

**Iverson, K. I., and C. W. Skinner**, eds. 2011. *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect* [Resources for Biblical Study 65]. Atlanta: SBL. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-58983-548-1. Pp. xii + 309. \$36.95.

David Rhoads' and Donald Michie's 1982 *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* was a ground-breaking monograph in NT narrative criticism. At the time, many scholars constrained by the limits of historical criticism began to focus instead on the literary aspects of the NT documents. Rhoads, a biblical scholar, started collaboration with Michie, a professor of literature, on the Gospel of Mark. The result of their joint effort was *Mark as Story*, which today is still seen as a seminal work for narrative criticism. Almost three decades later, Kelly I. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner look back to honour the influence of this work while at the same time looking forward to new developments in narrative criticism.

*Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect* is divided into three parts. The first part considers narrative method generally. Mark Allan Powell gives an overview of the rise and development of narrative criticism. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon identifies the growing focus on the narrative process, including the implied author and audience. She uses character studies as a case. Stephen D. Moore is more critical and focuses on the limitations of using a modern approach on pre-modern texts. Francis J. Moloney lets the reader look behind the screens of writing a commentary on Mark applying narrative criticism. Finally, based on performance criticism—a subcategory of present day narrative criticism—Thomas E. Boomershine argues that the original audience of Mark consisted of non-Christian Jews.

The second part assesses the application of narrative criticism in Mark. R. Alan Culpepper points out the contributions narrative criticism has made by showing how the insertion of the death of John the Baptist (6:14–29) does not make sense unless it is viewed in connection with the rest of the Gospel narrative. Morna D. Hooker identifies Mark as carefully constructing Jesus as the Son of God. Kelly R. Iverson argues that the secrecy motif, which has troubled scholars since William Wrede's thesis, is more a matter of creating a level of confidence between the performer and the audience than it is anything else. Holly E. Hearon shows how performance criticism can be seen as a refinement of the original narrative critical approach, and Robert M. Fowler continues this by explaining how he trains his students to think about the (filmic) performance of Mark.

In the last part Rhoads, Michie and Joanna Dewey, who helped Rhoads with the second edition of *Mark as Story*, reflect on the essays after having looked back at their own writing process. They also identify some of the important features they would give more attention to in a third edition of their book; e.g. they call for a stronger link between the narrative and the historical world and agree with the plea for a better development of performance criticism which does more justice to the original way of "reading" Mark.

*Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect* is a well-deserved tribute to original *Mark as Story*. It offers a clear introduction to thirty years of narrative criticism, but also critically assesses the beginning and the development of this methodology. The focus on performance criticism is especially valuable. Not only are theoretical arguments offered for this approach; it is also supported by convincing exegetical examples. The list of authors consists of some of the most influential scholars in narrative criticism and thus gives the book extra authority. The authors offer challenging, sometimes controversial insights and conclusions, esp. the essays of Moore and Boomershine. The essays in this book force the reader to re-evaluate her/his assessment of Mark's narrative.

Some might find the often very personal style of the authors—they are telling their own story of dealing with narrative criticism in Mark—not academic enough, but the purpose of the book and the method justify this. It is a book on narrative criticism and it is a tribute. The stories are thus in order. More problematic is the lack of a variety in the offered articles. Moore is the only one who offers a more postmodern critique of narrative criticism, and given the strong connection between literary theory and deconstructionist methods, one would expect these approaches to be

present in this book as well. Finally, the structuring of the first two parts is somewhat artificial. For example, Malbon's and Hooker's essays have a very similar approach while being in different parts: they combine method with case study. It is not always clear why some essays are considered method and others application.

In the end, Iverson and Skinner have composed a valuable resource for NT exegesis. *Mark as Story* offers an insightful overview of what narrative criticism is and has been, but also delivers on the second part of the subtitle: it gives a good prospect of this methodology. The reader will clearly understand how narrative criticism on the one hand has become more open to the historical critical approaches, but on the other hand has let the reader play a bigger role in the analysis of the Gospel. For this, performance criticism seems to be an especially promising approach.

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