

- MOORE, Stephen D. *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989. Includes chapters on narrative criticism, reader-response criticism, and deconstruction.
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Narrative Criticism:

How Does the Story Mean?

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The questions we ask of the texts we read are as important as the answers we are led to. Most readers of the New Testament for almost two thousand years have asked religious questions. What does the text mean? What does it mean to me? to us? to our faith and our lives? The answers have reflected not only the different individual readers but also broader cultural shifts. The time and place of the readers or communities of readers have influenced their answers. What other types of questions have been asked by New Testament readers—especially scholarly readers?

Since the nineteenth century, most New Testament scholars have asked, What *did* the text mean? What did it mean in its original context? for its author? to its first hearers or readers? Chapter 1 discusses three chief ways the question, What *did* the text mean? has been asked: source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism. Source, form, and redaction criticism might seem to be asking literary questions. Source criticism was first called literary criticism because it approached Matthew, Mark, and Luke as literary documents. However,

source criticism is a search for literary sources and relationships in history. Which Gospel was written first? Which Gospel was the historical source for the others? These questions are primarily historical. Form criticism is concerned with the literary form of the small stories. However, form criticism is a search for the sources behind the sources in history. What do the individual stories tell us about the history of the earliest churches? What may we attribute to the historical Jesus? Redaction criticism certainly has literary aspects. As the study of the theological motivation of the editing of earlier traditions, it is concerned with the Gospels as literary wholes. However, redaction criticism is a search for the theology of the churches of the Gospel writers in history. What *did* the text mean? To ask *what* did the text mean is to seek referential meaning. The text's meaning is found in what it refers to—what it refers to other than and outside itself.

In the past two decades an increasing number of biblical scholars (especially in the United States) have been asking a different question: *How* does the text mean? This question is literary; it represents a search for internal meaning rather than external (or referential) meaning. How do various literary patterns enable the text to communicate meaning to its hearers and readers? How do the interrelated characters, settings, and actions of the plot contribute to a narrative's meaning for a reader? The move from historical to literary questions represents a paradigm shift in biblical studies. A paradigm gives us our basic way of understanding things. When there is a paradigm shift, we are challenged to think of the old and familiar in a new way. The writer of Mark is no longer a cut-and-paste editor but an author with control over the story he narrates. The Jesus of Mark is no longer a shadowy historical personage but a lively character. Galilee and Jerusalem are no longer simply geographical references but settings for dramatic action. The account of Jesus' passion (suffering and death) is no longer the source of theological doctrine but the culmination of a dramatic and engaging plot.

The New Criticism and Structuralism

The shift to a literary paradigm by some biblical interpreters echoed a similar and earlier shift among interpreters of secular literature. In the 1940s the New Criticism argued that the key to reading a poem, play, novel, or short story is to be found in the work itself. Historical information about the culture and biographical information about the author were pushed aside as external to the work. The New Criticism must be understood as a reaction to previous literary studies that gave such information primary importance. A similar reaction in biblical studies led many to move from redaction criticism to literary criticism. The final lines of a poem by Archibald MacLeish may be understood almost as a slogan for the New Critics: "A poem should not mean/But be."¹ A critic or reader must not be concerned with a poem's referential meaning, that

1. Archibald MacLeish, "Ars Poetica," in *Collected Poems 1917-1954* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 50-51.

is, its reference to some external world. She or he must attend to its being, its presence, its metaphoric power. The poem's power to speak to us depends neither on the author's intention nor on the reader's knowledge of the author's circumstances. It depends on the poem itself—its words, its rhythms, its images.

The New Criticism made its initial impact in New Testament studies on interpretations of the sayings and parables of Jesus.² The "significance of forceful and imaginative language" in the Synoptic sayings of Jesus was explored by Robert Tannehill.³ Robert Funk considered "language as event and theology" in parable and letter.⁴ Dan Via reflected on the "literary and existential dimension" of the parables.⁵ The surprising, challenging, world-shattering potential of the parables was the theme of John Dominic Crossan's work.⁶ "A poem should not mean/But be"—and a parable should not refer but impel.

Structuralism is another critical approach that has influenced biblical literary criticism. Structuralism was born in linguistics and grew up in anthropology, literature, and other areas. Central to structuralism are three affirmations about language. First, language is communication. Language as communication involves a sender giving a message to a receiver; literature as communication means an author giving a text to a reader. Redaction critics focus on the sender or author, and reader-response critics (see chap. 3) focus on the receiver or reader. Structuralist critics in particular, like literary critics in general, focus on the text. By analogy, structuralist critics note that within a narrative text a "sender" gives an "object" to a "receiver." For example, in a traditional fairy tale the king gives his daughter in marriage to the most worthy suitor. (Much of the tale works out which suitor is most worthy.) In a Synoptic parable a king gives a feast to—surprisingly—the poor and the outcast. This model of language as communication and narrative as language has been worked out by French structuralist A. J. Greimas.⁶

Second, structuralism stresses that language is a system of signs. No sign has meaning on its own. Signs have meaning in relation to other signs. Analogously, no element of a literary work has meaning in isolation. Everything has meaning as part of a system of relationships. A narrative, that is, a literary work that

2. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Sword of His Mouth* (Semeia Supplements 1; Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975).
3. Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).
4. Dan Otto Via, Jr., *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).
5. John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); idem, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles, Ill.: Argus Communications, 1975; Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1988).
6. A. J. Greimas, "Elements of a Narrative Grammar," trans. Catherine Porter, *Diacritics* 7 (1977): 23-40. For an explanation see Daniel Patte, *What is Structural Exegesis?* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 41-43. For an adaptation and application to the parables, see Crossan, *Dark Interval*.

tells a story, must be read in two ways to disclose its system of relations. It must be read diachronically, that is, through time, from beginning to end. It must also be read (understood) synchronically, that is, as if everything happened at the same time. For a synchronic reading, logical categories (good versus evil, order versus chaos, etc.) are more important than chronological categories. The interrelation of parts within a whole is the key. This approach has been worked out by French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and applied in detail to the spatial settings of Mark's Gospel.⁷

Third, structuralism focuses on language as a cultural code. This understanding of language builds on the other two. Through careful analysis of the oppositions expressed in a text, the even more basic oppositions implicitly supporting it are revealed. Daniel Patte, the foremost biblical structuralist, has illustrated this and other aspects of structuralism in relation to Paul's letters and Matthew's Gospel. Patte seeks to uncover the "system of convictions" of Paul and of Matthew.⁸

Both the New Criticism and structuralism focus on the text itself—the language of the text and the text as language. Biblical literary criticism has been influenced by both approaches and shares this focus on the text. The first texts examined in detail by New Testament literary critics were the sayings and parables of Jesus. These short and powerful texts are in some ways comparable to the poems that intrigued the New Critics. The Gospels are the texts most explored by current New Testament literary critics. The Gospels are narratives, stories, in many ways not unlike the myths and folktales that structuralists often analyzed. New Testament literary criticism has become largely narrative criticism, a label employed by biblical critics but not by secular critics. To understand narrative criticism, we must consider the essential elements or aspects of narratives.

Narrative Elements

The distinction between story and discourse that was highlighted by literary critic Seymour Chatman has proved very useful to narrative critics. Story is the *what* of a narrative; discourse is the *how*. Story indicates the content of the narrative, including events, characters, and settings, and their interaction as

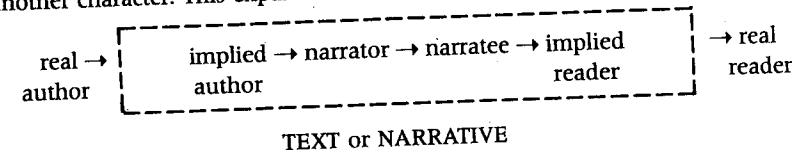
7. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *Journal of American Folklore* 68. (1955): 428–44; idem, "The Story of Asdiwal," trans. Nicholas Mann, in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, ed. Edmund Leach (Association of Social Anthropologists Monographs 5; London: Tavistock, 1967), 1–47. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (New Voices in Biblical Studies; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986; The Biblical Seminar 13; Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).
8. Daniel Patte, *Paul's Faith and the Power of the Gospel: A Structural Introduction to the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); idem, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). See also idem, *Structural Exegesis for New Testament Critics* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

the plot. Discourse indicates the rhetoric of the narrative, how the story is told. The four canonical Gospels, for example, share a similar (although not identical) story of Jesus, but the discourse of each Gospel is distinctive. The story is where the characters interact; the discourse is where the implied author and implied reader interact. Story and discourse are not really separable. What we have, in Chatman's words, is the story-as-discoursed. It is this about which narrative critics ask, How does the text mean?

The following elements or aspects of narrative (story-as-discoursed), although overlapping, are frequently distinguished by narrative critics: implied author and implied reader, characters, settings, plot, rhetoric. We will look at each in turn.

Implied Author and Implied Reader

The communication model of sender-message-receiver gives narrative critics a framework for approaching texts: author-text-reader. This simple model, however, soon proves inadequate for narrative analysis. Recent literary criticism has taught us to conceive of the author and the reader not as isolated entities but as poles of a continuum of communication. A real author writes a text for a real reader. An implied author, a creation of the real author that is implied in his or her text, presents a narrative to an implied reader, a parallel creation of the real author that is embedded in the text, and a narrator tells a story to a narratee. Of course, within a story a character may narrate another story to another character. This expanded model is often diagrammed like this:⁹



Narrative criticism focuses on the narrative, but the implied author and the implied reader are understood as aspects of the narrative in this model. The implied author is a hypothetical construction based on the requirements of knowledge and belief presupposed in the narrative. The same is true of the implied reader. The implied author is the one who would be necessary for this narrative to be told or written. The implied reader is the one who would be necessary for this narrative to be heard or read.

The distinctions between the real and implied author and the real and implied reader are important for narrative critics, who wish to interpret the narrative without reliance on biographical information about the real author and cultural information about the real reader. Of course, basic information about the cultural context is essential to any interpretation. The implied author and implied reader of Mark's Gospel, for example, were literate in *koine* (common) Greek and knew the Hebrew Bible (later to become the Old Testament for Christians) in the

9. This diagram is based on that of Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), 151

form of its Greek translation in the Septuagint. Narrative critics are eager to know as much as possible about the cultural contexts—especially of ancient works—in order to understand more completely the implied author and the implied reader of the narrative. However, narrative critics are wary of interpretations based on elements external to the narrative—including the intentions (known or supposed) of the real author.

The distinctions between the implied author and the narrator and between the narratee and the implied reader were developed in secular literary criticism for the close analysis of nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels. Ishmael is the narrator of *Moby Dick*, but he is the creation of the implied author. Most narrative critics of the first-century Gospels have not found these distinctions as useful. Most narrative critics have observed little or no difference between the implied author and narrator or between the narratee and implied reader of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The implied author of *Moby Dick* knows more than Ishmael, but a similar separation is not obvious in Mark. Thus some narrative critics use the terms *narrator* and *narratee*, and others employ *implied author* and *implied reader*.

The implied author/narrator may be characterized in various ways, according to the particular nature of the narrative. The implied authors/narrators of the Gospels are generally described as omniscient (all knowing), omnipresent (present everywhere), or unlimited. The implied author/narrator of Mark, for example, is able to narrate events involving any character or group of characters, including Jesus when alone. This implied author/narrator knows past, present, and future, as well as the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters. The Markan implied author/narrator is also reliable. The narratee/implied reader may trust him (probably him) as a nondeceptive guide to the action and safely believe that what he foreshadows will be fulfilled. (Even a reliable implied author/narrator may be ironic, however.) In addition, the point of view of the implied author/narrator of Mark is aligned not only with the point of view of the main character, Jesus, but also with the point of view of God. From the point of view of the implied reader/narratee, you can't get any more reliable than that! The implied author/narrator begins: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ (Messiah), the Son of God" (1:1). Ten verses later, God concurs, saying to Jesus, "You are my Son" (1:11). The interaction of the implied author and the implied reader is part of the discourse. The interaction of the characters is part of the story.

Characters

Characters are an obvious narrative element. A story is about someone—the characters. The actions are carried out by someone—the characters. Narrative analysis of characters is intertwined with narrative analysis of plot. The implied reader of the story-as-discoursed is frequently invited to admire, judge, or identify with the characters. Characters are brought to life for the implied reader by the implied author through narrating words and actions. These words and actions may be those of the character himself or herself, those of another character, or those of the narrator. A character can be known by what she says

and does; a character can be known by what other characters say to or about her and by what they do in relation to or because of her. A character can be known by what the narrator says about him—including names, epithets, and descriptions—or by what the narrator does in relation to him—including comparative or contrasting juxtapositions with other characters and the unfolding of the plot.

For example, the first mention of Judas Iscariot in Mark, at Jesus' appointing of the Twelve, is followed immediately by the narrator's comment, "who betrayed him" (3:19). At the point when Judas's betrayal is being narrated, however, the narrator calls him "Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve" (14:10). This is characterization by the narrator's words *and actions*, that is, the ironic placement of these descriptions at moments of greatest contrast. The ironic contrast is extended by the immediate juxtaposition of the story of the unnamed woman who gives up money for Jesus (the anointing woman, 14:3-9) and the story of one of the twelve specially named men who gives up Jesus for money (Judas's betrayal, 14:10-11).

Some narrative critics distinguish characterization by "telling" and characterization by "showing." "Telling" involves the explicit words of a reliable narrator about a character. Anything else is "showing." "Showing" requires more from the narratee and implied reader and is thus more engaging. Most of the characterization in the Gospels is by "showing."

Some narrative critics find it helpful to identify the dominant traits of characters. A trait is a personal quality that persists over time. Sometimes such traits are explicitly named in a narrative. Frequently they are inferred from words and actions, as suggested previously. Some characters are portrayed with only one trait. Others are given a number of traits, or developing traits, or even conflicting traits.

E. M. Forster, novelist and literary critic, called these two types of characters "flat" and "round."¹⁰ The distinction, which is sometimes elaborated, has proved to be extremely helpful for narrative critics. Flat characters are simple and consistent. Some flat characters appear but once, others again and again, but their actions and words are predictable. Round characters are complex or dynamic. They may reveal new aspects of themselves or even change. The distinction between flat and round characters is not the same as the distinction between "minor" and "major" characters. The Jewish leaders are hardly minor characters in Mark but they are flat. Nor is the flat/round distinction equivalent to negative versus positive. The Jewish leaders in Mark are flat and negative; the anointing woman is flat and positive. The disciples are round and both positive and negative; the Markan Jesus alone is a round, positive character. The flatness or roundness of characters, however, does affect the implied reader's response in praise, judgment, or identification. Round characters elicit identification in a way that flat characters do not.

Just as the point of view of the implied author/narrator is aligned and takes on a positive or negative value, so the point of view of each character or group

10. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1927, 1954), 103-118.

of characters is given an evaluative point of view by the implied author. Norman Petersen has argued that the two evaluative points of view among Markan characters are "thinking the things of God" and "thinking the things of men."¹¹ The implied author, narrator, Jesus, and several minor exemplary characters represent the first (positive) point of view. The Jewish leaders and sometimes the disciples represent the second (negative) one.

New Testament narrative critics are generally aware of the differences in characterization between nineteenth- and twentieth-century psychological novels, for example, and the Gospels. The secular literary theory on which biblical narrative critics so often lean is not particularly supportive at this point. Ways of analyzing characterization in the Gospels are still being developed. Perhaps the current debate about the portrayal of the disciples of Jesus in Mark (Are they "fallible followers" or final failures?¹²) will settle down somewhat as interpreters explore more thoroughly the techniques of characterization in use in the ancient world. Vernon Robbins has instructively compared the portrayal of the Markan disciples of Jesus with the portrayal of the disciples of Apollonius of Tyana by Philostratus.¹³ I have pointed out that characterization by "types" was conventional in ancient literature, including history as well as epic, drama, and other forms. Mark seems to continue this convention by presenting contrasting groups—exemplars to emulate and enemies to eschew. But perhaps Mark challenges this convention as well by presenting fallible followers with whom to identify.¹⁴ More research remains to be done in this area.

Settings

Characters are the "who" of the narrative; settings are the "where" and "when." The shift from historical questions to literary questions has made a significant impact on the way interpreters think about the spatial and temporal settings of the Gospels.¹⁵ The original questers for the historical Jesus combed the Gospels for information about the geography and chronology of Jesus' ministry. Early

11. Norman R. Petersen, "Point of View" in Mark's Narrative," *Semeia* 12 (1978): 97-121.
12. For the now classic exposition of the disciples as failed followers, see Theodore J. Weeden, Jr., *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). See also Werner H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). For the view of the disciples as "fallible followers," see Robert C. Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," *Journal of Religion* 57 (1977): 386-405, and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark," *Semeia* 28 (1983): 29-48.
13. Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992).
14. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Marcan Characterization," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 259-81, esp. 275-81.
15. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Galilee and Jerusalem: History and Literature in Marcan Interpretation," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 242-55.

redaction critics of Mark argued that its confused geographical references indicate an author writing outside Galilee and Israel, probably in Rome. Later redaction critics speculated that the positive connotations of Galilee in Mark indicate Galilee as the locale of the community for which the Gospel was written.¹⁶ The prediction of the destruction of the Jewish Temple in chapter 13 of Mark—especially with its cryptic parenthetical phrase: "(let the reader understand)," 13:14—has been cited as evidence that Mark was written prior to 70 C.E. (the date of the Temple's actual destruction by the Romans) and as evidence that it was written after 70 C.E.! The spatial and temporal settings of Mark give a clear picture of neither Jesus' time and place in history nor Mark's.

Literary critics, especially narrative critics, interpret these spatial and temporal references internally rather than externally. Together they form the background for the dramatic action of Mark's Gospel. In fact, settings often participate in the drama of the narrative. Places and times are rich in connotational, or associative, values, and these values contribute to the meaning of the narrative for the implied reader. For example, the Markan narrator says that Jesus "went up the mountain" (3:13) to appoint the Twelve. Historical critics have searched in vain for a mountain in Galilee. For the implied author and implied reader, who know their Bible, "the mountain" is where God comes to meet leaders of the people of God. Similarly, "the sea" is where God manifests divine power, and "the wilderness" is where God manifests divine care in miraculously feeding the people of God. Thus the implied reader is shown (not told) that Jesus' power over the sea (4:35-41; 6:45-52) and miraculous feedings in the wilderness (6:31-44; 8:1-10) are divine manifestations.

Markan temporal settings also contribute significantly to the implied reader's appreciation of the narrative. Some temporal references are clearly allusive or symbolic. Jesus' testing in the wilderness for forty days (1:13) is an allusion to Israel's forty years of testing in the wilderness during the Exodus. The twelve years of age of Jairus's daughter and the twelve years of suffering of the hemorrhaging woman intensify the Jewish flavor of the interwoven stories (5:21-43). Twelve is a number symbolic of Israel, with its twelve tribes.

In other cases the implied author uses temporal markers to pace the unfolding of the story. The first several chapters of Mark are peppered with the Greek adverb *euthus*, "immediately." (In English translation this effect is clearer in the Revised Standard Version than in the New Revised Standard Version.) The Markan Jesus rushes around—from baptism in the Jordan, to testing in the wilderness, to preaching and exorcising a demon in the Capernaum synagogue, to healing in Simon's house, to healing throughout Galilee. The Markan Jesus' first words tell of the urgency of the present time: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news"

16. Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel*, trans. James Boyce et al. (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1969). Werner H. Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and a New Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).

(1:15). The Markan narrator's first series of scenes *shows* this urgency. Immediately Jesus acts; immediately the implied reader is to respond.¹⁷

The pace of the Markan story-as-discoursed is dramatically different in the passion narrative, the story of Jesus' suffering and death. Everything slows down. Story time for the first ten chapters is months and months, perhaps a year. Story time for the last six chapters is about a week. Moreover, everything becomes more specific. Instead of the "in those days" or "in the morning" of the first ten chapters, we now read "two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread" (14:1) or "nine o'clock in the morning" (15:25, "the third hour [or watch]," *rsv*). The same specificity occurs spatially. Instead of "in the house," we find "at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, . . . at the table" (14:3). A modern-day analogy would be a filmmaker's skillful use of slow motion photography to suggest the profound significance of a climaxing series of scenes. The more detailed setting of scenes in time and space of the Markan passion narrative is the implied author's plea to the implied reader: slow down; take this in; to understand anything of the story, you must understand this. It is another form of urgency.

Spatial and temporal settings need to be mapped out in correlation with the plot of the narrative, just as characters need to be interpreted in terms of their roles in the plot. For the implied author and the implied reader, the elements of narrative—characters, settings, plot, rhetoric—are essentially integrated.

Plot

The plot is the "what" and the "why" of the narrative. What happens? Why? Then what happens? Why? These are questions of the plot. Biblical critic Norman Petersen presents a very fruitful distinction between Mark's narrative world and Mark's plotted time. The "narrative world is comprised of all events described or referred to in the narrative, but in their causal and logical sequence." The "plotting of this world is to be seen in the ways its components have been selected and arranged in a sequence of narrated incidents."¹⁸ Events are not always plotted in the narrative in the order in which they would occur in the narrative world. The changes from narrative world to the plotted time of the narrative are part of the implied author's discourse with the implied reader.

G rard Genette, a literary theorist, has worked out an intricate system for discussing the order, duration, and frequency of events in the plotted narrative. An event may be narrated *after* its logical order in the narrative world (analepsis). An event may be narrated *before* its logical order in the narrative world (prolepsis). And, of course, events may occur in the same order in both. An event may be narrated with a longer, shorter, or equal duration in comparison with its duration in the narrative world. An event that occurs once in the narrative

17. On the larger issues of apocalyptic and temporality in relation to Mark's plot, see Dan O. Via, Jr., *The Ethics of Mark's Gospel: In the Middle of Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), esp. 27–66.

18. Norman R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 49–50.

world may be narrated once or more than once. Changes in order, duration, and frequency are ways the implied author has of leading the implied reader through the story-as-discoursed to an interpretation.

Markan examples will clarify these distinctions. The three passion predictions that the Markan Jesus makes to his disciples (8:31; 9:31; 10:33) point proleptically to what will occur later—but still within the narrative. The Markan Jesus' prediction, echoed by the young man at the empty tomb (14:28; 16:7), that he will go before his disciples to Galilee, points proleptically to an event that is not narrated within the story-as-discoursed. The implied reader, however, has been cued to presume its occurrence in the narrative world (see, e.g., 13:9–13). This narrative technique contributes to the often noted open ending of Mark's Gospel. A short but surprising and significant analepsis is narrated at 15:40–41. The Markan Jesus' twelve disciples have fled; he is crucified, bereft of their presence. But at the cross "there were also women looking on from a distance." Three are named, but "many other women" are mentioned. At this crucial point the narrator tells the narratee that these women used to follow Jesus and minister to him in Galilee. *Follow* and *minister to* are discipleship words in Mark. So the implied reader learns at the last hour that Jesus had other followers, women followers, from the first. Moreover, these surprising followers stay to the last—although at a distance. Three of them are there at the empty tomb as well.

Conflict is the key to the Markan plot. As Markan characterization does not depend on psychological development within the characters, so the plot does not turn on high suspense and complicated intrigue among the characters. The plot moves by conflicts between groups of characters or, rather, between God or Jesus and groups of characters. There are multiple conflicts, along several dimensions. The kingdom of God is in conflict with all other claims to power and authority. Jesus is in conflict with demons and unclean spirits. Jesus and the Jewish authorities are in continuing conflict over issues of authority and interpretation of the Law (Torah). Jesus and the disciples are in conflict over what it means to be the Messiah and thus what it means to follow him. All the conflicts have to do with power and authority. Where do ultimate power and authority lie? How should human power and authority be exercised? But all the conflicts are not the same. The disciples, for example, are not portrayed and evaluated by the implied author in the same way as the Jewish leaders are. And, of course, the Markan Jesus responds to the disciples very differently from how he reacts to the other groups with whom he comes into conflict.

Thus the elements of narrative include the five Ws one might expect in the first paragraph of a news story: who (characters), where and when (settings), what and why (plot). To the extent that story and discourse can be separated analytically, these three are elements of story. A fourth narrative element is rhetoric, the how of the story-as-discoursed. Rhetoric refers to how the implied author persuades the implied reader to follow the story. Because narrative criticism (like literary criticism in general) asks, "How does the text mean?" narrative criticism takes a keen interest in rhetoric.

Rhetoric

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. Persuasion, of course, works differently in varying contexts. Markan rhetoric is narrative rhetoric. By the way the story is told, the implied author persuades the implied reader first to understand and then to share and extend the story's levels of meaning. Mark's rhetoric is one of juxtaposition—placing scene over against scene in order to elicit comparison, contrast, insight. This juxtaposition includes repetition, not only of scenes but also of words and phrases; duality is widespread. Juxtaposition also includes intercalation—splicing one story into another—and framing—placing similar stories as the beginning and the end of a series. In addition, juxtaposition includes foreshadowing and echoing of words, phrases, and whole events. Echoing and foreshadowing may be intratextual (within the text) or intertextual (between texts). The intertextual echoes heard in Mark's Gospel reverberate with the Septuagint. Symbolism involves the juxtaposition of a literal meaning and a metaphorical one. Irony involves the juxtaposition of an apparent or expected meaning and a deeper or surprising one. Repetition, intercalation, framing, foreshadowing and echoing, symbolism, and irony are favorite Markan rhetorical devices. They are part of the discourse of the narrative. Without the implied author's discourse, the implied reader could not receive the story. The story is never received directly but only as discoursed, only rhetorically.

The interwoven scenes of Jesus' trial before the high priest and Peter's denial (14:53-72) illustrate a number of these rhetorical techniques. The two stories are intercalated. The narrator first tells that Jesus was taken to the high priest (v. 53) and then that Peter followed "at a distance" into the courtyard of the high priest (v. 54). The scene between Jesus and the high priest and other chief priests is played out (vv. 55-65), and then the scene between Peter and the high priest's servant girl and other bystanders is played out (vv. 66-72). The implied reader cannot forget the presence of Peter "warming himself at the fire" (v. 54) all the while Jesus endures the fiery rage of the high priest. Jesus' scene concludes with the guards taunting him to "Prophecy!" (v. 65). Peter's scene concludes with his remembrance of Jesus' prophecy of his denial (v. 72), an ominous echo of the earlier foreshadowing. It is sadly ironic that Peter's noisy denial of his discipleship in order to save his life is narrated almost simultaneously with Jesus' quiet affirmation of his messiahship, although it will lead to his death. The rhetorical juxtaposition of these scenes—characters, words, actions, settings—in the unfolding plot pushes the implied reader not only to judge the two contrasting characters but also to judge himself or herself.

The order of stories or scenes in Mark 8:22—10:52 illustrates the rhetorical devices of repetition, framing, and symbolism. In this section of the narrative, the Markan Jesus three times predicts his passion and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:33). After each prediction, the disciples manifest their limited understanding of serving and suffering as aspects of Messiahship and discipleship (8:32-33; 9:32-34, 38; 10:35-41). After each misunderstanding, Jesus renews his teaching on this topic (8:34-38; 9:35-37, 39-50; 10:42-45). Of course, each time Jesus teaches the disciples, the implied author teaches the implied reader. Repetition adds clarity and force.

Around these three three-part scenes (passion prediction units), other scenes (of teaching and healing) are set. Then all these scenes are framed by the only two Markan stories of the healing of blindness. At the beginning of the series, the two-stage healing of blindness at Bethsaida is narrated (8:22-26). At the close, the healing of blind Bartimaeus, who follows Jesus "on the way," is recounted (10:46-52). Blindness and sight are symbolic of misunderstanding and insight. As Jesus healed the blind man of Bethsaida in two stages, so he must teach the disciples in two stages about his messiahship. At Caesarea Philippi, Peter tells that he "sees" Jesus' power and shows that he is "blind" to Jesus' suffering service (8:27-33). As the mighty deeds of chapters 1-8 were the first stage of Jesus' teaching, so the passion prediction units of chapters 8-10 are the second stage. The goal of the journey is for all—disciples and implied readers—to "see" as Bartimaeus does and to follow "on the way."

Understanding the narrative rhetoric is central to the work of the narrative critic because rhetoric is the how of the story's telling and "How does the text mean?" is the literary question. Earlier source, form, and redaction critics found Mark's rhetorical style rough and primitive. This judgment may be true at the level of the sentence. (English translations always smooth out Mark's Greek a bit.) But Mark's narrative rhetoric must be appreciated at the level of the scene. In the intriguing juxtaposition of scenes—with their characters, settings, and plot developments—the rhetoric of the Markan Gospel works its persuasive ways with the implied reader.

Narrative criticism compensates for the fragmentation of the text into smaller and smaller units by form and redaction criticism. Even redaction criticism—with its potential to be concerned for the Gospel as a whole—frequently bogs down in ever more meticulous divisions between "tradition" and "redaction"—what Mark received and what he added. Nevertheless, perhaps narrative criticism—in its holistic passion—overcompensates. Deconstructive criticism (see chap. 4) compensates for the totalizing effect of narrative criticism—creating a self-consistent unity of the text. Deconstructive criticism may overcompensate as well. But it is good for narrative criticism to be reminded of what it also knows—and often proclaims—of the tensions, gaps, and mysteries of the text itself—and even the text against itself.

Narrative criticism seeks to avoid the "intentional fallacy" of redaction criticism. The narrative critic does not pursue the quest for the real author's intention. Instead, the narrative critic seeks to analyze and appreciate the implied author's effect—that is, the text itself. But what is "the text itself"? Narrative critics affirm that it is the center of a communication process involving author, text, and reader. They (we) focus on the text, partly in reaction to redaction critics' focus on the author, but mostly because we find the text so intriguing.

Reader-response criticism (see chap. 3) seeks to avoid the objectivism of narrative criticism—viewing the text as an autonomous object. Reader-response criticism may overcompensate as well. Perhaps narrative criticism's appreciation for the role of the implied reader guards it from the extreme of objectivism. No doubt biblical criticism would benefit greatly from an approach that could—if

not simultaneously at least sequentially—keep in view all parts of the communication process: author, text, and reader. Then, “*What did the text mean?*” and “*How does the text mean?*” might contribute more fairly and more fully to the older and enduring question, “*What does the text mean—to me—to us?*”

Narrative Examples

We turn now to an extended example of narrative criticism at work in chapters 4–8 of the Gospel of Mark. Such an example should help to clarify and integrate the narrative elements. Chapters 4–8 have been chosen because of their rhetorical richness, because they hold together as a subunit within the entire Gospel, and because what Mark does here with these smaller stories is quite distinctive from what Matthew and Luke do with many of the same stories in their Gospels. We could study each narrative element in turn; first characters, then settings, and so on. This type of analysis is often done by narrative critics. But here we will look at the interrelated narrative elements as the story unfolds from 4:1 through 8:26, a pattern increasingly frequent within narrative criticism. (Let the reader understand: my implied reader is reading Mark 4–8 along with this chapter.)

Parables on the Sea (4:1-34)

At the beginning of chapter 4, the Markan narrator takes considerable trouble to make sure the narratee locates Jesus at the sea. Within one verse the word *sea* occurs three times and the word *boat* once. The narratee knows from 1:16 that the Sea of Galilee is intended. The setting places Jesus opposite the crowd. Jesus is in the boat on the sea. (The Greek is even more dramatic: “he got into a boat and sat on the sea.”) The crowd is beside the sea on the land. Spatial location underlines the differences between characters.

This setting represents a change from the previous scene. The action also changes. Jesus had been healing and exorcising demons; now he is teaching. The Markan Jesus is often said to be teaching or preaching, but few examples are given. Chapter 4, the parable chapter, is an important exception. The narrator’s introductory comment, “he began to teach them many things in parables,” is followed by Jesus’ telling of one parable, that of the sower.

Verse 10 presents a change of characters and thus a new scene. It has proven very difficult for real readers to agree on which characters are now assumed by the narrator to be present. It becomes immediately clear that when Jesus was “alone” means when the large crowd had left, not when he was solitary. What does not become immediately clear is who are “those who were around him along with the twelve.” If there are two groups (the Twelve, the others), they speak as one and Jesus so responds. It seems likely (although this observation is clear only from further analysis throughout the Gospel) that the implied author creates ambiguity about who is hearing Jesus in order to encourage the implied reader to read himself or herself into the story. The implied author, the

narrator, and the Markan Jesus have a shared point of view, and they simultaneously address the characters, the narratee, and the implied reader. The would-be two groups who are really one (the Twelve plus the others) are one over against “those outside.”

To those inside has been given (the passive voice suggests “given by God”) “the secret [or, better, ‘mystery’] of the kingdom of God.” For those outside, everything “comes in parables.” Parables are comparisons or riddles. In understanding parables, those outside are no better off than those to whom the prophet Isaiah spoke: they may hear, but they do not understand. This ironic allusion to Isaiah 6:9-10, which is itself ironic, is an intertextual echo of the Septuagint.

This mysterious little scene about the mystery of the kingdom is followed by the Markan Jesus’ allegorical explanation of the parable of the sower. Each element of the parable is taken to represent some element in the larger story of the growth of “the word.” “The word” (logos) is an early Christian synonym for the Gospel, the good news, the message by and about Jesus as the Christ. According to this explanation, the parable of the sower is about improper and proper ways of hearing the word. In its Markan narrative context (parable/insiders and outsiders/explanation), the story of the sower is symbolic of hearing parables as outsiders and as insiders. Insiders receive not only “the mystery” but also an additional explanation.

This twofold pattern, parable plus explanation, seems to be repeated. Verse 21 is a little parable about a lamp; verse 22 is a brief explanation. Verse 24 is a little parable about a measure; verse 25 is a brief explanation. Verse 23, right in the middle, is the echoing refrain: “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” (cf. 4:9). Next the narrator presents Jesus presenting two slightly longer parables, both about seeds. Neither one is followed by an explanation, but verses 33-34 restate this pattern. To “them” (the outsiders) Jesus spoke the word in parables, “as they were able to hear it.” To “his disciples” (and other insiders?) he explained everything privately. As other features in the Markan narrative make even more clear, who is inside and who is outside is not a matter of social status or role but of response to Jesus. “Let anyone with ears, to hear listen!”

The final two seed parables offer explicit comparisons to “the kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God comes *from God*, not from human effort. It comes in God’s time and thus, from a human point of view, it always comes as a surprise. All three seed parables suggest that the best predictor of the kingdom’s fulfillment is not its beginning but God’s power. But all of these implications are rhetorically shown, not told. Like the characters within the story, the implied readers of the narrative must have ears to hear and eyes to see. One becomes an insider by perceiving and understanding. The Markan Jesus and the Markan implied author recognize all such insight as a mysterious gift.

Mighty Deeds on and by the Sea (4:35—5:43)

The sea continues to be the dominant setting for Markan narrative events from 4:1 through 8:21. When the dominant setting switches to “the way” at 8:27, the plot also takes a turn. Narrative elements frequently echo each other in

Mark's narrative. At 4:35 the narrator reports a dramatic event that occurs on the sea. Jesus is already in the boat; the disciples join him, as well as other people in other boats. A windstorm comes up, threatening to fill the boat with water from the waves. Yet Jesus is asleep in the stern. The desperate disciples wake him, saying, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Apparently they assume Jesus *could* do something to help—if he just *would*. He does. He "rebukes" the wind, as he had earlier rebuked unclean spirits; and he tells the sea to become still. It does. Jesus also questions the disciples: "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" The disciples—not too surprisingly, "filled with great awe"—question themselves: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

The sea scene ends there. No character answers this question. It is forwarded to the implied reader, who shares with the implied author knowledge of the Hebrew Bible in the form of the Septuagint. Psalm 107:23-32 is especially relevant.

Some went down to the sea in ships,
 doing business on the mighty waters;
 they saw the deeds of the LORD,
 his wondrous works in the deep.
 For he commanded and raised the stormy wind,
 which lifted up the waves of the sea.

.....
 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
 and he brought them out from their distress;
 he made the storm be still,
 and the waves of the sea were hushed.

PSALM 107:23-25, 28-29

Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? The Lord God. The Lord Jesus Christ. The power of Jesus the Christ is the power of God. All these affirmations are shown, not told. The fact that the disciples do not explicitly answer their own rhetorical question has more to do with the discourse than with the story. The implied author has the disciples leave the question open for the implied reader. The implied author seems to know that a conclusion the implied reader must work to arrive at will be held more strongly. The narrative rhetoric is persuasive.

Despite the storm, Jesus and the disciples arrive on "the other side of the sea" at "the country of the Gerasenes." Historical interpreters, perhaps beginning with Matthew, who substitutes the name Gadarenes (Matt 8:28), have had difficulty locating such a place. From a narrative critical point of view, the country of the Gerasenes is gentile territory opposite Jewish Galilee. If the implied reader does not know that narrative fact from the name, he or she will surely know it from the great herd of swine found there. Because Jewish law classifies the pig as an unclean animal, one unfit for humans or God, primarily Jewish areas do not support large herds of swine. The casting out of a legion of demons from the Gerasene man, who had lived as a wild man among the

tombs, is the Markan Jesus' first healing of a Gentile. When the exorcised demons enter the swine, as they had requested, and the swine rush to their deaths in the sea, the gentile region seems to be purged of evil and made ready for Jesus' preaching of the good news. Jesus tells the healed Gerasene to go home and tell how much "the Lord" has done for him. Instead, the man goes throughout the "ten (Greek) cities" of the region, the Decapolis, proclaiming "how much Jesus had done for him." Who then is the Lord? The scene ends with all marveling.

The sea, however, still orients the scenes and the movements of the plot. At 5:21 the narrator tells that Jesus crossed "again in the boat to the other side," where a great crowd gathered about him "by the sea." For any implied reader who might be confused about which side of the sea is now "the other side," the implied author again gives a second indication: Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue, appears. No synagogues are needed where herds of swine are kept. Back in Jewish Galilee, Jesus heals his own people again. Two healing stories are intercalated: the raising of Jairus's daughter and the healing of the hemorrhaging woman. A third indication of the Jewishness of the setting is the repeated number twelve: a twelve-year flow of blood, a twelve-year old girl. As was mentioned above, twelve is symbolic of the twelve tribes and thus of Israel.

The intercalation is done very naturally. At times it has even been taken literally and historically rather than narratively and rhetorically. Because the woman interrupted Jesus on his way to Jairus's house, Jairus's daughter died. Here intercalation, the inserting of one story into another, is an integral part of the plot. But Markan intercalation is always for interpretive purposes. The framing story is to be interpreted in light of the inside story, and vice versa. Both suppliants have extreme needs. Jairus's daughter is "at the point of death" and then dead; the woman has spent everything she had on medical treatment, only to grow worse. In addition, both suppliants have extreme faith. The woman believes that Jesus' power is so great that merely touching the hem of his garment can heal her; Jairus, with Jesus' encouragement, believes that even if his daughter is dead Jesus' power can enable her to live again. According to Jewish law, the continual uncleanness of the hemorrhaging woman made her a social and religious outcaste, as dead socially as Jairus's daughter was physically. The child becomes again a daughter to her father, and the woman becomes again a "daughter" (5:34) of Israel.

At the close of the raising of Jairus' daughter, and thus of the two intercalated healing stories, the narrator adds—not too surprisingly—"at this they were overcome with amazement." But the next addition is surprising: "[And] he strictly ordered them that no one should know this. . . ." Impossible! The commotion, weeping, and wailing mentioned in verse 38 were, in effect, the first phase of the girl's funeral. It would be more than a little difficult not to say something to the mourners. As is frequently the case, what cannot be taken literally can be meaningful at another level. Redaction critics labeled Jesus' command to secrecy here and elsewhere "the messianic secret" and interpreted it in terms of Mark's editing of tradition to meet the needs of his community. Narrative critics see it as a plot device that calls attention to the complexity of

the image of messiahship in the Markan Gospel. If Jairus told all that he knew about Jesus, he would tell *only* that Jesus was powerful beyond imagining. For the implied author of Mark that statement would be a half-truth; the other half, developed in the other half of Mark's Gospel and equally beyond imagining, is that Jesus is committed to using that power only for service, even in the face of suffering and death. At 5:43 the implied reader knows more than Jairus knows, but not yet the whole truth. Jesus' charge to keep quiet his powerful deed is another way for the implied author to raise the question of his identity. If Lord, if Messiah, what kind of Lord? what kind of Messiah?

Preaching/Rejection/Death (6:1-30)

The event that follows the raising of Jairus's daughter in the plotted narrative suggests another reason for the Markan Jesus' hesitancy in making his mighty deeds known: even a half-truth about his power can be misunderstood. Jesus is rejected in the synagogue in his hometown. His teaching results not only in the astonishment of the people, as it had done earlier, but also in their anger and offense at him. Who does he think he is, anyway? He's just Mary's son (probably a slur, because a male child was normally identified as his father's son). His brothers and sisters are not anything special. Jesus says, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country [hometown], and among his own kin, and in his own house" (6:4, RSV). The implied reader says, "Jesus is a prophet."

The Markan Jesus' response to this rejection is threefold: (1) to heal whom-ever he can, limited, it would seem, by the people's unbelief, (2) to move on to other villages and teach; and (3) to send out the Twelve on a mission of their own. Jesus commissions the Twelve, two by two, to go out to preach and exorcise unclean spirits, just as he had been doing. He charges them not to rely on their own provisions ("no bread, no bag, no money") but on the hospitality of others. He warns them that they will be rejected, just as he has been. They go and carry out their double mission of preaching and healing.

While the Twelve are gone, as it were, the narrator tells another story, one about John the Baptizer. This is an intercalation, and it is arranged for interpretive purposes, not just for the convenience of the plot. The link is King Herod's learning about how Jesus' name had become known. What does Herod think about this famous Jesus? Others may think he is Elijah or a prophet, but Herod, apparently feeling the pangs of guilt, thinks Jesus is John the Baptizer raised to life again. For Herod, Jesus raises again the trauma of John's beheading.

In 1:14, passing reference is made by the narrator to the "handing over" (Greek, *paradidonai*) of John the Baptizer: "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, . . ." John preached and was rejected. Jesus is preaching. Nothing more is said about John's arrest until 6:14-29, at which point Jesus has been rejected and the Twelve are preaching. John's imprisonment and beheading at the command of Herod is told in a lively and detailed narrative flashback or analepsis. As this story within a story closes with John's death, Jesus' disciples return from a successful preaching tour. (They are sent out as "the twelve" [6:7], but they return as "the apostles"

[6:30]. *Apostles* means the "ones sent out.") The Markan narrative rhetoric discloses a parallelism between the preaching, being rejected, being "handed over," and death of John, Jesus, and the disciples. At chapter 6 John is dead, Jesus is rejected, and the disciples are preaching. What will happen to Jesus next? What will happen to the disciples?

Mighty Deeds by and on the Sea (6:31-56)

Jesus is concerned for his "apostles"; he takes them away from the crowd by boat to a wilderness place. But Jesus' attempt to find the leisure to eat with his disciples leads, ironically, to the work of teaching and feeding the crowd. Jesus teaches the great multitude that awaits him in the hoped-for deserted place because "they were like sheep without a shepherd." This echo of a common image of aimlessness from the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Num 27:17; 1 Kgs 22:17; Ezek 34:5) alerts the implied reader to the Jewishness of the setting.

The story of the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes and the feeding of the five thousand is filled with dialogue between Jesus and the disciples. "Send the crowd away to get food." "No, you feed them." "How can we feed them?" "Start with what you've got." The miraculous meal in the wilderness echoes God's provision of manna in the wilderness, but it also foreshadows for the implied reader the eucharistic meal. The four verbs *took*, *blessed*, *broke*, and *gave* (6:41) are repeated in the narration of the last supper (14:22), which models (actually is modeled after) the Eucharist. As is appropriate for meals that God hosts, everyone eats and is satisfied, and twelve baskets full of leftovers are collected. The number twelve reminds the implied reader (symbolically) that the recipients are Jews. The surplus of bread outshines the miracle of the manna, in which nothing extra could remain, except for use on the Sabbath (Exod 16:13-30).

"Immediately" Jesus sends the disciples off by boat again, not to some nearby deserted place this time, but to Bethsaida, a city on the other (gentile) side of the sea. Jesus dismisses the crowd and goes "up on the mountain" to pray. Which mountain? A mountain by the lakeshore in Galilee? No, the mountain where all of God's prophets communicate with God. The narrator's use of the contrast between land and sea to contrast characters at 6:47 is reminiscent of 4:1: "[And] when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land." The disciples are unable to complete their mission to "go on ahead" of Jesus to gentile Bethsaida. The wind is against them. Then they think they see a ghost passing by them, walking on the water. The implied reader knows it is Jesus yet is able to understand their terror. Jesus' words are another intertextual echo from Exodus: "I am" (usually translated "It is I"). God said "I am" to Moses from the burning bush (Exod 3:14). Who then is this? It does not surprise the implied reader that the wind ceases.

The narrator's next comment, the conclusion to this scene, does surprise. "And they [the disciples] were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened" (6:51b-52). Why doesn't the narrator say, "They did not understand about the wind or the walking on water"? What do the loaves have to do with the sea? And why are so many

images from Exodus being stacked up here? Bread in the wilderness, walking on (through) the sea, "I am"—and now hardened hearts. The passive voice ("their hearts were hardened") suggests that the disciples' hearts, like Pharaoh's, were hardened by God so that God's overall purpose for the people of God could be worked out. The implied reader must keep reading!

Surprising closings and openings of scenes are becoming the norm. From the cryptic reference to hardened hearts, the implied reader moves not to an anticipated arrival at Bethsaida on the east but to a surprising landing at Gennesaret, still on the west. In the midst of so many other amazing narrative events, one would not have been shocked to read of a successful, even miraculous, crossing to Bethsaida once Jesus entered the boat. But Jewish Gennesaret it is, where a narrative summary of Jesus' ministry of healing is presented. People bring the sick to him from everywhere; as many as touch even the fringe of his cloak are made well. The faith and healing of the hemorrhaging woman echoes for the implied reader. By the sea Jesus feeds five thousand; on the sea Jesus walks; by the sea Jesus heals many. Jesus has authority over the sea—and quite a bit more.

Conflict over Jewish Law (7:1-23)

Authority is the issue in the next series of scenes. Jesus' antagonists are "the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem" (7:1). Pharisees and scribes were the chief antagonists of the Markan Jesus in a series of five controversy stories narrated earlier (2:1—3:6). The "scribes who came down from Jerusalem" appeared earlier as the ones accusing Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebul, the prince of demons (3:22-30). Jerusalem itself, which has a high positive connotation in traditional Judaism, has a negative connotation in the Gospel of Mark. So, when Pharisees and Jerusalem scribes gather together to see Jesus, the implied reader anticipates conflict. And conflict there surely is.

The conflict is triggered by the failure of Jesus' disciples to observe the Jewish (and particularly Pharisaic) regulations about ritual handwashing before meals. The implied author finds it necessary in a parenthetical aside to explain this "tradition of the elders" for any implied reader who may be unfamiliar with it. Because at other times the implied author assumes the implied reader is quite familiar with the Hebrew Bible (in Greek translation), a mixed group of Jewish and gentile implied readers may be indicated, or implied readers who are familiar with Jewish *Scripture* but not Jewish *tradition* may be assumed. In the explanatory aside, the Pharisees and all the Jews are "they."

The conflict is expressed more in monologue than in dialogue. The Markan narrator's telling is one-sided from the start. The Pharisees and scribes get one question, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" Even that question has been elaborately anticipated by the narrator (7:2-4). Jesus gets two paragraphs of direct defense and counterattack. Jesus turns a statement from the prophet Isaiah against his antagonists. The Isaiah passage underlines what is at stake here for the Markan Jesus: divine commandment versus human tradition. As an example of this

opposition, Jesus suggests the disparity between one of the Ten Commandments, "Honor your father and your mother," and the traditional use (and abuse) of Corban. *Corban* refers to money or property that was verbally "offered" or "dedicated" to God, that is, withdrawn from ordinary use. Although the money was not handed over directly to the Temple treasury, it was not required to be used for care of one's parents. The "tradition of the elders" that may momentarily sound honorable on the lips of the Pharisees and scribes is clearly condemned when it is reclassified by Jesus as "human tradition" in opposition to "divine commandment." Jesus appeals to a higher authority—Scripture—and one that his antagonists themselves profess to honor. His antagonists are silenced.

A change of scene occurs with the entrance of a new group of characters. Jesus calls the crowd to himself again and opens with these words: "Listen to me, all of you, and understand." The words echo similar uses of "listen" and "understand" in chapter 4, the parable chapter, and, indeed, these words introduce a parable here. It is a very brief parable (comparison or riddle) about defilement being caused by what comes out of people, not by what goes into them. Because the previous scene concerned the "defiled hands" of the disciples, the topic continues despite the change of scene.

This pattern occurs again immediately (7:17): a change of scene without a change of topic, a third scene concerned with defilement. There is a spatial change: Jesus enters a house. The narrator had not commented on his location earlier; it was presumably out-of-doors. There is a shift in characters: Jesus leaves the crowd. Then his disciples ask him about the parable. The presence of the disciples was not mentioned at the narration of the parable. The implied author does not make everything explicit; thus what is made explicit becomes all the more important.

The shift from Jesus' public teaching of the crowd to his private teaching of the disciples occurs throughout the Markan narrative. It occurs in chapter 4: parable to the crowd, explanation of the parable to the disciples (and "those who were around him"). Frequently, as in chapter 7, this character shift is paralleled by a spatial shift: from out-of-doors or an unspecified location to in "the house."

Chapter 7 also echoes chapter 4 in the introduction of Jesus' explanation of the parable by questioning the disciples' lack of understanding (7:18; 4:13). Only when characters to whom the Markan Jesus is willing to give additional teaching misunderstand does the Markan implied author have an opportunity to give additional teaching to the implied reader. And here the narrator goes beyond Jesus! Jesus says that persons are not defiled by anything that enters their stomachs and passes through their digestive systems. The immediate implication is that persons are not defiled by dirt from unwashed hands. But the narrator notes, parenthetically: "(Thus be declared all foods clean)." (As the implied reader is aware, observing clean and unclean foods was one of the more obvious ways Jews were distinct from Gentiles.) Then Jesus says that persons are defiled by evil thoughts that come out of their hearts. The riddle is solved. The implicit is explicit.

Contact with Gentiles (7:24—8:10)

"[And] from there he set out and went away to . . ." From where? Where have we been? the implied reader might well ask. The topic was defilement, and the antagonists were Pharisees and scribes, so the territory must have been Jewish; there is where they would be. In fact, the last landfill was Gennesaret. "[And] from there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre [and Sidon]" (7:24). These place-names indicate quite a change. Tyre and Sidon are in the ancient land of Phoenicia, the Roman province of Syria, as far north as the Markan narrative reaches and definitely gentile territory. But the Markan narrator likes to make sure the narratee follows. The second indication of the gentile setting of the scene is the double description of the woman who seeks Jesus' help: "a Gentile [a Greek], of Syrophenician origin."

The narrator tells that Jesus' intention in going north was not to seek out more crowds to heal. "[And] he entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice" (7:24b). The fact that the Syrophenician woman seeks out the secluded Jesus is just the first indication of her persistence on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter. The Markan Jesus rebuffs her initial request, and he does so with a powerful and degrading metaphor. "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food [bread] and throw it to the dogs." The children are Israel. She is the dog, and she yaps right back! Two can play at metaphors. "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." She has him. She has risked a second rebuke and won her daughter's health. "For this saying [word, *logos*]" (7:29, *rsv*), Jesus says, you may go home to a healed child, a healed gentile child. (Jesus, too, seems to have experienced healing.)

The story of the Syrophenician demoniac is not the first story in Mark of a Gentile healed by Jesus. (This fact interests form critics and bothers redaction critics, who say that it would make more sense if it were the first gentile healing.) Even as the story echoes the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, it has a certain freshness. It explains more fully the outreach of Jesus' healing power. The Markan Jesus is not opposed to giving additional explanations—even in actions.

The next spatial shift is perhaps the most confusing one in the entire Markan narrative. "Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis" (7:31). Sidon is north of Tyre, and the region of the Decapolis is east of the Sea of Galilee. So Jesus went north to return south, through the east. The implied author seems less concerned with the logic of the travel route and more concerned with the nature of the destinations: Tyre, Sidon, the Decapolis. Gentile place-names are accumulated for emphasis. The deaf-mute who is healed is also a Gentile.

The healing is, for Mark's Gospel, a particularly physical one (touching, spitting), but the techniques are common to healers in the Greco-Roman world. The man is healed privately, away from the multitude, and Jesus charges those who know of it to tell no one. But the charge backfires: "the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it" (7:36). Astonishment beyond measure is the end result of this encounter with one who "makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

Two stories of gentile healings have followed the three-scene discussion of defilement. Maybe it is not just all *foods* that the Markan implied author thinks Jesus has declared clean. That possibility is strengthened by the next story: the feeding of the four thousand. The feeding stories resound with the loudest and clearest intratextual echoes of the Markan narrative. Their overall similarities set off their significant differences. The five thousand are fed somewhere on the west (Jewish) side of the sea; the four thousand are fed somewhere on the east (gentile) side of the sea. (There have been no place references since the mention of the Decapolis.) In the former case, the Markan Jesus' compassion is linked to the people being like sheep without a shepherd, an image from the Hebrew Bible. In the latter case, Jesus' compassion is linked to their hunger, a universal human problem. In the former case, twelve baskets of leftovers are collected; in the latter case, seven. As twelve is a number symbolic of the Jews, so seven is a number symbolic of "the nations," the Gentiles. (In Acts 6, at the instigation of the "Hellenists," seven deacons are chosen to assist the twelve apostles.)

The allusions—backward to the manna of the exodus and forward to the bread of the last supper and the Eucharist—remain constant between the two feeding stories. What is added is that such bread is for Gentiles as well as for Jews. Jesus heals and feeds his own; that would be story enough. But Jesus also heals and feeds outsiders. That action takes some explaining; it is harder to understand.

Signs and Seeing (8:11-26)

After dismissing the four thousand, Jesus "immediately" gets into a boat with his disciples and goes to the district of Dalmanutha. The location of such a place is no longer known, although it is generally thought to be in Galilee on the sea. Will the Markan narrator give a second clue about the setting? Yes! "The Pharisees came and began to argue with him . . ." (8:11). The implied reader knows the journey has returned to Galilee. Just before his departure from Galilee to gentile Tyre and Sidon, Jesus was arguing with the Pharisees. Now on his return from the gentile Decapolis, Jesus and the Pharisees pick up where they left off. If Jesus has so much authority, surely he can produce a sign from heaven, that is, from God, for the Pharisees. Something clear and explicit would be nice. Jesus sighs. No such sign will be given—to them or to "this generation." In Mark's Gospel Jesus performs mighty deeds (*dynameis*) but not signs (*sēmeia*). (Contrast John's Gospel.) To ask for a sign is to demand that divine power be present on one's own terms rather than to perceive it wherever it manifests itself. So Jesus leaves the Pharisees. He gets into the boat again and departs "to the other side."

Yet the next scene is not on "the other side" but on the sea itself. It is the third scene carried out on the sea in Mark's narrative: first, calming the sea; second, walking on the sea; third, a conversation in the boat on the sea. This dialogue is not just another conversation between Jesus and the disciples. It is a careful, symbolic drawing together of themes that have been developed since 4:1. The implied reader's ears ring with echoes: the sea, the boat, loaves of

bread, hardened hearts, eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear, five thousand, twelve baskets, four thousand, seven baskets, understand? So many things have happened, and then happened again in a different setting. Jesus tells a parable to all, and then explains it to some. Jesus heals and feeds at home and then far beyond. There is much to hear and see, to perceive and understand.

As the disciples did not answer their own rhetorical question at 4:41 ("Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"), so they do not answer Jesus' rhetorical question at 8:21 ("Do you not yet understand?"). The beneficiary of both silences is the implied reader, the one for whom the story is being told. To hear only the silence of the disciples and not also the rhetoric of the implied author is to try to read the story without the discourse. Narrative is always story-as-discoursed. Markan rhetorical discourse relies on juxtaposition: item, item, item; comparison, contrast, insight. The implied reader must make the connections—and *may*—because neither the characters nor the narrator make them explicit. Sea, boat, bread, twelve, seven. Do *you* not yet understand?

The conclusion of a large section of Mark (4:1-8:21) with Jesus' questioning of the disciples (8:14-21) suggests that Jesus' disciples are distinguished from his opponents not by possessing the right answers but by being possessed by the right question: not "Why does he not perform a sign from heaven?" (see 8:11), but "Who then is this . . . ?" (4:41). Jesus responds to opponents and followers with both questions and answers: "Why does this generation ask for a sign?" (8:12). "Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation" (8:12). "Do you not yet understand?" (8:21). "I am" (6:50). "I will go before you to Galilee" (14:28; cf. 16:7). Some interpreters—including redaction, narrative, and reader-response critics—see the misunderstanding (or incomprehension) of the disciples as central to Mark 4–8. Others, including the present author, see as a central thrust of these chapters the search for understanding—understanding of who Jesus is and thus of what following him entails. The disciples embody that search, that ongoing process. Like Mark's Gospel itself (its opening line is "The beginning of the good news . . ."), the search for understanding does not come to a decisive end in the Markan narrative. But neither the Markan narrator nor the Markan Jesus (nor his messenger at the empty tomb) gives up on the disciples. In this action, too, the implied reader is asked to follow.

"[And] they came to Bethsaida" (8:22). Bethsaida! Because of the significance of the sea conversation, a real reader, at least, and perhaps the implied reader as well, could almost forget about crossing the sea and surely about Bethsaida. Many scenes back—after feeding the five thousand and before walking on the sea—Jesus had tried to send the disciples across the sea before him to gentile Bethsaida. They never made it on their own. And now Jesus has led them there, led them to the Gentiles by an elaborate detour, through an additional explanation, as a second chance to see and hear the given mystery. The detour involved starting from the familiar (healings at Gennesaret, 6:53-56), arguing against the conventional (the tradition of the elders, 7:1-23), responding to the "other" (Syrophenician woman and deaf mute in the Decapolis, 7:24-37), feeding all who are hungry (feeding the four thousand, 8:1-10), departing from those who demand divine presence on their own terms

(Pharisees requesting a sign, 8:11-13), and questioning those who travel along-side (conversation with the disciples on the sea, 8:14-21). So they came at last to Bethsaida, and at Bethsaida the blind see, even if by stages.

Several echoes of the healing of the deaf mute in the Decapolis are heard in the story of the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida. Both suppliants are Gentiles and suffer from communicative disorders. Both persons are healed away from the crowd. Jesus even leads the blind man out of the village. Both stories involve physical healing techniques: applying spittle or saliva to the affected body part and touching with the fingers or hands. Both accounts conclude with Jesus' admonition not to make the healing known. Jesus tells the once-blind man not even to go into the village. The distinctive aspect of the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida—not only in Mark but in all the Gospels—is a healing process of two stages. Blindness and sight are frequently used symbolically in the ancient (and modern!) world. The two-stage transition from one to the other increases the symbolic possibilities.

The two-stage healing of the blind man outside Bethsaida is almost universally recognized as a pivotal scene in the Markan Gospel. It is generally linked symbolically with the two scenes that follow it: the "confession" of Peter (8:27-30) and Jesus' first passion prediction (8:31-33). Peter "sees" that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. But he fails to "see" that, as the Christ, Jesus must suffer. To heal Peter (and perhaps the implied reader) of that blindness will require a second stage, the second half of Mark's Gospel. The narrative clearly supports this reading.

But the two-stage healing of blindness is a transitional scene, and it also has symbolic links with the scenes that precede it. Jesus has been working in two stages all along: parables and explanations, Jewish healings and gentile healings, Jewish feeding and gentile feeding. The duality of the Markan Jesus' technique reflects the twofoldness of the Markan implied author's convictions: Jesus is Messiah for both Jews and Gentiles; Jesus is Messiah of power and suffering service. To see that is to see everything clearly.

Conclusion

The implied author of Mark is a storyteller—and a masterful one. For this reason, narrative criticism seems an especially appropriate approach to reading and interpreting the Gospel of Mark. Narrative critics seek to learn more about *how* the story means, that is, how the implied author uses characters, settings, plot, and rhetoric to communicate meaning. If such study can help us align ourselves with the implied reader, our own roles as real readers—and re-readers—of Mark will surely be enriched. We will look intently—and see.

FURTHER READING

General

CHATMAN, SEYMOUR. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978. A classic presentation of the elements of

"story" and "discourse" that has been widely influential in biblical narrative criticism; includes thorough discussions of plot, setting, characters, implied author, types of narrators (covert versus overt), and point of view, with examples drawn from secular literature and film.

- GENETTE, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980. An attempt at a comprehensive, systematic theory of narrative and simultaneously a study of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, which focuses on careful delineations of the order, duration, and frequency of narrated events and the mood and voice of narratives.
- RIMMON-KENAN, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London and New York: Methuen, 1983. A clear, concise, and very helpful overview of narrative aspects: events, characters, time, characterization, focalization, levels and voices, speech representation, the text and its reading, with examples drawn from various periods and various national literatures.

Biblical

- BERLIN, Adele. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Sheffield, Eng.: The Almond Press, 1983. A thoughtful and accessible discussion of aspects of (theoretical) poetics and (practical) interpretation of Hebrew Bible narratives, focusing on character and characterization in the stories of David's wives and on point of view; includes also an extended analysis of the book of Ruth and a reflection of the interrelations of literary and historical methods.
- CULPEPPER, R. Alan. *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983. A thorough and rich reading of the narrative of John's Gospel, exploring, in turn, the narrator and point of view, narrative time, plot, characters, implicit commentary, and the implied reader.
- FUNK, Robert W. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1988. An extensive presentation of narrative grammar, how narratives work; especially strong in analyzing smaller segments within narratives.
- KELBER, Werner H. *Mark's Story of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979. A brief, dramatic retelling of the Markan narrative focused on the negative portrayal of the disciples.
- KINGSBURY, Jack Dean. *Matthew as Story*. 2d ed. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988. A literary critical reading of Matthew with emphasis on the plot or story line of Jesus and the story line of the disciples.
- MALBON, Elizabeth Struthers. *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark*. New Voices in Biblical Studies. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986. The Biblical Seminar 13. Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991. A detailed analysis of the spatial settings of Mark based on a (literary) structuralist methodology and a suggestion of their significance to the Gospel as a whole.
- MOORE, Stephen D. *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989. A lively, scholarly critique of narrative criticism and reader-response criticism from the point of view of deconstruction and postmodernism; includes an extensive bibliography.
- PETERSEN, Norman R. *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics*. Guides to Biblical Scholarship. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978. A rich, yet accessible introduction to literary criticism of the New Testament; includes helpful discussions of the differing approaches of historical and literary criticism, contributions of structuralism, story time and plotted time in Mark, and narrative world and real world in Luke-Acts.

- POLAND, Lynn M. *Literary Criticism and Biblical Hermeneutics: A Critique of Formalist Approaches*. American Academy of Religion Academy Series 48. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985. A critique of the New Critical influence on biblical studies, focusing on examinations of the work of John Dominic Crossan, Dan Otto Via, Jr., and Hans W. Frei.
- POWELL, Mark Allan. *What is Narrative Criticism?* Guides to Biblical Scholarship. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990. A clear and inclusive introduction to narrative criticism of the Gospels, moving from a sketch of the relationship of narrative criticism to other critical approaches (biblical and secular) to an overview of narrative elements (story and discourse, events, characters, settings).
- RHOADS, David, and Michie, Donald. *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982. An indispensable and inviting introduction to narrative criticism of Mark, focusing on the rhetoric, settings, plot, and characters; includes a fresh translation of Mark.
- TANNEHILL, Robert C. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. Vol. 1, *The Gospel according to Luke*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986. An exploration of the narrative and theological unity of Luke, with emphasis on the shifting and developing relationships between Jesus and other individual characters and groups of characters.