

CRISIS IN JERUSALEM? NARRATIVE CRITICISM IN NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

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HISTORICAL-CRITICAL STUDY of the New Testament recognized from the beginning that in the context of the great classical works even the best of NT writings cannot be considered "literature." For English speakers, the noble prose of the Authorized Version coupled with an idealized, romantic interpretation of the religious content of the NT kept this fact from the consciousness of literary critics and English departments that continue to treat the "Bible as literature" within the boundaries of the Western literary canon.¹ As a result, literary studies of the Bible are often considered spurious to the serious task of NT scholars: historical-critical analysis and theological interpretation.

Though historical criticism tended to emphasize the development of NT writings out of smaller units of tradition and the correlation of such tradition histories with the emergence of distinctive religious language and theological ideas, it could not ignore altogether the challenge posed by ancient literature. What, if any, literary models did the various authors use in composing their works? How does a presumed genre shape the message which the author presents to the first-century reader? Attempts to answer these questions have created a flood of analyses of ancient literary remains that do not enjoy "classical" status, such as romances, fragments of ethnic histories, school books on rhetoric, papyrus letters, and the like.²

The study of ancient literary composition plays an important role in the task of redaction criticism. The exegete is asked to construct a "theology" of a given Gospel on the basis of the way in which the author has edited and arranged traditional materials. Usually such theologies

¹ See the discussion of this phenomenon in A. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1971) xi-xxx.

² These debates and their associated literature have been ably summarized by D. E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987). Aune's treatment is particularly important because it recognizes that both Greco-Roman and Jewish materials must be taken into account in describing the context of NT writings. Aune finds the Christian literary problem exemplified in Paul's own combination of Jewish traditions and Hellenistic rhetorical forms: "The Christianity reflected in Paul's letters is consciously rooted theologically in this Judaism and yet is struggling to discard the cultural markers of Jewish ethnic identity" (12).

emphasize the Christology of the individual writers.³ Attention to ancient literary patterns may prevent the exegete from drawing false conclusions about the significance of particular features in a gospel. For example, the frequent misunderstanding by Jesus' disciples in Mark are neither historical reports nor the theological devaluation of Christians attached to Jesus as miracle worker. Misunderstanding of divine revelation is characteristic of writings claiming to present revealed teaching throughout the period. As part of the stock literary content one also finds the encounter with hostile authorities and accounts of the weaknesses of the followers of the great man.⁴ This comparative approach has also fueled debates about the historical and biographical intent of the evangelists. Pointing to such common elements as an edifying or ideological point of view, entertaining fictions, constructed speeches, and fictional episodes in other ancient writings which are nonetheless considered historical or biographical, some scholars are abandoning the radical skepticism of the earlier historical-critical method, which had insisted that one could recover nothing except the ideology of the evangelists from the gospel narratives.⁵

Since the materials required to study NT writings in their ancient context are even less accessible than the established classics, the gap between such study and treatment of the Bible as literature by literary critics remains. The most powerful presentation of biblical narrative as

³ Some critics pursue the redaction-critical task by first constructing a detailed map of source material and editing by the evangelist, as in R. T. Fortna's *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988). Others do so by isolating structural elements that result from the use of transitional passages (for a critic of this method, see C. W. Hedrick, "The Role of Summary Statements in the Composition of the Gospel of Mark: A Dialogue with Karl Schmidt and Norman Perrin," *Novum Testamentum* 26 [1984] 289-311), or the positioning and use of key Christological titles (e.g., J. D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983]). In some cases a particular theme may be seen as structuring both the narrative and the Christology of a Gospel. D. Lee-Pollard has proposed that Mark is shaped around power and powerlessness. The opening sections demonstrate the immense power of the kingdom in Jesus' ministry; the passion, its renunciation in obedient trust in God, which is at the same time the triumphant coming of God's rule and destruction of the temple ("Powerlessness as Power: A Key Emphasis in the Gospel of Mark," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 [1987] 173-88).

⁴ Aune, *New Testament* 55-56.

⁵ So Aune, *ibid.* 55-65, 80; and from the perspective of a detailed study of the literary presentation of Galilee in the gospels complemented by archeology and sociological reconstruction of the Jesus movement, S. Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988). J. H. Charlesworth has also mounted a defense of historical Jesus research based on analyses of intertestamental Jewish writings and archeological investigation (*Jesus within Judaism* [New York: Doubleday, 1988]).

a formative element in the Western literary canon in recent years has been Northrop Frye's construction of biblical typologies.⁶ However, the "narrative" in this instance is a great construct of biblical history from Exodus through the Apocalypse from which the types of metaphors emerge as embedded in different writings of the Bible. The narrative patterns of individual writings or the peculiarities of their authors have all been swallowed up into the code.⁷ A more nuanced position on these issues is evident in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* edited by a specialist in OT literary analysis, Robert Alter, and the distinguished professor of English literature Frank Kermode.⁸ Christian treatment of Jewish Scriptures in terms of type and antitype, as well as the plotting of "world history," is carefully distinguished from a Jewish or literary reading of the same writings. The diverse mixture of authors, both exegetes and literary critics, as well as a varying understanding of literary analysis and disagreement over whether the text to be analyzed is a text-critically reconstructed Hebrew or Greek original, the Authorized Version, or some other English rendering, makes the volume a better example of the problems in attempting such a task than a guide.

Exegetes dissatisfied with the literary analyses appropriate to historical criticism have approached the NT narratives with methods of literary analysis taken from contemporary criticism. Two elements of the redaction-critical approach make its use of literary parallels invalid as literary criticism in this view. First, redaction criticism fails to perceive that the form of the work as a whole and the reader's participation in that work is the goal of interpretation, not moving from the text to theology.⁹ Second, redaction criticism is the victim of a literalist fallacy that underlies the treatment of biblical narrative from the beginnings of modern criticism: it mistakes realistic narrative for claims about a historical reality seen through the text.¹⁰ Historical critics may well

⁶ N. Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

⁷ Frye's construction is certainly a brilliant demonstration of the way in which the biblical code shapes English literature. However, typology not only destroys the literary qualities of the narrative wholes within the canon; it has also been the weapon by which Christian apologists have misread and reshaped Hebrew Scriptures to their own ends. Harold Bloom protests that Frye stands in a long line of such apologists (in H. Bloom, ed., *The Gospels* [New York: Chelsea House, 1988] 1-15).

⁸ Cambridge: Harvard University/Belknap, 1987.

⁹ W. A. Beardslee, *Literary Criticism of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) 1-13.

¹⁰ The emerging concern for NT narrative has been strongly influenced by Hans Frei's account of the historical turn away from biblical narrative in 18th- and 19th-century hermeneutics (*The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* [New Haven: Yale, 1974]). It should be noted that the criticism has contributed little to the solution. The problem of a hermeneutics

object to both challenges. While reader participation in creating the meaning of the text can even be seen in the work of exegetes, modern Western aesthetic and emotive responses cannot be projected onto ancient audiences. Much of the detail of comparative material from the ancient world that loads our commentaries, not to mention the major difficulties faced when we translate into modern languages, is an effort to create a more appropriate context for evoking meaning and engagement with the text than can be derived from literary theorists. Second, "narrative realism" is simply a variant of first-order naiveté about the text. It presumes an author in imaginative control of a fictional world which he or she creates. This model of authorship is not appropriate to the use of tradition in composition of the Gospels. The NT is not "literature" in the terms that modern criticism requires.

Narrative criticism of the NT being done by exegetes often responds to such objections by incorporating the results of historical-critical analysis or by insisting that a method of grasping the text as a narrative whole is the necessary first stage to any other form of analysis that might be pursued using the text as "data."¹¹ Justification for the turn toward narrative in particular often points to the narrative character of human life, which is lived as the embodiment of stories on both the personal and national level.¹² Narrative permits a rendering of the complexity of human lives and choice, as well as the dynamic engagement of readers

of understanding and the question of the relative authority of "author" and "interpreter" in relationship to a text posed by Schleiermacher (Frei, *Eclipse* 287–306) remain on the agenda of all but the formalist literary approaches. Since narrative criticism attends to the role of the reader in constructing the meaning of the text, the reader's construction as it responds to both text and reader's context may indeed be "privileged" over that of the author. Since narrative analysis frequently seeks to describe a "world" created by the text which seeks to engage the reader in its system of valuations, the hermeneutics of understanding, especially as developed by Ricoeur and Gadamer, can be enlisted in the enterprise. For a critique of formalist methods and a development of the case for such a hermeneutical approach, see L. M. Poland, *Literary Criticism and Biblical Hermeneutics: A Critique of Formalist Approaches* (Chico: Scholars, 1985).

¹¹ See the discussion of the relationship between the historical-critical paradigm and literary criticism by N. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

¹² E.g., W. A. Kort, *Story, Text and Scripture: Literary Interests in Biblical Narrative* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University, 1988) 6–15. Kort's actual treatment of biblical materials, forcing them to read as exempla of his schematic elements of narrative and globalized misreadings of critical theories with which he disagrees, makes the book an unreliable contribution to the discussion. For a sustained treatment of fiction and critical pluralism that faces the questions of "world building" and ethical and ideological criticism in a way that will be illuminating for students of biblical material, see W. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988) 227–373.

in responding to the story, that is lost with the translation of the NT into evidence for historical events or theological concepts. Narrative criticism seeks to facilitate entry into the complexity of the narrative world, not exit from it into history or theology.

THE COHERENCE OF NARRATIVE

Human storytelling implies patterns of coherence that shape the world in which humans find themselves. Fragmented, incoherent, and discordant experiences become coherent when incorporated into an intelligible story. Such processes are nowhere more evident than in the NT creations of a new story out of its experience and tradition.¹³ Historical criticism has shown that the complexes of oral material inherited by the evangelists did not contain within themselves the principles of narrative organization required by a gospel.¹⁴ While redaction criticism attributes all the shaping and editing that goes into the gospel story to the evangelist as author, narrative criticism complicates the simple model of author and narrative assumed by redaction criticism.

Coherence is not found in a theological agenda discovered in the narrative and described as the intention of the writer. The narrative is not simply the vehicle by which a message passes from author to reader. Instead, narrative coherence is as multifaceted as narrative itself. The critic must recognize that the "author" projected by the hints and choices made in a text is distinct from the real individual who composed the text. This "implied author" is also distinct from the voice of the narrator, who speaks directly to a listener. As a story progresses, the audience may discover that the narrator is both reliable and even omniscient as to events in, behind, and beyond the story and the thoughts, motives, and responses of characters. An "omniscient narrator" is characteristic of the gospels. Or the reader may discover that the narrator is unreliable, in which case the reader may identify with the implied author against the narrative voice.¹⁵

A narrative creates its audience in the assumptions that it makes about

¹³ Wilder (*Rhetoric* 55–70) emphasizes the importance of story from the earliest oral shaping of the Christian message. He insists that in Christianity the narrative mode took on a unique importance not evident in other religious and philosophical traditions. Christian faith can be presented simply by telling the story, without the mediation of sacred text (56). Stories are the primary imaginative vehicle for shaping what is considered ethical action (60).

¹⁴ E. Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983) 3–14; Kermode, "Matthew," *Literary Guide* 387.

¹⁵ The most widely used treatment of narrative criticism among NT critics is S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1978).

the values and beliefs which the world of the narrative presumes to be true, through remarks that the narrator addresses to the audience and in numerous assumptions an author makes about what the audience knows. The reader addressed by the narrator at the specific point may differ from the "ideal reader" projected by the story as a whole, one who perceives the ironies and interconnections in the development of the plot and who shares the implied author's presentation of the various characters. Anxious to press on to creating a picture of the "community for which the evangelist wrote," redaction criticism has neglected the distinctions between narrative audiences, ideal readers, and actual readers.¹⁶

To speak about the coherence of a gospel as narrative whole, then, can be understood as a description of the successful establishment of an implied reader. The importance of this process in narrative analysis of the NT quickly becomes evident in the growing appeals to "irony" to explain the divergence between what happens on the narrative line of the story and meanings which the reader is intended to discern based on the superior knowledge that he or she possesses either of Jesus' identity, the eventual working out of the plot according to a plan established by God, or even the reader's presumed knowledge of the unnarrated future spread of Christianity.¹⁷

The relationship between coherence, plot, characterization, and establishment of an "implied reader" who can decode the various hints given in the gospel is clearly exhibited by the debates over the ending of Mark's Gospel. The earliest manuscripts end at 16:8a, the women fleeing the tomb and saying nothing to anyone out of fear. How is such an ending

¹⁶ See the treatment of the implied reader in John by A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 205–27. Comparative literary analysis of OT as well as other ancient materials enters into the discussion of "implied reader" when it appears that the ideal reader is expected to recognize such literary patterns as "type scenes" from the OT, as is the case in the Matthean infancy narratives (Kermode, "Matthew," *Literary Guide* 395–98).

¹⁷ While the treatment of irony and misunderstanding is most developed in discussions of the Fourth Gospel (see Culpepper, *Anatomy* 165–80), it appears in analyses of all the gospels. Irony has become the primary explanatory term whenever an author is describing the apparent conflict between the implied author's view that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews is appropriate to a divine plan and the intentions of the agents responsible for Jesus' death in the narrative. Consequently, Jesus' opponents are the primary victims of irony. The disciples are secondarily victims when they misunderstand Jesus' intent to suffer. Unlike the ironies of modern fiction, however, the gospels never make the reader a victim of irony (Culpepper, *Anatomy* 179). Irony as a polemical weapon frequently appears in the Pauline letters, especially in contexts in which the apostle is describing his own afflictions (see K. A. Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1987]), and has even found its way into rhetorical analysis of 2 Peter (D. F. Watson, *Invention, Arrangement and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1988] 117, 127).

coherent with the angelic announcement of the resurrection and Jesus' fulfilment of his promise to the disciples (Mk 14:28) in the previous verse (16:7)? The various longer endings to Mark provided in the manuscript traditions, which make the Gospel's conclusion coherent with the resurrection-appearance traditions of the other Gospels, show that even in antiquity Mark was felt to have failed to attain suitable closure.¹⁸

Narrative critics who emphasize the importance of the reader's identification with the disciples as crucial to the reader's response to the narrative find failures in the disciples during the passion a clue to the Gospel's instruction about faithfulness.¹⁹ Though the passion-resurrection predictions in the Gospel make it evident that the reader knows some version of the resurrection kerygma, Mark's unwillingness to close his narrative in this way indicates to the reader that failed discipleship is still possible in the postresurrection community. The author has shown that the words of Jesus are reliable, but presents an audience which could put its trust in Jesus' word or could fail to follow him.²⁰

Satisfactory resolution of the ending in Mark presumes that the reader recalls Jesus' earlier words about his passion, as well as the distinction between human and divine perspectives. The ambiguity of the promise to see Jesus again may also recall the warnings about false prophets and messiahs in Mk 13:9, 11, as well as the anticipation of Jesus' return at the Parousia (13:24-29). In fact, the reader hears two stories: Mark's narrative, which ends with the hint of a return to Galilee, and the story implied by Jesus' predictions, which ends with the Parousia.²¹ Unlike the false prophets who claim that the end is at hand, the Markan story remains open-ended. The reader is invited to perceive the irony built up

¹⁸ In the most striking "reconstructive surgery" to account for the peculiarity of Mark, J. D. Crossan (*Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of the Canon* [Minneapolis: Winston, 1985] 149-81) uses the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* to reconstruct the pre-Synoptic source for Jesus' burial and resurrection which included a triumphant vision of the risen Lord and confession by both Jewish and Roman authorities. Mark is said to have truncated that account by relocating it into the Transfiguration scene and replaced it with the story of the women at the tomb.

¹⁹ E.g., R. Tannehill, "The Role of the Disciples in Mark," *Journal of Religion* 57 (1977) 386-405; idem, "The Gospel of Mark as a Narrative Christology," *Semeia* 16 (1979) 62, 69-70, 82-84.

²⁰ Tannehill, "Christology" 84; Best (*Mark* 47 f.) rejects Tannehill's claims about the ambiguity of the ending on the ground that the reader knows that this obstacle was overcome by the successful mission of the disciples. Weaknesses in the disciples only serve to highlight the power of God. Best points to other examples in which Mark presumes that the reader knows about the future life of the Church, such as healing by prayer and the Eucharistic practices of the Church, without including them in the narrative (*Mark* 120).

²¹ See N. Petersen, "When Is the End Not the End? Literary Reflections on the Ending of Mark's Narrative," *Interpretation* 34 (1980) 152-64.

by the contrast between Jesus' certainty of the divine purpose on the way to his passion and then to Galilee and the persistent confusion shown by the disciples. However, the eschatological warnings of chapter 13 minimize the failures of the disciples, since they will uphold Jesus' word against the words of such false prophets.²² The coherence of the narrative depends upon the imaginative expansion of the story by the implied reader.

CHARACTER, ROLE, AND ETHICAL CRITICISM

The dilemmas posed by Mark's ending point to another element of narrative criticism: treatment of characters. Where modern fiction emphasizes the internal development of character, ancient characters tend to be static embodiments of particular characteristics. Consequently, treatment of character in narrative analysis of the NT focuses on characters as the expression of particular roles in the narrative.²³ Roles stand between character and plot, since the role requires that one describe the characters in relationship and actions to others. The reader's perception of the plot of the narrative creates a unity which establishes the significance of the actions of the various characters.²⁴ But the unity which the reader perceives in the actions of the characters carries with it an evaluative point of view. Both the implied author and the narrator provide perspectives from which the reader views the characters and their actions. In the gospels, call stories as well as statements about how the disciples share Jesus' mission made by the narrator provide the reader with the criteria for evaluating their actions within the story. Such devices sometimes even suggest future actions in the unnarrated time beyond the gospel, which the evangelist shares with the implied reader.²⁵

The Fourth Gospel prefaces the passion events with extensive revelation discourses. These discourses point beyond the narrated events of the Gospel to a "return" by Jesus to his own when the meaning of his words will become clear. From the beginning of the Gospel, both Jesus (e.g., Jn 1:51) and the narrator, whose voice and point of view coincide with Jesus', had already hinted at such future understanding (2:22). Consequently, misunderstandings by the disciples at the level of the narrative do not form a hindrance to their role as followers and eventual

²² Ibid. 163, 166.

²³ Culpepper, *Anatomy* 101-4; Tannehill ("Christology" 63-65) focuses on the roles that Jesus assumes in relationship to others.

²⁴ So R. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) xiii-xiv, 1-4.

²⁵ Mark provides such clues in 1:16-20; 3:13-19; 6:7-13; 8:34-38 (Tannehill, "Christology" 64 f.).

witnesses to the Son in a hostile world.²⁶ The situation is quite different in relationships between Jesus and the Jews, whose hostility drives the plot to its culmination in Jerusalem. Their representational role as "enemies" sweeps away all the diverse characters one finds in the other Gospels. Even the most sympathetic character, the Jewish teacher Nicodemus, remains an "outsider" and hence destroys any expectation that "the Jews" might overcome their misunderstanding and rejection of Jesus.²⁷

While the ambiguity of Mark's ending and its consistent portrayal of flawed discipleship created narrative incoherences which the implied reader must resolve on the basis of later actions of the disciples which are not narrated, the sharp distinctions which the Fourth Gospel draws between "Jesus' own" (both the postresurrection disciples and the enlightened reader) and "the Jews" (the hostile world of unbelief) leave no narrative ambiguity about the judgments the implied reader is to pass on the world represented by these characters. John apparently uses the expression "Jews" as a consistent term for those descendants of Abraham closed to God's revelation in Jesus. The narrative links Jesus' brothers with "the Jews" (7:1-10), so the reader is not surprised that when Jesus' mother reappears at the foot of the cross she is not accompanied by "his brothers" as she had been in Capernaum (2:12). Instead, she is entrusted to the Beloved Disciple, who takes her into his home (19:26-27).²⁸

At the level of narrative criticism, the rising hostility of the Jews and even the crowds merely contributes to the dramatic intensity of a plot whose outcome the reader has known from the opening verses: God's Son is to be rejected in a cosmic drama of belief/unbelief, but those who do believe will enjoy a new status as children of God (1:1-18).²⁹ Variants on this plot are played out in the smaller confrontations between Jesus and "the Jews" which make up the ministry of Jesus. But it is the very consistency and sharpness with which the evangelist draws the lines between "insiders" and "outsiders" that may require contemporary readers to challenge the ethical point of view represented in the narrative. Narratives do require readers to assent to their values as they follow the story through to the conclusion. In that act of assent the lines between actual and implied readers become much more difficult to draw, since

²⁶ Culpepper, *Anatomy* 118.

²⁷ See the treatment of "the Jews" as characters in Culpepper, *Anatomy* 125-35. He observes that the evangelist repeatedly uses irony to emphasize the culpability of Jewish leaders for a rejection of Jesus, which is rejection of the God they claim to worship. The irony culminates in the trial scene, in which the Jews themselves become apostates. Pilate's verdict mocks them (*Anatomy* 169-72).

²⁸ Freyne, *Galilee* 130-31.

²⁹ Culpepper, *Anatomy* 86-91.

even assenting to those things which we accept only for the sake or duration of the story may engender commitments that we should otherwise resist.³⁰

The hostile irony and even bitterness which the Johannine narrator shows toward "the Jews" has not gone unnoticed by historical critics. Fortna's redaction-critical analysis finds most of the references to "the Jews" and the preoccupation with Jesus as the one who "overcomes" or replaces Jewish feasts and religious practices to be the work of the evangelist.³¹ Where narrative criticism risks short-circuiting any engagement with the ethical perspective of a text by insisting on merely formal analyses of characters, roles, and plot, historical criticism explains the text as an example of the "history of the community." Suggestions that Christians were expelled from Jewish synagogues for their belief in Jesus (9:22; 12:42 f.; 16:1-4a) become the traumatic separation of Jewish Christians from their synagogue home and former compatriots. Exiled from Judaism and threatened by hostility from others as well, the community saw all those outside its borders as condemned for unbelief. Jews and perhaps even Christian Jews who would not confess Jesus as the only revelation of God have no place in salvation.³² Scholars sometimes treat the violence of John's symbolic language as though it were evidence for the violence of persecution and loss suffered by the community, without any reflection on the narrative use of dualistic symbols or the locus of the emotions presumed to be associated with this use of symbols.³³

CRISIS IN JERUSALEM: SYMBOLIC OPPOSITIONS IN NARRATIVE

Both historical-critical and narrative analyses of John have recognized that not only does the author attach differing symbolic values to Galilee and Jerusalem/Judea; he even breaks up the anticipated linear pattern of Galilean ministry, journey to Jerusalem, crisis/death in Jerusalem into somewhat awkward journeys between the two. Historical critics are even

³⁰ Booth, *Company* 8-9, 32, 43, 111-14, 139-43.

³¹ Fortna, *Fourth Gospel* 54, 61, 87, 103, 115, 125, 151-54, 263. Fortna proposes that the "signs gospel" which the evangelist reworked stems from a thoroughly Jewish-Christian milieu (220-23).

³² Ibid. 292.

³³ A more radical hermeneutic of suspicion would employ as subtexts works such as Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* or Freud's treatment of aggression, guilt, and superego in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (see the use of modern psychoanalytic works as subtexts in the interpretation of the dynamics of narrative in Judges by M. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988] 52-196). Freud suggests that the internalized aggression of the superego does not correlate directly with the external force exercised by a child's parents but with the emotional force of the child's response.

tempted to rearrange the Johannine narrative to resolve the awkwardness this juxtaposition creates.³⁴ Resisting the temptation to rearrange, narrative criticism seeks to discover any keys to narrative coherence or codes that might be discovered in the work itself. The symbolic values of place in religious narratives, particularly boundaries, sacred mountains, doors and thresholds, barriers, temples, tombs, rivers, oceans, wilderness, and the like, cannot be treated as items for a modern geography.³⁵ They may easily encode multiple levels of religious significance, as is evident when the crowd at the Johannine feeding miracle is metaphorically transformed into its ancestors murmuring against Moses in the wilderness (6:25-50), even though they are not in the wilderness but at Capernaum (6:24), where we are told that Jesus was teaching in the synagogue (6:59).

John's narrative anticipation of the final crisis in Jerusalem has episodes of withdrawal from anticipated danger in Judea (4:1-3). At the same time, the reader is frequently reminded that Jesus cannot be harmed before his "hour" and that Jesus' true place is neither in Judea nor in Galilee but with the Father, a place to which his opponents cannot come (7:28-31, 32-35) but which his return to glory with the Father will open for his followers (14:1-6; 17:24). Early in the Gospel a major episode takes place between Judea and Galilee: Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman and the conversion of a number of Samaritan villagers to believing in Jesus as "savior of the world" (4:4-42). The naive realism of historical critics has often found this episode evidence for Samaritan converts to the Johannine community whose Moses traditions shaped the high Christology of the Gospel. Feminists are eager to claim the Samaritan woman as a prominent Christian missionary whose story points to the codiscipleship of women and men in the earliest communities before the corrupting influence of patriarchy distorted the true vision of Christian discipleship.

Rather than approach the text with an agenda for historical reconstruction, the deliberate place of this significant episode between Judea and Galilee, its suggestive symbolic connections with stories of the patriarch Jacob (already invoked in the image of 1:51), and its definitive relocation of true worship neither on the sacred mount of the Samaritans nor that of the Jews suggest that this text may have more to tell us about the troubling picture of "the Jews" in Johannine narrative than the universalist Christology of its conclusion. Hendrickus Boers has subjected this

³⁴ Freyne, *Galilee* 118-25.

³⁵ For a symbolic anthropological approach to place and the calling of the disciples to be fishers of men in Mark, see E. Leach, "Fishing for Men on the Edge of the Wilderness," *Literary Guide* 579-99.

narrative to a detailed structuralist analysis, following a modified version of the model created by A. J. Greimas.³⁶ It is impossible to summarize the formal presentation of the logical exchanges or failures to undertake an offered program at each sequence in the narrative or the logical squares of oppositions and contraries established in working through the text.

However, Boers's analysis of the narrative points up the importance of the cultural opposition Jew/Samaritan. When it leads the woman to refuse Jesus' request for water because of a burden of not associating with Samaritans which she attributes to Jews (4:9), Jesus shifts the program to his offer of water to her. When the woman refuses that claim (v. 15 is taken as a refusal, not the beginning of faith in Jesus), the program shifts again. Though Jesus' knowledge of her past impresses the woman and is the ground for her subsequent report about him in the village (v. 29), she once again challenges Jesus on the basis of religious separation between Samaritans and Jews, laying the blame on Jewish claims that God is to be worshiped in Jerusalem.³⁷ Though the woman recognizes that Jesus is a prophet and qualified to decide the issue of worship, her response to his claim that true worship of God is now "in Spirit and truth" rejects that authority by deferring resolution of the question to the coming of the messiah (v. 25). Contrary to most historical and literary critics, who presume that Jesus' "I am he" in v. 26 represents a confession of faith that the woman now shares,³⁸ Boers's logical analysis suggests that she refuses this insight just as she had Jesus' claim to provide "living water," which led her to challenge Jesus' status: "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" (v. 12a). Her only positive sanction for Jesus' continued action is the miraculous knowledge shown about her past.

None of the needs expressed in the narrative sequences have been fulfilled by the time the reader reaches v. 26: Jesus' thirst; woman's thirst, lack of understanding about living water; woman's understanding of Jesus' identity; resolution of the division between Jew and Samaritan over association between the groups; resolution of the division between Jew and Samaritan over the right place to worship. The issue of water will be resolved indirectly in Jesus' exchange with the disciples about food (= doing the will of the Father who sent him, vv. 27, 31-34). The questions of Jesus' identity and association between Jews and Samaritans

³⁶ H. Boers, *Neither on This Mountain Nor in Jerusalem: A Study of John 4* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988).

³⁷ *Ibid.* 4-15.

³⁸ E.g., Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 137: "As the light of understanding begins to break, the Samaritan woman shows herself at each stage ready to receive it."

are resolved in the encounter with the Samaritan villagers (vv. 39-42).³⁹ Though redaction critics have often presumed that the scene with the disciples was superimposed on a narrative about the Samaritan woman, the logical connection of actions and resolution shows it to be necessary to complete the sequence of actions in the narrative.⁴⁰

The variations on contraries and oppositions in the logical square provide a clue to the encoding of values within the narrative. The individual Jewish man and Samaritan woman become representative of Jews and Samaritans, and at a more abstract level the securities that come from adherence to one's group. Food and water are opposed as physical realities or Jesus' "other," spiritual food, and at a deeper level they represent the oppositions of life/death, good/bad. Similarly, the story begins with the apparent invasion of Samaritan sacred space by a "Jew." (The significance of the narrator's comment, "it was necessary for him to pass through Samaria," is transferred beyond the question of physical travel routes as the sequence progresses.) Factional division between Jew and Samaritan would affirm both refusal to participate in Jesus' initial project, request for water, and to trespass in the sanctuary of another. The values encoded in the narrative proposed to overcome such divisions with a different image of the solidarity of "true worshipers" who now dwell together. Unlike the woman's initial refusals, the Samaritan villagers extend hospitality to Jesus, which he accepts.⁴¹

Samaria is no longer "alien" to Jesus, because the sacred space which had marked the separation of Jew/Samaritan has been dissolved with the coming of "true worshipers." In dissolving the dichotomy of space, Jesus also reveals that the necessity which led him to pass through Samaria was not geographical in the physical sense, but represents his commitment to doing the will of the One who sent him. The harvest sayings identifying the immediacy of sowing and reaping dramatically illustrate the successful accomplishment of the task implied in this sending. Structuralist analysis does not identify the meaning of the text only with the most abstract levels of opposition, but with the totality of meanings encoded in it.⁴²

This form of narrative analysis attends to logical, syntactic, and semantic structures within the text. The extent to which the world of the story corresponds to other historical information about Jewish and

³⁹ Boers, *Mountain* 23-27. The significance of Jesus' dwelling with the Samaritans for two days in the Johannine symbol system evidently reflects the full presence of salvation (so Jn 14:3; Boers, *Mountain* 28).

⁴⁰ Boers, *Mountain* 73.

⁴¹ Ibid. 79-96.

⁴² Ibid. 79.

Samaritan relationships, legends concerning Jacob, actual relationships between men and women, and messianic speculations in the first century are irrelevant to its methodology. The significance of the Christological titles—prophet, messiah, and savior of the world—is not given by external examples of Jewish, Samaritan, and early Christian usage. It emerges in the course of the narrative itself. Jesus becomes “savior of the world” in breaking down the oppositions encoded in the fundamental antagonisms of Samaritan/Jew, this mountain/Jerusalem. With some difficulty he enlists the aid of the Samaritan woman in accomplishing this task.⁴³ The implied opposition between “this world,” where geographical divisions matter, and “true worshipers,” attached to the heavenly world, which is Jesus’ real “home,” is hinted at in the concluding act of hospitality. The theme becomes explicit in the Farewell Discourses, which emphasize the fellowship of love that binds the Father, Jesus, and those who have received Jesus together.

Johannine narrative forms a complex web of symbolic interconnections. This story points backward as well as forward to the culmination of the plot. The Samaritan woman presumed that Jesus would identify with “the Jews” in affirming Jerusalem as the place in which God is worshiped (v. 20). His reply immediately disengages from that context to the wider framework of “true worshipers” and the Father.⁴⁴ In so doing, Jesus creates a new point of view from which the reader is to view the rest of the narrative. At the same time, the reader may remember that Jesus has already engaged the issue of the Jerusalem temple in the episode frequently referred to as “cleansing” the temple (2:13-22). Jesus does not, in fact, cleanse or purify the temple; he rejects its claim to represent “my Father’s house.”

The complex historical-critical problems of tradition and redaction, relationship between the Johannine version of the episode and those in the Synoptics, and its apparent chronological dislocation from the passion events to an earlier visit to Jerusalem do not impinge upon its narrative significance. The narrator provides an interpretive framework by addressing the reader directly. When the Scripture and the word of Jesus are fulfilled in the passion/resurrection, then it becomes clear that the “temple” is not the edifice to which “the Jews” are attached but Jesus’ own body. The narrator goes on to observe (2:23-25) that Jesus refused the faith of many who believed in his signs because he knows what is inside human beings—an ominous warning. An ambiguous element of threat resulting from Jesus’ popularity with the crowds (4:1-3) had led Jesus to depart Judea. Thus the reader knows that the terms on

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 71.

which the Samaritan woman includes Jesus among "the Jews" as one who demands worship in Jerusalem is false as soon as she utters the sentence.

These connections highlight the jarring quality of verse 22, which appears to demand recognition of the ethnocentric superiority of the Jewish religious position over against the Samaritans, who are second-class citizens. The verse has not troubled Christian exegetes, who swallow its objectionable character up in the grand sweep of salvation history, from Israel, through Jesus, to the Church. But Jacob Neusner has rightly protested that with this scheme Christian scholars have also created a fictionalized first-century Judaism, said to be the "background" for early Christianity. He insists that much of what Christians say is easily intelligible on the basis of such backgrounds, such as the need for the messiah to "cleanse" the temple, makes no sense at all. There is not one shared history of salvation but two competing claims about God and salvation. The Christian construes salvation in universalist terms. The Jew insists upon the separateness and sanctification of the people, Israel. Jesus could only appear to be a madman disrupting the sacrificial order essential to the holiness of the people.⁴⁵ (At least John was more honest. Jesus' action could not be understood until after the symbolic restructuring of Scripture and Jesus' word required by his death and resurrection.)

Neusner's ethical criticism of Christian scholarship should give us pause in accepting the common "salvation history" resolution of the difficulty in Jn 4:22. Boers's structuralist analysis creates even more uneasiness with the verse, since it violates the logical patterns underlying the narrative. Our own literary correlation of this passage with the previous episode in the temple also suggests that it is unacceptable to the narrator. Culpepper's study of the narrator's voice in John hints that the "we" in this passage is anomalous.⁴⁶ If it is not appropriate to the structuring patterns discovered by various forms of narrative analysis to presume that Jesus re-engages in a partisan frame of reference, then we are compelled, as Boers suggests, to question the authenticity of this verse.⁴⁷ He sees verse 22 as a later misunderstanding of the episode, in which it is taken to affirm the correctness of Christian views over against

⁴⁵ J. Neusner, "The Absoluteness of Christianity and the Uniqueness of Judaism: Why Salvation Is Not of the Jews," *Interpretation* 43 (1989) 18–31.

⁴⁶ Culpepper, *Anatomy* 46. He does not pick up this problem when he returns to the treatment of "the Jews" as characters, but seems to interpret the passage according to the salvation-history model (127).

⁴⁷ Boers, *Mountain* 72.

both Samaritans and Jews.⁴⁸ In this challenge to the authenticity of verse 22, the narrative critic may either resort to a theory of multiple redactions of the Gospel or to an even older tool in the historical-critical arsenal, text criticism. On the latter view, the comment reflects an early interpretive gloss which was immediately accepted into the manuscript tradition, since it represents the unchallenged self-understanding of Christians.

Jn 4:4-42 presents Jesus as savior of the world because he rejects the divisions into which the fundamental patterns of human identity fall: with one's ancestral origins, one's "people," one's place, and the sacral character which the religious place of worship gives to such ordering boundaries. At the same time, the use of "the Jews" as figures of unbelief in the narrative seems to precipitate the emergence of just the kind of Christian tribalism evident in 4:22. Though Christian scholars often resolve the charge of anti-Semitism by insisting that "the Jews" are symbolic actors standing for unbelief and hence humanity in general,⁴⁹ the subtle and deliberate use of Samaritan/Jew as cultural and religious poles in John 4 makes it difficult to agree that the author would accept a symbolic substitution, "the unbelievers," for "the Jews" in his narrative.

Secure in their construction of the "Jewish heritage" of Christianity, exegetes often emphasize the assertion that Jesus is a Jew when confronted by the overwhelming separation between Jesus and "the Jews" posited by the narrative.⁵⁰ If we accept the possibility that 4:22 is a gloss, then we must challenge the assumption that identification of Jesus as "a Jew" is to be evaluated positively by the reader of the Gospel. In fact, the assertion only appears in settings of hostility and rejection. If 4:43-45 does imply that Judea is Jesus' homeland, then it claims that the homeland dishonors him. The prologue speaks of the Word rejected by "his own," a symbol that the narrative leads the reader to fill out with "the Jews" who reject the "light" (1:11; 12:36b-50). In both instances where Jesus is identified as "a Jew" by a character, the intent is negative. The Samaritan woman (4:9) and Pilate (18:35) are refusing a proposal made by Jesus by using a category, "Jew," to separate themselves from him. Both narratives go on to reject the socio-religious categories by appealing to a nonearthly standard (18:36; note that Jesus distinguishes himself and his followers from "the Jews"). Finally, the polemic exchanges in 8:31-47 reject the claim that Jesus' Father, God, is "father" to "the Jews." The cumulative effect of such symbolic patterns in the

⁴⁸ Ibid. 27. The same perspective characterizes the other "we" passage which Culpepper identifies as anomalous, Jn 3:11.

⁴⁹ So Fortna, *Fourth Gospel* 312-14.

⁵⁰ E.g., *ibid.* 312.

narrative loads "the Jews" with negative connotations and separates Jesus as far as possible from any association with them.

WHY NARRATIVE CRITICISM?

Our examples of narrative criticism in NT studies show that biblical scholars are much more able analysts than most literary critics. Although narrative criticism demands that one attend to the text and not constructions derived from outside the symbolic world that it creates, the experience of reading the OT and other literature of the period that is brought into the exegetical enterprise by those who seek to study the literary context of biblical writings is fundamental to judgments even about the surface structures and language of the narrative. Modern theories of narrative communication and techniques of analysis provide fruitful approaches to NT narrative, but our expectations of them must also be schooled by as many examples of ancient performance as the literary critics who devised the categories of analysis brought to the task from the modern world of literature. Narrative criticism cannot provide a short cut around the older elements of historical criticism.

We have also seen that narrative criticism poses a challenge to widely held assumptions of the historical-critical paradigm: its assumptions about redaction and textual coherence; its easy move from text to history; its reliance upon constructed syntheses like "Judaism in the first century." Narrative criticism also runs up against some of the theological convictions operative in historical-critical syntheses. It demonstrates the pervasiveness of the salvation-history paradigm as an explanatory model for the emergence of Christianity and the justification for Christian rewriting of Jewish traditions into completely different and even alien patterns of signification. As ethical criticism, narrative criticism can demand that we attend to the values encoded in the world presented by a text in a way that does not simply assign those which we find unacceptable to the fragments of some past ideology. The powerful effect of narrative in shaping character can be developed in reflection on the complex dynamics of reader-response and creation of a self through acts of reading.

At the same time, the plurality of readings which narrative criticism suggests frustrates what may be the most pervasive goal of theological readings of Scripture: to fix the meaning of the text, to compel it to make an authoritative pronouncement on some issues of theological or ethical concern. (In this regard narrative criticism also opposes monolithic ideological schemata for rendering the real message of the gospel whether for liberationist theology, women's equality within the Church, or their equally dogmatic opponents.) Narrative analysis does not yield the kind

of conceptual syntheses which might provide the introductory paragraphs to systematic expositions of Christology, ecclesiology, Christian discipleship, or ethics. The meanings which the stories convey in their symbolic structures and dynamic unfolding in narrative are not frozen propositions. A hermeneutics attentive to narrative as invitation to participate in a "world," a particular orientation of life and character, may provide a way of speaking about the multiple invitations that we receive from Scripture. But in the end the encounter of readers and narrative is also a new reading, contextually bounded and yet always changing in its results.

Narratives may embody values, the complexity of human characters in their moments of social and personal decision, even the unconscious and deformed desires of human beings. Narratives may bring all that reality into touch with signs and symbols of another reality which transcends them and even asks whether the attachments we struggle so hard to preserve are vehicles of life or death. In the Christian tradition our stories have provoked theological and ethical reflection, but they do not hand us theology or ethics on a platter ready for consumption. We create and re-create them. Within such a context narrative criticism is not a linguistic game played with endlessly self-referential markers. It serves to facilitate encounters with the reality opened up by our stories, so that, like the Samaritan villagers, readers must decide whether or not it might be true to claim of Jesus, "This is indeed the savior of the world" (Jn 4:42).