

Part One. Reading the Text: Explorations of the Johannine Reader

In what sense can reading be seen as a form of play, as an act of fantasy or imagining, a model of impersonating, pretending, playing imaginary roles?

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CHAPTER ONE

Stumbling in the Dark, Reaching for the Light: John 5 and 9 and the Encoded Reader

"With the exception of music, we have been trained to think of patterns as fixed affairs. The truth is that the right way to begin to think about the pattern which connects is as a dance of interacting parts, secondarily pegged down by various sorts of physical limits and by habits, and by the naming of states and component entities." Goleman

"[Biblical] narrative become[s] an obstacle course, its reading turns into a drama of understanding--conflict between inferences, seesawing, reversal, discovery, and all. The only knowledge perfectly acquired is the knowledge of our limitations." Sternberg

"Every character is a trap of a certain kind, one which the writer would like his readers to fall into." Foldenyi

"If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains." Jn 9:41

Reading Between the Lines in Biblical Narrative

One of the shibboleths of reader-response criticism has been the intricate weave of terms its adherents have fabricated for readers. Pick up any discussion of reader criticism in literary theory or biblical criticism and the emperor's new clothes are soon paraded before the viewing public.¹ But is there really anything there beneath the flowery phrases and bulging postulates of reader criticism? Sometimes it seems hard to say for sure. Yet in spite of the inherent difficulties posed by these varieties of readers,² the terms *implied reader* or *encoded reader* best express the rhetorical aspects of texts which I wish to explore in this chapter.³ What I mean to evoke in the use of these two terms is precisely that: 1) narratives, like arguments, are persuasive in intent and temporal in their mode of expression; 2) by paying close attention to the temporal quality of narratives--that is, by being attentive to the linear sequence of words on the page--the

¹Mailloux, *Rhetorical Power*, 31. See also Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 71-72; Fowler, "Let the Reader Understand", 25-40; Porter, "Why Hasn't Reader-Response Criticism Caught on in New Testament Studies?," 278-281; and Machor, "Introduction: Readers/Texts/Contexts," vii-xi.

²For example, see Freund, *The Return of the Reader*, 69-89, 136-156; Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves," 35-39; Mailloux, "Misreading as a Historical Act," 4-5; and Wuellner, "Is There an Encoded Reader Fallacy?," 40-54.

³Staley, *The Print's First Kiss*, 30-37. The expression "encoded reader" comes from Christine Brooke-Rose (*A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, 105).

critic will be better able to analyze words' manipulative power;⁴ and 3) by being aware of different socio-cultural narrative codes, the critic can better assess the persuasive intent of stories.⁵

Because the miracle stories in John 5 and 9 are constructed in such a way that the encoded reader discovers they were performed on the sabbath only after reading that the miracles occurred, and because the characters' conversations are reminiscent of the dialogues in ancient Hebrew literature, these two stories are excellent places to explore the narratological and theological implications of temporality and ancient cultural codes for Johannine characterization.

In his analysis of characters in the Fourth Gospel, Alan Culpepper quotes Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg where they describe the difference between Greek and Hebraic forms of characterization (the paragraph is well-worn by biblical scholars):

The heroes of the Old Testament were in a process of becoming, whereas the heroes of Greek narrative were in a state of being. Process in Greek narrative was confined to the action of a plot. And even so, the action exemplified unchanging, universal laws; while the agents of the action, the characters, became as the plot unfolded only more and more consistent ethical types. Abraham, Jacob, David, and Samson, on the other hand, are men whose personal development is the focus of interest.⁶

Building upon these observations, Culpepper notes that:

In John, the character of Jesus is static; it does not change. He only emerges more clearly as what he was from the beginning. Some of the minor characters, the Samaritan woman and the blind man in particular, undergo a significant change. To some extent, therefore, the Gospel of John draws from both Greek and Hebrew models of character development, but most of its characters appear to represent particular ethical types.⁷

A great deal has been written about the nature of ancient Hebrew narrative since Scholes and Kellogg's terse comparisons of twenty-five years ago and since Culpepper's suggestive comments, now more than ten years old.⁸ Yet little has been done with Culpepper's observation regarding the "Hebrew model of character" in the Fourth Gospel, beyond taking note of the same point he made. For example, in a more recent study of the characterization of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, J. A. du Rand does not attempt to delineate any aspects of the "Hebrew model" of characterization in spite of observing: "One can agree with Culpepper that to some extent the

⁴What I have in mind here is not a "virginal, first-time reading," but rather a critically informed "second reading" (see, for example, Calinescu's concept of rereading and play in *Rereading*, 112-113, 188-192, 278; cf. Mailloux, *Rhetorical Power*, 34-35).

⁵For example, see Malina, "Reading Theory Perspective: Reading Luke-Acts," 14-23.

⁶*The Nature of Narrative*, 169; *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 103. Erich Auerbach's 1953 essay "Odysseus' Scar," in *Mimesis*, prefigured Scholes and Kellogg's comparisons of Greek and Hebrew literature, but is not quoted in Culpepper's chapter on character.

⁷Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 103.

⁸Cf. Sternberg's critique (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 232-233, 268). Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, which appeared in 1981, is only mentioned twice by Culpepper, and Adele Berlin's *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* appeared in 1983, the same year Culpepper's book was published. Subsequently, two other important works on Hebrew narrative have seen print in English. Sternberg's *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* was published in 1985, and Shimon Bar-Efrat's second edition of *Narrative Art in the Bible* appeared in translation in 1989, five years after its Hebrew publication.

Gospel of John draws from both Greek and Hebrew models of character development but that most of the Johannine characters are presented as definite ethical types."⁹

Among the many literary critics working with ancient Hebrew literature, Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, Meir Sternberg, and Shimon Bar-Efrat each have made special efforts to describe the various kinds of characters which the biblical writers created and have tried to isolate the narrative modes of their characterization. With regard to the types of characters found in ancient Hebrew literature, these scholars--explicitly or implicitly--all take issue with E. M. Forster's often quoted description that "flat" characters with only one or two ethical traits are a distinguishing feature of Hebrew poetics.¹⁰ Berlin, for example, finds three types of characters in Hebrew narrative (the "full-fledged character," the "type," and the "agent");¹¹ and, coincidentally, Culpepper describes three types in the Fourth Gospel (the "protagonist," the "ficelles," and the "background characters").¹² There is, however, no one-to-one correspondence between Berlin's three types and Culpepper's three.

But rather than getting into an extended discussion of Johannine character types and attempting to classify either the bedridden man of John 5 or the blind man of John 9 along those lines, I prefer to take my cue from Alter and Sternberg who eschew any straightforward typology of Hebrew characters. The two of them might well agree with Amelie Rorty who once developed an insightful, fivefold typology of character, and concluded her study saying: "The distinctions that I have drawn are forced; most philosophers and novelists blend the notions that I have distinguished. One would hardly find a pure case. . . ."¹³

If a typology of the Fourth Gospel's characters is not one of my aims, the book's modes of characterization and the interweaving of these modes certainly is. For example, in his summary of characterization in ancient Hebrew narrative, Alter discusses its four modes--all of which appear in the Fourth Gospel. These modes are: 1) the narrator's description of a character in terms of actions, appearance, or attitudes and intentions (e.g., Jn 6:71; 11:2; 12:4; 13:23; 19:39); 2) one character's comments on another (e.g., 1:29, 36; 6:70); 3) the direct speech of the character (e.g., 6:35; 8:12; 11:25); and 4) inward speech (i.e., interior monologue; e.g., 17:1-26).¹⁴ With regard to narration, Alter, Sternberg, and Bar-Efrat argue that the ancient Hebraic narrators are reliable and omniscient, and are thus accorded descriptive certainty.¹⁵ The same holds true for the narrator of the Fourth Gospel.¹⁶ However, when describing characters, the Hebrew narrators

⁹"The Characterization of Jesus as Depicted in the Narrative of the Fourth Gospel," 25, 31-33.

¹⁰Forster, Aspects of the Novel, 68-78. Cf. Scholes and Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative, 164-166; Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, 114; Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative, 23, 37-38; Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 191, 525; and Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 90-92.

¹¹Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative, 23-24, 31-32.

¹²Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 103-104.

¹³"A Literary Postscript: Character, Persons, Selves, Individuals," 319; see also Baruch Hochman, Character in Literature, 86-89.

¹⁴The Art of Biblical Narrative, 116-117. Cf. Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative, 33-42; Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 322-330, 342-348; and Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 48-86.

¹⁵Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, 117; Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 63-70; and Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 13-45.

¹⁶Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 26-34.

tend to be laconic and highly selective in their use of omniscience.¹⁷ Again, Johannine poetics parallel this peculiarity.¹⁸

In comparison to such narrators, the characters in Johannine and ancient Hebrew narrative themselves often appear loquacious. But as Alter states, characters' words ironically "may be more of a drawn shutter than an open window."¹⁹ From this observation Alter goes on to argue that in ancient Hebrew narrative the reader is therefore compelled "to get at character and motive through a process of inference from fragmentary data, often with crucial pieces of narrative exposition strategically withheld, and this leads to multiple or sometimes even wavering perspectives on the characters."²⁰ Alter thus gives special attention to the dynamic interplay between narration and dialogue and the subtle nuances of repetition.²¹ But it is Sternberg who especially concentrates on analyzing the "crucial pieces of narrative exposition strategically withheld,"²² that is, the manipulation of ambiguity, suspense, curiosity, and surprise that make up a large part of Hebrew characterization.²³ Like Palestinian peasant children guiding their goats through the Judean wilderness, Alter, Berlin, Sternberg, and Bar-Efrat are masters at leading the reader through the sudden twists and sharp turns, the steep ridges and dizzying drop-offs that make up the art of ancient Hebrew characterization.

In view of their observations regarding ancient Hebrew narrative, my analysis of John 5 and 9 will attempt to show that these two miracle stories evince the same combination of rhetorical devices so often found in ancient Hebraic characterization. And as in Hebrew narrative, repetition and minute changes in direct speech and narration play major roles in the formation of Johannine characters. As a consequence, Johannine characterization can likewise be complex. And its complexities are multiplied when one tries to account for the effect of narrative temporality on that characterization.²⁴

Reading with the Bedridden

The two Johannine healings on the sabbath have often been compared,²⁵ and Culpepper himself lists eleven parallels in his analysis of the Johannine characters, most of which are easily recognized.²⁶ The setting in both instances is a pool in Jerusalem and both unnamed characters

¹⁷Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 20, 126; Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 180-185; and Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 48-53.

¹⁸Staley, *The Print's First Kiss*, 37-41, 95-98.

¹⁹*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 117. See also, Alter, *The Pleasure of Reading in an Ideological Age*, 55; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 64-65; and Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 346-364.

²⁰*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 126. See also Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 67; and Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 230-235.

²¹*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 63-116. See also Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 365-375, 436-440.

²²Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 126.

²³Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 230-320. Cf. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 12.

²⁴John Darr attempts to account for the implications of the reading process for the formation of character in Luke-Acts, but his focus is much broader than mine. He is interested in tracing major characters throughout the entire Lukan corpus (*On Building Character*).

²⁵Collins, "The Representative Figures in the Fourth Gospel," 41.

²⁶*Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 139.

are introduced as having long-term disabilities (a thirty-eight year infirmity and blindness from birth).²⁷ And because both men are healed on the sabbath, the stories share the similar theological themes of work, sin, and the identity of Jesus. The parallels are so remarkable that at least one scholar has been led to see these two stories as complementary units in a giant chiasm which overlays the entire gospel,²⁸ and both Brown and Culpepper see them as demarcating a major unit of Johannine narrative.²⁹ Yet there are also important differences between the two stories, not the least of which is that, whereas John 5 is a miracle story with significant repercussions for the story's larger plot and for Jesus' identity, John 9 begins as a pronouncement story, then turns into a miracle story which is three times as long as the John 5 story, and serves virtually no plot function.

While the miracle story structure of John 5:1-9 is straightforward and simple, it varies significantly from that of the two signs earlier in the Fourth Gospel. John 5:1-9 is the first narrated miracle in Jerusalem (but cf. 2:23-3:2); it is the first miracle which Jesus performs for a person of low status; and, consequently, it is the first miracle story in which Jesus initiates the action.³⁰ Its structure is as follows: Jesus goes up to Jerusalem to participate in a religious festival and, while he is there, he sees a sick man lying beside a pool (5:1-6a). After a brief verbal exchange between the miracle worker and the sick man (5:6b-8), the man is healed (5:9a). The only element that fleshes out the skeletal miracle story form is the conversation between Jesus and the sick man (5:6b-7).

Normally, after the hero has come on the scene and sized up the situation (e.g., "When Jesus saw this man lying there and realized that he had been there a long time . . ." [5:6a]), a miracle is performed. But in this story, rather than Jesus immediately effecting the cure, he asks the man, "Do you want to get well?" (5:6b). For the moment the question postpones the inevitable cure, whetting the encoded reader's appetite for another impressive sign. At the same time, it forces the encoded reader to concentrate on the developing conversation's peculiarities.³¹

Initially, Jesus' question might seem to reinforce the obvious point in the story--a story that closely follows the pattern of thousands of other miracle stories: Of course the man wants to

²⁷Meir Sternberg has this to say about unnamed characters in ancient Hebrew narrative: "Anonymity is the lot (and mark) of supernumeraries, type-characters, institutional figures, embodied plot devices. . . . To remain nameless is to remain faceless, with hardly a life of one's own. Accordingly, a character's emergence from anonymity may correlate with a rise in importance" (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 330). However, quite nearly the opposite is the case in the Fourth Gospel. Here, the nameless mother of Jesus, the Samaritan woman, the blind man, and the beloved disciple are characters with more of "a life of their own" than named characters like Judas, Nathaniel, Caiaphas, or Philip (cf. Beck, "The Narrative Function of Anonymity in Fourth Gospel Characterization," 147-149).

²⁸Deeks, "The Structure of the Fourth Gospel," 107-128.

²⁹*The Gospel According to John*, 1:cxliv; Culpepper, "Un exemple de commentaire fondé sur la critique narrative," 139-140.

³⁰Culpepper and Koester both note the differences between this miracle and the first two (Culpepper, "Un exemple de commentaire fondé sur la critique narrative: Jean 5,1-18," 141-143; Koester, "Hearing, Seeing, and Believing in the Gospel of John," 336-337), but neither of them point out the lower social status of this man or the Jerusalem setting of the miracle.

³¹I agree with Ernst Haenchen who says that at this point Jesus' question is "not intended to determine whether the lame man has the desire to become well again (the Johannine Jesus is not trained to practice psychology)" (*John*, 1:255), if Haenchen means by "intended" that the encoded reader would not initially suspect a lack of desire on the part of the sick man. That is to say, Jesus does not ask him, "*Me theleis hygies genesthai?*" (cf. 3:4; 4:12, 29, 33), which would imply that Jesus expected a negative response from the bedridden man. Thus, Jesus' question naturally expects a positive response.

get well!³² Hasn't the narrator just said that the man had been ill for thirty-eight years and that Jesus realized he had been there a long time? Yet the sick man does not give a straightforward reply to Jesus' question, such as, "Yes, I want to get well, can you help me?"³³ Rather, he responds with an unusually long sentence, one fraught with innuendo: "Sir, I don't have a person to--whenever the water is stirred up--to put me into the pool. But while I'm coming, someone else gets in before me" (5:7).³⁴

For ancient Mediterranean culture, Jesus' direct, open-ended question and the convoluted, indirect response of the bedridden man reflect the characters' sensitivity to their differing social status. In the Fourth Gospel's first two miracle stories, Jesus' mother and the royal official were in culturally recognized positions of honor from which they could, and did, personally make requests of Jesus. But this sick, incapacitated man is physically impure and thus of lower social status than Jesus.³⁵ And since "every social interaction [in the ancient Mediterranean world] that [took] place outside one's family or outside one's circle of friends [was] perceived as a challenge to honor,"³⁶ the sick man is revealing his integrity and respect for social boundaries by not publically challenging Jesus to respond to his need.³⁷ So while the illocutionary force of the sick man's response may indeed imply a request for help, it is vague enough to allow a prospective benefactor, if he so desires, to ignore the need without losing face.³⁸ Thus, taking into account the agonistic nature of ancient Mediterranean honor/shame culture, the sick man's response does not imply a lack of determination on his part to get well,³⁹ nor is he complaining about his plight.⁴⁰ Rather, the social dynamics of the dialogue reveal that Jesus picks up on the sick man's veiled but

³²Haenchen thought that the question by Jesus was "odd," but was one which "permitted the reader to divine that a story of a healing [was] to follow" (*John*, 1:255). I have difficulties with this solution to Jesus' question, since the encoded reader has already read two other miracle stories in this book (2:1-11; 4:46-53) and should have no difficulty in figuring out from the setting (5:1-5) that a miracle is imminent. Jesus' question seems "odd" precisely because the answer initially seems so transparent to the encoded reader, Jesus, and the sick man (cf. 1:42, 47-48; 2:24; 4:17-19).

³³John Chrysostom imagines what a more logical response on the part of the Johannine invalid might have been. He writes: "[The sick man] did not rant at his questioner, nor did he say: 'It is to ridicule and make fun of my condition that you ask whether I want to get well.'" (*Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist*, 360).

³⁴Robert Alter argues: "In any given narrative event, and especially, at the beginning of any new story the point at which dialogue first emerges will be worthy of special attention, and in most instances, the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory, perhaps more in manner than in matter, constituting an important moment in the exposition of character" (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 74). Similarly, many Johannine commentators (not trained to write with Alter's poetic precision) have sensed that the bedridden man's opening words are somehow revelatory of his character.

³⁵Pilch, "Sickness and Healing in Luke-Acts," 207.

³⁶Malina, *The New Testament World*, 32.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 34. Note also the similarly veiled request of the socially inferior women, Mary and Martha (Jn 11:3; see below, 88).

³⁸*Ibid.*, 34-36. By "illocutionary force," I mean what the sentence intends to do, as "distinguished from [its] mere grammatical, or 'locutionary' aspect, and from what [it does] in fact do, [its] effect on the hearer, or 'perlocutionary aspect'" (Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 161-166; see also Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman*, 64-66).

³⁹Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:209; Culpepper, "Un exemple de commentaire fondé sur la critique narrative," 148.

⁴⁰Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:209.

respectful request and tells the sick man to begin to act on his own behalf. Jesus says to him: "Get up, pick up your mat and keep walking" (5:8, my translation).

Immediately upon being healed--or perhaps as a means to being healed--the man picks up his pallet and walks, and so fulfills Jesus' command.⁴¹ The narrator then adds a temporal notation previously omitted: "Now that day was a sabbath" (5:9b).⁴² What began as a relatively simple miracle story with a simple alignment of the encoded reader's sympathies ("Nice work, Jesus!" "Way to go, sick man!") has now turned into something much more complex, with competing allegiances ("Wait a minute! Should Jesus have told the man to carry his mat?"). Healing the man is fine, but did Jesus choose the proper means to effect and illustrate the cure? And what now will happen to the man who so innocently acted upon Jesus' sabbath-breaking word?

As noted earlier, in both John 5 and 9 the encoded reader discovers that the healings were done on the sabbath only after the miracle story has been narrated.⁴³ In this sense they are unique among New Testament sabbath day miracles. In every other case the miracle stories begin with someone, either the narrator or characters, noting that the day is a sabbath.⁴⁴ But in John 5 and 9, the narrator's belated reference to the sabbath forces the encoded reader to reevaluate the significance of the miracle itself; and furthermore, it forces the encoded reader to reevaluate the story's characters. Although in previous stories Jesus challenges certain Jewish religious scruples,⁴⁵ he has not actually broken Torah,⁴⁶ nor has he told anyone else to do so. However, now with the narrator's added temporal note, the encoded reader must re-view Jesus' heretofore innocuous seeming action. That Jesus should command the sick man to work on the sabbath, whether in order to be healed or to serve as a witness to his healing, must come as a surprise if not as an outright shock to the reader.⁴⁷ And the sick man, whose initial sputtering, convoluted

⁴¹Koester thinks that only "[a]fter experiencing healing did he take up his pallet and walk" ("Hearing, Seeing, and Believing in the Gospel of John," 338, emphasis mine; see also, Culpepper, "Un exemple de commentaire fondé sur la critique narrative," 142). But the syntax of 5:8-9a is more ambiguous than Koester and Culpepper imply. Is the narrator's phrase, "And immediately the man became well" (note that codex Sinaiticus omits the phrase "and immediately"), temporally prior to the man's action of picking up his mat and walking, or is it merely logically prior to the man's action? If the narrator were concerned about emphasizing the temporal order of the miracle, he certainly could have used an aorist participle or a temporal adverb with *egeneto*. By way of contrast, in Mk 2:1-12 the actual physical healing of the paralytic (e.g., "Your sins are forgiven," 2:5) is clearly temporally prior to his getting up and walking (2:9-12).

⁴²To use Sternberg's term, this is a narrative "gap"; that is, "a lack of information about the world--an event, motive, causal link, character trait, plot structure, law of probability contrived by a temporal displacement" (The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 234-236; cf. Iser, The Implied Reader, 33-34; The Act of Reading, 168-168). Somewhat facetiously, I might add: That which is now called "gap" was formerly called "aporia" (cf. Haenchen, John, 1:257).

⁴³Brown and others discuss the "sabbath motif" which is introduced "almost as an afterthought," primarily in terms of source critical issues (The Gospel According to John, 1:210; see also Fortna, The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor, 113-117). My interest, however, is in the rhetorical effect of the "afterthought," not in its place of origin.

⁴⁴Cf. Mt. 12:9-14; Mk 1:21-28, 3:1-6; Lk 4:31-37, 6:6-11, 13:10-17, 14:16.

⁴⁵Jesus has challenged purification rituals (2:6-7), attitudes toward the temple (2:13-22), and attitudes toward the Samaritans (4:5-42).

⁴⁶Jer 17:21. Brown, The Gospel According to John, 1:208; Yee, Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John, 31-47. Pancaro also adds: "Commanding something unlawful (what precisely is understood by this is not stated clearly, but the sabbath was no doubt included) was punishable with death . . ." (The Law in the Fourth Gospel, 15).

⁴⁷Culpepper recognizes the surprise in the belated temporal notation when he says: "By withholding this information [i.e., that it was the sabbath] and supplying it just at this point, the narrator forces the reader to

response to Jesus might have appeared sniveling and weak-kneed, in retrospect proves to be a daring, risk taking individual, a person one who unquestioningly acts on a stranger's sabbath-breaking command.

As soon as the encoded reader is clued in to the miracle's temporal setting, the narrator introduces to the story a third party: "the Jews" (5:10).⁴⁸ In contrast to Jesus and the sick man who know that a healing has taken place on the sabbath precisely because the formerly sick man is carrying his mat, and in contrast to the encoded reader who initially does not know that that day was a sabbath, "the Jews" know only that "It is sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat" (5:10). There is no evidence that they know anything of the miracle which has just taken place.⁴⁹ Thus the statement, "So the Jews said to the man *who had been cured* . . ." (5:10a), is the narrator's point of view; a perspective which Jesus and the encoded reader also share (5:6, 9; Cf. 13, 14). It cannot be the perspective of "the Jews" (cf. 5:12, 16), for in the remaining dialogue they continue to be concerned with "the one who *said* to you, 'Take it up and walk'" (5:12). "The Jews" are not concerned with anyone "who made [a person] well." The latter characterization of Jesus is that of the healed man (5:11, 15), a characterization of particular interest also to the narrator (5:9, 5:10, 5:13).⁵⁰

To the critical observation of "the Jews," "It is not lawful for you to carry your mat" (5:10), the healed man responds, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Take up your mat and walk'" (5:11). "The Jews" neither ask him why he is carrying his mat nor try to find out if someone else told him to carry it. Yet the healed man responds by proclaiming, "The man who made me well said to me. . . ." He does not reveal his benefactor's name, but rather describes his benefactor solely in terms of what he did: "the man who made me well."⁵¹

Now at this point in the story the encoded reader has no clue that the healed man does not know who his benefactor is. Here, then, is another significant gap in the story, and one that will remain unclarified until 5:13. This gap makes it more difficult for the encoded reader to assess the narrator's evaluation of the healed man, because the man's response to "the Jews'" observation, "It is not lawful," could simply be read as juxtaposing the legal authority of "the

review the healing from a new perspective which catches the reader by surprise" ("Un exemple de commentaire fondé sur la critique narrative: Jean 5,1-18," 149). I just wish to add a note of specificity to his observation by saying that the encoded reader is forced to reevaluate the behavior of *the characters* by the belated temporal notation. Sternberg calls this type of device "character-elevating" (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 165).

⁴⁸For a full analysis of the expression "the Jews" in this pericope, see Culpepper, "Un exemple de commentaire fondé sur la critique narrative: Jean 5,1-18," 148-150.

⁴⁹Contra Haenchen, who says, "It is astonishing that the Jews are unmoved by the miracle, either at this point or in what follows," (*John*, 1:246-247; cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:208).

⁵⁰The narrator, whose descriptions are usually quite limited, uses three different words to denote the formerly sick man. Interestingly, all three are passive verbal constructions with the obvious agent left unidentified. The characters, on the other hand, are limited to the noun *hygies*. The narrator's interest is thus in Jesus' act of healing: the "giving of life" as *to poiein*, not in the man's activity of carrying his mat (see Haenchen, *John*, 1:258). This act of Jesus will also be an important point of emphasis in his dramatic monologue (5:21, 24-29, 39-40). The verb *airo* likewise occurs quite often in the miracle story (five times), but the narrator uses it only once, and, not surprisingly, it never occurs in Jesus' subsequent monologue (but cf. 10:18).

⁵¹Brown says: "The fact that he had let his benefactor slip away without even asking his name is another instance of real dullness" (*The Gospel According to John*, 1:209; see also Beasley-Murray, *John*, 74; but cf. 4:29, 39!). Haenchen, on the other hand, asks: "Should [Jesus] not perhaps have introduced himself to the lame man?" (*John*, 1:247). At this point in the story, however, these commentators' judgments are presumptuous. Such observations can only be made after reading the narrator's aside in 5:13.

Jews" and the authority of a charismatic healer ("the man who made me well said . . .").⁵² If this particular gap-filling logic were followed, then the healed man's argument essentially would be that the one who has the power to heal also has the power to abrogate sabbath law (cf. 5:17, 19-23).

Conflicts like this, regarding the authority of Torah and the authority of charismatics, were quite common among Jewish rabbis at the end of the first century CE when the Fourth Gospel was being written. For example, after noting that "the one sphere in which supernatural proof was judged totally inadmissible was the definition of lawful conduct (*halakhah*)," Geza Vermes goes on to relate the following "legendary account of a doctrinal argument . . . between Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and his colleagues. Having exhausted his arsenal of reasoning and still not convinced them, he performed a miracle, only to be told that there is no room for miracles in a legal debate."⁵³

The question of "the Jews," "Who is the man *who said to you, 'Take it up and walk?'*" (5:12), is thus focused solely on identifying the person who abrogated the Torah proscription of sabbath work. Clearly, "the Jews" are not concerned with the man's testimonial, "The man who made me well," for they do not ask him, "Who made you well?" The possibility of a miraculous healing will not affect the infraction that confronts them: A man is carrying his bedding on the sabbath and, moreover, somebody put him up to it.⁵⁴ But before the healed man has a chance to respond to "the Jews'" repeated question, the narrator intrudes and says, "Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there" (5:13).

What just moments before had appeared to be a spirited theological exchange between the religious elite on one side and, on the other, a weak and timid social outcast recently empowered by Jesus' sabbath command, has now been undermined by the narrator's offhand remark. Had the healed man really devised a profound theological argument for replacing Torah with the words of a charismatic healer? Or was the healed man simply revealing the fact that he didn't know his benefactor's name, and trying to put the blame for his actions on someone else by saying, "The man who made me well said to me . . .?"⁵⁵ The healed man is not even granted the privilege of speaking the words, "I don't know" (cf. 9:12, 25). He will not be permitted to speak for himself again.⁵⁶ The reader almost has a sense that the narrator is shielding the healed man

⁵²Haenchen hints at this when he says: "The man who was healed responds, however, that *the performer of miracles*, who has just healed him, told him to [take up his pallet and walk around]" (*John*, 1:257, my emphasis). John Chrysostom puts it even more strongly. He argues that the healed man's statement, "He who made me well said to me," "was as much as saying: 'You are insane and out of your wits if you bid me, when I have been cured in this way of a long and difficult illness, not to think well of the Healer and not to obey everything He may command.' Yet, if he wished to be ignoble, he could have spoken in quite a different vein; for example: 'I did not do this of my own accord, but because someone else told me to. If this is blameworthy, charge it to the one gave me the order, and I will but down my couch;' and he would have concealed the cure. . . . Actually, however, he did not conceal this, nor did he speak in this way, and he did not plead any excuse, but acknowledged his benefactor and proclaimed him in a loud voice" (*Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist*, 363-364).

⁵³*Jesus the Jew*, 81. See also Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 15; contra Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 243.

⁵⁴Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 15. Cf. Jn 7:12, 47-48.

⁵⁵Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:209; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 138.

⁵⁶Even the healed man's final words to "the Jews" are put in indirect discourse. Alter discusses such break-off points in dialogue as strategies that can be a type of "implicit commentary" (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 125).

from his adversaries by whisking him away from the scene and then intervening to speak on his behalf.⁵⁷ But is the narrator guarding the integrity of a character who has fought well and is now on the ropes, or is the narrator protecting the encoded reader from one of the gospel's least desirable models of faith?⁵⁸

The story continues with Jesus' discovery of the healed man in the temple. It is unclear from the narrator's statement whether this was the place where the man's earlier confrontation with "the Jews" had taken place but, for whatever reason, the man is there. And Jesus, finding him there, says to him, "See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more,⁵⁹ so that nothing worse happens to you" (5:14). In response to this injunction the narrator draws the story to a close: "The man went away and told⁶⁰ the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.⁶¹ Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath" (5:15-16).

The account of Jesus' second meeting with the healed man again throws into a quandary the encoded reader's assessments of the story's two major characters. Jesus' observation that the man is well, echoing his initial question to the man (5:6), seems to bring the miracle account to a fitting conclusion. But his injunction, "Do not sin anymore" (present imperative),⁶² is surprising.⁶³

⁵⁷It should be noted that in speaking for the character, the narrator does not blame the character for his failure to know his benefactor's name. Rather, the reason the narrator gives for the healed man's lack of knowledge is "*Jesus had slipped away*," not, "The healed man ran off." Nor does the narrator say after 5:11, "This he said, not because he cared about Jesus, but because he did not know who had healed him." The Johannine narrator is well able to clarify the intent of characters' words when he wishes (see, for example, 12:5-6).

⁵⁸Culpepper says that "the lame man represents those whom even the signs cannot lead to authentic faith" (*Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 138; see also Collins, "The Representative Figures in the Fourth Gospel," 42-43).

⁵⁹The present imperative *hamartane* is the first occurrence of the verb "to sin" in the gospel, and the nominal form *hamartia* has been used only once thus far ("Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," 1:29).

⁶⁰The verb *anangellein* has only occurred at Jn 4:25. But it will reappear in Jesus' farewell discourse (16:13, 14, and 15). There characters will use the word and always with a positive nuance.

⁶¹The narrator does not say that the healed man told "the Jews," "Jesus was the one who told him to carry his mat," but rather, "it was Jesus who made him well" (cf. 5:11; also Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 15). Alter's insightful discussion of how to read repetitions in direct speech and narrated speech is à propos here: "When there is no divergence between a statement as it occurs in narration and as it recurs in dialogue, or vice versa, the repetition generally has the effect of giving a weight of emphasis to the specific terms which the speaker chooses for his speech" (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 77-78).

⁶²An aorist imperative would have meant, "Don't start sinning (again), or something worse will happen to you," implying that the act of healing was also an act of forgiving sins, and that there was a causal connection between the illness and sin. But the present imperative would seem to imply that the man is still living in sin ("You've been sinning up to this point, now don't do it any more"; see also Koester, "Hearing, Seeing, and Believing in the Gospel of John," 338, n. 25); and thus, perhaps, that the initial healing was not related to the forgiveness of any sins. Compare Lk 8:49; Eph 4:28; and 1 Tim 5:23 (in the textually suspect Jn 8:11 the phrase "from now on" precedes "do not sin again," giving the latter phrase an aoristic sense).

⁶³From the perspective of reader-response criticism, one cannot appeal to Jesus' later statement in 9:3 in order to argue that this earlier statement in 5:14 is surprising (Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 243). One can only argue, as Sternberg does, that surprise "catch[es] the reader off-guard due to a false impression given earlier" (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 259), and that "for the new information to perform its unsettling effect, the old must look settled" (ibid., 309; cf. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:97; Haenchen, *John*, 1:247). Here, the "false impression given earlier" is that the healed man was innocent. The narrator, the healed man, and Jesus have all assumed it up to this point. Only "the Jews" have thought otherwise.

The only explicit character trait attributed to the healed man is couched in a prohibition and joined to a warning! But shouldn't the man's healing have been enough evidence of the forgiveness of his sins? And hasn't he just stood up admirably to the legal authorities? So what possible wrong or sin could the man be presently guilty of? Whatever the infraction, it must be significant, for Jesus takes the trouble to find the man and warn him of a worse fate that could befall him.

The suddenness of Jesus' warning and his failure to mention any of the specifics of the man's sin, and the narrator's lack of interest in illuminating the matter for the encoded reader, have the effect of forcing real readers to fill the new gap by attempting to explain the healed man's character flaw.⁶⁴ Perhaps the healed man has been sinning somehow by flaunting his new found freedom from Torah in ways that the narrator declines to disclose--perhaps by parading with his mat around the temple courtyard?⁶⁵ Jesus had earlier told the healed man to pick up his mat and keep walking, and "the Jews" have just finished telling him that it is unlawful to do what he is doing. Could Jesus be telling the healed man that he is indeed "sinning" by continuing to do what Jesus had previously asked him to do? Has Jesus gone back on his word? (He's beginning to sound just like "the Jews"!) Or less alarmingly, is Jesus saying, "Enough is enough. You've had your fun parading about the temple precincts. Now put down your mat and get on with living"?

Although the narrative gap raises many questions for readers, especially commentators, most quickly move on to the "meatier" theological issues of the appended monologue.⁶⁶ But the effect of the gap should not be set aside in order to hurry on to elaborate the miracle's christological implications. It is true, that real readers' gap filling attempts cannot supply an ultimate answer to why Jesus tells the man, "Do not sin any more." But this is precisely the point of *reading*. Through this gap--and also the previous gaps--the text creates an encoded reader who focuses on earthly questions; a reader who delights in constructing plausible contexts for the characters' words. But later on, in Jesus' monologue, when the encoded reader is finally shown the inadequacies of those earlier gap filling attempts, the reader will be prepared to accept Jesus' conclusions.

But that is getting ahead of the story. At present, the encoded reader is still stuck in the perplexing narrative gap of 5:14. Perhaps, by the very fact that Jesus has not told the healed man

⁶⁴Compare, for example, the variety of scholarly attempts to explain Jesus' warning either in terms of: 1) Jesus' own understanding of sin (Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:208; Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, 217; Hasitschka, *Befreiung von Sünde nach dem Johannesevangelium*, 285, 337); 2) the author's theology (Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 243; Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:97; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 74); or 3) the healed man's life. In the latter instance three possibilities have been proposed. Either the man is being told "don't sin, as you did in the past, when you incurred a debilitating illness" (Collins, "The Representative Figures in the Fourth Gospel," 43; Haenchen, *John*, 1:247); or, "don't continue in your sinful ways as you presently are doing" (Countryman, *The Mystical Way in the Fourth Gospel*, 41); or, "you're healthy, but you should be concerned about your spiritual condition" (Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, 217; Kysar, *John's Story of Jesus*, 34; Culpepper, "Un exemple de commentaire fondé sur la critique narrative: Jean 5,1-18," 147).

⁶⁵Haenchen hints at something like this when he says, "If one examines verse 8 more closely, it then becomes apparent that Jesus does not give the man who is healed an order like he does in Mark 2:11: the man is not to go home, but is to parade around defiantly with his pallet. That is intended not only to serve as proof that the lame man was healed, but also that he thereby violated the sabbath in accordance with the order given him" (*John*, 1:257). However, this unified reading is one which he later rejects (*ibid.*, 258).

⁶⁶For example, see Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:97; and Countryman, *The Mystical Way in the Fourth Gospel*, 40.

what his sin is, the narrator is giving the encoded reader a clue to the meaning of Jesus' words. The narrator has said that Jesus finds the healed man in the temple (5:14). Maybe the healed man is sinning simply by being in the temple--a religious site about which the encoded reader already knows Jesus has expressed negative sentiments (2:13-22; 4:21-24). But the narrator had also said that the healed man didn't know who Jesus was (5:13). Could Jesus' warning have been precipitated somehow by the healed man's previous response to "the Jews"? Perhaps he was "sinning" in not fully revealing the identity of his benefactor. What does Jesus' "Do not sin anymore" mean in this context? Whatever answer real readers might supply to fill the gap, the phrase seems to raise more questions for readers than it does for the story's character. For that character, having quickly acted on Jesus' command once before, does so again (5:15).

It would appear, then, that the healed man somehow understands Jesus' ambiguous "Do not sin anymore" as relating to his previous conversation with "the Jews," for it is seemingly in response to Jesus' injunction that the man returns immediately to his interrogators with the new information, "Jesus [i.e., not just anybody] was the one who made me well" (5:15). Since the narrator had earlier said that many of the people in Jerusalem had believed in Jesus precisely because of his signs (2:23; 3:1-2; 4:45), the healed man's intentions, ironically, can be understood positively (cf. 11:45-46; 12:9-11, 17-18). Only the encoded reader and Jesus know enough not to trust the level of belief in the Jerusalemites (2:24; 3:10; 4:1-3, 48). As a result of the healed man's proclamation, however, "the Jews" begin to stalk Jesus--because he was doing "these things" on the sabbath.⁶⁷

In view of my interpretation, which seeks to take into account the reading process and the subtle nuances of repetition in narration and conversation, one cannot so easily categorize the character as one who "rats on" or "betrays" Jesus.⁶⁸ Is he really the "super ingrate,"⁶⁹ "ready to blame his violation of the sabbath on his benefactor?"⁷⁰ Or is he simply a person who shows "persistent naivete?"⁷¹ Such readings of the character are indeed possible in light of the narrator's and Jesus' earlier, general comments about the people of Jerusalem. But in view of the fact that neither the narrator nor Jesus condemns this man, either explicitly or implicitly (cf. 2:24; 3:10; 4:1-3, 48), a counter-reading seems just as legitimate.⁷² In his final narrated sentence, the healed

⁶⁷Lindars catches the ambiguity of the narrator's conclusion (5:16) when he says, "the vagueness of the expression ["such things"] leaves it doubtful whether Jesus is to blame for causing someone else to break the sabbath, or whether his own act of healing contravened it" (*The Gospel of John*, 217). However, there will be no ambiguity later on, when, in response to the raising of Lazarus from the dead, "some of ["the Jews"] went to the Pharisees and told them what [Jesus] had done" (11:46).

⁶⁸Kysar, *John's Story of Jesus*, 34; Smith, *John*, 41; Countryman, *The Mystical Way in the Fourth Gospel*, 41.

⁶⁹Haenchen, *John*, 1:247, cf. 259; Kysar, *John's Story of Jesus*, 34.

⁷⁰Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 138; Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:209.

⁷¹Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:209.

⁷²Culpepper lists four factors why the character's final act should be interpreted negatively: "(1) The man's earlier responses have established the trait of seeking to pass responsibility from himself to others; (2) Jesus' warning in v. 14 underlines that he is a sinner; (3) we have seen formal contrasts between this passage and the first two signs, where individuals come to believe in Jesus; and (4) this pericope functions to establish the opposition to Jesus and explain some of the reasons for it" ("Un exemple de commentaire fondé sur la critique narrative," 148). I have presented important literary critical and sociological arguments for alternative readings to 1 and 3, and if they are reasonable, then the man's final report to "the Jews" can also be read as rectifying his "sin" (2).

Culpepper's third factor, the formal contrasts in the rendering of the signs, is important, for the contrasts lead to many of the ambiguities in reading this character. It should be noted, however, that the narrator

man may actually be making a strong argument for the charismatic healer's authority over and above Torah authority--this time supplying the name of the healer in the hope that his interrogators will be impressed (2:23, 3:1-2; 4:45). Perhaps he is not a tattletale, but a character who serves, in his own way and with his own theological argument, as a faithful witness to the performed sign.

Thus, in my reading of the character, the healed man is no more a representative of those "whom even the signs cannot lead to authentic faith"⁷³ than is the Samaritan woman. It should be remembered that her dramatic witness regarding the stranger who "told me everything I have ever done" ("*meti houtos estin ho Christos?*," 4:29, 39) was a question that expected a negative answer (4:29; cf. 18:35). The characters of John 4:1-42 and 5:1-16 are both imperfect witnesses, and in neither case does the narrator say "she/he believed (episteusen)."⁷⁴ The major difference between the two characters is that the man lives in Jerusalem and announces his good news in a city whose inhabitants have a natural distrust of outside authority figures (1:19-24; 2:18-21), a city unable to trust wholly in Jesus (2:23-25), and whose leaders pose a serious threat to him (4:1-3). The woman, on the other hand, lives far from Jerusalem, in an area which "the Jews" do not control, and where "the Jews" cannot take deliberative actions against Jesus.

Finally, I would submit that no character in the Fourth Gospel fully grasps the narrator's perspective that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God" (20:31), except for the story's narrator, the beloved disciple (21:24-25). Culpepper rightly argues that the individuality of the Johannine characters "is determined by their encounter with Jesus," and that the "characters represent a continuum of responses to Jesus, which exemplify misunderstandings the reader may share and responses one might make to the depiction of Jesus in the gospel."⁷⁵ Following Culpepper's lead, one can argue that, in spite of the man's faithful witness, he fails to understand the political implications of announcing Jesus' miraculous, Torah-breaking powers in a city with hostile "Jews" around. But most scholars have been hobbled by the man's misstep; blind to his act of faith and the ambiguities in his characterization. They have condemned the man too quickly, tying him too tightly to the plot (5:15-16; cf. 11:45-46) and Jesus' subsequent monologue (5:17-47).

The Blind Reading the Blind

Unlike the bedridden man of John 5 who has rarely been the subject of independent study and is not one of the gospel's more memorable characters, the blind man of John 9 is both well known and often has been the topic of extended research. Of course, most of the scholarly interest has been generated not so much by the man himself as by the narrator's curious comments about the Pharisees' "synagogue ban" (9:22, 34-35).⁷⁶ But no less important have been

does not particularly value belief based upon seeing signs (2:23-24; 4:48; 6:25; 20:29; see particularly my reading of the first two signs in *The Print's First Kiss*, 83-86). Culpepper's fourth factor is dealt with below (46-47).

⁷³Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 138.

⁷⁴Culbertson makes the important observation: "Unbelievers in John's Gospel never admit to needing anything" (*The Poetics of Revelation*, 170). In contrast to unbelievers, both the Samaritan woman and the bedridden man admit their needs, even though they misunderstand how Jesus can fulfill them.

⁷⁵*Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 104.

⁷⁶Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 37-62; Painter, "John 9 and the Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel," 31-61.

those studies that direct readers to the story's dramatic elements.⁷⁷ These studies have noted the sevenfold scenes in the narrative,⁷⁸ the rising tempo of the Pharisees' accusations and the increasing insight of the blind man,⁷⁹ and the role of the blind man as *eirōn*.⁸⁰ Following the leads of these latter studies, my analysis will attempt to show that sensitivity to subtle changes in the blind man's repetitive dialogue and the narrator's descriptions,⁸¹ and sensitivity to the implied author's manipulation of temporal order⁸² can give a fuller portrait of the character than scholarship has previously noted.

Although it seems to have gone unnoticed in the history of scholarship, the formal structure of John 9:1-5 is that of a pronouncement story, not that of a miracle story.⁸³ The scene is set when Jesus, "passing by," sees a man "blind from birth" (9:1). But rather than having the hero effect a cure, as he has done numerous times in the past, Jesus' disciples force their way into the story and interject a theological question (9:2) which leads to a pronouncement by Jesus (9:3-5). From the very outset, however, the narrator teases the encoded reader with the possibility of an ensuing miracle story and with the possibility of double meanings. It is, after all, a *blind man* who is the cause of the disciples' question, not some debatable activity of Jesus or his disciples (cf. Mk 2:13-28). And Jesus' seeing appears to be of two kinds: 1) natural seeing (when a blind man come into his view), and 2) supernatural seeing (realizing that the man has been blind *from birth*).⁸⁴ But since the disciples' question shows that they, too, somehow know that the man was blind from birth,⁸⁵ that theological problem along with Jesus' final pronouncement will be the story's ultimate focus rather than the miracle itself.⁸⁶

After Jesus' lengthy pronouncements (9:3-5) a miracle is swiftly narrated (9:6-7). Wordlessly, Jesus spits in the dust, makes mud, and anoints the man's eyes with the mud (the narrator uses the word *mud* twice).⁸⁷ In contrast to the bedridden man of John 5, Jesus does not

⁷⁷Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:376-377.

⁷⁸Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 24-36.

⁷⁹Resseguie, "John 9: A Literary-Critical Analysis," 299-303; Lieu, "Blindness in the Johannine Tradition," 83-84.

⁸⁰Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, 119-125.

⁸¹Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 63-113.

⁸²Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 230-320.

⁸³Surprisingly, even Bultmann misses this (*The Gospel of John*, 329-333). And Martyn simply describes the miracle story form (9:1, 6-7), skipping over the intervening verses (9:2-5) as though they didn't exist (*History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 25; cf. Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor*, 109-113). Pancaro, however, notes that the story "takes on the form (in its final moments) of a Streitgespräch" (*The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 17).

⁸⁴Compare, for example, Jn 5:6 where the narrator used two verbs: "When Jesus saw [idon] him lying there and knew [gnous] that he had been there a long time. . . ." At the conclusion of this story Jesus will point out that there are indeed two kinds of sight--one that is open to new spiritual realities, and one that is blind to them (9:40-41).

⁸⁵Bultmann puts the issue this way: "Of course one may not ask how the disciples know that he was born blind" (*The Gospel of John*, 330). In Sternberg's terms, Bultmann is saying that to ask this question is to be involved in "illegitimate gap-filling" (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 188).

⁸⁶Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, 118.

⁸⁷Pancaro lists the kneading of mud as one of three sabbath infractions in this story. The other two infractions are healing a person whose life is not in danger and using a substance which was not normally used during the week to anoint eyes (*The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 19-20; see also Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:373; and Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 332). But the kneading of mud is the only activity emphasized by the narrator (9:6, 14) and the healed man (9:11). Furthermore, the "how" of the miracle will be the central issue for

ask the blind man anything and the man says nothing to Jesus. Jesus is wholly the agent, the blind man is wholly the patient.⁸⁸ Jesus then gives a terse command: "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (9:7a), and disappears from the story. He will not speak again until he reveals his true identity to the healed man (9:35b-41).⁸⁹

After the narrator's interpretive note regarding the name of the pool, he describes the man's prompt action and its effect: "Then he went and washed, and came back able to see" (9:7b). The blind man will no longer simply be the occasion for the disciples' theological question and Jesus' revelatory remarks, for he now takes on a living presence as one who acts upon the authoritative command of Jesus.

Unlike the bedridden man of John 5 whose plaintive voice caught the encoded reader's ear prior to Jesus' miracle producing words, this man is voiceless until he encounters those who once knew him as a beggar (9:8-12). And in contrast to the bedridden man who was immediately confronted by the hostile questions of authority figures, this man is given a chance to test his new-found voice on the curious and seemingly harmless questions of his neighbors and acquaintances; people who are close to his social equals.⁹⁰ His response to his inquisitive neighbors is almost an exact repetition of the narrator's description of the miracle: "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight" (9:11). He knows quite well who it was who healed him (cf. 5:13) and the means by which the healing was done, but he is ignorant of his benefactor's present whereabouts (9:12).

The story takes an ominous turn when the narrator says: "They brought to the the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind man" (9:13).⁹¹ The encoded reader knows that, in the past, the Pharisees have been suspicious of Jesus (4:1; 7:32, 45-53; 8:13). And so when the narrator goes on to add, "Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes" (9:14), a re-evaluation of the neighbors' apparently guileless questions becomes necessary.⁹² In retrospect, perhaps there was an undercurrent of maliciousness lurking beneath those questions.⁹³

the Pharisees (9:15, 19, 26).

⁸⁸O'Day, The Word Disclosed, 59.

⁸⁹Duke observes that this is Jesus' most prolonged absence in the entire gospel (Irony in the Fourth Gospel, 119).

⁹⁰The questioners begin by talking about "the beggar" among themselves (note the use of the demonstrative pronoun *houtos* in 9:8-9), before finally addressing him directly ("*your* eyes," 9:10).

⁹¹Lindars accurately assesses the encoded reader's perspective of the neighbors at this point when he says, "it is left to the reader to guess why this was done," i.e., why they took him to the Pharisees (The Gospel of John, 345).

⁹²At this point Pancaro asks the crucial question for reader-response criticism: "Why did Jn wait until v. 14 to mention this fact?" (i.e., the fact that it was a sabbath, The Law in the Fourth Gospel, 18). But his answer relates the gap to the miracle's symbolism of baptism--the importance of which lies in the man's (post-baptismal) witness to his neighbors (*ibid.*, 26).

⁹³O'Day realizes that "the neighbors are not so guileless" as the healed man (The Word Disclosed, 62), and Kysar theorizes that the religious authorities "are brought into this matter because the healing has taken place on the sabbath, and so must determine whether or not the sabbath regulations have been violated" (John's Story of Jesus, 49). Neither Lindars nor Beasley-Murray, however, see any connection between the neighbors bringing the healed man to the Pharisees and the narrator's notation that it was a sabbath (Lindars, The Gospel of John, 345; Beasley-Murray, John, 156).

Furthermore, if the blind man knew that he had been healed on the sabbath, perhaps he should have been more careful in proclaiming the means by which the miracle occurred. Yet, by withholding the temporal notation until after the healed man's conversation with his neighbors, the encoded reader's first assessment of the healed man and the neighbors cannot be construed negatively. Both the encoded reader and the healed man have been innocently caught in a web of words. The healed man has blurted out the name of his benefactor and the means of his cure to his trusted neighbors in a moment of radiant joy, while the encoded reader has had no idea that the day on which this all occurred was a sabbath.

When the Pharisees appear on the scene, there is a peculiar shift in the narrator's description of the healed man. Earlier, in the presence of those who had known him as a beggar, the narrator had described the healed man as "a beggar" (9:8). Now, in the presence of those who will refuse to recognize the miracle and the miracle-worker, the narrator describes him as "the man who had formerly been blind" (*ton pote typhlon*, 9:13), or "the blind man" (*to typhlo*, 9:17; *hos en typhlos*, 9:24). However, in the presence of his parents who recognize their son, the narrator will call him "the one who received his sight" (*tou anablepsantos*, 9:18). The narrator's epithets betray his ideological perspective⁹⁴--a perspective that surreptitiously leads the encoded reader toward the pronouncement with which Jesus ends the story: Those with eyes to see do not have the ability to peer beneath the surface and find the person with true insight. The Pharisees see nothing more than a blindly ignorant fool (9:41).

The Pharisees' first reaction to being confronted with the healed man is to question the neighbors, and the Pharisees' query gives rise to the story's second gap. Their question is not what the encoded reader might expect: "Why have your neighbors brought you here?" Instead, the Pharisees' question regarding "how he had received his sight" (9:15a; cf. 9:16-17), is directed at the neighbors and presumes that a miracle has occurred.⁹⁵ The question implies that the neighbors have already repeated the healed man's story to the Pharisees. The healed man then responds to the Pharisees' question with a remarkably abbreviated account of what had happened to him (9:15b; cf. 17c, 25). In response to their question the healed man replies, "*He put mud on my eyes, then I washed, and now I see*" (9:15b, my emphasis).⁹⁶

⁹⁴Sternberg's discussion of the role of the epithet in ancient Hebrew narrative is helpful for the analysis of Jn 9. He says it is usually "proleptic" (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 337), for "[i]t shapes the sequence of our expectations (as a foreshadowing device) because it is bound to shape the sequence of events (as a developmental factor). This unusual premise to a coming proposition, then, appears as a cause that signals some effect yet unborn in the world, but already a presence to be reckoned with in the reading" (*ibid.*, 338).

⁹⁵By placing this initial question in indirect discourse and by having the Pharisees discuss the healed man's response among themselves (9:16-17), the implied author puts some distance between the central character and his opponents. Thus, the encoded reader and the character are shielded from the Pharisees' probing, barbed questions. Even after the Pharisees finally ask a question in direct discourse ("What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." 9:16), and the man answers, "He is a prophet" (9:17), the narrator immediately intrudes by announcing the calling of the man's parents.

⁹⁶Most commentators have been content to assume that the author somehow gives a summary account of the healing through the voice of the character (i.e, a narrative gap occurs in the healed man's shortened account). In this reading, the reader should assume that, in fact, the healed man "told all" to the Pharisees--the author just hasn't told all. Based upon a different understanding of narrative (*The Print's First Kiss*, 27-30), I would argue that the neighbors must have repeated the man's story to the Pharisees, and thus that is the place where the narrative gap occurs (see the discussion below of the healed man's words, 52-53).

Although numerous commentators brush off the man's response as merely the author's attempt to shorten what otherwise would be a very redundant account,⁹⁷ Alter's and Sternberg's discussions of repetition in ancient Hebrew narrative open up other possible readings.⁹⁸ In his opening statement, "He put mud on my eyes," the healed man does not mention his benefactor's name (9:15b)--although he had mentioned it earlier (9:11). Could his omission of Jesus' name at this point be due to the change of his audience? Perhaps he doesn't want to disclose Jesus' identity.⁹⁹ This thesis gains further support when the encoded reader comes to the man's next statement. The man does not use the narrator's language of "making mud" (*epoiesen*) or "anointing" (*epechrisen*) as he had earlier (9:11, cf. 9:6, 14; cf. 9:27); instead, the man switches to the more innocuous phrase "put mud" (*epitheken*, 9:15). The healed man's choice of language thus successfully shields Jesus from two possible sabbath violations.¹⁰⁰ Then, finally, as if to insure that there will not be the slightest possibility that anyone could accuse his benefactor of sabbath violations, the man omits from his account Jesus' command "Go, wash" (9:7, 11), and instead simply says, "I washed and now I see."¹⁰¹ In view of the extended repetitions of 9:7 and 9:11 and the change of audience, the encoded reader cannot ignore the remarkable brevity and different word choices in the healed man's response to the Pharisees. The man intends to protect his benefactor from his opponents' opening jabs, and he will keep his guard up throughout his interrogation--in spite of the pointed questions peppering him (9:26-27).

If the healed man's account of what had transpired earlier is a cautious feinting, then the Pharisees' pronouncement that "This man is not from God for he does not observe the sabbath" (9:16) comes as a surprise to the encoded reader. The healed man has given them no data for coming to such a conclusion! The Pharisees' observation, then, like their opening question (9:15), cannot be based upon anything that the healed man had told them. It, too, must be based upon the neighbors' remarks--those remarks which the narrator had left unrecorded.

After the healed man makes his first public declaration regarding Jesus (9:17), the narrator diverts the encoded reader's attention away from the man for the moment and turns to

⁹⁷Haenchen says: "The narrative becomes shorter with each repetition--the reader knows it and should not be bored with the repetition" (*John*, 2:39; see also Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2:247-248). Resseguie describes the man in this scene as one who "still lacks color: to the questions of the authorities he responds with short, declarative sentences" ("John 9: A Literary-Critical Analysis," 300). Only O'Day comes close to the real significance of the healed man's brief answer when she says: "Nothing more is offered than the minimum required to answer the Pharisees' question" (*The Word Disclosed*, 63).

⁹⁸Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 97-113; Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 365-427.

⁹⁹O'Day astutely observes that "[a]s much as Jesus is talked about in the interrogations of verses 8-34, Jesus' name is never named [by a character] after verse 11. . . . There are many reasons for this reluctance to name Jesus' name. The Pharisees do not name the name of Jesus because to do so would give credence and standing to the one who bears the name. The man born blind does not name the name because the significance of the name will only dawn on him as the narrative advances. The man's parents do not name the name because they are afraid to do so (v. 23)" (*The Word Disclosed*, 56). O'Day's observations are very insightful. However, I would object to the reason she gives for the blind man's deference. He does indeed identify Jesus by name to his neighbors (9:11). Only after he meets the Pharisees does he refuse to name his benefactor.

¹⁰⁰"Putting mud" on one's body was not necessarily work, but "making mud" and anointing certainly were (Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 19-20).

¹⁰¹Schnackenburg argues that the choice of the narrator's verb "he opened" (*aneoksen*, 9:14) is "deliberate, since it brings Jesus into prominence as healer and sabbath-breaker" (*The Gospel According to St. John*, 2:247). However, when the man speaks, he uses the plain "I see" (*blepo*, 9:15), which does not necessarily assume that the person who "put mud on his eyes" had any curative powers.

"the Jews" interrogation of his parents (9:18-23).¹⁰² The dramatic shift is reminiscent of Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman. In that story, immediately after Jesus reveals his identity to the woman (4:25-26), the narrator breaks into the scene to announce the arrival of the disciples (4:27) and so postpones her anticipated response. Similarly in this story, the encoded reader must wait in suspense before hearing the Pharisees' reaction to the healed man's declaration, "He is a prophet" (9:17).

But the narrator's explanation of the parents' fear (9:22-23) opens up yet another narrative gap, a gap that forces the encoded reader to reevaluate the healed man's earlier conversation with the Pharisees. That gap will also sharpen the encoded reader's attentiveness to the healed man's future confessions. In retrospect, the parents' fear, coupled with "the Jews" determination to put out of the synagogue anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Christ (9:22), turns a perplexingly unnecessary, rude conversation into a high-staked courtroom drama.¹⁰³ The quotation of the parents' slightly nuanced words, "He is of age, question him" (*eperotesate*, 9:23 for *erotesate*, 9:21), may also imply that, from the narrator's perspective, this was indeed a legal proceeding.¹⁰⁴ Given that setting, how then will the Pharisees respond to the man's straightforward reply, "He is a prophet"? Will the healed man, like the Samaritan woman, move from perceiving that Jesus is a prophet to recognizing him as the Christ, and thus end up excluded from the synagogue (4:19, 29; cf. 1:19-21; 7:40-41, 45-52)?

After the dramatic interlude in which his parents were called to testify (9:18-23),¹⁰⁵ the Pharisees (now described as "the Jews") again question "the man who had been blind" (9:24-34). The conversation is reminiscent of the earlier dialogue of 8:31-56, where accusers leveled the charges of sin, lying, and dishonorable birth. Ironically, however, the only real liar in this scene is the healed man himself who responds to the questions, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" with the lie, "I have told you already and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again?" (9:27).¹⁰⁶ It is precisely because the man did not tell them the whole truth earlier that the Pharisees, becoming more and more exasperated, are still asking him the same questions! Finally, in this exchange, the healed man attains his full stature as a character who opposes the Pharisees, pummeling them with his own ripostes.¹⁰⁷ Even with no direction from the narrator, the irony and biting sarcasm of the healed man's questions are obvious.¹⁰⁸ Amidst the

¹⁰²In this scene, as many commentators have noted, the narrator switches from the term "the Pharisees," to the expression, "the Jews," to describe those who interrogate the man's parents (9:13, 15-16; cf. 9:40). This phenomenon is not unusual in the gospel (cf. 1:19, 24; 7:32-35; 8:13, 22), but no perfect answer to the peculiarity has been found. Generally speaking, "the Jews" are found on the scene whenever antagonism toward Jesus reaches a breaking point (e.g., 5:16-17; 6:41, 52; 7:10-15, 35; 8:21-59; 10:19-39; 11:31-54; 18:31-19:22; see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 125-132). Here, as elsewhere, the epithet may warn the encoded reader that banners are being unfurled. Battle lines are being drawn tighter, the opposition is closing ranks.

¹⁰³Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 32.

¹⁰⁴Bauer, Gingrich, and Danker, *eperotao*, in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*.

¹⁰⁵See especially O'Day's discussion of this scene (*The Word Disclosed*, 64-65).

¹⁰⁶Beasley-Murray makes a strong case for understanding the earlier command "Give glory to God," as "a command to the man to confess his sin, i.e., the sin of lying as to his blindness and subsequent healing by Jesus. . . ." (*John*, 158).

¹⁰⁷Jn 9:30-32. See Resseguie, "John 9," 299-300.

¹⁰⁸Bultmann says: "By pretending that he believes [the Pharisees] really to be in earnest, [the healed man] treats the insincerity of the inquiry with the greatest possible irony" (*The Gospel of John*, 336; cf. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, 121-123).

debris of the hard-fought battle, his benefactor will meet him once again, and the healed man will show his true colors as he bows down and worships--not the Christ--but the Son of Man (9:35-38). The narrative then closes when Jesus confronts the Pharisees with their own blindness (9:39-41).

As was the case with the bedridden man of John 5, so also here in John 9 careful attention to repetition, the interplay of narration and direct speech, and the dynamics of reading reveal hidden nuances in the Johannine art of characterization. The healed man's speech (9:15) early in the story alerts the encoded reader to the character's cleverness, and that cleverness is further confirmed by the end of the story.¹⁰⁹ He is indeed, as critics have pointed out, a "quick-witted *iron*"¹¹⁰ and a man of "dogged loyalty."¹¹¹ But I would point out that his quick-wittedness and dogged loyalty show themselves as early as the man's first encounter with the Pharisees (9:13-17), not just during the second interrogation (9:24-34). From the very beginning the man tried to protect Jesus by refusing to tell the Pharisees that Jesus had made mud, anointed his eyes, and told him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. At the same time, the narrator's evasive action gradually unveiled the neighbors' motives for questioning the man and bringing him to the Pharisees. Something more than mere idle curiosity was at stake. Finally, the narrator's choice of epithets in the story was shown to be proleptic. The various descriptions of the healed man led the encoded reader to contemplate the Pharisees' blindness long before Jesus stated it openly (9:39-41).

Sabbath Day Heroes

Reading these two miracle stories with close attention to the sequence of sentences, and to the gradual accumulation of information and responses, reveals a correspondingly more complex portrait of the two men whom Jesus healed on the sabbath. In the first instance, blame for the persecution of Jesus cannot be put at the feet of the bedridden man. It was, after all, Jesus who healed him on the sabbath and told the man to carry his mat. In fact, the bedridden man's argument for the implicit authority of the charismatic healer is one which Jesus himself later on picks up and develops, albeit in a different manner (5:17, 19-21; cf. 7:21-23). Yet there are indeed ambiguities in the first man's response. For example, does he respond correctly to Jesus' injunction: "Do not sin anymore?" Later, after reading John 9, the encoded reader finds that the first man's ambiguous behavior has become more understandable. The first man had already flagrantly broken the sabbath by the time he encountered "the Jews." By way of contrast, the blind man does nothing that could be considered even remotely unlawful.¹¹² He simply washes his face on the sabbath. Furthermore, he is apparently safe so long as he does not acknowledge Jesus to be the Christ (an acknowledgement which, in fact, the man never makes).

In light of this contrast, there is an element of tragedy surrounding the first character: he is bound to his past. He has publically broken sabbath law. How can he rewrite history to exonerate his sin? The second character, on the other hand, is comical: he is liberated from his past. Is he the same man who used to sit and beg? Was he really blind? Can he wiggle his way out of the predicament in which his neighbors have put him? These two narratives, filtered through ancient Hebrew models of characterization, together express the double-edged, painful

¹⁰⁹Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:377.

¹¹⁰Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, 125.

¹¹¹Countryman, *The Mystical Way in the Fourth Gospel*, 65.

¹¹²Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 19.

joy of late first-century Christian commitment: an experience that stumbles in the dark as it reaches for the light.

A Postscript

In their critiques of the application of reader-response criticism to the Bible, both Temma Berg and Stephen Moore challenge biblical reader critics to reconceive their nascent "readers." From Berg's perspective, New Testament scholars' readings of biblical texts work--and also fail--precisely because they presume an understanding of reading unlike that of any real reader's reading experience. Their readings are painstakingly slow; there is no room for forgetfulness in them; they trudge on, without ever being interrupted.¹¹³ My readings of the two Johannine miracles fit her criticisms perfectly. But although I will agree that my readings are slow and laborious, I will steady them on the ground that they move light years faster than any other critical readings of the stories. All other readings have been predicated upon an immobile text. There the readings lie, begging for aid from their equally paralyzed neighbors, but all the while they lack the courage to move beyond their own shadowy porticos. Those readings prefer the reassurance of the text's encircling grasp to the dangerous excitement of striding wild-eyed into the temple (2:14-19; 5:14; 11:48).

As with Berg's critique of biblical reader-response criticism, Moore's critique recognizes that the biblical text is ideologically motivated and that its largest reading communities share similar ideological concerns.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless he still finds New Testament reader critics' readings to be overly cerebral and emotionally retarded.¹¹⁵ Moore's criticism, too, seems to knock the breath out of my readings at the very moment they attempt their first halting steps. I speak of problems that "beg for solutions"; of a reader who "reconsiders" the implications of seemingly direct questions; of characters who are "ignorant of things the reader knows."

Whether from mountain or moor the view is the same: there apparently is a painful stumbling and stuttering in my readings; a blind spot which makes it impossible for me to see the translucent holes beyond the opaque wholes.¹¹⁶

Can such blindness lead to insight? Will the bedridden reader ever really walk?

¹¹³Berg, "Reading in/to Mark," 188, 195; cf. Mailloux, *Rhetorical Power*, 36-53.

¹¹⁴*Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 125-126, 174-175; cf. Berg, "Reading in/to Mark," 190-192.

¹¹⁵Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 95-98; 106-107.

¹¹⁶Daniel Goleman describes the physiological basis for the metaphor of the blind spot this way: "At the back of each eyeball is a point where the optic nerve, which runs to the brain, attaches to the retina. This point lacks the cells that line the rest of the retina to register the light that comes through the lens of the eye. As a result, at this one point in vision there is a gap in the information transmitted to the brain. The blind spot registers nothing" (*Vital Lies, Simple Truths*, 15; cf. Moore, "How Jesus' Risen Body Became a Cadaver," 277).

I was made painfully aware of this physiological fact a few years ago when doctors discovered that a prenatal hemorrhage on the left occipital horn of my brain had left me with a shriveled optic nerve to my right eyeball. At that moment I realized that I had never observed the world as a normal person would observe it.