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Introduction

Identifying a Dominant Pattern/Paradigm

People are interested in people and like to hear their stories. The appeal of a good novel, movie, or biography is that it draws people into the story such that they identify with one or more of the characters. Some authors write simply to entertain readers, while others write in order to persuade their readers of a particular viewpoint. The biblical authors fall in the latter category. The author of the Gospel of John, for example, explicitly states that the purpose for his writing is that his audience may come and continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, in order to partake in the divine life (John 20:30–31). In order to accomplish this purpose John deliberately puts on the stage various characters that interact with Jesus, producing an array of belief-responses in order to challenge his readers to evaluate their stance regarding Jesus. Other biblical narratives also have an inbuilt perspective through which the authors seek to shape their audiences. The notion that various biblical authors use the characters in the story to communicate their point of view to the readers, and in so doing recommend some characters to be emulated and others to be avoided, is an important reason to study character.[1]

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1. The same holds true for the Bible as a whole. While the Bible, at one level, is an anthology of individual stories, it arguably also contains the grand story of God's dealings with humanity and the world, with the purpose that people recognize God's desire to have a relationship with them and respond to him. Thus, analyzing the characters in the individual stories in the Bible also assists in understanding the protagonist of the meta-story and his program for this world. While postmodernists are critical of (even deny) metanarratives, others provide a good case for the Bible telling a single story with a single and integrated meaning (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998]; Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], ch. 4).

This leads us to another important rationale for this book. A story has two main elements: events and characters.[2] While much has been written on events and on the logical or causal sequence of events called "plot," character appears to be the neglected child of literary theory. According to Seymour Chatman, "It is remarkable how little has been said about the theory of character in literary history and criticism."[3] Similarly, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan remarks, "The elaboration of a systematic, non-reductive but also non-impressionistic theory of character remains one of the challenges poetics has not yet met."[4] With few exceptions, literary criticism has not advanced beyond the well-known categories of "flat" and "round" coined by E. M. Forster in 1927 to classify characters. The absence of an articulate and comprehensive theory of character is partly due to the Aristotelian idea that character is fixed and secondary to plot, on which twentieth-century Russian Formalism and French Structuralism have capitalized.[5] Another reason is the complexity of the concept of character (characters resemble people but are not real) and the difficulty of analyzing character (something one can rarely read from the surface of the text).[6]

These observations also (or especially) hold true for narrative criticism, which applies literary theory to biblical narratives. In the last thirty-odd years, there has been an increased interest in the Bible as literature and story. Literary methods, when applied particularly to the Gospels, have proven fruitful. Nevertheless, biblical scholars rarely discuss how to study character. Fred Burnett, for example, points out that "[r]ecent work on narrative criticism of the Gospels has emphasized plot and story, but very little has been done with characterization. This is due mostly to the disarray of the theoretical discussion about characterization in current literary criticism."[7] Francois Tolmie comments that the lack of a uniform approach to characterization in biblical narratives is understandable because "contemporary literary criticism has not yet provided a systematic and comprehensive theory for the analysis of character."[8]

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2. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY/London: Cornell University Press, 1978), 19; Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd ed. (London/New York: Routledge, 2002 [1983]), 3, 6.

3. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 107.

4. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 29.

5. Many modern writers have even pronounced the death of character (see Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 29–31). For them there is obviously no incentive to develop a theory of character.

6. Cf. Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. C. van Boheemen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 80.

7. Burnett, "Characterization," 3.

8. D. Francois Tolmie, *Jesus' Farewell to the Disciples: John 13:1–17:26 in Narratological Perspective* (BIS 12; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 117–18 (quotation from p. 118).

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon observes that "[w]ays of analyzing characterization in the Gospels are still being developed" but "[m]ore research remains to be done in this area."[9] At the outset of his monograph, Kelly Iverson points out that "a theory of character is a complex and by no means settled issue among literary critics."[10] More recently, Nicolas Farelly remarks that as "[c]haracterisation is arguably the most interesting element of the story . . . [i]t is all the more surprising that this area of narrative analysis has not produced a larger array of studies on the Fourth Gospel's characters."[11] As recently as 2013, two very different volumes on Johannine characterization appeared: one volume contains seven essays on the theory of character study, with each of them stressing different aspects;[12] the other volume analyzes seventy Johannine characters where contributors are free to choose their own approach, resulting in a wide variety of approaches.[13] In New Testament criticism, character study is thus still in its infancy.

We will see that many biblical critics assume that the Aristotelian view of character was dominant in all of ancient Greek literature and also influenced the Gospel narratives. Too often scholars perceive character in the Hebrew Bible (where characters can develop) to be radically different from that in ancient Greek literature (where characters are supposedly consistent ethical types). Many also sharply distinguish between modern fiction, with its psychological, individualistic approach to character, and ancient characterization where characters lack personality or individuality. Even though the last five years have seen an increased interest in methods and models for studying character in the Gospels, scholars often promulgate an approach that focuses on a particular aspect of character.[14] There is, as yet, no comprehensive

9. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 11–12.

10. Kelly R. Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark: "Even the Dogs Under the Table Eat the Children's Crumbs"* (LNTS 339; London: T. & T. Clark, 2007), 1 n. 1.

11. Nicolas Farelly, *The Disciples in the Fourth Gospel: A Narrative Analysis of Their Faith and Understanding* (WUNT II/290; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 7.

12. Christopher W. Skinner, ed., *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John* (LNTS 461; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2013), 1–127. In fact, my essay in this volume is the only one aiming at a comprehensive approach to character study.

13. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann, eds., *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013). The editors explain their decision for openness with respect to methodology on pp. xi–xii.

14. Besides my own 2009 work (for details, see Preface, n. 1), we can include Christopher W. Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict? Johannine Characterization and the Thomas Question* (PTMS 115; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009) (he focuses on misunderstanding); Susan E. Hylen, *Imperfect Believers:*

theory of character in either literary theory or biblical criticism, and no consensus among scholars on how to analyze and classify characters. We are still faced with John Darr's challenge from 1992, that "it is important to 'do something about' the theoretical issues involved in characterization, rather than just 'talking about' characters."[15] The task of this book, then, is to develop a robust and extensive model for studying character in New Testament narrative. Before taking on such a daunting task, we must familiarize ourselves with the contributions of scholars on the subject.

1.1. The Current State of Affairs

The earliest studies that employ a narrative approach to the Gospels and Acts are those from the 1980s by David Rhoads and Donald Michie (on Mark), Alan Culpepper (on John), Robert Tannehill (on Luke–Acts), and Jack Dean Kingsbury (on Matthew), and except for Tannehill, each of them also looked at the approach to character.[16] Since then, numerous studies on character have appeared, but many do not use, mention, or show awareness of a theory for doing character analysis. In the literature review that follows, I will not simply rehearse the array of character studies in the New Testament, but focus on those that have either referred or contributed to the *theoretical* aspect of character studies. In order to provide an accurate sketch of the current state of affairs in New Testament character studies, I have selected the Gospel of Mark, the

Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009) (she focuses on ambiguity); Sönke Finnern, *Narratologie und biblische Exegese: Eine integrative Methode der Erzählanalyse und ihr Ertrag am Beispiel von Matthäus 28* (WUNT II/285; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 125–64 (he relies on Jens Eder's work on character in film); Alicia D. Myers, *Characterizing Jesus: A Rhetorical Analysis on the Fourth Gospel's Use of Scripture in Its Presentation of Jesus* (LNTS 458; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2012) (she turns to ancient Greco-Roman characterization techniques); Skinner, ed., *Characters and Characterization* (various scholars focus on particular aspects of character). For the study of character in literary and media theory, see Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis, and Ralf Schneider, eds., *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media* (Revisionen 3; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2010).

15. John A. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke–Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 37.

16. David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), chs. 5–6; R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), ch. 5; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986, 1989); Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1988), 9–27. Tannehill's work is a narratological commentary on Luke–Acts and does not deal with the theoretical aspects of narrative criticism.

Gospel of John, and the Acts of the Apostles as a fair representation of the narrative material in the New Testament. The length of the literature review for each selected New Testament book is in proportion to the amount of work done on the subject.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Many scholars have examined various Markan characters, but all too often without a clear approach to character.[17] I will present some who do use or refer to an explicit method and draw out their contributions to the theory of character. Before Rhoads and Michie's landmark narratological study on Mark, *Robert Tannehill* and *Norman Petersen* had already advocated reading Mark's Gospel as a narrative rather than a redaction. Drawing on the work of literary critics, they focus on the narrator's or implied author's evaluative point of view and how this is recommended to the reader.[18] They realize that the role of the characters in a narrative is shaped by the composition of the author and reflects his concerns. According to Tannehill, the author assumes that there are essential similarities between the characters in the narrative world and the readers in the real world, so that what the author reveals about the characters may become a revelation about the readers and so enable them to change.[19]

David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie outline different approaches to characterization.[20] On the one hand, they contend that Mark's characterization conforms to ancient Greco-Roman characterization where characters are unchanging, consistent, and predictable. Thus most Markan characters are types or agents—they are consistent throughout the narrative, show little development, and represent typical responses. On the other hand, they consider that Mark's characterization is influenced by characterization in

17. E.g., Ernest Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983); Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1989), 4–27; Susan Lochrie Graham, "Silent Voices: Women in the Gospel of Mark," *Semeia* 54 (1991): 145–58; Susan Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel* (LNTS 259; London: T. & T. Clark, 2004). For the most recent and detailed review of character studies in the Gospel of Mark, see the opening essay in Christopher W. Skinner and Matthew Ryan Hauge, eds., *Character Studies and the Gospel of Mark* (LNTS; New York: T. & T. Clark, forthcoming 2014).

18. Robert C. Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," *JR* 57 (1977): 386–405; Norman R. Petersen, "'Point of View' in Mark's Narrative," *Semeia* 12 (1978): 97–121.

19. Tannehill, "Disciples in Mark," 405.

20. David M. Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2012 [1999, 1982]), 100–104. Joanna Dewey became a co-author in the second edition. I refer to the third edition since this reflects their most recent understanding of character.

the Hebrew Bible where characters can change and be diverse. Considering Mark's "standards of judgment" (the values and beliefs embedded in the narrative) and its resulting moral dualism (a life on God's terms versus a life on human terms), Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie contend that even though the Markan characters consistently typify these standards and embody either of these two ways of life, they are not simply moral exemplars or stock characters.[21] In fact, they observe that Mark "uses many methods in characterization and, for an ancient narrative, offers some surprisingly complex characters."[22] For the final reconstruction of character, they use some of Baruch Hochman's categories (see our section 2.3) to "assess whether a character is complex (with many traits) or simple (having few traits), open to change or fixed, difficult to figure out or transparent, consistent or inconsistent."[23] Because of these features, they classify a character as "round" (having changing and conflicting traits, is complex and unpredictable, and is intriguing and mysterious), "flat" (less complex, fewer traits, predictable), or "stock" (plot functionary, few traits).[24]

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon's work on Markan characters and characterization is extensive and spans several decades.[25] She claims that while New Testament narrative critics are generally aware of the differences in characterization between modern novels and the Gospels, "[t]he secular literary theory on which biblical narrative critics so often lean is not particularly supportive at this point."[26] Nevertheless, in her particular view of ancient

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21. Cf. Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark—Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). While this is a redaction-critical work rather than a narratological one, Weeden stresses the importance of characterization, arguing that the Markan characters exemplify moral principles and urge the reader to make moral judgments.

22. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 100. Cf. David Rhoads, "Losing Life for Others in the Face of Death: Mark's Standards of Judgment," *Int* 47 (1993): 358–69.

23. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 103.

24. While the second edition still uses the terms *round*, *flat*, and *stock* (pp. 102–3), the third edition has dropped these, although the descriptions are similar (p. 103). Cf. David Rhoads, *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 11–13.

25. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark," *Semeia* 28 (1983): 29–48; idem, "The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Markan Characterization," *JBL* 108 (1989): 259–81; idem, "The Major Importance of the Minor Characters in Mark," in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament*, ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. McKnight (JSNTS 109; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 58–86; idem, *In the Company of Jesus*; idem, *Mark's Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009); idem, "Characters in Mark's Story: Changing Perspectives on the Narrative Process," in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (SBLRBS 65; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 45–69.

26. Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, 11.

characterization, she also uses Forster's modern categories of "flat" and "round" characters. While Malbon points out that characterization by "types" was conventional in ancient literature and that Mark seems to continue this convention, she admits that perhaps Mark also challenges this convention in that his "flat" characters are either good types to emulate *or* bad types to avoid, and his "round" characters are both good *and* bad types.[27] Finally, she asserts that the Markan characters must be evaluated according to their response to Jesus.[28] The dominant undercurrent in Malbon's work is that characters cannot be understood on their own but only in relation to other characters.[29]

Mary Ann Tolbert observes that despite the large number of studies on the Markan disciples, "little consensus exists about how these Markan characters are to be understood or their role and fate evaluated."[30] She contends that the source of the problem is that many scholars do not know how to read ancient stories. Tolbert then briefly outlines ancient character building: (i) ancient Greek drama and biography stress the typological nature of its characters, that is, they are portrayed as exemplars of general, ethical qualities; (ii) ancient characters are subordinate to the overall plot or action; (iii) all characters are fashioned to promote the author's rhetorical goal to persuade or move the readers to action.[31] Tolbert contends that such understanding of character reconstruction also applies to Mark's Gospel and she consequently criticizes biblical scholars who use modern character classifications (such as E. M. Forster's "flat" and "round" categories) to analyze ancient characters, because the blending of the typical/general with the individual in ancient characterization does not fit modern psychologized approaches to character.[32]

Joel Williams presents the most extensive discussion on character in Mark's Gospel to date.[33] In a study on the Markan characterization of the minor characters, Williams follows Seymour Chatman's so-called open theory of

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27. Malbon, "Jewish Leaders," 278–80; idem, *In the Company of Jesus*, 12.

28. Malbon, "Major Importance," 81; idem, "Characters in Mark's Story," 61.

29. Malbon, "Characters in Mark's Story," 61.

30. Mary Ann Tolbert, "How the Gospel of Mark Builds Character," *Int* 47 (1993): 347.

31. Tolbert, "Character," 348–49. Cf. Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 76–77. In this earlier work, Tolbert understands the Markan characters as illustrative of the four types of hearing or responses to Jesus presented in the parable of the sower in Mark 4: Jesus' opponents are the soil along the path, the disciples are the rocky soil, some characters symbolize the thorny soil (Herod, the rich young ruler), and many minor characters represent the good soil (*Sowing the Gospel*, 148–64).

32. Tolbert, "Character," 349, 357 n. 9.

33. Joel F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel* (JSNTS 102; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994).

character (see our section 2.3). In reaction to a structuralist approach that views characters as subordinated to the plot and hence focuses on what characters *do* in a story, Chatman contends that characters are autonomous beings, and hence also reconstructs who the characters *are* in terms of their traits or qualities.[34] Williams also adheres to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's understanding of characterization, referring to the textual indicators that the author uses to state or present the traits of a particular character.[35] Drawing on the work of various literary and narrative critics, Williams produces an extensive list of literary devices that Mark uses to characterize the people in his Gospel.[36] Finally, in conversation with scholars such as Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, Stephen Moore, and Robert Tannehill, Williams provides a detailed discussion about the role of the reader in relation to characterization.[37] While Williams's theoretical discussion is extensive, it focuses on characterization, that is, on the various techniques the author uses to disperse information about the character in the text, and he does not indicate how the reader should reconstruct character from the text.

In his monograph on Markan discipleship, *Whitney Taylor Shiner* uses W. J. Harvey's character categories (protagonists, cards, ficelles; see our section 2.3) and contends that Alan Culpepper's observation about characters in the Gospel of John also holds true for the Gospel of Mark: Jesus is the protagonist and most of the other characters are ficelles, who serve primarily to further the portrayal of Jesus.[38] Shiner also contends that the Markan characters show little or no inner life, and where inner life is revealed, it merely serves "to develop the plot or to define a narrative or rhetorical role rather than to develop the characters as characters."[39] The lack of characterization in Mark, Shiner argues, is because most characters are groups—the religious authorities, the disciples, the minor characters—rather than individuals.[40]

Modeled on Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, *Stephen Smith* deals with the chief aspects of narrative criticism in Mark's Gospel.[41] Regarding

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34. Williams, *Other Followers*, 57–58.

35. Williams, *Other Followers*, 60.

36. Williams, *Other Followers*, 60–67.

37. Williams, *Other Followers*, 67–88.

38. Whitney Taylor Shiner, *Follow Me! Disciples in Markan Rhetoric* (SBLDS 145; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), 8–9.

39. Shiner, *Follow Me*, 10–11 (quotation from p. 11).

40. Shiner, *Follow Me*, 10.

41. Stephen H. Smith, *A Lion with Wings: A Narrative-Critical Approach to Mark's Gospel* (The Biblical Seminar 38; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

Markan characterization, Smith discusses various methods the author has at his disposal to reveal a character's traits (referring to Rimmon-Kenan), and how we can classify a character based on the number and diversity of traits (he uses Forster's "flat" and "round" categories).[42] Other features of characterization Smith refers to are the concept of "distance"—the way the author leads a reader to sympathize with or avoid a character, which relates to "point of view"—and the relationship between characters and plot (according to Smith, the Markan characters are subservient to the plot).[43]

In his analysis of the Markan Herod Antipas, *Abraham Smith* also examines Greco-Roman literature and claims that characterization was largely typical. For Aristotle, who wrote extensively about drama, character is subordinated to plot and illustrates general truths by showing action appropriate for their character type. Smith argues that typological characterization was also dominant in other Greco-Roman genres, such as biographies, novels, and histories.[44] Mark likewise uses typological characterization and Smith argues that Mark repeatedly drew on stock features about a "tyrant" to portray Herod Antipas.[45]

In his treatment of the Gentiles in Mark's Gospel, *Kelly Iverson*'s methodological considerations include that of character. While Iverson contends that "the application of contemporary literary theories to the biblical text is potentially anachronistic," he nevertheless decides that the potential benefit of better understanding biblical characters using modern literary theories outweighs the risk.[46] What then follows is a brief discussion of the contributions of various contemporary literary critics regarding the nature of character resulting in the decision to adopt Chatman's "open theory of character" (see our section 2.3).[47]

The work of *Geoff Webb* is very different in that he relates Bakhtinian categories (dialogue, genre-memory, chronotope, carnival) to Markan characterization.[48] For example, using Bakhtin's dialogical approach, Webb

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42. Smith, *Lion with Wings*, 53–57.

43. Smith, *Lion with Wings*, 57–59. Smith explains the relationship between character and plot in ch. 3, and between character and point of view in ch. 5.

44. Abraham Smith, "Tyranny Exposed: Mark's Typological Characterization of Herod Antipas (Mark 6:14-29)," *BibInt* 14 (2006): 263–66.

45. Smith, "Tyranny," 266–87.

46. Iverson, *Gentiles*, 5 n. 23.

47. Iverson, *Gentiles*, 6–9.

48. Geoff R. Webb, *Mark at the Threshold: Applying Bakhtinian Categories to Markan Characterisation* (BIS 95; Leiden: Brill, 2008).

states that characters are shaped in the dialogue between author, reader, and text, although characters are never finalized since each rereading of the text will shape them in new and unforeseen ways.[49] Over against an anachronistic psychological approach to character (such as Forster's "flat"/"round" distinction) or structuralist approaches that subordinate character to the plot, Webb claims that dialogic criticism, which sees characters as voice sources in the text, is particularly appropriate for the study of character in ancient writings such as the Gospels.[50] Webb perceives a distinction between characterization in the Old Testament and ancient Greek literature. While characterization in Greek antiquity is generally uncomplicated (characters are static, opaque, unchanging), Old Testament heroes were in a process of learning.[51] Webb contends that Markan characterization follows the pattern of Old Testament narrators.[52]

Summary. Many scholars contend that Markan characterization resembles (either in part or in whole) the typical characterization in Greco-Roman literature where characters are consistent, unchanging, and represent typical responses (Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, Malbon, Tolbert, Abraham Smith). Tolbert's Aristotelian approach to character (characters are types/flat and plot functionaries) is typical of the kind of character reconstruction that was established in the 1980s and remains a dominant model to date. Those who acknowledge the influence of the Old Testament on Markan characterization often see a contrast between Hebraic characterization (characters can change) and Hellenic characterization (static, unchanging characters) (Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, Webb). While some of these scholars seemingly have no problem using aspects of modern literary methods in the study of ancient narratives (Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, Malbon), Tolbert objects to this practice. Others exclusively/mainly depend on modern literary criticism to understand Markan characterization (Williams, Shiner, Stephen Smith, Iverson, Webb), but do not always discuss the legitimacy of applying modern methods to ancient narratives. Whether resorting to Greco-Roman or modern approaches to characterization, many scholars view the majority of Markan characters as flat (Tolbert, A. Smith, S. Smith, Shiner; cf. Rhoads, Dewey, and Richie, and Malbon). Some scholars classify the Markan characters, but there is no consensus on a system of classification (Rhoads, Dewey, and Richie use Hochman; Malbon and S. Smith use Forster; Shiner uses Harvey). Only a few scholars seek to evaluate the

49. Webb, *Mark at the Threshold*, 9–10.

50. Webb, *Mark at the Threshold*, 10–11.

51. Webb, *Mark at the Threshold*, 11–12.

52. Webb, *Mark at the Threshold*, 13.

characters, but they differ in the criterion for character evaluation (for Rhoads, Dewey, and Richie it is the narrative's norms; for Malbon it is the character's response to Jesus).

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Most character studies in the New Testament have been done in the Gospel of John, but many more scholars than is the case in Markan studies do not discuss or use any theory of character.[53] Once again, I will focus on those who do.

In what I still consider the most significant narratological work on the Gospel of John, *Alan Culpepper* devotes a chapter to Johannine characters.[54]

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53. Eva Krafft, "Die Personen des Johannesevangeliums," *EvT* 16 (1956): 18–32; Raymond E. Brown, "Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel," *TS* 36 (1975): 688–99; Raymond F. Collins, "Representative Figures," in *These Things Have Been Written: Studies on the Fourth Gospel* (LTPM 2; Louvain/Grand Rapids: Peeters/Eerdmans, 1990), 1–45 (originally in *Downside Review* 94 [1976]: 26–46; 95 [1976]: 118–32); idem, "From John to the Beloved Disciple: An Essay on Johannine Characters," *Int* 49 (1995): 359–69; Sandra M. Schneiders, "Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church," *BTB* 12 (1982): 35–45; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM, 1983), 323–33; Turid Karlsen Seim, "Roles of Women in the Gospel of John," in *Aspects on the Johannine Literature*, ed. Lars Hartman and Birger Olsson (CBNTS 18; Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1987), 56–73; Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTS 69; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 154–58, 313–49; Sjef van Tilborg, *Imaginative Love in John* (BIS 2; Leiden: Brill, 1993), ch. 1.1 and ch. 4; Robert G. Maccini, *Her Testimony Is True: Women as Witnesses according to John* (JSNTS 125; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Adeline Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998); Ruth Edwards, *Discovering John* (London: SPCK, 2003), ch. 10; Margaret M. Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel: A Genuine Discipleship of Equals* (JSNTS 242; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003); Jean K. Kim, *Woman and Nation: An Intercontextual Reading of the Gospel of John from a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective* (BIS 69; Leiden: Brill, 2004); James M. Howard, "The Significance of Minor Characters in the Gospel of John," *BSac* 163 (2006): 63–78; Frances Taylor Gench, *Encounters with Jesus: Studies in the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007). For detailed reviews of these character studies, see Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 2–10; Christopher W. Skinner, "Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John: Reflections on the *Status Questionis*," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner (LNTS 461; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2013), xvii–xxxii; Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann, "An Introduction to Character and Characterization in John and Related New Testament Literature," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 1–33. Stan Harstine only has a minimal discussion of character, observing the difficulty of applying modern narrative categories to ancient narratives and then referring to Scholes and Kellogg, and Harvey to provide some theoretical guidelines (*Moses as a Character in the Fourth Gospel: A Study of Ancient Reading Techniques* [JSNTS 229; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002], 19–22).

He provides a brief theoretical discussion on characterization, arguing that John draws from both Greek and Hebrew models of character, although most Johannine characters represent particular ethical types (as in Greek literature). Using the modern character classifications of literary critics E. M. Forster and W. J. Harvey (see our section 2.3), Culpepper argues that most of John's minor characters are types that the reader can recognize easily.[55] According to Culpepper, the Johannine characters are particular kinds of choosers: "Given the pervasive dualism of the Fourth Gospel, the choice is either/or. *All* situations are reduced to two clear-cut alternatives, and *all* the characters eventually make their choice."[56] He then produces, in relation to John's ideological point of view, an extensive taxonomy of belief-responses in which a character can progress or regress from one response to another.[57]

Mark Stibbe's important work on characterization in John 8, 11, and 18–19 shows how narrative criticism can be applied to John's Gospel, and he was the first to present a number of characters, like Pilate and Peter, as more complicated than had been previously thought.[58] Stibbe provides brief theoretical considerations on characterization, stressing that readers must (i) construct character by inference from fragmentary information in the text (as in ancient Hebrew narratives); (ii) analyze characters with reference to history rather than according to the laws of fiction; and (iii) consider the Gospel's ideological point of view, expressed in 20:31.[59]

In his narratological analysis of John 13–17, *Francois Tolmie* also examines the characters that appear in this text.[60] He undergirds his study with an extensive theoretical discussion. He follows the narratological model of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (who in turn draws on Seymour Chatman), and

54. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 99–148.

55. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 102–4. I explain Forster and Harvey's character classifications in section 2.3.

56. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 104 (emphasis added).

57. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 145–48. In a recent essay, R. Alan Culpepper acknowledges that the Johannine characters are more than their responses ("The Weave of the Tapestry: Character and Theme in John," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner [LNTS 461; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2013], 18–35).

58. Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 73; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 97–99, 106–13, 119; idem, *John's Gospel* (London: Routledge, 1994), 90–96, 121–25. In addition, Stibbe produced a narratological commentary on John's Gospel, highlighting how John portrays the various characters in his Gospel (*John* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993]).

59. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 24–25, 28; idem, *John's Gospel*, 10–11.

60. Tolmie, *Jesus' Farewell*, 117–44.

utilizes the actantial model of A. J. Greimas and the character classification of Yosef Ewen (but also refers to E. M. Forster and W. J. Harvey; see our section 2.3). Tolmie only discusses contemporary fiction and disregards character in ancient Hebrew and Greek literature. With the exception of God, Jesus, and the Spirit, Tolmie concludes that all characters in John 13–17 are flat—they have a single trait or are not complex, show no development, and reveal no inner life.

David Beck explores the concept of anonymity in relation to discipleship, arguing that only the unnamed characters serve as models of appropriate responses to Jesus.[61] He also provides a brief theoretical discussion on character. Rejecting three methods of character analysis (Forster's psychological model, Greimas's structuralist approach, and Fokkema's semiotic approach), he adopts John Darr's model, which is influenced by the reader-oriented theory of Wolfgang Iser and which considers how characterization entices readers into fuller participation in the narrative.[62]

Colleen Conway looks at Johannine characterization from the perspective of gender, asking whether men and women are presented differently.[63] She also provides an informed theoretical discussion of character in which she leans toward the contemporary theories of Seymour Chatman and Baruch Hochman (although she does not use the latter's classification), and includes Hebrew techniques of characterization (but leaves out character in ancient Greek literature).[64] In a subsequent article, Conway challenges the consensus view that Johannine characters represent particular belief-responses.[65] She criticizes the "flattening" of characters and argues that Johannine characters show varying degrees of ambiguity and do more to complicate the clear choice between belief and unbelief than to illustrate it. Instead of positioning the minor characters on a spectrum of negative to positive faith-responses, she claims that they appear unstable in relation to Jesus as if shifting up and down such a spectrum. In doing so, the characters challenge, undercut, and subvert the

61. David R. Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm: Readers and Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (BIS 27; Leiden: Brill, 1997). Beck's monograph builds on his earlier essay, "The Narrative Function of Anonymity in Fourth Gospel Characterization," *Semeia* 63 (1993): 143–58. Beck recently revisits the subject ("'Whom Jesus Loved': Anonymity and Identity. Belief and Witness in the Fourth Gospel," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner [LNTS 461; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2013], 221–39).

62. Beck, *Discipleship Paradigm*, 6–8.

63. Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization* (SBLDS 167; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999).

64. Conway, *Men and Women*, 50–63.

65. Colleen M. Conway, "Speaking through Ambiguity: Minor Characters in the Fourth Gospel," *BibInt* 10 (2002): 324–41.

dualistic world of the Gospel because they do not line up on either side of the belief/unbelief divide.

Ingrid Kitzberger traces the female characters from the Synoptics that appear in John's Gospel but are not visible at first sight.[66] For her analysis, she combines Seymour Chatman's view of character, Wolfgang Müller's "interfigural" view of character (i.e., interrelations that exist between characters of different texts), and a reader-response approach. She concludes that "interfigural encounters create a network of relationships, between characters in different texts, and between characters and readers reading characters."[67]

In his monograph on point of view in John's Gospel, *James Resseguie* explores various Johannine characters from a material point of view and classifies them according to their dominance or status in society rather than, for example, their faith-response.[68] He claims that the characters' material points of view contribute or relate to the Gospel's overall ideology. Subsequently, in an introductory book on narrative criticism, Resseguie devotes one chapter to character.[69] After explaining some theoretical aspects of character, Resseguie, once again, analyzes a few characters according to their position in society. There are two surprising issues in Resseguie's approach. First, there is a logical discontinuity between his theory of character and his analysis of character; nothing in the first part[70] prepares for classifying characters according to their social standing. Second, he does not explain why he contends John's overall ideology is sociological in nature rather than soteriological (as John 20:30-31 seems to indicate).

In his book, *Craig Koester* has a chapter on characterization, supporting the idea that each of John's characters represents a particular faith-response.[71] Koester's strength lies in interpreting the Johannine characters on the basis of the text and its historical context. He sees parallels between John's story and ancient Greek drama or tragedy, where characters are types who convey general truths by representing a moral choice.

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66. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, "Synoptic Women in John: Interfigural Readings," in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Re-viewed*, ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger (BIS 43; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 77–111.

67. Kitzberger, "Synoptic Women," 108–9.

68. James L. Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John* (BIS 56; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 109–68.

69. James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 121–65.

70. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 121–32.

71. Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 33–77.

Exploring the relationship between John's Gospel and ancient Greek tragedy, *Jo-Ann Brant* examines the Johannine characters against the backdrop of Greek drama.[72] For example, "the Jews" are not actors in the Johannine drama but function as the deliberating chorus in a Greek drama—a corporate voice at the sidelines, witnesses to the action. As such, by watching "the Jews" and their response of unbelief, the believing audience has an opportunity to look into the mind of the other, whose perspective it does not share. Brant deliberately refrains from evaluating the Johannine characters. Drawing parallels with ancient Greek tragedy, she argues that readers are not members of a jury, evaluating characters as right or wrong, innocent or guilty, or answering christological questions about Jesus' identity, but are called to join the Johannine author in commemorating Jesus' life.

For my own part, in 2009 I produced a twofold work on Johannine characters where I seek to reverse the consensus view that Johannine characters are types, have little complexity, and show little or no development. Arguing that the differences in characterization in the Hebrew Bible, ancient Greek literature, and modern fiction are differences in emphases rather than kind, I suggest that it is better to speak of degrees of characterization along a continuum.[73] I then outline a comprehensive theory of character that comprises three aspects: (i) the study of character in text and context, using information from the text and other sources; (ii) the analysis and classification of characters along Yosef Ewen's three dimensions (complexity, development, inner life), and plotting the resulting character on a continuum of degree of characterization (from agent to type to personality to individuality); (iii) the evaluation of characters in relation to John's point of view, purpose, and dualistic worldview.[74] After that, I apply my theory to John's Gospel, showing that only eight out of twenty-three characters are "types."[75]

Susan Hylen identifies the following problem in Johannine character studies: while the majority of interpreters read most Johannine characters as "flat"—embodying a single trait and representing a type of believer—the sheer variety of interpretations proves that it is difficult to evaluate John's characters.[76] She presents an alternative strategy for reading them, arguing that John's

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72. Jo-Ann A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 159–232.

73. I am indebted to Burnett, who has excellently argued this case in "Characterization," 3–28.

74. Bennema, "Theory of Character," 375–421. I sharpened my theory further in another article ("Comprehensive Approach," 34–56).

75. Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*.

76. Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*.

characters display various kinds of ambiguity. For example, Nicodemus's ambiguity lies in the uncertainty of what he understands or believes. The Samaritan woman, the disciples, Martha, the beloved disciple, and "the Jews" display a more prominent ambiguity, namely that of belief in Jesus mixed with disbelief and misunderstanding. Finally, although Jesus' character is unambiguously positive, it is also ambiguous in the many metaphors John uses to characterize Jesus.

Christopher Skinner uses misunderstanding as a lens through which to view the Johannine characters.[77] On the basis that the Prologue is the greatest source of information about Jesus, Skinner contends that "[e]ach character in the narrative approaches Jesus with varying levels of understanding but no one approaches him fully comprehending the truths that have been revealed to the reader in the prologue. Thus, it is possible for the reader to evaluate the correctness of every character's interaction with Jesus on the basis of what has been revealed in the prologue."[78] Examining six male characters (Thomas, Peter, Andrew, Philip, Judas [not Iscariot], and Nicodemus), three female characters (the Samaritan woman, Martha, and Mary), and one male character group (the twelve disciples), Skinner shows that all Johannine characters are uncomprehending to a degree.

Nicolas Farelly undertakes a narratological analysis of the disciples in John's Gospel. Much of his study is dominated by the question of how the reader is expected to respond to the characterization of the disciples, and Farelly contends that implied readers learn about characters primarily through discovering their role in the plot.[79] Consequently, Farelly explores the relationship between plot and character, concluding that characters are more than mere plot functionaries: "[C]haracters do 'exist' to serve specific plot functions . . . but they do not lose their impact as constructed persons."[80] Finally, Farelly discusses the readers' participation in the narrative through identification with the characters, which includes both involvement and distancing because the world of the narrative is like and unlike the world of the readers.[81]

In her study of the character of Peter in John's Gospel, *Tanja Schultheiss* discusses various aspects of characterization and is against applying modern ("anachronistic") approaches to ancient narratives.[82] Besides, she addresses issues such as the relation between character and plot, and the presentation and

77. Skinner, *John and Thomas*.

78. Skinner, *John and Thomas*, 37.

79. Farelly, *Disciples in the Fourth Gospel*, 7–8.

80. Farelly, *Disciples in the Fourth Gospel*, 164–67 (quotation from p. 167).

81. Farelly, *Disciples in the Fourth Gospel*, 184–95.

classification of character.[83] Challenging my historical–narratological approach (i.e., a literary approach that considers the socio–historical context),[84] Schultheiss suggests the examination of each relevant text using a synchronic approach (restricted to the Johannine text) followed by a diachronic approach (analyzing the corresponding Synoptic texts).[85]

Ruth Sheridan provides a critical appraisal of various literary theories of characterization in her character analysis of "the Jews" in John 1–12.[86] She begins with the contributions of E. M. Forster, Seymour Chatman, Yosef Ewen, and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, and then turns to the Johannine scholars Craig Koester, Alan Culpepper, Francois Tolmie, and myself, who have applied the methods of character analysis of these literary critics to John's Gospel. Disregarding these Johannine scholars for the rest of her study, Sheridan decides to adopt aspects of narratological and intertextual theory, and to apply Rimmon-Kenan's method of character reconstruction to her reading of "the Jews."[87]

In a monograph on the characterization of the Johannine Jesus, *Alicia Myers* uses categories of ancient rhetorical practices of characterization, as found in Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks (those of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian) and various *progymnasmata*. Her approach consists of three elements: (i) rhetorical *topoi* of characterization (the presentation of a character through a list of aspects or "topics"); (ii) rhetorical techniques of characterization (*ekphrasis, synkrisis, prosopopoiia*); (iii) rhetorical expectations of characterization.[88] Myers argues that ancient authors used common *topoi* and rhetorical techniques to construct "typical" characters in order to persuade their audiences to either imitate a character's virtues or avoid his vices. She stresses that in Greco-Roman antiquity, characters were consistent or predictable in order to be credible.[89] With this theoretical grounding, she explores how John's use of Scripture contributes to the characterization of Jesus.

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82. Tanja Schultheiss, *Das Petrusbild im Johannesevangelium* (WUNT II/329; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 53–60.

83. Schultheiss, *Petrusbild*, 69–72.

84. Schultheiss, *Petrusbild*, 40 n. 232, 59 n. 61.

85. Schultheiss, *Petrusbild*, 72–79.

86. Ruth Sheridan, *Retelling Scripture: "The Jews" and the Scriptural Citations in John 1:19–12:15* (BIS 110; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 68–90.

87. Sheridan, *Retelling Scripture*, 97.

88. Myers, *Characterizing Jesus*, 42–61. William M. Wright uses a similar approach ("Greco-Roman Character Typing and the Presentation of Judas in the Fourth Gospel," *CBQ* 71 [2009]: 545–50).

89. Myers, *Characterizing Jesus*, 55–61.

The most recent work on Johannine characters is two collections of essays that appeared in 2013. The volume edited by Christopher Skinner features seven essays on methods or models for reading Johannine characters, but only two essays break significantly new ground.[90] *Alan Culpepper* explores a neglected aspect in character studies, namely how the Johannine characters relate to the development of the narrative's major themes.[91] *Judith Christine Single Redman* "examines the contributions made by theories of character and characterization, and the work of psychologists on eyewitness testimony and human memory to our understanding of where along this continuum [of actual representations of reality] the characters in the Gospel according to John might fall."[92] The significance of her essay for our study lies in her critique of those who think that the Johannine characters have a representative value. Supporting Conway's argument that the Johannine characters cannot be contained in binary categories and hence there is no clarity about what they represent, Redman asserts that John never intended his characters to be evaluated (contra Culpepper and myself), and consequently the Johannine characters cannot be used as yardsticks against which to evaluate people's belief.[93] Instead, she contends that the Johannine characters are intended to "provide examples for the reader of what a belief in Jesus that brings life might look like in real life."[94]

The other volume, edited by Steven Hunt, Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann, contains no overarching theoretical framework, and although many authors clarify their approach, most draw on existing aspects of character theory rather than contributing to it.[95] A significant exception, however, is *William John Lyons*'s essay on the Johannine character of Joseph of Arimathea, where he takes issue with the sources I use (mainly the Synoptics and John)

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90. See n. 12, above, for bibliographical details. Of the five other essays, James Resseguie does not go beyond his earlier work; Raymond Collins explores the comparative-contrast dynamic in some Johannine character pairs, but his essay does not explicitly contribute to the theory of character; Susan Hylen, Christopher Skinner, and I all sharpen and extend our 2009 work, and while this is significant, we do not propose a radically different theory. The present book includes the material I contributed to Skinner's volume.

91. Culpepper, "Weave of the Tapestry," 18–35.

92. Judith Christine Single Redman, "Eyewitness Testimony and the Characters in the Fourth Gospel," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner (LNTS 461; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2013), 59–78 (quotation from p. 59).

93. Redman, "Eyewitness Testimony," 63–67.

94. Redman, "Eyewitness Testimony," 76.

95. See n. 13, above, for bibliographical details. The uniqueness of this 700-page volume lies in its exhaustive treatment of *all* (seventy) characters in the Johannine narrative (the character of God, Jesus, the Spirit, and the narrator have not been considered).

to reconstruct the identity of Joseph of Arimathea.[96] Instead, he presents two possible readings—one where the implied reader only has access to John's Gospel and another where the reader also knows Mark's Gospel. I will return to the issue of possible readers and the sources they might have had access to for character reconstruction in section 3.1.

Summary. Johannine scholars present a broad variety of approaches to study character. Some draw on ancient methods of characterization, whether Hebrew, Greek, or both (Stibbe, Koester, Brant, Myers), others employ modern literary methods (Tolmie, Beck, Sheridan), and still others use both (Culpepper, Conway, myself). Regarding character analysis, scholars use a variety of lenses through which to examine the Johannine characters: gender (Conway), anonymity (Beck), social status (Resseguie), ambiguity (Hylen), misunderstanding (Skinner), complexity, development, and inner life (myself), common ancient *topoi* (Myers). As for character classification, many scholars categorize most Johannine characters as types or ficelles (Culpepper, Koester, many scholars mentioned in n. 53, above; cf. Myers). Only Tolmie and I use a more complex, nonreductionist classification, but while Tolmie, ironically, reduces the characters to being flat, I see a broad spectrum of characters. While some scholars question or object to the evaluation of characters (Conway, Brant, Hylen, Redman), Culpepper and I both use the criterion of the character's response to Jesus, but where Culpepper creates an entire hierarchy of responses, I only use the qualifiers "adequate" and "inadequate." Finally, Conway points out a glaring discrepancy: while many scholars argue that most of John's minor characters personify one single trait or belief-response to Jesus, there is surprisingly little agreement on what each character typifies or represents. A response to Conway's challenge would require a fresh analysis of Johannine characters.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

As in the case of the Gospels, few studies on character in the Acts of the Apostles refer to a theory of character.[97] In the early 1990s, *David Gowler* produced a

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96. William John Lyons, "Joseph of Arimathea: One of 'the Jews,' But with a Fearful Secret!," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie and Ruben Zimmermann (WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 646–57. While I use information from the Synoptics to reconstruct the identity of Joseph in John's Gospel, for his *role* or *function* I rely solely on information in the Johannine narrative (Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 191–94).

97. The following studies, for example, do not resort to a theory of character: Tannehill, *Narrative Unity* (Vol. 2); C. Clifton Black, "The Presentation of John Mark in the Acts of the Apostles," *PRSt* 20

pioneering work on character in Luke–Acts, half of which was given over to a discussion on character in both modern literary theory and ancient narratives.[98] Regarding characterization in modern literary theory, Gowler describes the rise of the novel and the corresponding importance of characters and the role of the reader, because a character does not exist until the reader retrieves it from the text. In dialogue with Seymour Chatman, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, W. J. Harvey, and Baruch Hochman, Gowler agrees that characters are both persons and words—characters are generated by the text but cannot be merely dissolved into the text. Contra the structuralists and supporting Chatman and Rimmon-Kenan, Gowler affirms that character and plot are interdependent.[99] Gowler then turns to the important issue of how character should be studied. Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the character classifications proposed by E. M. Forster, W. J. Harvey, Yosef Ewen, and Baruch Hochman (see our section 2.3), he decides to apply Hochman's model to his study of the Pharisees.[100] However, he provides no rationale for his choice, apart from stating that Hochman's model is the most comprehensive one. Lastly, Gowler turns to the (direct and indirect) presentation of character in the text.[101]

The second part of Gowler's theoretical discussion pertains to characterization in ancient narratives. Besides looking at the Hebrew Bible, Gowler examines in detail select writings from the vast corpus of ancient Greek literature: three tragedies (Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Sophocles' *Antigone*, and Euripides' *Medea*), two ancient biographies (Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* and Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*), three ancient histories (Tacitus' *Annals*, Josephus' *Jewish War*, and 1 Maccabees), and two ancient novels (Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* and Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*).[102] Gowler concludes that

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(1993): 235–54; Pheme Perkins, *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994); Philip H. Kern, "Paul's Conversion and Luke's Portrayal of Character in Acts 8–10," *TynBul* 54 (2003): 63–80; Scott Shauf, "Locating the Eunuch: Characterization and Narrative Context in Acts 8:26-40," *CBQ* 71 (2009): 762–75; S. Jonathan Murphy, "The Role of Barnabas in the Book of Acts," *BSac* 167 (2010): 319–41. Providing a minimal theoretical discussion, Abraham Smith sees many affinities between Luke–Acts and the ancient Greek novel, including that the Lukan characters are plot functionaries and typological ("'Do You Understand What You Are Reading?': A Literary Critical Reading of the Ethiopian (Kushite) Episode (Acts 8:26-40)," *JITC* 22 [1994]: 48–70).

98. David B. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts* (ESEC 2; New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 29–176. He adds another fifty-odd pages in appendixes.

99. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend*, 31–49.

100. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend*, 50–54, 306–17. He also provides a detailed explanation of Hochman's eight continua and how they can be adapted for ancient narratives (*Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend*, 321–32).

101. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend*, 55–70.

both Greek and Hebraic literature present characters in a "variety of ways, as simple or complex, and as developing or static."[103]

Shortly after Gowler, *John Darr*'s work on Lukan characters appeared, highlighting various aspects of character in modern literary methods, such as: (i) character and plot are interdependent; (ii) characters are delineated largely in relation to each other; (iii) character is cumulative as readers proceed along the text continuum; (iv) character is revealed through "showing" or "telling"; (v) characters are not just words or textual functions, but neither are they people; (vi) the reader reconstructs character with the help of extratextual information.[104] With regard to Luke–Acts, Darr contends that characterization occurs more through showing than telling, that its characters are largely typed, and that we can divide the characters into three groups, according to Harvey's taxonomy (see our section 2.3).[105] Darr also contends that the rhetoric of Luke–Acts compels the involvement of the reader in that the reader witnesses what the characters witness and is forced to reflect on his own response. Thus the reader is shaped in the very process of character construction.[106]

In a 1993 article on the characterization of the Lukan narrator, Darr expands on his theory that readers build characters. First, he recognizes that the reader one postulates at least partially determines how characters are reconstructed. On the one hand, Darr admits that literary critics create readers in their own image; that is, to a certain extent, the reader is always a heuristic construct of the literary critic. On the other hand, he also values the reconstruction of a text-specific reader, that is, an approximation of the intended reader with a degree of knowledge of the socio-cultural conventions assumed by the original author. Darr's reader, then, is *a heuristic hybrid*, a fusion of ancient and modern cultural horizons.[107] Second, Darr asserts that a text is not seamless but "full of gaps, indeterminacies, tensions, inconsistencies, and ambiguities" and it is the reader who seeks to "build a consistent, coherent narrative world" by piecing together textual and extratextual information.[108] Third, "all of the information (shown and told) that the reader receives is filtered through the narrator's particular point of view."[109]

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102. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend*, 88–169.

103. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend*, 173.

104. Darr, *On Character Building*, 38–49.

105. Darr, *On Character Building*, 38, 44, 48.

106. Darr, *On Character Building*, 56–59.

107. John A. Darr, "Narrator as Character: Mapping a Reader-Oriented Approach to Narration in Luke–Acts," *Semeia* 65 (1993): 47–48.

108. Darr, "Narrator as Character," 50–51.

Before examining the character of the Holy Spirit in Luke–Acts, *William Shepherd* provides a comprehensive overview of theories on character and characterization.[110] Based on the work of, *inter alios*, literary critic Northrop Frye, structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and historian Hayden White, Shepherd argues that the application of modern literary methods to ancient biblical texts is entirely appropriate because the modern use of "narrative" now encompasses fiction and nonfiction, ancient and modern texts.[111] Shepherd then discusses the nature of character, preferring a "mimetic" view of character (characters are like people) to a "semiotic" view of character advocated by structuralism.[112] For him, character can neither be reduced to the plot (as in structuralism) nor be independent of it.[113] Shepherd then turns to the classification of characters. Surveying the classifications of E. M. Forster, W. J. Harvey, and Yosef Ewen, Shepherd settles for Baruch Hochman's classification of eight categories (see our section 2.3).[114] Based on the work of reader-response critics, Shepherd acknowledges that character is both "in" the text and "in front of" the text; character is both generated by the text and constructed by the reader through "filling the gaps" (to use Wolfgang Iser's term). At the same time, Shepherd agrees with Stanley Fish that "gap-filling" is learned behavior for the reader, that is, part of the reading conventions practiced by the reader's interpretive community.[115]

John Roth uses an audience-oriented literary approach to analyze the character types of the blind, the lame, and the poor in Luke–Acts.[116] He grounds his approach in speech act theory, developed by critics such as J. L. Austin, J. Searle, R. Jakobson, and S. Lanser. Roth's interest is in the reader's role in producing a text's meaning and the text's effect on the reader. He decides to adopt Wolfgang Iser's model of reading, where the reader examines the text as a coherent whole to fill the gaps.[117] After discussing the reading process and the construction of an authorial audience, Roth turns to the subject of character.

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109. Darr, "Narrator as Character," 54.

110. William H. Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke–Acts* (SBLDS 147; Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), 43–90.

111. Shepherd, *Narrative Function*, 44–51.

112. Shepherd, *Narrative Function*, 51–65.

113. Shepherd, *Narrative Function*, 65–66.

114. Shepherd, *Narrative Function*, 67–78.

115. Shepherd, *Narrative Function*, 80–84.

116. S. John Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor: Character Types in Luke–Acts* (JSNTS 144; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

117. Roth, *Blind*, 58–63.

Taking Forster's "flat" and "round" categories as the basis, he looks at character traits and point of view (using Boris Uspensky's model) to explain a character's flatness or roundness.[118] Roth concludes that we must distinguish between characterization in ancient literature, where characters are mostly types and "flat" (following Scholes and Kellogg, Darr, and Tolbert), and characterization in modern literature where characters possess individuality and psychological depth.[119]

Richard Thompson's theoretical foundation for his study on the church as a narrative character in Acts deals with two aspects.[120] First, he concentrates on the reader and the reading process, explaining that the focus of ancient narratives, including Acts, is not the events per se but the relationship or connection between those events. In doing so, the author guides the reader through the narrative toward a judgment and response. Thompson also contends that the reader, not the text alone, realizes meaning. However, "[s]ince no text provides the reader with all the information or connections necessary for its realization, these textual indeterminacies or 'gaps' stimulate the reader's imagination so that one fills in those gaps in ways that build a consistent reading."[121] Second, Thompson deals with characters in ancient narratives. He stresses that "the reader must actively make judgments and decisions about those characters from the information that the text provides."[122] Besides, based primarily on the work of Christopher Gill, Thompson highlights that ancient literature often contains two categories of character portrayal—characters as typical figures and characters as individual personalities. Thompson acknowledges, however, that characterization in ancient literature varies, and one may discover degrees of character depiction.[123]

For her study of the character of God in Acts, *Ling Cheng* seeks some theoretical grounding.[124] She finds Forster's dualistic categories of "flat" and "round" characters too simplistic for her study. She also dismisses Berlin's classification of characters because Berlin does not (in her view) distinguish sharply enough between her three character types. Cheng finally settles on

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118. Roth, *Blind*, 74–75.

119. Roth, *Blind*, 76–78.

120. Richard P. Thompson, *Keeping the Church in Its Place: The Church as Narrative Character in Acts* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006), ch. 1.

121. Thompson, *Keeping the Church in Its Place*, 9–17 (quotation from p. 16).

122. Thompson, *Keeping the Church in Its Place*, 20.

123. Thompson, *Keeping the Church in Its Place*, 22–25.

124. Ling Cheng, *The Characterisation of God in Acts: The Indirect Portrayal of an Invisible Character* (PBM; Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2011), 2–12.

Harvey's threefold character classification of protagonist, intermediate figures (cards and ficelles), and background characters. She decides that Harvey's classification is most suited for her study of Acts, where characters function as a plot device.[125] Cheng's conclusions are somewhat puzzling, because I view Berlin's proposal to place characters on a continuum rather than mutually exclusive categories as a major step forward in the whole character debate (see our section 2.3). Finally, Cheng deals briefly with characterization (the literary technique of presenting characters) and argues that in Acts, characterization is inclined more toward showing than telling.[126] Cheng's theoretical foundation would have been strengthened significantly had she interacted with the work of David Gowler and William Shepherd.

Summary. While all the scholars, whose work we examined, use modern literary methods to analyze characters in ancient narratives, only some discuss whether this is legitimate (Gowler, Shepherd, Roth). While Gowler, Shepherd, and Thompson argue for continuity between ancient and modern characterization (and that, therefore, ancient characters can be complex), Roth sees a sharp contrast (ancient characters are flat; modern characters can be round; cf. Darr).

1.2. Identifying a Pattern or Paradigm of Character Reconstruction

Based on this extensive literature review, I conclude that it is possible to detect a pattern or even a paradigm in the study of character in New Testament narrative. While *pattern* refers to a "discernible regularity" or "perceptible structure," *paradigm* is a narrower category, denoting a "normative pattern" or "generally accepted perspective." Looking at what we have summarized regarding each of the three New Testament books, it would be legitimate to ask whether we can even speak of a pattern, not to mention a paradigm. Perhaps pandemonium is a better term to describe what has been happening in the study of New Testament character over the last thirty-odd years. Nevertheless, I will seek to uncover some trends and establish a minimum pattern.

Among the numerous issues in the study of character in New Testament narrative, it appears that three assumptions, beliefs, or practices are prominent—albeit not always in agreement. First, there is a contrast between Hebraic and Hellenic characterization. Many scholars hold that characters in the

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125. Cheng, *Characterisation of God*, 5–6. However, on p. 14 she claims that character and plot are interdependent.

126. Cheng, *Characterisation of God*, 10–11.

Hebrew Bible can be complex, dynamic, and show change, whereas Greco-Roman characters are typical—uncomplicated, static, and unchanging. Second, there is a contrast between ancient and modern characterization. The majority view is that characters in ancient narratives are radically different from the psychologized, developed, and individualized characters in the modern novel. Third, there is the prevalent practice of applying modern literary methods of fiction to ancient historical narratives such as those in the New Testament. A few scholars object to this practice (e.g., Tolbert and Myers), but the majority of biblical scholars use insights from modern literary methods to study characters in biblical narratives, even if it is as minimal as speaking of "round" and "flat" characters. I contend that these features constitute a minimum pattern in New Testament character studies.

Pressing further, it appears that several scholars operate with a paradigm that is based on three assumptions: (i) characters in Greco-Roman literature are "Aristotelian" (flat, types, plot functionaries); (ii) characters in the Gospels and Acts are not like characters in modern fiction (round, individualistic, psychologized) but resemble Greco-Roman characters and hence are mostly flat/types; (iii) (yet) modern literary methods can be used to analyze ancient characters. There is an inherent inconsistency here: if ancient characters are unlike modern characters, we should not use modern methods; for if we apply modern methods to ancient narratives, most characters will appear flat since they do not meet modern criteria for roundness. I am not suggesting that every scholar operates with this paradigm, but many do, whether explicitly, implicitly, or in part. Besides, while I maintain that there is at least a minimum pattern in New Testament character studies, I admit that it is perhaps not a *normative* pattern required for a paradigm. To rephrase it, even if there is not enough to speak of a (dominant) paradigm, there certainly is a dominant pattern within the haphazard array of approaches.[127]

We should also note that many scholars who reconstruct character without an apparent theoretical grounding or clarification on their approach to character often conform to the above-mentioned pattern or paradigm. Although I have only made cursory reference to this large number of character studies (see nn. 17, 53, and 97, above), I have dealt extensively with many of these regarding the Gospel of John, showing that such pattern or paradigm indeed exists.[128] Besides, we can often infer from the studies themselves the kind of method

127. This pattern or paradigm is more discernible in character studies on the Gospels than on Acts, but this may simply be because of the much larger number of character studies on the Gospels.

128. Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 2–10. Such an exercise here would divert from the book's focus and overburden the reader.

scholars use or the assumptions underlying their work. For example, studies that view all characters as types would suggest an Aristotelian approach; studies that distinguish sharply between characterization in the Old Testament and New Testament probably assume that the New Testament characters are typical; studies that mostly speak of "round" and "flat" characters probably use reductionist classifications; while studies that only use modern literary categories may not have considered the temporal, cultural, and conceptual distance that exists between modern fiction and biblical narratives.

Admittedly, there have been voices that spoke out against this pattern/paradigm or aspects of it. Some have argued that modern methods of character in fiction cannot be used to analyze characters in the Bible (e.g., Tolbert and Myers). Others see more continuity between Hebraic and Hellenic characterization, and between ancient and modern characterization (e.g., Gowler, Shepherd, myself). Besides, an increasing number of scholars now see greater complexity in the New Testament characters.[129] Nevertheless, much of the stereotypical thinking remains. The current interest in New Testament characters has, regrettably, not led to a consensus on how to study character in biblical narrative. Nor has a comprehensive, nonreductionist theory of character been proposed and shown to work. At best, a plethora of approaches provides liberty, eclecticism, and choice, and has led to a wide array of results;[130] at worst, the approaches are simplistic and reductionist, and lead to a one-sided or distorted view that most New Testament characters are flat and types. Irrespective of how one looks at it, it is fair to conclude that regarding the study of character in New Testament narrative, there is no consensus and no comprehensive theory.

In the end, whether one sees a pattern, a paradigm, or just an array of haphazard approaches, the most significant conclusion is that *there is no robust, comprehensive theory of character in New Testament narrative.* While some/many scholars do not clarify their approach to studying character or discuss any theory of character, others provide a range of theoretical considerations. There is no consensus on how to analyze, classify, and evaluate characters. As for character analysis, while some draw on ancient methods of characterization (whether Hebrew, Greek, or both), virtually all scholars employ modern literary methods. Others use a specific focus, such as misunderstanding, ambiguity, anonymity, gender, or social status. Besides, many scholars tend to oversimplify

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129. See, for example, the observations by Alan Culpepper, Judith Redman, and Susan Hylen regarding John's Gospel in Skinner, ed., *Characters in Characterization*, 22–23, 61–63, 96.

130. A good example is the recent volume with essays on seventy Johannine characters (Hunt, Tolmie, and Zimmermann, eds., *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel*).

most New Testament characters, viewing them as flat—opaque, unchanging, and uncomplicated. Nevertheless, as Conway has astutely pointed out, there is surprisingly little agreement on what each character typifies or represents. As for character classification, while many scholars still use fixed, reductionist categories (e.g., flat and round), others have proposed positioning characters on a continuum, but again, there is no consensus on how this should look. As for character evaluation, most scholars avoid doing so or even object to it, and among those who do, there are no agreed criteria for evaluation. But how can we compare characters except in relation to one another? Finally, there is no consensus on whether New Testament characters have any representative value or ongoing significance, and if so, what this is. All this leads us to the conclusion that we need a comprehensive, nonreductionist theoretical framework in which we can analyze, classify, and evaluate the New Testament characters and determine their possible significance. This takes us to the next section.

1.3. The Plan and Approach of the Book

The study of New Testament character has burgeoned in the last thirty-odd years, with different approaches, findings, and conclusions coming at a remarkable pace. Instead of adding to this expanding and diverging corpus, this study attempts to regulate and consolidate extant data by proposing a paradigm for character reconstruction in New Testament narrative. The aim of this study is to formulate a robust, comprehensive theory of character for New Testament studies—a theoretical framework that will enable and validate a sound, nonreductive interpretation of New Testament characters.

Our review of literature shows that many scholars seemingly follow a pattern or paradigm of character reconstruction in the New Testament. In Chapter 2, I will attempt a comprehensive critique of and challenge to this pattern/paradigm. I will argue that the differences in characterization in the Hebrew Bible, ancient Greek literature, and modern narrative are differences in emphases rather than kind. It is therefore better to speak of degrees of characterization along a continuum. Following this deconstruction phase, Chapter 3 is devoted to the construction of a new paradigm to study character. This comprehensive theory of character for New Testament studies consists of three aspects. First, I study character in text and context, using information from the text and other sources. I also delineate the kind of reader I assume for this task. Second, I analyze and classify the Johannine characters along three dimensions (complexity, development, inner life), and plot the resulting character on a continuum of degree of characterization (from agent to type to personality to individuality). Third, I evaluate the characters in relation to the

narrative's point of view and plot, and I seek to determine their representative value for today. Finally, in Chapter 4, I will seek to validate this new paradigm by applying the theory to select characters in the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of John, and the Acts of the Apostles.

While the scope of the book's field of reference is literary narrative, both ancient and modern, the specific focus is character in New Testament narrative. Our study has two limitations. First, I will focus on character (the reader's reconstruction of character) rather than characterization (the author's construction of character). To rephrase, I seek to understand what character is and how the reader can reconstruct character from indicators in the text; not characterization, as far as it refers to the author's techniques of constructing character by placing various indicators along the text continuum. The second limitation is that I will only examine the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles because these contain most narrative material in the New Testament and are, therefore, most suited for the analysis of characters. Among the Gospels, I concentrate on the "bi-optic Gospels" Mark (the earliest Gospel, on which Matthew and Luke show a literal dependency) and John (while John might have known Mark, he also wrote independently of Mark).[131] For the sake of convenience, I will use "Mark," "John," and "Luke" to refer to the authors of the works, which is not a claim about their historical identity. Our focus on the Gospels and Acts does not mean that our proposed theory is not applicable to other parts of the New Testament, but that building and demonstrating our theory using a narrower section of the New Testament is simply more feasible.

I must clarify some of the terminology in this book. First, when dealing with modern literary theory, I prefer the term *narrative* to fiction or novel since narrative is now generally understood to include both fiction and nonfiction. By "narrative," I mean those literary works that contain a story and a storyteller.[132] While fifty years ago the dominant object of literary narrative study was the novel, its scope has broadened significantly today.[133] In fact, "narrative has displaced the novel as the central concern of literary critics."[134]

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131. The term *bi-optic Gospels* comes from Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 126.

132. Cf. Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 [1966]), 4. Except for minor stylistic adjustments, the second edition has kept the text of the 1966 edition by Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, but is supplemented with an extensive overview of narrative theory from 1966 to 2006 by James Phelan.

133. See especially James Phelan's above-mentioned overview in Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative*, 283–336.

134. Shepherd, *Narrative Function*, 49.

Second, I will use the term *modern/ity* in the sense of "contemporary," over against "antiquity" rather than in contradistinction to "postmodern/ity." Third, I largely adopt Uri Margolin's definition of character: "'Character' designates any entity, individual or collective—normally human or human-like—introduced in a work of narrative fiction. Characters exist within storyworlds, play a role in the narrative, and can hence be defined as *storyworld participants*."[135] However, instead of Margolin's narrower term *narrative fiction*, I use *narrative* to refer to any literary work (fiction and nonfiction) in both ancient and modern times. In adapted form, then, the term *character* refers to "a human actor, individual or collective, imaginary or real, who plays a role in the story of a literary narrative." While characters may resemble people, they only exist within the story world of the text (even when they represent real people in the real world).

135. Uri Margolin, "Character," in *Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. D. Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 66–79.