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**Resseguie, James L.**

***The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John***

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Steven M. Sheeley  
Shorter College  
Rome, Georgia

James L. Resseguie, professor at Winebrenner Theological Seminary, has submitted his latest foray into narrative-critical reading of the Gospels as part of Brill's Biblical Interpretation Series, edited by Alan Culpepper and Rolf Rendtorff. As have many scholars living at the intersection of biblical studies and narrative criticism, Resseguie credited the pioneering work of Kenneth Gros-Louis and James Ackerman (among others) for his introduction to "new" narrative- and literary-critical methods of reading biblical literature. In the over twenty years following that initial encounter, Resseguie's work has evidenced an informed interaction with both areas of scholarship and a carefully nuanced reading of (primarily Gospel) New Testament texts. This monograph is a fitting addition to Resseguie's body of work.

A sweeping overview of the Fourth Gospel has been rendered unnecessary by the work of such scholars as Raymond Brown, Alan Culpepper, Robert Fortna, Robert Kysar, and Moody Smith. Within that context, Resseguie is able to focus his analysis on one particular aspect of narrative-critical analysis of John's Gospel: point of view. Using Uspensky's typology (ideological, spatial, temporal, phraseological, and psychological points of view)—and paying careful attention to the work of Susan S. Lanser—Resseguie argues that the narrator's point of view in the Fourth Gospel allowed the narrator to

communicate a normative ideological stance in the process of telling the Gospel's story. In effect, John's narrator was able to convince his readers that their material view of their world—their “below” perspective—needed to be replaced by a spiritual view of their world—God's/Jesus'/the narrator's “above” perspective.

Following an introduction, the monograph is presented in five chapters, with the fifth chapter being a summarizing conclusion. The first chapter explores the narrator's “language of estrangement,” using a concept developed by Russian Formalism, that of “defamiliarization.” Those familiar with Resseguie's work will note that this is not his first use of the concept of defamiliarization, the idea that narrative rhetoric is often designed to make the reader's/hearer's familiar unfamiliar, in order to replace it with a new perspective, a new “familiar,” more suited to the narrator's point of view. In the case of John's Gospel, Resseguie notes the use of irony, misunderstandings, and double entendres as rhetorical devices designed to create a “deforming process [that] turns on its head a ‘below’ point of view so that the reader shares the narrator's ‘above’ point of view” (59).

Chapters 2 and 3 evaluate the narrative's expression of point of view through setting and characters, respectively. In chapter 2, Resseguie argues that the narrator “shapes familiar settings to express an unfamiliar, new, or otherwise strange point of view” (106). Events occur in settings that are inside or outside, center or perimeter, and near or far. In each of these pairs, one setting is preferred. Inside is secure; outside is dangerous. Those at the center are correct; those at the perimeter lack important knowledge or other characteristics. The spatial differences between near and far may reflect spiritual or emotional distance, as well. Chapter 3 extends Resseguie's analysis of point of view to the characters in John's Gospel. Here Resseguie builds on the work of Culpepper and others in noting phraseological unanimity in the narrative's characterization of Jesus. Resseguie's real contribution, though, lies in his analysis of other characters in the Fourth Gospel, which he divides into dominant characters (Nicodemus, Jewish leaders, etc.), marginalized characters (Mary Magdalene, the man at Bethzatha's pool, the man born blind), and the disciples (especially Peter, the beloved disciple, Thomas, and Judas). As a result of his analysis, Resseguie argues that the misguided “below” point of view infected every aspect (save Jesus) of the Gospel's society, with the exception of the beloved disciple. This character “represents a correct, nonmaterial point of view that is able to see beyond the literal to a spiritual interpretation” (167).

Chapter 4 explores point of view and the plot of John's Gospel. Resseguie asserts that the plot of John is a classical comedy. It begins with a stable condition, experiences a radical downturn with the crucifixion of Jesus, and, through external intervention, turns upward again to establish a new, postresurrection, condition. Resseguie notes the Gospel's play

on light and dark in his analysis of the plot, and his conclusion to this chapter returns to the rhetorical use of setting as Jesus' establishment of a new order also brought the (now-enlightened) disciples from their "far" position to a "near" one by the end of the narrative. Chapter 5 summarizes Resseguie's argument and analysis, again using Uspensky's typology of points of view.

This book is not a watershed event in the history of the reading of John's Gospel. The work is, however, a careful, sophisticated, and insightful analysis of the rhetorical power of narrative point of view in the Fourth Gospel. Resseguie has presented a persuasive argument; one would be hard pressed to deny the desire on the part of John's narrator to convince his readers to adopt a different, spiritual point of view that comes from "above." Resseguie's work on the rhetorical use of narrative settings and his analysis of characterization in John, in particular, will continue to be fruitful for some time to come. His point is well made and well supported; other scholars will find his reading very helpful in their own analysis. What is more, Resseguie's observations will very easily be adapted and expanded by those who teach John's Gospel on the undergraduate or graduate levels. His work offers many of those wonderful flashes of insight that can be appropriated by his readers in their own reading of the text.

Perhaps the book's greatest weakness is the chapter on plot. While the first three chapters are clearly organized and offer a crisp argument in support of Resseguie's thesis, the chapter on plot seems somewhat disjointed and difficult to follow. The best moments in the chapter make use of ideas of earlier chapters, applied to the Gospel's plot. In all, however, the weaknesses of this volume are few; it offers a solid contribution to the study of the Fourth Gospel.