Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus

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Narrative Criticism after Poststructuralism

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For Meredith
who misses characters after they are gone

And for Evelyn and Lydia
my source of endless delight

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Preface

I have had, for any number of reasons, an unquenchable fascination with both the Gospel of Mark and literary theory for as long as I have known of each. Moreover, I am endlessly intrigued by ways of reading and by actual readings of both narratives and sacred literature. These proclivities intersected in keen fashion when, during my doctoral studies, I discovered the ancient Greek novels. While the stories they told were indeed delightful, it was their mode of discourse that most struck me. These novels exhibit a remarkable degree of self-awareness and playfulness, and they read as criticism in narrative form, taking on politics, culture, history, literature, identity, religion, and even writing itself.

While studying the novels, I came across Daniel Selden's essay, 'Genre of Genre',[1] in which he comments, more or less in passing, on the use and abuse of ancient novels in contemporary debates on literary characters, which is best illustrated by the way interpreters evaluate rather than simply describe the characters therein. I recognized in this a parallel to what is arguably the central project of New Testament scholarship, albeit variously conceived—namely, pinpointing Jesus. New Testament scholars (in the West at least), predominantly working from within the framework of positivist historiography, have endeavored to exercise extreme caution so as not to project modern sensibilities into their reconstruction of Jesus. Nevertheless, the historical Jesus has repeatedly looked a little too familiar, been a little too easy to understand and translate, and served as a benchmark of socio-cultural values. Proponents of more recent literary approaches have come to recognize the near impossibility of accessing and reconstructing history through narratives and the absolute impossibility of ever fully separating the interpreter from the interpretation. But they have too often only exchanged an historical reality for an essentialized, reified, and all too human literary character. Despite what it appeared in some cases, a more focused treatment of the narrative figure inextricably intertwined with the discourse itself was still missing.

Naturally, I was particularly attracted to New Testament narrative criticism early on. Returning to it as a doctoral student, but now smitten with

1. Daniel L. Selden, 'Genre of Genre', in James Tatum (ed.), *The Search for the Ancient Novel* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 39-64.

things I had read (or witnessed, as the case may be, given the performative aspect of the material) in *The Postmodern Bible*, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspective*, the work of Roland Barthes, and so forth, I found the method lacking in imagination, failing to be sufficiently critical of the dominant historical-critical approach (which meant failing to recognize the implications of their own theoretical and methodological perspectives), and overly attentive to what they perceived as the *content* of the narrative (especially its extrapolated message) than to the dynamics of the discourse, hence rarely offering anything substantively different from the usual fare of biblical criticism. Outside of the world of biblical criticism, narratologists were focused on the grammar of narratives. But New Testament narrative critics were viewing narrative discourse strictly as an author's instrument of communication, and using narrative analysis as just another means of accessing that author's intent. Even those biblical scholars who were working on ancient novels were, more often than not, seeing in them merely another opportunity for gaining a more thorough understanding of the context out of which Jesus and the gospels emerged. I found in the work of theorists like Patrick O'Neill not simply a poststructuralist critique of narratology but an actual poststructuralist brand of narratology, which seemed to resonate with the later reflections of classic narratologists like Mieke Bal and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, and to present an alternative approach to engaging biblical narrative. Whereas narrative critical studies of literary characters began with the character itself, already formed, and proceeded to describe how 'he' or 'she' is *portrayed* in the narrative, poststructuralist narratology sees characters as literary figures, constructed by the discourse and inseparable from it. Attending, then, to narrative aspects such as focalization, for example, vis-à-vis *characterization* (versus 'character') is a first step toward what I see as a necessary and desirable reorientation and realignment of narrative criticism.

Despite the severity of my criticisms at various points throughout this book, I hope my work will be seen ultimately as an indication of how deeply influenced I have been by the work of first generation New Testament narrative critics (e.g., David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, Robert Tannehill, Thomas Boomershine, Mark Allan Powell, to list just a few). I greatly admire their work, and were it not for the path they blazed my work would not be possible. I intend my book to be in conversation with their writings, even if it aims at the same time to move that conversation in very different directions. The work of New Testament narrative critics once stood in sharp contrast to that of historical critics, but the two have since gotten along with each other quite easily. I hope this book will, in some small way, contribute to a reinvigoration and reanimation of New Testament narrative criticism such that, on one hand, it can make good on its promise of better readings of the text (not

only the gospels, on which it has been almost entirely focused, but even the implied and autobiographical narratives of the epistles), and, on the other hand, it might participate in discussions about narrative discourse outside of biblical studies from the unique perspective afforded by the study of both religion generally and sacred literature specifically.

The debts owed at the culmination of a project like this are many and varied. Stephen Moore was my doctoral advisor, and it was he who urged me to revisit the dissertation sooner than I would have on my own in order to revise it for publication. Stephen's work has long been an inspiration for my own, and this study is certainly no exception. On countless occasions, he provided a great deal of help in figuring out precisely what it was I wanted to say and how best to say it. His support and encouragement have been invaluable. I am grateful to Virginia Burrus and George Aichele, both of whom also served on my dissertation committee. They pushed for clarity and consistency, and helped me attend to blind spots in ways that challenged and expanded my thinking. All three insisted on raising very difficult questions concerning certain implications of this study. While I have yet to process and explore fully those questions, I hope the book has taken at least a few meaningful steps in that direction. My sincerest thanks go to David Clines and the editorial board of Sheffield Phoenix Press for their willingness to publish my work. I count it a privilege to be in such good company. I extend a very heartfelt tip of the cap to my closest colleagues, Matt Waggoner, Jon Schwiebert, Eric Thurman, and Jason Coker. The best ideas take shape amidst good conversation. I am also obliged to my parents, Steve and Marsha Elliott, who instilled in me long ago a profound affection for the Bible that ultimately led to a career dedicated to studying it. Most of all, I want to thank my wife Meredith. Her patience and generosity seem so effortless and inexhaustible, and her joy and excitement make these accomplishments all the more remarkable. She has had far more to do with the book than she will ever realize. My daughters, Evelyn and Lydia, have had a hand in this also, reminding me of the value of study breaks, and using their crayons to turn the blank side of discarded drafts into works of art that now adorn the walls.

Scott S. Elliott
May 2011

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
ClQ	*Classical Quarterly*
CompLit	*Comparative Literature*
ELH	*English Literary History*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	*Interpretation*
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Supplement Series
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	H.G. Liddell, Robert Scott and H. Stuart Jones, *Greek–English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 9th edn, 1968).
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	The New International Greek Testament Commentary
NLH	*New Literary History*
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTL	New Testament Library
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
RelSRev	*Religious Studies Review*
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLRBS	SBL Resources for Biblical Study
SBLSS	SBL Semeia Studies
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

Introduction

Reorienting Biblical Narrative Criticism

> The story I tell comes out of the tension within the dual nature of Jesus Christ, but what I do with it is my responsibility. Parts of it read like a novel, parts like history, and parts like a fairy tale; I wanted it to be like that because it is, among other things, a story about how stories become stories.
>
> Philip Pullman, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*

> On the stage of the text, no footlights: there is not, behind the text, someone active (the writer) and out front someone passive (the reader); there is not a subject and an object. The text supersedes grammatical attitudes: it is the undifferentiated eye which an excessive author (Angelus Silesius) describes: 'The eye by which I see God is the same eye by which He sees me'.
>
> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (trans. Richard Miller)

New Testament narrative criticism—the American form of biblical criticism that utilizes elements of secular narratology to interpret the Gospels[1]—has, at best, fallen short of its promise; at worst, it has suffered a failure of nerve. In their attempt to 'apply' narrative theory in order to 'explicate' the text, its champions have largely domesticated both. Alternatively, historically-oriented New Testament scholars, although noting a 'family resemblance' between the gospels and novelistic literature of the period, have failed to appreciate fully the dynamics of these texts *as narratives*, hence reading them too transparently en route to reconstructing

1. Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 131. See, e.g., Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, 'Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?', in Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (eds.), *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2nd edn, 2008), pp. 29-57; Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); David M. Gunn, 'Narrative Criticism', in McKenzie and Haynes (eds.), *To Each its Own Meaning*, pp. 201-29; James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); and The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 70-118.

history. The latter, moreover, already fully appreciative of certain literary dynamics at work in the gospels, have all too easily assimilated most of the methodological concerns and terminology of narrative criticism. This is largely because both groups are equally indebted to and shaped by the fundamental conception of the self that pervades Western thought,[2] which maps just as neatly onto reconstructions of historical persons as onto narrative readings of literary characters. The ironic collusion of these approaches in the analysis of narrative characters results, unsurprisingly, in the aspect of characterization playing host to dominant ideologies of both 'literature' and the 'self', and leads to confusion between narrative characters and historical persons.

The present study revisits characterization in Mark's gospel because major shifts on conceptualizations of both narrative and the self call for new ways of reading each. I have chosen to read Markan characterization (and the character of Jesus specifically) in conversation with two other works of narrative prose from antiquity—*Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius and the anonymous *Life of Aesop*—and with poststructuralist theory. This intertextual reading seeks not to identify influence and conscious imitation but rather constructs a matrix of interpretability and traces a residue of textual effects (i.e., reading the texts together with reference to the overarching issue of narrative discourse and the work it does). It aims to problematize both implicitly modern notions of literary characters as autonomous 'agents' and 'naturalizing' treatments of literary characters as historical referents. How might we read narratives like Mark without resort to what are arguably both anachronistic and ideologically suspect concerns about a *character's* agency or subjectivity (e.g., *his* or *her* interior thoughts, feelings, or motivations)? Pursuing such possibilities, and concentrating on the processes of characterization rather than on the characteristics of

2. Stephen D. Moore ('Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark', in Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher Skinner [eds.], *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011], pp. 71-94) argues quite convincingly that 'the concept of literary character that comes to expression in the modern novel … is the literary corollary of the recentering of European philosophy on the subjective experience of the individual human being, a reorientation inaugurated by Descartes', which in turn made the modern novel a key instrument 'in the formation of modernity itself, specifically the construction of modern subjectivity'. Cf. Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003), pp. 62-69. Prothero illustrates the connection between literary characters in the modern novels and developments in the notion of 'character' (i.e., vis-à-vis 'personality'), and traces the emergence of Jesus narratives in the 19th century (i.e., in terms of both greater emphasis on stories from the pulpit and full-fledged Jesus novels), with their emphasis on personal experience, as reaction against sermons focused more squarely on doctrine, theology, and scriptural exposition.

individual characters, I am taking an alternative approach to New Testament *narrative* as a discursive mode that forces a radically different reading of the literary figure of Jesus in Mark's gospel. It is an approach that, I believe, resonates with the Gospel of Mark itself.

More than two decades have passed since Stephen Moore published *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*.[3] While the book continues to be referenced in countless 'literary' studies of the New Testament, 'the theoretical challenge' it posed has only been taken up by a handful of New Testament scholars. Three years after *Literary Criticism*, Moore published *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*,[4] responding to his own challenge in the process. It is quite telling that this book garners virtually no attention at all by comparison with *Literary Criticism*. Whereas the structuralist underpinnings of secular narratology gradually gave way to poststructuralist critiques, allowing narratology to adapt itself to a wider range of use, practitioners of biblical narrative criticism somehow neglected the more challenging questions being posed about the way narratives work and dodged some of the messier implications.

It may seem that another book on the Gospel of Mark is the last thing we need in the field of biblical studies. Nevertheless, the justification for choosing to use the Gospel of Mark is simple. To begin with, the majority of New Testament scholars have long held that Mark is the earliest narrative gospel. As such, the author enjoyed a literary freedom that his successors did not, which makes him comparable to the authors of the ancient novels (i.e., in terms of having fewer generic constraints). Moreover, narrative criticism on the New Testament cut its teeth on Mark.[5] It makes perfectly good sense then to begin again with Mark when attempting to reestablish narrative criticism on a different footing.

Narrative Criticism

This book is about both narrative and narrative criticism. It is concerned with the narrative and narrativity of Mark's gospel in general, and with Markan characters and characterization in particular. In contrast to historical critics,

3. Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

4. Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

5. The well-known Markan Seminar of the SBL, out of which 'narrative criticism' emerged, ran from 1971 to 1980. The Seminar was a watershed for literary-critical work not only on Mark, but also on the other Synoptic Gospels and Acts. See Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, pp. 3-13. See also Anderson and Moore (eds.), *Mark and Method*, p. ix, where the editors cite Mark's brevity, priority, and literary artistry as the three key factors making this gospel 'a favorite testing-ground for new methodologies'.

narrative critics begin by emphasizing the finished form of the text and its fundamental unity as a whole. They view the text as an end in itself, and base much of what they do on models of communication in an effort to read the text as the implied reader. Stephen Moore describes biblical narrative criticism as

> a uniquely American form of biblical criticism, mainly holistic in thrust and associated with the study of the Gospels and Acts. It appropriates secular narratology to analyze plot, character, point of view, setting, narrative time, and other features of Gospel narrative, including the intertextual reader (at which point it shades over into reader-response criticism).[6]

Configured thus, New Testament narrative criticism has no clear parallel in the larger sphere of literary theory outside of biblical studies, much less in narratology specifically. Initially, those whose work came to define narratology were concerned with the inherent structures and properties of *all* narrative. In other words, narratology was interested in questions regarding what defines narrative and what is possible within this particular mode of writing. Narratological studies focused on things like narrative time, order, frequency, point of view, focalization, the distinction between story and discourse (i.e., between *what* is told and *how* it is told), the narrator, narrative voice, levels of narration, events, characters and characterization, setting, and so forth.[7] Narratologists sought to articulate a science of narrative, and to produce narrative grammars. So, for example, Gérard Genette described the analysis of narrative discourse as 'a study of relationships', namely, between discourse and the events recounted, and, moving in the other direction, between discourse and the act producing it.[8] The objective, to put it plainly, was not to use these elements to read stories better, but to use stories to better understand these aspects of narrative.

6. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament*, p. 131. At the time, Moore went on to say that 'it is not yet possible to speak of a poststructuralist narrative criticism, although some literary theorists have claimed that a poststructuralist narratology is conceivable'. There have since been concrete steps in that direction, and here I hope to take yet another.

7. See, e.g., Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2nd edn, 1997); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (trans. Jane E. Lewin; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980); Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1982); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2nd edn, 2002). For general overviews, see Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); and Paul Cobley, *Narrative* (London: Routledge, 2001).

8. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 27.

The difference between the work of biblical narrative critics and that of their counterparts in the larger field of narratology is important to stress, as it is easily overlooked if one attends only to the terminology being used. Classical narratology was concerned with the features themselves. It studied them in order to determine the anatomy of narrative discourse. Meanwhile, newer narratological developments of various sorts have concerned themselves with analyzing what texts do despite themselves (and despite their authors and readers) as a consequence of narrative discourse and the plethora of other determinative factors intersecting with it in the processes of reading. Biblical narrative critics, one the other hand, study individual texts through the framework of these features, viewing them as rhetorical tools in the hands of an author seeking to convey a particular meaning or message.

Mark Allan Powell lists five common objections to narrative criticism. Opponents contend that narrative criticism (i) 'treats the Gospels as coherent narratives when they are actually collections of disparate material'; (ii) 'imposes on ancient literature concepts drawn from the study of modern literature'; (iii) 'seeks to interpret the Gospels through methods that were devised for the study of fiction'; (iv) 'lacks objective criteria for the analysis of texts'; and (v) 'rejects or ignores the historical witness of the Gospels'.[9] These objections stem from the perspective of historical criticism and criticize the method for failing to work within an established code of interpretive conduct. Although I do not share this perspective, I nevertheless espouse some of these objections, but for different reasons. I contend that the opponents of narrative criticism miss their mark. These detractors fail to understand how mutually dependent and implicated they are in the narrative critical approach, and to recognize the extent to which narrative critics uphold many of the fundamental conclusions of historical critics, even while positioning themselves over against the historical critical method itself.

Powell identifies the fifth objection as the most pervasive. Opponents view the method as anti-historical because the gospels are not treated as testimonies to God's action in history but as literary artifacts with their own inherent value apart from anything they describe. Powell's response is to defend narrative criticism on the basis that 'nothing in the assumptions or presuppositions of narrative criticism calls into question the legitimacy of historical investigation. There is no reason why a text that is examined with regard to its poetic function cannot also be examined by a different method that is interested in its referential function.'[10] Herein lies one of the fundamental problems with biblical narrative criticism as it is

9. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, pp. 91-96.
10. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, p. 96.

presently conceived, namely that both approaches to the text (viz., historical *and* narrative) seem to share strikingly similar objectives, despite all statements to the contrary. Both narrative critics and historical critics want to understand the text either as it was intended to be understood, or as the original audience would have heard it. Thus, Powell is quite right to note that 'the charge that narrative criticism is at odds with the goals of historical interpretation cannot be maintained',[11] but for a very different reason. Biblical narrative critics regularly insist that modern readers be mindful of certain historical information. Then they turn to the findings of historical critics to supply this information so that contemporary readers will be better equipped to adequately understand the text as it was intended and/or as it was heard by its original audience. That is to say, despite their stated interest in 'the world of the text', narrative critics go beyond the discourse. In the words of Mieke Bal, they 'mimetically interpret' according to assumptions about what would happen in real life rather than confining themselves to 'purely semiotic criticism', which takes into account only the narrative signs provided.[12] This sort of 'mimetic' criticism has its place, to be sure, but the issue here has to do with critics failing either to recognize or to acknowledge their breach of the narrative and the subsequent shift in register, precisely because narrative criticism pointedly claims to be doing something different.[13] To be sure, inference is inescapable, and every story's telling depends on it. My concern, however, is what biblical narrative critics do with their inferences.

Though they often do so in more subtle fashion, narrative critics seem no less intent than their historically-minded predecessors in laying hold of what they perceive to be the textual referent, i.e., an historical actuality behind the narrative, namely Jesus himself, by various means, not least of which is taking the 'implied author' as an 'index' of the real author. According to Powell, all that is required for such an 'application of narrative-

11. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, p. 97. He even describes the two approaches as sharing a 'symbiotic relationship' (p. 98).

12. See Mieke Bal, 'The Laughing Mice: Or: On Focalization', *Poetics Today* 2 (1981), pp. 202-10 (205).

13. Here, it is worth recalling David Rhoads's programmatic essay, 'Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark', *JAAR* 50 (1982), pp. 411-34. The article is a manifesto for narrative criticism. It mounts an explicit and sustained argument for treating the narrative text as a 'world-in-itself' (pp. 413, 426 n. 1), a 'closed universe' (p. 413), and contends that the narrative criticism 'brackets … historical questions' in approaching it. (Moore summarizes Rhoads's argument fully in *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, pp. 7-13.) What is most significant is that as soon as Rhoads descends from theorizing about narrative criticism to actually practice it, the 'historical questions' immediately slip back in, even if unacknowledged, and exercise tight control over the analysis throughout.

critical insights' is a 'hermeneutical leap', which 'entails acceptance of the unprovable premise that the authors of our Gospels succeeded in creating narratives that would have the effects they wanted them to have'.[14] Unfortunately, such a 'hermeneutical leap' is anything but unproblematic.

I have no intention of dismissing history out of hand. However, the history that should concern anyone interested in the narrativity of these texts is that which is peripheral to them. It is the history taking place within and alongside these texts, as opposed to that which is behind them, reflected in them, or represented by them, which one supposedly discovers once the layers of interpretation and perspective have been properly peeled away to reveal the truth underneath. These narratives do not simply convey a history that precedes them; rather, they shape and are shaped by history writ large, a history that extends to their ongoing reception. We need a degree of theoretical nuance and sophistication that narrative criticism, at one time, seemed to promise but has provided only rarely since.[15]

In his effort to defend the use of narrative criticism, Whitney Shiner suggests that all of the aforementioned criticisms listed by Powell together 'reflect different aspects of the same complaint: narrative criticism has misperceived the nature of the Gospel narratives'.[16] As such, they are criticisms less of the method than of the models used by narrative critics in their readings of the gospels. I agree with Shiner insofar as we both recognize that, although the canonical gospel writers had at their disposal a number of genre models from which to draw for their respective presentations, they all opted to use narrative. However, I do not think Shiner goes far enough. The oft-cited criticism that using modern theory to read

14. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, p. 97.

15. See, for example, J. Hillis Miller, 'Narrative and History', *ELH* 41 (1974), 455-73; Fred W. Burnett, 'Historiography', in A.K.M. Adam (ed.), *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), pp. 106-12; Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Christine M. Thomas, *The* Acts of Peter, *Gospel Literature, and the Ancient Novel: Rewriting the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 92-97; Colleen M. Conway, 'There and Back Again: Johannine History on the Other Side of Literary Criticism', in Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore (eds.), *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), pp. 77-91; Tat-siong Benny Liew, 'The Word of Bare Life: Workings of Death and Dream in the Fourth Gospel', in Thatcher and Moore (eds.), *Anatomies*, pp. 167-93; and Stephen D. Moore, 'A Modest Manifesto for New Testament Literary Criticism: How to Interface with a Literary Studies Field that is Post-Literary, Post-Theoretical, and Post-Methodological', *BibInt* 15 (2007), pp. 1-25.

16. Whitney Taylor Shiner, *Follow Me! Disciples in Markan Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), p. 3.

ancient texts is anachronistic is based in large part on the assumption that the central concern or area of investigation is an author's intent. Thus, for example, one cannot speak of the author of Mark deconstructing ideologically errant conceptualizations of the Messiah because he never would have read Jacques Derrida and he would not have been cognizant of any such 'methodology'. Moreover, what these criticisms share in common is that they betray latent theological concerns regarding both 'the Bible' as such and, more importantly perhaps, the figure of Jesus. What historical critics are implicitly criticizing is narrative critics' vision of Jesus. What I aim to demonstrate in this book is that so-called 'modern theories' of reading actually do a better job of accounting for certain aspects of these ancient narratives *and* of explaining the interpretations of contemporary readers. The difference between these contested images of Jesus (viz., the historical and the literary) is, in many respects, quite superficial, because both rely on strikingly similar understandings of narrative.

The (Ancient) Novel

This book reads the Gospel of Mark alongside ancient novelistic literature of the same general period. It is important to state at the outset that I am not suggesting that Mark is *merely* fiction. Appraisals of this sort are driven, in my opinion, by theological concerns. I am interested neither in the 'Bible as literature' approach, nor in suggesting that Mark is in some fashion 'true fiction'. Throughout this study, I use 'narrative' rather than 'fiction' to refer to the texts in question. 'Fiction' and 'narrative' are not synonymous terms. The latter is too heavily laden with ideological valuation. In modern parlance, 'fiction' is too often taken to be synonymous with 'falsehood'. 'Fiction' is but one type of narrative. Furthermore, consider the relationship of narrative to history—an issue that will be of central importance in the chapters that follow. The word 'history' is often used (uncritically) to refer to both a collection of 'real' events that actually happened and a discursive representation of those events.[17] However, the former cannot be accessed apart from the latter. Events are always colored by their portrayal. Going one step further, if an actual event cannot be accessed in any pure state apart

17. Cobley, *Narrative*, p. 30. On fiction and history, see Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451b-1452a (trans. James Hutton; New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1982). Here, Aristotle distinguishes poetry on the basis of its function, not to report things that have happened, but to describe things that might happen, things that are possibilities by virtue of being inevitable or probable. For Aristotle, this characteristic of poetry makes it more philosophical and of a higher order than history, the former expressing the universal and the latter expressing only an instance of fact. See also George Aichele, *The Limits of Story* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 24-29, 47-54.

from its narrative portrayal, how then could one ever discern whether or to what extent an event portrayed is represented accurately or if it even happened? Hence, narrative portrayal is in fact intimately involved in the very creation and formation of these events from the outset. The surface of such representations is scarred with traces of decisions regarding selection, arrangement, and interpretations of causality and the underlying relationship between 'facts'—all of which are integral aspects of narrative. 'All written discourse is cognitive in its aims and mimetic in its means', writes Hayden White; 'in this respect, history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation'.[18]

Regarding fiction as something occupying the space between truth and mendacity is not only a consequence of contemporary critical theory; it finds precedent among the authors of the Second Sophistic. Whereas modern readers think of novelistic fabrication as a mild form of deception (i.e., invented or created with the intent of being misleading, illusory and unreliable, even if plausible in the sense of verisimilitude), ancient readers fully understood 'fiction' (πλάσμα) to connote that which is crafted, constructed, manufactured, shaped (i.e., attaching no self-evidently negative value to 'fiction' over against 'truth' or 'history').[19] In a word, it pertained to the manner of discourse rather than to the degree of veracity and verifiability of the content. Hence, the boundary between such categorical distinctions as fiction, history, truth, and so forth—categories that are always best understood in term of function rather than any presumed innate quality—in the period in which Mark and the ancient novels were written was blurred, to say the least, and one could certainly make the case that our own situation bears striking similarities in that respect.

The case for treating Mark as a 'novel-like' work and situating it among other similar texts is not difficult to make.[20] Historically, the novels are roughly contemporaneous with the Gospel of Mark, and the latter is the earliest extant example we have of an author narrating the life of Jesus. But

18. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 122.

19. Glen W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 10-11 and passim.

20. For starters, one need only to note the work of the Ancient Fiction and Early Christian and Jewish Narrative section of the SBL, which has been meeting for twenty years and will soon publish its third volume of collected essays. See especially Ronald F. Hock, 'Why New Testament Scholars Should Read Ancient Novels', in Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance and Judith Perkins (eds.), *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1998), pp. 121-38. Hock's argument is unconditionally historical: the ancient novels (viz., 'romances') illuminate the New Testament and the world of which it is a part. I find in them value beyond this, as will be seen.

the case can be made on theoretical grounds also. Roland Barthes speaks of 'the novelistic without the novel', which he dubs 'the writerly'. In part, this is that which allows the reader to move from being a consumer of the text to being its producer. It is thus that which also frees the reader from the confining position of either accepting or rejecting the text.[21] My engagement with the ancient novels alongside Mark in this book is an intertextual reading that is not focused on matters of influence, or even similarity and difference, with respect to content. Rather, it is concerned with reading these texts together vis-à-vis the manner of their discourse, which is narrative, the novelistic. Of course, these texts are not devoid of context and history. There are certain aspects that characterize these writings and also occasion the theoretical reflections that are of greatest concern to me in this study. In other words, aspects that not only serve as descriptive markers of individual novels, but also function as microcosms of narrative discourse. To these I now turn.

Tim Whitmarsh explains that the novel, like the satirical dialogues of Lucian, for example, *marks itself* as 'innovative and modernist'.[22] In his view, this self-consciousness is demonstrated by 'a recurrent interest in paradoxes, innovative "set-piece" scenes, and the intermingling of nature and culture'.[23] He writes:

21. Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (trans. Richard Howard; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). See also Allen, *Roland Barthes*, pp. 88-92; Culler, *Barthes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 29-30. Culler writes, 'The novelistic, for Barthes, is the novel minus story and characters: fragments of astute observation, details of the world as bearers of second-order meaning'. The novel(istic), then, is not what one reads but what one writes. The novelistic is what occasions a multiplicity of writings; it is what provides the possibility of reversing the story.

22. Tim Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 78, my emphasis. Ordinarily, the works in view when discussing the ancient novel are the five extant romances: Chariton, *Chaereas and Callirhoe*; Xenophon of Ephesus, *An Ephesian Tale*; Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*; Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*; and Heliodorus, *An Ethiopian Story*. These five works share in common a highly formulaic plot and cast of character types, which B.P. Reardon summarizes succinctly: 'Hero and heroine are always young, well-born, and handsome; their marriage is disrupted or temporarily prevented by separation, travel in distant parts, and a series of misfortunes, usually spectacular. Virginity or chastity, at least in the female, is of crucial importance, and fidelity to one's partner, together often with trust in the gods, will ultimately guarantee a happy ending' (*Collected Ancient Greek Novels* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989], p. 2; see also Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996]). In addition to the so-called romances, there are other examples of extended prose narrative from the period, among them are Lucian's *A True Story*, Pseudo-Lucian's *The Ass*, Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Alexander Romance*, and the anonymous *Apollonius King of Tyre* and *Life of Aesop*.

23. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, pp. 78-79.

> In this respect, they demand contextualizing against the background of Roman Greece's preoccupation with the dialectical relationship between tradition and innovation; or, to put it another way, the novelistic genre is predisposed to take a provocative stance vis-à-vis the current debates concerning the ways in which literature 'should' construct its relationship with the past.[24]

The ancient Greek novels are fundamentally parodic literature, and this is exemplified in a variety of ways. Complex processes of identity formation are at work in this literature. According to Virginia Burrus, they are 'processes reflecting diverse intertextual strategies of appropriation, fragmentation, recombination, and parody that subtly interrogate both the hegemony of Greek *paideia* and the imperial dominion of Rome'.[25] The novels poke fun at other genres. They lampoon philosophy and history. They are ambivalent toward social norms. They display a deep fascination with literature, language, and writing. Moreover, in addition to the many ways these novels seem to interact with other cultural texts and discourses, written and otherwise, within the world of the story, the very nature of the genre is also parodic by virtue of its inherent dialogism and intertextuality.

The Greek romances and popular novels are a distinctive byproduct of the Hellenistic period. Burrus describes the novel as 'a quintessentially colonial literary product emanating from the geographical and cultural margins of what passed for "civilization" '. At the same time, however, she notes that the ancient novel 'lays claim to the central texts and linguistic practices that constitute "Hellenism", at once disputing and colluding with the universalizing aspirations of empire'.[26] They emerge amidst a time of extraordinary literary production that is fundamentally caught up in various modes of rewriting (e.g., revisionist historiography, national and ethnic identity construction and contestation, literary criticism, and cultural self-reflection). According to Glen Bowersock, a 'general indifference' to the distinction between history and fiction permeates the literary productions of the period. Rewriting the old stories of the past was a 'conspicuous feature of the Graeco-Roman world… History was being invented all over again; [and] even the mythic past was being rewritten.'[27] At the hands of

24. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, p. 79.

25. Virginia Burrus, 'Mimicking Virgins: Colonial Ambivalence and the Ancient Romance', *Arethusa* 38 (2005), pp. 49-88 (49).

26. Burrus, 'Mimicking Virgins', p. 50.

27. Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, p. 9. On fiction and history, see again Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451b-1452a; Aichele, *Limits of Story*, pp. 24-29, 47-54. Poetry and history are *not* distinguishable in terms of genre or form. Tragedy, meanwhile—which is important to consider in anticipation of the theatrical elements of *Leucippe and Clitophon*—bridges poetry and history in an interesting fashion. Retaining some historical names while inventing others, because 'possibility means credibility; until something happens

writers and readers, neither the figures of culture and history nor the heroes and gods of mythology were sacrosanct and unaffected.

Lucian's fantastical novel ironically titled, *True Stories*, betrays an acute fascination (albeit complex in its blend of rich allusion and relentless ridicule) with the disappearance of traditional boundary markers between veracity and falsehood. *True Stories* draws on literary traditions as old as Homer and pays explicit homage to ancient predecessors in the art of narrating the fabulous. However, the narrator pays his respects in a curious and unexpected manner. To begin with, he challenges the canons of literature and literary criticism of his day. To do so, he first goes to the source (as any good historical critic would do), claiming to have spoken directly to Homer in order to clear up the confusion about his works. However, he turns around and openly criticizes Homer's abilities to faithfully depict or *represent* an *imaginary* place. At another point in the narrative, the narrator credits Odysseus with being the founder of the sort of 'literary horseplay' in which the novel is engaging (viz., a supposed travelogue). Later, the very same Odysseus is recognized for successfully protecting Homer's good name against accusations of slander against Thersites. Hence, characters of every sort, both historical and fictional, overflow and spill into one another so as to blur the boundaries between the true testimony of historical witnesses and the 'yarn-spinning' performances of writers, readers, and scripted personalities. In ironic and paradoxical fashion, it is the *fictional* that ultimately comes to the defense of the writer, reader, critic, and even the characters within the narrative. Whether it is some romanced version of Lucian in a pseudo-autobiographical travel narrative, the narrator's forthright confession that everything he has to write is a lie, the character of Odysseus coming to the aid of his literary creator, the result is the same: the narrative functions (at least in part) as a site wherein identities become fluid and dialogical.

What these examples from *True Stories* make clear is that at no point was there any outright rejection of the Homeric literature, the historiography of Aristophanes, or the philosophy of Plato. Rather, they show how writers were engaged in new and creative ways of reading and rewriting foundational narratives in order to make sense of the world around them. And, although Lucian's work represents some of the most outlandish writing of the period, he was hardly unique. According to Bowersock, Homeric revisionism spans most of the literary activity during period of the Roman

we remain uncertain of its possibility, but what has happened obviously is possible, since if impossible, it would not have happened'. Tragedies, which differ from poems in terms of the *kind* of action they imitate, and are designed to effect 'through pity and fear…the catharsis of such emotions, are not bound by the traditions upon which they are said to be based'.

Empire. But Homer was not the only literature being revised. The so-called 'Gnostics' produced imaginative readings of Jewish literature and Christian myth. Jews wrote new stories based on familiar characters and translated the age old stories of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. In so doing, they adapted the material to the structural forms of the literature they were imitating resulting in the production of Jewish novels (e.g., *Joseph and Aseneth*, Greek Daniel, Greek Esther[28]). Philo styled Moses after a Greek hero and depicted Jerusalem as a mother city not unlike the Greek *polis*. Finally, Christians began writing gospels and would later write apocryphal acts that told fantastic stories of Paul, Peter, Thecla, and Perpetua engaging in hero-like exploits.[29] Creative revisionist literary activities—novelistic activities—were not limited to any one group, and nothing was self-evidently immune, whether it be myth, history, or fiction.

Bowersock explains that ancient writers were confronted with the problem of sorting out truth from fiction 'in a world that seemed hopelessly to intermingle and confuse [the two], a world in which the boundaries between creative imagination and willful mendacity, between fiction and lying, often proved impossible to determine'.[30] Sextus identified three kinds of narrative: 'history', which was the presentation of truths and real events; 'fiction' (πλάσμα), which was made up of things that did not happen but that resemble things that have happened; and 'myth', things that did not happen and are false.[31] Fiction, thus, refers to something *made* not *made-up*, and it occupies a space between truth and falsehood in the Hellenistic world.

Reflecting the effects of empire and cultural displacement, the ancient novels function as a parody of genres. They refract socio-cultural dialogism, a sense of incompleteness, and an especially 'Hellenistic' fascination with

28. Lawrence M. Wills (ed.), *Ancient Jewish Novels: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

29. See, e.g., Paul Cartledge, Peter Garnsey and Erich Gruen (eds.), *Hellenistic Constructs: Essays in Culture, History, and Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); John Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 1999); Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), Lee I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998); Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BCE to 640 CE* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Simon Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, AD 50–250* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*; Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

30. Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, p. 1.

31. Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, p. 10.

the alien, the foreigner, and oriental cultural in general. The Greek novels in particular demonstrate a striking preoccupation with re-imagining group identities vis-à-vis the Roman Empire. In Bowersock's view, the Hellenistic fascination with the alien and the exotic provided a refreshing perspective on the allegedly stable and hegemonic Hellenic standard to which the Greco-Roman world had grown accustomed. Fiction was well suited to gratify a growing interest in other peoples and places.[32] 'Imperial fiction has a very special character: It is concerned with outsiders, with going away from home (or being wrenched away), and with brutal or occasionally agreeable confrontation with the unknown.'[33] Moreover, this style of writing challenged both the traditional notions of culture and decorum among Greeks and Romans. In regard to both, its interest was in constructions of identity: it called into question what meant to be 'Greek' or 'Roman'. The Hellenistic novels are indicative of 'the absorption of writers and readers in alien customs, the emergence of new standards of otherness—not only foreignness but social marginality as well'.[34]

Like Bowersock, Simon Swain situates the novels among a number of literary activities of the period, for example, a revival in the use of Attic Greek language, and the construction and use of an imaginary past.[35] He points out that a particular *image* of the past was more important than actual past events; an idealized sense of the past, not its reality, was the necessary goal. Consequently, the endless rewritings of the Greek past in this period were free to deviate from the known events of history. Due to the cultural interpenetration brought on by imperial action, it was no longer clear who was Greek by race, and there were no national borders within which all 'Greeks' were gathered. Thus, the constant rewriting of the classical period became a means of defining and asserting a group identity. In other words, these writers were not mere iconoclasts. The novelists' efforts to re-imagine the past in all its varied forms was simultaneously an indication of the persistence and lasting importance of that past. As products of a history that they in turn helped to produce, the novels appropriate the past in a way deemed more suitable to contemporary concerns.[36] The author of Mark was no less caught up in and marked by this activity than his contemporaries.

32. Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, p. 32.
33. Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, p. 33.
34. Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, p. 53.
35. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, pp. 101-31.
36. See Burrus, 'Mimicking Virgins'. Burrus reads the figure of the virgin that recurs throughout the ancient novels as a signifier of colonial ambivalence, one that functions synecdochically for the novel itself: 'she is unveiled as a figure of the hybridity of discourse and culture that arguably characterizes all novelistic literature—and that may also situate novelistic writing itself, whether ancient or modern, as a distinctly "postcolonial" literary practice' (p. 85).

Chapter 3 below deals specifically with Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*. Whitmarsh suggests that in various set-pieces scattered about the novel, particularly those in which words like παράδοξος, παράλογος, and καινός are used to describe various events, the author 'establishes a synecdochic definition of the novel itself, the genre that crosses boundaries, gobbling up pre-established literary forms, inter-permeating high art and low comedy'.[37] When characters respond in awe to that which is novel throughout the narrative, they act out one possible response to the novel itself.[38] The two most significant studies of *Leucippe and Clitophon* in recent years focus on two closely related elements of the novel that reinforce the point made by Whitmarsh: the function of extended descriptions (ἐκφρασις) in relation to the narrative generally and to its interpretation in particular (both by the story's characters and its readers),[39] and the centrality of vision (i.e., both seeing and being seen) to the overall plot and to the construction of the subject (i.e., knowledge, gender, etc.) whether as viewer or viewed.[40] Both concern one dimension of representation—what things *look like*. And while the appearance of characters is of minimal concern to Mark, the manner of seeing is of paramount importance.

Rather than attempting to disguise its own discursiveness (notwithstanding the fair effort put forth to achieve a certain degree of verisimilitude), *Leucippe and Clitophon* instead seems to revel in the opportunities afforded by prose narrative and to always keep in view (even if at the periphery on occasion) a sense of the artifice. After investigating these dimensions in *Leucippe and Clitophon*, we will turn our attention to the Gospel of Mark where we find similar aspects in play. As noted previously,

37. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, p. 79.

38. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, p. 80. Whitmarsh goes on to write, 'As Lucian reminds us in his declamation *On the Hall*, however, mere "wonder" (θαῦμα) is the response of an unsophisticate (ἰδιώτης, *De dom.* 2)'. Later we will investigate the frequent references to various sorts of 'amazement' in the Gospel of Mark (see, e.g., 1.22, 27; 2.12, *et al.*) and their relationship to Markan characterization. Whitmarsh points out that the character Clinias (Achilles Tatius, *LC* 7.6.2) proves himself a more adept reader than other characters throughout the narrative. This is striking when one then compares Clinias to both Clitophon himself (viz., as narrator) and even the first narrator with which the novel began, who is, on one hand, responding in awe to the painting, and on the other hand, is in some way responsible for Clinias's interpretive expertise, first prompting it and later recounting it. This is analogous to the character of the 'young man … dressed in a white robe' at Jesus' tomb in Mk 16.5, who also seems to be better skilled at interpreting the narrative that precedes and gives rise to his appearance.

39. Shadi Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel: The Reader and the Role of Description in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

40. Helen Morales, *Vision and Narrative in Achilles Tatius*' Leucippe and Clitophon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

I am not reading *Leucippe and Clitophon* alongside the Gospel of Mark in order to compare the stories they tell (i.e., their respective content), or their generic similarities and differences, both of which have been the central focus in past conversations about the gospels and the ancient novels. Instead, I am reading them together *as narratives*, investigating various discursive aspects—namely, focalization and self-reflexivity, in this case—as they relate to the processes of characterization. All readings are intertextual. While my decision to read Mark alongside these particular novels is not altogether random, it is not primarily concerned with matters of influence or allusion either. What it comes down to for me is that, while all narratives share in common aspects of focalization, dialogue, plot, and characterization, these novels and the Gospel of Mark also share in common certain tendencies and recurrences of theme with respect to *how* focalization, dialogue, plot, and characterization manifest and function. These tendencies and motifs betray unintentional, involuntary, hidden, subliminal interests in these works, which operate on the periphery and apart from any author's control. But they also occasion interpretive opportunities for me, resulting in readings that I would never presume to be faithful to an author's intent.

In this book, I am reading Mark alongside the ancient novel, and reading both through the lens of poststructuralist literary theory, because I am convinced that both the materials themselves and the world we presently inhabit call for fresh ways of reading. In a word, my book contends that such an approach to these ancient texts ultimately produce better readings. There is a tendency among died-in-the-wool New Testament scholars to get hung up on methodological fastidiousness and to fret about anachronistic error.[41] But the example of someone like Burrus, who attends to the 'literariness of the texts themselves',[42] provides me with a helpful model for what I aim to do throughout the following chapters.

Poststructuralist Literary Theory

In addition to critiquing New Testament narrative criticism and reading the Gospel of Mark alongside the ancient novels, this book also reads Mark (and the ancient novels) in conversation with poststructuralist literary theory. To be specific, it reads Markan characterization and the figure

41. Moore, 'Modest Manifesto', p. 23: 'methodology has long been the *sine qua non* of biblical studies as an academic discipline. Methodology is what is meant to keep our discourse on the Bible from being subjective, personal, private, pietistic, pastoral, devotional, or homiletical. Methodology, in short, is what maintains partition between sermon and scholarship.'

42. Burrus, 'Mimicking Virgins', p. 85.

of Jesus in Mark's gospel in a way that regards the character of Jesus, as encountered in Mark's narrative, as a 'creature of discourse'.[43] Whereas members of the Ancient Fiction and Early Christian and Jewish Narrative section of the Society of Biblical Literature have put the gospels into contact with the ancient novels, and New Testament narrative critics have put the gospels into contact with narratology and modern novels, I am putting New Testament narrative criticism into conversation with poststructuralist theory in order to read differently the ancient novels, the Gospel of Mark, and the narrative critical method, using the characters and characterization as the primary site of experimentation.

Above, I noted that narratologists set out initially with the aim of identifying the structures of narrative discourse. More recently, narratology has undergone a number of transitions. In the words of one author, narratology has moved 'from discovery to invention, from coherence to complexity, and from poetics to politics'.[44] That is to say, narrative theory has become increasingly concerned with the instability, intertextuality, and openness of narrative as such.[45] While poststructuralism has made numerous inroads into biblical studies, New Testament narrative criticism reflects very little influence from poststructuralism. Seeing the story of Jesus as something still somehow independent of its narration in the gospels, New Testament narrative critics have tended to pursue many of the same interests that have

43. Patrick O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 41.

44. Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave, 1998), p. 2. See also Cobley, *Narrative*, pp. 171-200.

45. To be sure, this represents only one version of contemporary narratology, namely, poststructuralist narratology, which is what concerns me in this study. Chapter 2 will take up the matter in earnest. Several other variants of what has been labeled 'postclassical narratology' exist, among them, cognitive narratology, feminist narratology, and cultural narratology. See, e.g., David Herman (ed.), *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2003); Ruth Page, 'Gender', in David Herman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 189-202; and Ansgar Nünning, 'Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet: Towards an Applied Cultural Narratology', *Style* 38 (2004), pp. 352-75. Admittedly, some of what one finds listed under headings like 'postcolonial narratology' and 'queer narratology' appear to have a very tenuous relationship to narratology as traditionally conceived, stretching the term considerably and thereby making the headings somewhat problematic. Nevertheless, one must be careful not to suggest any sort of 'pure' narratology. See again Moore's challenge to methodological fetishism in 'Modest Manifesto', where he asks: 'Can we move beyond methodology in biblical studies without writing sermons pure and simple? That, I would suggest, is an important, perhaps even central, challenge for those of us in biblical studies interested in engaging in authentic interdisciplinary dialogue with contemporary literary studies' (p. 24). I count myself among that group.

characterized traditional forms of biblical criticism, albeit under the guise of something new.

New Testament critics of all sorts are caught up in a struggle for Jesus' identity.[46] But contemporary narrative theory problematizes this seemingly straightforward quest in at least two ways. First, it suggests that the historical or material reality of that figure is inaccessible to us; his identity is a narrative construct and inseparable from its discourse. To be sure, critics long ago recognized that the gospels are theological interpretations crafted to serve the interests of the communities around them. What too often remains neglected, however, is the recognition that this explanation itself, along with the 'facts' that critics distill from the artifacts that inescapably help to construct and represent this history to us, is expressed (i.e., *put into words*) in forms that resemble the gospels themselves in fundamental ways; namely, it is narrated.[47] My argument is not simply that we can never know anything, but rather that, since we are always already one step removed from the 'facts' we seek to understand by virtue of language and discourse, it might be necessary to alter our object of study.

Second, what plays out in that struggle to locate and articulate Jesus' identity is the critics' battle for their own identities.[48] Consequently, modern conceptualizations of the self are reinscribed in and through various interpretations of what is arguably one of the most powerful literary figures ever represented in narrative. I make no pretense of not being invested in this struggle myself. Nevertheless, my interest here is not so much with Jesus himself as with a particular figuration of him, namely that of Mark's narrative (and perhaps also, by extension, narrative critical formulations thereof). What I aim to critique in this project is, in fact, the very thing I also critique in the work of historical critics: the failure to fully engage the narrativity of these texts. My study is concerned with the dynamics of language and form. The topic is literary characters, figures constructed and

46. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (London: Continuum, 2000). Fiorenza's book focuses specifically on historical Jesus research, but much of her argument speaks to New Testament criticism across the board, including her own work.

47. Cf. Susan Lochrie Graham, *The Flesh Was Made Word: A Metahistorical Critique of the Contemporary Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010).

48. All literature, including criticism itself, is caught up in identity construction. Whitmarsh writes, 'Literature is an ever incomplete, ever unstable *process* of self-making' (*Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, p. 2, author's emphasis). Cf. Nicholas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory, and the Work of Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2003). See also Kwok Pui-lan, 'On Color-Coding Jesus: An Interview with Kwok Pui-Lan', in R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 176-88.

deconstructed by the inherent play of words strung together in prose. But instead of interpreting individual characters to determine what they mean (much less who or what sort of person they are), I will be looking at how characters are made and shaped through narrative discourse in the processes of characterization and at what this means for how we understand the characters and ourselves as readers. I will consider what characters do, not as agents but as narrative functions. I will attend especially to those instances when characters may seem to escape or transcend the narrative, or to somehow beckon the reader to imbue them with motivations, feelings, histories, or futures, disguising the fact that narrative discourse itself is both enabling and prohibiting such a thing from taking place by forcing a shift wherein the character is transported from one narrative to another.

Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus

When this project first took shape as a dissertation, it was titled, '"The Son of Man Goes as It Is Written of Him": The Figuration of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark'. The words of Mk 14.21 have been for me a source of unending allure—the irony concerning the betrayal and the betrayer;[49] the ambiguity of the supposed reference; the way in which the narrative reflects upon itself while simultaneously anticipating its afterlife in the yet-to-unfold history of its reception. Then, as now, I was struck by the fact that narrative critics in particular did virtually nothing with this verse. On the rare occasions when they did address it, they did so by means of commonplace historical-critical and cross-referential strategies in a more or less futile effort to locate precisely the underlying source of this allusion, overlooking completely the opportunity to reflect upon the 'literariness of the texts themselves' and the complex processes of characterization that are never solely literary, referential, historical, or subjective—something one would imagine narrative critics uniquely positioned to do.

This chapter begins with epigraphs from Philip Pullman and Roland Barthes. As I read it, Pullman's self-reflective commentary on his novel points up four things. First, to say that parts of the book 'read like' this or that, especially without identifying directly which parts, is to highlight the blurriness that marks the supposed boundaries between the novelistic, the historical, and the imaginary. Second, the dual nature of Jesus Christ, for me, within the context both of this book and of narrative discourse, is not initially that of an earthly man and a divine being, but rather is that of the figure and the persona. Third, stories are never solely about the characters and plots they purport to describe. Among other things, stories are

49. See George Aichele, *Jesus Framed* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 18-26.

also always about themselves and about their telling. And finally, from the last point it follows that story is something inescapable and endlessly deferred.

Of course, I read Pullman's remarks this way because they are framed by the remarks from Barthes that follow. New Testament narrative critics, like the majority of classically trained biblical scholars, have tended, in my assessment, to separate things too much—Jesus from Christ, story from discourse, history from myth, text from commentary, and so on. The making of such distinctions is ultimately about mastery and control. But such control is both elusive and itself subject to and circumscribed by the stories we tell about the text and ourselves as readers. Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus, therefore, entails prolonged and focused reflection on and around the character and characterization of Jesus within the discourse of narrative and commentary. It is an act of reading and performance intended not to explicate but to reproduce in kind.[50]

The Plan of the Book

The book unfolds as follows. Chapter 1 describes and assesses more fully the current state of New Testament narrative criticism. Beginning with David Rhoads, Johanna Dewey, and Donald Michie's *Mark as Story*,[51] I outline what narrative criticism claims to do and how. Understandably, narrative critics perceived their approach as something fundamentally different from historical criticism. However, as I will show with examples from Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, as well as from the narrative critical works of Stephen Smith[52] and James Resseguie,[53] despite positioning itself over against historical criticism, the method implicitly (and often quite openly) contradicts itself in that regard and fails to adhere to its own guidelines. In addition to showing how underlying historical concerns continue to hold sway over efforts to analyze the narrative dynamics of the gospels, the chapter also demonstrates the extent to which modernist conceptualizations of 'character' (i.e., as the essence of the autonomous and agential self) persist in contemporary narrative-critical engagements with the New Testament. Since the focus of the book is specifically characterization in the Gospel of Mark, the chapter considers other extended treatments of the characterization

50. Cf. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, pp. xviii, 9, 14-25.

51. David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2nd edn, 1999; orig. pub. 1982).

52. Stephen H. Smith, *A Lion with Wings: A Narrative-Critical Approach to Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

53. See above, p. 1 n. 1 above.

aspect of New Testament narrative,[54] and concludes with a look at Elizabeth Struthers Malbon's recently published *Mark's Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology*.[55] Malbon's most recent book represents, in my judgment, one of few occasions in which a New Testament critic fully engaged in narrative criticism as such flirts with ideas that—potentially at least—truly challenge the status quo of historical critical treatments of Jesus and the gospels, and thus shift the focus and outcomes of the narrative critical method toward a necessary re-conceptualization that is more attentive to the discursive figuration of Jesus as a character. In so doing, Malbon actually begins to push the approach and its analyses toward something closer to what I am envisioning here.

Chapter 2 picks up 'secular' narratology at the point where New Testament narrative criticism left off, and explores various aspects of poststructuralist narrative theory and their implications for thinking about characters and characterization. Looking specifically at characters and characterization, I will draw on the work of theorists like Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Michael Currie, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Mieke Bal, Patrick O'Neill and Michael Roemer in order to outline a poststructuralist narratological framework for understanding literary characters. Such a framing begins by dislodging the notions of 'unity' and 'coherence' (i.e., with respect to both the narrative and its individual components, such as characters), jettisoning categorizations of characters as 'flat' and 'round', dispensing with any projection of interiority, and unsettling the dichotomy of story and discourse. I make the case for each of these moves on the basis of narratological theory itself. Since my goal, in part, is to upset perceptions of characters as 'real' people, I will avoid reading characters as representative stand-ins. Characters do not simply represent real historical figures or ideas; nor are they self-evidently models for imitation or identification. Rather, for the purposes of this study, characters are literary constructs and narrative functions. The final section of this chapter sets forth the three aspects of narrative that, in my view, are inseparable from characterization, but that also always threaten to deconstruct characters even as they influence their construction—namely, focalization, dialogue, and plot.

54. E.g., Paul L. Danove, *The Rhetoric of the Characterization of God, Jesus, and Jesus' Disciples in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2004); Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Adele Berlin (eds.), *Characterization in Biblical Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1993); Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2000); and David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni (eds.), *Characterization in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

55. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Mark's Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009).

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 perform readings of specific themes and episodes in the Gospel of Mark and in two roughly contemporaneous Greek novels—*Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius and the anonymous *Life of Aesop*. These readings are prompted and informed by the theoretical prospects of the previous chapter, and they attend specifically to the aspects of focalization, dialogue, and plot as they relate to characterization. Together, they illustrate the inherent ambiguity of narrative discourse, particularly with regard to referentiality, human agency, and the complex relationship between literature and history. Chapter 3 takes up *Leucippe and Clitophon* paying particular attention to the emphasis on vision running throughout the novel. The chapter investigates the role played by narrative focalization—i.e., the vision through which a story is narrated—in the processes of characterization, and what affect that function of the discourse has on our interpretations of literary characters, first in *Leucippe and Clitophon* and then in the Gospel of Mark, which also reflects a curious fascination with sight. The fundamental question concerns the precise relationship between 'literal' vision (i.e., acts of seeing within the narrative world) and focalization. Are these acts of seeing, and the general language of sight within the narrative more broadly, synecdoches of the larger invisible process of focalization? Or are they instead designed to 'naturalize' the text's focalization, and hence its ideology, by rendering it in concrete terms? In response, I will argue that the narrative does, in fact, draw the reader's attention to the otherwise invisible processes of focalization. In so doing, it isolates the figure of Jesus, as both focalizer and focalized, dividing other characters and readers alike between insiders who see the figure as the lens and outsiders that mistake the lens for the object.

Chapter 4 shifts attention to dialogue and represented speech. Here, I make extended use of *The Life of Aesop*, which features a character constructed almost entirely in terms of his speech. The relationship of the dialogical aspect of narrative discourse to characterization is not as simple as it might appear at first. Characters cannot be defined solely in terms of what they say and what others say about them. This is significant when thinking about the characterization of Jesus in Mark, given the length to which scholars go to determine the 'character' (i.e., in the sense of the perceived individual's nature and moral quality, etc.) and identity of the historical Jesus based on what they consider to be his most authentic words. My argument is that, to whatever extent a narrative like Mark's gospel may be said to contain some trace of the authentic words of Jesus, represented speech in narrative is an unreliable indicator of a character's essence because dialogue does not function referentially vis-à-vis the person, but rather reflects back upon the discourse itself, mirroring the narrative figure.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I address the aspect of plot in relation to characterization. This chapter deals entirely with the Gospel of Mark. At the heart

of this chapter are two interrelated ideas. On one hand, characters are completely bounded by and subjected to the narrative plots that present them. They are 'paper people' absolutely unable to overcome, outlive, or outpace the stories of which they are a part. While it often appears that characters are what readers identify with, for example, on the basis of personality traits and feelings of intimacy, it is in fact the experience of plot itself that provides the basis of identification between characters and readers both in terms of the way both are beholden to forces beyond their control and in terms of the propensity of each to make and provide causal connections for the purposes of creating meaning. On the other hand, characters are 'creatures of discourse', figures of writing, textual entities that possess fabric-like qualities whereby they are inextricably knit together in and with endless readings and re-readings.

Throughout Chapter 5 and the book as a whole, a substantial part of my argument is that narratives always, of necessity, produce fragmented characters that refract (i.e., rather than reflect directly) the inherent paradoxes of narrative itself and of human experience, insofar as characters, narrators, and readers alike are unable to ever fully escape their own emplotments, even if they do continually threaten to destabilize it. Human beings identify with characters most, I suggest, in the way that their lives and experiences are mediated through narratives—discourses that are never complete, subjectivities that are perpetually under construction in and through language. The book, therefore, concludes with a look toward what I believe should be the aim and activity of New Testament narrative criticism if it is to continue to hold a meaningful place within the field of biblical studies.

1

New Testament Narrative Criticism: Rhetoric, Implied Readers, and the New Quest for *History*

> …[C]haracters are integrally related to plot. At one level, characters are agents in a plot—a character aspires to a goal, a character is the object of an action, other characters help to further goals or become obstacles to them, and so on. Yet the reverse is also true: The actions of the plot are expressions of the characters, and *they reveal the characters for who they are*… Thus we can analyze not only what characters 'do', but also who they 'are', treating them as autonomous figures in the plot and assessing them as we assess real people.
>
> David Rhoads, *et al.*, *Mark as Story* (my emphasis)

> [T]he character and the discourse are each other's accomplices.
>
> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*

> In Morris Zapp's view, the root of all critical error was a naïve confusion of literature with life.
>
> David Lodge, *Changing Places*

It is reasonable to think that narratology—the discourse in literary studies from which biblical narrative criticism took its inspiration—would prompt challenging questions not only about the nature of the gospels, but especially about the characterization of Jesus and other figures within the gospel narratives. This is truer still once one takes into account recent seismic shifts in the vast and varied universe of literary studies. To be sure, narrative criticism, pushing off as it did from historical criticism, did trigger its share of waves initially. But ultimately its fate has largely been one of assimilation. This chapter outlines more fully what narrative criticism is and what it aims to do, and explains why it has been absorbed so easily into the mainstream of biblical criticism.

The fundamental tenets of narrative criticism are essentially three-fold. First, the story each gospel narrates is taken to be unified and coherent, and therefore should be read and understood holistically. Second, since the story is the product of a particular author's discourse and is conveyed by that discourse to a reader, an effort should be made to hear it on its own

terms, as a self-contained, autonomous work of literature, without appeal to historical background concerning, for example, the sources used in the composition of the text, or the socio-economic structures of first-century Palestine. Finally, and as a corollary to the supposition that the gospels narratives reflect an intention to communicate, the goal of any narrative critical analysis should be to ascertain, and at times even to embody, the position of the implied reader.[1]

The title for this chapter is intended to summarize these three tenets in a slightly different way. Narrative critics, first, view the narrative discourse of a particular gospel as a rhetorical device, an instrument used by an author to communicate an independent (theoretically) story to a reader. Therefore, next, they endeavor to assume the position of that implied reader in order to ascertain and understand—one might even say experience—what the author is intending to say through his literary portrait, as it were, i.e., the message of that story. Finally—and this is where characters and characterization come into play most pronouncedly—having set aside any conventional historical reconstruction, they distill and reify the story, and by extension the supposed essence, of its most central character—Jesus. Jesus, that is to say, is neither so much an historical entity nor a theological symbol, but rather an idealized character to whom we ultimately have even greater access by means of our experience of his story variously told and retold.

How this approach to the gospels differs (on the surface at least) from that of historical criticism is not difficult to see. But it should not be missed how much it differs from narratology as it is known outside of biblical studies. For while New Testament narrative critics imitate narratologists by

1. Although they are connected and, to a certain extent, overlap, the 'implied reader' should not be confused with the 'ideal reader'. New Testament narrative critics draw heavily upon the conceptual framework and theoretical perspective of Wolfgang Iser. Stephen Moore notes that 'a salient feature of Iser's reader, as posited theoretically, is that it is neither wholly actual nor wholly ideal. Whereas an ideal reader would be entirely manipulated by a text… Iser's implied reader would bring sociocultural and personal history to the text' (*Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, p. 101; cf. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978], pp. 27-38). However, elsewhere Moore describes the 'implied reader' as '(the generally more oblique) image of "the reader in the text"; the reader presupposed or produced by the text as (in some theories) its ideal interpreter' (*Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, p. 46). Here, Moore is commenting on R. Alan Culpepper's 'narrative communication model' (R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983]). Culpepper's treatment of the implied reader (pp. 203-27) focuses primarily on the question of who the reader constructed by John's gospel is, but the question of 'what the reader of the Fourth Gospel must do to read it successfully' (p. 205) drives the entire study. It is this concern that continues to motivate the vast majority of New Testament narrative critics.

attending to the aspects of plot, characterization, point of view, setting, narrative time, and so on, the manner in which they appropriate and employ those aspects to better interpret individual narratives is rather peculiar in comparison to the work of traditional narratologists, albeit right at home with conventional biblical criticism. As noted above in the Introduction, early narratologists wanted to understand narrative discourse as such. They were interested in the intrinsic structures and properties that they deemed constitutive of *all* narrative, in the function of narrative aspects, in the possibilities and limitations of these narrative elements, and in the unique ways that narrative discourse works.

Just about the time that New Testament critics were beginning to dabble in narratology and to experiment with its applicability for explicating the gospels and Acts, narratology was beginning to undergo a number of transitions, all of which have increasingly highlighted the inventiveness, intricacy, and ideology of narrative discourse itself (versus of individual narratives per se). Contemporary narrative theory attends to the volatility, unpredictability, and boundlessness of narrative discourse, conditioned primarily by its inherently intertextual quality. We will look more closely at the impact and significance of these shifts in the following chapter. There, too, I will attempt to sketch an approach to reading literary characters that I think is more acutely focused on the *discourse* of biblical narratives, and to explore where we might go were we to think differently about the narrativity of the gospels, which is precisely what New Testament narrative critics aimed to do initially, before eventually shying away from the places where such a path might lead.

But before we get to that, we need to better understand what narrative criticism is and how it works. Hence, for the remainder of this chapter, I want to look a bit more closely at the character of New Testament narrative criticism, as it is customarily conceived. In order to do so, I draw upon a variety of books written either about or from the perspective of New Testament narrative criticism, and particularly those focused on the Gospel of Mark, on characters and characterization, or both.[2]

As far as the Gospel of Mark is concerned, few studies are as well known and influential as David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark*

2. The bibliography on narrative criticism generally is vast and still growing. See, e.g., Mark Minor, *Literary-Critical Approaches to the Bible: An Annotated Bibliography* (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1992); *Literary-Critical Approaches to the Bible: A Bibliographical Supplement* (West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 1996); Mark Allan Powell, *The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992). The bibliography has grown exponentially over the last decade, not to mention having splintered off in a number of different directions, bleeding into reader-response criticism, rhetorical criticism, ideological criticism, deconstruction, feminist criticism, postcolonial criticism, etc.

as Story.[3] This important text, together with James Resseguie's introduction to New Testament narrative criticism, a collection of essays edited by Tom Thatcher and Stephen Moore, *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism*,[4] and Stephen Smith's extended narrative critical treatment of Mark in *A Lion with Wings*,[5] provide a framework on which to hang the key elements of New Testament narrative critical analysis, as well as a good gauge by which to assess the current state of the approach. The edited volume by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Between Author and Audience in Mark*,[6] highlights the timeliness of this discussion insofar as it features a collection of papers presented within the space of less than one year on the interrelated themes of narration, characterization, and interpretation. Although it is essential that we understand and engage narrative criticism as a whole, the focus of this study is characters and characterization in Mark. It is worth noting, therefore, that three collections of essays have been published which focus squarely on characterization: *Characterization in Biblical Literature*, edited by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Adele Berlin; *Characterization in the Gospels*, edited by David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni; and *In the Company of Jesus* by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon.[7] The present chapter will conclude with a look at Malbon's recently published volume, *Mark's Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology*.[8] This remarkable book ties together all of the aforementioned threads—viz., narrative criticism, characterization, and the Gospel of Mark—in eloquent fashion, and represents, in my opinion, a highpoint of narrative criticism in its present configuration.[9]

3. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*. To further illustrate my point, note the recently published volume by Iverson and Skinner (eds.), *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*. If the second edition of *Mark as Story* were not itself enough to highlight its significance and impact, a volume of collected essays paying homage to it certainly is.

4. See above, p. 7 n. 15.

5. See above, p. 20 n. 52.

6. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon (ed.), *Between Author and Audience in Mark: Narration, Characterization, Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009).

7. See above, p. 21 n. 54.

8. See above, p. 21 n. 55.

9. Paul L. Danove has produced a considerable body of work on the topic of characterization: 'A Failed Story but a Successful Plot: An Analysis of the Plot of the Gospel of Mark as a Guide to the Narrative Rhetoric' (PhD dissertation; Graduate Theological Union, 1991); *The End of Mark's Story: A Methodological Study* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993); 'The Characterization and Narrative Function of the Women at the Tomb (Mark 15.40-41, 47; 16.1-8)', *Bib* 77 (1996), pp. 375-97; 'The Narrative Function of Mark's Characterization of God', *NovT* 43 (2001), pp. 12-30; 'The Rhetoric of Characterization of Jesus as the Son of Man and Christ in Mark', *Bib* 84 (2003), pp. 16-34; and *The Rhetoric of the Characterization of God, Jesus, and Jesus' Disciples in the Gospel of Mark*. One reason for my decision not to include his work is because Danove makes no

Throughout this chapter, examples will illustrate the various ways that New Testament narrative criticism has reinscribed so much of what it initially aimed to unseat when it entered the fray of biblical studies. Given this somewhat surprising development, it is interesting to consider the reaction against such literary approaches. An example of that reaction can be seen in Richard Horsley's *Hearing the Whole Story*[10] in which the Horsley himself, ironically, distills 'the story' from its telling and then retrofits it to an historical reality that lies outside of it. Horsley's book demonstrates what a pervasive contagion narrative criticism has become, extending even to the most stalwart of historical commentaries, namely, the *Hermeneia* series, as examples from the recent volume on Mark by Adela Yarbro Collins[11] will show. And whereas historical criticism and narrative criticism seem to collaborate only secretly in the case of Horsley and Collins, the two approaches are working together quite publicly, openly, and intentionally toward a common goal in other commentaries on Mark's gospel, such as those of John Donahue and Daniel Harrington,[12] Francis Moloney,[13] and Eugene Boring.[14] These commentaries will serve as dialogue partners throughout this study whenever we take up specific Markan texts.

All things considered, one finds that narrative critics share more in common with historical critics than with their 'secular' counterparts, particularly in regard to the interests these respective camps pursue. Since their emergence, narrative-critical analyses have yielded strikingly similar results with regard to *how* the figure of Jesus is imagined, both among narrative critics and in comparison to the conclusions of historical critics. To be sure, opinions on *who* Jesus was as a human being, or *what* he was about in terms of his message and mission vary widely. But what remains highly

claim to be doing narrative criticism, per se, and his approach differs drastically from both traditional narrative criticism and the poststructuralist narrative theory that interests me. Danove is concerned with matters of rhetoric and semantics. Nevertheless, what he shares in common with narrative and historical critics alike is the view that texts are fundamentally about communication and, therefore, that the (real) author's intention (accessible through the narrative) has a determinative affect on the reader. For this and other reasons, his work is subject to the same critique I make of New Testament narrative critics, such as Rhoads, Resseguie, Smith, and others.

10. Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001).

11. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

12. John R. Donahue, SJ, and Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002).

13. Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002).

14. M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY and London: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006).

consistent is the nature of 'Jesus' as a specific name attached to a particular set of traits and so forth, and the way we approach him as literary figure, as well as how we regard the narratives that offer him to us, remains highly consistent.

The first epigraph at the head of this chapter neatly summarizes the customary view of literary characters among New Testament narrative critics. While I fully agree with the interconnectedness of characters and plot, it is the implication that Rhoads takes away from it that I find most problematic—namely, that the character can be assessed in the same way one would assess a 'real person', the words and actions of characters 'expressing' and 'revealing' who they are, which is based on underlying assumptions about what narrative discourse is and how it works. To be sure, narrative critics are very quick to state that the narrative is only a portrayal, and that any referent to which the narrative might be said to point is ultimately inaccessible; the narrative is all we really have access to. But the fact that there is, in their view, still something to which the narrative refers in some manner or another, whether it be a person or a story, something that precedes the narrative and stands apart from it, something distinguishable from the narrative, betrays the ongoing and deep-seated concern with something other than the narrative discourse itself. My dissatisfaction with such an implication is the driving force of this study. Without exception, New Testament narrative critics state that their primary concern is the narrative not the referent; the character, not the person. But in reality such is not the case. This is not only a 'confusion of literature with life', in the words of David Lodge's narrator, who is speaking of a character positively and altogether disdainful of all supposedly 'realist' narrative (epitomized most dreadfully, in his professional opinion, by a writer like Jane Austen). It is also symptomatic of the tendency to overlook precisely where the quality of Mark's narrative is potentially most pronounced. Here is the context for the quote from Barthes:

> From a critical point of view, therefore, it is as wrong to suppress the character as it is to take him off the page in order to turn him into a psychological character (endowed with possible motives): *the character and the discourse are each other's accomplices*: the discourse creates in the character its own accomplice: a form of theurgical detachment by which, mythically, God has given himself a subject, man a helpmate, etc., whose relative independence, once they have been created, allows for *playing*.[15]

The undecidability that prevents the reader from determining the cause for various narrative actions—i.e., whether it is a signifier of motivation characterizing the figure, or the necessity of the narrative itself to continue, to

15. Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (trans. Richard Miller; New York: Hill & Wang, 1974), p. 178 (author's italics).

perpetuate itself—is, for Barthes, a defining mark of good narrative. Characters and discourse are types of one another, in Barthes' view, and the former exist in order for the latter 'to play with them, to obtain from them a complicity which assures the uninterrupted exchange of the codes'.[16]

My attraction to Barthes' reading of Balzac's *Sarrasine*, and the value I see in it in relation to the present conversation, is that it focuses pointedly on the narrativity of a particular narrative. In other words, it is neither solely an analysis of narrative discourse that utilizes *Sarrasine* as an item of illustration, nor an interpretation of the story drawing upon the instruments of narratological theory and method. It is instead 'the work of commentary', to use Barthes' own words,[17] which he describes not in terms of totality but of interruption. It is the 'systematic use of digression'[18] in order to refuse comprehensiveness, because insisting upon such closure of the text is ultimately unfaithful to both the narrative and the reader. This, in my view, should be the basis for New Testament narrative criticism.

The Object of New Testament Narrative Criticism

Narrative criticism has never fully shaken off the constraints of historical criticism. Notwithstanding James Resseguie's recent statement to the contrary, New Testament narrative criticism has not been the sort of 'interloper' one might have hoped it would be since its emergence in the 1980s.[19] To be sure, David Rhoads is right to point out narrative criticism's influence in paving the way for the emergence of other critical theories in Biblical Studies, such as reader-response criticism, deconstruction, and postcolonial criticism.[20] But the fact that 'narrative criticism has established a firm foothold in biblical studies, and [that] it continues to be a lively and productive discipline in Hebrew Bible and New Testament studies', as he goes on to

16. Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 179.
17. Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 15.
18. Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 13.
19. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 17. Considering how commonplace it has become in New Testament studies to attend to generically defined narrative elements in a text, it is somewhat surprising to see a new 'introduction' to the narrative critical method on bookshelves. Nevertheless, one would at least expect to find in a book like this, appearing nearly 25 years after David Rhoads and Donald Michie published the first edition of *Mark as Story*, signs of significant advancement in the field. Indeed, Resseguie is to be commended for bringing to bear much more 'secular' literary theory than one finds in Rhoads (even in the revised edition of *Mark as Story*). But unfortunately a number of key problems remain, and there is little to indicate substantive development in narrative-critical method.
20. David Rhoads, *Reading Mark: Engaging the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), p. xii.

say, suggests a degree of ease and coziness among perspectives that would seem to differ on the most fundamental level. The reason for this lies with the fact that positivist notions of history and modern, Western conceptualizations of the self pervade New Testament studies, and fundamentally unite seemingly disparate approaches, especially with respect to characters, the most central of which being, of course, Jesus himself. Furthermore, both the disparagement of narrative criticism on the part of its detractors and, alternately, the ironic closeness narrative criticism shares with historical critical methods are indicative of a particular understanding of texts and their function that biblical studies is loath to surrender.

The 'common goal' I mentioned earlier is not one that presents itself on the level of details, to be sure. At that level, there will always be fierce debate. But in some respects, the fierceness of that debate is precisely what betrays just how close the methods are to one another with regard to their fundamental interests. The 'common goal' they share has to do with the persistent effort to get *through* the text in order to get to something else, be it the story, history, or message.

Any 'plain sense' reading of the New Testament gospels suggests that they are *about* Jesus[21]—at least primarily. Hence, one is not surprised to see readers *consulting* the gospel narratives to learn more about his earthly life and to better understand him as a person. However, problems arise when we assume that they are about Jesus in the same way we think of a modern biography or novel being about an individual or a character.[22] But the issue

21. See, e.g., Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 23.

22. From an historical point of view, this is true insofar as ancient writers and readers simply did not do biography or history they way we are accustomed to. Scholars like David Rhoads freely admit this, and others like Richard Horsley capitalize on it as an occasion for criticizing modern readings of the gospels. One also can point, e.g., to Wayne A. Meeks, *Christ Is the Question* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006), pp. 63-100; Christopher Gill, 'The Character–Personality Distinction', in Christopher Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 1-31. The point I am making also holds with respect to reading the gospels through the framework of modern novels with their persistent interest in human psychology and interiority. While it can be argued that notions of 'individuality' (agency, subjectivity) may have been taking shape during this period, there is no shortage of material to problematize anachronistic projections of post-Freudian concepts of individuality into the ancient novel and to indicate that responsibility to 'the whole' (be it society, culture, race, etc.) was still of greater importance (see, e.g., the contributions by Stephen Halliwell, Simon Goldhill and Jasper Griffin to the aforementioned collection edited by Pelling). This monograph is not especially concerned with addressing the issue from an historical standpoint, however. I would suggest, therefore, that the point holds with regard to the dynamics of narrative itself. That is to say, these narratives are not about *persons*, but rather occupied with *characters*. This is not because an author intends it so, but because the latter are, at best, *representations* of the former, and thus one

is not primarily a matter of genre. The problem does not begin or end with the differentiation of ancient and modern forms of historiography. Rather, my contention throughout this book is that the problem is a condition or consequence of narrative discourse itself. But this has not been the central focus of New Testament narrative critics, despite appearances and numerous statements to the contrary. As this chapter will demonstrate, New Testament narrative critics have tended to the narrative only in terms of how it used by an author to communicate a message. If, as narrative critics, our focus were reoriented toward only the text,[23] the results would be most certainly and of necessity quite different.

Each of the authors' works mentioned earlier, to varying degrees and in different ways, adopts, either consciously or unwittingly, the position of Rhoads articulated in the quote that begins this chapter. That is, they assume that, in some way or another, the actions of the plot are *expressions* and *self-revelations* of the characters figured in the narrative. Each, therefore, seeks in some way to better understand these literary 'individuals' (especially Jesus), to apprehend their 'essence'. All of these authors endeavor to read as the implied reader, which entails upholding a number of assumptions; namely, (i) that one's primary task is exegetical insofar as critics seek to *discover* (even to disrobe) what lies within the narrative, (ii) that each narrative in question is *coherent* and *whole*, and (iii) that their work consists of delineating the poetics of the text (with a strong orientation toward meaning) in relation to the independent, preexisting, and stable story purportedly conveyed. To be sure, very few New Testament narrative critics indicate any strict interest in doing narrative poetics per se. By the same token, however, they take their lead from poetics. Moreover, while many interpreters have attended to political concerns (e.g., Richard Horsley and the more recent work of David Rhoads), rarely has it been in the sense that poststructuralist narrative theorists have in mind.[24] The work of these critics is largely predetermined by the historical-critical paradigm. Hence, for example, while they are concerned with political

step removed. Cf. Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe* (trans. James Harkness; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). More will be said on this matter in due course.

23. Throughout this study, I follow Rimmon-Kenan's three-part categorization, wherein '"story" designates the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events'; '"text is a spoken or written discourse" that undertakes the telling of the "story"'; and 'narration' is 'the act or process of production'. 'Of the three aspects of narrative fiction, the text is the only one directly available to the reader' (*Narrative Fiction*, pp. 3-4).

24. Cf. Conway, 'There and Back Again', in Thatcher and Moore (eds.), *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism*, pp. 77-91; and Liew, 'The Word of Bare Life', in Thatcher and Moore (eds.), *Anatomies*, pp. 167-93.

context and the like, the embedded ideologies of language, form, and reading garner little attention.

These authors abstract and reify the alleged content of the narrative from its narration.[25] In the hands of these narrative critics, the figure of Jesus 'goes as it is written of him' (see Mk 14.21), and the gospel is transcribed. In other words, 'Jesus' as a literary character (or his message as a narrative theme) is distilled from the text and rewritten elsewhere. Suffice it to say for now that the significance of this phrase (viz., 'goes as it is written of him') in this particular context is twofold: on one hand is the persistence of character in general, and especially of particular notions of 'characters', both of which carry within them certain theological 'agendas' regarding the role and significance of these figures in relation to *meaning*. Repeatedly throughout the history of biblical scholarship, 'theologians attempt to align the literary character with the theological function and meaning of the gospel'.[26] On the other hand is way that Jesus, as a character, is subjected to the narrative in which he is contained. The character aspect is a fundamental and absolutely inextricable component of all narrative. Like all literary figures, Jesus is emplotted within a discourse, and any effort to separate the one from the other betrays something else at work.

Mark as Story: Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark

When one thinks about New Testament narrative criticism in general, and especially on the Gospel of Mark, there is probably no other book that comes to mind more readily than *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* by David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie[27]—without doubt, the most influential study of the literary aspects of Mark's Gospel. The book occupies a position in relation to this area of biblical criticism that earns it pride of place. *Mark as Story* is likely to be one of the first texts perused by someone unfamiliar with New Testament narrative criticism. It has played (and continues to play) a profound role in

25. See Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, pp. 41-45, 51-55. At one point, Moore writes, 'If story is to be understood strictly as the "what" of the narrative, and rhetoric as "how" that story is told, then everything in the narrative (which is all a "telling", after all) is rhetorical' (p. 60). Cf. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*. I will take this up more fully in Chapter 2.

26. Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Power and Prejudice: The Reception of the Gospel of Mark* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), p. 134.

27. Stephen Moore engaged this book thoroughly in *Literary Criticism and the Gospels* (see, e.g., pp. 41-43, 60-62, 98-102), but despite the issues Moore raised, the revised edition of *Mark as Story* and the numerous books and articles that have since been published show surprisingly little theoretical development.

establishing narrative criticism as a method in the field of New Testament studies and in providing the impetus for so much that has followed when speaking of 'narrative criticism'.

The first edition of *Mark as Story* appeared within the first decade of narrative criticism's emergence in the field of biblical studies. In the mid- to late-seventies, there began to surface, out of the Markan Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature, a number of studies focused on the narrative features of Mark's Gospel. Works by Thomas Boomershine, Robert Tannehill, Joanna Dewey, Norman Petersen, Werner Kelber, Mary Ann Tolbert, and Robert Fowler marked the beginning a significant shift in biblical studies.[28] As a member of the group, Rhoads addressed this emergent trend in the Markan Seminar in his article, 'Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark'.[29] The article identifies the necessary modifications that take place when one moves from a conventional historical-critical analysis of the text to a narrative-critical reading, a shift Rhoads describes as being 'from history to story, from a redactional analysis of the text to treating the text as a whole, and from a focus on the writer's compositional activity to the experience of a reader/hearer'.[30]

Mark as Story was first published in 1982, the same year Rhoads published his article in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Publication of a second edition indicates how important this book is in this area of the field, and it highlights the prominent position this method has taken up both among professional Bible scholars and even non-academic audiences. The importance of this text when it first appeared is that it 'presents

28. See Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, pp. 3-13. Today, it is commonplace to find narrative critical terms (e.g., plot, characters, narrators, readers, point of view) bandied about in any number of books or articles on one aspect or another of the Bible. Frequently, however, the inclusion of such terminology merely adds a bit of color to the presentation. It does little to fundamentally alter the conclusions. In my judgment, this only goes to show the degree to which we have failed to explore fully the implications of reading these texts as narratives.

29. Rhoads, 'Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark', *JAAR* 50 (1982), pp. 411-34 (repr. in David Rhoads, *Reading Mark: Engaging the Gospel* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004], pp. 1-43; page references are to the reprint). It was in this article that Rhoads first coined the term 'narrative criticism'.

30. Rhoads, *Reading Mark*, p. xi. Cf. Rhoads, 'Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark', pp. 2-5. The second of these three has really been the defining characteristic of biblical narrative criticism. See, e.g., Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, pp. 29-34, 56-68. While the assumption of (or desperate search for) unity and coherence in biblical narrative criticism has been associated with the text itself, it has been the goal of theory in classical narratology. However, just as these presuppositions in biblical studies have come under fire from historical and poststructuralist critics alike, the 'rage for order' (to borrow from Henry James) among narratologists has been problematized in recent years as well. See Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*.

us for the first time with a descriptive poetics of a gospel',[31] and does so still today. Simply put, the aim of the authors is to present the Gospel of Mark *as a story* in order to demonstrate how a narrative-critical method can open up a text.[32]

The starting point for Rhoads and the vast majority of New Testament narrative critics is the differentiation of story and discourse, a distinction based on Seymour Chatman's 1978 book, *Story and Discourse*, which is a structuralist perspective on narrative form that establishes a fundamental division between the *what* and the *how* of a narrative. The former (variously called 'story', *histoire*, *fabula*) refers to the content of the narrative (e.g., events and existents). The latter (variously referred to as discourse, *sjužet*, plot) refers to the expression or the means by which the content is communicated.[33] Discourse is composed of two principal features: order and selection.[34] 'The insight Chatman builds on is that everything in

31. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, p. 41. The year after *Mark as Story* appeared in print, R. Alan Culpepper published *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, which was even more comprehensive than Rhoads in many respects. Since, we have seen also Robert W. Funk, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1989), and Petri Merenlahti, *Poetics for the Gospels? Rethinking Narrative Criticism* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2002), both of which seek to articulate a poetics unique to the gospels. In many respects, it is here that narrative critics share the greatest affinity with secular narratology, notwithstanding the fact that they privilege this particular form as if it were a distinct genre of narrative.

32. Thus, Rhoads, Dewey and Michie (*Mark as Story*, p. xi) write, 'We are not so much trying to give an interpretation of Mark—though of course we do—as we are endeavoring to show how narrative criticism can illumine a text, using Mark as our example'.

33. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 19. According to Moore, the significance of Chatman's work is that it combined the French and Anglo-American traditions of narrative theory. Whereas the former focused on plot, character, and time, the latter focused on point of view. The book's 'importance for New Testament literary criticism was that it enabled the individual facets of gospel narrative to be interrelated and integrated more successfully than before, an obvious boon for a narrative criticism intent on displaying the unity of the gospel text' (*Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, p. 44).

34. In Chatman's view, the transposability of stories is the strongest argument to support this conceptualization of narrative's twin register. Given that the genre of film plays an important role in Chatman's analysis, an example from the medium of television will prove helpful. In a television series consisting of multiple episodes (or in films with sequels), different 'actors' can often play the same 'character'. Moreover, characters can came and go from a particular story, either 'physically' or in the 'memory' (e.g., through dialogue) of other 'characters' within the ongoing story. The implication is that characters can be exchanged, redistributed, and recycled. On one hand, these characters do not exist (or at least exist differently) outside of the narrative. On the other hand, they *always* (continue to) exist (and thus remain) firmly within the narrative that produced them and wherein they first appear. More will be said on this below.

narrative discourse is selection, framing, arranging, filtering, slanting, that is, rhetorical'.[35]

Chatman's framework provided the foundation upon which New Testament narrative criticism would be built. *Mark as Story* utilized Chatman's dichotomy between story and 'rhetoric' (i.e., discourse), but attempted to apply it to a reading of the entire gospel, which was organized around five narrative features—narrator, settings, plot, characters, and rhetoric—in 'a method that seeks to keep form and content together'.[36] Rather than drawing attention to the determinative force of the narrative rhetoric, the separation of story and discourse served to buttress the claim that the Gospel of Mark is a coherent, unified text, and everything about Rhoads's analysis of Mark's narrative is premised on this outlook. The categories of analysis are viewed as simply individual facets of the whole, outward aspects of the story by means of which the story takes shape, manifestations of the story that carry it along.

The most pressing methodological concern for Rhoads and company was the development of a holistic approach to the gospel narratives.[37] From the outset, the authors assert the coherence of Mark's narrative, describing it as being of 'remarkably whole cloth': the narrator's point-of-view is unwavering; the plot coherent; the characters consistent, and so on. This coherence has an internal and an external quality; not only does the story possess an inherent unity; it is integrated with its telling also.[38] In contrast to what I will do in the next chapter, Rhoads and company take this inseparability to mean that this story, which existed as such prior to its telling, is narrated in an intentional manner on the part of an actual author whose meaning is

35. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, p. 45.

36. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. xi. For the interpretive framework they employ, the authors credit Wesley A. Kort, *Story, Text and Scripture: Literary Interests in Biblical Narratives* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), which is interesting insofar as Kort's driving concern is for an appreciation of the biblical text *as* Scripture. Kort writes, 'Literary interests … do not impose themselves on the religious meaning or theological standing of biblical material. Rather, if there are religious and theological meanings and force in biblical narratives, they derive from and can be traced to the characteristics of narrativity and textuality. It is not as though narrative and text are neutral containers of occasions for a religious or theological content and agenda. Religious meaning does not antedate and cannot be divorced from narrativity and textuality. The literary and religious are fundamentally joined' (p. 3).

37. On the centrality of coherency to biblical narrative criticism, see above, p. 34 n. 3. See also Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, pp. 6-10; and Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, p. 17.

38. 'We do not intend for our study of these features of narrative [viz., narrator, setting, plot, characters, and rhetoric] to fragment the story… A story is not just a vehicle for an idea, such that the story can be discarded once one has the idea' (Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 7).

the reward of proper understanding. The narrative aspects of setting, plot, point of view, and so on are matters of coloring and technique, the specifics of an artist's genius. Hence, rhetoric—their term for the discourse—is 'the way in which an author writes so as to create certain effects on the reader'.[39]

Concern with a unified *methodology* overlaps with secular narratology's early interest in developing a scientific and objective theory of narrative. Concern with a unified text, however, represents a sharp break with traditional narratological theory, which has had little interest in the interpretation of isolated narratives, and distinguishes New Testament narrative criticism especially from postmodern narrative theory, which challenges notions of coherency altogether. It is a reaction against the tools and methods of traditional historical criticism—most notably source, form, and redaction criticism. Most importantly for our purposes, it prefigures the authors' treatment of characters in which is reflected a thoroughly modernist conceptualization of the self—whole, unified, autonomous, and agential.

Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie treat as the 'rhetorical aspect…the various ways an author may use the combined features of narrative to persuade readers to enter and embrace the world presented by the narrative', which they discuss in their chapter on the reader.[40] Despite all of Rhoads's efforts to differentiate the narrator from the author, authorial intent is explicit in this description. And to whatever extent authorial intent *is* set aside elsewhere, there still exists a sense of control and manipulation resident within the text itself determining the reader's experience.[41] This, in turn, is related to the 'ideal reader', an imaginary construct in which is epitomized a reader who possesses all of the requisite knowledge necessary to read and interpret a text correctly, i.e., according to the author's intent. The ideal reader is a properly and adequately informed reader.[42] Rhoads

39. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 137. Even some of the gaps in Mark are intentional (p. 4), and Mark's story is deliberately ambiguous (p. 61).

40. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 7. In the first edition of *Mark as Story*, an entire chapter was given to rhetoric. The authors took up the narrator, point of view and standards of judgment, style, narrative patterns, and other literary features. The second edition renames this chapter 'The Narrator', and therein deals with the narrator's role, the narrator's point of view, the narrator's style and tempo, etc. Rhetoric, then, is tucked into the expanded concluding chapter, which attends to the reader. Their point throughout is that narrative rhetoric is an instrument for persuading an audience.

41. Cf. Iser, *The Act of Reading*.

42. Considering the ever-increasing need for more and more specialized information to overcome the gap between 'ancient text' and 'modern (real) readers', and ironic distancing occurs between 'ideal' and 'real' readers that, in turn, parallels the distance between 'experts' (i.e., critics, scholars, professional interpreters, etc.) and 'novice' readers, which privileges critics as masters of the text.

and company are persuaded that 'the story of Mark seeks to create ideal readers who will receive the rule of God with faith and have the courage to follow Jesus whatever the circumstances'.[43] Furthermore, 'Mark's rhetoric seems to enable real readers to become ideal readers and followers… [T]he rhetoric is compelling in large part because the reader understands it to be based on real events.'[44] The ideal reader, however, is a narrative fiction in its own right. In a word, the ideal reader is a type of character[45]—an imaginary figure embedded in and inseparable from the narrative itself.

Take, for instance, Resseguie's treatment of setting and the story of the Gerasene demoniac in Mk 5.1-20. Narrative criticism and historical criticism are so intertwined that Resseguie finds it useful to incorporate Richard Horsley's treatment of Mk 5.1-20 in order to make clear and emphasize the connection between the topographical setting that provides the backdrop for the scene and the political implications thereof. Horsley, as we will see below, sharply disapproves of narrative approaches to the New Testament. To be sure, Resseguie criticizes Horsley's political interpretation of the passage, finding it 'less convincing when all the aspects of narrative analysis are considered'. Regrettably, however, all he really has to add are some theological reflections—indeed, some altogether routine commentary—on Legion as 'an appropriate term to illustrate the strength of the occupying force within the demon-possessed man', and the drowning of the pigs as

43. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 138.

44. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 144.

45. See, e.g., Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), pp. 36-40. The 'ideal reader', writes Fowler, 'is a fictive role assumed by a critic in the process of presuming to address the critical community. It is…a pose adopted by the critic for rhetorical purposes' (p. 38). See also Temma F. Berg, 'Reading In/to Mark', *Semeia* 48 (1989), pp. 187-206; Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, pp. 98-107. It seems to me that this overlaps, in a sense, with what Stephen Moore describes as a key aspect of deconstructionist perspective. 'Deconstruction tends to work with the heuristic assumption that the literary text is capable of deftly turning the tables on the critic who sets out to master it. The critic, while appearing to grasp the meaning of the text from a position of safety outside or above it, has unknowingly been grasped by the text and pulled into it. He or she is unwittingly acting out an interpretive role that the text has scripted in advance' (Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament*, p. 48). See also Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, pp. 28-38. Cf. Barthes (*The Rustle of Language*, p. 41), who writes, 'There has been a great deal of discussion … of the different points of view an author can adopt to tell a story—or simply to produce a text. A way of connecting the reader to a theory of Narration, or more broadly to Poetics, would be to consider him as *himself* occupying a point of view (or several in succession); in other words, to treat the reader *as a character*, to make him into one of the characters (not even necessarily a privileged one) of the fiction and/or the Text' (author's emphasis). I will have more to say on this in the next chapter.

a reference to 'the deliverance of a new Israel from a new pharaoh…the subjugating forces of Satan and his emissaries'.[46] This suggests that the deficiency in historical criticism perceived by narrative critics like Resseguie is one of a theological nature. Some twenty pages later, Resseguie again disagrees with Horsley[47] over the issue of whether or to what extent first-century socio-cultural codes governing purity and impurity are a concern in the interrelated stories of Jairus' daughter and the hemorrhaging women, again merging historical and theological concerns. This running dialogue with scholars like Horsley appears to be the direct consequence of what Resseguie earlier states plainly: namely, 'a successful close reading cannot ignore background details'.[48]

Narrative criticism's 'reemployment of the reader' that Resseguie celebrates[49] is less about the reader's involvement in the text (i.e., even to the point of inventing, constructing, constituting the text), than about an attentiveness to the text's effect on the reader, e.g., its ability to 'influence the reader's response', to 'transform the reader's point of view', and to 'move' the reader (presumably to a form of action—namely, that of accepting, believing its 'message'). The means whereby these effects are achieved is that of the story-discourse dichotomy mentioned above. The discourse is a rhetorical tool that *enables* and *ensures* the safe delivery of the story to the (ideal) reader. This dichotomy, in turn, also serves to uphold the unwavering concern for coherence, and underpins the structuralist poetics that form the outline of the narrative critical method.

46. All three comments are taken from Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 120.

47. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 139 n. 44.

48. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 29. The remark is made amidst Resseguie's reading of van Gogh's painting, 'The Good Samaritan' (pp. 26-30), which adorns the cover of Resseguie's book. His analysis draws on numerous bits of information external to the painting, most of which are historical in nature, and all of which seem to be at a distance from the reader himself, i.e., all of the references are objective and never self-reflective. Resseguie states that 'a close reading does not treat all background information equally' (p. 30), but provides no criteria indicating how one decides. With Resseguie's strong reliance on 'background details', and his privileging of readings from the inside, one is left questioning what it is specifically that narrative criticism has to offer that is unique and necessary when compared to historical criticism (e.g., beyond an appreciation for matters of literary color and texture). What does our refusal to let go of such historical groundings betray? Note that my point is not primarily to argue against drawing on historical information and understanding in acts of interpretation, but to show the extent to which historical criticism and narrative criticism share certain fundamental assumptions, viz., regarding the value of historical information for *understanding* a text. I am contesting the privileging of both the historical information and the reading it yields, along with the subsequent authorization it provides those commanding such information, and the theological interests that such readings and hermeneutical strictures ultimately protect.

49. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 32 and passim.

Stephen Smith's volume is very similar to *Mark as Story* in terms of its organization, content, and intent, though Smith endeavors to incorporate more fully the perspectives of classic narratology, drawing, for example, on the work of Gérard Genette and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. He also engages more directly Bible scholars who have explored the possibilities of more theoretically nuanced readings of New Testament narratives, for instance Robert Fowler and Stephen Moore. It is telling, however, to find him relying far more on theorists such as Wayne Booth and Seymour Chatman, and on biblical critics like William Lane, Bruce Malina, and Norman Petersen. As regards history, Smith adopts the position that it is 'the medium through which the author communicates with the reader'.[50]

Like Rhoads and Resseguie, Smith takes as his starting point the coherence of the text and the holistic approach of the method. He then proceeds to examine the narrative features of Mark's gospel through the lens of narrative theory in order to distill relevant principles that can be applied to the text in order to better understand its message. Not unlike *Mark as Story*, it is ultimately a *rhetorical* analysis, viewing narrative as a rhetorical tool wielded by the author of Mark to convey his ideas, to communicate.

Characters and Characterization in New Testament Narrative Criticism

Smith takes up Markan characters and characterization first thing. He begins by pointing out, rightly, that 'in a work of fiction, no character can be *identical* with an actual person, even if based on one'.[51] The latter he describes as an 'imitation of reality'. He goes on to say,

> With regard to fiction, then, this much is clear, although precisely how a character functions in a narrative—mimetically (as a representation of reality) or semiotically (as symbols of meaning in the text)—has long been a matter for debate. But of course, Mark's Gospel is *not* fictitious—not, at least, in the manner of a novel. All the characters, we assume, are historically authentic… Undoubtedly, the Jesus of history serves as a model for Mark's characterization. Many, if not all, the incidents reported will, in essentials, have been real events in which the real Jesus participated; but the Markan Jesus is nevertheless a character who serves the interests of plot; he is, for example, taken out of real time and relocated in plotted time … and his actions not only conform to the structure of the plot, but disclose certain traits of his narrative character. In that sense, then, Jesus is a victim of the story and not, in Mark's hands, the flesh-and-blood individual of whom we know less than perhaps we would like to think.[52]

50. Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, p. 16.
51. Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, p. 52, author's emphasis.
52. Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, p. 53, author's emphasis.

Mark as Story is concerned with problems of representation, also, as is most evident in the authors' treatment of Markan characters and characterization. What is vital for Rhoads and company is that the gospel 'concerns real people [and] is based on actual events', but only '*as portrayed in the story*'.[53] The authors want to avoid falling prey to the so-called 'referential fallacy' whereby one mistakenly regards what is expressed or implied in the narrative of Mark as 'a "direct" representation of the events of Jesus' day'.[54] For New Testament narrative critics, then, the story has actual referents in history, but the narrative itself represents an interpretation of those referents.

Just as New Testament narrative criticism falters at the precipice of letting go historical moorings, and just as it reinforces the text's tether upon the reader, so too it secures the link between literary figures and real persons by favoring mimesis over semiotics, and thereby leaving ajar the door promising to provide access to the concrete individual outside the narrative. That is to say, instead of recognizing the infinite regress of the signifier in the relationship of narrative to reality (and especially of character to person), instead of recognizing the numerous ways that narratives *prevent* access to anything actual, narrative critics posit a stable beginning and end (the two being coterminous) in the historical reality of the person, and interpret the narrative discourse that presents that person as a matter of medium and technique in the execution of a portrayal. Put simply, narrative critics go beyond the discourse in a way that attempts to interpret the narrative according to assumptions about what would happen in real life rather than confining themselves only the narrative signs provided, *despite explicit claims to the contrary*.[55] To be sure, I find Smith's remarks suggestive. I think they have the potential of moving us beyond Rhoads. But the assurances that 'Mark's Gospel is *not* fictitious',

53. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, pp. 3, 5, authors' emphasis. One perhaps cannot help but to think of so many films and television programs said to be 'inspired by actual events' or 'based on a true story', claims which function to authorize in some fashion what follows, albeit with a great deal of ambiguity.

54. Rhoads, 'Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark', p. 4. The authors' guidelines for approaching Mark as a narrative include reading Mark as a story rather than as history, understanding that the text represents Mark's *portrayal* of Jesus, and avoiding the importation of modern cultural assumptions and theologies about Jesus into Mark's first-century story. It is interesting, given their caution toward referential fallacies, that they are not equally concerned about avoiding the so-called intentional fallacy, i.e., the belief that meaning lies with the author of a given text. In fact, they seem quite interested in getting at the author, albeit by a different route. See Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image/Music/Text* (trans. Stephen Heath; New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), pp. 142-48; Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 101-20; Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, pp. 12, 30-38, 53-55.

55. See again Bal, 'The Laughing Mice', p. 205.

and that the characters are 'historically authentic' betray apprehension and reticence on his part.

Like Smith, Resseguie hints at ways characters can and should be thought of differently than living human beings. For example, he indicates that minor characters can serve as items of setting,[56] and he notes that the same selectivity that typifies all narratives marks the characters within those narratives.[57] However, he speaks from the same perspective of 'givenness' exhibited by Smith. For instance, in a bit of fascinatingly circular reasoning, he argues that the narrator's act of breathing life into narrative characters 'does not imply that biblical characters are fictional anymore than Mary of Magdala or Jesus would be considered fictional characters'.[58] Furthermore, he attributes the aforementioned selectivity to authorial intention, and to the impossibility of capturing the whole (i.e., that which already exists beforehand, out there, apart from the story) and the complexity of human beings.

Narrative theorists typically identify two approaches to narrative characterization. On one hand is telling (i.e., direct characterization, in which a character's traits are stated reliably by the narrator, another character, or the character herself or himself); on the other hand is showing (i.e., indirect characterization, whereby the character's traits are deduced from her or his actions, reactions, thoughts, etc.).[59] According to Rhoads and company, the Markan narrator relies most heavily on the latter.[60] The onus is on the reader, therefore, to *infer* character traits. What readers infer, however, is something no less *revealed* to them, something inherent to the character itself—a psychological dimension.

> Other considerations to look for in analyzing characters include what *drives* and *motivates* the character, what they *seek* and work for, what they *fear* and avoid, how they measure up to the values and beliefs that make up the standards of judgment in the story, what their traits are, and how they are illuminated by comparison or contrast with other characters. The author of Mark uses many methods in characterization and, for an ancient narrative, offers some surprisingly *complex* characters.[61]

56. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, pp. 87-88.
57. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 121.
58. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 121.
59. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, pp. 98-99; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, pp. 126-30; Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, rev. edn, 2003), p. 13.
60. 'Mark presents rich characterizations by being minimally suggestive' (Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 99). See also Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*; Mary Ann Tolbert, 'How the Gospel of Mark Builds Character', *Int* 47 (1993), pp. 347-57; David H. Johnson, 'The Characterization of Jesus in Mark', *Didaskalia* 10 (1999), pp. 79-92.
61. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 99, my emphases. For more on

The authors draw on history to make their case. First, they look to ancient literary theory to explain that 'the outward actions and words of a person reflected what was inside a person's mind and heart'.[62] Second, this approach to character reflects how individuals viewed one other in the culture of that period.[63] Third, they note that 'there was little individualism, and people got their identity form the social group to which they belonged'.[64]

'standards of judgment', see Rhoads, 'Losing Life for Others in the Face of Death: Mark's Standards of Judgment', *Int* 47 (1993), pp. 358-69. Despite this emphasis on the psychological dimension, the authors correctly acknowledge that Greek and Roman literature of the period had a tendency to portray characters in a stylized fashion. Characters were unchanging, predictable, and underdeveloped psychologically, and rarely demonstrated any inclination toward introspection. They suggest that this is why the narrator's inside views are limited, i.e., the characters do indeed possess some degree of interiority, but the narrator is simply unable to adequately capture that which remains hidden and inaccessible. With the foundations for psychological interiority and personality provided by Rhoads and Resseguie, a book like *Jesus: A Psychological Biography*, by Donald Capps (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), comes as no surprise. Capps seeks to better understand Jesus' internal motivations by probing the mental and emotional implications of Jesus having no knowledge of his biological father and experiencing little in the way of paternal love. The author's effort to 'backfill' a literary character imitates the very processes of narrative production in its attempt to explain, and thereby to create a plot.

62. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 100. The character of Jesus himself provides us with a similar insight at Mk 7.14b-15, though I will offer an alternative reading of these verses in Chapter 4.

63. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 100. The authors are citing Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, rev. edn, 1993), pp. 63-89. This is but one of many instances in which Rhoads and company look to the materials of historical background and context (viz., of the conventional historical-critical sort) in order to illuminate the Markan text. Looking to an anthropological and sociological model, they implicitly suggest that Mark is still somehow *about* certain historical realities, easily ascertained and delineated, that Mark reflects upon and addresses *directly*. To be sure, as we will see in the chapters that follow, Mark cannot be separated from its historical location, and we will consider more fully how writers and readers (or hearers as the case may be) understood literary characters. However, Mark's relationship, as literature, to history is more complex than this methodology suggests. Furthermore, how and to what degree it *refracts* history is indirect, as a consequence of both how history and literature interact, and how the nature of language is such that it exceeds the control of the author. And finally, the 'ideal reader' cannot be reduced to an 'informed reader' in the sense that it has been traditionally by historical critics. I will have more to say about this momentarily.

64. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 100. Indeed. So how then, regardless of how complex a real individual may or may not be in himself or herself, would we expect to find any complexity at all in a literary figure? These texts are not intentionally exploring the question of what it means to be human. The observations are correct, but there is in inherent paradox in the analysis and application, which is primarily the result of the persistent connection between a literary figure and an historical referent.

Rhoads and company regard Jesus as a 'round' character 'with many and varied traits'.[65] He 'expresses an individualism rare for the ancient world, acting and speaking in unconventional ways'.[66] He is developing, strong-willed, independent, full of fierce determination and conviction (thus possessing psychological depth), possessing wisdom and insight, and obedient (viz., to God). His actions reveal 'the extent and nature of his authority from God', while his words 'disclose his understanding of himself as agent of God and his purposes'. Jesus' character is defined by his role as God's agent, his authority, his own faith toward God, the manner in which he positions himself as a servant in relation to those around him, and his renunciation of self.

The authors' treatment of the other characters in Mark is much briefer than that of Jesus, but all are defined by their relationship to Jesus. For example, the authorities are characterized by their opposition to Jesus.[67] The disciples are characterized as 'round' characters because they have conflicting traits; what they say and what they do is rarely in sync. Initially, they exhibit faith and loyalty. As the story progresses, however, they show signs of fear, incomprehension, and doubt. They seek their own glory, have wrongheaded ideas about the nature of Jesus' mission, and ultimately abandon and fail Jesus. Finally, 'the people' [i.e., the remaining 'minor characters' scattered throughout the narrative] 'are close to being stock characters with one trait. Yet many of them are really flat characters with several typifying traits.'[68] According to Rhoads, the minor characters serve as foils for both the disciples and the authorities in relation to the emerging standards

65. Just as Chatman's distinction between 'story' and 'discourse' provides the master framework for New Testament narrative criticism in general, E.M. Forster's distinction between 'flat' and 'round' characters provides the master framework for narrative-critical analyses of biblical characters. See E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927), pp. 67-78; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, pp. 123-26; Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, pp. 98-136, passim; Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*. For critiques of Forster, see Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, pp. 40-42; Docherty, *Reading (Absent) Character*, pp. 47-48.

66. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, pp. 104, 105.

67. Cf. Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989). The authorities are 'flat' characters, marked by consistent and predictable traits. 'They are the opposite of Jesus, and they illuminate his character throughout' (Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 117). They are cast in a consistently negative light and distanced from the readers.

68. Rhoads, *Mark as Story*, p. 130. The authors go on to paint a rather positive picture of the minor characters. They are said to have faith (though in fact not all do, and the relationship between the faith of those that seem to exhibit it and the concept of understanding in Mark is ambiguous at best). And they show no signs of concern for wealth, power, or privilege (although clearly there are exceptions, e.g., the 'rich young ruler' in 10.17-22).

of judgment in the story.[69] They are counterpoints of contrast that faithfully exhibit ideal characteristics vis-à-vis the actual behavior of the disciples and authorities, both of which have upon them clear expectations regarding the roles they are to play and the responses they are to have toward Jesus.

This same approach—i.e., analyzing, first, Jesus, and then, so many other characters peppered throughout the narrative—is followed by Smith and also by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon in her collection of character studies, *In the Company of Jesus*.[70] The end result offers little in the way of understanding narrative characterization or the nature of literary characters in general, or even the dynamics of *biblical* characters and characterization. Rather, we have something more akin to what one finds in a museum where isolated 'studies' hung about the room offer viewers a greater appreciation for the full-scale image displayed at the head of the room.

New Testament narrative critics view characters as representatives. Following the parable of the sower (Mk 4.1-20), for example, Rhoads and company identify Markan characters as types and categorize them on the basis of their responses to the rule of God.[71] This lends support to the belief that Markan characters are capable of change: 'Mark's story assumes that people will be able to turn around and put faith in the good news—indeed to undergo a reorientation in life'.[72] To be sure, one certainly can see how Mark could be read this way. The 'message' *seems* to be an 'evangelistic' one. However, it must be noted that this aspect is itself an inseparable part of the narrative. First of all, not all of the characters who appear in Mark's gospel can be easily categorized on the basis how they respond to the rule of God, because not all are in positions whereby they can respond. Numerous

69. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 133.

70. See also Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2009), and Susan E. Hylen, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2009). Below, I will argue that Malbon moves beyond pseudo-biographical portraiture in *Mark's Jesus*, with potentially very fruitful results.

71. Cf. Robert C. Tannehill, 'The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology', *Semeia* 16 (1979), pp. 57-97; Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); and 'How the Gospel of Mark Builds Character'. Cf. Shiner, *Follow Me!* Here, representation is shifting toward something different than the historical referentiality described earlier, viz., toward something along the lines of a symbolic stand-in. Taking on a dual function, characters vacillate between substitutions for historical persons and envoys or delegates for contemporary readers. Cf. Nicholas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory and the Work of Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), pp. 92-111.

72. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 101. Elsewhere they write, 'Within the story, characters may think they understand their situation only to discover their expectations overturned' (p. 1).

characters serve merely as foils, conscripted into the plot at various points to serve other interests. Moreover, nowhere in Mark's gospel is there any depiction of someone gradually moving from one mindset to another. At best, we have only instances of reaction without any deliberation. Furthermore, when we encounter such instances, we often are not provided with any basis of comparison. The moment of 'decision', if we dare call it that, is merely one more episode in the 'life' of the character. For example, in the case of minor characters like the paralytic in Capernaum (Mk 2.1-12), the Syrophoenician woman (Mk 7.24-29), and others, there is nothing preceding or following their 'decisions'. This particular episode is all we have. How then can it illustrate change? In the case of the disciples, their characterizations *begin* with the supposed 'reorientation' (i.e., by responding to their calling), and what follows is a seemingly random series of episodes wherein they alternately understand and misunderstand.[73]

As representatives, Markan characters provide readers with figures with which to *identify* themselves (or not identify themselves, as the case may be).[74] According to Rhoads and company, the narrator leads the reader to reject the authorities'[75] claim to act as agents of God and to accept Jesus' claim to the same effect. He does this by aligning his own point of view with that of Jesus regarding the rule of God.[76] Meanwhile, the reader is likely to feel ambivalently toward the disciples. On one hand, 'the reader probably identifies with the disciples more than any other characters and wants them to succeed'; on the other hand, however, readers are compelled to evaluate the disciples by the values of the kingdom as taught by Jesus. Readers are even presented with conflicting inside views with the result that readers are uncertain whether to feel sympathy or incredulity toward them.[77] Finally, the authors suggest that the original hearers of

73. To further illustrate the point, take the series of episodes in Mark 8. Both Jesus' actions and his plain speech (v. 32a) fail to affect change. In fact, their failure to do so is precisely what is necessary in order to maintain the theme of the disciples' persistent misunderstanding, to say nothing of how Jesus is further characterized as one misunderstood.

74. Rhoads and company give only a single paragraph to this issue. But we will see in the next chapter that it deserves far more attention.

75. The authorities are 'flat, entirely negative figures who embody standards opposite the rule of God. These characters are not reflective of actual people… Nevertheless, the portrayals of authority accurately caricature the nature of power' (Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, p. 122).

76. And by extension with God's point of view regarding the person of Jesus. See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

77. Perhaps one of the greatest and most complex moments of ambivalence between the readers and the disciples—one that Rhoads and company choose not to address in this context—comes at the moment of Peter's confession and the episode that

Mark's Gospel, commoners and peasants, would have identified with the marginal figures in the narrative.

It is my contention in this dissertation that any coherency narratives seem to possess is always tenuous, and the split between story and discourse only works all the more *against* coherency. What's more, the need for historical background to ensure proper understanding paradoxically distances and separates the reader from the narrative even while disguising the ways that the reader is inscribed in the text and also actively writes the text in the reading process. Finally, analyzing narrative as a rhetorical instrument overlooks the ubiquity of narrative as a discursive mode that functions as the very fabric of human experience. Hence, the foundational distinctions narrative critics rely upon (e.g., story/discourse, fiction/history, characters/ideal readers) are unsettled by the very object of their investigation—narrative. Wherever narrative discourse is at work—which is everywhere and always—any pre-existing story or 'reality' there may be can only be made present to us as a rendering, and the 'facts' (i.e., of the story, but not of its telling) remain inaccessible. In other words, the very thing that makes it possible to articulate history, for example—namely, narrative discourse—at the same time prohibits us from recovering it.

What, then, of the distinction between fictional characters and real subjects, historical or otherwise? Narrative critics, on one hand, typically treat literary characters as dynamic entities, continuously under construction, but treat real or historical human subjects as somehow fixed, finished, and stable. On the other hand, they frequently distinguish between 'flat' and 'round' characters in a manner that seems to parallel 'fictional' and 'actual' figures. But if one were also to take a non-essentialist, poststructuralist view of subjectivity as something always under construction (and deconstruction), permanently in flux, irredeemably split, the cumulative product of a complex series of identifications, projections, and negotiations, then the fashioning of literary characters would not be an activity qualitatively different from the kind of self-fashioning in which every human being (including authors) is necessarily and continuously engaged. Moreover, it would become apparent that literary characters and real subjects share in common also the predicament of never being able to ever fully escape the narratives that fashion them.

immediately follows (8.27-33). The rug is pulled out from under the reader no less than from under Peter, and the reader is left either to wonder whether in fact he or she truly understands or else to rest confidently assuming that he or she understands sufficiently and thus risk being in Peter's sandals (or worse, in the sandals of the authorities). However, lest we play a straight reader-response approach, it should be noted that the matter is more complicated than it would appear.

One is not surprised to find New Testament scholars of a more traditional, historical-critical ilk either disparaging or ignoring narrative engagements with the text. What is surprising is the nature of that criticism and the degree to which narrative-critical ideas have been picked up and incorporated into the work of mainstream biblical interpretation.

Richard Horsley's argument in *Hearing the Whole Story* begins with the premise that we should read the 'whole story' of Mark because it was composed as such. Once we do so and grasp the message of that story, it becomes clear that 'it was about and addressed to the ancient equivalent of "third-world" peoples subjected by empire'.[78] This was a predominantly oral culture. Thus Mark likely was performed orally to groups of people and thus probably was *not* understood to be about individual discipleship. Mark's plot 'presents Jesus as a Moses- and Elijah-like prophet engaged in the renewal of the people of Israel through a sustained program of proclaiming of the kingdom of God and manifesting God's renewing power for the people in exorcisms and healings'.[79] Recognition of the centrality of this plot (i.e., the opposition between Jesus' renewal program and the rulers of Jerusalem and Rome) forces us to reassess three things: the degree to which Mark is 'apocalyptic', the subplot of Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees, and the relationship of Mark to Israelite cultural tradition. With respect to the last point, for example, the twelve are 'symbolic representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel', and various women in Mark 'emerge as paradigms of following and serving'.[80] In the end, it becomes evident that 'the story is "informed" by particular (oral) "scripts" operative in the Galilean and Judean villages in which the Jesus movement represented by Mark emerged'.[81]

Richard Horsley is highly critical of the use of contemporary literary theory in the analysis of texts from antiquity. He writes,

> The new wave of literary (and rhetorical) criticism of Mark serves to reinforce the reading of the Gospel as primarily a story about discipleship. Literary critics simply begin with the standard Christian theological assumption that Mark was about discipleship. Most influential in reinforcing the discipleship reading is literary critics' emphasis on 'character' and 'characterization' in Mark. Almost by definition, attempts to characterize an author's characterization of characters involve abstraction from the rhetorically plotted action and teaching of the story. Recent literary critics of Mark borrow their concept of 'character' and their theory of 'characterization' from literary criticism of modern novels, which feature the inner psychological development of individual characters. They then tend to dissolve Mark's *story* into categorizations of its characters… Despite their

78. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, p. xii.
79. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, p. xiii.
80. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, p. xv.
81. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, p. xv.

> apparent awareness that characterization is not particularly important in ancient literature, in contrast to the modern novel, literary critics of Mark persist in applying categories derived from study of modern novels.[82]

The excerpt is taken from a chapter titled, 'Disciples Become Deserters', in which Horsley asks whether or to what extent the Gospel of Mark is about discipleship. 'The modern reading of Mark as focused on individual discipleship "works" only insofar as the individual reader internalizes and spiritualizes what in Mark's story is concrete political struggle'.[83] Horsley locates this move within the context of a particular sort of Christian piety and its corresponding theological tradition.[84]

Since characters were largely types, and since they were agents of and subordinate to the plot, Horsley argues that 'it makes sense to refocus investigation of the Gospel on the overall story'.[85] In his view, 'the discipleship reading, rooted in Christian theology and reinforced by recent literary critical treatments and sociological analysis, does not square with Mark's story as a whole. It mistakes a part for the whole, a subplot for the overall plot, a secondary conflict for the dominant conflict.'[86] The principal conflict is between Jesus and the Jerusalem rulers and their representatives. In Horsley's view, literary critical analyses of Mark have little interest in 'the contents of the story'.

Horsley is reacting against narrative studies like that of Robert Tannehill, in which the central hypothesis is that 'the author [of Mark] has undertaken the more subtle task of speaking through story to his friends about the glory of their calling and grave dangers of failure to which they are largely blind'.[87] For Tannehill, it is all about the author's communication with the reader. The disciples 'are representatives of the early church'.[88]

82. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, pp. 83-84.

83. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, p. 83. One could rephrase and reframe what Horsley is arguing to mean that what he is attacking is an approach that sees Mark as being about individual self-fashioning. But, as will be shown directly, his deconstruction of modern ideologies of individual selfhood do not extend to the figure of Jesus, whether in Mark or in history (not that he fully distinguishes the two, as I will also point out).

84. Cf. Meeks, *Question*, pp. 6-61.

85. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, p. 84.

86. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, p. 85.

87. Robert C. Tannehill, 'The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role', *JR* 57 (1977), pp. 386-405 (394). The significance of Tannehill's article should not be overlooked. As the first published example of New Testament narrative criticism/reader-response criticism, it illustrates that certain (viz., Iserian) tendencies were present in narrative criticism from its inception.

88. Tannehill, 'The Disciples in Mark', p. 392 n. 21. The author is making reference to the work of Karl-Georg Reploh. Tannehill approves of the claim that the disciples are representatives, but criticizes Reploh for not dealing adequately with

The disciples, like all the characters in the story (and those in any other story as well) embody particular 'life roles' that the reader can imaginatively take up in his or her own life.[89] With respect to the disciples, the reader's inclination and ability to identify with them is not unproblematic. Tannehill admits, rather tellingly, that there is a tension between identification and repulsion on the part of the reader. 'Initially identification is encouraged by positive evaluation of the disciples in the early part of Mark. Identification is encouraged later in the Gospel by the similarity between the problems faced by the disciples and the problems faced by the Gospel's first readers.'[90]

The focus throughout Tannehill's study is on what the author (whether actual or implied) is (consciously) doing vis-à-vis (real) readers. There are repeated references to what the author assumes.[91] It is suggested that the author's rationale for making certain choices, not least of which being the decision to use narrative, will become apparent, and that the viewpoints of both author and reader will find indirect expression in the story.[92] Moreover, Tannehill states that the author's purposes are 'mirrored' by individual stories and the narrative as a whole. These are historical-critical moves, and Horsley understandably follows suit.

Arguably, Tannehill's defense of utilizing contemporary literary theory on the basis that all narratives share certain qualities, particularly when the author 'has a strong, creative role' misses the point. Commonalities among narratives exist *regardless* of whether or to what extent an 'author' has a 'strong creative role'. In contrast to both Tannehill and Horsley, my focus in this book is in what the narrative itself is doing as a discourse vis-à-vis language, form, and so on. The prevailing interest in the notion of an 'implied author' among biblical narrative critics is telling, for it betrays their continued interest in still gaining access, no matter how partial, to a

the narrative form of Mark's gospel and for being too restrictive in what materials he chooses to use form Mark.

89. Michael Vines's use of Bakhtin in his treatment of Mark's gospel bears a certain resemblance to this approach, in my judgment. 'In the monologic novel, the hero invariably represents the axiological position of the implied author. The hero represents a particular point of view that the author wishes to test… The function of the plot is then to expose the hero's ideological perspective to other heteroglot perspectives in order to test that ideological position and set it in sharper relief' (*The Problem of Markan Genre: The Gospel of Mark and the Jewish Novel* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002], p. 77). Engaging Bakhtin's discussion of three types of Greco-Roman literature, Vines later identifies the 'rhetorical intention' of Greco-Roman biography as a call to imitation (pp. 80-81). The biographical genre influenced later novelistic prose, particularly with respect to the 'fictional representation of a person's life and deeds' (p. 85).

90. Tannehill, 'The Disciples in Mark', p. 395.

91. E.g., Tannehill, 'The Disciples in Mark', pp. 393, 405.

92. Tannehill, 'The Disciples in Mark', p. 390.

real author, recovering an underlying communicative message, and then constructing a bridge between the author and contemporary readers who can hear that message afresh and apply it to their own lives. Horsley shares that same interest, notwithstanding the fact that he gets at it differently.

Even Horsley, who, as indicated by the subtitle of his book, is interested in the politics of the plot, is no less concerned with a particular *message*—namely, the message of Jesus. His concern is essentially a pragmatic one: he wants 'ears to hear' in order that he can perceive correctly in such a way that modern sensibilities (e.g., Jesus pointing outward rather than toward himself) are forcefully upheld even while he (ironically) cautions against individualist readings.

Viewing characters as stable, tangible, made up of essential qualities, and as entities that are part of the narrative but somehow stand outside of it oversimplifies the relationship of history, identity, and culture. These critics overlook the complex dynamics of narrative itself, and they reify the *content* of the narrative (e.g., the *story*) in order to treat it as an independent and autonomous object. Therefore, I agree with Horsley when he charges New Testament literary critics with abstracting from the 'rhetorically plotted action' and with being anachronistic by forcing literature of the period to fit the *interpretive* rubrics of our own era. But it is unclear to me whether Horsley is accusing these critics of dissolving the story or of misreading it. Moreover, Horsley's reading of Mark is no less an abstraction, because the 'teaching of the story' does not exist apart from its narration. In the end, Horsley himself is just as deeply ensnared within this prevailing obsession with characters. In his effort to salvage the message of Jesus, who he envisions as the leader of a grassroots movement of renewal among colonized people in resistance to the Roman Empire, he inadvertently blurs the line between Jesus as an historical figure and Jesus as a literary character. The problem of forcing an *interpretive* rubric surfaces, and the outcome is equally anachronistic.

In Horsley's reading, the disciples are representatives, too. They stand in for the twelve tribes of Israel, which are caught up in the process of renewal initiated by Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God and his acts of healing and exorcism. The disciples are also foils[93], just not in the same sense as they are for Rhoads and company. Rather, for Horsley, they are foils 'in a far more pervasive and programmatic sense'.[94]

Horsley references contemporaneous literature from Judean scribal circles to support his case. These materials provide an historical setting through which to read and better understand Mark. Ironically, however, it reinforces the text and context dichotomy that Horsley seems so intent on

93. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, p. 90.
94. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, p. 91.

overcoming. Meanwhile, Horsley criticizes comparisons to ancient novels on the grounds that such texts were 'neither "popular" literature comparable to Mark nor examples of a genre similar to Mark'. His problem with such comparisons is that they, like so many modern literary treatments of Mark's gospel, on one hand 'assimilate Mark's story to the thought patterns of the reader', and on the other hand absorb Mark's otherwise oppositional ideology into 'culturally dominant patterns' of thought, compromising its ability to stand over against them. Unfortunately, in rejecting the comparison, Horsley also stops short of adequately appreciating these texts as narratives. This is due in part to the heavy emphasis he places on the romances. But not only were more 'popular' novels in circulation, but even the romances, as narratives, occupied a complex position vis-à-vis the historical circumstances in which they arose and their readership, as we shall see later on. Whereas Rhoads and company failed to go far enough with narrative theory and so reproduced both the conclusions of conventional historical critical studies and dominant Western myths of the individual, Horsley fails to take seriously these texts as narratives, his emphasis on 'plot' and the like notwithstanding.

Reading the Whole Story arises from Horsley's dissatisfaction with what he deems politically irrelevant 'postmodern' reading strategies. Nevertheless, his criticism of using modern interpretive methods functions somewhat like a red herring. According to Horsley, various applications of literary theory de-historicize (and thus de-politicize) the text. While this has certainly been true of many early efforts to read the gospels through the lens of literary theory, it is not a foregone conclusion. What is needed on the part of both biblical narrative critics and their historically-minded detractors (like Horsley) is a more carefully nuanced understanding of the relationship between history/politics and literature, *and* a more theoretically rigorous conceptualization of narrative and its aspects (viz., characters and characterization, plot, and point of view, among others). Such would provide new perspectives for thinking critically about the ideology of writing, reading, and narrative. As it happens, certain strands of narrative theory provide analytic tools particularly well suited to the interpretation of Greek prose narratives produced in the imperial Roman period.

To be sure, Horsley's work differs considerably from that of New Testament narrative critics described earlier, but he is no less concerned with finding a savior in the historical person of Jesus, a revolutionary leader whose cause and ideals live on though he himself was martyred. The 'politics of plot' intersect with the 'politics of interpretation'. Indeed, Horsley would not have it any other way.

Daniel Selden notes that contemporary studies of the character aspect in the Greco-Roman novel are less descriptive than judgmental. 'They show a marked preference for the "effortlessly natural representation of

[an] unforgettable individual", where a premium is placed on the fullness of the portrait and the impression of psychological depth.'[95] Critics regard highly characters identified as 'distinctive', 'many-sided', 'consistent', and 'convincing', while denouncing characters deemed 'predictable', 'simplistic', 'underdeveloped', or 'absurd'. Reading characters this way, and rediscovering such strategies of characterization in ancient fiction, 'reinforces the great novelistic myth that character as such is universal'.[96] It is not especially difficult to see the anachronistic and ideological impulses articulated by Selden at work in biblical narrative criticism, a point with which I am sure Horsley would agree. But similar impulses are present in Horsley as well. One significant way that *ancient* fiction has been co-opted in the enterprise of constructing *modern* bourgeois culture is the widespread fascination with character, in which 'the continual focus on personally distinctive traits systematically opposes the individual to the collective'.[97] This prevailing approach to characters in both ancient and modern narrative is governed by an especially modernist/humanist sense of the individual, the unified and autonomous self, the existential agent. Whereas narrative critics allow modern notions of the autonomous individual to bleed into their treatment of characters, Horsley (who, to be sure, does that as well) allows related notions of renewal, restoration, etc. to do so, projecting them onto a particular message that is inseparably linked to a particular individual qua literary character. Horsley relinquishes his critical distance, loses sight of the discourse, and takes Mark's narrative at its word, at face value, to such a degree that one wonders if the Jesus is he reconstructs is an historical figure or a literary character. Either way the result is the same: Jesus remains a model to be emulated, a hero and champion to be followed, a 'savior' of 'the people' who stands valiantly (if tragically) against the oppressive powers that try to keep him down. Notwithstanding Horsley's effort to dispense with interpretations of Mark that emphasize discipleship and to play down individualistic readings of the text, and even in spite of his attempt to minimize isolated characters in favor of an ideological plot taken en bloc, Horsley's analysis is neither less positivistic nor less literary. It is rather another attempt to read as the ideal/implied reader.

Essentially, the apparent disagreement between Horsley and his narrative-critical foil—which is in fact a rather superficial quarrel—reflects the age-old debate among literary and narrative theorists over whether characters or plot 'drive' story and determine its outcome (or perhaps a much more recent debate over whether dynamic individuals or complex but ordinary circumstances move history). This, in turn, intersects with the break

95. Selden, 'Genre of Genre', p. 45.
96. Selden, 'Genre of Genre', p. 47.
97. Selden, 'Genre of Genre', p. 46.

between story and discourse that underpins modern analyses of narrative. Both of these issues will be taken up in the next chapter.

Moving From Characters to Characterization: Literary Figures as Writing

In *Mark's Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology*, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon sets out 'to give serious, sustained attention to the story of Jesus told in the Gospel of Mark and the way of its telling',[98] an act that she juxtaposes to that of 'mining' Mark's narrative as a source for details concerning either the historical Jesus or an historical Christian community. At first blush, one might see in her approach nothing out of the ordinary compared to other narrative-critical analyses mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, the manner in which she goes about performing this 'sustained attention' yields a richly layered, intricately nuanced, and highly sophisticated portrait of *the figure and figuration* of Jesus in Mark.[99] I do not mean simply that it is detailed and thorough. Rather, in its own way, Malbon's interpretation responds in kind to both the literary qualities of Mark, and the literary character of Mark's Jesus.[100] Moreover, the combination of her unwavering focus on Mark's narrative discourse and her more substantive and thoroughgoing use of classical narratological *modi operandi* results in a wonderfully complex (but surprisingly accessible) schematization, not of the theology of an author that one can reach through the text and by means of careful historical reconstruction, but of the theological dimension of literature and language as such—in other words, a narrative christology.

98. Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, p. 4.

99. At the 2009 SBL Annual Meeting, there was a review panel featuring *Mark's Jesus*. Joanna Dewey opened her remarks by stating that, today, we have generally mastered narrative approaches. Fortunately, she went on to say that *Mark's Jesus* represents something new. Clearly, as far as Malbon herself is concerned, it is not yet time to move on as if we have learned all we can from narrative analyses. I could not agree more, and the present study aims to show even more possibilities of reconfiguration and adaptation in narrative-critical engagements with New Testament literature.

100. To be sure, Malbon does not respond to Mark in kind the way that Moore does in *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*: 'Rather than take a jackhammer to the concrete, parabolic language of the Gospels, replacing graphic images with abstract categories, I prefer to respond to a pictographic text pictographically, to a narrative text narratively, producing a critical text that is a postmodern analogue of the premodern text that it purports to read' (p. xviii). But, then, hers is not a postmodern orientation. What she does do is recognize, far more convincingly and productively than any of the other New Testament narrative critics discussed in this chapter, that, when we speak of the character 'Jesus', 'we don't see him at all; what we see is an always receding "figure" whom we proceed to chase through the many pages that follow' (Stanley Fish, *How to Write a Sentence: And How to Read One* [New York: HarperCollins, 2011], p. 65).

'Remembering the experience of the character Peter', Malbon writes, 'a narrative christology of Mark looks for something more than coming up with the correct title'.[101] Hence, while she is systematic and methodical in her approach, there is a certain fluidity to what she puts forth. For Malbon, the Markan characterization of Jesus is a multilayered affair. To begin with, Jesus, like any other literary figure, is constructed through four channels: namely, the character of Jesus becomes known to readers by means of what that character says and does, and by what other characters say and do 'to, about, or in relation to' that character.[102] These channels are tempered, qualified, and articulated in no less than five different ways. The characterization of Jesus is, alternately, enacted, projected, deflected, refracted, and reflected. Here, she explains how these categories, these modes of denotation and connotation, map onto the four channels previously mentioned:

> Thus my current project is to present a multilayered Markan narrative christology, focusing not only on what the narrator and other characters say about Jesus (projected christology), but also on what Jesus says in response to what these others say to and about him (deflected christology), what Jesus says instead about himself and God (refracted christology), what Jesus does (enacted christology), and *how* what other characters do is related to what Jesus says and does (reflected christology).[103]

In *Mark's Jesus*, Malbon explicitly calls in to question the prevailing assumption that the character of Jesus in Mark and the narrator of Mark share the same point of view, and that the narrator of Mark and the implied author of Mark are, in effect, one in the same. For her, 'the distinction between the narrator and the implied author [are] essential to perceiving and expressing Markan narrative christology' because 'the Markan Jesus and the Markan narrator do not speak with the same voice'.[104] Furthermore, it is the implied author that lies behind both, giving expression to each point of view, and thereby creating the tension between the two that runs throughout the narrative.[105]

Of the two possibilities Malbon suggests for how we might understand and interpret the aforementioned dissimilarity, I find the second most intriguing, as well as most useful for the present study. Drawing on the work of F.K. Stanzel,[106] she proposes that Mark's gospel and the creative tensions

101. Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, p. 16.
102. Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, p. 17.
103. Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, p. 18; author's emphasis.
104. Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, p. 233 and 234. See most notably, Norman R. Petersen, '"Point of View" in Mark's Narrative', *Semeia* 12 (1978), pp. 97-121; Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel*; and Rhoads, 'Losing Life for Others in the Face of Death'.
105. Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, p. 243.
106. Franz K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative* (trans. Charlotte Goedsche; Cambridge:

between the respective points of view of the narrator and the character of Jesus therein be regard as a 'figural narrative situation, in which the reader loses the sense of being told the story as the events are filtered through the consciousness of a character ("reflector") who exists in the story world … though the narration is given in the third person…'.[107] The effect of this arrangement is that

> the mediating narrator is replaced by a reflector: a character in the novel who thinks, feels and perceives, but does not speak to the reader like a narrator. The reader looks at the other characters of the narrative through the eyes of this reflector-character… Thus the distinguishing characteristic of the figural narrative situation is that the illusion of immediacy is superimposed over mediacy.[108]

In Malbon's adoption of Stanzel's schematic, the character of Jesus does not *replace* the narrator; rather the situations of both—i.e., the authorial narrative situation (that of the Markan narrator) and the figural narrative situation (that of Mark's Jesus)—are presented side by side as 'polyphony'.[109] For Malbon, Mark's narrative represents a point of view on the figure of Jesus, which in turn presents a self-reflective point of view on himself in relation to God.[110] In the end, the result is that 'Mark's Gospel subverts its own nar-

Cambridge University Press, 1984). Malbon (*Mark's Jesus*, pp. 241-42) relies primarily on the explication of Stanzel's theory by Gary Yamasaki, *Watching a Biblical Narrative: Point of View in Biblical Exegesis* (New York and London: T. & T. Clark, 2007). See also, Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form* (trans. Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

107. Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, p. 241, citing Yamasaki, *Watching*, p. 101.

108. Stanzel, *Theory of Narrative*, p. 5; cited in Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, p. 241

109. Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, p. 242. Here, Malbon notes the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* [trans. Caryl Emerson; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984]); Uspensky, *Poetics of Composition*; and Merenlahti, *Poetics*.

110. Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, p. 242. It is worth noting that, at this point, Malbon devotes nearly thirteen pages (viz., pp. 244-56) to the relationship between 'Mark's Jesus' and the 'historical Jesus', which is to say, the relationship between narrative criticism and historical criticism (i.e., historical Jesus research specifically). She makes a persuasive case for why and how narrative criticism, particularly after the manner she has performed it in *Mark's Jesus*, actually should provide an important layer of precision and nuance that might propel historical research forward in beneficial ways. One wonders, however, whether or to what extent scholars like John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright—two examples that Malbon uses to represent opposite ends of a continuum within historical Jesus research—would be convinced, especially when other scholars already sympathetic to narrative criticism, or at least elements thereof (e.g., Culpepper, Boring, Dennis R. MacDonald) raised questions in the aforementioned SBL review panel about things like what difference it makes whether or not one includes Mk 1.1, whether we are dealing with the canonical/received/written text vs. some sort of oral

rator's manifest sense of what it means for Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God, by its protagonist's manifest sense of what it means for God to be God'.[111]

While I am attracted to a number of things about Malbon's study, there are two aspects that I find most useful for my purposes here. First, the terms she selects for her categories speak, in many cases—for example, deflected, refracted—of indirectness. These categories address the peripheral manner in which literary characters ultimately take shape in the mind of the reader. Arguably, this not only highlights the marvelous complexity of literature and language; it is also this peripheral, sideward, ephemeral, fleeting quality of narrative discourse that we ultimately find so pleasurable. It is those moments in the act of reading when we are invited into the act of writing.

Second, to a degree that few if any other traditional New Testament narrative critics have done, Malbon treats characterization as a *function* of the narrative discourse. Her focus is explicitly on the processes of characterization as an aspect of narrative, rather than on the character itself. Hence, she is interested not in content conveyed, but in figuration. There is a sense of literary artistry on the part of a real author (though not one she ever presumes to access) that comes through in her rendering of Mark's gospel, but there is also a clear sense that what transpires in Mark's narrative is a consequence of the intersection of language, narrative discourse, and the reader.

Mark's Jesus sets the stage for a reconfiguration of New Testament narrative criticism by taking more seriously both classical and contemporary developments in narratology to create a 'meaningful' space between various actants, existents, and aspects in narrative. Literary characters—figures—here, begin to take shape as modes of writing. Malbon's engagement with Mark's narrative and with narrative theory is not simply a means for adding a layer of color and flavor to what are becoming increasingly stale explanations of the Gospel, Jesus, and early Christianity. Rather, it makes a substantive difference in how the text is read, understood, and interpreted. In this way, *Mark's Jesus* potentially represents a bridge between the sort of New Testament narrative criticism that has held sway in the field for the last thirty years, on one hand, and the approach I am attempting to take in this book, on the other.

Urtext; even broaching the topic of authorial intent and raising questions about rhetorical handbooks, in the case of the latter, because this degree of subtlety would be lost on ancient readers/hearers. Admittedly, while I fully recognize and appreciate the importance of history in relation to literature, I am not particularly concerned to use narrative theory to assist historical inquiry in terms of helping the latter succeed in its quest for the facts. I am, however, deeply interested in how narrative theory forces us to reconsider the questions we ask of literature.

111. Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, p. 256.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to illustrate how, despite its promise, New Testament narrative criticism, as presently conceived, has not taken us as far as it could (and even should) have. In many cases, it has largely reproduced the standard fare of historical criticism. My approach in what follows will be to realign New Testament narrative criticism, drawing heavily on poststructuralist theory. However, my criticisms in this chapter are not confined to that perspective, for even the modernist and structuralist underpinnings of 'classical narratology' look strikingly different from the vast majority of what one finds in the work of most New Testament narrative critics. Therefore, before taking up Mark's narrative specifically, it behooves us to look more closely at how various literary theorists have conceptualized characters and characterization, particularly in relation other interrelated aspects of narrative discourse, outside of biblical studies.

2

'Paper People': Theorizing Characters in Narrative

> Characters resemble people. Literature is written by, for, and about people. That remains a truism, so banal that we often tend to forget it, and so problematic that we as often repress it with the same ease. On the other hand, the people with whom literature is concerned are not real people. They are fabricated creatures made up from fantasy, imitation, memory: paper people, without flesh and blood. That no satisfying, coherent theory of character is available is probably precisely because of this human aspect. The character is not a human being, but it resembles one. It has no real psyche, personality, ideology, or competence to act, but it does possess characteristics which make psychological and ideological descriptions possible. Character is intuitively the most crucial category of narrative, and also most subject to projection and fallacies.
>
> Mieke Bal, *Narratology*

> The ostensible solidity of this no-nonsense story-world of hard facts (as opposed to mere fictions that convey those facts) becomes remarkably diaphanous the more closely we examine it, however. The apparently solid world of the story, it quickly emerges, is riddled with instabilities and uncertainties. To summarize: for the external observer (the reader, for example), the world of story emerges as not only inaccessible, but always potentially fantastic, and finally indescribable; while for the (internal) actor/participant, it reveals itself as a world that is entirely provisional, fundamentally unstable, and wholly inescapable… [N]arrative is always and in a very central way precisely a game structure, involving its readers in a hermeneutic contest in which, even in the case of the most ostensibly solid non-fictional accounts, they are essentially and unavoidably off balance from the very start.
>
> Patrick O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*

The previous chapter provided numerous illustrations of how New Testament narrative critics go about their work, and of the various ways in which they analyze characters in particular. New Testament narrative criticism was shown to be focused on reading for the meaning of narratives and characters, most of all by viewing narratives as communicative instruments and by seeking to occupy the position of the implied reader. Hence, narrative

critics operate under the following assumptions: (i) that one's primary task is exegetical insofar as critics seek to discover what lies within the narrative; (ii) that each narrative (i.e., each message) in question is coherent and whole; and (iii) that their work consists of delineating the poetics of the text (understood in terms of the rhetorical tools that various authors wield to convey their ideas).

Since the 1980s, when New Testament critics were beginning to dabble in narrative theory and to introduce it to the field of biblical studies, the once predominantly structuralist field of narratology has undergone a number of important shifts in response to various critiques. This chapter will identify some of those shifts. En route, I will point out significant ways in which the division between story and discourse upon which New Testament narrative criticism is fundamentally based raises more questions than it answers, and how it lies at the heart of the problem I see with the treatment of literary figures among narrative critics. Following an overview of poststructuralist narrative theory generally, I will take up the three narrative aspects that will provide the framework for the next three chapters—focalization, dialogue, and plot. The theme throughout will be how each of these aspects simultaneously constructs and deconstructs literary figures, destabilizing characters and disguising the origins of narrative discourse. This in turn raises questions concerning how we should understand and read literary characters and the processes of characterization, as well as questions about the implicit ideology of narrative discourse. The chapter concludes with a look at three books—George Aichele, *Jesus Framed*,[1] and Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspective*,[2] and Andrew Wilson, *Transfigured*[3]—that have explored in very imaginative and intriguing ways the implications of postclassical[4] or post-formalist narratological theory for thinking about the figure of Jesus and the text of Mark's Gospel.

Temma Berg describes poststructuralism as '(self-)critical reading, mining the heterogeneity of the text, emphasizing the way the text differs from/

1. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*.

2. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*.

3. Andrew P. Wilson, *Transfigured: A Derridean Rereading of the Markan Transfiguration* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2007).

4. A term coined by David Herman and picked up by others. See, e.g., David Herman (ed.), *Narratologies: New Perspectives of Narrative Analysis* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), pp. 2-3: 'Narratology has moved from its classical, structuralist phase—a Saussurean phase relatively isolated from energizing developments in contemporary literary and language theory—to its postclassical phase. Postclassical narratology (which should not be conflated with poststructuralist theories of narrative) contains classical narratology as one of its 'moments' but is marked by a profusion of new methodologies and research hypotheses; the result is a host of new perspectives on the forms and functions of narrative itself.'

defers itself'.[5] To illustrate, Berg performs her own poststructuralist reading of Mark, which portrays the reader as both 'legion and everywhere' (versus unified and locatable *in* the narrative). Pointing to an unbounded stream of metaphorical and metonymical links and condensations in the narrative, Berg highlights the 'endless supplementarity'[6] of Mark's gospel, and stresses how the presence and role of actual readers reading are inseparable and theoretically indistinct from any supposed reader *in* the text. 'As we read we become what we read if we are prepared ("breached") to receive it. Perception is not a transparent process.'[7] Recognizing the uncontainable nature of reading provides us with an occasion to interrogate ourselves and the interpretive activities by which we always, of necessity, cut off an otherwise infinite process of deferral.

There are two aspects of Berg's analysis that I find especially interesting for my purposes here. First, her unfamiliarity with certain kinds of historical information (e.g., the meaning or referent of the phrase, 'unclean spirits') affords her a degree of freedom that trained biblical scholars find difficult to exercise. This freedom leads to anything but a naïve or reckless reading; rather, it leads to a reading that is both sensitive and self-reflective. Second, Berg questions whether or to what extent an insider (a Christian) can ever embrace or engage in a poststructuralist reading of the New Testament if the intent and goal of reading the Bible is believed to be understanding leading to acceptance, if faith is both prerequisite and outcome. She asks,

> Who is the reader in the New Testament and who can become it or who can it become? … Can a Jew who lacks Christian faith become the (implied, model, ideal) reader in a New Testament text and master what the book tells her? Likewise, can a Christian who has faith *not* be the ideal reader and fail to master what the Bible tells her?[8]

5. Berg, 'Reading In/to Mark', p. 187.
6. Berg, 'Reading In/to Mark', p. 201.
7. Berg, 'Reading In/to Mark', p. 202. She goes on to say, 'The reader is in and not in the text. The reader can never be separated from the texts that surround him, partly because "reader" and "text" are interchangeable signs, but also because the reader is an active producer of what she reads… Neither the reader nor the text has a single, stable center; both the reader and the text may be endlessly exchanged. For post-structuralist critics, reading is not [about] … discovering meaning or significance, looking over, scanning, decoding a text to arrive at an objective interpretation. Rather, readers read to expose themselves to the flickering significances of the text and, in the process, organize texts according to patterns preinscribed in their (un)conscious. Post-structuralism asserts that we may never attain mastery of a text, we may never come to the end of our reading experience…' (pp. 202-203).
8. Berg, 'Reading in/to Mark', p. 190, author's emphasis. Berg's questions speak equally to the practices of 'devotional' and 'academic' reading. Cf. Moore, *Literary Criticism*, p. 104. Moore asks how to remain 'true to theoretical tenets while remaining

These are especially interesting questions to pose in a book concerned with the Gospel of Mark where the identities of insiders and outsiders, and their relationship to one another, are dreadfully vague, ambiguous, and slippery.[9]

Characters and Characterization in Narrative Discourse

New Testament narrative criticism has treated narrative primarily as a genre. And, since the text is viewed as a vehicle for delivering a message, it follows that New Testament narrative criticism has treated narrative aspects as rhetorical devices that can be analyzed on the basis of a narrator's technique.[10] They have persistently viewed individual gospels, for

within the pale of scholarly respectability'. Does this somehow link New Testament studies with a theological enterprise, if not make it one? Does membership in the guild require a particular confession? For my part, I *am* attempting a poststructuralist reading from the position of an adherent (on some level, I think—see the note that follows), and so I hereby confess what might well be the most fundamental flaw in my endeavor.

9. Mark 4.10-13 (NRSV) reads, 'When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven'". And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?"'

I found Berg's reading of these verses, and her reading of Robert Fowler's reading of these verses (Berg, 'Reading In/to Mark', pp. 198-99), affirming my own, resonating with me, written with the same sense of self-obviousness as I am oft prone to use in my internal monologues. I am not certain whether this places me within or without. Perhaps betwixt and between is a more apt description given that 'inside and outside cannot be simply opposed to one another' (Berg, 'Reading In/to Mark', p. 202). We will return to these enigmatic verses and this recurring theme in Mark in subsequent chapters. See also Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

10. Customarily, narrative critics are quick to distinguish between the narrator and any flesh-and-blood author, but rarely do they make much of the distinction. Instead, they argue that while the two are theoretically distinct the reliability and omniscience of the narrator (viz., in Mark) makes the narrator's voice implicitly aligned with the perspectives of the actual author and thus on some level representative of that author. Their emphasis on narrative aspects as rhetorical devices functions to support this methodological stance. Note, for example, that neither Smith (*Lion with Wings*) nor Resseguie (*Narrative Criticism*) offers an extended treatment of 'the narrator'. Smith even goes so far as to remark, 'The narrator, if there is one, may be used as a vehicle through which the implied author communicates its attitudes, beliefs and values, for the implied author has no voice of its own…' (*Lion with Wings*, p. 28). Not only do I disagree with the notion of a narrative sans narrator, but it seems to me to be directly contradicted by Smith's comment concerning the implied author. Representative treatments

example, as autonomous, standalone narratives, capable of being isolated and interpreted independent of so many other narratives with which they intersect. When New Testament narrative critics speak, for example, of 'intertextuality', they do so in regard to matters of influence or parallelism.[11] The failure to consider more fully the ubiquity of narrative in terms of its relationship to how we experience and organize the world, for example, has created a gap in which certain ideological dimensions of narrative discourse have remained hidden. Similarly, when New Testament narrative critics regularly attend to the political elements *within* individual narratives, they treat it as a matter of context, a concern inherited from their historical-critical training. But the politics *of* narrative are something else altogether, especially when we consider the sort of work narratives do independent of authorial intents.[12]

Chapter 1 described how narrative critical analyses of New Testament texts treat characters. They are sometimes identified as elements of setting; they are occasionally referred to as victims of plot or identified in relation to how they serve the plot; the means of their characterization is catalogued according to the narrator's techniques of 'showing' and 'telling'; and individual characters were categorized according to various degrees of 'flatness' or 'roundness', whether they were 'static' or 'dynamic', and so forth. In the present configuration of the narrative-critical method, there are a number of unanswered questions. For example, how does one distinguish between characters functioning as setting and those that presumably do something more integral with respect to plot? How is it that characters can seem at once to serve a plot and be victims of a story, but also somehow transcend plot? In the case of a New Testament gospel, to what extent and how do we recognize and articulate the similarities and differences between (i) purely literary characters (i.e., those entirely fabricated, which could be any number of named or unnamed characters that populate the story-world, including those that operate in embedded narratives like parables), (ii) presumably historical persons, like 'John', 'Jesus', or 'Peter' (or non-specific, non-individuated groups of historical persons, like 'the disciples') characterized within the narrative framework, and (iii) divine entities (viz.,

of the narrator can be found in Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie (*Mark as Story*, pp. 39-62), and Culpepper (*Anatomy*, pp. 13-49, esp. 16-18). For exceptions to the rule, see the essays by Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll and Philip Ruge-Jones in Malbon (ed.), *Between Author and Audience in Mark*, and Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, esp. pp. 231-44.

11. See, e.g., Amelia Devin Freedman, *God as an Absent Character in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Literary Theoretical Study* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 87-118.

12. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, pp. 1-14; See also Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (ed. Michael Holquist; trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*; Cobley, *Narrative*, pp. 171-200.

'God'), which enter a text with certain shared beliefs already attached to them, but which then are textualized and characterized within a narrative framework? These sorts of distinctions are still lacking in narratological studies of biblical texts.

According to Uri Margolin, a 'character', in the broadest sense, is 'any entity, individual or collective—normally human or human-like—introduced in a work of narrative fiction… Character can be succinctly defined as storyworld participant.'[13] Margolin summarizes three theoretical perspectives on characters currently held among narratologists generally. The first regards characters as literary figures, 'an artistic product or artifice constructed by an author for some purpose'. The second approach views a character as a 'non-actual but well-specified individual presumed to exist in some hypothetical, fictional domain', i.e., an individual within a possible world. Finally, there are those who understand a character to be a 'text-based construct or mental image in the reader's mind.'

As we have seen, the most commonly held views on characters and characterization among New Testament narrative critics hardly resemble any of these three options. Taking Jesus as the primary example, narrative critics most certainly do not regard him as 'a contingently created, abstract cultural entity, depending essentially for [his] existence on actual objects in space and time and on the intellectual activity of authors and readers'.[14] New Testament narrative critics perhaps come a little closer to the second perspective described above. While they hardly imagine Jesus as 'non-actual', they will occasionally posit the idea that the gospel narratives represent worlds of possibility (of a sort) held up for readers' consideration.[15] However, narrative critics do not really see the gospel presentations of Jesus as explorations of existence and identity; they regard them as representations in a more clearly referential sense, and as rhetorical instruments in the hands of a skillful author working to convince his readers of a particular

13. Uri Margolin, 'Character', in Herman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, pp. 66-79 (66).

14. Margolin, 'Character', p. 67. To be sure, many New Testament narrative critics, keeping in step with their historical-critical counterparts, are quite comfortable suggesting that an author takes creative license with a particular character or perhaps even invents a character to suit his rhetorical purposes. But this is always articulated *in relation to* Jesus who somehow seems to exist in a different manner or on a different plane. Margolin recognizes that despite the character-as-aesthetic-fabrication view probably being the closest to actuality (p. 70), it is 'deflationary' and does not match the experiences of real readers. Such a recognition gets at a key tension that poststructuralist theory is keen to interrogate.

15. See, e.g., Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel*; Rhoads, 'Losing Life for Others in the Face of Death'; Danove, *The Rhetoric of the Characterization of God, Jesus, and Jesus' Disciples in the Gospel of Mark*.

way to think and be. The final option offered by Margolin shares similarities with the previous one. 'The cognitive-psychological approach', he writes,

> views characters as … text-based mental models of possible individuals, built up in the mind of the reader in the course of textual processing. More precisely, characters are conceptualized here as complex readerly mental representations (constructs, portraits, mental files). This approach, unlike the previous two, is concerned not so much with the validity and specific nature of any given mental representation but rather with its textual base (cues, sources), the operations involved in its formation, the principles (rules, regularities) governing or guiding these operations, and the architecture of the final construct.[16]

Although it is difficult to imagine New Testament narrative critics regarding Jesus as a 'readerly mental construct',[17] the concern with textual cues is something they tend to share in common. However, narrative critics regard the text and reader as separate entities so that they can analyze the unidirectional effects of text upon reader. The cognitive-psychological approach takes account of readers in a much more thoroughgoing manner—namely, by *reading* readers (i.e., as much as the narrative itself), and by emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between reader and text.

The primary reason that New Testament narrative-critical treatments of characters do not fit comfortably within any of the aforementioned categories is that the gospels are taken too frequently and too straightforwardly as *some* sort of historical record, albeit cast within a narrative frame that provides color and flare for articulating a theology. In a word, the gospels are regarded as *accounts*—reports of real events (and of *essentially the same* events across different gospels). They are told in a particular way and from a particular perspective, but they are reports all the same. In New Testament narrative criticism, characters (and characterization) are not theorized; they are a given.[18]

16. Margolin, 'Character', p. 76.

17. New Testament narrative critics would make a point to distinguish between 'Jesus the man' and 'Jesus the character', but any such distinction is largely superficial insofar as they still see the latter pointing rather directly and transparently to the former. But see Fred W. Burnett, 'Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels', *Semeia* 63 (1993), pp. 1-28 (esp. pp. 4-6).

18. There are exceptions. See, e.g., Aichele, *Jesus Framed*; *The Phantom Messiah: Postmodern Fantasy and the Gospel of Mark* (New York and London: T. & T. Clark International, 2006); Fred W. Burnett, 'The Undecidability of the Proper Name "Jesus" in Matthew', *Semeia* 54 (1991), pp. 123-44; Laura E. Donaldson, 'Cyborgs, Ciphers, and Sexuality: Re: Theorizing Literary and Biblical Character', *Semeia* 63 (1993), pp. 81-96; Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*; Wilson, *Transfigured*. Hence, Thomas Docherty, after noting that 'it is in the interaction of the writer's language

The issue here is not whether, to what extent, or how we judge or engage the historical verity of the gospels. My contention is not that the gospels are or are not fictional in the contemporary sense of the word; I am not interested, per se, in whether they are true or false, accurate or inaccurate, reasoned reports or clever fabrications. Rather, I am suggesting that, because the figures that populate them—real or otherwise—come to us through narrative, they are forever inseparable from discourse and narration. This is not only because they come to us in specific narratives (e.g., the gospels in the case of Jesus), but because we encounter, understand, and conceive of them narratively. They are not simply creatures of *a* discourse; they are discoursed creatures.

In the act of narrating, these figures are (re)invented. Language, form, selection, and arrangement exert force on the figure, overdetermine the figure, and prevent direct access to any person(s) that the narrative seems to portray. The story of the character is the story of any given narrative in which the figure is discoursed. This, I think, fits perfectly with the exigencies of Mark's gospel in particular, which I aim to demonstrate in the chapters ahead. At this point, let me say that, as a narrative, the Gospel of Mark performs an experience. It is not capable of conveying that experience precisely or replicating it for the reader, but the generative power of narrative can give rise to new experiences.

Patrick O'Neill summarizes the matter nicely:

> The world of story, what really happened, is and must remain not only an abstraction but also essentially inaccessible to entities external to it. We can never penetrate as readers into this world. Any attempt to isolate the story from its discourse simply results in another *telling* of the story. All we can ever do as readers, other than theoretically, is *paraphrase*, *re*-tell, provide another discourse.[19]

No matter how similar Mark's story looks to anything historically verifiable, anything we claim to know is true, anything counting as reality, it is fundamentally and inexorably a narrative. The point seems obvious, but casual and critical readers alike often overlook it. C.S. Lewis's novel, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950), provides a useful illustration. The city of

with the positions it affords the reader that the element of the text which we call "character" is produced', suggests—rightly, I think—that 'by concentrating on the process of characterization in the activity of reading and writing, rather than on the established product of character, the theory will allow for the possibility of change or mobility in the meaning of character (and equally of the writer and reader) as the text is reproduced in the reading' (*Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterization in Fiction* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983], pp. xiii-xiv). See also John Frow, 'Spectacle Binding: On Character', *Poetics Today* 7 (1986), pp. 227-50.

19. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 36.

'London' that the main characters leave behind in order to escape the air raids of World War II only seems more real than the fantasy land of Narnia that the children discover on the other side of the fabled wardrobe because there is a homologue of the 'London' of the *Chronicles of Narnia* in our world, but both are equally storied within the narrative discourse. Perhaps someone will grant that this is easy to accept in an obvious case of fiction. But how does one distinguish, within the narrative of Mark, for instance, between 'the Mount of Olives opposite the temple' (13.3) and 'a deserted place' (1.35; 6.10, 11, 31, 32, 35)? The degree of precision that appears with one description and is absent in another no more guarantees its actuality. And if this is true of places, it is equally true of characters. Therefore, the distinctions put forward above—purely literary characters versus historical persons versus divine entities—are on one hand altogether meaningless, and on the other hand point both to the way a story's discourse (i.e., its narration, its telling) always potentially undermines the story and prevents it from being told, and to readers actively engaged in writing.

The aforementioned differentiations are artificial, that is, they are matters of artifice; they are superficial. Such taxonomies reflect readers' investments. And these investments are neither innocent nor self-obvious. Fiction is regularly set over against fact. But in reality fiction is inherently ambiguous since it is neither entirely true nor altogether false. The ambivalence of novelistic fiction in particular unsettles clarities about what constitutes either a factual or an invented account. Novels parody other genres.[20] Moreover, narrative, which precedes, exceeds, circumvents, transcends the specificity of fiction as a designation of genre, problematizes notions of stability, identity, and agency, *especially* with respect to literary characters. Narrative is necessary for the articulation of identity, history, and so many other facts, but at the same time it relativizes those facts, undermining the basis of their factuality. Narrative forces the negotiation of boundaries between truth and mendacity to take place elsewhere. What seems like a relatively clear-cut dichotomy between fact and fiction is in fact a mirage. For instance, everything we know about historical (read 'real') figures has been garnered through a series of accounts—narrated. Even firsthand experience is recounted through the telling of stories (e.g., to oneself and others), stories that have, at their heart, an interest in *explanation*, which is

20. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 5: 'The novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, reformulating and re-accentuating them'. A novel like Lucian's *True Stories* is an excellent example of a very self-conscious parodying, but the importance of Bakhtin's argument is the light it sheds on *all* novels concerning the ways they mimic history, philosophy, etc. while unavoidably violating the rules thought to govern such discourses by virtue of their innate dialogism, manipulation of time, emplotments, and so forth.

to say meaning-making.[21] If literary figures are never fully capable of escaping the narratives that create and sustain them, if characters move in and out of storyworld plots only to succumb ultimately to the plot of textuality and discourse, then *any* 'life' they possess is imaginary, a projection of the reader's desire.

Contemporary narrative theory engages these issues in ways that differ substantially from the approach of biblical scholars, and the remainder of this chapter will explore some of the important developments in narratology since it was first introduced to the field of biblical criticism. Rather than taking up characters directly, I will instead address three aspects of narrative that are inextricably tied to the processes of characterization—focalization, dialogue, and plot. These aspects frame and shape characters and character functions, and at the same time affect and implicate readers. For each, I will consider both the classical narratological perspective and the ways that poststructuralist theory has taken them in different directions. But before doing that, more needs to be said on narrative discourse generally from the field of narratology.

Narrative Discourse

Narratology is the theorization of narrative. Until recently, narratology has been a formalist-structuralist project. Its roots are in French structuralist theory and Russian formalism. It began as a deductive enterprise intent on defining the structure of narrative in general (i.e., *all* narrative), the 'nature' of stories and their telling as such, and then proceeded to use that schematic as an instrument for analyzing 'deep structures' within individual narratives. With this focus on narrative structure, classical narratology sought to be objective, neutral, descriptive, and scientific. The goal was to codify narrative. The object of study in narratology was the *differentia specifica* of narrative discourse (e.g., events, time, narration, causality), which, at one stage, were studied in order to articulate a narrative grammar.[22] Narratology was interested above all in 'narrativity'—understanding 'narrative' in the sense of a discursive mode distinct from *both* 'story' (i.e., that which is signified, the narrative content), and 'discourse' (i.e., the act of telling).[23]

21. See O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, pp. 35-36.

22. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, pp. 1-5, 9-11.

23. The separation of story and discourse (à la both Russian formalism and the work of Seymour Chatman) is the most basic distinction. Later narratologists often further distinguish text, the thing we read (i.e., the discourse that undertakes the telling of the story elements), and the act or process of producing the text, i.e., narration. See Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*. See also Cobley, *Narrative*, who, following a 'constructionist approach' to narrative, builds on Chatman and others to distinguish between story, plot, and narrative. 'Story' consists of all the events to be

Early on, narratological studies were interested primarily in the development of an inductive theory drawn from any and all narratives rather than in commentary-like interpretations of individual stories.[24] 'Narratives' were not limited strictly to *literary* texts, however, and before long narratologists began to incorporate into their grammars images, spectacles, events—any cultural artifact that 'tells a story' and all modes of storytelling.

Early narratologists' concern with content extended only so far as it could be distinguished from, and analyzed in relation to, discourse. Seymour Chatman is the best known example.[25] He categorized as 'story' (*histoire*, *fabula*) material, i.e., the 'what' of a narrative, the narrated events and situations (actions, happenings) and 'existents' (characters, items of setting). He designated as 'discourse' (*discours*, *sjuzet*) the expression of that story material, the means by which the content is communicated, the 'how' of a narrative. In Chatman's view, the transposability of a story is the strongest argument supporting the idea that narratives are structures independent of any medium.

Of the many and various aspects that mark narrative, plot (order, arrangement, sequencing, the structuring and configuring of causation) stands out as a key indicator pointing to the artifice of narrative: that is, its artificial quality, its identity as a discourse, the chief aspect that simultaneously gives rise to and prevents a story from being told, that which thwarts seamless or unadulterated representation. I am interested in this for two reasons. First, narrative plots and the characters that populate them are intimately connected. Second, plot is customarily listed among the items internal to the discourse, i.e., the plot itself is discoursed. However, discourse itself is a plot, an emplotment. This blurring of the boundary line between story and discourse threatens to unsettle both and thereby undermines the independent existence of the one and the work of the other.

Therefore, Chatman's identification of narrative as a unique structure (drawing on Piaget) because it is suitably whole, transformational, and self-regulating is suggestive. For Chatman, a narrative is a whole because it is constituted of elements (events and existents) that differ from what they constitute, and those elements are in turn related or mutually entailing.

depicted; 'plot' is the chain of causation which dictates that these events are somehow linked and that they are therefore to be depicted in relation to each other; and 'narrative' is the showing or telling of these events and the mode selected for that to take place.

24. Narratologists of various sorts still seem primarily interested in theorizing narrative discourse as a whole. However, recent turns toward semiotics, film studies, cultural studies, gender studies, ideological criticism, and so forth have been accompanied by close and comprehensive readings of individual texts.

25. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*.

The process by which a narrative event is expressed is its transformation because 'deep structure' is 'transformed' in order to occur in the surface representation. This transformation determines and controls what possibilities can occur. Finally, narratives are self-regulatory because they maintain and close themselves. It is the transformational dimension of narrative structure, as described by Chatman, that I find important. Epitomizing the early stages of narratological analysis, Chatman maintains a structuralist perspective, and thus is interested in distinguishing between the particular and the universal. At the same time, however, he reinforces the point that narrative discourse is made up of two principal features: order and selection. Narrative structure is ultimately one of limitation and determination, no matter the lengths to which a narrator goes to describe, depict, recount, or represent everything. At the very least, this problematizes essentialist conceptualizations of 'story', because the particularity of any given rendition forces questions about the minimum requirements necessary to constitute an identical story.

Wayne Booth's analysis of perspective and point of view in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) provides another excellent example of early narratology, and lends further support to the limiting tendencies of narrative discourse. Booth's interest in how an author attempts 'consciously or unconsciously' to impose a fictional world upon a reader, in 'treating technique as rhetoric', and in discerning precisely what it is that authors do when they 'intrude' upon the reader in order to say something about the story, makes his work very appealing to those who, like New Testament narrative critics, view the various aspects of narrative as tools to be wielded by an author in order to convey an idea or message. Such critics are also attracted to Booth's notion that authors create an image of a reader, and that an ideal reading is one in which real readers adopt the position of the reader imaged in the text. However, by emphasizing the communicational dimensions of narrative over formal features and the involvement of readers in the determination of meaning, Booth opens the door to various layers of narrative relativizing one another and threatening to prevent or obscure the story or reality a writer intends to represent.

Early in his book, Booth is arguing against the possibility of an author's self-effacement. He is demonstrating how the simulation of objectivity and the appearance of not being concerned with one's audience may well disguise the presence of commentary, but it in no way does away with it. Booth is, of course, speaking specifically about modern fictional novels. What he says, however, can, in many cases, extend to narrative more broadly. Moreover, as contemporary readers whose manner of reading is highly influenced by the modern novel, we are prone to judge ancient narratives, whether fictional or not, by standards of verisimilitude. Therefore, when Booth states, for instance, that 'since any sense of composition or selection falsifies life,

all fiction requires an elaborate rhetoric of dissimulation',[26] he points to the inherent and inescapable irony of narrative discourse: namely that in seeking to represent reality it falsifies itself. The greater the extent to which an author tries to depict both faithfully and vividly his or her subject matter, to evoke certain emotional responses, the more he or she is forced to rely upon a discursive artifice.

Another example of classical narratology that has within the seeds of its own alternative is Gérard Genette's analysis of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* in *Narrative Discourse* (Eng. trans. 1980). Genette's theory draws on categories borrowed from the grammar of verbs, and is structured around tense (the temporal relations between narrative and story), mood (the modalities of narrative representation), and voice (the way in which the narrating itself is implicated in the narrative).[27] Using a relational framework, he examines time around the aspects of order (contrasting the 'real' chronological order in which the events of the story took place and the order in which they are recounted by the particular narrative discourse), duration (contrasting the amount of 'real' time elapsed in the story and the amount of discourse-time, i.e., textual space, involved in presenting it), and frequency (contrasting the number of times an event 'really' happened in the story and the number of times it is narrated). Genette demonstrates that narrative is, of necessity, bound up with sequence, space, and time. Narrative subjects real time to discourse time. The fact that narrative is always a matter of past tense and can never be recounted in real time will play an important role later on when we consider the actions of literary characters.

What is at stake in these various analyses? Basically it is the question of what constitutes narrative; what is its nature? At the most basic level of simplification, a narrative is a sequence that is narrated.[28] Narrative consists of signs. Signs (i.e., what humans interpret as signs) stand in for something else in the world, i.e., they *re*-present it. *Re*-presentation results in transformation. Since re-presentation can be carried out by non-narrative forms, the question becomes, what is specific to narrative representation?

26. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 44.

27. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 27-32 and passim. See also his *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (trans. Jane E. Lewin; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 13-43.

28. Cf. Gerald Prince, *A Grammar of Stories* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973); *Narratology*. Prince defines story at its most basic as a state of affairs and its opposite separated by an action. The key is the distinction between story and plot. Take, for instance, Forster's classic example, 'The king died and then the queen died' is a story. 'The king died, and then queen died of grief' is a plot (*Aspects of the Novel*, p. 86). Hence, story is an abstraction, and plot centers on causality. See also Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative*, pp. 94-95; Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, pp. 6-8, 18-20.

All narratives are the sequence from a beginning point to a finishing point. However, the progress of fictional narrative must be impeded, because an untrammeled journey from point A to point B, like a one-dimensional object, is impossible; narrative must entail some kind of delay or diversion. These *detours* and digressions are related to two additional elements of narrative: space and time.

Paul Cobley traces the history of narrative in terms of changes in form and style (e.g., the development of epic literature out of oral storytelling, through the rise of the novel and 'realist representation', and onward to film, postmodernist narratives, and cyberspace). He begins with an overview of standard analytical categories of narrative (e.g., story, plot, sequence, space, time) and treats narrative as part of the general process of representation that takes place in human discourse. Cobley outlines three approaches to the work done by representation. First, there is the 'reflective approach', which sees meaning as residing in the person or thing as it exists in the real world, which is in turn reflected in narrative representation. Second, is the 'intentional approach', which posits meaning in the control exercised by the producer of a representational form such as narrative, in which case representation is used by the producer to make the world mean. Finally, the 'constructionist approach' identifies the thoroughly social nature in the construction of meaning, i.e., the fact that representational systems, rather than their users and objects, allow meaning to occur. Cobley also identifies selection as a critical aspect of narrative. As it relates to representation, the act of selection points to the inescapable fact that some things can be depicted while others cannot.

Narratology has undergone a great deal of change since its emergence. Questions about what narrative is gave way to questions about what it does, how it functions. Narratologists have moved gradually away from linguistic models to communication models, less often attempting to discover the formal structures on which all stories are based, and instead trying to determine why and how we read stories as we do.[29] There is also a renewed emphasis on problems of interpretation. The most significant challenges to formal analyses have been from those arguing that narrative writing disrupts all codes and conventions that might give it unified form and meaning, and from those that contend that form and meaning are always in a reciprocal relationship, creating and deforming each other.

Poststructuralist theory was one of many new (often related or overlapping) theoretical discourses that prompted methodological shifts in connection with the underlying assumptions of traditional narratology. As indicated earlier, poststructuralist narratology, like postmodern narratology in general, moved away from discovery to invention, from

29. Martin, *Recent Theories*, pp. 26-30.

coherence to complexity, and from poetics to politics.[30] Theorists ceased viewing narratology as an objective 'science' that unearths the inherent structures and formal properties of all narrative, and instead began to consider reading as a mode of construction and fabrication. Moreover, they critiqued the idea that narratives are unified and stable, and instead sought to hold in tension the contradictory aspects of narrative, preserving their complexity and refusing the impulse to reduce the narrative to a secure meaning. Finally, more overt forms of ideological criticism emerged that sought to uncover hidden values in narrative, values which often subvert the more conscious intentions of any given narrative.

Over the remaining three chapters, my treatment of characters and characterization will be framed with reference to three aspects of narrative discourse that, in my judgment, are essential to any understanding of literary figures. These three aspects—focalization, dialogue, and plot—are fundamentally constitutive of narrative, and therefore of the character therein.[31] My interest in them and their role in the processes of characterization has to do especially with their relationship to the reader, and with how they simultaneously bring about and foil these 'creatures of discourse'[32] that we call characters. Before delving into my analysis of these dynamics in individual narratives, a brief introduction to each of the aforementioned aspects is in order.

Focalization

Every element of a given narrative is presented always 'from within a certain vision'.[33] The relationship of a particular element to the vision that presents it, i.e., 'the relation between the vision and that which is "seen", perceived', is focalization. Manfred Jahn defines it this way: 'focalization is the submission of (potentially limitless) narrative information to a perspectival filter'.[34] Focalization is not synonymous with point of view. The latter does not distinguish between 'the vision through which the elements are presented' and 'the identity of the voice verbalizing that vision'.[35] A frequently cited example of one type of focalization appears near the beginning of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

30. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, pp. 1-70; Herman (ed.), *Narratologies*, pp. 1-30; Docherty, *Reading (Absent) Character*, pp. 3-42.

31. See, e.g., Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction* (trans. Alexander Starritt; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2010).

32. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 41.

33. Bal, *Narratology*, p. 142.

34. Manfred Jahn, 'Focalization', in Herman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, pp. 94-108 (94).

35. Bal, *Narratology*, p. 143.

> Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo…
>
> His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hair [*sic*] face.[36]

In this excerpt, a variety of lexical and syntactical items (e.g., near-rhyming diminutives, nonstandard word formation, the absence of conjunctions and subordinating connectives, and the associative logic linking the three clauses) indicate that, even though the narrator is not a child, the story elements are focalized by a child. Pronouns, indefinite and definite articles, verbs of perception, cognition, and emotion, and verbal tenses and moods can also serves as indicators of focalization.[37]

There have been, traditionally, three types of focalization: internal, external, and non- or zero-focalization.[38] Taking them in reverse order, zero-focalization is indicative of an omniscient, unrestricted narrating position vis-à-vis the events and characters of the story world. The narrator is able to see across time and space, as well as to see within the minds of story world participants. External focalization refers to narratives in which everything is narrated from a position completely outside of the story. Such narratives consist of little more than dialogue and the equivalent of stage directions. In the case of internal focalization, the story is focalized through a particular character within the story world. Information, therefore, is restricted to what is perceptible to only that particular character. Internal focalization is typically broken down into subcategories: fixed (i.e., all events narrated exclusively through the perspective of a single character), variable (i.e., various events seen through the perspectives of various characters), and multiple focalization (single events seen through multiple perspectives). Focalization does not necessarily have to extend across an entire narrative; it can be limited to a specific narrative section of virtually any length.

What concerns me here is not so much taxonomy as function: what sort of work does focalization do, particularly with regard to characterization?

36. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 8, cited in David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. 309.

37. Herman, *Story Logic*, pp. 306-309.

38. See, e.g., Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 185-210; *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, pp. 64-78; Herman, *Story Logic*, pp. 301-309; Jahn, 'Focalization', pp. 96-100; Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, pp. 72-86; and Bal, *Narratology*, pp. 142-61. Also of interest is Manfred Jahn, '"Awake! Open your eyes!" The Cognitive Logic of External and Internal Stories', in David Herman (ed.) *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences* (Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications, 2003), pp. 195-213.

In general, focalization is a means whereby the settings, events, and characters of a narrative are shaped, colored, cast in a certain light. Focalization factors into characterization by illustrating how a particular character sees (or is seen by other characters) and experiences the story world, and by differentiating between individual character perspectives and individual character positions within the story world in relation to the focalizer.[39] This indicates that there are a variety of objects not focalized, of subjects not focalizing, of visual trajectories not put on view—all of which threaten (potentially at least) to destabilize the narrative. The issue here is not simply that a uniquely identifiable story is capable of being told from various points of view by means of various narrations. The destabilizing potential of focalization stems from two things. First, the manner in which a story is discoursed determines the substance and identity of the story. And second, the possibility or actual presence of different focalizations within a story shifts (potentially) points of reference. The fact that focalization cannot be circumvented also limits the extent to which it can be subject to authorial intent or control. The quote from Bal that begins this chapter points to our incurable tendency as readers to imagine and interact with literary characters in ways identical to real people.[40] Within narrative, there are at work certain aspects that affect these tendencies. These are, to a point, techniques that an author can manipulate. But they are also consequences of language and form, and thus they are never perfectly under the control of the author. Focalization is intertwined with the inevitable processes of selection that mark narrative discourse. Furthermore, it also plays an integral role in the establishment of spatial relationships. Therefore, the properties of language and of narrative discourse affect focalization beyond what an author or narrator can dictate.

The role of focalization in creating and influencing spatial relationships is important with respect to characterization. By manipulating distance and fashioning various degrees of proximity, focalization not only contributes to the construction of characters, but also conscripts readers into particular viewing positions. Currie notes that, in general, sympathy for a character is garnered through the simple means of quantity and type of information, and the manner of its delivery. 'We are more likely to sympathize with people when we have a lot of information about their inner lives, motivations, fears, etc. [and] … when we see other people who do not share our access to their inner lives judging them harshly or incorrectly'.[41] Rather than being the foregone conclusion of shared moral values, intimacy is created

39. See below, p. 99 n. 7.

40. Currie labels this one of the 'referential illusions of fictional narrative' (*Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 17).

41. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 19.

as a result of readers feeling as if they have access to a character's mind. 'In short', writes Currie, 'we find ourselves as readers yoked to the narrator, our distance, whether ocular or moral, controlled by the subtle shifts in point of view between layers of represented voices and thoughts, by the information we are given and that which is withheld from us.'[42] But lest we imagine that this situation is indicative of a real author intentionally manipulating an actual reader with regard to sympathy and identification with a character, Currie asks: 'what happens if we analyze the story in a similar way, for its technical operations, for the structure of its multiple voices, and for its control of access to the inner lives of characters, without reference to authorial intention?' His answer marks an important step in the shift toward a poststructuralist narratology. In sum, 'we move from the analysis of rhetoric to the analysis of ideology'.[43]

The emphasis on ideology is accompanied by a shift from point of view to positionality. Early narratological analyses established that the relationship between readers and literary figures were controlled by means of rhetorical devices of which they were ordinarily unaware. In more recent narratological theory, a 'change in emphasis occurs between the idea of fictional point of view as the manufacture of sympathy and the idea of *interpellation* as the manufacture of identity'.[44] This is one way in which narrative is intimately and inextricably implicated in the constitution of the subject. With this we move beyond the notion that narratives simply locate readers with respect to an author's or a narrator's view on the events portrayed and thereby provoke sympathies toward certain characters. We are no longer speaking of sympathy in the sense of feeling positively, or about identity in terms of self-recognition. The ideological dimensions of the process show any notion of autonomous choices on the part of individual readers to be a chimera. Not only does it show those decisions to be largely overdetermined, but also suggests that any description of readers' identifications with or sympathies toward this or that literary character as a matter of choice or personal expression is itself the product of a particular ideology. Readers are forced, not by an author or a narrator but by language and narrative discourse, into inescapable identifications and into the assumption of particular positions and roles.

The manner in which narrative positionality constitutes the subject is ironic. Contrary to what we might call 'evangelistic' conceptualizations of biblical narrative, for example, wherein readers are affected by the message of the text and subsequently converted in some way, ideological analyses of narrative argue that the subject leaves the text the same way that subject

42. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 22.
43. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 23.
44. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, pp. 27-28, author's emphasis.

initially came to it; there is no change. 'This characterizes the ideological function of narrative—that it repeats and confirms the possibilities of identification that have already constituted our subjectivities.'[45] This is not to say simply that readers never encounter narratives that challenge their ideology. The ideological dynamics of focalization are, in a sense, two-fold. On one hand, focalization forces readers, in a very heavy handed manner, to see particular things (selection) in particular ways, both in terms of vision and presentation.[46] On the other hand, readers navigate and negotiate the indeterminacies of complex focalization by adopting, essentially, the path of least resistance, i.e., making sense of the narrative in accordance with their context and reading the way they think they are *supposed* to read.[47]

While my primary focus is not ideological criticism, what I am saying here is especially relevant when we consider, for instance, the relative positions and identities of insiders and outsiders in the Gospel of Mark. We will look at this more closely in later chapters, but suffice it to say here that Mark is a narrative pointedly concerned with issues of inside and outside. But never is it particularly clear who occupies which position (and this pertains not only to characters but to readers also), much less how one crosses over from one side to the other. The end result, however, is not the expected feeling of uncertainty as to one's identity. On the contrary, more often than not, there is an odd sense of strong conviction and perfect confidence about just where to plot each and every figure, not least of all one's self.

Before moving on to the dialogue aspect of narrative, there is another important consequence of focalization to discuss. All narratives, to varying degrees, disguise the originating point of their discourse through a variety of means. O'Neill refers to this as the 'ventriloquism effect' of narrative.[48] Confusion regularly results from continually imagining focalizers in anthropomorphic terms, which happens primarily because of the visual metaphor attached to the terminology. The focalizer, however, is neither a person nor an agent, 'but rather a chosen *point*, the point from which the narrative is perceived as being presented at any given moment'.[49] As noted above, this point can shift throughout the narrative. In fact, it is exceedingly rare (and nearly impossible) for a focalizer to remain, for example, perfectly fixed and consistently external. However, the entirety of any narrative is always narrated (i.e., voiced, articulated) by a single narrator. Therefore,

45. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 32.

46. See Mieke Bal, 'The Narrating and the Focalizing', *Style* 17 (1983), pp. 234-69 (248-49).

47. See O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, pp. 100-106.

48. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, pp. 58, 76-82.

49. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 86, author's emphasis.

whenever we encounter shifts in focalization, moments in which a scene or some other story element is focalized *through* a character, we are dealing with embedded focalization. Character focalization, embedded within a narrative, is compound focalization: a focalizer (the focalizing subject) is at the same time the focalized (object of focalization). One effect this has is to relativize various perspectives reflected in the narrative.

Going further, it would appear from what I have just said that external and internal focalization are easily identifiable and distinguishable, but such is not the case. It is often very difficult to determine the focalizer of a narrative. When it seems there is both too much and too little information provided to allow the reader to locate the focalizer, we are dealing with what O'Neill labels complex focalization, which has indeterminacy as its primary attribute. This ambiguity and indeterminacy implicitly (and at times quite directly) unsettles readers with respect to certainty, authority, factualness, reliability, and so on. More importantly, and by extension, it undermines (or at the very least problematizes) readers' confidence by pointing to the fact that while *every* narrative is told from somewhere that location is at once both outside of the narrative and everywhere within it, and accessible only through it. The boundary between inside and outside the text is completely obscured.

Dialogue

The obviousness of narrative 'facts' contributes to the guise mentioned in the previous section. O'Neill offers the example of Homer's Ulysses. On one hand, it would seem that Ulysses did certain things, and someone later recounted the story of the things he did. 'Except, of course, that Ulysses did *not* do these or any other things before they were later recounted as having happened, for, as we also know very well, Ulysses' deeds are invented in the process of telling about them.'[50] Since this or any other series of events—regardless of whether or to what extent they are 'true'—can be narrated (i.e., re-presented) in any number of ways and media, the narrative discourse both determines and prevents our access to them.

The representation of speech or dialogue is a fundamental aspect of narrative, and a key element in the process of characterization. It contributes to the formation and identity of characters, influences the degree of readers' sympathies toward characters, and frequently contributes meaningfully to the advancement of the plot. Rimmon-Kenan lists seven types of speech representation in narrative, which she describes as 'a progressive scale, ranging from the "purely" diegetic to the "purely" mimetic'.[51] The types

50. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 35.
51. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, pp. 110-11; cf. Schmid, *Narratology*, pp.

include summaries that merely indicate speech took place, reports naming topics of conversation, paraphrases, indirect or non-specific imitations, free indirect discourse, direct 'quotations', and free direct discourse of the sort used to represent first-person interior monologue. What these types reflect, in part, are degrees of access and verisimilitude. As it relates to characterization, analysis of dialogue must attend not only to content, but also to style—not only to what characters say, but also to how they are depicted as saying it, which includes tone, inflection, vocabulary, sentence structures, the number of lines given to a character's speech (i.e., in comparison to that afforded other characters), and even the spaces between utterances—all of which is signified, to a greater or lesser extent, by discursive cues or indicators.[52]

According to Thomas, dialogue theorists show us the 'need to uncover the underlying structures governing the speech of characters, and to approach dialogue not with a view to closing off its meanings, but prepared to immerse ourselves in the give-and-take, the nuances, that make dialogue as a stylistic device so exciting'.[53] Again we are confronted with the fact that most narrative theorists have in view modernist and contemporary literature. One might argue that there is a difference between 'dialogue as a stylistic device so exciting' (i.e., something crafted with creative intent, skillful technique, and so forth) on one hand, and on the other that which presents itself (or is perceived) as a report, an historical record, a descriptive account. However, just like the classificatory separation of 'purely literary characters' from 'historical persons' mentioned earlier, such a distinction is a sort of second-order taxonomy, which itself requires an explanatory narrative. There is nothing inherent in either representation of speech to distinguish one from the other. And in both instances, important dynamics of narrative discourse are operative. It is those and their effects that are the object of our study here.

Mikhail Bakhtin is well known for his work on the dialogical aspect of novelistic literature. For Bakhtin, the novel was marked by generic parody.

118-74. Rimmon-Kenan is drawing on Brian McHale, 'Free Indirect Discourse: A Survey of Recent Accounts', *Poetics and Theory of Literature* 3 (1978), pp. 249-87, and Norman Page, *Speech in the English Novel* (London: Longman, 1973). The mimetic–diegetic dichotomy appears first in Book 3 of Plato's *Republic*, and is taken up at length by Genette (*Narrative Discourse*, pp. 162-85) in his discussion of the role played by distance in 'the regulation of narrative information', which he labels 'mood'.

52. Bronwen Thomas, 'Dialogue', in Herman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, pp. 85-86, 92. See, e.g., Martin, *Recent Theories*, pp. 147-51; Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 169-85; *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, pp. 50-63; Herman, *Story Logic*, pp. 171-207 (esp. 194-95); Bal, *Narratology*, pp. 43-52; Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, pp. 107-17.

53. Thomas, 'Dialogue', p. 85.

'The novel', he writes, 'parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, reformulating and re-accentuating them.'[54] Writing in the novel is also characterized by openness, incompleteness, plasticity, and a concern with the present. Dialogue is the central element in Bakhtin's analysis of narrative, but not in terms of the speech and conversations of characters; rather, he sees in and throughout all narrative discourse a fundamental multiplicity of voices that are constantly intersecting and interacting with one another. The authority of any given voice within a narrative is limited by the plethora of voices present in narrative as a whole. Moreover, the voices in view here are not only those within the story, but extend to the author and to readers as well. The presence of so many voices prevents the closing off of meaning.[55]

Bakhtin's theory has important implications for thinking about characterization. What we are presented with in narrative is an *image* of persons and their speech, 'but not an image in the narrow sense; it is rather a *novelistic* image: the image of another's language…'[56] Bakhtin describes protagonists as being 'located in a zone of potential conversation with the author, in a zone of *dialogical contact*'.[57] Characters, therefore, are the product of discursive intersections. Their speech is not an expression of who they are but rather they exist in the space between countless and unrecoverable trajectories of language. Drawing on Bakhtin to describe the situation of a narrative made up entirely of bits of conversation between two characters, Thomas explains how the dialogic nature of their talk is not found merely in its conversational structure but rather emerges 'as we see how their utterances carry within them traces of previous conversations, and echoes of the social and ideological discourses that shape them as individuals'.[58]

54. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 5.

55. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 47: 'The author participates in the novel (he is omnipresent in it) with *almost no direct language of his own*. The language of the novel is a *system* of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other. It is impossible to describe and analyze it as a single unitary language' (author's emphases).

56. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 44, author's emphasis.

57. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 45, author's emphasis.

58. Thomas, 'Dialogue', p. 86. The author goes on to describe how readers learn the intricacies of the story and of the characters by deciphering the fragments of dialogue that make up the narrative. The process of recognition includes even the sorting out of who is speaking, because the narrative does not provide any speech tags to identify the speakers, or any framing commentary. His example bears a striking similarity to the New Testament gospels, which also draw heavily on sources consisting of saying without context, and which were written in a language that is inconsistent and frequently ambiguous in its acknowledgment of direct quotation and its identification of speakers.

The point here is not that we can get to the bottom of a character's essence or determine precisely what a character represents by, for instance, tracing inherent ideological threads back to their points of origin.[59] Instead, the point is that all characters (even the most 'flat') are complex and overdetermined. Furthermore, they are inseparable from the discourses that produce them. To distill a character from the narrative in which it appears is only to resituate and rearticulate that character in another narrative discourse. Finally, characters are fundamentally unstable because the intersecting discourses that are responsible for their existence are always competing with one another. The potential for a character's voice to speak differently (or not at all) is ever-present. This brings us to intertextuality.

Amelia Devin Freedman[60] distinguishes between two types of 'intertextuality'. There is the dominant approach to (or understanding of) intertextuality in the field of biblical studies, influenced by historical-critical methodology, which she labels (following Ellen van Wolde) 'the intertextuality of text production'. In sum, it has to do with intentional allusion on the part of an author. Alternatively, there is 'the intertextuality of text reception', which has to do with intertexts that the reader draws upon, either consciously or unconsciously, in the production of literary meaning. In my opinion, we should abandon altogether any use of intertextuality to refer to intentional allusion. Such use is simply too narrow and unhelpful. For example, Freedman's 'intertextual reading' of Esther vis-à-vis *Chaereas and Callirhoe* is justified on the basis of similarities in plot devices, characters, and settings.[61] Hence, it is very intentional and controlled. My reading of the Gospel of Mark alongside the ancient novels of *Leucippe and Clito-*

59. The notion of speech as private property, which developed in the nineteenth century (Thomas, 'Dialogue', p. 81), seems to be far removed from the common understanding of speech in antiquity. It could be argued that speech in narrative was intended to capture the essence of a person, but it was not an essence affixed to an autonomous self. However, as in the case of Booth above, where the critic is dealing specifically with modern literature, contemporary readers are equally prone to read ancient narrative through the lens of familiar understandings. It is worth repeating that my interest in this monograph is not one of historical corrective. Rather, I find it interesting that experimental, avant-garde literature of modernity shares similarities with ancient narrative with regard to the ways in which the lines between individual character voices and between characters and narrator are blurred through the use or non-use of textual markers, e.g., quotation marks. Thomas ('Dialogue', p. 82) points to the practice in modern literature. See also, e.g., Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, pp. 111-17 (on free indirect discourse); Bal, *Narratology*, pp. 46-52 (on indirect and free indirect discourse vis-à-vis levels of narration); Cobley, *Narrative*, pp. 146-222 (on characteristics of modern and postmodern literature).

60. Freedman, *God as an Absent Character*, pp. 87-118. Cf. Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000), esp. pp. 2-5.

61. Freedman, *God as an Absent Character*, p. 108.

phon and *The Life of Aesop* is not oriented toward either determinations of genre, or instances of conscience imitation on the part of authors, or indications of historical or literary influence. The basis of my comparison has not to do with the suggestion that the three narratives share similarities in plot (devices), characters, and settings, but that they *have*, as narratives, plot (devices), characters, and settings. More than that, it is a comparison (or better, a cross-reading) induced by the emergence of the 'novelistic' in these narratives.[62]

Freedman contends that intertextuality 'is arguably more useful than any other literary method…because of the high degree of agency it provides the reader for the creation of literary meaning'.[63] Indeed, intertextuality is one of the most fascinating concepts of literary theory, but it is not what I would label a method. It would be better described as a consequence of language and of textuality.[64] It does not authorize the reader to do anything so much as allow critics to analyze what readers, language, and texts do naturally, as a matter of course. Intertextuality is the precondition of meaning; it makes meaning possible and texts intelligible (even while

62. My use of 'novelistic' is not a reference to genre. It is a term of Roland Barthes, which he uses to describe 'the writerly'—i.e., a text wherein the reader is a producer—(in contrast to 'the readerly'—i.e., a text that can only be accepted or rejected): 'The writerly is the novelistic without the novel' (Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 5; see also Allen, *Roland Barthes*, pp. 88-92). The novelistic goes hand in hand with intertextuality, which is central to Barthes' understanding of Text, in part, because it provides Barthes with an opportunity to describe a literary work without recourse to an author. The concept of intertextuality dispenses with the author as the center (and thus control) of meaning. The author is merely a compiler and arranger, and his or her 'work' is a 'tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture' (Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 146). Hence, Barthes' notion of the novelistic compliments Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic.

63. Freedman, *God as an Absent Character*, p. 104.

64. Intertextuality in the work of theorists like Barthes, Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, *et al.* has nothing to do with matters of influence, allusion, conscious imitation, or intentional reference. In the words of Graham Allen, 'intertextuality is the very condition of signification, of meaning, in literary and indeed all language' (Allen, *Roland Barthes*, p. 82). See also Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (trans. Alice Jardine, Thomas Gora, and Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006); Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), esp. pp. 20-36; Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Timothy Beal, 'Intertextuality', in Adam (ed.), *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 128-30. Beal defines intertextuality concisely as the notion which understands every text (meaning anything that can be read, whether written or not) as 'a locus of intersections, overlaps, and collisions between other texts' (p. 128), which means by extension that every text is without center and without boundaries.

threatening unintelligibility). Intertextuality is everywhere in and around narrative discourse, and dialogue is simply another form, layer, or guise of multivocality. As such, dialogue is impersonation: in the context of narrative discourse, literary fragments called characters assume roles and act the part of subjects; they articulate one identifiable voice within the narrative even as they are articulated in, by, and through that narrative and other voices therein.

Just as there is no point of view or position from which we can see perfectly or even accurately the events behind a narrative account as they really happened, no vision that provides us unrestricted access to reality, so too narrative characters fail to provide us with 'positive terms' pointing to real persons, whether directly (e.g., historical narrative) or indirectly (e.g., fictions 'based on true events' utilizing stand-ins and substitutes). This is no less true in instances of speech than in instances of description. Poststructuralist narratology collapses the perceived distance between form and content in language; there is no distinction between what is purportedly represented and its representation. The profoundly counter-intuitive nature of such a claim is the source of much consternation on the part of those nonplussed (and unimpressed) by poststructuralist theory. The claim seems absurd, and appears to be at odds with the experience of ordinary readers reading ordinarily. Yet that is precisely the point: narrative discourse disguises its own artificiality, its provisional nature. Poststructuralist narratology points to the mirage in narrative's inherent and barefaced assertion to represent something other than itself.[65] This is, in fact, the entire premise of O'Neill's book. 'Narrative as a discursive system is always potentially subversive both of the story it ostensibly reconstructs and of its own telling of that story'.[66] Language and narrative are not nearly as transparent as they appear.

Returning to the representation of speech in narrative, when New Testament narrative critics suggest, for example, that we analyze characters by taking into consideration the things they say and the things that others say about them,[67] they inadvertently privilege speech over writing (despite the

65. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 35.

66. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 3.

67. See, e.g., Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, pp. 52-58; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, pp. 126-30; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 106; Rhoads, 'Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark', p. 10; Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, pp. 98-99 (and see especially pp. 152, 155, 157-58 in the Appendices where the authors provide a step-by-step how-to guide for analyzing characters on this basis). It is worth pointing out that even the decision among the majority of New Testament narrative critics (if not all) to treat dialogue and speech representation *only* within their analysis of characters and characterization is an indication of just how deeply ingrained is the notion that speech provides direct access to the essence of an individual.

repeated emphasis they place on the priority of narrated discourse), and they concede or acquiesce (unawares) the analytical position and distance they presume to have in relation to the text, i.e., they cease attending to the discourse as the primary semiotic device. This brings us back to the relationship between inside and outside with which this chapter began. After describing the impact of deconstruction on narrative theory as one in which the fundamental instability of narrative is highlighted and the ability of narrative to evade scientific analysis results in the emergence of a unique epistemology, Currie goes on to describe de Man's inside/outside model of narrative analysis. 'The main characteristic of the inside/outside model is that nobody knows which is which. The opposition of form and content implies that form is external, yet in another sense the form of a work is within it while its content is often something which is pointed to outside the work.'[68] Distinguishing between form and content, between discourse and story, is deceptive. Not only is structure something that can be said to materialize both from within and from outside of a text, but thinking of the inside and outside of a text as the 'what' and 'how' of a narrative respectively leads to the conclusion that the discourse itself is the only substance there is.[69] The distinction between what a character says and what is said about that character, and even the notion that a character's speech expresses something internal and essential to that character, are both based on the same inside/outside dichotomy that attempts to separate story and discourse. But it is precisely that dichotomy that poststructuralist literary theory questions and problematizes. 'If the semiological approach to narrative was essentially deductive', writes Currie, 'the poststructuralist approach was to demonstrate that the structure of narrative was created rather than revealed by the deductive approach, so that the analysis projected the structure of its categories and distinctions onto the work and… projected a lot of philosophical assumptions about the inside and outside of language onto narrative in the process.'[70] The inside/outside theme will linger with us throughout the remainder of this study.

68. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 44.

69. See Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, pp. 60-62. As Moore notes, this leads to a simple and somewhat obvious conclusion: 'narrative is ubiquitously rhetorical'. But he also adds that the implications go beyond merely labeling *content* as theological to recognizing that the narrative discursive form itself is fundamentally theological. 'Reconceived with a rigor that narrative criticism demands but has yet to realize, the notion of form encompasses everything in the presentation of the contentual set of events to which the given gospel refers.' Theology is not *one* aspect of a story, but rather a cardinal condition of narrative discourse. Hence, theology does not precede narrative anymore than story does. Neither is expressed in and through narrative; rather, the narrative *is* the theology. This will come into play again when we consider the plot aspect of narrative below.

70. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 46.

Plot

Plot is another common category in narrative analysis. It is arguably the most central aspect of narrative alongside character. In fact, even though the two are customarily analyzed separately, they are recognized as inseparable and sharing a symbiotic relationship. The oft-cited quote from Henry James underscores how the two dimensions are customarily connected: 'What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?'[71]

The plot aspect, by most standards, has foremost to do with the incidents (as opposed to the existents) of a narrative. Plot also has to do with matters of arrangement, temporality, and causality. Hence, classical narratologists like E.M. Forster made a distinction between story and plot. Story referred to 'a narrative of events arranged in time-sequence'. A plot, on the other hand, was also a narrative of events, but one that emphasized causality. Hence, '"The king died, and then the queen died" is a story. "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot.'[72] Causality is an important and basic characteristic of narrative. Arrangement and temporality serve the purposes of causality. Even the most descriptive of narratives has an interpretive and explanatory thrust running as an undercurrent throughout the entirety of the discourse.

Typically, plot has been defined and approached in one of three ways.[73] First, as in the example of Forster above, plot is a *type* of story, 'a skeletal story, either universally or culturally fabricated, which performs its psychosocial work while cloaked in a diversity of narrative dress'. Plot has been used also to refer to that which converts raw material, miscellaneous, disconnected, bits of content, into a story. This use of plot emphasizes selection, ordering, and most of all teleological purpose. This is the notion of plot behind Aristotle's concept of *mythos*, which we will revisit in a moment. Finally, the third use of plot attends to the variety of ways that this aspect of narrative 're-arranges, expands, contracts, or repeats' story events, thereby emphasizing plot as 'the artful disclosure of story'. Abbott rightly concludes that the first use reflects most closely the commonsense notion and points foremost to plot as something inherent to the story, while the second and third uses have more to do with narrative as discourse and might therefore be better thought of in terms of emplotment.

71. Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction', in Morris Shapira (ed.), *Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; orig. pub. 1884), pp. 49-67 (58), cited, e.g., in Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, pp. 35-36.

72. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 86.

73. H. Porter Abbott, 'Story, Plot, and Narration', in David Herman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, pp. 39-51 (43-44).

Early on, Abbott speaks of emplotment 'arousing the reader',[74] and throughout he frequently refers to 'plot decisions'. The latter firmly situates plot as a narrative technique, one that engages readers, enticing them to seek causes from effects, to explore implications and ramifications from suggestive insinuations, to investigate what lies behind doors left ajar in the story. 'Narrative is an art', writes Abbott, 'of the opening and closing of gaps, and … in those gaps lie whole worlds that the art of narrative invites us either to actualize or leave as possibilities.'[75] The notion of narrative as gap-filling is something I find both tremendously useful and ironic. The endless probing of why, the plumbing, fathoming, and auguring of origins and destinations on the part of readers ultimately betrays an ironic resistance to narrative, marked as it is by the setting of boundaries, of beginnings and endings;[76] ironic in that it leads, at the same time, to speculation, to interpretation, to further narration, to the creation and satiation of more fissures.

With this in mind, I want to consider another way of looking at plot. If at the heart of all narrative plots is an effort not simply to depict or describe but to explain or rationalize, then narrative shares a certain analogous relationship to myth. The two modes of discourse intersect on a certain level with respect to both form and function. Bruce Lincoln makes a persuasive case for thinking of myth as ideology in narrative form.[77] Tracing the use of *mythos* from the Golden Age of Greece through the advent of Rome's empire, comparing and contrasting it with *logos* to which it is frequently juxtaposed, Lincoln shows *mythos* to have been understood as 'an assertive discourse of power and authority that represents itself as something to be believed and obeyed'.[78] In other words, *mythos*, not *logos*, was at one time the superlative discourse, one of divine origin and ordination. *Logos*, on the other hand, was the speech of 'seduction, beguilement, and deception, through which structural inferiors outwitted those who held power over them'.[79] These respective evaluations had nothing to do with content. *Mythos* and *logos* are not words possessing fixed meanings. They were used differently at different periods to achieve specific rhetorical effects. And the eventual preference

74. Abbott, 'Story, Plot, and Narration', p. 40.

75. Abbott, 'Story, Plot, and Narration', p. 50.

76. Michael Roemer, *Telling Stories: Postmodernism and the Invalidation of Traditional Narrative* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995), p. 12: 'No story begins at the beginning'. Roemer later cites Henry James: 'relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally to draw, by a geometry of its own, a circle in which they *appear* to do so' (p. 43).

77. Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

78. Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, p. 17.

79. Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, p. x.

for, or privileging of, certain types of discourse over others did not proceed cleanly or in a perfectly linear trajectory, nor was it based on any self-evident progress (e.g., the latter reflecting an evolution in epistemology and factual knowledge). Perhaps most important of all, the debate between *mythos* and *logos* was not fundamentally about truth per se; rather, according to Lincoln, 'these words…were the sites of pointed and highly consequential semantic skirmishes fought between rival regimes of truth'.[80] The contest was about discursive authority—'What kind of speech will command the respect and attention of others? Poetry or prose? Spoken or written? Narrative or propositional argumentation? Traditional or novel? That which claims divine inspiration or that backed by the power of the state?'[81]

The connection I see between narrative and myth is in the 'religious' quality of plot. A narrative theorist like Forster saw a disconnect between the novel and reality with respect to how perfectly and fully we can know individuals in one and not the other.[82] Michael Roemer, however, would suggest that the novel is only too precisely an imitation of life. For Roemer, the issue is hardly that narrative discourse is best equipped to explore the intricacies of the human psyche. Instead, the subjugation of characters to plots beyond their control reflects, mimics, and parodies the lives of real humans (readers) who, like literary characters are also beholden to forces beyond their control, and whose identities are both overdetermined and perpetually under construction. They are identities, moreover, that must be narrated in order to exist. By virtue of the fact that every story is always already completed before it begins and thus is told only in retrospect, the characters therein are never really free. Plot is an exterior aspect, 'a manifestation of "forces" that are beyond the reach of the figures'.[83] Characters enter a plot that is already in play before their arrival and that continues once they are gone. Although heroes may appear to overcome and escape the challenges they face in the story, they never escape the plot itself. O'Neill puts it this way: 'the world inhabited by actors is one that in principle they cannot escape, for … they have absolutely no recourse against the essentially arbitrary narrative decisions of the discourse—the narrative abode of those discursive gods that kill them for their sport'.[84]

In the narratives I will examine in this book, there is always a 'god' simultaneously present within the narrative and lurking about outside of

80. Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, p. 18.

81. Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, p. 43. Lincoln's remarks concerning the nature of this contest for authority are interesting when we consider represented speech within the context of narrative discourse, where the distinctions between the gods and the state, for example, are conditioned by focalization, characterization, and plot.

82. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 63.

83. Roemer, *Telling Stories*, p. 42.

84. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 41.

it, whether it be the narrator or the implied author.[85] The god-like figure is responsible for the plot even as the narrator's voice is constructed by the plot and no less a victim of it than the characters that populate it. Recalling what was said above, the theology that emerges and takes shape in and through a myth/narrative is a product, a condition, a chief characteristic and property of narrative itself whereby narrative itself—i.e., *story* rather than stories—reflects a particular image or view of our being in the world vis-à-vis the gods, fate, reality. It reflects the human condition. 'We know our control is tenuous at best', writes Roemer, 'and that, despite all progress, we remain beholden for our existence to processes and occurrences we cannot command'.[86]

Commenting on the ambivalence we often experience toward stories, the shifting back and forth between belief and disbelief, Roemer notes how many contemporary writers and theorists have sought to dispense with plot, turned off as they are with its artificial and contrived quality. 'Yet without a plot', he writes, 'there *is* no story, for the fundamental conflict—which *appears* to be between the figures—is actually between the figures and the plot. Once the plot "wins", as it always does, the story is over.'[87]

However, lest we seem simply to be exchanging plot for character in a debate over which takes precedence, which exerts the greatest control over a narrative, it should be noted once again that, just as poststructuralist thought blurred the boundary between inside and outside the text, it also upsets the plot/character dichotomy along with all the dichotomies Lincoln outlines. Dangling the chimera of possibility before the reader and acting as if there were outcomes yet to be decided is not the only way narratives undermine their own telling. 'Paradoxically, indeed, however fantastic the story may be, the story world is always entirely real for its actors; while however real the story may be for the reader, the discourse that presents it always has the potential to demonstrate that reality to be completely unreliable.'[88]

85. These functions of the narrative discourse are not identical. For an interesting discussion of the implications for an aspect like focalization, see O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, pp. 95-100. 'It must in principle follow', writes O'Neill, 'that all narrators are therefore *at least potentially* not only unreliable narrators but also unreliable focalizers. *Everything*, it likewise follows, is therefore ultimately—or rather, *primarily*—focalized by the implied author, through the interposed lens of the narrator(s), and possibly also through the further lens of one or more characters' (p. 97).

86. Roemer, *Telling Stories*, p. 47.

87. Roemer, *Telling Stories*, p. 179. This coincides with Currie's remarks on the fundamental relationship of narrative to identity, the latter existing only as the former such that it cannot be unless it is narrated, and can thus be *only* as it is narrated. Moreover, identities are thrust upon us, such that our own narratives become contestations of identity. See Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, pp. 17-32.

88. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 38.

The 'story' in any narrative is an abstraction. Its accessibility only through the discourse of its narration is akin to the way that reality and experience are never without mediation. Myths, 'religious worlds'[89] are one way of organizing and representing (interpreting) reality. As such, they impose causation and plot onto otherwise meaningless, random, and disconnected events. Similarly, readers read plot and meaning into narratives at will.[90] There is a fundamentally religious quality to narrative that stems, on one hand, from the abstractedness and reification of story, and, on the other hand, from the imposition of selection, order, causality, plot, and meaning. The supposed bare facts of a story or plot only disguise the countless items necessary to constitute the narrative, which exceeds the sum of the parts. These are what O'Neill calls 'virtual facts':[91] the loose ends, gaps, false starts, silent pasts, which factor into the undefined or unstated parameters within which the bare facts exist as constituent parts. Readers are implicated in formulation and execution of narrative plots, which in turn always threaten to supplement, subvert, and supplant the narrative.[92]

'Beware of the scribes'

If deconstruction at its most fundamental (realizing, of course, that deconstructionist thought resists all attempts to be reduced to essences) is 'the dismantling of the hierarchical binary oppositions that structure'[93] varieties

89. William E. Paden, *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994). Paden's analysis centers on religion as a particular kind of language. He uses the concept of 'world' to name 'what a community or individual deems is the "reality" it inhabits' (p. 7). The creation of religious worlds on the part of groups marks both commonality and difference; that is, every group creates and occupies worlds, but every group's world is distinct. Like narratives, worlds are defined by a 'double process of selection and exclusion' (p. 52). The concept of 'world' thus emphasizes the integral role played by language. Through language, reality is 'screened' and 'minted' in order to determine which entities will and will not come into being (p. 56). Moreover, language and 'world' work together to provide the flexibility and malleability necessary for survival as systems interpret or incorporate 'new' events and disparate phenomena (pp. 56-57).

90. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p. 17; Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, pp. 45-46.

91. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 40.

92. Cf. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, pp. 81-82. Drawing on Barthes and Kristeva, O'Neill describes 'not just the intratextual narrative but also the very writing and reading of all narratives as further embedded in an intertextual discourse, an endless interweaving and interwovenness of discursive voices without number, past, present, and to come'. Cf. Aichele, *Limits of Story*, pp. 99-102.

93. Stephen D. Moore, 'Deconstructive Criticism: Turning Mark Inside-Out', in Anderson and Moore (eds.), *Mark and Method*, pp. 95-110 (96). See also The Bible and

of discourse, value systems, and the perspectives that order our lives from one day to the next, then poststructuralist narrative criticism of the New Testament gospels may take an assortment of forms. We can deconstruct the customary distinctions between story and discourse, flat and round characters, plot and character, and so on, to demonstrate how they are mutually dependent and implicated. Fundamental metaphors within the narrative (e.g., in Mark, the theme of insiders and outsiders, the kingdom of God, the Son of Man) can be dismantled to reveal their inner workings and tensions, thereby exposing their ambiguity and instability. Furthermore, in a text such as Mark's gospel, which is a narrative that in some way claims to report an historical reality, to provide a descriptive and interpretive account of an actual person, we can unsettle and unravel the relationship between text and referent.

Stephen Moore, George Aichele, and Andrew Wilson each have offered rich and complex deconstructionist/poststructuralist readings of Mark's gospel. Published in 1992, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* reads and queries Mark in conversation with Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault. What is of greatest interest for this dissertation is Moore's treatment of Jesus as a space or site of writing. Seeking to 'reply to the Gospels in kind, to write in a related idiom … to respond…to a narrative text narratively',[94] Moore shows Mark to be something akin to a dream, refusing to state directly whether its word pictures should be taken literally or figuratively (indeed, undermining any distinction between the two), a sort of hieroglyph that plays tricks on the eyes. It presents readers with complex and multilayered images; leaves readers questioning what they have seen; and reflects back upon the viewer as the writer of the text and as one (con)scripted by that very same text. At both the center and the margins of this text, Jesus is 'a species of writing—literally, since we know him only through the letter. Jesus is a man of letters.'[95] Moore describes the efforts to decode, to decipher these letters and the figure they inscribe, on

Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible*, pp. 119-48; David W. Odell-Scott, 'Deconstruction', in Adam (ed.) *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 55-61.

94. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, p. xviii; cf. p. 74. See also pp. 61-84, where Moore outlines his method (or at least what lies behind his approach) in a slightly more clinical fashion portraying it to be one that recognizes and allows the free play of language, that quality of language that resists being forced (whether by an author or a critic) to do precisely what it is supposed to do. On the point about reading a narrative text narratively, one wonders if this does not, in fact, present a more 'faithful' or responsible 'analysis' of the text than so many historical-critical attempts that claim to understand the text on its own terms, or in its context (see, e.g., p. 83; cf. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, pp. 43-70).

95. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, p. 16. Moore later states: 'A figure in a writing, Jesus is also a figure *of* writing' (p. 19).

the parts of critics in particular, the struggles to interpret and to understand Mark's text, as a process of bringing styles to bear upon it, of cutting away, peeling away, separating, uncovering, unveiling. It is a search for origins and sources governed by the presupposition that therein lies authority, certainty, a stability of meaning. Questions of what lies beneath, however, are inevitably frustrated.

> To be solicitous for Mark's integrity is perhaps to underestimate its defenses. And to overlook the fact that it too is armed. As a violent reading of an older body of writing (Jewish scripture), an exercise in 'stolentelling', Mark is not itself without (a) style. Nor is its protagonist, Jesus, a raider of scripture any less violent than Mark. Style is the Son if Man.[96]

Moore's reference to Mark's own readings of the Hebrew Bible is especially important for our purposes. As will be seen in the final chapter, exegetes have searched in vain for the specific scripture to which Mk 14:21 alludes. Or rather, finding no perfectly suitable scripture to cite, exegetes have very cleverly written their own, drawing on a *synopsis* and a *synapsis* of theologies distilled from Hebrew Bible texts filtered through interpretations of New Testament writings that are themselves interpretive readings of selected Hebrew Bible texts. The substance of the allusion is elusive and ephemeral. It is not unlike the young man who flees naked at Jesus' arrest. The effort to grasp seems to leave us holding only the costume, the façade. But, in many respects, such is only the case if we already presume there is something there to be had.[97] On the significance of the naked young man

96. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, p. 36. The reference to 'style' here should be understood in relation to Jacques Derrida's reading of the term in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Eperons: les styles de Nietzsche* (trans. Barbara Harlow; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), in which Derrida takes up the essentialization and differentiation of 'woman' as a figure of castration in Nietzsche. The 'styles' or 'spurs' of Nietzsche simultaneously prod and parry, and their plurality therefore floats between essentialized notions of masculine and feminine, truth and falsehood, castrating and castrated. Moore reads Jesus as a 'style' vis-à-vis the act of reading, interpretation *of* and *in* the Gospel of Mark. 'Jesus' resists interpretation even as the figure itself is a 'writing instrument', both a writer and a writing. 'Jesus', in a sense, is a Name that does not name, but only inscribes.

97. Cf. Aichele, *Phantom Messiah*, p. 135: 'There is no "messianic secret" in Mark unless one expects that Jesus *should* be the Christ'. Aichele describes the 'messianic secret' theory as an anachronism generated by the need of contemporary readers to make sense of certain indeterminacies peppered throughout Mark's gospel (p. 183). Interestingly, Aichele raises the issue in a chapter devoted to an analysis of the Superman myth as it is creatively rewritten in two recent television series, *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* and *Smallville*. An especially interesting aspect of Aichele's analysis is the two-fold way he presents the figure of Superman as necessarily transcending narrative time (by virtue of his mythic role and identity) and also bound by narrative time (not only as a narrative character but also, ironically, as a feature of his mythic

fleeing the scene Moore remarks, 'What if the secret of this scene were precisely that it *had* no secret. What if it were "only … simulating some hidden truth within its folds?" The proposition that truth entails unveiling would then be unveiled as untrue. Run after the young man and you might end up in the abyss.'[98]

What is the nature of this abyss? Like the guide and his companion in Edgar Allan Poe's tale of decent—a *mise en abyme* that fools you into thinking it is a story about an event when it is in fact a story of the recounting of that event[99]—we stand on the precipice giddy at the heights of uncertainty and enticed by the prospect of believing, letting go, seeing what lies on the other side, even while we consider ways to ensure our own safety and survival by means of disbelief. Rimmon-Kenan describes *mise en abyme* as 'an analogy which verges on identity, making the hypodiegetic level a mirror and reduplication of the diegetic'.[100] The classic example is that of

role and identity, which is performed and manifest within the 'ordinary' time of 'real' life). Returning to the matter of secret identities, Superman's and Jesus' quizzical secrets make the texts that produce them 'writerly' texts (à la Roland Barthes). 'Writerliness subverts the narrative, opening it to multiple and inconsistent meanings. The hermeneutic code is interrupted and paralyzed, and in the case of Mark, Jesus' identity remains obscure. Many answers are given, and none of them is decisive' (p. 197).

98. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, p. 37, author's italics. Moore is citing Derrida, *Spurs*, p. 133. The scene in Mk 14.52 (or at least Moore's reading thereof), like so many other 'odd' and not-so-easily-systematized details of Mark's narrative (e.g., the 'other boats' of 4.36, the 'green grass' of 6.39) recalls Roland Barthes' 'reality effect' (*The Rustle of Language*, pp. 141-48). Such details seem unnecessary and to lack function. They may even seem to be obstacles to more essential narrative information. But such details are 'justified', according to Barthes, 'if not by the work's logic, at least by the laws of literature: its "meaning" exists, it depends on conformity not to the model but to the cultural rules of representation' (p. 145). However, 'just when these details are reputed to *denote* the real directly, all that they do—without saying so—is *signify* it' (p. 148).

99. As we will see in the next chapter, *Leucippe and Clitophon* is a story within a story as well. The presence of a clearly defined frame story on the discursive level only makes more overt what is always implicit. Is the Gospel of Mark then any different? Cf. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, p. 7: 'the story of a story that was never understood … and therefore never told'. Moore asks whether we might not think of 'Mark' as a pen name of Jesus (p. 9). And, citing Caputo, notes that, in one fell swoop wrought with paradoxical twist, 'the sayings of Jesus are dictated by those who followed him; the Teacher is the effect produced by those who are supposed to be receiving the teaching' (John D. Caputo, 'Derrida and the Study of Religion', *RSR* 16 [1990], pp. 21-25 [22]). Jesus is the trace left behind rather than the 'original content' that precedes the narrative and is preserved and conveyed by the narrative. This dovetails nicely with infinite regress one encounters when searching for sources in the Hebrew Bible texts Mark and Jesus read together.

100. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p. 94. Rimmon-Kenan cites Christine Brooke-

a painting that contains within it an image of itself, or the illusion created when one stands between two opposing mirrors. The multiplication of narrative levels blurs the distinction between fact and fiction, and between inside and outside. The boundary between inside and outside brings us back to where this chapter began. This motif in Mark intersects with its recurrence in contemporary narrative theory. Moore puts the two discourses into conversation with one another through deconstruction, demonstrating that Mark itself upsets the distinction between inside and outside figuratively every bit as much as deconstructionist perspectives on the way language and texts work upset that distinction theoretically. Noting the way Mark's gospel identifies insiders and outsiders on the twin registers of faith and understanding (seeing and perceiving to pluck a phrase directly from the narrative), Moore notes the ironic paradox reflected in the failure of characters who are supposed to understand Jesus' significance and teachings in contrast to those 'outside' who frequently recognize who Jesus is. Hence, in relation to Mark/Jesus as sign and signature, as metaphor and metonymy, Jesus' closest followers end up being 'insiders on the inside looking in'; there are 'no insiders in Mark who are not at the same time outside'.[101]

In his book *Jesus Framed*, George Aichele takes up the inside–outside dichotomy in Mark through the lens of Roland Barthes and his concepts of denotation and connotation, which reflect two types of meaning. Aichele summarizes the two terms in relation to Mark this way: 'Connotation is the understanding of those who are on the "inside", who are given "the secrets of the Kingdom of God". Denotation is the fate of those on the "outside", to whom "all comes through parables".'[102] Aichele further distinguishes between the two respective positions or localities or identities by pointing out that connotation is linked to being a disciple and imagines the text as something stable, complete, coherent, in possession of meaning distinguishable from it and communicated through it. For these insiders, the shape of the form, its material substance, is a vehicle or conduit for the purposes of conveyance. The outsider, on the other hand, is one who appears to the insiders as 'a thief, a violent, barbaric, and illegitimate reader…a Judas who betrays the true meaning of the text'.[103] Like Moore,

Rose's *Thru* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975) as 'an extreme example of the interchangeability of narrative levels. The novel repeatedly reverses the hierarchy, transforming a narrated object into a narrating agent and vice versa. The very distinction between outside and inside, container and contained, narrating subject and narrated object, higher and lower level collapses, resulting in a paradox which the text itself puts in a nutshell: "Whoever you invented invented you too" ' (p. 95).

101. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Postructuralist Perspectives*, pp. 13, 24.

102. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, p. 1; see also pp. 109-20. Cf. Allen, *Roland Barthes*, pp. 50-51.

103. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, p. 3.

Aichele notes the inherent paradox of this position threaded into the very words of the text in question. Whereas Mk 4.11-12 indicates the preventative function of parables in transforming the identity of outsiders into insiders, Mark 2.17 shows Jesus transposing the relative position of insiders and outsiders. The Pharisees protest Jesus' association with 'sinners' (presumably outsiders), and Jesus dismisses their complaint by telling them that he did not come to call 'the righteous' (insiders?) but 'sinners' (outsiders now made insiders?). 'This obscurity concerning the relative value of outside and inside', concludes Aichele, 'suggests the possibility, and the desirability, of reading the gospel of Mark from the outside.'[104]

Jesus Framed is 'a discourse about the *possibility* of meaning, rather than about meaning itself'.[105] According to Aichele, such a reading is necessitated by virtue of the fact that writing disconnects readers from the referent(s) and thereby forces readers outside. Readers, in turn rewrite texts when the desire for meaning overcomes the obstacles to it and the reader slips inside and overlooks the artificial, productional, and fictional characteristics of the text, disguising the fact that every reader is always an outsider. This sort of reading—that is, intentional reading from outside in resistance to everything that would otherwise make the text discernable and the reader a possessor of its secrets—attends most closely to moments in the text that are not easily assimilated into the coherent and comprehensive (comprehensible) story. The best examples of these instances are not those that insiders are most likely to list. They are not necessarily the texts that frequently lead to sidebar excursuses in commentaries. They are instead those self-referential texts that create complex spirals of deferral. They are texts in which the writing reveals itself in the same way that the reflection of a camera might appear peripherally in a film. Aichele cites Mk 14.49 ('…let the scriptures be fulfilled') and 9.12 ('…how is it written of the Son of man…?') as examples, along with Mk 14.21, which has been mentioned already and will be discussed again. In each, 'the desire for fulfillment is denied satisfaction by the very text which announces it'.[106] Aichele also deals at length with Mark's ending, Markan transliterations and glosses (e.g., 5.41; 7.34; 3.17; 7.11; 15.34), the parable of the sower in Mark 4, Jesus' plain speech in Mk 8.32, and the story of Jesus' anointing in Bethany (particularly 14.9).

In every instance, Aichele points up the diverse but persistent ways in which the material text gets in the way of the supposed content/story, or

104. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, p. 3. Similarly, in Moore's view, Mark invites a method with 'no inherent boundaries, other than the skill of the scribe' (*Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, p. 83).

105. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, p. 3.

106. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, p. 5; see also pp. 18-26.

rather, to be more precise, how the text shows itself to possess no inherent content or meaning. No matter how directly or 'plainly' the text speaks (or claims to speak), it sets in motion an endless series of questions that can never be terminated. Asking and answering these questions evokes and triggers a web of intertextual associations that allow for the creation of meaning, and transforms the reader of a text into the writer of a text. 'Reading rewrites the text', notes Aichele,[107] and this act of reading-(re)writing is also one of elimination and erasure.

Speaking of the episode in Bethany, Aichele writes: 'even as the text of Mark anoints Jesus, it also betrays him. The woman's costly nard is an allegory of hermeneutical richness, covering the mere flesh of the signifier, Jesus' body, and preparing it/him for burial, just as the intertextual context prepares the naked text-body for the reading of faith.'[108] The body of Jesus is displaced by its narration. The profound and pronounced absence of Jesus' physical body in the tomb (its dis-appearance)—that hollowed-out, vacant space at the end of Mark's gospel—is really nothing more than the material text revealing the flatness of its facade. Jesus' textual body is what remains, and it is that textual body that is repeatedly fleshed-out in every narration.

Finally, Andrew Wilson's *Transfigured: A Derridean Rereading of the Markan Transfiguration* is another fine example of an extended poststructuralist reading of Mark's gospel through the episode of Jesus' transfiguration in Mk 9.2-8. Since I deal with this episode myself in Chapter 5, I will engage Wilson's study more fully there. Suffice it to say at this point that, like Moore and Aichele, Wilson attends to 'those neglected and problematic details of the text that have thus far not played a major part in mainstream readings' and to 'details of the text that have been overlooked, either because they are self-evident and raise no immediate questions…, or because they are awkward and even embarrassing…'[109] These are details in the episode that are not easily systematized, details that in and of themselves are awkward and knotty. So, for instance, Peter's gaffe, the strange analogy of the bleacher, and the disappearance of Jesus' face function as interpretive cruxes in his reading of both the transfiguration narrative and the history of scholarship on it. Wilson's performance of a deconstructionist rereading of the transfiguration narrative, interrogating each of these details fully along the way, demonstrates a variety of fascinating ways in which 'the perceived Markan plot line is actually subverted most vividly at this point'.[110] Among other things, Wilson's study provides a helpful illustration of why we cannot privilege plot over character, as Roemer essentially

107. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, p. 169.
108. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, p. 172.
109. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 86.
110. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 85.

does. While it is true that Mark's narrative is not nearly as character-driven as so many narrative-critical interpretations and popular readings may suggest, we would gain little ground by saying that plot simply subsumes character. A poststructuralist narratological reading, as Moore, Aichele, and Wilson demonstrate, centers on the inescapable moments in every narrative where both the story and the discourse are interrupted as a consequence of both form and language.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated some of the tendencies in post-classical and poststructuralist approaches to narrative discourse, which stand in sharp contrast to the perspectives that undergird New Testament narrative criticism, and in so doing has also drawn attention to certain elements of narrative discourse that must factor into any analysis of characterization. In the chapters that follow, we will consider characters and characterization in relation to focalization, dialogue, and plot. The purpose of these explorations will not be to gain insight into an author's style or techniques of characterization; nor do I intend to provide individual character profiles. Instead, these aspects of the narrative, in their interactions with characters and the processes of characterization, give rise to moments at which characters are constructed and deconstructed by one in the same discourse; instances when characters seem to emerge only to be thwarted in their development by the very things that create them; moments, in other words, that conscript and mark readers as scribes.

Poststructuralist narratology raises questions about the figure of Jesus within the gospel narratives. The absence of such questions thus far reflects not only the limits of New Testament narrative criticism but also the covertly theological preoccupation with uncovering the historical Jesus, notwithstanding narrative critics' fervent claims to the contrary. Clearly the gospel narratives are pointedly focused on the figure of Jesus. As cultural artifacts, the gospels are rightly used as primary sources for historical reconstructions. Nevertheless, as a literary construct, the character of Jesus is both limited and destabilized by the narrative and therefore does not necessarily provide us with a reliable bridge to any historical person behind the story. Narratological theory reminds us that all literary characters are 'creatures of discourse' (O'Neill) and thus are stuck in a story world that is always provisional and completely inescapable. Despite appearances, characters cannot even be perfectly translated or transferred to another story. Rather, they are perpetually introduced afresh, clothed in intertextual allusion. In the words of Mieke Bal, they are 'paper people, without flesh or blood', and they are subjected to a plot that is not of their own making but that they affect nevertheless.

Treating the figure of Jesus in the gospels as a 'creature of discourse' is not about implicitly suggesting that he never existed, that he was 'merely' the figment of (religious) imagination. Rather, it is intended to deconstruct 'a certain construal of sense and reference',[111] the various portrayals, accounts, visions, characterizations, narrations, de-scriptions, emplotments of him—the representation that is the narrative of Mark's gospel, the never fully traceable threads that precede, exceed, and run through that representation, and every subsequent discourse generated by readings thereof—that falter and ultimately reflect back upon us. In the end, 'fate, like plot, is preclusive. *Fatum* means "that which has been spoken".'[112] Plot is an analogue of fate (τυχή), and the Son of Man goes as it is written of him.

111. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 45, citing John Llewelyn, *Derrida on the Threshold of Sense* (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 78-89.
112. Roemer, *Telling Stories*, p. 59.

3

Focalization: 'You Will See the Son of Man'

> 'You are poking up a wasps' nest of narrative. My life has been very storied.'
> 'Well sir, by Zeus and by Eros himself, please don't hesitate. The more storied the better.'
>
> Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 1.2[1]

> He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Can you see anything?' And the man looked up and said, 'I can see people, but they look like trees, walking'.
>
> Mark 8.23-24 NRSV

> I have a disease: I *see* language.
>
> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*

> But we don't see him at all; what we see is an always receding 'figure' whom we proceed to chase through the many pages that follow.
>
> Stanley Fish, *How to Write a Sentence*

The preceding chapter positions us to think differently about how narratives work, and to question the way we customarily regard the figures that populate them. In this chapter, we will undertake to do just that by exploring the first of three narrative aspects that directly impact characterization in Mark's gospel, namely, focalization. Here, reading Mark alongside a roughly contemporaneous novel by Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, the spotlight will be on the role played by vision, line of sight, and

1. This translation is that of John J. Winkler in Reardon (ed.), *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, pp. 170-284. Throughout this chapter, I will be making use also of two other translations: S. Gaselee, *Achilles Tatius:* Leucippe and Clitophon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, rev. edn, 1984), and Tim Whitmarsh, *Achilles Tatius:* Leucippe and Clitophon, *Translated with Notes* (Oxford World Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). See also the textual commentary of Ebbe Vilborg, *Achilles Tatius,* Leucippe and Clitophon*: A Commentary* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell Publishers, 1962).

spectacle in the processes of characterization. One of the primary questions before us concerns the precise relationship between 'literal' vision (i.e., acts of seeing within the narrative world) and focalization. Are these acts of seeing, and the general language of sight within the narrative more broadly, synecdoches of the larger invisible process of focalization? Or are they instead designed to 'naturalize' the text's focalization, and hence its ideology, by rendering it in concrete terms?

In the preceding chapter, I summarized the relative perspectives of non- or zero-focalization, external focalization, and internal focalization, along with the relative positions and roles of focalizer and focalized.[2] I also discussed three levels of focalization: simple, compound, and complex. Finally, I described O'Neill's notion of the 'ventriloquism effect' and the connection between focalization and ideology. The reading of Leucippe and Clitophon and the Gospel of Mark in this chapter attempts to bring these concepts to bear, and to answer the questions above.

Leucippe and Clitophon: *A Wasp's Nest of Narrative*

The excerpt from *Leucippe and Clitophon* that begins this chapter provides an opportunity to make a number of preliminary observations that together highlight certain inherent problematic conditions of narrative discourse. To begin with, the claim is made that to embark on this wordy journey is to poke up 'a wasp's nest of narrative' (σμῆνος ἀνεγείρεις). The allusion is to Plato (see, e.g., *Republic* 450A, B; 574D; and *Meno* 72A[3]), although the metaphor also appears in Hesiod and Aeschylus. To rouse a wasp's nest, of course, is to create an upheaval and even perhaps to risk stirring up some danger. But why will there be such turmoil and disorder? What is the risk we are taking?[4]

2. See Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, p. 73. For Genette, 'there is no focalizing or focalized character: *focalized* can be applied only to the narrative itself, and if *focalizer* applied to anyone, it could only be the person who *focalizes the narrative*—that is, the narrator…' He says this over against Bal, who treats focalization as something more closely related to ideology, something that exceeds line of sight to also incorporate conceptualization and self-reflexivity. For Bal, focalization refers to 'the relations between the elements presented and the vision through which that are presented' (*Narratology*, p. 142). In her analysis, the *focalized* is the object of focalization, i.e., a character, action, item of setting, etc. as it appears or is described or interpreted through the focalizer's point of view (*Narratology*, pp. 149-54). The *focalizer*, then, is the subject of focalization, i.e., that which conditions the narrative (*Narratology*, pp. 144-49; cf. Schmid, *Narratology*, 100-105; W. Bronzwaer, 'Mieke Bal's Concept of Focalization: A Critical Note', *Poetics Today* 2 [1981], pp. 193-201).

3. Whitmarsh, *Achilles Tatius*, p. 146 n. 1.2; Vilborg, *Commentary*, 20; John M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

4. Are 'we' (i.e., the readers), in fact, the ones taking the risk, or is it only the

The speaker explains that his 'life has been very storied' (λόγων τὰ γὰρ ἐμὰ μύθοις ἔοικε), as if to suggest that a *storied* life is especially convoluted and agitating (or agitated). What makes a life that is discoursed through narrative such a bevy of bees? The answer does not seem to be that a storied life is less reliable, less true (in the sense of factual, accurate, and correct), or especially distanced from actuality. In fact, if anything, there is a subtle indication that a narrative is most appropriate to the situation and subject matter. Moreover, the story promised is put forward as validation and affirmation of a hypothesis voiced by the story's first narrator only moments before. The answer, therefore, appears to be, in part, that a discoursed life occupies a space *between* invention, fabrication, imagination, and so forth, on one hand, and, on the other hand, that which is actual, tangible, *perceptible*. That which is about to unfold, according to the speaker, is a wasp's nest of narrative because it is *like* (a) story (μύθοις ἔοικε). Only a few sentences later, Clitophon will recount how his own heart was set 'more fiercely ablaze' at the hearing of a story 'for love stories are the very fuel of desire' (1.5). The qualifier that specifies erotic stories is merely a self-referential reflection of this particular narrative wherein *Eros* is a central figure and trope. What Clitophon says, in this moment of doubling wherein he is simultaneously both narrator and figure of narration (character), both writer and reader, is a consequence of any narrative. Narrative discourse is both consequence and catalyst of desire. The risk and uncertainty, in other words, stem from narrative's innate exuberance, that is, its over abundance, its excess, its ability to be at once all consuming and insatiable.

Clitophon invites the question that prompts the narration, but he feigns hesitancy to divulge that which he has just offered on the basis that it will sound unbelievable and absurd even as it is claimed to guarantee the certainty of the unnamed narrator's assertion, which itself was inspired by his reading of a painted image recreated in narrative form. Indeed, it is at the intersection of experience and its mediation when events are interpreted, when desire gives rise to narrative explanations of *Eros*' incarnation, the god's intervention into human affairs from outside, that the assumed but unstated limits of possibility are made visible, questioned, exceeded. The absurdity that is cause for concern and which *de facto* cannot be escaped, has not to do with the details Clitophon claims to recount but with act of narration itself. In this mode of discourse where certain rules are inviolable despite how they in turn allow the narrative to be rewritten by handing it

character to whom this remark is directed? Poststructuralist narratology problematizes any distinction between the two, or at least questions the basis on which such a distinction is made.

over to reading, where the unbelievable argues for believability, the unruly and the absurd perpetually threaten to outdo the reality the narrative strives to represent. Clitophon's story—both the story Clitophon narrates *and* the story of Clitophon—is no more a wasp's nest than that of any other literary character; rather, all literary characters are tangled up in a nest of narrative from which they can never fully escape. It is not a real person saying this as a way of describing his unique life. It is a narrator commenting on narrative as such.

Clitophon's λόγος (i.e., not his life but the story that represents it, even occasions it—his life after all *is* a story) is both akin to, and befitting of μύθος (i.e., both ideas are inherent in ἔοικε). However, λόγος, according to Liddell and Scott, is a tale that stands in opposition to *mere* fable (μύθος) on one hand, and 'regular history' (ἱστορία) on the other. All three terms reflect a high degree of fluidity, and thus Clitophon's response reflects uncertainty and an awareness of the artificiality that accompanies the story he is about to narrate.

The exchange between the unnamed narrator who initiates *Leucippe and Clitophon* and the protagonist presents us with another problem that further illustrates the nature of the wasp's nest that is about to entangle us. The narrative begins with an unnamed narrator that speaks in first person so as to give the reader the impression of autobiography. But almost immediately the first person 'I' shifts. The text reads: 'This is how *he* began: *I* am of Phoenician stock, my fatherland is Tyre, and my name is Clitophon' (1.3). This creates an embedded narrative, itself autobiographical in orientation and focus, that reflects back upon the statements of the first narrator and the frame story he has established. The implication is one of verification, reliability, and factuality. The first narrator says, in effect, here is a first-person account of what I read in the votive painting, quoted verbatim as it was told to me. Clitophon, the character with whom our first narrator converses at this point, is the story's protagonist, and here, within only a few sentences of this conversation, he has taken over as the narrator, a character-narrator.

As noted earlier, characters and every other element of a story are always presented through and according to one or more particular lines of sight, a vision. In the case of a novel like *Leucippe and Clitophon* specifically, the aforementioned shift in the role of Clitophon from character to character-narrator is significant in that it represents more than an extended quote. Noting the distinction between Clitophon the character (whose knowledge of events is limited by space, time, and perspective) and Clitophon the narrator (who appears to possess retrospective knowledge of everything), Tim Whitmarsh argues that the author 'specifically and artfully subverts the authority of the narrator by proposing contrary readings, and that the alternative perspectives are bound into the narrative's thematic explorations

of identity…'[5] A key aspect of the identities in question concerns what sort of reader one will be. In his role as narrator, Clitophon reflects but one approach to reading narrative, 'an approach that is itself explored, distanced, problematized, and ironized'.[6]

At the instant in which Clitophon takes over as narrator, he doubles the roles played by each of these two figures. On one hand, we have a character-narrator in the figure of Clitophon. From this point onward, he narrates himself. That is, he becomes the narrative embodiment of his own story. In so doing, the text refracts the way human identities are always constructed. The fact that his narrating is narrated by another only further illustrates and reinforces the point by drawing attention to the other side of the equation. In other words, not only do we articulate our respective lives through narratives that recount select events and persons according to rules of order and arrangement making identity something external to us, but the models we have available to us to emulate are embedded in narratives; we identify with characters.[7] Since these narratives never begin at the beginning[8] and are also always incomplete, the splitting and doubling of Clitophon's narrative function reflects the relativity of personal identities. The figure of Clitophon is assembled through the interaction of his own self-fashioning processes in the telling of his story with processes of accumulation and accretion by which readers produce him as a character. The wasp's nest of narrative is dangerous because the two are always potentially out of sync if not altogether at odds.

On the other hand, the presence of the original narrator is hidden from view. Moreover, a certain kind of authority and transparency is lent to the original narrator insofar as he purportedly tells the story of someone else directly as told to him. Any distinction between fact and fiction within the world of the story becomes incredibly blurred as readings and narrations repeatedly fold over upon one another and relativize one another.[9] The

5. Tim Whitmarsh, 'Reading for Pleasure: Narrative, Irony, and Erotics in Achilles Tatius', in Stelios Panayotakis, Maaike Zimmerman, and Wytse Keulen (eds.), *The Ancient Novel and Beyond* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), pp. 191-205 (192-93).

6. Whitmarsh, 'Reading for Pleasure', p. 191.

7. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 17.

8. Notice that despite the first narrator's remark that 'this is how he [Clitophon] began' (1.3), Clitophon had, in fact, already begun only a handful of sentences earlier, speaking in retrospect, 'Yes, I should know! Eros has dealt me enough blows' (1.2).

9. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, pp. 107-16; Bal, *Narratology*, pp. 43-75; Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p. 23; cf. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 84-110; Mona Baker, *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 55, 176 n. 6. Considering that *Leucippe and Clitophon* begins with an *ekphrasis* of a votive painting, I find it especially interesting that Bal concludes her remarks on embedded narratives with an analysis of a complex, mixed-media painting

reliability and trustworthiness of *both* narrators is undermined by the very move that was intended to lend them credibility. The blurring of the line between character and narrator further and in a very self-conscious way draws attention to the artifice of narrative discourse. The wasp's nest of narrative is dangerous because the narration required to perform it threatens to discredit and invalidate it.

Finally, still keeping with this opening exchange, we are presented with an idea that essentially counters the caveat of Clitophon and seems to dispense with his protest. The unnamed narrator's response to Clitophon is that listening will be of even greater pleasure if the tale is like fiction.[10] Gaselee translates this sentence, 'I hope, Sir … that you will not hesitate to give me all the same the pleasure of hearing them, *even if* they are like fiction…' (my emphasis), his interpretation thus revealing a tendency on the part of the translator to allow modern valuations regarding 'fiction' to creep into the way he renders the sentence. The previous sentence in Gaselee's rendition reads, 'my adventures are really like fiction', thus implying that they are incredible and unbelievable. In Gaselee's version, the pleasure is in hearing the story *even if* it is fictional, whereas a more accurate translation indicates that the pleasure of the story increases by virtue of it being fictional—the more fictional the better.

What then are the grounds of this valuation? What is the nature of the distinction between the fictional and less-than-fictional, and why is there a qualitative difference attached to it? Why is an increase of μύθος to be preferred? Recalling that these words are spoken by the first narrator, the line suggests that the conversation between the two narrators reflects a tension pertaining to the act of narrating itself, which has already begun to emerge in the self-awareness of Clitophon's concern over the wasp's nest of narrative just roused, a turmoil that marks his very life as a literary character. This tension certainly has many facets to it, but two that are particularly relevant to this study are as follows. First, the impossibility of narrating everything demands selectivity. 'The more storied the better' is a nod to the unavoidable temptation, though no less futile effort, to tell more and more in an endless chase to capture it all. Speaking specifically to the fact that the subject of the conversation between the narrator and the character of Clitophon is the latter's very life, it pokes fun at the quagmire encountered in one's attempt to capture and portray the life of any 'real' person. Second, just as narrative always betrays selectivity, so it also demands

that layers the words of a first-person autobiographical narrative on top of a replication of another painted image, which includes a representation of its frame.

10. Vilborg notes that author's use of *mallon* 'indicates that the pleasure of the hearer increases if the adventures told are incredible' (*Commentary*, pp. 20-21). The translations of Winkler and Whitmarsh do an excellent job of emphasizing Vilborg's point.

order and arrangement; narrative seeks to make sense of what is otherwise meaningless. 'The more storied the better' acknowledges the desire to stand above events so as to interpret them accurately, even as it scoffs at any ability to ever do so successfully. Narrative, it seems, is cause for both delight and fear because of its inescapability.

Narrative Representation

Narrative discourse is a unique form of representation, a particular mode of language, whether various narratives are fundamentally concerned with portraiture, ideation, or the concomitant acts of writing and narrating themselves. But in its representation, narrative invents, constructs, and fabricates. While it would appear that the representations of the narratives I am discussing here are, in some manner, 'realist' in nature, focused on faithfully depicting the realities of actual persons (e.g., the experiences of ordinary individuals in romantic relationships, in the case of *Leucippe and Clitophon*, or the biography of a man named Jesus in the case of Mark's gospel), it is in fact indirectly reflective of something else. Narratives deal in slights of hand. By their very nature, their composition, narratives weave together characters, plots, and readers in a complex assemblage of literary and interpretive intersections. These in turn thwart any effort to separate characters from the narrative and, at the same time, threaten to unravel the narrative that accounts for their very existence. This is one way that the novel repeatedly criticizes itself.[11] Within the novel are a number of moments in which the narrative itself (de)constructs and manipulates not only characters themselves but the very issue of character (i.e., as it relates to subjectivity, identity, and agency, and especially as it pertains to plot, whether literary or historical).

The centrality of spectacle, of both seeing and being seen, not only to the novel itself but also to the cultural and political milieu of the Roman period, has been noted by Helen Morales, Chris Frilingos, Shadi Bartsch, Tim Whitmarsh, and others.[12] Shadi Bartsch defines 'spectacles' as 'macroscopic events in which a few individuals or a group of people form the focus of interest, whether deliberately or not, for an emotive crowd that

11. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 6: 'Parodic stylizations of canonized genres and styles occupy an essential place in the novel… This ability of the novel to criticize itself is a remarkable feature of this ever-developing genre.'

12. See, e.g., Morales, *Vision and Narrative*; Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel*; Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*; and Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); cf. Irene J.F. de Jong' analysis of focalization in *The Illiad* (*Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad* [London: Bristol Classical Press, 2nd edn, 2004]).

functions as audience'.[13] She points out that characters within a novel like *Leucippe and Clitophon* must constantly interpret what they see, whether it be a painting, a dream, or some particular event. Readers are then forced to evaluate the interpretation and to determine whether or to what extent to adopt it. Bartsch cites evidence from the *Progymnasmata* that clearly demonstrates how *ekphrasis*—essentially description, but description that is pointedly concerned with visual representation (e.g., paintings)—was to *effect* sight and *fashion* spectators such that the reading audience would *almost see* the things narrated. 'Thus the readers of detailed descriptions of spectacles are invited to be "spectators" of the spectacle themselves, sharing this with the characters in the text.'[14] Just as earlier we noted that various responses of characters to events in the narrative mirror reader responses, here readers themselves are made into characters in a text, character-spectators. Below, we will investigate the healing of an unidentified blind man in Bethsaida (Mk 8.22-26). When first touched by Jesus and asked if he could see, the man replies, 'I see men like trees walking'. Is this not, after a fashion, *almost* seeing? In the case of Mark, it is not the result of skilled *ekphrasis* on the part of an author or narrator, but it no less places the reader in an unsettling and awkward interpretive position. Just as the figure of Jesus is affecting (a) vision upon the unnamed blind man, so the text seeks to interpellate the reader into a particular interpretive stance. This is not simply a matter of an author seeking to persuade his ideal reader, but of real readers themselves seeing 'men like trees walking' while they attempt to pass themselves off as representations of 'real' human beings.

Bartsch explains that 'in reading and visualizing [the] descriptions of spectacles, we actualize ourselves as a second and extratextual audience…'[15] Frilingos takes this to mean that we, the extratextual audience, 'look over the shoulders of another interested party'.[16] Hence, this act of oversight, of gander-taking is what fundamentally characterizes the reader. Spectacle refers not only to the bits and pieces of fabula that constitute the narrative, but also the narrative itself and, by extension, the rich variety of elements that constitute a narrative discourse, not least of which are characters and characterization. We find in *Leucippe and Clitophon* an interesting paradox concerning spectacles. In 3.15, Clitophon is describing the 'sacrifice' of Leucippe. He says at one point, 'The general and his army were watching and cried out at each one of these rites, *averting their eyes from the spectacle*' (my emphasis). The only one who actually

13. Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel*, p. 109.
14. Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel*, p. 111.
15. Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel*, pp. 110-11.
16. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, p. 49.

seems to be 'seeing' this spectacle is Clitophon himself and we the readers as he describes it to us.[17]

In the course of making spectators of the audience, the text also makes them interpreters and vice versa.[18] In other words, to observe is to interpret. The text does not (re)present itself directly and unmediated. Bartsch distinguishes between Achilles Tatius's descriptions of spectacles and that of an author like Heliodorus. The latter is concerned with involving the reader in the task of interpretation, integrating his descriptions with the overall story, and focusing on the (emotional) responses of the viewing audience within the narrative. The former 'focuses more on the emotion of the character who provides the focus of interest than on that of those who are the viewers', treating his material according to the rules of rhetoric and art criticism, and often emphasizing the power of what is heard over that which is seen.[19] Here then we have a sort of second-order spectacle whereby the reader watches the spectator as much or more than the spectacle itself. In this sense, the character is the spectacle.[20] Spectacular episodes in *Leucippe and Clitophon*, more often than not, deceive and misdirect both characters and readers rather than assist them in (accurately) interpreting either the individual event or the larger narrative. In other words, that which is seen conceals rather than reveals 'the truth'. 'Theater in Achilles Tatius is equated with deception or persuasion rather than revelation, and it is usually associated with false rhetoric'.[21] The eyes cannot be trusted in *Leucippe and Clitophon*, nor can vision be counted on to provoke a (right) response. Bartsch cites the episode in the temple of Artemis (8.2) in which Clitophon cries out to those observing in 'a tragic declamation' (τραγῳδῶν) after they have failed initially to respond to the sight of violence they have just witnessed. Similarly, the priest later persuades the crowd to act using theatrical rhetoric (8.9; e.g., he refers to Thersander has having 'acted the part', 'made a show', 'pretended', and 'entertained').

17. Cf. Mk 9.9 where Jesus orders three of his disciples to *tell* no one what they had *seen*. Vision must be narrated. The transfiguration of Jesus will be taken up in the final chapter.

18. Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel*; Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, p. 47.

19. Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel*, pp. 125, 127.

20. In his essay 'Myth Today' (*Mythologies* [trans. Annette Lavers; New York: Hill & Wang, 1972], pp. 109-59), Barthes describes myth as something defined not by its message, but by its manner of speaking. It is a second-order semiological system (p. 114), a metalanguage (p. 115). He writes, 'it is again this duplicity of the signifier which determines the characters of the signification. We now know that myth is a type of speech defined by its intention (*I am a grammatical example*) much more than by its literal sense (*my name is lion*); and that in spite of this, its intention is somehow frozen, purified, eternalized, *made absent* by this literal sense' (p. 124, author's italics).

21. Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel*, p. 127.

And so, ironically, a 'real' event (viz., within the story world, Thersander's assault on Clitophon in 8.1) merely *produces* spectators while rhetorical theatrics provoke other characters to action.

If characters within *Leucippe and Clitophon* cannot rely on what they have seen, and if readers either cannot trust their eyes or else can only do so in increments as the narrative progresses, then there is a question regarding whether or to what extent readers can trust their vision of the characters themselves as they perceive them in and through the narrative. If descriptions of appearance and processes of showing are fundamental techniques of characterization, then characters themselves are undermined by the very processes of characterization in *Leucippe and Clitophon*.

The issue is not simply that things are not what they seem. There is a certain way of knowing and of being known that is in play. As Chris Frilingos describes it, it is 'the production of knowledge through imperial viewing'.[22] Intertwined with this mode of knowledge production are issues of cultural identity and negotiations of power. In the Greek novels, 'rather than relating strange figures and places to a specific locus of authority, Rome, *the production of knowledge hinges on the character of characters*, such as Kleitophon [*sic*], whose elite background represents a classical Greek ideal'.[23] Hence, from an historical standpoint, *Leucippe and Clitophon* reflects a situation in which a particular literary mode of resistance is being crafted, an effort to articulate a certain subjectivity vis-à-vis the Empire, co-opting one of its primary mechanisms in the process. But what I find even more interesting is how the narrative discourse effects this position and role of viewing subject on readers only in turn to undermine the assumed confidence of that station and to redirect the gaze back upon the reader. In *Leucippe and Clitophon*, the gaze itself is deconstructed, and both the possibilities of representation and the processes of knowing are questioned. Within the world of the story, characters ascertain knowledge through visioning and re-visioning. Likewise, readers of the narrative are assembling their understanding of events and characters by visioning and re-visioning various elements of the story as the narrative unfolds. However, by twice removing the gaze (i.e., we, as readers, gaze upon others gazing), and by twice embedding it within a narrative discourse (i.e., we are reading Clitophon's narration of his experiences—not seeing them for ourselves as they happen; we are not witnesses—as recounted by the unnamed narrator that initiates the novel), *Leucippe and Clitophon* qualifies, if not collapses altogether, the distinction between seer

22. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, p. 49. Interestingly, Frilingos's comment is addressing the conspicuous absence of a chief character in the ancient romance novels, the 'silent partner' of the Roman Empire.

23. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, p. 61, my emphasis.

and seen, viewer and viewed, making both narrative objects. They are represented *and* masked by the narrative portrayal, and thereby made unrepeatable. By virtue of this unrepeatability, a demand is made of the reader. A responsibility is hoisted upon the reader as he or she is obligated to (an) *en*vision(ing). Otherwise innocent, silent bystanders are coerced by the mechanics of narrative discourse into being readers, spectators occupying an interpretive position, standing in judgment over the events of the narrative. But in order to pronounce their 'view' on the matter, they must adjudicate between the variety of visions intersecting with and opposing one another in the narrative. Readers cannot verify for themselves the 'facts' that the narrative repeatedly claims to reference. They are at the mercy of the narrative, a narrative that, as we have seen already, appeals only to itself as a guarantee of both those 'facts' and its own validity. Readers do this by pointing to what they have seen throughout the story, and by drawing evidence from the story elements so presented they reenact the actions of the characters themselves choosing up sides in debates concerning the truth of whether or to what extent events really happened. Once readers have done this, their judgment is compromised, because so much of what they have seen, right alongside the character-narrator, Clitophon, has subsequently been unveiled as false, artificial, or misrepresented time and again.

Another look at Book 8 of *Leucippe and Clitophon* will help illustrate the point I am trying to make. Functioning as the climax and dénouement of the novel, Book 8 is supposed to tie up loose ends and close off the narrative. Setting aside for the time being the obvious gap created when the novel foregoes both the protagonists' return to their homeland and the narrator's return to the frame story, we are confronted with a number of clever little knots that frustrate our ability as readers to sort out matters with confidence and that undermine the credibility of our narrator and his narrative. In other words, Book 8 invites us again to question what we have seen, and thus also our abilities to read and interpret, even while admitting to its own guise and artifice, and bidding us to wonder how else we would have known of our predicament but for the very text that has created it.

In Book 8, Clitophon recounts his story and then that of Leucippe (stories dividing, multiplying, intersecting, and recombining—all within a larger narrative). In both instances, he professes to have told everything. And in both instances, within a sentence or two of these professions, he confesses to *not* having told everything. Not only is it important that he is selective, but also that he embellishes and amplifies the details, tone, and even sequence of events, re-shaping the story as necessary to the advantage of his self-representation, his character. Furthermore, he is simultaneously playing to no less than four audiences: the general lot of folks in attendance at the banquet, Leucippe herself, Leucippe's father, and the readers (by way

of the first, and thereafter silent, narrator), in each case looking to advance different interests (viz., entertainment, flattery, commendation, and verification, respectively).

There is a key episode that weaves its way throughout the whole of *Leucippe and Clitophon*: the *Scheintod*, or 'false death' of Leucippe,[24] and it is not overlooked here in Clitophon's final account. Here Clitophon mentions, 'Menelaus' artful device' (τὴν Μενελάου τέχνην), which was, of course, not necessarily any single item, such as the retractable blade, which he and his cohorts stumbled upon by chance amidst other lost props, or the fake belly, which he crafted himself, next to the altar upon which Leucippe was supposedly slain. Rather, it functions metonymically as a reference to the entirety of the ruse by which Leucippe's captors and Clitophon alike are taken in, and along with them the readers of the narrative. When we first witness Leucippe's gruesome dismemberment in 3.15, it is focalized through Clitophon. We see the events unfold in the same manner as he claims to have seen them in the moment of their unfolding. We are no more the wiser than Clitophon. For all we know, Leucippe really is dead, until, a few pages later, when we learn of the cunning performance on the part of Clitophon's cronies. In Book 8, when Clitophon rehearses the episode at the banquet, he tells it as part of *his* story, and therefore it is recounted through the same focalization with which we first encountered it as readers.[25] And, of course, it most certainly is part of 'Clitophon's' story because all of what we have before us presents itself as that which Clitophon told to Achilles Tatius's narrator. What I would like to suggest is that 'Menelaus' artful device' is not only another significant way the narrative draws attention to itself—and a particularly colorful and provocative one at that—but also an unconscious metaphor for the characters that populate

24. See 3.15 (the sacrifice of Leucippe) and 5.7 (Leucippe's beheading at sea), as well as 2.23 where Leucippe's mother, Pantheia, has a dream in which 'a brigand carrying a naked blade kidnapped her daughter and carried her off; then he laid her down on her back and cut open the middle of her belly with the knife, starting down below at her most intimate parts'. See B.P. Reardon, 'Achilles Tatius and Ego-Narrative', in J.R. Morgan and Richard Stoneman (eds.), *Greek Fiction: The Greek Novel in Context* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 80-96; Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel*, pp. 126-29; Morales, *Vision and Narrative*, pp. 167-72.

25. There are a couple of items worth noting. Distance plays a role in the focalizing of this event. When Leucippe is sacrificed on the altar in Book 3, Clitophon is at a distance from the action, as are the readers. We have already seen that distance and focalization also factor into whether or to what extent we feel sympathetically toward or identify with various characters. At the banquet, when Clitophon recounts this event, we are aware that this is not the end of the story, and so we are treated to the guests' response of shock. What was once the spectacle no longer is the focus, but has become another trigger for provoking a spectacle of shock and disbelief on the part of others, whom we now observe instead of the event itself.

it. Costumes, props, false blades, stand-ins, set pieces—the novel is a world of trickery and play, of smoke and mirrors, as it were. My concern is not so much with any historical relationship between the novel and the theater, both of which are preceded by narrative as a discursive mode, but rather narrative's propensity for misdirection, its innate and constant potential for misperception, and its characteristic capacity for interpretive conundrums that bifurcate and double.[26]

Helen Morales makes other important connections between seeing and characterization in *Leucippe and Clitophon*. She begins by pointing out that the novel begins with three narrative openings that inaugurate different points of view and launch three specific ways of reading the story that is to follow.[27] She identifies four ways of reading (used broadly in reference to both literal reading and figurative reading, i.e., 'how a character approaches, interprets, and reacts to the narrative that she or he inhabits') reflected in four of the novel's characters: Clitophon, Thersander, Conops, and Callisthenes.[28] The character of Clitophon, in his act of pretending to read a book all the while using it as a guise for catching glimpses of Leucippe, presents reading as a covert and unstable activity, and portrays the reader's gaze as a voyeuristic one. Meanwhile, 'Thersander's reading of the world is a *realistic* one, hinging on what is reasonable and likely and

26. These conundrums are rarely mutually exclusive so much as capable of being decided in either of two perfectly suitable ways. I am thinking specifically of Pantheia's dream and the novel's opening *ekphrasis* on the votive painting (along with other such descriptions peppered throughout the narrative). But the frequent occurrences of doubling have rich and complex effects. Morales writes, 'Achilles' use of imagery and analogy is designed to court confusion over identification, likeness, and referral', and goes on to point out that viewing is 'a subjective activity, contingent upon the spectator's cultural frame of reference' (*Vision and Narrative*, p. 43). Cf. Selden, 'Genre of Genre'.

27. Morales, *Vision and Narrative*, p. 35. Bartsch writes: 'In all these works we begin to see how a descriptive passage might be used to draw in its audience and ask of them an effort at interpretation' (*Decoding the Ancient Novel*, p. 15). 'The descriptions function as the key to the works, and to ignore them is to make misjudgment inevitable: to a greater or lesser degree almost all of them are relevant to the text, and in a number of ways. However, those descriptions that require an interpretive effort, whether on the part of characters, readers, or both, play a particularly crucial part in engaging the readers and in determining the nature of their communication with the text. The descriptions of paintings, sculptures, dreams, and spectacles present a visual *signans* to which the *signatum* is not always clear; how it is made clear in the course of the reader's activity is a process that ultimately determines our interpretation of the works themselves' (*Decoding the Ancient Novel*, p. 171). Cf. Docherty, *Reading (Absent) Character*, pp. 82-83.

28. Morales, *Vision and Narrative*, pp. 77-95.

rejecting the improbable and fantastic'.[29] This is best reflected, for Morales, in the scene where Thersander balks at the preposterous idea of Leucippe's professed virginity (Book 6, to which I will return in Chapter 5). The character of Thersander, then, 'mirrors readings of *Leucippe and Clitophon* that take realism as their criterion for judgment and find the novel lacking'.[30] Moving on to Conops, here we encounter a reader intent on ferreting out the buried and veiled meanings of the text. *Leucippe and Clitophon* cast reading in this manner as irritating (e.g., the name 'Conops', being a so-called 'speaking-name'—i.e., a name in which literary and etymological connections intersect or overlap—meaning 'gnat').[31] Paradoxically, however, the reader 'is placed in a double-bind, for the strategies of concealment and revelation mobilized by the narrative encourage him or her to be vigilant and curious'.[32] Finally, there is Callisthenes, whose character ironically 'reinforces the ocularcentrism of Graeco-Roman culture' by illustrating the consequences of not conforming to it, opting instead for alternative ways of knowing—namely, hearing. His is an image of the imagination, a phantasm; it is an image unavailable to the other senses, 'a "vision" communicated by language.'[33] Reliance on such is problematized, however; it reflects a *failure* to see, to make right connections, and to read and interpret correctly. Callisthenes' misreading, wherein he mistakenly identifies someone else as Leucippe because the girl happens to be standing beside Leucippe's mother (2.16), at once points to the inadequacy of the senses (sight included) and the limits of *ekphrasis*. The latter Morales describes as 'a specific failure: the failure to function mimetically'. *Ekphrasis* is funda-

29. Morales, *Vision and Narrative*, p. 83.

30. Morales, *Vision and Narrative*, p. 83.

31. Perhaps the most obvious signal of the linguistic function that underpins the nature of literary characters is the names assigned to various characters throughout the novel, specifically the fictional names invented by the author. In his translation of *Leucippe and Clitophon*, p. 163, Whitmarsh labels them 'speaking names' to indicate their strong etymological and literary connections. Take, for example, Clitophon. The name means 'famous-voiced', which is also the name of the subject of a Platonic dialogue and thus an echo of the dialogue itself. The emphasis on 'voice' appears also in the character of Chaerephon ('pleasurable-voice'). I do not want to place too much weight on the etymological aspect of these names, nor do I want to suggest an allegorical interpretation. However, recognizing the intentionality of their construction and how, by their very nature, they echo other texts reminds us of their artificiality and reinforces their semiotic function. Furthermore, literary characters are signified, in part, by their speech (i.e., not by what they say but by the fact that they speak). Hence, names suggesting the presence of a voice, assigned to 'paper people' that never really speak at all, are doubly ironic. Cf. Aichele's reading of 'Barabbas' in *Jesus Framed*, pp. 13-18.

32. Morales, *Vision and Narrative*, p. 87.

33. Morales, *Vision and Narrative*, pp. 89-90.

mentally deceptive.[34] Like the eyes, it is unreliable and untrustworthy specifically because the more precise it attempts to be the greater the number of possibilities it creates.

The descriptive passages scattered throughout *Leucippe and Clitophon* not only function to draw readers into the text by requiring an act of interpretation on their part, but also push the reader beyond passivity and non-conscious receptivity by compelling readers to reflect on and evaluate their own ability to read.[35] These intricate verbal descriptions go beyond an attempt to accurately portray the objects that occupy their focus, and actually try to outdo or rival the object they describe, both in terms of the craftsmanship and in their appeal to the reader's emotions. Bartsch argues that in *Leucippe and Clitophon* descriptions function as the key to the work, and to ignore them is to make misjudgment inevitable.[36] As noted above, descriptions that require interpretive effort—whether on the part of characters within the text, or readers, or both—engage readers; the audience is lured into either forming their own interpretation or accepting false ones provided by characters in the text. And generally, it is the more sophisticated readers, those confident in their interpretations, who will be most deceived. The variety of ways that characters read and respond to descriptions peppered throughout the narrative corresponds to options that readers have for interpreting those descriptions (and the characters' interpretations) in relation to the story.

Readers are forced—not by an author but by the very act of reading—to adopt one of these reading positions, and in so doing they identify with this or that character; it is a matter of consequence more than one of choice. At the same time, however, throughout the course of reading, readers are prone to shift unwittingly from one to the other. The reader is put off balance and even doubled to the extent that she is repeatedly reading alternative ways of reading through the lens of whichever particular way she occupies and embodies in that moment. Again, this is not a matter of an author, Achilles Tatius, saying, here, read this way and then that. We know this in part because at no point is one way of reading or one mode of interpretation expressly privileged over another; there is no corrective at work. All of them are simultaneously encouraged (if not altogether necessitated or provoked) and equally problematized (if not altogether criticized and parodied) within and by the narrative, even as the narrative

34. Morales, *Vision and Narrative*, pp. 92-93.

35. Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel*, pp. 15, 174.

36. Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel*, p. 171-72. Cf. Mk 4.13, where the character of Jesus is portrayed as saying, 'Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?' The saying prompts Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, pp. 121-24) to map the entirety of Mark's narrative onto the parable of the sower that directly precedes Jesus' questions.

demands they be variously adopted in order to facilitate the articulation of that problematic.

Going further, identifying these characters as modes of reading is itself an act of reading, an imposition of structure and meaning. By modeling so many varieties of reading, the text, once again, draws attention to itself, betrays an awareness of itself, and, perhaps most importantly, anticipates its own reading. Therefore, in the same way that ways of reading are inscribed within the text in the form of characters, 'real' readers, too, are inscribed within the text and ultimately function like characters. They are engaged in the same voyeuristic activities. They acquire knowledge in like manner. They are susceptible to the same misunderstandings, misperceptions, and misrecognitions. In a word, their subjectivity is constructed, negotiated, and relativized in strikingly similar ways; they are always subjects-in-the-making.[37] Morales points out that the eclectic and digressive reading and narrating of various characters within the novel mirrors the eclectic and digressive framing narrative, and this in turn 'militates against a stable position of readership and a focused position of spectatorship'.[38] *This* is how and why readers relate to or identify with characters—not primarily because we like or dislike them, or because we find in them shared personality traits or points of interest, but because their very mode of being mimics and parodies our own.

Double Vision

The instability associated with seeing in *Leucippe and Clitophon* has another dimension that ties into characterization: disparity, or paradoxical admixture. I have noted already that the mélange of various and often disparate items described in the novel (e.g., the inner and outer harbor of Sidon, assorted aspects of the painting described in the opening) parallels narrative itself. This is not something that takes place only on the surface of the text, or only within the narrow context of the novel genre itself; rather, it reflects the inherently dialogical essence of the form, wherein language is 'simultaneously represented *and* representing'.[39] Just as these places, scenes, events, items, and so forth are inseparable from their depiction as

37. Cf. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes* (trans. Richard Howard; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977): 'It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel' (p. 1); 'all this must be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel—or rather by several characters' (p. 119); and 'the substance of this book, ultimately, is totally fictive' (p. 120). See also Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 74: 'the subject is merely an effect of language'.

38. Morales, *Vision and Narrative*, p. 80.

39. Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination*, p. 45. Cf. Barthes' famously suggestive and oft-quoted line: 'The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture' ('The Death of the Author', p. 146).

paradoxical, fused, and incongruent, the novel, as a genre, is fundamentally defined by admixture. For example, in reference to Clitophon's description of 'two extraordinary departures from convention: an aquatic infantry battle and a shipwreck on land' (4.14), Whitmarsh writes, 'fusion and paradoxical hybridity are the defining indices of novelistic discourse, whether in 'set pieces' such as this or (in a more psychological context) in the topos of the mixed emotions of a character'.[40] In a sense, 'set pieces' and 'characters' are cut from the same cloth. With that in mind, let us look at some additional examples from *Leucippe and Clitophon*.

At the outset of the novel, the first narrator observes a painting, which he describes as 'a landscape and seascape in one'. In it, flowers, trees, and bushes intermingle, leaves are intertwined, and even the color of the sea is twofold. The maidens on the shore are caught in a moment of arrested ambivalence, their pose suggesting 'both desire to pursue the bull and fear to enter the sea'. This posture and display of what I am referring to as 'arrested ambivalence' will play out in the actions (or inactions) of certain characters elsewhere in the narrative, and we will return to this point in due course.

Moving on, we arrive at the garden of Clitophon's home, which serves as the setting for Clitophon's eyeing of Leucippe and his discussion with Satyrus regarding how to 'break the girl into the ways of desire'. The place is described in a manner similar to the votive painting: interlocking branches, mingling trees, etc. (1.15, 16; see also 2.15 and, with reference to bodies or various parts thereof, 2.8, 37, 38). Of particular note, Clitophon describes the water of the fountain as a 'mirror' that seemed to double the grove: 'part real and part reflection'. Only a few paragraphs later, Leucippe herself is doubled as well. From Clitophon's point of view, 'she seemed still present: though departed, she had left behind her image in my eyes' (1.19). The intersection of admixture, sight, and speech intersect when this line is taken together with the one that follows: 'So Satyrus and I congratulated ourselves, I for my storytelling (μυθολογία) and Satyrus for having provided me with the pretexts (ἀφορμή)'.

Admixture continues when we learn that Clitophon's father and uncle are half-brothers, and Calligone is his half-sister. Furthermore, along the same lines, the bandits (βουκόλος) along the shore of the Nile are described as being like 'half-caste Egyptians' (3.9), and the crocodile is portrayed as a disproportionate 'mixture' (παραλλαγή) of fish and beast in form (4.19). The paradoxical juxtapositions become even more pronounced and absurd (though cleverly fashioned from a rhetorical standpoint) when references are made, for example, to 'a city in the sea and an island on the land' (2.14), and a Sicilian spring carrying fire intermingled with it (2.14).

40. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, pp. 79-80.

As the Achilles Tatius's literary concoctions become increasingly conspicuous, the latter half of Whitmarsh's remarks in the quote above become of greater interest to me. Again, 'fusion and paradoxical hybridity are the defining indices of novelistic discourse … in the topos of the mixed emotions of a character'.[41] This is precisely what I am arguing in this book—namely, that the same admixture that both defines the narrative and threatens to unravel it is a central aspect of the characters themselves. The issue is not limited only to the smattering of two-dimensional emotions the characters of *Leucippe and Clitophon* exhibit. It extends also to both their role in the narratives and the manner in which they are constructed and whereby they exist. The author's bizarre and incongruous amalgamations begin to overlap with a sense of dividedness when Clitophon refers to himself as being 'on the border between two countries at war', viz., fate and nature (1.11). In reaction to the news that pirates had kidnapped Calligone, he describes himself as 'reanimated' at the prospect of escaping his wedding (Calligone as fiancée) and 'dismayed' that misfortune had befallen his sister (Calligone as familial relation). Satyrus tells a story in which a gnat says to a lion he has just struck, 'though I am here, I am not: I flee and resist at one and the same time' (2.22). Menelaus, rehearsing his experience as a victim of Eros, complains, 'my living state resembled anyone else's death' (2.34). In the painting of Andromeda and Prometheus, the face of the former reveals beauty and fear, while the latter can barely contain his hope and fear.

Returning to the painting with which the narrative began, there is a detail that serves the aspect of vision just as well as that of admixture. The first narrator describes the breasts of the woman riding the bull: 'the girdle that fastened her tunic enclosed her breasts, but the tunic mirrored her body'. Here we have an instance of revelation and disclosure in concealment. The picture itself is said to give the *impression* of motion; and the description concludes with Eros looking at Zeus in a mocking manner.

What are we to make of all this? Repeatedly, throughout the novel, Clitophon refers to items and events like the ones I have been describing variously as a 'novel spectacle' (e.g., τὸ θέαμα καινόν in 2.14; 4.4, 12), a 'novel kind of ill-fortune' (καινὰ ἀτυχήματα at 4.14), an 'extraordinary departure from convention' (ἀμφότερα δὲ καινὰ καὶ παράλογα also at 4.14), and the like. These characterizations should not be dismissed too quickly as merely colorful accounts and clever summarizations. Instead, they speak unwittingly to the very nature of the discourse attempting to convey the items thus described. Moreover, to the same extent that they describe events and settings, they extend to the characters themselves as well. These figures are makeshift, incomplete, provisional assemblages conditioned by language and narrative discourse, which itself a mixture of voices, trajectories,

41. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, pp. 79-80.

intertexts, and so forth. We are dealing here not with a novel concerned with spectacle, but with a discourse that is itself spectacular.

The Gospel of Mark: 'You will see the Son of Man…'

Contrary to what New Testament narrative critics would have us believe, the Gospel of Mark, in and of itself, does not provide us with the sort of consistent, rounded, psychologically sophisticated characters one might like. As in all narrative, characters throughout Mark are indirectly patched together with scraps of discourse that readers distill from the text. Mark's gospel reflects a similar concern with vision and spectacle and with the paradoxical admixtures that confront the eyes, though it is more subdued and couched in somewhat different terms.

Within the narrative of Mark's Gospel, the figure of Jesus is a literary construct, a 'creature of discourse'.[42] Jesus is, therefore, limited by the narrative that presents him as a character. The theory of focalization allows one to deconstruct 'a certain construal of sense and reference'.[43] Gérard Genette explains that characters are among the objects or content of narrative. *Characterization*, on the other hand, is a matter of narrative *discourse*. Characters are 'wholly constituted by the discourse that claims to describe them and report their actions, thoughts, and words', writes Genette. 'All the more reason, no doubt, to be more interested in the constituting discourse than in the object constituted—this "living being with no insides", which in this situation … is only an effect of the text.'[44]

The Gospel of Mark is a narrative pointedly concerned with issues of inside and outside, but never is it particularly clear who occupies which position—a situation that pertains to characters and to readers both. In the Gospel of Mark, the act of seeing and the state of knowing are intimately related. Sight is a principal criterion whereby the identity of insiders and outsiders is determined.[45] In Mark, the reader not only sees what a character sees, but also sees characters seeing. Moreover, competing interpretations in and of the narrative hinge upon one's vision. It is a fundamental technique or instrument of Markan characterization wherein characters are characterized in and through the act of viewing.

O'Neill, it so happens, demonstrates the inherent ambiguity of focalization with an illustration from Mark's Gospel, and he does so precisely

42. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 41.

43. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 45, citing Llewelyn, *Derrida on the Threshold of Sense*, pp. 78-89.

44. Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, pp. 135-36.

45. George Aichele, 'The Possibility of Error: *Minority Report* and the Gospel of Mark', *BibInt* 14 (2006), pp. 150-56.

because the biblical text is not where one expects to find such indeterminacy.[46] Mark 6.48 in the King James Version reads: 'When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the lake. He intended to pass them by.' Identifying the focalized objects is not difficult, but the identification of the focalizer(s) is unclear.

> When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind [CF_{Jesus}], he came towards them early in the morning [EF? $CF_{disciples}$?], walking on the lake [EF? $CF_{disciples}$?]. He intended to pass them by [EF? $CF_{disciples}$? CF_{Jesus}?].

The point O'Neill aims to make with this example is that greater ambiguity in focalization leads to greater scope in interpretation. In this instance, the way we understand the subject and object of focalization directly determines whether we read the episode as a characterization of Jesus or of the disciples. If it is a characterization of Jesus, is the figure characterized according to the vision of the narrator, that of the disciples, or, in the final sentence of the verse, that of Jesus himself? The reader must inevitably choose, and the reader will do so on the basis of what best suits his or her overall reading of the situation in relation to the narrative as a whole.

The connection between seeing and knowing is made early in Mark's Gospel and reinforced throughout. From the second verse of chapter one, where the reader is told to 'look!' seeing takes up an important stage position.[47] It is Jesus' vision of the heavens opening at his baptism that sets in motion the inauguration of his ministry. Jesus catching sight of Simon, Andrew, James, and John leads to their being called to follow him. The same is true when Jesus calls Levi in 2.14, and is there by extension in 3.33-34 and 5.32-34 as well. In 2.5, Jesus is capable of seeing the faith of the paralytic's friends. Jesus himself is the absent object of another's search (ζητοῦσιν) in 1.37 and 3.32, while in 9.1 the assurance is given that some standing there with Jesus will see God's kingdom before tasting death. Finally, in 2.6-12, Jesus perceives (ἐπιγνούς) the silent internal questions of others (which are externalized for the reader by the narrative but left accessible only by inference for the other characters of the story), leading to the healing of a paralytic and to the amazement (ἐξίστασθαι, lit., they were put out of place; they were out of their senses; cf. 5.42; 6.51-52) of the scribes and others.

In 4.3, a directive to 'look!' comes just before Jesus tells the parable of the Sower, which is identified as the key to understanding all of the

46. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 92.

47. Kevin W. Larsen, *Seeing and Understanding Jesus: A Literary and Theological Commentary on Mark 8:22–9:13* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005).

parables (4.13) immediately after it is explained that Jesus spoke in parables precisely '*so that* they may indeed see but not perceive' (4.11-12, ἵνα βλέποντες βλέπωσιν καὶ μὴ ἴδωσιν). The irony is only reinforced when the disciples are told to 'behold!' as Jesus makes his third passion prediction in 10.33-34.[48] Readers are called to look, to fix their attention, *not on Jesus* but *through* Jesus toward that to which he points; to see not just as he sees but as the narrator sees him seeing. This is in order that the reader would be discipled (her gaze disciplined) by seeing rightly, perceiving correctly, re-cognizing the story. At the same time, this call to look here and/or to look in this manner is in tension with the focalization of the narrative as a whole. The diverting of attention *away from* Jesus clashes with the attention *on* Jesus. The so-called messianic secret is the most obvious example, but it surfaces also in Jesus' references to the Son of Man. Concerning the messianic secret, Aichele rightly points out that it only works if the reader already presumes to know Jesus' true identity.[49] The tension that results from this combination of disorientation and reorientation is one of a number of ways that the narrative of Mark itself, and any reading thereof, always potentially betrays Jesus by framing Jesus in concrete terms.

Frequently, when Jesus *is* focalized, it is as a character-focalizer and the focalization is internal. Hence, he is focalized as a lens through which to focalize other characters and items of the story in particular ways, which in turn reflects back upon him and factors into his characterization. In 2.5, the reader gains access to the faith of the paralytic's friends through Jesus' perception. The reader is provided with Jesus' interpretation of their actions. Similarly, in 2.6-12, it is Jesus' perception of the otherwise silent internal questions of others (thus accessible to us but not to the other characters in the story) that leads to the paralytic's healing and the amazement of the scribes and those assembled. Alternately, on occasions when Jesus is externally focalized, the connotations are troubling and thorny at best (note esp. 6.1-5, 14-16, 49; 8.27-30; 15.16-21, 39).

In Mark 5, we have two instances in which characters are characterized by their position and role as focalizers and focalized objects. First, the Gerasene demoniac sees Jesus from afar (5.6), the people from the region come out to see the man (5.14), and they saw him sitting there, clothed, and in his right mind (5.15). In the very same chapter, Jairus approaches Jesus upon seeing him (5.22), and after healing the hemorrhaging woman along the way to Jairus' house, Jesus 'looked around to see' who had touched his garments

48. Here is but one instance in which Mark's apparently simple and straightforward narrative offers a glimpse of the seams and layers of textual threads piled and tangled as dialogue, narration, citation, and interpretation intersect and frame one another in ways that question which is 'original' and which is derivative.

49. See Aichele, *Phantom Messiah*, p. 135; and *Jesus Framed*, pp. 13-26, 106-109.

(5.32). Note again the ambiguity and indeterminacy brought about, in part, by the embedded, compound and complex character-focalizations:

> Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him [internal CF_{Jesus}? EF?], Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' And his disciples said to him [$CF_{disciples}$? EF?], 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' He looked all round to see who [EF] had done it (5.30-32).

Jesus immediately asks to know who touched him. In so doing, 'the narrative shifts to *a dialogue* which becomes *the actual focal point of the story*'.[50] Moreover, a delay is created in the space between Jesus' question and his action of looking all around to see who had touched him. The disciples, in typical Markan portrayal, are shocked precisely because *everyone* is touching him. But there is something fundamentally different about this particular touch. Mark tells us that Jesus *perceived* in himself that power had gone out from him and he looked around to see who (a feminine pronoun indicating, on the level of the discourse, that the figure in view is focalized by the narrator)[51] had touched him (vv. 30, 32). Joel Marcus, noting the 'extraordinary pileup of epistemological language' throughout this section, states, 'it is…significant that Jesus "looks around to see" the woman, a feature that would probably remind Mark's readers of Jesus' riveting, supernatural, discipleship-creating gaze elsewhere in the Gospel'.[52] Here again we encounter the somewhat circular notion that knowing the story will somehow ensure that meaning is present and available. Therefore, interpretation becomes an act of re-cognition, an idea that fits remarkably well with a narrative that divides the world in terms of insiders and outsiders based on what and how individuals see, perceive, and know without ever indicating clearly how one comes to know in the first place.

50. Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26* (WBC; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), p. 297, my emphasis; Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 180. More will be said about dialogue and its role in characterization in the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that Guelich's remark hinges on the problematic distinction between 'telling' and 'showing'.

51. William Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 193 n. 50. See also C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 186. Cf. Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 359. Marcus reads the gender identification as another indication of Jesus' clairvoyance, and thereby links it to Mark's characterization of Jesus. But he still recognizes that a shift in perspective is central to the scene (p. 368). Concerning v. 32, which few commentators address, Cranfield interestingly notes (p. 121) that in seven occurrences of περιβλέπομαι in the New Testament, six have Jesus as the subject, and five of those are in Mark.

52. Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, p. 369.

A particularly interesting moment in which Markan characterization hinges upon seeing is the 'flashback' episode of John the Baptizer's death (6.14-29). Jennifer Glancy notes that the length of this particular episode, relative to the rest of the narrative as a whole and to other individual scenes throughout, suggests that it is especially important.[53] Furthermore, she points out that this episode is focalized through the character of Herod.[54] In this instance, we see the events from the perspective of Herod. She notes, however, that the reader is not seeing these events through Herod's eyes *as they unfold*, but rather as he recollects them. 'The framework invites readers to share Herod's memories of the execution…'[55] Later she writes, '…we watch Herod and his guests *watch* the girl dance'.[56] Glancy's concern is with both the way in which certain historical assumptions about gender influence Mark's narrative, and how modern assumptions about gender influence contemporary interpretations of the story and of the characters therein. Thus, she argues, 'a key component in the representation of gender in this scene is the construction of femininity as "to-be-looked-at-ness" and masculinity in terms of active voyeurism'.[57] My concern is less with the specific dimensions of gender reflected in this passage than with the construction of characters in general by means of doubled focalization—not only 'who sees' but 'who sees whom seeing', and furthermore the respective positions of viewer and viewed with respect to characterization. Herod and John (and by extension even Jesus, given the way the episode begins, i.e., word of Jesus' activities circulating and triggering the analepsis) are characterized in and through the act of viewing. A specific *act* of viewing (viz., the performance of Salome's dance) functions as the linchpin of the scene's plot. The discourse manhandles content elements like plot and characters to the extent that they are created by it, not conveyed through it.

Throughout Mark, competing interpretations hinge upon one's vision, and on which focalizer one adopts or trusts (and on what is focalized thereby). But, to a large extent, the perspective one has is not entirely a matter of

53. Jennifer A. Glancy, 'Unveiling Masculinity: The Construction of Gender in Mark 6:17-29', *BibInt* 2 (1994), pp. 34-50 (38). For more on the concept of point of view and its relevance for (and conspicuous absence from) biblical narrative criticism, see Gary Yamasaki, 'Point of View in a Gospel Story: What Difference Does It Make? Luke 19:1-10 as a Test Case', *JBL* 125 (2006), pp. 89-105.

54. Glancy, 'Unveiling Masculinity', p. 38. Cf. Janice Capel Anderson, 'Feminist Criticism: The Dancing Daughter', in Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (eds.), *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2nd edn, 2008), pp. 111-43.

55. Glancy, 'Unveiling Masculinity', p. 38.

56. Glancy, 'Unveiling Masculinity', p. 40, author's emphasis.

57. Glancy, 'Unveiling Masculinity', p. 39.

personal choice, per se. Rather, recalling what was said earlier in Chapter 2, interpretive perspective is also, in part, scripted for the reader; it is the one that interpellates the reader and prefigures her reading. In 6.33, Jesus looks upon the crowd with compassion, viewing them as sheep without a shepherd (cf. 10.21, where Jesus 'looks upon' the rich man 'and loved him'). The disciples, in effect, see five loaves and two fish while Jesus, 'looking up to heaven', sees the multiplication of resources. Jesus sees the disciples struggling against the violent sea in 6.48, but when they see him walking toward them they regard him as a ghost and are terrified (6.49, 50). Similarly, in 7.1-23, the activity of the disciples (plucking grain on the Sabbath) is *viewed* differently by the Pharisees and by Jesus leading to a debate on fulfilling the law. In Mk 8.11-13, the Pharisees demand a 'sign', that is, they request a (presumably visual[58]) demonstration of Jesus' identity, a validation of the claims made of him,[59] an authentication of his origin. While the character of Jesus within the story refuses to provide such a 'proof', [60] the discoursed figure is validated by the narrative and becomes a sign of itself. The focalizer (i.e., a Jesus who diverts attention from himself toward other things that he sees differently) becomes the focalized, as competing visions, competing narratives, intersect. It is another scene of in-cognition. 'The Pharisees' request reflects their spiritual blindness: unable to *recognize* the signs which God gives them, they demand signs of their own choosing.'[61]

The image on the denarius (12.13-17),[62] the sight of the poor widow offering two small coins (12.41-44), and the depiction of the costly ointment

58. The lexical connection between 'argue' (συζητέω) and 'ask' or 'seek' (ζητέω) is striking, given the latter's frequent association with hostility (Mk 8.12, 18; 12.12; 14.1, 11, 55; cf. 1.27; 9.10). It seems to hint at the inherent confines vision imposes. Meanwhile, the testing (πειράζω) of the Pharisees is reminiscent of so many other tests Jesus faces throughout the narrative, not least of which comes at the outset of the narrative when all eyes are on Jesus, the solitary figure in the wilderness, seeking a demonstration, a validation of the identity placed upon him by the narrative.

59. Marcus (*Mark 1–8*, p. 502) points out that, whereas signs are typically requested to confirm explicit or implicit claims previously made, here the immediate context lacks any such claim. According to Collins, 'their reappearance here [cf. 7.1-13] suggests that their demand for a sign is a response to the miracles that Jesus has done in the meantime' (*Mark*, p. 383).

60. An ellipsis of a Hebrew Bible oath formula (see, e.g., 1 Kgs 3.14; 2 Kgs 6.31; Ps 95.11 LXX; Jer. 45.16 LXX; 3 Kgdms 17.1; 4 Kgdms 4.30. See Guelich, *Mark*, p. 415; Boring, *Mark*, pp. 221-22.), thereby evoking that which cannot be said, representing the unrepresentable. It occurs within a scene that itself reads like a truncated fragment of a longer narrative, possibly playing into a reworking of Exodus (see Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, pp. 502, 505-506; cf. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, pp. 258-59).

61. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, p. 258, my emphasis.

62. Interestingly, the etymology of the word 'character' begins with the Greek χαρακτήρ, which refers to 'a mark engraved or impressed, the impress or stamp on coins

from a busted alabaster jar running over the head of a dead man walking (14.3-9) are further examples of the figure of Jesus functioning as both focalizer and focalized.[63] The point I want to make is not that there is a theological corrective at work, or that differences in interpretive opinion are merely matters of perspective. Rather, what is seen (perceived), both on the part of characters within the narrative (i.e., as a story element) and on the part of readers who must see the narrative and the elements that populate it through a particular vision (i.e., as a discursive aspect), is determined by how it is seen. Since there are always multiple options, the text functions like a prism rather than as a magnifier.[64] Readers do not deliberately and purposely opt for this or that reading of something otherwise stable, and capable of multifarious viewing. We *recognize* our construction of reality, or point of view, or way of viewing, reflected back to us in the narrative. Ideology is embedded in and reinforced through focalization most of all by its inconspicuousness.[65] Every reading is obvious, coherent, plainly seen, and meaningful.

An episode portraying Jesus healing an unidentified blind man in Bethsaida (8.22-26) occurs just before Peter's confession (8.27-30) and Jesus' first passion prediction (8.31-33), both of which mark a clear turning point in Mark's plot. By and large, the story is interpreted as the story of the disciples in microcosm; that is, just as their 'sight' (i.e., understanding) of Jesus has been partial, it will eventually be complete and perfect.[66] Mark's

and seals' (LSJ). Character/-ization is 'a mark, scar, trace, mold'; the result of a strike against something (e.g., metal); the image of a die-cast. The *OED* adds the element of 'distinction', that is, 'character' is an image or some other clear indicator that signified or branded something. Hence, it translates metaphorically (*figuratively*) to mean 'a distinctive mark, evidence … a feature, trait', etc. (*OED*), 'the mark impressed (as it were) on a person or thing, a distinctive mark, characteristic, character' (LSJ). I do not want to make the mistake of place too much weight on etymology. However, it is important to recognize the nature of the relationship between representation and characterization. It is not simply that characters are representations of people, but that the two concepts are related even on a linguistic level. Here, the coin is twice focalized. The 'character' (literal sense) of the coin and the lens through which it is viewed are in tension in determining the coin's source and ownership.

63. In 14.3-9, the reader's gaze is directed toward the other dinner guests and through them to Jesus and the woman, who in turn mutually focalize one another and cast a reflection back upon the onlookers—both guests and readers alike.

64. Cf. Malbon's notion of deflected and refracted christology (*Mark's Jesus*, pp. 17-18, 129-217).

65. The act of seeing has etymological connections to 'ideology', both stemming from the root ἰδ-. To see (ἰδεῖν) is to behold, leading, or presupposing, in turn, an ἰδέα, a look, semblance, form, configuration, species, kind, class, sort, nature, (in Platonic philosophy) a general or ideal form, type, model (*OED*).

66. Ernst Best, 'The Role of the Disciples in Mark', *NTS* 23 (1977), pp. 377-401;

account of the healing of an unidentified blind man just outside the village of Bethsaida functions as a cue to the reader that both the message of the text and especially the meaning of Jesus are such that they require special insight in order to be perceived and ascertained. The pericope particularly sheds light on the narrative's characterization of the disciples as those incapable of (or at least unskilled at) discerning the subtleties of Jesus' teachings and actions. Various characters throughout the text, as well as the readers of the text, cannot see clearly on their own under the constraints of their present circumstances. There is an inherent deficiency or obstruction. Nevertheless, by means of necessary and appropriate intervention, their sight can and will be fully restored. Moloney summarizes the consensus nicely:

> Following an episode during which Jesus accused his disciples of blindness (see v. 18a), the miracle tells of a man who moves from no sight (v. 22), to a limited vision (vv. 23-24), to full sight (v. 25), before being dismissed from the scene (v. 26). The passage looks back to the blindness of the disciples (v. 18), and forward to the episode which follows, closing the first half of the Gospel, where two of these stages of 'sight' will be realized (8.27-30). It also opens the door upon the second half of the Gospel (8.31–15.47), during which the nature of 'full sight' will be explained by the teaching and the death of Jesus.[67]

To be sure, there is plenty that lends itself to this reading. Verse 21 concludes the preceding pericope with Jesus' question to the disciples, 'Do you not yet perceive?', and 8.22-26 provides a transitional segue to the remainder of the narrative, which exhibits a significant shift in tone, and which focuses heavily on Jesus' efforts to instruct his closest disciples and on their pronounced inability to understand. Several scholars have pointed

Mark: The Gospel as Story (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), pp. 44-50; C. Clifton Black, *The Disciples according to Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); Boring, *Mark*, pp. 231-34; Collins, *Mark*, pp. 391, 394-95; Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, p. 254; Kim E. Dewey, 'Peter's Curse and Cursed Peter', in Werner Kelber (ed.), *The Passion in Mark: Studies on Mark 14–16* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), pp. 96-114; Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, pp. 257-58; Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, pp. 430-36; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 241-45; R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 320-23; Tannehill, 'The Disciples in Mark'; Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*; Theodore J. Weeden, 'The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel', in William R. Telford (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2nd edn, 1995); Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 238-39; cf. R.S. Sugirtharajah, 'Men, Trees and Walking: A Conjectural Solution to Mk 8:24', *ExpTim* 103 (1992), pp. 172-74. In light of this, it is curious that Shiner (*Follow Me!*) never even discusses 8.22-26 in his analysis of the disciples in Mark.

67. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 163.

out the parallels between 8.22-26 and 7.32-37, the healing of a deaf-mute, in some cases even suggesting that the parallels reflect a Markan doublet. Both involve the use of spittle and the laying on of hands. Both healings are accompanied by some degree of difficulty. And, finally, both stories end with the charge to secrecy.[68] A similar comparison can be made between 8.22-26 and 10.46-52 (par. Mt. 20.29-34; 9.27-31; Lk. 18.35-43). Pheme Perkins incorporates all three and notes that '8.22-26 falls at the center of three stories dealing with senses'.[69] The pliability of this pericope seems to parody the absurd and carnivalesque imagery situated at the very heart of the episode.

Typical of the approaches that have been taken to this passage, scholars have explored the connections between Jesus' use of spittle and ancient Near Eastern and first-century Mediterranean cultural views on magic and healing miracles,[70] analyzed the tension created by the fact that Jesus

68. Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to Mark* (London: Macmillan, 2nd edn, 1966), pp. 368-69. Cf. Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 416-18; Lane, *Gospel according to Mark*, pp. 283-87; Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, pp. 476-77; and Robert M. Fowler, *The Loaves and the Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981), pp. 165-66. An additional similarity is that Matthew and Luke omit both miracles. In fact, they are the only miracles from Mark that they do not include in their gospels. See E.S. Johnson, 'Mark 8.22-26: The Blind Man from Bethsaida', *NTS* 25 (1978–79), pp. 370-83 (370).

69. Pheme Perkins, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIB, 8; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 619. Others have pointed to an even larger parallel in the form of two miracle cycles running between 4.35 and 8.26. Fowler, *Loaves*, pp. 7-11. Fowler references the work of Luke H. Jenkins and Vincent Taylor, both of whom propose that 6.30–7.37 and 8.1-26 represent variants of an identical cycle of stories. Fowler concludes, 'That one receives intuitions of repetition or duality when reading Mark 6–8 cannot be denied. However, the explanation that two variant cycles of stories lie behind Mark 6.30–8.26 is inadequate.'

70. One of the more creative readings of Jesus' spittle is offered by Moore (*Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, pp. 108-109): 'Perhaps we should then speak not of the Gospel of Mark but of the mark of the G(ospe)l—the warm wet imprint left on our G(l)os(s)pel by the evangelist's glossal organ'. This sentence occurs amidst Moore's reading of Mark alongside Derrida's *Glas* (trans. John P. Leavy, Jr and Richard Rand; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), a book in which Derrida, among other things, interrogates 'the word' not in terms of ideas that supersede or transcend it, but via the bodily and sensory elements that precede and form it. Thus, at one point, he becomes quite fixated on the organs of speech and on the phoneme *gl*, which is 'sub-lingual', a kind of necessary non-thing, as I read it. Meanwhile, J. Keir Howard strips the text of all intrigue by explaining, 'it is not impossible that there was an eminently practical reason for the use of saliva, namely to remove the dirt and dried secretions from the eyelids preparatory to the healing' ('Men as Trees, Walking: Mark 8.22-26', *SJT* 37 [1984], pp. 163-70 [165]).

appears to fail initially in his attempt to heal the man, and evaluated the placement and arrangement of the pericope in juxtaposition to the structure of Mark's gospel as a whole. Scholars who have made an effort to deal with the physicality of the healing/miracle itself, i.e., what actually happened to the blind man that resulted in him 'seeing all things clearly' have turned their attention to theories of vision in antiquity.[71] In contrast to modern optometry, ancient medical practitioners had a so-called 'extramission' theory of vision. Marcus explains, 'people and animals see not by means of light rays that travel from the external object to the eye, as modern optics would have it, but by means of beams that come *out of* the eye, travel to the object of sight, and strike it, thereby producing vision'.[72]

Hans Dieter Betz, in his exploration of the philosophical and medical theories and conceptualizations that form the background for Mt. 6.22f. ('The eye is the lamp of the body…', RSV), traces ancient Greek theories of sense perception in general, and vision in particular, from anonymous Pythagoreans through Heraclitus, Parmenides, Theophrastus, Empedocles, and Plato. He makes a number of observations that deserve mention here. First, Betz points out two sayings of Heraclitus that demonstrate an interesting preference for the eye over the ear as a critical organ for sense perception. The second of the two sayings refers to 'bad witnesses—men having eyes and ears of Barbarian souls', which Betz, following Diels-Kranz, interprets as those 'who like barbarians cannot properly understand the information given by the senses'.[73] Betz expands on this notion by pointing out that 'the eye alone is not capable of recognizing the truth, but that another factor must enter into the process of vision', namely recognition, differentiation, and perception.[74] Second, Betz turns his attention to Plato. What is interesting here with regard to Mk 8.22-26 is that Plato explicitly ties together the physical ability to see with the ways in which

71. See, for example, Joel Marcus, 'A Note on Markan Optics', *NTS* 45 (1999), pp. 250-56. Cf. Hans Dieter Betz, 'Matthew vi.22 and Ancient Greek Theories of Vision', in E. Best and R. McL. Wilson (eds.), *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 43-56; Dale Allison, 'The Eye as a Lamp: Finding the Sense', in *The Jesus Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); and J. Keir Howard, 'Men as Trees, Walking'.

72. Marcus, 'Markan Optics', p. 251, author's emphasis.

73. Betz, 'Matthew vi.22', p. 47. Heraclitus, in fact, has much to say on this matter of (mis)perception. For example, 'Eyes and ears are bad witnesses to men if they have souls that understand not their language' (*Frag. 107*); and 'The many do not take heed of such things as those they meet with, nor do they mark them when they are taught, though they think they do' (*Frag. 17*).

74. Betz, 'Matthew vi.22', p. 48.

the individual's soul perceives truth. Betz quotes the following from Plato's *Republic*:

> When it [i.e., the soul via the eyes] is firmly fixed on the domain where truth and reality shine resplendent it apprehends and knows them and appears to possess reason; but when it inclines to that region which is mingled with darkness, the world of becoming and passing away, it opines only and its edge is blunted, and it shifts its opinions hither and thither, and again seems as if it lacked reason.[75]

For Plato, the task of the philosopher is directly tied to discernment. It is the starting point for *paideia*. 'Education…cannot "put true knowledge into a soul that does not possess it, as if they were inserting vision into blind eyes".'[76] Therefore, blindness in antiquity was considered to be primarily some sort of impediment, blockage, or obstruction, namely from the inside out.

J. Keir Howard offers the following definition of blindness from D. Vaughan and T. Asbury's, *General Ophthalmology*: '[Blindness is] loss of vision sufficient enough to prevent an individual from supporting himself in an occupation, making him dependent upon other persons, agencies, or devices in order to live'.[77] The information provided to us by the narrator certainly seems to fit this definition. The man in 8.22-26 is dependent upon his friends to bring him to Jesus, and later dependent on Jesus to lead him outside the village. Moreover, he does not even speak for himself initially, and when he does speak the only remark he makes is cryptic and ultimately indicative of a persisting deficiency.

There are two things I want to note. First, in the customary reading of the story, a verisimilitudinous depiction of physical blindness and the restoration of sight is taken as a metaphor or symbol for what is perceived to be a much larger and more significant story at the macro level of the narrative. This second-order production of meaning—what is said to be represented—provides context and explanation and is, by implication, more real or truer than the otherwise circumstantial and meaningless events that the text claims to portray. Second, it follows that we have here a situation in which a character is very clearly placed into the narrative solely in service to another figure (a situation not unlike that of the Syrophoenician woman of Mk 7.24-30, and particularly that of her daughter). What may well have been the representation of an actual blind man becomes only a peripheral and perfunctory representation of a prop designed to characterize Jesus. But if the first figure is a chimera, then how is the second figure any less transparent and pliable when it, too, can serve as a discursive

75. Betz, 'Matthew vi.22', pp. 50-51; see Plato, *Republic* 508D.
76. Betz, 'Matthew vi.22', p. 52, cf. Plato, *Republic* 518C.
77. Howard, 'Men as Trees, Walking', p. 163.

instrument, lens, or site? Hence, it is the manner in which the blind man is lead about by others that ultimately best reflects the situation of both literary characters and readers vis-à-vis narrative insofar as any agency either seems to possess is always relative to an Other and to the vision determining the plot.

My rationale for giving so much space to what amounts to an historical analysis of the passage has nothing to do with thinking that it somehow provides the key to unlocking the 'plain sense' meaning of the episode. Rather, it is intended to show, first of all, how such an analysis itself focalizes the episode and various aspects thereof in a particular manner, adding another layer to the discourse rather than peeling back narrative layers to get at what 'really' lies beneath. Secondly, by extension, it does not provide the context for understanding the narrative vis-à-vis the author's intent so much as it demonstrates the persistent privileging of sight and provides the context for our own visioning of the episode. Finally, by further extension, it illustrates how the text—here, in an exceptionally salient and nearly allegorical way—reflects our own readings back upon us, rather than faithfully and clearly conveying to us something the precedes it.

What makes this episode in Mark so striking is that the initial attempt of Jesus to heal is insufficient. In order for the cure to be complete and to take effect, his first effort must be supplemented by a second. This makes the crux of the story the man's response to Jesus when asked whether he could see anything: 'I see people, but they look like trees, walking' (βλέπω τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ὅτι ὡς δένδρα ὁρῶ περιπατοῦντας). How are we to understand this cryptic remark?[78] As I have pointed out already, the comment is typically taken as an analog for the disciples (and perhaps certain readers of Mark's gospel) who see but do not perceive. The additional factor required for correct perception, in this reading, is an understanding of Jesus' identity, particularly with respect to the suffering for which he is destined. What is not so clear is how this correction comes about. Whereas the blind man benefits from a direct intervention,

78. Howard devotes the majority of his article to the man's response. He and many others who address this aspect of the narrative believe that its explanation, in part, hinges on whether the man was born blind or became blind later in life. This stems, of course, from dealing with the nature of the man's visual impairment on the level of the story. They are attempting to determine what really happened to a real person and how Mark and his audience understood the event. However, having already dispensed with such an approach, I am not as interested in 'story' elements as in the discursive *portrayal* of those elements. The question is not whether the man must have been capable of seeing at some stage in his life in order to make the comparison to trees, but rather what is it about such an analogy that makes it work for readers then and now. See Gundry, *Mark*, p. 418; Taylor, *Mark*, p. 371; Lane, *Mark*, p. 285; *contra* Geoffrey Walker, 'The Blind Recover their Sight', *ExpTim* 87 (1975), p. 23.

no such intervention is provided the disciples, unless one takes the scene of Jesus' transfiguration as such. But that event seems indicative of a message contrary to the image of suffering, and thus actually reaffirming of the disciples' incorrect notions. In any event, it fails, too. The three disciples who witness the event are stupefied. More will be said about the transfiguration in the final chapter. Meanwhile, whether and to what extent clear vision comes about seems to depend on nothing within the narrative (i.e., on the story level). Rather it depends on the narrator and/or reader—the former showing and plotting characters at will, and the latter reading in accordance with the vision she inhabits. The story secondarily and retrospectively reflects the evidence that supports our case, allowing us to recognize what we already hold to be true.[79]

The presence of the messianic secret motif at the conclusion of this episode is now all the more interesting. Moloney writes, 'the literary feature of the so-called messianic secret continues to point the reader further into the narrative, toward the final *revelation* of Jesus as the crucified Christ and Son of God'.[80] Revelation is itself an ocular concept. I mentioned previously Aichele's observation that the messianic secret only works if one already knows Jesus' true identity. What is at play here, and what tips the focus away from the story to the discourse—or rather what exposes the mechanics of the discourse at work within the seemingly independent details of the story—is less a situation of seeing or not seeing and more an instance of 'visual agnosia', a failure to interpret and to recognize.[81]

79. Concerning this pericope, Robert M. Fowler writes, '…just as the author dons a mask or assumes a persona to present the literary work to the reader, he also casts the reader in a particular role, creating a mask or persona for the reader as well. For the reader to participate fully in the work, he must be willing to become, at least for the moment, the reader envisioned by the author in the process of composing the work' (*Let the Reader Understand*, p. 152). I noted in Chapter 1 that this is precisely what narrative critics and historical critics alike aim to do, each in their respective ways. It seems possible, with effort, to read in a manner other than that envisioned by the author of a work, but how does one read contrary to the text itself when the text always readily provides the materials necessary for any reading?

80. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 164 n. 247, my emphasis.

81. On this point, I take inspiration from Oliver Sacks' essay, 'The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat', in *The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales* (New York: Touchstone, 1985), pp. 8-22. Sacks describes a man who sees perfectly well as far as the functioning of the eye is concerned, but who experienced a disconnect in the processes of translation whereby visual stimuli became meaningful. So, for instance, when handed a picture, he could identify details but would fail to comprehend the scene as a whole. Sacks says of the man, '… he did not behold. No face was familiar to him, seen as a "thou", being just identified as a set of features, an "it" ' (p. 13). It was a failure of cognitive judgment, and inability to relate the things he saw to himself and thereby to perceive them. Visual agnosia does not involve the loss of one's ability to see, only one's ability to interpret and recognize what is seen.

The relationship between the pervasive recurrence of perception language throughout the narrative, epistemology, and the relative position and identity of insiders and outsiders is complex.[82] In Mark, knowledge, like faith, is a gift of God.[83] But this seemingly arbitrary gift is accompanied by an appraised value.[84] It distinguishes between insiders and outsiders, not on the basis of simply *what* they see, but rather on *how* they (mis) perceive (or even conceive) of Jesus, how their manner of seeing determines the substance, content, object of their vision. This is another twist to the story-discourse dichotomy. Even as that distinction is blurred and undercut by the narrative itself, so is the boundary between characters and readers. Two things are key here: the narrator's role and the reader's sense of certainty and affirmation, which is ensured by the ambiguity of the boundary (i.e., between insiders and outsiders) and the need for it always to be pointed out from elsewhere. Like the characters that populate the narrative, readers cannot, of their own volition, place themselves inside or outside.

Visual agnosia is not put forward as a suggestion for how we might best understand the actual physical condition of some unnamed blind man and the nature of Jesus' miracle cure. It is an apt metaphor for thinking about how and why readers understand certain narratives and not others; how and why readers 'identify with' certain characters and not others; how and why the meaning of a narrative is always transparent and obvious to every reader. The occurrence of this pericope functions best vis-à-vis its immediate context and the over-arching narrative dynamics of the text when we read it as a self-reflective commentary on the nature of narrative discourse and on the experience and spectacle of reading, which is always conservative by virtue of being at once an instance of confirmation and of misperception.

This chapter began with the following questions: What is the precise relationship between 'literal vision' (i.e., acts of seeing within the narrative world) and focalization? Are these acts of seeing, and the general language of sight within the narrative more broadly, synecdoches of the larger invisible process of focalization? Or are they instead designed to 'naturalize' the text's focalization, and hence its ideology, by rendering it in concrete terms?

82. See Joel Marcus, 'Mark 4:10-12 and Marcan Epistemology', *JBL* 103 (1984), pp. 557-74; Larsen, *Seeing and Understanding Jesus*.

83. Marcus, 'Mark 4:10-12', pp. 558-59.

84. Consider Plato's pointedly self-serving reflection on the difference between the two: 'Sense and intelligence are often required to interpret prophecies, and to determine what is meant by dreams, or signs, or prognostics of other kinds: but such revelations are received by men destitute of sense. To receive them is the business of one class of men; to interpret them, that of another.' Cited in John I. Beare, *Greek Theories of Elementary Cognition from Alcmaeon to Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), p. 273.

The distinction between simple, compound, and complex focalization described earlier is somewhat misleading in that it is a matter of degree rather than kind. Anytime focalization is *through* a character (i.e., character-focalization), it is compound focalization, and, therefore, embedded, i.e., one focalization is presented from within another—namely, that of the narrator, which can never decide whether to focalize, but only how to do so.[85] Every character-focalizer is relativized and, therefore, at least potentially, unreliable. Given that any narrator's vision is itself theoretically embedded within that of the implied author, it too is relativized and at least potentially unreliable. All focalization, it follows, is theoretically complex focalization, because it cannot be precisely and firmly located.

Throughout Mark, there is a tension brought about by the play between the figure of Jesus as focalizer and the figure of Jesus as focalized. The focalizer, i.e., a Jesus who, as a character, repeatedly diverts attention from himself toward other things that he sees differently, is focalized, as competing visions, competing narratives, intersect (see again, e.g., 8.27-30, and note the narrative context). Scenes and sequences of in-cognition and re-cognition overlap.

Let us consider one final example:

> Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last [EF_1]. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom [EF_1? EF_2?]. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him [EF], saw [CF] that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!' (15.37-39).

The events of vv. 37 and 38 are focalized by an external focalizer, but whether both events are focalized by the same focalizer or by different focalizers cannot be determined. At v. 39, our attention is drawn to the figure of the centurion himself, 'who stood facing him', and who thereby focalizes Jesus on the cross. His pronouncement, 'Truly this man was God's Son!' (NRSV), is at once ironic and myopic. That is, it paradoxically affirms Jesus' true identity while also missing, as it were, the forest for the trees (cf. 8.24).

Given the indeterminacy of embedded focalization, how is one to adjudicate between various focalizers in order to determine which is reliable? Such is the ideological dimension of focalization. It is not simply a matter of the narrative forcing readers to see particular things in a particular way; rather, it is way in which readers are trapped in a double bind.

Returning to the questions posed above, the acts of seeing scattered throughout Mark act like one-way mirrors, which function differently depending on where one stands in relation to the glass. The narrative does, in fact, draw the reader's attention to the otherwise invisible processes of focalization. In so doing, it isolates the figure of Jesus, as both focalizer and

85. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 90.

focalized, dividing other characters and readers alike between insiders who see the figure as the lens and outsiders that mistake the lens for the object.

Conclusion

In many respects, focalization is a matter that would seem to have little if anything to do with characterization. Or perhaps at best it is something that exists within (i.e., inside) the 'content' of the narrative. But what interest me is not akin to typical approaches that will talk about characterization in terms of how characters are described by a narrator (i.e., what they look like); it is not what they look like, but how (in what manner) they look. This in turn further upends and collapses the distinction between inside and outside right from the very outset. What I have described in this chapter is not primarily the result of an author's intent but rather a consequence of the form, of narrative as discourse. Characters/characterization, point-of-view, and focalization are inseparable. The figures that populate narratives are existents that see and are seen; they frame and are framed. Therefore, when we imagine characters as independent agents or subjects, we allow the camera, as it were, to recede into the background and allow ourselves to occupy a role, not unlike the characters themselves.

The notion of 'character' has embedded within it a certain ambiguity that is reflected in our everyday use of the word. Like the coin mentioned earlier, it is Janus-faced. On one hand, it refers to an object, as in the concept of a literary character. On the other hand, it is used regularly in the sense of personality, as in the concept of an individual's 'character', that which defines who or what that person 'really' is (e.g., on the inside). Among other things, it is the confusion of the two that causes problems for modern readers when they interpret characters in (ancient) narratives. The marvelous and dizzying way in which Mark's gospel repeatedly relativizes the position and identity of insiders and outsiders, when considered in relation to vision and focalization, poses significant challenges to regarding character(s) as person(s). Substance as a quality of character(s) is a chimera at best. How then ought we read the sharp warning in Mk 9.47, which cautions, 'And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell' (RSV)?[86] It is a double bind. On every page, Mark's gospel all but

86. There are numerous other instances in Mark's gospel where vision in the narrative plays off of and intersects with focalization of the narrative. Each is rife with potential, but there is no way to adequately address them all here. Take for example the disciples' failure to 'keep watch' with Jesus in the garden as he prayers, which concludes with Jesus directing their gaze to his betrayer coming with the delegation from the chief priests, scribes, and elders to arrest him. At his trial, Jesus announces that his

begs us to speculate. We cannot turn away. The text makes spectators of us that we might, in turn, be spectacles. In observing the text, in viewing it mentally, we reflect upon it and attend closely to it. According to the *OED*, the notion of risk-taking also is embedded in the etymology of speculation and in the history of its usage. What is the nature of such risk? Jonathan Z. Smith has suggested that religion is, in practice and effect, a matter of attentiveness, differing from so many other activities only in degree rather than kind.[87] Perhaps, in the case of Mark and the characterization of Jesus, what we risk is the error of mistaking the lens for the object.

accusers 'will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven' (14.62). The spectacle of Jesus' crucifixion, characterized not least by the fact that he is publicly humiliated and hung on a cross, is redoubled by virtue of his charge being inscribed for all to read. The centurion's 'confession' comes as a result of his seeing Jesus breath his last (15.39). The women, meanwhile, look on from afar (15.40, 47). Some of these same women return to the tomb some time later to 'see' the stone removed, an empty tomb, and a young man dressed in white sitting on the right side. They are characterized by their reaction, which is one of amazement (16.4-5, ἐξεθαμβήθησαν, i.e., they were beside themselves). We have already encountered others characterized in this manner, i.e., doubled and turned inside out.

87. Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon', in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 36-52 (44).

4

Dialogue: 'Witless in your Own Cause'

> When the Lydians came and repeated their message, it is related that the Pythian prophetess responded: 'The fated destiny it is impossible even for a god to escape…'
>
> Herodotus, *The Histories*, I.91 (trans. G.C. Macaulay)

> Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, 'Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?' But he was silent and did not answer.
>
> Mk 14.60-61a NRSV

> The friend sorrowfully said to [Aesop], 'Why in the world did you have to insult them in their own land and city, and do it when you were at their mercy? Where was your training? Where was your learning? You have given advice to cities and peoples, but you have turned out witless in your own cause.'
>
> *The Life of Aesop*, 130 (trans. Lloyd W. Daly)

Dialogue is another standard component in studies of characterization. Characters and the processes of characterization are analyzed, for example, with respect to what individual figures say and what other figures say about them. In biblical studies generally, and in biblical narrative criticism specifically, even when we grant that speeches and dialogues are invented or heavily massaged by an author, we nonetheless tend to privilege speech and dialogue such that it somehow better or more accurately or more fully reflects the inner essence of an individual. Dialogue, even at its most diegetic, implicitly claims to be mimetic, reflective and representative of something indicative of realty. In narrative discourse, however, the difference between dialogue and, say, description is only a matter of degree, not of kind. They are both acts of imitation and representation. Moreover, in narrative representations of speech, the narrating voice attempts to disguise itself even while the fundamentally dialogical and intertextual nature of narrative itself is at its most pronounced. Ironically, the more mimetic a character's speech purports to be, i.e., the greater the extent to which it goes to sound as if it is spoken by this unique 'person', the more artificial it

becomes. Not only is it as selective as anything else in the narrative, but as readers are forced by virtue of the reading process to voice the words of another they demonstrate the artificiality of the script, playacting as it were, and once again becoming characters themselves.

In this chapter, I will take up the anonymously written novella known as *The Life of Aesop*, which shares far more numerous, direct, and obvious similarities with the Gospel of Mark than were seen in *Leucippe and Clitophon*.[1] For starters, both narratives center on an historical figure. The former relies almost entirely on dialogue for its characterization of the protagonist, Aesop, and the Gospel of Mark, likewise, uses dialogue extensively in its characterization of Jesus. Both narratives also include representations of divine activity at key points in relation to the plot. Each story begins with a divine intervention that interrupts the narrative; the gods hover about throughout the duration of the narrative; and they are credited with a role in the death of both protagonists. Finally, both narratives conclude with depictions of the central character's death. This, too, is inextricably bound up in their characterization and the narrative plot. Each of these aspects—dialogical discourse, divine activity, and the death of the protagonists—is constructed in and through an episodic narrative structure.[2] While divine activity and the deaths of the protagonists are clearly elements of plot, which will be the focus of the following chapter, I am touching on them here because divine activity is something that takes shape dialogically in the narratives—both with the world of the story and at the level of narration, and the narrator ties the deaths of the protagonists directly to each character's speech.

'*Everything he says is unnatural*': The Life of Aesop

The scholarship on *The Life of Aesop* identifies it as popular novel (vs. a romance proper, e.g., *Leucippe and Clitophon*), a fictional (comic or

1. Lawrence M. Wills, *The Quest of the Historical Gospel: Mark, John, and the Origins of the Gospel Genre* (London: Routledge, 1997). See also Richard I. Pervo, 'A Nihilist Fabula: Introducing the *Life of Aesop*', in Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance and Judith Perkins (eds.), *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), pp. 77-120; and Whitney Taylor Shiner, 'Creating Plot in Episodic Narratives: *The Life of Aesop* and the Gospel of Mark', in Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance and Judith Perkins (eds.), *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), pp. 155-76.

2. The gods play a role in *Leucippe and Clitophon* as well, and in all the ancient romances for that matter. I am choosing to discuss them here, in part, because, from a religious studies perspective, we are not talking about actual entities so much as about persons and texts that talk about such entities, i.e., we are talking about theological discourse.

'romanticized') biography, based (loosely) on a supposedly historical figure.[3] Some would go so far as to identify it as an 'historical novel', provided the designation is defined in a sufficiently broad manner.[4] As such, it is comparable to prose narratives like the *Alexander Romance* or *Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus.

As noted above, the narrator of *The Life of Aesop* characterizes the protagonist primarily by means of dialogue. Utilizing a series of episodic narratives constructed around an assortment of extended *chreiai* (i.e., didactic anecdotes), the narrator juxtaposes the sardonic, quick-witted, cleverness of Aesop's speech to the expectations of the audience and other characters in the story, which are based on commonplace assumptions regarding appearance, social standing, cultural heritage, religious ideology, and so forth. Hence, physical descriptions and appearances are parodied in the story, and are shown to be secondary to speech, a less valuable and less trustworthy representation of one's character. This critique is not as straightforward as it would seem, however, because gestures are repeatedly portrayed as reliable instruments of communication, and both the body and facial expressions corroborate testimony and betray secrets. That tension notwithstanding, nearly every scene in the narrative functions as a site for the illustration of the Aesop's teaching and wit, which are by implication the substance of his identity as a character. Furthermore, it is not only speech and appearance that are played off one other. Words are set over against both actions and status, gifted speech is contrasted to the discourses of formal education, and literalness is set in opposition to nuance—and irony reverberates between every line. It could safely be

3. Francisco R. Adrados, 'The "Life of Aesop" and the Origins of the Novel in Antiquity', *Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica* 30 (1979), pp. 93-112; C. Birch, 'Traditions in the Life of Aesop' (Dissertation, Washington University, 1955); Tomas Hägg, 'A Professor and his Slave: Conventions and Values in the Life of Aesop', in Per Bilde, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Lise Hannestad and Jan Zahle (eds.), *Conventional Values of the Hellenistic Greeks* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1997), pp. 177-203; William Hansen (ed.), *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Niklas Holzberg, 'Novel-Like Works of Extended Prose Fiction 2', in Gareth Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill Academic Publishers, 2003); Morgan and Stoneman (eds.), *Greek Fiction*; Annabel Patterson, *Fables of Power: Aesopian Writing and Political History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991); Ben E. Perry, *Aesopica* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952); *Babrius and Phaedrus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); Pervo, 'A Nihilist Fabula'; Shiner, 'Creating Plot'; Wills, *Quest*. See also Thomas, *The* Acts of Peter.

4. Thomas, *The* Acts of Peter, p. 95. Thomas uses the designation 'historical novel' to refer to narratives that variously set their stories in the distant past, and incorporate characters from historiography proper (pp. 8-10). See also Wills, *Quest*; Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 121-35.

said that without dialogue there is no life of Aesop. As one author puts it, Aesop is created through the gift of language.[5]

Aesop is a mute when he first appears in the story, but an apparently serendipitous encounter with a priestess of Isis results in the removal of the impediment that was preventing him from speaking and in the Muses conferring upon him 'the power to compose stories and elaborate Greek tales' (αἱ δὲ ἐχαρίσαντο λόγων εὕρεμα καὶ μύθων Ἑλληνικῶν πλοκὴν καὶ ποιήσεις, §7). The narrator gives us the impression that this should be regarded as the most delightful of events, for Aesop's speechlessness was earlier described as 'a defect more serious than his unsightliness' (§1), the latter being no small thing.[6] But this too will be undermined at the conclusion of the narrative when Aesop's words are found powerless to save him from death. Nevertheless, this moment of conferral in which Aesop is voiced, like the opening scene of *Leucippe and Clitophon*, quivers beneath the weight of the narrative it sets in motion. The episode is a tangled knot of self-referentiality, reverberation, and polyphony. To begin, the gift of Isis and the nine Muses is one that imitates and mimics the narrator's own craft.[7] The narrator is one who, like Aesop, has 'the power to devise stories and the ability to conceive and elaborate tales' in narrative. More than that, however, the narrator imitates Isis and the nine Muses by bestowing upon characters the ability to speak and act. Like the gods, the narrator possesses (and at the conclusion of every narrative dutifully and necessarily exercises) the power to silence voices and make actions cease as well.

Speech, whether actual or represented, is, like narrative itself, a sort of 'wasp's nest'. For all its ordinariness, it is in fact an altogether unnatural expression of, or proxy for, the self. Hence, the complaint of Zenas that 'everything [Aesop] says is unnatural' (§10), functions like an ironic commentary on both speech and its supposed relationship to the self. For Zenas, the 'unnaturalness' of Aesop's speech stems from its 'monstrously slanderous' nature. The things Aesop says are perceived by Zenas to be inappropriate, inaccurate, unfaithful in its portrayal of others (viz., of himself). Zenas describes Aesop's words as 'things [his] ears won't bear hearing' (§10). What once could not be held in by Aesop now cannot be taken in by his audience. Speech finds no home. It is lost in the same manner as the priestess when she encountered Aesop. Mediation is required. In a sense,

5. Shiner, 'Creating Plot', p. 168. Pervo ('A Nihilist Fabula', p. 81) points out that 'dialogue is a mark of novelists rather than of pseudo-historians or pseudo-biographers', and recommends the *Historia augusta* for contrast.

6. The narrative begins, 'The fabulist Aesop, the great benefactor of mankind, was by chance a slave but by origin a Phrygian of Phrygia, of loathsome aspect, worthless as a servant, potbellied, misshapen of head, snub-nosed, swarthy, dwarfish, bandy-legged, short-armed, squint-eyed, liver lipped—a portentous monstrosity' (§1).

7. Shiner, 'Creating Plot', p. 161. Cf. Pervo, 'A Nihilist Fabula', pp. 84-97.

Zenas's criticism parodies the way that *all* speech is constructed and artificial. Speech can only be (re)processed. Its substance is deferred, and its meaning or effect is peripheral. In the episode with Zenas, the audience is split in multiple ways. Zenas is himself first a hearer of Aesop's words and then a reporter of those words to his master. It is fitting that this master has no name because it is but a figure of the narrative while the master of both Zenas and his lord is none other than the narrator, who narrates the very things he or she in turn hears as a reader. All the while, readers overhear the hearer, as it were. It is a lateral effect; we never *hear* anything so much as *see* an effect of the words, in the stylized and representational form of another character's reaction or in some event said by the narrator to follow. There is a sense in which it is always implied that Aesop's words are not what offend per se but rather their substance, what is supposedly communicated by and through them. But what makes the novel so clever and so well-suited to my purposes here is that Aesop plays both trickster and theoretical cipher by insisting that the problem really is with the words themselves.[8]

In all of this, and throughout the novel, Aesop-the-character functions as a site, a space, a mouthpiece that does not attempt to disguise itself in order to deliver its message untainted, but instead repeatedly draws attention to itself, generating interference at every opportunity. It is precisely the failure of speech to communicate, the ambiguity of language, the innate requirement that words *not* be taken literally, and the lack of control one has over one's speech that the Aesop character and novel underscore, less to lament than to applaud them.

It has already been pointed out that the representation of speech or dialogue is a fundamental aspect of narrative. It is a fundamental element of the characterization process, contributing to the formation and identity of characters, influencing the degree of readers' sympathies toward characters, and frequently factoring into the advancement of the plot. Dialogue, representations of which reflect varying degrees of mimesis and verisimilitude (i.e., ranging from the direct quote to free indirect discourse), is frequently regarded as a mark of a person's essence, as a reliable source for determining the character of a person (or the substance of a character, as the case may be). Even when one allows for a narrator's manipulation, such that a particular character may prove to be unreliable, that unreliability is taken

8. Examples include the following: in §40, Aesop is told to 'bring something to drink straight from the bath', so he brings bath water; in §§42-43, Aesop cautions against being too literal indicating that he would have been more likely to do what was asked of him had the order not been put so literally; the entire comedy of events in §§51-55 results form a play on the word 'tongues'; and in §§70-73, Aesop helps Xanthus avoid the negative consequences of a foolish wager by pressing a point of definition.

as a feature of the character's identity. However, the move on the part of poststructuralist narratology to collapse the distinctions between form and content in language, between signifier and signified, between what is purportedly represented and its representation, raises questions about the relationship of speech to the 'self'.

While everything about the narrative form seems innately predisposed to disguise its own artificiality, *The Life of Aesop* delights in the inability of language (and speech in particular) to penetrate any concrete truth, and celebrates the arbitrariness of form. In *The Life of Aesop* there is no 'inside' to be faithfully projected onto the screen 'outside'. Aesop time and again draws attention to the deceptiveness of distinguishing between form and content, between discourse and story.[9]

Following the opening scene in which Aesop is bequeathed his voice, the narrative unfolds a rather shallow and uncomplicated plot constructed by means of colorful episodes that could well have continued indefinitely. Aesop is placed in one battle of wits after another and repeatedly bests his opponents with a show of deft cunning. Much of what ultimately constitutes the story could be rearranged easily, suggesting that these episodes function as individual examples of a greater whole; that taken together they reflect the essence of Aesop's character; that what we have before us is in summary the 'life' of Aesop. Aesop the man, supposed referent of the name 'Aesop' attached to the literary figure inhabiting this narrative, is portrayed as someone who is clever, witty, savvy. He is not a product of his upbringing, or heritage, or circumstances. He is not easily beaten in verbal exchanges, but on the rare occasion that he is outdone he abides by the rules of the game, dutifully taking what comes to him as a result. All of this equates to Aesop being a certain kind of person. But in being a type of person, i.e., by virtue of his being cast in a particular category of individuals, any distinct characteristics he may possess that might make him unique somehow become homogenized. Aesop is formed, described, and defined relatively, always with respect to some other character, group, event, or the like with which he is paired. He is a conglomeration of family resemblances, shaped by varying degrees of similarity and difference. Only his name sets him apart (i.e., in this narrative), but it is a name repeatedly robbed of substance, most ironically, in one of the chief narrative

9. See, e.g., §77, where Aesop describes 'signs and the interpretation of omens' as an 'idle business', reacting to their indeterminable and interchangeable nature. In a similar vein, §§78-80 recount a series of interpretations of the same epitaph, pointing to the fickle, shifty, unstable nature of signs, which leave any meaning attached to them unsettled and insecure. In *The Life of Aesop*, the issue is not simply that signs are dependent upon their interpreters, but that they miss their marks altogether, *regardless* of their interpreters.

techniques designed to give it meaning—namely, speech.[10] As mentioned above, what is so remarkable about this dynamic in *The Life of Aesop* is the playful way the novel gleefully embroils itself in the problems of language by featuring a protagonist who insists on taking the letter over the spirit.

The ramifications of this instance are significant. *The Life of Aesop* (i.e., the narrative) is the entirety of Aesop's life, not because it exhausts the totality of all that might be recorded, but because it is determinative of Aesop as a named character. Moreover, the reach of this focus on the word finds a way to extend beyond the boundaries of the novel, not by means of faithfully representing anything but, but precisely by calling into question any such representation. Consider for example the gods, death, and the narrator.

Divine activity is interwoven with the dialogical aspect of *The Life of Aesop* and factors into the characterization of the protagonist (as well as playing a key role in shaping and guiding the plot). The gods frame the narrative, appearing at the beginning of the story as the source of Aesop's speech and narrative skill, and appearing again at the end of the story as the cause of Aesop's fatal demise. These two episodes—the only points in the narrative at which the gods are directly involved in the movement of the plot—are integral to Aesop's characterization (and by extension to that of others as well). But their presence elsewhere, scattered quietly throughout the narrative, is important for characterization also insofar as it suggests that nothing happens outside of their purview. Isis, the Muses, and Apollo are the most significant divine figures in the *Life*, but we are frequently reminded of Zeus also, and others are mentioned as well (e.g., Dionysus, Nemesis, Atlas, Hera, Aphrodite, Endymion, Ganymede, Charybdis, Prometheus). Moreover, sacred spaces provide settings for the story (e.g., Bubastis and Delphi). Perhaps most interesting (aside from Isis, the Muses, and Zeus, of course) is the reference to Mnemosyne. It is in his act of erecting a statue of the mother of the Muses and the personification of memory that Aesop offends Apollo, which ultimately leads to his death. Two related items are of interest in the context. First, it is here (i.e., in §100) that Aesop 'wrote down the stories and fables that go by his name even now and deposited them in the library'.[11] Second,

10. Here, I am thinking of so many instances in which it is not the substance/content of Aesop's speech (e.g., more and more parables) but the 'style' of his reading and the manner of his speech, the interpretations by which he frustrates and eludes others (e.g., the 'doubletalk' of §50; the 'sesquipedalian verbiage' of §31; and especially his warning against literal readings/statements of the law that backfire precisely because of their precision: 'statements that go too far in either inclusion of exclusion are no small errors' (§43).

11. It is interesting to note that, in §101, the place where Aesop had been 'turned over' is named the 'Aesopeum'.

there is a sizeable delay between when Aesop erects the statue and when Apollo exacts his revenge. These two items intersect and work together. The library is the bastion of memory, itself a shrine to Mnemosyne, and the effects and evocations of what it acts as caretaker of can be infinitely delayed or deferred. Like the texts themselves, it is an all-consuming and self-consuming web of cross-reference. The sense one has of the role played by the gods in *The Life of Aesop* is that their presence, activity, and vision is all-encompassing. Even when they are not involved directly or in a plain or immediately observable way, nothing happens outside their reach. They mimic language and narrative by defining the limits of possibility. Essential to their characterization is the fact that they are characterized less by what they actually say than by what they do not say, by the fact that they do not speak. In *The Life of Aesop*, others always speak (and act as well) on behalf of the gods. In the same manner, the narrative always speaks on behalf of the characters that populate it. Characters do not themselves speak; they are spoken (written) into existence and are made to speak only in service to the narrative that gives rise to them. The point I am making is further illustrated by the fact that these names call to mind not persons but narratives (e.g., in §62, the narrator says of a rube character serving as the patsy in a scene between Aesop and his master that he 'began to gulp them down like Charybdis'). Here, in the most concrete fashion, the (divine) character serves the narrative (rather than vice versa), by functioning as a metonymic device. The narrative constitutes the character.

Earlier in the narrative, before Isis and the Muses appear, there is another mythological figure already present, lurking amidst the staging that functions as the backdrop for what is about to take place. Like Mnemosyne, this figure is of great interest on account of the way she seems to have less to do with any substantive character or persona than with dynamics inherent in the language of narrative discourse itself. Orchestrating a symphony of natural sounds and conditions, 'and mingling it all in harmony, Echo, the imitator of voices, uttered her answering cries' and lulls Aesop into 'a pleasant slumber' (§6). Echo's story, which this reference presumably conjures up, is itself an echo, the resonance of two stories not necessarily in perfect tune with each other. According to one story, Echo was the one whom Pan loved until the darker side of ambivalence later took hold and he bestowed upon her a voice powerless to do anything other than repeat that which she has just heard. Elsewhere it is said that Echo loved Narcissus. Her unrequited love led to her demise, as she wasted away to nothing save a disembodied voice. The mention of Echo here, in the midst of Aesop finding his voice, echoes the loss of any voice that would otherwise mark one's presence, one as present. It illustrates within the very texture of the narrative what is happening at the level of the narrative discourse. The

godlike narrator,[12] after the fashion of Echo, creates the illusion of a voice, which is in turn taken by a reader to represent the trace of a person, while all the while it actually only refracts in a sort of feedback loop the text that has occasioned it at this juncture.

The patron of Aesop's fortune identifies herself as both 'stranger' (ξένη) and 'priestess' (ἱεροφόρος, i.e., specifically, a teacher of sacrificial rites and worship [LSJ]) (§4). She is lost when she finds Aesop. As one who represents the goddess and who speaks on behalf of the goddess, her waywardness is a curious pretext,[13] particularly in light of what I have been saying to this point. This most important of figures and episodes with respect to Aesop's characterization and the narrative plot, is one of deferral; she is a provisional representative, a character that prefigures on the level of both the story and the discourse, thereby undermining any distinction between the two and problematizing both. The priestess is not the goddess she represents, but she provides the only access to the goddess, and even has the power to broker the goddess' dealings with Aesop. She, therefore, also reads like the narrative itself, simultaneously self-generating and self-effacing.

The fact that the gods appear again at the end of the story as the cause of Aesop's fatal demise is quite fitting, given the foundational role they play in granting him the ability to speak at the outset of the narrative. Here, Aesop will be made once again speechless, 'witless in his own cause', outwitted. The story, the life, will conclude with a return to silence. On the pretext of stories, and in a manifestation of Aesop's interpretations of more fables added to the narrative sequence, one god will undo the work of another. In the world of the story, Zeus and Apollo gain the upper hand on Isis and her Muses, but there is a double twist: Aesop, in effect, silences himself, leaping to his death before he can be pushed by the crowd, while the narrator silences the gods by concluding the narrative. But before we get there, it is worth noting a few more things.

With Aesop in jail at Delphi, a friend asks him, 'What have we come to?' (§129). Aesop responds with a series of fables, each question generating another parable. In every instance, Aesop's interprets the fable with himself and his circumstances as the objects. A man and a woman who have each buried their spouses find one another mourning and 'get to know each other' for the sake of comfort. The man's oxen are stolen while he is not looking and he begins to wail with grief upon discovering the loss, explaining to the woman that now he really has something to mourn. The fable that follows that one depicts Aesop's loss of wit as a rape predicated on a young girl's naïveté. The fables continue to pile up. A mouse exacts its

12. In this particular narrative, the narrator is extradiegetic and omniscient.

13. There are frequent references to 'pretext' scattered throughout the novel; see §§4, 9, 42, 43, 56, 58.

revenge on a frog that tried to trick it. A tumblebug outwits both an eagle and Zeus himself. A farmer curses Zeus for an ironic and ignoble death brought on by happenstance. And finally, a man forces himself upon his daughter only to be told by her that she would have rather submitted herself to a hundred men than to him.

This pile up of stories within the larger plot produces some interesting effects. As Aesop plays the part of narrator, there is a repeat performance of the narrative itself and its episodic characterization of Aesop set on a smaller scale, the characterization of the presumably much more vast characters of the gods is compressed and truncated, summed up, as it were. The pace of the larger story speeds up even as the events of the story come almost to a standstill. The sense of the inevitable is only heightened with each effort to prolong it. Each fable, in its discursiveness and the interpretations it generates and that adhere to it vis-à-vis the frame narrative, foreshadows the coming end. Each fable poses as another angle on the same thing, as if it existed independently and were here called upon and employed to elucidate the nature of the situation. But such is not the case. Any relation one bears to another is the product of the interpreter, whether that be Aesop or the narrator or a reader. By means of their embeddedness within the frame narrative, they obscure matters even further. Each functions as commentary on (the) narrative itself, and most of all on its indeterminacy.

As a character-narrator, Aesop is compromised.[14] And the stories he tells in his defense are powerless to save. '[T]he relationship between nested narratives is always one of mutual relativization', writes O'Neill: 'while the embedding narrative is ultimately always in a position to colour fundamentally our reception of an embedded narrative, it may itself always in turn be challenged or even displaced altogether by the narrative it embeds'.[15] *All* we are left with are interpretations.[16] These stories do not mean directly. We have already seen (§§33, 77, 79-80) that signs are shifty and unstable making any meaning attached to them unsettled and insecure. The reader *is* a busybody despite appearances to the contrary (see §§56-58). The reader always gets involved.[17] What other recourse is available, at this point, aside from silence, a final word? The stories will not suffice. Only the cessation of dialogue will bring about an end (such as it is, provisional as it may be) and

14. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 62.

15. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 65.

16. This makes the Samarians' description of Aesop himself as a portent in §87 all the more interesting: 'when the Samarians saw Aesop, they burst out laughing and shouted, "Bring us another interpreter to interpret this portent" '.

17. The (interpretive) involvement of the reader is an ironic paradox and an unavoidable necessity; it is a catch-22, despite the (violent) outcomes. In §58, if the man (who, as it happens, was reading when Aesop found him) does not get involved the cook is beaten, but if he interferes Aesop is beaten.

relieve Aesop of the burden of perpetuating the echo of another's speech. The final word will not be Aesop's to have. That word belongs always to the narrator (i.e., relative to the story any narrator tells of an Other, even if and when that other is his or her self). The answer to the question posed by Aesop's friend—'What have we come to?'—is that we are the stories we tell and that others tell about us. We have become as characters, like gods not in the act of narrating but in being narrated, in being discoursed and subjected to the same whims of narrative fate through interpretation.

Considering for a moment the episodic structure of these narratives, Shiner points out that this stylistic feature parallels a certain understanding of the nature of life itself. It also reflects ancient notions regarding literary characters, which typically were viewed as static and unchanging with a nature that was revealed in episodic moments. The challenge intrinsic to any given narrative, then, is to find some means by which to tie one episode to the next. 'A common way of showing plausibility in ancient narrative', writes Shiner, 'is to show divine causation.'[18] He contends that the authors' use of divine causation most likely represents more than just the employment of a literary device; it reflects 'a shared understanding of the nature of causation in the world', which intersects directly with the episodic structuring of these narratives. In other words, if the true cause of human events exists in the divine realm, then it is not as important to trace explicitly the causal links between various episodes as it would be if causation were located solely in the human realm (cf. §§33, 35, etc.). Divine causation, therefore, adds credibility and direction to what otherwise might seem to be disparity and randomness. Moreover, divine causation *unifies* the narrative.

I would suggest that, while divine activity may represent a strategy on the part of the narrator to somehow unify the narrative, it exceeds the narrator's control and therefore functions to unravel the narrative. Aesop's gift of speech, by which the gods created him and which mimics the gift of the narrator's craft,[19] results in the subjugation of both protagonist and narrator to the whims of Fate in the interpellative power of discourse itself. Neither the philosophers, nor Aesop, nor even the narrator can escape taking recourse to the gods in order to explain what has befallen them.

The episodic structuring of these narratives parallels the episodic nature of the characters created therein, not because it reveals their static qualities, but rather because they are fractured in the same way as the text itself, and also because they are always incomplete, in-the-making. Neither entirely passive nor altogether active, they are interpellated into a narrative

18. Shiner, 'Creating Plot', pp. 167-69.

19. Shiner, 'Creating Plot', pp. 168 and 161, respectively. Cf. Pervo, 'A Nihilist Fabula', pp. 84-97.

discourse, which they in turn affect but cannot control or escape. And the gods suffer the same fate. Within the world of the story, the gods appear responsible for various events. But as far as the narrative discourse is concerned, they exercise no more control than the characters themselves. They are altogether unable to break free of the plot even while they seem to be the ones responsible for executing it. The only control or influence they exercise ultimately is one of limitation. Characters, be they gods or otherwise, represent or function as the threshold, the boundary of the (un)speakable as a consequence of the words placed in their mouths by virtue of their positions in the narrative. Outside the narrative there is nothing.

Returning to Aesop's character, it is interesting to note that the gift of speech bestowed upon him is, essentially, a consolation prize. The priestess of Isis prays, '…and if you are unwilling to repay this man with a livelihood of many talents for what the other gods have taken from him, at least grant him the power of speech…' (§5). The qualification would seem to undermine both the connection between Aesop's storytelling craft and the narrator's own tale-telling abilities, and also any productive value of speech, dialogue, language. Alternatively, it presents yet one more ironic critique of the significance and worth attached to other sorts of practices, positions, persons, etc. For there is a tension between this suggestion that language is secondary, inferior, and of less importance, and the inescapable fact of the narrative discourse itself in which language brings all things into being, a fact mirrored in the very words of the priestess and the gods when they effect Aesop's voice by calling it into existence.

The narrative inadvertently hints that what the character Aesop has been robbed of is ultimately the power to create, invent, initiate, inspire, possess. After Aesop awakes from the slumber he has been in while the Muses did their work, he confirms his gift of speech by 'naming (ὀναμάζω) over things he saw' (§8). Two things are interesting about this. First, Aesop is not quoted directly. The names he pronounces are not actually placed on his lips by means of the conventional signifier of quotation marks. Rather, the narrator names what Aesop named—'mattock, pouch, sheepskin, napkin, ox, ass, sheep'. Second, these are neither proper names, nor original, unique, self-generated designations. They are received names, confirmations of existing designations, affirmations of shared labels. Aesop's acts of naming indicate merely that he is a speaker. After all, it is not as if we would presume that he did not know, as a mute, what a mattock or a pouch was. Furthermore, this particular set of items can be characterized by a common sense of utility and commodity; each of these items is either an instrument or an article of trade. Aesop himself is framed likewise by the narrative both when the label of slave is affixed to him, and in the process of plotting the life of his character. His character is a slave in a two-fold sense: 'Aesop' is bought and sold as a slave within the world

of the story, and the narrative figure is a slave to the narrative discourse.[20] The figure seems *almost* to transcend the narrative when it protests: 'what a wearisome thing it is being a slave! What's more, it must be evil in the sight of the gods' (§13). And even the slave dealer appears, in a way, to peek behind the veil of Aesop's façade when he swears by Aesop's 'dubious origin' (§15), which is not Phrygia but the narrative. But with respect to Aesop's act of naming as a substantiation of his newfound ability to speak, it is merely a self-reflective, self-referencing linguistic eddy, wherein words swirl about asserting and affirming their own existence, disguised as persons, places, and things.

Running throughout *The Life of Aesop* is a critique of philosophy intermingled with a juxtaposition of action or gesture to speech. Early in the novel, prior to receiving his voice, Aesop communicates by way of gestures and physical signs (e.g., §§3, 9[21]). But others capable of talking are also said to gesture (e.g., §4). Xanthus puts the matter directly in §22: 'Gentleman and scholars, you must not think philosophy consists only in what can be put into words but also in acts. Indeed, unspoken philosophy often surpasses that which is expressed in words.' He offers up dancers as an illustration, and then demonstrates for his students his skills at interpreting (perceiving) the slave dealer's strategy. This is a curious contrast in the context of a novel, especially one focused so pointedly on a figure characterized by his speech. It mirrors distinctions that persist in common understandings of the self (e.g., a person's 'true character' is revealed by what she or he does, not by what she or he says), which likewise are reflected in narrative analyses of literary characters. But it is precisely the latter that problematizes such categorization and compartmentalization. In other words, narrative discourse, whether it is a work of fiction or an autobiographical account, subjects everything to a logic of re-presentations and plot; it makes explicit the fact that experience and perception are always mediated. Neither gesture nor speech, within the context of a narrative, is any more actual or immediate.

20. Aesop is explicitly identified by his slave status. Throughout the narrative, other characters are also identified by their role, function, or status (see also, e.g., 'merchant Ophelion' and 'farmer Zenas'). In the case of minor characters, the proper name clearly takes a back seat to the affixed title. Ordinarily, one would be inclined to suggest just the opposite for main characters, but on what grounds? Among other things, the attachment of designations like 'slave' and 'philosopher' to Aesop and his master, respectively, implicitly problematizes distinctions between major and minor characters, in particular by undermining any personification of major characters as more human-like by virtue of their proper names.

21. This is a particularly interesting reference. Zenas retrospectively reads Aesop's gestures as saying 'I'll accuse you by signs', and worries that Aesop will be 'all the more persuasive now that he is talking'.

The relationship of literary characters and real persons is a very fundamental one, but the parallels are not those customarily noted by readers and interpreters. There is a tendency to talk about relating to or identifying with characters in terms of how their literary lives and experiences either mirror or differ from our own, picking and choosing between various characters scattered throughout a narrative. Interpreters also comment on the ways in which narrators rhetorically manipulate readers so that they will feel sympathy toward certain characters and not others. Indeed, this is a particularly fascinating dynamic wherein readers can find themselves sympathizing with characters within a narrative that they would otherwise despise were they to meet such a person in 'real life'. But what interests me here is the paradoxical way in which readers ultimately identify with every literary character at the level of the character's experience within its scripted life. As composite creatures, literary characters echo ourselves in their fragmented and incomplete makeup, and in the ways they speak and are read. The inescapably episodic nature in which they are (re)presented is analogous to what any (re)presentation of ourselves will be, despite the sense one has of an essential and contiguous person, identity, self existing in a period of time (and across time). Any consistency, coherency, or wholeness they appear to possess is only a result of our own desire for and projections of the same.[22] Moreover, it is the result of a narrative we tell in the process of weaving together these traits and other bits of mediated information.

What seems to be key in *The Life of Aesop* is less the degree to which one's speech reveals one's character (or status, or education, etc.), but rather whether, when, and how one ever speaks at all. Aesop, once mute but now loquacious, repeatedly 'muzzles' (§26) Xanthus, though he himself is occasionally quieted as well. The very point of all the verbal sparring matches that make up the novel—one could argue they function more as the plot than does the actual storyline beginning with Aesop's muted condition and culminating with his death—is for one character to silence the other, to leave the other character speechless. It has been noted already that, from beginning to end, Aesop's wordcraft parallels and mimics the art of the narrator.[23] In my opinion, this makes the conclusion of *The Life of Aesop*—indeed, the conclusion of Aesop's life—all the more interesting. After Aesop's wit has carried him through one challenge after another, he makes his way to Delphi, where he offends Apollo to his own peril. The Delphians,

22. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament*, pp. 74-81; Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 43; Norman N. Holland, 'Unity Identity Text Self', in Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 118-33.

23. See Shiner, 'Creating Plot', p. 161.

acting as mere puppets and 'expressing the wrath of the gods',[24] determine to throw Aesop off a cliff. After feebly 'defending' himself with a handful of fables, Aesop curses his pursuers and commits suicide. In the midst of this, a friend of Aesop's remarks: 'You have given advice to cities and peoples, but you have turned out witless in your own cause' (§130). Aesop's only response to both his friend's question and his impending doom is to spin another story. Whitney Shiner notes that Aesop's death at Delphi has been part of the story since Herodotus, but 'it does not seem…to have been part of the essential understanding of who Aesop was. On the contrary, it seems curious, even after repeated readings, to see the ever clever Aesop so helpless and lacking in resources.'[25] But perhaps there is an important observation to be made here: The 'essence' of the 'real' Aesop's life is no match for the narrative plot that brought him from the fields to the cliff, from obscurity to fame, from being a spinner of narratives to being the object of one wherein he is destroyed by the performance of the very stories he's spun. Aesop's death, particularly as a literary character, is equated with speechlessness. And the story's conclusion leaves the narrator, de facto, speechless as well.

'He said this plainly': Jesus the Teacher

The prologue to Mark's Gospel (Mk 1.1-13), and especially Jesus' proclamation concerning the arrival of God's kingdom (Mk 1.14-15), would seem to position Jesus' *message* at center stage. Moreover, Jesus is cast repeatedly and explicitly as a teacher in Mark's gospel (e.g., Mk 1.21, 27; 4.38; 9.17, 38; 10.51; 14.14).[26] The subsequent dialogue(s) of Jesus throughout the

24. Shiner, 'Creating Plot', p. 168.
25. Shiner, 'Creating Plot', p. 166.
26. Boring, *Mark*, pp. 205-206 and 253-54. Cf. Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009). Boring points out that, in Mark's gospel, Jesus is the only one identified directly as a teacher, and only he and those he authorizes are shown teaching. Mark depicts Jesus' teaching as an ongoing activity, not simply an occasional occupation. Interestingly, Boring states, 'despite its frequency, the term "teacher" is not for Mark Jesus' fundamental identity. He is not basically a teacher in the Hellenistic sense… Thus little content of Jesus' teaching is given; *that* Jesus teaches by God's authority, not *what* he teaches, is central for Mark' (p. 253, author's emphases). While I acknowledge that the nature of Mark's characterization of Jesus as teacher is focused as much on how and why he taught as on the content of his lessons, I am attempting to question and unsettle, from a narrative standpoint, the basis of such distinctions. Hence, I would argue that teaching is as integral to the fundamental identity of the literary figure as is any other activity ascribed to the character, regardless of any real author's theological interpretation of an historical man. What is partly at issue is how, at the level of narrative discourse, conceptualizations of content vis-à-vis teaching (or any form of dialogue for that matter) are problematized.

remainder of Mark are varied. While the characterization of Jesus in Mark's narrative involves a diverse assortment of dialogues as well as other activities, the so-called 'controversy stories' (and conflict in general[27]) play a key role in their own right and represent the bulk of his verbal exchanges with other characters.[28] Like Aesop, the figure of Jesus is placed in one battle of wits after another and repeatedly bests his opponents with a show of deft cunning. In Mark, just as in *The Life of Aesop*, the plot occasions dialogue. That is to say, the discourse uses dialogue to perform, execute, and complete its determined course.

By way of example, let us look at the story of the Syrophoenician woman in Mk 7.24-30. In so doing, I want to revisit briefly the work of David Rhoads and Richard Horsley. David Rhoads's careful and detailed narrative-critical study of this episode provides readers with an excellent entrée into this mode of biblical criticism.[29] However, as his treatment of this episode demonstrates, he still invests significant effort into defending traditional claims of biblical narrative criticism (e.g., the unity and integrity of the text; the specificity and necessity of its arrangements; the intention of the author). To be sure, these claims are foundational to biblical narrative criticism's self-definition over against its methodological counterpart, historical criticism. The problem, however, is that these claims in fact rob narrative theory (and narrative itself) of its full force and capacity, and thus ultimately work against what are presumably the best intentions of New Testament narrative critics.

On account of his interest in providing a thorough, coherent interpretive reading of the gospel in its entirety, the context of the Syrophoenician woman's story in relation to the overall plot is central to Rhoads's argument about its function and significance. Like most commentators,[30] Rhoads identifies the episode as a transitional link that marks a shift in

27. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*.

28. Burton L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), pp. 177-78; Michael L. Humphries, *Christian Origins and the Language of the Kingdom of God* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999). Mack and Humphries are both concerned foremost with the origins of Christianity and the social formative dimensions of myth. However, I find in their careful and nuanced readings of Markan dialogues, and especially in Humphries's concern with what ultimately amounts to dialogism recast as socio-rhetorical contestation, far more resonance with the work I am doing in this monograph than I find in the somewhat similar work of someone like Richard Horsley.

29. David Rhoads, 'Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman in Mark: A Narrative-Critical Study', *JAAR* 62 (1994), pp. 343-75 (repr. Rhoads, *Reading Mark*, pp. 63-94). All page references in this chapter are taken from the 2004 version.

30. See, e.g., Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, pp. 466-71; Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark*, pp. 258-64; Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, pp. 381-89; Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, pp. 144-8; and France, *The Gospel of Mark*, pp. 294-99.

Jesus' ministry (and thus also the message of the 'gospel') from Jewish to Gentile territory. He categorizes the episode as a healing type-scene of 'a suppliant with faith', which necessarily follows a particular and easily recognizable structure with a number of clearly identifiable features.[31] Together, the story's form and purpose demonstrate for Rhoads the non-interchangeability of the Syrophoenician woman as the suppliant in this instance. In other words, not just any character would do, but only *this* character: a *Syrophoenician woman*.

The Syrophoenician woman, in Rhoads's estimation, is a 'stock' character: 'the suppliant with faith'. As a stock character, she has basically one trait, which is faith illustrated by the act of coming to Jesus on behalf of her child. Despite the fact that we have no access to this woman other than the information provided in this scene, Rhoads implies that her faith goes beyond anything we are capable of witnessing here. He describes her characterization as 'remarkably developed', and labels her 'a *rather complex* stock character'.[32] In contrast to the woman, Jesus is of course a 'round' character, displaying signs of complexity, change, depth, and development. There are a number of reasons why Rhoads sees Jesus as a round character, but the most significant in this episode seems to be that Jesus exhibits 'a genuine change of mind'.[33] Richard Horsley appears to agree, depicting the character of Jesus as being directly influenced by the woman's actions and words, and by the significance of her identity. 'She is vindicated because of, not in spite of, her assertive behavior', he writes. 'And she is vindicated because of her argument insisting that societal renewal in the kingdom should include non-Israelites.'[34]

My question, however, is this: how is it that a *literary* character can have a change of mind in the manner that Rhoads and Horsley imagine? 'Relying on the analogy between character and human being', writes Bal, 'readers tend to attach so much importance to coherence that this material is easily reduced to a psychological "portrait" that has more bearing on the reader's own desire than on the interchange between story and fabula.'[35]

31. Rhoads, 'Syrophoenician Woman', pp. 70-72.

32. Rhoads, 'Syrophoenician Woman', pp. 82-83, my emphasis.

33. Once again, a narrative approach is hardly necessary in order to come to this conclusion. See again the sources listed in n. 30 above.

34. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, p. 215.

35. Bal, *Narratology*, p. 116. 'Story' and 'fabula' are sometimes used interchangeably to refer to the content of a narrative as distinct from its arrangement and expression (viz., *sjužet*/discourse/plot), i.e., the 'what' of narrative versus the 'how' of its telling. Bal, however, distinguishes between the two. In her view, 'story' pertains to 'aspects': material that does not differ from that of text or fabula in terms of substance but that is viewed from a particular perspective. 'If one regards the text [words] primarily as the product of the use of a medium, and the fabula primarily as the product of imagination, the story

When Rhoads elsewhere writes, 'the actions of the plot are expressions of the characters, and they reveal the characters for *who they are*',[36] he illustrates Bal's point perfectly. It reflects merely one of many instances in which he betrays an underlying theological interest in ascertaining the 'real' Jesus behind the story, that is, an essentially corporeal human being capable of changing his mind in response to human need. The only mind that can change, however, is that of the reader. As far as literary characters are concerned, the narrative discourse represents only the chimera of change. It portrays and manipulates a linear, sequential structure that suggests cause and effect, while in fact it is bound by its own discursive constraints. Its manipulation of linearity is itself a self-referential mark of narrative form.[37]

Here, then, Rhoads and Horsley intersect rather serendipitously. For both, Jesus exhibits a change of mind, albeit for different reasons. For both, the 'good news' message of inclusion is the point of the episode. Both distill the content of the narrative in a way that suggests it exists independently of the discourse. And this move goes hand-in-hand with their reification of literary figures. Both imagine first an already existing person, who has a (his)story and a message, and then proceed to read the narrative as if it were merely the vehicle for transmitting that content. Like Rhoads, Horsley seems to indicate that it must be *this* character (viz., the Syrophoenician woman) in *this* episode in order for the narrator to articulate the message he has to communicate. There is then no arbitrariness to the story. She is the perfect character, a 'double outsider',[38] a representative figure, standing in for all sorts of marginalized people. Both authors take the insider-outsider framework in Mark to be one of sociocultural, religious, and gender boundary marking.

could be regarded as the result of an ordering' (p. 78). 'Fabula', in Bal's analysis, is akin to something like 'story-line' and, as such, is 'comparable transculturally and transhistorically' (p. 178). Hence, in the quote above, I read Bal to be describing and emphasizing the adaptation of raw material to story type, and the restrictions placed on that material on account of the fact that we are limited to only what information is provided us by the actual words of the text. What is so important about Bal's argument is that it allows (or forces) us to understand and appreciate the narrative *work* rather than leaving us frustrated by the impossibility of ever knowing more about some 'person' thought to be represented by the character. Cf. Emma Kafalenos, 'Toward a Typology of Indeterminacy in Postmodern Narrative', *CompLit* 44 (1992), pp. 380-408. Kafalenos defines fabula as 'an abstraction of the events in a narrative, ordered in chronological and causal sequence, and conceived ontologically as unexpressed in any medium' (p. 380).

36. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 98, my emphasis.

37. See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*.

38. That is, culturally and ethnically in the case of Horsley (*Hearing the Whole Story*, p. 213), which Rhoads will combine and then include religiously also ('Syrophoenician Woman', p. 74). Both authors also add gender to the mix.

While all this may certainly be true and provide for us a fascinating lens through which to read the narrative, the insider-outsider motif running through the Gospel of Mark, it seems to me, operates additionally at a level, or in a manner, that exceeds any intentionality concerned with social categorization. It is tied largely to one's ability to comprehend, but the object and means of this comprehension is generally ambiguous. Riddles of various sorts occur frequently in Mark, and Rhoads correctly notes that characters within the story, as well as those listening to (or reading) Mark's narrative, 'must decipher the allegorical riddles in order to understand them'[39] The question, in part, concerns how one goes about deciphering them and what one uses in the process. Rhoads and Horsley accept the customary interpretation, which treats Jesus' statement in 7.27 as a summary of the narrative plot running from Mk 6.30 through 8.10, and a synopsis of Jesus' ministry, which was to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. Unfortunately, both at the same time miss the implications for their respective readings of Mark and the figure of Jesus. This reading is akin to the narrator's exegesis of the parable of the Sower placed on the lips of Jesus in Mk 4.13-20. In each instance, both riddle and interpretation are constructions of the narrator, a function which is also inextricably bound to the narrative itself. In a sense, 'decipher' is a good choice of words, it turns out, and perhaps nowhere more so than with respect to represented speech. But it is not the riddles themselves (or the riddles alone) that call for our interpretive attention, but the discursive dynamics of their embedded position with respect to the larger narrative. Rather than imagining our task to be one of decoding the words of a person to better understand the individual, I would propose that we instead view characters as ciphers—i.e., both as non-entities and as translational instruments—that provide interpretive lenses for reading *the narrative*. They are, in a sense, figurative embodiments of both the reading experience and of our experience as humans in a world we never fully comprehend or control. I will pick this up again in the next chapter.

Returning to Mk 7.24-30, all of the characters in the episode of the Syrophoenician woman are paper people, but the most two-dimensional of all are the two that Rhoads and Horsley (along with nearly everyone else) virtually overlook altogether: the daughter and the demon that possesses her. These two figures exist *solely* for the purposes of this episode. Note the ease with which they appear and disappear[40] and their function vis-à-vis the

39. Rhoads, 'Syrophoenician Woman', p. 76.

40. Laura E. Donaldson, 'Gospel Hauntings: The Postcolonial Demons of New Testament Criticism', in Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (eds.), *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections* (London: T. & T. Clark International, 2005), pp. 97-113.

conversation between Jesus and the woman. Their silence is just as fundamental to their characterization and their role in the story as are the words of both Jesus and the woman. But if they exist for no other purpose than staging, so to speak, the woman too, who is characterized by them, exists and functions likewise with respect to Jesus. This in turn threatens the stability of Jesus as a literary figure, relativizing his words (and especially any decision or change of mind the character appears to exhibit), and ultimately exposing the rather fragmented and unstable construction of the figure.

The fact that the Syrophoenician woman does not oppose Jesus' remarks implicitly christening her a 'dog' but rather conscripts the term for her own use[41] prompts Fowler to state, 'The woman takes up the figures of speech Jesus uses and turns them against him. In this instance, he who lives by the metaphor dies by the metaphor. Bested in this contest of wits and words, Jesus relents…'[42] I think this can be taken a step further. Jesus does not change his mind; rather, 'The Son of Man goes as it is written of him' (14.21a). The words of Gérard Genette drive home the point: 'the factors "determining" [a character's] behavior almost never actually determine it'; rather, causal connectives actually emphasize the very thing they wish to mask: 'the arbitrariness of the story'.[43] In a word, characters that exist by the text also vanish and are vanquished by the text.

As with the Aesop narrative, transcendental figures play a role in Mark's story as well, and they do so foremost in terms of speech rather than action. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie admit, with respect to the Gospel of Mark, that the theological significance of Jesus' death is only a secondary concern of the author, but they also argue that divine causation was involved and that Jesus himself is portrayed as believing his death has meaning.[44] Hence, divine causation can be seen as playing a unifying role in the Gospel of Mark even more than it does in *The Life of Aesop*. I noted in my Introduction that narrative criticism in biblical studies has been preoccupied with a quest for narrative unity and coherence since its inception.[45] What interests me is the way in which this search for literary harmony carries over

41. Rhoads, 'Syrophoenician Woman', p. 79. It is interesting to observe the number of times that reference is made to 'dogs' in *The Life of Aesop*, usually in the context of physical descriptions of the protagonist. In §30, Aesop actually co-opts the designation and turns it back on his interlocutor in a manner similar to that of the Syrophoenician woman.

42. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, p. 117.

43. Gérard Genette, *Figures II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 85, translated and cited by Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism*, p. 25.

44. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, pp. 112-15.

45. See, e.g., Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*; Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*; and Merenlahti, *Poetics for the Gospels?*. Cf. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*.

into our reading of characters as well. Certainly this desire for coherence is driven in part by underlying theological concerns. But what if divine intervention were in fact the *cause* of fragmentation in the narrative lives of those that populate Mark's gospel, not least of all Jesus? Not only is God characterized every bit as much as any other figure in the narrative, but the style and hallmark of that characterization is one of interruption, disruptive speech. To further complicate matters, the nature of the Jesus figure, mysteriously both man and super-man, which is taken by many to be the central question of the narrative, is fragmented in a way that other characters are not. Whereas all characters are amalgamations, composites assembled from bits of information scattered throughout the narrative, the figure of Jesus is further compounded by the uncertain origins of his speech. In other words, it is never perfectly clear on whose behalf he is speaking, or whose voice he represents. He regularly speaks about himself in the third person,[46] and when he is given the opportunity to speak directly in his own defense he is silent (14.60-61a).

The role of the character of God in the Gospel of Mark[47] is more complex than the role played by various gods in *The Life of Aesop*. The 'presence' of God as a character in the narrative is somewhat ambiguous. Not only does God come and go, alternately speaking and being silent, but God's interjections are so unnatural with respect to the narrative flow that their function in relation to the plot is almost stilted. Of course, the unnaturalness of this particular character's speech is an element of the characterization. This character is super-natural and the speech associated with it reflects that. But, while supernatural, it is not super-textual; it cannot transcend the narrative discourse itself. There is, therefore, a sort of quagmire in which any characterized figure is embroiled that is only complicated further when that figure is thought to transcend not only the narrative discourse but earthly existence as well.

46. Assuming, that is, that Jesus is referring to himself and not someone else when he refers to the 'Son of Man'. See Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, pp. 22-26. Aichele's suggestion that Jesus' 'I am' in 14.62 'does not identify who he is [but] instead identifies a lack of coherent identity' (p. 23) lends support to my argument that represented speech is not a reliable indicator of a character's stable 'self'.

47. See John R. Donahue, SJ, 'A Neglected Factor in the Theology of Mark', *JBL* 101 (1982), pp. 562-94; 'Jesus as a Parable of God in the Gospel of Mark', *Int* 32 (1978), pp. 369-86; 'The Revelation of God in the Gospel of Mark', in Francis A. Eigo (ed.), *Modern Biblical Scholarship: Its Impact on Theology and Proclamation* (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1984), pp. 157-83. Cf. Ira Brent Driggers, *Following God through Mark: Theological Tension in the Second Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007); Marianne Meye Thompson, '"God's Voice You Have Never Heard, God's Form You Have Never Seen": The Characterization of God in the Gospel of John', *Semeia* 63 (1993), pp. 177-204.

God's role in the prologue is a good example. If Mk 1.1-15 'is essential as a basis for the entire narrative [of Mark]', as a narrative critic like Stephen Smith suggests,[48] part of its function should be that of laying the necessary groundwork for establishing Jesus' character and positioning him as the protagonist. Instead, the passage confronts us with a series of 'knots', perplexities, and entanglements that have as their cumulative effect the destabilization of the very thing they seek to construct. My interest at this point has to do with only the role and representation of speech and the divine. Suffice it to say here that, since this pericope functions to ground the story that follows, the instability inherent in the initial characterization of Jesus spells trouble for the narrative as a whole.

The text opens with an ambiguous beginning: 'the beginning of the gospel'. Commentators have long recognized the interpretive uncertainty here: does the opening phrase signify the narrative itself or its content? What is of interest here is the way in which the two possibilities overlap, each conditioning, determining, and qualifying the other. By making the narrative simultaneously both a 'report about' and the 'message of' Jesus, the narrator takes the first step toward eliminating the distance between the narrative and the act of narration. Jesus here is at once the speaking subject of a certain socio-rhetorical discourse as well as the linguistic object spoken into being by a discursive narrative. Identifying with this character, it would seem, means being drawn to a figure whose agency is complicated and compromised by the unsettling intersection of political and literary orders.

God as a character is also present and active here at the beginning of the story, positioned as the originator—one might say the Author, or, alternatively, the divine narrator—of the story about to unfold. This happens by means of the prophetic recollection through scriptural citation, and also the voice from heaven speaking simultaneously to Jesus and the reader, but to no one else (i.e., later in 1.11). In v. 1, the narrator continues the introduction, naming Jesus as 'Christ, the Son of God'. Roland Barthes equates the 'process of nomination' with the act of reading itself: 'To read is to struggle to name, to subject the sentences of a text to a semantic transformation'.[49] He describes the transformation as erratic: 'it consists of hesitating among several names'. With the textual apparatus in the Greek Testament itself bearing witness, this act of naming Jesus in fact hesitates between two names. The tradition itself seems divided over whether or to what extent it should nominate Jesus as the Son of God (or to affirm that designation, as the case may be). A few verses later, at his baptism,

48. Smith, *A Lion With Wings*, p. 96. Cf. M. Eugene Boring, 'Mark 1:1-15 and the Beginning of the Gospel', *Semeia* 52 (1990), pp. 43-81.

49. Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 92. Cf. Docherty, *Reading (Absent) Character*, pp. 73-74.

Jesus is again constructed through language, summoned by a divine but not entirely public pronouncement that simultaneously produces him as more than human, a son of God, and as a literary object, a character who is directed by a (providentially) plotted story. Doubling the initial naming made by the narrator, 'a voice from heaven' (a designation that intends to name without naming—an effort that must always, of necessity, fail if it is to succeed) hails Jesus as the beloved Son. In so doing, the voice of God is conscripted by the narrator to affirm what the narrator has just said.

The narrative credits God's spirit with responsibility for driving Jesus into the wilderness, and by implication God is the driving force throughout the rest of the story as well. With the voice from heaven comes the Spirit and the Spirit violently drives Jesus into the wilderness in a move that foreshadows so many instances in the gospel where individual autonomy and agency are compromised, especially by demonic possession.[50] Together, the episode of the baptism and the temptation prefigure the manner in which Jesus has been drawn into the ideology of narrative form. It is demonstrated by the Spirit's unimpeded control of Jesus, but reinforced by the narrative itself with repeated notices that everything that happens to Jesus happens 'as it is written'. Recalling the argument of Roemer, these scenes prefigure the subjugation of characters to their narration.[51] This scene is not simply mimetic (i.e., representative) of some real historical event (viz., Jesus' actual baptism), but the very *form* of the scene (i.e., narrative discourse) also mimics human efforts to navigate the conditions and experiences of our existence. As a literary character, Jesus is conscripted, written into a subject position that complicates his agency. As a character, he is pressed into the service of whatever interpretive ideologies are in play, whether by a narrator or a reader, and providence itself has predetermined he will give his life for that cause. Jesus is narratively possessed, as it were, by the Spirit and the plot. As Mark's protagonist, Jesus figures the narrative production of the subject itself.

Both the importance of represented speech for the characterization of Jesus and the awkward, disruptive role played by the divine voice feature prominently in the episode of Jesus' transfiguration (9.2-8), wherein a voice from a cloud author(ize)s Jesus by identifying him as the beloved son and commanding those present to listen to him. This scene will be the centerpiece of my final chapter, so I will limit my remarks here strictly to the dialogue aspect. We have in this episode (i) a silent or unrecorded

50. See, e.g., Mk 5.1-20; 7.31-37; 9.31; 10.33-34; 13.9-13; 14.21, 27, 36, 41, 61; 15.5.

51. A literary text is always already one step ahead of its readers and critics. See Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism*, p. 110; Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament*, pp. 48-49; *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, pp. 29-30.

conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah; (ii) a one-way conversation between Peter and Jesus; and (iii) another one-way conversation between the voice from the cloud and, presumably, Peter, James, and John. Jesus never speaks. That is to say, he is never quoted; his speech is never represented.[52] Yet, this episode is absolutely central to his characterization in Mark's gospel, and, despite all visual aspects of the scene, dialogue is of paramount importance in constructing the figure of Jesus here. Moreover, the dialogue portrayed here has far-reaching implications, not only for the remainder of the narrative, but also for what has already transpired to this point.

I want to focus on the curious interjection from the narrator at 9.6 (which itself reflects a fourth conversation taking place here between the narrator and the reader). In the first half of the verse, the narrator, in the words of Cranfield, 'excuses the incongruous remark'.[53] Peter, according to the narrator, said what he said because he did not know what to say. Commentators repeatedly draw attention to Peter's failure.[54] Divided and unresolved in their explanations of this example of Peter's propensity toward misunderstanding, they interpret it in terms of his inability either to recognize that Jesus is of a higher nature than the prophets (viz., Moses and Elijah), or to appreciate that the moment they were in could not be indefinitely perpetuated or contained. However, as interesting as is the fact that this moment is indeed perpetuated ad infinitum by means of its narration here—the narrator himself erecting a tabernacle as it were—I find more striking the inescapable knot in which the narrative text entangles itself on account of the rules governing the form, the necessary impossibility of saying that which cannot be said, or the paradox of representing silence with speech.

First of all, Peter's failure is no failure at all because his character plays perfectly the part assigned to him. Secondly, not only is Peter's misguided pronouncement actually necessitated by the purposes of the scene (viz., to characterize Jesus), but any inappropriateness credited to his remark depends entirely upon a kind of after-the-fact backwards glance that would not be possible were it not for Peter's preemption of an unasked question and a willingness on the part of the reader to accept the notion that the narrator is in control of the story with alternatives readily available. It is

52. One could argue, as many have, that the episode continues through v. 13 (see, e.g., Boring, *Mark*; Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*; France, *The Gospel of Mark*; Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*; Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*), in which case, Jesus does speak, first indirectly (v. 9) and then directly (vv. 12-13).

53. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, p. 291.

54. For an excellent summary of the various ways scholars have interpreted exactly what the nature of that failure was, see Wilson, *Transfigured*, pp. 73-77.

not simply that he did not know what to *say*, as if it were a matter of self-expression and self-articulation, but that he did not know how to *respond*, or how to *answer* (note the use of ἀποκρίνομαι). This only highlights further the extent to which everything in the narrative is occasioned and conditioned by something else. It does not arise naturally or self-evidently. Peter's characterization as both a representative of the twelve and as one hard of understanding, is ironically compromised by the very fact that he ultimately speaks on behalf of another who may well be more divided than any. I am inclined to posit that the identity of the one who did not know what to say was not in fact Peter but the narrator.[55] For it is the narrator who ascribes to Peter these words that he in turn excuses. What we encounter then is not any revelation of Peter's character but another instance of self-referentiality on the part of the text.

The second half of the verse picks up on a motif that runs throughout the narrative and that, I think, takes on an added dimension when used in the context of this episode. Whereas the first half attempted to excuse, nullify, erase, make meaningless Peter's mistaken but ironically necessary comment, the second half attempts, in part, to legitimate the revision. The theme is one of 'fear' or 'awe' in response to Jesus, whether on account of his teaching, his miracles and exorcisms, or other acts and 'revelations' of his character. In the transfiguration scene, the word ἔκφοβος is used to describe the disciples' befuddlement. Elsewhere Mark uses a variety of other terms to convey the same sense of amazement and wonder,[56] a phenomenon that simultaneously characterizes parties on both sides of the encounter. The word I find most interesting with respect to characterization is ἐξίστημι (see 2.12; 5.42; 6.51). According to Liddell and Scott, it carries a figurative sense of being out of one's wits, or 'witless' one might say. It means, metaphorically, to drive someone out of his or her senses. When used in a less colloquial fashion, it has a causal function whereby something or someone is put out of its place, changed or altered completely. The reason I find this notion particularly useful for thinking about characterization in general, and in the Gospel of Mark specifically, is that it epitomizes, in the very fabric of the narrative language used to depict them, the most fundamental aspects of literary characters: namely, the split conditions of their narrative existence. They consist not of spirits, psyches, and immutable

55. In his treatment of the phrase, 'such as no one on earth could bleach them' (Mk 9.3), Wilson (*Transfigured*, p. 67) implicitly suggests that the narrator was no better off than Peter. Wilson writes, 'and so, the evangelist is seen to lack the sophistication necessary to account for the glory that shines so vividly in the light of Jesus' robes'.

56. E.g., ἐκπλήσσω in 1.22; 6.2; 7.37; 10.26; 11.18; θαυμάζω in 5.20; 15.5, 44; ἐκθαυμάζω in 12.17; θαμβοῦμαι in 1.27; 10.24, 32; ἐκθαμβοῦμαι in 9.15; 16.5-6; and φοβοῦμαι in 4.41; 5.15, 33, 36; 6.50; 9.32; 10.32; 11.18; 16.8.

selves capable of accepting or resisting change or influence at will, but of easily and completely malleable, controllable textual material susceptible to amendment, alteration, translation, modification, as suits the narrative discourse. The fear that possesses these characters, the shock of dislocation and of irrecoverable transposition, is a mark of characterization cutting across individual figures. Moreover, this notion of being moved out of place plays off of the recurring insider-outsider theme, which I will revisit again following one last observation on the transfiguration scene.

Finally, returning to the point about Jesus' speech not being represented in this passage, and recalling what was said earlier about his silence before his accusers at trial, Mark's narrative seems to suggest, somewhat paradoxically, that a primary aspect of Jesus' characterization is his reticence to assert his identity. What I have in mind here is not the so-called 'messianic secret', wherein Jesus seems to hide or play down his identity publicly in order to curtail certain misunderstandings about who he is and the nature of his mission. Instead, I am suggesting that the most significant aspect of Jesus' identity as a character can only be narratively figured by means of circumlocution in the form of silence on the part of the character itself.

Nowhere is the relationship of represented speech and characterization more problematic in Mark's gospel than at 4.10-13, 33-34 and 8.31-32a. To whatever degree these two passages[57] function as illustrations of Jesus' character—e.g., as one who teaches mysteries and always speaks truth, but who does so plainly with some and in riddles with others[58]—(and by extension other characters listening to him), they function all the more as self-referential commentaries on the narrative itself, and on the process of characterization. Taken at face value, these explanations on the part of the narrator, one of which is placed directly on the lips of Jesus himself, presume to describe the manner of Jesus' speech, on one hand, and the nature of various characters both in his immediate audience and peppered throughout the gospel, on the other. However, in their attempt to do so,

57. I am taking 4.10-13 and 4.33-34 together.

58. Collins, *Mark*, p. 406. See also Boring, *Mark*, pp. 235 n. *e*, 241-42; Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 173; Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, p. 279; cf. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, pp. 99-120. It is important to notice, I think, something very subtle here. παρρησίᾳ describes the manner of Jesus' speech. Therefore, it characterizes, by extension, Jesus himself (e.g., as a plain speaker, at least in this instance), his hearers (whether capable or incapable of understanding), and, to a point, the actual words (i.e., as if to say the *manner* of their delivery affects directly whether or to what extent they can—or should—be interpreted and understood). Returning to Collins, I am tempted to wonder if there is not a latent or implicit sense of fact or history versus fiction or myth in this distinction between plain speech and riddles, the latter never being entirely false—lest it disparage the figure of Jesus—simply different, e.g., in the matter of form, the disposable shell.

they characterize (i.e., position) narrator and readers also. The former is portrayed as the one who really determines the relative degree of clarity in characters' speech. And the latter are set up as character doubles, interpreters who 'naturally' take for granted (one would presume) that they are insiders because they understand fully and perfectly these straightforward words of Jesus. However, not only is this made problematic by the fact that those who would appear to be outsiders are the ones who seem to understand Jesus when insiders fail to do so (indicating that they do not hear riddles while those to whom the secrets of the kingdom have been given do);[59] it also complicates the perceived relationship or distance between readers, narratives, and the characters therein.

Jesus' plain speech has been interpreted traditionally to emphasize the repeated and persistent failure of the disciples to understand the nature of his messianic identity and mission. Jesus, the narrative suggests, speaks in parables to those outside and plainly to his disciples, who, one would assume, are insiders. But it would appear from Mark 4 that *everyone*—insiders and outsiders alike—experienced Jesus' speech first in parabolic form or manner. In 4.10-13, a mixed crowd consisting of 'those who were around him along with the twelve' is forced to ask about the meaning of the parable they have just heard. Then, after being told somewhat paradoxically that they already have been given the secrets of the kingdom, Jesus asks a rhetorical question highlighting the incongruity of their lack in understanding. He proceeds to explain the parable to them, while implicitly demonstrating for them the way they ('insiders'?) are to interpret his words, which are of course the words of the narrative itself. With the help of the ambiguity inherent in the referent of the pronoun 'them' in vv. 33-34, the narrator reinforces the necessity for readers to boldly assert an independence from the text, and then to recognize that they have done so. Arguably, their inability (or unwillingness) to comprehend Jesus is juxtaposed not so much to others within the story (i.e., thus insiders versus outsiders) but to the readers themselves (i.e., thus insiders versus savvier, more astute insiders). In other words, the story portrayed by the narrative is itself a dialogue between an endless variety of readers, who converse in and through the narrative, so much so that the story is in fact repeatedly (re)constituted by those readers in their ongoing acts of reading.[60] The narrative has little

59. Cf. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, pp. 85-92, 101; Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, pp. 21-25.

60. Historical critics have long recognized that the evangelists crafted the events they depict in order to serve rhetorical and pastoral purposes vis-à-vis the perceived needs of their audiences and communities. That, however, is not exactly what I have in mind when I describe the narrative as a dialogue, or as the residue of interpretive effort and experience. I am not attempting to isolate any original moment, whether that of authorship or of reception. I am not analyzing intention and 'plain sense meaning'. I

to do with 'the story' itself, but instead is at its core the trace of competing (though not always necessarily oppositional) efforts to read and to name the figure of Jesus. This dialogue *is* the story. The characters—especially Jesus—are discourses.[61]

The 'plain speech' of Jesus draws ironic attention to the opacity of narrative discourse,[62] and it refracts the exhaustion of every frustrated effort to speak the unspeakable, to represent in narrative what is thereby irreparably changed and lost in the act of doing so. The tension within the figure of Jesus himself is mirrored on the part of those who encounter Jesus, alternately hearing and not hearing him. The figure of Jesus is fundamentally split between riddle and riddler, plain speech and plain speaker, parable and cipher. To transplant a summation from another context that is certainly no less fitting here: 'what Jesus *says* is contradicted by what he *is*'.[63] The nature of narrative discourse is such that it must distinguish between persons (insider and outsiders), times ('when they were alone'), and spaces ('in private'), but it is a chimera; in the end, the only difference is superimposed from outside.

Conclusion

My goal in this chapter was to show that represented speech, often taken as a hallmark of character identity and as a reliable means of character expression, in fact provides no further stability or certainty with respect to a character's essence. Dialogue is another self-referential aspect of narrative discourse whereby the text both exposes and exploits the non-substantive nature of characters, and leaves readers with little in their grasp. To reiterate, I will close with one final anecdote.

am, nevertheless, taking such historicizing readings as part and parcel of this never-ending process of narration and characterization.

61. Cf. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, pp. 132-41, where the author explores a post-structuralist, intertextual model of translation to answer the question, who (and where) is Kafka? In such a model, 'Kafka is neither a unique and unchanging individual nor a proliferation of endlessly variable individual readings but rather an entire *system* of potentially endless variables, the *sum*, that is to say, of all the translations and readings of Kafka that have ever existed or will ever exist in any language' (p. 140, author's emphasis).

62. See Kermode, *Genesis of Secrecy*, pp. 23-47.

63. See Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament*, p. 59; author's emphasis. In its original context, Moore is commenting on 'Jesus' as a site of paradox throughout the Fourth Gospel'. The contradiction is between a *person* who is portrayed as transcending distinctions between 'heaven and earth, spirit and matter, *figure and letter*' (my emphasis), and a *character* who acts and speaks as if such distinctions were both still in play and easily traversed. Here, the contradiction is similar. The character's plain speech is at odds with the narrative that positions the figure as a secret. The paradox is not in the person but in the character. It is a narratological problem.

In *The Life of Aesop*, Aesop, prior to receiving his voice, relies on gestures and trickery to convey meaning and to conspire against others. Falsely accused of having eaten figs that were not his to eat, Aesop points the finger at his fellow slaves and demonstrates their guilt by hoodwinking them into vomiting up the evidence (§§2–3).[64] Just prior to the episode between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman, the narrator of Mark's gospel depicts Jesus as saying, 'Listen to me, all of you; there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile' (7.14-15). Later 'witnesses' add the oft-repeated admonition, 'let anyone with ears to hear listen'. The narrator indicates that Jesus' disciples took this seemingly straightforward observation to be a parable (v. 17).

In both instances, what comes out is presented as evidence of what is within. That is, figures within the narrative direct readers away from the surface of the narrative toward something deeper, more interior. But who or what is the expression evidence of, ultimately, within the context of a narrative discourse? If an historical person is unavailable or inaccessible to us via narrative discourse—whether the person behind the character, or the author behind the text—then all we have is the narrative and our readings of it. What comes out is evidence of what we, as readers, put in. The expression is an extraction reflecting a projection. It is like two mirrors opposite one another. Perhaps in this instance the disciples, those insiders always acting and speaking as if they are outside, get it right in their inference that the seemingly obvious words of Jesus are parabolic.

It should not be missed that the disciples and Jesus physically enter an interior space to take up the question. Seven verses later, Jesus 'set out' and, upon reaching his destination, 'entered a house', where, despite his supposed intention, he could not be hid. In other words, the interior afforded him no seclusion. In fact, it only occasions an opportunity for further disclosure. Jesus will not be perfectly concealed, veiled, and out of sight until he is silent, and vanishes altogether from the narrative, a point that is marked by an *opened* tomb. The juxtaposition and play of interior and exterior spaces is significant, but the meaning is not as clear or certain as one might like.[65] Interiority is not as obvious as the characters already within the narrative itself would have us believe. It is elusive and perceptible only by those who are a part of it. With respect to narrative discourse, interiority is always a façade, not unlike so many other elements of setting. The character is a stage prop. Inside the character is nothing but the emptiness of backstage. Biblical narrative critics insist on remaining within the text

64. Cf. §67 where the reason that is offered for why humans look at their defecation is so as to ensure they have not passed their wits unawares.

65. See Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986); cf. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, pp. 64-65.

(i.e., allowing the framing devices to fade from view, listening as if they themselves were part of the narrative, members of the audience within the world of the story), overlooking the fact that the labyrinthine structure of a narrative like the Gospel of Mark repeatedly leads readers everywhere but inside. Represented speech is one more means by which a narrative disguises its origins, leaving readers entangled in writing.

5

Plot: A 'Novel Drama' to Undo Jesus

> …and I went from story to story as we moved on.
>
> Anne Rice, *Out of Egypt*

> For the Son of man goes as it is written of him…
>
> The Gospel according to Mark 14.21 (RSV)

> God has given himself a subject, man a helpmate, etc., whose relative independence, once they have been created, allows for *playing*.
>
> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*

> [A]ny biography is a novel that dares not speak its name.
>
> Roland Barthes, 'Responses' (interview), *Tel Quel*

The previous two chapters have considered the complex ways in which the narrative aspects of focalization and dialogue or speech representation—both of which are inseparable from the character aspect—factor into the processes of characterization by simultaneously constructing and deconstructing characters. This final chapter takes up the aspect of plot in the same vein. Here I will address a series of key episodes in the Gospel of Mark that seem to be pointedly concerned with characterizing Jesus. One in particular, however, appears never to have been fully considered directly with respect to narrative characterization. That is to say, while it may have been touched upon by some in their analysis of the characterization of Jesus specifically (though very few have done even this much), it has not been considered at all with regard to what literary characters are in general and how they function within a narrative. Among historical critics, it is an episode that pertains above all to matters of Markan theology; that is, the way that the historical author and his community understood Jesus (particularly his death) in view of the Hebrew Bible and the circumstances in which the gospel was written. Among narrative critics, if it is not overlooked altogether, it concerns primarily the Markan plot. Though in either case, I would argue, critics of both sorts slip into a position of taking the narrative at some sort of face value, insofar as both regard it as a straightforward indication that Jesus was cast as fulfilling or embodying, in some way, images of the Messiah presaged in

certain Hebrew Bible texts. Critics are, of course, fully cognizant of the fact that the portrayal of Jesus in Mark has been shaped in order to accomplish this goal. But it is as if, once that argument is accepted, all that remains is either to evaluate the author's success at making his point, or to ponder the truth of his claim. The ramifications of Jesus being cast in narrative have not been considered as fully as they need to be. The episode of which I am speaking is Mk 14.17-21. Since this chapter attends to the aspect of plot in relation to characterization, it is perfectly fitting that we should take up this episode and the scholarship surrounding it.

At various points throughout this study, I have hinted at the sort of character Jesus is taken to be by New Testament narrative critics, but I have not laid out fully their conclusions. Therefore, before I turn our attention to my reading of Jesus in Mark, a representative summary of the consensus among New Testament narrative critics regarding the figure of Jesus is in order. Recalling what was said in the Introduction, what is perhaps most striking is how little their characterizations differ from what has been put forward by so many historical critics.

I summarized in, Chapter 1, the viewpoint of Rhoads and company concerning the character of Jesus. Smith's view is similar. For Smith, Jesus is characterized by means of narrative asides from the narrator, by Jesus' own words and actions, and by what others say about Jesus or how they react to him. He is described as being authoritative, wise and shrewd, resolute, and exceptionally 'human'. Smith concludes, 'Despite this *wide range* of character traits, Jesus remains *totally consistent* throughout the narrative'.[1] Following the taxonomy of Margolin described in Chapter 1, the ordinary narrative critical treatment of Jesus, represented here by Rhoads, falls within the 'character-as-readerly-mental-construct' category, if pressed. For all their acknowledgement of the reader, New Testament narrative critics favor an understanding of the text-reader interaction that follows someone like Wolfgang Iser, wherein the text 'induces and guides the reader's constitutive activity'.[2] In other words, the reader is an inseparable factor in the text's meaning and toward ensuring successful communication of the text's message, but the reader is not the determination of that meaning.

My objective here has been to entertain alternative ideas about the way characters are constructed and function within the narrative of Mark's gospel. To put it quite plainly, I want to think about literary characters, for a moment at least, as anything but human. I indicated in the first chapter that distinctions between (i) purely literary characters (i.e., those that are entirely fabricated), (ii) historical persons (or non-individuated historical

1. Smith, *Lion with Wings*, pp. 60-63 (62, my emphasis).

2. Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 39.

groups) characterized within a narrative framework, and (iii) divine entities, which enter a text with certain shared beliefs attached to them, but which are then textualized, framed, and re-formed within a narrative discourse, are unfounded from a theoretical perspective. We cannot simply speak of the author of Mark using narrative techniques to accomplish this or that. Rather, I submit that we need to approach Mark's narrative, in part, as a reflection of the way readers experience the figure of Jesus and the world around them—a reflection not in the sense that the gospel can be mirror-read for insights into its *Sitz im Leben* and audience characteristics, but rather in a more peripheral or refractory sense whereby the narrative form itself codes and mimics experience. The world, as we come to know it (i.e., as it is mediated to and by us), is plotted. Although it in fact may be experienced quite randomly, we *narrate* the things that happen, the people we encounter, and even ourselves, and we ascribe meaning, causation, and connection to these people, places, and things—in other words, we explain. Emplotment is inescapable. To be sure, literary characters seem to escape danger at every turn, and some even appear to escape the narratives that give rise to them. But I do not have in view here individual plots (i.e., stories); rather, I am speaking of plot itself (i.e., diegesis, narrative). For a character cannot be plucked from one narrative without being re-situated into another.

While I imagine and interpret literary characters foremost as pure literary constructs, products of language, word pictures, I realize that remaining there does us a disservice by merely exchanging one oversimplified notion of characters for another, and one that simply does not match our experience as readers. Nevertheless, I do think it is possible to think about characters in a manner that does not take recourse to personification. Therefore, in this final chapter, I want to look at the ways narrative discourse, plot, and characters all deconstruct one another. Plot and narrative discourse are not *identical*—there is a distance between them—but they are *analogous*, and, as I have repeatedly shown throughout, they undermine any sense of agency associated with characters even as they endeavor to portray it in the story. At the same time, however, characters threaten to upset the plots that contain them. They are never entirely or perfectly free of the plots and narratives that fabricate them. They do not exist apart from the narratives that produce them. Those narratives adhere to them and create intertexts for interpreting and understanding those characters. But the mental conceptualizations to which those characters give rise manifest a kind of potentiality, an afterlife in the imagination that inhabits a sort of 'neutral' space,[3] a space between

3. Roland Barthes, *The Neutral* (trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier; New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). Barthes describes the Neutral as the 'time of the *not yet*' (p. 50, author's emphasis), which, it seems to me, offers a unique perspective on the classical eschatological schema in New Testament studies of the 'already/not

being and non-being, and between fact and fiction. Characters are not nothing, per se; they are not an absence or a void. But neither are they, on one hand, solely marks on a page, nor, on the other hand, real people, or even suitable stand-ins for actual person, at least as far as the limits of the narrative are concerned. In other words, to move from a character to a person requires a supplement, which will, in turn, be another narrative in its own right.

While the whole of Mark is in view here, much of which has been discussed in the preceding chapters, I find the following episodes, themes, and structural elements of the narrative to be the most critical when thinking about characterization generally and about the character of Jesus specifically in this gospel. First, the prologue (1.1-15), in which the character and narrative life of Jesus is explicitly placed in a script(ur)ed context, coupled with the ending, (16.1-8), where Jesus' body recedes into the shadows leaving behind a space around which the figure is discoursed and its afterlife refashioned. Second, the transfiguration (9.2-8), which presents us with a particularly salient (though easily overlooked) instance of a literary character's essence being laid bare; that is not to say an individual's true self is revealed or expressed (i.e., we are not offered an opportunity to see either the historical Jesus or the resurrected Christ of faith for *who* he really is), but rather that we catch a glimpse of how a narrative character works (i.e., we see the literary figure for *what* it really is) by virtue of an ironically 'plain' statement on the part of the narrator. The transfiguration is an episode in which the narrative discourse, the textuality of the character, asserts itself most forcefully and inescapably. Finally, the passion, where Jesus announces the endlessly repeated fate of the Son of Man to go as it is written of him, and where the figure is emplotted and transgressed most vividly, profoundly, and richly. Before I address each of these in turn, some general comments on plot are in order.

Plot

Tim Whitmarsh, considering the novel genre from an historical vantage point, makes an interesting observation.

> Ruses and subterfuges drive novelistic narrative: in this particular dramatization of cultivated behaviour, of *paideia*, the reader is permitted to access both the public performance (open to all) and the machinations behind the scenes (more restricted).[4]

yet'. For Barthes, 'everything about the Neutral is about sidestepping assertion' (p. 44). Hence, it is the avoidance of 'expression'. In this way, language—which is 'naturally assertive' (p. 42)—is at odds with the Neutral. To write the Neutral is, therefore, in a sense, to charge it, or to substantiate it.

4. Tim Whitmarsh, *Ancient Greek Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 157.

My concern is neither with the specific historical circumstances of the ancient novel, nor with generic classifications. However, I find his comment no less useful with regard to what it says about the way these narratives work. Two important observations about novelistic discourse surface in his remarks: first, it is a trickster genre, and second, plot and narrative discourse are very closely related.

By way of example, and in order to explain the title I have given this final chapter, I want to return briefly to Achilles Tatius. Book Six of *Leucippe and Clitophon* opens with Clitophon and Melite getting dressed following an amorous frolic, and in the midst of doing so they devise a plan that will enable Clitophon to get Leucippe: Melite tells Clitophon to dress in her clothes that he might pass undetected and then be taken to where Leucippe waits for him. As Clitophon is making his way to Leucippe, Thersander returns, thwarting Melite's plan even as he himself is in the midst of hatching another plan with the help of Sosthenes. This plan, too, has Leucippe as its objective. This plan is stymied when Thersander speaks to Leucippe inside the hut where she is being kept and she adamantly resists his advances. Consequently, he and Sosthenes concoct another plan designed to ensure the success of the previous plan. While it is being set in motion, Melite learns that Clitophon has been imprisoned and Leucippe abducted, so she finds a clever way of enlisting Thersander's assistance in searching for Leucippe.

Earlier, just as *the character* Clitophon has cleared the guards keeping watch over his cell and is about to continue onward in his journey toward Leucippe, *the narrator* Clitophon pauses to remark: 'As for me, my old friend Fortune attacked again, scripting a new drama for me' (6.3). Hence, even as Thersander inadvertently foils the plans of Melite and Clitophon and devises another of his own in consultation with Sosthenes, it is Fortune herself acting as playwright. In other words, Thersander's plan is not *simply* his but rather, in retrospect, that of fate.

All three published translations of this text[5] variously draw attention to the negative impact and implications of Fortune's interest in Clitophon, which play out presumably in the events immediately following his remark. But it is Winkler's rendition of Clitophon's statement that I find best captures what it is I want to discuss in this chapter. It reads, 'But as for me, my usual bad luck set her sights on me once again and *arranged a novel drama to undo me*'.[6] In what manner is Clitophon 'undone'? As we read on, interpreting the story in the same retrospective manner as the narrator tells it, we are, I suspect, lured into thinking that Clitophon is simply bested, outdone and vanquished for the time being in his plan to get Leucippe. There is,

5. See above, p. 98 n. 1.
6. Winkler's translation; my emphasis.

however, another aspect to Clitophon's remark that is all too easily overlooked but perhaps of even greater interest. There is a sense in which Clitophon undone is altogether canceled, negated, nullified, and invalidated. Put another way, he is not only undone *in* the narrative but also *by* the narrative. Moreover, it is precisely Fortune's act of scripting and arranging that is most relevant for our understanding of Clitophon's undoing.

What is the relationship between Fortune, the plot, the character of Clitophon (and characters in general for that matter), and the act of narration, and what are the implications of that relationship for thinking about novelistic discourse? Ordinarily, a distinction is made between story and plot (and narration). The argument is that any given story exists independently of its narration and can therefore always be told and plotted differently. One author goes so far as to suggest that 'this analytically powerful distinction between story and its representation is, arguably, the founding insight of the field of narratology'.[7] Secular narrative theorists have been open to problematizing/questioning such a sharp distinction on the grounds that, on one hand, renderings seem to generate stories despite their apparent pre-existence, and, on the other hand, it is difficult to determine the necessary elements required in order to properly recognize that a particular story is being repeated if narrated differently. New Testament narrative critics, however, have been quite keen to keep the distinction firmly in place. The reasons for this are relatively straightforward, and have already been discussed.

The narrative aspect of 'plot' can be tremendously difficult to define despite its apparent obviousness. In New Testament narrative criticism (and elsewhere in New Testament studies whenever narrative critical terminology has been used), 'plot' denotes storyline, i.e., the basic outline and progression of the narrative. What it *connotes* for narrative critics, however, is clearly a sense of purpose and, hard on its heels, intention and theology.[8] But the relationship of plot to discourse, on one hand, and of plot to causation, on the other hand, is not immediately clear. It is interesting that

7. Abbott, 'Story, Plot, and Narration', in Herman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, p. 40.

8. This goes back to Werner Kelber ('Redaction Criticism: On the Nature and Exposition of the Gospels', *PRSt* 6 [1979], pp. 4-16) who challenged the notion that Mark was merely a 'string of pearls' by arguing that the gospel exhibited a *purposeful* plot. This only illustrates further how little biblical narrative criticism has moved beyond redaction criticism. See, e.g., Boring, *Mark*, p. 206. Drawing attention to the 'two-level drama' of Mark (which, in this instance, refers to [i] the Syrophoenician woman's effort to find help for her daughter, and [ii] the mission to the Gentiles), Boring stresses its importance for 'understanding the text', and cautions against minimizing what might be described as the surface level of the story for the sake of the 'theological meaning of the story at the Markan level', even though the latter is 'the focus of Mark's attention'.

for its seeming obviousness as an aspect of narrative it often goes unmentioned by name in key works of narratology.[9] As far as a 'textbook definition' is concerned, Prince offers four ways of thinking about plot.[10] First, it can refer to the primary incidents of a narrative as opposed to the characters and other 'existents'. Second, it might have to do with the arrangement of those incidents in terms of their presentation in the narrative (i.e., in Russian formalist terms, *sjužet* rather than *fabula*). Third, it can convey a sort of teleological dimension, referring to 'the global dynamic (goal-oriented and forward-moving) organization of narrative constituents which is responsible for the thematic interest (indeed, the very intelligibility) of a narrative and for its emotional effect'. Finally, references to plot can be concerned with emphasizing causality (à la Forster). This final view of plot is significant as far as New Testament narrative criticism is concerned for two reasons: it provides an open door to the sort of (intentional) meaning and purpose they equate with sacred literature, history, and texts intended to communicate, and it easily spills over into a character-driven, character-centric interpretive logic, complete with notions of personality, psychological depth, and rationale, a reading in which plot is fundamentally about the revelation of character.

Of the three interrelated terms—story, narration, and plot—plot is the most difficult to pin down. To quickly summarize again the three approaches to plot described in Chapter 2, plot can refer to a type of story, which is what we saw reflected in Forster's approach above. Plot can refer to the quality of a narrative that ultimately converts it from raw materials to a story, for example the selection and order of events. In this approach, there is a degree of value attached; not all stories are created equal. Finally, plot is used to refer to a discursive technique that serves the story by manipulating the events, particularly in relation to time (e.g., in terms of duration, iteration, pace), pointedly manipulating chronology and exposure in order to create effects. Genette is the theorist best known for analyzing plot in this fashion. Of these three general perspectives, I find that of Genette to be the most useful. However, whereas New Testament narrative critics, for example, have treated all aspects of narrative, including plot, as rhetorical instruments—i.e., narrative itself is chosen by an author as the best vehicle through which to convey his message, and all the techniques

9. Hence, for example, one will not find 'plot' among the indexed terms in Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*; Genette, *Narrative Discourse*; or even O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*. Though, of course, each of these authors is addressing matters pertaining to plot, and each is operating upon (or, in the case of O'Neill, interrogating) the fundamental narratological distinction between story and discourse (referred to above in the quote from Abbott), the latter of which has to do with matters of arrangement, sequence, and so on—i.e., plotting.

10. Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 73.

subsequently afforded him are employed as necessary to accomplish his specific purpose—I am imagining plot as a function of narrative discourse, one that is also limited by the rules of that discourse (e.g., simultaneous speech or action cannot, in fact, be represented in perfectly simultaneous fashion). Therefore, no matter what plot is written into a narrative by design, there exist alongside it certain structural elements that always threaten to upset and destabilize the sense of flow, direction, and purpose that otherwise seems to dictate the movement or course of events in the story. Plot, then, is something that straddles the levels of story and discourse, thereby problematizing the distinction between the two.

It is difficult to treat 'plot' (vis-à-vis characterization) in the same manner that I have with focalization and dialogue. Plot subsumes the others, in certain respects, though it also exists only insofar as the others are present. That is, plot can be focalized, and it can also take shape in the dialogue and interactions of characters. We find specific references to plot from within the narrative in Acts 9.23 (συμβουλεύω); 20.3, 19; 23.30 (ἐπιβουλή); and in Mt. 22.15 (συμβούλιον). I want to make just a couple of observations on these verses and their use of plot. First, there is a sinister dimension to the understanding of plot reflected in these passages (recalling the comment from Whitmarsh above). It is not simply a matter of planning, but of planning against. Second, Mt. 22.15 ties plot to dialogue and discourse. The NRSV reads: 'then the Pharisees went and *plotted to entrap him in what he said*' (τότε πορευθέντες οἱ Φαρισαῖοι συμβούλιον ἔλαβον ὅπως αὐτὸν παγιδεύσωσιν ἐν λόγῳ). The RSV translates παγιδεύσωσιν as 'entangle', which I find equally appealing and useful. The second half of the verse identifying the nature of the emplotment and entanglement is paralleled in Mk 12.13, but it is the Matthean narrator that seems compelled to make the implicit plot of the discourse explicit in the story, and in doing so creates a scapegoat within the story.

How we think about plot directly influences the way we conceptualize and interpret characters (and vice versa); the two are inextricable. The reader is reminded again of James's coalescence of character and incident (i.e., plot, action) mentioned earlier.[11] But the relationship between these two key aspects of narrative is more complicated than the quote from James would suggest. James shows a clear preference for characters and the

11. 'What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?' ('The Art of Fiction', p. 58). Notwithstanding James's firm entrenchment in the realist tradition and his propensity for depictions of psychological depth, Martin rightly identifies in James's perspective a fundamental agreement with formalists and (later) structuralists like Tomashevsky, Propp, and (early) Barthes. More nuanced theories of characters and characterization have since been advanced, naturally, which do not regard characters as nothing more than 'verbal scraps…held loosely together by a proper name' (*Recent Theories of Narrative*, pp. 118-19).

character aspect in his statement. However, as the example from *Leucippe and Clitophon* demonstrates, characters are utterly dependent upon the discourse for their existence and everything that existence entails. In some respects, this seems like an obvious point, but I think we fail to appreciate the ramifications in the case of historical figures resituated in narrative contexts, such as we have with someone like Jesus.

Recalling Roemer's argument, summarized above in Chapter 2, literary characters are completely and fundamentally constrained by the plots they serve. There is no character within a narrative that also stands outside or independent of it. Characters enter a plot already in play before their arrival and that continues once they are gone. Their existence is contained by that plot. Although heroes may appear to overcome and escape the challenges they face in the story, they never escape the plot itself.

I think Mk 7.24 provides an excellent example. The text reads simply, '[Jesus] could not be hid', or 'he was not able to escape notice' (cf. Mk 1.45; 6.31-33). Naturally, commentators—even those sensitive to narrative structures, elements, and techniques—make little of this remark. It is taken simply as another indication of Jesus' popularity, challenging his ability to keep the movement quiet and to curtail misunderstanding regarding his purpose. As far as the narrative discourse is concerned, however, the purpose of the Jesus character is precisely to be both seen and heard, to be displayed for view and put forward for consideration. The dissonance that results between internal (or perhaps rather the horizontal/intradiegetic, i.e., Jesus and the other characters in the episode) and external (or the vertical/extradiegetic, i.e., the figures and the omniscient narrator of Mark's gospel) levels of the narrative—in a word, between or at the intersection of story and discourse—reflects the inherent paradox of narrative discourse.[12] Moreover, in illustrating the extent to which the discourse always trumps the character, it raises important questions about the effect of narrating the life of an historical individual.

As noted in Chapter 1, it is in this manner that story itself (vs. stor*ies*) reflects the human condition. The knowledge we have as storytellers and readers that characters are subject to plots beyond the scope of their awareness always makes us superior to the characters. As 'paper people, without flesh and blood',[13] literary figures are not truly 'aware' of anything.[14] All

12. Cranfield (*The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, p. 246) thus says more than he may have realized when he identifies this second καί as 'adversative' (cf. similar uses at 6.19, 20, 21).

13. Bal, *Narratology*, p. 115.

14. It could be argued that, in a manner of speaking, even the narrator, seemingly in control of the story and its telling, is equally subject to the plot insofar as the narrator is also an element of narrative. Biblical narrative critics tend to move too easily from narrators or implied authors to flesh and blood writers. This, I think, is partly the result

literary characters are 'creatures of discourse', stuck in a story world that is always provisional and completely inescapable.[15] Characters are inextricably bound up in words. The narrative constitutes the reality it represents.

In view of what we read from Barthes above, however, we cannot stop there. Therefore, I want to return again to the excerpt from *S/Z* that I touched on briefly in Chapter 1. Barthes contrasts a 'realistic view of *character*', which is marked by the belief that a particular 'he' or 'she' has a life off the page, with a 'realistic view of *discourse*', which regards the story being told as a mechanism that must function until its termination. In the case of the former we will look for motivations in order to articulate causality and provide rationale for the events of the story. In the case of the latter, we will account for certain actions differently, i.e., without resort to motivations. The events portrayed will be taken as necessary manifestations of an immutable logic that demands that certain things happen (or do not happen), are said (or are not said) in order that the narrative can continue to its end. By the same token, however, both perspectives, even though at odds with one another fundamentally, facilitate each other. Each makes possible and prolongs the life of the other. These two notions, two arguments of causation, overlap so fully that a single statement expressing either will simultaneously contain the other and allow for such a reading. Barthes summarizes and extends his point:

> *…the character and the discourse are each other's accomplices*: the discourse creates in the character its own accomplice: a form of theurgical detachment by which, mythically, God has given himself a subject, man a helpmate, etc., whose relative independence, once they have been created, allows for *playing*. Such is discourse: if it creates characters, it is not to make them play among themselves before us but to play with them, to obtain from them a complicity which assures the uninterrupted exchange of the codes: the characters are types of discourse and, conversely, the discourse is a character like the others.[16]

of relying more heavily on historical information (e.g., concerning writing techniques) than on literary theory (e.g., concerning the dynamics of narrative discourse apart from authorial intentions) to govern interpretation.

15. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 41. Arguably, this also would include 'real' 'historical' figures translated into narrative accounts.

16. Barthes, *S/Z*, pp. 178-79, author's emphasis. The 'codes'—intersecting threads or sites of meaning—analyzed by Barthes in *S/Z* are neatly summarized by Culler (*Barthes*, p. 70): the 'proairetic code' refers to models of action that help readers place details in plot sequences so as to make sense of the action. The 'hermeneutic code' governs mystery and suspense so that readers are able to identify interpretive problems and the details pertaining to their solution. The 'semic code' deals directly with characterization insofar as it draws on cultural stereotypes to enable readers to assemble bits of information pertinent to the construction of characters. The 'symbolic code' provides for the translation of textual details to symbolic meaning. Finally, the 'referential code' is a sort

What stands out immediately is the reintroduction of the theological, the divine, the mythic, the mysterious. It is similar to what we encountered in Roemer, but there is an importance difference. Whereas Roemer's analogy is made on the basis of immutability—plot, like fate, is inviolable—Barthes' analogy has more to do with indeterminacy, or one might say indecipherability. Barthes' remarks on the play of novelistic discourse trouble readings that are intended to pinpoint firmly locatable sources of meaning in historical persons and events, in facts, and introduce instead an element of instability, uncertainty, and risk. But with the latter comes also a sense of infinite possibility. It creates an opportunity for—nay, invites—readings and interpretations that are bold, even gaudy and outlandish. Readers are empowered, even unwittingly at times, to read and interpret texts in endlessly variable ways according to their contexts (and intertexts).

Writing about characters and characterization earlier in *S/Z*, Barthes takes up the aspect of the Proper Name, distinguishing between the *figure*—'an impersonal network of symbols combined under the proper name'—and the *person*—'a moral freedom endowed with motives and an overdetermination of meanings'. When we read and analyze narrative texts, we *construct* rather than discover characters. Barthes writes,

> we are developing connotations, not pursuing investigations; we are not searching for the truth of Sarrasine, but for the systematics of a (transitory) site of the text: we mark this site (under the name Sarrasine) so it will take its place among the alibis of the narrative operation, in the indeterminable network of meanings, in the plurality of codes.[17]

The Proper Name, being as it is a matter of economy, a method of bookkeeping whereby it stands in as (i.e., represents) a sum value, a *figure*, is then a sort of cipher.

Despite the fact that Barthes is theorizing these innate aspects of narrative while dealing specifically with a work of modern fiction in *S/Z*, his point should not be dismissed on those grounds as being irrelevant for texts like the Gospel of Mark when they are *perceived as*—i.e., narrated as—reports, histories, or even rhetorical tracts containing bits of reliable evidence (if mined properly) designed to communicate a particular ideology. I

of intertextual register, 'a series of cultural codes that are most easily thought of as so many manuals providing the cultural information on which texts rely'.

17. Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 95. Allen (*Roland Barthes*, pp. 86-88) points out that these codes are not resident in the text awaiting some properly trained reader to tune into them; rather, they are tools of the reader (in this case, Barthes himself) brought to the text in order to actively and productively structure it. They 'register the "difference" of the text', which is not its singularity but its plurality—'the unfinished and unfinishable nature of its significance'. While the proairetic and hermeneutic codes work to close that plurality, the semic, symbolic, and referential codes work against any such closure.

am convinced that what Barthes is saying is not genre specific. It has little to do with genre, in fact, and pertains directly to matters of form, function, and signification. Narrative *discourse*, regardless of the supposed factuality of it content, is subject to (and subjects its content to) the constraints that give rise to this indecipherability. To be sure, texts like the Gospel of Mark may well be and do all those things; it is an historical artifact. But the nature of their form circumvents and destabilizes every would-be influence, dictate, and constraint employed to accomplish a particular end. The Proper Name is not a guarantor of historicity, reality, or stability. I would even go so far as to say that the Proper Name—names like Jesus, John, Peter, Moses, and Elijah, to put a finer point on it—actually augment and heighten the indeterminability, thereby frustrating any representational or communicative interest of the narrator. For Barthes, 'all subversion, or all novelistic submission, thus begins with the Proper Name'.[18]

What is in view from this point forward is not the novel but the novelistic—'the novel minus story and characters: fragments of astute observation, details of the world as bearers of second-order meaning'.[19] In the preceding chapters, I have not been interested in studying *a* character so much as analyzing characterization, being attuned specifically to other aspects of narrative discourse that fragment and subvert that process. In this final chapter, I will continue in this vein. The goal is not to sketch a character study of Jesus in Mark's gospel. I will not produce, per se, another picture of Jesus either as an historical person or as a unique literary character imbued with particular traits and qualities. Rather, by taking plot as a function or consequence of narrative discourse, and by attending to details of the narrative that evoke second-order meaning, I will develop connotations. I will not be searching for the truth of Jesus, but for the systematics of a transitory site of the text marked by the name 'Jesus'.

18. Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 95.

19. Culler, *Barthes*, p. 29; cf. Allen, *Roland Barthes*, pp. 108-12. In *S/Z*, Barthes states: 'the writerly is the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure' (p. 5). For an illustration, see Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (trans. Richard Howard; New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), which one might describe as a story without a plot. Allen describes it this way: '*A Lover's Discourse* is a novelistic text. It is a text which presents a fictional character (intertextually compiled out of pieces of literary, philosophical, experiential and other kinds of discourse) whose condition it is to live in a novelistic fiction wishing that they lived in another kind of fiction' (p. 112). Novelistic writing blurs the distinction between fiction and criticism. Recognizing that the two are ultimately indistinguishable Barthes self-reflectively notes in the epigraph to *Roland Barthes*, 'It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel'.

'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ'

The Markan prologue imitates a beginning, an inception.[20] It initiates and sets in motion that which will come to constitute *this* particular narrative, such as the setting(s), characters, and plot. Narratives must always start somewhere, but they never originate. Narratives emerge *in medias res*; they do not form *ex nihilo*. But one would be hard pressed to find a narrative that betrays any desire to be born out of nothing. Narrative plots are concerned with making connections, in varying degrees, to the past, present, and future. But in the effort to tether a narrative the story only accentuates its boundless, polyvalent, and multidirectional makeup.

Thus, despite the fact that Mk 1.1-13 is overburdened with the weighty task of laying the foundation for the plot that is to follow, and is especially pressed to position (or at least to set the stage for) Jesus as the protagonist, we encounter there a number of details that have as their cumulative effect the destabilization of the very thing they seek to construct: namely, a (purposeful) beginning that qualifies a narratively figured character as a representative stand in, a God-sent delegate, an envoy properly prefaced. The narrator's effort to establish the narrative by weaving it into historical and theological time betrays a desire to imitate and re-present an actual reality, to connect literary and political forms of representation. It is as if the narrative is caught in a struggle against its own inevitable demise, and also against the unpredictability of the contradictory or disruptive tendencies pulsing through its body, even against its own incredulity (or perhaps the potential disbelief it anticipates on the part of its audience). The narrator aims to 'begin' the story *in medias res* so as to suggest that the 'imagined community' founded by Jesus does not come into being *ex nihilo*. Mark asserts that *this* Messiah and *this* community *authentically* lay claim to the myths of Israel's origins, which is to say that theirs is the most appropriate reading of those myths, or rather that their reading of Jesus is affirmed in and through an adept reading of those myths. The urgency of this narrative move becomes even more apparent later, when the Markan Jesus warns his disciples about the deceptive claims made by pseudo-Messiahs (13.5-6, 21-23)—warnings which threaten to undermine the promise and direction

20. I consider 1.13 to conclude Mark's prologue (cf. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*; Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*; *et al.*). The issue is subject to much debate. The case for extending the prologue to v. 15 is supported by Boring, *Mark*; Collins, *Mark*; Smith, *Lion with Wings*; *et al.* The lack of consensus only reinforces the point that structure is not innate to narratives but imposed upon them. My decision to close the segment at v. 13 notwithstanding, the prologue, as far as Mark's narrative is concerned, is inseparable from 1.14-15 insofar as it qualifies Jesus' announcement of the kingdom. It establishes the narrator's own reading of that announcement.

of Jesus' own messenger at the empty tomb in 16.6-7, and bring us full circle to the destabilization of this narrative that is responsible for representing the figure of Jesus. The instability in this initial characterization of Jesus thwarts the structural function of the pericope to ground the story that follows.

The narrator of Mark, like all narrators, attempts to disguise the arbitrary nature of the narrative's starting point by diverting the reader's intention. First, the narrator uses a deeply ambiguous marker (ἀρχή), and then poses a back story—both so as to veil the story of reading that is taking place here in this very narrative. 'The beginning of the gospel' points at once in a plurality of different directions.[21] It can refer to the scriptural or prophetic precedent, as if to say, the good news of Jesus Christ begins in the foretelling and the preparation. It can signify the initiation of Jesus' ministry under the tutelage of John the Baptist and at the banks of the Jordan River. The word ἀρχή can denote the sense of 'norm' (i.e., suggesting that the narrative about to unfold is the standard against which all other portrayals should be judged), as well as 'source' or 'origin' (e.g., of the church's message, its gospel). It can refer even to the text itself, i.e., functioning as a title to the narrative.

The interpretive uncertainty here (i.e., whether the opening phrase refers to the narrative itself or its content) was noted in the previous chapter. As indicated earlier, I am interested in how the two possibilities intersect and intercept one another. While the narrator may be trying to duck into the shadows, as all omniscient narrators of pre-modern literature do, to divert the reader's attention away from his presence and to collapse the distance between the narrative and the act of narration, he does not, however, seem interested in drawing attention away from the fabric of the narrative and its irreducibility, its inextricability from the life and gospel it is about to portray. The 'good news' will recount and recast an alternative 'way of the Lord' that will turn out to be a way of reading and writing. Seeing the alternatives multiply as they do, each setting off its own interpretive course (and along with it, of necessity, imposing limits also), I am struck by the number that have essentially to do with textuality, replete with a sense of that which is inscribed, marked, recorded, the written—the composition (or compositional quality) of origins; the publication of the good news.

21. See Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, pp. 34-35. Though noted by most commentators, see in particular Boring, 'Mark 1:1-15'. Boring (*Mark*, 29-32) identifies four possibilities based on syntactical uncertainty, notes the combined sense of 'beginning' and 'norm' inherent in the word, and also calls attention to the dual signification of both chronology and source or origin. He opts for taking ἀρχή as the title affixed to the work by the original author (versus the κατὰ Μάρκον attached by later tradition).

The opening of Mark references an ambiguous, multidirectional, and *fluid* 'beginning'. The reader finds herself in the midst of a chain letter. The beginning of the good news is an inscription functioning as both epigraph and epilogue. The prophet Isaiah, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, John, Jesus—all of them sent and senders, envoys and letters.

The indeterminacy that follows ἀρχή compounds as the prologue continues and the emplotment of Jesus—which is, in Mark, essentially, the substance of his characterization by virtually all counts—gets underway. Opening with a multidirectional (and therefore undecidable) set of possibilities concerning what kind of text this is, the prologue lays out an assortment of vignettes that, in light of what precedes and what follows, simultaneously affect both the narrative and the figure of Jesus. There is first the figure of John the Baptist (vv. 4-8). The portrayal of his activity, his appearance, and his announcement—one of deference and deferral, a repetition and an embodiment of the forward-looking but recast, reoriented words of the prophet. This, in turn, overlaps with the arrival, the advent of Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee and his baptism (vv. 9-11). Finally, the temptation (1.12-13), or rather the transportation of Jesus to the wilderness, carves a void into the very outset of the narrative, while also bracketing the pericope (cf. 1.3). Together, these episodes all have to do with preparation in the narrative and self-reflective, self-referential interpretation of the narrative.

Jesus, as described earlier in my comments on dialogue and represented speech in Chapter 4, is positioned at once both as linguistic object spoken into being by a narrative discourse, and as speaking subject. In the midst of the phrase '(the good news) of Jesus Christ', the Proper Name is thrust upon the reader. It arrives initially without any content or context immediately available from the narrative with which to interpret it. Ideally, the Proper Name sets apart and distinguishes. From the outset, though, this name is perfectly ordinary.[22] The Proper Name is a 'fundamental cohesive factor'.[23] It is something affixed to a point of intersection, at the pile up of repeated traits, implications, catalogued similarities and differences. The narrator of Mark, one would gather both from the opening and from the narrative as a whole, is concerned with illustrating who this character is, what this figure is like. It is interesting, therefore, with respect to the plot aspect of the narrative, that this character is already so overdetermined by the prologue. He is enshrouded by and written into both another story and a particular trajectory of reading that story, described as one more powerful

22. Cranfield (*The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, p. 37) points to a number of familiar 'Jesuses' (variously spelled and pronounced, to be sure) from the lexicon of the Hebrew Bible.

23. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p. 39.

than John, baptized, designated by indeterminately locatable voices outside the story but inside the discourse as 'Son of God', and then driven into the wilderness to be tempted and tended to—all before he is credited with uttering a single word. One is hard-pressed to 'correctly' identify this Jesus solely on the basis of the details provided in the narrative thus far. Nevertheless, readers who are well acquainted with the story and/or the character read according to assumptions already in play, re-cognizing that which fits with their understanding or can be easily assimilated, and navigating around (if not missing altogether) details of the story, fabula, and discourse that otherwise would undermine or compromise, dis-integrate that understanding.

Mark's opening, as noted above, asserts a (purposeful) beginning designed to qualify, authenticate, and validate a narratively figured character as a representative stand in, a delegate, an envoy. Weaving narrative and figure into historical and theological time might be read by some as an indication of a desire to imitate and re-present an actual reality, to connect literary and political forms of representation. Doing so might function to orient the story, 'beginning' it *in media res* so as to suggest that the 'imagined community' founded by Jesus does not come into being *ex nihilo*. Mark asserts that *this* Messiah and *this* community *authentically* lay claim to the myths of Israel's origins. But this possibility is further undermined in that the narrating, the storying of the figure also points to the figurative quality of the history and myths themselves. All that this narrative can really lay claim to is an interpretive tradition, a reading. Later, when the Markan Jesus warns his disciples about the deceptive claims made by pseudo-messiahs, it reflects the precariousness of an identity fabricated in this manner. The ever-present potential for misreading is dangerous (and, ironically, necessary).[24] However, Mark's gospel also reflects an awareness that no other path is available; that is to say it seems to relish the playfulness of language, and to invite participation on the part of the readers despite the risk.

With the voice from heaven at 1.11 comes the Spirit to impel Jesus toward wilderness (1.12). He is but one of many characters whose supposed agency and autonomy will be involuntarily conceded (1.14; 3.19; 9.31, et al.) Banished and exposed to the wilderness, Jesus here begins his 'service' in a manner that anticipates the way he will be subjected to the plot as a character, the complication of his agency, and that seems to undermine his capacity to act. Were we to retain the customary distinction between story and discourse, it would be noted that this effect happens at both levels. Within the story, it is the Spirit that exercises unimpeded control over Jesus; in the discourse, the narration ensures that all that befalls Jesus happens 'as it is written'.

24. See Aichele, 'The Possibility of Error'.

The importance of this scene is not limited to any light it sheds on Jesus in particular but extends to its pre-figuring of the subjugation of all characters to their narration, anticipating Roemer's argument. The 'forces' Jesus stands against within the framework of the plot are beyond his reach as a narrative figure.[25] He is deployed in a plot already in play before his arrival and that will continue once he is gone. The inescapability of plot, meanwhile, will confront us again and perhaps most forcefully at the passion.

The temptation of Jesus in Mark's gospel (1.12-13) is stark and austere, the barrenness of its detail reflecting the bleakness of the landscape in which it is set. The non-specificity of the place turns out to be all too specific in its signification. The transportation of Jesus to the wilderness carves a certain void into the very outset of the narrative. The 'wilderness' brackets the pericope (cf. 1.3); it evokes the wanderings of the Israelites (as does the reference to 'forty days' paralleling forty years of exodus), while the 'wild beasts' populating it evoke ever-present sufferings, and the angels waiting on Jesus offers a glimpse of the ongoing cosmic warfare that will be running as a parallel plot throughout the narrative. The wilderness is something that comes to factor substantively in both the plot and the characterization of Jesus. At 1.35, Jesus ventures out—who or what is the driving force on this occasion?—to a lonely or deserted place. As he prays, others pursue and search, and upon finding out, his response is to wander elsewhere, saying that to do so is the very reason he has come. In 6.30-44, the first of the two feeding stories, reference is made three times to setting, which again is a lonely, deserted place. In the feeding story, the setting accentuates the link made earlier with Israel's exodus, and the other references to Jesus wandering off in search of isolation are frequently tied to the so-called messianic secret motif. But what if we were to take the wilderness in Mark as a metaphor for the narrative itself? It is, after all, there that the prospect of both temptation and nourishment exist. It is in the wilderness of the text that the figure is bounded, where the character wanders, always exposed to the gaze of the reader.

Above the mention of 'forty days' was said to further connect the story with the wandering Israelites, but it is also reminiscent of the narratives of Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod. 24.9-18) and Elijah at Mount Horeb where angels provided for him (1 Kgs 19.4-9; note also how John's appearance in verse 6 conjures up images of Elijah as well, e.g., 2 Kgs 1.8)—figures we will see again at the transfiguration. But what is the nature of the evocation? Scholars will point to the stories as indicators of meaning, guides to how this episode in the Markan narrative should be read (viz., in the eyes of the author). But we quickly find ourselves in the midst of infinite regress. What

25. Roemer, *Telling Stories*, p. 42.

story precedes the one alluded to in Mark in order to explain it? How are we to decide between two alternatives? What if, for instance, the clothing of John is a disguise intended to mislead (cf. Zech. 13.4)? What if allusions are diversions? Jesus himself will warn against being mislead by those that would direct you here or there in search of the Messiah only to find that you have latched onto a charlatan, an impostor. Therefore, let us imagine instead that something else is signified—namely, narrativity, a processes of signification itself.

Let us now return to where we began (and, in so doing, look forward to where we will end, in a manner of speaking). Reference to something having been 'written' is made seven times in the Gospel of Mark.[26] Each functions as a sort of (pre)script that accounts, in some manner, for the events unfolding (as well as the words being said amidst them). Adela Yarbro Collins points out that the reference at 1.2 'is the most complete and explicit citation of scripture in the Gospel of Mark'.[27] Elsewhere, the narrator cites scripture without reference to any specific text or author. In other instances, the narrator refers generally to 'the scriptures' without any clear indication of what, if any, specific text(s) is in view. The most vague, non-specific of these references to 'the written' are at 9.12 and 14.21, both of which speak of matters pertaining to the Son of Man unfolding in some manner related to what 'is written'. 'The written' suggests specificity, stability, a rule or record, a canonicity, a promise and guarantee. However, readers are forced, when reading these references, either to search in vain for the specific script(ure) in view, or to assume and extrapolate the sense, the gist of what is evoked. And in either case, they must account for why it is the narrator is not more specific, and determine what role the ambiguity plays. These ambiguous and indeterminate references must, of necessity, signify in a different way, and perhaps signify even some other thing.

Just as we found in the opening pages of *Leucippe and Clitophon*, the Gospel of Mark provides us with a remarkably loaded declaration, overburdened with implication and extending well beyond the intentioned limits presumably set for it. Like the words of Clitophon to the narrator, it too is highly suggestive and offers readers a glimpse into a reality just as fundamental as (and perhaps even more terrifying than) the episode itself vis-à-vis the 'good news' of the gospel. In Mk 14.17-21, while celebrating Passover with his disciples, just before instituting the Lord's Supper, Jesus announces that one among them will betray him. The text reads (in the RSV):

26. Viz., 1.2; 7.6; 9.12, 13; 11.17; 14.21; 14.27. Citations and allusions to scripture appear elsewhere, but these are the only ones framed explicitly as having been written, as existing in writing (note the perfect tense, γέγραπται).

27. Collins, *Mark*, p. 135.

> [17] And when it was evening he came with the twelve. [18] And as they were at table eating, Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me'. [19] They began to be sorrowful, and to say to him one after another, 'Is it I?' [20] He said to them, 'It is the one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. [21] For the Son of man goes as it is written of him (ὅτι ὁ μὲν υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὑπάγει καθὼς γέγραπται περὶ αὐτοῦ), but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.

Verse 21 is, for me, the point upon which everything turns. Commentators typically read the verse as a sign of cooperation between Divine intention and human will, an indication of Jesus' dutiful surrender to the purposes of God standing in sharp contrast (μὲν … δέ) to the betrayer who acts of his own accord.[28] The first question, of course, has to do with *where* 'it is written'. The answers offered most frequently are Ps. 41.9; Dan. 9.26; and Isaiah 53, but the truth is that none of these are certain. Taylor rightly notes that since there is no direct Hebrew Bible reference, the saying is only intelligible in the mind of someone who has already made an identity association between the Son of man and the suffering servant.[29]

Robert Gundry points to the 'causal ὅτι [that] introduces Scripture as the reason for the giving over of Jesus; i.e., the OT assigns to him the fate of going away in this manner…'[30] Likewise, Alexander Bruce argues that the ὅτι assigns a reason for the fact just stated. 'To fulfill Scripture (Ps xli. 9)', he writes, 'the Son of Man must go from the earth through betrayal by an intimate'.[31] As I have indicated previously, assigning reasons, concocting causality is one of the primary characteristics of narrative. Such is the nature and function of plot, and of emplotment. Here, interpreters are not simply identifying and analyzing the plot of Mark's gospel. They themselves are actively engaging in the emplotment of both Jesus *and* the narrator of Mark. Of even greater interest and significance to me is the fact that an explicitly *textual* reason is offered. The raison d'être that the Son of man is (to be) betrayed in 14.21, even the explanation as to why it is one of the Twelve, the very one dipping bread into the dish alongside the hand of Jesus, is because the Son of Man goes *as it is written*. This is the second

28. See, e.g., G.A. Chadwick, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1905); Taylor, *The Gospel according to St Mark*; A. Elwood Sanner, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1964); Walter W. Wessel, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984). On the parallel in Mt. 26.24, see, e.g., D.A. Carson, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

29. Taylor, *St Mark*, p. 542.

30. Gundry, *Mark*, p. 828.

31. Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 437.

time since 9.12 that 'the narrator has Jesus explicitly connect the death of the Son of Man with what is written of him'.[32] The link between death and writing takes on new meaning within the framework of my analysis, and more specifically with respect to the figuration of Jesus as a character. Betrayal, death, and writing share a profound connection.

With this in mind, let us consider the connection with death and ὑπάγει. Perkins, Bruce, Sanner, Allen, Gould, McKenzie, Carson all concur that the entire focus of the meal is Jesus' death, marked by betrayal (vv. 17-21) and denial (vv. 26-31).[33] These and the majority of other commentators agree that Jesus is speaking self-referentially and in a mode of prediction. Jesus' destiny and destination are his demise: it is to his death that Jesus *goes*. Gundry nuances it slightly, taking ὑπάγει to mean 'is going away' and thus connecting it to the 'is being given over'. Taylor, too, offers a subtle nuance, reading it as 'goes his way' (cf. Jn 8.14, 21f.; 13.3, 33; 14.4, 28). Hence, Taylor regards it as something characteristic of Jesus (i.e., historically): 'it describes a *voluntary* act of "homegoing" on the part of the Son of Man in fulfillment of what "stands written concerning him"'.[34] Of course, the nuance notwithstanding, death remains the primary referent even for Taylor and Gundry. The manhandling of Jesus (and other figures in the narrative) is a theological trope. However, in his treatment of the parallel in Mt. 26.24, Ulrich Luz states, 'as a simple word, ὑπάγειν (to go) has no more the figurative sense of "to die" in the Synoptics than it does elsewhere in Greek or Jewish literature. It is the context that gives it this nuance—a meaning with which then the fourth evangelist plays (8.14, 21; cf. 7.33; 13.3).'[35] At this point, two observations are in order. First, the nuance of which Luz speaks is not only that of the text (whether Matthew or Mark is in view) but also that of the reader-interpreter. Second—and of much greater interest as far as my analysis is concerned—the 'death' in view is not only that of the historical Jesus at the hands of the Romans but that of the figure inscribed in this narrative at its imminent conclusion. The cessation of writing results in departure, demise, expiry. The character

32. Bas M.F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* (trans. W.H. Bisscheroux; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 423.

33. Perkins, *The Gospel of Mark*; Bruce, *Synoptic Gospels*; Sanner, 'The Gospel according to Mark', pp. 261-416; Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St Matthew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907); Ezra P. Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St Mark* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907); John L. McKenzie, 'The Gospel according to Matthew', in Raymond E. Brown and Joseph A. Fitzmyer (eds.), *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, II (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 62-114.

34. Taylor, *St Mark*, p. 542, my emphasis.

35. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 360.

cannot go on without a narrative to sustain it. Here then is the crux: the Son of Man *goes as it is written of him* insofar as what is written of him (in both Mark's Gospel and the chapter in front of me) determines him. Moreover, the Son of Man goes *as* it is written of him; in the very moment of writing his very existence and destiny hang. I will return to this below.

Let us speak then, finally, to the issue of the betrayer. Jesus' words, καλὸν αὐτῷ εἰ (cf. 9.42-48), occur in reference to punishment to be feared by those who cause the downfall of others.[36] If Jesus' death was, in some way, necessary, unavoidable, and inviolable, what then is the purpose of the betrayer and the betrayal? McKenzie remarks in passing, 'the death of Jesus is inevitable [because he goes] "as it is written"'. But he mistakenly thinks that 'it is not inevitable that one of his disciples should betray him'.[37] One could argue the point on theological grounds, perhaps, but it does not hold with respect to the narrative plot. The betrayer and his act of betrayal are there, in part, to disguise and divert attention away from other, somewhat more disturbing acts of betrayal taking place, as we shall see. 'Even the threatening words of Jesus…', writes van Iersel, 'are apparently unable to change that course of events.'[38] Indeed. And insofar as I am reading the death of the Son of Man as that of a literary figure vanishing by virtue of his storied life concluding, the relationship (perhaps we should say identification) between narrator, character(s), readers and betrayer/betrayal cannot be overlooked.

It is striking to me that nowhere in their respective discussions of Mark's characterization of Jesus specifically, or even of the Markan narrative generally, do narrative critics like Malbon, Resseguie, Smith, or Rhoads make any mention of Mk 14.21. The supposed 'obviousness' of its reference, meaning, and function is so deeply assumed that those best positioned (and, one could argue, most called upon) to make something of this verse overlook it altogether. George Aichele, however, in *Jesus Framed*, *does* make reference to it, always with regard to issues of framing, self-referentiality, scripture, and betrayal. In the opening chapter of the book, Aichele analyzes the artifices in and through which the narrator frames the characters and events, which in turn undermines any factuality they may otherwise intend or seem to represent. Part of Aichele's argument concerning 14.21 is that Mark refers to itself as scripture. The betrayal has been prophesied '*intra*textually' in Jesus' passion predictions (8.31; 9.31; 10.33-34). This only works, however, if one equates Jesus with the Son of Man, because it is actually the latter that Jesus says will be betrayed, and such a connection is never perfectly certain. Returning to the betrayal and the betrayer, Aichele

36. Van Iersel, *Mark*, p. 423.
37. McKenzie, 'The Gospel according to Matthew', p. 108.
38. Van Iersel, *Mark*, p. 423.

points out that Judas is not the only betrayer in the narrative. Peter also betrays Jesus. 'Mark presents both Judas and Peter, then, as fulfilling the scriptures. Both of these characters share, along with numerous others in Mark, the responsibility for the death of Jesus.'[39] Aichele then goes another step further. Shifting his attention from the frames to the framed, he demonstrates that, while various characters within the trial sequence fail to frame Jesus, the Markan narrative itself frames him perfectly. Moreover, in the course of doing so, it places Jesus in a position where he betrays himself in his response to the high priest's question.[40] But once again, Jesus' supposed confession of his identity is an indication of its confusion and incoherence.

I see the self-referentiality of Mk 14.21 as inextricably entangled with the act of writing itself, and also with the narrating, the telling of this story, this fiction, this πλάσμα. I see in it a glimmer of the novelistic. 'The son of man goes *as it is written* of him' is, for me, an explicit (though incidental) crack in the surface of the narrative whereby the narrative exhibits an awareness if itself. It is a rupturing of the narrative artifice. Similar to Barthes' reality effect, this verse signifies not only a tradition or a heritage, not only a sense of foreordination and fulfillment, but a sense of allegiance to imposed constraints concerning the legitimization of the Messiah, together with an exposure of the unstable, uncertain, and non-obvious nature of those constraints, i.e., the artificiality of those constraints. It embodies all the immediacy of the Markan linguistic style, with its 'historical presents', pileups of simplistic conjunctions that leave one short of breath, and markers of time that quicken the pace—until we reach the passion, that is, at which point the narrative almost seems to catch up with itself. And with this embodied immediacy comes also the fleetingness, the rush of consumption, evaporation, disappearance, vanishing, erasure that marks those things that cannot be forever grasped. 'The son of man goes as it is written of him' points expressly to the fact that Jesus, in the context of a narrative, as a word, is a discursive construct, a fundamentally textual figure, that operates, performs, becomes, always already, *as* he is written—that is to say, both *in the way* that he is written, and *in the moment* that he is written. Hence, in these moments when we witness the character of Jesus characterizing the Son of Man, the

39. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, p. 20. I find fascinating the way in which commentators typically absolve Peter while doubly condemning Judas by explaining his actions as avoidable (despite the unavoidability of Jesus' death pre-scribed in the same writing). Perhaps it reveals a lingering or shadowy sense of internal uncertainty, culpability, and compunction regarding our own endless reading and writing of Jesus. Hoping and believing that we do our very best and might one day get it right, we will always be more inclined to favor one type of necessity over the other; we will always permit the err of being human before we will accept the predetermination of fate.

40. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, pp. 22-23.

narrator narrates Jesus narrating himself.[41] We find ourselves caught in the midst of an echo. Jesus speaks in the third person of himself as an Other and thereby the text refracts a moment of candor and transparency, revealing not the essence of a person but the inner workings of subjectivity and narrative discourse.

Each reference to 'the scriptures', to instances and places where 'it is written', brings us back the gospel's 'beginning' and to its indisguisable obsession with writing. Granted, this obsession is nothing like Matthew's, for example, but it differs only in terms of type not in degree. Matthew's is a slavish attachment to the written word, a desperate search for precision, pinpoint accuracy, legal demonstration. Mark's obsession, on the other hand, is not with the word but with its writing.

Collins notices that 'Mark 1.2 is unique insofar as it is the only scriptural citation made by the narrator, whereas the others are made by characters in the narrative',[42] but, as might be expected, she makes nothing of her observation. Given that everything I have said to this point problematizes distinctions between story and discourse, what if we were to resist the breaks and pauses, the syntactical structurations imposed on the text by punctuation and, for instance, refuse to separate at the level of the sentence '(the good news) of Jesus Christ' and 'as it is written', instead taking them together so as to say, 'as the figure is written so begins the narrative', or 'the figure begins in writing'? This story takes place in/within what is written. The narrator sets in motion a way of reading. In a manner similar to the opening of *Leucippe and Clitophon*, the characters write and narrate their own story, as it were. This sheds a different light on a verse like 9.13. To whatever extent the figure of Elijah can be read not only as a code or role for the figure of John the Baptist but also as a stand-in for a certain writing, then we might read the phrase, 'they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him', vis-à-vis Jesus' caution to 'beware of the scribes' (Mk 12.38) as a self-reflective indicator of the narrative's innate potential for misreading. Jesus' critique, after all, centers on the scribes extravagant reading of the Law.

41. O'Neill (*Fictions of Discourse*, pp. 58-66, 76-82) argues that, by virtue of their embeddedness, *all* character-narrators are unreliable *theoretically*. This raises interesting interpretive questions. The issue is not whether or to what extent the historical Jesus was trustworthy, but rather how to (or on what grounds we) resolve the indeterminacy concerning whose voice we 'hear' when we read 'his' words in the narrative. Meanwhile, if Jesus, as a character, is a cipher for reading-writing, then the narrative of the gospel is not unlike the tabernacles Peter proposed at the transfiguration.

42. Collins, *Mark*, p. 135. Here is an excellent illustration of how deeply and thoroughly narrative critical terminology has been absorbed into the dominant historical-critical discourse of the field. It is hardly shocking to find this sort of language in a commentary series so well known and highly regarded for its traditional methodology and perspective.

'And he was trans-figured before them'

In the transfiguration episode, which occurs at roughly the center of Mark's Gospel, focalization, dialogue, and plot intersect richly. The strategic placement of this scene in relation to Mark's over all plot and structure is such that 'transfiguration' functions as a particularly apt description, and carries within it both a sort of self-reflexivity and an irony. Andrew Wilson's recent study of the Markan transfiguration episode provides an excellent summary of how biblical scholars have read this remarkable event in the narrative.[43] He points out that, on the surface, the transfiguration incident is a relatively straightforward and obvious matter: 'the transfiguration reveals the glory of God and affirms the glorious identity of his Son'.[44] The episode is both structurally and theological significant with respect to a perceived Markan program of rendering 'the fullness of Christ's glorious personhood'. As such, the scene is ultimately one of clarification. It is an interpretive key to unlocking the meaning of Jesus' messianic identity for the *author* (as historical critics, for example, would see it) of Mark's gospel. Having said this, however, Wilson demonstrates through his survey of the passage's reception that the pericope is cluttered with all sorts of enigmatic elements that interpreters are forced to navigate in creative ways lest those awkward details be permitted to disrupt the story and its role. Not content to overlook such details himself, Wilson segues to his own deconstructionist rereading of the transfiguration wondering whether 'the perceived Markan plot line [is] actually subverted most vividly at this point'.[45]

Wilson divides the episode and the history of scholarship on it into eight elements or segments. The two that interest me most and that are most relevant for the reading I am performing have to do with defining the transfiguration (v. 2), and the appearance of Elijah and Moses (v. 4). In his survey of the criticism on verse 2, Wilson gives considerable space to the work of David Ulansey,[46] who connects the transfiguration of Jesus' gar-

43. Wilson, *Transfigured*, pp. 52-83.

44. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 52. Wilson does not appear to make use of the commentaries of Boring or Moloney in his study, and Collins's volume on Mark would not have been available to him at the time of writing. It is worth mentioning, however, that, despite Boring and Moloney focusing rather heavily on narrative aspects, and Collins taking an historical approach, none of them differ in any meaningful way from what Wilson illustrates from the vast body of literature on this pericope. I will also take this opportunity to point out another example of Collins appropriating narrative critical language. She says of the interlude in vv. 5-6 that it 'effectively slows down the action and builds suspense' (p. 424), aspects that suggest a narrative logic at work.

45. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 85.

46. Wilson, *Transfigured*, pp. 61-64. The study in view is David Ulansey, 'The Transfiguration, Cosmic Symbolism, and the Transformation of Consciousness in the Gospel

ments to the tearing of the heavens at Jesus' baptism in Mk 1.10 and to the tearing of the temple veil at Jesus' crucifixion in Mk 15.38. While Wilson rightly includes Ulansey's reading with the majority of others that interpret the transfiguration primarily in terms of its foreshadowing of Jesus' true inner glory and the glory to come at his resurrection, I am nonetheless attracted to Ulansey's emphasis on fabrics on account of the relationship to text(uality), weaving, and fabrication vis-à-vis characterization, narrative, and the written—something that Wilson himself will make much of in his reading of the transfiguration, as will be seen below.

On the appearance of Elijah and Moses, which some (e.g., Bultmann) have regarded as a Markan intervention, Wilson begins by drawing attention to the amount of narrative space given to these two figures (they are mentioned in three of the seven verses that makeup the pericope).[47] The customary interpretation of these figures is a symbolic one: Elijah and Moses represent the prophets and the Law, respectively—the order should not be overlooked since it is unique to Mark's gospel and 'corrected' by both Matthew and Luke, but broader, more general connections with the Hebrew scriptures have been made. Therein, for me, lies a great deal of their significance. It is not the specificity but the ironic lack of specificity and the proliferation of explanations it generates that I find important for my reading of Jesus' characterization in Mark. As Wilson notes, 'despite—or possibly because of—the richness of their associations, their particular role within the transfiguration passage and within Mark's Gospel story remains far from clear'.[48]

Boring identifies their importance in terms of salvation history in the past and eschatological denouement in the future, and Jesus' conversation with them positions him firmly within the line of salvation history, namely, 'as its climax and fulfiller'.[49] Moloney makes a point to address the unusual ordering, but it is not entirely clear what, if anything, he makes of it. He credits the prominence of Elijah in the surrounding narrative for

of Mark', which, at the time of Wilson's publication, was an unpublished paper presented at the 1996 SBL Annual Meeting. The full text is available at http://www.well.com/user/davidu/transfiguration2.html. See also David Ulansey, 'The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark's Cosmic Inclusio', *JBL* 110 (1991), pp. 123-25.

47. Wilson, *Transfigured*, pp. 67-72. Cf. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, pp. 178-79; Boring, *Mark*, pp. 261-62; Collins, *Mark*, pp. 422-24.

48. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 68. Wilson notes, however, in general, 'the tendency to interpret them either in terms of a coming fullness (parousia, eschaton), or else as a means of emphasizing the singular quality of this glorious vision of Jesus—something that goes beyond other associations and towards the fullest encounter with God's glory to date' (pp. 68-69).

49. Boring, *Mark*, p. 261. Boring makes other comparisons between the three characters as well, e.g., they are all prophetic figures, each rejected in his time.

his top billing here. He hones in on the tradition that Moses and Elijah had both been transported to heaven without tasting death, refers back to Mk 8.38, and concludes, 'the scene, therefore, is an anticipation of the glorification of Jesus that must take place by means of his suffering, death, and resurrection into glory'.[50] Collins also addresses the uncommon order and, on the basis of traditions concerning the translation of Elijah into heaven, takes it to mean that 'an important purpose of the transfiguration account is to foreshadow the transformation of Jesus' body and its translation into heaven'.[51] Collins argues against the familiar interpretation that takes Elijah and Moses as stand-ins for the prophets and the Law, stressing the appearance of Elijah *with* (σύν) Moses emphasizes the immortal quality all three figures share. The writer foregrounds Elijah on account of his eschatological significance.[52]

According to Wilson, a number of critics come close to reading the presence of Elijah and Moses in relation to Jesus' characterization insofar as they take Elijah and Moses as contrasting figures set alongside Jesus in order to set the nature and significance of his identity in sharper relief. John McGuckin and Robert Gundry, for instance, interpret Elijah and Moses as 'a type of commentary on the transfigured Jesus'.[53] Wilson concludes his section summarizing various treatments of these two figures by pointing out how odd it is that such an enigmatic detail as Jesus conversing with Elijah and Moses would not be developed in some way elsewhere in the narrative. 'Has the unsophisticated, awkward Mark returned? How else would one explain why, when Mark is seen to make the most of every literary nuance, he would include this detail and yet allow it essentially to go to waste?'[54] We will return to these questions and to the comments on these two important aspects of the transfiguration event—the nature of the transfiguring and the meaning of Elijah and Moses—in a moment. But first, we need to consider Wilson's own *re*reading of the episode.

Wilson approaches the transfiguration with more or less the same questions that have guided most scholars. However, since he is interested in

50. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 179.

51. Collins, *Mark*, p. 422.

52. The order is not of great concern to me here, but two ideas come to mind for a future study. First, the nature of the reversed order, the way it forces a stumble and so on, suggests that it may share something in common with both the seemingly incidental details scattered about the narrative (see above, Chapter 2, n. 98) and things categorized as mistakes (e.g., in geography) or bad form (e.g., the obsessive use of the καί conjunction). Second, if Elijah and Moses *can* be read as representatives of the prophets and the Law, then I wonder if the order inadvertently reflects the manner in which interpretation ironically precedes presentation.

53. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 69.

54. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 72.

answering those questions from a Derridean perspective, he attends first to 'those neglected and problematic details of the text that have thus far not played a major part in mainstream readings' (e.g., Jesus' missing face and Peter's error). He then attends also to 'details of the text that have been overlooked, either because they are self-evident and raise no immediate questions (the vision of the sparkling robes; the disciples' fear), or because they are awkward and even embarrassing (the image of the bleacher)'.[55] Of particular interest and relevance for my study are his reading of the bleached robes through the image of a palimpsest, and his analysis of Peter's response to the vision.

Having noted earlier how quickly the Markan analogy of a fuller bleaching cloth is dismissed as an awkward and lame attempt to describe the nature of the transfiguring of Jesus' garments, Wilson juxtaposes a thick description of the fuller's work to Derrida's metaphorical use of the palimpsest to describe the process by which 'metaphysics has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible design covered over in the palimpsest'.[56] Wilson goes on to say, 'this invisible design swirls beneath the whiteness of Jesus' newly blanched robes as a weave of references and a tangle of possible origins'. Of course connections to previously existing myths, narratives, and interpretive traditions are there, but since pinpointing them with certainty is altogether impossible, commentators are forced to pick and choose among them or else rank them all in terms of probability. It should not be surprising that both maneuvers parallel the processes of narrative discourse (i.e., selection, ordering, assigning causation). 'Rather than engage in this process of inclusion and exclusion', writes Wilson, 'the palimpsest prompts an appreciation of the warp and woof of the garment. Attention is drawn to the surface of the fabric, to its series of simultaneous layers, each inseparably merged into the other.'[57] The key to the image, and what makes it so important for thinking about the character of Jesus in Mark, is not *what* it means but *how* it means. 'The metaphor of the fuller charts the passage of one metaphor to another, a movement in which preceding meanings are subsumed and covered over, but not eliminated, *as space is made for more writing*.'[58] What

55. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 86.

56. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 96, citing Jacques Derrida, 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy', *NLH* 6 (1974), pp. 5-74 (11).

57. Wilson, *Transfigured*, pp. 96-97. He goes on to say that 'the palimpsest asks to be regarded for its own sake, not in terms of where these various traces may lead'. I cannot help but to think of the dictum so frequently emphasized in narrative criticism that the critic must take the narrative on its own terms and remain within the confines of the story. Their persisting reliance on historical information suggests that they mean by that something very different from what Wilson is advocating.

58. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 97, my emphasis.

Wilson is saying of this not-so-easily-systematized detail I am extending, in effect, to the character of Jesus as such.

Turning to Peter's so-called error, his suggestion in response to the vision he and the others are beholding, particularly the conversation between Jesus, Elijah, and Moses, is to make three tents, Wilson asks, 'what if Peter's suggestion is necessarily deficient, and if the lack it intimates evokes something of what he and the other disciples have just experienced?'[59] Such a suggestion lends support to what I said in Chapter 4 concerning the narrator's scripting of the dialogue, each character playing his assigned part perfectly. Wilson characterizes Peter's thinking as an effort to fix the location of this presence by means of a remembrance, a re-presentation that replaces it. This would allow Peter, in turn, to convey that presence (and his interpretation of it) to others. The erection of tabernacles co-opts the figures for an ongoing participation and significance in the life of the community. With this, Wilson makes an important connection. 'Indeed in current scholarship, this is exactly what can be seen to be the case when commentators attempt to account for the presence of Elijah and Moses. These two figures invite a richness of meaning and the search for their significance alone has resulted in a plethora of interpretations…'[60] Earlier I described the narrative as an analog for the wilderness of Jesus' solitude. Peter's desire to apprehend and shelter in tabernacles could almost be said to accord with divine prescriptions in the Hebrew Bible. The Tent of Meeting is where the Israelites, through their priestly representatives, interfaced with God when they were wandering in the wilderness. Why should not the narrative have within it sites of stability and refuge where (divine) meaning can be accessed directly? However, as Wilson notes, σκηνή is both tabernacle and nomadic tent. The σκηνή is, in a sense, fluid, enduring through time and moving from 'ground' to 'ground'. Hence, any meaning attached to the commemorative tents Peter is wont to erect would not be fixed.[61] But just like the bleached robes of Jesus stress the fabric-like qualities of experience, interpretation, and meaning, the 'cloth houses' Peter recommends point self-referentially back to the very text in which the episode is discoursed.

Wilson, reading through the lens of Derrida's concept of the *mysterium tremendum*, takes Peter's dumbfounded speechlessness as a mark of the incommunicability of the experience. It is, in fact, the right response,

59. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 113.

60. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 114. It is interesting to me that Wilson does not comment on the fact that the commemoration Peter proposed would, in effect, break up the conversation between Jesus, Elijah, and Moses, separating the figures by means of three, individual tabernacles. It is, as such, an effort to silence or at least reorient the dialogue.

61. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 114.

so to speak, because 'in his speechlessness, Peter stops short of attempting to articulate the inexpressible: the secret remains a secret'.[62] In my view, this speaks to the entire narrative of Mark's gospel and, in large part, captures and articulates everything I have intended to say about the characterization of Jesus, or rather about Jesus as a narrative figure. The presence of Elijah and Moses and the bald, frank, colorless, unadorned manner of the narrator's statement—'And he was transfigured before them'[63]—are of paramount importance to me. At the prologue and in the transfiguration, Jesus appears amidst writing. In narrative, Jesus is transfigured. 'He' is (a way of) writing. This is precisely why I find Wilson's emphasis on the fabric metaphors (i.e., the robes and the tabernacles) so useful. The figure of Jesus, in the transfiguration especially, does subvert the Markan plot. As a way of writing, Jesus is a negotiable feature of the text. 'Almost any textual feature', writes Mona Baker, 'can be renegotiated at the local or global level to reconfigure the relationship between participants within and around the source narrative.'[64] Jesus is fully susceptible to appropriation. Whereas above I spoke of the figure dying with the cessation of writing, here I would expand that to say that the subject also simultaneously dies and is constructed, constituted *in* writing. *Through* writing the figure passes, is translated from physical life to narrative afterlife. The former is no longer accessible; the latter is infinitely variable.

Stephen Moore asks, 'what if "Mark" itself were but a pen name of Jesus, one of many? Could Mark not have staged Jesus' suicide in order to provide him with a new identity—that of a writer?'[65] Later, following up on the notion, Moore asks, 'is not Mark itself Jesus' resurrected body, the reappearance that its ending predicts but does not depict?'[66] And finally, 'what should we conclude? That this Gospel, text, cloth, *sindōn* (see 14.51-52), covered with a profusion of scribbled Marks, is simply a cloak or a cover-up designed to divert our attention while the bearer of a name that we can never know loses himself—or herself—in the night?'[67] It should be obvious at this point that I would respond affirmatively to each of these questions.

62. Wilson, *Transfigured*, p. 115.

63. With a sense of understatedness that matches that of the narrative itself, Moloney (*The Gospel of Mark*, p. 178) states: 'Without any flourish, Mark reports…' Considering that Moloney is attuned to narrative aspects in the Gospel of Mark, especially plot (see, e.g., pp. 16-22), it is disappointing that he makes nothing of his astute observation. He recognizes that narrator's craft in the shape and location of the piece, and links the episode to the narrative's ongoing instruction on Jesus' identity (particularly in terms of his relationship to God) and discipleship.

64. Baker, *Translation and Conflict*, p. 135.

65. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, pp. 8-9.

66. Moore, *Poststructuralist Perspectives*, p. 46.

67. Moore, *Poststructuralist Perspectives*, pp. 59-60.

As a narrative, the Gospel of Mark is ultimately a novel plot to undo Jesus. And as a character, Jesus goes as it is written of him, moving, as it were, from story to story, conscripted and weaved over and over again into the fabric of this body of literature.

The Passion

I would be remiss, in a book on the characterization of Jesus in a narrative such as Mark, to forego any discussion of the Markan passion. Most would contend that in it lies the very crux of Mark's plot, and by extension the most fundamental aspect of Mark's characterization of Jesus. I discussed the passion briefly in the chapters on focalization and dialogue, and it is all the more appropriate to discuss it here given how closely associated it is with the plot aspect. With respect to focalization, I pointed out the way in which the passion sequence is positioned as spectacle. Perspectives pile up as so many onlookers watch the objectified Jesus get swept up in the machinations of those who want to kill him. The only point at which the narrative is focalized through Jesus is the sequence involving Peter's betrayal (see, e.g., 14.54, 66a), even though the character of Jesus is not in a physical position to actually see Peter. With respect to dialogue, I emphasized primarily the silence of Jesus in the face of his accusers at trial. Jesus, like Aesop, proves witless in his own cause despite a narrative life otherwise marked by shocking statements, verbal commands that exorcised demons and stilled raging seas, and teaching with authority. In both cases, I drew on the work of Michael Roemer to stress the nature of narrative plot as inescapable, unstoppable, and inviolable. Here, I will call again on Roemer to address the passion and, as it were, to tie up some loose ends.

Returning to Mk 14.21, commentators customarily read the verse as an indication of cooperation between the human and the divine. In addition, they also regularly take it to signify a sense of awareness and control on the part of Jesus. In the words of Cranfield, 'the tradition was no doubt valued by the early Church chiefly as evidence that Jesus had not been taken by surprise'.[68] Craig Evans puts it this way:

> Jesus' mastery of the situation is seen in the fact that he is able to foretell his fate… At every point Jesus is in command of the unfolding events; nothing takes him by surprise, nothing causes him to stumble and shrink back from fulfilling his mission. Indeed, his impending death occasions the opportunity to speak to the significance of this death (viz., in 14.22-25).[69]

68. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, p. 423.

69. Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), p. 379. Cf. McKenzie, 'The Gospel according to Matthew', p. 108; contra van Iersel, *Mark*, p. 423.

In view of Roemer's theory of narrative emplotment, I want to raise two important points concerning Evans's remarks. First, 'Jesus' mastery' in foretelling his fate and his unwavering heroism in the face of it is, at the very least, problematized by what he says to his disciples and by what he prays in Gethsemane (14.32-42). Secondly, Evans's argument itself is problematized by his description of how Jesus' looming death 'occasions' the dialogue. Both points, in fact, reinforce to me that his agency is conditioned, complicated, and compromised by the narrative that circumscribes both his character and the events that intersect with it.

Yvonne Sherwood recognizes in both the word 'passion' and in the portrayal of Jesus' passion in Christian mythology a 'seductive enigma', which is located in its ability to position its central figure as simultaneously subject and object.[70] She describes the Christian passion narrative as 'a performance of this etymological ambiguity writ large. The figure at its centre functions as extreme subject and extreme object.'[71] Drawing on Roemer, she locates the allure of the passion narrative in its role as the paradigmatic story. In a dense, multilayered, and deeply profound reading of the passion—followed by an equally dense, multilayered, and deeply profound reading of the *aqedah*—Sherwood demonstrates the extreme and utterly terrifying constriction manifest in the minimalist but all-encompassing 'Hyperstory' of Christian discourse and Hebrew scripture: Almighty God subjected and subjugated to both self and story in one fell swoop.

Sherwood is not content to adopt an either–or response to this portrayal—i.e., either a position of accusation, disdain, and distantiation (e.g., frequently found in the work of feminist and womanist scholars), or a position of identifying with the characters by means of 'translating' them and the story very carefully into more palatable terms (e.g., what she labels 'Jouissance Studies', in which 'deprivation/procrastination/pain—in moderation' serves a *narratological* purpose, making the Bible 'an excellent literary performer', suspending desire productively to meet the requirements of plot to defer the end of the story and thus also the fulfillment of desire).[72] Searching for a way to navigate the space between them, and the course she plots is one of transfiguration. Within the game space of the text, in the case of the Hebrew Bible specifically, Torah is 'the ultimate safe word, to which, crucially, God the qualified Master is also subject'.[73] But here the

70. Yvonne Sherwood, 'Passion–Binding–Passion', in Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (eds.), *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 169-93.

71. Sherwood, 'Passion–Binding–Passion', p. 170. She refers to Jesus variously as both 'subjected subject and sovereign subject (like a god)', and as both 'supra- and sub-subject'. In their own way, Evans's remarks illustrate her point.

72. Sherwood, 'Passion–Binding–Passion', pp. 184-86.

73. Sherwood, 'Passion–Binding–Passion', p. 191. It is necessary to point out at this

restrictions of Torah are also precisely what enable 'the kind of question-asking that actively seeks out acute difficulty, restriction, the double bind of an impossible contradiction, encounters with the limits of one's own thinking and the exposure of one's most precious concepts to death'.[74]

Sherwood argues that the discomfort we experience as readers gazing upon discomforted characters in narrative has resulted in a history of reception 'marked by the desire to transfigure, transform, rewrite, begin again'.[75] The reading–writing of the passion in the Gospel of Mark—and, for that matter, the whole of Mark, the gospel's characterization of Jesus, and the figure of Jesus himself—is, for me, akin to Sherwood's description of 'the traditional Jew [who] binds the leather straps of tefillin around his body as a sign of submission to intractable commandments … [and] becomes, at the same time, in the performative and reperformative zone of Torah, a highly active subject and a co-performer/participant with God'.[76] There is no way easy or perfect way out of the paradox of a subjected subject in narrative so long as we are bound by language (which Sherwood recognizes), but the fabric-like quality of narrative, its inherent elasticity is such that it allows, even necessitates, that reading and writing always be coupled together. Only in this way do characters transcend the narrative without abandoning it.

The passion is the Gospel of Mark's final publication of Jesus. Having been transfigured, he is on the cross finally lettered. References to writing and scripture seem to pile up (see 14.21, 27, 49, 62), some of which are remarkably self-referential. Mark 14.50, for example, is the fulfillment of 14.27. In 15.12, Pilate, referring to Jesus, says to the crowd, 'the man *you* call king of the Jews', but it is not until 15.32 that they in fact *do* refer to Jesus—albeit mockingly—as 'king of Israel'. In diverse ways the script(ure)s, of which Mark in this moment of writing becomes a part, are fulfilled.[77] All the while, Jesus is handled (14.46, 53, 65; 15.1, 15, 16, 20, 22) like a good book, and an *inscription* is 'published' above his head (15.26) like a title page.

But the figure of Jesus, *specifically in his function as a narrative character*, pushes back and fights against death in a way that is unique to Mark in comparison to the other New Testament gospels because of its minimalism and profuse ambiguity. The figure invites (if not calls for) other readings. In Gethsemane, prayer and acquiescence intersect in the ambiguous statement, 'all things are possible' (14.36). Is the emphasis on the power of one outside

juncture that Sherwood is drawing on and speaking within the framework of S/M sexual encounters.

74. Sherwood, 'Passion–Binding–Passion', pp. 191-92. In keeping with her analogy to S/M, she labels this 'masochistic hermeneutics'.

75. Sherwood, 'Passion–Binding–Passion', p. 190.

76. Sherwood, 'Passion–Binding–Passion', p. 192.

77. Cf. Aichele, *Jesus Framed*, p. 19.

the text or on the limited power (or outright) powerlessness of one inside the text (cf. 10.27)? In 9.23, the presence or absence of faith is what makes the difference. And how are we to understand the call for Elijah, particularly given what was said above concerning his role in the transfiguration episode? Is it a call for further reading, for more scriptures, another return to the beginning? Though, of course, Jesus himself is *not* calling for Elijah, he is only being heard, interpreted by those looking on as calling for Elijah. This particular moment is focalized through the onlookers, i.e., through readers. Hence, we are brought back again to Mk 14.21, and especially to the ironic truth found in those commentators who read it as a mark of cooperation between the human and divine. The scriptures are fulfilled at the full stop.

Conclusion

As I draw this chapter to a close, I am reminded of the image that graces the front cover of my copy of Nino Ricci's novel, *Testament*.[78] The painting by Vivente Juan Macip, titled 'Ecce homo', depicts a listless, sad, somewhat distant Jesus, reed or staff in hand, the crown of thorns set firmly upon his scalp, and a faint halo about his head, fighting against the darkness of the shadows in the backdrop. It depicts a pause in the moments immediately following the scene wherein the soldiers mock Jesus. In the painting on the cover, Jesus' hands are bound by a slipknot. I find the image, viewed against the backdrop of the passion and of this chapter, richly suggestive. With a wink and a nod the figure seems to address us directly from within its narrative frame and thereby offer us a glimpse behind the proverbial curtain (an apt analogy, I think, considering the Markan rupture of the temple veil). What does it mean to identify with a character whose agency is complicated and compromised by the unsettling intersection of theological and literary orders? I suspect that it is not so much a call to disbelief as a call to belief in spite of.

The previous two chapters have investigated the ways in which 'spectacle' and 'dialogue' factor into novelistic characterization. The present chapter has added to the discussion the element of plot. These should not be viewed independently; rather, they have a combined and cumulative effect. In the words of Stephen Moore, 'Mark's writing instrument is Jesus…a Jesus who writes. Jesus, as writer and as writing, has the aggressive–defensive, hermaphroditic design of an umbrella, able to thrust, to

78. Nino Ricci, *Testament: A Novel* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003). For a rather clever and insightful reading of Ricci's novel vis-à-vis the color-coding work of the Jesus Seminar, see Margaret E. Ramey, 'The Quest for the Fictional Jesus: Gospel Rewrites, Gospel (Re)Interpretation, and Christological Portraits within Jesus Novels' (PhD dissertation, University of St Andrews, St Mary's College, 2011).

parry, and to penetrate, but also to open, to enfold, and to conceal.'[79] The character cannot escape the plot, but the plot is one that the character itself has helped to write. We are invited to participate in the story ourselves, not only as readers but as writers also, because the space of the narrative, though wilderness, is ultimately a safe one.

79. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, p. 36.

Conclusion

Narrative Criticism after Poststructuralism

I undertook this study primarily in order to consider more fully the implications of Jesus as a character in a narrative discourse. The goal was not to more thoroughly flesh out Jesus as a character, but rather to read the processes of his characterization in the Gospel of Mark. I have not been interested in what type of *person* Jesus is according to the Gospel of Mark, nor have I speculated on his psychological makeup, questioned his motivations, or reflected on his emotional state. In fact, my aim has been to problematize any connection between the narrative character and the historical person. Hence, I have explored throughout the ramifications of his translation, transformation, transfiguration into a focalized, dialogued, emplotted—in a word, discoursed—character.

I began in the Preface and Chapter 1 decrying the extent to which narrative criticism had failed to meaningfully upset status quo understandings of both Jesus and the gospel texts. I demonstrated that this was due to self-imposed limits on what was borrowed from secular narrative theorists, resulting in fundamental changes to the nature of the project (e.g., shifting it from the study of properties of narrative discourse to the interpretation of actual narratives). Moreover, it was the consequence of a reluctance on the part of New Testament narrative critics to let go of longstanding historical-critical concerns (e.g., depending on historical information to properly illuminate the meaning of narrative episodes, and speaking of narrators and characters in such a way as to suggest they were at least semi-transparent windows to real authors and real individuals). Therefore, despite initially raising the ire of historical critics, narrative criticism eventually came to be assimilated quite easily, never fully exacting the kind of reorientation of New Testament scholarship that it might have.

Desiring to salvage, in some way, the potential of narrative criticism for biblical studies, I attempted in my second chapter to pick up secular narrative theory where New Testament narrative critics left off, and to follow one strand of 'post-classical' narratology—specifically, that which works within a poststructuralist theoretical perspective. Following a brief introduction to classical narratology, I indentified a number of important shifts in the way that postmodern narrative theory, in general, has come to regard

texts, textuality, and the way we read and experience stories. Whereas New Testament narrative critics see their primary task as one of exegetical discovery, regard individual narratives (and their latent messages) as coherent and whole, and seek to explicate the poetics of the text as if they were rhetorical devices used by an author to convey ideas—perspectives that are already somewhat foreign to 'classical' secular narratology—narrative theorists operating from within a postmodern frame of reference have shifted attention 'from discovery to invention, from coherence to complexity, and from poetics to politics'.[1] With the help of scholars like Mark Currie and Patrick O'Neill, I pointed out various ways in which poststructuralist narratology in particular sustains rather than resolves the fundamentally contradictory aspects of narrative discourse, preserving the inherent complexities of both the text and the reading experience. The excesses, indeterminacies, and paradoxes of narrative itself, in turn, condition, complicate, and compromise specific elements of every story, not least of which are characters and the processes of characterization. Characters are inextricably interwoven with other aspects of narrative and, therefore, cannot be analyzed apart from those other aspects. It is those other aspects that prevent any given character from being perfectly, identically translated to another narrative. I elected to take up just three of these concomitant aspects: focalization, dialogue, and plot.

Over the remaining three chapters, I performed readings of two ancient Greek novels—*Leucippe and Clitophon* and *The Life of Aesop*—and the Gospel of Mark. Each chapter centered on one of these three different narrative aspects in relation to characters and characterization, the goal being to analyze these aspects together rather than in isolation as if one could exist or be changed without the other. Chapter 3 addressed focalization, which was prompted by the copious and frequently recurring references in *Leucippe and Clitophon* to things that pertain to vision: seeing and being seen, spectacles, the eyes, dreams and visions, incongruent images, and so on. Although it does not do so in the same manner or to the same degree, the Gospel of Mark shares a similar interest seeing and perception, which is intimately associated with the Markan motif of insiders and outsiders. Considering that every element of a given narrative is presented in accordance with a specific vision, focalization is the relationship of a particular element to the vision that presents it, i.e., 'the relation between the vision and that which is "seen", perceived'.[2] As such, focalization has an explicit ideological function. In *Leucippe and Clitophon*, my discussion centered on the role played by *ekphrasis* in enlisting readers in the processes of making meaning, and on the manner in which the vision of various characters in

1. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 2.
2. Bal, *Narratology*, p. 142.

the narrative parallels certain ways of reading. I then identified instances in the Gospel of Mark where similar dynamics are at play, and I spoke specifically to the intersection of these dynamics with the Markan theme of insiders and outsiders. Throughout the chapter, I made a point to highlight the self-referentiality of focalization in these narratives. For all that focalization shows, it veils and disguises in equal measure. The selectivity of focalization is a fundamental mark of narrative representation. Its combined ideological and perspectival functions problematize attempts to extrapolate from a narrative figure to any real historical person.

Chapter 4 addressed the relationship of dialogue to characterization in *The Life of Aesop* and the Gospel of Mark, which share in common a clear propensity toward characterizing the protagonist in terms of his speech. Whereas it is customary in New Testament narrative criticism to analyze characters based (in part) on what they say and what others say about them, and to treat the speech of individual characters as a reliable (more often than not) indication of their personality, this chapter demonstrated that dialogue does not, in fact, provide trustworthy access to a character's essence, and it is certainly not a dependable indicator of any real person's 'voice', whether that be an author or an historical referent. Once again, the narratives in question reveal a significant degree of self-reflexivity, first by giving and taking away the voices of individual characters at will, and second by showing the characters powerless to adequately affect, let alone escape, their circumstances. In light of the way the represented speech of narrative characters fails to offer access to their (non-existent) interior, dialogue in narrative implicitly blurs distinctions between inside and outside, and ultimately forces readers to remain always in the fluid, novelistic space of the text, neither perfectly inside nor outside.

In my final chapter, I turned my attention to the plot aspect, focusing solely on Mark's Gospel and analyzing the characterization of Jesus in light of three specific sections: the prologue, the transfiguration, and the passion. For all the emphasis the Gospel of Mark gives to Jesus' speech and his identity as a teacher, the character of Jesus is all the more determined by the plot that overshadows every other dimension of his storied life. This chapter emphasized two dimensions of narrative characterization in general and the Markan characterization of Jesus in particular, both of which had been developing throughout the preceding two chapters, and both of which I take to be linked in symbiotic fashion. First, I argued for the subjection and subjugation of characters to the emplotment of narrative discourse. No matter how fantastic a hero's exploits or how integral a character is to the creation, development, and movement of events in a narrative, the effect is always provisional and temporary, because the plot ultimately trumps anything and everything the character is said to say or do. This quality of narrative, somewhat ironically, is what connects most deeply with human

experience. No matter what we say or do, we are beholden to forces beyond our control and, in many cases, even our awareness. Moreover, narrative is inescapable insofar as no experience is independent of mediation. Every effort to articulate even ourselves requires another narrative. We are subjects always in the making. This leads to my second emphasis. Narrative discourse itself is no more stable, coherent, or perfectly complete than the characters it depicts. Narrative is fluid, and it contains within it an endless array of traces and potentialities. It perpetuates itself, beckoning readers both to hold loosely to whatever story they perceive and to write with and alongside the text.

This is why the fundamental metaphor for me, throughout this book, has been the words doubly read—i.e., by us and by the figure—on the lips of Jesus in Mk 14.21. It is also what makes Mark's ambiguous and frequently unlocatable references to scripture so important to me. They are at once both indeterminate and overdetermined in a way that I find infinitely more mysterious and inviting than any neatly summarized rendition of an identifiable original.

This project was sparked in large part by Daniel Selden's article on the ancient novel, which I mentioned in Chapter 1. His remarks on the appropriation of the ancient novels on the basis of what amount to evaluations of characters rather than descriptions seemed to me such an astute observation and an equally applicable summation of what I saw in the work of New Testament narrative critics. Despite drawing on the resources of secular narrative theory, New Testament narrative critics did not appear interested in considering the ways that the gospel narratives might affect the way we think about narrative discourse itself. Hence, when it came to characters and characterization, the tools of narrative theory were employed only insofar as they could assist in the demonstration of the literary artistry whereby the gospels render the *historical* Jesus and meaningfully convey his story so as to affect insiders always already familiar with that story. Even if we grant New Testament narrative critics the task of explicating specific narratives rather than theorizing narrativity in general, it has been my contention here that they stopped short and shied away from theories of reading that developed later (such as those of the poststructuralist variety) which ultimately do a better job of accounting for certain aspects of these ancient narratives *and* of explaining the interpretations of contemporary readers.

I do not profess to have come to this study free of ideas about the person of Jesus. Nevertheless, my hope is that this performance has successfully problematized both modernist notions of literary characters as autonomous 'agents' and 'naturalizing' treatments of literary characters as historical referents. I have read the Gospel of Mark without resort to ideologically suspect concerns about Jesus' interior thoughts, feelings, or motivations. In

other words, I have been less attentive to Jesus' identity than to my own identity as a reader. This book has been very much about Mark's narrative itself, and has had very little to do with any message it can be said to convey, whether about Jesus or something else. My study is an attempt to foreignize the text, to recognize both the text and the discourse as Other. Here, I have endeavored to open up the character of Jesus, the figure, as a way of writing.

The 'Son of Man' always has and always will 'go as it is written of him', and the present study is no exception. 'What really happened' is forever inaccessible to us, and any (re)construction thereof will always be an abstraction. Attempts to penetrate into any world 'behind' the story and to isolate from its narration will only result in paraphrase. The point is not to say that 'everything is relative' or 'nothing really exists', all is only language/text. Rather, the point, in part, is that while narratives and translations may not provide the direct access they purport to offer, they no less affirm the things they claim to represent for certain readers (e.g., those who position themselves as 'ideal readers'). Insofar as the past or reality is only available to us through language and narrative, such discourses—be they historical reconstructions or novelistic representations—are at once *both* histories *and* fictions.[3]

My hope is that this study might be in some way a small step toward the reorientation and reinvigoration of New Testament narrative criticism. Whoever the 'real' author of Mark was, he or she acted as a translator—a reader with the courage of his convictions[4]—in the mediation and rendering of his interpretive experience. I, in turn, have attempted to do likewise, because it seems perfectly in keeping with the exigencies of (the) narrative itself.

3. See Burnett, 'Historiography'; Clark, *History, Theory, Text*; Paden, *Religious Worlds*; and Thomas, *The* Acts of Peter, pp. 1-13 and esp. 92-97.

4. See O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*, p. 140.

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