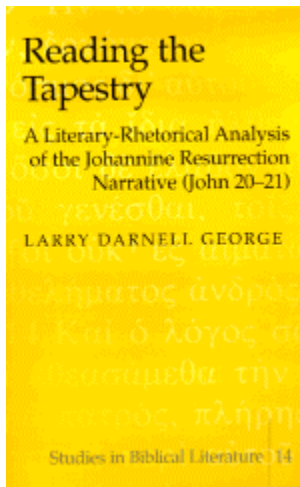


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George, Larry Darnell

Reading the Tapestry: A Literary-Rhetorical Analysis of the Johannine Resurrection Narrative (John 20-21)

Studies in Biblical Literature 14

New York: Peter Lang, 2000. Pp. xix + 195, Cloth, \$34.95, ISBN 0820444448.

Colleen M Conway
New York, NY 10027

In *Reading the Tapestry*, George aims to read John 20-21 synchronically, with an eye toward the unity and coherence of this portion of the Gospel. He wants to read the finely woven tapestry on the “frontside” rather than focusing the tangled web of history on its backside. Thus in his first chapter, as he reviews the history of scholarship on John’s resurrection narrative, George distinguishes his work from those focused on compositional history (e.g., Bultman, Brown, Barrett, and Schnackenburg). His own method, a literary-rhetorical approach, is closer to readings by Culpepper, Staley, and Segovia, especially as these works focus on the role of the implied reader. In addition to demonstrating the unity of chapters 20-21, George is interested in analyzing the rhetorical strategies of the narrative, especially how including chapter 21 (traditionally viewed as an appendix) opens up additional interpretive options for the implied reader.

George divides the resurrection narrative into three episodes comprised of twelve scenes. Chapters two through four work methodically through these episodes using a four-fold approach: 1) an English translation, 2) a delineation of episodes and scenes, 3) a temporal process of reading from the perspective of the implied reader 4) a conclusion that summarizes the temporal process of reading and the overall rhetorical design of the narrative.

In terms of his two major aims, George meets with mixed success. For the most part, he accomplishes a unified reading of the narrative, differentiating each scene based on literary criteria rather than redactional layers. He weaves the narrative together by tracing

a theme of accumulated evidence of the resurrection demanded by the lackluster response from the disciples. There is some inconsistency to his argument, however, in the treatment of the Beloved Disciple. On the one hand, George makes a point of the beloved disciple's belief in the resurrection over against the assumed faithlessness of Peter in 20:1-18. Later, however, the connection he sees between episode one (20:1-18) and episode two (20:19-23) depends on "the lack of response and faith of the disciples at Mary's report" (p. 87).

Less convincing is George's "temporal process of reading" which is dependent on a reader-response approach to the narrative. As one reads George's account of how the implied reader is alternatively dismayed, surprised, impressed, and especially how such a reader fills narrative gaps in particular ways, one wonders about the implications of alternative readings. What are the criteria for establishing the "successful" response? Confronted by a range of options for filling narrative gaps, how can one be certain that this implied reader is choosing the right filling? Along this line, recognition of alternative possibilities for reading the narrative are conspicuously absent from George's textual analysis.

These are not new questions to ask of the reader-response method. Nor is another that presents itself, namely who is this implied reader? One might argue—as critics of reader-response criticism are wont to do—that the implied reader is simply the interpreter. In other words, why reply on an abstract reader to argue for a particular interpretation of the text? Or, since it may be hard to imagine that George himself goes through the full range of emotions as does his implied reader, perhaps we should envision the reader as a sort of "readerly alter ego" suggested by Stephen Moore (*Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* New Haven/London: Yale University, 1989). Unfortunately, George nowhere addresses such questions. The description of his method is quite brief and theoretical issues addressed only by way of reference to other resources.

In short, this work might be more convincing overall if the author made a case for his approach through a more detailed theoretical discussion that included engagement with its critics. Still, if one is looking for a close literary reading of John 20-21, this book will be of use.