Readings, readers and authors: an orientation

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ABSTRACT
Are the readings of Luke being proposed in this volume evidence of readers finding in the text what they want? Different readings of the same text can be related to different manifestations of "the reader". Yet a responsible reading of the text implies taking the text as a speech-act functioning in a communicative context. The role of the author and the context therefore becomes important again. The concept of foolproof composition is relevant too as it implies the exclusion of the possibility of a counterreading of the text. The phenomenon of the inspiration of a sacred text also functions as a constraint.

1 PROBLEM
The theme of this volume, Readings and readers of Luke 12:35-48, confronts us again with the concrete problem of the multiplicity of meanings and interpretations of texts which were the topic of Neotestamentica 18 (cf Combrink 1984). But what was rather a theoretical discussion at that stage, is now illustrated concretely in the various papers and approaches being presented in this volume. Successive papers deal with this text, Luke 12:35-48, time and time again, illustrating the different readings and interpretations that can arise from the same text in Luke.

It is commonly acknowledged that the myth of the so-called objective, disinterested and scientific reader cannot be maintained any longer. When it is conceded that our interpretation of texts is just as much a part of history as the texts themselves, does this necessarily imply that our reading and interpretation of the text of the New Testament is to be taken as completely relativistic? Unfortunately, this dangerous possibility often becomes a reality when the Bible is (mis)used to substantiate a specific preconceived idea (or ideology!), instead of formulating an argument in the light of the message of the Bible.

Some of the approaches to the text in Luke 12 are obviously not mutually exclusive, and could be taken to be complementary perspectives on the same text, proving the possibility of a meaningful plurality of interpretations. But are all the readings valid? Or should one desist from even asking such a question?

One could furthermore distinguish between multiple interpretations and the possibility of multiple meanings (polysemy) of the same sign. And even though one has to concede the existence of the multiple interpretations of a given parable, it should also be stated that a sign (including metaphors and
parables) mean in context (Vorster 1985:31). If one takes adequately into consideration the way a story functions in the remade reality, its narrative context, will this then imply that the one meaning of the sign will be arrived at?

If one concedes that, in the case of Paul's letters, there was a legitimate possibility of reading someone else's letters, because he meant his occasional letters to be read and reread, the hermeneutical factor of the changed situation must also be taken into account. In other words, *when asking what the text meant we should ask for two intentions of Paul: the one regarding the specific occasion and, secondly, the one related to more general interest* (Hartman 1986:145).

The question, however, remains whether readers should be prevented from finding in the text what they are already hoping to find there (Van Huyssteen 1987:39), something which obviously happens frequently.

In this introductory paper the point will be propounded that, to arrive at a responsible reading of the text, one has to take account of the text as a speech-act functioning in a communicative context. This implies that one needs not capitulate before the relativism of the plurality of meanings proposed for the text, but that a certain degree of control can be attained in dealing with the meaning and interpretation of the text (Van Coller & Van Rensburg 1982:231; cf Van Coller & Van Jaarsveld 1984:iii). This, however, also implies that - without succumbing again to the intentional fallacy - the intention of the implicit author has to be reckoned with (Coller & Van Rensburg 1984:87). This is also the reason for the inclusion of the category "authors" in the title of this paper.

2 DEVELOPMENT OF READER-ORIENTED APPROACHES

2.1 Survey
The gradual shift of focus that took place in hermeneutics, first from text production to the text itself and then to text reception and the role of the reader, has been pointed out often enough in recent times (cf Lategan 1984). In an admirable manner McKnight (1985) documents the development of the role of the reader from its background in the formalist-structuralist tradition through the varied European and American contributions in this field. This does not mean that everyone has jumped on the bandwagon already.

A customary approach had been, and still is (cf Brown 1981:23-44), to distinguish between what the text meant and what it means. This recalls the typical genetic interpretation model by which the meaning of a text is determined by its origin. The distinction by Hirsch between meaning and significance illustrates his aim of showing that meaning and the historical being of the reader has to be separated, and of defending the stable determinacy of meaning. Yet, interestingly enough, McKnight concludes his discussion of Hirsch with the following remarks:
Once a conventional critic oriented toward historical and original meaning moves as far as Hirsch in the direction of reader's meaning, of what value is the focus on original meaning? It becomes a means instead of an end. It is a construct of the reader that enables the reader to make a sense of the text and by means of the text (McKnight 1985:100). This, then, is the thesis of his book - that even the most radically objective historical approach has been accompanied by reader-meaning (McKnight 1985:133).

2.2 The reader and the critic
Without going into the detail of the reader-oriented approaches (cf also Holub 1984), it has to be stressed that these approaches must be seen within the framework of a communications model.

When dealing with the different readings of a single text as illustrated in this volume, the use Fowler (1985) made of Steiner's distinction (1979) between the reader and the critic can be of help. Without belabouring the well-known distinctions between real reader, implied reader, narratee, authorial and non-authorial readers (Petersen 1984:39f), it is relevant to pay attention to the tension, well-known to readers of the Bible, between the critic or "objectifying" pole and the reader or "subjectifying" pole on the critic/reader continuum. When Fowler admits to wanting to be a critical reader, this entails being a critic who can also be called the ideal reader. The Ideal Reader I, is the skilled individual critic, whereas the Ideal Reader II represents a composite ideal reader out of the accumulated critical experience of one's critical community (Fowler 1985:17). Different readings of the same text can therefore be related to different manifestations of "the reader": the textual persona (the reader/s implied in the text), the reader as an individual persona and the reader as a communal persona (the abstracted total experience of the critical community) (Fowler 1985:21). Reading is furthermore a dynamic and temporal process and not the perception of a static spatial form.

2.3 Text and work
Another relevant distinction is between the physically objective text and the mentally subjective work from which a perceivable world is built by the reader. But it is important to realise that this work

*is created by the reader from three sources: from the objective text, from the cultural and linguistic codes known to the reader, and from the reader's personal experience, namely one's past experience with texts, codes, and the things they might refer to or represent* (Petersen 1984:42).

This obviously implies that the work (aesthetic object) being produced by different readers will vary because of differing contexts (Van Coller & Van Rensburg 1982:223). It will be clear that if there are no other constraints, there is a real danger of relativising the text in the process of producing the aesthetic object.
2.4 Reader response and parables
As the text in Luke under discussion comprises two parables, it is worthwhile noting the varying manner in which the reader has played a role in the history of the interpretation of the parables. It comes as no surprise to state that with Jülicher the role of the reader is reduced to a minimum. Yet, his hermeneutics reflects his own horizon of expectation concerning the method and message of Jesus, and in this respect it controls the text more decisively than the text controls the hermeneutics (Thiselton 1985:89).

Someone like Dodd is more sensitive to the role of the reader, whereas Jeremias in effect sees the parables as speech-acts, without drawing the full consequences of the action model of parabolic language due to his overemphasis on the functioning of the parables in the historical reconstruction of the message of Jesus (Thiselton 1985:99).

In the work of scholars like Fuchs, Funk, Via and Crossan, the way has been prepared for more attention to the role of the reader in the parables. What a parable really amounts to, is the transformation of the reader's attitudes and actions. The relation between parable and metaphor, as well as the broader context of semiotics has also come into consideration in the work of Weder, McFague, Wittig and Tolbert. In the process the influence of the reader-response approach of Iser as well as the polyvalence of parables has become clear.

Nevertheless, Thiselton (1985:103f) points out that reader-response approaches to the parables can be questioned on three issues. In the first place, such approaches can lead to a hermeneutical radicalism and scepticism where the text means just what the reader wants to make of it. In this manner one approaches the point of view of deconstruction, which implies that the idea of interpretation is done away with (cf Ryan 1985:16).

Secondly, it is pointed out that even though some interpreters profess to the principle of congruency (or "fit") between the reading and the text (Tolbert 1979:39,71), the reader still remains free to utilise different aspects of his own contextual system in interpreting a text which is in effect isolated from its own context (Thiselton 1985:106). And, thirdly, a reader-response theory on its own is inadequate to function as a comprehensive hermeneutical model.

2.5 Guiding the (implied) reader
Although a reader-oriented approach so often results in a relativising tendency, other dimensions of the approach should also be pointed out.

Attention should be given to the fact that the text embodies signals coercing the reader in a specific direction. It is known that the implied reader is to be seen as a text-internal reader, actually a construct of the text. According to Iser, this term (implied reader)
incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process. It refers to the active nature of this process - which will vary historically from one age to another - and not to a typology of possible readers (Iser 1980:xiii).

One has to recognize that the prestructuring of potential meaning in the text can be done in various ways. Language is the obvious code. But rhetorical and other techniques can also be used to guide or educate the implied reader. So, for example, we see the technique of redundancy (cf Burnett 1985) and repetition in the Gospel of Matthew. When redundancy is to be understood as the availability of information from more than one source (Anderson 1985:82), it is important to note its function. Suleiman states that "...it is by means of redundancy that plural meanings and ambiguities are eliminated and a single 'correct' reading imposed" (1980:120). The function of redundancy is also to overcome interference (noise) on the channel in order to ensure successful communication (Burnett 1985:93).

The most common form of redundancy is verbal repetition. In the case of Matthew's double and triple stories,

Verbal repetition increases predictability, creates expectations, eliminates noise, persuades, and reduces alternative interpretations. Verbal repetition teaches the implied reader how to "read" the text (Anderson 1985:84).

The phenomenon of variation in repetition also underlines the importance of the context which is another source of information for the implied reader.

Yet, when all this has been said, it must still be acknowledged that real readers can and do react differently to these signals in the text.

3 SPEECH-ACTS

3.1 Limits of literature as language model

In view of the scepticism sometimes associated with reader-oriented, or thoroughly text-autonomous approaches, it is worthwhile considering the limits of treating language as completely autonomous. The autonomy of the text has been celebrated in its most radical manner in the agnostic view of reference in the deconstructive method, which affirms interpretation as "a new act of 'writing' and participates in the creative and free interplay of human culture" (Walhout 1985:38).

There was a time when it was necessary - in reaction to a one-sided genetic approach - to warn against the dangers of the so-called intentional fallacy. But the pendulum has swung back again and the dilemma of purely formalised theories is being stressed more and more. There is a growing awareness of the fact that language, including literature, is to be seen as a product of human action, as a means, an instrument, functioning in the context of human actions. "Language is never autonomous and context-free" (Walhout 1985:43).
When dealing with a text from a speech-act point of view, the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions of language have to be taken into consideration. It must be admitted that initially speech-act theorists dealt only with short utterances in isolation addressed to an individual, and did not comment on the literary work as such as speech-act. It has become clear, however, that speech-act theory also has important implications for the study of literature.

In the first place, literature can be seen as locution, emphasising the phonetic, phatic and rhetorical dimensions of the locution (Cloete 1984:7). It is obvious that readings of a text could differ according to the placing of the main emphasis. But a literary work can also be an illocution, that is, the vehicle of a specific intention or tendency. Without repeating the "intentional fallacy", a speech-act approach enables the interpreter to deal in a more responsible manner with the intention of the abstract author by taking the illocutionary nature of the text into consideration (Van Coller & Van Rensburg 1984:87). This approach therefore implies that the reader/hearer has only a limited amount of freedom. He is bound to the illocution of the text, or one could also say to the intended perlocution of the abstract author (Van Coller & Van Rensburg 1982:224). This does not imply that the road to one canonical interpretation has been rediscovered, but that one is moving again in the direction of some interpretations with at least greater claim to validity.

3.2 Context and social goals
An important emphasis of the speech-act approach is that the meaning or sense of a text is related not only to its internal structure, its syntactic and semantic relations, but also to the context (in the extra textual sense of the word), the situation in which it occurs and the functions for which it is used (cf Walhout 1985:44).

Attention has been drawn above to the illocution of a text. This entails an awareness of the social goals of conversation (and textual communication). The illocutionary goal represents the motivation behind an utterance. According to Leech (1983:16) two types of social goals can be distinguished: interpersonal rhetoric and textual rhetoric, together constituting the rhetorical force of an utterance or conversation.

The illocutionary force in combination with the rhetorical force creates the pragmatic force of an utterance: The pragmatic force is the intended effect of the utterance (Du Plessis 1987: 36).

The way in which principles of personal and textual rhetoric are flouted enables one to read between the lines, a necessary step in the process of discovering the "world of meaning between the lines in the text" (Du Plessis 1987:37).
3.3 Temporal and historical aspect of speech-acts
Walhout discusses the way in which Ingarden sees a text as an object containing a self-defined meaning, with the result "that in very complex ways the language-structures contain an 'intentional' meaning apart from the author" (1985:46). Ricoeur also underlines the intentionality of the text and that a written text should be interpreted as a language structure independent of its author (cf Ricoeur 1976). From a speech-act point of view, and keeping in mind the temporal nature of actions, the question of authorship is put on the agenda of literary criticism again. Not that an awareness of the author's intentions is strictly necessary, but by placing a text in its historical and temporal context and being aware of the author's actions in forming a text, we can be more conscious of the author's presence in a text and more willing to recognize the potential value of a knowledge of those intentions (Walhout 1985:49).

Besides the intentions of the author, his actions (the ways in which he used language) can be investigated.

3.4 Discourse and source
Mention has already been made of approaches to treating the text of the New Testament as in the New Criticism, thereby dismissing historical questions and concentrating on the discourse of the text itself. In the light of what has been said so far in connection with a speech-act approach and the temporal and historical aspect of speech-acts, it should be clear that discourse (literary) analysis and a source-oriented (genetic) approach should not be opposed any longer, but should be implemented in a complementary fashion. This holds true for biblical as well as literary interpretation. In this respect a remark by Sternberg needs heeding:

Since biblical study is not a discipline by any stretch of the term but the intersection of the humanities par excellence, the progress it so badly needs is conditional either on all-round expertise, not given to humans, or on a truly common pursuit of knowledge. In the meantime, if we must continue to play double or multiple roles as best we can, we should be all the more on our guard against mixing them up (1985:21f).

Perhaps this can cast some light on the multiple readings of this volume.

3.5 Foolproof composition
The relationship between the actions of authors and readers and the world outside the text inevitably calls for attention to the problem of reference, mimesis, fictionality and history. The inspiration of sacred texts will be discussed later, but at this stage it has to be stated that when the communicative goal of the Bible is taken into account, the biblical narratives claim historicity and not fictionality. It is by their inspiration that the narratives can have a truth claim and the omniscient narrator free access to the hidden acts of God and the secret thoughts of various participants (Sternberg 1985:32).
But in stating this, one has to realise again that the texts of biblical narratives are regulated by three principles, which may seem to be competing at times: the ideological (dealing with promise and fulfilment, sin and judgment), the historiographic (dealing with dates, names, places, genealogies), and the aesthetic (dealing with the various literary and narrative techniques) (Sternberg 1985:41). In certain instances it may even be difficult to state whether the account of the narrative was influenced most by the ideological, historiographical or aesthetic factors. But the crucial factor is that the biblical narrator is depicted as absolutely reliable. And furthermore, the biblical narrative is, in its essentials, transparent.

Still, the Bible's thrust and forte rather lie in what I call foolproof composition, whereby the discourse strives to open and bring home its essentials to all readers so as to establish a common ground, a bond instead of a barrier of understanding,... By foolproof composition I mean that the Bible is difficult to read, easy to underread and overread and even misread, but virtually impossible to, so to speak, counterread (Sternberg 1985:50, my emphasis).

This is an important characteristic of the biblical text, but one that does not negate the other aspects, such as the gaps and vacancies which can be filled by different readers in various ways. Nevertheless, Sternberg draws attention to several precautions in the biblical text against the possibility of counterreading. The effect of these measures is to ensure that the implied reader will be led to move between the safeguarded minimum truth of the text, and the outer pole of the whole truth, but at the same time endeavour to be directed by the available textual strategies in the direction of the whole truth (Sternberg 1985:56). Yet, it is clear that the possibility still remains of implied readers actualising the same text in different ways. Nevertheless, there are certain constraints to the reading of the text.

3.6 Other aspects of a speech-act approach
It has already been pointed out that the illocutionary and the pragmatic force of an utterance are important dimensions of the meaning of a text. It must further be noted that common knowledge and pragmatic presuppositions reflecting the context of the speech-act, can also play an important role in interpreting the illocution of the sender (cf De Bruyn 1982:54ff). One also has to take into account indirect speech-acts such as irony which are intended to lead the hearer/reader to interpret a specific speech-act in a non-literal manner (Du Plessis 1982:71).

3.7 Hermeneutical consequences
Walhout draws some important hermeneutical conclusions from a speech-action approach (1985:62ff). In the first place the author uses language to form his text. This calls for attention to the formal features of the text. Secondly, a textual world is projected by language. Here the interest is in the
characters, events and situations in the narrative text. Thirdly, the author assigns significance to the narrative world and establishes his point of view by various narrative strategies. In the fourth place, the mimetic function of the fictional world is analysed. In the light of the above, the text is then evaluated. Walhout stresses that the goal of hermeneutics cannot be to identify a single valid and verifiable textual meaning, as some of these levels involve our personal philosophies (1985:67). He also points to two additional levels related to the hermeneutical process: the use authors may make of a text (with a view to income, influence, entertainment), or the different uses of the text by a reader (to impress others, while away the time, or confirm religious practices of the church) (1985:68).

In contrast to the fictional stance of a novelist, the stance of the author of a historical work is assertive. We shall not deal extensively with these matters now, but the issue of the extra textual reality remains relevant in the interpretation of New Testament texts. Again, we are forced to move outside the text, as the question of whether a text is to be taken as pragmatic or fictional is not decided by text-immanent factors, but by the intention of the sender (Du Plessis 1984:87).

3.8 Pragmatics and Rhetoric

Semiotics is traditionally distinguished into syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Pragmatics deals then with the relations between language and context that are "grammaticalized" (Levinson 1983:9). Although pragmatics is not to be seen as exactly synonymous with a philosophical speech-act theory, it is occupied with "the systematic study of the relations between the linguistic properties of utterances and their properties as social action" (Ferrara 1985:138). The discussion above concerning a speech-act approach, is to be seen in the context of the swing towards a pragmatic interpretation of the New Testament.

At the same time the resurgent interest in rhetoric is also relevant to the questions addressed for, in the words of Booth, Rhetorical study is the study of use, of purpose pursued, targets hit or missed, practises illuminated for the sake not of pure knowledge, but of further (and improved) practice (Booth 1982:441). Rhetoric, dealing with the use of language in a specific context and situation, is therefore part and parcel of pragmatics.

Wuellner draws attention to the two competing versions of rhetorical criticism currently dominating the scene. On the one hand, rhetorical criticism is indebted to traditional Hellenistic-Roman rhetoric, but implies a reduction of rhetoric to stylistics, to literary criticism, which can be called "rhetoric restrained". On the other hand, rhetorical criticism is seen as "rhetoric revalued" in which rhetorical criticism is identical to practical criticism (Wuellner 1987a:453). It is especially the emphasis on the function of rhetoric in this approach which can further our research. In an unpublished paper Wuellner (1987b) relates the two distinct methods of the theory of argumentation (re-
conceptualised in the new rhetoric) and the theory of intentionality (related to the theory of speech-acts) with a view to reading texts in their contexts. Never before has it been more true than today that text and context are complementary. The value of the text (including its implied or encoded reader) is determined by the context (Wuellner 1987b:22).

3.9 Orality of texts
Before taking leave of the concept of speech-acts, mention should be made of the interesting vistas opened when attention is given to the phenomenon of the media change, the change from orality to textuality. This is of course directly related to the work of Kelber (1983).

Arguing from the basis that the medium can be seen to be the primary cause of the meaning of texts, Boomershine (1987) illustrates that a specific interpretation of the characterisation of Peter in Mark can be tested by reading the story of Peter's denial aloud. His contention is that the medium makes a difference with a view to the question of the intended meaning of Mark's narrative in its original context (1987:59).

Perhaps we should have had an oral reading of our text as well in this volume. The question, of course, concerns the manner in which our oral readings could be thought to be related to the oral readings of the original speech-act situation. Nevertheless, media criticism may have something to say too, with a view to the responsible reading of a text.

4 SACRED TEXT
A factor that has to be addressed in an effort to deal with the text in a responsible manner is that, in a specific context, the readers or community of interpreters of the text may believe in the sacredness, inspiration or divine authority of the text. Readers who believe in the sacredness of the text will experience more constraints in the reading process due to the divine authority of the text. And as the meaning of the text can only be what the divine author intended, this inevitably leads to the phenomenon of privileged interpreters (Detweiler 1985:214).

4.1 Phenomenological characteristics
One of the basic traits of sacred texts is that they are considered to be divinely inspired. The important thing to realise is that the sacred text also implies a reader willing to accept the inspiration of the text, and this holds true across cultural boundaries. The omniscience and other prerogatives of the narrator are therefore to be seen in the light of this inspiration.

Across all doctrinal boundaries, inspiration simply figures as an institutional rule for writing and reading; and it is no more liable to questioning than the Bible's rules of grammar (or the reality of Hamlet's ghost). To make sense of the Bible in terms of its own conventions, one need not believe in either, but one must postulate both (Sternberg 1985:81).
Inspiration may not be an explanation in terms of genesis-as-source, yet it does establish a divine genesis for the discourse. The authority with which the artist addresses his audience is therefore to be seen as an institutional fact. Van Huyssteen warns against the dangers accompanying a naive realism when dealing with the metaphor of inspiration, leading to a fundamentalistic handling of the theory of inspiration. Inspiration has to be seen "as a quality of the biblical text" (1987:48), related not only to the writing but also to the reading of the text. The reality of the presence of the living God is not only relevant in the creation of the Bible, but also to be acknowledged in the community that recreates the text by reading and interpreting it anew.

When one realizes that the reading process is as essential to inspiration as the text itself, it becomes clear that only a specific believing community can recognize the text of the Bible as inspired (Van Huyssteen 1987:50).

There are more phenomenological traits associated with sacred texts such as the need for a privileged interpreter due to the need to decode the message, the effecting of the transformation of lives, the necessary foundation of religious ritual and the evocation of the divine presence (Detweiler 1985:223).

4.2 Hermeneutical traits
Besides the specific traits of sacred texts, the reader of sacred texts (either believer or non-believer) receives two further sets of signals from the text. One is the usual system of conventions associated with any text (characterisation, point of view, gaps, plot etc) eliciting the response of the reader. But at the same time another system is also at work. The reader assumes that he is dealing with either a novel, a poem, an advertisement, a newspaper, or a sacred text.

The reader approaching the gospel as a text that is crucial to her religious faith will take a position of willing suspension of disbelief that is quite different from the fiction reader's attitude. It is in fact not a passive stance, not a mere suspension, but an intensified act of believing in the message of the text against the evidence outside of it in the reader's world (Detweiler 1985:224).

It will be obvious that for a responsible interpretation of the New Testament, one will have to keep these realities in mind. Sternberg gives ample examples of the ways in which the text of the Bible leads the implied reader in such a way as to guarantee the foolproof composition "whereby not even the slowest in the uptake among the audience will be left unenlightened at the end" (Sternberg 1985:179).

5 CONCLUSION
Once again we are confronted with the plurality of readings of a specific text, bordering on the verge of complete relativity. In this orientation some positive aspects of the sustained attention to the role of the reader in the text were noted. It furthermore became clear that, in order to deal with the text of the New Testament in a responsible manner, attention should be given to the
pragmatic, rhetorical aspects of the text as well. That is, the text should be seen not only to embody various speech-acts, but also to be situated in a specific communicative context and rhetorical situation. This invariably leads to the insight that the meaning of the text is constituted not only by text-internal matters, but that the illocutionary and perlocutionary force of the text has to be reckoned with, as well as other matters from the extra-textual context. At this level the fact that, for a specific community of readers, the New Testament is a sacred and canonical text does place certain constraints on the reading process. Obviously this would not imply that the reading of the text is then elevated to a level where no underreadings, overreadings or even misreadings might occur. But if the text is approached within the communication framework it presupposes, one may perhaps agree that a counterreading of the text should be excluded. But then one also has to take into consideration the changes taking place in the context of the interpretive community, which will inevitably reflect on the reading of the text (Vorster 1987:391).

WORKS CONSULTED


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