

# Marcin Kowalski

---

"The Interface of Orality and Writing : speaking, Seeing, Writing in the Shaping of New Genres", Annette Weissenrieder, Robert B. Coote, Tübingen 2010 : [recenzja]

---

The Biblical Annals 3/2, 511-515

---

2013

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Annette Weissenrieder and Robert B. Coote, eds., *The Interface of Orality and Writing. Speaking, Seeing, Writing in the Shaping of New Genres* (WUNT 1/260; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). Pp. xiv + 438.  
 € 129,00. ISBN 978-3-16-150445-7

### MARCIN KOWALSKI

Institute of Biblical Studies, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin  
 address: Aleje Racławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland; e-mail: xmkowal@gmail.com

The book *The Interface of Orality and Writing* edited by Annette Weissenrieder and Robert B. Coote in the greater part is a selection of papers delivered at the Conference held at San Francisco Theological Seminary in March, 2009. In the present volume, the papers are published in revised form and supplied with the texts coming from other authors invited by the editors to explore the issues connected with orality and writing. Both the conference and the publication was to honor Antoinette Wire Clark and her research in oral tradition.

More specifically, the purpose of the book is to “take into account the role that images, texts, and oral sources played in the production and reception of early Christian ideas” (p. ix). The whole volume divides into four parts. In the first, introductory one, entitled “The Interface of the Orality and Writing Hearing, Seeing, Writing in New Genres”, the reader will deal with the texts of the four authors. The first article by Susan Niditch, “Hebrew Bible and Oral Literature: Misconceptions and New Directions” explores applications of the notion of orality in approaching ancient Israelite literature and illustrates their relevance with the brief case study from the Book of Judges. Special attention is paid to the contributions of Albert B. Lord with misunderstandings that arose around them in terms of accentuating the great divide and the evolution, rather than interplay, between orality and writing. In the second article, “Orality and Writing in Ancient Philosophy: Their Interrelationship and the Shaping of Literary Forms”, Teun Tieleman interestingly shows the coexistence of orality and literacy in Greek philosophical works from the 6<sup>th</sup> CBE to the Hellenistic and imperial period. The author argues that the role accorded by the Greek philosopher to the spoken word was decisive in shaping some specific literary genres as letters and biographies. The third contribution by Catherine Hezser, “From Oral Conversations to Written Texts: Randomness in the Transmission of Rabbinic Traditions” shows the

circumstantial character of the rabbinic teachings and randomness governing their transmission. Despite the value given to memorization, according to the author, the traditions could be forgotten, changed, and misinterpreted with no guaranties that what was memorized reflected the earlier rabbis' actual opinions. In the same vein, the process of editing the Talmud *Yerushalmi* proves that a large amount of material would have been omitted and lost while what was left underwent constant adaptations and changes. In the fourth article in this part, "Mark: News as Tradition", Antoinette Clark Wire looks for a story pattern in Mark. According to Clark, the gospel fits the agonistic pattern developing on the three levels: the tensions between Jesus and legal authorities, the tension between God and Satan, and the tension in man's heart between trust and fear. Another story pattern applicable to Mark is the Jewish story of the prophet's rejection and vindication. In the last paragraph the author reconstructs the process of putting the story in writing, explores the circumstances and individuals standing behind the text of the Gospel. Finally, the last article in this section by *Werner Kelber*, "The History of the Closure of Biblical Texts", deals with the phenomenon of textuality, with its pluriformity, and with the shape it took over centuries in Christian codexes, manuscripts and in print.

The second part of the book, entitled "Speaking in the Shaping of New Genres", contains six articles. In the first one, "Plenitude and Diversity: Interactions between Orality and Writing", John Foley presents a schematic overview of the oral tradition studies from Millman Parry to the present, and illustrates the similarity between OT oral tradition and Internet. In the second contribution, "Transmissions from Scripturality to Orality: Hearing the Voice of Jesus in Mark 4:1–34", Kristina Dronsch uses Clark's notion of storytelling as "effective communication" to inquire into the strategies used by Mark (e.g. prosody, rhetorical stylization, consonances, word repetitions, decontextualization) to make his gospel an effective form of communication and a written continuation of Jesus's teachings. Next, Ruben Zimmermann, in the article "Memory and Form Criticism: The Typicality of Memory as a Bridge between Orality and Literality in the Early Christian Remembering Process", focuses on the media used in the early Christian communities to remember the life of Jesus, with the special stress on language-based memory. Such a memory requires repetition and typification of certain forms and thus leads to development of narrative genres, like e.g. parables. In the fourth article of this section, "The Gospel of Mark in the Interface of Orality and Writing", Richard Horsley reflects on some scribal practices of the I AD (Scriptural quotations) to show to how great extent they were based on the oral-memorial learning and recitation

*Annette Weissenrieder and Robert B. Coote, eds., The Interface of Orality and Writing*

of the texts. The author also ponders on some traditional cultural patterns (Exodus, messianic popular expectations, prophetic traditions) and the role they played in the plotting of the Gospel story. Horlsey interprets the Gospel of Mark following the pattern of prophetic story, “cultivated primarily by oral performance, learned by hearing and recited memorially” (p. 156). In the fifth contribution, “Performance Events in Early Christianity: New Testament Writings in an Oral Context”, David Rhoads presents generally how different writings of the NT might have been presented orally to early Christian communities, and how the texts we know today could function as “performance events”. Finally in the last article of this section, “Performance Criticism as an Exegetical Method: A Story, Three Insights, and Two Jokes”, David Trobisch points at the performance criticism as a valuable tool in recreating the original situation for which the texts of the NT were designed. The method also enables those who use it to discover different authorial intentions, audience reactions and interpretations present in one and the same text.

The third part of the book, entitled “Seeing in the Shaping of New Genres”, is comprised of the three articles. The first one by Kristina Dronsch and Annette Weissenrieder, “A Theory of the Message for New Testament Writings or Communicating the Words of Jesus: From Angelos to Euangelion”, focuses on the figure of messenger in antiquity and shows how it functioned within a communicative process. The article, in which the authors discuss also the graphical material coming from the ancient artifacts, finishes with the analyses of the Gospels. In Mark the Gospel plays the role of the messenger as a representation of the words of Jesus. In Luke the messenger is the “I” of the evangelist, while in John the messenger is the Paraclete who makes the voice of Jesus present in writing. In the next article, “Women Prophets/Maenads Visually Represented in Two Roman Colonies: Pompeii and Corinth”, David Balch, examining Roman domestic art, draws an interesting parallel between the Corinthian Christian women prophets and Dionysian female maenads. The similarities, according to the author, consist in the same enthusiasm, the relation of the spirit to the mind, anticipation of life after death, and celebration of life and joy. The primary contrasts lie in the mythological aspect of Dionysian stories and accompanying them bloody rituals having nothing to do with Christ who willingly gave up himself to be crucified. Finally, the last article of this section, “The Didactics of Images: The Fig-Tree in Mark 11:12–14 and 20–21” by Annette Weissenrieder, deals with the interpretation of the image of fig tree occurring twice in Mark 11. By referring to ancient coins on which the fig tree appears as the emblem of Rome founding fathers, the author tries to broaden the interpretation of

Mark 11 to see in the withered three the personification of Rome and the emperors: Augustus, Caligula or Nero.

The last fourth part of the book entitled, “Writing in the Shaping of New Genres”, contains the eight contributions. Annette Schellenberg in “A ‘lying pen of the scribes’ (Jer 8:8)? Orality and Writing in the Formation of Prophetic Books”, drawing on the observations from the ANE texts and from the Book of Jeremiah, argues that “until late in the postexilic time OT prophetic compositions were not officially linked to an institutional setting, but were in the hands of unofficial ‘followers’ driven by a ‘prophetic impetus’ themselves (p. 287). In the second article, “Writing Songs, Singing Songs: The Oral and the Written in the Commission of the Levitical Singers (1 Chr 25:1-6)”, Roger Nam examines 1 Chr 25:1-6 (the description of Levitical singers) as a paradigm of interworking between the culture of writtenness and orality. The analyzed passage demonstrates the characteristics of deep scribal tradition and multiple layers of literary redaction, and, in the same time, legitimizes the oral performance in the temple. In the next contribution, “Call on me in the day of trouble [...]’. From Oral Lament to Lament Psalms”, Andreas Schuele reflects on the shift from the oral lamentation to the written lament psalms, in which the original protest of the praying person is eventually “tamed” by the firm expectation of salvation and deliverance appearing in the textual version of the prayer. In the fourth article, “Publishing’ a Gospel: Notes on Historical Constraints to Gospel Criticism”, Pieter J.J. Botha explores the possible conditions and historical-cultural constraints (manuscript culture, scenarios for writing a book) in which the gospels as material artifacts were produced in antiquity. The following text by Daniel Boyarin, “The Sovereignty of the Son of Man: Reading Mark”, argues for the presence of the advanced “Son of Man” – Christology in Mark, originated with Jesus’s self-identification and enrooted in the Jewish expectations of the divine-human redeemer. In the sixth contribution, “Scripture and the Writer of Mark”, Robert Coote presents a challenging interpretation of Mark as a saturated with irony adaptation of the scriptural story of salvation. Jesus is an anti-story of the sacrificed Isaac, of Joshua who did not conquer the land, and of the anointed David betrayed by his lieutenants. Mark’s story is not the early church’s dominant story of Jesus. Although Mark does not ignore the resurrection and its victorious aftermath, he downplays them to stress the irony of the present. Jesus’s failure is resolved not by his resurrection but by his baptism – the passage from the shame of nakedness to the honor of new birth. In this sense Mark’s story went way beyond Paul’s theology of baptism and clearly against the church’s version of the narrative of national liberation. Markan irony resembles that of the latter prophets. The

*Annette Weissenrieder and Robert B. Coote, eds., The Interface of Orality and Writing*

penultimate contribution by Holly Hearon, “Mapping Written and Spoken Word in the Gospel of Mark”, deals with the question of how the written text of the Gospel of Mark could be performed and perceived by the first century audience. The author presents Mark in terms of the spoken proclamation permeated by the language of hearing and creative combination of prophetic voices. Finally, in the last article, “Writing in Character: Claudius Lysias to Felix as a Double-Pseudepigraphon (Acts 23:26-30)”, Trevor Thompson analyzes the letter of Claudius Lysias as an example of the rhetorical exercise of *prosopopoiia*. It shows the skills of the author of Acts both as a speaker and writer, a participant of the Greco-Roman rhetorical culture.

The book *The Interface of Orality and Writing* is surely an interesting and valuable overview of the present scholarly research on the interaction between oral and written word. It shows the advantage and necessity of the studies on orality for a better understanding of the Scriptures. The main ancient text considered here is the Gospel of Mark, but a number of scholars ponders also on the relationship between orality and writing in the Hebrew Bible or in Greek philosophers. The innovative character of the volume consists in bringing into play with biblical exegesis the exegesis of the ancient iconographic schemes and the role of visual media (frescos, paintings, artifacts, coin images and inscriptions). In such a variety fields covered in the present publication, everybody who is interested in the issue should find something for himself. The book is destined rather for scholars and students having some expertise in the topics treated by the authors. For instance, the article by Hezser on the randomness in the transmission of the rabbinic traditions is an interesting option for the “formally controlled transmission” model proposed by Gerhardsson. Some of the contributions use a very technical language or move within a very narrow fields of research. It does not mean however that a popular reader cannot find the articles published here inspirational (see e.g. the contributions by Clark and the story pattern of Mark, Weissenrieder and her interpretation of the fig tree in Mark 11, or Coote and Mark’s irony). All in all, *The Interface of Orality and Writing* is a must-to-read book for everybody who works in the field of orality or wants to broaden his knowledge on this relevant topic of biblical studies.