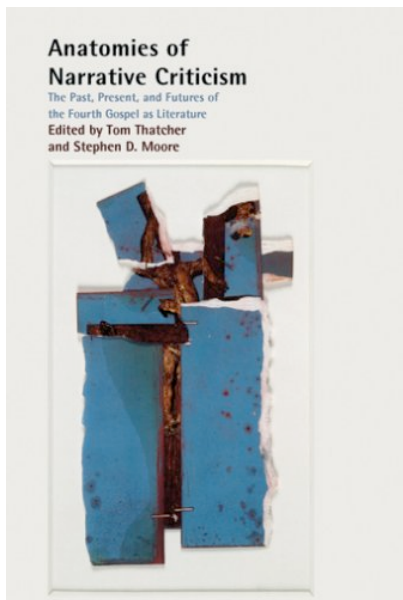


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Thatcher, Tom, and Stephen D. Moore, eds.

Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature

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Publication of R. Alan Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* in 1983 was a landmark even in Johannine studies. It was a sustained treatment of John's Gospel from the perspective of narrative criticism. There were sections on narrator and point of view, narrative time, plot, characters, and forms of implicit commentary such as misunderstanding, irony, and symbolism. The book also introduced many to the mysterious notion of the "implied reader," who is presupposed by the narrative. Although some scholars had previously used narrative criticism to interpret other New Testament books and a few had employed the discipline on aspects of John, Culpepper provided the first comprehensive look at how this approach might be used by students of the Fourth Gospel. His work invited many to follow his lead, and this volume edited by Thatcher and Moore is a fitting way to reflect on Culpepper's legacy.

Tom Thatcher's essay, "Anatomies of the Fourth Gospel: Past, Present, and Future Probes," helps situate Culpepper's work within the currents of modern Johannine studies. Modern historical critics usually assumed that the meaning of the text came from the interplay between the sources that were thought to lie behind the text and the later editing of those who turned these sources into the book as we have it (5). Historical studies attempted to trace the process of composition by distinguishing layers of tradition and

redaction, as well as by reconstructing the social settings that might have occasioned the changes. By way of contrast, Culpepper approached the text as a unified whole, asking how it works as a narrative. He also opened up questions of how the text interacts with its readers, whose encounter with the text contributes to its meaning.

Part 1 consists of hermeneutical reflections on this approach to reading the Gospel. In his essay "Symbolism and History in John's Account of Jesus' Death," Culpepper notes that when considering the narrative elements in the Gospel he suspended questions of the historical setting of the Gospel, yet he did not abandon those questions. As a test case, he considers the scene in which Jesus entrusts his mother to the Beloved Disciple at the crucifixion. He finds that narrative criticism helps to relate this scene to the portrayal of these figures elsewhere in the story, and it underscores the kinship metaphors in the Gospel. He then relates these observations to questions of the Gospel's composition, concluding that the scene must be the work of the Evangelist and that the Evangelist is almost certainly not the Beloved Disciple. Perhaps the most important aspect of the essay is that narrative criticism can helpfully contribute to interdisciplinary studies of the Gospel.

Adele Reinhartz considers the complex relationship of literary and historical studies in "Building Skyscrapers on Toothpicks: The Literary-Critical Challenge to Historical Criticism." She identifies the conundrum that literary criticism can be used as a tool for historical criticism and, conversely, to undermine historical criticism. Nevertheless, she values interdisciplinary work. For example, since characters in the Gospel seem to show that movement between unbelief and belief is possible, she asks how this might have functioned in the social context of the Gospel's early readers. Colleen M. Conway explores related questions in "There and Back Again: Johannine History on the Other Side of Literary Criticism." This "other side" includes the suggestion of a postcolonial reading of John that gives heightened attention to the Roman presence in early readers' context, a presence that might have contributed to the conflict between the followers of Jesus and the wider Jewish community that is reflected in the narrative.

Paul N. Anderson emphasizes interdisciplinary work in "From One Dialogue to Another: Johannine Polyvalence from Origins to Receptions." Theologically, the Gospel works dialectically, bringing different christological perspectives together into a new whole. Historically, the Gospel is the product of a dialogue between the different traditions that preceded it and the experiences of the community in which it was formed. Literarily, the Gospel describes dialogues between Jesus and others, which invite the readers themselves to engage the text. Interaction is also stressed by Jean Zumstein, "Intratextuality and Intertextuality in the Gospel of John." He proposes that the Gospel reflects an internal dialogue where the prologue, epilogue, and some of the Farewell Discourses supplement an

earlier form of the text with later reflections. He also suggests that the Gospel is not to be read as an isolated text but considers what it means to read the Gospel in connection with the Hebrew Scriptures and a larger body of Christian writings. The essay by Robert Kysar, "Dead Is Dead: Long Live John!" concludes this section with reflections on the meaning of historical and implied authorship.

Part 2 consists of various "Anatomical Probes" into aspects of the Gospel. Mark Stibbe takes up the question of the Gospel's awkward transitions in "Magnificent but Flawed: The Breaking of Form in the Fourth Gospel." He notes that the Gospel values what is unbroken, such as the legs of Jesus (John 19:33), the net (21:11), and the community (17:20–21). Yet the text includes surprising breaks in narrative sequence, which could serve as a commentary on the fractures within the Evangelist's own community. Tat-siong Benny Liew continues exploring the interplay of text and sociohistorical context in "The Word of Bare Life: Workings of Death and Dream in the Fourth Gospel." He considers Jesus to be a colonized Jew who knowingly lives in the shadow of death. By going willingly to his death, Jesus exerts some control. The question is whether in doing so Jesus and those like him adopt one of the stances toward heroic death that would typify their colonial masters.

Shifting focus, Jeffrey L. Staley uses the ancient text to critique modern renderings of it in "Resurrection Dysfunction, or One Hundred Years of Cinematic Attempts at Raising a Stiff (John 11:1–46)." Staley notes that where the Gospel minimizes miraculous elements, moviemakers expand them, and where John's portrayals of female characters can be liberating, those in films often show more stereotyped roles. Ruben Zimmermann follows an interdisciplinary approach to the interpretation of Johannine symbolism in "Symbolic Communication between John and His Reader: The Garden Symbolism in John 19–20." When asking whether readers are to take something symbolically, he asks whether an image was commonly used as a symbol, which would give it "conventional plausibility." He also asks about cues for symbolic usage within the Gospel, which would give a symbol "textual plausibility" (224). His test case is the garden where the risen Jesus meets Mary Magdalene (20:11–17). Proposing that a garden could conventionally be linked to Eden through Jewish tradition, he notes the Gospel uses creation imagery in the resurrection scene (e.g., breathing the Spirit into the disciples in 20:22). This could suggest that the resurrection is the opening of paradise. Francis J. Moloney considers how John 21 is both related to and different from the rest of the Gospel in "John 21 and the Johannine Story." He finds that the epilogue continues the prior story by showing how the risen Jesus, who seems physically absent, remains present with his disciples.

Concluding reflections are offered by Stephen D. Moore in "Afterword: Things Not Written in This Book." He observes that as narrative criticism has become mainstreamed,

many have added it to their methodological repertoire but fewer identify themselves primarily as narrative critics. Interestingly, broader currents in the study of narratology have moved away from the discussion of theory and show a renewed interest in historical and sociocultural contexts. In both respects New Testament scholars are, in a sense, “ahead of the narratological curve,” since they have typically been far more interested in interpreting texts than in theory, and the legacy of historical criticism has made attention to context a persistent element in biblical studies (257).

Those observations are appropriate for the varied essays in this collection. Where Culpepper’s *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* encouraged readers to give due attention to the world within the text, most of the contributors to this volume have shown a restlessness with remaining there. In the 1980s and 1990s, many who followed Culpepper explored one or more of his literary categories, continuing the study of character development, irony, symbolism, or metaphor. At the same time, ongoing discussion of the social setting of the Johannine community meant that narrative critics continued to run into questions of sociohistorical context. Where conversation among scholars focused on the Fourth Gospel, it regularly became interdisciplinary. This is certainly the case with the essays in this volume, which push beyond the historical and literary topics that have dominated discussion in recent decades to propose alternative angles of vision. Moore noted that “New Testament narrative criticism has, from its inception, really only ever been interested in interpretation, theory only ever being a means to that end” (257). The point is well-taken. It is most often the book rather than the method that draws people into Johannine studies. Those primarily interested in method will find this collection of essays to be rather eclectic, but those engaged in John will want to see how a recent group of interpreters work with his Gospel.