Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel

Edited by
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Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John

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Foreword

The following volume on characters studies in John began, strangely enough, when two of the editors met (via email) because they shared a love for Paul's rhetoric in Galatians! Upon this discovery in late 2008, they soon realized they also thoroughly enjoyed literary studies related to the Fourth Gospel. However great the distance between Galatians and John, one point of convergence relates to "artistic" issues: the rhetorical art in Paul and the literary art in John are both explicitly persuasive (cf. Galatians *passim*; John 20:30–31). So emails passed between Gordon College near Boston, Massachusetts, and the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa frequently in those days. The idea to do something with characters in John was the result of those early emails. When Ruben Zimmermann from the Johannes Gutenberg-University of Mainz in Germany joined the project in the spring of 2009, the team was complete. And during a delicious dinner in New Orleans at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature later that year, the contours of the book were worked out. Realizing that we did not know of any book like the one we were proposing (on the state of character studies in John at present, see more below), we knew that an ambitious project related to nearly all the characters in the Gospel was in order. Running the idea by a few different publishers who expressed some enthusiasm at that conference cemented in our minds the need for this book.

Since we desired to make a substantial contribution to the field of literary studies on the Fourth Gospel, we sketched out the following purpose statement for the volume before issuing any invitations to contribute:

> The purpose of this volume is to offer a comprehensive narrative-critical study of nearly every character Jesus (or, in some cases, only the reader) encounters in the narrative world of the Fourth Gospel. The emphasis is thus on a literary approach to the matter, in particular from the viewpoint of characterization as it is generally understood.

In light of the statement, we thought long and hard about *methodology* (on methodological issues related to character and characterization, see more below). While we insisted on a literary approach to the characters in John (as opposed to, for example, a strictly historical approach), we did not prescribe a certain method. In the end, our authors employed a variety of approaches: in several articles the approach chosen could be described simply as a close reading of the text which focuses especially on the way a character is portrayed in

the narrative. In others, the approach could be described in broad terms, e. g., as a focus on intertextuality, intercharacterization, spatial semantics, polyvalence, participant reference, or speech act theory, to name only a few. One author even engaged in a dramatic rewriting of the text from the perspective of characterization. Other authors preferred to employ a specific model (in some instances, a combination of such models) developed for the analysis of characters in narrative texts. In this regard readers will find well-known names such as Robert Alter, Cornelis Bennema, Adele Berlin, Seymour Chatman, Joseph Ewen, E. M. Forster, W. J. Harvey, Uri Margolin, James Resseguie, and Victor Shklovsky.

We allowed for this openness with respect to methodology for three basic reasons: first, we believed that the contributors should determine the best course of action with respect to the character(s) they were studying. Literary criticism related to John over the years has shown definitively that there is no one particular methodology that works best with respect to so many different kinds of characters (and, of course, this conclusion holds true for character studies related to other works as well). Second, we believed that insisting on one particular methodology would make for formulaic chapters, lead to predetermined conclusions, and, quite frankly, result in boring reading. Instead, the authors here are as varied in their hermeneutical presuppositions and literary methodologies as they are in their conclusions. Readers will therefore observe firsthand the implementation of a wide variety of methods available for character studies, as well as the necessarily circular relationship between methods and conclusions. Third, as editors we are each committed to the notion that *openness* best suits the literary design and theological message of the Fourth Gospel itself. With regard to theological issues like Christology, for example, the Fourth Gospel likes playing with different titles, images, and traditions. As soon as someone wants to focus on a single name or decisive image, one clear conviction over the rest, that same one is inevitably confronted in the text by the one Mark Stibbe has aptly described, "the elusive Christ" (e. g., John 6:15; 8:59; 12:36);[1] it does not seem possible to harness the Fourth Gospel's openness. Indeed, since Jesus won't ride in his disciples' boat in John (cf. 6:21), we suspect he won't ride in ours either.

After drawing up the list of characters in John, we began to compile a list of scholars to approach for possible contributions. The response from those we invited could not have been more enthusiastic. We were delighted by their interest in the project and, subsequently, the way they went about their work. In the end, forty-four authors from eleven different countries and four different continents, contributed essays to this volume. Editors of volumes such as

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[1] See Mark W. G. Stibbe, "The Elusive Christ: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel," *JSNT* 44 (1991): 20–38.

this often speak about contributors as though working with them is akin to "herding cats." Our experience, however, has proved that old maxim (mostly!) untrue. We very much want to thank the authors for their contributions to this volume, as well as for their patience with us during this long process. Having worked on the project steadily for nearly four years (in the midst of other obligations and commitments), we have learned a great deal about what we have described as "inter-continental, cross-cultural, team exegesis." We remain committed to the notion that reading, interpreting, writing, and editing – as well as the process by which all of that gets repeated again and again – are all worthy endeavors.

In terms of the selection of characters included here, we deliberately avoided articles related to the deity; readers looking for articles on "God/Father,"[2] "Jesus,"[3] or "the Holy Spirit/Paraclete,"[4] or the titles, symbols, and images related specifically to them, will not find them here. Still, given their prominence in the Gospel, readers of this volume will encounter discussions of these three, especially Jesus, quite frequently. The authors of other recent publications on characters in John, especially those with titles like "encountering Jesus,"[5] understand this point very well. In terms of non-human "characters," we grouped together as one character, "the Devil, Satan, and the Ruler of this World," even though we could perhaps have split them profitably into separate studies;

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[2] See further, Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001); D. Francois Tolmie, "The Characterization of God in the Fourth Gospel," *JSNT* (1998) 20: 57–75.

[3] On Jesus specifically as a character in John, see most recently, Jason Sturdevant, *The Character of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: The Adaptability of the Logos* (PhD Dissertation; Princeton Theological Seminary, 2013); see also, Steven A. Hunt, "And the Word Became Flesh – Again? Jesus and Abraham in John 8," in *Perspectives on Our Father Abraham* (ed. Steven A. Hunt; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 81–109; Ruben Zimmermann, *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium* (WUNT 171; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), here "Chapter 8: Narrative Bildlichkeit," 197–217, 355–71; Mark W. G. Stibbe, "The Elusive Christ: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel," *JSNT* 44 (1991): 20–38; J. A. du Rand, "The Characterization of Jesus as Depicted in the Narrative of the Fourth Gospel," *Neotestamentica* 19 (1985): 18–36; Gail O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); R. Alan Culpepper, *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), esp. 106–12.

[4] While not strictly narratological studies, see especially, Gitte Buch-Hansen, *"It is the Spirit that Gives Life": A Stoic Understanding of Pneuma in John's Gospel* (BZNW 173; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010); Tricia Gates Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John: Johannine Pneumatology in Social-Scientific Perspective* (JSNTSup 253; London: T&T Clark, 2003); and Gary M. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Community* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987) and the excellent bibliographies in all those works.

[5] See Peter Dschulnigg, *Jesus begegnen: Personen und ihre Bedeutung im Johannesevangelium* (2d ed.; Münster: LIT, 2002); Frances Taylor Gench, *Encounters with Jesus: Studies in the Gospel of John* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009).

and we included an essay on the Angels at Jesus' tomb. And while we included an essay on "the World" as a corporate character, we decided against an essay on "Scripture" as a character, even though a compelling case can be made for its personification in the Gospel.[6] Similarly, while we considered this option, in the end we did not include essays on "characters from the Hebrew Bible" who figure prominently in John (most notably, for example, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Isaiah).[7] We also decided against articles on the "We/I" in 1:14, 16; 21:24–25, since they do not actually operate as characters in the narrative world of the text. While some minor "implied" characters have been omitted from the volume ("the guests" who will presumably get "over-served" at the wedding in John 2; "inhabitants of Jerusalem" in 7:25; "a messenger" in 11:3, etc.), for various reasons a few others have been linked together in articles:

– "the Priests" and "the Levites"
– "Jesus' Disciples" and "the Twelve"
– "the Servants at Cana" and "the Steward at Cana"
– "the Money Changers in the Temple" and "the Animal Traders in the Temple"
– "the Ill at the Pool" and "the Sick at the Feeding"
– "the Scribes" and "the Elders" in the *Pericope Adulterae*
– "Caiaphas" and "Annas"
– "the Mother of Jesus" and "the Beloved Disciple"
– "the Sons of Zebedee" and "the Two Anonymous Disciples"

In the end, roughly seventy characters (or groups of characters) in John, no matter how major or minor, however round or flat, have been made the focus of an essay in this book. This number – seventy – is not to be understood in any absolute sense for a few fairly obvious reasons. First, how should one count corporate characters? So, for example, there are characters which speak and act or get acted upon like a single character and accordingly can be counted just as "one," even if they were "two" (consider in this regard the parents of the man born blind in John 9 or the co-crucified men in John 19). Others, like "the neighbors" in John 9 or "the many believers" in John 10, obviously defy

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[6] See especially Michael Labahn's essay "Scripture *Talks* Because Jesus *Talks*: The Narrative Rhetoric of Persuading and Creativity in John's Use of Scripture," in *The Fourth Gospel in First-Century Media Culture* (ed. Anthony Le Donne and Tom Thatcher; LNTS 426; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 133–54; and Gary T. Manning, Jr., *The 'Character' of the Scriptures in the Fourth Gospel: A Literary Analysis* (paper presented at the "John Section" of the national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Milwaukee, Wisc., Nov. 13–15, 2012).

[7] See, e. g., Michael Theobald, "Abraham – (Isaak –) Jakob: Israels Väter im Johannesevangelium," in *Israel und seine Heilstraditionen im Johannesevangelium* (ed. Michael Labahn et al.; FS J. Beutler SJ, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 158–83; on Moses in particular see, Stan Harstine, *Moses as a Character in the Fourth Gospel: A Study of Ancient Reading Techniques* (JSNTSup 229; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

the numbers game entirely and sometimes split into further subgroups anyway, like "the crowds" in John 7. And while others like the "Women at the cross" in John 19 can be counted separately, it made sense to us to understand them as a single character in that scene.[8] This example in particular illustrates well the inherent subjectivity of the enterprise, since we also saw fit to group one of these women, Jesus' mother, with the disciple Jesus loved as yet another group character, all while commissioning separate essays on both as individual characters as well! Subjective? We are guilty as charged! We also included essays on the three characters that share the stage with Jesus in the *Pericope Adulterae* (John 7:53–8:11), even though the vast majority of scholars line up against that narrative's authenticity; and we asked that, when appropriate, our authors consider John 21 and the characters therein as integral to the process, even though the jury still appears to be out on whether or not this passage is a later addition to the Gospel. When one adds to all of this that there are clearly overlapping group characters, like "the Pharisees" and "the Jews" (or "the crowds" and "the Jews"), and perhaps even overlapping individual characters like the "anonymous disciple" in John 1:35 and the "Beloved Disciple" who emerges in John 13, that one will likely come to the conclusion, as we did, that any form of absolute counting is out of the question. Hence, *roughly* seventy characters.

Far from worrying about our inability to delimit these characters, we remain convinced that it would be a basic misunderstanding of Johannine style to attempt to circumscribe them at all. There is already a symbolism related to numbers in John (e. g., the counting of days, miracles, "I Am" sayings,[9] "a hundred and fifty-three" fish,[10] etc.) and in the end, such counting almost invariably leaves one pondering curious anomalies.[11] The patterns appear to be there of course, but how should they be counted? One gets the distinct impression

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[8] Even here scholars differ on whether there were two, three, or four women at the cross! For a discussion of these issues, see D. Francois Tolmie, "Creating Contrasts: The Women Standing Near the Cross," in this volume.

[9] There are not only the seven "I Am" sayings, as they are so often described. During the "bread of life" discourse alone, we find four different ones (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51); furthermore, we must include the so called "absolute 'I Am' sayings" (e. g., 4:26; 6:20; 8:58 etc.), as well as the "I Am" saying of the man born blind (John 9:9); even John 18:37 may be seen as an inverted "I Am" saying; see on all these problems, Ruben Zimmermann, *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium* (WUNT 171; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2004), 121–36.

[10] See, e. g., R. Alan Culpepper, "Designs for the Church in the Imagery of John 21:1–14," in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language* (ed. Jörg Frey et al.; WUNT 200; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 369–402, here 383–94 on "the 153 large fish;" Richard Bauckham, "The 153 Fish and the Unity of the Fourth Gospel," in *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), 271–84.

[11] Cf. Maarten J. J. Menken, *Numerical Literary Techniques in John: The Fourth Evangelist's Use of Numbers of Words and Syllables* (NovTSup 55; Leiden: Brill, 1985).

that the text simply does not want to be pinned down. Starting and ending the Gospel with "anonymous disciples" (John 1:35; 21:2) should be enough to demonstrate that the puzzling openness and genuine flexibility of this Gospel probably also extends to its characters. Still, as editors, we had to draw the line somewhere. So we did. We hope the number and combinations of characters we fixed upon functions heuristically to demonstrate that there are many characters in John and, if thought about in another light or from another angle, probably more than we expect. We conclude the topic of character selection with a slightly revised form of Johannine wisdom: there are also many other characters who encountered Jesus; if every one of them were written down, we suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Two important details about the organization of the book and its chapters: the more or less seventy characters presented in this volume in sixty-two chapters are arranged here, with only a handful of exceptions, simply in the order of their first appearance in the Gospel (see the table of contents and the accompanying table). In the chapters themselves, authors have been asked to introduce their method, offer a brief history of research (if one is available), summarize the raw data related to the character in terms of narrative occurrences, actions, and speech, and finally to engage in character analysis of traits, development, interaction with others, etc. Of course, our authors were not limited to these kinds of issues and concerns, and many went much further in their studies, for example, considering the theological implications of their character's role in the text or the way their character was instrumental in the development of the Gospel's overall Christology.

In conclusion, we are delighted to publically acknowledge several individuals whose work on this volume will not soon be forgotten. We are grateful to Christopher Skinner for his frequent encouragement, especially early on while he was getting his own project off the ground,[12] as well as his timely and thoughtful contributions to our volume. We would like to recognize also the exceptional research, writing, and translation work of four Gordon College students (Sophie Buchanan, Laura Johnson, Joel Nolette, and Chelsea Revell), as well as several extraordinary "wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter" associated with the Johannes Gutenberg-University at Mainz (Lena-Mareen Höllein, Jörg Röder, Dieter Roth, and Susanne Luther). Cornelis Bennema, whose own major work on several characters in John came out in 2009,[13] spent some research time at the Johannes Gutenberg-University in 2012. During this time he was involved in several aspects related to our project; we are exceedingly grateful that he was so keen to help out. We would like to thank Jörg Frey

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[12] Christopher Skinner (ed.), *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John* (LNTS 461; London: T & T Clark, 2013).

[13] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*.

who accepted this volume for Mohr Siebeck's WUNT series. We are delighted to be working with such a fine editor as well as with such an esteemed publisher. Ilse König did a phenomenal job managing the editorial process on the side of the publisher. We offer her our sincerest gratitude.

Finally, we have spent many hours with these figures in John; no doubt, many more than we realize. Attempting to live in their world, to see things through their eyes, we have embraced the object of our investigation. But it's very difficult to live in two worlds, especially when we consider that there are real figures in this one, figures near and dear to the editors' hearts who have stood by patiently, bearing much of the burden of our fascination with this Gospel. We would be entirely remiss, therefore, if we did not express our deep and abiding love for our wives, Bridget, Ansa, and Mirjam. We each consider ourselves blessed beyond measure. As fathers also, we want to thank our children for their love and support: Carmien (24), Francois (21), Nathaniel (20), Jordan (18), Rahel (18), Josua (16), Mialise (15), William (13), Rebekka (13), Lindsey (11), Ruth (11), and Parker (2). Like we said, blessed beyond measure!

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An Introduction to Character and Characterization in John and Related New Testament Literature

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1. Theoretical Approaches to Character and Characterization: A Brief Overview

Over the centuries scholars have grappled with the interpretation of character and characterization in texts. Issues that surfaced regularly include the relationship between character(s) and actions/plot; whether characters should be regarded as people or words, and how one should classify characters. This brief overview will highlight some of the responses to these and other issues.

For *Aristotle*, action was more important than character, because, according to him, one could not have a tragedy without action, but one could have a tragedy without character.[1] Accordingly, since antiquity it has become common to describe characters in terms of their actions in a narrative, for example by using terms such as "protagonist" for the main character, and "antagonist" for his/her most important opponent.[2] In the nineteenth century, more emphasis was placed on characters themselves, for example by *Leslie Stephen,* for whom the primary purpose of narrative was to reveal characters; and by *Henry James*, who argued that one could not separate characters and action, since they actually melted into one another.[3] In the nineteenth century the distinction between *direct* and *indirect characterization* also came to the fore, with some critics highlighting the fact that contemporary authors and readers seemed to prefer the latter.[4]

Early in the twentieth century *Edward M. Forster*[5] introduced the distinction between so-called "flat" and "round" characters. According to Forster,

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[1] *Poetics* 1450a. Cf. Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis and Ralf Schneider, *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media* (Revisionen 3; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 20.

[2] Eder, Jannidis, Schneider, *Characters in Fictional Worlds*, 20.

[3] Horace P. Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 124.

[4] Fotis Jannidis, "Character," in *Handbook of Narratology* (ed. Peter Hühn et al.; Narratologia; Contributions to Narrative Theory 19; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 21.

[5] Edward M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1927), 67–78.

"flat" characters are caricatures or types that embody only a single idea or quality. Furthermore, they do not display any development in the course of the narrative. "Round characters," on the other hand, are complex characters who have more than one quality (trait) and who show signs of development. In order to establish a criterion for deciding whether a character should be classified as round or flat, Forster suggested that a character that is capable of surprising the reader in a convincing way, should be classified as a round character. In spite of criticism raised by scholars on the usefulness of this distinction,[6] it has remained one of the most popular classifications of character up to the present day.

Vladimir Propp[7] – considered by many as the founder of Structuralism – investigated 100 Russian folktales and identified a sequence of 31 events underlying all of them. Propp also distinguished eight character types in these tales: the hero, helper, villain, false hero, donor (the person who helps the hero by giving him something special), the dispatcher (the one who sends the hero on his mission), the princess and the princess' father. Propp's approach was later generalized by Greimas (see further, below)

In their well-known book, *Theory of Literature, René Wellek and Austin Warren*[8] discuss a large number of issues which are important for the study of literature in general. A section on narrative fiction is also included.[9] They point out that plot, character and setting are the three constituents of narrative fiction, with each of the three elements being determinant of the others. In their discussion of character, they focus primarily on characterization. For example, they point out that naming is the simplest form of characterization, but that many other modes of characterization exist, such as block characterization, introductory labels and mimicry. They also distinguish between static and dynamic (or developmental) characterization. These two categories overlap to a large degree with the distinction between flat and round characters which was introduced by Forster. Finally, they point out that there is a connection between characterization and characterology (theories of character and personality types) and that one often finds a "repertory company" in novels, namely the hero, heroine and the villain who function as the "character

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[6] For example, that the criteria are formulated so vaguely that it really is very difficult to apply them fruitfully to Biblical texts, or that the distinction between "flat" and "round" may imply a moral judgment of the characters, in the sense that round characters are usually considered as being superior to flat characters. Cf. Klaus D. Beekman and Jan Fontijn, "Roman-Figuren I," *Spektator* 1 (1971): 406–13.

[7] Propp's study was published in 1928 in Russian, and thirty years later in English as Vladimir J. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Bloomington, Ind.: Research Center, Indiana Univ, 1958).

[8] René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (repr.; London: Jonathan Cape, 1961 [1949]).

[9] Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 224–234.

actors." Other types of characters that are often used are "juveniles, and ingé-
nues and the elderly."[10]

W. J. Harvey[11] devoted a whole book to character in the novel, based on a
mimetic approach. In the first part[12] of this book, several constituents of char-
acter are discussed. He begins by indicating how important context is for inter-
preting character, in particular the various types of relationships that can exist
between people and objects. In the next chapter[13] the human context is con-
sidered, which is approached from the perspective of depth, i. e., the extent to
which characters stand out from other human beings. In this regard Harvey
distinguishes between several categories of characters: on the one end of the
scale are the protagonists (the important characters in the narrative), with
background characters at the other end of the scale (their only function being
to fulfill a role in the mechanics of the plot); while in between, two types of
intermediary characters are found: cards (characters who approach greatness,
but who are not cast into the role of protagonists) and *ficelles* (characterized
more extensively than the background characters, yet only existing with the
purpose of fulfilling certain functions within the narrative). The last constitu-
ent issue that Harvey discusses is the relationship between character and nar-
ration,[14] in particular the effect that reliable and unreliable narrators may have
on the portrayal of characters.

Based on the work of Propp, *Algirdas J. Greimas*[15] proposed the actantial
model, according to which all characters are viewed as expressions of an
underlying structure, even if this implies that the same actant is manifested in
more than one character, or that more than one character should be reduced
to the same actant. The six actants are divided into three groups, each forming
an actantial axis: the axis of desire (subject and object; the relationship between
subject and object is called a junction); the axis of power (helper – the one
who helps in achieving the junction, and opponent – the one who opposes
the junction), and the axis of knowledge (sender – the one who instigates the
action, and receiver – the one who benefits from the action). By means of
actantial analysis the action in narrative texts may then be analyzed.

Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg[16] argue that there are three different ways
of representing reality, and that one can distinguish between three types of

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[10] Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 228.
[11] William J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965).
[12] Harvey, *Character and the Novel*, 30–51.
[13] Harvey, *Character and the Novel*, 52–73.
[14] Harvey, *Character and the Novel*, 74–79.
[15] Algirdas J. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale: Recherche de méthode* (Paris: Librairie La-
rousse, 1966), 172–91.
[16] Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (repr.; Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 1975 [1966]), 87–91.

characterization: aesthetic, illustrative and mimetic. In the case of aesthetic characterization, characters are used as stock types; illustrative characterization is used when characters are employed to illustrate particular principles, but are not characterized in detail; mimetic characterization is used when characters are portrayed in a highly realistic fashion with numerous details. In another chapter,[17] they argue that one should not regard a particular order of characterization as being better than any other; for example "monolithic and stark"[18] characterization can be just as impressive as detailed characterization. They also point out that the notion of a developing character is a factor that only came to the fore rather late in the history of literature; characters in primitive stories were all flat, static and opaque. The importance of the portrayal of inward life in the type of characterization that is used in modern literature is also pointed out.

According to *Roland G. Barthes,*[19] characters in a narrative text should be regarded in terms of the web of "semes" (basic units of signification) that are attached to a particular proper name. In *S/Z,* his famous analysis of Balzac's novel *Sarrasine,* Barthes illustrates how a text may be analyzed in terms of the five codes or "voices" speaking from it at the same time, namely the proairetic, hermeneutic, referential, semic and symbolic codes.[20] Of these, the fourth one, the semic code (also known as the connotative code), is important for characterization. According to Barthes, the semic code in a text enables the reader to label persons in the text in an adjectival way as persons with certain traits. On the basis of the semic code, various semes in the text are collected and linked to a particular proper name, thereby constituting character.[21]

For *Jurij Lotman,*[22] a text is a stratified system which generates meaning by means of sets of similarities and oppositions. A character may thus be regarded as the sum of all its oppositions to other characters in the text. Furthermore, all the characters in a text form a collection of characters who either display similar traits or who manifest opposing traits.

Seymour Chatman[23] opts for an "open theory," treating characters as "autonomous beings," and not merely in terms of the functions that they fulfill in relation to the plot. He focuses on the way in which characters are con-

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[17] Scholes and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative*, 160–206.
[18] Scholes and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative*, 163.
[19] Roland G. Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).
[20] Barthes, *S/Z*, XII (27–29).
[21] Barthes, *S/Z*, XL–XLVI (98–113).
[22] Cf. Jurij Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (trans. G. Lenhoff and R. Vroon; Michigan Slavic Contributions 7; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1977). The summary of Lotman's views above is based upon Jannidis, "Character," 16–17.
[23] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), 121–30.

structed by the reader, and views a character as a "paradigm of traits" constructed by the reader, a trait being any relatively stable or abiding personal quality that is associated with a character. As such, the traits associated with a particular character may be unfolded, or replaced, or may even disappear in the course of the narrative.

Mieke Bal[24] distinguishes between actors (on the level of the *fabula* – the events organized and structured by aspects such as time, location and actors) and characters (on the level of the story, formed by aspects such as point of view, focalization and characters). For the analysis of the actors, she basically follows the distinctions made by Greimas, i. e., between subject and object, sender and receiver, and helper and opponent.[25] For the analysis of the characters, she emphasizes aspects such as the predictability of characters and the way in which the reader's attention is focused on the relevant traits of a particular character, namely by means of repetition, accumulation and the portrayal of its relationship with other characters.[26]

Baruch Hochman[27] agrees with Chatman on the process of abstracting characters from a text, further pointing out that there is a congruity between the way in which readers perceive characters in a text and the way in which they think of people in the real world. Hochman also stresses the large variety of ways in which information about characters is revealed in texts: "speech, gesture, actions, thoughts, dress, and surroundings; the company they keep and the objects and subjects they desire, abhor, and equivocate about; the images and associations they stir in our consciousness, including the epithets that we apply to them."[28] Furthermore, he proposes a different taxonomy for characters, consisting of eight categories, each representing a continuum with two polar opposites: stylization/naturalism, coherence/incoherence, wholeness/fragmentariness, literalness/symbolism, complexity/simplicity, transparency/opacity, dynamism/staticism and closure/openness.[29]

In her book on narratology, *Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan*[30] distinguishes between story, text and narration (as Mieke Bal does), with characters being considered on two levels, namely the level of the story, and that of the text. In

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[24] Mieke Bal, *De Theorie van Vertellen en Verhalen: Inleiding in de Narratologie* (Muiderberg: Dick Coutinho, 1978), 33–46, 87–100. Newest (revised) English version: Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (3d ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

[25] Bal, *De Theorie van Vertellen en Verhalen*, 33–46.

[26] Bal, *De Theorie van Vertellen en Verhalen*, 87–100.

[27] Baruch Hochman, *Character in Literature* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 16.

[28] Hochman, *Character in Literature*, 38.

[29] Hochman, *Character in Literature*, 89.

[30] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Metheuen, 1983), 29–42, 59–70. Second edition: Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (2d ed.; London: Routledge, 2002).

her discussion of characters on the level of the story, she follows Chatman: Characters are construed by the reader from the text in terms of a paradigm of traits associated with every character. She also points out that this is a process of generalization, in that elements are combined in "increasingly broader categories."[31] In this regard, cohesion is achieved by four aspects, namely repetition, similarity, contrast and implication of elements. With regard to character classification, she follows Joseph Ewen,[32] who classifies characters in terms of three continua, namely complexity, development and penetration into inner life.[33] On the level of the text, Rimmon-Kenan focuses on the process of characterization. Two issues are discussed.[34] First, a distinction is made between two types of textual indicators of character, namely direct definition (the naming of a character's qualities) and indirect presentation, which may be effectuated by the representation of action, speech, external appearance and the environment within which a character is portrayed. Secondly, reinforcement by analogy is discussed. Three ways in which characterization can be reinforced are mentioned: analogous names, analogous landscapes and analogy between characters.

Of the many contributions to the theoretical consideration of characterization made by *Uri Margolin*, the following three are highlighted: In one contribution, Margolin[35] points out that characters may be approached from three different theoretical perspectives: as literary figures (constructed by an author for a particular purpose), as individuals within a possible world, and as constructs in a reader's mind, based on a text. In another contribution,[36] Margolin focuses on the way in which readers ascribe mental properties to characters. In this regard he distinguishes between "characterization" and "character-building." The former refers to the inferences made by readers from the actions of characters, and is the primary process involved. The latter is a secondary process, which refers to the accumulation of individual properties, in particular to a process of "classification, hierarchisation and confrontation,"[37] and the combination of such properties into a unified constellation. In a further contribution,[38] Margolin outlines five conditions which need to be fulfilled if characters

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[31] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 39.

[32] Joseph Ewen, "The Theory of Character in Narrative Fiction (Hebrew)," *Hasifrut* 3 (1971): 1–30.

[33] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 40–41.

[34] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 59–70.

[35] Uri Margolin, "Character," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (ed. David Herman; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 66–79.

[36] Uri Margolin, "Characterization in Narrative: Some Theoretical Prolegomena," *Neophilologus* 67 (1983): 1–14.

[37] Margolin, "Characterization in Narrative," 4.

[38] Uri Margolin, "Introducing and Sustaining Characters in Literary Narrative," *Style* 21/1 (1987): 107–24.

are to be introduced and sustained in a narrative. Three examples: existential dimension (a character must "exist" in the narrative world), intentional dimension (a character must have some traits or properties), and uniqueness (a character must differ in some way from other characters).

In contrast to the structuralist and semiotic approaches that have dominated theoretical approaches to character, *James Phelan*[39] opts for a rhetorical approach, emphasizing the text as communication between author and reader, and the effect that narrative progression has on the way in which a reader understands characters, and is moved to various ways of relating to particular characters. In his view, characters are "multichromatic" – literary elements composed of three components, namely mimetic, thematic and synthetic elements, with the possibility of the first two elements being developed in different ways, and of the third element being foregrounded in different ways.[40] The mimetic element refers to the way in which characters are recognizable as images of real people; the thematic element to the way in which characters may express significant attitudes or be representative figures; while the synthetic element refers to the fact that characters are always artificial, in the sense that they are constructed from the text. In his discussion of narrative progression, Phelan also emphasizes "instabilities" in the text, of which he distinguishes two kinds, namely instabilities occurring within the story, for example instabilities between characters, and, secondly, instabilities created by the discourse, for example instabilities between the author and the reader.[41]

Fotis Jannidis[42] made quite a number of contributions to the study of character of which some are highlighted here: A character is defined as follows: "Die Figur ist ein mentales Modell eines Modell-Lesers, das inkremental im Fortgang des Textes gebildet wird."[43] According to Jannidis, this model presupposes a basic type according to which a distinction is made between internal being and external appearance, with external appearance being observable by other characters as well as the narrator, whereas internal being is observable to the narrator only. With regard to the nature of the information on characters that is provided in a text, Jannidis[44] identifies four important dimensions: reliability, mode, relevance and straightforwardness. The process of character-

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[39] James Phelan, *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1–23. See also James Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996).

[40] Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric*, 3.

[41] Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric*, 15.

[42] Fotis Jannidis, *Figur und Person: Beitrag zu einer historischen Narratologie* (Narratologia 3; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004).

[43] Jannidis, *Figur und Person*, 240.

[44] Jannidis, *Figur und Person*, 201–207.

ization is also discussed in detail. According to Jannidis,[45] some of the issues that are important in this regard include how long and how often a particular character is characterized; the extent to which the sources of information with regard to a character are mixed; how often the same information about a character is provided; the order in which the information about a particular character is revealed; whether everything about a character is revealed at once or whether it is distributed throughout the text; how information about a character is linked to other information that is provided; and which information about a character is linked to other characters.

Jens Eder's[46] book is devoted to characters in films, but contains much about character analysis in general. The two basic theoretical issues that he discusses are how one can analyze characters in a systematic way and how one can explain the various ways in which viewers of films experience characters. The model that he proposes for character consists of four aspects, and is called a "clock" ("Uhr") of character.[47] The four aspects are: characters as artifacts, fictional beings, symbols and symptoms. If one focuses on characters as artifacts, the questions investigated typically concern composition and textual aspects, and characters are classified as realistic or multi-dimensional.[48] When characters are considered as fictional beings, the focus falls on the properties that characters possess and how they act within a fictional world.[49] When characters are analyzed as symbols, one asks the question as to whether characters stand for something, for example whether they represent a deeper or even an allegorical meaning.[50] When characters are considered in terms of symptoms, the focal issues is that of how characters are "caused;" in other words, which effects were used to produce them.[51] According to Eder, scholars tend to concentrate on one aspect only, namely characters as fictional beings. By means of the model that he proposes, one is encouraged to investigate other issues as well.

This brief overview has highlighted some of the developments and approaches with regard to characterization. Many of these have had an influence on the way in which Biblical scholars approach characterization. This will be illustrated in the next two sections.

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[45] Jannidis, *Figur und Person*, 220–21.
[46] Jens Eder, *Die Figur im Film: Grundlagen der Figurenanalyse* (Marburg: Schüren, 2008).
[47] Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 131–42.
[48] Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 322–425.
[49] Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 426–520.
[50] Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 529–41.
[51] Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 541–53.

2. Approaches to Character and Characterization in Biblical Studies

Over the years numerous studies of a more general nature dealing with characterization in Biblical literature have been published. In this section a brief overview of some of these studies will be offered, with a focus on the approach to characters/characterization that has been followed in each instance.

Robert Alter[52] points out the different ways in which a character may be revealed: through actions, appearance, gesture, posture, costume, the comments that a character makes about other characters, direct speech, inward speech, and statements by the narrator. Furthermore, he draws attention to the order of explicitness that can be detected in the way in which characters are presented: when only actions or appearance are narrated, one is in the realm of inference; when the direct speech of a character is reported, one moves from inference to the weighing of claims; when inward speech is narrated, one may be relatively certain that one's interpretation of a character is correct; and when a reliable narrator's statements are used for the purpose of characterization, one has certainty about this issue. Alter illustrates this by discussing 1 Sam 18, where Saul is characterized directly by the narrator, whereas David is characterized by means derived from the lower end of the scale.

In her study on the interpretation of Biblical narrative, *Adele Berlin*[53] focuses on two issues pertaining to character, namely character types and characterization. With regard to character types, she distinguishes between three types of characters, instead of the usual two types (flat and round characters): full-fledged characters (normally called "round characters"), types (normally called "flat characters") and functionaries (characters who are not characterized at all, and who only have to fulfill a particular role or function). With regard to characterization, she identifies a number of techniques that are used in this regard: description, portrayal of inner life, speech and actions and contrast. She also points out that in most cases in Biblical narrative, characterization is achieved by a combination of some or all of these techniques.

For *Meir Sternberg,*[54] the process of reading is important when characterization is considered. Such a reading process might be quite intricate: "So reading a character becomes a process of discovery, attended by all the biblical hallmarks: progressive reconstruction, tentative closure of discontinuities, frequent and sometimes painful reshaping in the face of the unexpected, and intractable pock-

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[52] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 114–30.

[53] Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Bible and Literature; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 23–42.

[54] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana Literary Biblical Studies; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985), 321–322.

ets of darkness."[55] He first focuses on direct characterization, *inter alia* by pointing out three varieties: "complete but stylized insight into a simple or simplified character," "partial revelation of a complex and otherwise opaque character," and "the depiction of externals, for which the transparent and the intricate are equally eligible."[56] In his discussion of indirect characterization, Sternberg[57] draws particular attention to the way in which indirect characterization may be used for portrayal that is aimed at moving beyond a characteristic that has already been indicated by means of an epithet, for example in cases where the indirect characterization is discontinuous with direct epithetic characterization.

For *Shimon Bar-Efrat,*[58] a character in literature is the "sum of the means used in the description;"[59] it is thus created by the portrayal. Accordingly, he focuses on the two ways in which characters may be shaped, namely directly and indirectly. With regard to direct shaping of characters, two techniques are discussed and illustrated, namely that of outward appearance and that of inner personality.[60] With regard to indirect shaping of characters, three techniques are identified, namely portrayal of speech, actions and subsidiary characters.[61]

Mark Allan Powell[62] points out that characters are constructs of an implied author and that they are created in order to play a particular role in the narrative. Several issues with regard to characterization are then discussed in more detail. The distinction between telling and showing is highlighted; and it is also pointed out that in the Gospels, the technique of showing is favored to a large extent. Furthermore, the evaluative point of view that a character or group of characters in a narrative may have is discussed. Powell also endorses Chatman's definition of characters in terms of a paradigm of traits. With regard to the classification of characters, Powell follows Forster's well-known definition, adding one type, the stock character[63] (a character having a single trait only). Lastly, he indicates how empathy, sympathy, and antipathy towards characters are created.

In their discussion of character in the Hebrew Bible, *David Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell*[64] proceed from the assumption that characters are not

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[55] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 323–24.

[56] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 326.

[57] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 342–64.

[58] Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOT 17; Sheffield: Almond, 1989). This study was first published in Hebrew in 1979. First English publication: 1989.

[59] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 48.

[60] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 48–63.

[61] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 64–91.

[62] Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 51–61.

[63] Powell here follows Meyer H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (4th ed.; New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1981), 185.

[64] David M. Gunn and Danna N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford Bible Series; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 51.

real people, but are constructed from the text. They then highlight the two sources of information pertaining to character, namely the narrator and the characters themselves. With regard to the narrator's role, three aspects are pointed out: the relationship between the reliability of the narrator and characterization; how description by the narrator may be used to characterize; and the possible effect of the evaluation of characters by the narrator.[65] With regard to characterization by characters themselves, three issues are distinguished: first, the possible role that may be played by a character's speech, as well as by the context and the use of contrast; secondly, how the responses by characters and their reliability influence characterization; and, thirdly, the effect of issues such as contradiction between various sources of information about a character, difference in points of view between narrator and character(s), and irony.[66] Finally, Forster's distinction between round and flat characters is adopted, followed by two remarks, namely that readers relate more easily to round characters, and that a character that may be a flat character in one episode may be a round character in the next.[67]

Jan Fokkelman[68] highlights the relationship between characters and the narrator who is "the boss of the complete circus,"[69] "the veritable ringmaster."[70] After a discussion and several illustrations of the fact that narrator and characters operate at different levels, the various ways in which readers may discover the deceit of characters are discussed.[71] This is followed by a discussion of the difference between character text (direct speech of characters) and the narrator's text.[72]

In their contribution to the analysis of characters in Biblical texts, *Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin*[73] attempt to combine two approaches, namely that of regarding characters as agents (as, for example Propp has done) and that of viewing characters as autonomous beings (as Chatman has done). For the classification of characters, the models of Forster and Greimas are recommended.[74] Another issue that is dealt with is the question as to why readers are captivated by characters. According to Marguerat and Bourquin, the more

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[65] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 53–63.

[66] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 63–75.

[67] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 75–76.

[68] Jan Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (trans. I. Smit; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999). Originally published in Dutch, 1995. First English publication: 1999.

[69] Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 55.

[70] Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 56.

[71] Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 60–67.

[72] Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 67–72.

[73] Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism* (London: SCM, 1999), 58–59.

[74] Marguerat and Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories*, 62–63.