

MARY RICE – Assignment 8/03/2026

Assignment 10-1

1. Explain the difference between reader response and authorial intent?

Reader response is where the reader brings their experience to the text

Authorial intent is where the author wants the reader to think about what the author is trying to convey.

Three pieces of literature that I would like to draw attention to as I study this question are: the Bible, the Messies Manual by Barbra Felton and the Seven Basic Plots by Christopher Booker.

First of all we will start with God's word the Bible, with Scripture.

In **Proverbs 25:11** it says "a word fitly spoken, is like apples of gold in settings of silver".

King Solomon is the author here and his intention is for us to be wise, to say the right thing at the right time. Us the reader, reading that will want us to be wise and say the right thing at the right time.

I had reason to do that when a friend of mine with a one and two year old was stressing out, about how to toilet train the two year old. The two year old boy was having so many accidents and crying all the time, because he didn't get to the bathroom on time.

I told my much stressed friend, not to worry too much about it, "Put a nappy back on him and start toilet training him again when the child is nearly three. Then the one year old will be nearly two and they can do their toilet training together, and it will be a lot easier".

And you know, it worked. She rang me 9 months later and both children were toilet trained, because they trained together. That advice came from me because I read the scripture about apples in gold and my friend was very happy to receive it. Also I remember my mum saying that some boys and girls train differently, some younger than two and, some nearly three. The Bible is full of wisdom and if you take what King Solomon says here and apply it to your life you will do well.

The Messies Manual, believe it or not, is similar. Upon first buying this book I had no idea that it contained Scripture, because I bought it at a regular book store. Barbara Felton was a Pastor's wife who had parishioners at her door constantly. She felt she needed to tidy up, but there was one problem, she suffered depression and because of this she found it hard to lift a finger to help herself.

Then she discovered Scripture. Her husband was always talking about Jesus, so she decided to read her Bible.

She uses **Psalm 90:1**. “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations”...

This Scripture is used to emphasize that the Lord is a secure dwelling place and our homes are a reflection of that divine peace.

Proverbs 16:9 “In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps”... This Scripture is used to encourage steady, small steps in the process of overcoming clutter, rather than aiming for overnight perfection.

The authorial intent here is to get us to look after our homes, our lives and our families. She also says that her intent on writing this book was to draw closer to God herself, to clean her home and help others clean their home, and to not be embarrassed when visitors came.

My intent as the reader was to learn how to clean my home, not to be embarrassed when visitors came over either, and to draw closer to God and to use Scripture to do it. So the intent in this case was the same.

However, the Seven Basic Plots by Christopher Booker, again I had no idea that it contained Scripture because it was from a normal bookstore. The intent by this author was to demonstrate how the Bible, God being the author of stories, uses seven basic themes in literature. I bought the book because I wanted to write at the time.

Christopher Booker ascertains that these seven basic themes in literature are in any book, the Bible, being one of them, because God is the author of true stories. Well, I like to call them accounts because “stories” denotes sometimes fairytales and the Word of God certainly isn’t; and I don’t think that is what Christopher Booker meant either, that the accounts were made up! His intent was to, through Scripture, let us see that the Bible is the Inspired Word of God, and in the Inspired Word of God all would-be authors can learn from these stories to shape their own.

The seven basic plots in the Bible are:

1. Overcoming the Monster: A hero battles a powerful evil force, such as David fighting Goliath or Jesus defeating Satan.
2. Rags to Riches: A protagonist moves from a low desperate position to a high influential one, exemplified by Joseph becoming Egypt’s ruler, or Esther becoming Queen.
3. The Quest: Characters travel to find a specific object, or reach a location; such as the Israelites searching for the Promised Land.
4. Voyage and Return: A character leaves their familiar world for a dangerous, strange one before returning, changed, like Jonah in Nineveh, or the Babylonian Exile.
5. Comedy: A narrative characterized by misunderstandings, confusion and obstacles that end up in a positive union, such as “The Book of Ruth”.
6. Tragedy: A character with great potential falls due to a fatal flaw, such as King Saul’s disobedience, leading to his downfall!

7. Rebirth The character or nation's freedom from a dark, restricted state to find new life: symbolized by the resurrection of Christ, or the return of the Babylonians from Exile.

I would have to disagree with some of what Booker has said here. Although Jonah did go to Nineveh and he did change direction, the Scriptures don't say that he was a changed man preaching to the Ninevites. He still complained afterwards.

In Comedy I would also add that the Story of Esther can be classed as a bit of a comedy, because Haman sets up gallows to hang Mordecai, but Haman was hanged on them himself.

The story of Elijah is pretty funny. When Elijah started making fun of the Baal worshippers "Pray Louder, he is a god, maybe he is daydreaming or relieving himself. Maybe he is sleeping and you have to wake him up". (**1 Kings 18:27**).

That would be comedy to me, but it was so long since I have read "The Seven Basic Plots" by Booker I don't know whether he added it or not. So there you have it, that was Booker's seven basic plots.

Now his authorial intent was to just really teach would-be writers their craft. He uses scripture to do it amongst other pieces of literature.

Reader intent for me however, was to think "wow, I want to see where Booker is going with this", and yes upon reading the Bible at the time, I examined what he said with the stories of Joseph etc. and I could see Booker's point of view.

But reader intent for me was quite different. I liked the fact that Booker said that God was the author of stories because He made the world. But I didn't like some of the things he said referring to Jesus as a Character, not the Son of God!! The Word of God is more to me than how to write good stories.

So reader intent maybe quite different, depending on how one interprets the information, and what they need it for. But with the Bible and King Solomon and the Messies Manual and the Seven Plots the author intent is the same. King Solomon here wants us to be wise and to listen to him, and Barbara Felton and Booker want us to listen to them. However, King Solomon knows that the day will come when we need what he says. His Proverbs are inspired by God, so he wants us to read on as he has written many!

2. **Why is the issue of communication important to the discussion of authorial intent?**

We will discuss the Bible again. The issue of communication is important to the discussion of authorial intent, because without the author, we have no meaning. We don't know what the text is about. We have to know what the text is about to understand the meaning of the text. We will not want to read on, if we don't understand the text. If the author hasn't communicated properly with us, then the meaning of the text will become obscure.

Let's take the Bible again with the scripture in **Luke 23:43**, where Jesus says to the thief on the cross "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise". (NKJV).

Jesus is the author, here. He made the statement. But He died and rose again for our sins over 2000 years ago. The Bible was written by 40 different authors Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and a few others; quoting what Jesus said and did and telling also what happened in the Old Testament. We live now and weren't there and when the Bible was written there were no commas and punctuation marks. It was the Gutenberg Bible printed in the 1450's. So how do we know what Jesus really meant when He said this, as commas, etc. were added later.

Well, we can know by examining other scriptures. At first glance, it seems that Jesus was telling the thief, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise". But that sentence doesn't fit with the whole of the New Testament".

Jesus says in **Matthew 12:40**. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth".

The people who Jesus was speaking to would have understood that! He was speaking to the Scribes and Pharisees as mentioned in **Matthew 12:38**.

So we know that He wasn't in Paradise that day when the statement was made; when he spoke to the thief on the cross, because of the Jonah statement that He had made days earlier.

We can also know, by this statement in **John 20:17** when Jesus says to Mary Magdalene "Do not hold onto Me for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God"

If Jesus and the thief had been in Paradise the day Jesus was crucified, Paradise being in Heaven and ascending upwards, it would have made him a liar in the statement to Mary Magdalene (3 days after the crucifixion), which he did not, because Jesus cannot lie!!!

In **1 Peter 2:2** it says that no deceit was found in His mouth, and with the Scripture in Jonah it proves it.

So it all has to do with syntax and grammar and placing of words in the sentence. Grasping the text in our town means reading it and analyzing what it meant to the original audience. The original audience was John, the thief on the cross and among others, the Jews at the time. We were not there. They were. The theological principal here is that Jesus cannot lie.

We should interpret the scripture of Jesus talking to the thief on the cross this way! **Luke 23:43**. "Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise". That is a far better translation and it does make sense with the rest of the

Scriptures! The New World Translation renders it, "Truly I tell you today, you will be with me in Paradise".

Jesus often said truly or assuredly before He made a statement to emphasize some important fact, to highlight the importance of it, e.g. **John 3:3**. Jesus answered and said to him "Truly; truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God".

Now we know what the timing of that statement is, that Jesus said it that day. So we can assume, with all the facts present, that the thief on the cross statement was said that day and not to mean that you will be in Paradise today!

So the issue of communication is important to authorial intent because whole doctrines can be wrong. We know this to be true, that's why we have so many Christian Sects!

3. Discuss several situations whereby a reader may change an author's intended meaning?

Instance 1

Okay, the Parable I want to discuss here is **Mathew 13:1-9 and 18-23**

I had that wrong years ago. I was in the Jehovah's Witnesses sect and having problems, so wanted to be out of it.

Jesus is telling the Parable here and He intends for us to be fruitful. He says to His followers "A sower went out to sow, some seed fell on the wayside and birds devoured them. Some fell on stony places, some fell upon thorns and the thorns sprang up and choked them. And some fell on good ground and yielded a crop of 100, 60 and 30.

Now I know in this parable I wasn't in the last statement of the seed that yielded 30 etc. Silly me! I had no intention of being in the last one at that stage either. I was unhappy and I felt the cares of the world were choking me. So I went to the brothers and said "This is where I'm at, I'm like the seed that fell on stony ground and bears fruit for a little while and has no depth, and I'm also like the seed that fell among the thorns and the thorns sprung up and choked the seed. I need to leave the Witnesses.

I was actually happy that I had identified myself with that too, because I felt God was calling me out. It says here "Now he who receives seed among the thorns is he who hears the Word and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the Word and he becomes unfruitful".

I kept on saying to the brothers "I'm hearing the Word, but I need to go"! They kept on saying to me "Mary you need to be the last one in Jesus' Parable, bear fruit some 100 some 60 etc. and I kept on saying I can't "I'm being choked because I heard the Word". They kept on saying to me "Mary you can't stay as you are".

So that was in those days. I was also concentrating on (he who hears the word receives it with Joy) but I wasn't concentrating on (he has no root in himself). So that was my wrong interpretation of that Parable. I was happy being stuck, that I identified myself with it and I was sure that at a later date I'd be the last statement that Jesus made in that Parable and bear fruit.

Instance 2

The second instance I feel where people make many mistakes is to do with the thief on the cross again. Not because of the comma incident, but because we can assume that the thief wasn't baptized.

The thief says in **Luke 23:40** "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation. And we indeed justly for we receive the just reward of our deeds, but this Man has done nothing wrong"!

Then Jesus says to him "You will be with me in Paradise"

Jesus was happy with the repentant sinner. He is the one who owns Paradise and says who will be there and who won't be. He saw the thief's repentant heart.

Now we can assume that the thief was saved. There is another Scripture in **Luke 13:5**. "I tell you no, but unless you repent you will all likewise perish". Jesus said this when some people told him of all the atrocities going on.

There is a Church that will cite these two scriptures, **Luke 23:43 & Luke 13:5**, saying we don't need to be baptized because Jesus in these two instances doesn't talk of baptism.

My understanding of it is, pertaining to the thief on the cross 1- there was no time to baptize him and 2 - Jesus is the author here as well. He is the author of baptism. He designed it and even said to John the Baptist in **Mat 3:15**, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness". Jesus had the Holy Spirit. Who is to say that the thief on the cross didn't receive the Holy Spirit there and then because of his; "We deserved it" comments? and admitting that Jesus is God! (Do you not even fear God). He admitted this just simply by Jesus talking to him.

There is a scripture about baptism. Peter says "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you should receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:38**)

There is a Church near here that teaches that you do not have to be baptized. You only have to repent they say. That is their understanding of it, but it is wrong, because this scripture clearly talks of baptism – which is not in their doctrine and neither is this one

Surprising to learn of a local church that dismisses baptism!!!

1 **Peter 3:21**, states there is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh) but the answer of a good conscience towards God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So you see, those 2 instances quoted where baptism **is** necessary for the forgiveness of sins.

Another example I would like to talk about is King Herod. I have often used that Scripture incorrectly too. King Herod's daughter dances and pleases him in such a way that he offers her up to ½ of his Kingdom. She ends up asking for the head of John the Baptist. He is sad because he really doesn't want to do it, but because he says it in front of all of his guests, he feels he can't let her down, or his reputation will be ruined "So he does it"!

I have looked at that to do with fasting, Silly, I know, but I have vowed to God to fast all day!

As the day wears on and I get hungry and I am not performing well at my job, I say to myself "Well, this is the Boss' time, I owe it to him to do the best that I can today". So I start eating so I can perform better. I reason that I have to, just as Herod had to do what he vowed, but unlike Herod I do the opposite of what I vowed. Still probably, for the same reasons Herod did, he didn't want to look bad in front of his friends, I didn't want to look bad in front of the Boss by not performing well.

That's a terrible illustration, because John the Baptist lost his life in this Scripture and the Scripture has nothing to do with fasting, but however, I'm honest and this is how I have reasoned and what I have done. I see things differently now, God has forgiven me. Praise the Lord.

The author's intended meaning here isn't to talk about fasting. It is to talk of a tragedy and how one man's pompous attitude can change whether a person lives or dies.

In summary, readers do change the Bible's intended meaning in so many instances. That is why we have so many Churches.

Thank you Mary. You have laboured well and intently to share your responses to this assignment. You have also used personal examples, material that you've read, and more than exceeded the assignment's requirements. Thank you. Your enthusiasm and honesty in sharing your experiences bring a valuable and important element to our class journey together. Well done.