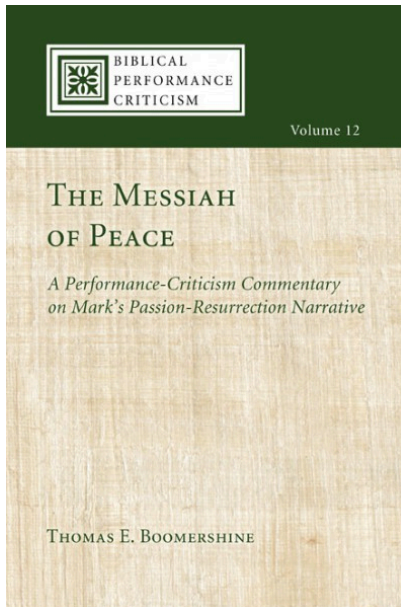


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Thomas Boomershine

The Messiah of Peace: A Performance-Criticism Commentary on Mark's Passion-Resurrection Narrative

Biblical Performance Criticism 12

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Thomas Boomershine's *The Messiah of Peace: A Performance-Criticism Commentary on Mark's Passion Resurrection Narrative* is volume 12 of the Biblical Performance Criticism series. It consists of nine chapters, an introduction, and eight appendices. The chapters contain a detailed investigation of the contents of the passion story of Mark's Gospel, beginning with 14:1–11, "The Day before the Passover." Subsequent chapters explore the Markan text up through 16:1–8 ("The Resurrection") in commentary fashion, followed by a concluding chapter. The appendices, in addition to some other topics, provide detailed information on the sound of and pronunciation of Koine Greek, the Markan audience and their historical context, and the rhetorics of biblical storytelling.

Boomershine uses biblical performance criticism (BPC) as a method to "listen closely to Mark's Passion-Resurrection Narrative (hereafter PRN), as a story that was performed for audiences at the conclusion of the Judean-Roman War (66–70 CE)" (1). Due to the low literacy rate and the high cost of manuscript production in the first century most individuals exposed to Mark heard it recited or performed rather than reading it themselves.

According to Boomershine, when the PRN is studied through the lens of BPC, Jesus is depicted as a messiah who advocated nonviolence against the Romans and included

gentiles in God's plan of salvation (22). This focus is different from the purpose and meaning of Mark's narrative, which is often considered to be an anti-Jewish and pro-Roman apologetic (21). Boomershine hopes that "hearing" the PRN today as a peaceful and not anti-Jewish story may energize a way toward modern day global peace (35)—an enthusiastic but important objective.

In addition to the above preliminary remarks, the introduction discusses Boomershine's view that Mark was performed primarily for non-Christian, Hellenistic Judeans in Alexandria rather than gentile Christians, the dominant view (13–19). Through an analysis of the PRN utilizing BPC, *The Messiah of Peace* aims to demonstrate that non-Christians were persuaded to identify with the disciples so that they would come to believe in Jesus as their Messiah (16). A rhetoric of alienation-condemnation and one of involvement-implication moved the audience toward this transformation. These rhetorical devices work by evoking sympathy from a listener who identifies with a character (the disciples, Peter, the women, or the crowds) who have violated a norm that is embraced by the storyteller and audience (27–29).

Each of the eight chapters of commentary, which include "The Day before the Passover, (14:1–11)," "The Passover Meal (14:12–25)," "The Night in Gethsemane (14:26–52)," "The Trials at the High Priest's House (14:53–72)," "The Handing Over to the Gentiles (15:1–20)," "The Crucifixion of Jesus (15:21–32)," "The Death and Burial of Jesus (15:33–47)," and "The Resurrection (16:1–8)," contain five or six sections: Sound Map, Translation, The Sounds of the Story, Notes on Detail and Translation, Comments on Meaning and Impact of the Story, The Performance of the Story, and when appropriate, Audience Associations and Connections. The purpose of each section will be considered subsequently.

The Sound Map section provides a graphic display of the sound patterns of the Greek text of Mark. The breath units are also indicated in this section, highlighting the words that could be comfortably said in one breath. The premise of sound maps is that the text was composed by a "highly skilled storyteller" who employed sophisticated sound structuring for creating meaning and enhancing memory (6). An example of an emphasized sonic unit is the repetition of πάντοτε and ἔχετε at the beginning and end of Mark 14:7 (45). The sound map section is followed by an English translation that indicates the sound, sonic, and breathing units identified in the Greek. However, the sonic and sound units are not always visible in the English.

The Sounds of the Story identifies devices such as onomatopoeia—sounds not usually captured in English translations. Harsh consonants are noted, such as those present in ἔτυπτον and ἐνέπτυσον (Mark 15:19), matching the harshness of Jesus being hit and spit on

by the Romans (251). High concentrations of smooth syllables are also isolated, such as the repeated *ou* sound in the Greek at the beginning of the anointing at Bethany narrative (Mark 14:3). These sound associations, when heard, add to the emotional impact of the story on the listening audience.

Notes on Detail and Translation investigates features heard by the first-century audience, such as Greek word order, which is usually impossible to translate into English but often important for emphasis. Greek words are also defined in this portion of the chapter (253). Further recognized in this section is the use of the historical present tense for making past action more immediate, creating the sense that the events are transpiring in the present (116). This unit also explores various English translations, highlighting for the reader those that best capture the intention of the Greek. Boomershine often provides his own translation where no adequate one is available. For example, in Mark 14:3, “breaking the neck of the alabaster vase” is preferable. Otherwise, pouring ointment on Jesus from a “broken jar” might be somewhat difficult and perhaps messy (51).

Comments on the Meaning and Impact of the Story discusses critical narrative details such as structure (165), characterization (227), plot (198), point of view (192), and irony (278). Historical context, allusions, and quotations of Old Testament passages are also discussed with the intent to determine their impact on the original listening audience.

The section The Performance of the Story offers suggestions for performing the passage to a modern audience. Boomershine believes that most performers memorized the text, freeing up their hands from holding a scroll and thereby allowing them instead to use their hands for gestures (5). Thus, performers might spread their arms to visually depict the crucified Jesus (316). In addition to proposing conceivable gestures, Boomershine presents advice on volume, tempo, tone, and emotion that should be reflected in a modern performance of the narrative. For example, the telling of the disciples fleeing the scene of Jesus’s arrest needs to convey the shame of their action (153).

Audience Associations and Connections is a final component included in some of the chapters. Here Boomershine draws attention to possible associations and connections that would come to bear on an original audience member attempting to understand the account being heard. The crucifixion of Jesus might conjure up memories of Israelite martyrs and righteous sufferers of the past, such as the Maccabees (2 Macc 6–7) or Isaiah in the Martyrdom of Isaiah (270). Earlier stories of Israelite humiliation by gentiles (e.g., Samson in Judg 16:25, 27) might come to mind when hearing and processing the story of the mocking of Jesus by Roman soldiers (247).

There is much to applaud in *The Messiah of Peace*. Boomershine provides detailed and comprehensive insight into the Greek language of the PRN—material that one would hope to find in any good scholarly commentary. The attention to the sound features of the original language and the possible performance of the text are unique and helpful. However, many of the gestures and modes of delivery are speculative. More background and research on ancient delivery and performance would have been a welcome component of *The Messiah of Peace*. Further, it remains uncertain whether a performance-critical analysis of the PRN yields a portrait of a nonviolent messiah better than another methodological approach. Nonetheless, educators seeking to better understand the oral nature of the first century will find the text informative. Pastors desiring to introduce a modern audience to the Messiah of Peace, with an emotional and dramatic impact, will appreciate the performance perspective.