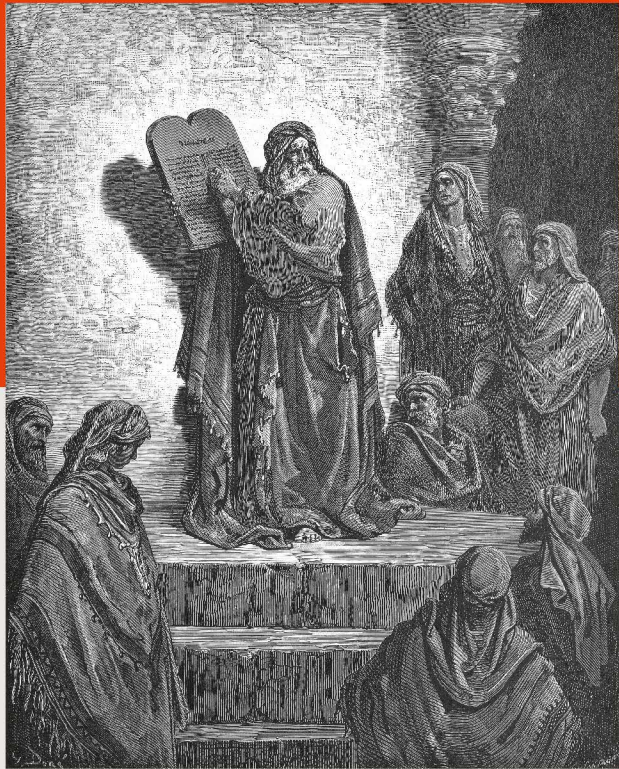Marvin Lloyd Miller

Performances of Ancient Jewish Letters

From Elephantine to MMT

V&R

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Volume 20

Marvin Lloyd Miller

Performances
of Ancient Jewish Letters

From Elephantine to MMT

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

For Elfreda
With Whom I Continue to Create My Story

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List of Abbreviations

Primary Literature

In most instances, abbreviations and matters of style in this study follow The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines, edited by Billie Jean Collins, Bob Buller, and John F. Kutsko (2nd edition; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

Arrian
  Epict. diss.   *Epicteti dissertations* (*Discourses of Epictetus*)
CD   Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Document
Cicero
  Brut.   *Brutus*
  De or.   *De oratore*
  Flac.   *Pro Flacco*
G^L Greek Leningrad Codex
Herodotus
  Hist.   *Histories*
Homer
  Il.   *Iliad*
Isocrates
  Panath.   *Panathenaicus*
Josephus
  Ant.   *Jewish Antiquities*
Longinus
  [*Subl.*]   *De sublimitate* (*On the Sublime*)
Mishnah
  Pesaḥ   *Pesaḥim*
Pausanias
  Descr.   *Description of Greece*
Philo
  Abraham   *On the Life of Abraham*
  Good Person   *That Every Good Person is Free*
  Rewards   *On Rewards and Punishments*

Plato
  Parm.   *Parmenides*
  Phaedr.   *Phaedrus*
Plutarch
  Dem.   *Demosthenes*
  Gen. Socr. *De genio Socratis*
Pseudo-Demetrius
  Eloc.   *De elocutione*
Qumran
  1QGen ap   1Q Genesis Apocryphon
  1QH   1Q Hodayot or Thanksgiving Hymns
  1QpHab   1Q pesher on Habakkuk
  1QS   *Rule of the Community*
  4QApocJer   4Q Apocryphon of Jeremiah
  4QFlor   4Q Florilegium or Midrash on Eschatology
  4QMMT   4Q Miqṣat Maʿaśe ha-Torah
  4QpPs   4Q pesher on Psalms
  11QtgJob   11Q targum of Job
papMur   papyrus Murabbaʿat
Talmud
  Ber.   *Berakot*
  Meg.   *Megillah*
Xenophon
  Cyr.   *Cyropaedia*
  Mem.   *Memorabilia*

Secondary Literature

AB   Anchor Bible
AbB   *Altbabylonische Briefe im Umschrift und Übersetzung.* F.R. Kraus. Vol. 7. Leiden: Brill, 1977.
ABS   Archeology and Biblical Studies
ABD   *The Anchor Bible Dictionary.* Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
AJSL   *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*
AOAT   Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AP   *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*A. Cowley. Oxford: Clarendon, 1923.
AS   *Aramaic Studies*
ASOR   American School of Oriental Research
BDB   Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.*
BHS   *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.* Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1983.
BMAP *Brooklyn Museum of Aramaic Papyri.* E.G. Kraeling. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.

BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BRev	*Bible Review*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CEJL	Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature
CHJ	*Cambridge History of Judaism.* Edited by William D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein. 4 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–2006.
CJAS	Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity Series
CRBS	*Current Research in Biblical Studies*
DJD X	Qimron, Elisha and John Strugnell. *Qumran Cave 4, V: Miqṣat Ma'aśe Ha-Torah.* Discoveries in the Judean Desert X. Oxford: Clarendon, 1994.
DSD	*Dead Sea Discoveries*
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
EBib	*Etudes bibliques*
EDSS	*Encyclopedia of Dead Sea Scrolls*
GHCLOT	*Gesenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures.* F.H. Wilhelm Gesenius. Repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950.
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E.J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IES	Israel Exploration Society
KJV	King James Version
JAOS	*Journal of American Oriental Society*
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JDS	Judean Desert Studies
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSP	*Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha*
JSQ	*Jewish Studies Quarterly*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
KAI	*Kanaanäische Inschriften (Moabitisch, Althebräisch, Phonizisch, Punisch).* Edited by Mark Lidzbarski. Giessen: Töpelmann, 1907.

LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LEH	Lust, Johan, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint.* Rev. ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003.
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon.* 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
LSTS	The Library of Second Temple Studies
LXX	Septuagint
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NEB	New English Bible
NETS	*A New English Translation of the Septuagint and Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title.* Edited by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NJPS	*Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.* Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
OLAW	Orality and Literacy in the Ancient World
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
PN	Personal Name
PRSt	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
RB	*Revue biblique*
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Studies
SBLSup	Society of Biblical Literature Supplement
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SDSSRL	Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature
SR	*Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StPB	Studia Post-Biblica
TAD	*Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt.* Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1988–89.
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck

	and Helmer Riggren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.
TLOT	*Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Edited by Ernst Jenni, with assistance from Claus Westermann. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997.
TUMSR	Trinity University Monograph Series in Religion
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMAT	Wissenschaftliche Monographie zum Alten Testament
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographie zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAH	*Zeitschrift für Althebräistik*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Marvin Lloyd Miller, Performances of Ancient Jewish Letters

Preface

My initial exploration in performance was as an undergraduate student who was asked to be the resident composer for the Western Film Board at the University of Alberta as part of a team of up-and-coming film actors, actresses, directors, technicians, and musicians. The summer was spent composing and arranging music for students who were learning the art of creating stories. The experience of being a part of their acting, directing, and filming sessions exposed me to the excitement of telling stories from a particular point of view. That involvement developed into opportunities for me to act in short sketches, plays, and musicals. My emphasis then shifted from music composing to being a pastor and during that period I memorized and performed several books of the New Testament in an attempt to bring the biblical text to life before an audience.

The next stage consisted of applying my past experiences to the rigors of academic inquiry. I arrived at performance criticism through the back door. My doctoral dissertation on ancient letters was under the direction of George Brooke, whose patient oversight guided my investigation. He suggested that performance may offer an approach that is fresh and contribute something new to the understanding of ancient letters. Professor Alex Samely, a member of my dissertation panel, examined parts of my rough study and pressed me to pursue performance criticism as the centrepiece of my investigation. The course of my inquiry was now set.

After having completed my dissertation, Bernard Levinson graciously asked me to consider converting my work into a book for the Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplement series. I optimistically indicated that it would only take me a few months to complete the revisions. The next two years consisted of re-thinking aspects of how these letters may have been performed. Significant changes were adopted that reshaped and refined the study, such as incorporating ethnopoetics into the structure of the text, engaging more robustly with primary sources, and considering a wide range of modern treatments on the subject. The anonymous reviewer generously provided extensive critical feedback that trig-

gered new ways of strengthening my approach. Obviously, all remaining errors and weaknesses in the study are my responsibility.

There are several people who have encouraged me along the way, in particular Dorothy Peters, who has been a strong supporter of my academic endeavours, and Dirk Büchner, who has been a great dialogue partner. Finally, thanks to my adult children, Jace and his wife Andrea, Tristan and his wife Shiyara, and Jonathan, who perform around the dinner table and at all family events and provide enough laughter and joy to off-set some of the more tedious aspects of studying performance criticism. I reserve my deepest gratitude for Elfreda, my wife, who has lived my performance story in all its stages and has supported me no matter where my story has taken me.

Chapter 1
Introduction

"Performance" is a contested concept. Continued debate by sociologists, anthropologists, theatre experts, and other specialists seems to result in constructive disagreement. The decision to adopt the term in the title of this volume was made with some hesitation. Indeed, it has been argued by some sociologists that all social behaviour can be considered a performance, a view that is too broad to be helpfully applied to ancient letters. On the other hand, theatre studies have frequently narrowed the field too much by including only theatrical presentations as performances, which is not a workable definition because the ancient Jewish letters under review were most likely not performed on a theatrical stage. If "performance" cannot satisfactorily be defined, how can I apply the term in a meaningful way to this study? Recognizing that there are conceptual differences among experts concerning "performance," it seems best to consider how the term will be used in this book. It seems clear that a definition needs to be considered that includes both verbal and non-verbal means used to promote the meaning of a letter. The perspective adopted here implies that ancient letters were read, or better performed, most likely before an audience. Having said that, we cannot assume that all letters were read in public, and therefore this study will argue for that position whenever it seems plausible.

Until recently scholarship on ancient Jewish letters has been relatively scarce, to some extent due to the concerns over the authenticity of some letters embedded in literary texts. It seems to be time for a re-evaluation of many of these ancient letters and an opportunity to apply a new methodological perspective on Jewish letters. This book sets out to explore the impact a performance may have had on an audience by piecing together evidence for performance that is fragmentary and ambiguous. The intent of this difficult task is to re-animate the letters for performance in order to offer interpretive glimpses into the text.[1]

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1 By "texts" I refer to a wide range of material including oral and printed texts. The term "text" etymologically comes from the root meaning "to weave," which is the way certain cultures

Before going on to discuss the individual letters in this volume, I would like to devote some thought here to the historical background of performance criticism, particularly as it applies to letters. The study of ancient Jewish letters is a recent development in Biblical Studies. In the early twentieth century, the pioneering publications on ancient letters—such as Gustav Deissmann, Francis Exler, and Ioannis Sykutris—focused on categorizing Greek letters.[2] These methodological approaches yielded invaluable results and laid a foundation for further studies. One of the significant consequences of their inquiry was that understanding the form of ancient letters was now viewed as worthy of serious study. With new archaeological discoveries being made at the beginning of the twentieth century, the formal aspects of Aramaic letters could be highlighted and compared with letters found in the Hebrew Bible. It has been a very welcome development that several important figures have taken up the task of studying Aramaic letters from different perspectives. Joseph Fitzmyer provided a description of the Aramaic epistolary corpus, Philip Alexander studied non-biblical Aramaic letters from the Persian era and Paul Dion considered the possible influences of other cultures on letter writing.[3] More recent research has considered Jewish letters written in Hebrew. For instance, Dennis Pardee compared Hebrew letters from different groups, regions, and time periods, Dirk Schwiderski considered Hebrew and Aramaic from the ninth century BCE to the Bar Kokhba letters, and Mark Whitters emphasized the characteristics of Jewish festal letters.[4] A fuller treatment of scholars' works that have contributed to our understanding of ancient Jewish letters is given in the next chapter.

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understood the term. We say "weave a tale" or "spinning a yarn" as an expression of what a text may imply.

2 Gustav Adolf Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten: Das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte der hellenistisch-römischen Welt* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1908); repr. *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated from Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman Period,* trans. Lionel R.M. Strachan (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995); Francis Xavier J. Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter of the Epistolary Papyri* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1923); repr., *A Study in Greek Epistolography* (Chicago: Ares, 1976); Ioannis Sykutris, "Epistolographie," in *Pauly's Real Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Suppl. 5; Stuttgart: Metzlersche, 1924).

3 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Some Notes," *JBL* 93 (1974): 201–24; Philip S. Alexander, "Remarks on Aramaic Epistolography in the Persian Period," *JSS* 23 (1978): 155–70; Paul E. Dion, "The Aramaic 'Family Letter' and Other Related Epistolary Forms in Other Oriental Languages and in Hellenistic Greek," in *Studies in Ancient Letter Writing,* ed. J.L. White (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).

4 Dennis Pardee, "Letters," *ABD* 4:282–85; Dirk Schwiderski, *Handbuch des nordwestsemitischen Briefformulars: Ein Beitrag zur Echtheitsfrage der aramäischen Briefe des Esrabuches* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000); Mark F. Whitters, *The Epistle of Second Baruch: A Study in Form and Message* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003).

1.1   Performance Criticism

What is missing in most treatments of ancient Jewish letters is the consideration of how a text may have been actualized in performance. If the "medium is the message" as Marshal McLuhan has suggested,[5] then documents must be experienced in the original medium, which may include oral storytelling or recitation to an audience. Performance criticism helps expose and address the possible misperception or misinterpretation that may arise from a methodology that reads back into the ancient world the documentary system of the eighteenth to twenty-first centuries, a practice called media anachronism by Tom Boomershine.[6]

In order to arrive at a clearer understanding of performance criticism and how it may supplement our understanding of ancient Jewish letters, it is helpful to consider the various approaches scholars have employed as they reflected on performance theory and from their observations suggest a definition that can be used in our study of letters. Since our emphasis is the performance of ancient letters in communities, I will give a brief overview of how some social science experts and linguistic theorists used performance as a model or metaphor to understand better human behaviour.

1.1.1   Different Approaches to Performance

In contrast to focusing on the meaning of words and phrases, using a performance perspective considers what is happening in the performance of a text and what effect or function the text may have had in a social context.[7] In light of our concern to understand better performances of ancient letters as an event that frequently occurred in a community setting, it seems useful to begin by asking how social sciences may contribute to our understanding of performance. Two categories of the social sciences that serve as a point of entry for our study are

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5 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man,* 2nd ed. (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1964; New York: Penguin Books, 1990). Critics of McLuhan accuse him of technological determinism.

6 Tom Boomershine, "Biblical Storytelling and Biblical Scholarship," NOBS Scholars Conference, Aug 2–7, 2009.

7 I prefer to use the term "performing" rather than "reading" a text, because a performance implies that the reader will gesture, modulate the voice, act out the text and the term suggests that an audience response is expected. The interest in this book concerns the ways in which a letter works as a composition-as-performance in order to have an impact on an audience. For contributions of reader-response to performance criticism, see David Rhoads, "Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Temple Studies—Part II," *BTB* 36 (2009), 167.

anthropology, which offers theories and strategies that scholars have used to explain human behaviour, and sociology, which is primarily concerned with the *practice* of performance. In his analysis of culture, Clifford Geertz, an anthropologists and cultural critic, noted in the early 1980s an "enormous amount of genre mixing in intellectual life."[8] In his essay "Blurred Genres," he identified three newer interpretive concepts for the study of human behaviour, namely "game," "drama," and "text."[9] The context of experimentation with making connections between anthropology and performance must include theatre practitioner Richard Schechner, who outlined seven "areas where performance theory and the social sciences coincide."[10] There are four characteristics he cites that also intersect with our study of ancient Jewish letters:

1. Performance in everyday life, including gatherings of every kind.
2. The structure of sports, ritual, play, and public political behaviors.
3. Analysis of various modes of communication (other than the written word); semiotics.
4. Ethnography and prehistory—both of exotic and familiar cultures.[11]

According to Schechner performance is a cultural event and can occur in "play, games, sports, dance, music, and ritual."[12] Using Schechner's model of performance "means promoting an approach to performance that unsettles divisions between high and low, that advocates a radically contextual and socially grounded analysis…and that links scholarship to modes of *praxis* outside the academy."[13]

From a similar perspective, Victor Turner was the first to develop the concept of "social drama," which emphasized the "temporal and collective dimensions"

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8 Clifford Geertz, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," repr. *Local Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 19. He also noted that scholars were not as interested in "the sort of thing that connected planets and pendulums" as those things that "connect chrysanthemums and swords."

9 Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 146. Our emphasis will be on "drama" and "text."

10 Richard Schechner, "Drama, Script, Theatre and Performance," *Drama Review* 17 (1973): 5. This special edition of *Drama Review* was devoted to "Theatre and the Social Sciences" in which guest editor Schechner listed the seven areas of intersection.

11 The three categories that Schechner lists that do not significantly impact our study on ancient Jewish letters are: "connections between human and animal behavior patterns with an emphasis on play and ritualized behavior"; "aspects of psychotherapy that emphasize person-to-person interaction, acting out, and body awareness"; and "constitution of unified theories of performance, which are, in fact, theories of behavior" (Schechner, "Drama, Script," 5).

12 Schechner, *Performance Theory*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 1988), 6.

13 Jackson, *Professing Performance*, 80–81; emphasis original.

of social action and the ability of performances "to transmute not just opinions but…also…the people who hold them."[14] By using a performance analogy, he sought to explain social activity in festivals, carnivals, rituals, and protest movements of an intercultural world.[15] Turner emphasized the use of drama as a metaphor for cultural activities and applied performance to social life at large.[16] In a similar way, Milton Singer argued that the observations of traditions could provide "the most concrete observable units of the cultural structure" as demonstrated in events such as dance, weddings, recitations, religious festivals, and so forth, which he termed "cultural performances."[17] There are three major contributions cultural studies have made in how we understand performance. Their concerns have invited readers to probe the function performance may have had within a culture; they drew attention to the relation of performer to audience; and they required readers to consider how particular performance contexts were established.[18] These advances in the concept of performance can usefully be applied to ancient letters, particularly when we consider how reading a text may have been experienced in a community, especially those letters that have an emphasis on rituals and festivals.

From a sociological point of view, comes the recognition that all social behaviour is in some way performed and that an exploration of the implications of these performative actions can be analyzed and understood. Although much can be said concerning how researchers in sociology applied the concept of role playing to their field of study, our particular emphasis is on how human actions can be seen as signs of a social role.[19] The way in which social roles are constructed and/or performed and how human communication operates is the central concern of semiotics. In an influential work, Umberto Eco considers performance from a semiotic standpoint and concludes that something is a sign "only because it is interpreted as a sign of something by some interpreter."[20]

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14 Quoted in Geertz, "Blurred Genres," 28.

15 Victor Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life* (Manchester University Press, 1957; repr., Yale University Press, 1996). Turner based his concept of "social drama" on the work of Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage,* trans. M.B. Vizedon and G.L. Caffee (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960; from the original *Rites de Passage,* 1908).

16 Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).

17 Milton Singer, ed., *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959).Turner's model was more concerned with traditional structures of dramatic action and Singer developed a model that drew more directly upon the performance situation of theatre. For a comparison of Turner and Singer's models, see Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 19–20.

18 Carlson, *Performance,* 33.

19 For a more extensive discussion of performance in society, see Carlson, *Performance,* 34–55.

20 Quotation of Charles Morris is found in Umberto Eco, "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance," *The Drama Review* 21 (1977):107–17, here 112.

According to this perspective, in the process of a performance an everyday object can be reformed and recreated as a signifying image, thus the boundary between "actual" and "imaginary" is difficult to maintain. A contribution to performance theory by Bert States is his view that any activity in which an audience and a work interacts is "a way of *seeing*—not, that is, the thing seen or performed (from ritual to parade to play to photograph) but seeing that involves certain collaborative and contextual functions (between work and spectator) which are highly elastic."[21] Thus, he contends that the audience is joined to a "certain kind of *actual*,"[22] which holds in tension the "actual" and "imaginary" or the mimetic and "real."[23]

What the analysis of social performance reflects is that there is a close relationship between everyday activities and performance in a "formal" setting, or more precisely, between performance (reading a letter, saying a prayer, giving a prophecy, etc.) and performativity (presentation of one's self in a social setting).[24] To put it another way, some models tend to view performance from an audience's standpoint and others emphasize a performer's perspective,[25] in either case the vocabulary of performance has been used by some social science experts to analyze cultural activity and seems to have application to our study of the performance of ancient letters. What these models have not emphasized is how language can be used to construct a context.

A typical performance of a letter is a solo performance, and a typical performer of letters used little in the way of scenery or props, with the individual body remaining at the centre of the performance—speech and gestures are the principal means of communication. Therefore, it is not surprising that many scholars interested in linguistic studies have contributed to performance theory by grounding speech in a contextualized social event in which a performance takes place, in other words, a speech can be understood as consisting of the speaker's knowledge of a language as well as the performance or application of

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21 Bert O. States, "Performance as Metaphor," *Theatre Journal* 48 (1996): 2–26, doi: 10.1353/tj.1996.0021; emphasis original.

22 States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1985)*,* 45.

23 Carlson, *Performance,* 54.

24 See particularly, Erving Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959). Goffman was not concerned with the question "What is performance?" because in his view the term "performance" was simply a metaphor for social behaviour. His major concern was to determine in what ways we repeat and present ourselves.

25 For example, Schechner, *Performance Theory,* uses a model of "restored [or twice-behaved] behaviour," which emphasizes the performer's perspective, while Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), emphasizes the role of the spectator. She describes performance as "the interaction between the art object and the spectator [which] is, essentially, performative" (p. 147).

that knowledge in a community.[26] Similar to the interdisciplinary attitude of many social science experts discussed above, several linguistic scholars combined social sciences with performance and formed new fields of study, such as sociolinguistics. According to Carlson, "Dell Hymes, one of the leading developers of modern sociolinguistics, very much reflects these relationships and concerns, urging a more 'functional' linguistics to supplement more traditional 'structural' linguistics,"[27] thus situating a speech event in a performative context. Other scholars who have drawn upon social sciences in conjunction with linguistics are Mikhail Bakhtin,[28] who uses "utterance" as a principal concept and Julia Kristeva, who contends that "language remains incapable of detaching itself from representation."[29] What is being emphasized by these two related positions is that performance is located in language. As a further explanation of the oral features that focus on language as performance, is a position that is represented by the pioneering work of John Austin's speech-act theory.[30] In short, his view is that the function of language is not merely to state things, but to do things.[31] Stating things is only one function of language, and those who state things may also intend to do something with their language. Expanding the concept of

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26 Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), distinguished between the "competence" and "performance" of a speaker.

27 Carlson, *Performance,* 57.

28 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* trans. by Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). Carlson in *Performance* describes Bakhtin's view in this way: "According to Bakhtin, the 'utterance,' is a strip of language that is 'always individual and contextual in nature,' and 'inseparable link' in an ongoing chain of discourse, never reappearing in precisely the same context, even if, as often occurs, a specific pattern or words is repeated" (p. 57).

29 Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language,* ed. Leon Roudiez, trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine, and L. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 79. Kristeva's position is in response to what she calls Bakhtin's "omnified stage of carnival."

30 The concept of speech-act theory that has provided a method for considering language as performance is associated with John Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) and Austin's student, John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). For a concise history of speech-act theory, see Carlson, *Performance,* 56–75. For the performative dimensions of language, see J.E. Botha, "The Potential for Speech Act Theory for New Testament Exegesis: Some Basic Concepts," *Hervormide Teologiese Studies* 47 (1991): 294–303; R. Briggs, "The Use of Speech Act Theory in Biblical Interpretation," *CRBS* 9 (2001): 229–76; idem, *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation: Toward a Hermeneutic of Self-Involvement* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001); see also the cautions expressed by Anthony C. Thiselton, "The Supposed Power of Words in Biblical Writings," *JTS* 25 (1974): 283–99. He writes that "acts of blessing in the Old Testament rest on accepted *conventions*; on procedures or institutions accepted within Israelite society, and usually involving conventionally accepted formulae. They are effective, in most cases, only when performed by the appropriate person in the appropriate situation" (p. 294).

31 An example of this position is the "I do" pronouncement during a marriage ceremony. These words carry an intention of marriage; not merely a pronouncement using words.

speech-act theory, Eli Rozik argues that speech acts should be analyzed not as part of language but as part of action, which may be accompanied by non-verbal cues.[32] The key to this clarification is that the indicative force used in letters of request or the descriptive information found in the introduction to a letter may reveal something about the intention or experiences of the author(s) or elicit a desired response from the audience—a point which may have been more clear and direct in a performance. The important shift that this book emphasizes is how information from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and linguistics can be used, not merely to understand how the text was created, but more importantly how letters operated in the context of a community and how a fresh meaning may be sought through considering a letter's performance.

These modern approaches to performance must be adapted to the oral/performance setting of the Second Temple literary culture, which falls into several categories or processes. First, letters were initially written by the sender or dictated to a scribe for the production of a text. This oral/aural setting may have consisted of the official writing of governmental decrees, memoranda, and treaties, or during the dictation of personal letters. Second, some letters were subsequently embedded in a narrative in which the readers and re-readers understood that the texts "were composed under the assumption that they would be read in the setting of oral performance."[33] Third, letters were most likely performed in a community. To be fair these three processes are general practices and do not consider other aspects of ancient letter writing, such as, translation, letter composition exercises, and ostraca.

Performance theory has attempted to demonstrate the dynamic nature of the relationship between author, text, and interpretive audience, as well as between performance and life, precisely because the text was influenced by the performative context in which it was shared and adapted to match different community settings.[34] This brief analysis and commentary on performance theory can be used to develop our own perspective on how performance criticism can be defined, particularly as it applies to ancient Jewish letters.

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32 Eli Rozik, *Generating Theatre Meaning: A Theory and Methodology of Performance Analysis* (Brighton: Sussex Academic, 2008).

33 Martin Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 18.

34 See Emanuel Tov, "Scribal Practices Reflected in Texts from the Judean Desert," vol. 1 of *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, ed. Peter Flint and J. VanderKam (Leiden: Brill, 1998). "When copying from an existing text, most ancient scribes incorporated their thoughts on that text into the new version which they produced. Thus they added, omitted, and altered elements; all of these changes became part of the newly created text, in which the new features were not easily recognizable since they were not marked in a special way" (p. 424).

1.1.2   Towards a Definition of Performance Criticism

The purpose for our study of performance criticism is to explain the features of ancient Jewish oral culture and to clarify the function of a letter in relation to performance. As has been shown, performance criticism is a sprawling discipline. It includes theatre and performance studies, social sciences and linguistics and is a term that "has a wide range of meanings, from the traditional practice of critically analyzing performance histories, through the study of the presentation of theatre and drama, to the anthropological and sociological study of identity, politics, and power."[35] In order to create a guide for navigating through the complex issues of understanding performance, I will now set out how the term is going to be used in this study.[36]

Fundamental to a definition of performance to many who are engaged in this field is the repeatability of an action. As an example of this position, Richard Schechner defines "performance" as "restored behaviour," even though he recognizes that repetition occasionally entails differences and variations on the same text.[37] Critical to Schechner's notion of performance is his description that restored behaviour is "living behavior as a film director treats a strip of film. These strips of behavior can be rearranged or reconstructed; they are independent of the causal systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence. They have a life of their own."[38] The emphasis that Schechner brings to the study of performance from an anthropological perspective is that performance theory can be used to explore a tradition. This position can usefully be applied to ancient letters if we image that the performer of the letter had in mind to restore or recreate a written text and that each performance is distinctive and may provide a fresh access to understand better patterns of behaviour in a community. The "restored behaviour" in letters is immediately evident in that the opening frequently identifies the sender(s) and recipient(s) and may state their location, thus during the presentation of the text

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35 Terry Giles and William J. Doan, *Twice Used Songs: Performance Criticism of the Songs of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 142.

36 Jackson, *Professing Performance*, suggests that the flexibility of the concept of performance helps to clarify how scholarship works with different assumptions. She contends that "performance's many connotations and its varied intellectual kinships ensure that an interdisciplinary conversation around this interdisciplinary site rarely will be neat and straightforward" (p. 15). Rhoads, "Performance Criticism," 9–14, gives seven components of the performance event: act of performing, composition-as-performance, performer, audience, material context, socio-historical circumstance and rhetorical effect/impact.

37 Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1985), 35.

38 Schechner, *Between Theatre*, 35. Also quoted in William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 14.