelous things. The polemical nature of Jesus’ speech is evident in his insinuation that “they have evidently never read the passage!” The speech of Jesus is designed to give the impression that Jesus regularly reads the writings, and on some occasion in the past he has read Ps 118:22-23.

It is informative, in light of the internal interface of orality and literature in the speech of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark, that scholarly commentary on this passage regularly has focused on recitation of scripture and personal embodiment of scriptural verses, in the historical Jesus’ speech and action. Even though “the quotation of Ps 118:22-23 clearly comes from the LXX,” scholars have created an extensive scenario of the presence of an Aramaic interplay on “son” (benê) and “stone” (’iben) that creates “a remarkably consistent, but very subtle, exegetical thread running throughout Jesus’ entrance into and activity within the temple precincts.” The internal interface between orality and literature in Markan narration has beautifully produced the effect the narration is meant to imply! In contrast to the Gospel of Thomas, in which the implication of the narration is that the writings have no potential for helping the hearer to understand the nature of Jesus, the Gospel of Mark implies from the very beginning that the gospel must be understood as a story that flows naturally, as it were, out of the writings (1:1-8). Interpreters of Mark naturally perceive an interplay between “son” and “stone” that is operative from the moment Jesus enters the Temple until he leaves it.

In the Gospel of Mark, then, it is not only the case that the writings have an internal relation to the narration of the story of Jesus. Rather, it is also the case that the writings, which Jesus either claims or implies that he has read, have an internal relation to the speech of Jesus. Both the narration of the overall story and Jesus’ speech have an oral flow that presents an internal interface of orality with written literature. Mark 12:9-11 presents a forward-flowing orality from which emerges a rhetorical question that Jesus himself answers (12:9), followed by a second rhetorical question in which Jesus embeds a recitation of four lines from the writings: “Have you not read this writing, ‘a stone which the builders rejected, this has become the chief cornerstone [or keystone],’ this has come from the Lord and is a marvel in our eyes?” (12:10-11). In Mark, Jesus’ speech flows directly from the parable to rhetorical questions that contain his own authoritative assertions alongside authoritative assertions in the writings.

After Jesus’ recitation from the writings, the narration continues with a description of how the chief priests, elders, and scribes tried to seize him while he was in the Temple, because they knew he told the parable against them. They were afraid to do so, however, since they feared the crowd (12:12). When he went away, therefore, they sent some Pharisees and Herodians to trap him “in his talk” (logó; 12:13). In Mark, therefore, Jesus’ statement about a stone the builders rejected indicts Temple authorities with shameful actions, insinuating that even though there are scribes among them, they have never read the writings that explain what is happening in the story of Jesus. In response, the Temple hierarchies
inaugurate new actions against Jesus, enlisting some Pharisees and some Herodians to help them gain evidence from his talking that can help them develop a case to arrest him.

Psalm 118:22 as a Saying of Jesus in Gospel of Thomas 66

Gospel of Thomas 66 presents Ps 118:22 without giving any clue that these words exist somewhere in the writings. Without v. 23, Jesus’ speech also makes no assertion about the Lord. Rather than launching an attack on Temple authorities, who include writers, Gos. Thom. 65–70 invites deep thinking about what people know and do not know in a context of rejection and persecution. Thus, the issue is knowledge rather than action. In the process, the interface of orality and literature in Jesus’ speech is very different from the Gospel of Mark.

Gospel of Thomas 66 makes the initial couplet of Ps 118:22 into a 

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saying of Jesus: “Jesus said, ‘Show me the stone that the builders rejected: that is the cornerstone.’” Introduced with “Jesus said,” the two assertions become a saying of Jesus about builders who tossed a stone away because they did not recognize it had the qualities to be a cornerstone for a building, or perhaps a keystone for an archway. They threw the stone away, not realizing that it could function as the primary stone for their entire building project.

There is no suggestion in Gos. Thom. 66 that the words in Jesus’ saying are also present in the writings. This saying of Jesus stands in a sequence of logia about: (1) a vineyard owner whose servants were almost killed, then whose son was killed, when he sent them to collect his share of the produce from the vineyard (65); (2) a stone that builders rejected, which was the cornerstone or keystone (66); (3) the one who knows all but is lacking in oneself is utterly lacking; (4) blessed are you when you are hated and persecuted and no place will be found, wherever you have been persecuted; (5) blessed are those who have been persecuted in their hearts, because they are the ones who have truly come to know the Father (69:1); (6) blessed are those who go hungry, so the stomach of the one in want may be filled (69:2); and (7) if you bring forth what is in you, what you have will save you, but if you do not have that within you, what you do not have within you will kill you (70).

In the midst of this sequence of sayings of Jesus, Gos. Thom. 66 is a saying about a stone that builders rejected. It continues the topic of rejection that is present in the preceding parable about the vineyard owner (65) and provides a bridge to the sayings after it that explore the relation of knowledge to deficiency within oneself (67), the relation of being hated and persecuted to being able to find the place where the persecution occurred (68), the relation of knowing the Father to being persecuted “in the heart” (69:1), the relation of individual hunger to making food available to others in need (69:2), and the relation of “that within you” to being saved or being killed (70). This is not the place to interpret more fully the relation of these sayings to one another.23 The goal here is to observe that Jesus’ orality has no interface with the writings. Rather, words that scholars know are in the writings are simply words of Jesus that function alongside other words of Jesus in a sequence of sayings that explore various aspects of being rejected, having knowledge, having certain kinds of things in oneself, and bringing certain kinds of things forth from within oneself.

The contrast between Gos. Thom. 65–70 and Mark 11:27–12:12 calls attention to a significantly different register in early Christian rhetorical culture. In the Gospel of Thomas the prophetic register functioning in the Synoptic Gospels is absent. In its place is a wisdom register that presupposes the dynamics of a personage who possesses knowledge from the sphere of the divine. This personage leads hearers into ever more reflective and inquiring exploration of sayings that are vehicles of insight into divine wisdom. Introducing a series of sayings in a sequence creates a context in which it is asserted that knowing certain kinds of things can be helpful in contexts of rejection and persecution. The literature at work in the orality of the sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas is literature that contains more sayings of Jesus. In other words, for the Gospel of Thomas there is no interface between orality and the writings from which the Gospel story flows, as in Mark, or that function as external support for the narration of the story, as in Matthew and Luke (and John).

Matthew 21:23-46 as Jesus’ Elaboration of What Is Written

An interpreter begins to see the many interfaces of orality and literature in the Gospel tradition by seeing how Matt 21:40–46 expands the internal interface of orality and literature in the Markan presentation of Jesus’ speech. The Matthean version of Jesus’ speech unfolds as follows:

(A1) “When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” (21:40)

(A2) They said to him,

“He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.” (21:41)
(B1) Jesus says to them,
"Have you never read in the writings:
The stone that the builders rejected,
this has become the cornerstone;
this was from the Lord,
and it is amazing in our eyes?" (21:42)
Therefore I tell you,
the kingdom of God will be taken away from you
and given to a nation that produces the fruits of
it." (21:43)
And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his
parables,
they knew that he was speaking about them, (21:45)
and wanting to seize him they feared the crowds,
because they regarded him as a prophet. (21:46)

(C1) And again Jesus answered and spoke to them in parables,
saying . . . (22:1)
Instead of presenting Jesus' recitation of the writing as a direct continuation of the presentation of the parable, Matthew precedes the recitation with: "Jesus says to them, 'Have you never read in the writings?"' (21:42). The Matthean version, then, merges the *dōreia* approach to the speech of Jesus evident in *Gos. Thom.* 66 with the "recitation of writing" approach in the *Gospel* of Mark. Matthew introduces a new unit of speech for Jesus with the assertion that "Jesus says to them" and the use of the plural form, "the writings," rather than the singular, which would refer simply to the text he recites.

In Matthew the introduction of a new unit of speech with "Jesus says to them" is part of a dialogue that starts with the chief priests and elders in the Temple when they ask Jesus who gave him authority to do the things he is doing (21:23). Jesus' first response is to ask them a question (21:24-25), to which they respond, "We do not know" (21:27). Jesus tells them in return that he will not tell them the authority behind what he is doing, but he has a question for them about a son who said that he would go to the vineyard to work but did not, while the other son said he would not go but did (21:28-30). When they respond to Jesus that the son who said he would not go but had done the will of his father, Jesus responds that the tax collectors and prostitutes will go into the kingdom of God before they do (21:31). After providing a rationale for this assertion (21:32), Jesus tells them to "Listen to another parable" (21:33). At the end of the parable, Jesus asks the chief priests and the elders another question: "Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do
to those tenants?" (21:41). When they respond that the owner will "put
those wretches to a miserable death" (21:41), Jesus says to them, "Have
you not read in the writings . . . ?" (21:42). Then he presents a conclusion
to the dialogue: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken
away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the
kingdom" (21:43). After narration that tells the hearer that chief priests and
Pharisees heard the parables of Jesus, that they perceived that Jesus was
telling the parables "against them," and that they wanted to arrest him but
couldn't (21:45-46), Jesus continues to answer them by speaking to them in
parables (22:1).

In Matthew's presentation, Jesus' recitation of Ps 118:22-23 functions as an authoritative thesis and rationale gleaned from the writings (21:42) that produces the conclusion: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (21:43). The thesis is that "the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone [or keystone]." The rationale is that "this is the Lord's doing and it is a marvelous thing." From the writings, then, Jesus has gleaned a thesis and rationale that are the first and second part of a syllogistic argument. The third part is a conclusion that Jesus "authoritatively" generates in his own speech. Jesus begins the conclusion with, "Therefore I tell you" and asserts that God is taking the kingdom of God away from the people with authority over the Jerusalem Temple and giving it to "another nation" that will produce the fruits of the kingdom. The presence of the divine passive in "will be taken away" and "will be given" carries "the Lord's doing" from the rationale to the conclusion.

In summary, Matt 21:23-43 is a continuous dialogue that ends with a special unit that contains Jesus' recitation from the authoritative writings that presents a thesis and a rationale from the writings (21:42), the presentation of a conclusion to both the syllogistic argument and the dialogue (21:43), and a narration to the dialogue (21:45-46) that leads into Jesus' continuation of his teaching in parables. The narrative conclusion refers back to the two parables Jesus told the chief priests and elders (21:28-30, 33-39), and it extends the awareness of the chief priests and elders that the crowd regarded John as a prophet (21:26) to an awareness that the crowds also regarded Jesus as a prophet (21:46). Instead of following the Markan approach, in which Jesus simply embeds an oral recitation of a written text in a rhetorical question to the Temple authorities (Mark 12:10-11), Matthew builds Jesus' recitation from the writings into an authoritative response at the end of an extended dialogue.
that began with a question about his authority to do the things he was doing (Matt 21:23-24).

Matthew, then, builds the internal interface of orality and literature present in Mark into a syllogistic conclusion by Jesus containing a thesis and rationale from the writings that leads to a conclusion about what God will do to them. The Matthean presentation of Jesus' speech leaves nothing in the domain of subtle with regard to Jesus' telling of the parable. Jesus not only speaks the parable "against them"; he asserts that God will take the kingdom of God away from them and give it to another group of people (12:43). The third line in the recitation of Ps 118:22-23 functions not only as the first statement in the rationale ("this was the Lord's doing") but also as an answer to the question by the chief priests and elders at the beginning of the overall unit: "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (21:23). Jesus would not tell them who gave him the authority, but he would let the authoritative writings tell them! In turn, Jesus' conclusion that the kingdom of God will be taken away from them and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom (21:43) is a reformulation of the rationale he gave in 21:32: "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him" (21:32).

Another interface of orality and literature among the Synoptic Gospels occurs where another Gospel, like Matthew or Luke, builds the internal interface of orality and literature in Jesus' speech into an argumentative sequence in which the recitation from the writings functions as a thesis, a rationale, or a conclusion. In Matt 21:42 the recitation provides the thesis and rationale, and an additional saying by Jesus provides the conclusion (21:43).35

Luke 20:16-19 as Explanation of a Literary Text
The Gospel of Luke presents the sequence in the Jerusalem Temple in a way that relates both to the Markan and to the Matthean version of the scene.

"...What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? (20:15)
He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." (A1) When they heard this, they said, "Heaven forbid!" (20:16)

(B1) But he looked at them and said, "What then does this text mean:
The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone? (20:17)
Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls." (20:18)

(C1) When the scribes and chief priests realized that he had told this parable against them,
they wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour,
but they feared the people; for they perceived that he had
told this parable against them. (20:19)

(D1) And they watched him and sent spies who pretended to
be sincere, that they might take hold of what he said, so as
to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the
governor. (20:20)

On the one hand, Luke, similar to Matthew, presents Jesus' recitation from the writings as a separate unit introduced by "But he looked around at them and said" (20:17). On the other hand, the Lukan version does two things the Matthean version does not do: (1) it refers to the words from the writings as "this that is written" (to gegrannmenon touto), and (2) it presents a conclusion to the recitation of scripture in another recitation of scripture that is not identified as coming from the writings.

Lukan narration, in contrast to Mark and Matthew, features Jesus teaching the people in the Temple, with chief priests, scribes, and elders listening in. When Jesus is teaching the people (20:1), chief priests, scribes, and elders ask him by what authority he is doing what he does (20:2). When Jesus asks them to tell him if the baptism of John came from heaven or was of human origin (20:4), a major concern is that if they say, "Of human origin," "all the people will stone us, because they are convinced that John was a prophet" (20:6). The reference by the Temple hierarchy to the fear of being stoned by the people keeps a focus on the people and sets the stage for the special comments about the stone that occurs in 20:17-18. After Jesus refuses to tell the Temple hierarchies by what authority he is doing what he does (20:8), he begins to tell the people about the man with a vineyard who sent servants and finally his "beloved son" to get its produce (20:9-15). When Jesus ends the parable with his own rhetorical question and answer that the vineyard owner
will “destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others” (20:15-16) the people respond aghast with, “Heaven forbid” (μή γενοίτο). At this point, Jesus looks around at the people and says, “What then does this which is written mean?” (20:17). The focus on the singular written text creates an image of Jesus with a text in front of him, pointing to a specific line in the text.

After reciting only the first two lines about the stone, without the comment about “the Lord” and the marvelous things the Lord is doing (Mark 12:11 // Matt 21:42), Jesus continues with a recitation of Isa 8:14-15, “Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls” (Luke 20:18). In this instance, Jesus interprets the written text about the stone that is rejected with another written text, without indicating that the interpretation also comes from the writings. Here one sees an even deeper interface with literature in the orality of Jesus in Luke. In a manner related to Jesus’ reading from “the place where it was written,” “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Isa 61:1-2 // Luke 4:17-19), where words from a specific written place become Jesus’ own words, so Jesus interprets Ps 118:22 with Isa 8:14-15 as though they were his own words.

Lukan narration, then, comes full circle through the use of written words to interpret events, like the coming of John the Baptist (3:4-6), to a use of written words in the speech of Jesus much like Gos Thom. 66. In other words, even Lukan narration nurtures a dynamic interface between orality and literature in the speech of Jesus. Rather than bypassing literature as an external support for both the narration of the story and the speech of Jesus, however, it uses the writings both for external support and for internal orality. This special feature in Luke was so effective that many manuscripts add Luke 20:18 at Matt 21:44. With this addition to Matthew, not only does Jesus end the discussion with the syllogistic argument about the stone and the Lord’s doing in 21:42 followed by the conclusion in 21:43, but Jesus adds yet another authoritative judgment that convinces the chief priests and scribes that they must find a way to arrest him.

In Luke, then, the prophetic register of the interface between orality and literature comes full circle through the speech of Jesus. Not only does Jesus recite from the writings, as he does in Mark (and also Matthew), but he also recites from the writings in a dynamic, oral manner, like the Gospel of Thomas, that acknowledges no indebtedness to the writings.

A Multitude of Voices

I would argue from the evidence I presented above that all of the recitation of the writings in the Gospel of Mark are internal either to the narration of the story itself, to speech of Jesus, or to an interlocutor. There is no instance in Mark in which the narrator appeals to the writings for external support on an event or for an assertion in the narration. This is an important part of the orality of the Gospel of Mark. It means that the interface between orality and literature in Mark is internal to the narrative voices in the text. This is a phenomenon close to the dynamics of oral speech in a rhetorical culture, when an oral speaker does not, himself or herself, regularly read substantive portions of other literature. Rather than authoritatively presenting recitations from the writings on the basis of his or her own authority as a narrator, like Matthew or Luke (or John), the narrator of the Gospel of Mark attributes the authority for recitations to a personage like Isaiah (1:2-4), to Jesus, or to an interlocutor like “the Pharisees” (10:4).

A major characteristic of the interface between orality and literature in the Gospel of Mark is the presence of assertions that, from a scholarly point of view, are “errors.” It is not accurate to say that the wording of Mark 2-4 is “written in Isaiah,” but the interface between orality and literature in the prophetic register in the Gospel of Mark manifests itself in this kind of assertion. There are other assertions like this in Mark that are, from a scholarly point of view, either inaccurate or highly uncertain. Scholars regularly insist that there must be a lost written source somewhere that is the basis for the assertion. This position, I suggest, is based on a misunderstanding of the interface of orality and literature in the Gospel of Mark. When orality is in a dominant position, literary “errors” are a natural feature of the discourse.

Moreover, the written nature of the Gospel of Mark in no way destroys the orality of its narration. Both Matthew and Luke participate in the oral effect of Markan narration in dynamic ways. They may expand the orality in argumentation, proceeding in ways that are highly characteristic of speech making during the first century. Or they may rework the narrational voice to include a recitation from writings that supports either a narrational assertion or a narrative account of an entire event with a prophetic rationale. In addition, it is possible, as we have seen in Luke 20:18, that the interface of orality and literature in the speech of Jesus comes full circle. Starting with orality in the speech of Jesus that flaunts
Jesus' knowledge of the writings in the context of well-established writers (scribes), the Gospel writers feature Jesus reciting authoritatively from the writings in his own speech, without indicating that the words are from the writings.

Does only orality give life, then, while writing kills? Not at all. The question is precisely what kind of interface between orality and literature exists at certain points in a written or oral composition. When the early Christian prophetic register is present, an intermingling of multiple voices of authority that feature a dynamic interplay of orality and literature is, as one might say, the order of the day. One should expect exactly this dynamic interplay of voices to be present, since it is precisely the manner in which meanings are evoked in traditional cultures.

On the basis of orality studies by Walter Ong, Eric Havelock, and others, Werner Kelber emphasized in *The Oral and the Written Gospel* the profound effect that a written Gospel had upon the early church.1 Discussions since that time have generally confirmed that position. Writing in the ancient world was often related to issues of power and authority, and whether or not it was the author's intention, a written life of Jesus would tend, at least over time, to be invested with a different type of authority than that of oral sources. This was at least in part because those in the church who could lay no claim to familiarity with the fast-disappearing authorities of the earliest period of the church could wield authority on the basis of such written records and could use the authority of a fixed text to challenge the different understandings of representatives of oral tradition. Those who made such claims were successful in spite of the often-stated preference of writers in the Roman world for the living oral word over the dead written letter and the freedom with which both speakers and writers adapted such oral authorities.²

While Kelber had stressed the differences between oral and written media, his later writings have explored the complex interrelationship between the two in rhetorical cultures such as that found in the Roman Empire during New Testament times.³ Oral delivery was still the norm in a rhetorical culture, but the nature of the compositions and the method of