

**REVIEW ARTICLE OF KELLY R. IVERSON
AND CHRISTOPHER W. SKINNER'S
*MARK AS STORY: RETROSPECT
AND PROSPECT***

TOM SHEPHERD
Andrews University

Iverson, Kelly R., and Christopher W. Skinner, eds. *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, Resources for Biblical Study. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011. xii + 309 pp. Paper, \$36.95.

Context

Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner's *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect* was reviewed at a session of the Mark Group of the Society of Biblical Literature in its annual meetings in San Francisco in November 2011. Respondents to the book included Rikki Watts of Regent College, Francis J. Moloney of Salesians of Don Bosco, Kathleen Corely of the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, Philip Ruge-Jones of Texas Lutheran University, and me. Each reviewer approached the work from a different perspective. My approach was through the eyes of Narrative Criticism.

The book arose out of consideration of the fundamental impact that the book, *Mark as Story*, by David Rhoads and Donald Michie (and in a second edition with Joanna Dewey) has had on Markan studies, particularly on narrative approaches to the text. The present book, edited by Iverson and Skinner, reviews that impact, the developments that have risen out of it, and the directions further narrative investigations are taking. The following review is what I presented at the review session with some modifications. It is published here to provide the concepts and discussion to a wider readership and to encourage the perusal of this excellent anthology.

Overview

I want to begin my review of this book with a word of thanks to David Rhoads and Donald Michie for their work in producing the first edition of *Mark as Story*, and with Joanna Dewey, the second edition. This book has had an impressive influence in the field of narrative studies of Mark in particular, and the Gospels in general. As others have stated in the book and elsewhere, we owe the authors a debt of gratitude for a book that has sparked interest in our field of study and helped so many to engage narrative in a new way. I also want to thank Kelly Iverson and Christopher Skinner for their work in editing the current work, *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*. Having done editorial work on books like this, I know what is involved in moving articles forward for publication; thank you, gentlemen.

Iverson and Skinner's book is an enjoyable read for anyone involved in narrative criticism. What I especially appreciate is the opportunity to read the *mature* thought of many who have been leaders in this field. The sense of

nuance, the attention to detail, the challenges to typical ways of thinking and the opening of new vistas—all these are present in this book and in a quantity quite a bit above what one normally encounters in an anthology. Thus, thank you to all the contributors, and again to the editors.

In this essay, I cannot engage with all the authors who participated in this work, but I do want to make brief mention of what I consider to be each author's special contribution. The book is divided into three sections: Method, Application, and a shorter Reflections of the authors of *Mark as Story*. My brief summary here is of the first two sections. In the section on Method, *Christopher Skinner* provides a *summary of the historical development of narrative criticism within the academy*—its precursors and the way *Mark as Story* impacted the field. *Mark Powell* further nuances this history of narrative studies by categorizing narrative critics *as author-oriented* (what was the author's intent?), *text-oriented* (what was expected of the implied reader?), and *reader-oriented* (how do any group of readers understand the story?). *Elizabeth Struthers Malbon* investigates changes from the first to second edition of the book and also deals with characterization. In the first part of her essay, she carries out a *redaction-critical analysis* of the two editions of *Mark as Story*. She concludes that many shifts have made the second edition more nuanced and improved. Regarding character, as she has discussed elsewhere, she maintains there is a *distinction between the viewpoint/statements of the implied author and the narrator*, with the implied author focusing attention on God (through the words of Jesus), and the narrator focusing attention on Jesus. However, Malbon also notes that *characters are only understandable in relation to other characters*. This illustrates the interactive qualities of characterization.

Stephen Moore focuses attention on the issue of *interior views of Jesus* as depicted in *Mark as Story* and finds this anachronistic. For Moore, Mark illustrates a view of persons who in Cartesian epistemology could be called prehuman, whereas Rhoads and Michie's view could be called human, and Moore himself, in twenty-first-century postmodern perspective, calls for a posthuman view. *Francis Moloney* focuses attention on *plot* and presents the entire Gospel of Mark as having *three central turning points*—the prologue in 1:1-13, the central confession in 8:27-30, and the ending in 16:1-8. *Thomas Boomershine* presents evidence that suggests that in the ancient world Mark was presented in performances rather than read silently. He posits from a *performance-criticism* perspective that Mark was likely written for a *mainly Jewish audience* that needed to be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ.

Alan Culpepper's article begins the section on Application. He focuses on the question of the *unity of the Gospel of Mark* and does an analysis of the beheading of John the Baptist in Mark 6:17-29 as a test case since that story is often seen as disengaged from the rest of the Gospel. His conclusion is that this story does link well with a number of themes of the Gospel of Mark and thus illustrates the unity of the book. *Morna Hooker* outlines *turning points* in Mark at the beginning, center, and end that illustrate the idea of *Scripture fulfilled* in John the Baptist as forerunner, Jesus as Messiah, and as Son of God. *Kelly Iverson* discusses the Messianic Secret that William Wrede first promoted.

Through narrative study he concludes that the Gospel of Mark displays a *secrecy theme* that is more far reaching than the Messianic Secret as commonly conceived. *Holly Hearon compares and contrasts narrative analysis and performance analysis*, illustrating particularly their distinctive views of audience. Her study focuses on the story of Jairus and the woman with the hemorrhage in Mark 5. *Robert Fowler* describes an assignment he has his students do in “*filming*” the story of Jesus’ three in-the-boat scenes and the lessons that can be learned from this exercise.

*Review of Stephen Moore’s and
Holly Hearon’s Essays*

In the rest of this essay, I want to interact with and interrelate two of the essays—Stephen Moore’s “Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark” and Holly Hearon’s “From Narrative to Performance: Methodological Considerations and Interpretive Moves.”

Stephen Moore

Stephen Moore utilizes Jacques Derrida’s and Bruce Boehrer’s works on deconstruction of character to critique Rhoads and Michie’s treatment of Mark as a short story in the first edition of *Mark as Story*. Moore maintains that treating Mark as a short story and using the modern novel’s concept of character in analyzing the second Gospel is anachronistic since the modern novel’s concept of character is rooted in the Cartesian reorientation of European philosophy toward the subjective experience of the individual. This Cartesian reorientation involved the redefinition of what it means to be human via a sharp distinction drawn between the human and the animal. Humans had souls and animals did not (an animal became known as a “beast-machine”) (80).

Moore relates this sense of the human and animal to Rhoads and Michie’s characterization designations of “flat” (beast like) and “round” (human) (82-87). With this in view, to be close to the Jesus of *Mark as Story* is to not only be a more “round” character, but also to be more human. To be further from Jesus is to be more “flat,” more animal. Moore makes the point sharply:

As the characters who are furthest from Jesus, the group Rhoads and Michie term “the authorities” are also the flattest characters—characters possessed only of “consistent” and “predictable” traits. Relative to Jesus, they are automatons: Rhoads and Michie tell us as much. Relative to Jesus, they are animals: Rhoads and Michie imply as much (83).

Moore also sees this sense of animalization of people in the description of minor characters in *Mark as Story*, in which they are described as having “childlike, often persistent, faith” and “childlike humility.” Whereas Rhoads and Michie describe this as an aptitude for service, Moore relates it to “worker animals” (84).

Moore suggests a different approach to character in Mark by relating Jesus’ self-designation as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ to its Hebrew Bible roots in Daniel 7

and positing thereby a “precarious, shifting, unstable space between God and beast, divinity and animality, sacrificer and sacrificed (cf. 10:45)” (89).

I find Moore’s critique of characterization in *Mark as Story* thoughtful and provocative as always. I appreciate his uncovering of the Cartesian roots of the modern novel’s concept of character and his deconstruction of its significance for meaning in Mark. At the close of his essay, Moore quotes Cary Wolfe describing our culture as “bookended by a pre- and posthumanism that thinks the human/animal distinction quite otherwise” (“Human, All Too Human: ‘Animal Studies’ and the Humanities,” in *PMLA* 124 [2009], 564; 564-575, cited in Moore, 93). I sense in this a hint that Moore’s posthuman critique of the Enlightenment may have more affinities to what he and others describe as the prehuman perspective of the ancient world. But not total affinity, for Moore critiques the Markan view of the animal quite sharply, with Rhoads, in decrying the destruction of animals (2,000 pigs, Mark 5) and the designation by Jesus of the Syrophenecian woman as a *κυνάριον* (“little dog” or “household dog,” Mark 7).

Regarding Moore’s critique of Rhoads and Michie on minor characters, Moore uses the terminology “infantilizing language” when describing how Rhoads and Michie talk about minor characters (Moore, 84). He notes their use of terms such as “childlike, often persistent, faith” and “childlike humility.” Moore links this with the concept of “worker animals,” but I think this is a misreading of *Mark as Story*. The very concepts of simple faith and self-sacrificing service are central values to the Gospel of Mark (10:13-16, 41-45) and should not be considered as a deprecation of minor characters but rather their valuation. This, I believe, is what Rhoads and Michie were trying to express.

Regarding the wider biblical context regarding human and animal, Moore does not seem to take sufficient note that all *creatures* are placed under God in Scripture and all, including animals, have a relationship to the *Creator*. People in particular have responsibility toward God for the stewardship of creation and creatures in this world.

On the point of characterization, I will have to say that I never have found the terms “round” and “flat” very helpful in describing biblical narratives. Partly it is due to the riveting power of these stories that leads me to think of Herod in his banquet hall, or the Syrophenecian woman pleading for her daughter, or Jairus imploring for his little girl, as anything but “flat” characters. But I also realize that these biblical characters do not display the type of interiority and introspection typical of characters in modern novels (though the woman with the hemorrhage does say, “If I touch even his garments, I will be healed,” to whom? Obviously to herself—no one else was listening, except the Markan audience).

But at a functional level I also find the terms “round” and “flat” wanting, not because of a misapplication of philosophical presuppositions (though I agree with Stephen here), but because the terms are interpretive rather than descriptive. I do what I call “Quantitative Narrative Analysis”—that is, I analyze the passage I am studying in close detail within the various categories

of narrative (plot, settings, characters, actions, time relationships, narrator/ implied reader characteristics, stylistic features) and place all the data in charts. When I finish, I have about 15-20 pages of charts detailing the minutiae of the narrative. I then look for patterns pointing in the same direction to determine the overall point or thesis of the story. When it comes to character, I prefer to detail the different characters via categories of *showing* and *telling* and note who says what about whom. I don't bother to describe characters as "round" or "flat" because I find that too blunt a tool for explaining what is happening in the story.

While I find Moore's critique useful, I want to point out that he has touched Rhoads and Michie's work at what I consider to be its weakest link. The issue of character is a particularly complex and controverted matter—evidence of Malbon's careful work regarding differentiating character voices in Mark. Obviously ancient literature had characters, and they were recognized as such. The other categories of narrative criticism I have mentioned above are also readily apparent in ancient narratives, even if not developed in the same way as in modern works. Narrative critics of the Bible are sensitive to this matter. Thus, I would not want Moore's critique to be taken as a critique of narrative criticism of the Scriptures in general or in whole, but rather a corrective on the fascinating matter of characterization.

Holly Hearon

Holly Hearon's study on narrative performance was an especially interesting article to me for three reasons. First, I work in narrative analysis, not performance analysis; hence I learned a great deal reading her article (along with Tom Boomershine's article). Second, I love telling stories—largely children's stories at church, where I enjoy incorporating the children into the story, much as Hearon describes audience involvement in performance. Third, Hearon chose to use Mark 5:21-43 as her test case for discussion—one of the most famous of Markan Sandwich Stories (intercalations), and one of six intercalations that I analyzed in my Ph.D. dissertation.

Hearon compares and contrasts how narrative analysis describes and evaluates stories and how performance analysis does the same. She makes the comparison in four areas: Setting, Conflict, Character, and Narrator. Regarding Setting in Narrative Criticism, Hearon thinks in terms of temporal, spatial, and social settings. She describes Jesus by the lake, pressed in the crowd, and in Jairus's house. She argues that "interior spaces . . . function as revelatory space" (213). She refers to the leader of the synagogue and physicians within the social setting of the story and finds the number 12 evocative of Israel. Comparing Narrative Criticism with Performance Criticism, Hearon notes the way that Performance Criticism modifies setting in two ways—first, the textual markers concerning setting are, as she puts it, "blocked out in performance space" (215). That is, locations in the story space are given actual physical space on the stage or location where the story is told. Second, the storyteller uses gestures and movements to also illustrate setting (such as Rhoads ducking down to enter Jairus's house as he tells the

story). Hearon notes the way in which performance makes the characteristics of the story concrete before the audience, raising awareness of the details of the story that otherwise might go unnoticed. Performance Criticism does this, she maintains, in a way that Narrative Criticism does not.

Regarding Conflict, Hearon posits two main conflicts for the story (217-221). The first is the need for healing. The obstacle to healing Jairus's daughter is neither the crowd nor the woman. It is Jesus' stopping that allows time for Jairus's daughter to die. This leads to what Hearon sees as the second conflict, the need for faith. The report of the daughter's death is attached to the suggestion not to bother Jesus any longer. This is the first obstacle to Jairus's faith. The second is the crowd at Jairus's house jeering at Jesus' comment that the girl is only asleep. The resolution occurs in the raising of the daughter, which is anticipated by the earlier healing of the woman. Her faith in believing that she could be healed by just touching Jesus' clothes sets a model of faith for Jairus to follow.

Hearon compares and contrasts the performance of this scene by David Rhoads and Philip Ruge-Jones. It is interesting to notice how the same scene plays out so differently in the telling by the two performers. Rhoads invites comparison between Jairus and the woman by placing them on either side of him, while Ruge-Jones emphasizes the woman's role as a model of faith by having Jesus look at her while he talks words of faith to Jairus. At Jairus's house Rhoads portrays Jesus as dismissing the disbelief of the crowd with a quickened pace of the telling, followed by a slowing when Jesus enters the room where the dead girl is. Ruge-Jones, on the other hand, emphasizes the crowd's disbelief when they mock Jesus and portrays him driving them out of the house. Jesus then takes the mother and father by hand and leads them "to face what they fear (their sleeping daughter) and to find their faith affirmed through her restoration" (220). Hearon notes that both performers minimize the importance of the delay created by healing the woman and focus attention on the need for faith instead.

Regarding Character, Hearon maintains that the major characters in Narrative Criticism would be Jesus, Jairus, and the woman, with the daughter playing no active role in the story (for the discussion of character, see 221-226; for discussion regarding the role of the daughter, see 222). She notes that Jesus is the central character, does the most talking, and is consistently in charge. Jairus is present throughout the story and plays an active role only at the beginning. Hearon does not see him as part of the ruling elite since he is in a village context. In comparison, the woman is nameless, appears hopeless, does not want to be noticed, but has confidence that Jesus has power to restore her. Hearon notes that the story invites comparisons of Jairus and the woman and the woman and Jairus's daughter.

Hearon notes the way in which performance brings characters to life in a performer. In this regard, reading is actually more active than performance. That is to say, in performance the activity of interpreting the text is done by and resides in the performance, whereas in reading the reader must interpret the text's meaning. Hearon notes that Rhoads and Ruge-Jones embody the

characters differently from one another. Rhoads's Jesus is commanding, in charge, whereas Ruge-Jones's Jesus is more empathetic and compassionate. With Rhoads, Jesus is a presence in the midst of people; with Ruge-Jones, Jesus is present with people. Hearon goes on to note differences in the way the two performers illustrate Jairus and the woman. Rhoads's Jairus is more desperate, Ruge-Jones's more a petitioner. In Rhoads's depiction, the woman is present only a short time, with focus on the encounter with Jesus, while in Ruge-Jones's presentation, the woman is much more of a physical presence in the storytelling.

Regarding the role of Narrator, Hearon posits that in Narrative Criticism the narrator "has no expressed identity or social location and is not bound by time or space" and is a rather invisible voice that tells the story (see 226-231 for the discussion of narrator; see 227 for the quotation about narrative criticism and the narrator). The narrator cultivates sympathy for Jairus and the woman and confidence in Jesus as he brings healing to both the woman and Jairus's daughter. But Hearon notes that the reader has to fill in many gaps left by the narrator. In contrast, in performance the narrator takes on a much more active role, embodied in the performer. The narrator in performance takes much of the interpretive role that the reader carries in a silent reading. Furthermore, the narrator has to gain the trust of the audience, more as a careful observer of events than as omniscient. Indeed, every storyteller knows the difference between an audience being "with you" or indifferent.

Hearon concludes her article by noting, "A narrative-critical analysis forms, in many respects, the basis for a performance-critical analysis of the text" (342). She goes on to note how performance criticism raises a new set of questions that lead to new perspectives on the text—e.g., how to block out space in performance, physical settings and the values they represent, how characters are presented and introduced, physical proximity of characters, tone of voice, gestures, turning points in the story. She sees two special contributions of Performance Criticism to interpretation—first, the degree to which it illustrates NT stories are character driven, and second, the challenge Performance Criticism presents to engage the ethical issues that emerge in performance not simply as abstractions on a page, but as concerns that affect people in time and space.

As a narrative critic, I welcome the contributions made by performance criticism to the interpretation of the text. As someone who has thought a long time about the Sandwich Stories of Mark, I found the issues raised by Hearon's discussion of the story of Jairus and the woman with the hemorrhage an engaging and thought-provoking review of the story's meaning. Hearon affirmed and developed a number of convictions I already had about the story, and challenged others. As such, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to read and interact with her work. It suggests to me the "two-way street" of Narrative Criticism and Performance Criticism, in which each contributes to the other.

I think that Hearon is quite right that narrative criticism forms the basis for performance criticism of the text. Her presentation seems to fit within the

text-oriented approach to narrative. One must know what the story point is in order to perform it with respect for the author's perspective.

However, here, I am afraid, is the rub for other authors within the book. Reader-response criticism has moved in the direction of polyvalent meanings of texts and does not accept readily the idea of authorial intent as the control for meaning, or even that authorial intent is recoverable. One thinks of Mark Powell's discussion of three branches or approaches to narrative criticism, with the reader-oriented approach focusing attention on "polyvalent responses" (43). And there is the comment of Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie that "Narrative criticism can distinguish between readings that the text may suggest as well as readings that resist or ignore the text's signals, but it cannot (and should not) isolate one correct reading" (271). The first part of their comment I can understand well. Being sensitive to the text's signals suggests performance based in a careful analysis of textual markers as indicative of authorial intent. But saying that narrative criticism cannot isolate one correct reading, and especially that it should not (!), suggests to me the imposition of reader-oriented readings over author- and text-oriented readings, first on the basis of what is possible, and second on ethical grounds (what "should not" be done). Put another way, Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie seem to say that the author- and text-oriented approaches are, first of all, mistaken in what they consider possible, and second they are wrong in presenting or promoting their conclusions. While I accept that thoughtful people take a reader-oriented position, I would expect that those taking that position would recognize the same regarding author- and text-oriented approaches.

Here is my point. If the reader-oriented position is taken to its logical conclusion, texts become the political tool of whoever explains or performs them rather than a communication from an author writing at a particular time to a particular audience. That the early Christians quickly reduced their message to writing and transmitted those writings over a long period of time to use again and again within the community of faith, indicates to me that they highly valued these texts and saw authorial intention as vital, indeed the Word of God to them and to the world. We can agree or disagree with their decisions, but I find it important to recognize the significance of those decisions for what they say about how early readers took these texts.

I wish I had time to further discuss Hearon's reading/performance of Mark 5. In my own work on the passage, I found that the two stories create dramatized irony between major characters—in this particular intercalation, the irony is that the Messiah's delay in healing a chronic case of illness, because he seemingly does not know who touched him, results in the death of the acute case—Jairus's daughter. Jesus further complicates this sense of irony by asking the strange question, "Who touched me?" and later stating that the little girl has not died, but is sleeping. In both cases, the question or comment is misunderstood by people present, but the tables are turned as both question and comment turn out to be the revelation of the miracle to follow. Where Jesus appears foolish, he is found to be powerful. The irony of a wonder worker who does not know who touched him or who does not

understand what death is, is turned on its head—the “touch” is where real faith in the Messiah resides, and death is only sleep to him. Thus, the central point of the intercalation revolves around who Jesus is, and the outcome is not tragic but comic as he turns suffering into peace and wailing into reunion. The two stories also play on the topic of secrecy and revelation as one begins in public but ends in private and the other begins in secrecy but ends in revelation as the woman tells “all the truth” (Mark 5:33).

Conclusion

It seems to me that as we proceed to analyze these stories and perform them that the two methods of study, Narrative Criticism and Performance Criticism, will do well to continue contact and discussion. The anthology of articles put together by Iverson and Skinner helps open the door for further discussion of the meaning of texts. It is a volume everyone interested in narrative Markan studies will need to take into account.