

THE NARRATIVE SELF
IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

SBL Press

WRITINGS FROM THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD
SUPPLEMENT SERIES

Clare K. Rothschild, General Editor

Number 15

SBL Press



THE NARRATIVE SELF
IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Essays in Honor of Judith Perkins

Edited by
Janet E. Spittler

SBL Press



SBL PRESS

Atlanta

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Perkins, Judith, 1944– honouree. | Spittler, Janet E., 1976– editor.

Title: The narrative self in early Christianity : essays in honor of Judith Perkins / edited by Janet E. Spittler.

Description: Atlanta : SBL Press, 2019. | Series: Writings from the Greco-Roman world supplement series; Number 15 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019026146 (print) | LCCN 2019026147 (ebook) | ISBN 9781628372519 (paperback) | ISBN 9780884143970 (hardback) | ISBN 9780884143987 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles—Criticism, interpretation, etc. | Church history—Primitive and early church, ca. 30-600. | Perkins, Judith, 1944–

Classification: LCC BS2871 .N37 2019 (print) | LCC BS2871 (ebook) | DDC 270.1—dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019026146>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019026147>

Printed on acid-free paper.



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Abbreviations

<i>Abst.</i>	Porphyry, <i>De abstinentia</i>
Acts Andr. Mth.	Acts of Andrew and Matthias
Acts Thadd.	Acts of Thaddaeus
Acts Thom.	Acts of Thomas
Acts Thom. Skin	Acts of Thomas and His Wonderworking Skin
Acts Tim.	Acts of Timothy
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AION	<i>Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli</i>
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>Alex.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Alexander</i>
<i>Amic.</i>	Cicero, <i>De amicitia</i>
<i>Anab.</i>	Arrian, <i>Anabasis</i>
ANF	Roberts, Alexander, and James Donaldson, eds. <i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> . 1885–1887. 10 vols. Repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
<i>Ann.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Annales</i>
ANRW	Temporini, Hildegard, and Wolfgang Haase, eds. <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> . Part 2, <i>Principat</i> . Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972–.
<i>Ant.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Antonius</i>
<i>Apol.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Apologeticus</i>
<i>B.J.</i>	Josephus, <i>Bellum judaicum</i>
<i>Bacch.</i>	Euripides, <i>Bacchae</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>

BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina
CEJL	Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature
<i>Cel. Phryg.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>Celaenis Phrygiae (Or. 35)</i>
<i>Chaer.</i>	Chariton, <i>Chaereas and Callirhoe</i>
CHRC	<i>Church History and Religious Culture</i>
<i>Chron.</i>	Jerome, <i>Chronicon Eusebii a Graeco Latine redditum et continuatum</i>
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
ClAnt	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
CSCO	Chabot, Jean Baptiste, et al. <i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i> . Paris, 1903.
CW	<i>Classical World</i>
Doctr. Add.	Doctrina Addai
<i>Don.</i>	Cyprian, <i>Donatum</i>
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
ECA	Early Christian Apocrypha
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistula(e)</i>
<i>Ep. 22</i>	Jerome, <i>Libellus de virginitate servanda</i>
<i>Ep. virg.</i>	Athanasius, <i>Epistula ad virgines</i>
<i>Eth. nic.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Ethica nicomachea</i>
FCNTECW	Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings
<i>Fem. reg.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Quod regulares feminae viris cohabitare non debeant</i>
<i>Flacc.</i>	Philo, <i>Flaccus</i>
fol(s).	folio(s)
G&H	<i>Gender and History</i>
<i>Geog.</i>	Strabo, <i>Geographica</i>
GiL	<i>Gilte Legende</i>
Gos. Pet.	Gospel of Peter
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>Hist. Arm.</i>	Moses of Chorene, <i>History of Armenia</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Hist. Rom.</i>	Cassius Dio, <i>Historia Romana</i>
<i>Hom.</i>	Gregory Refrendarius, <i>Homilia</i>
<i>Hom. Gen.</i>	Origen, <i>Homiliae in Genesim</i>
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>

HSem	Horae semiticae
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
Hug	<i>Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies</i>
IPriene	von Gaertringen, F. Hiller, ed. <i>Inscriptionen von Priene</i> . Berlin, 1906.
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
Il.	Homer, <i>Iliad</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
Jdt	Judith
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JGRCJ	<i>Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism</i>
JÖAI	<i>Jahreshefte des Österreichischen archäologischen Instituts</i>
JRE	<i>Journal of Religious Ethics</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KJV	King James Version
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LgA	<i>Legenda Aurea</i>
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with rev. supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
LXX	Septuagint
Marc.	Seneca, <i>Ad Marciam de consolatione</i>
MS	manuscript
NIV	New International Version
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testament
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTApoc	<i>New Testament Apocrypha</i> . 2 vols. Revised ed. Edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher. English trans.

	ed. Robert McL. Wilson. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003.
NTGL	The New Testament and Greek Literature
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
Num. Rab.	Numbers Rabbah
OLA	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta</i>
<i>Onom.</i>	Pollux, <i>Onomasticon</i>
Pass. Perp.	Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas
<i>Peregr. Eg.</i>	Egeria, <i>Peregrinatio Egeriae</i>
PG	Migne, Jacques-Paul, ed. <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> [= <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca</i>]. 161 vols. Paris, 1857–1886.
<i>Phaed.</i>	Plato, <i>Phaedo</i>
PL	Migne, Jacques-Paul, ed. <i>Patrologia Latina</i> [= <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina</i>]. 217 vols. Paris, 1884–1864.
<i>R&T</i>	<i>Religion and Theology</i>
RAC	Klauser, Theodor, et al., eds. <i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> . Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–.
<i>RBén</i>	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i>
RGRW	Religions in the Greco-Roman World
RMCS	Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Satirae</i>
<i>Satyr.</i>	Petronius, <i>Satyricon</i>
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SCH	Studies in Church History
SEG	Supplementum epigraphicum graecum
SEL	<i>South English Legendary</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>Strom.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Stromateis</i>
<i>Subintr.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Contra eos qui subintroductas habent virgines</i>
TAPA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
TJT	<i>Toronto Journal of Theology</i>

TS	Text and Studies
TT	Text and Translations
v(v).	verse(s)
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
<i>Vir. ill.</i>	Jerome, <i>De viris illustribus</i>
<i>Virg.</i>	Ambrose, <i>De virginibus</i>
<i>Virginit.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>De virginitate</i>
<i>Vit. Apoll.</i>	Philostratus, <i>Vita Apollonii</i>
<i>Vit. Phil.</i>	Diogenes Laertius, <i>Vitae Philosophorum</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZKG	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>

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Introduction

Janet E. Spittler

Judith Perkins, here celebrated for her contributions to the study of early Christianity, was in fact trained as a classicist. Her bachelor's degree from Mount Holyoke College is in Latin. Her graduate studies at the University of Toronto concentrated in Latin hexameter poetry. Her 1972 dissertation, "Valerius Flaccus: Synonym and Style," is a detailed study in applied stylistics of the Silver Age poet's word choice. In the thesis there is no trace of a budding interest in early Christianity, though a brief note on the signature page perhaps hints that her interests ranged beyond Latin poetry: "Second Minor Field: Mystery Religions." In 1976 she was hired to teach classics at Saint Joseph College (now the University of Saint Joseph) in West Hartford, Connecticut, where she is professor emerita of classics and humanities today.

I had known Judith for some time before I learned about this background. That she was trained in classics was not really a surprise: her philological chops are everywhere evident in her work, though I would have guessed her first scholarly love was the Greek novels or other ancient narrative—something rather closer to early Christian narrative than Silver Age Latin poetry. When I asked her when, where, and how she first got interested in early Christianity, the answer was surprisingly specific. It was 1979 in New Haven: "It all had to do with wanting to attend a NEH summer seminar, and the only one close enough to allow me to get home in time to meet my sons' day-camp bus was being offered by Wayne Meeks for classicists and New Testament scholars at Yale on the 'Social World of Early Christianity.'"

This response says so much about so many things, ranging from the degree to which academic success depends on serendipity to the importance of federal funding for research in the humanities (which peaked in the early 1980s). It speaks to matters of limitation, of opportunity, of

priorities, of pragmatism, of ambition, of open-mindedness, of adventurousness. And, of course, it speaks to the realities of juggling an active research agenda and active parenthood, particularly motherhood—a feat that, to my knowledge, no one has yet perfected. But those of us—any sort of parent—doing research and writing between childcare drop-offs and pickups in 2019 surely owe a great debt to women like Judith Perkins, who somehow made it work forty years ago.

So she took the seminar, she loved it, and her publications gradually shifted from titles such as “An Aspect of Latin Comparison Construction” to “The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: An Ideological Novel.” But she surely did not leave classics behind: to the contrary, one of her most significant contributions to the field of early Christianity is her insistence on bringing the two fields together. She was an early contributor to the late twentieth century’s burgeoning body of scholarship on ancient Greek and Latin novelistic literature. She was an original member of the Society of Biblical Literature’s Ancient Fiction and Early Christian and Jewish Narrative group, founded in 1992 as an interdisciplinary effort to bring ancient fiction to the attention of biblical scholars, and was coeditor of *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, the 1998 volume produced by the group. She has also been a longtime participant in the International Conference on the Ancient Novel (ICAN), in which context she, conversely, has worked to bring Christian and Jewish narratives to the attention of classicists, serving as coeditor of *The Ancient Novel and Early Christian and Jewish Narrative: Fictional Intersections*, one volume of the proceedings of ICAN IV. Very few scholars are equally at home in two distinct fields, but the scholar who can successfully bring two fields together—not just through her own work but by creating a bridge that others cross—is truly exceptional.

Her two important monographs, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* and *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era*, both illustrate the gains that can be made when disciplinary boundaries are broken down. *The Suffering Self*, which has had an enormous impact on how scholars of early Christianity understand depictions of the body in pain, begins with an observation made while reading Apuleius and Aelius Aristides, that is, that many Greek and Latin writings of the first centuries CE take up a discursive focus on the suffering human body. This initial observation might, in the hands of a less sensitive scholar, have led to the simplistic conclusion that Christian authors had been influenced by their non-Christian Greco-Roman counterparts.

Through detailed analysis of the “particularities and specificities of the suffering body displayed in Christian narratives,”¹ however, Perkins demonstrates how Christian authors participated in and contributed to the discourse, ultimately producing a self-understanding and self-representation that allowed Christianity as an institution to thrive in the cultural context of the late first- and second-century Mediterranean world.

Her second monograph, *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era*, expands this work on self-understanding and self-representation, examining how two specific cosmopolitan social entities (a transempire coalition of the socially elite and early Christians) constructed for themselves specific cultural identities during the consolidation of the Roman Empire. Here again, Perkins both argues for and demonstrates the value of treating Christians and non-Christians as fellow participants in a common cultural context and discourse. As she writes:

In my discussion, I hope to destabilize [the] polarity between Christians and non-Christians, which has proved so enormously influential in structuring discussions of the early imperial period. It has allowed the interconnections between Christians and people contemporaneous with them in their social world to be obscured, with the result that historical testimony that could prove useful for understanding the social dynamics of the early imperial period has been sequestered as “Christian” rather than recognized and utilized as evidence for understanding the social and political negotiations being enacted during the period.... A basic defining characteristic of the Christians surveyed in this study, one that is too often disregarded, is that they are inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Their writings need to be recognized as productions of that empire and as being in dialogue with other writings of this period adjusting to the enlarged perspective of cosmopolitanism.²

Her analysis of Christian identity construction alongside that of the socially elite (including their respective self-construction vis-à-vis topics such as cosmopolitanism, death, patriarchy, and the body) reveals the specific strategies used by Christians to “intervene and interrupt” the elite imperial discourse, carving out a position for themselves to hold, a space

1. Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995), 12.

2. Judith Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era*, RMCS (London: Routledge, 2009), 3.

for their own institutional presence. As with all her work, the result for the reader is a better understanding of both Christianity as a distinct phenomenon *and* the broader world in which it developed.

The contributors to this Festschrift represent a very small segment of the scholars for whom Judith Perkins's work and mentorship have had a significant impact. Perhaps now is the moment to apologize to the many who would very much have liked to contribute—some of whom have worked quite closely with her over the years—but were not invited. I do indeed apologize! But a quick look at the table of contents, which includes ten women and two men, will likely suggest to the reader the context in which this Festschrift was first conceived. Judith Perkins was the first scholar, beyond my dissertation advisors, to take me and my work seriously. After my first presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, she approached me to talk about my work; she asked for a copy of my paper, offering to send a copy of one of her own works in progress on a similar topic; she replied to my emails with helpful bibliography and good suggestions. In short, she treated me like a full colleague, while offering the sort of help and encouragement that a graduate student and junior scholar needs. While she has spent her entire career teaching at an undergraduate institution, never training graduate students of her own, I have learned through countless conversations with others in the field that *many* people, particularly women, count her as a model and mentor. The majority of the contributors to this volume fall into that category.

The essays presented here, arranged alphabetically by author, offer the reader a small sense of the impact of Perkins's scholarship—of the various directions in which others have taken her insights. The reader will surely recognize recurring themes (e.g., representations of suffering) and texts (e.g., the apocryphal acts of the apostles), but each essay engages with these themes and texts in distinctive combinations, resisting simple categorization. Jo-Ann Brant, Virginia Burrus, Jennifer A. Glancy, and Jeannie Sellick all treat the Acts of Thomas, a text that Perkins has worked with extensively, but each from a very different angle. Brant widens the scope of comparative material, looking to Buddhist texts for insights on how best to take the seemingly extreme asceticism prescribed. Burrus takes up the depiction of animals in the text (yet another topic Perkins has treated) and widens the scope of *comparanda* in a different direction, looking to an anonymous letter from late fourth-century Spain or Gaul that, like the Acts of Thomas, muses on the nature of the ass as both distinctly animal and paradoxically human. Glancy takes up identity construction, considering the complex

constructions of the self in terms of a twin or double in the Acts of Thomas. Sellick turns to the well-known bridal-chamber scene in the Acts of Thomas; taking as her starting point Perkins's assessment that the apocryphal acts "offer an opportunity to view how Christians understood and positioned themselves vis-à-vis and in dialogue with other members of a complex and highly mobile society,"³ she asks to what degree and in what manner this episode represents and/or sheds light on the later phenomenon of spiritual marriage in late antiquity. Two further essays treat other apocryphal acts. My own contribution on the Acts of Thomas and His Wonderworking Skin offers a case study of the representation of extreme suffering in an apostle narrative. Meira Z. Kensky's essay, like Sellick's, treats the relationship between text (the Acts of Timothy) and historical phenomenon (the claiming of Ephesus as the sacred city of Timothy). Ilaria L. E. Ramelli's contribution likewise deals with the interplay of text and history, tracing the complex development of traditions surrounding the *Mandyllion* image-relic (i.e., the image of Christ imprinted on a towel and sent to Abgar of Edessa). Three more essays deal with suffering in other contexts. Shelly Matthews treats the depiction of suffering in the Gospel of Luke, specifically the deeply problematic ideology of just crucifixion at play in Luke 23:41. Kate Cooper's essay turns to Prudentius's *Passio Sancti Cassiani* and its depiction of pain and violence in the Christian classroom, both in the content of instruction (the violent stories of martyrdom) and the violence mutually inflicted by teacher and student. Nicola Denzey Lewis's essay moves beyond literary representations of suffering, turning to the contemporary spectacle celebrating the torture and martyrdom of Cristina of Bolsena. The remaining two essays, by David Konstan and Dennis R. MacDonald, engage perhaps the most fundamental question raised in Perkins's work: How do narrative texts create meaning?

It has truly been a pleasure to edit this volume—not a statement one hears every day! I thank the contributors for their prompt submission of essays, for the high quality of their work, and—particularly—for their enthusiasm. I also thank Clare Rothschild, editor of this series, for her wonderful support of the project and her consummate editorial skills. But most of all, I would like to thank Judith Perkins herself for her scholarship, her mentorship, and her friendship.

3. Judith Perkins, "Fictional Narratives and Social Critique," in *Late Ancient Christianity: A People's History of Christianity*, ed. Virginia Burrus and Rebecca Lyman (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 48.

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