John, Elijah, or One of the Prophets: How the Markan Reader Understands Jesus Through John/Elijah

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Trinity College and the Biblical Department of the Toronto School of Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy awarded by the University of St. Michael's College.

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

A primary concern of the Gospel of Mark is the identity and fate of Jesus. In service to this, the Gospel develops a secondary interest in the identity and fate of John the Baptist. John, as Elijah *redivivus*, provides reasons to believe that Jesus is the Christ, provides a grid by which Jesus’ ministry and identity can be comprehended, and helps justify and explicate the unexpected death of the Messiah. This is accomplished through various literary devices throughout the narrative. For them to be fully effective it is necessary for the implied reader to be actively involved.

The fact that Jesus’ identity and John’s identity are not adequately acknowledged within the narrative suggests that the plot moves towards a recognition of both of these figures. Jesus’ identity and John’s identity are related, in such a way that a recognition of John’s witness and identity leads towards a recognition of Jesus’ identity and fate. To understand John is to understand Jesus, and to misunderstand John is to misunderstand Jesus. Furthermore, John the Baptist is used to evoke the past and foreshadow the future in such a way as to place the whole of the story of Jesus into the divine purpose and salvation history.
The only one who appropriately grasps the identities and fates of Jesus and John is the implied reader. This illustrates the role of the implied reader in the narrative. The characters within the story do not adequately recognize either John or Jesus. It remains to the reader to do this. Hence, for the narrative to have closure concerning the theme of recognition relating to both Jesus and John, it will be a closure brought to pass by the reader, and not by the characters within the narrative.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introductory Issues

There is wide consensus that the identity of Jesus is a central concern in the Gospel of Mark.¹ This can be seen in the questions that drive the narrative: “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him? (4:41);” “Who do people say that I am? (8:27);” and, “Who do you say that I am? (8:28).”² Among the most important pericopae in which the issue of identity comes to a focus are the opening of the Gospel (1:1-14), the story of the death of John (6:14-29), Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi (8:27-30), the Transfiguration (9:2-8), and the Crucifixion (15:24-39). Interestingly, in each of these there is a reference to John the Baptist or Elijah. John the Baptist is introduced in 1:2-15. Jesus is thought to be John or Elijah in 6:14-16 and 8:28. At the Transfiguration, Elijah appears with Moses. Bystanders mistake Jesus’ plea to God as a plea to Elijah at the Crucifixion (15:35). This is made more interesting by the fact that in 9:11-13 John the Baptist and Elijah are somehow equated. If these pericopae concern the identity of Jesus and in them John or Elijah appears, then John and Elijah are related to the question of Jesus’ identity: they have a role in bringing Jesus’ identity into focus.

While older historical-critical studies, especially redaction criticism, have examined the question of the relationship of John and Elijah to the identity of Jesus in Mark, narrative criticism is uniquely suited to deal with this. Its concern with literary devices such as character, setting, time, plot, and irony, make it appropriate, as it is with

² See also Mark 1:27, 2:7, 6:3, 11:28, 14:61, 15:2.
these things that the Gospel of Mark uses John and Elijah to address the issue of Jesus’ identity.

The question, then, is how does Mark use Elijah and John the Baptist to guide his readers towards an appropriate understanding of Jesus? How does Mark define and defend Jesus’ identity and destiny through John and Elijah? Or perhaps better, it might be appropriate to reformulate these questions to correspond more closely with the guiding methodology of this dissertation, narrative criticism: How does the implied author use Elijah and John the Baptist to guide the implied reader towards an appropriate understanding of Jesus? How does the implied author of Mark define and defend Jesus’ identity and destiny through John and Elijah by means of the narrative tools at his disposal (including devices such as various aspects of narration, characterization, setting, time, plot, and irony)?

I will argue that through John the Baptist (and Elijah) the implied reader of the narrative of Mark is given reasons to believe that Jesus is the Christ, is provided a grid by which Jesus’ ministry and identity can be comprehended, and is led to understand and accept the death of Jesus.

Chapter one states the questions that will drive this project and the thesis to be argued. The next component of this chapter explores the state of the question relating to the study of John/Elijah in the Gospel of Mark.

Chapter two explains the methodology to be used in this dissertation – narrative criticism. This includes a discussion regarding implied authors and implied readers, narration, characters and characterization, setting, time, events and plot, and irony.

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3 See the Methodology Section below for further explanation.
4 See above.
5 “John/Elijah” will be used to signify John as Elijah.
Chapter three is the heart of the argument. After considering a few introductory issues (the general qualities of the Markan narrator, issues relating to the structure of Mark, and characteristics of the Markan implied reader), the episodes within the narrative that feature John or Elijah are examined.

Chapter four offers a summary of what has been discussed as well as some general conclusions.

1.2 The Study of John/Elijah in the Gospel of Mark

1.2.1 Early Historical Criticism

Historical Criticism “narrowly defined deals with the historical setting of a document, the time and place in which it was written, its sources, if any, the events, dates, persons, and places mentioned or implied in the text, etc.” It could be argued that the appearance in 1774-78 of Reimarus’ Fragments was a watershed moment for the study of the historical John the Baptist. Broadly speaking, before Fragments the Gospels were generally understood to provide an unobstructed, relatively objective view of history. While Reimarus believed that the Gospels were historically accurate reports, he argued that the evangelists had “changed the original meaning of those reports to fit their own purposes.” He argued that Jesus and John conspired together in an attempt to have Jesus become king and national liberator of Israel. Although John knew his cousin Jesus, they both pretended not to know each other. “John pretends to receive his revelation at the

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8 Ibid., 4.
baptism” of Jesus so that he might deceive the people. Their hope was of “awakening the people to the speedy arrival of the long-hoped-for deliverer, and of making them eager for his coming.” Nevertheless, things did not go as planned for Jesus, and, due in part to the removal and death of his co-conspirator, John, their plans fell apart.

Reimarus’ John has little to do with Mark’s Gospel specifically. Because his interest was not in appreciating the narrativity of the Gospels, but in assessing their historicity, he ignores the plot as established by the evangelists, and establishes an alternative plot of his own. Furthermore, he also ignores the evangelists’ characterizations of the John and Jesus within the Gospels in favor of his own alternative characterizations.

1.2.2 Source Criticism

Source criticism considers oral or written sources that allegedly lie behind Mark’s Gospel. An example of this that pertains to John (and Elijah) in Mark relates to the

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10 Ibid., 140.
11 Ibid., 141.
12 Ibid., 148.
relationship between 6:14-15 and 8:28. Pesch believes that a common tradition lies behind both texts.\(^{14}\) Bultmann believes that 6:14 comes from one tradition, and 8:28 comes from another tradition. 6:15-16 comes from Mark, and was derived from the traditions behind 8:28.\(^{15}\) Schweizer argues that 6:15 was taken from the tradition behind 8:28, which was added to 6:16, which also comes from tradition. Finally, Schweizer believes Mark added 6:14 as an introduction.\(^{16}\) Gundry and Rawlinson think that 8:28 comes from tradition, and that Mark duplicates it again in 6:14-16.\(^{17}\) Taylor eschews the question of priority, and suggests, “It is not necessary to infer that the one passage is merely an echo of the other.”\(^{18}\)

It is not difficult to see that this sort of analysis does not lead to a holistic and integrated understanding of the narrative. It breaks the narrative apart into separate units, and then attempts to determine priority among them, or what preexisting traditions might lie behind them. Its interest is not in the finished product, but in the individual building blocks.

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\(^{18}\) Taylor, *Mark*, 376.
Adam Winn takes a different approach to the question of Markan source criticism in *Mark and the Elijah-Elisha Narrative*. Winn argues that Mark used the Elijah-Elisha narratives of Kings in the same way that Virgil’s *Aeneid* used Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Virgil “modeled” his work upon Homer’s work, but did not do so “woodenly or slavishly, but rather quite creatively.” Likewise, Mark creatively modeled his work upon the Elijah-Elisha narratives of Kings. Winn argues that there are macro and micro parallels between Mark and the Elijah-Elisha narratives that indicate that the latter provided an exemplar for the former. Some of the macro parallels include comparable genres, similar overall lengths, analogous episodic styles, and comparable “geographic orientation/structures.” The micro parallels include similar miracles. Winn also argues that the Parable of the Wicked Tenant (12:1-10) is based upon 2 Ki 9 (in addition to Isa 5). Winn is careful to note that the Elijah-Elisha narratives are not the “only literary sources for Mark’s Gospel.” He also notes that his analysis “does not carry with it any implicit conclusion regarding the gospel’s meaning or significance.”

Winn has essentially redefined what is meant by *source criticism*. Source criticism of the Gospels usually considers something to be a “source” that specifically deals with stories or sayings related to Jesus. Winn, however, includes as a “source” that which is commonly considered to be a “literary influence.” The greatest limitation of

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20 Ibid., 9-10, 11-50.
21 Ibid., 13.
22 Ibid., 61-64.
23 Ibid., 64-65.
24 Ibid., 65-67.
25 Ibid., 67-68.
26 Ibid., 77-84.
27 Ibid., 100-108.
28 Ibid., 117.
29 Ibid., 117.
Winn’s work, at least inasmuch as this present work is concerned, is that the implied reader would seek to understand exactly what Winn’s study brackets out – namely, what the fact that the Elijah-Elisha narratives stand behind the Markan narrative indicates “regarding the gospel’s meaning or significance.”

1.2.3 Form Criticism

Form criticism considers the form, genre, purpose or function of the sources Mark might have used before they were placed within his Gospel. It brings a new picture of John the Baptist into view. It seeks to determine those elements in the extant texts that were the result of the evangelists, often with the intent of discarding them so to get closer to the original events. For example, form critics claim that John did not proclaim Jesus as Messiah, and that John’s wilderness setting (1:3, 4) are “Christian accretions” that connected John with the prophecy from Isaiah 40:3 and made him a forerunner of Jesus. Likewise, the story of John’s death (6:14-29) likely was taken “over from Hellenistic

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30 Ibid., 117.
31 A basic assumption of form criticism is that the smaller units that comprise Mark originally “circulated in isolated form” (Perrin and Duling, Introduction, 234). Form criticism is concerned with the history of the individual textual units, and its goal is to determine their original “setting in life” (Sitz im Leben). For example, a form critic will not be content to suggest that Mark used a collection of miracles stories, but will also attempt to determine the function that this collection might have originally possessed. See Paul J. Achtemeier, “Origin and Function of the Pre-Marcan Miracle Catenae,” Journal of Biblical Literature 91, no. 2 (1972) 198. Form criticism posits a three-stage development for the Gospel traditions. The first stage is the “original event,” the second stage is the taking up of these events into various forms or genres, and the third stage is the final editorial re-working that brings the discrete individual components from the second stage together into a larger whole. See Kittel, John the Baptist, 9. Form critics are usually interested either in the second stage (the history of the tradition) or the first stage (the original event). However, neither of these tasks is easy. Getting to the first stage is hampered by the fact that it is only found within the second stage in a fragmented form, and much has been added to the original events in terms of substance and interpretation. Getting to the second stage is difficult as the evangelists have reworked things to match their own beliefs, and these beliefs were often at odds with the beliefs reflected in stage two (and stage one). See Kittel, John the Baptist, 8-10.
33 Kittel, John the Baptist, 10. See M. Dibelius, Die urchristliche Oberlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer, (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911).
34 Bultmann, Synoptic Tradition, 246.
Jewish traditions,” and may be “an indication of a branch of Baptistry on Hellenistic soil.” In fact, in Mark, it likely serves no purpose beyond “fill[ing] the gap between the sending out of the disciples and their return.”

These few examples show some of the scope of form criticism in that while Markan editorial decisions play a part in the analysis, the real object of interest lies elsewhere. The history of the tradition, or perhaps the historical Jesus (or historical John) is the real object of enquiry. Form criticism does not lead towards a holistic assessment of the finished text, as that is not its aim.

1.2.4 Redactional Criticism

1.2.4.1 John the Baptist

Redaction criticism considers how Mark arranges, changes, deletes from, or adds to the material he had at hand in the creation of his Gospel, and what all this says about his theological convictions. At the risk of over-simplifying, it might be suggested that, for both source and form criticism, the interest is in what lies behind Mark, whether it be older sources, or older traditions, rather than in the final narrative shape of Mark itself. With the advent of redaction criticism, however, the focus shifts so that a primary interest is to understand the Gospel of Mark itself. If Mark used previously existing textual (or oral) units, redaction criticism asks how all these things were put together.

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35 Ibid., 301.
36 Ibid., 301-302.
37 Some of redaction criticism’s earlier non-Markan practitioners include Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, New Testament library, (London: SCM Press, 1963); Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1961). The relationship that form criticism has with redaction criticism should be obvious: the former is concerned with Mark’s “raw material,” and the latter is concerned with how Mark put this raw material together in his Gospel. This should also make plain the difference between form and redaction criticism, in that the former tends towards fragmentation of the narrative, and the latter towards a holistic integration.
Willi Marxsen’s *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* was a groundbreaking volume using redaction criticism to understand Mark’s Gospel.\(^{38}\) He argues that, while Mark may “not yet [be] master of his material,” he was no mere collector.\(^{39}\) While this verdict may seem rather modest for many modern narrative critics, it was rather bold when Marxsen was writing. Marxsen’s work, primarily restricted to the prologue of Mark’s Gospel regarding John, argues that, for Mark, “the statements concerning the Baptist are christological.”\(^{40}\) This is to say that John has no meaning in and of himself in the Gospel, but rather is important only inasmuch as he pertains to Jesus. Marxsen suggests that, contrary to what is “most often true of a literary work” where “what follows interprets what precedes,” with Mark what comes later explains what comes earlier.”\(^{41}\) More specifically, “[the Baptist] takes [his] shape from [Jesus].”\(^{42}\) Marxsen argues that previous to Mark there existed two disparate traditions: one relating to baptizing at the Jordan, and the other likely referring to John’s ascetic diet and attire (1:6).\(^{43}\) Perhaps because of associations with Elijah evoked by 1:6, as well as a desire to ground his presentation of the Baptist in scripture, Mark created the hybrid scriptural citation of 1:2-3.\(^{44}\) This would mean that the reference to the wilderness in 1:3-4 does not speak to the actual historical setting of the Baptist’s ministry as much as to the theological concerns of connecting John to the Isaiah prophecy and to Elijah.\(^{45}\) Similarly, the statement in 1:14 that Jesus went to Galilee and commenced his ministry “after”


\(^{39}\) Ibid., 53.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 35-37.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 36-37.

John was arrested, says less about an actual historical chronology, and more about John’s role vis-à-vis Jesus in the Gospel. That is, it indicates that John was the forerunner of Jesus and that Jesus followed John as his successor. A further parallel between John and Jesus is indicated with the word παραδοθεῖναι (“to imprison,” or “to hand over”) in 1:14, which is also used to describe Jesus’ fate. Hence, John is connected to Jesus’ passion. These things “intimately connect the Baptist’s fate with that of Jesus,” which is appropriate if John is to be seen as Jesus’ forerunner. All of this further suggests a certain schema for a Heilsgeschichte with three basic blocks: Jesus–the Baptist–the Old Testament.

While Marxsen’s argument that John’s significance is christological is compelling, he likely goes too far when he suggests “[the Baptist] takes [his] shape from [Jesus].” This is contrary to the way that a reader would most likely understand the narrative. And while his reconstruction of the pre-history of the text highlights Markan redaction, it does not succeed at getting at the intricacies of the Markan narrative. It is difficult to deny that the interests of the narrative lie in theological preoccupations, rather than historical ones, as Marxsen suggests. Nevertheless, it seems that Marxsen’s methodology breaks up the narrative, even though it also attempts a redactional

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48 Marxsen, Mark, 40.
49 Ibid., 42.
50 Ibid., 33.
“consolidation.” That is, the Jordan traditions, and those elements that have been created by the redactor, remain artificially pasted together, and are not fully integrated into a coherent narrative through Marxsen’s analysis. Does this stitching together of discrete traditions accurately convey the final shape of the narrative? Finally, is it enough to suggest a succession between John and Jesus, or that there is a connection between their deaths, or that they parallel each other, or even that John signifies a specific pattern of salvation history without suggesting why these things are? These intriguing suggestions are often left hanging, and the implications that they occasion are not explored at sufficient length.

Another work dealing with John the Baptist in Mark’s Gospel from a redaction critical point of view is Walter Wink’s *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*. He argues that while Mark’s “chronology” of John’s death (6:14-29) is “rambling” and “unedifying,” it also “intends to draw a parallel between John and Jesus and to indicate that Jesus at this point was in the same kind of danger that had formerly proved fatal to John.” Wink suggests that Jesus only discovered John’s true identity at the Transfiguration: “This is part of the revelation he received as ‘they were talking with Jesus’ (9:4b).” This leads Wink to conclude, “The secret of Jesus’ messiahship thus issues directly in the secret of John’s Elijahship.”

I will demonstrate below that the narrative of John’s death (6:14-29) is not quite as “rambling and unedifying” as Wink suggests, but well composed. While it accomplishes what Wink suggests, it also accomplishes more. Also interesting are

51 Ibid., 43.
52 Wink, *John the Baptist*, 11.
53 Ibid., 15. This is one of the more fanciful elements of Wink’s understanding of Mark’s John.
54 Ibid., 15.
Wink’s suggestions that Jesus and John have parallel secrets, and that their deaths are linked. Unfortunately these promising suggestions are not explored to the extent that they could be. For the most part, they are left as discrete ideas that are not integrated into a synthetic whole.

Josef Ernst’s *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation, Geschichte, Wirkungsgeschichte* is a redactional critical study of John which has as its primary aim the historical John.\(^{55}\) Nevertheless, on the way to this goal it considers how Mark redactionally shaped his Gospel.\(^{56}\) Ernst argues that the Baptist has a complex relationship with salvation history. On the one hand, he stands as one who goes before the Gospel (1:2, 7), and on the other hand, he stands “at the beginning of the Gospel.” His baptism has the unique status of being part of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. His ministry, then, represents both promise and fulfillment.\(^{57}\) This suggests to Ernst that John, according to Mark, was a “man between the times.”\(^{58}\)

This liminal understanding of John gives John’s ministry a transitional quality, and embraces the fact that he is one who ushers in something else. While this model is

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\(^{57}\) Ernst, *Johannes Der Täufer*, 21-23.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 37-38.
helpful, in order to do justice to the parallels between John and Jesus, a model of salvation history is required that honors the differences suggested in 1:7, but also embraces the overlaps and similarities between the two figures. What might be needed is a model where some of the distinctions between Jesus and John are more blurred.

Ernst also argues that, right from the beginning of the Gospel, John is presented not only as a precursor, but also as a prototype for Jesus.\(^{59}\) John’s role as prototype pertains particularly to the suffering of Jesus,\(^{60}\) and is particularly relevant in John’s capacity as Elijah.\(^{61}\) Ernst argues that John’s role as prototype fulfills an apologetic function in that it demonstrates that Jesus was not merely a victim, but remained within the will of God even though he suffered a shameful death.\(^{62}\)

Ernst’s suggestion that John is a prototype of Jesus is very interesting. Unfortunately, much as was the case with some of the suggestions offered by Marxsen and Wink, the implications of this promising idea are not sufficiently explored or developed.

Robert Webb’s *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* is also a “quest for the ‘historical John’.”\(^{63}\) In the section on Mark Webb argues that John the Baptist has two different roles: he is a baptizer and a prophet.\(^{64}\) Webb believes that the Baptist is being used christologically to set the stage for the events of Jesus’ baptism.\(^{65}\) Thus, John calls the people to repentance and baptism and announces the “imminent

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\(^{59}\) Ibid., 5, 22-23.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 22-23.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 28, 32, 33, 37.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 23, 37.


\(^{64}\) Ibid., 55.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 52.
arrival of a figure who will inaugurate God’s salvation by bestowing the spirit (1:4-8). John is the “forerunner and ally” of Jesus, both of whom participate in the “arrival of the eschatological time of salvation (1:14-15).” Nevertheless, Webb sees John’s ministry, together with that of the Pharisees, as belonging to the old order. This contrasts with Jesus’ ministry, which belongs to the new order. This two-stage schema differs from the three-stage schemas of Marxsen and Ernst. John, in Mark, is not only a baptizer, but also Elijah-\textit{redivivus}, and this is particularly relevant as “John’s suffering and death as ‘Elijah’ paves the way for, and prefigures, the similar fate of Jesus as the Son of Man.” Webb also notes that the story of John’s death also “parallels Elijah’s suffering due to Jezebel’s scheming.”

That there is little that is new in Webb’s volume regarding Mark’s narrative use of the Baptist might be due to the fact that his ultimate aim was not to understand how the Baptist functions in the narrative, but in recovering the historical John. The narrative is a vehicle to get to the history, and not an end in its own right. What is primary for narrative criticism is considered “secondary” by historical criticism.

Michael Tilly’s \textit{Johannes der Täufer und die Biographie der Propheten: Die synoptische Täuferüberlieferung und das jüdische Prophetenbild zur Zeit des Täufers}, like the works of Webb and Ernst, seeks to uncover the historical John. Tilly concludes that John was originally considered to be a prophet, and that later tradition interpreted

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{66} Ibid., 55.
\item \footnote{67} Ibid., 55.
\item \footnote{68} Ibid., 52.
\item \footnote{69} Ibid., 53-54.
\item \footnote{70} Ibid., 54.
\item \footnote{71} Michael Tilly, \textit{Johannes der Täufer und die Biographie der Propheten: Die synoptische Täuferüberlieferung und das jüdische Prophetenbild zur Zeit des Täufers}, Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament, 7, (17) (W Kohlhammer, 1994).
\end{itemize}
him as Elijah *redivivus*. Tilly believes it is likely that Mark is the one responsible for interpreting John as Elijah, specifically in terms of his death (9:11-13), in an effort to forge a parallel between John’s death and Jesus’s death. He argues that Jesus’ miracles were the result of divine power conferred upon him at the baptism, and that these powers signify that he is the Messiah. He also sees Mark suggesting a parallel between John’s baptism and Jesus’ cleansing of the temple, in that both were symbolic eschatological acts that dealt with the cleansing of sin.

While Tilly’s volume has some interesting suggestions that might be helpful in a narrative critical analysis, his concern with the historical John has rendered much of his work unhelpful. I will contest the idea that in Mark Jesus’ miracles signify his status as Messiah below.

### 1.2.4.2 Elijah

Joachim Jeremias’ long career (1929-1979) spanned the respective eras of source, form and redaction criticisms, and he used all three methods during his career. His form critical work on John the Baptist in *New Testament Theology*, for example, is entirely devoted to using the sources to get closer to the historical John, and is therefore not helpful in understanding Mark’s John the Baptist from a literary perspective. His article on Elijah in the New Testament, however, uses redaction criticism (in addition to form criticism) and is helpful. He argues that when Jesus is misheard on the cross as crying out for Elijah (15:35), this refers to a tradition in which Elijah is one who helps those in a

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72 Ibid., 62.
73 Ibid., 62.
74 Ibid., 56.
75 Ibid., 64-65.
time of need. The fact that Elijah did not respond to Jesus’ cry would have undermined the claim that he was the Messiah from the perspective of the Jewish bystanders. Jeremias sees this perspective as misguided in that it only reflects the view of those who do not hear Jesus correctly. He writes that the “Christian community did not adopt the conception of Elijah as helper; it knew only one Helper in time of need, namely, Christ.”78 Furthermore, Elijah is also a figure whose return is expected. Jeremias notes that the popular “intensity” of the belief in a returning Elijah is indicated in the fact that Jesus was thought to be this returning figure (6:15, 8:28), and that this belief was believed to be derived from scripture.79 After noting other interpretive options for interpreting the Elijah of the Transfiguration, Jeremias concludes that Elijah’s and Moses’ function at the mount is as “precursors of Jesus.”80

Jeremias’ argument that Mark undermines the trope of Elijah-the-helper deserves consideration, as does his suggestion that Elijah at the Transfiguration functions as a precursor of Jesus. Unfortunately, the implications of these promising suggestions are not explored to any length.

Gerhard Dautzenberg suggests that a popular tradition existed before Mark that saw Jesus as Elijah redivivus, and that Mark’s redactional response in his Gospel is to deny this. Hence he first presents this belief on the lips of outsiders in 6:14-16 and 8:28, and then shows the truth at the transfiguration by presenting Jesus and Elijah as both

78 Jeremias, Ἡλ(ε)ίας, 935-936.
79 Ibid., 936.

While Dautzenberg’s analysis may be correct, it does not advance our understanding of the full narrative shape and purpose of John the Baptist in Mark. Its interest is in situations beyond the text, namely, in the false beliefs concerning Jesus’ identity as Elijah allegedly in the tradition.

Markus Öhler argues that there are two distinct traditions regarding John in Mark: John as precursor, and John as Elijah \textit{redivivus}.\footnote{Markus Öhler, \textit{Elia im Neuen Testament: Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung des alttestamentlichen Propheten im frühen Christentum}, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche ; Beiheft 88 (Berlin ; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997).} The former was more important than the latter to the Markan redactor. The prologue, for example, reflects traditional material, in which John is Elijah. Nevertheless, for Mark these aspects are muted.\footnote{Ibid., 31-36, 47.} Öhler argues that while the belt of 1:6 might evoke Elijah, the hairy garment does not. Hence, he concludes that Elijah is not important in the prologue. Furthermore, he argues that the citation of 1:2-3 had been formed before Mark, which he feels might explain why Mark falsely attributes it to Isaiah. This means that Mark did not recognize the references to Elijah in 1:2-3, and that if Elijah is present in the prologue, this is so merely because of an accident of textual transmission. Additionally, while the account of John’s death (6:14-29) parallels the death of Jesus, Öhler argues that it contains no Elijah typology, and that it therefore does not evoke Elijah.\footnote{Ibid., 37-38. Öhler argues this by noting that Elijah is not killed while John is, and that therefore the parallel between them is not compelling. I will argue that Mark’s use of parallels as a means of evoking characters or stories are not necessarily exact or exhaustive.} In 9:9-13 Öhler acknowledges that John is equated with Elijah, albeit implicitly. He argues that in the community behind Mark there...
was a great deal of speculation concerning the expected Elijah. Mark wants to silence this and turn the hearts of the community towards an expected Son of Man, Jesus, and away from the expected Elijah. Hence, Mark agrees with the belief that Elijah will return only to shut down further speculation by arguing that Elijah has already come in the person of John. Öhler’s conclusion is “Elijah remains a marginal figure” in Mark.

Öhler’s argument is a classic example of redaction criticism. He determines that some texts are secondary to the redactor’s purpose, and then proceeds to provide an interpretation using only those texts considered primary. It also demonstrates starkly a difference between redaction criticism and narrative criticism, as the latter takes the text as it is, and gives more or less weight to any given passage not because of posited pre-history of the text, but due to the narrative indicators latent within the narrative itself. For example, a narrative critic would not discount the testimony hidden within 1:2-3 regarding John’s status as Elijah because it was determined that the author did not realize that it was present. Rather, a narrative critic would embrace the obvious testimony of 1:2-3 (which even Öhler acknowledges exists within the text, albeit only as a residue from tradition). Furthermore, because beginnings and endings of narratives have special importance, not only would a narrative critic not discount the testimony of 1:2-3, she would emphasize it. Where Öhler succeeds by fragmenting the narrative, narrative criticism would seek to find a holistic integration of the narrative.

With the exception of Dautzenberg, the views discussed above relate to Elijah inasmuch as he coincides with the Baptist. What has not yet been brought into view is the Elijah who appears at the Transfiguration (9:4). The traditional explanation for Elijah’s
presence at the Transfiguration (9:2-8) is that he with Moses represents the Law and the Prophets. This is unlikely if for no other reason than that Mark puts Elijah before Moses. If he had wanted to use these two figures to speak of the law and prophets, he would have most likely put Moses first. Others argue that Elijah and Moses are present at the Transfiguration to signify Jesus’ eschatological significance, or that they are present because of salient parallels that they share with each other and with Jesus. Some argue that, rather than suggesting parallels, Mark rather wishes to contrast Jesus with Moses and Elijah. Gundry, for example, argues that Elijah and Moses act “as foils to highlight that [Jesus] alone is God's beloved Son [who is] to be heard.” Likewise, Dorothy Lee believes that Jesus at the Transfiguration is shown to possess “an identity superior to [Elijah and Moses] in every way.” Finally, others believe that Mark uses


91 For a list of parallel miracles between Jesus and Elijah (and Elisha), see footnote 613.

92 Gundry, Mark, 458.

93 Dorothy A. Lee, Transfiguration, New Century Theology. (London: Continuum, 2004) 19. See also M. D. Hooker, “What Doest Thou Here, Elijah: A Look At St Mark’s Account of the Transfiguration,”
these two great figures from sacred history to validate Jesus. Hare, for example, believes that by having Jesus associate with such notables as Moses and Elijah, Jesus is validated in spite of his suffering. Another view is that Moses and Elijah act as “sponsors” of Jesus.

Most of these views have merit (with the likely exception of the view that Elijah and Moses represent the Law and the Prophets). Furthermore, most of these suggestions are not mutually exclusive. What remains, however, is to integrate what happened at the Transfiguration – specifically relating to the appearance of Elijah – with the remainder of Mark’s narrative. This is something that previous studies have failed to do adequately. This issue is all the more salient as Elijah is a thread woven into the fabric of the narrative from the beginning to the end. With this in mind, it is likely the astounding appearance of the great prophet in 9:4 coheres in some way with the other references to Elijah within the narrative.

Redaction critics have asked what Mark, the redactor, has done with the material that he inherited. By making the locus of their interest the theology of the evangelist, they

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94 Hare, *Mark*, 105.
95 See Evans, *Mark*, 35; Hooker, “What Doest Thou,” 68; Lee, *Transfiguration*, 19. Collins states that that reason Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus was to “show that Jesus belongs in their company” because he, like them, will ascend bodily into heaven, and he, like them, “has an important role in the last days” (*Mark*, 423).
have moved closer to the text itself, and further away from those things behind the text. They have moved the analysis closer to a literary level, and hence have gained some useful leverage upon the Markan material concerning John. Nevertheless, because the locus of its interest is the historical author/redactor and the hypothetical situation that the historical author/redactor addresses, the move towards a literary analysis is only partial. Redaction criticism is not able to draw out of the text all the depth that lies therein. The Markan narrative is still not being fully explored as such, but rather as a manifestation of a mind or a situation standing behind it.

1.2.4.3 Various Views

Before moving on to narrative critical studies of John’s role in Mark, it might be helpful at this point to summarize what other redactional studies, not specifically focused on John in Mark, have concluded (such as commentaries).96

Most commentators believe that Mark equates John with Elijah in the opening sequence of the Gospel.97 Even those who hesitate to make this conclusion agree that John is equated with Elijah in 9:11-13.98 That is to say, there exists wide consensus that Mark’s John is Elijah, understood either figuratively,99 or ontologically.100

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96 While many of these studies are explicitly redactionally oriented, others use redaction criticism as well as other methodologies. Some touch on literary analysis, while stopping short of being explicitly narrative critical.

97 Including Boring, Mark, 41, 51; Collins, Mark, 136, 141, 145; France, Mark, 69; Grant, Mark, 650; Hooker, Mark, 37; Lane, Mark, 51; Marcus, Mark 1-8, 156-157; Nineham, Mark, 57; Schweizer, Good News, 29, 31, 33, 36; Taylor, Mark, 151, 156. These commentators typically believe that John and Elijah are connected by means of John’s attire is 1:6, and the opening citation in 1:2-3 that hearkens to a figure in Malachi who is identified, later in Malachi, as Elijah.

98 Guelich, Mark, 331; Gundry, Mark, 465. For both Guelich and Gundry, the details regarding John’s appearance in chapter 1 relate to Mark’s desire to represent John as a man of the desert, and not as Elijah. See Guelich, Mark, 21; Gundry, Mark, 37, 44.

99 Some believe that John is Elijah in the sense that he fulfills the eschatological-Elijah’s function. See Taylor, The Immerser, 284; Lane, Mark, 326.

100 For many scholars, Mark’s John literally was Elijah - Elijah redivivis. See Boring, Mark, 263; Gould, 164; Moloney, Mark, 182; Schweizer, Mark, 185; G. Molin, “Elijahu: Der Prophet und sein Weiterleben in den Hoffningen des Judentums und der Christenheit,” Judaica 8, (1952) 89. Christine
Some critics suggest that John/Elijah serves apologetic purposes in Mark. In 9:11-13 Mark counters those who argue that Jesus could not be the Messiah because Elijah has not yet come by showing that Elijah has come.¹⁰¹ This explains only 9:11-13, however, and fails to address the remainder of episodes in the Gospel that feature John/Elijah.

Contemporary commentators note that there are striking parallels between Jesus and John, something already observed. Parallels between Jesus and John include the way they are presented,¹⁰² their messages,¹⁰³ and their deaths.¹⁰⁴ One common explanation for these parallels is that John “foreshadows” Jesus—often specifically relating to rejection and death.¹⁰⁵

Some, like Ernst above, suggest that the parallels can be explained by understanding that John is a prototype of Jesus.¹⁰⁶ John’s death provides a “model . . . of what is in store for . . . Jesus.”¹⁰⁷ Likewise, James Robinson argues, “Jesus’ activity is

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¹⁰¹ See Boring, Mark, 262-263; Nineham, Mark, 55-58, 239; Rawlinson, Mark, 120. Schweizer (Mark, 185) believes that the apologetic is against a claim that the end is not near, rather than against Jesus’ status per se. See §3.8.1.1 for more on this.
¹⁰² Marcus, Mark 1-8, 138.
¹⁰³ Collins, Mark, 153; Marcus, Mark 1-8, 148.
¹⁰⁴ Collins, Mark, 432; Evans, Mark, 44; France, Mark, 358-359; Gould, Mark, 165; Hooker, Mark, 220; Moloney, Mark, 182; Nineham, Mark, 239, 240; Schweizer, Good News, 185; Taylor, Mark, 395.
¹⁰⁵ For examples see Boring, Mark, 49; Evans, Mark 8:27-16:20, 44; France, Mark, 358-359; Hooker, Mark, 220.
¹⁰⁶ Boring, Mark, 177.
clearly built upon and even to a certain extent modeled after the baptism of John.”

However, it is not enough to say that John foreshadows, or provides a model for Jesus, without further exploring the significance of this narrative detail.

The parallels between John and Jesus are seen by some scholars as a way of indicating the prophetic nature of Jesus’ ministry. For example, Adela Yarbro Collins believes Mark uses the parallels between Jesus and John (in part) to demonstrate that Jesus possesses a “number of distinctly prophetic characteristics.” While she does not specifically highlight John or Elijah in her discussion, nevertheless it is striking how many of her arguments directly relate to John or Elijah. Nevertheless, for Collins, Jesus is in reality much more than a prophet. Her argument does not show with clarity in what sense Jesus is a prophet, and in what sense he is not.

Some have argued that Jesus was to John as Elisha was to Elijah. Wolfgang Roth goes one step further, and argues, “Jesus’ commissioning by John is patterned after that of Elisha by Elijah,” and that Mark’s whole narrative is based upon the stories of Elijah and Elisha in 1 and 2 Kings. Roth’s suggestion has been critiqued for relying on

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111 Ibid., 46-48.
112 Ibid., 547. See also See also Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 376; Rawlinson, *Mark*, 163.
tenuous connections between Mark and the books of Kings.\textsuperscript{116} Roth would have been on more solid ground had he sought similar parallels between Elisha and Jesus as exist between John and Elijah. The parallels between John and Elijah exist alongside differences (e.g. John performed no miracles). If Jesus is equated with Elisha as John is with Elijah, then we should not require exact one-to-one correspondences or exhaustive similarities. When the Markan narrative uses parallels to evoke extra-textual entities, those parallels are not extensive or exhaustive. The important thing between John and Jesus would then be that the latter succeeded the former much as Elisha succeeded Elijah, and that Jesus’ ministry would be marked by greater acts of power, as was Elisha’s.

\textbf{1.2.5 Narrative Criticism}

While these previous methodologies are well suited to address certain questions, each has limitations. For example, they often atomize narratives, or, in an attempt to understand something else (such as the historical Jesus, or early Christian communities) they do not duly consider the narrative itself. These limits are particularly noticeable within source and form criticisms. While redaction criticism is a promising means to examine a narrative in that it often takes a holistic view of narratives, its tools are not sufficiently sophisticated to adequately explore the intricacies of plot, character, or setting, and it is a little too tied to the postulated author standing behind the text (as well as to postulated situations standing behind the author).

It is with some of these concerns in mind that \textit{narrative criticism} was developed for biblical studies. In the study of secular literature, this methodology is known as

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literary criticism, or narratology, but when transferred to the study of biblical texts it has become known as “narrative criticism.” There are subtle differences between narrative criticism and narratology: “Narratology is about theory, narrative criticism is about exegesis. Narratologists analyze texts mainly to develop theories. Narrative critics utilize theory mainly to explicate texts.”

David Rhoads wrote of narrative criticism in 1982 when he used secular literary criticism in his study of the Gospel of Mark. His methodology was adopted from the work of Wayne Booth, and others who were inspired largely by Booth. His desire was to “investigate the formal features of narrative in the texts of the Gospels,” namely, “plot, conflict, character, setting, narrator, point of view, standards of judgment, the implied author, ideal reader, style, and rhetorical techniques.” Rhoads believed that narrative criticism involved two fundamental shifts for biblical studies. The first shift was a move towards emphasizing the unity of the narratives. Rhoads explained that unlike “redaction criticism, form criticism, source criticism, and even composition criticism,” narrative criticism does not “break up the narrative in order to get at the questions [it] pursue[s].” The second was a shift “from history to fiction.”

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120 Rhoads, “Narrative Criticism,” 411.
121 Ibid., 412.
122 Ibid., 412.
123 Ibid., 412-413.
“the narrative world of the story is a literary creation of the author and has an autonomous integrity.”

Some have criticized using this methodology to study the Bible because it was developed in the context of fictional literature. Powell rightly argues against this by noting, “to the extent that the genres of novel and gospel share a narrative form, both are subject to narrative analysis.”

Another criticism leveled against narrative criticism is that it assumes that Bible narratives possess a coherence and unity that they do not. The concern is that literary critics may be “forcing” coherence upon what is not coherent, thus “smooth[ing] over inconsistencies and breaks in the text in favor of harmonizing interpretations.” Against this it should be remembered, “Narrative critics have used the coherence of the text as a working hypothesis, a heuristic device to discern fully the coherent patterns of

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124 Ibid., 413.
125 The issue is not with the historical accuracy of biblical narratives. Rather, the concern is that readers react differently to fiction than they do to history, regardless of how accurate that history may or may not be (Merenlahti and Hakola, “Reconceiving,” 34). Differences include such things as how the author is differentiated from the narrator (ibid., 37), or the types of question the reader might reasonably ask (ibid., 39-40). For example, while one would be foolish to ask what happens to Agatha Christie’s Poirot between novels, it would not be unreasonable for one reading of an an unresolved crime in an old newspaper article to wonder if it had yet been resolved. Also, the reader’s emotional response is different when she reads fiction from what it is when she reads history (ibid., 39). As an example, Merenlahti and Hakola note that our reaction to a murder is different if we read of it in a murder mystery than if we read of it in a newspaper. The former would likely elicit curiosity, while the latter might provoke horror (ibid., 39). Finally, the reader’s assumptions regarding the referential nature of the characters in the narrative are different in fiction than it is in history (ibid., 40-42). For example, Merenlahti and Hakola (ibid., 41) argue that Mark Allan Powell is misguided in his attempt to absolve Matthew from charges of anti-Judaism because the religious leaders are meant to be understood merely as literary creations, and not as characters that “stand for any real people.” Mark Allan Powell, What is Narrative Criticism, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 66-67.

126 Powell, Narrative Criticism, 94. Merenlahti and Hakola come to a similar conclusion, but qualify the results somewhat. For them, the Gospels are non-fictional narratives, and thus subject to narrative criticism, but the critic should be aware that there are “bugs in the narrative machinery of the Gospels, or lumps in the biblical pudding” (Merenlahti and Hakola, “Reconceiving,” 47). They further argue that no one methodology (such as narrative criticism) should see itself as exclusive, and that ultimately a co-operative approach between many methods will avoid the most errors (ibid., 47-48).

127 Ibid., 28.
128 Ibid., 24-25.
storytelling on the surface level of the final narrative.”\textsuperscript{129} Furthermore, narratologists, such as Gérard Genette, do not believe that their methodology requires that the literature it analyzes necessarily possess unity or coherence.\textsuperscript{130}

It should also be noted that while narrative criticism does not necessarily reject the methodologies previously mentioned above, it might nevertheless find some less helpful than others. While it might not find the history behind the text as helpful as does form or source criticism, it will not ignore the finding of historical criticism. Narrative criticism is more interested in the text as narrative than as artifact. Nevertheless, narrative critics wish to avoid anachronisms, and to stay within an appropriate cultural-historical milieu.

With the exception of an unpublished 1976 dissertation,\textsuperscript{131} and perhaps a work by Johannes Majoros-Danowski,\textsuperscript{132} there have been no full-length narrative critical treatments of John the Baptist in the Gospel of Mark. This is not case with other Gospels; both Matthew and Luke have had full-length narrative critical treatment of the Baptist.\textsuperscript{133} This means in order to grasp the state of the question relating to the narrative function of the Baptist in Mark, it will be necessary to rely on either journal articles which have a specific literary focus on John in Mark, or to look to other larger works that consider John but have different concerns as their central interest.

\textsuperscript{130} Gérard Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980) 266-268. See also Merenlahti and Hakola, Reconceiving, 28; Moore, Literary Criticism, 52.
\textsuperscript{131} To be considered below.
\textsuperscript{132} Also to be considered below. Majoros-Danowski’s work deals with Elijah, and follows a literary analysis, broadly speaking, but does not use narratological tools.
Ronald Kittel’s 1976 dissertation *John the Baptist in the Gospel of Mark* seeks to provide a holistic approach that will “examine the roles of the leading characters in the Gospel of Mark from a consideration of that Gospel as a whole and as a literary work.” Kittel wrote his dissertation at a time when redaction criticism was a dominant mode for analyzing the Gospels, and attempted to answer Perrin’s call to treat the Gospel of Mark as a literary text, that “should be interpreted according to the canons of literary criticism.” One initial critique of this work is that it does not work within the “canons of literary criticism;” it does not use or cite theories or methods developed by literary critics. Within his bibliography there is only one entry that could be said to be representative of a methodology of literary studies. Kittel proposes a reading of Mark’s plot that accounts for the role of John the Baptist without recourse to a theory relating to what constitutes plot.

Starting with the prologue, Kittel distinguishes between two functions for John: He is sent to prepare the way (1:2), and he is sent to get others to prepare the way (1:3). Although Kittel sees John as Elijah *redivivus*, he argues, “This is [not] the only role of significance which John has in Mark.” He argues that John’s clothing in 1:6 connects John with Elijah, while John’s diet distinguishes John from Elijah. Although the clothing of Elijah and John was similar (2 Ki 1:8), their diet was not. Elijah ate bread, meat, cakes of meal and oil, and baked cakes (1 Ki 17:6, 12-16, 19:6-8), “civilized foods [requiring] human preparation,” while John ate food of the wilderness that “needs no

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134 Kittel, *John the Baptist*, 34-35.
137 Kittel, *John the Baptist*, 44-51.
138 Ibid., 59.
139 Ibid., 60.
preparation.”  

Hence Mark not only draws comparisons between John and Elijah, but also makes contrasts: “John embodies an aspect of the Elijah redivivus in making preparation for the coming of the Lord, but is at the same time a distinct individual.”

Corresponding to John’s two roles, Jesus also has two roles. Kittel argues that it was not likely “that the Elijah redivivus would speak of himself so abjectly (1:7) if the one coming is simply an anointed one, a king or messiah.”

Hence, John’s proclamation in 1:7-8 of a greater coming one refers to YHWH, and it is obvious that for Mark Jesus is the one to come. The conclusion is “in the same way that John is both individual in his own right and yet at the same time a manifestation of Elijah redivivus, so also is Jesus, at one and the same time, the man from Nazareth and the one in whom YHWH is present to His people.”

Kittel distinguishes between John’s role as baptizer and his role as one who dies: “The days of John’s baptizing are the time of Elijah redivivus,” and, John’s death is “a most un-Elijah-like fate.”

Kittel notes that there are parallels between John’s death and what happened to Elijah under Jezebel. Nevertheless, he also notes that for all the parallels, there are also some important differences. For example, Jezebel does not succeed in killing Elijah, but is rather put to death herself. This leads Kittel to conclude that while Mark is using “essential character traits of Jezebel” in this story, the more important parallels remain those between John’s death and Jesus’ death.

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140 Ibid., 60-61.
141 Ibid., 61.
142 Ibid., 64.
143 Ibid., 65.
144 Ibid., 82.
145 Ibid., 61.
146 Ibid., 97.
147 Ibid., 98.
148 Ibid., 99.
Kittel argues for what he calls a “Son of Man pattern,” which entails being delivered up (παραδότωμι), being put to death and then rising from the dead.\textsuperscript{149} He argues that the parallels between John and Jesus reside in the first two stages of this pattern, being delivered up, and being put to death.\textsuperscript{150} However, when it comes to the third and decisive stage – resurrection – the parallels give way to “intriguing discontinuity.”\textsuperscript{151} From this, Kittel concludes that John sets up for Jesus two-thirds of the pattern, and “through John, Jesus learns of and takes up the way of death. . . . John is once again . . . the one whom Jesus follows on the pathway of death; John’s own death becomes the pattern for dying.”\textsuperscript{152} John, as a baptizing Elijah, prepares the Way “on which YHWH will come” in the prologue “with the symbolic death in the baptismal death waters,” and John, in his “non-Elijanic capacity” will be a “guide or model for Jesus in being delivered up and put to death, but not in resurrection.”\textsuperscript{153}

Kittel’s argument that John fulfills two discrete roles in the narrative is only compelling if John’s identity is understood purely in figural terms. That is, if John is Elijah ontologically, then it cannot be argued that anything he did or said can be understood apart from this. If John really was Elijah, then he could not cease being Elijah. On the other hand, if John was Elijah only in the sense that he fulfilled an Elijah function, then he could cease “being Elijah” simply by adopting a different function from the Elijah one.

While Kittel’s argument regarding John’s diet and attire is coherent, it is not the only interpretive option. It is my position that the parallels that connect characters in

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 100-113.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 112.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 114.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 117.
Mark are never exact and exhaustive. Hence, John is construed to be Elijah even though one of Elijah’s most salient attributes was the working of miracles, which was something missing from John’s portfolio. John’s diet might signify that he has a less friendly stance towards civilization than did Elijah, as Kittel argues. However, this need not imply that Mark is indicating that John’s Elijah-function is only a part-time phenomenon. Other options exist: it might be a way of keeping John’s true identity secret from the reader, as a means of making the clue given in John’s attire less certain; or, it might function as a marker of John’s asceticism, his law-abiding fidelity, and his wilderness orientation.154

Indeed, Kittel’s argument runs into trouble elsewhere in the narrative. Kittel argues that the story of John’s death is decidedly “un-Elijah-like.”155 However, it is precisely in the context of John’s death that John’s identity as Elijah is made clear in 9:11-13. This suggests that John suffered death precisely as Elijah. If that which is most “un-Elijah-like” is exactly that which is identified as Elijah, then Kittel’s clear distinction between John’s two functions becomes somewhat less clear.

Furthermore, Kittel’s argument that John has two roles rests in part upon the corresponding argument that Jesus also has two roles. While it might be argued that Jesus performs the role of the coming YHWH, the arguments that Kittel puts forth are not persuasive. He argues that Elijah would not “abject himself” as he does in 1:7 before the Messiah.156 This argument is only compelling if it is presumed that the Messiah was not held in sufficient regard. It is not difficult to imagine that the position of Messiah might be sufficient in Mark for such a display of humility, even from one as great as Elijah.

154 See §3.2.4.
155 Ibid., 61.
156 Ibid., 64.
Indeed, the idea that a character has two strictly differentiated roles might be a rather foreign way for an implied reader to understand things. It is likely that the implied reader will integrate a character’s attributes and features, at least until such integration is no longer possible.

Kittel’s argument regarding the Son of Man pattern is promising, and his argument that Jesus learned the way of death from John is compelling. However, it is not certain that the narrative contrasts John and Jesus in relation to resurrection. Resurrection is something that pertains to Jesus, and as such is likely an area where Jesus’ ministry exceeds that of John (1:7-8), but this does not imply a sharp contrast. If there is a contrast, it is that Jesus is the Messiah, and John is Elijah, and that each has different fates, and different roles in the divine plan.

Kittel’s analysis relies entirely upon a synchronic reading. That is, he does not explore how the text unfolds through time for a first-time reader. His analysis depends upon knowledge of the whole narrative. While a synchronic reading is helpful, a more robust understanding will be achieved when it is combined with a diachronic reading. In a synchronic reading the meaning of John’s attire and diet is explored using everything the text says about John, but in a diachronic reading the implied reader only knows what she has learned in the first five verses when she reads the sixth verse.\footnote{I refer to the implied reader as “she” and the narrator (and implied author) as “he” not because there is anything implicitly more masculine or feminine about either the implied reader or the narrator. It is meant simply as a way to avoid the exclusive use of masculine pronouns, as well as a means of differentiating the implied reader from the narrator.} The reader can only surmise what these hints might mean, and that includes not merely the note regarding the diet, but also that regarding the attire. She might see parallels between John and Elijah, but is not yet sure what this might suggest. Reading Mark is akin to a murder
mystery, in that part of the suspense of the plot is derived from trying to discern the meaning of what appear to be clues. Some clues, however, may be false clues meant to keep unknown that which is unknown. A diachronic reading notes how a narrative leads a reader from ignorance to knowledge, and the degree and nature of the ignorance is as important in the unfolding of the plot as the final state of knowledge.

Jean Delorme considers the story of John’s death from a narrative critical perspective.158 He argues that in the introduction to the story of John’s death, there is a telling difference between what the people think and what Herod thinks, even though on some levels it is the same thing. In thinking that Jesus was John raised from the dead, “the past is awakened in [Herod’s] memory with the precision of an act that he himself performed, so the raising of John raises the specter of the beheaded body.”159 However, in this belief, the people “recognize in [Jesus] something of the future which the figure of [Elijah’s] return represented.”160 For the people, to think that John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, or that Elijah has arrived, are both ideas where old figures are present in a way that is full of promise for something new. Nevertheless, the people err when they think that they understand Jesus through the categories of John, Elijah, or another Prophet (6:14-16), because the

. . . relationship between Jesus and these great witnesses of the word is not satisfactory if the past is the object of an imaginary fixation. Evoking images of well-known and perhaps idealized characters, and attaching these images to Jesus, prevents one from paying attention to what is different and extraordinary about Jesus.161

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159 Ibid., 117.
160 Ibid., 117.
161 Ibid., 127.
Likewise Herod is stuck in confusion because he sees only the past of his own guilt.

Delorme argues that the story of John’s death “reestablishes the borderline between past and present, which is in danger of being overshadowed by the rumors concerning Jesus.”¹⁶²

Delorme further argues that the point of continuity between Elijah, John, and Jesus is not primarily one of power, but one of word:

Thus, among all the opinions circulating about Jesus, there is something right that deserves to be retained. Elijah, the prophets, and John all testify to a word that transcends them, a testimony which Jesus now takes over (cf. Mark 1:14). The image of one cannot be assigned to the other, nor their testimonies confounded in a single message they might have in common. The word also passes through their differences.¹⁶³

Furthermore, this word is an “excluded word, the word alienated against its witness and sealed by a death that spreads it further.”¹⁶⁴

A continuity between Jesus and John is expressed in Mark by means of the numerous parallels relating to their deaths.¹⁶⁵ According to Delorme, however, there is also an important contrast between John and Jesus. While both men are laid in a tomb, for John this tomb speaks of death, while Jesus’ tomb will ultimately be an empty place: “The memorial denies John's resurrection but signals that of Jesus.”¹⁶⁶ The resurrection “is a new word that sprang up from death and is open to the present like the one whom it claims is alive.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Ibid., 127.
¹⁶³ Ibid., 127.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 127.
¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 127.
¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 127.
¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 128.
Delorme’s study has many fine qualities. His suggestion that the story of John’s death has the function of “reestablish[ing] the borderline between past and present” is promising and worthy of further consideration. Furthermore, he develops a coherent theory for explaining the various comparisons and contrasts that exist between John and Jesus in Mark. The similarities speak to the fact that they both testify to a word that “transcends them,” and the differences testify to Jesus’ superior accomplishment won through his resurrection. If there is a fault in this work it is due to its limited focus on the events of John’s death, and its parallel with Jesus’ death. This means that the richest soil for understanding the role of the Baptist in Mark – the prologue – is largely left untapped. Hence John’s roles as the one who goes before and prepares the way are sides of the Baptist largely unaddressed by Delorme. Also missing from the study is John as Elijah redivivus.

Regina Janes, also working specifically with the story of John’s death, believes that Herodias, by providing a parallel with Jezebel, gives evidence that John is Elijah. Without her, “Mark's evidence for identifying John as Elijah is reduced by half, to a leather girdle.” She also argues “As the living John identifies Jesus as Christ, so a dying Elijah enables a dying Messiah, concepts equally unknown to the pre-Christian Jewish tradition.”

Janes’ notes parallels between the daughter of Herodias and the daughter of Jairus (5:22-24a, 35-43): both have influential parents; both respond to commands “immediately” (5:42a | 6:25a); and, both are connected by a chiasmus:

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168 Ibid., 127.
170 Ibid., 449.
171 Ibid., 444.
Jesus raises Jairus’ daughter and John dies, later Jesus dies and rises. The two women who kill John, bracketed by two women Jesus heals and three who attend his body, are produced in the narrative by Mark's need to demonstrate John's identity as Elijah and to reaffirm through John's death Jesus' resurrection and power to raise others.\footnote{Ibid., 444.}

Through this connection, the two daughters point to each other, so that “the dancing daughter who brings death makes visible the dead daughter, rising to life.”\footnote{Ibid., 452.} This connection, then, implicitly makes John’s death a negative testimony to Jesus’ resurrection.

Janes’ argument that Herodias “provides evidence” that John is Elijah needs to be nuanced somewhat. Herodias provides evidence only for the reader, as it is only the reader who grasps this allusion to Elijah, and not the characters in the story. Hence, Herodias bolsters the linkage between John and Elijah for the reader by providing an additional example.

Finally, the connection she forges between the daughter of Herodias and the daughter of Jairus is less compelling since the linkages are weak. The use of the word “immediately” (ἐὐθύς) hardly counts as evidence, as it is a common word in Mark.\footnote{It appears 41 times in Mark.} Identifying a chiasmus would link the two, but unfortunately there is something subjective and unverifiable about whether an element of a narrative is part of a chiasmus or not. This leaves the fact that they were both daughters of influential men. This seems to be rather weak evidence.

Nevertheless, her argument that a “dying Elijah enables a dying Messiah”\footnote{Ibid., 444.} is worthy of further consideration.
Considering the story of the death of John from a literary perspective, Christos Karakolis believes that John is the returning Elijah. Unlike Kittel, Karakolis is not bothered by the differences that emerge between John and Elijah. Where Jezebel failed against her Elijah, Herodias triumphs over hers: “She managed against the Elijah redivivus that which Jezebel had failed against the historical Elijah.”

Karakolis notes similarities and differences between the deaths of John and Jesus. The most important differences are that there is no resurrection for John, and John’s death does not have salvific or theological significance in the way that Jesus’ does.

The result of all this is that John is the harbinger of Jesus. While John’s preaching and baptism are important, more important is the way that he led Jesus in the way of death. John’s importance is restricted to a thematic pointing to, and highlighting of the importance of Jesus’ death, but beyond this, it has no “redemptive importance.”

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177 Ibid., 140.
178 Ibid., 145.
179 Similarities for Karakolis include the fact that both John and Jesus emanate from the will of God; the structural parallels between Herodias and the religious leaders responsible for Jesus’ death; that a “favorable opportunity” was required for both (6:21 | 14:11); that both are arrested and held; that Herod/Pilate acknowledge the innocence of John/Jesus; that behind the death are parallel groups (the guest of Herod/the fanatical crowds) that urge Herod/Pilate on; that indirect speech is used for the passing of the sentence; that soldiers carry out the execution, and; that the corpse is taken and buried (ibid., 146-148).
180 Ibid., 150. Additional differences for Karakolis include the fact that only two significant actors (Herod and Herodias) are involved versus a wider group of actors (the Jewish religious leaders); that Jesus’ death is longer and more tragic (i.e. he is falsely accused, mocked, tortured, and abandoned); that John is killed in a place (Galilee or Perea) and at a time (Herod’s birthday) that had little national significance and Jesus in a place (Jerusalem) and at a time (Passover) that were heavy with national significance; that John’s arrest is apparently performed without complication or obstacle, while Jesus’ required planning and betrayal; that John’s body is honorably buried by his disciples while Jesus’ disciples’ abandoned him, and; that John’s dead body is referred to as πτώμα, while Jesus’ dead body is referred to as σῶμα (ibid., 149-152).
181 Ibid., 154.
182 Ibid., 154-155.
Little can be said against Karakolis’s analysis, other than the fact that he does not have much to offer that is new. His conclusion that John’s death points to Jesus’ and has no salvific importance of itself is likely correct, as far as it goes. It is obvious that Jesus is at the core of Mark’s theology of redemption, and that John’s narrative role is subservient to this. Nevertheless, I will argue below that John’s narrative function is more than merely pointing to Jesus. Indeed, on some levels John defines Jesus. Nevertheless, Karakolis is certainly correct that the Markan Baptist does not possess salvific significance apart from Jesus.

Tom Shepherd uses narratological tools in a way that parallels somewhat what will be done in my work below. His analysis is broken into the distinct areas of settings, characters, actions and plots, time, and narrator and implied reader. Shepherd argues,

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The narrator of any story can be described by four characteristics – knowledge, intrusion, distance, and ideology. The narrator in Mark, in common with other biblical narrative, is omniscient. He knows where and when everything occurs, can see over long distances, and authoritatively tells the reader what everything means.
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The narrator speaks in 1:1-3 as if it is not from his past, yet most of the story is told from the point of view of “some later present.” This has the effect of making the narrator authoritative and reliable to the reader.

The narrator draws the reader closer to both John and Jesus by means of distance. Initially John is simply in the desert, but then “the view draws in closer to [him] as we

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184 Ibid., 162.
185 Ibid., 163.
186 Ibid., 163.
see baptisms taking place.” Likewise Jesus is at a distance when in Galilee, but then moves closer at the baptism.

Jesus’ superiority to John is suggested by the relationship of the messenger over the unnamed “you” in 1:2. That is, the former is in complete service to the latter, and the latter is hence superior to the former. Shepherd suggests that the relationship between John and Jesus here is “that of a herald going before an important personage.” The reader will learn that the “way” of the prologue (1:2-3) ultimately leads to the cross for Jesus, and that John goes before Jesus not only as forerunner, but also in death.

Shepherd argues that there is an interesting tension in the way strength and weakness are characterized in relationship to Jesus and John. On the one hand, John is a strong figure, as “ἀγγέλος, preparer of the way, the voice, sent by God, a great authoritative preacher, ascetic, and Elijah like,” and on the other hand he is not worthy to stoop down and untie a thong of Jesus’ sandals (1:7), and ends up being arrested (1:14). Interestingly, Jesus is strong when characterized by means of telling, and weak when characterized by means of showing.

Shepherd considers the prophecies cited from scripture in the prologue from the perspective of a narratological use of time. Such prophecies coming from the past and yet speaking to the narrative’s future are a striking “combination of analepsis and prolepsis.” They have the functions of bringing “the prophecies of the past … into the present,” of linking the “ministry of Jesus … to the ministry of John,” and of tying the

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187 Ibid., 163.  
188 Ibid., 163.  
189 Ibid., 154.  
190 Ibid., 154.  
191 Ibid., 155.  
192 Ibid., 157.  
193 Ibid., 156. For more on showing and telling in characterization, see §2.4.1.  
194 Ibid., 161. For more on analepsis and prolepsis, see §2.6.1.
“future … to the present.” The overall result is to tie “the past, the present, and the future together into one message of challenge, change, and hope based in belief.”

In general, most of what Shepherd has argued is helpful and compelling. What remains is to consider the whole narrative of Mark, rather than merely the prologue. Furthermore, while Shepherd’s view regarding omniscience in narration is common, it is also problematic. If we say that the Markan narrator is omniscient, does that mean he knows what Jesus ate before he came to be baptized? While this question might seem somewhat foolish, it highlights the need to better define what we mean by omniscience in narration.

Shepherd argues that John was a “herald” for Jesus who led the way as forerunner and in death. This is undoubtedly true, but not complete. More can be said about the narrative relationship between these two characters in Mark.

One aspect missing from Shepherd’s analysis is focalization. While he uses the term, he apparently defines it differently than do theorists such as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and Mieke Bal. Shepherd defines this concept in terms of setting as “markers of a story’s beginning and ending,” rather than as an aspect of the narration. I will later discuss the focalization of the Markan narrative as understood by Rimmon-Kenan and Bal.
Johannes Majoros-Danowski analyzes the role that Elijah plays in the whole of the Gospel of Mark from literary and structuralist perspectives.\textsuperscript{200} He considers the narrative as narrative, which is certainly commendable; however, he makes scant use of the available narratological tools. Methodologically, he is more indebted to Greimas’ Structuralism. Majoros-Danowski’s over-riding concern is to address anti-Judaic interpretations of Mark that fail to understand it within Jewish contexts, and he finds that the analysis of the role of Elijah to be particularly helpful in this.\textsuperscript{201}

Majoros-Danowski argues that there are striking parallels between Elijah, John and Jesus. He argues that not only is John identified as Elijah in Mark, but that Jesus is also identified as Elijah.\textsuperscript{202} In fact, Jesus is also identified as John. These conclusions are based in part upon the people’s opinion concerning Jesus’ identity in 6:14, 16, 8:28.\textsuperscript{203} This raises the question: How Jesus can ‘be’ Elijah and also meet with Elijah at the Transfiguration? Majoros-Danowski attempts to explain this by referencing the work of anthropologist Evans-Pritchard, who, by studying the Nuer tribes located in South Sudan, notes that these tribes made similar seemingly contradictory identity statements. For instance, they would affirm, “the cucumber is an ox.”\textsuperscript{204} Evans-Pritchard came to realize that the identity of the two items was being gauged according to a third entity, so that the formula A=B actually meant “A=B with respect to C.”\textsuperscript{205} Pertaining to Mark, this might mean “John ‘is’ Elijah in terms of God, but Elijah is not John. Jesus ‘is’ Elijah in relation to God, but Elijah is not Jesus. Jesus ‘is’ John, in reference to God, but John is not

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 183-184.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., 183-184. The claim that Jesus is Elijah is also argued because of the parallels between Jesus and Elijah.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 184.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., 184.
Jesus.” This is to say “the name ‘Elijah’ stands for the role of messenger of God and is just like a title of honor,” and because John and Jesus are both worthy messengers, in terms of “their mission from God, they are Elijah.” From this, Majoros-Danowski argues that 9:13 (“Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him”) concerns Jesus, and not John. Specifically, it speaks to the rejection of those of his hometown (6:3), his family (3.21), the religious authorities (3:6), and even his disciples (8:32).

Majoros-Danowski’s arguments go boldly beyond the majority view regarding the place of Elijah in Mark; unfortunately, it is likely they go too far. His notion that “Elijah” is merely a title for Messenger, at least as it relates to John and Jesus in Mark, does not correspond with what was believed relating to Elijah redivivus. It was believed that Elijah would return, not that his name would function as a symbol of being a messenger of God.

Furthermore, having exchangeable identities for the story’s main protagonists runs the risk of causing narrative havoc. Unless there is a compelling reason to do so, it also runs counter to the way the reader would read. Characters are created as discrete entities in the mind of the reader. They can be confused, compared, contrasted, hidden, overt, round, flat, and much more – but they are generally not merged. That is simply to say, Peter is Peter (with all the change or lack or change that this might imply), and while he might “be of a piece” with James, his identity remains distinct from James.

Majoros-Danowski’s argument stands or falls with the notion that Jesus is Elijah, just as John is Elijah (and perhaps that Jesus is John). Inasmuch as this argument is based upon the public opinions expressed in 6:14, 16, 8:28, it is unpersuasive. The opinions

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206 Ibid., 184-185. Emphasis added.
207 Ibid., 185.
208 Ibid., 215.
expressed in these passages are most likely simply false. Any truth derived from these false opinions will most likely be derived by means of a reading that understands them as an instant of dramatic irony: \(^{209}\) 6:14-16 and 8:28 does not support Majoros-Danowski’s arguments.

Majoros-Danowski’s argument that Jesus as Elijah could meet Elijah at the Transfiguration only holds if the reader intuits something along the lines of what Evans-Pritchard postulated as happening in the Nuer tribes (where they could say “the cucumber is an ox”). This seems unlikely. It is far more likely that the reader will simply understand Jesus and Elijah to be different characters.

While the argument that Jesus is Elijah (or that Jesus is John) cannot be sustained on the basis of 6:14-16 and 8:28, Majoros-Danowski is nevertheless correct to note that there are parallels between Jesus and Elijah. The question is what is the best explanation for these parallels. Parallels do not necessarily mean that similar entities share the same identity – although they could mean this, as is likely the case with Elijah and John. Majoros-Danowski also notes the presence of many parallels between Jesus and Elisha, but fails to provide an explanation of what they accomplish within the narrative. \(^{210}\) One clue as to what the parallels between Elijah and Jesus signify might be these parallels between Jesus and Elisha. Perhaps the relationship between Elijah and Jesus is similar in form to the relationship between Elijah and Elisha. When 2 Ki 2:15 states “the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha,” this does not lead to the conclusion that Elisha therefore was Elijah. Elijah maintains his own discrete identity. The parallels between Elijah and Elisha suggest rather that Elisha continues Elijah’s ministry – that Elisha succeeded Elijah. The

\(^{209}\) See §3.8.2.

\(^{210}\) Ibid., 246-248.
parallels between Jesus and Elisha, as well as the parallels between Jesus and Elijah, when put together with the narrative presentation of John as forerunner and as Elijah, suggest that Jesus succeeded John as Elisha succeeded Elijah. A thread of continuity runs therefore between all these figures. This explanation is more likely than the suggestion that Jesus is Elijah.

At this point, it might be helpful to summarize what other narrative critical studies on Mark, not specifically focused on John, suggest about the role of the Baptist in the Gospel of Mark. Most of what has been suggested regarding John’s function in the Gospel has already been mentioned above in one form or another. For example, it is commonly argued that John is used to foreshadow Jesus, often with a specific reference to his death,211 or that he provides a model for Jesus.212 However, as has been mentioned, it is not enough to say that John foreshadows, or provides a model for Jesus, without exploring the significance of this narrative detail. What is accomplished through this foreshadowing or modeling? It is likewise not enough to argue that the fates of John and Jesus are “intertwined,” or “John’s ministry and its results are echoed by Jesus” without exploring the narrative implications that these suggestions imply.213 Why are John and

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212 Kelber, *Mark’s Story*, 17, 34.

Jesus’ fates intertwined? Why is John’s ministry echoed in Jesus’? What do these things accomplish in the narrative?

Elizabeth Malbon has argued that John is a “parallel character” with Jesus, and that he is “Jesus’ precursor more than exemplar.”214 She does not provide reasons why John is not Jesus’ exemplar. The fact that John precedes Jesus, and that Jesus afterwards parallels much of what John does, can indeed be taken to suggest that John functions as an exemplar for Jesus. Other than noting that John is Jesus’ precursor, Malbon has done little to explain the narrative function of John in Mark’s narrative.

Another common view – one that we have already encountered above with Shepherd – is that John’s role in Mark is that of a herald sent to announce the arrival of Jesus, which highlights Jesus’ importance.215 However, this proposal can only be part of the solution. It fails to explain the parallels between Jesus and John: why would a herald mirror the one being heralded?

Bastiaan van Iersel argues that John/Elijah establishes for the reader an “unmistakable link between the Old and New Testaments.”216 He argues that John’s baptism signified an “immers[ion] in the major events of Israel's past.”217 Likewise, Ohajuobodo Oko believes that Israel’s past is “mediated” in the ministry of John, and “underlying it is a heilsgeschichtlich, i.e. salvation-historical line of promise and

215 See Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, Mark’s Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology, (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2009) 96; Oko, Who Then is This?, 75; Smith, Lion, 63, 96, 230.
217 Iersel, Mark, 96-97.
fulfillment.” James S. Hanson understands John/Elijah’s appearance according to a “narrative pattern which is firmly entrenched in Israel's scriptures,” in which God’s promises are in dire peril, yet are ultimately vindicated. John the Baptist’s association with the wilderness recalls previous scriptural wilderness situations where God’s promises have been threatened, and his appearance thus comes as a “confirmation” of promises made in the scriptures. These various suggestions understand John’s narrative function as a “stand-in” for the past, and the past’s interaction with the present. They are rich with evocative possibilities, and will be explored in this present work.

Werner Kelber writes that because the prologue presents John as “preparing the way of Jesus,” the reader knows “Jesus will be traveling a way.” Beyond the prologue, ὁ διὸς (“way”) is also used in relation to Jesus’ passion predictions and in relation to his approach to Jerusalem, where those predictions find fulfillment. This leads Kelber to conclude, “Mark leaves little doubt in the reader’s mind that Jesus’ journey is unto death.”

This way, when put together with some of the possibilities mentioned above, raises some questions: how can we correlate the wilderness, the evocation of Israel’s mythic past, the way, John as preparer, prototype, model, with Jesus’ ministry and death? Can the question regarding Jesus’ identity be related and integrated with all these things? If there is a way to tie all these things into a cohesive narrative whole, then we will be in

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220 Ibid., 132-138.
221 Ibid., 108.
222 Kelber, Mark’s Story, 17. Emphasis added.
223 See 8:27, 10:17, 32, 46.
224 Ibid., 72.
a better position to understand John/Elijah’s narrative role in the Gospel of Mark. This is what this present work seeks to do.
Chapter 2: Narrative Criticism

2.1 Introduction
Narrative criticism is a discipline within biblical studies that has been developed from secular literary studies, or narratology, specifically to understand biblical narratives better. Chatman divides narratology into that which concerns \textit{discourse}, and that which concerns \textit{story}.\footnote{Seymour Benjamin Chatman, \textit{Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film}, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978) 9.} \textit{Discourse} relates to the manner in which the narrative is told, with the focus being primarily upon how the narrator functions within a narrative.\footnote{Ibid., 146-262.} \textit{Story}, on the other hand, is the narrative content. Discourse is the \textit{way} a narrative is told, and story is \textit{what} is told.\footnote{Ibid., 9.} One could argue that everything is discourse. There can be no substance without form,\footnote{One can imagine form without story, but not story without form.} and a story cannot exist alone without the form that conveys it. Nevertheless, for the sake of analysis, it is helpful to distinguish between the form and the substance. Story is the somewhat abstract content of discourse.

2.2 Implied Authors and Implied Readers

\subsection*{2.2.1 Wayne Booth and Seymour Chatman}
Narratology distinguishes between the “real” historical author and a virtual author, often referred to as the implied author. The implied author is an idea created by Wayne Booth in 1961 in \textit{The Rhetoric of Fiction}.\footnote{Wayne C. Booth, \textit{The Rhetoric of Fiction}, 2nd ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).} He writes, “The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves,
The image that a real author makes of himself is the implied author, and the image that he makes of his reader has come to be known as the implied reader. Booth writes, “The ‘implied author’ chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices.” The implied reader “is defined by the text as the one who performs all the mental moves required to enter into the narrative world and respond to it as the implied author intends.”

Seymour Chatman writes, “A narrative is a communication; hence, it presupposes two parties, a sender and a receiver. Each party entails three different personages. On the sending end are the real author, the implied author, and the narrator (if any); on the receiving end, the real audience (listener, reader, viewer), the implied audience, and the narratee.” This view is illustrated in the following diagram.

The box represents the narrative text, and only those elements within it are part of the “narrative transaction as such.” Actual authors and actual readers never make direct contact in the process of reading, but only communicate through their implied counterparts. The real author, as creator, stands beyond the text, and the implied author is

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230 Ibid., 138.
231 Ibid., 74-75.
232 Culpepper, Anatomy, 7.
233 Chatman, Story, 28.
234 Ibid., 151.
235 Ibid., 151. The narrator and narratee are bracketed because they may or may not be elements in any given narrative, according to Chatman (ibid., 150).
that which can be implied from the text itself. Readers “infer [the implied author] as an ideal, literary, created version of the real [author].”

For Booth, the implied author is related to “the norms which the reader must apprehend in each work if he is to grasp it adequately.” From this Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan suggests that Booth’s implied author is the “governing consciousness of the work as a whole, the source of the norms embodied in the work.” Furthermore, she argues that for Booth the implied author is an “anthropomorphic entity,” which in her view needs to be “de-personified, and is best considered as a set of implicit norms rather than as a speaker or a voice. It follows therefore, that the implied author cannot literally be a participant in the narrative communication situation.” In other words, the values and norms that are often implied rather than stated, and which provide structure for the narrative, come from the implied author, who does not have an actual voice within the narrative. A narrator might be the closest substitute that the implied author has for a voice.

All the arrows in this model proceed from left to right, from author, real or implied, to reader, real or implied, which suggest that the reader (implied and real) is a passive receiver of the text. Booth’s implied reader is “subordinated” to the text. This is not to say that Booth’s reader has no active role in the process. He suggests that textual ambiguities encourage readers to “[play] with the differences” opened up within

236 Booth, Fiction, 74-75.
238 Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, 87-88.
239 Ibid., 87.
240 Ibid., 89.
241 Booth, Fiction, 138.
Nevertheless, Booth tends to advocate a more or less passive role for the reader. This is illustrated when, arguing against strong reader-response interpretations, he writes, “[reader response critics] have [a strong] tendency . . . to reduce the chance of that glorious meeting of authors (of many kinds) and readers (of many kinds) in texts (of many kinds) that justifies studying our subject as rhetoric.” Hence for Booth, there exists the potential of a real form of communication between author and reader that can be thwarted if the reader takes too active a role in the process of narrative meaning making.

For Booth the image that the real author makes of himself is, as it were, deposited in the text to be discovered by the reader. However, for others, such as Chatman and Iser, the implied author is not “left behind” in the text by the real author as much as it is constructed by the reader. Chatman argues, “[The implied author] is `implied,’ that is, reconstructed by the reader from the narrative.” This suggests that the reader has a more active role.

2.2.2 Wolfgang Iser and Peter Rabinowitz

If there is a continuum concerning how active the reader is (or should be), ranging from Booth’s (mostly) passive receiver of the text, to Fish’s reader who exercises a degree of mastery over the text, then somewhere in the middle of these extremes lies Wolfgang Iser. Iser argues that the reader actively constructs meaning in close relationship with the text. Where Booth thought of the implied reader as something

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242 Ibid., 426-427.
243 Ibid., 403.
244 Chatman, Story, 148.
245 See Stanley Eugene Fish, Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Stanley Eugene Fish, Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980); See Fowler, Let the Reader, 35-36.
embedded within the text, Iser thinks of the implied reader as “a construct of the real reader's interaction with the text rather than as a construct of the implied author that lies within the text itself.” Iser seeks to find a via media between the author and the reader:

. . . the literary work has two poles; which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic pole is the author's text and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader. In view of this polarity, it is clear that the work itself cannot be identical with the text or with the concretization, but must be situated somewhere between the two. It must inevitably be virtual in character, as it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader, and it is from this virtuality that it derives its dynamism.\(^\text{246}\)

Iser seeks to avoid mere subjectivism, on the one hand, and mere absolutism on the other hand. Neither the reader nor the author reigns supreme.

For Iser, the implied reader “embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect – predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself.”\(^\text{247}\) The fact that the implied reader possesses “all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect,”\(^\text{248}\) implies that the reader has certain competences.\(^\text{249}\) For example, the reader has sufficient mastery of the language in which the text was written. Thus, implied readers “are competent readers who are thoroughly familiar with the repertoire of literary, historical, social, linguistic, and cultural assumptions . . . .”\(^\text{250}\) The key term here is “assumptions:” the implied reader is not culturally omniscient. The implied reader does not necessarily understand everything there is to be understood about the culture behind the text. Rather, the implied reader is sufficiently competent to be able to understand cultural cues in the text that

\(^{246}\) Iser, *Act of Reading*, 21.
\(^{247}\) Ibid., 34.
\(^{248}\) Ibid., 34.
\(^{249}\) Kindt and Müller, *Implied Author*, 173.
\(^{250}\) Ressenguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 32.
apparently are intended to be understood even when not explained. Iser speaks of the “conventions necessary for the establishment of a situation” within the context of the text and its readers, and these he calls the “repertoire of the text.” The repertoire consists of all the familiar territory within the text. This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged. . . .” Often the repertoire of the text will be revealed in those elements within the text that appear to presuppose knowledge in the reader. These elements are often not explained.

Because the repertoire of the text includes those things the text assumes the reader knows, we could just as easily speak of the repertoire of the reader as we could of the repertoire of the text. Furthermore, to speak of the repertoire of the reader connects this notion explicitly with the implied reader, rather than merely with the text, and hence has an advantage of being more specifically oriented to the virtual participants within the communicative modal suggested by Chatman above. Hence, this work will refer to the “repertoire of the reader” rather than the “repertoire of the text,” but this shift in terminology is not meant to signify any important shift in meaning: the “repertoire of the reader” is intended to mean the same thing as the “repertoire of the text.”

The notion of the repertoire of the text/reader illustrates how historical, cultural, and economic backgrounds are important in narrative criticism. While the implied reader is not meant to be a vehicle to get to the historical situation or the real author, this does not mean that the historical context is no longer relevant:

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252 Ibid., 69.
253 That is, it relates to the implied reader, which is part of the continuum involving the real author → implied author → implied reader → real reader. See §2.2.1.
Narrative criticism has succeeded in showing the value of the narrative in its own right, without serving as a handmaid to historical reconstruction. Nevertheless, narrative criticism affirms that a Gospel narrative is a historical artifact, a first-century contextual document fully conditioned by its time and place. More than ever, interpretations of the Gospel narratives are drawing upon our knowledge of the history, society and cultures of the first-century Mediterranean world as a means to help us understand the story better.\(^{254}\)

Historical criticism is a welcome tool for narrative critics. It is an essential means for modern readers to come closer to grasping how ancient readers might have heard things. Historical criticism provides a way for us to appreciate the “literary, historical, social, linguistic, and cultural assumptions” that guided first century readers, but that may no longer guide the modern reader. Nevertheless, one key difference between historical criticism and narrative criticism is that the former uses the text to get to the historical context, while the latter uses the historical context to help get to the story.

In relationship with the text, the reader builds meaning as she reads. As she starts reading a narrative for the first time, the reader builds an internal mental representation of the action, characters, and world of the narrative.\(^{255}\) This mental representation continues to grow, shift and change throughout the process of reading.

While the act of reading progresses in a simple linear timeframe, the experience of reading does not: “reading does not merely flow forward, but, recalled segments also

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\(^{255}\) Iersel, Mark, 19-21.
have a retroactive effect, with the present transforming the past.”

The implied reader starts not knowing anything about the narrative. As she starts to read and to learn about the plot and characters, she begins to make projections about the narrative as a whole. As she continues reading, certain projections are confirmed and others are not, leading to a “continual interplay between expectations and transformed memories.”

This dynamic temporality means, “in the time-flow of the reading process, past and future continually converge in the present moment, and the synthetizing operations of the wandering viewpoint enable the text to pass through the reader's mind as an ever expanding network of connections.”

A key element in this project relates to bringing the various elements of the narrative together in a consistent fashion. Iser explains, “Consistency-building is the indispensable basis for all acts of comprehension.”

One of the more salient places where this occurs in the context of reading happens when readers encounter gaps and places of indeterminacy within the narrative. The reader must fill these gaps if they are to have a coherent reading experience.

Rabinowitz argues that readers assume that narratives have a degree of coherence. Rabinowitz believes that this assumed coherence relates to “the work as a completed totality.” This sense of coherence is achieved, during the reading of a narrative, by projecting toward the end of the narrative, an end that the reader does not yet actually know. Each new narrative element is assessed with the implicit question, “If it works out

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257 Ibid., 111.
258 Ibid., 116.
259 Ibid., 125.
261 Rabinowitz, *Before Reading*, 112.
in that way, how will I account for this particular element?" 262 This means that the narrative exists for the reader as a “horizon of expectation.” 263 A field of expectation is extended when each narrative element is introduced, and the assumption is that there are no extraneous details that will cause the reader to project possible “fulfillments” to otherwise innocent narrative elements. 264 In this way the reader creates expectations. Some of these expectations will be fulfilled; others will be thwarted. 

Narrative indeterminacies invite the reader to take a more active role in the narrative. Rabinowitz sees three ways in which a text might require such active interaction from the reader. There can be gaps that need to be filled, a “surplus of information” that needs to be tamed, or works that are “simply disparate” that require “rules to help us bundle them together into convenient packages.” 265

When narratives have gaps that require filling, Rabinowitz suggests at least two rules the reader can use to assist them. The first, the “rule of inertia,” states, “unless we are given reason to believe otherwise, that events in the blank spots continue along the same path as the events preceding them.” 266 The second, the “realism rule,” affirms “narrative gaps can be filled through reliance on the authorial audience's assumptions about the way things are.” 267

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262 Ibid., 112. Once the narrative is completed this question might be changed to: “Given how it worked out, how can I account for these particular elements?”


264 Rabinowitz, Before Reading, 119-140. An Example of this might be a statement of hubris from an arrogant character which creates the expectation in the reader of some sort of future humiliation (ibid., 121).

265 Ibid., 148.

266 Ibid., 151.

267 Ibid., 151. The realism rule also allows the reader to fill in gaps through the principle of cause and effect, by which “we assume that gaps contain those events that are most likely to produce the effects that we see in the events that are explicitly narrated” (ibid., 152).
Excessive information can sometimes be “tamed” by presuming that some information “is simply unnecessary or extraneous.” However, this strategy is usually reserved for literature considered careless or inferior, as readers usually “assume that the surplus is intentional and that we are supposed to interpret it in one way or another.” Sometimes this surplus information can be understood as a means of providing “verisimilitude or local color,” and at other times it can be taken as figurative. Finally disparate information can be understood, organized and apprehended through “naming, bundling, and thematizing.”

2.3 Narration

2.3.1 A Narrator’s Reliability

The implied author does not speak in his own voice within a narrative. It is the narrator who “may serve as the implied author’s voice.” A reliable narrator is a guide for the reader who “introduces the reader to the world of the narrative and the characters which populate it, and provides the proper perspective from which to view the action.” The reliable narrator is to be trusted, and the information and values that he implicitly or explicitly communicates to the implied reader are to be accepted.

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268 Ibid., 154.
269 Ibid., 154.
270 Ibid., 154. When the surplus provides contradictory information, then Rabinowitz suggests the general rule of “trusting the last.” Often the final word in such a contradiction is more reliable. Also, Rabinowitz suggests that a character is more reliable after “undergoing experiences worthy of narration than before them” (Ibid., 155).
271 Ibid., 158-169. The very act of naming can provide a “sense of coherence.” Furthermore, finding parallels for various elements within some works can help reader to organize otherwise confusing narrative data (ibid., 159).
272 Culpepper, Anatomy, 16.
273 Ibid., 16-17.
274 The values or information that the unreliable narrator communicates, on the other hand, are not to be accepted (to various degrees).
Booth states “a narrator [is] reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), [and he is] unreliable when he does not.” Unreliable narration is not relevant for the study of Mark because it is a phenomenon likely not found in ancient literature. Nevertheless, we can already see in Booth’s definition that defining reliable narrators often includes defining unreliable ones. This is perhaps even clearer with Rimmon-Kenan who says that reliability can “be negatively defined by [the absence of signs of unreliability].” If the “main sources of unreliability are the narrator’s limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme,” then a reliable narrator would not be troubled with limited knowledge, inappropriate personal involvement, or skewed values.

The reliable narrator guides the reader towards those values and beliefs that need to be embraced in order to fully appreciate the work. Furthermore, this narrator also guides the readers towards particular emotional responses that will encourage her to appropriately appreciate the narrative. The reliable narrator’s values and beliefs are trustworthy, and because the implied reader wishes to understand the narrative according to the norms of the implied author, she will heed the reliable narrator.

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275 Booth, *Fiction*, 158-159.
278 Ibid., 101.
279 Booth, *Fiction*, 200-205.
A reliable narrator’s knowledge is trustworthy. In the context of fictional narratives, this reliable knowledge is a “constitutive convention of fiction.” That is, the acceptance of various facts provided within fictional narratives is a primary condition of the acceptance of fictional narrative itself. To ask how an author knows something about one of her characters betrays a fundamental convention upholding fictional narratives. Things are somewhat different with historical narratives. That being said, to ask how an author of a historical narrative knows a detail included in her narrative moves the analysis away from narratology (or narrative criticism), and towards a form of historical criticism.

2.3.2 A Narrator’s Characteristics

2.3.2.1 Omniscience

Narrators differ in respect to their access to knowledge, and to their limitation of knowledge. There are omniscient narrators, who have no limits, and there are limited narrators. An omniscient narrator can be a narrator not bound by space and time, and can move as freely into the past as into a distant land. An omniscient narrator has “the capacity to enter characters’ consciousness.” The omniscient narrator is not fixed to a particular vantage point, or to a particular character. Booth notes that the “most important single privilege” that a narrator can have is to obtain “an inside view of another character.” An omniscient narrator freely moves from one character to the next explaining the thoughts, motives, or feelings of each. This means that the narrator knows

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282 Chatman, Story, 212.
283 Booth, Fiction, 160-161.
more than the characters in the story, and that the narrator’s knowledge is privileged.\textsuperscript{284} This access to knowledge “leads the reader to trust the narrator as a reliable guide in the world of the story.”\textsuperscript{285}

However, just because a narrator is omniscient does not mean that he communicates everything he knows to the reader: “Knowing all, of course, need not mean telling all. Narrators regularly conceal information: that is a normal selective function of the discourse . . . .”\textsuperscript{286} A property of narrative is that the information that narrators relate is revealed over time. The linear nature of reading makes this unavoidable.

While literary critics regularly speak of omniscience in regards to narrators, it should be noted, “omniscience is perhaps an exaggerated term.”\textsuperscript{287} Taken literally, the idea of narrative omniscience raises some interesting questions:

Does the author know only the facts stipulated in the novel, or does he or she by definition know the colour of the eyes of each character in the novel, even if this is never mentioned? That seems the sort of thing that omniscience ought to involve: a vast store of knowledge, in excess of what might be expressed. Does the author know the complete histories of minor characters?\textsuperscript{288}

Hence, taken literally, the ideal of an omniscient narrator could lead to strange dead-end questions about the narrative that would take the reader well beyond the actual scope of the narrative. Instead of omniscience, one suggestion is to use \textit{unlimited} or \textit{unrestricted}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{284} Genette argues for a three-term typology in respect to the narrator’s knowledge as compared to character’s knowledge. An omniscient narrator knows more than the characters: \textit{Narrator > Character}. Alternatives include a narrator who says only what a given character knows (\textit{Narrator = Character}), or a narrator who says less than the character knows (\textit{Narrator < Character}). See Genette, Narrative Discourse, 188-189.
\item \textsuperscript{285} Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, \textit{Mark as Story}, 41.
\item \textsuperscript{286} Chatman, \textit{Story}, 212.
\item \textsuperscript{287} Rimmon-Kenan, \textit{Narrative Fiction}, 96.
\item \textsuperscript{288} Culler, \textit{Omniscience}, 23.
\end{itemize}
knowledge. These corrections are not much of an improvement, as they predicate the same thing about the narrator as omniscience. Therefore, in the absence of a better alternative, I will continue to speak of an omniscient narrator. By omniscient, however, I do not mean actual omniscience, but rather that the narrator has as much freedom as he wants to have, and knows everything that needs to be known for this particular story to be told in this particular way.

2.3.2.2 Dramatized and Undramatized Narrators

A dramatized (or homodiegetic) narrator is also a character within the narrative, while an undramatized (or heterodiegetic) narrator is not. Undramatized narrators are always simply absent – there are no degrees of absence – while there are degrees of presence for dramatized narrators.

2.3.2.3 Point of View and Focalization

The point of view is the perspective, or location from which the story is told. That location might be centred in a character within the story (a dramatized narrator), or in a narrator that is not a character in the story (an undramatized narrator). If the story is being told by one not in the narrative (an undramatized narrator), then further questions can be asked: is the “psychological point of view” omniscient? Is the “spatial point of view” omnipresent? Is the “temporal point of view” retrospective? Omniscience has already been discussed. Omnipresence means that the narrator is not restricting himself to

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290 Booth, Fiction, 151; Culpepper, Anatomy, 16. Genette, Narrative Discourse, 245. Referring to these different forms of narration as “first-person,” or “third-person” is inadequate, according to Genette. See Narrative Discourse, 243-244.
291 Genette, Narrative Discourse, 245.
292 Culpepper, Anatomy, 20; Genette, Narrative Discourse, 186.
293 Culpepper, Anatomy, 21-32.
a particular vantage point. A retrospective point of view is when the narrator implicitly or explicitly stands in a time that is after the events of the narrative, and that he essentially is looking back telling of things that occurred in the past. Chatman divides point of view into three senses; the literal (the “perceptual” – seeing events through someone’s eyes), the figurative (the “conceptual” – seeing through someone’s world view, conceptual system or ideology), and transferred (the “interest” – seeing through someone’s “interest, profit, welfare, well-being, etc.”).  

By way of analogy, one might say that point of view is similar to the placement of a camera in film. By keeping the camera close to a particular character, the viewer is encouraged to identify in some way with that character. However, things are a little more complex with written narratives. In narrative texts there is not a single “lens” through which the story is told, as in film. Rather there are different “voices,” including the voice of the narrator and the various voices of the characters. Each of these different voices “may manifest one or more kinds of point of view.” This leads Chatman to differentiate between point of view and narrative voice. The point of view is the perspective (the various points of view discussed above), and the narrative voice is the expression. The point of view of a narrative voice need not be made through that

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294 Chatman, *Story*, 151-152. Culpepper, borrowing from Boris Uspensky, notes five conceptual planes that relate to point of view. They are the “ideological (evaluative norms), the phraseological (speech patterns), the spatial (location of the narrator), the temporal (the time of the narrator), and the psychological (internal and external to the narrator.” Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 21; Boris Andreevich Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) 96.


narrative character: “The perspective and the expression need not be lodged in the same person.”

The distinction between seeing (implied in “point of view”) and speaking (or the “narrative voice”), and the confusion that arises when this distinction is missed, has led some to speak of focalization rather than point of view. In third person narration, or more precisely, in narration that has an undramatized, heterodiegetic narrator, the “user of the third person is the narrator,” and the “centre of consciousness” is the focalizer. That is, if a narrative has an undramatized narrator, then most often that narrator is the focalizer, and what he relates is the focalized. However, if a narrative, told by an undramatized narrator, has at its centre of attention a particular character within the narrative, then that character can be the focalizer, and what they perceive the focalized.

There are various types of focalization. External focalization is essentially when an undramatized, heterodiegetic narrator’s voice is heard. This is also called a “narrator-focalizer.” Internal focalization “is inside the represented events. This type generally takes the form of a character focalizer.” While this latter form of focalization may employ a first-person narrative (or a dramatized, homodiegetic narrator), it is important to remember that it also may not. An undramatized narrator can just as well be involved in this type of focalization by focusing upon the perspective of a particular character.

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297 Ibid., 153. This is particularly obvious when an undramatized narrator informs the reader of the point of view of one of the characters within the story.
298 Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, 72-75.
299 Ibid., 74.
300 Ibid., 75.
301 Ibid., 147-160; Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, 75.
302 Ibid., 75.
303 Ibid., 76.
As there is external and internal focalization, so there is also the externally and internally focalized.\textsuperscript{304} This distinction focuses upon whether the focalized (the object of concern to the focalizer) is perceived from within or from without. Something (or someone) that is focalized from without is represented “only in the outward manifestations of the object,” while something that is focalized from within “penetrat[es] … feelings and thoughts.”\textsuperscript{305} The basic difference then relates to the penetration in the mind of the focalized.

Focalization, much like point of view, has different facets that constitute its scope. The perceptual facet includes “sight, hearing smell, etc.” and is “determined by two main coordinates: space and time.”\textsuperscript{306} The spatial coordinate refers to the angle or breadth of perception, and can be tied to a limited observer, or cover a panoramic view.\textsuperscript{307} The temporal coordinate largely corresponds to what was discussed above relating to a retrospective point of view. It concerns itself with the temporal relationship between the focalizer and the focalized.\textsuperscript{308} The psychological facet includes cognitive and emotive components.\textsuperscript{309}

\textbf{2.3.2.4 Audibility: Covert and Overt Narrators}

Chatman believes that a key thing to note relating to narrators is “the features that mark their degrees of audibility.”\textsuperscript{310} There are overt and covert narrators: an overt narrator directly addresses the reader, while a covert one does not.\textsuperscript{311} Chatman explains, “A

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{304} Ibid., 77.
\item \textsuperscript{305} Ibid., 77.
\item \textsuperscript{306} Ibid., 78.
\item \textsuperscript{307} Ibid., 78-79.
\item \textsuperscript{308} Ibid., 79-80.
\item \textsuperscript{309} Ibid., 80-82.
\item \textsuperscript{310} Chatman, \textit{Story}, 196.
\item \textsuperscript{311} Ibid., 196-262. Culpepper, \textit{Anatomy}, 16. For more on the various types of covert narration, see Chatman, \textit{Story}, 197-219.
\end{itemize}
narrator’s overt presence is marked by explicit description, direct communications to a narratee about the setting that he needs to know.” Narrators directly address readers through commentary, descriptions, definitions, summaries, judgments, and reports of what characters think, feel or say. The more a narrator uses these sorts of direct communication, the more overt he becomes.

2.4 Characters

2.4.1 Characterization and Traits

A narrator communicates information about characters in two basic ways: showing and telling. Telling is when the narrator expressly defines a character’s trait. Hence, when the narrator says a character is brave and noble, the implied reader incorporates this into her conceptualization of that character. This form of presentation has the virtue of being economical and explicit; however, overuse may produce a “rational, authoritative and static impression.” This flaw, however, is more likely to be experienced as such in the modern age, which is likely to see it as slightly reductive. This may not have been the case in older eras when “generalizing, classificatory nature of definition was considered as asset.”

Showing describes a character’s trait by displaying it through what a character does. Actions can be one-time events, habitual, acts of omission, commission, or “contemplated acts.” A character’s traits can also be conveyed through speech, which

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312 Ibid., 219.
313 Ibid., 219.
314 Booth, Fiction, 154-155; Chatman, Story, 219-253.
315 Booth, Fiction, 3-20. Rimmon-Kenan speaks of “direct definition and indirect presentation,” which is essentially the same thing as showing and telling (Narrative Fiction, 60-61).
316 Ibid., 61.
317 Ibid., 60.
318 Ibid., 60.
319 Ibid., 61-63.
can be internal and unspoken, or external and uttered. Another way that the implied author can relay information about a character can be through the character’s external appearance, or the setting that the character finds itself in, or which is habitually associated with it. Parallels between characters can also imply similar character traits for both.

The building blocks for characters within narrative are traits. Readers take the information they have received about characters, what they have been told or shown, and extrapolate from it characteristics and qualities. Through repetition, the “piling up of data,” and a character’s relation with other characters, some of the reader’s extrapolations cohere into something that abides or endures within the narrative. These are traits. Chatman argues that a crucial element of traits is their “relative persistence.” While a trait may possess a “relatively stable or abiding personal quality,” it is not necessarily static. Indeed, it may “emerge earlier or later in the course of the story, or . . . may disappear and be replaced by another.” If they are developed in the least, characters will have more than one trait. A collection of traits – what Chatman refers to as “a paradigm of traits” – constitutes literary characters. A paradigm of traits thus includes traits that have been assembled, combined, contrasted, and generalized.

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320 Ibid., 63-65.
321 Ibid., 65-66.
322 Ibid., 66-68.
323 Ibid., 70-71.
325 Chatman, Story, 122.
326 Ibid., 126.
327 Ibid., 126-134.
328 Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, 37-39.
2.4.2 Round & Flat Character Types

E. M. Forster argues there are two types of characters, flat and round. Flat characters are those with a single trait or very few traits. These characters are “simple and consistent,” and can be easily remembered. Because they are “not changed by circumstances,” they possess a “comforting quality.” These characters may be “typological figures, whose sparse, simplified, mechanical, and stereotyped quality obviates change, development, or meaningful inwardness.” A flat character is often a type. Because flat character “can always be recognized by the reader whenever it reappears,” such figures not need be reintroduced when they resurface within a narrative. Although these characters may be predictable, this does not mean that they are not also “capable of great vivacity or power.”

Round characters, in contrast to flat characters, possess a variety of traits, some of which are conflicting or contradictory . . . They are “complex in temperament and motivation, . . . as difficult to describe as people in real life.” An important quality of round characters is their ability to surprise the reader: “The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is flat pretending to be round.” Where flat characters

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329 Forster, Aspects, 46-54, 132-133.
330 Chatman, Story, 132.
331 Malbon, “Narrative Criticism,” 29.
332 Forster, Aspects, 47-48.
333 Ibid., 48.
334 Hochman, Character, 43.
335 Forster, Aspects, 132
336 Ibid., 133.
337 Chatman, Story, 132; Forster, Aspects, 49.
338 Chatman, Story, 132.
340 Forster, Aspects, 54.
are predictable, round ones are not.\textsuperscript{341} What is striking about round characters is their proximity to real persons: they have “the incalculability of life about [them] – life within the pages of a book.”\textsuperscript{342}

Forster’s proposal of round and flat characters has critics. Rimmon-Kenan offers three concerns: 1) “Flat” implies characters “devoid of depth and ‘life,’” yet some of the characters Forster has termed flat (such as virtually every Dickens character) “are not only felt as very much ‘alive’ but also create the impression of depth.” 2) The “dichotomy is highly reductive, obliterating the degrees and nuances found in actual works of narrative fiction.” 3) The criteria of flat being simple and undeveloping and round being complex and developing overlooks instances where characters are simple and developing or complex and undeveloping.\textsuperscript{343} Rimmon-Kenan commends Joseph Ewen’s proposal that flatness and roundness be thought of in terms of a continuum, rather than of two absolute and distinct positions.\textsuperscript{344} More precisely, Ewen suggests that three continua be used to gauge character depth: complexity, development, and “penetration into the inner life.”\textsuperscript{345}

Bal believes that Forster’s distinction between flat and round characters is “based on psychological criteria,” and thus would “only be applicable to a limited corpus: that of the psychological narrative.”\textsuperscript{346} She adds that many genres, including biblical narratives, are more or less untouched by much of the weight of Forster’s proposal because “all their

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Chatman, \textit{Story}, 132.
\item Forster, \textit{Aspects}, 54.
\item Rimmon-Kenan, \textit{Narrative Fiction}, 40-41.
\item Ewen, “Character in Narrative,” 33-44.
\item Bal, \textit{Introduction}, 115.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
characters are ‘flat’.” Edward Burns agrees, stating that Forster’s flat characters are “of limited relevance” for understanding classical literature, as they “presuppose the existence of substantive (real, rounded, individual) ‘character’ to which ‘flat’ . . . presentation is inadequate.”

It is overstating, if not inaccurate, to suggest that all biblical characters are flat, or at least, equally flat. Nevertheless, in comparison with contemporary literature, it is true that the characters in ancient literature do not approach today’s levels of “roundness.” Hence, within biblical literature, it might be better to speak of degrees of flatness rather than actual roundness.

2.5 Setting

M. H. Abrams defines setting within a narrative as “the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which its action occurs.” Chatman believes that a “normal and perhaps principal function of setting is to contribute to the mood of the narrative.”

Spatial settings can be topographical or architectural. Hence, the use of geographic phenomena such as mountains, deserts, rivers, cities, house, temples, etc., are settings that direct the implied reader towards imagining the physical context for the characters within narratives. The movement from one setting to another can be programmatic for some narratives, especially for narratives such as Homer’s Odyssey, Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, and Dante’s Divine Comedy that “use a journey as a setting

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347 Ibid., 115.
349 Abrams, Glossary, 284.
350 Chatman, Story, 141.
for understanding and discovery.” On a grander scale, the setting can also be cosmic, employing the mythical/cosmological beliefs that frame the whole of the narrative. For instance, even when not stated, the fact that in ancient Christian literature the world is the creation of God is an important setting for framing an understanding of the narrative as a whole.

Props and walk-ons are another aspect of spatial setting. Props are items that are specifically mentioned as existing within the spatial setting, and can include anything (for example, clothing, clouds, or water). While “props are the type of detail that could easily be omitted and no one would notice,” they nevertheless are “a puzzle to be solved.” The implied reader wonders why a particular item has been mentioned, and if it is “important for the interpretation of the story?” A “walk-on” is what Chatman calls minor characters “who are mere elements of the setting.” These are to the written narrative what extras are to the movie.

Settings are not restricted to spatial elements, but can also refer to temporal components. That is, settings are not just where things happen but also when. Powell suggests that temporal settings can be divided into at least two basic categories: chronological and typological. Powell argues that the chronological can be divided into the locative or durative. The locative refers to when an event occurs, whether to a specific year, specific month, or a specific time of day. Durative references “also indicate a

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352 Ibid., 99.
353 Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, Mark as Story, 64-65.
354 Ressegueie, Narrative Criticism, 105.
355 Ibid., 88.
356 Ibid., 88.
357 Chatman, Story, 139.
358 Powell, Narrative Criticism, 72-74.
chronological temporal setting, but they denote an *interval* of time.” The durative “does not indicate the point in time when” an event happened, “but the amount of time that transpired” for that event to occur. A typological setting indicates “the kind of time within which an action transpires.” It would be locative to say that the Second World War happened between 1939 and 1945, durative to say that it lasted six years, and typological to say that 1939 was a dark year.

A final type of setting, beyond the spatial and the temporal, is the social setting. This includes the political, social, economic, religious and cultural phenomena that lie behind a narrative. It may be explicit or implicit, but remains operative even when not expressly mentioned.

Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie state that settings make narrative possible by providing characters with a context. They “provide the conditions - the possibilities and the limitations - within which the characters chart their destinies.”

Setting can be used as a way to convey a character’s traits. That is, according to Rimmon-Kenan, they can be “trait-connoting metonymies.” Hence, a disorganized and dirty house can suggest that a character is lazy, or decadent. The spatial setting, ranging from the physical location to the props and the clothes that are worn, “may highlight the religious, moral, social, emotional, and spiritual values of the characters.”

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359 Ibid., 72. Emphasis added.
360 Ibid., 73.
361 Ibid., 73.
365 Ibid., 66-67.
Chatman, borrowing from Robert Liddell, suggests various ways that setting can be related to the plot: utilitarian (what is “minimally necessary for the action”), or symbolic (where the setting parallels the action – “tempestuous happenings take place in tempestuous places”).

A utilitarian setting might further verisimilitude, or simply provide a necessary context that has no other purpose than to locate characters and events within time, culture and space. A symbolic setting, on the other hand, embeds meaning and significance into the setting so that it becomes a means to “convey important themes,” or even provides structure for the story. An example of this is the journey stories mentioned above. The journey links the various elements of the narrative together in such stories. Symbolic settings are loaded with cultural symbolic significance and have the ability to “evok[e] associations present in the culture of the audience.” Settings such as rivers, mountains, and deserts can be encoded with a great deal of cultural weight. Temporal settings and social setting can also have symbolic significance.

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367 Chatman, *Story*, 143, citing Robert Liddell, *A Treatise on the Novel*, (London: Cape, 1947) ch 6. Additional ways that setting can be related to the plot, not germane to this present study, include irrelevant (where the setting does not matter), countries of the mind (which is concerned with character’s inner landscape), and kaleidoscopic (shifting between character’s outer world and inner world of imagination). See Chatman, *Story*, 143.

368 Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 63

369 Powell, Narrative Criticism, 70; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 88; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 63.

370 Ibid., 66-72.

371 Ibid., 63.

372 For more on the symbolic significance of rivers, mountains, and deserts, see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 95-100.

373 As an example, nighttime can possess symbolic significance within narratives.

374 Using a New Testament example, the “Kingdom of God” overlays political realities with spiritual significance.
2.6 Time

2.6.1 Order

2.6.1.1 Anachrony

Narratives are rarely told in strict chronological sequence. Events from the past or the future are mentioned alongside events of the present. Genette calls an event that is mentioned out of sequence an *anachrony*. Anachronies can be expositions that explain significant features of a narrative. They provide “necessary information concerning characters and events existing before the action proper of a story begins.”

Anachronies within a narrative highlight particular aspects of the narrative. They can also be “a means of drawing attention to certain things, to emphasize, to bring about aesthetic or psychological effects, to show various interpretations of an event, to indicate the subtle difference between expectation and realization, and much else besides.”

In order to explore anachronies, it is necessary to have a “base-line” narrative against which anachronies depart. Genette refers to this as the first narrative. The first narrative is the temporally prior and dominant level, and anachronies are “temporally second, subordinate.”

2.6.1.2 Analepses

An anachrony can reach into the past or into the future. If it reaches into the past, it is an *analepsis*. Hence, an analepsis is an event that happened in the past of the first narrative. These are sometime referred to as “flashbacks.” However, “flashback” is properly a term used to refer to a cinematic analepsis that is “introduced by some overt

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379 Ibid., 48.
mark of transition like a cut or a dissolve.” In written narrative, then, it is more appropriate to speak of analepses.

Analepses can be external, internal, or mixed. An external analepsis is one “whose entire extent remains external to the extent of the first narrative.” That is, it happens entirely before the first narrative begins. There is no temporal overlap between it and the first narrative; it ends before the first narrative begins. An internal analepsis, on the other hand, begins and ends within the timeframe of the first narrative. A mixed analepsis is one “whose reach goes back to a point earlier and whose extent arrives at a point later than the beginning of the first narrative;” it starts before and ends after the first narrative commences.

External analepses can provide additional information to help the reader understand the first narrative better. Bal writes that generally analepses “provide indications about the antecedents, the past of the actors concerned, in so far as that past can be relevant for the interpretation of events.” Internal analepses not only serve the rather utilitarian function of “providing an identification, recollection, or transition which allows the narrative to proceed smoothly,” but also “have the more exciting task of heightening dramatic intensity by anticipating coming events.” They can also “fill gaps in the narrative,” provide background for a newly introduced character whose

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381 Chatman, *Story*, 64. See also Bal, *Introduction*, 83.
384 Ibid., 49.
385 Ibid., 49.
388 Ibid., 69-70.
389 Ibid., 70.
importance in the first narrative is growing,\textsuperscript{390} and can bring a new meaning or a new interpretation to a previously narrative event.\textsuperscript{391} Mixed analepses can have the “function of providing narrative flow, clarity, emphasis, and subsequent interpretation.”\textsuperscript{392}

Analepses can be either complete or partial.\textsuperscript{393} A complete analepsis “joins the first narrative without any gap between the two sections of the story.”\textsuperscript{394} That is, its end links up with the beginning of the first narrative so that there is no gap between the two. It may, of course, overlap, going further than merely the beginning of the first narrative. Its reach is “inside the temporal field of the first narrative.”\textsuperscript{395} A complete analepsis can be a central part of the narrative. Indeed, sometimes they “even present the chief part of [the narrative], with the first narrative functioning as the denouement in advance.”\textsuperscript{396}

A partial analepsis, on the other hand, “ends on an ellipsis without rejoining the first narrative.”\textsuperscript{397} It is partial because the end of the analepsis does not coincide with the beginning of the first narrative, but occurs before its beginning. This means that there is a gap between the end of the analepsis and the time of the beginning of the first narrative. This gap may, or may not, be explicitly noted in the text of the narrative.\textsuperscript{398} One of the main functions of a partial analepsis is “to bring the reader an isolated piece of information, necessary for an understanding of a specific moment of the action.”\textsuperscript{399}

\textsuperscript{390} Bal, \textit{Introduction}, 90.
\textsuperscript{391} Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{392} Culpepper, \textit{Anatomy}, 69.
\textsuperscript{393} A complete analepsis is not to be confused with a completing analepsis, to be discussed below.
\textsuperscript{394} Genette, \textit{Narrative Discourse}, 62.
\textsuperscript{395} Ibid., 61. See also p. 51.
\textsuperscript{396} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{397} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{398} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{399} Ibid., 62.
If the substance of an analepsis deals with a storyline “different from the content (or contents) of the first narrative,” then Genette calls it a heterodiegetic analepsis.\textsuperscript{400} This sort of analepsis often deals “with a character who has been out of sight for some time and whose recent past we must catch up with.”\textsuperscript{401} A homodiegetic analepsis, on the other hand, deals “with the same line of action as the first narrative.”\textsuperscript{402} There is the risk of redundancy with homodiegetic analepses, as their timeline overlaps with the timeline of the first narrative.\textsuperscript{403}

Homodiegetic analepses can be divided into two categories, completing and repeating. A completing homodiegetic analepsis fills in an earlier gap or ellipsis left in the narrative. It “comprises the retrospective sections that fill in, after the event, an earlier gap in the narrative. . . . These earlier gaps can be ellipses pure and simple, that is, breaks in the temporal continuity.”\textsuperscript{404} In other words, the narrative returns to its own previously told past to fill in details not told when it was previously narrated.\textsuperscript{405}

A repeating homodiegetic analepsis repeats what was previously narrated.\textsuperscript{406} This can be either an explicit “retracing of the path” of the narrative, or “the narrative’s allusion to its own past,”\textsuperscript{407} and can be a way to bring new insights, perspectives, or interpretations to events or characters previously narrated.\textsuperscript{408}

Analepses can also be distinguished according to the relationship that they have with the first narrative. A first-order analepsis happens when the narration fundamentally

\textsuperscript{400} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{401} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{402} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{403} Ibid., 51, 54.
\textsuperscript{404} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{405} See also Chatman, \textit{Story}, 65; Culpepper, \textit{Anatomy}, 59.
\textsuperscript{407} Genette, \textit{Narrative Discourse}, 54.
\textsuperscript{408} See Chatman, \textit{Story}, 65.
départs the first narrative to go into the past. This is usually the work of the narrator. An example of a first-order analepsis would be when the narrative simply steps away from the first narrative and tells the story from the past from its own perspective. In a film, this would be a flashback. A second-order analepsis stays within the first narrative but openly speaks of the past. This can be from the viewpoint of either the narrator or a character. An example of a second-order analepsis would be a story set in the past, but told by a character within the first narrative. The analepsis, then, moves to the past, but its telling remains within the first narrative. A third-order analepsis also stays within the first narrative, but explicitly or implicitly refers to something from the past by means of allusion. This is the work of the narrator. An example of a third-order analepsis would be some element within the text (which the characters within the story may fail to notice) that evokes something of the past. The story remains in the first narrative, but there is an evocation of the past.\footnote{For more on advance warnings, see §2.6.1.3.}

2.6.1.3 Prolepses

A prolepsis is an anachrony that occurs in the first narrative’s future.\footnote{Genette, \textit{Narrative Discourse}, 67.} Like analepses, prolepses can be internal or external. An external prolepsis occurs beyond the “limit of the temporal field of the first narrative,” where the limit “of the temporal field of the first narrative is clearly marked by the last nonproleptic scene.”\footnote{Ibid., 68.} An internal prolepsis occurs within the “limit of the temporal field of the first narrative.”\footnote{Ibid., 68.} The former happens outside the scope of the span of the first narrative, and the latter happens within its scope.
Likewise, there are completing and repeating prolepses. Repeating prolepses “scarcely occur except as brief allusions: they refer in advance to an event that will be told in its place.” These “brief allusions” provide advance notice to the reader of what will occur. These have the function of creating expectation in the reader of what will happen, either immediately or much later on. Slightly different from advance notices are advance mentions. Advance mentions do not create expectation within the reader, but can pass almost unnoticed. They “will acquire their significance only later on.” Initially an advance mention is “only an ‘insignificant seed,’ and even an imperceptible one, whose importance as a seed will not be recognized until later, and retrospectively.” They are hints that may be, and indeed in many cases usually are, missed when initially encountered within the narrative. There can also be false advance notices that seem to foreshadow something of the narrative’s future, but in fact do not.

Prolepses, like analepses, can be first-order, second-order, or third-order. A first-order prolepsis happens when the narrator jumps forward in time and leaves the first narrative. A second-order prolepsis happens when the future is overtly referred to in the first narrative, but nevertheless remains within the first narrative. A third-order prolepsis occurs when some feature within the story alludes to the future. A third-order prolepsis can be either an advance notice or an advance mention.

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413 A completing prolepsis “fills in ahead of time a later blank” (ibid., 71; see also 71-73).
414 Ibid., 73.
415 Ibid., 73.
416 Ibid., 73-74.
417 Ibid., 75.
418 Ibid., 76.
419 Bal, Introduction, 95.
420 Ibid., 95-96. These narrative snares are intended to fool readers into suspecting that something anticipates the future of the narrative, when it does not. Detective novels can then proceed one step further, and offer false snares, which lead sophisticated readers into thinking they are false advance notices, when in fact they are true advance notices. See Genette, Narrative Discourse, 77.
2.6.2 Duration

Not every part of a narrative moves at the same speed. For example, it might take ten pages to relate the events of a decade, and then one hundred pages to relate the events of a single evening. It is helpful to note the difference between discourse-time and story-time. Discourse-time is “the time it take to peruse the discourse,” and story-time is the “duration of the purported event of the narrative.”421 A narrative’s rhythm is constituted by the speed of its discourse-time in relationship to its story-time.

Understanding a narrative’s rhythm means, “gauging the pace of the narrative, [and] determining where it speeds up and where it slows down.”422 Often we can note what is important in a narrative by the speed of that narrative at any given moment: “acceleration and deceleration are often valuated by the reader as indicators of importance and centrality. Ordinarily, the more important events or conversations are given in detail (i.e. decelerated), whereas the less important ones are compressed (i.e. accelerated).”423 However this is not a blind formula, but rather something that needs to be assessed narrative by narrative, as “sometimes the effect of shock or irony is produced by summing up briefly the most central event and rendering trivial events in detail.”424

There are at least four different “temps” relative to duration, including pause, scene, summary, and ellipsis. Pauses step away from the narrative action, and elaborate on some aspect or issue leaving the temporal flow of the narrative untouched. When the narrative returns back to the scene, no time has elapsed. They slow down the overall narrative425 to provide descriptions,426 contemplative halts,427 and recollections.428

421 Chatman, Story, 62.
422 Powell, Narrative Criticism, 39.
423 Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, 56.
424 Ibid., 56.
Scenes are normally comprised of “dialogue and overt physical actions of relatively short duration, the kind that do not take much longer to perform than to relate.” This means that theoretically discourse-time and story-time are equal, more or less. Such equality comes the closest to being realized in “pure dialogue.”

With summaries story-time is greater than discourse-time. Summaries are very flexible, and can range from being just faster than a scene to just slower than an ellipsis. They can cover the events of an afternoon, or of an epoch.

With ellipses, discourse-time moves infinitely faster than story-time, as story-time is simply skipped over. There are four types of ellipses: 1. A Definite ellipsis where the duration of the “gap” is indicated; 2. an indefinite ellipsis where the duration of “gap” is not indicated; 3. an explicit ellipsis where the presence of “gap” is indicated; and, 4. an implicit ellipsis where the presence of “gap” is not indicated.

2.6.3 Frequency

Frequency, which is “an analysis of repetition,” is the final way that discourse can be examined temporally. It is “the relation between the number of times an event

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427 Ibid., 102.
428 Ibid., 105.
429 Chatman, *Story*, 72.
431 Ibid., 95.
432 Ibid., 94-95.
433 Ibid., 94.
434 Ibid., 94-95.
435 Ibid., 106.
436 Ibid., 106.
437 The narrative may not mention the exact duration of the gap – rather something like “some time had passed,” rather than “three years had passed” (ibid., 106-108). Bal thinks that this is, in fact, “no longer an ellipsis, but could be called a minimal summary.” Bal, *Introduction*, 101-102.
438 This type of ellipsis “is not announced in the text . . . the reader can infer [its presence] only from some chronological lacuna or gap in narrative continuity.” Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 108.
439 Ibid., 113.
appears in the story and the number of times it is narrated (or mentioned) in the text.”

What happened once can be narrated once (what Genette calls a *singulative narrative*). What happened *n* times can be narrated *n* times (which might be another form of the singulative narrative). What happened once can be narrated *n* times (*repeating narrative*). This can be mere repetition, or can be done “with stylistic variation.” Advance notices and repeating analepsis fall in this category. What happened *n* times could be narrated once (iterative narrative).

Generally speaking, in older literature, singulative narratives have a more dominant role in narratives, with “iterative sections . . . almost always functionally subordinate to” them. Iterative narratives tend to “provide a sort of informative frame or background.” While singulative narratives may have a more dominant role in many older narratives, noting where and in what ways texts repeat themselves is important. Repetition can be a way that the implied author can communicate to the implied reader what is important. Something that is oft repeated needs to be carefully heeded.

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441 Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 114.
442 Ibid., 114-115.
443 Ibid., 115-116.
444 Ibid., 116. “Everyday, rather than Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday, etc.” (ibid., 116). Iterative narration can further be measured by: 1. *determination*, which is the setting of the temporal range and can be left undetermined (as in “the sun set every morning”); 2. *Specification* which specifies particulars within the determined range, and can also be left undetermined (as in, “certain days”); and, 3. *extension*, which involves further specification (ibid., 127-129). See also Bal, *Introduction*, 111.
2.7 Events and Plots

2.7.1 Events & Plots

Not only does a character’s physical actions constitute an event, but also “speech, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.”\(^{447}\) Events bring about change of states within the narrative.\(^{448}\) This change might be in the state of a character, or in the state of the plot.\(^{449}\) This change is either caused by a character (an action), or experienced by one (a happening).\(^{450}\) Events, when put together within a narrative, “are turned into a plot.”\(^{451}\)

Between individual events and the story as a whole exists an “intermediary unit which may be called storyline. A storyline is structured like the complete story, but unlike the latter is restricted to one set of individuals.”\(^{452}\) While related to the main plot, a storyline – or subplot – is “a second story that is complete and interesting in its own right.”\(^{453}\)

Plots (and subplots) often deal with conflict.\(^{454}\) A conflict between characters usually involves “some clash of actions, ideas, points of views, desires, values, or norms,” and “may be physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, or moral” in nature.\(^{455}\) Conflict between characters is usually between a protagonist and an antagonist. The main character in the plot, usually the one who is the greatest concern for the implied reader, is the protagonist, and a character who opposes the protagonist is the antagonist.\(^{456}\)

\(^{447}\) Resseguie, Narrative Criticism, 197.
\(^{448}\) Chatman, Story, 44; Resseguie, Narrative Criticism, 197.
\(^{449}\) Ibid., 197.
\(^{450}\) Bal, Introduction, 189.
\(^{451}\) Chatman, Story, 43; Resseguie, Narrative Criticism, 197.
\(^{452}\) Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, 16.
\(^{453}\) Abrams, Glossary, 226.
\(^{454}\) Ibid., 225.
\(^{455}\) Resseguie, Narrative Criticism, 201. See also Laurence Perrine, Story and Structure, 4th ed., (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974) 44; Powell, Narrative Criticism, 42.
\(^{456}\) Abrams, Glossary, 224.
2.7.2 Connecting Events

Although plots are the result of events being put together, this does not mean that any events will forge a plot if placed together. A series of random and unrelated events will not result in a plot if put together. To have a plot the events must be appropriate to each other, and must be suitably connected. E. M. Forster argues that the only thing separating chronology and plot is the presence of causality. He explained: “We have defined a [chronology] as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. ‘The king died and then the queen died’ is a [chronology] ‘The king died and then the queen died of grief’ is a plot.”\(^{457}\) Chatman builds upon Forster’s illustration:

But the interesting thing is that our minds inveterately seek structure, and they will provide it if necessary. Unless otherwise instructed, readers will tend to assume that even ‘the king dies and the queen died’ presents a causal link, that the king’s death has something to do with the queen’s.\(^{458}\)

Hence, the implied reader assumes causality even when it is not expressly noted.

Likewise, Rabinowitz argues that readers assume narratives possess coherence, unless proven otherwise. This means that two events can be tied together according to the “rules of coherence.”\(^{459}\) The rules of coherence become particularly important when events and linkages between events appear to the reader incoherent.\(^ {460}\) Some narratives are poorly constructed and simply lack coherence, while others are overly ordered. Rabinowitz argues that between these two extremes “lies a third category of works: works that leave us baffled and confused until we apply the proper procedures to them –

\(^{457}\) Forster, Aspects, 60. Forster contrasts story with narrative, rather than chronology and narrative. I do not find the diminished sense of “story” that this contrast assumes to be helpful. I have substituted “chronology” for “story” in this citation from Forster.

\(^{458}\) Chatman, Story, 45-46.

\(^{459}\) Rabinowitz, Before Reading, 112. See also §2.2.2.

\(^{460}\) Ibid., 145.
works that are just pieces of wood and rope until we find the proper assembly techniques and apply the proper effort.\textsuperscript{461} He continues by noting that it is this third category that critics find most interesting.

Events have significance, according to the rules of coherence, in ways that would not be the case in real life. Readers assume that elements within texts are there for a reason. A statement made by a person in real life would not have the same “predictive value” as it would within a narrative. For example, a cough in real life suggests nothing more than a cold, but in a narrative a reader suspects something more dire.\textsuperscript{462} Hence, a reader assumes that an event relates meaningfully to other events, or will relate meaningfully to other events, even when no meaning is explicitly attached to that event by the narrator.

The disclosure of the meaning of an event is often deferred to a future moment within a narrative. The ability of an event to “reach into the future” to events that have not yet occurred is a way that narratives create suspense. “Suspense is usually achieved in part by foreshadowing – hints of what is to come.”\textsuperscript{463} Chatman argues “suspense always entails a lesser or greater degree of foreshadowing.”\textsuperscript{464} Such foreshadowing can create in the implied reader expectations as to what future events might be, and when that expectation is later thwarted, suspense yields to surprise.\textsuperscript{465} Suspense and surprise are

\textsuperscript{461} Ibid., 146.
\textsuperscript{462} Rabinowitz, Before Reading, 138.
\textsuperscript{464} Chatman, Story, 60. Chatman also notes, “Narratives may foreshadow in an unsuspenseful way.”
\textsuperscript{465} Abrams, Glossary, 255.
thus related. Suspense is also created when the reader is uncertain how future events can or will resolve tensions or problems within the current state of events.

2.7.3 Hierarchy of Events
In order to determine a plot, it is necessary not only to appropriately connect events, but also to appropriately weigh them. This is simply because not all events are of equal importance. Chatman, borrowing from Roland Barthes, speaks of crucial events within a story, which he calls kernels. These kernels, he says, “cannot be deleted without destroying the narrative logic.” Kernels advance the plot by being crucial moments of decision. They are “nodes or hinges in the structure, branching points which force a movement into one or two (or more) possible paths.” On the other hand, satellites are those events which are not crucial, and which “can be deleted without disturbing the logic of the plot.” No important choices are made within the satellites, rather within them are only “solely the workings-out of the choices made at the kernels.”

Rabinowitz suggests “Rules of Notice” as ways to determine which events are important within a narrative, and which are not. He argues that there are cues that narrators give to indicate whether an event is important. One such cue is “privileged positions,” including titles, openings and endings. Repetition is another cue.

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466 Chatman, Story, 60; Resseguie, Narrative Criticism, 202.
467 Ibid., 202.
469 Chatman, Story, 53.
470 Ibid., 54.
471 Ibid., 54. See also Powell, Narrative Criticism, 36; Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, 16.
472 Rabinowitz, Before Reading, 47-75.
473 Ibid., 58-65.
474 Ibid., 52-58. Rabinowitz suggests additional cues include explicit statements such as, “this is important” (54), the use of key words, metaphors and similes (52-58), or ruptures in the narrative (65-68). A rupture can include “blatantly irrelevant” and inappropriate details, a shift in style, or a change in the direction of the plot.
2.7.4 Recognition

A theme of recognition is a motif that sometimes functions within plots. A classic example of recognition (ἀνάγνωσις) is the bath-scene in the *Odyssey* (19.317-507). Odysseus has been away from Penelope for a very long time, and when he arrives back home, although he recognizes her, she does not recognize him, and he does not tell her who he is. His childhood nurse bathes him, and she discovers an old scar that reveals his identity. From this everyone realizes who he really is, and they all rejoice.\(^{475}\) Using this story as an exemplar, Kasper Larsen determines five key moments that exist within recognition scenes.\(^{476}\) First there is the meeting between “the observer and the observed.”\(^{477}\) Second, there is “the move of cognitive resistance” where the observer fails, for whatever reason, to accept or understand whom the observed really is.\(^{478}\) Third, there is “the move of displaying the token.” The token is a form of evidence (such as Odysseus’ scar) that has the power to reveal the observed true identity.\(^{479}\) Fourth, there is the “moment of recognition,” where the observer recognizes the real identity of the observed.\(^{480}\) The fifth and final step is the “attendant reactions and physical (re-)union,” usually accompanied by “awe and amazement.”\(^{481}\) Not every step will necessarily be present in every recognition scene.\(^{482}\)

The Prince and the Pauper is another example of a recognition story. In this fairy tale, a prince and a pauper who look alike exchange places. The pauper henceforth

\(^{477}\) Larsen, *Recognizing*, 63-64.
\(^{478}\) Ibid., 64-66.
\(^{479}\) Ibid., 66-68.
\(^{480}\) Ibid., 68-69.
\(^{481}\) Ibid., 69-71.
\(^{482}\) Ibid., 60.
appears to everyone to be a prince, and the prince appears to everyone to be a pauper. Both the prince and the pauper are the “observed,” and know their own true identities. In order for a recognition theme to have its desired epistemological effect, there must be the “observer,” who has the job of initially failing to understand the true identity of the “observed.” The “observer,” in the prince and the pauper, are those who see the prince but think they only see a pauper, or those who see a pauper when they actually see the prince. This interplay “between seeming and true being” involves a certain degree of “epistemological play.”

According to Algirdas Greimas and Joseph Courtés, this epistemological play “logically creates [the] four cognitive positions . . . of truth, delusion, secrecy and falsehood.” This can be illustrated in the following diagram:

The prince is living a secret because he “is something that is, but does not appear,” while the pauper is living a lie because he “is something that is not though it appears.”

It is possible to imagine variations of this. For example, consider a story where an emperor appears to be a subjugated vassal head of state. While it might be concluded that

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483 Ibid., 37.
485 From Larsen, Recognizing, 38.
486 Ibid., 38.
this character’s identity is “secret,” it might be better to think of those who believe that he is a vassal as being “deluded.” He “is something that is not though it appears.” He “appears” to be someone important, but he is not what he “appears” to be. That is, the Emperor “appears” to be someone important, but what is thought of him does not coincide with the truth (“not being”). Had the Emperor appeared to be a peasant, then his identity would be secret.

2.8 Irony

D. C. Muecke believes “irony is a double-layered or two-story phenomenon. At the lower level is the situation either as it appears to the victim of irony (where there is a victim), or as it is deceptively presented by the ironist (where there is an ironist). At the upper level is the situation as it appears to the observer or the ironist.” Furthermore, there is “always some kind of opposition between the two levels.” Booth argues that when someone grasps irony, it is as if they “leap or climb to a higher level.” The lower level is a level of false appearances, and the upper one is of reality, and there is a “contrast of reality and appearance” between levels. Generally speaking, “the greater the contrast, the more striking the irony.”

It is helpful to distinguish between verbal irony and situational irony. Verbal irony happens when a character (the ironist) within a narrative knowingly and intentionally says something ironic. Situational irony is where characters within a narrative “… are not aware that they are being ironical.”

487 Ibid., 38.
488 Muecke, Compass, 19.
489 Ibid., 19.
491 Muecke, Irony, 30.
492 Ibid., 32.
493 Powell, Narrative Criticism, 30.
Two crucial elements to interpreting irony include detecting its presence, and unpacking its meaning. Detecting irony is crucial. Due to its nature, a failure to do so can result in complete misunderstanding. Undetected irony can lead to the conclusion the implied author is affirming something, when in fact it is being denied. Over-interpretation that posits irony where there is none runs a similar risk. 494

Booth argues that the implied author leaves clues in the text that signal the presence of irony. One of the more salient clues that irony is at work is when “we notice an unmistakable conflict between the beliefs expressed and the beliefs we . . . suspect the author of holding.” 495 Other clues include the presence of “conflicts of facts within the work,” “manipulating the time-sequence” so as to juxtapose an ironic incongruence, 497 or a narrator’s “explanatory comments” that provide the reader with information the characters in the narrative are not privy to. 498 Using “words with double meanings and textual ambiguity, and the use of rhetorical questions, understatement, overstatement, parody, paradox, repetition, [or] metaphor” might also signal irony. 499

Once it has been determined that an element of the text is ironic, the next step is determining how to understand it. Booth speaks of interpreting irony in terms of “reconstruction,” and argues that there are four steps involved: 1) The reader is led to reject the literal meaning because it does not cohere with what is known about the

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494 Paul Duke writes: “Scholars and critics who quest after ironies in a text are prone, once they have caught the thrill of the hunt, to become downright intoxicated, not only bagging their limit so to speak, but opening fire on everything in the text that moves.” Paul D. Duke, Irony in the Fourth Gospel, (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1985) 2.
495 Booth, Irony, 73-86. See also Muecke, Compass, 58.
496 Booth, Irony, 61-67.
497 Feagin, Irony, 37.
498 Ibid., 35-36.
499 Gail R. O’Day, Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) 28. Other clues include blunt statements from the narrator that irony is being used, the presence of obvious error, or a clash of styles (See Booth, Irony, 53-73).
narrative world; 2) The reader tries various alternative interpretations; 3) A decision is made regarding the values and beliefs of the author; and, 4) Using the results from step 3, the reader adopts the best option from those considered in the second step.⁵⁰⁰

From the implied author’s point of view, irony may be used “as a rhetorical device to enforce one's meaning, . . . as a satiric device to attack a point of view or to expose folly, hypocrisy, or vanity, . . . [or] as an heuristic device to lead one's readers to see that things are not so simple or certain as they seem, or perhaps not so complex or doubtful as they seem.”⁵⁰¹

From the implied reader’s vantage point, irony serves as a “silent communication between [implied] author and [implied] reader”⁵⁰² because it is usually the implied reader, and not the characters within the narrative, who is aware of its presence. Furthermore, irony draws the implied reader further into the story, as it demands from her an effort of “reconstruction.” Because of irony’s emotive force upon the reader,⁵⁰³ it makes a point more forcefully than would be the case with plain speech. In discerning and “reconstructing” irony, the reader is catapulted into a higher vantage point – one that is “wiser, wittier, more compassionate, subtler, truer, more moral.”⁵⁰⁴ One implication of this upward movement is that, once taken, it enables one to look back with a superior attitude upon the inferior “lower” locations inhabited by the victims of the irony. Hence, there is both an affirmation of what the reconstructed irony endorses, and a rejection of

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⁵⁰⁰ Booth, Irony, 10-12.
⁵⁰¹ Muecke, Compass, 232-233. Muecke also notes that it can be used in “self-regarding, self-protective, or evasive” ways to “to camouflage emptiness or mere negation, or to disguise weakness as strength and then by this false show of strength to intimidate others.” Muecke, Compass, 233, 239.
⁵⁰² Culpepper, Anatomy, 65. Culpepper does not speak of implied author and reader. “Implied” has been added to avoid confusion in the context of the method embraced in this work.
⁵⁰³ Booth, Irony, 29; Feagin, Irony, 28.
⁵⁰⁴ Booth, Irony, 36.
what it surpasses. Irony “forces the reader to a decision,” and sets the reader apart from those within (and perhaps without) the narrative who do not understand. The result is a reader who now perceives herself as an insider, which in turn can lead to the “building of amiable communities.”

2.9 Procedure
Chapter Three will use the preceding methodology to analyze those sections in the Gospel of Mark that pertain uniquely to John the Baptist, or to Elijah. These include the Prologue (1:1-5), John’s death (6:14-29), the confession at Caesarea Philippi (8:27-9:1), the Transfiguration (9:2-10), the question of Elijah’s return (9:11-13), and the narrative of Jesus’ death (15:1-39). The episodes relating to Caesarea Philippi (8:27-9:1), the story of the Transfiguration (9:2-10), and the discussion about Elijah’s return (9:11-13), together form one extended episode, but will be separated for convenience sake.

When appropriate, the examination of each of these pericopae will start with a consideration of pertinent aspects of the repertoire of the reader. The next step (or the first step if there is no relevant repertoire of the reader to be considered) will be to consider germane elements of the discourse at work in the narrative. The final section for each of these pericopae, will consider how an implied reader might experience the text.

Because the same episode will be considered from up to three different perspectives, there will be a degree of repetition. Nevertheless, the different foci of each of the sections will keep this repetition from being mere redundancy. The Repertoire of

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505 Culpepper, Anatomy, 167.
507 Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, Mark as Story, 61.
508 Booth, Irony, 28. See also Duke, Irony, 38-39; Powell, Narrative Criticism, 32.
509 Or, what Iser refers to as “The Repertoire of the Text.” See Iser, Act of Reading, 69; §2.2.2.
the Reader Section will provide background information (when relevant), the Discourse Sections will be more descriptive, and the Implied Reader Sections will be more analytic.

The Repertoire of the Reader and Discourse sections will focus primarily upon the episode at hand, but will adopt a synchronic view of the narrative when appropriate. This is because the discourse section tends towards the work of the implied author rather than the implied reader, and the implied author presumably knows the narrative’s future in a way that the implied reader does not. This means that the whole narrative, including that which has not yet happened, might be drawn upon to understand the episode at hand. This contrasts with the Implied Reader sections, which will be strictly diachronic. That is to say, they will consider only that which the implied reader knows at any given moment in the reading of the narrative. Hence, if the pericope under consideration is chapter one of Mark, nothing outside that chapter will be allowed into the argument.

In addition to the primary pericopae mentioned above, secondary pericopae will also be considered, including but not limited to the question on fasting (2:18-22), the sending out of the disciples (6:7-13, 30), the question of the religious leaders in Jerusalem concerning Jesus’ authority (11:27-33), and the parable of the vineyard (12:1-9). These pericopae will be explored from the perspective of the implied reader.

Finally, at pertinent moments, there will be sections that revisit previously read material in the narrative from the reader’s perspective. This is a way of honoring the diachronic nature of the reader’s experience of reading (particularly as articulated by

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510 When I refer to the implied author, it primarily will be as that which represents the narrative as a whole – its values and norms (Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, 87-89). The implied author will also be referred to in contexts, such as when dramatic irony is being used, to signal a covert communication to the implied reader. The “voice” of the narrative, however, is that of the narrator, and hence the narrator will receive greater attention within the Discourse sections than the implied author.
The narrative unfolds over time for the reader, and certain themes become clearer as she continues to read. These sections will explore this dynamic.

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\(^{511}\) For more on a diachronic reader, see §2.2.2.
Chapter 3: A Narrative Critical Analysis of John the Baptist

3.1 General Introduction

3.1.1 General Qualities of the Narrator

The narrator in Mark is a reliable and trustworthy guide. He leads the implied reader towards the values and beliefs that are necessary for a “successful” reading of the Gospel.\(^\text{512}\) This is not surprising, as the use of an unreliable narrator is more or less a modern invention.

Mark’s narrator is also omniscient, which is to say that he knows everything required to tell the story exactly as he does. He is able to reveal unspoken thoughts, motives, and feelings of any character whenever and however he wants. He is not bound by space or time, and can move his attention anywhere he chooses.\(^\text{513}\) This degree of knowledge adds to the narrator’s reliability, as he does not make mistakes (from a narrative point of view) due to a lack of knowledge. At times he portrays characters externally, narrating only what they look like, do and say, and at other times he portrays their inner thoughts and feelings. He is free to limit his line of sight, or expand it as he sees fit.\(^\text{514}\)

The narrator in Mark is undramatized, or heterodiegetic. That is to say he is not a character in the narrative, but rather stands outside of the story.\(^\text{515}\) The narrator in Mark is overt.\(^\text{516}\) That is, he describes settings, unspoken thoughts, provides descriptions, commentaries, and makes authoritative declarations. These are often made in the

\(^{513}\) Ibid., 40-41.
\(^{514}\) For more on omniscient narration, see §2.3.2.1.
\(^{515}\) For more on undramatized narration, see §2.3.2.2.
\(^{516}\) The Markan narrator even directly addresses the reader in 13:14. Nevertheless, this level of address is something of an anomaly in Mark.
narrator’s own voice, but can also be made using citations from scripture.\footnote{517} Finally, the Markan narrator adopts an implicitly retrospective point of view.\footnote{518} That is, he speaks from an undefined time in the future, relative to the time of the first narrative. He does this implicitly inasmuch as he does not call attention to the time that he writes. This, according to Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, has the effect of “effacing … the narrator’s identity and presence” which “enables the narrator to assume a position of authority in relation to the story being recounted.”\footnote{519}

### 3.1.2 The Structure of the Plot

No consensus exists concerning the structure of the Gospel of Mark, and opinions are widely divergent. Some question whether Mark even had a structure:

The very fact that such widely differing principles of arrangement have been attributed to St. Mark perhaps suggests that in searching the Gospel for a single and entirely coherent master-plan, corresponding to a set of clearly formulated practical purposes, scholars are looking for something that is not there and attributing to the Evangelist a higher degree of self-conscious purpose than he in fact possessed.\footnote{520}

On the other hand, others argue that Mark’s structure is highly detailed and complex, involving concentric circles of carefully interwoven themes,\footnote{521} and that different sections are marked off from each other by means of summary statements,\footnote{522} the use of

\footnote{517} For more on overt narration, see §2.3.2.4.  
\footnote{518} For more on retrospective narration, see §2.3.2.3.  
\footnote{519} Ibid., 40.  
\footnote{520} Nineham, Mark, 29.  
Some argue that it is geography that determines the structure of the story. Others suggest that sections can be thematically determined by the use of the title, “Son of God,” the theme of rejection, or a pattern of gathering or dealing with disciples.

It is beyond the purview of this present work to attempt to settle this difficult issue. The lack of scholarly consensus relating to the structure of Mark concerns subdivisions. When it comes to certain larger divisions of Mark’s Gospel, however, there is, in fact, a remarkable consensus. That is, a strong consensus exists that a new section begins around 8:22, and that chapter thirteen stands apart from everything else. Likewise, the passion of Jesus (ch 14-16) appears to be distinct. The prologue also appears to be distinct, as does chapter 4. Beyond these determinations, the criterion is too

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530 Guelich, *Mark*, xxxvi.

subjective and uncertain to be confident. Fortunately, further divisions are not necessary for this present project.

There are identifiable key moments in Mark. For example, it is clear that the storyline of the Gospel shifts at the episode at Caesarea Philippi, and the narrator brings the reader into a new stage of narrative development. Adela Collins understands this development in the context of her argument that Mark’s Gospel is structured similarly to an Aristotelian tragedy. Working from categories derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, she notes, “two of the most important elements in the emotional effect of tragedy are the parts of the plot called ‘reversals’ (περιπέτειαι) and ‘discoveries’ or ‘recognitions’ (ἀναγνώρισείς). A ‘reversal’ is a change of situation or fortune into the opposite, this change being probable or inevitable.”

These qualities are nicely demonstrated in 8:27-28, where Jesus is recognized as the Christ, and this recognition “coincides with a reversal in the action, because Jesus’ response is the prediction of his own suffering and death.”

Chad Meyers suggests that the narrative is structured around the three key moments where Jesus’ identity is highlighted: the baptism, the transfiguration, and the crucifixion. In any event, these pivotal moments provide sufficient structure for the present work, especially insofar as in each of them John the Baptist or Elijah appears or is referred to.

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533 Ibid., 92-93.
3.1.3 The Implied Reader

The implied reader of Mark is a first time reader. When John and Jesus are introduced in the prologue, the reader has no previous knowledge regarding them other than what the narrator discloses.\(^535\) Thus, the implied reader does not know that Jesus will be crucified prior to her reading of the narrative. This is probably something that most of the *actual readers* did know when they first read this Gospel.

3.2 The Prologue (1:1-15)

3.2.1 The Title (1:1)

3.2.1.1 Repertoire of the Reader

Jesus is stated to be “Christ” (Χριστός) in 1:1 without explanation, and hence it can be presumed that the reader would have had certain assumptions concerning what was meant by this term from her repertoire.\(^536\) As suggested by 10:47-48, 11:1-10, 12:35-37, and 15:32, as well as the Psalms of Solomon, a primary context for “Christ” appears to be a royal Messianism. The Kingly paradigm usually involved David. Most of the characteristics of the Kingly messiah relate to his ability to rule.\(^537\) He rules and judges

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\(^535\) This contrasted with the Gospel of John, which likely does presume a previous knowledge of the reader. See Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 212-214, 222-223.

\(^536\) Various eschatological expectations existed within Second Temple. John Collins describes “four basic messianic paradigms” – “king, priest, prophet, and heavenly messiah.” John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*, Anchor Bible reference library (New York: Doubleday, 1995) 12. See also Ed Condra, *Salvation for the Righteous Revealed: Jesus Amid Covenantal and Messianic Expectations in Second Temple Judaism*, Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums; 51 (Leiden ; Boston, MA: Brill, 2002) 227-269. The Priestly paradigm was involved with national purification and instruction. The priestly paradigm is likely not part of the repertoire of the Markan reader, as it does not appear in the Gospel. The “heavenly messiah” is how Collins speaks of the Son of Man in 1 Enoch. The “Son of Man” paradigm may have been part of the reader’s repertoire. For more on the Son of Man paradigm, see §3.7.3.1. The Prophetic paradigm envisions one who has power to teach, heal and liberate. It is less certain that the Prophetic paradigm was within the reader’s repertoire. For more on understanding Jesus using a Prophetic category, see §3.4.1.2, §3.6.2.2, and §3.9.4.

\(^537\) The Davidic paradigm is perhaps the more dominant option with Second Temple Judaism, and there are more examples of it in the relevant literature. This hope is built largely upon the promise to David in 2 Sam 7:12-13, where David and his lineage are promised a perpetual kingdom.
justly; he has good council and wisdom; he will be a righteous, or even a sinless person. Power, perhaps even more than righteousness, is the defining characteristic of the Royal messianic paradigm. The Davidic Messiah will destroy all rival nations, enemies and sinners as well as deliver and restore Israel.

3.2.1.2 Discourse

In the opening line of the Gospel, the narrator, speaking in his own voice, explains that the story to be narrated is “good news” (εὐαγγελίον), and that its protagonist, Jesus, is the Messiah.

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538 1QSb 5:21, 4Q161 f5 10:12-14, 21-22, Ps Sol 17.2, 26
539 1QSb 5:25-26, 4Q161 f5 10:12-14, 21-22, Ps Sol 17:37, 43, 18:7.
540 Ps Sol 17:36.
541 Ps Sol 17:22, 37, 1QSb 5:28.
542 Ps Sol 17:22-41, 1QSb 5:22-25, 4Q161 f5 6:3, 10:15-16, 18-20, 4Q174 2:13, 4Q285 7:1-6, 11Q14 1:12
543
544 The narrator may also explain that Jesus is the Son of God, depending upon text critical considerations. A few important textual witnesses (including Κ, Θ, and 28) do not have “Son of God” (υἱοῦ θεοῦ) at the end of the verse. A majority of texts include these words, including some important witnesses (such as Κ, B, D, L, W, Θ, A, f1, f13, 33 and Π). With this evidence alone, we might surmise that the words belong in the text. However, when internal criteria are considered, this conclusion becomes less clear. The main argument for the secondary nature of the words is that it is more likely that they would have been added by a later scribe than that they would have been deleted. Some have argued that the reason they might have been deleted is due to a homoioteleuton (Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ). However, this is an unlikely explanation, for this type of error is usually one born of a copyist’s exhaustion, and that is not something we would expect at the very beginning of the endeavor. In any event, neither side of the issue currently commands a consensus. From a narrative point of view, the importance regards emphasis. The narrator makes it clear that Jesus is the Son of God elsewhere (1:11, 9:7). Hence, the absence of υἱοῦ θεοῦ in 1:1 would not mean that Jesus is not the Son of God. Rather the issue is how central this designation is. If υἱοῦ θεοῦ is original in 1:1 then this theme becomes a more programmatic one in the gospel. This is because themes in title and opening are especially significant for narratives. See Rabinowitz, Before Reading, 58-65. For more on the textual critical issues in Mark 1:1, see Adela Yarbro Collins, “Establishing the Text: Mark 1:1,” in Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts: Essays in Honor of Lars Hartman, eds. Tord Fornberg and David Hellholm, (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995) 111-127; Bart D. Ehrman, “The Text of Mark in the Hands of the Orthodox,” in Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich On His Sixtieth Birthday, eds. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991) 19-31; Bart D. Ehrman, The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 72-75; Alexander Globe, “The Caesarean Omission of the Phrase ‘Son of God’ in Mark 1:1,” Harvard Theological Review 75, no. 2 (1982) 209 – 218; Guelich, Mark 1-8:26, 6; Peter M. Head, “A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1:1: ‘the Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ’,” New Testament Studies 37, no. 4 (1991) 621 – 629; Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 2nd ed., (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2000) 62; J. Slomp, “Are the Words ‘Son of God’ in Mark 1:1 Original?,” The Bible Translator 28, (1977) 143-150.
It could be argued that the absence of the article before Ἱσσως (“Christ”) in 1:1 suggests that it functions as a personal name rather than a title.\textsuperscript{544} However, nowhere else is “Christ” used as a personal name in the narrative.\textsuperscript{545} The argument that χριστός is a personal name would be persuasive only if it never functioned otherwise within the narrative. Or, to put it differently, if elsewhere within the narrative χριστός functions titularly, then even where it does not, “its significance … [nevertheless] would not have been missed.”\textsuperscript{546} The declaration of Peter in 8:29 σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός (“you are the Christ”) shows χριστός bearing a titular meaning within Mark,\textsuperscript{547} which means that even if 1:1 is to be taken as a personal name, messianic overtones are also present. Given this, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, at the beginning of the Gospel, identifies Jesus as the Christ, or the Messiah.

### 3.2.1.3 Implied Reader

The first thing the reader learns is that the story to come is “good news,” which builds in her certain emotional expectations. These expectations are, at this point in the

\textsuperscript{544} Those who believe that Ἱσσως is meant as a personal name in 1:1 include Joachim Gnilka, 

\textsuperscript{545} France, _Mark_, 50. Guelich believes that 9:41 uses “Christ” as a personal name (Guelich, _Mark_, 9). Although this passage, like 1:1, does not have the article, in the context it appears that Jesus is referring to himself in the light of his position and not merely in light of his person. Hence, Guelich’s conclusion is doubtful.

\textsuperscript{546} Hooker, _Mark_, 34. Even Paul uses χριστός in a titular fashion, in addition to using it as a personal name. See Martin Hengel, “Jesus, the Messiah of Israel,” in _Studies in Early Christology_, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995) 1-7.

narrative, as vague as they are general. Nevertheless, the reader projects into her future reading of this story something positive and happy. In learning that Jesus, the protagonist, is the messiah, the reader likely expects that Jesus will conform to the Davidic messianic paradigm, which suggests that he will destroy the imperial power of Rome and purify and restore the people of God. This would be good news indeed.

3.2.2 The Opening Citation (1:2-3)

3.2.2.1 Repertoire of the Reader

In 1:2-3 the nature and authority of scripture is presumed and not stated. The reader’s repertoire, therefore, includes an acceptance of the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures. She knows that scripture contains not only the stories of the people of Israel, but also the revelation of the covenant, and the predictions of what is to happen in the future. The whole of this is sometimes interpreted as a schema of a history of salvation. The narrator’s use of scripture in 1:2-3 hence stakes a claim upon salvation history. Mark’s narrative is to be read in relation to the scriptures, and not in isolation from them. It stands as part of the sacred story contained within the Holy Scriptures. More precisely, it stands not just as part of that story, but also as its fulfillment.

The citation in 1:2-3 is drawn from Mal 3:1, Ex 23:20, and LXX Isa 40:3. The messenger in Mal 3:1 is later identified in Mal 4:5 with Elijah. 2 Kings 2:11 speaks of Elijah’s ascension to heaven, and presumably taking up this theme of heavenly ascension, Elijah in Malachi was to return “before the great and terrible day of the Lord” to “turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents” (Mal 4:5-

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548 Henceforth when the “reader” is referred to, it is the “implied reader” that is meant.
549 In the redactional history of Malachi, the messenger of Mal 3:1 originally may not have originally referred to Elijah. Mal 4:4-6, which may have been added later, interpreted Mal 3:1 by equating the messenger with Elijah. See Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary ; 32 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1984) 340-342.
6).\textsuperscript{550} A belief in Elijah’s return, then, would likely be a part of the reader’s repertoire. Furthermore, the implied author likely assumes that the reader has sufficient scriptural competence to know the general context of these source texts.\textsuperscript{551}

\textbf{3.2.2.2 Discourse}

The focalization in 1:2 is dense: on one level the one speaking is the prophet Isaiah,\textsuperscript{552} while on another it is God. So, it is possible to discern three voices speaking – the narrator, Isaiah, and God.

In 1:2 the narrator uses the scripture to make a first-person statement. The speaker is God, and the one addressed is Jesus.\textsuperscript{553} John is introduced, but he remains an undetermined character.

In 1:3a the focalization shifts so that the speaker speaks in the third person. This leaves only two voices, the narrator and Isaiah.\textsuperscript{554} The addressee has also changed. It is no longer Jesus who is addressed, but an undetermined third-person plural recipient. John’s profile is clarified by the revelation of his location (the wilderness) and his message.

In 1:3b John “speaks.” The words of 1:3b, however, function as a summary of John’s ministry, which suggests that the whole of 1:2-3 describes and summarizes John’s ministry.

\textsuperscript{550} In Malachi, Elijah precedes the “Day of the Lord” rather than the Messiah. Nevertheless, it is evident that Mark believes that Elijah was to precede Jesus. This is demonstrated by Mark’s presentation of the Baptist, commencing from the introductory citations in 1:2-3, where John (as Elijah) precedes Jesus (as Messiah). For more on this, See §3.8.1.1.

\textsuperscript{551} Given the later identification of John with Elijah in 9:11-13, it would be a surprising coincidence if the allusion to Elijah, by means of the Malachi citation was unintended.

\textsuperscript{552} Actually it is the prophet Malachi, but I will stay with Mark’s stated understanding.

\textsuperscript{553} One could deduce from this that Jesus is pre-existent, and that God speaks to him at some time before his earthly life. See Jacob Chacko Naluparayil, \textit{The Identity of Jesus in Mark: An Essay on Narrative Christology}, (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2000) 307. However, the statement in 1:2 is likely not a dialogue – the one addressed never speaks back, which suggests that 1:2 is simply declarative.

\textsuperscript{554} Here the source text is Isaiah.
The implicit cultural setting is Judaism, which embraces as authoritative the prophets, and by extension, the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The citation’s temporal setting is complicated. In terms of the prophet Isaiah, the words come from a prophet in Israel’s history, making the temporal setting the historic past. However, in terms of the words themselves, which purport to have God speaking about (or to) his son, the temporal setting is closer to an “ahistorical past.” That is, the temporal setting is still past – it is something that occurred before the action of the narrative properly commences – but it is not something that occurred within history. The words spoken by God are presumably spoken either within the context of divine intention, or in a heavenly “place” between God and the son. The temporal setting is within the realm of divine time, which impacts human history, but is not derived from it.

Another way to speak of the citation’s temporal setting is by noting its anachronical function. That is to say, the citation from scripture in 1:2-3 is a second-order external analepsis. It starts from the vantage point of the past, the time of Isaiah (and perhaps Malachi). From the vantage point of the past a future is predicted – embedded within this analepsis is also a prolepsis. The past speaks of its future, which is in fact the time of the first narrative. The first narrative’s initial set of circumstances is established in the context of the past – from the prophet Isaiah.

Verses 1:2-3 is the first citation of scripture within the narrative, and occurs “outside” the story. That is, it is a communication that none of the characters in the story are privy to.
The citation from Malachi might hint that John is Elijah *redivivus*. This might be an advance mention or advance notice. Because the equation of John as Elijah in 9:11-13 appears to inform the reader of something she did not previously know, it seems likely that the hints regarding Elijah *redivivus* in the Prologue are advance mentions.

### 3.2.2.3 Implied Reader

The dense focalization of 1:2, that juxtaposes the voices of Isaiah, God, and the narrator, has the effect of elevating the Markan narrator to a similar level of reliability as Isaiah and God. The reader accepts the word of the narrator as she would the word of Isaiah, or even as the word of God. In 1:2-3 there are no recipients within the story to hear these words from scripture, and the reader receives them as a direct communication from the narrator.

The implied reader learns that the beginning of the Good News accords with what is written in the Prophet Isaiah. The portion of this citation that is taken from Malachi 3:1 (1:2) does not mention Elijah, and what is cited is ascribed to Isaiah. Together this might throw the implied reader off the scent, so that she does not fully attend to the allusion to Elijah. However, it is also likely that the implied reader recognizes that Malachi lay behind 1:2, and that Elijah figures into things somehow. She does not yet know how.

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555 *Advance mentions*, it will be recalled, are elements in the text that *covertly* signal something of the first narrative’s future. Their significance is often realized after the fact: they are an unnoticed seed placed in the text that will grow in due time. *Advance notices*, on the other hand, are explicit anticipations of the narrative’s future, and are noticed as such by the reader.

556 The narrator ascribed the whole 1:2-3 to Isaiah when, in fact, only 1:3 comes from Isaiah. If this were the result of a mistake, then, the nature of the implied reader being what it is, the implied reader would not recognize this. However, it is unlikely that it is a mistake. An allusion to Elijah in 1:2-3 is only possible if the implied author realized that part of the citation comes from Malachi. Elijah appears in Malachi but does not appear in Isaiah. It is more likely that the implied author “is deliberately setting his story in an Isaian context” (Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 147).

557 As mentioned, the figure mentioned in Malachi 3:1 is identified as Elijah in Malachi 4:5. See footnote 550 above.
The reader concludes from this citation that the story she reads stands on the shoulders of the narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures. It stands in an affirmative relationship with sacred history and sacred text; the reader rejects any thoughts that it might clash with scripture. Those ancient texts predicted a future, and the time of fulfillment has come – the time of the first narrative is that time of fulfillment. This citation, then, increases the reader’s expectation regarding the scope and import of the story to come. This story relates to the grand story of God’s redemptive purposes for his people. It is a central part of salvation history. With the opening three verses, she finds that even before the story starts, the narrative clock has already been ticking, and has been ticking for a long time. The story proper may start in 1:4, but 1:2-3 connects it to a more ancient story. The story of Jesus is but one chapter (albeit the chief and most notable chapter) in a larger story.

A back and forth movement flows between the past and the narrative’s present: the prediction from the past speaks of the time of the first narrative, and the first narrative becomes the fulfillment of the analepsis’ prediction. The reader concludes that the analepsis defines the first narrative and the first narrative explains the analepsis, that the analepsis without the first narrative is an unsolved mystery, and the first narrative without the analepsis is rootless, and cut off from its source.

The reader enjoys privileged access to crucial information in 1:1-3, although at this point she probably does not realize yet exactly how privileged this information is. Right from the onset, she knows that Jesus and John are part of the divine plan established in the timeless past of God’s purpose. Already she possesses information relating to John’s ministry that, as it will turn out, the characters in the narrative lack.
In 1:2, the implied reader, gaining access to the inner council of God, learns that John (as yet unnamed) goes before Jesus (πρὸ προσώπου σου – Jesus is also not named). “The Way” (ἡ ὁδὸς) is mentioned twice in 1:2-3, which leads the reader to suspect that Mark might be a travel story.\(^{558}\) In 1:2 “the way” is something that John will “prepare” (κατασκευάζω)\(^{559}\) for Jesus, while in 1:3 it is something that the people ought to “make ready” (ἐτοιμάζω). The “way” in 1:3 is the “way of the Lord” (τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου), and the proximity to “your way” (ὁδὸν σου) in 1:2 leads the reader to conclude that Jesus is “the Lord” spoken of in 1:3. The parallel between 1:2 and 1:3 in the mention of “the way” provides coherency for the reader between the two verses. While there is a parallel here, there is also a distinction, as the preparation (κατασκευάζω) that John provides in 1:2 is not the same thing that the people are to do (ἐτοιμάζω) in 1:3.\(^{560}\) All of this raises at least three questions for the reader: What is “the way?” How does John prepare this way for Jesus? And, how does John get the people to make ready the way for Jesus? She cannot yet answer these questions.

3.2.3 John’s Ministry (1:4-5)

3.2.3.1 Repertoire of the Reader

In 1:3-4 the wilderness (ἔρημος) is a key setting, which evokes important associations derived from the reader’s repertoire. Isaiah 40:3, cited in 1:3, speaks of a

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\(^{558}\) Kelber, *Mark’s Story*, 17.

\(^{559}\) Κατασκευάζω has a range of meanings. It can mean to “build, construct, erect, create” (BDAG, s.v. Κατασκευάζω 2). It is usually translated “prepare” here, in part because of a precedent set by an ancient tradition in which the way (ὁδὸι) was prepared “along which the procession in honor of Zeus and Dionysus was to pass” (BDAG, s.v. Κατασκευάζω 1).

\(^{560}\) 1:3 is often translated “prepare the way of the Lord,” but using “prepare” in both 1:2 and 1:3 obscures the fact that two different words are used (κατασκευάζω and ἐτοιμάζω). Using “prepare” for both these words gives the suggestion that there is a stronger parallel than there might actually be between what John does for Jesus in 1:2 (κατασκευάζω), and what John demands of the people in 1:3 (ἐτοιμάζω).
second Exodus. However, to speak of a second Exodus, one needs to understand the first Exodus. The wilderness is pivotal in the stories of Moses and the children of Israel in the Pentateuch. The wilderness is where “Israel was born as a Nation,” God’s name was revealed, and the covenant and law was given. It is a place of hazard and help:

The desert stories of Exodus and Numbers almost always combine two elements: danger and divine help. The wilderness is the place that threatens the very existence of Yahweh’s chosen people, but it is also the stage which brightly illumines God’s power and readiness to dispel the threat.

The Exodus is a place of testing, where “God tests Israel so that she may find out what is in her heart.”

Many of the central motifs that defined Israel as a people come in the context of Exodus wilderness. This led later stories to make reference to the Exodus story. An example of this is the story of Elijah, who, going into the desert for forty days and forty nights (1 Ki 9:8), ends up ascending the same mountain that Moses ascended when he received the Ten Commandments (19:8).

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563 Ibid., 23.
564 Ibid., 25-27.
565 Ibid., 21.
566 Ibid., 35.
567 See Ex 28:18 for parallel.
Starting with Hosea, the prophets began to envision “a new time which Israel will have to spend in the wilderness.”\(^{568}\) It is this second Exodus that Deutero-Isaiah speaks of in Isa 40:3-4, and which Mark cites in 1:3. Faced with political occupation and captivity, the prophets predicted a new Exodus that was to be a time of national restoration and renewal. As messianic expectations grew, the new Exodus sometimes took on messianic, and apocalyptic dimensions.\(^{569}\) Hence, the wilderness possesses a multi-faceted symbolic richness. It evokes the grandest moments of Israel’s past, as well as some of her deepest hopes for the future.

The River Jordan also has associations relating to the reader’s repertoire. Jordan “is the primary river in the land of Israel,”\(^{570}\) and the final boundary between the children of Israel and the Promised Land that needed to be crossed (Josh 3). It is not surprising that the Jordan accumulated a surplus of meaning, as “notions of boundary crossing are often laden with symbolic and metaphoric connotations.”\(^ {571}\) The Jordan marks a boundary of what belongs to God’s people, and as such, an obstacle that can only be overcome with divine assistance.

Additionally, the river Jordan evokes the story of Elisha and Naaman, where the latter is commanded by the former to wash seven times in the river Jordan so that he might be cleansed of his leprosy (2 Ki 5:10). Furthermore, it was at the Jordan that Elijah transferred the authority and power of his ministry to Elisha (2 Ki 2:6-15).

\(^{568}\) Ibid., 45.
\(^{570}\) Collins, *Mark*, 142.
3.2.3.2 Discourse

The narrator sheds the mask of scripture in 1:4, and speaks in his own voice. Building upon themes found in the cited scriptures, he introduces the name of the messenger of 1:2-3. The narrator explains that John proclaims a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ὀμαρτιῶν).

John appears in the wilderness at the River Jordan. The River Jordan (1:5) is not a distinct setting from the wilderness, but specifies the location of the Baptist’s ministry. That is, the Jordan and the wilderness intersect.

3.2.3.3 Implied Reader

It is not difficult for the reader to fill a gap in the narrative at 1:4. The fact that John “proclaims” and is in the “wilderness” makes it obvious to the reader that John, the “messenger” (1:2), and the “voice” (1:3), are one and the same. Nevertheless, this identification is left implicit, requiring work from the reader. Right from the beginning of the narrative the reader is given the important task of identity recognition.

The reader first hears about John in abstract terms in 1:2-3, and then encounters him more concretely in 1:4. She learns that the one predicted in 1:2-3, who was to prepare the way for Jesus, and who was to urge the people to make ready the way for Jesus, is named John. The reader also learns that John baptized, and that he proclaims a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The reader might suspect that this rite of reconciliation is related to what was predicted of John in 1:3b: John urges the people to prepare a way for Jesus by means of baptism, repentance, and forgiveness.

The first character on stage is John. It might surprise the reader that the story of Jesus does not begin with Jesus. She suspects that John will be important, and wonders what his purpose will be in the narrative.
The reader is struck by the location of John’s ministry. The wilderness is a place far from the securities of the city and filled with danger. The wilderness is a place of symbolic depth for the reader, evoking many of the central stories from sacred history. This rich tapestry of significance grants to the story a mythic importance. The reader might be struck especially by a parallel between John and Elisha, in that they both use the River Jordan to effect cleansing. The affirmation of forgiveness by John’s ministry suggests to the reader that the story she is reading relates to divine deliverance and reconciliation, yet the setting of his ministry also suggests danger, testing, and threat. The reader wonders if the citation from Isaiah in 1:3 means that this story might be a second exodus. For now, the reader has more questions than answers.

The reader learns in 1:5 that John’s ministry has a wide popular appeal among the people of Judea and Jerusalem. The people come “confessing their sins” (ἐξομολογούμενοι τὰς ὀμορτίαις αὐτῶν). The reader likely concludes that they are responding appropriately to John’s call to repentance, and that their confession results in forgiveness. The reader notes that forgiveness has now been mentioned twice within the narrative, and concludes that this will be an important theme.

3.2.4 John’s Diet and Clothing (1:6)

3.2.4.1 Repertoire of the Reader

John’s leather belt in 1:6 parallels Elijah’s leather belt in 2 Ki 1:8 LXX (ζώνην δερματίνην περιέξωσμένος τὴν ὀσφύν αὐτοῦ). In 2 Ki 1:8 LXX Elijah is described as a “hairy man” (Ἄνηρ δασὺς), and it has been suggested that this phrase came to be

572 See Isa 40:3.
understood as referring to a hairy garment, and that Zech 13:4 refers to a practice of prophets, established initially by Elijah, of wearing clothing of hair.\footnote{See Collins, \textit{Mark}, 145. See also Martin Hengel, \textit{The Charismatic Leader and His Followers}, (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 36 n. 71; Joel Marcus, \textit{Mark 1-8}, 156. For a contrary argument, see Guelich, \textit{Mark}, 21.}

It is more difficult to understand how John’s diet relates to the reader’s repertoire. There are no traditions that suggest that Elijah ate such things, or that such a diet was common among prophets.\footnote{Some have argued that this diet was known in the community in Qumran. See Boring, Mark, 41; James A. Kelhoffer, “Did John the Baptist Eat Like a Former Essene? Locust-Eating in the Ancient Near East and At Qumran,” Dead Sea Discoveries 11, no. 3 (2004) 293 – 314; Ben Witherington, \textit{The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary}, (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2001) 73.} According to Lev 11:22, locusts are clean.

\subsection*{3.2.4.2 Discourse}

The narrator explains in 1:6 “John was clothed with camel’s hair, and had a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey” (καὶ ἦν ὁ Ἰωάννης ἐνδεδυμένος τρίχας καμήλου καὶ ζωὴν δερματίνην περὶ τὴν ὀσφύν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔσθιων ἄκριδας καὶ μέλι ἄγριον). This sketch of John is surprisingly detailed given the paucity of descriptive details elsewhere in the prologue. The mention of the diet of locusts and honey may be to characterize John as an ascetic,\footnote{See Collins, \textit{Mark}, 145-146; France, \textit{Mark}, 69; Kelber, \textit{Mark’s Story}, 17; Moloney, \textit{Mark}, 33; Rawlinson, \textit{Mark}, 8; Tom Shepherd, “The Narrative Role of John and Jesus in Mark 1:1-15,” in \textit{Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels}, ed. Thomas R. Hatina, (London ; New York: T & T Clark, 2006) 157. For an argument against asceticism, see Gundry, \textit{Mark}, 44.} and to indicate that one of his traits is austerity.\footnote{Ohajuobodo I. Oko, \textit{Who Then is This?: A Narrative Study of the Role of the Identity of Jesus in the Plot of Mark’s Gospel}, Bonner biblische Beiträge ; Bd. 148 (Berlin: Philo, 2004) 61, 76.}

\subsection*{3.2.4.3 Implied Reader}

The diet of John mentioned in 1:6 reminds the reader that John was a man of the wilderness.\footnote{Guelich, \textit{Mark}, 21, 26; Gundry, \textit{Mark}, 37, 44; Lane, \textit{Mark}, 49, 51.} This diet also points to his righteousness, that despite the difficulties and
scarcities inherent in living in the wilderness, John has not forgotten the Law and eats lawful food. While he seems to be an austere and intimidating figure, his emphasis on forgiveness assures the reader that, though fierce and demanding, John is not heartless and cold.

The leather belt and camel’s hair remind the reader of Elijah, but she does not know what to make of this yet. This is not the first time that allusions or associations connecting John to Elijah have surfaced in the narrative. The reader therefore wonders what significance Elijah might have in John’s ministry.⁵⁷⁸

3.2.5 John’s Prediction (1:7-8)

3.2.5.1 Discourse

In John’s message of 1:7-8 Jesus is again introduced into the narrative. The “walk-on” characters at the river hear John proclaim that another more powerful and worthy person is coming after him, but since they do not know whom John is referring to his message remains a riddle.

In 1:4-8 John is externally focalized. That is, the focalization does not penetrate John’s consciousness: the narrator tells where John is, describes his appearance, shows the popular reaction he inspired, gives a snapshot of his message, but never goes beneath the surface to tell us what John felt or thought.

⁵⁷⁸ As noted previously, the declaration in 9:11-13 suggests that the reader is being told something she does not yet know, which suggests that the present hints that John is Elijah redivivus are advance mentions.
3.2.5.2 Implied Reader

The reader hears John speak in his own voice for the first time in 1:7-8. Because of 1:3, she has expected John to “proclaim,” but thus far has only encountered indirect speech (1:4). Hence, the fact that direct speech is used of John in 1:7 for the first time emphasizes the content of what he proclaims. While the characters in the story do not know to whom John is referring when he predicts a stronger one who comes after him, the narrative effect is different for the reader because of the clarity offered by the narrator in 1:1. She knows that the one spoken of in 1:7-8 is Jesus, which gives her a privileged position over the characters within the story. The reader not only knows that this coming figure is Jesus, but also that he is the Messiah.

If “the one who is coming after” will be more powerful and more worthy than John, considering the success of John’s ministry (1:5), this figure must indeed be very powerful. Because of her repertoire, she is expecting Jesus to conform to the Davidic paradigm, and now that she hears from John that he will be more powerful than even the Baptist, this expectation is strengthened. Hence, the reader expects Jesus to destroy the enemies of God (the Romans) and deliver the chosen people of God.

3.2.6 The Baptism of Jesus (1:9-11)

3.2.6.1 Repertoire of the Reader

The reader’s repertoire includes the knowledge that the words spoken in 1:11 are from Ps. 2:7, and that the reference to “son” in 1:11 may well refer to kingship. Within the reader’s repertoire is also the knowledge that the prophets of old ordained kings.

579 The “voice” in 1:3 is John’s voice after a fashion. Nevertheless, it functions more as a description and summary of John’s ministry, leaving the reader to conclude that John never actually spoke these words.

580 See Collins, Mark, 213; Evans, Mark, 448-50; Hare, Mark, 18, 103, 151, 200; Mann, Mark, 194-95; Marcus, Mark I-8, 162; Schweizer, Good News, 356-57.
3.2.6.2 Discourse

Jesus enters the narrative in person in 1:9 when he is baptized by John. The passive ἐβαπτίσθη ("was baptized") moves the center of attention slightly away from John, but not yet fully onto Jesus. The shift to Jesus is completed in 1:10 where John is no longer mentioned, and the narrator internally focalizes Jesus by penetrating Jesus’ consciousness (he saw the heaven opened), a narrative device never used with John.

1:9-11 is a singulative narrative, meaning what happened once is narrated once. It is also the first scene in the narrative. Because it might be the narrative’s first singulative narrative, as well as the first incontrovertible scene, it casts that which has gone before (1:2-8) as introductory.

The appearance of Jesus in 1:9 is surprisingly understated. He simply appears with the crowd. The narrator gives no indication that John recognizes him, which suggests that John is not aware that his prediction of a coming stronger one is now being fulfilled. While the characters in the narrative realize that “something is going on” with John, they are not aware that Jesus is anyone unusual, or that anything unusual has occurred with his baptism. The baptism, which begins Jesus’ ministry, would be underwhelming were it not for the divine response in 1:10-11, which declares Jesus to be the Son.

In 1:11 the voice of God declares Jesus’ divine sonship. The words of God likely are drawn from a combination of Isa 42:1, Gen 22:2, and Psa 2:7. This is the second citation from scripture. However, in 1:2-3, the first citation, the narrator is quoting God,

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581 1 Sam 8:22, 10:1, 15:1, 16:13, 1 Ki 19:6, 15-16.
582 1:2-3 is a summary or pause. It could be considered a scene if we conclude that it speaks of a “literal” conversation between God and Jesus that happened before the birth of Jesus in some undefined heavenly location. 1:4-8 is a summary.
whereas in 1:11 God is speaking directly. Hence, while it is God who is speaking in both citations, in 1:11 his voice is more immediately rendered. Furthermore, 1:11 is “inside” the story in that it is between characters within the story (God and Jesus).

### 3.2.6.3 Implied Reader

The shift from summary to scene in 1:9 causes the reader to suspect that what is about to happen within this scene will be of special significance. Tangibly, this shift has the additional effect of subordinating the narrative concerning John (1:2-8) to the narrative concerning Jesus (1:9-11). Although John was the first character brought into focus, the duration and frequency of 1:9-11 by way of contrast with 1:2-8 indicates to the reader that Jesus is to be the central character (which is something that was also made clear in 1:1).

The reader now encounters Jesus in person for the first time, outside of the introductory sentence, and the elliptical allusions in the opening citation of 1:2-3. The reader may be surprised that Jesus comes from Nazareth, as his place of origin is different from all the others coming to John. Jesus, thus appears to be something of an outsider, and yet does not eschew the multitudes, but joins them.

The reader is surprised that Jesus, whom the narrator has identified as being more powerful and more worthy, submits to John in baptism. Should one who is mightier and more important submit to one who is weaker and less important? Thus, the reader again wonders at the role of John in the narrative.

The reader remembers some of the ancient stories. She remembers how this very River Jordan marked off the boundary of the Promised Land for the children of Israel.

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583 The Multitudes come to John from the South, namely from Jerusalem and the Judean countryside (1:5), and none are said to have come from a northern region such as Galilee.
under Moses and Joshua. Perhaps even more striking in the present context, are the parallels with Elijah and Elisha, where in 2 Ki 2:6-15 Elisha succeeded Elijah at the River Jordan. The reader wonders if maybe Jesus is going to continue John’s ministry as Elisha continued Elijah’s? If so, how would this cohere with his messianic status?

The reader has been kept to that which is externally focalized thus far, but with the vision after the baptism, the reader is catapulted right into the consciousness of Jesus. She sees, as it were, right along with Jesus, the vision of heaven opening. She hears, right along with Jesus, the divine affirmation. This brings the reader right into the matrix of events. It is as if the reader comes up with Jesus out of the water, sees the heavens opened and hears the voice with Jesus. Because Jesus is internally focalized, the reader is led into the story: she participates in the events. This grants the reader a privileged status; none of the characters in the story except Jesus appear to be aware of the divine voice.

By immediately seeing this striking vision of an internally focalized Jesus after witnessing exclusively an externally focalized John, the reader forges a greater sympathy with Jesus than she has with John. Because of John’s austerity, and the way that he is focalized, the reader respects John but feels distanced from him. The forerunner and preparer yields to the coming one, and the reader experiences a movement from a sense of remoteness experienced in relationship to John, to a feeling of closeness experienced in relationship to Jesus. The John-character has moved the reader to identify more closely with the Jesus-character by way of contrast.

The reader discovers from a reliable source (God) that Jesus is God’s Son.584 The reader observes this heavenly proclamation, but is not within its circle. That is, it is not

584 It is not likely that νεοῦ θεοῦ in 1:1 is authentic. See footnote 544.
directed to her, as was 1:1, but to Jesus. Nevertheless, unlike the other characters within
the narrative, she is made aware of this solemn proclamation. She likely concludes that
this declaration affirms that Jesus is to be a king, and wonders if John is present to ordain
Jesus as Samuel was for David? If the reader concludes that John participates in Jesus’
commissioning, then she also concludes that John is more than mere herald. The reader is
not sure of the full extent of John’s relevance for Jesus at this point.

3.2.7 Jesus’ Ministry Begins (1:14-15)

3.2.7.1 Discourse

What follows next is a brief summary of a wilderness temptation. In 1:14-15 the
narrator’s focus is set upon Jesus, with John being removed from the stage with a mere
dependent clause (“after John was arrested…” or, μετὰ δὲ τὸ παραδοθῆναι τὸν
Ἰωάννην). This is the first time the word παραδώμε ("to arrest," “to hand over”) is
used in the narrative. The narrator plants this word here as the beginning of a theme that
will be of some importance later in the narrative. It is an advance mention.

There are two ways that 1:14 is elliptical. First, there is an explicit indefinite
ellipsis relating to the space between John’s arrest and Jesus’ move to Galilee, so that it is
not clear how much time has elapsed between the two events. The briskness of the
narrative might suggest not a great deal of time, but the narrative does not address this.
What is clear is that the two events are not contemporaneous; one followed the other.
Second, the report of John’s arrest is also elliptical: it is reported without any details or
explanation. The mere fact that John is arrested is all that is provided.

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585 See 1 Sam 16:13.
586 The question “how long after?” is beyond the narrative’s purview.
587 The missing information will be supplied in chapter six.
The report of Jesus’ return to Galilee and subsequent preaching there in 1:14 is a summary. The fact that 1:15 reports the first spoken words of Jesus in the narrative, as well as the programmatic nature of those words, suggests that 1:15 may also be summary. If so, then 1:15 is not so much something that Jesus said once in his preaching in Galilee, but rather a synopsis of his message taken as a whole. This would mean that 1:15 might be classified as an iterative narrative, as it says once something that happened many times (in various forms). 588

Two events are brought together in 1:14-15: the arrest of John and the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Using Forster’s distinctions, what is stated in the text here does not form a plot, strictly speaking. 589 That is, there is no explicit causal relation between these two events. All the narrator says is that after John was arrested, Jesus began his ministry. The only connection that is actually stated between these two events is temporal – one happened after (μετά) the other.

3.2.7.2 Implied Reader

Even though the events of 1:14-15 are not causally linked, the reader will provide a causal connection if it is not expressly provided within the narrative. 590 The reader might suspect that the causal connection between John’s arrest and the commencement of Jesus ministry is to be understood in terms of succession. Jesus appeared “after” John because he, in some ways, was carrying on John’s ministry in a similar way as Elisha

588 Grammatically, the present tense participles in 1:14-15 (κηρύσσων and λέγων) might suggest that the action they describe occur concurrently with the main verb, which is going (ἵλθεν) in 1:14. See Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996) 614-615. But since the act of “going to Galilee” itself is an event that spans some time, the participles must also span some time. In any event, the fact that κηρύσσων of 1:14 parallels the same word in 1:4 (where the sense is certainly iterative) suggests that it is iterative in 1:14 as well. See Collins, Mark, 153. Nevertheless, it is possible to see 1:15 as scene, where the words are part of an actual one-time announcement made in Galilee.

589 Forster, Aspects, 60. Also see § 2.7.2.

590 See Chatman, Story, 45-46. Also see § 2.7.2.
carried on Elijah’s ministry. This suspicion is strengthened for the reader by the fact that both ministries focus on repentance (1:4, 1:15). However, if Jesus’ ministry is a continuation of John’s ministry, 1:7-8 suggests that it also surpasses it. The reader wonders in what ways Jesus’ ministry will continue the work of John, and in what ways it will be better.

The reader likely assumes Jesus will conform to the Kingly messianic paradigm, and might wonder how Jesus’ messianic identity relates to those aspects of his ministry that continue the ministry of John? The mention of John’s arrest in 1:14 casts a shadow for the reader. The elliptical nature of the account of John’s arrest causes the reader to wonder what happened to John: what were the circumstances of his death?

3.2.8 Summary (1:1-15)

3.2.8.1 Discourse

One recurrent theme that drives the plot is the question of recognition, specifically that of Jesus’ true identity. The reader already knows that Jesus is the Messiah, but it seems that no one else in the narrative is aware of this yet. According to Larsen, the coinciding of “being” with “not appearing” means that Jesus’ identity is “secret.”591 In the prologue Jesus does “not appear” to any of the characters as anyone special, yet the narrator has made it plain that he is someone special.

3.2.8.2 Implied Reader

The reader acknowledges that the coming of John constitutes the initial event of the Gospel, and she knows that this event is important in the narrative, a kernel, because it occupies the privileged status of providing a beginning. The movement of the plot is set

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591 See Larsen, Recognizing, 38. Also see §2.7.4.
in motion by the appearance of a prophesied figure in the wilderness that speaks of another figure, Jesus. John is the fulfillment of a prediction made in scripture, who in turn predicts Jesus’ coming. John is propelled forward by prophecy, and propels Jesus forward by prophecy. The second-order anachronies in the prologue (the prophecies) ground the narrative as a whole for the reader in the larger narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures. They create anticipation for her, and provide relevance to what is narrated. Without the “Isaian” predictions, the coming of John and Jesus would not be any different than any other person’s coming or going. Without this grounding, what they do would not be rooted in the purposes and plans of God. The anachronies also breathe a sacred air and purpose around what occurs within the first narrative. The first narrative never stands alone, but in the light of its past and future. These predictive patterns establish a predestined quality for the narrative so that the reader believes the events of the narrative are imbued with a divine origin.

The reader does not yet know the arc of the plot, as she barely even has a sense of its beginning. Yet she can imagine an equilibrium existing within the land of Israel previous to John’s advent. This equilibrium has been disturbed. John, as part of God’s plan, has appeared and set things in motion. He comes as the one before, and so now Jesus comes as the one after. The reader knows Jesus’ secret identity, and wonders what the circumstances will be that will lead to its being uncovered and made known. This is a source of anticipation. She is excited to see the surprise in all the characters when they all discover his secret identity. She also wonders how the great deliverance anticipated through him will unfold. She wonders about the “way,” and where it will lead. She has an idea of how the people are to make ready the way for Jesus, but still does not know how
John prepares a way for Jesus. She has discovered that when the first narrative started, the narrative clock had already been ticking in the form of prophecies of old. The story of Jesus takes up the ancient stories told in the scriptures. The reader may suspect that this narrative might be the climactic chapter of the great sacred story. Nevertheless, questions remain concerning the exact relation between Jesus and John, as well as the relationship between John’s role as precursor and Jesus’ role as Messiah.

3.3 The Preceding Context for 6:14-29

3.3.1 Teaching – Implied Reader (1:22)

The narrative does not explicitly state that John taught, only that he “proclaimed” (κηρύσσω) his baptism (1:4), and that he predicted the coming of Jesus (1:7-8). However, the reader likely reasons that John did teach, even though it is not reported. After all, the reader is aware that the whole of John’s ministry is briefly summarized in the prologue, and that hence much happened “offstage” that was not reported. However, the reader also observes that, while both figures likely taught, it was the teachings of Jesus that are reported in the narrative. Furthermore, the reader has learned that Jesus’ teachings were unusually powerful (1:22). Teaching, then, is one area where Jesus both continues and transcends John.

3.3.2 Forgiveness – Implied Reader (2:1-12)

The implied reader notes a parallel between John and Jesus in 2:1-12, where Jesus heals a paralytic. This episode emphasizes that Jesus’ ministry is concerned with forgiveness, which is something the reader recalls was a concern for John as well (1:4-5). The reader wonders from this if this is one of the ways that Jesus’ ministry is a continuation of John’s ministry.
3.3.3 Fasting and the Bridegroom – Implied Reader (2:18-22)

In 2:18 there is a complaint against Jesus from an indefinite source\(^592\) that his disciples do not fast like the disciples of the Pharisees and the disciples of John. Jesus’ answer in 2:19-20 does not criticize John’s disciples or the Pharisees because they fast, nor does it challenge fasting in general. Rather, the reader reasons that it speaks to the inappropriate timing of fasting during a time of celebration. It is not appropriate to fast at a wedding because it dishonors the bridegroom, and fails to grasp the joy of the moment. The problem with the disciples of John and of the Pharisees is that they have failed to understand the import of the moment they find themselves in. That is to say, they fail to understand the significance of the person of Jesus.

The indefinite “they” of 2:18 pairs the disciples of John with the Pharisees, which suggests to the reader that there are similarities between the disciples of the Pharisees and the disciples of John. The reader has only recently encountered the Pharisees in the narrative in 2:16 where they express concern about Jesus eating with sinners and tax collectors. Because the Pharisees question Jesus’ integrity, the reader understands that they are likely antagonists and therefore to be viewed with suspicion. Hence this pairing with John’s disciples leaves the reader puzzled, as John has always been represented positively.

The reader realizes that inasmuch as “the disciples of the Pharisees” actually refers to the Pharisees, then “the disciples of John” might also refer to John (at least in part). Hence, the reader might perceive a tension between the expectations of John and

\(^{592}\) “They came and they said…” (ἦρχονται καὶ λέγουσιν). The grammatical antecedent in these verbs is not the Pharisees and “their scribes” of the previous clause (2:16). See Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 109. The question of 2:18b is expressed in the third person (the *person* is conveyed in the verb “to fast” – νηστεύουσιν). If “they” were the Pharisees and their scribes, then we would expect the question of 2:18b to be expressed in the first person rather than in the third person (“their disciples”). See Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 110.
Jesus regarding their respective disciples. This will not likely surprise the reader, as she has already contrasted the austere picture of John that she encountered in the prologue, with the more inviting representation of Jesus. Nevertheless, the fact that the criticism does not come from either John’s disciples, or the disciples of the Pharisees, but from some anonymous source speaks against this. If there was a conflict between John (or his disciples) and Jesus relating to issues of praxis, it is more likely that the disciples themselves would be the actors, and not an indefinite “they.” Raising the issue by means of this indefinite “they” appears to distance the criticism from John and his disciples.

The reader does not know what happened to John beyond the mere fact that he was arrested (1:14), and this is the first that the reader has heard of him having disciples. Nevertheless, it is not difficult for the reader to imagine some sort of back-story for these disciples. The reader might wonder why John’s disciples did not embrace “the mightier and more worthy one” who came after John (1:7). The reader has privileged information regarding John that even his own disciples lack. She knows from 1:2-3 that John’s prediction of one who was to come after him (1:7-8) was not incidental, but rather touched on John’s raison d’être. That John’s disciples continue to follow John even after Jesus has come indicates not only that they do not recognize Jesus, but that they also fail to understand the real purpose of their own master’s ministry.

The contrast between the old and new wine skins of 2:22 has been understood as a contrast between the manner of life of the Pharisees and John with the new manner of life offered by Christ,⁵⁹³ or even as a contrast between “the old structures of Judaism” and “the eschatological newness of Jesus’ mission.”⁵⁹⁴ However, it is difficult to fit either of

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these interpretations together with 2:19-20. Hare believes that the parables of 2:21-22 “possess a relevance which is broader than the narrow issue of fasting, and Mark makes no attempt to link them narrowly to the preceding verses.” However, the implied reader would inevitably wonder how the narrower statements of 2:19-20 cohere with the broader statements of 2:21-22. If the narrator moves from narrower arguments in 2:19-20 to the more universal ones in 2:21-22, as Hare argues, then the implied reader would nevertheless expect the narrower to correspond with the universal. The “narrower” argument of 2:19-20 presents the reader with variable situations, where fasting is not appropriate because of the presence of the Bridegroom, but will again be appropriate once the bridegroom is removed. However, if the new wine in 2:22 refers to the teaching of Jesus, his manner of life, or the “eschatological newness of [his] mission,” there is no room for changing circumstances. It would be difficult for the implied reader to reconcile the idea that “the newness of Jesus’ radical message of the kingdom of God [is] incompatib[le] with the existing forms of religion and society” when the only specific form of that religion that has been mentioned – fasting – is sometimes appropriate and sometimes not.

The reader seeks coherency in the narrative, and will create it if necessary. If the parable of the bridegroom in 2:19-20 reflects inappropriate behavior caused by a failure to understand the situation that one finds oneself in, then the implied reader will

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595 For some commentators the tension between 2:19-20 and 2:21-22 is dealt with on redactional grounds. For an example, see Taylor, Mark, 212.
596 Lane, Mark, 112.
597 France, Mark, 141.
598 Additionally, the passage itself does not support a contrast between old and new as most traditional interpretations would have it. The traditional interpretation focuses more upon 2:22 than 2:21, and appears to force 2:21 to mean something similar to 2:22. However, in 2:21 the “new” is represented by “a patch of unshrunk cloth” (ἐπιβλημα ἰάκους ἀγνισφον), which is hardly capable of holding all the meaning it is asked to, at least not in the same way that the new wine can.
599 See §2.2.2 and §2.7.2.
likely wonder if something of this theme is advanced in 2:21-22. The problem with the Pharisees and disciples of John, as well as the indefinite “they” of 2:18 who are interrogating Jesus, is that they do not recognize the new situation they find themselves in. They are in the presence of the Bridegroom and ought to be celebrating, not fasting. The reader might conclude that the problem with the “they” of 2:18 can be traced back to this basic failure.

However obscure it might be, the mention of the Bridegroom’s removal is the first prediction of Jesus’ death in the narrative. When the reader learns that the Bridegroom will be taken away, it is a shock, as this does not correspond with her expectations of Jesus (as the bringer of salvation to Israel and destruction to Israel’s enemies). Indeed, it may be incomprehensible. Mourning and fasting would indeed be appropriate for the death of a Messiah, if for no other reason than that it would seem the reader’s hopes would die with him. The reader is presented with two radically new and unexpected situations in 2:19-20: the presence of the Bridegroom, and his removal. Both of these require different reactions and attitudes.

The reader might suspect that the “new wine” of 2:22 refers to something situational rather than to something timeless and unchanging. If there is a contrast in 2:21-22, as there certainly is, then perhaps it does not pertain to the respective teachings of the Pharisees and John with Jesus, but rather to the changing circumstances of the “Bridegroom.” This would suggest that John is not part of the existing forms of religion and society that, like an old wine skin, are to be discarded in favor of something new. Indeed, the narrative as a whole thus far suggests that John is the agent chosen by God to

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600 The resurrection is not alluded to in 2:19-20.
usher in the new situation in Jesus. John’s ministry is that which, by definition, *precedes* the coming of the Bridegroom. Fasting for John therefore was appropriate to his situation (in which there was as yet no Bridegroom), and cohered with his austere character as well as his message of repentance. Nevertheless, John is still an agent of “the new:” he is not only the one who introduces the Bridegroom, but also the one to lead the way for the Bridegroom. Just as John has been removed (1:14), the reader now learns the Bridegroom will also be removed (2:20). The reader likely concludes that there are more parallels than contrasts between Jesus and John in this passage.

### 3.3.4 Popularity – Implied Reader (3:7-8)

As the reader continues reading, another parallel emerges between John and Jesus: both were popular figures that were well received by the public at large. This is particularly evident in 3:7-8 when compared to 1:5. In 1:5 the reader learned “the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to [John].” In 3:7-8 the reader learns that not only “a large crowd from Galilee followed [Jesus],” but also “many people from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon.” The reader realizes there is an overlap between the reach of John’s ministry, and that of Jesus, but that the latter extended further. The one who comes after is greater than the one who comes before (1:7-8).\(^{601}\) The public thought well of John, and they think well of Jesus.\(^{602}\)

\(^{601}\) See also 1:32-34, 45, 2:2-3, 13, 3:20, 32, 4:1, 5:21, 24.  
\(^{602}\) See 1:27-28, 2:12.
3.3.5 Miracles – Implied Reader
By the time the reader reaches chapter six, Jesus has performed many miracles, while the narrative has not reported that John performed any. The reader suspects this is another way that Jesus is “more powerful” than John, as predicted in 1:7.

3.3.6 Jesus is Rejected – Implied Reader (6:1-6a)
In 6:1-6a, when Jesus is rejected by those of his hometown, he proclaims: “A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house” (6:4). The reader wonders how Jesus will win over the nation if he cannot even win over those of his own hometown. She might also wonder if Jesus is saying that he is a prophet, and if so, then how would this relate to his being the Messiah?

3.3.7 Jesus Sends Out His Disciples – Implied Reader (6:7-13)
In 6:14-29 the reader learns that the disciples of Jesus are sent out to preach. They are given instructions in 6:7-11, they leave, and they preach repentance (ἐκήρυξαν ἵνα μετανοήσιν). John preached repentance (κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας) in 1:4, Jesus preached repentance (λέγων ... μετανοεῖτε) in 1:15, and now the disciples are to preach repentance. The reader might recall that the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures also preached repentance. Hence, the prophets, John, Jesus, and Jesus’ disciples are all tied together by one theme: repentance.

3.4 The Passion of John the Baptist (6:14-29)

3.4.1 John, Elijah, or One of the Prophets (6:14-16)

3.4.1.1 Discourse
The story of the sending out of the twelve, which begins in 6:7-13, and ends at 6:30, is interrupted by 6:14-29. This is an intercalation, a favored device of the Markan

narrator. The “two paired episodes” involved in intercalations “often repeat a common theme, one episode illuminating the theme by comparison or contrast with the other episode.”\textsuperscript{604} James Edwards suggests that in intercalations “the middle story nearly always provides the key to the theological purpose of the sandwich.”\textsuperscript{605}

Jesus is only explicitly referred to in the opening three verses of this pericope (6:14-16). While there is nothing particularly unusual for a narrative’s protagonist to be missing from a section of the story, in Mark this absence is unusual. It is the only prolonged episode in the Gospel (apart, perhaps, from the prologue, which interestingly also features John) in which Jesus is absent.

In 6:16, the narrative is focalized through Herod. His perspective on the question of Jesus’ identity in 6:16 becomes a springboard for the extended first-order analepsis of 6:17-29. This places the focus more upon what Herod’s views are than on the opinions of the anonymous voices of 6:14-15.

The theme of Jesus’ identity is dealt with directly in 6:14-16. Some people think that Jesus is John, others that he is Elijah, and yet others that he is like one of the prophets. Larsen’s diagram illustrating the “four cognitive positions” involved in recognition scenes can help illustrate what is happening in 6:14-16.\textsuperscript{606}

\textsuperscript{604}Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, \textit{Mark as Story}, 52.
\textsuperscript{606}See Larsen, \textit{Recognizing}, 38. Also see §2.7.4 above.
It might be argued that Jesus’ identity in 6:14-16 is “secret” (the mixture of being and not appearing) for those on the outside. However, the picture is somewhat more complicated, as the characters in 6:14-16 do “see” Jesus, but they falsely interpret what they see. While Jesus “appears” to them, and the identity they ascribe may have elements of truth, it is not true enough to qualify as “truth” (in the sense intended in the chart above). Hence, their opinion might be closer to delusion (the combination of appearing and not being).

Recognizing Jesus is not like recognizing a prince dressed as a pauper, in that he is not a great prince who appears to be completely normal like everyone else. Rather, his works of power and his teaching make it obvious to everyone that Jesus is not like everyone else. Recognition will occur when the correct category by which his “specialness” can be comprehended is determined and defined, and thus far within the narrative, no one has done this. Nevertheless, the notion that Jesus is “like a prophet” has some truth to it, as Jesus’ miracles do correspond to figures such as Elijah and Elisha. Nevertheless, it is clear that Jesus is not John or Elijah.

The recognition theme within the narrative has two related subjects. While the focus in 6:14-16 is on Jesus, the opinions voiced make it apparent that John’s identity is
also secret. The fact that some among the people think that Jesus is John, and others think that he is Elijah, makes it apparent that no one thinks that John was Elijah.  

**3.4.1.2 Implied Reader**

The intercalation creates suspense for the reader, as she wants to know what the deferred ending of the interrupted story will be. Furthermore, the sudden transition surprises her, and gets her attention. Abruptly, she finds herself transported from the mission of the disciples to the court of Herod. She discovers that Jesus’ fame has spread so widely that even the king has heard of him.

Previously to 6:14-16, the reader has not been informed who the public thinks Jesus is. Given that the reader knows that he is the Messiah, this issue is important to her. She is likely wondering, “The people approve of Jesus, but do they know who he is?” At this point in the narrative, the reader also does not know who the disciples think Jesus is. The delay in the narrative in making all this known likely creates in the reader anticipation for a moment of recognition within the story. She might be asking who will recognize that he is the Messiah first, and what will be the circumstances of this moment of recognition? The reader also does not know what are the popular beliefs regarding the identity of John, although it is likely the common people believed John to be a prophet.

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607 One difference between the secret of Jesus’ identity and the secret of John’s identity is that the reader is aware of the truth of Jesus’ identity, for the most part, but not yet John’s.


609 The Markan narrator calls Herod “king” (βασιλεύς) even though historically he was Tetrarch (τετραρχής). See David C. Braund, Herod Antipas, ed. David Noel Freedman, The Anchor Bible Dictionary, 3, (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 160. Though historically inaccurate, in the interest of staying within the narrative world created by the Markan narrator, I will continue to speak of Herod as “king.” The result of this will become clear below. See footnote 618.

610 Earlier the reader learned that some officials believed that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebul (3:22), which speaks to the question of his identity.
The reader finds in 6:14-16 that there are three opinions circulating regarding the identity of Jesus, and that nobody has understood the truth. No one in the narrative appears to be aware of Jesus’ real identity: there has been no recognition. One important function of this episode, then, is to bring this fact to the forefront for the reader. This episode keeps the tension of Jesus’ unrecognized identity alive for her by showing dead-end attempts to solve the riddle. Unlike the characters in the story who are “deluded” regarding Jesus’ identity, the reader recognizes Jesus’ identity as messiah in “truth” (in the coinciding of being and appearing). This creates a tension in the reader who knows this truth, and wants it to be acknowledged within the narrative. She may even grow frustrated that no one has yet grasped it. This frustration creates an additional expectation within the reader for a moment of recognition within the story. Along with this frustration and tension, the reader also experiences a degree of elation that she has grasped a crucial truth that has eluded everyone else within the narrative.

The reader might wonder why no one suspects that Jesus is the Messiah. The various opinions all interpret Jesus within prophetic categories, and the reader might wonder if the reason for this is that Jesus has acted more like a prophet than a Messiah, which may remind her of what Jesus said in 6:4. The reader is concerned that Jesus has not yet acted according to her expectations. There are things that one expects from a Messiah, such as movement towards national liberation and against the enemies of God’s people. Why is Jesus not working for these things? Nevertheless, it is still early in the narrative; there is plenty of time for these things to happen.

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611 As the plot develops, the reader will realize that she requires additional information to see the full “truth” concerning Jesus.
612 “A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.”
The implied reader is surprised to hear in 6:14 that John has died, and all the more so because of the elliptic way that she finds out: “John the baptizer has been raised from the dead.” The reader wants to know more about the circumstances of John’s death.

The reader is also surprised to hear many believe that Jesus is John the Baptist. Knowing that this is not correct, she realizes that the people have not understood the relationship between John and Jesus. They have correctly realized that John and Jesus are connected, but do not understand the nature of this connection (even though the reader may not be entirely sure of what the relationship is between them herself at this point).

Initially the reader might be somewhat surprised that people think Jesus is Elijah. As she considers this, she realizes there are some striking parallels between Jesus and Elijah/Elisha, who were also itinerant preachers who proclaimed messages of repentance and forgiveness. Furthermore, Elijah (and Elisha) performed many wonderful healings, and other miracles, strikingly similar to those of Jesus. Although the reader sees that such evidence could be marshaled to make a case that Jesus is Elijah, she nevertheless also knows that this view is wrong.

The third opinion expressed in 6:15 is that Jesus is “a prophet like one of the prophets” (προφήτης ὁς εἶς τῶν προφητῶν). This is the only view expressed which does not see Jesus as a returning prophetic figure. The reader realizes that much of what Jesus does conforms to a prophetic pattern. He performs miracles like Elijah and

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613 Jesus and Elijah/Elisha share similar miracles, including a power to heal (1 Ki 17:17-24 | Mark 1:29-31, 2:3-12, 3:1-6, 5:25-34, 6:55-56, 7:31-37, 8:22-26, 10:46-52), the power to cure leprosy (2 Ki 5:1-14 | Mark 1:40-45), and the power to bring the dead back to life (2 Ki 4:18-37 | Mark 5:21-24, 35-43). They also have the power to multiply food (1 Ki 17:10-16, 2 Ki 4:42-44 | Mark 6:30-44, 8:1-10), power over the natural world (1 Ki 17:1, 18:1, 18:41-46 2 Ki 6:5-7 | Mark 4:35-41, 6:45-52, 11:12-14, 20), and when they die, provide to others benefits (2 Ki 13:21 | Mark 10:45). For more on the parallels between Elijah, Moses, and Jesus, see Candida R. Moss, “The Transfiguration: An Exercise in Markan Accommodation,” Biblical Interpretation 12, no. 1 (2004) 72-73; Wink, Mark 9:2-8, 64.

614 8:28 is worded differently. There people think that he is “one of the prophets” (εἶς τῶν προφητῶν).
Elisha, and he teaches like Isaiah and Jeremiah. Earlier, in 6:4 Jesus responded to his rejection by those of his hometown by saying, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.” Even though this statement stops short of an unambiguous and categorical identification of Jesus as prophet, the reader accepts that Jesus’ ministry appears prophet-like. Hence, this last opinion is different from the previous two in that it may be somewhat true, even though it does not say all that needs to be said about Jesus. The reader wonders why Jesus is so “prophet-like,” and how this corresponds to his messianic status.

In each of these opinions the reader sees that the truth of public opinion is, at best, partial, and falls short of what she knows about Jesus’ identity.

The implied reader wonders what the implied author might be insinuating by means of the various popular opinions relating to Jesus’ identity, but remains uncertain, as she does not yet possess enough information. Nevertheless, there are a few things that the reader can deduce from the popular opinions. The fact that Jesus’ miracles can so easily be interpreted to indicate that he was merely a prophet, might cause the reader to reconsider what the miracles signify concerning the identity of Jesus. Previously, she might have assumed that miracles prove that Jesus is the Messiah, but she now realizes that mighty works can prove only that Jesus is “like one of the prophets of old,” who also performed similar miracles. Miracles suggest prophetic status, but not necessarily messianic status. She might begin to wonder what would serve as proof that Jesus is the Messiah?

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615 The implied reader might wonder if the implied author is contrasting the prophetic office with the messianic office, so that public opinion is wrong because they understood Jesus in prophetic terms at all. However, too much of what is said about Jesus follows a prophetic pattern for the reader to accept this possibility.
3.4.2 The Death of John the Baptist (6:17-29)

3.4.2.1 Discourse

The narrator explains that Herod arrests John because the Baptist reprimanded him concerning his illegal marriage to Herodias (6:17-18). Herodias wants to kill John, but Herod protects him (6:19-20). Herod knows that John is a “righteous and holy man,” and fears him (6:20). Herod likes to hear John speak, even though doing so confuses him (6:20). Herodias takes advantage of a foolish oath and forces Herod to have John beheaded against his will, which he does because he did not want to look bad in front of important guests (6:22-26). This leaves Herod apparently plagued with guilt (6:16).

For the most part, this episode is focalized through Herod. The passage starts with the statement that Herod had heard of Jesus. As if to make sure that Herod remains the center of attention, the various opinions regarding Jesus’ identity given in 6:14b-6:15 are expressed by anonymous voices. Surveying the various public opinions, the narrator comes back to Herod, who believes that Jesus must be John because he had John beheaded. The circumstances of the beheading, then, are explained in 6:17-29. With the minor exception of 6:24-25, this entire tale is focalized through Herod. Additionally, Herod is internally focalized in 6:20, 22, and 26, where the narrator penetrates his consciousness.

The narrator shows, rather than tells, that Herod’s traits include lawlessness (breaking marriage laws), defensiveness (arresting John for reprimanding him), and rashness (making foolish oaths). Herod also regards human opinion more than God’s. Nevertheless, Herod also respects righteousness and holiness, tries to protect the innocent, respects someone even though reprimanded by him, honors oaths, and feels
remorse when he has done wrong. Herod’s complex and contradictory character makes him one of the rounder characters in the Gospel.

The story is never focalized through John; he is a passive recipient of the actions of others. Even when John is re-introduced into the story, the focus is not on him. Once again, as was the case in the prologue, John is externally focalized; his thoughts, perceptions, or feelings are not disclosed.

The only first-order analepsis in the Gospel is 6:17-29. The narrator informed the reader of John’s arrest in 1:14 in the scarest of terms, and now finally explains the circumstances of the arrest. There are striking parallels between John’s death and Jesus’ death. Perhaps the most notable parallel is their mere mutual existence. John is the only person in the narrative besides Jesus whose death is narrated. This suggests that the story of John’s death also is a third-order prolepsis, in addition to being an analepsis. That is, it alludes to events in the narrative’s future (Jesus’ death). As of 6:14-29 there have been no explicit passion predictions in the narrative.616 Because the narrator has not yet revealed with any clarity what will happen to Jesus, this means the prolepsis in 6:17-29 functions as an advance mention.

In addition to 6:17-29 being a first-order analepsis and a third-order prolepsis, it is also a third-order analepsis. Not only does it allude to events in the narrative’s future (namely, the death of Jesus), it also alludes to a story where Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, persecutes Elijah (1 Ki 19). Both stories feature a vindictive wife and weak king.617 It is

616 The first explicit passion prediction comes in 8:31, although there have been a few implicit hints that something negative will happen to Jesus (2:20, 3:6, and 3:19).
617 See also the story of Naboth the Jezreelite (1 Ki 21) in which Jezebel manipulates Ahab to do evil. One thing the narrator accomplishes by calling Herod “king” even though historically he was tetrarch, is that the parallel between him and king Ahab becomes more striking. See footnote 610.
these parallels that forge the third-order analepsis. This analepsis reinforces the connection between John and Elijah.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak Passive Agent</th>
<th>Strong Active Agent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahab</td>
<td>Jezebel</td>
<td>Elijah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herod</td>
<td>Herodias</td>
<td>John</td>
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Herod follows in the path of Ahab, Herodias in the path of Jezebel, and John in the path of Elijah.

The narrator uses 6:17-29 to analeptically connect John with Elijah, and proleptically connect the death of John with the death of Jesus. By intercalating the story of John’s death with the sending out and return of the disciples, the story of John’s death is connected to the demands of discipleship. What is accomplished in 8:34-38 by means of teaching is accomplished in chapter six through intercalation.

Chatman believes that one of the main functions of analepses is to provide a form of “exposition” that explains important features of a narrative.\(^{618}\) The reason the story of John’s death is brought up is because of various opinions concerning Jesus’ identity. Hence, while 6:17-29 fills a gap in information by relating the fate of the Baptist, it more primarily explains how it could be believed that Jesus was John, a belief predicated upon the knowledge that John has died.

The death of John is connected to Jesus, at least in public opinion. The miracles that Jesus does are, in the public’s view, the result of his having risen from the dead (6:14). Hence, this analepsis also provides one popular interpretation of the significance of Jesus’ miracles, in addition to his identity. In public opinion, the miracles of Jesus

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\(^{618}\) Chatman, *Story*, 67.
issued forth because he has died and rose again, so that his miracles defined him, not as Messiah, but as prophetic miracle-worker.

This analepsis also brings John onto the stage again, and this further emphasizes the importance of the Baptist in the narrative. The Baptist was introduced in the prologue in rather grand terms, only to be quickly removed from the narrative. In this analepsis the narrator brings a dead character “back to life,” emphasizing again John’s pivotal function in the story.

**3.4.2.2 Implied Reader**

At 6:14, the reader abruptly leaves Jesus and the disciples and finds herself at the court of Herod, and from there, in 6:17-29, travels back in time to the events that led to the death of John. The world of the first narrative dissolves, and the reader finds herself in the past. She notes that this long analeptic story of John’s death emphasizes the opinion that Jesus is John above the views that think he is Elijah or a prophet like the prophets (6:14-16).

The reader finds Herod surprisingly sympathetic in the narrative. Herod is certainly no hero, as he lets himself be manipulated into doing wrong. However, he is not a willing agent in the murder of John, whose presence Herod has actually enjoyed, even though he found what John said disturbing (6:20). Hence, the reader sympathizes with Herod, perhaps even against her will. Herod seems more weak than villainous. One result of having such a round character in a sea of flatness is that he is highlighted and set apart: the reader will not forget Herod.

The reader finds Herodias to be utterly villainous. Her spite and malice fill the reader with righteous rage.
Adding to the tragedy of John’s death, the reader suspects that John may well have gone to his grave without recognizing Jesus. Because John did not hear the voice at the baptism of Jesus, and was arrested before Jesus started his ministry, there is little reason to believe that John realized that Jesus was the one he predicted.

The reader likely is startled by the juxtaposition between the fantasies of public opinion and “the real story.” The fantasy is that the miracle-working power is present because John has been raised, but the real story is simply that the Baptist has been killed. Jesus’ power is not related to John’s death in the way that the public thinks. By means of this analepsis the reader juxtaposes Jesus’ fame and miraculous power with the death of John. This brings the theme of death into the narrative, and connects it with the question of identity. The reader has a vague sense of foreboding, but does not know enough to understand what this might have to do with the narrative’s main protagonist: Jesus.

The reader might note striking parallels between this story and a story in 1 Ki 19, where Elijah is persecuted by Jezebel. While the parallels are striking, the narrator has not overtly mentioned the story of Elijah in this episode, and so therefore this connection is something that is left to the reader to make. This draws her farther into the story, and creates a greater mystery concerning the function and meaning of John.

John had seemed so central in the prologue, but then vanished from the narrative. Suddenly, the reader encounters him again. This final appearance elevates the importance of John in the narrative, which might have waned since his disappearance in the opening

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619 Kermode writes that the story of John’s beheading “is obviously [not] prompted by some crucial moment (for example, or recognition) in the principal narrative.” Kermode, *Genesis of Secrecy*, 128. The argument put forth in this present work is that one of the functions of this story in fact does concern “recognition in the principal narrative.” This will be made clearer in the subsequent sections.
chapter. All of this leads the reader to suspect that the Baptist’s long shadow continues to hover over the narrative.

The reader has not been told what John thinks or feels during this episode, which was also the case in the prologue. By having an externally focalized John, the narrator has kept a distance between the reader and John. The reader has been led to respect John, but does not necessarily identify with him.

The reader wonders why so much time is spent with an episode that does not feature Jesus. In every episode since the prologue Jesus has never been far from view, and was usually the central character. The one exception, the reader recalls, is in the prologue, where John was also prominent. Hence, the reader realizes that John has a unique position within the narrative as a whole, in that no other character except Jesus has received this sort of attention. The reader wonders what it is about John that makes him this important. Surely it is not that he is merely a herald, as that would account for his importance only in the prologue. The reader wonders if perhaps one important thing about John is his death. These remain open questions for the reader, as she does not yet have enough information.

3.5 The Preceding Context for 8:27-9:1

3.5.1 Completed Intercalation (6:30)

The first thing the reader notices when she finishes reading the story of John’s death is that 6:30 continues and completes the narrative abruptly broken off in 6:12. This has the effect of forging a connection between the story of John’s death and the story of the mission of the disciples. The reader wonders what this connection might be. For now, however, she does not have enough information.
3.6 The Confession (8:27-9:1)

3.6.1 Caesarea Philippi (8:27)

3.6.1.1 Repertoire of the Reader

At least some knowledge concerning Caesarea Philippi is part of the reader’s repertoire, as it is introduced without explanation. According to Joel Marcus, this largely Gentile city⁶²⁰ was “a fitting backdrop” for this episode,⁶²¹ because it was “associated with imperial rule,⁶²² messianic hopes,⁶²³ and violent death.”⁶²⁴ However, this might be over-reaching, as Jesus does not actually go into the city of Caesarea Philippi, but to the “villages around Caesarea Philippi” (εἰς τὰς κύριαις Καίσαρείας τῆς Φιλίππου).⁶²⁵ Whatever the symbolic value of the region, it is a point distant from Jerusalem that Jesus sets off to in the narrative: “Jesus goes to that remote corner to make it the starting point of a long journey to the centre, that is, Jerusalem.”⁶²⁶

3.6.1.2 Discourse

8:27-9:1 is a major turning point in the narrative.⁶²⁷ The episode starts with the narrator stating that Jesus and his disciples have traveled close to Caesarea Philippi. The theme of “the way,” largely forgotten since the prologue, is again picked up. The way to Jerusalem dominates the following chapters.

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⁶²⁰ Marcus, Mark 8-16, 602.
⁶²¹ Ibid., 603.
⁶²² Vespasian, according to Josephus (War 3:443-444), let his army enjoy recreational time in the city (ibid., 603).
⁶²³ Marcus notes, “Jewish tradition speaks of the miraculous fall of a gate in Panias as a sign of the coming of the Messiah (b. Sanh. 98a)” (ibid., 603).
⁶²⁴ Josephus writes (Life 54) that most of the Jews living in the city were killed during the great revolt (ibid., 603).
⁶²⁵ France, Mark, 328.
⁶²⁶ Jersel, Mark, 281.
⁶²⁷ Humphrey, Narrative Structure, 29-92.
3.6.1.3 Implied Reader

When the reader learns that Jesus comes to the regions of Caesarea Philippi, she realizes that Jesus is coming dangerously close to leaving the land of Israel altogether. This creates tension and suspense in the reader, who wonders how Jesus will fulfill his role as Messiah if he keeps avoiding Jerusalem.

The narrator states in 8:27 that the discussion happens “on the way” (ἐν τῷ ὑπόδρομῳ). This reminds the reader of “the way” mentioned in the prologue (1:2, 3), and she wonders what the connection might be.

3.6.2 Who Do They Say that I Am? (8:28-29)

3.6.2.1 Discourse

Jesus next asks the disciples what people are saying about who he is. From the answer given in 8:28 it seems that public opinion has changed little since 6:14-16. Jesus’ identity still remains hidden – and so has John’s.

Both 6:14-16 and 8:28 refer to speculations regarding Jesus’ identity that are ongoing, constant, and perpetual. The repetition of these views from 6:14-16 again here accentuates the widespread and ongoing nature of these beliefs. In Genette’s locution, this is “narrating n times what happened n times,” which he believes is a sub-group of the singulative. However, this is somewhat misleading in this instance, as what is narrated twice in fact happened more than merely two times. Hence, this is closer to an iterative than to singulative narrative. Furthermore, 8:28 is not merely repetitive in one sense: Jesus and the disciples are absent from the narrative in 6:14-16, which makes the fact that the disciples are aware of popular opinion in 8:28 a new thing.

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The story of John’s death is again alluded to in 8:28. Even though his death is not explicitly mentioned, the obvious parallels between 6:14-16 and 8:28 connect the two stories. The story of John’s death continues to explain how the people could think that Jesus was John raised from the dead. That is, by mentioning the opinion that Jesus is John in 8:28, the circumstances for these beliefs are evoked from 6:14-29, making it unnecessary to explain them again.

3.6.2.2 Implied Reader

Jesus’ question in 8:27 makes explicit an issue that has been interwoven implicitly throughout the whole narrative. The question of identity is particularly salient for the implied reader; she knows that the identity of Jesus is profoundly important. She has seen that characters in the story occasionally also realize that it is significant, such as in 4:41 where people wonder, “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?” In that instance, the importance of Jesus’ identity was expressed in an unanswered question. The people in 4:41 know Jesus is important, but do not yet have any (expressed) views regarding who or what he might be. Later, in 6:14-16, the reader recalls that various (inadequate) opinions were suggested, implying that the question of Jesus’ identity was still being asked amongst the people, but now with attendant “answers.” In 6:14-16, as in 4:41, the reader saw that the people realized that there was something special about Jesus, but remained fundamentally in the dark concerning his true identity. The reader knows the answer to Jesus’ question “Who do people say that I am?” in 8:27, and wants to know if public opinion has progressed beyond what was expressed in 6:14-16.

However the answers that the disciples provide, which largely duplicate the views of 6:14-16, demonstrate to the reader that public opinion has not progressed. Despite all
that has happened between 6:30 to the present, people remain in the dark. While the reader still enjoys a special revelation relating to Jesus’ identity not shared by others, the pleasure of this is somewhat spoiled by the fact that no one else knows who Jesus is. This is likely frustrating to the reader, who wants Jesus’ messianic identity to be acknowledged. Her expectations regarding his Davidic status will be thwarted if no one in Israel recognizes that he is the Messiah of God.

The reader is reminded of John’s death by the view of some that Jesus is John. That is, the reason that people think that Jesus is John is presumably the same here as it was in 6:14-16: Herod murdered John, and Jesus is John, raised from the dead. The reader has been prepared for this present pericope by 6:14-29. She might be struck that she is again reminded of John’s death right in the middle of a conversation regarding the identity of Jesus. How are the two figures’ identities related to each other, and how are they related to death? In bringing the Baptist to mind, the reader might wonder yet again if there is a deeper significance to this mysterious figure in the narrative. The question remains open, as the reader does not yet have enough information.

Again the reader learns that popular opinion still has it that Jesus might be Elijah or “one of the prophets.” The reader wonders why the figure of Elijah keeps cropping up in often unusual or obscure ways. In this instance, it seems that the same old answers to the question of Jesus’ identity are being recycled. The opinion that Jesus might be “one of the prophets” (ἐἷς τῶν προφητῶν) is a minor departure from the earlier view that held that he was similar to some other prophetic figure from Israel’s past. Here, Jesus is thought to actually be one of these prophets.629 Once more, the reader notes that public

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629 The implied idea is that the people think Jesus is one of the prophets of old. “Of old” is not found in the text, but nevertheless is suggested by the context. This may mirror what is found in 2 Esdras
opinion sees Jesus in prophetic categories. The reader again admits that much of what Jesus has done conforms to a prophetic pattern. This may make her feel a little uncomfortable yet again, as her expectations regarding Jesus’ messianic status have led her to expect Jesus to conform to a somewhat different pattern. She might wonder when Jesus will start acting more “Messiah-like?”

3.6.3 Who Do You Say that I Am? (8:31)

3.6.3.1 Discourse

While public opinion errs, such is not the case with Peter, who proclaims that Jesus is the Christ (8:29). The word Χριστός (“Christ,” or “Messiah”) has not made an appearance in the story since 1:1, and was then the word of the narrator. This is the first time a character in the story has uttered this word, making Peter’s declaration a watershed moment for the plot.

Jesus’ response to Peter’s confession is to not tell anyone about him (8:30), 630 which suggests, at the least, Jesus accepts the title “Christ.” 631 The issue of secrecy here is

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630 peri… aujtou.

631 Much has been made of theme of secrecy here and elsewhere in the Gospel. In 1901 William Wrede argued that there is an all-pervasive theme of secrecy resulting from two differing views regarding the person of Jesus within the early church. One group believed that Jesus became the Messiah only after
related to the theme of recognition, which is particularly salient in this episode. The scene begins with a question relating to identity, and Peter’s answer is a recognition of sorts. The command to silence by Jesus brings the importance of recognition to the foreground - or perhaps better, it brings the reality of the lack of general recognition to the foreground. By making the question of recognition and identity explicit, the narrator propels this theme into a clearer position within the plot’s development. If everyone recognized Jesus, the game would be over and the narrative would collapse. It is the tension relating to the lack of recognition that drives the plot forward. Hence Peter’s declaration must not be made public. Because of this, the event of Peter’s confession is a kernel. It is a crucial moment when the theme of recognition takes a dramatic step forward. The command to silence is also a kernel: if it were removed, an important source of tension relating to the question of identity and recognition would be removed.

The command to silence and the moment of recognition belong together. The command

of silence makes Jesus’ identity a secret, otherwise it would merely be that which is not known. As it is, the narrator signals that Jesus’ messianic identity is not merely unknown, but that it is an actively kept secret. The movement of the plot requires the command to silence.

**3.6.3.2 Implied Reader**

Up to this point the reader has learned how various outsiders identify Jesus and where his power comes from, but she does not yet know how the disciples view him. The reader might wonder how Jesus could be the Messiah if even his own disciples do not recognize him? The answer by the disciples to Jesus’ question in 8:29 is important for the reader.

When Peter proclaims, “You are the Christ!” in 8:29, the reader rejoices. Finally she shares her special knowledge with someone within the narrative. She does not know how long Peter has held this view, but this is a narrative moment of climax. Much of the tension and frustration the reader has previously experienced, knowing something that was not recognized freely within the narrative, is released. Peter’s confession coincides with her own confession, and this makes Peter her surrogate-self in the story.

The incorrect opinions of outsiders serve as foils for the correct view of insiders. The reader juxtaposes the incorrect views of outsiders that Jesus is Elijah, or John the Baptist or a prophet of old with Peter’s correct view, and the light shines more brightly because of its contrast with the darkness.

The reader’s joy, however, is soon quenched. She is dismayed by Jesus’ command in 8:30 to keep his true identity a secret. Why would Jesus not want his Messianic identity to be known? If Jesus is to liberate his people from the Romans, and if
he is to purify and reconcile them to God, then people need to know who he is. The reader is troubled, and perhaps even frustrated. She wants Jesus’ messianic identity to be shouted from the housetops, not shrouded in secrecy.

3.6.4 The Son of Man Must Suffer (8:31-33)

3.6.4.1 Repertoire of the Reader

Despite the arguments of some, it is unlikely that there existed a belief in a suffering Messiah before the advent of Christianity. Even if such did exist, Peter’s response in 8:32 indicates that such an idea was intended to be surprising. This means that, even in the unlikely event that there did exist a belief in a suffering messianic figure previous to the Jesus movement, the narrator and the implied author of Mark do not know about it. Therefore, a suffering Messiah is not part of the reader’s repertoire.

If the declaration that Jesus was messiah alludes to the Davidic Kingly paradigm, as is likely, then Peter is proclaiming that Jesus is the national liberator and purifier of Israel, and the destroyer of her enemies. This would explain why the picture of defeat, failure and death in Jesus’ statement in 8:31 is so jarring to Peter. For him, Jesus’ passion prediction undermines what is meant by “Christ.” If the implied reader is to share in Peter’s shock and confusion (as I believe she should), it will be because she shares his belief in the same conquering Messiah. This piece of the reader’s repertoire is essential for the appropriate emotional reaction to this episode.


633 See Collins, Scepter, 123-126; Condra, Salvation, 233-234.
Immediately after Peter’s declaration, Jesus explains to the disciples about his death and resurrection. When Peter hears, he cannot abide it and begins to reprimand Jesus. Jesus reacts strongly and reprimands Peter.

In the light of the command to silence and Peter’s rejection of Jesus’ passion prediction, some believe that Peter’s confession of 8:29 is a Christological error. Likely reflecting a majority view, others believe that Peter’s confession in 8:29 reflects a correct albeit less than complete understanding. It is difficult to conclude that Peter’s declaration is completely wrong, as that would also cast doubt upon the narrator’s opening statement regarding Jesus in 1:1. Hence, Peter correctly recognizes Jesus as Christ.

However, Jesus’ prediction of his passion explains what kind of Messiah he is. Peter rejects this “modified messiah,” and in doing so reveals that his recognition of Jesus is incomplete. Because Peter does not accept a fuller understanding of what the Messiah will be like, Jesus’ identity therefore remains largely a secret to him, even though he correctly confessed him to be Christ. More precisely, using Larsen’s categories, Peter remains in a deluded state, for the most part. That is, what Peter believes Jesus to be does not correspond to what he is. Peter has taken the “appearance” of Jesus and has understood it according to a category that does not pertain, so that appearing and not

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being coincide resulting in delusion. Jesus “appears” to Peter as an extraordinary figure, yet Jesus does not match the image that Peter has embraced. What makes this situation slightly more complicated is that Peter is not entirely wrong. Jesus is the Messiah, as Peter confessed. Yet his understanding of what a Messiah is like is not adequate, and because Peter continues to apprehend Jesus according to a faulty paradigm, he remains in a state of delusion. Nevertheless, because his understanding has some truth in it, it might be better to speak of partial delusion.\textsuperscript{636} Peter’s partial delusion, contrasts with the full delusion of outsiders who do not even partially understand Jesus as Messiah.

After direct speech is used in Peter’s affirmation that Jesus is the messiah in 8:29, indirect speech dominates from 8:30-32. That is, the narrator uses indirect speech to convey Jesus’ command to silence (8:30), Jesus’ prediction of his death and resurrection (8:31), and Peter’s rebuke of Jesus (8:32). In 8:33 the narrator switches back to direct speech for Jesus’ rebuke of Peter. This makes Jesus’ reprimand in 8:33 more striking.

An important shift in the plot occurs when the narrator, through Jesus’ words, tells how the story will end. The passion prediction in 8:31 is a second-order prolepsis that functions as an advance notice. This prolepsis in 8:31 casts a dark cloud of predestination over the narrative, which is strengthened by the use of the word δεῖ (“it is necessary”). The narrative does not explain why “it is necessary” for Jesus to undergo the passion.

\textsuperscript{636} In 8:22-26 a blind man is partly healed so that he can only partially see. The narrator, by placing that episode immediately before this episode, might be hinting that the disciples are like the partially blind man in that they also only partially see. Partial blindness is an apt metaphor of partial delusion.
3.6.4.3 Implied Reader

If the reader is frustrated and puzzled by the command to silence, she is downright shocked by what comes next. Jesus tells the disciples he must experience great suffering. The reader is given no explanation for this suffering beyond the fact “it is necessary,” which the reader understands to mean divine necessity, even though the details are not spelled out. “Divine necessity” relates directly to the divine plan and to a belief that scripture needs to be fulfilled, which itself is implicitly tied to divine purpose. Jesus is part of God’s timeless plan and salvation history, and what happens to him is determined by divine predestination. The narrative is thus caught up in mysterious machinery beyond the control of anyone within the narrative, even Jesus. This machinery moves intractably towards its inevitable and terrifying goal. This is not how the reader has previously understood the Messiah, God’s plan, or salvation history.

The passion prediction dramatically shocks the reader. That Jesus must suffer and die contradicts her expectations regarding Jesus as Messiah – indeed, the Messiah as Messiah. How she has understood the protagonist of the narrative, as well as the narrative itself, has in large part been determined by what she believed the Davidic Messiah to be like. While she has been anxious that Jesus has not yet conformed to the Messianic paradigm, she comforted herself with the belief that there was still time for him to do so. Here in 8:31-32a is the first time that Jesus openly contradicts her messianic expectations. This shock might even cause the reader to largely miss the final portion of Jesus’ prediction, where he says that he will rise from the dead after three days.

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637 The implied reader understands the Son of Man to be Jesus.
638 Evans, Mark 8:27-16:20, 16.
Peter takes Jesus aside, and rebukes him. The elliptic nature of the act allows the reader to insert herself into the story. Because the narrator does not tell the reader what Peter says, or even what Peter was rebuking Jesus about, the reader fills in the blanks. Assuming causality and coherence, the reader concludes that Peter rebukes Jesus because he thinks Jesus is wrongly embracing a path of suffering and death – a path that does not cohere to his identity as Messiah. The reader might even supply words for Peter’s reprimand of Jesus. In short, Peter becomes the reader’s surrogate within the narrative, as he expresses her concern and shock regarding Jesus’ passion prediction. The story is unraveling before the reader’s eyes, just as it is before Peter’s. For the reader, a collision is occurring between her repertoire and the narrative. Her repertoire, which has guided her at least inasmuch as Jesus’ identity and mission is concerned, now falters. She might even be angry, and if so, then she can read that anger into Peter’s reaction. The concerns of the implied reader and Peter merge.

The reader barely has time to process Peter’s rebuke of Jesus before Jesus turns to Peter and rebukes him back. However, this time the reader does not have to imagine what Jesus said to Peter. The narrator is explicit: “Get behind me, Satan, for you have set your mind, not on the things of God, but on human things” (ὦπαγε ὁπίσω μου, σατανᾶ, ὅτι οὐ φρονεῖς τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων). This is a blistering judgment upon Peter, and because the reader has identified with the apostle, she feels the sting of it. Not only have her expectations been dashed upon the ground, her concerns about the loss are said to be satanic! They are derived from human speculation, and not divine truth. The reader might distance herself from Peter; getting close to him has not served her well. The reader is disturbed about how the narrative is unfolding.
Because of Jesus’ passion prediction, the reader now knows how the story will end: Jesus will die and be resurrected. That which has been hinted at previously in the narrative now emerges into the light of day. Some of the suspense of the narrative has been removed; at least inasmuch as it was derived from not knowing what is to happen to the protagonist in the end. However, this second-order prolepsis also increases suspense for the reader, as many of the details of what will happen have not yet been disclosed. Furthermore, the question of identity remains to be resolved, both for the characters within the story and the reader. The reader still does not know if Jesus will be adequately recognized within the story. Furthermore, she also does not understand how Jesus can be the Messiah and suffer such a fate. She anxiously hopes these questions will be answered.

3.6.5 Apocalypse (8:34-9:1)

3.6.5.1 Repertoire of the Reader

Part of the reader’s repertoire includes apocalyptic convictions such as the belief that God is going to decisively intervene in history. These convictions were sometimes combined with some form of messianism, so that the agent of this decisive action was the Messiah.639

3.6.5.2 Discourse

In 8:38-9:1, by means of a second-order prolepsis, Jesus demands bold loyalty to himself, and to his words. The great Parousia of which this passage speaks is likely a final judgment scene.640

639 See §3.2.1.1.
640 Collins, Mark, 410-411; Evans, Mark 8:27-16:20, 27.
3.6.5.3 Implied Reader

The reader is presented with an apocalyptic scenario in 8:38-9:1. In it Jesus proclaims that he will be ashamed of anyone ashamed of him when he comes with the angels. The reader finds this troubling; it is difficult to imagine anyone who would not be embarrassed by a crucified Messiah. The reader hopes to find in the narrative some way to understand Jesus’ surprising fate that might imbue it with honor, or at least make it less shameful.

The portrayal of Jesus as heavenly ruler in the apocalyptic vision in 8:38-9:1 parallels some of her messianic expectations, although on a grander, more cosmic scale. She wonders if some of her initial expectations might find a home in such a vision of Jesus. Perhaps her former messianic expectations were not quite as wrong as she has recently suspected. Perhaps they can be rehabilitated through modifications. She will keep an eye out in the narrative for hints of what these modifications might be.

3.6.6 Revisiting the Narrative – Implied Reader

All of this might lead the implied reader to re-navigate not only the narrative, but also her own repertoire. She needs to redefine what the Messiah is. To do this, she will revisit what she has previously read. She thought she understood what “Messiah” meant, but now she must either reject the narrative, or reconfigure what this title means. Because she is the implied reader, she will never reject the narrative.

While the implied reader will not part ways from the narrator, and will affirm that Jesus is the Christ (1:1), she is in an awkward position. She now will have difficulty defending this belief to outsiders, as well as understanding it herself. She will consider the narrative closely to see what warrant it provides, both that Jesus is the Christ, and that the Christ needs to suffer.
She holds to the correctness of scripture, especially in matters relating to the Messiah. She shares this value with the narrator, who demonstrates his concern for scripture by frequently citing it. She notes this to be especially true in the prologue, where scripture provides the grand introduction to Jesus. This use of sacred text implies that Jesus was the fulfillment of scriptural anticipations regarding the Messiah. The Messiah, then, stands in a unique relationship not only to scripture, but also to salvation history – which is attested to by scripture. The question and challenge before the reader, then, is how does a suffering Messiah cohere with sacred scripture and salvation history?

The first thing she notes is that in 2:20 Jesus referred elliptically to his passion. Jesus mentioned that the day comes when the Bridegroom will be taken away. When the reader initially read this she was troubled, but did not fully understand what it meant. Now she understands, and it seems that Jesus has been aware of this troubling aspect to his fate for quite a while.

Furthermore, other previously read episodes within the narrative now take on new significance. For example, the reader sees how previous instances of persecution and rejection by religious leaders foreshadow, or anticipate the persecution to come. Particularly chilling is the statement in 3:6 that “The Pharisees with the Herodians immediately took council regarding how they might kill Jesus.”

Furthermore, in 8:34-35 Jesus states that persecution is not reserved for him alone, but awaits his followers as well. The reader might conclude that this insight is also expressed by the intercalation of 6:7-30. She might suspect that the relationship between

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the inner and outer stories is comparative, so that this intercalation connects the mission of the disciples with a fate of persecution and death.

This does yet not give her proof relating to Jesus’ messianic status, nor does it explain how a suffering Messiah coheres with scripture. The reader still seeks to know how to defend the assertion that Christ must suffer. The reader looks for other instances in the narrative where themes of rejection and death are at play. She recalls that the narrative devotes a great deal of time to precisely these themes in the episode relating to the death of John the Baptist.

The reader recalls in the prologue that John was sent before Jesus (1:2). The reader realizes that John went before Jesus in terms of simple chronology – that is, his ministry occurred before Jesus’ ministry started. The reader now also realizes that John may have gone before Jesus in other ways: he went before Jesus as an itinerant preacher; he went before Jesus as one who preached repentance and forgiveness of sins; and, he went before Jesus as one whose ministry paralleled Elijah. Now, the reader sees that John also goes before Jesus in rejection and death. The reader wonders what all this might mean. The reader seems to be getting closer, but still lacks important information.

The reader also recalls that in 1:2 John was to “prepare the way” for Jesus as well as go before him. She wonders what the relationship might be between going before and preparing. How does John and his death help the reader reconfigure what is meant by “Messiah?” Does John’s fate help the reader to defend the claim that Jesus is the Christ,

642 Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie argue that the purpose is contrastive: “Jesus sending disciples to heal (with no food) contrasts with Herod sending someone to execute John the baptizer (at a banquet).” Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, Mark as Story, 52. However, this emphasizes too greatly what is a minor detail in the story of John. Some older interpreters suggested that the function of the intercalation of the story of John the Baptist’s death is simply to “fill the gap” between the sending of the disciples, and their return. See Bultmann, Synoptic Tradition, 301-302; Nineham, Mark, 172; Taylor, Mark, 307. A problem with this is that the story of the Baptist’s death has the more dominant position when compared to the story of the disciples sending, as it is more detailed and more graphic. See Tolbert, Sowing, 197.
and that the Messiah must suffer? Does John help the reader to understand how Jesus, the suffering and dying Messiah, relates to her repertoire? How does John’s death help the reader relate Jesus’ approaching death with sacred scripture and salvation history? Again, the reader does not yet have enough information.

3.7 The Transfiguration (9:2-10)

3.7.1 Time and Place (9:2)

3.7.1.1 Repertoire of the Reader

The temporal setting “after six days” in 9:2 likely evokes Ex 24:16 LXX, where it is written that the “cloud of God [was] covering [the mountain for] six days” (ἐκάλυψεν αὐτὸ ἡ νεφέλη ἐξ ἡμέρας), and on the seventh day (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἐβδόμῃ) God called Moses to ascend the mountain.⁶⁴³

Mountains evoke rich possibilities from the reader’s repertoire. Not only are mountains isolated places, away from the cities and the crowds,⁶⁴⁴ but their height brings people closer to heaven and thus closer to God. This symbolism is even more effective “in a cosmographic system in which God dwells in the heavens above and human beings dwell on the earth below.”⁶⁴⁵ Hence, mountains are ideal settings for encountering God and receiving revelation.⁶⁴⁶

Adela Collins argues “members of the audience familiar with the topography of Caesarea Philippi . . . probably inferred that this mountain was Mount Hermon.”⁶⁴⁷ Mount Hermon is the largest mountain in the region, and is close to Caesarea Philippi. The

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⁶⁴³ Boring, Mark, 261; Collins, Mark, 420; Marcus, Mark 8-16, 631; Evans, Mark 8:27-16:20, 35; Moloney, Mark, 177-178.
⁶⁴⁴ Mountains are like the wilderness in this respect. Malbon, Narrative Space, 88-89.
⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., 84.
⁶⁴⁶ Malbon, Narrative Space, 84; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, Mark as Story, 70.
⁶⁴⁷ Collins, Mark, 400.
traditional site is Mount Tabor, which is much farther south, but which could be reached from Caesarea Philippi in six days “walking at a steady rate.” Given the choice between these two options, Collins thinks Mount Hermon is the more likely candidate. She believes that Mount Hermon is the more appropriate location for the Transfiguration because, according to George Nickelsburg, “the region around Mount Hermon was sacred to Canaanites, Israelites, non-Israelites of the Greco-Roman period, and Christians.” While Collins may be correct, it is significant, from a literary point of view, that the narrator does not specify the name of the mountain. Earlier Collins had argued that the fact a mountain was unnamed in Mark (3:13) to be significant: “that the mountain which Jesus climbs is not named allows it to take on connotations of the mountain of God or the cosmic mountain.” For the reader of this Gospel, such a mountain might “call to mind the mythic notion of... the mountain as the dwelling place of a god or of the gods.” The Mountain of God is a generalized ideal which can be realized in various locations, such as “Mount Horeb (Ex 3:1), Mount Sinai (Ex 19:1–2, 11), or Mount Zion (Ps 2:6; 48:2).” It might be that the narrator, by not providing a name and thus not determining an exact location, idealizes this mountain and makes it symbolic of all sacred mountains within Israel’s history. Hence the mountain where the

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Transfiguration occurs can merge with other sacred mountains without actually having to be any of them.653

There are at least two encounters on mountains within the reader’s repertoire that are relevant, given the narrative context. The first has already been hinted at with the temporal marker “after six days,” and that is the story of Moses, who ascends Mount Sinai to have an encounter with God in Ex 24:15-18. It is on this Mountain that God gives the Law to Moses.

The other relevant mountain experience is found in 1 Ki 19, where Elijah flees from the fury of Jezebel, and goes to Mount Horeb. He encounters God there (19:9) and complains about the persecution of the prophets (19:10). After an epiphany (19:11-12), Elijah is given instructions to anoint Jehu as king over Israel, and to anoint Elisha as a Prophet to replace him (19:16).

**3.7.1.2 Discourse**

Jesus brings the three chosen disciples up a mountain, which provides the location, or setting for this scene. The temporal marker “after six days” (μετὰ ἡμέρας ἔξ) connects the previous episode (8:27-9:1) to this one. It has been argued that this expression means “on the seventh day,” which is to say, “on the Sabbath.”654 However, as Adela Collins notes, “since we are not told on what day the six began, an allusion to the

Sabbath is unlikely.” While this may not refer to the Sabbath, it does refer to the seventh day, as that is obviously what comes “after six days.”

3.7.1.3 Implied Reader

The reader finds that six days have elapsed before this next episode starts, when Jesus takes three disciples up a mountain. The isolated setting makes this private excursion with Jesus and his three disciples more intimate. This is a private moment between Jesus and three chosen followers. The reader is included in this intimate and private moment, which makes her feel privileged. While this is not the first time Jesus has gone to a mountain/hill (ὁρος) before, it is the first time that he has gone to a “high mountain” (ὁρος υψηλον), which makes this setting unique. The reader knows that when holy men ascend mountains they often meet God and receive revelations. The reader, for example recalls 1 Ki 19:9-16, where Elijah met God on a mountain. Perhaps even more striking for the reader are the associations between mountains and Moses. It was “after six days” that Moses went up the mountain in Ex 24:15-18 to receive law for the people from God. The reader is alert for something special to happen.

3.7.2 Elijah, Moses, and the Transfigured Jesus (9:3-8)

3.7.2.1 Repertoire of the Reader

Jesus’ shining white clothing in 9:3 (ιματια ... στιλβοντα λευκα λιαν) might evoke Ex 34:30, where Moses’ face shone as he came down the mountain. However,

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656 Ibid., 420.
657 See 3:13, and 6:46.
658 Beyond this, there were many other times that Moses ascended the mountain to meet with God face to face. See Ex 3:1-12, 4:27, 19:2-20:21, 32:1, 15, 34:1-9, 29-35.
659 Other shining faces can be found within Jewish literature, including anonymous saints in heaven whose faces will “shine like the sun” (2 Esdr 7:97, see also 7:125).
Jesus’ face is not mentioned. In fact, Jesus’ appearance is not mentioned in any more specific terms than that he “was transfigured” (μετεμορφώθη). What is described in detail is not Jesus, but his clothing. It would probably be hasty to conclude from this that Ex 34:30 has nothing to do with 9:3 if for no reason than the other salient parallels with Moses in this passage. Nevertheless, the differences between the two passages might suggest Ex 34:30 is not the primary point of reference behind Jesus’ clothing in 9:3.

In Daniel 7:9 the Ancient of Days’ (παλαιός ήμερῶν) clothing is described as being “white as snow” (ώσει χιόνα). This could relate to Jesus’ shining attire, except that for the narrator (and the implied author) of Mark, Jesus is the Son of Man and not the Ancient of Days. In Dan 7:13, the Son of Man is clearly distinguished from the Ancient of Days. Since the “Son of Man” is such an important figure in Mark, it is unlikely that the narrator of Mark would confuse him with the Ancient of Days. It is thus unlikely that Dan 7:13 stands behind Jesus’ shining attire.

However, the reader’s repertoire does include traditions that associate white clothes with the saints, where whiteness represents purity, or holiness. This may be what is intended here.

The traditional explanation for the presence of Elijah and Moses is that Moses represents the Law, and Elijah represents the prophets. However, “if the narrator had wished to use these two figures to represent the law and prophets, most likely he would

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660 Luke 9:29 is different from Mark in this respect.
661 See also Psa 104:1-2; 1 En. 14:20.
662 Or, more closely translated, “one like a Son of Man” (ὡς νίκος ἀνθρώπου).
663 Or, more closely translated, “one like an Ancient of Days” (ὡς παλαιός ώμερῶν παρῆν).
664 See Pss. Sol. 11:7, T. Levi 8:2, 2 En. 22:8–9, Rev 3:4-5, 18, 4:4.
665 For ancient and modern examples of interpreters who understand Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration as representing the Law and Prophets, see footnote 88.
have put Moses first.” Hence, it is unlikely that the reader’s repertoire would yield this meaning. Instead, it is probably a confluence of several things that inform the reader’s repertoire regarding Elijah and Moses. For example, within the reader’s repertoire is the knowledge that Elijah was transported into heaven (2 Ki 2:11), bypassing death. There may have been within it a belief that Moses was also transported into heaven. While the narrative has already made it clear that Jesus will not bypass death (8:31), it has also made it clear that death will not have the final word for him either. Perhaps then Moses and Elijah are present because they bypassed death, and it is this that somewhat parallels Jesus’ resurrection. Furthermore, within the reader’s repertoire is the knowledge that Elijah and Moses experienced rejection and suffering, and both experienced theophanies upon mountains.

### 3.7.2.2 Discourse

This episode is focalized through Peter, James, and John. It is through their perspective that this story is presented. In 9:2 Jesus was transfigured before them.

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669 Margaret Thrall argues that a contrast is intended. Moses and Elijah were “translated” and thus bypassed death, while Jesus was resurrected. This makes Jesus greater than Moses and Elijah. Thrall, *Elijah and Moses*, 314-315. See footnote 93.


(μετεμορφώθη ἐμπροσθεν αὐτῶν), in 9:4 Elijah with Moses appeared to them (ὡθη αὐτοῖς Ἠλίας σὺν Μωϋσει), and in 9:7 a cloud overshadowed them (ἐγένετο νεφέλη ἐπισκιάζουσα αὐτοῖς). Furthermore, Peter is internally focalized in 9:6, where Peter does not know what to say, because he is terrified. Here, Peter’s inner experience is described through a cognitive and emotive description.

Jesus’ transformed clothing are props, and are described as “exceedingly white and shining, more than any launderer on earth is able to make it” (στίλβοντα λευκὰ λίαν, οἶα γναφεύς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐ δύναται οὕτως λευκᾶν). Elijah and Moses appear beside the transfigured Jesus. These characters are externally focalized by the narrator – they are represented by what they say, look like, do, or simply are; there is no mention of their feelings, thoughts, or motives. They converse with Jesus (9:4b), but the narrator does not say what they talk about.

3.7.2.3 Implied Reader

Because this story is focalized through Peter and the other two disciples that are with him, the reader experiences the transfiguration through the eyes of these three. In 9:5 Peter offers to build tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, and in 9:6 the reason for this offer is internally focalized (he did not know what to say). This means that the reader has a greater proximity to Peter than to the other two disciples because he is mentioned separately, and internally focalized separately. Because Jesus, Elijah, and Moses are externally focalized, they are at a greater distance from the reader (at least in comparison to the disciples). Given the thematic content of this episode, the accessibility of Peter’s internal experience, when juxtaposed with the inaccessibility of Jesus, Elijah, Moses, and
God, has the effect of heightening the latter four characters’ quality of holiness and uniqueness for the reader.

If Elijah and Moses appear to the reader as awe-inspiring, larger than life characters, then Jesus is beyond description. This effect is achieved in part because the narrator does not describe him. The narrator says simply that Jesus was transformed (μετεμορφώθη). The only descriptive features relate to his clothing, and not to his person. It is striking, from a literary perspective, how suggestive this is, in combination with this absence of description. It suggests a profound “otherness” or holiness about Jesus, and fills the scene with an almost otherworldly quality. The absence of description of Jesus’ appearance allows the reader full access to her imagination: it is up to the reader to visualize what his appearance might have been like.

Previously, the narrator had represented Jesus in terms that might be called “this-worldly.” Now the reader is suddenly presented with an otherworldly picture of Jesus, which might have the effect of disorienting her somewhat. The supernatural whiteness of his clothing suggests an image of Jesus as overwhelmingly holy, and the reader can only imagine the facial and bodily appearance of Jesus. This is arresting to the reader, and her well-structured sense of reality may well be near the breaking point due to the weight of this scene before her.

The reader has gained privileged access to a marvelous moment in the story of Jesus. She knows that Jesus has appeared in this glorious light to only a very few. Most remain unaware of this aspect of Jesus’ identity, and only the reader and three disciples know anything about this august meeting between these three imposing figures. To everyone else within the narrative Jesus is only differentiated by the fact that he performs
impressive miracles, and gives powerful teachings. The reader concludes that to recognize Jesus as he truly is, must mean embracing this exalted figure. Jesus is shown in terms here that might exceed what the reader would believe concerning the Davidic Messiah.

The reader might be reminded of Ex 34:30, where Moses’ face shone as he came down the mountain of God. Furthermore, previously in the narrative there have been allusions to Elijah, often in relationship with John the Baptist. The reader might wonder what this means, but because she has not yet solved the riddle concerning John, she is not in a position to make any suggestions yet. However, one thing this episode makes clear is that the opinion that Jesus is Elijah is wrong, as it plainly presents Jesus and Elijah as two discrete figures.

The conversation between Elijah, Moses, and Jesus happens just out of earshot, as it were. The reader wonders what the conversation is about, and the fact that she is not told makes her realize even her valued position has limits. She may know more than most characters within the narrative, but the narrator reminds her that even her precious privileged access to knowledge has limits. Beyond giving it a mysterious quality, the unknown nature of this conversation places Elijah, Moses, and Jesus at a distance from the reader, which again elevates the status of these three figures.

The reader might wonder why it is these two particular figures from sacred history that appear at this point in the narrative. The reader notes parallels between these three figures, and she wonders if the significance of the presence of Elijah and Moses lie in the fact that they have walked the way that Jesus goes. This would help explain what is meant by “the way.” Jesus has indicated what will happen to him at the end of the
narrative (8:31), and she might wonder if Elijah’s and Moses’ “escape” of death foreshadow in some way what will happen to Jesus.  

The reader realizes that the appearance of these two figures from sacred history provides a strong validation and affirmation of Jesus’ ministry. Moses’ and Elijah’s tacit approval of Jesus’ ministry carries weight, and renders the criticism of Jesus’ opponents null by comparison. This is particularly true in regards to Moses’ “friendly” appearance with Jesus, which offers an answer to those who question Jesus in terms of his faithfulness to the law (2:24, 3:2, 7:5). This “answer,” however, is only available to the reader and the disciples. The reader might also wonder if the presence of Elijah and Moses testifies to Jesus’ special eschatological status. This would be especially true for Elijah, also an expected eschatological figure.

After Peter offers to build tents for Elijah, Moses, and Jesus, the voice of God sounds from heaven, affirms Jesus’ divine Sonship, and commands the three disciples to heed Jesus (ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ). The reader has previously heard a divine affirmation of Jesus’ divine Sonship in 1:11, after Jesus was baptized by John. When the voice from heaven is finished, the disciples realize that Elijah and Moses have disappeared, and they stand before Jesus alone.

The fact that both Elijah and Moses have vanished and that Jesus alone remains might suggest to the reader that Elijah and Moses act “as foils to highlight that [Jesus]

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672 This would mean that Elijah and Moses function as third-order prolepses, and that they create anticipation and expectation.

673 See Collins Mark, 423; Evans, Mark, 35; Hare, Mark, 105; Hooker, “What Doest Thou,” 68; Lee, Transfiguration, 19.

alone is God's beloved Son [who is] to be heard. As great as Elijah and Moses are, Jesus is superior to both. After all, it was Jesus alone who was transfigured. Contrasting Jesus against such eminent personages greatly magnifies the importance of Jesus to the reader.

### 3.7.3 Don’t Tell Anyone (9:9-10)

#### 3.7.3.1 Repertoire of the Reader

Even though Jesus’ shining clothing might not evoke the personage of the Son of Man from the reader’s repertoire, there are other elements in this episode that might. The most notable is the occurrence of clouds in 9:7, which parallels the clouds that are associated with the Son of Man in Dan 7:13-14. Jesus has spoken of himself as the Son of Man previously. In 13:26 and 14:62, Jesus will mention clouds (νεφελή) in relation to the Son of Man, which further connects the Son of Man of Dan 7:13 to the Son of Man in Mark.

Daniel 7:13-14’s “one like a Son of Man” (ὁ ωτός υἱὸς ἄνθρωπος) was a foundational text for the Heavenly Son of Man paradigm as seen in 1 Enoch, and most likely stands behind this designation in Mark as well.

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675 Gundry (Mark, 458). See also M. D. Hooker, “What Doest Thou,” 70.
676 See 2:10, 28, 8:31, 38.
holy and righteous. The “Spirit of Righteousness is poured upon him,” and righteousness will never leave him.\textsuperscript{678} He is wise,\textsuperscript{679} gracious,\textsuperscript{680} and is (presumably) the occasion for great joy.\textsuperscript{681} The Enochian Son of Man, like the Davidic Messiah, sits on a throne and rules all nations,\textsuperscript{682} but this throne is (presumably) a heavenly one and he will judge not only those things done on earth, but those things done in heaven as well.\textsuperscript{683} The Enochian Son of Man is pre-existent,\textsuperscript{684} and is a figure of extraordinary authority. Perhaps the most salient feature of the Danielic Son of Man is his power.\textsuperscript{685} This figure will remove kings from their thrones, and destroy sinners,\textsuperscript{686} in a similar way as the Davidic Messiah. This Son of Man in 1 Enoch will be the support of the righteous, a light to the Gentiles and a parallel Dan 7:13 too closely to imagine that no positive relation exists the figure in Daniel and Jesus in Mark. See Frederick Houk Borsch, \textit{The Son of Man in Myth and History}, (London: SCM Press, 1967) 362; Delbert Burkett, \textit{The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation}, (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 122-123; Higgins, \textit{The Son of Man in the Teaching of Jesus}, (Cambridge [Eng.]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 61-66; M. D. Hooker, \textit{The Son of Man in Mark: A Study of the Background of the Term “Son of Man” and Its Use in St. Mark’s Gospel}, (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967) 158; Barnabas Lindars, \textit{Jesus, Son of Man}, 17-28; Nickelsburg, “Son of Man,” 143.

\textsuperscript{678} 1 En. 48:7, 49:2, 62:2, 71:14, 16.
\textsuperscript{679} 1 En. 49:3, 51:3.
\textsuperscript{680} 1 En. 46:1.
\textsuperscript{682} 1 En. 61:8-9.
\textsuperscript{683} 1 En. 46:1, 48:2-6.
\textsuperscript{684} 1 En. 46:1, 48:2-6.


\textsuperscript{685} 1 En. 45:3, 46:4-5, 6-8.
hope to those who are troubled. The Son of Man, at least as described in Daniel and 1st Enoch, tends to have a more universalist scope than the Davidic Messiah, but both destroy the enemies of God and purify the earth.

While there is no evidence to suggest that the reader’s repertoire includes specific knowledge of 1 Enoch, the representation above can nevertheless be taken as an indication of what sort of ideas might have been in circulation.

3.7.3.2 Discourse

As they are coming down the mountain after the great vision, Jesus commands the three disciples “not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man has risen from the dead” (9:10). The disciples obey, but do not understand what “rising from the dead” means (9:10).

This command to silence (9:9) further emphasizes the theme of recognition (or lack thereof). Finally, the fact that Jesus commanded that this silence last “until the Son of Man has risen from the dead” (ἐὶ μὴ ὅταν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῇ) connects the question of Jesus’ identity to the passion. One of the key elements of recognizing Jesus is accepting the role that suffering and rejection plays in his life. To just embrace only the Jesus of glory as seen at the Transfiguration is to fail to embrace the whole truth about him – it is to remain in a state of delusion. It will be recalled that delusion, according to Larsen, occurs when “appearing” and “not being” coincide. That is, it happens when spectators see Jesus (appear) but incorrectly interpret what they see (not being). According to Larsen’s theory, Jesus’ identity is not secret, as such, because he “appears” to be someone special. To be secret would require that he “not appear,”

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687 1 En. 48:4.
688 See Larsen, Recognizing, 38.
which is to say, that he would be thought of as merely an ordinary person. As it is, Jesus is widely recognized to be someone important – he is just not recognized as the Messiah.\textsuperscript{689} And, when he is recognized as Messiah, as is the case with the disciples, the place of the crucifixion is ignored or rejected. In both instances, Jesus is understood to be something important, yet in inadequate terms.

The command to silence furthers this theme of recognition vis-à-vis Jesus’ identity by linking the glory to the suffering. Both need to be understood together if a full appreciation of Jesus’ true identity is to be attained. This is why the knowledge of what the three disciples have seen at the Transfiguration can be revealed only after “the Son of Man has risen from the dead” (9:9); only then can his glory be appropriately apprehended in the light of his passion.

The narrator makes it clear that the disciples do not understand any of this. The fact that the disciples do not understand what “rising from the dead might mean,” (9:10) indicates that they do not understand what was proclaimed in 8:31. In short, they do not yet understand Jesus. They believe Jesus to be what might be called the expected Messiah, a Davidic King figure whose primary characteristics would be militancy and power.\textsuperscript{690} There is no room for suffering or death in this understanding.

The narrator implicitly contrasts this expected Messiah with what might be called the surprising Messiah. Jesus, as the surprising Messiah, has power to heal and teach, but will also be rejected, killed, and raised after three days. Ultimately, he will return in the power of the Son of Man (8:38). Only in this last stage does Jesus conform to the pattern set by the expected Messiah. To confess Jesus as the expected Christ, to use the meaning

\textsuperscript{689} Hence, Jesus is like the emperor who appears to be a subjugated vassal head discussed in §2.7.4.

\textsuperscript{690} See §3.2.1.1.
I have assigned, is to fail to understand the full arc of the plot of what happens to Jesus. Essentially, it is to fail to understand the nature of Jesus and his ministry.

3.7.3.3 Implied Reader

The command to silence reminds the reader of the similar command in 8:30 after Peter made his declaration that Jesus was the Messiah. In both instances the command to silence has the paradoxical effect of making the issue of Jesus’ identity more important for the reader. As in 8:30, the reader is again frustrated by the command to silence, as she would prefer to make the wondrous identity of Jesus known broadly. However, the disappointment and frustration brought to pass in 8:30 has prepared her for this present command, and she is becoming aware that her original expectations concerning Jesus require modification. She is willing to make this change.

The transfigured Jesus might also remind the reader of the Son of Man figure from Daniel 7:13, where clouds are also present. The reader recalls that Jesus frequently refers to himself as the Son of Man. Nevertheless, this also presents the readers with problems, as the Son of Man, much like the Davidic Messiah, is a figure of power and victory. This does not cohere well with the rejection, suffering, and death that Jesus speaks of.

Jesus has again said he will be raised from the dead (9:9). This statement in 9:9 speaks of the resurrection, but does not mention the passion. This is an aspect of the original passion prediction that the reader might almost have missed because of the original shock, but is again brought to her attention here without the distraction of the crucifixion. A new light might begin to dawn for the reader, as she begins to suspect what is good about the Good News.
Nevertheless, while the mention of resurrection in 9:9 does not emphasize the aspect of suffering in Jesus’ fate, it implicitly includes it. Hence, even in the light of the glory of the transfiguration, and the wonder of the anticipated resurrection, the reader cannot avoid the shocking truth that it is necessary for the Messiah to be rejected and to be killed.

The reader notes that the disciples remain obtuse regarding the resurrection. She concludes that they failed to listen and understand in 8:31, when Jesus told them that after three days he would rise again. While the implied reader might have failed to make full notice of this initially, she ultimately was not deaf to what Jesus has said. So, now, when mention is again made of the resurrection in 9:9, the reader is ready to listen. Hence, there is a break between the reader and the disciples. Before 8:29, the reader did not know what the disciples thought about Jesus’ identity. Now things have changed, and the reader knows exactly what the disciples’ level of knowledge is. She is aware of the resurrection, but the disciples, due to their obtuseness, apparently are not. This gives her a privileged position over against the disciples, and it also creates a distance between herself and them. The disciples are heading in a different direction from the reader.

3.8 John is Elijah (9:11-13)

3.8.1 Elijah Comes First (9:11-13)

3.8.1.1 Repertoire of the Reader

In 9:11 the disciples report that the scribes are saying, “Elijah must come first” (Ἡλίαν δὲ Ελθεῖν πρῶτον), which speaks to the reader’s repertoire. To understand what this means, the question “what does Elijah come before?” needs to be answered. In Malachi 4:5 Elijah comes “before the great and terrible Day of the LORD” (πρὶν ἑλθεῖν
The “Day of the LORD” meant many things. It could refer to the apocalyptic final day, the Parousia, the general resurrection, or an idealized day when God renders decisive judgment. Does Elijah come before the Day of the LORD in Mark, as he does in Malachi, or does he come before something else? Does he come before the Messiah? It is debatable whether a belief existed previous to the early Christians that Elijah was to come before the Messiah, and it is possible “the concept of Elijah as forerunner [of the Messiah] is a novum in the New Testament.” However, from a literary perspective the question is not whether actual historical scribes held these beliefs, but whether Mark (or better, the implied author of Mark) believed this was what the scribes believed.

The disciples are presumably puzzled because a scribal teaching conflicts with either something Jesus has taught, or something that they believe about him. One possibility is that the disciples are concerned that something has not yet happened which,

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693 Faierstein, “Elijah Must Come,” 86. The argument that the belief in Elijah as forerunner to the Messiah was a “novum in the New Testament” implicitly affirms that this belief can be found in the New Testament.
according to scribal teaching, was supposed to have taken place already. That is, whatever is being spoken about – be it the Day of the LORD, the Parousia, the Kingdom of God – cannot yet have happened because Elijah has not yet come. However, if this is what lies behind the scribal teaching, it is difficult to make sense of the question in 9:11. The problem with these alternatives is that there is no reason for the disciples to have expected any of these things to have happened already. There is still time for Elijah to come “before” the Day of the LORD. If this was the scribal teaching, it would not have caused the disciples such concern.

Another possibility is that the disciples are agitated because of what Jesus had just been discussing, the raising of the Son of Man (9:9) vis-à-vis the coming of Elijah. If the disciples correctly understand the resurrection predictions of 8:31 and 9:9, then Elijah must come before the Son of Man is raised from the dead (which is tantamount to believing that Elijah must come before the Messiah). However, this possibility is improbable, as it presumes the disciples correctly understand the predictions of the resurrection in 8:31 and 9:9, which is unlikely. Furthermore it presumes the even more unlikely scenario that the scribes are teaching that Elijah must come before the resurrection of the Son of Man/Messiah.

Perhaps instead the disciples are assuming that the resurrection of the Son of Man would be part of the general resurrection, and they do not realize that Jesus is speaking about a distinct event. In this case the confusion is “caused by the evidently imminent resurrection of the Son of Man, in spite of the fact that Elijah apparently has not yet

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come.” While not impossible, there are arguments that make this interpretation less probable. First, this interpretation presumes that the narrative makes an important distinction between the resurrection of the Son of Man and the general resurrection. Such a distinction, however, is never explicitly articulated in Mark. Furthermore, Jesus, in his answer at 9:12, would be agreeing with the scribes that Elijah comes first, but only because, for him, the resurrection of the Son of Man is distinct from the general resurrection. This means that Elijah comes before the general resurrection according to the scribes, but before the individual resurrection of the Son of Man according to Jesus. That is, the “first” of the scribal teaching (9:11) is different from the “first” of Jesus’ answer (9:12). While possible, Jesus’ answer reads more smoothly if the “first” of 9:11 is the same “first” of 9:12. That is, Jesus’ answer in 9:12 suggests something like, “the scribes are correct, but . . .,” rather than “the scribes are correct only insofar as . . . .” Furthermore, when Jesus agrees with the scribes that Elijah comes first, this interpretation requires that “first” continues to refer to the resurrection of the Son of Man. This seems unlikely in 9:12, where the resurrection does not appear to be in view. Finally, this interpretation presumes that the disciples understood what the resurrection of the dead referred to, or least thought they understood. This is not suggested by the text, which reads, ”they were questioning among themselves what the resurrection from the dead meant” (ἐνωτούς συζητοῦντες τί ἐστιν τὸ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστήματι), which implies that the disciples were fundamentally clueless regarding what was being spoken of.

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696 Ibid., 430.
697 Otherwise it falters for the same reason that the previous option does – namely that it would not have concerned the disciples that something had not happened that they had no reason to have expected should have happened.
698 9:10.
Schweizer believes that the issue relates to a belief that the end was near, which, according to Jewish sources, could not be the case because Elijah had not yet come.\footnote{Schweizer, Good News, 185.} This interpretation does not cohere well with Jesus’ answer in 9:12-13, which does not refer to the Parousia. Nevertheless, it might be possible that the question of 9:11 derives from the combination of 9:1 with the appearance of Elijah at the Transfiguration. Hence, according to what the disciples know of scribal teaching, the end could not be as imminent as suggested in 9:1 if Elijah (brought to the disciples’ mind by his appearance in 9:4) has not yet come. Jesus’ answer implies that Elijah has come in the person of John; hence, what he affirmed in 9:1 stands. It should be noted that according to this interpretation John/Elijah does indeed come before the Son of Man. That is, Jesus’ answer suggests that the objection raised in 9:11 is flawed because Elijah has already come – that is, he came first. Hence, even though Schweizer wishes to distance himself from the idea that 9:11-13 speaks of a belief that Elijah comes before the Messiah, his interpretation ends up affirming exactly this. Elijah comes before the “end,” and, as it happens, before the Messiah.

It is possible that, for the implied author, the scribes’ beliefs concerning Elijah are simply faulty. They are wrong in their belief that Elijah comes before the Day of the LORD (or whatever), but the implied author more correctly affirms that he comes before the Messiah. Their error would be similar to the error of the Sadducees who, in 12:24, “do not know the Scriptures” (μὴ εἰδότες τὰς γραφὰς).\footnote{“There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God come in glory.”} Perhaps the disciples were more curious than concerned about the teaching of the scribes. That is, they simply wanted to know how Elijah fit into the grand scheme. They had just seen Elijah, and perhaps wanted to know if they should therefore expect to see him again as things unfold. The fact that the
Most of the alternatives that have been discussed thus far have taken 9:11 in isolation. However, the question “what does Elijah come before?” will be more decisively answered by considering what is affirmed concerning Elijah elsewhere in the Gospel. Collins argues that 9:11-13 does not affirm Elijah as forerunner to the Messiah, yet concedes elsewhere that Elijah is presented as the forerunner of the Messiah in Mark, and points to 1:7-8.\textsuperscript{702} To this it can be added that the “restoration” (\(\lambda\pi\omicron\kappa\omicron\alpha\theta\iota\varsigma\tau\omicron\eta\omicron\iota\)) that occurs “first” in 9:12 coheres with John’s work of repentance, baptism, and forgiveness in 1:4-5, as well as with the work of making ready the people in 1:3.\textsuperscript{703} If this work of John comes “first,” it is only reasonable to conclude that the work of Jesus comes “second.” Hence, John/Elijah comes before Jesus/the Messiah. Even more specific, however, is 1:2, where the messenger “goes before” (\(\pi\omicron\rho\omicron\omicron\sigma\omicron\omega\pi\omicron\omicron\)) the Messiah. Therefore, the introduction of the narrative as a whole includes a statement stating that John/Elijah goes before Jesus/the Messiah. Elijah comes before the Messiah to the same degree that John comes before Jesus.

If the narrative of Mark is coherent, then what is true in the prologue is true also in 9:11. It would be remarkable if the conviction that Elijah was to precede the Messiah, as found in the prologue, vanished later in the narrative only to be replaced by something entirely different. To suggest that Elijah goes before the Messiah in the prologue, but does not go before the Messiah in 9:11-13 is to suggest that Mark is incoherent.

Given this, it is likely that what the disciples are asking about is a scribal teaching that concerns \textit{Elijah preceding the Messiah}. Their concern relates not to an aspect of disciples do not simply ask about Elijah, but about what the scribes are saying about Elijah suggests that the issue is more about concern than curiosity. The scribes have been the source of challenge and conflict thus far, which makes it likely that challenge and conflict are somehow involved here as well.

\textsuperscript{702} Collins, \textit{Mark}, 430.
\textsuperscript{703} See also §3.8.1.3.
Jesus’ teaching, but to the more fundamental issue of his identity. This scribal teaching is believed by the implied author, which means it is also accepted by the implied reader – whether or not it was ever believed by actual historical scribes.

The Son of Man is again mentioned in 9:12. The narrator shows Jesus adopting and modifying the persona of the Son of Man from Daniel by introducing into it a note of suffering and death. While this makes the Son of Man a suffering figure, the implied author also maintains the original transcendent ideal of Daniel’s Son of Man.

3.8.1.2 Discourse

In 9:11, the disciples and Jesus are still descending the mountain. This setting places Jesus and the disciples in a liminal zone between the inspirational mountaintop and the bottom of the mountain with its controversy, failure, and strife (9:14-29). The time between 9:9 and 9:13 transitions the characters and the narrative back into the hustle and bustle of Jesus’ ministry life. This liminal zone is ideal for a private discussion between Jesus and his disciples about a problem that apparently has been bothering the disciples.

In 9:11 the disciples ask Jesus why the scribes say “it is necessary” (δεῖ) for Elijah to come first. This is the second time that the word δεῖ has been used in the narrative. The first time was in 8:31 where Jesus proclaimed that it is necessary (δεῖ) for him to be rejected and to die. The scribes are thus saying that there is a divine requirement that Elijah come. Jesus replies that while this is correct, there is also a divine scriptural requirement that both Elijah and the Son of Man must suffer (9:12, 13).

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704 This has already been discussed above in §3.7.3.1.
705 See 13:26 and 14:62.
In saying that the scribes are correct when they say that Elijah must come first, Jesus evokes Malachi’s prediction of a returning Elijah, and in using the twice-repeated formula “it is written” (ἦγραπταν) evokes scripture in less specified terms. These references to the time of scripture and the prophets are second-order external analepses.

Jesus says “Elijah has come, and that they treated him as they wanted, as it is written concerning him” (Ελλήνες ἐλήλυθεν, καὶ ἔποιήσαν αὐτῷ ὅσα ἤθελον, καθὼς ἦγραπταν ἐπ’ αὐτόν). The reference is elliptic, but clearly refers to the death of John. However, also embedded within Jesus’ response is a second-order prolepsis. Jesus asks, “How is it written concerning the Son of Man that he will suffer many things and be rejected?” (πῶς ἦγραπταν ἐπὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἵνα πολλὰ πάθη καὶ ἐξουδενηθῇ). This anticipates the passion of Jesus.

The suffering predicted in 9:12 was presented previously in 8:31 with greater clarity, and so 9:12 brings little new to the narrative, as far as plot development is concerned. Nevertheless, two new elements are introduced in this pericope: John is equated with Elijah, something that has been hinted at previously but is revealed here explicitly; and, the rejection and death of John is explicitly connected to the rejection and death of Jesus.

This clear affirmation that John is Elijah relates directly to the issue of recognition of Jesus within the narrative. That is, if part of the plot involves the recognition of Jesus, then, according to Larsen’s five steps within many recognition scenes, John the Baptist functions as step three’s displaying of the token. That is, in a similar way that Odysseus’

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706 It will be recalled the steps include: 1) the meeting between the observer and the observed; 2) the move of cognitive resistance; 3) the move of displaying the token; 4) the moment of recognition, and; 5) the attendant reactions and physical (re-)union. Not every step is always present. See Larsen, Recognizing, 63-71. See also §2.7.4.
hidden identity was disclosed by noting his scar (the token), so also the true identity of Jesus will be disclosed by understanding the presence of Elijah in John.\textsuperscript{707} However, this is complicated by the fact that John’s ability to function as a token, as a marker that will reveal Jesus’ true identity, will only be effective when John’s true identity is also known. Thus, there is a sub-theme in the Gospel that places John as the \textit{observed} in his own recognition scene. Two parallel recognition themes flow through the Gospel from the beginning. The dominant recognition theme concerns Jesus and the secondary one concerns John. These two themes are related, as the secondary recognition theme is a key to the dominant recognition theme.

A question concerning the Transfiguration-Elijah and John the Baptist that touches on the coherence of the narrative is: how does the Transfiguration-Elijah relate to the John/Elijah subplot? The question asked by the disciples in 9:11 has presumably been prompted by statements made by the scribes concerning the coming of Elijah. This presumes a back-story in which the disciples have heard the Scribes teach that it was necessary for Elijah to come before the Messiah.\textsuperscript{708} It is unlikely that the scribes were attacking Jesus’ messianic credentials as only a small handful of people have affirmed Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus has scrupulously kept the matter hidden. It is more likely that the disciples, having heard the scribal teaching, fear that Jesus’ status as Messiah is being threatened. The disciples’ question in 9:11 is presumably \textit{also} prompted by the appearance of Elijah in 9:4. This is suggested by reason of proximity; the question relating to John/Elijah is raised immediately after an episode with the Transfiguration-Elijah.

\textsuperscript{707} Ibid., 1, 66-68.
\textsuperscript{708} For more on Elijah preceding the Messiah, see §3.8.1.1.
It might be that the disciples are really asking, “Is the Transfiguration-Elijah the one who the scribes are talking about?” The answer that Jesus gives does not refer to the Transfiguration-Elijah, but to John. This might mean that the Transfiguration-Elijah is simply not in view, or it could mean that the Transfiguration-Elijah is not the whole picture. Jesus’ answer, then, affirms that the scribes are correct in saying that Elijah must come first. But the scribes have overlooked two important things: Elijah has already come in John, and the real significance of the coming Elijah, according to (unspecified) scripture (9:13), relates to the fact that Elijah will suffer rejection, a rejection for which the scribes themselves are likely responsible. Hence, the fulfillment of Elijah’s coming is not to be understood as being like the Transfiguration-Elijah, but, counter-intuitively, it is to be understood in the rejection of John. Jesus appears to suggest that the suffering of the Son of Man and the suffering of Elijah are related, which connects John’s death with Jesus’ fate.

This still leaves unresolved the question regarding the relation between the Transfiguration-Elijah and John/Elijah. At least three options exist. The first is that Mark’s narrative lacks cohesiveness and therefore that the very question itself is off-target. This option would argue that any question relating to the relationship between the Transfiguration-Elijah and John/Elijah goes beyond anything that the implied author or narrator imagined. No relation exists between the Transfiguration-Elijah and John/Elijah, and 9:2-10 may have been linked with 9:11-13 merely because of a key idea (Elijah) that indicates nothing thematically. While this may make sense from a redactional point of view, a literary approach assumes (until proven otherwise) that stories cohere and that episodes are connected by more than mere happenstance.
The second option is that the Transfiguration-Elijah is the “real” Elijah and John only fulfilled the symbolic role of Elijah. The problem with this is that it necessitates postulating two figures in the same narrative both laying claim to the same name.

The final option is that the Transfiguration-Elijah and John/Elijah are one and the same.

3.8.1.3 Implied Reader

With the disciples’ question of Jesus in 9:11, the reader likely imagines a previous instance where the disciples hear the scribes teach that it is necessary (δεῖ) that Elijah must come first – presumably before the Messiah – and the appearance of Elijah at the Transfiguration has brought the issue back to mind. This is the second time the reader has encountered the word δεῖ. The first was in relation to Jesus’ passion prediction (8:31), when Jesus said that his suffering, death, and resurrection were necessary. The reader suspects, if the scribes are correct about Elijah, there is a connection between these two necessary events, and that therefore the suffering of both John and Jesus are part of a divine plan.

Jesus responds to the disciples’ question by saying that the scribes are right, as Elijah does come first to restore all things. Then, Jesus asks, “How is it written concerning the Son of Man that he must suffer?” The reader puzzles at Jesus’ apparent change of topic. Why is he now speaking about himself when the question related to Elijah?

Jesus continues in 9:13 by saying that the event the scribes speak of as occurring in the future, has, in fact, already happened in the past. Elijah has already come, but “they did to him whatever they wanted, at it is written concerning him” (ἐποίησαν αὐτῷ ὅσα
The reader notes that Jesus has returned to Elijah in this part of his answer.

Jesus’ answer is elliptic and terse, and requires unpacking. The reader must work her way through it carefully if she wishes to comprehend. She might start by noting the things in his answer she does understand. It is clear, for example, that the “Son of Man” is Jesus. It is less clear who “they” are who have mistreated Elijah (9:13). It is possible that “they” are the scribes of 9:11. It is also possible that “they” might be Herod and Herodias. The reader might suspect the referent of “they” is left intentionally vague. The reader might wonder if this vagueness is a way of grouping together the scribes who continue to bother Jesus (the Son of Man of 9:12b) with whoever mistreated Elijah (9:13), even though, in reality, they are different.

The reader then comes to what is arguably the heart of this episode – who is Elijah? The only answer available to the reader is that Elijah is John the Baptist. He is the only one who came first to whom “they did as they pleased.” No one else in the narrative qualifies. The narrator has not explicitly told her, but the reader nevertheless has no doubt that Elijah is John, and “they did as they pleased” refers to the events surrounding John’s death, as narrated in 6:14-29.

The affirmation that John is Elijah appears to be something that the reader did not previously know. The implicit claim that John is Elijah in 9:13 does not make as much sense, and does not have the same effect, if the reader already possesses this knowledge. The revelation in this passage is presented as if it were something surprising, which suggests that it is not something the reader has already concluded. This, together with the

709 “They” is not notated by a pronoun but by the case endings of ποιῶ (ἐποίησαν) and θέλω (ἦθελον).
fact that the previous allusions to Elijah involving John were not always clear, suggests that the clarity in this passage is something new. This is a moment of disclosure for the reader.

This might well raise another question for the reader: How did John restore all things? An obvious explanation might be that he did this through his baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (1:4). He restored “all” things (πάντα) inasmuch as “all” (πάντας) Judea and “all” (πάντας) Jerusalem came out to him to be baptized (1:5). The reader is not bothered by what might be considered hyperbolic language with the use of the word “all,” either here in 9:12, or in 1:5. Another way the reader might conclude that John restored all things was by baptizing Jesus. John/Elijah became an agent of universal reconciliation by being the agent through whom God commissioned his Messiah. In either event, the reader might conclude “restoring all things” was simply a shorthand way to refer to John’s ministry.

“It is written” (γεγραπτό) appears twice in 9:11-13, which the reader knows refers to scripture. Even though she might not know exactly which scripture is meant, the reader accepts that the suffering of Jesus and John are both predicted by the sacred texts. The reader connects the statements “it is written” with “it is necessary” of 9:11, and concludes that the fate of these two men has been predestined. These things have been predicted, and must come to pass. This means that both their sufferings are not aberrations from God’s design, but instead are integral to the timeless plan of God, and God’s salvation history.

The reader also sees from Jesus’ answer that the suffering and fates of Jesus and John are connected. The statement, predicated from scripture, concerning the suffering of
the Son of Man in 9:12 parallels the statement, also predicated from scripture, concerning “what they wished to do to him” of Elijah in 9:13.

While it is clear enough that Elijah/John and Jesus parallel each other, it is not exactly clear what is the relationship between 9:12 and 9:13. Why is the suffering of the Son of Man mentioned in a saying that concerns Elijah? To attempt to unravel this knot, the reader might examine the structure of the argument.\(^{710}\)

A basic structure of the argument might go like this: 9:12a (X)\(^{711}\) is a true premise. 9:12b (Y)\(^{712}\) is a complication occasioned or suggested by X, such as “How can the reader understand X in the light of Y, or Y in the light of X?” 9:13 (Z)\(^{713}\) provides a resolution to the complication posed by X. Relating this structure more specifically to Mark 9:12-13 then, the reader finds that it is true that Elijah has come first to restore all things (X). However, there is a problem with this, namely “how then is it written concerning the Son of Man, that he will suffer many things and be treated with contempt?” (Y). X is a predicate derived from scripture, and as such is true. However, Y is also predicated from scripture, and hence is also true, but how does it relate to X? How does a suffering Son of Man relate to the coming Elijah?\(^{714}\)

\(^{710}\) While this is a modern way of putting things, I believe that the nature of this argument might nevertheless capture something of what might be the implicit reasoning of the implied reader.

\(^{711}\) “Elijah does indeed come first, and restores all things.”

\(^{712}\) “Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?”

\(^{713}\) “But I tell you that Elijah has certainly come, and they did to him whatever they wanted, just as it is written about him.”

\(^{714}\) Another possibility is that X and Y contradict each other. That is, the question might have been, “how can it be written that the Son of Man must suffer, given that Elijah comes first to restore all things?” That is, either X is incompatible with Y, or Y is incompatible with X; either X is true, or Y is true, but not both. Given the context of the narrative in Mark, it is certain that Y is true (that the Son of Man must suffer), hence X would be in doubt (Elijah comes first to restore all things). This would require a somewhat different understanding of the structure of the argument, so that the veracity of 9:12a is in view. It would essentially mean that X is not a true statement. That is, 9:12a would either have to be taken ironically, or as a question (“Does Elijah … indeed restore all things?”), rather than as a statement (“Elijah … restores all things”). In either event, the issue would be how is it true that Elijah has restored all things, presumably given the way that people will treat the Son of Man? Is it not evident that all things have not been restored?
This brings the reader to Z: how does the coming of Elijah relate to the suffering Son of Man? Jesus says that it relates perfectly: just as the Son of man suffers death according to scripture, so also Elijah suffers death according to scripture. In fact, Elijah/John’s death is an explanation for Jesus’ death. The answer to, “how is it that the Son of Man suffers according to scripture?” is “Elijah has suffered ‘their’ ill-will according to scripture.” This passage responds to the question of Jesus’ death with the answer of Elijah/John’s death. John the Baptist both evokes the past in the elliptic reference to scripture, and anticipates the future – he brings the ancient promises and expectations together with the future suffering of the passion. The reader wonders what this means for her understanding of Jesus.

3.8.2 Revisiting the Narrative

The revelation that John is Elijah prompts the reader to revisit previously read passages to see how this new understanding might illuminate them. When she initially read the opening scriptural citation in 1:2-3, she realized that Malachi stood behind at least part of it. She also likely realized faintly that Elijah “hid” within the Malachi portion of the citation. Nevertheless, she had been unable to understand the relevance of this allusion to Elijah. Now, what was hidden is revealed, and she knows that 1:2-3 speaks of

In short, 9:12a “challenges Elijah’s traditional role” (Boring, *Mark*, 263). Elijah may have come, but he has not effected a universal restoration. Had he done so, then people would not still be heaping scorn upon the agents of God. The problem with this view, however, is that it not only challenges the traditional view concerning Elijah’s return, but also the view as espoused by Malachi. “Restores all things” (ἀφορίζειν πάντα) in 9:12 is likely a way of paraphrasing Mal. 4:6, where it was said that Elijah would “turn” (ἀφορίζειν) the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents.” If Jesus is questioning the idea that Elijah restores all things, then he is questioning scripture itself. Given the place that scripture has in Mark, and Malachi specifically (see 1:2), it is doubtful that this is what is in view. For more on this issue, see Boring, *Mark*, 263; Cranfield, *Mark*, 298; Evans, *Mark*, 43; Gundry, *Mark*, 484-485; Percy J. Heawood, “Mark 9:11-13,” *Expository Times* 64, no. 8 (1953) 239; Joel Marcus, “Mark 9:11-13 : “As it has been written”,” *Zeitschrift für die neuestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 80, no. 1-2 (1989) 42 – 63; Nineham, *Mark*, 240; Taylor, *Mark*, 394-395; Charles Cutler Torrey, *Our Translated Gospels, Some of the Evidence*, (New York: Harper, 1936) 56-58; Julius Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci*, (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1909) 70; Julius Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Matthaei*, (Berlin: Reimer, 1904) 87.
the great ancient prophet Elijah, returned in the person of John. The one who was sent before, and who prepares the way for Jesus, is not an unknown new comer: he is none other than Elijah.

The reader initially wondered about certain details in the prologue concerning John’s physical attire (1:6). They seemed significant, as the reader realized that the narrator rarely gives out this sort of information about the characters, which suggests that it is important. The reader may have noted possible allusions to Elijah when she originally read 1:6, but was likely uncertain about what they might have meant. Now, however, she realizes the narrator had put a significant clue in the text. The detail concerning John’s attire tells the reader that John is Elijah. This advance mention, planted in the prologue, now blossoms in the mind of the reader. The movement from obscurity to clarity fills the reader with elation – the elation of solving a difficult puzzle. Pieces of the narrative, which previously meant little, now shine forth. John’s identity as Elijah has been revealed to the reader like the rising of a new day’s sun. Again, the full significance of John’s attire is lost upon the people, just as it was initially for the reader.

The reader also revisits the narrative concerning the death of John to see if it yields anything new in the light of the knowledge that John is Elijah. Previously when she read 6:14-16, the reader concluded that miracles did not prove that Jesus was the Messiah, and she had wondered what would prove this.715 While miracles do not suffice – all they demonstrate is that Jesus is similar to Elijah or some other prophet – the reader has now found evidence that will suffice: John provides the proof.716 John is Elijah, and

715 See §3.4.1.2, and §3.6.6.
716 The implied reader needs no proof, as the word of the narrator in 1:1 is enough. Nevertheless she will seek for warrants to believe what the narrator says, and clues as to how it is to be understood.
the coming of Elijah is a definitive indication of the coming of the Messiah. However, this proof is hidden. It is veiled, while the miracles are public and visible.

Understanding the relationship between John and Jesus more clearly, as the reader does now, makes it obvious that Jesus is the Messiah. The presence of John/Elijah proves to those who have eyes to see that Jesus is the Christ. The reader also realizes that most of the characters do not have eyes to see, and because they are not aware that John is Elijah, they are also not aware that Jesus is the Messiah.

The reader realizes that the scribes are correct in their belief that Elijah must come before the Messiah. However, it is precisely because they are not aware that John is Elijah that they do not realize that Elijah has already come, and that therefore Jesus must be the Messiah. To realize that Elijah has come signals that the Messiah is on the doorstep.

The reader might recall 8:11, where some Pharisees sought a sign from heaven (σημείον ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) from Jesus. They presumably sought a miraculous act of power – something ironically similar to the multiplication of bread in 8:1-9. However, the reader now sees that while this type of sign may prove Jesus is sent from God, it will not disclose his full identity. The sign from heaven that does this is John the Baptist.

The reader continues to be struck by the parallels between John and Jesus. They are both figures who have unknown identities, and who remain unrecognized by the characters in the story. Furthermore, both of these unrecognized characters also have unexpected fates. The reader, as well as the characters within the story, did not expect a suffering Messiah any more than a suffering Elijah redivivus.
These parallels suggest linkage. The reader again concludes that the question of Jesus’ identity is linked to the question of John’s identity, just as the question of Messiah’s fate is linked to the fate of Elijah. Their secret identities are as intertwined as their unexpected deaths. The messianic secret is paired with an Elijianic secret. Or perhaps better, to use Larsen’s terminology, the Jesus delusion and the John delusion are linked. People realized that Jesus is special yet failed to correctly identify him; so also they realized that John is special yet failed to correctly identify him. The people are deluded regarding both John and Jesus, and in order to recognize Jesus, John needs to be recognized. The reader realizes that John’s role in the narrative is important indeed: the characters’ ability to correctly identify Jesus within the narrative is impeded and perhaps even determined by their ability to correctly identify John.

The reader previously wondered if the implied author was suggesting anything by means of the people’s erroneous view concerning Jesus’ identity in 6:14-16.\footnote{See §3.4.1.2.} Now that she realizes that John is Elijah, she might wonder if the misunderstanding of the people in 6:14-16 might be understood as an instance of dramatic irony. She reasons that if the people had recognized that John was Elijah, who prepared the way for the Messiah, then they would have also recognized that Jesus was the Messiah. The irony in the confusion over Jesus’ identity in 6:14-16 is that public opinion, in failing to understand John, has also failed to understand Jesus. They thought Jesus might be John, but John was actually Elijah. If people had known who John was they would not have thought that Jesus was either John or Elijah. They would have known that the presence of John/Elijah

\footnote{\textsuperscript{717} See §3.4.1.2.}
demonstrated that Jesus was the Messiah. So when the people say that Jesus is Elijah or John, they demonstrate their own ignorance concerning Jesus, Elijah and John.

The reader again realizes that she has privileged knowledge. Nevertheless, she is also aware that she too was ignorant once concerning John, which again reminds her that there are limits to her privileged status. She may feel special because of her superior knowledge, but she may feel chastened against arrogance as well.

When the reader revisits the episode at Caesarea Philippi, she finds the same ironic confusion over Jesus’ identity as she found in 6:14-16. Just as before, if the people had recognized John, they would know that Jesus is the Messiah. One difference in 8:28 is that instead of the mistaken opinion regarding Jesus’ identity being an occasion for the narration of John’s death, here it is the occasion for Peter’s confession and the first passion prediction. The reader, remembering again that the pattern for Jesus’ death has been set by John’s example, concludes that Peter would not have made the mistake that he made in rejecting Jesus’ passion prediction if he had understood the pattern established by John. She sees that Peter correctly assesses Jesus’ identity (8:29), but fails when it comes to Jesus’ destiny (8:32-33). For Peter the problem is not so much that he failed to understand who John was, but that he failed to understand the pattern of rejection set forth by John and followed by Jesus.718 Had he understood this, he would not have rejected Jesus’ passion prediction in 8:31. Peter’s faulty response to Jesus would have been offset had he understood the pattern set by John. To understand John is thus not only to know that Jesus is the Messiah, it is also to know that the Messiah must suffer. Hence there is a double irony in the episode at Caesarea Philippi: the people

718 Nevertheless, the question of 9:11 suggests that Peter did not understand who John was.
wonder if Jesus is John or Elijah, when in fact John is Elijah (which suggests Jesus is the Messiah), and Peter, after appearing to offer a better witness than the people, rejects a suffering Messiah when the testimony of Elijah affirms exactly this. In both instances a failure to understand John results in a failure to understand Jesus, either in respect to his identity or to his fate.

The reader wonders what the relationship is between John the Baptist and the Elijah of the Transfiguration. Perhaps Elijah of the Transfiguration is not related to John the Baptist, which means that he is also not related to the Elijah of Malachi, since the Elijah of Malachi is John. However, because she assumes narrative coherence and causality, the reader is unlikely to conclude that the two are meant to be seen as disparate figures in the narrative.

The second option for the reader might be to conclude that John is only Elijah in a figural sense, and that the Elijah of the Transfiguration is the “real” Elijah. That is, the figure at the mount is the one who establishes the pattern that John followed, and by following it John performed a symbolic “Elijah-function” in the Gospel. The relationship between John and the transfiguration-Elijah would then be the relationship between original and copy, or between the one who establishes an exemplar and the one who follows an exemplar. If the reader embraces this option, then she might conclude that the Elijah at the Transfiguration is something of a guarantor of John’s legitimacy as forerunner of the Messiah. The presence of the original underwrites the ministry of the copy. However, the reader might have difficulty with this option because it is not particularly stable. That is, if John is Elijah only in a figural way, then the “real” Elijah’s

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719 See Section §3.8.1.2.
presence at the Transfiguration can undermine rather than underwrite John’s role as Elijah. Can two different figures lay claim to the same identity in the same narrative? If the reader is presented with the “figurative Elijah” first and then with the “real Elijah,” might not this diminish the status of the former? The presence of the “real Elijah” at the Transfiguration could highlight the fact that John is not the “real Elijah.” While this might not be enough to take this option off the table altogether, it could be enough to cause the reader to consider the final option.

The third option is that John is Elijah ontologically.\textsuperscript{720} If the reader concludes that John “really is” Elijah, then she will also conclude that there is no real difference between John and the Elijah of the Transfiguration. This would be to say that John the Baptist \textit{is} the Elijah of the Transfiguration. The reader sees Elijah directly at the Transfiguration, and not under the hidden veil of John. The reader might expect this schema of concealment and revelation seen in John/Elijah to be duplicated again in Jesus. If the reader embraces this option, the implications are startling. To say the figure on the Mount is Elijah in the same way that John is Elijah is to say they are the same person. This would mean that the figure on the mount is not only John revealed, but also John resurrected from the dead. The reader would then conclude that John has preceded Jesus in every important way: he came from God, preached repentance and forgiveness, was killed, and then was even raised from the dead. By “going before” Jesus (1:2), John established a template for Jesus’ ministry and death – and resurrection!

\textsuperscript{720} See Section §3.8.1.2.
3.9 The Preceding Context for 15:1-37

3.9.1 The Baptism with which I am Baptized (10:38) – Implied Reader

The next allusion to John is faint, but distinct. In 10:38 Jesus asks his disciples James and John if they are able to be baptized with the baptism with which he is baptized (δύνασθε...τὸ βάπτισμα ἧ ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι βαπτισθήναι). Immediately preceding this episode is Jesus’ third passion prediction (10:32-34). The reader learned little that is new from the second passion prediction (9:30-32), yet the repetition of what was already stated underscores its importance. It also highlights the obtuseness of the disciples who fail to understand even after being told repeatedly. In the third passion prediction, however, the reader learns that Jesus’ death will happen in Jerusalem (10:32), that his death will be the result of collusion between the Jewish religious leadership (presumably in Jerusalem) and the Gentiles (10:33), and that not only will Jesus be put to death, he will be mocked, spat upon, and flogged (10:34).

Immediately after this, James and John approach Jesus and ask if they can have the seats of honor when Jesus is in his glory (10:37). The reader notes the stark contrast between the predicted suffering of 10:34 and this request for positions of power. Their request seems to bespeak a traditional understanding of a conquering Messiah who would rule over all. Jesus’ comment in 10:40 ("to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared") appears to also adhere to this traditional understanding. Hence, Jesus does not entirely eschew the paradigm of Messiah as a powerful ruler. Nevertheless, he has been teaching his disciples that the Messiah must suffer rejection and death before anything like the traditional ideal can be
realized. This suggests that while the two disciples’ request demonstrates a degree of faith in Jesus as Messiah, they nevertheless remain stridently off the mark. It seems that the disciples (or at least James and John) have completely failed to understand what Jesus has repeatedly been teaching them about the nature of his ministry, as well as the implications of being his disciple.

Jesus responds to the two disciples’ question by asking if they are able to partake of his cup or of his baptism. The only baptism that the reader has encountered within the narrative is the baptism of John. The reader finds it difficult to relate the saying of 10:38 directly to either repentance or forgiveness, which leads her to conclude that Jesus must be extending the significance of John’s baptism so it represents something more than what it did in the prologue. Given the fact that Jesus has just referred to his suffering and death in graphic terms in 10:34, the reader likely concludes that the cup and baptism here also refers to suffering. For the reader, what Jesus speaks of, at least insomuch as the baptism is concerned, points backwards to his baptism by John and forwards to his passion. She concludes that the baptism of Jesus by John foreshadows Jesus’ suffering. Hence, the reader now sees a deeper significance to Jesus’ baptism by John.

She recalls that after Jesus’ baptism the divine affirmation of Jesus as Son (1:11) was spoken in the words from Ps 2:7 that were used to crown kings. The reader might

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721 Chapter 13 similarly also affirms a more traditional messianic expectation. The Messiah (Jesus), after the fashion of the Son of Man in Dan 7:13, will come in the clouds with great power and glory and will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven (13:26-27). A similar understanding is likewise affirmed in the statement made before the high priest in 14:62, where Jesus states that he (the Son of Man) will be seated at the right hand of the Power, and come with the clouds of heaven. These passages are more oriented to a Son of Man paradigm than to a Son of David paradigm.

722 See 8:34-9:1.

723 In other words, by alluding to Jesus’ suffering and death, Jesus’ baptism by John is a third-order prolepsis functioning as an advance notice.
wonder if John/Elijah anointed Jesus King not with oil, as did Samuel, but through baptism. The reader might begin to suspect that it is through baptism that John, as the human agent, not only establishes the authority of Jesus, but also predicts and foreshadows his suffering and death. The person and actions of John/Elijah officially establishes Jesus’ credentials as king.

3.9.2 Blessed be the One Who Comes (11:9-10) – Implied Reader

The reader is surprised at the joyous reaction of the people as Jesus enters Jerusalem. They are chanting “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” This likely indicates to the reader that the people believe Jesus to be the Davidic Messiah. They appear to have “caught up” to where Peter was in 8:29 (and where Peter likely still remains), but do not realize that Jesus will experience rejection, suffering, and death in the great city, and that he will not bring in the Kingdom of God – at least not in the way that they are thinking.

3.9.3 By Whose Authority? (11:27-33) – Implied Reader

At the temple the religious authorities approach Jesus and question him: “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?” Jesus turns the question back on them by asking whether John was an agent of God, or someone who acted on his own accord. While the narrator does not spell it out, the reader, assuming coherence and causality, likely presumes that Jesus uses John in his argument because John’s authority is immediately connected to his authority. Jesus seems

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724 See 1 Sam 8:6-10:1, 16:13.
725 If John did not recognize Jesus as the one he predicted (see §3.4.2.2), this would mean that he fulfilled this prophetic role of anointing kings without knowing it.
to be suggesting that if John was sent from God, then so was he, and if John was acting only on his own behalf, then so was Jesus. The ministries of John and Jesus stand or fall together. To defend John is to defend Jesus, and to accuse John is to accuse Jesus. Hence, John’s ministry provides a warrant and a defense for the ministry of Jesus.

3.9.4 Some They Beat, Others They Killed (12:1-9) – Implied Reader

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (12:1-9) “condenses the plot of Mark’s Gospel into a miniature.”\(^{726}\) While this parable does not mention John, it arranges certain themes that relate to John into a coherent structure for the reader. It speaks of something similar to the Deuteronomistic theme of the persecution of the prophets. While John is not specifically referred to,\(^ {727}\) he was nevertheless a prophet that was treated poorly in a similar way as the slaves in the parable. In the parable the son stands in continuity with the servants, as well as transcending them. The reader has already noted this pattern of continuity and transcendence in the relationship between Jesus and John, as Jesus’ ministry seems to be a continuation of John’s ministry, even as it surpassed it (1:7-8). This parable leads the reader to place Jesus’ ministry within the lineage of the prophets, in terms of message, power, and suffering, but also to acknowledge his superiority over the prophets. It explains Jesus’ ministry and fate as coterminous to what happened to the prophets, something already exemplified by John. This parable broadens the context for the reader in respect to the issue of suffering: Jesus’ suffering is not merely patterned

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after John, but more generally after the suffering of the prophets. John is the last exemplar of this suffering before Jesus.

3.10 The Death of Jesus (15:1-37)

3.10.1 Pilate (15:1-15)

3.10.1.1 Discourse

The Jewish religious leaders bring Jesus before Pilate, where Pilate questions Jesus about his claim to royalty (15:2-4). Jesus does not answer, and Pilate marvels (15:5). Using the crowd’s desire to fulfill custom as a pretext, Pilate seeks to release Jesus (15:8-9), knowing that Jesus has been brought to him out of malice (15:10). On at least two occasions Pilate resists the crowd’s desire to have Jesus crucified (15:9-14), but the crowd insists, and Pilate, wanting to please the crowd, finally caves in, and hands over (παραδίωμι) Jesus to be crucified (15:15).

Pilate initially resists public opinion and defends the unjustly accused. Pilate’s traits, therefore, include courage and a desire for justice. However, by ultimately giving into public opinion and participating in an unjust death, Pilate’s traits also include injustice and cowardice. These contradictory traits move him towards a roundness of character that contrasts with the flatness of the religious leaders.

The trial before Pilate (15:1-15) is focalized through Pilate. This is indicated by the fact that he is the only character here who is internally focalized: he marvels in 15:5, knows in 15:10, and desires in 15:15.

The narrator’s focalization and characterization of Pilate parallels the depiction of Herod: both are somewhat round characters, and are somewhat sympathetic, despite their weaknesses. Both desire to defend the just, and yet both ultimately fail to do so because of the manipulation of those below them with less power. Both the deaths of John and
Jesus are focalized through the agents of authority who were responsible for the ultimate decision to execute. Furthermore, Jesus before Pilate and John before Herod in 6:17-29 are both externally focalized.

The parallels relating to how the various actors function in the stories of the deaths of Jesus and John suggest the following grid:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak Passive Agent</th>
<th>Strong Active Agent</th>
<th>Passive persecuted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herod</td>
<td>Herodias</td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilate</td>
<td>The Jewish</td>
<td>Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It will be recalled that the story of John’s death, represented by the Herod-Herodias-John line above, was a third-order external analepsis that alluded to Elijah and Jezebel, which resulted in a similar grid. Putting all three co-ordinates into one grid results in the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak Passive Agent</th>
<th>Strong Active Agent</th>
<th>Passive persecuted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahab</td>
<td>Jezebel</td>
<td>Elijah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herod</td>
<td>Herodias</td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilate</td>
<td>The Jewish</td>
<td>Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.10.1.2 Implied Reader

The reader is struck by the use of the word παραδίδωμι (“to arrest,” “to hand over”) in 15:15 where Pilate “hands over” Jesus to be crucified. The reader realizes that this word signals a recurring theme in the Gospel. It has been used to speak of events or characters that participated in Jesus’ death. She recalls that it was also used to speak

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728 See §3.4.2.1.
proleptically of the coming persecution of Jesus’ followers. The reader first encountered this word in 1:14 where it was used of John’s arrest. Hence, it seems that a trajectory has been set with John. This trajectory starts with John, moves to Jesus, and ends with the disciples.

The reader notes the parallels between the roles of the actors in the story of Jesus’ death, with the story of John’s death in 6:14-29, and with Elijah, Jezebel, and Ahab. These parallels provide the reader with a grid that helps her understand each of these sets of characters, as she can transfer certain qualities from any one person in any of the three stories to the corresponding person in the other stories. Thus similarities between Herod, Pilate, and Ahab suggest to the reader that not only is Pilate much like Herod, but that she might even be able to deduce something about Pilate by considering Ahab or Herod. Likewise similarities between Jezebel, Herodias and the Jewish religious leaders suggest to the reader that she might be able to learn something about the Jewish religious leaders by considering Herodias or Jezebel. And finally, she realizes that the similarities between Elijah, John, and Jesus suggest that the reader might be able to learn something about Jesus by considering John or Elijah. A trajectory has been set from Elijah through John to Jesus, which ties these stories together. Elijah defines John, just as John defines Jesus. To understand Jesus, the reader needs to understand John, just as it is necessary to understand Elijah in order to fully grasp John. The earlier stories imbue the later stories with a greater depth of meaning, so that John’s death is not simply a unique affair. With the Parable of the Vineyard in mind, the reader likely concludes that John’s death is rather an instantiation of the persecution of the prophets in the present. The reader

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730 13:9, 11, 12.
731 See 1 Ki 19 and 1Ki 21.
concludes that Jesus does not stand alone, but rather in the shadow of John, who in turn stands in the shadow of others before him.

3.10.2 The Cry of Dereliction (15:33-34)

3.10.2.1 Repertoire of the Reader

A question concerning the cry of dereliction that pertains to the reader’s repertoire is whether the citation from Ps 22:1a in 15:35 is meant to evoke the whole of Ps 22, or just 22:1a. This is important because Ps 22 starts as a lament, but ends as a song of victory and praise. If the entire Psalm is being alluded to, then Jesus’ last words become a veiled reference to the resurrection. However, if the cry of Jesus evokes only 22:1a, they are the poignant words of a person in agony. If the cry of Jesus refers to the entire Psalm, this coheres with the passion predictions, which include predictions of resurrection (8:31, 9:31, 10:34). If the cry refers only to Ps 22:1a, this coheres with the Gethsemane scene, which emphasizes the agony of the crucifixion.\footnote{732} If the cry of dereliction is taken in this latter stronger sense, it, when taken together with the cry from Gethsemane, creates a potent characterization of Jesus. However, for Mark there was resurrection after Jesus’ death, and so it is conceivable that this also might be hinted at in Jesus’ last words. However, it might be best not to overplay the victorious qualities of the ending of Ps 22, otherwise the result might be “to take almost the opposite meaning of what Jesus is portrayed as saying.”\footnote{733} It is likely the cry of dereliction bespeaks anguish, albeit not devoid of hope.\footnote{734}

\footnote{732} For arguments in favor of 15:34 alluding to the whole of Ps 22, including the cry of victory, see Timothy J. Geddert, “The use of Psalms in Mark,” Direction 38, no. 2 (2009) 179 – 192; Hartmut Gese, “Psalms 22 und das Neue Testament: der älteste Bericht vom Tode Jesu und die Entstehung des Herrenmahles,” Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 65, no. 1 (1968) 1 - 22. For an argument for taking the citation in 15:32 as it is without reference to the remainder of the Psalm, see Brown, Death, 1049-1051.

\footnote{733} Brown, Death, 1050.

\footnote{734} See also Marcus, Mark 8-16, 1061-1062.
3.10.2.2 Discourse
Jesus has been tried, condemned, brutally mocked, beaten, and finally crucified. At three o’clock, Jesus cries, “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This cry of dereliction serves to emphasize the awful nature of what is happening, and is the only vehicle the narrator uses to explain the extent of Jesus’ suffering. Jesus is externally focalized, and his pain is captured solely through the cry of 15:34.

3.10.2.3 Implied Reader
The reader has watched as Jesus’ grim and inevitable fate works itself out on the way that has led to the crucifixion. The reader is shocked when Jesus calls for God in the words of Psalm 22:1. Jesus’ ultimate victory has been assured in the affirmations of the resurrection within the passion predictions (8:31, 9:31, 10:34), and so it would not be surprising if the sense of victory from the remainder of the Psalm flashes across the reader’s mind. Yet, the reader is profoundly struck by the desolation of the cry, and is not easily consoled. The prediction of Jesus’ suffering and rejection is brought to a startling fulfillment in 15:35.

The reader recalls the story of John’s tragic death. She has previously noted parallels between Jesus and John, many specifically relating to their deaths. John’s death has prepared her for the death of Jesus, and has even made it intelligible. The reader might note an additional parallel. John proclaimed that one was to come after him who was more worthy and more powerful. However, since there is no indication that John recognized Jesus at the baptism as this expected person, the reader imagines that John might have gone to his grave not knowing that his prediction was fulfilled in Jesus. So, John might have also believed that God failed him. This speculation might lead the reader to conclude John’s feeling of abandonment was akin to that of Jesus’. This has
implications regarding how the reader might hear Jesus’ cry: if John had falsely thought that God had abandoned him, so also might be the case with Jesus.\footnote{735}

The reader notes differences between John’s death and Jesus’ death. She realizes that the story of Jesus’ death is told with much more detail. As long as is the story John’s death, Jesus’ is longer. Furthermore, the shame experienced by Jesus sets his story apart from what she read of John in 6:17-29. The reader has no indication that John was shamed as was Jesus.\footnote{736} Even though Jesus is focalized at a distance as he goes to death – as was John – the reader nevertheless forges a greater sympathy with Jesus, because of the greater detail involved in the narration of Jesus’ death.

\section*{3.10.3 The Misunderstanding, Death & Confession (15:35-39)}

\subsection*{3.10.3.1 Repertoire of the Reader}

The misunderstanding of the bystanders relates to the reader’s repertoire, although in this instance it is not clear exactly how. It might be to a tradition in which Elijah helps the poor and needy.\footnote{737} On the other hand, it is possible that Elijah is being referred to “in his eschatological role.”\footnote{738} It may not be possible to determine which of these Elijah-functions is being alluded to here, as both are appropriate for the context. Seeing as these two different aspects were both understood as belonging to Elijah, it might be artificial to force a categorical distinction between them. If these are two different aspects of one character – Elijah – both can be mutually affirmed.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[735] If the reader previously deduced that John was Elijah ontologically, and the Elijah at the Transfiguration was in fact John the Baptist raised from the dead (see §3.8.2), then she might be able to add another chapter to the story of John. That is, when John/Elijah met with Jesus at the Transfiguration, he would have known that his prediction of a coming more stong one \textit{was} fulfilled in Jesus. The Transfiguration vindicates John’s ministry as much as it shows forth the glory of Jesus.
\item[736] Karakolis, “Narrative Funktion,” 149-152.
\item[738] Evans, \textit{Mark} 8:27-16:20, 508.
\end{footnotes}

\subsection{3.10.3.2 Discourse}

The narrator renders the words of Jesus’ cry in a transliterated form (“\textit{Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”}) before providing a translation. This explains why the bystanders could mistake Jesus’ prayer to God as a plea to Elijah.\footnote{It might be difficult to imagine how the bystanders would have confused \textit{ελώι} (\textit{elōi}) with \textit{Ἡλίας} (\textit{Eelias}). See Brown, \textit{Death of the Messiah}, 1060-1065; Bultmann, \textit{Synoptic Tradition}, 273, 281, 313; Collins, \textit{Mark}, 733-734, 753; France, \textit{Mark}, 654; Gundry, \textit{Mark}, 967; Klostermann, \textit{Markusevangelium}, 186; Ulrich Luz and Helmut Koester, \textit{Matthew 21-28: A Commentary}, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) 542; Frank J. Matera, \textit{The Kingship of Jesus: Composition and Theology in Mark 15}, (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982) 30-31, 36-37; Johannes Schreiber, \textit{Theologie des Vertrauens eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung des Markusevangeliums}, (Hamburg: Furche-Verl, 1967) 32-33; Taylor, \textit{Mark}, 593-596; Julius Wellhausen, \textit{Das Evangelium Marci}, (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1909) 132. Nevertheless, the verisimilitude of this misunderstanding is apparently not an issue for the narrator.} One of them goes and quickly
fills a sponge with sour wine, and is about to offer it to Jesus when someone else tells him to stop, so that they might see if Elijah actually does save Jesus (15:35-36). Jesus dies (15:37), and a Centurion says that Jesus truly was God’s son (15:39).

As important as the cry is in itself, it seems primarily to have the function of providing a context for the misunderstanding of 15:35-36. While the motivations of the actor offering sour wine are unclear, the action itself accomplishes at least two important things for the plot. It instantiates the mockery and derision experienced by Jesus during the three hours that he was on the cross, and re-introduces Elijah into the narrative.

While the death of Jesus does not mark the end of the story, it nevertheless forms the likely climax of the plot. When the narrator relates the story of the resurrection, it is a

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745 The incident relating to the offering of sour wine in 15:36 might allude to LXX Ps 68:21: “They gave me also gall for my food, and to drink vinegar for my thirst” (καὶ ἐδόθην εἰς τὸ βρῶμα μου χόλην καὶ εἰς τὴν δίφαν μου ἑπότισαν με ὀξός). See Brown, Death, 1059-1064; Evans, Mark 8:27-16:20, 508; France, Mark, 655; Marcus, Mark 8-16, 1065; Moloney, Mark, 327.

746 The general tenor of the episode makes it unlikely that the sour wine was offered sympathetically (Collins, Mark, 759). Some argue that the wine was poison that would shorten life. See Maurice Goguel, The Life of Jesus, (New York: Macmillan, 1933) 543. The suggestion, however, has not been popular, and more scholars suggest that the wine was intended to prolong Jesus’ life (Boring, Mark, 431; France, Mark, 654; Marcus, Mark 8-16, 1055-1056; Moloney, Mark, 327). But then, why would a bystander want to prolong Jesus’ life? Perhaps the bystanders were simply curious, and wished to see another miracle from this crucified miracle worker (Boring, Mark, 431), or they wanted to keep Jesus alive to prolong his suffering (Marcus, Mark 8-16, 1065). Perhaps “the individual offers Jesus the sour wine in order to extend his life long enough for Elijah to appear” (Collins, Mark, 759. See also Boring, Mark, 431; Evans, Mark 8:27-16:20, 508), but this goes against the response of the one who forbids the wine to be offered in 15:36. If the point of offering the wine was to prolong Jesus’ life to see if Elijah might come to save him, then why is the command to not offer the wine given for the same reason? If Ps LXX 68:21 stands behind this episode, then it is likely that the wine was offered in mockery or sarcasm (Brown, Death, 1060, 1064; Evans, Mark 8:27-16:20, 508; France, Mark, 655; Marcus, Mark 8-16, 1065; Moloney, Mark, 327). However, it is not clear how the act of offering wine would be a form of mockery. Perhaps the mockery was in the fact that sour wine (ὀξός) was a drink of the common people, and hence was “not a fit drink for Jesus, the king of the Jews” (Collins, Mark, 759). The problem with this is that it can only be understood as a form of dramatic irony (Collins, Mark, 759), which does not help us to understand what it might have meant from the perspective of the character in the story. Perhaps this is simply a moment where the fabric of the Markan narrative is not well woven. Perhaps the narrator wanted to introduce Ps LXX 68:21 as well as continue the Elijah theme. Hence the offer of wine evokes Ps LXX 68:21, and the demand not to give wine continues the Elijah theme. The motives of the one who offers the wine, and the one who forbids the wine are not in view. Rather, what we have is a somewhat awkward weaving together of themes, which results in reduced verisimilitude. For more on the awkward nature of this episode, see Brown, Death, 1059-1065.
rather muted version (16:1-8). In terms of the plot’s arc, 16:1-8 functions more as an epilogue.

The narrative ends with virtually all the characters in the story remaining in a state of delusion, to use Larsen’s terminology. That is, while most have understood Jesus to be merely a prophet, others have confessed Jesus as Messiah. Nevertheless, the nature of his messianic ministry is not understood. Furthermore, still others, joining the religious leaders, have simply turned their backs on him. The mockery at the cross suggests that those mocking thought Jesus to be a fraud. Using Larsen’s terminology, this might suggest that for many people Jesus’ identity truly was a “secret.” To the mockers it seems the underlying conviction is that Jesus is not anyone special – not a prophet, a teacher, or even a holy man. For these people, he is merely a fake. Jesus no long “appears” to be anyone of any significance.

If the Centurion’s words are taken as a straightforward confession of Jesus’ status as the Son of God, then his declaration is a climactic moment of recognition. The Centurion is the lone exception in the narrative who understands Jesus to be both Christ and one who is rejected and killed. However, if he is speaking sarcastically in affirming that Jesus is the Son of God, then Jesus’ identity remains a secret to him too. His affirmation bespeaks delusion if he sincerely confesses Jesus to be a son of God. In either of these latter two instances, the narrative remains void of a genuine recognition: it is a recognition story without a recognition.

3.10.3.3 Implied Reader

As Jesus is mocked, the reader again recalls John. Beyond the parallels between his suffering and Jesus’ suffering, she notes an additional difference between the two figures: John was never thought to be a fraud as Jesus was. If Herodias had such an opinion of the Baptist, the reader has not heard of it. This makes the story of Jesus’ death more poignant and tragic than John’s. This, along with the fact that Jesus is the story’s protagonist, draws the reader into greater sympathy with Jesus.

Jesus’ shocking despair, expressed in the cry on the cross, when juxtaposed with the trite misunderstanding of the bystanders, results in an arresting narrative moment for the reader. She contemplates the profound agony of Jesus, on the one hand, and the blithe curiosity of the bystanders on the other. The bystanders are deeply removed from the stark grandeur of the moment, and utterly fail to understand the importance of what they witness. They remain at a dim and shallow level of comprehension. The reader is the only recipient of disclosure. Nowhere else in the narrative is this grim contrast between disclosure and concealment more stark.
The misunderstanding of 15:35-36 causes the reader to realize just how constantly misunderstood Jesus has been throughout his ministry, and that this misunderstanding continues right to the moment of his death. The bystanders are merely of a piece with all the characters within the whole of the narrative who fail to understand Jesus. They provide the final example of a failure to understand. The reader may have expected a moment when Jesus would be fully recognized and understood by characters within the narrative, but as he hangs at the precipice of his own death, it appears that this moment has not yet arrived.

The reader wonders about the meaning of this misunderstanding. She recalls that Elijah has been alluded to in various ways from the beginning of the narrative. Elijah first appeared in a veiled form in the person of John, and the people did not recognize John for whom he really was. Elijah next appeared, or was at least evoked, in the narratives concerning the false opinions concerning Jesus’ identity (6:14-16, 8:28). Then he appeared in bodily form at the Transfiguration. Now, he is again evoked in the misunderstanding of the bystanders at the crucifixion. The reader realizes that Elijah is a thread that runs through the narrative, appearing at crucial moments within the plot’s development.

The reader can group the various references to Elijah into two categories: where Elijah is truly present, and where he is not but is alluded to because of a failure to understand. John’s role as Elijah and the Elijah at the transfiguration both present Elijah as truly present. Elijah is alluded to, but not present, when Jesus is mistakenly thought to be Elijah (6:15 and 8:28), and here, where Jesus’ cry to God at the crucifixion is mistakenly thought to be a cry to Elijah. These latter examples are the result of a lack of
comprehension, while, in part, the former examples are instances that result in a lack of comprehension.\footnote{The theme of John as Elijah results in a lack of comprehension. This is less true of the appearance of Elijah at the Transfiguration, as few witness this event, and none who do fail to recognize Elijah.}

Insofar as the reader concluded the implied author was using irony in the previous episodes within the second category (in which Elijah is not present, but is referred to – namely 6:15 and 8:28), she might conclude the implied author is using irony in the misunderstanding of the bystanders as well. The irony here, however, is more poignant given what happened to Elijah/John. In 6:15 and 8:28 the reader had previously reasoned that the implied author used irony to say that the people did not understand Jesus to be the Messiah because they did not understand who John was. If they had understood who John was, they would not have believed Jesus to be John or Elijah given the fact John was Elijah. Now this same line of ironic reasoning extends into not merely Jesus as the Messiah, but Jesus as the \textit{crucified} Messiah. The reader might “reconstruct” the implied author’s intended ironic meaning in this way: Had the bystanders known that John was Elijah, and that John/Elijah had been murdered, they would not have blithely wondered why Jesus was calling upon Elijah for help. No help was to be forthcoming from Elijah, just as no help was forthcoming to Elijah. The bystanders had previously mocked Jesus as a messianic pretender (15:16-20, 27-32). This mockery assumes that such things as crucifixion do not befall the Messiah: this proves that Jesus must therefore not be the Messiah. The reader realizes through the ironic misunderstanding of the bystanders in 15:35, that a crucified Messiah was only unthinkable because they did not understand the pattern established by John/Elijah.
After Jesus dies, the reader is surprised by the unexpected confession of the Centurion (15:39). There has been little in the narrative that prepares the reader for this bold declaration. The reader is uncertain how this “confession” should be understood. If it is a true confession, then her longing for a public declaration of Jesus’ identity is satisfied, although she would prefer to have the whole nation of Israel make this confession rather a lone soldier responsible for Jesus’ execution.

The reader wonders what led the Centurion to make this confession. Was it the omens that accompanied Jesus’ death – the darkness of 15:33, and the tearing of the temple curtain in in 15:38? To think that the Centurion could see the tearing of the curtain from where he was standing stretches the narrative’s verisimilitude, and therefore is unlikely. In any event, the narrative says simply that the Centurion made the confession upon “seeing how [Jesus] died” (Ἰδὼν... οὕτως ἐξέπνευσεν). The story, however, is sparse when it comes to explaining “how he died.” All that is mentioned is the cry of dereliction, a “loud cry” (ἀφείσας φωνὴν μεγάλην), and that he “expired” (ἐξέπνευσεν). Most of the episode is concerned with the reactions of the bystanders. The reader wonders how a cry of dereliction, a loud unintelligible cry, and death, could inspire such a profound recognition. While she might be able to imagine the possibility that these things counter-intuitively inspired the Centurion to recognize Jesus’ identity, the reader might want to consider other options that work better in the narrative.

If the Centurion’s confession was that Jesus was a son of God, then his confession is somewhat similar to those who thought that Jesus was Elijah or John the Baptist. That is, they were deluded concerning Jesus’ identity, knowing him to be someone special, but incorrectly interpreting what his significance is. The reader might see in the grammatical
indeterminacy of this passage a potent bit of dramatic irony. That is, Jesus is confessed as a son of God, when in fact he is the Son of God.\textsuperscript{750} However, this interpretive possibility runs into the same difficulty as the previous one – namely it does not explain what led to the centurion’s revelation. There is little in Jesus’ death that would lead a Greek-thinking person to conclude that Jesus was a heroic figure.

This leaves a final option: the Centurion spoke sarcastically. This fits well with the rest of the episode, where other actors speak sarcastically about Jesus (15:29, 31-32).\textsuperscript{751} The reader recognizes the presence of dramatic irony, just as was the case with these other instances of sarcasm. The one who is sarcastically referred to as the King of the Jews in fact really is the King of the Jews.\textsuperscript{752} So also the one who is sarcastically referred to as the Son of God in fact really is the Son of God. The reader might conclude that these two instances of sarcasm are of a piece. That is, if “‘Son of God,’ ‘king,’ and ‘messiah’ are synony[mos],”\textsuperscript{753} then the Centurion is making the same sarcastic accusation as 15:18, albeit worded differently: the Centurion is also sarcastically mocking Jesus as the “King of the Jews.”

If the reader concludes that the Centurion’s confession was sarcastic, she will also conclude that no one in the narrative has correctly identified Jesus. This pains her who so earnestly wanted to see an adequate recognition within the narrative. The reader concludes that she will have to boldly make that recognition herself! If this narrative is to have closure regarding the theme of recognition of Jesus, it will be a closure brought to pass, not by the characters within the narrative, but by the implied reader herself! She

\textsuperscript{750} Collins, \textit{Mark}, 768-769.
\textsuperscript{751} Juel, \textit{The Gospel of Mark}, 145-147.
\textsuperscript{752} Booth, \textit{Irony}, 28-29.
\textsuperscript{753} Collins, \textit{Mark}, 767.
will boldly acknowledge Jesus as the crucified Messiah! She will trace the line from the prophets of old, through Elijah and John, and to Jesus. She will embrace this new surprising Messiah in the face of all those who still adhere to the expected Messiah.

The reader has had her expectation of what a Messiah should look like torn apart and reconfigured. As she sees Jesus die she knows that he dies as one beloved of God (1:11, 9:7, 12:6), despite what Jesus declares in 15:35. She also knows that Jesus will not save his own life (8:35), but rather dies for others (10:45, 14:24). She knows that, in ironic contrast to what the bystanders imply, Jesus’ death is part of the divine necessity and plan – it is a culminating moment in salvation history. She has learned this in large part though the role that John the Baptist has played: he has provided a model, and anticipated and foreshadowed the way of Jesus’ death. John’s ministry and death has become an embodied prediction, which when forged together with Jesus’ teachings and predictions, has created an interpretive grid for the reader. John has linked this otherwise incomprehensible tragedy to the sacred past and the promised future. Jesus’ death would be unintelligible were it not for these previous predictions. As Jesus breathes his last breath, the reader knows in this awful moment God’s kingdom draws mysteriously closer.

3.10.4 Revisiting the Narrative – Implied Reader

The reader has learned many things about Jesus’ identity: he is the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Son of Man. The parallels between Jesus and John (as well as between Jesus and Elijah/Elisha) indicate that Jesus also has prophet-like qualities. The reader notes that, while the narrator may have stopped short of explicitly affirming that Jesus is a prophet, what is not accomplished through saying is accomplished through
showing. The rejection and death of Jesus are explicated as coterminous to what happens to prophets. While the ultimate results might be different – the death of prophets did not render the same salvific effects as the death of the Messiah – the pattern remains the same. The reader realizes that the implied author has combined three messianic paradigms – Davidic King, Son of Man, and Prophet – into a new “mix.” Jesus is one entity – that is, each of the messianic paradigms utilized in the narrative are integrated into a single character. The reader also concludes that one cannot understand what the implied author is affirming Jesus to be if any of these three paradigms is not included in the mix. A big part of the implied author’s presentation of Jesus relates to the messiah’s unexpected fate of rejection and death. While the narrative speaks of the suffering of the Son of Man, the reader notes that it explains this rejection and death through the prophetic paradigm, and uses John’s witness significantly in this regard.

The narrative opened with a bold proclamation of “the way” in 1:2 and 1:3. It spoke generally of the road that Jesus was to travel. The reader again encountered “the way” in 8:27, where it provided a setting both for Peter’s confession of Jesus as Messiah, and Jesus’ first explicit passion prediction. The reader learned in 10:32-34 “the way” was specifically the way to Jerusalem (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἀναβαίνοντες εἰς Ἰεροσόλυμα) where Jesus was to be mocked, mistreated, and killed. The reader has now seen this prediction fulfilled, and she knows more about “the way” than she did when she first encountered it at the beginning of the narrative. She knows now that the way is the path of rejection and death – the way exemplified by Jesus’ death on the cross. She has learned that John also walked this way of rejection and death. She has learned that John was sent and destined

754 As previously mentioned (footnote 542), the priestly paradigm does not appear in Mark.
by God to “go before” Jesus (1:2-3, 9:11-13). The reader has concluded John went before Jesus on the way in respect to teaching, to death, and perhaps even to resurrection. She might also have concluded John “prepared the way” (2:2b) for Jesus precisely by going before. John prepared the path by walking upon it. A path becomes a path only when there are those who walk on it. Others had walked this path before John, especially the prophets of old. The way that Jesus goes, the reader realizes, is not a unique way, but one well trodden.

In the light of the crucifixion, the reader understands more deeply the symbolic meaning of the wilderness (1:3-4). It was the liminal zone that the children of Israel had to cross in order to get to their promised land. The reader now realizes that the implied author has extended the meaning of “wilderness” into the story of Jesus. Jesus’ oblique reference to his baptism in 10:38-39 connects his baptism by John in the wilderness with his passion. Hence, the wilderness is tied to the passion. Jesus’ death is now the final liminal zone. The people of the covenant (14:24) must be willing to follow the Messiah across this threshold of death (8:34-9:1). The Promised Land, however, is not simply the place awaiting the faithful when they die a martyrs’ death. Rather, it is the culmination of all things that will occur at the Parousia of the great Messiah, Jesus.

The reader realizes that it was in the wilderness and on a mountain that she saw the transfigured Jesus with Elijah (and Moses) in 9:4. When she initially observed the transfigured Jesus, she had likely concluded that an allegiance to Jesus related to embracing this glorious exalted figure. In 9:11-13, however, both Elijah and Jesus are connected as parallel victims of suffering and rejection. In 6:14-29 she saw what this meant for John, and at the crucifixion she saw what it meant for Jesus. The reader
juxtaposes the glory of the Transfiguration with the rejection and death witnessed with both John and Jesus, and reasons that embracing Jesus likely has less to do with the figure she witnessed at the Transfiguration than she had originally thought. While the reader concludes that the transfigured Jesus is “truth,” nevertheless this exalted figure does not represent the whole story. The witness of John/Elijah and Jesus is one of rejection rather than glory, and it is this testimony that rings the truest for the reader. To embrace Jesus, is to walk the way of the wilderness; it is to embrace the way of death and shame, without being ashamed.
3.11 Epilogue: The Resurrection

The reader has seen Jesus buried, as John was buried. John’s burial was the act of faithful disciples, while Jesus’ burial was an act of a faithful stranger. Jesus’ disciples have scattered in fear, and all who remain are women. Little of this comes as a surprise for the reader, as Jesus predicted much of it. The reader also knows that Jesus predicted a resurrection, and so she is not surprised that this occurs in chapter 16. She is disappointed that Jesus does not appear, but even more disappointed in the overall lack of recognition that remains as the narrative draws to a close. Nevertheless, by now even this does not particularly surprise her. She has accepted the fact that the fulfillment of many of the desires borne of the narrative must occur beyond the narrative. The question of recognition and identity must be transformed into a question of discipleship.

Much of the narrative’s tension and surprise is dependent upon the clash between what happened in the narrative and what the reader expected was going to happen. At the very beginning of the story, the reader was told that this narrative was “good news” (εὐαγγέλιον). When she found out it was a story about the Messiah (1:1), because of her repertoire she had made certain assumptions about what was to happen. Not only did the reader’s expectations get subverted, at times it is likely that this narrative’s claim to be “good news” stood in doubt. The heroes of the story were murdered: first John and then Jesus. The reader also learned that if she is to follow the in the “way,” that such a fate may await her as well. This does not seem to be good news. Yet the narrative does not let murder, betrayal, and evil have the final word. The narrative’s understated resurrection episode (16:1-8) nevertheless makes it evident that Jesus’ prediction of being raised from the dead has been fulfilled. Earlier, the reader might even have concluded that John also was raised from the dead.
While it seems to the reader that the narrative’s emphasis leans to tragedy, to murder and death, she now sees in the resurrection of Jesus that there is a corresponding positive aspect to the story. From a literary perspective the understated nature of this positive aspect might be considered one of the narrative’s more brilliant achievements. The narrative’s relentless focus on the negative grants it realism, suspense, and surprise. The understated quality of the positive makes a demand on the reader. It is not easily attained, and cannot be arrived at through bypassing the negative aspects. Beyond the utility of such a presentation in both psychological and theological domains, it imbues the literary work with a striking gravitas. As seen with contemporary eyes, this narrative is on the opposite end of the narrative spectrum from clichéd Hollywood movies with predictable happy endings. These movies pretend to be good news, but do not come close enough to real life to be news at all. They provide a momentary good feeling, but are easily forgotten. The Gospel of Mark moves in a different direction. It dives into life’s uglier places, and seeks to unearth ill ease within the reader. It explores the heart of fear, disappointment, heartache, and death, and yet claims to be good news. Only the reader who wrestles with this text will find the good news therein. Its good news is not predictable, even though it is predicted.

The reader returns to the women, who remain in the text as the last possible vestige of a “surrogate-self” for the reader. She has distanced herself from the twelve, and wonders if perhaps these women might perform some hopeful task through which she might see the sentiments of her heart come to expression. “Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were
afraid” (16:8). In these closing words of the narrative, the narrator takes away this hope from her. Faithlessness is all the reader sees.

The young man at the tomb had told the women that Jesus goes before the disciples to Galilee (16:7), but the reader may fear “the sealed lips of the women deny Peter and the disciples’ knowledge of the Easter event and its proclamation.”755 Previously, in 14:28, Jesus had told the disciples that, after the resurrection, he would go before them to Galilee. Would Peter and the disciples follow Jesus to Galilee because of what they had heard in 14:28? This would presuppose that the disciples embrace the reality of the resurrection without a report of its having occurred: it would mean that the disciples acted on faith! Can the reader believe this of Peter and the other disciples? Did the women eventually overcome their fear, and tell the disciples? Without something more from the narrator the reader cannot decide, and so she hesitates, and remains torn and unsure. Yet despite the reader’s uncertainty, the narrative demands a definitive answer: did Peter and the disciples follow Jesus to Galilee? Born of uncertainty, the reader must make a move of her own, if this narrative is to have closure. Indeed, if there is to be faith in the end of the narrative - as indeed there must be! – it will be the faith of the reader.

The reader realizes that, at least figuratively, she must be the one who will follow Jesus to Galilee. She knows that she will not be alone in this movement of faith, for Jesus himself goes before (14:28, 16:7).

The narrative, then, ends with this promise of Jesus going before, much as it started with John going before. John successfully prepared the path for Jesus, and Jesus

755 Weeden, Traditions, 117.
walked that path to the end. Now, Jesus goes before, and implicitly invites the reader, as she finishes reading, to come along. From within the narrative, she hears the echoes of a voice saying, “Follow me!” and puts down the scroll she reads, gets up, and follows.
Chapter 4: Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the Gospel of Mark demonstrates that a central feature of its plot is related to the identity and fate of Jesus. After the opening line of the Gospel, the first character introduced was John. His identity was later disclosed to be Elijah _redivivus_. The narrator, using various literary devices, conveyed to the reader that John, as Elijah _redivivus_, provided reasons to believe that Jesus is the Christ, presented a grid by which Jesus’ ministry and identity can be comprehended, and helped justify and explicate the unexpected death of the Messiah.

The reader knows that John/Elijah went before Jesus according to the prophecy of Malachi 4:5, and as such provided proof that Jesus is the Messiah. The reader may not require this evidence, as the word of the reliable narrator in 1:1 was sufficient. Nevertheless, the evidence provided in John bolstered her faith, and provided her a warrant for her beliefs. John was a token, similar to Odysseus’s scar, which when understood appropriately reveals Jesus’ identity as Messiah. The twist in this story was that the token itself was hidden from most of the characters. Then again, Odysseus’s scar also remained hidden – until it was disclosed.

The reader knows that John/Elijah established a pattern of preaching, rejection and death (as well as perhaps even resurrection) that Jesus followed. This pattern explained Jesus’ ministry in such a way that the surprising fate of Jesus is not as unexpected. This pattern connected John and Jesus’ ministries. It also connected Jesus with Elijah and, more generally, with prophetic patterns of rejection.

Furthermore, the pattern of rejecting the prophets (understood generally, or in the more specific exemplar of John) provided the reader with a means of approaching, understanding, and evaluating the lack of comprehension within the story concerning the
identity of Jesus. The people misunderstood Jesus not because Jesus did not conform to messianic ideals, but because they themselves were unwittingly following a pattern in which prophets are misunderstood. Thus, just as the prophets were misunderstood and rejected, in spite of being God’s agents, so also the people misunderstood and rejected Jesus, in spite of being God’s supreme agent. The rejection of the prophets was exemplified in the rejection of John, and ultimately fulfilled in the rejection of Jesus. The unjust and cruel death of the Messiah does not stand outside God’s purposes, but is the fulfillment of them. It does not contradict what should be expected of the Messiah, but is rather part and parcel of what happens to every agent of God (6:4).

Previously, in response to the warning of 8:38 against being ashamed of Jesus, the reader had hoped to find some way within the narrative to understand the notion of a crucified Messiah that might make it less embarrassing. In the light of this prophetic pattern of rejection exemplified in John, the reader realized Jesus’ death was not one marked by dishonor, unless dishonor also clung to the misunderstood prophets of old. By understanding the pattern established by John, but also found in the prophets at large, the reader understood how she might not be embarrassed at the idea of a crucified Messiah (see 8:38). Jesus’ death was honorable.

Spatial settings that have been relevant to John/Elijah included the wilderness, the River Jordan, and mountains. Temporal settings (9:2) and props (1:6, 9:3) largely functioned by means of the reader’s repertoire as way to connect the stories of Jesus and John to other older stories, such as those that relate to Moses or Elijah. They were a way that themes from scripture were applied to Mark’s narrative. One of the important

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756 See §3.6.5.3.
implications of this is that the story of Jesus was connected to the larger story of salvation history.

The narrator of Mark was not interested in creating fully three-dimensional characters as his modern counterparts often are. Nevertheless, there were some notable accomplishments in regards to characterization, specifically with respect to Herod and Pilate. Both of these characters were presented as sympathetic “round” characters. Whatever else this accomplished, it linked these two figures together, suggesting that they had parallel roles. The characterization of John had him being austere, yet not hard and merciless. Although the narrator presented John as sympathetic and heroic, he did not lead the reader to identify with him as he led her to identity with Jesus. His characterization served the function in the Gospel of pointing to, and explicating Jesus’ identity and fate.

The narrator’s choices in focalization brought the reader closer to Jesus through John. In the prologue, focalization put the voice of the narrator on par with the voices of God and Isaiah. This illustrated one way that the narrator’s reliability was established. The narrator did not always make things easy, but the difficulties latent within the narrative never cast a shadow upon the narrator’s reliability.

The Markan narrative is rich with irony. In respect to the place of John in the story, irony was a way of explicating the failure of the people to understand. They did not understand Jesus because they did not understand John. Had they understood John, they would not have made such egregious errors concerning Jesus. This was true in relationship to both Jesus’ identity as Messiah, and his fate of rejection and death. By representing the characters in the narrative as victims of irony, the implied author
encouraged the implied reader – who understood the irony – to value more greatly the perspective on Jesus’ identity and John’s identity that she had attained. She became party to “insider information,” and this made this knowledge more valuable. The implied author used irony as a way of granting a special status to the information he conveyed to the reader. Her perspective on the identities of both Jesus and John was hence something important and emotionally significant for the reader.

The narrator’s use of temporality was sometimes complex. There were first, second, and third-order analepses and prolepses operating at the same time as other second and third-order analepses and prolepses. A single episode could simultaneously evoke the ancient past, the recent past, and the future. This “trans-temporality” was often at work in the use of John the Baptist, who evoked the ancient past of Elijah, the past of his own death (later in the Markan narrative), and the future of Jesus’ coming death. The narrator, thus, used John to bring together multiple evocations of the past with anticipations of the future. He linked the past with the future, and in doing so breathed meaning into the suffering of the Messiah. Jesus’ suffering was of a piece with the suffering of the prophets. John’s “trans-temporality” lifted the story of Jesus into the realm of salvation history, connecting the story of Jesus with the larger story of Israel as found in Holy Scripture. John’s “trans-temporality” also manifested itself in that he was predicted by Malachi, and he predicted the coming of another – Jesus. He was the predicted predictor. The “overloading” of prediction and prophecy into the figure of John had the effect of making the story of Jesus the fulfillment of salvation history, its decisive chapter. The narrator’s use of temporality raised the story of Jesus to a rarefied place for the reader through John, and undergirded the reader’s assessment of its importance.
The narrative challenged the reader in regards to her repertoire. She had believed initially that the Messiah was to be a militant figure who would banish sin from the People of God, decisively destroy their enemies, and bring liberty to Israel. Furthermore, she had likely suspected that when Elijah came, he would be a glorious figure who would also proceed in the power of God. What she learned from the narrative, however, is that both Elijah and the Messiah did not have the victories she had assumed, but rather both suffered death.

The reader likely initially believed that such apparent failures had no backing in scripture. One of the key functions of John in the narrative was to disabuse the reader of this belief. The reader had to broaden the parameters of her repertoire if she was to discover how a suffering Messiah was “predicted” in scripture. John’s example taught her that scripture so spoke of Jesus’ fate in the rejection of the prophets, and this was confirmed by the parable of the Vineyard (12:1-9).

John was a vehicle that helped the reader to renegotiate her repertoire so as to make sense of the surprising Messiah. The reader has also learned that many of the victorious images that she had of the Messiah were not so much wrong as temporally misplaced. Jesus spoke about a mighty Son of Man coming at the Parousia, a figure that matched her repertoire somewhat. Taken together, the reader concluded that her repertoire was more incomplete than incorrect. From this, the reader was able to place Jesus in a more coherent context in relation to salvation history. She knows from the opening citation that Jesus was predicted and predestined. She also knows from his own teaching that he was predestined specifically to suffer (8:31, 9:12). She placed Jesus in an apocalyptic framework, as the Messiah who ushers in a new era (ch 13). John was the
returning eschatological Elijah. Jesus and John, then, stand as the final chapters of the great story of God’s salvific work on earth, even though there are to be delays (13:32-37).

As the reader attempted to understand the meaning of John in relationship to Jesus within the narrative, it became clear that the narrator did not make things entirely transparent for her. He marked John as an important character by means of his position as the central figure in the narrative’s first episode, and yet provided few clues regarding his significance. Much has been left to the reader. Even when John was equated with Elijah in 9:11-13, the narrator (or Jesus) “spoke around” the issue. There was no other conclusion for the reader to reach but that John was Elijah, yet it was a conclusion that she had to make herself, and not one made for her. When she considered the various ways that John “went before” Jesus – itinerancy, preaching, repentance, rejection, and death – it was she who put these things together. Once again, the conclusions she drew were those that she forged, and not those forged for her by the narrator. The narrator led her in a way, but she had to walk actively that way for the narrative to have its full effect. If she concluded that John and the Elijah of the Transfiguration were the same person, then the implication was that John was resurrected. This was not an implication derived immediately from the narrator, but one the reader arrived at by her own power of deduction. The question of identity that permeates the whole of the narrative was not answered satisfactorily within the narrative, which resulted in the reader making her own “answer” to compensate, as it were, for the lack in the story. It was the reader who answered the question of identity, who recognized Jesus, and who understood the “token” that was John.
The implied author demanded much from the reader, and without her considerable effort, the narrative would fail to have its full effect. This effort drew the reader into the narrative, and forced her to make this story her own. In the end, the story and the reader merged into a new entity. After all, this story was meant to be transforming, not merely entertaining.
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