

Simon's Mother-in-Law as a Minor Character in the Gospel of Mark: A Narrative Analysis

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Legend has it that Ernest Hemingway, known for his concise language, once won a wager that he could tell a story in just six words. He then wrote on a napkin: "For sale. Baby shoes. Never worn." Whenever I share this story, invariably the audience fills in the gaps by positing a backstory which includes the baby's death. One thing is clear—the story did not start at the beginning; it was told out of chronological order.

Narratives do not simply record what happened; they are selective arrangements of material.¹ For instance, the call of Simon is presented differently in the Gospel of Mark than it is in the Gospel of Luke. In Mark the call is concise and *precedes* the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (Mark 1:16–18, cf. 1:29–31), while in Luke the call is more developed and *follows* the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (cf. Luke 5:1–11 with 4:38–39). As Abraham Kuruvilla is fond of saying, an interpreter must ask: "What is the author *doing* with what he is *saying*?"²

Narratives often have two aspects, or a two-storied architecture. Following French structuralists, Seymour Chatman categorizes the two tiers as "story" and "discourse."³ "Story" consists of the *what* of the narrative, including events, plot, and existents (character and setting); "discourse" is the *way* of the narrative, or the "means through which the story is transmitted."⁴ Russian formalists have a similar, dualist model distinguishing *fabula* (story/tale, the sequence of events referred to in a narrative in their causal, chronological order) from *sjuzhet* (discourse, the sequence of events in the order in which they appear in the narrative).⁵

Within these categories, the analysis of character is often discussed under the category of "story."⁶ However, because characterization looks at *how* characters are developed in a narrative, it seems more appropriate to identify characterization with "discourse" than with "story."⁷ While character may be described, in the abstract, as a compilation of motifs, or a cluster of traits of someone in the narrative, and in that sense fall under the umbrella of "story," characterization is built from *how* the account is told—the author's presentation as found in the discourse of the work.⁸

One means of developing character within the discourse is through comparisons and contrasts, providing the reader opportunities to fill in gaps by implication.⁹ This means of characterization causes traits to stand out: "Even if a characterization is implicit in the words or deeds of a character, it stands out more clearly if it is contrasted with its opposite, e.g. Nabal and Abigail, Esau and Jacob."¹⁰ Often it is through comparison that the reader discovers the contrast. Furthermore, it is through comparison that a character is often developed throughout a narrative.¹¹ Accordingly, characters are not so much individuals as "interdividuals" in that they are seen, compared, and contrasted, in relationship to others.¹²

Various women are among the minor characters in the Gospel of Mark.¹³ This study will examine an especially minor character in Mark who is not named, not given significant space in the narrative,¹⁴ and rarely discussed in scholarship—Simon's

mother-in-law. When her narrative is read within the narrative structure and logic of Mark's Gospel (the story's discourse), it makes significant contributions to the message of Mark, and more broadly, to Mark's biblical theology of discipleship.

The Healing of Simon's Mother-in-Law (Mark 1:29–31)

Performance criticism (analysis based on an oral-aural presentation of the text) focuses on the progressive nature of the narrative as presented from beginning to end for the first-time reader or hearer, rather than on the final form of the narrative which is only discerned upon second, third, and other subsequent readings.¹⁵ The argument is that texts were originally heard in their progressive development and not with an understanding of the whole. Certainly, a first reading, or hearing, differs from a subsequent reading or hearing; however, it does not seem necessary to limit the interpretation of a text to only one approach. Those who originally presented the Gospel may have memorized it, or at least read it multiple times before performing it aloud. Therefore, the presenters had a sense of the whole, and their presentations may have emphasized significant themes for the first-time listener.¹⁶ Furthermore, a text may have been read aloud more than once to an audience. Accordingly, a strict dichotomy between first and subsequent readings may be overemphasis. Mark's account of the healing of Simon's mother-in-law occurs early in the narrative; therefore, we will examine it from both the perspective of a first-time reading and then from the perspective of a subsequent reading.

A First Reading of the Narrative

The Gospel of Mark opens with a prologue that foreshadows many themes developed in the book, including geographical themes (wilderness, Galilee, Jerusalem, the way); the centrality of Jesus through the multiple witnesses of Isaiah, John the Baptizer, the Father, and the Spirit; the identity of Jesus as the Son of God; and a story that is characterized by an authoritative revelation of Jesus in the midst of an ambiguous human response.¹⁷ While it is true that many of these themes are only fully discerned upon a subsequent reading/hearing of the gospel, they still express themselves in the first exposure to the text. As the account continues, the listener will be able to identify the echoes of earlier voices.¹⁸

The wilderness focus of the prologue (cf. "wilderness" [*erēmos*] in 1:3, 4, 12) transitions to Jesus' activity in Galilee.¹⁹ Each time Jesus calls disciples, he is reported to be near the Sea of Galilee.²⁰ Four disciples are explicitly named in 1:16–20 (Simon, Andrew, James, and John). They will reappear by name in our brief narrative. Jesus then begins to demonstrate who he is through a sequence of cures, the last of which involves a conflict (1:21–2:12).²¹ These cures have an alternating pattern between the spiritual and the physical:

A (spiritual): casting out a demon (1:21–28)

B (physical): healing Simon's mother-in law (1:29–31)

B' / A' (physical/spiritual): healing many with diseases & casting out many demons (1:32–39)

B'' (physical): healing man with leprosy (1:40–45)

A''/B''' (spiritual/physical): forgiveness of sins/healing the paralytic (2:1–12)

There is also an interchange between healing individuals (A, B, A'', B'''), and healing the multitude (B'/A'). Simon's mother-in-law is the first individual physically healed in 1:29–31:

And immediately after going out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. And Simon's mother-in-law was lying down with a fever, and immediately they spoke with him concerning her. And coming, he raised her up taking hold of her hand, and the fever left her, and she served them.²²

Many interpret the “serving” response of Simon's mother-in-law merely as a verification of her healing.²³ However, even in a first reading/hearing of the Gospel, the word describing her service (*diakoneō*) was already used in close proximity of angels who served, or ministered, to Jesus after his temptation in the wilderness (1:13).²⁴ Therefore, whatever Simon's mother-in-law is doing in response to Jesus' healing is similar to what angels did for Jesus after his temptation. This similarity would not be lost on the reader or listener in Greek.

In addition, every miracle in this broader section of the narrative (1:21–2:12) includes a *response*, and the action of Simon's mother-in-law is the only *positive* response in the entire section:

A (spiritual): casting out a demon (1:21–28)

[*An improper response of a demon (24–26)*]

B (physical): healing Simon's mother-in law (1:29–31)

[*A proper response of Simon's mother-in law (31)*]

B'/A' (physical/spiritual): healing many with diseases & casting out many demons (1:32–39)

[*An improper response of the disciples, corrected (35–39)*]

B'' (physical): healing man with leprosy (1:40–45)

[*An improper response of a healed man, magnified (44–45)*]

A''/B''' (spiritual/physical): forgiveness of sins/healing the paralytic (2:1–12)

[*An improper response of scribes, controversy (2:7)*]²⁵

The first-time reader/hearer would notice this responsive contrast in the progression of the narrative, once again magnifying the *service* of Simon's mother-in-law.²⁶

Moreover, the use of names in the response to Jesus' healing of the multitude highlights a contrast between Simon and his mother-in-law. As set forth above, the names of all four of the disciples called in 1:16–20 are repeated in 1:29: “As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John” (NRSV). However, in the response to Jesus' healing of the multitude, Jesus goes away to a secluded place (*erēmos topon*) to pray.²⁷ Only Simon is specifically identified among those searching for him: “and Simon and those with him hunted for him” (1:36).²⁸ The diffusion of those with Simon, and the highlighting of Simon once again reminds the reader of the anonymous woman earlier identified as “Simon's mother-in-law” (*penthera Simōnos*) in 1:29. This linking of names sets up

an implied comparison between the woman and the disciple. In response to Jesus' personal healing, Simon's mother-in-law served them (*diēkonei autois*). However, in response to Jesus' healing of the multitude, Simon hunted, or tracked, Jesus down (*katediōxen*, third person singular). This term is used elsewhere to describe the pursuit of someone in a hostile sense.²⁹ Then Simon and his companions say: “All are seeking you” (*pantes zētousin se*) 1:37. These words appear to be a rebuke, or correction, of Jesus for secluding himself.³⁰ Then Jesus redirects their attention away from the multitudes to his purpose of proclaiming his message in other rural towns (*kōmopolis*, 1:38). Jesus' correction of Simon's response is the first indication in the Gospel that these eager followers may not be perfectly aligned with what Jesus is doing. It is a flag for the initial reader who has identified with the followers, and places in stark relief the unique response of Simon's mother-in-law who alone offers to *serve* them.³¹

The first-time reader/hearer of Mark is given many contextual clues through the repetition of terms and the contrasting responses to Jesus' healing to suspect that the serving response of Simon's mother-in-law was not only uniquely proper, but as significant as the service of angels after Jesus' temptation. After subsequent readings of the Gospel, these heuristic guesses will be fully validated.

Subsequent Readings of the Narrative

Westerners tend to be more adept at interpreting visual media than written media. Upon a first-time viewing of the movie, *The Sixth Sense*, most audiences were stunned to realize at the end of the show that the child psychologist, Dr. Malcolm Crowe (played by Bruce Willis), was actually dead. And the reason the troubled boy, Cole Sear (played by Haley Joel Osment), was able to talk with Dr. Crowe was because he sees “dead people.” Upon a re-viewing of the movie, the careful observer discovers clues throughout the show that pointed to Dr. Crowe being dead—his conversations with his wife and Cole's mother are one-sided; the color red prominently appears when the dead are near (red concrete, red clothes, a red door knob, red hats, red fingernails, a red balloon); Dr. Crowe mostly wears the same clothes he was wearing when he was shot; and rooms become cold whenever the dead are near. Then when Dr. Crowe's wife drops his wedding ring, he suddenly realizes he has not been wearing it, and the past and the present meet in an awareness that he is in fact dead. There are also parallels in the show—the former patient who shot Dr. Crowe also saw “dead people;” so by helping Cole, who now sees ghosts, Dr. Crowe is able to correct a fatal flaw in his care for an earlier patient. These subsequent viewings make the movie even more fascinating for the viewer as the patterns, which were always there, become more transparent. Similar insights, depths, and delights are present for subsequent readers and hearers of the Gospel of Mark. Since earlier audiences were more familiar with the written/oral presentation of story, they may have made the connections sooner than modern Western readers.

As noted above, even though the four male disciples who were explicitly called to follow Jesus in 1:16–20 are named (Simon, Andrew, James, and John) in the unit describing the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (1:29), she is anonymous. Often in Mark's Gospel, the unnamed are exemplary followers of Christ who express faith: the Gerasene demoniac (5:1–20); the woman with

the flow of blood (5:25–34); the Syrophenician woman (7:24–30); the widow who gives at the temple (12:41–44); the woman who anoints Jesus for his death (14:3–9); and the many women who had come up with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (15:41). Therefore, in the overarching pattern of the Gospel, Simon’s mother-in-law is the first of a group of faithful followers who are anonymous.³²

In addition, the service (*diakoneō*) of Simon’s mother-in-law adumbrates the major theme of “service” in Mark. In the central section of Mark, Jesus emphasizes the need for the disciples to serve:

So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over [*katakuriuousin*] them, and their great ones are tyrants over [*katexousiazousin*] them.⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant [*diakonos*],⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave [*doulos*] of all.⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served [*diakonēthēnai*] but to serve [*diakonēsai*], and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42–45 NRSV)

Some might object that the statement in 1:31 only says: “and the fever left her and she served them” (*diēkonei autois*); this clearly has the sense that she provided them “table service”³³ and is not parallel to the service described in Mark 10:42–45. However, a similar discussion of “service” in the central section of the Gospel clarifies that the service Jesus has in view includes “table service:”

He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all *and servant* [*diakonos*] of all.”³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them,³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

³⁸John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”³⁹ But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.⁴⁰ Whoever is not against us is for us.⁴¹ For truly I tell you, *whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.* (Mark 9:35–41 NRSV, emphasis added)

In other words, serving children and serving water are the kind of activities for which disciples will be rewarded.

Finally, the only other place in the Gospel of Mark where the verb for service (*diakoneō*) is used for people in the company of Jesus is in the description of the women who provided for Jesus’ needs from Galilee to Jerusalem:

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.⁴¹ These used to follow him and provided for

him [*diēkonoun auto*] when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. (Mark 15:40–41 NRSV)³⁴

Here Mark describes women who have been a part of the story all along but have not been brought to the narrative’s foreground. Even though four women are explicitly named in v. 40, they have functioned in the story as the ultimate expression of the anonymous in that their presence was active but unknown to the reader. And the essence of their activity was serving, or ministering (*diakoneō*) to Jesus—whatever that entailed. In their *service* they have multiplied and magnified the initial response of Simon’s mother-in-law to her healing.

Service is the pattern of discipleship that Jesus is showing his followers, and the example he will give in Jerusalem—not by leading, *per se*, but by giving up his own life for them. The very first example of a person who follows in this pattern of service is Simon’s mother-in-law, whose response to being healed was to *serve* them—even if what she provided was “table service.”³⁵ To separate “table service” from the service of discipleship is to make a distinction without a difference—especially from the perspective of subsequent readings of the Gospel of Mark.

Conclusion

The concept of *service* is hard for many of us—the educated, the academe, the professional. As “servant-leaders,” we more readily identify with “leadership” than with “servanthood.” As Henri Nouwen, Roman Catholic priest and former faculty member at Harvard and Yale, once said as he prepared to serve the mentally disabled at L’Arche in France:

I feel a deep resistance against this way. Somehow I have come to think about eating, drinking, washing, and dressing as so many necessary preconditions for reading, speaking, teaching, or writing. Somehow the pure word was the real thing for me. Time spent with “material” things was necessary but needed to be kept to a minimum. But at L’Arche, that is where all the attention goes. At L’Arch the body is the place where the word is met. It is in relationship to the wounded body of the handicapped person that I must learn to discover God.

This is very hard for me. I still find a long meal in the middle of the day a waste of time. I still think that I have more important things to do than to set the table, eat slowly, wash the dishes, and set the table again. I think, “Surely we must eat, but the work which comes after is what counts.” But L’Arche cannot be endured with this mind set.

I wonder when and how I will learn to fully live the Incarnation. I suppose that only the handicapped people themselves will be able to show me the way. I must trust that God will send me the teachers I need.³⁶

It is entirely possible that our “deep resistance against this way” of service is one reason why the response of Simon’s mother-in-law has historically been exegetically minimized. But for a careful first and subsequent reader/hearer of the Gospel of Mark, the service of Simon’s mother-in-law is a first sounding of a growing

chorus about the essence of following Jesus who came not to be served, but to serve. Like the disciples, we tend to focus on content, direction, opportunities, objectives, building, creating a movement—our activities. But like Simon's mother-in-law, we are exhorted to focus on need, helping, providing, and restoring—the care of others. The response of Simon's mother-in-law is the first explicit example of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark.

Notes

1. Tzvetan Todorov, "Primitive Narrative," in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 55 ("there is no 'primitive narrative.' No narrative is natural; a choice and a construction will always preside over its appearance; narrative is a discourse, not a series of events.")

2. Abraham Kuruvilla, *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene: Cascade, 2012), x; *Privilege the Text!: A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 89–150; "David v. Goliath (1 Samuel 17): What Is the Author Doing with What He Is Saying?," *JETS* 3, no. 58 (2015): 490. Kuruvilla also set forth this memorable metaphor: "Mark must be read as story, rather than primarily as history. It is not a *plain-glass window* through which we only see what happened; it is a *stained-glass window* that, in addition, tells a story itself—the theology of the text." Kuruvilla, *Mark*, xiv.

3. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 9.

4. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 9. This writer will use Chatman's categories of "story" and "discourse" in this discussion.

5. Boris Viktorovich Tomashevsky, "Thematics," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 66–68 ("In brief, the story is 'the action itself,' the plot, 'how the reader learns of the action.'" 67n5); James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); David M. Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 9. Tzvetan Todorov distinguishes between *histoire* (story, a reality of events that would have passed, events reported) and *discours* (the manner in which the narrator makes events known to us); Todorov, "The Categories of Literary Narrative," trans. Joseph Kestner, *Papers on Language & Literature* 50, no. 3/4 (2014): 383–84. Mieke Ball follows a three-layer distinction of narrative text (a finite, structured whole composed of language signs that tells a story), story (the sequence of events), and *fabula* (a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors—the way in which events are presented); Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 5–6. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003).

6. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 107–38; Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 101–36; R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 9–30; Todorov, "The Categories of Literary Narrative," 393–402; Bal, *Narratology*, 114–31.

7. As Moore wrote: "when we come to read or analyze a concrete narrative text, for example, Mark, everything in that text is encountered as discourse-rhetoric." Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 61. Rimmon-Kenan also observes that in the text, "the events do not necessarily appear in chronological order, the characteristics of the participants are dispersed throughout, and all the items of the narrative content are filtered through some prism or perspective ('focalizer')." Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 5.

Moore continues: "the notion of form encompasses everything in the presentation of the contentual set of events to which the given gospel refers. Such presentational strategies include plotting, characterization, the filtering of story events through theocentric, christocentric, and other perspectives, and the rearrangement of chronological sequence, the use of literary patterns and techniques, and so on." Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 61. Berlin seems to approach characterization as discourse when she states: "The reader reconstructs a character from the information provided to him in the discourse." Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 33–42. More broadly, Henry James commented on the interface of story and discourse long ago: "This sense of the story being the idea, the starting-point, of the novel is the only one that I see in which it can be spoken of as something different from its organic whole; and since, in proportion as the work is successful, the idea permeates and penetrates it, informs and animates it, so that every word and every punctuation-point contribute directly to the expression, in that proportion do we lose our sense of the story being a blade which may be drawn more or less out of its sheath. The story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and thread, and I never heard of a guild of tailors who recommended the use of the thread without the needle or the needle without the thread." Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," *Longman's Magazine* (September 1884).

8. Tomashevsky describes characterization as a function of discourse when he explains the distinction between direct and indirect characterization: "In *direct characterization* the author may characterize the figure directly by a straightforward report; he may have other characters discuss the person in question; or he may have the character tell about himself in, say, a confession of some sort. *Indirect characterization* also occurs frequently; the character in such a case betrays himself in his actions or conduct." Tomashevsky, "Thematics," 88. Both direct and indirect characterization look to how the author presents the character in the narrative. See also Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: "in the story character is a construct, put together by the reader from various indications dispersed throughout the text." Marianne Meyer Thompson argues that: "Rather than mining the text for the specific virtues and traits possessed by a particular character, they mine the text for its rhetorical and literary strategies in presenting characters. Thus the emphasis falls not so much on *what* a character is (e.g. honest, virtuous, brave, pious, etc.), but on *how* the character is constructed by the reader (i.e. through actions, speech, description, etc.) and *how* these elements of characterization are progressively coordinated by the reader." Thompson, "'God's Voice You Have Never Heard, God's Form You Have Never Seen': The Characterization of God in the Gospel of John," in *Characterization in Biblical Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Adele Berlin, *Semeia* 63 (1993), 180.

9. Berlin focuses on the term "contrast," noting that characterization is developed through "three types of contrast: 1) contrast with another character, 2) contrast with an earlier action of the same character, and 3) contrast with the expected norm." Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 40. Alice Bach provides a good example of comparing and contrasting an earlier presentation of Bathsheba as an object in 2 Sam 11–12 with the later transformation of Bathsheba as queen mother in 1 Kgs 1–2. Bach, "Signs of the Flesh: Observations on Characterization in the Bible," in *Characterization in Biblical Literature*, 70–77. Laura Donaldson also provides a good example of comparison between Joseph and Potiphar's wife to show that Potiphar's wife "uses her sexuality as a weapon to prevent the household's passing from man to man (from Potiphar to Joseph) rather than from man to woman (from Potiphar to Potiphar's wife)." Donaldson, "Cyborgs, Ciphers, and Sexuality; Re-Theorizing Literary and Biblical Characters," in *Characterization in Biblical Literature*, 90. See also Joel F. Williams,

Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel, JSNTSup 102 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 65–66.

10. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 40.

11. Thompson argues that characters are presented and developed in biblical narratives. “God’s Voice You Have Never Heard, God’s Form You Have Never Seen,” 179. See also Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 169.

12. David McCracken, “Character in the Boundary: Bakhtin’s Interdividuality in Biblical Narratives,” in *Characterization in Biblical Literature*, 36.

13. Malbon provides a helpful definition of minor characters: “For my purposes a ‘minor’ character is one who lacks a continuing or recurrent presence in the story as narrated. For the most part minor characters appear only once.” Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “The Major Importance of the Minor Characters in Mark,” in *New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 60. See also Susan Miller, “Women Characters in Mark’s Gospel,” in *Character Studies and The Gospel of Mark*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner and Matthew Ryan Hauge, Library of New Testament Studies 483 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 175; Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*; Malbon, “Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark,” *Semeia* 28 (1983), 29–48.

14. Some women in Mark are central to larger narrative sections, namely intercalations, that comprise more space in the narrative. See David E. Malick, “An Examination of Jesus’s View of Women through Three Intercalations in the Gospel of Mark,” *Priscilla Papers* 27, no. 3 (2013): 4–15.

15. See Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 84–88. See also Jouette M. Bassler, “The Parable of the Loaves,” *JR* 66, no. 2 (1986): 157–72; David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), Kindle location 177: “Recent New Testament research has recognized that first-century Mediterranean societies were predominantly oral/aural cultures in which probably no more than three to five percent of the people were able to read or write.” By contrast, see Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Vol. 1: The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 6: “the discussion that follows is not simply an expanded reading; it is commentary. It represents part of what might be said after reading a second, third, or fourth time. It is not confined to what is happening when reading for the first time, with much of the text still unknown.”

16. “Ancient storytellers brought out the dynamics of the story in their telling, putting their stamp on the story, and shaping it to each particular audience. The performer used voice, volume, pace, gestures, facial expressions, and bodily movement to express an interpretation of the story and to engender certain impacts on different audiences. The performance would stimulate the audience’s imagination and bring out the emotion, the humor, and the irony of the story.” Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, Kindle location 191.

17. See Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark’s World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 108–13, 316–17.

18. In a more modern sense, one might liken these foreshadows in the prologue to the overture of a musical. The first time one hears an overture, all of the music is unfamiliar. However, it sets up themes that are revisited in the show. Then, upon subsequent listening, the overture is filled with meaning from the fullness of the musical. Present-day audiences more easily comprehend literary theory expressed through the mediums of auditory and visual expression. The foreshadows of the prologue will resonate with the reader/hearer upon an initial reading, and then become explicitly meaningful upon subsequent readings.

19. Jesus came “into Galilee” (*eis tēn Galilaian*) 1:14.

20. The call of Simon and Andrew and James and John in 1:16–20 (“and going by the Sea of Galilee,” *kai paragōn para tēn thalassan tēs Galilaias*); the call of Levi in 2:13–14 (“and he went out again by the sea,” *kai exēlthen palin para tēn thalassan*); the call of the Twelve in 3:7–19 (“And Jesus with his disciples withdrew to the sea,” *Kai ho Iēsous meta tōn mathētōn autou anechōrēsen pros tēn thalassan*).

21. C. S. Mann, ed., *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1986), 180–81. The overall structure of this section is construed differently by others who group the controversies as a unit in 2:1–3:6. See Wilfrid Harrington, *Mark*, New Testament Message 4 (Dublin: Veritas, 1979), 24–25; P. Moulton Beernaert, “Jésus Controversé. Structure Et Théologie de Marc 2, 1–3, 6,” *NRTh* 95, no. 2 (1973): 129–49. Joanna Dewey groups the controversies as a unit. Dewey, *Markan Public Debate: Literary Technique, Concentric Structure, and Theology in Mark 2:1–3:6*, SBLDS 48 (Society of Biblical Literature, 1980), 110. However, it seems to this writer that some of Dewey’s parallels are strained. For instance, Dewey combines the call of Levi with the pericope about Jesus eating with sinners in 2:13–17. This grouping enables her to see a pattern in 2:13–17 and 2:23–27 where the activity begins out of doors and then continues indoors (Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 113–14). However, this arrangement of the text appears to have overlooked the textual clues that structure the narrative around Jesus going by the sea to call the four disciples (1:16–20), Levi (2:13–14), and the Twelve (3:7–19). With these textual clues in view, it seems better to break the narrative into an alternating pattern:

A Call of four disciples (1:16–20)

B Jesus demonstrates who he is through a sequence of cures, the last involving a conflict (1:21–2:12)

A’ Call of Levi (2:13–14)

B’ Jesus demonstrates who he is through a sequence of conflicts, the last involving a cure (2:15–3:6)

A’’ Choice of the Twelve (3:7–10).

This is not to say that correlations do not exist between 2:1–12 and 3:1–6, but these correlations do not seem significant enough to move 2:1–2 from the narrative logic of the units that precede it in 1:21–45.

22. The author’s translation.

23. Kathleen E. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 88 (“Mark does nothing to emphasize her activity, and the woman does not join the men for their meal. In this context, the service of Peter’s mother-in-law merely verifies her healing.”); Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 94 (“At this point in the narrative, the service of the woman seems to function simply as evidence that she is completely healed of her affliction.”); D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (Penguin, 1973), 81 (“The words show both the completeness of the cure . . . and also its miraculous speed.”); William L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark: The English Text With Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 78 (“The notice that the woman ‘ministered to them’ confirms the mercy and compassion extended toward her by Jesus and indicates that the figures in the background of the gospel narrative are affected by the power of this mysterious Galilean.”); R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 108 (“The completeness of the cure is emphasized by the clause *kai diēkonei autois*: no period of convalescence was needed. While *diakoneō* has a wide range of meaning, in this context its basic sense of domestic provision seems most likely; she fulfilled what would have been the expected role of the mother-in-law in the family home, by serving up refreshments.”). Some others interpret the woman’s activity as a

proclamation that she is free from Sabbath restrictions. Augustine Stock, *The Method and the Message of Mark* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989), 80 (“She seems to have come to the conclusion that if Jesus was free to heal her on the Sabbath, then she was free from the Sabbath restrictions preventing her from serving and helping others.”); Bas M. van Iersel, *Mark* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2005), 138–39 (“Here begins—for the reader, not for the characters—the conflict over the question of whether the sabbath regulations are still valid.”).

24. “And the angels served, or ministered, to him,” (*kai hoi aggeloi diēkonoun autō*). See also Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 137–38n20.

25. It may be argued that the onlookers appear to have a positive response to the healing of the lame man when the narrator states that “all were amazed and glorified God saying that we have never seen this” (*existasthai pantas kai doxazein ton theon legontas hoti houtōs oude pote eidomen*). However, it is questionable whether the term for “amazed” (*existēmi*) is explicitly positive. It is used in the Septuagint for astonishment mingled with fear (Gen 43:33, Ruth 3:8, 1 Sam 14:15). The term in Mark is used elsewhere with the same sense (Mark 5:42, 6:51, see also Acts 2:7, 12). Nevertheless, the onlookers do glorify God (*doxazein ton theon*). Therefore, one might say that this is a mixed response by the people, but the response of the religious leaders is clearly negative (Mark 2:6–7), and it is the focus of the unit—the reason for the healing.

26. As Malbon has stated: “[N]ot only must attention to characterization be integrated with analysis of plot, settings, rhetoric, etc., but also all the characters—‘minor’ as well as ‘major’—must be observed in relation with each other if we are to be competent and sensitive readers of biblical narratives.” Malbon, “Major Importance,” 59. Continuing, she explains: “I read Mark’s Gospel as not only the story of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, but also the story of others’ response to him in that role. For some time I have been investigating the characters around the Markan Jesus, especially the religious leaders and the disciples or followers. Here I wish to show how the minor characters extend the continuum of responses to Jesus that these major characters present.” Malbon, “Major Importance,” 63–64.

27. Because there is not a “wilderness” per se in Galilee, the use of the term *erēmos* may echo the spiritual testing of the temptation (cf. Mark 1:12–13).

28. *kai katediōxen auton Simōn kai hoi met’ autou*

29. See the Septuagint of Psalms of Solomon 15:8, “for they will flee from the holy ones like those pursued in battle,” see also BDAG, s.v. *katadiōkō*.

30. The disciples are “craving for self-enhancement. They want to be known, respected, honored, obeyed, and generally held in high repute as the greatest and the first.” But Jesus strives to suppress his reputation. “Understanding the disciples’ desire for glory and renown as a foil to Jesus’ actions suggests a different construction for secrecy: Jesus’ commands for silence and his attempts to stay hidden define his steadfast rejection of personal renown and glory. Closely related to this rejection is his attempt to avoid drawing crowds. . . . [T]he first four healings in the Gospel (1:21–2:12) all ended in reports of Jesus’ fame spreading, crowds growing, and his constant efforts to stem that tide. His consistent point is to keep from becoming known (1:34; 3:12; 5:43; 7:24).” Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 226–27.

31. As Malbon observes: “Only minor characters, never major characters such as the disciples or the religious leaders, are healed by Jesus in the Markan narrative, and the minor characters whom he has healed exemplify faith in Jesus’ power and authority. Their stories of faith and healing are absolutely essential to Mark’s story of Jesus as the Christ. Their responses of exemplary faith extend the Markan response continuum: from enemies to fallible followers to exemplars.” Malbon, “Major Importance,” 65. Clearly Simon’s mother-in-law is being shown

to be an “exemplar” in her service while Simon is showing himself to be a “fallible follower” early in the narrative as he attempts to redirect Jesus’ activity.

32. Tolbert identifies the anonymous followers as examples of the good soil who also align with Jesus. See *Sowing the Gospel*, 226–27 (“Not only is this drive [by the disciples for self-enhancement] the antithesis of that embodied by the anonymous, faithful ones who are healed, it also stands in stark contrast to the depiction of Jesus himself, who throughout Division One actively strives to suppress his reputation and keep his name from becoming known. . . . Jesus’ commands for silence and his attempts to stay hidden define his steadfast rejection of personal renown and glory. Closely related to this rejection is his attempt to avoid drawing crowds.”).

33. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 87.

34. Iersel, *Mark*, 117 (“After the cure the woman may seem to drop out of the picture. That she does not is something that the reader does not discover until the last page of the book, where the narrator mentions a number of women who ministered to Jesus when he was in Galilee (15.40–41). As it is, this information is anticipated in the first part of the book by the mention of at least one woman who ministered to Jesus and his companions in Galilee (1.31). These are the only two places in Mark where the verb *diakoneō* (‘minister to’) is used for people in Jesus’ company.”).

35. Others have reservedly correlated the response of Simon’s mother-in-law to discipleship. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 78n128 (“Yet in Chs. 9:33–37 and 10:43–45 the essence of discipleship is described in terms of service, and this may be anticipated in the present narrative.”); Joanna Dewey, “Women in the Gospel of Mark,” *WW* 26, no. 1 (2006): 22–23 (“Service becomes an important Markan theme describing ideal discipleship, which in retrospect may apply in this passage. Peter’s mother-in-law is ministering to the disciples.”); Malbon, “Fallible Followers,” 34–35 (“[I]t is not clear at this early point in the narrative whether her service, her ministry, shares—and foreshadows—the theological connotations that the ministry of Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome manifests later (*diēkonoun*, 15:41);” see also Iersel, *Mark*, 117, 138n33 (quoted above). More recently, Kuruvilla has positively asserted: “It is no doubt significant that there are only two instance of *diakoneō* . . . with humans as subjects in Mark’s Gospel (1:31 and 15:41), and both times the subjects are women. A subtle jab! The narrator is pointing an appreciative finger at the example of this mother-in-law, a woman who does the male disciples one better! She is already doing what Jesus himself will later model for his disciples. The same verb *diakoneō* is found in the statement on the essence of Jesus’ mission: The Son of man did not come to be served, but to *serve* (10:45). The narrator is implying that this woman is a true disciple, serving after the fashion of her Lord. Simon’s mother-in-law is thus a foil to both crowds and disciples, indeed, to all who might follow Jesus for the wrong reasons.” Kuruvilla, *Mark*, 38–39.

36. Henri Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey* (New York: Image, 1990), 151.

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