

Emplotment, Plot and Explotment: Refining Plot Analysis of Biblical Narratives from the Reader's Perspective

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Abstract

The notion of plot has a long history of various nuances and uses in literary and biblical studies. Consequently, the practice of plot analysis is quite variable. Although most definitions of plot privilege other elements than the reader, this tendency has recently begun to change. This article argues that plot is more comprehensible and constructive when it is located within the reader's encounter of the storyworld on the cognitive and affective levels. Thus, the activities of composition and reception, emplotment and plot are best considered distinct activities. An evaluation of definitions illustrates this necessary distinction and leads to a fresh formulation of plot, especially in relation to narratives purporting to be factual. As a complementary step, 'explotment' is proposed as a link between the interpretation of the past and the evaluation of the reader, thus explaining the immersive and emersive exploration of the story's central question(s). Equipped with this heuristic, the interpreter can investigate various questions in the study of biblical narratives on the macro and micro levels; for example, the narrative's progressive ideological and pragmatic force and development as well as single plot-enhancing elements such as various types of pericopes, literary devices and narrative techniques. With this emphasis on reception theory, this type of plot analysis can be especially beneficial to narrative-critical and reader-response studies. The value of plot theory for biblical exegesis is further demonstrated through illustrations and discussion applied to Luke-Acts.

Keywords

plot; emplotment; explotment; narrative criticism; reader-response criticism; Luke-Acts

Research on 'plot' and plot analysis in works of narratology and biblical exegesis reveals a paradoxical situation: Most literary scholars consider

plot an indispensable element of narrative, yet plot is neither defined nor used consistently. If it is true that plot is an essential element of narrative, and that the Bible is full of narratives, then plot analysis should be beneficial for the study of biblical narratives. Yet this begs the question: What is plot anyway? Is it found in the composition or in the reception of a narrative? Does it exist independently of the reading experience? What does plot actually do? Thus, how can plot theory be constructive for biblical exegesis? The primary concern of this article then is to bring clarity to these questions, arguing that plot theory is more comprehensible and has greater value for biblical exegesis in particular and narrative theory in general, when plot is viewed from the reader's perspective. To this effect, the article demonstrates the value of plot analysis on the macro and micro narrative levels through illustrations and exegetical discussion on Luke-Acts.

Plot's Pertinence for Narrative, yet Ambiguity in Narratology and Biblical Exegesis

Concerning the pertinence of plot for literary studies, many scholars affirm that plot is fundamental to the essence of narrative, both fictional and factual. Paul Cobley affirms this but also recognizes the difficulty of defining plot:

The most fundamental elements of narrative representation for narratology are the terms 'story', 'plot', and indeed 'narrative' itself. No narratological approach can proceed without some conception regarding each of these. However, this is not to say that narratologists never disagree on what defines each of these elements of narrative. Moreover, in commonsense parlance, 'story' and 'narrative', as well as 'story' and 'plot', are also constantly conflated.¹

Consequently, although plot theory is at least as old as Aristotle's *mythos* in his *Poetics*, literary scholars have not reached consensus about its definition. Hilarly Dannenberg's conclusion is accurate: 'Despite its apparent simplicity of reference, *plot* is one of the most elusive terms in

¹) Paul Cobley, 'Narratology', in Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth and Imre Szeman (eds.), *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 677-683 (678).

narrative theory.² One of the factors for this ambiguity is its location: in the causal structure of story, on the level of action, on the level of discourse, in the production of the narrative, or in its reception. Dannenberg suggests that this plurality of meanings represents the richness of the notion of plot that cannot be forced into one definition.³ This conundrum in defining ‘plot’ has led two distinguished scholars to propose a substitute term, yet without demanding its exclusion. H. Porter Abbott describes plot as ‘a vexed term’, suggesting a more functional expression such as ‘narrative discourse’,⁴ and James Phelan proposes ‘narrative progression’.⁵ Thus, in general, plot is considered an essential element in narrative, but some ambiguity remains concerning its identity and function.

The effects of this uncertainty about plot are also evident in biblical exegesis. For example, performing research in the area of Luke-Acts—this author’s primary interest in biblical studies—reveals this ambiguity. For example, Ju Hur—using a theory of plot that does not emphasize the reader’s perspective—does not perform an adequate plot analysis of Luke-Acts. The result resembles more of a thematic plan on the action level: ‘a geographically oriented plot’ divided into five causal stages of ‘the way of witness’ guided by the Holy Spirit. This, however, is better understood as a story outline based on the theme of witness.⁶

Robert Tannehill’s watershed narrative-critical commentaries on Luke-Acts offer another example albeit in a different light. It is clear throughout his work that plot is integral to his methodology, describing it mostly from the level of action as a unifying divine purpose being

² Hilary P. Dannenberg, ‘Plot’, in David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 435-39 (435).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

⁴ H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 2008), p. 240.

⁵ James Phelan, ‘Narrative Progression’, in David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 359-60.

⁶ Ju Hur, *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts* (JSNTSup, 211; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 191-93.

accomplished and opposed by divine and human characters.⁷ In addition, he presents his interpretation in two different manners: The first volume is organized thematically and the second volume narratively as the story unfolds. Tannehill's choice is based on his conclusion that the Gospel of Luke is more episodic than Acts, containing less of causal structure between scenes.⁸ Yet, according to this article's argument, his overall analysis could have been enhanced if both commentaries had followed the narrative's progression, as in volume two, according to the reader's progressive encounter.

In contrast, Ute Eisen does not even use plot in her narrative-critical study of Acts due to its complex history: "The problem with this term is that none other in narrative theory is used in so many ways—and this since approximately eighty years ... I will not use it subsequently, because I consider it dispensable."⁹ This is unfortunate since a valid term and analytical tool is set aside. Other examples of diverse interpretations about plot in biblical exegesis will be discussed below.

Despite this ambiguity, plot analysis has not been relinquished in recent works of narratology¹⁰ and biblical exegesis.¹¹ Therefore, despite the lack of consensus on the definition of plot, the notion has continued

⁷ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation; The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁹ Ute E. Eisen, *Die Poetik der Apostelgeschichte. Eine narratologische Studie* (NTOA, 58; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), p. 126 (my translation).

¹⁰ See, for example, Johanne Villeneuve, *Le sens de l'intrigue. Ou: La narrativité, le jeu et l'invention du diable* (InterCultures; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université de Laval, 2004); Raphaël Baroni, *La tension narrative. Suspense, curiosité, surprise* (Paris: Seuil, 2007); and Hilary P. Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

¹¹ See the articles from the fourth international colloquium of the *Réseau de recherche en analyse narrative des textes bibliques* in Anne Pasquier, Daniel Marguerat, and André Wénin (eds.), *L'intrigue dans le récit biblique* (BETL, 237; Leuven: Peeters, 2010). See also these influential 'introductions' to narrative criticism: Mark A. Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 23-34; Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1999), pp. 40-57; and James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), pp. 197-213.

to enjoy attention in the study of narratives. Nevertheless, can its theoretical basis be clarified and improved in order to be of greater use in the analysis of biblical narratives?

Plot Theory from the Reader's Perspective: Question and Prolegomena

The argument of this essay begins with the assertion that plot analysis can be most productive for biblical exegesis when emplotment and plot are considered distinct processes. A definition of plot from the reader's perspective clarifies the theoretical basis for the unique contribution of plot analysis. In addition, the term 'emplotment' will be explored as a constructive step that connects the various phases from the world of the narrated past to the world of the reader. Following this theoretical discussion, some questions and methods of this type of plot analysis are presented and illustrated by examples from Luke-Acts.

Given the growing and variable field of narrative theory, clarification is necessary concerning methodology and terms. Since the discussion focuses on biblical narratives, the formulations of plot do not claim to be the final word on plot theory for various types of narrative media. In this sense, it may be helpful to replace 'reader' with 'interpreter' for a broader application. Furthermore, since much of plot theory is developed to study fiction, the question arises whether plot theory is applicable to historical representations of the past. The present argument presupposes that historiography shares certain structures and techniques with other types of narrative, which substantiates the use of plot analysis for fiction and non-fiction.

Since it will be argued that the reader is an essential element in plot theory, I indicate here my uses of 'reader'. As regards narrative-critical interpretation, I employ the concept of 'implied reader', a *general* profile that can be inferred from the text, the readership for whom the narrative appears to be written. This is justified by the fact that narratives represent a historic communicative act: somebody telling another person or group on a certain occasion and for some purposes that something has occurred. Luke-Acts, for example, tells the story about Jesus and his disciples to a first-century, Greek-speaking, sympathetic readership like

‘Theophilus’ living in the Roman Empire rather than to a Fulfulde-speaking Fulani Muslim under French colonial rule in twentieth-century Sahel.¹² Therefore, a rigid dichotomy—especially concerning factual narratives—between real reader and the implied reader that the narrative supposes is not tenable. For narrative-critical analysis, then, this approach keeps more closely to the notion of the historic consciousness for which the author has written. In factual narrative, the narrator is simply the author’s voice inscribed in the text, and the implied reader is the profile or image of the intended audience to whom the story is told through the text.¹³ That said, in the case of biblical narratives, very often flesh-and-blood authors and readers are anonymous, so the profile of the reader must be constructed principally from the text and secondarily from what can be plausibly established for a reader of a particular time period. Although this heuristic has its limits, the above reasons justify the use of ‘implied reader’ in the interpretation of historical narrative.¹⁴

This seems to be a justifiable demarcation between narrative-critical and reader-response readings since the latter can work with any type of audience, irrespective of time, culture, or location. For example, the

¹² The conundrum regarding Theophilus’s identity is well known. His existence cannot be proven or disproven. I use his name as the intended reader who probably represents a broader, Christian readership. This is based on his name in the introduction in Luke 1.1-4, its reiteration in Acts 1.1, explicit and implicit commentary, and assumptions of the reader’s knowledge and interest in the story. For stimulating thoughts on his identity and its value for interpretation, see Paul Sevier Minear, ‘Dear Theo: The Kerygmatic Intention and Claim of the Book of Acts’, *Interpretation* 27, no. 2 (1973), pp. 131-50; Gerald Downing, ‘Theophilus’s First Reading of Luke-Acts’, in C.M. Tuckett (ed.), *Luke’s Literary Achievement* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 91-109; and Loveday Alexander, ‘What if Luke had never met Theophilus?’ *Biblical Interpretation* 8, no. 1-2 (2000), pp. 161-70 (165).

¹³ See Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 123-33.

¹⁴ Stephen Moore, among others, has expressed objections to the feasibility of performing a reading from the implied reader’s perspective. While this heuristic requires additional support, a general profile of the implied reader is possible based on textual information and reliable historical data. See, for example, Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), pp. 5-7.

interaction between a biblical story and reader can be analyzed among groups so varied as Romanian Baptists in *diaspora* in Italy all the way to the Sawi people in New Guinea. Why do certain stories resonate more with them than with others? Why are their responses to certain stories different from the probable responses sought from the implied reader?¹⁵ In this article, application of plot analysis will be mainly narrative-critical with a strong emphasis on reception theory, thus displaying a certain overlap with reader-response techniques.

The Necessary Distinction between ‘Emplotment’ and ‘Plot’

The first question to explore is the theoretical distinction between emplotment and plot, especially in relation to the study of historical narratives. The term emplotment can be traced to Hayden White¹⁶ and to Paul Ricoeur, who used a similar expression, *mise en intrigue*.¹⁷ Essentially, White and Ricoeur used these terms to describe similar elements in the use of narrative as a modal discourse in historiography. White focuses on the relationship between ideology and narrative, Ricoeur on the configuration of temporal experience in narrative. They focus more on the production of narrative than on its reception. Their theories describe the work of historians, who, consciously or not, practice the activity of emplotment; that is, they identify a common thread from obtained data and develop it by selecting and linking various historical events and elements. This is clearly not an arbitrary process, since it is performed according to historians’ preferences and interests as well as those of their readership.

¹⁵ A striking example of an audience’s response that is radically different from the probable response of the implied reader’s: Men from the Sawi people take pleasure in Judas’s betrayal of Jesus, because treachery is one of their highest values (Don Richardson, *Peace Child* [Ventura: Regal Books, 3rd edn, 1976], pp. 177-79).

¹⁶ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 7-11. See also Paul Veyne’s use of the notion of plot in historiography in *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 33.

¹⁷ See Paul Ricoeur, *L’intrigue et le récit historique* (Temps et récit; Paris: Seuil, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 66-104.

In contrast to authors of fictional narrative, historians are limited to the information that they have recovered about events, people, and contexts. This, of course, depends on the author’s principles of writing history. Yet authors of fiction make the same fundamental choices: what material to include and how to organize and express the narrative according to their interpretation and pragmatic objectives for the reader (e.g. instruction, utility, enjoyment, etc.). This creative activity in historiography is a configurational process between two periods: the past of the events and the present of the composition. Through this process of emplotment, a textual storyworld is produced that functions as a bridge for the reader to enter the temporal sphere of the narrated events (see Figure 1).

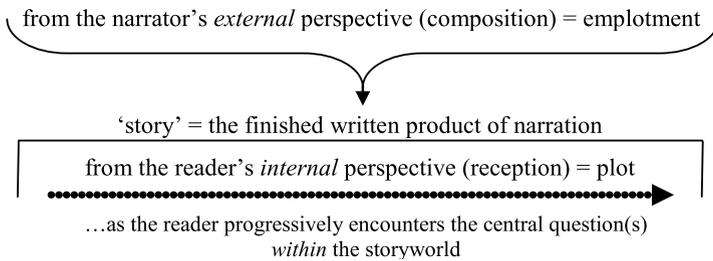


Figure 1: Distinction between ‘emplotment’ and ‘plot’ from the reader’s perspective.

H. Porter Abbott describes this process as ‘normalization’, because it brings ‘a collection of events into narrative coherence.’¹⁸ It describes the power of narrative to make sense of time, ‘a kind of “rhetoric of the real” in that it accounts for things.’¹⁹ Consequently, as a part of this process of exploring one or more questions, it is evident that historians work with some notion of their audience’s questions and interests.

Thus, it is arguable that historians, consciously or unconsciously, cannot escape the process of emplotment in their historical reconstructions. Accordingly, Ricoeur, interacting with White’s theory, summarizes a presupposition concerning a ‘poetics of history’: ‘... that fiction and history belong to the same class as far as their narrative structure is

¹⁸) Abbott, pp. 44-46.

¹⁹) Ibid., p. 44.

concerned'.²⁰ This, of course, does not lead *a priori* to the confusion of factual and fictional narrative concerning their referential value. In addition, the degree to which the author places emphasis on information or experience of the historical period can differ greatly from one work to another. Moreover, particularly in White's theory, historiography presupposes and reflects the author's ideological preferences, since this activity is never neutral. It always represents a particular position, even if the author claims to represent various viewpoints equally. As White describes, 'By emplotment, sets of events can be transformed into stories with beginnings, middles, and ends and thereby provided with positive or negative moral or ideological valences'.²¹ This statement also underlines the contrast between narrative and non-narrative discourse such as chronicles and annals.

With this interest in composition, biblical research has often focused on questions related to the processes involved in emplotment: the author's choice and use of texts as well as theological and literary influences. Accordingly, each evangelist—it may be said—has 'emplotted', or (synthetically) identified a 'lived-out plot' from human experience—a certain *fil rouge*—for readers to encounter based on a central question (or questions) that provides narrative unity and progression of various events and narrative elements. The evangelists, motivated by ideological and theological values, sought to influence their audience, not just to inform them. Ricoeur is right that in the Gospels, ideology is a part of the very strategy of narrative, 'an indissociable union of the kerygmatic and the narrative aspects'.²² The above lines of inquiry, therefore, should contribute to the study of 'emplotment'; that is, what sources, thought, and techniques have gone into the production of a unique narrative. Henry Cadbury's classic, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, is an excellent example of this type of research.²³

²⁰ Ricoeur, *L'intrigue*, p. 287 (my translation).

²¹ Hayden White, 'Emplotment', in David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 137.

²² Paul Ricoeur, 'Interpretative Narrative', in Regina M. Schwartz (ed.), *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990); pp. 236-57 (237).

²³ Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2nd edn,

Petri Merenlahti describes the value of plot for biblical studies in *Poetics for the Gospels? Rethinking Narrative Criticism*.²⁴ Although I agree with his thesis that narrative criticism should integrate historical research more fully, I have some difficulty with his understanding of plot. Inspired mainly by Peter Brooks's theory, Merenlahti understands plot as an interpretative activity that allows narrative 'to work as an hermeneutic instrument, a structure of sense-making, a tool in the explication of meaning'.²⁵ In his discussion, plot describes the author's compositional activity, the production of the Gospels. This line of inquiry corresponds to the notion of emplotment exploring the cognitive and formal processes responsible for the creation of kerygmatic narratives. For Merenlahti, plot is thus the link between content and expression. Consequently, what he seeks in the analysis of the production of the Gospels are the literary, ideological and theological influences on the author's thought and expression. The analysis of plot—it will be argued below—focuses on something different: the reader's progressive encounter of the story's central questions. The following section provides a comparison between definitions of plot, indicating their particular emphases and the degree to which they include the reader.

Definitions of Plot with Various Emphases

This section provides some background to the discussion on plot theory against which the proposed definition can be compared. It will be seen that definitions of plot often privilege other elements rather than the reader's encounter with the story. Indeed, one of the difficulties in defining plot is to determine from which perspective it should be defined; for instance, the narrator, the text, the events, the causal structure, or the reader. In fact, discussion of plot does not emerge *ex nihilo*; it reflects the shift in interests in literary and narrative theory and biblical

1958; reprint, 1999). See also William Kurz's discussion on compositional elements in *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 17-36.

²⁴ Petri Merenlahti, *Poetics for the Gospels? Rethinking Narrative Criticism* (Studies of the New Testament and Its World; London: T&T Clark, 2002), 99-100.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

exegesis on author, text and reader. Recent discussion on plot attempts to give more attention to the reader, which is certainly a reflection of the current rhetorical emphasis within narratology. The ensuing discussion on literary theory and biblical exegesis provides an overview of the various angles from which plot has been defined.

Definitions of Plot in Literary Theory

Literary scholar M.H. Abrams, whose definition is often quoted, illustrates this puzzle: 'The plot (which Aristotle termed the *mythos*) in a dramatic or narrative work is constituted by its events and actions, as these are rendered and ordered toward achieving particular artistic and emotional effects'.²⁶ Abrams's emphasis is primarily on the production side of narrativity, the choices of discourse (*what* and *how* to narrate). Yet two gaps are noteworthy. First, the interpreter is not mentioned as being active in the plot, only assumed as the beneficiary of the artistic and emotional effects. Second, the interpreter's progressive encounter of the plot is not clear, as being distinct from story (viewed externally from the narrator's perspective; cf. Figure 1).

Peter Brooks provides several definitions in his influential *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Brooks seeks to describe plot beyond the limitations of structuralist theory, privileging the experiential aspects of the reading experience. Brooks formulates then reformulates, leaving some doubt about the location of plot. For example, he speaks of 'plotting', which is clearly on the production side.²⁷ Nevertheless, the following description clearly illustrates Brooks's understanding of plot as also taking place through the reading experience:

Plot as we have defined it is the organizing line and intention of narrative, thus perhaps best conceived as an activity, a structuring operation elicited *in the reader* trying to make sense of those meanings that develop only through *textual and temporal succession*. Plot in this view belongs to the reader's 'competence', and in his

²⁶ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 7th edn, 1999), p. 224. For a similar influential definition, see Kieran Egan, 'What is a Plot?' *New Literary History* 9, no. 3 (1978), pp. 455-73 (470).

²⁷ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992 [1984]), p. xiii.

'performance'—the reading of narrative—it animates the sense-making process: it is a key component of that 'passion of (for) meaning' that, Barthes says, lights us afire when we read.²⁸

Three key elements emerge: (1) the dynamic nature of narrative discourse, what drives the story toward its intent or direction; (2) its temporal succession; and (3) the reader's involvement in being carried, through desire, toward meaning. However, due to his multiple formulations, Brooks is unclear whether plot exists only within the reading experience.

Gerald Prince's influential definition highlights two discernable aspects of plot: 'The global dynamic (goal-oriented and forward-moving) organization of narrative constituents which is responsible for the thematic interest (indeed, the very intelligibility) of a narrative and for its emotional effect'.²⁹ This definition is constructive for it focuses on the dynamic nature of the narrative (assumed to be between text and reader), which moves toward some goal for a receiving consciousness ('thematic interest' and 'emotional effect'). True, the text is working on the audience; yet what is the reader's role? Can plot exist independently of the reading experience? As in Abrams's definition, it is simply assumed.

Other descriptions of plot in narrative theory will be discussed below in relation to formulations in biblical exegesis.

Definitions of Plot in Works of Biblical Exegesis

Three major introductions to narrative criticism treat the concept of plot, yet all lack the necessary emphasis on the reader's involvement in their formulations. Mark Allen Powell's description does not succeed, because it does not integrate adequately the discourse level and the reader in his definition: '*Story* refers to the content of the narrative, what it is about. A story consists of such elements as events, characters, and settings, and the interaction of these elements comprises what we call the plot'.³⁰ His attempt to maintain a distinction between 'story' and

²⁸ Ibid., p. 37, emphasis added.

²⁹ Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, revised edn, 2003), p. 73.

³⁰ Powell, p. 23.

'plot' is helpful, but it is reductive since plot is merely the 'interaction' of the three stated elements without the reader's involvement. Powell comes closer to the definition argued for in this article through Seymour Chatman's expression 'story-as-discoursed', which was his attempt to express plot concisely: 'The events in a story are turned into a plot by its discourse, the modus of presentation'.³¹ Again, the emphasis is on the narrator's activity and not on the reader's. Powell then relates Chatman's formulation to the focus of his book: 'Narrative criticism is interested in what Chatman calls "story-as-discoursed". A central question is, How does the implied author guide the implied reader in understanding the story?'.³² Therefore, what Chatman calls 'plot', Powell considers a central question of narrative criticism. However, in view of plot analysis, this could be stated from another angle: 'How does the implied reader *progressively encounter* the story?'. This adjustment in focus is inspired by Boris Tomashevski's formulation on the distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzet*; that is, that *fabula* has to do with what actually happened, whereas *sjuzet*—including the reader in the equation—explains how the reader becomes aware of what happened.³³ If plot analysis concerns the story's progression as the reader encounters it, then it is at the very heart of narrative criticism. This claim will be explored in more detail below.

James Resseguie dedicates a chapter to the question of plot in *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* in which he recognizes the value for plot analysis: 'An understanding of plot is important to determine the structure, unity, and direction of a narrative'.³⁴ His definition of plot is similar to Brooks's emphasis on the side of production: 'It is the designing principle that contributes to our understanding of the meaning of a narrative. More concretely, the plot is the sequence

³¹ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 43.

³² Powell, p. 23.

³³ Tomachevski expresses it this way: '*Bref, la fable, c'est ce qui s'est effectivement passé; le sujet c'est la manière dont le lecteur en a pris connaissance*' (Boris Tomashevski, 'Thématique', in Tzvetan Todorov [ed.], *Théorie de la littérature. Textes des Formalistes russes réunis, présentés et traduits par Tzvetan Todorov* [Paris: Seuil, 2001]), pp. 263-307 (272).

³⁴ Resseguie, 197.

of events or incidents that make up a narrative'.³⁵ The main weakness of this definition is that it also rests too much on the action level: the sequence of events, which reveals a designing principal.

Similarly, Marguerat and Bourquin provide this definition of plot: 'systematization of the events which make up the story: these events are linked together by a causal link (configuration) and inserted into a chronological process (sequence of events)'.³⁶ Again, this definition provides no indication of the reader's activity; rather, it emphasizes the sequence of events and the causal link. The expression 'chronological process' is positive, because it assumes the progressive exposure of the events as the reader encounters them.³⁷ Marguerat's recent study, which privileges the reader in his discussion of plot, will be considered below.

The distinction between emplotment and plot has been sufficiently illustrated, and various elements in plot theory have been emphasized. Salient aspects of recent theory of plot and the practice of plot analysis will now be considered.

Recent Plot Theory with Greater Emphasis on the Reader

Daniel Marguerat's article, 'Intrigue et tension narrative en Marc 14 et Luc 22. Une approche post-classique du schéma quinaire', gives emphasis to reception in the notion of plot recognizing certain weaknesses in early narrative theory. His summary of key contributions of recent narrative theory is constructive.³⁸ Some commentary is given on the four points to orient the discussion and to suggest a few clarifications.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, p. 176. For a similar emphasis on the action level, see Jean-Noël Aletti et al. (eds.), *Vocabulaire raisonné de l'exégèse biblique* (Paris: Cerf, 2005), p. 75.

³⁷ Similar to the definitions by Abrams and Egan, Shimon Bar-Efrat is more emphatic that the organization of events serves 'to arouse the reader's interest and emotional involvement' (*Narrative Art in the Bible* [London: T&T Clark International, 1989], p. 92).

³⁸ Marguerat, 'Intrigue et tension narrative en Marc 14 et Luc 22. Une approche post-classique du schéma quinaire', in Anne Pasquier, Daniel Marguerat, and André Wénin (eds.), *L'intrigue dans le récit biblique* (BETL, 237; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 37-64 (45-47).

First, limitations have been demonstrated concerning structuralist theory on plot, in particular the limits of certain narrative sequence models. One example is a narrative sequence model now known as the 'quinary scheme' proposed by Paul Larivaille.³⁹ This model seeks to define structure common to narratives; that is, five sequences each with a specific function: initial state, provocation, action, sanction and final state. Larivaille proposes the model's primary use for the identification of principal transformations, enacted or endured by the hero, from an initial state to a final state on the chronological action level (before, during and after).⁴⁰ This forms the 'backbone' of the story: the changes and causes in a process of transformation.⁴¹ The model fails, however, to incorporate variations on the discourse level. The five sequences are not present in all narratives, nor do all narratives follow a chronological presentation. Nonetheless, Marguerat deems that the quinary scheme as an organizational model is still useful in plot analysis because it corresponds more or less to 'the reader's expectation of the story' (*l'attente du lecteur face au récit*).⁴² Yet the quinary scheme's strength is also its weakness in plot analysis: It focuses on the chronological development, and not necessarily *how* and *when* sequences are encountered by the reader. An adaptation of this model will be presented below.

A second limitation in structuralist plot theory was in the identification of the 'knot' (*noeud*, *complication* or *provocation* in the quinary scheme). The 'provocation' was limited to the presentation of a 'complication' at the action level. In recent theory, the 'knot' is to be identified with the production of narrative tension acting upon the reader on the discourse level. Although the sense of tension is often concordant between characters and reader, the 'knot' has been shifted from the immanent action level to the reader's experience, since the reader may be aware of some type of tension on the action level before the actors become aware of it (e.g., a need, conflict, danger). This is very often the

³⁹) Paul Larivaille, 'L'analyse (morpho)logique du récit', *Poétique* 19 (1974), pp. 368-88 (387).

⁴⁰) Cf. a similar approach proposed on initial procedures in literary analysis in Roland Barthes, 'Par où commencer?' *Poétique* 1 (1970), pp. 3-9 (4).

⁴¹) Larivaille, p. 379.

⁴²) Marguerat, p. 39.

case in Luke-Acts with the reader's privileged position. Conversely, the reader may become aware of an element subsequently that certain characters already know. Thus, a discordance of knowledge between reader and characters can be an important factor in the production of narrative tension.

Third, early narrative theory tended to concentrate on the properties of the imminent level of the story (i.e. the action level). Post-structuralist theory places greater emphasis on the reception of the text. Beyond the question of 'knot' or 'complication', recent theory focuses on the production of tension within the reception of the text; for example, how various techniques can generate suspense, curiosity and surprise—even in multiple readings. Therefore, the focus is no longer exclusively on the events and structure but is now also on the story's possibilities—that is, those events which could have happened, not only those that did happen.

Based on these developments, Marguerat proposes a scheme that represents two dimensions of plot (*intrigue*): compositional and pragmatic.⁴³ The drawback is that it illustrates a previous point; namely, the confusion of the processes involved in emplotment and plot. For example, Marguerat includes the quinary scheme in his formulation of the 'compositional dimension', but it is not necessary in the equation, since it is an analytical tool and not an intrinsic part of plot or emplotment. His model could be divided in two: emplotment (*mise en intrigue*) representing the compositional part, and plot (*intrigue*) representing the pragmatic dimension of the story's encounter. This means that emplotment—vitaly connected to but theoretically distinct from plot—explores questions such as how the author perceived a red thread connecting various events in time, sources and various influences (ideological, social and literary). In this sense, the 'quinary scheme' certainly has some value, because it attempts to highlight what the author considered the principal transformations concerning the protagonist as the events occurred in *chronological order*. This focus on an individual or collective hero provides unity to and generates interest in the unfolding of the story. Therefore, the quinary scheme can help to identify the 'point', the *raison d'être* of the story, or its 'interest', that which moti-

⁴³ Ibid., p. 47.

vates the narration in the first place.⁴⁴ For the above reasons, I suggest that plot reflects more closely the ‘pragmatic dimension’ in Marguerat’s model; namely, the reader’s progressive encounter with the narrative’s central question(s) within its storyworld, which can be distinguished from ‘emplotment’, the external compositional processes leading to the production of a ‘story’ (see Figure 1). Based on this distinction among ‘emplotment’, ‘story’ and ‘plot’ in relation to Marguerat’s synthesis of recent plot theory, the discussion continues with a formulation of plot.

A Definition of Plot from the Reader’s Perspective

Plot is a composite term and, admittedly, not easy to define, for it holds together various elements. This formulation of plot attempts to incorporate the following salient elements: the reader’s progressive encounter, central question(s), cognitive and affective narrative tension as well as degree of closure. Plot, in written narrative, is located in the dynamic relationship between text and reader, the reader’s progressive encounter within the storyworld produced via emplotment. In this sense, plot can be defined as the reader’s progressive cognitive and affective encounter with the gradual release of information concerning the narrative’s central question(s) within a storyworld—normally about a central protagonist—which raises questions and expectations and the consequent desire to know and experience their development toward some degree of closure. This encounter is not limited to one occurrence but may happen repeatedly and more fully through multiple readings (cf. emplotment in Figures 3 and 4). This definition of plot is broad enough to be applied to the interpreter’s encounter of fictional or factual narrative, but the latter will normally require more attention to the referential and ideological values as well as pragmatic aims.

This definition of plot can be illustrated by Raphaël Baroni’s ‘narrative tension curve’ (see Figure 2), which describes the progression of

⁴⁴ See Ricoeur, *L'intrigue*, pp. 267-70. Also, William Labov’s discussion on the ‘evaluation’ of a story helps to identify what makes the story reportable or its ‘point’ (William Labov, *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972], p. 366).

time and intensity and how the reader may perceive narrative tension through the combination of anticipation and uncertainty.

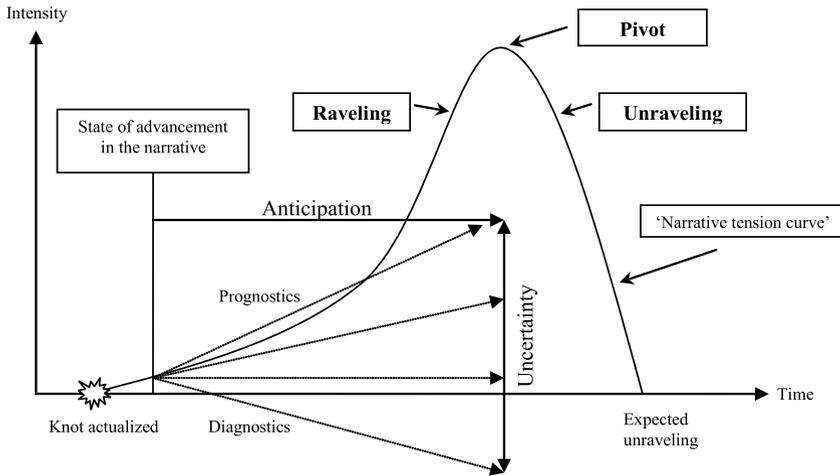


Figure 2: Adaptation of R. Baroni's 'narrative tension curve'. Source: Raphaël Baroni, *La tension narrative. Suspense, curiosité, surprise* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), p. 131.

Fluctuations of tension wax and wane in a given narrative and vary from one narrative to another, as well as from one reader to another, resulting in the degree to which narrative tension is actually felt. In this sense, Baroni is right that plot presupposes the presence and activity of an interpreter: 'We will defend a concept of *plot* which envisages an *effective structure* of the text only to the degree that it is inserted in an interlocutory relationship and actualized in a conscience susceptible to perceive—or better, to feel and to anticipate—the greater articulations that *mark* a narrative in view of the development of tension'.⁴⁵ In short, plot requires the presence of an interpreter, someone who can experience narrative tension generated through various narrative features and techniques, especially suspense and curiosity. Depending on the reader's

⁴⁵ Baroni, pp. 40-41 (my translation and author's emphasis). For the connection between intrigue and tension, Baroni refers to the definition of R. Bourneuf and R. Ouellet who speak of 'the presence of an internal tension' (R. Bourneuf and R. Ouellet, *L'Univers du roman* [Paris: PUF, 1972], p. 43). Yet this remains too much on the action level.

knowledge of the story, narrative tension can be generated prognostically (what is going to happen next?) or diagnostically (how and why did that happen?). The logic of Baroni's theory is that narrative tension arouses in the reader both expectation and consequently the desire for relaxation (*'la tension suscite l'attente et le désir d'une détente'*).⁴⁶ Accordingly, plot (*intrigue*) highlights Meir Sternberg's argument for the necessity of reception as a part of narrative's distinctive element: narrativity itself, understood as 'unique interplay between temporalities'.⁴⁷

James Phelan's emphasis on the reader's activity provides further support for the above discussion. Suggesting that 'narrative progression' could substitute 'plot' as an appropriate term, it is clear that he privileges the reader's reception: 'the synthesis of the internal dynamics of the text's movement from beginning to end with the authorial audience's developing responses to that movement'.⁴⁸ In this definition, the objective and pragmatic aspects (text and reader) are articulated reflecting their dynamic relationship activated in the reading event.

Narrative progression in the notion of plot can be illustrated by returning to the question of narrative sequences. Recent discussion in narratology has demonstrated interest in narrative sequences for the study of various narrative media.⁴⁹ A 'reader's quinary scheme' illustrates the progressive nature of plot and the major sequences in a plot's development: initial orientation, raveling, pivot, unraveling and final orientation.⁵⁰ The choice in terms is crucial for they are not limited to the chronological action level. Rather, they reflect the reader's encounter

⁴⁶ Baroni, p. 49.

⁴⁷ Meir Sternberg, 'How Narrativity Makes a Difference', *Narrative* 9, no. 2 (2001), pp. 115-22 (122).

⁴⁸ Robert Scholes, James Phelan and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, fortieth anniversary edn, rev. and expanded, 2006), p. 302.

⁴⁹ For example, narratologists focused on the theme: 'Redéfinitions de la séquence dans la narratologie postclassique', during the first international colloquium of the *Réseau romand de narratologie*, May 20-21, 2011 at the University of Fribourg.

⁵⁰ Following Jean-Michel Adam's narrative sequence model, an additional sequence could be added at the beginning ('Resume and/or Entry-preface') and another at the end ('Final evaluation [moral] and/or "Chute"'). These sequences provide further support for the reader to enter and exit the reading (J.-M. Adam, 'Décrire des actions: raconter ou relater?' *Littérature* 95 [1994], pp. 3-22 [19]).

within the storyworld: how the reader encounters a ‘storyworld-influx’,⁵¹ which highlights the questions and expectations around the central question(s). The central question(s)—responsible for generating interest—are then raveled and unraveled for the reader. For this reason, the raveling and unraveling sequences are the heart of the narrative. As the raveling of a rope creates tension, so the exploration of raveled narrative creates tension in the reader through the arousal of desire to know and experience the outcome of questions, expectations and possibilities. The result is that readers do not want to put their book down and viewers do not want to stop watching a film, for they are in the grips of the plot since they are part of it. They will continue to read and watch until they know what they wanted to know and feel what they have wanted to feel, unless—for some annoying reason—they are forced to stop.

Further support of this discussion is again Baroni’s ‘narrative tension curve’ (Figure 2) from which one can deduce both progression and the three major internal sequences: raveling, pivot and unraveling. This suggestion, however, does not preclude the possibility of other types of sequences within the greater sequences mentioned above. Furthermore, the duration and intensity of each sequence can vary extensively from one narrative to another.

The discussion on narrative sequences illustrates succinctly the distinction between plot and story: The reader is a part of it, not outside it; it is the reader’s progressive encounter of the storyworld, whether factual or fictional. To illustrate the discussion of plot, it is profitable to explore another term, ‘exploitment’, which provides an additional link between narrative-critical and reader-response methods of interpretation.

‘Exploitment’: the Post-reading Relationship between Narrative and Reader

The post-reading stage—after the reader has encountered the storyworld and re-entered his or her own world—may be called ‘exploitment’ (see

⁵¹ David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 9, 14.

Figure 2). With this additional step, the discussion moves from the first temporal stage to the last: the past of the narrated events, the moments of composition (emplotment), encounter (plot) and then evaluation (exploitment). The world of the past and the world of the reader have been connected through narrativity. Concerning the reading of historiography, it describes the reader's process of leaving temporarily the story's temporal sphere for his or her own world, or permanently, for he or she may never return to the story. It represents the stage of evaluation in which the reader now considers whether or not to integrate it into his or her world. Will he or she accept the author's explanation of the central question(s) and allow the narrative to shape his or her moral and ideological values? Consequently, the reading event is rightly compared to a journey, an exploration of another historical situation; more specifically, it represents the reader's exploration of one or more questions within a mediated storyworld (see Figure 3).⁵² Yet this additional step also illustrates the journey of ideas and knowledge of the past. Thus, the three interrelated processes are connected by the central question(s): emplotment via composition, plot via encounter and exploitment via evaluation.

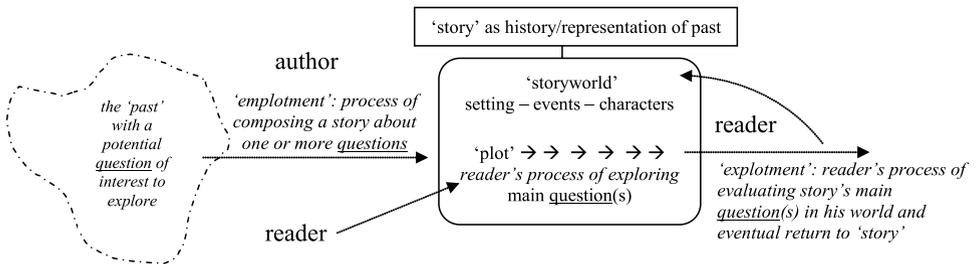


Figure 3: Historical immersion and emersion via the exploration of the narrative's central question(s).

Exploitment thus describes the process of evaluation after the reader exits the storyworld and reenters his or her own world. This concept is especially relevant to the reading of biblical narratives, which are charged

⁵² This illustration is inspired by H. Dannenberg's diagram 'The Reading Experience as Immersive Journey' in *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*, p. 24.

with moral and ideological values through claims about knowledge of God's character and God's interventions in the human sphere. Given the prominence of re-reading of biblical literature, exploitment has value for the description of the ongoing relationship between narratives and readers. In Figure 3, the second arrow on the right, moving back into the storyworld, indicates the reader's (eventual) return to the narrative with the desire to know and experience again—perhaps more fully—the central question(s).

The additional element that makes exploitment particularly relevant for the discussion about plot and historical narrative is the potential impact on readers of historical narrative. Abbott, exploring the relationship between narrative and truth, states one significant difference between fiction and nonfiction: 'Despite the powerful advantages of fiction, nonfiction narratives enjoy one attraction that fiction lacks, and that is that they claim to tell a story that is *factually* true'.⁵³ He illustrates this on the pragmatic level with an example of an autobiography that enjoyed much success until the public discovered that the author had not died as the narrative had reported. The result was that 'the [audience's] feeling of betrayal was as deep as it was widespread, and the book fell into an obscurity from which it has rarely emerged'.⁵⁴ This reaction is clearly compounded when a reader has significant personal investment in a narrative. Thus, given that historical representations are an interpretation, Abbott suggests that readers generally have this expectation: 'So what most audiences expect in historical narrative is not the truth but the intent to tell the truth. It's a kind of contract. The common expression is that nonfiction narrative is *falsifiable*, which is a somewhat misleading way of saying that it makes sense to test the accuracy of such a narrative as a representative of what actually happened'.⁵⁵

In order to illustrate the three interrelated processes (emplotment, plot and exploitment), one can imagine this type of contract between

⁵³ Abbott, p. 145. See also Merenlahti (pp. 9-12) for a similar explanation being applied to the reading of the Gospels and the pragmatic differences between factual and fictional narrative.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31. The event concerns W.N.P. Barbellion's *The Journal of a Disappointed Man* (New York: George H. Doran, 1919).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

author and audience inferred from the narrative situation described in the ‘abstract’ of Luke-Acts (Luke 1.1-4) in which the author promises to provide a coherent narrative, based on facts gathered from reliable sources, and how the reader will benefit from it. Figure 4 illustrates the various moments of activities and experience involved in the composition and reading of Luke-Acts; similar to an immersive and emersive journey, these moments connect individuals of the past, author and then audience.⁵⁶

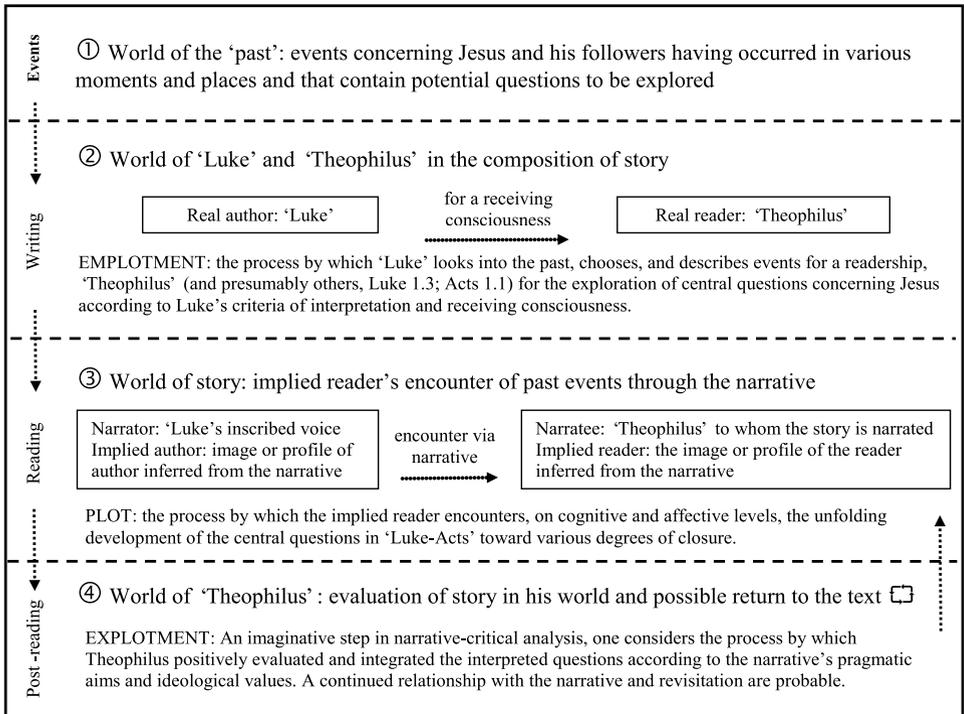


Figure 4: Emplotment, Plot and Exploptment in historical narrative applied to ‘Luke-Acts’.

⁵⁶ This model overlaps some with the three types of *mimesis* in Ricoeur’s *Temps et récit*, especially *Mimesis* II with ‘emplotment’ and *Mimesis* III with ‘plot’. However, Ricoeur’s main focus is on the temporal aspect: (1) the prefiguration of the temporal configuration shared by author and reader, (2) the author’s configuration of the temporal world via composition and (3) the refiguration of the temporal world by the reader.

It is immersive in the sense that the author must penetrate the world of the past through various means and sources in order to provide what he has promised to his intended reader, 'Theophilus' (Luke 1.1-2). Through the narrative, the author and reader are indirectly connected. Now the reader must also immerse into the world of the past through the mediation of the narrative. This is the basis for the reading encounter, an exploration of questions concerning Jesus and the disciples. Then the reader of Luke-Acts emerges from this reading encounter in the story-world and re-enters his or her world. In the process of exploitation, the reader like 'Theophilus' can choose to incorporate or exclude the narrative's aims and values in his or her life. For a narrative-critical reading of Luke-Acts, this is clearly an imaginative step since the interpreter does not know the outcome of Theophilus's reading. One can only imagine that the implied reader, the image of Theophilus—most likely a sympathetic reader—was affected positively by Luke's work. On the other hand, reader-response studies can investigate this process through other types of readers (inserted in the fourth stage, 'world of reader'). Empirical data can help evaluate the degree of the reader's evaluation and integration of the values of Luke-Acts.

In light of the above description of exploitation, plot and exploitation and the illustration applied to Luke-Acts, it is constructive at this point to sum up and demonstrate the value of plot analysis for the study of biblical narratives.

Plot Analysis for Biblical Exegesis: Value and Methods

The Value of Plot Analysis for Biblical Exegesis

If the formulation of plot is realigned to the reader's perspective, then the biblical interpreter can focus on the reader's progressive encounter with the narrator's development of central question(s) within the story-world. As Marguerat rightly states, 'The interest of the researcher will in this way fix his [*sic.*] attention on the dialogical potential of the plot, a potential that consists in the management of the tension begun by the nouement [raveling] and released by the denouement [unraveling]'.⁵⁷ As

⁵⁷ Marguerat, p. 44 (my translation).

claimed above, this line of inquiry is fundamental for the distinct tasks of narrative criticism by examining the implied reader's progressive *cognitive and affective encounter* of the story, which is a unique representation of questions carrying theological values and pragmatic aims. In light of the pragmatic differences between fictional and factual narrative, plot analysis seeks also to disclose narrative techniques working upon the reader through the reading encounter. In other words, how does the force and beauty of a literary work serve the author's theological and pragmatic project?

Plot analysis may be constructive in comparing responses of various types of readers: the implied reader and readers from various times, places and cultures. Thus, plot analysis is also valuable for reader-response studies. For these reasons, plot analysis can play a profitable role in the biblical interpreter's repertoire of exegetical methods. The following sections demonstrate in a cursory manner how plot analysis can be applied with benefits on the macro and micro levels of a narrative.

Methods for Plot Analysis

Once plot is defined, how does one analyze a plot and for what benefit? Since plot analysis explores the reader's progressive encounter of the story, it contributes to a systematic and fluid analysis of the macro narrative (its main sequences and articulations) and its teleological advancement. The main concern of this article is to contribute to the theoretical basis of plot analysis already practiced by biblical scholars to some degree.⁵⁸ Plot analysis, as understood here, should certainly be enriched by historical analysis but not distracted by it in the description of the nar-

⁵⁸) I mention only a few. Joel B. Green's commentary is an outstanding example of narrative-critical analysis: *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). For the Acts of the Apostles, besides Tannehill's commentary mentioned above, another fine work that maintains narrative flow is F. Scott Spencer's *Journeying through Acts: A Literary-Cultural Reading* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004). In addition, for an analysis on a different type of literary unit offered here, see Jean-Noël Aletti's stimulating discussion of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in *Il racconto come teologia. Studio narrative del terzo vangelo e del libro degli Atti degli Apostoli* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2nd edn, 2009), pp. 181-217.

rative progression. In order to develop this overall picture of the reader's encounter, some constructive methods are described below.

The 'narrative tension curve' can help trace and highlight the uniqueness of a plot rather than forcing it into a preconceived structure (cf. Figure 1). This instrument can be used to represent graphically the development of the plot on a macro narrative level, indicating the waxing and waning of narrative tension especially in the two major sequences, the raveling and the unraveling. Performed retrospectively, plot analysis helps to identify key junctures in the story (or a series of moments) such as the 'knot' and the 'pivot' in which the reader becomes aware of significant shifts in the story's movement.

Likewise, the quinary scheme from the reader's perspective (initial orientation, raveling, pivot, unraveling and final orientation) can be constructive on the macro level by locating the main sequences that describe the reader's encounter of the progressive unfolding of the story. Within the plot's major sequences, the interpreter can analyze the development of narrative tension, identifying each pericope and its part in raveling and unraveling the plot. A micro or macro narrative may not have all five sequences. The interpreter must resist the temptation to force a story into a five-sequenced mold. In addition, paratextual features may be present at the beginning or end of the story (e.g. Luke 1.1-4) to offer some hermeneutical clues.

With this view on the macro level, an additional move is to inventory questions or expectations that arise progressively in the reading.⁵⁹ By filling in the larger sequences in this manner, the interpreter provides a running commentary on the pragmatic level. It is clear that types of question can vary when the interpreter already has some knowledge of the story. Depending on the interpreter's interest, memory and competence, narrative tension can still be produced in multiple readings due to the anticipation of certain developments and their importance for the overall story. It is simply reliving the story for the interest that it continues to generate on the cognitive and affective levels.

⁵⁹) Sylvain Rigollot performs this type of analysis on the film *Titanic* in *Méthodologie du scénario: Titanic* (Paris: Dixit, 1999), pp. 141-42. For the value of this move and an expansion of Rigollot's analysis, see Baroni, pp. 342-61.

Consequently, in light of the plot's development and a plausible description of the (implied) reader, the interpreter can ask: In which sequence of the plot does the reader enter the story ('initial orientation' or 'raveling')? What does the reader know up to now? Does he or she know more or less than the characters (e.g. about Jesus' destiny)? What questions and expectations are being raised in the reader through this particular scene? How has the reader been prepared to understand and experience this episode? How might this episode affect the reader pragmatically? Does it fill in gaps of information? How does this episode prepare the reader to interpret subsequent episodes? In short, what kind of encounter is being developed on the cognitive and affective levels?

Again, this line of questioning depends on the type of reader. Phelan's suggestions concerning readers' developing interests are particularly useful for this step.⁶⁰ As readers advance in their encounter of the story, they develop three main interests: mimetic, thematic and synthetic. The first concerns how the reader relates the story's characters and situations (both similarities and differences) to his or her own world. The thematic interest involves the narrative's ideas, values and worldviews. Finally, the synthetic interest concerns the reader's appreciation of the narrative as an artificial construct. Phelan adds that various types of responses are generated in relation to these three interests: 'As audiences develop these interests through following the internal dynamics of a narrative, they engage in many kinds of more specific responses: judging characters, developing hopes, desires, and expectations for them, and constructing tentative hypotheses about the overall shape and direction of the narrative'.⁶¹ For readers of the Bible seeking spiritual edification, this 'spiritual' dimension could be subsumed under thematic interest. It may be understood as an element that transcends these categories so that plot analysis could also include the reader's spiritual experience in the (re)reading.

Finally, one can enrich plot analysis by being attentive to the narrative's gradual rhetorical force, the 'rhetoric of the real' or 'normaliza-

⁶⁰ Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg, p. 307. This is further developed in Phelan's book, *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007).

⁶¹ Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction*, pp. 307-308.

tion'. This means seeking how the narrative unpacks its theological and ideological values that the author develops for the reader's interest, instruction or utility. In other words, plot can be viewed as an exploration of ideological or theological values in narrative form. Thus, how does the reader encounter this sense-making process? How does each pericope—regardless of its literary type—contribute to the development of the main questions and assume a degree of programmatic value? And which values is the reader expected to accept and integrate into his or her own world? It reflects the reality that narrative is not only a 'flowing system of information'⁶² but also a developing 'system of influence' attempting to shape the beliefs and values of the reader.⁶³ Thus, Luke-Acts, for example, informs the reader in order to provide certainty (Luke 4.1). Luke's work exemplifies 'normalization' as it expresses meaningful and purposeful content, artistically expressed, that provides a coherent, convincing story for the audience's experience.

In addition to the uses above on the macro narrative level, plot analysis permits the analysis of smaller blocks of text—even various types of literary units—and their part in the reader's encounter of the story. The following section provides an exegetical demonstration on the story of Jesus' temptation.

Plot Analysis on the Macro and Micro Narrative Levels

The Contribution of a Pericope to the Plot on Micro and Macro Levels (Luke 4.1-13)

Plot analysis describes the plot of a single pericope as well as its contribution to the overall plot. The following discussion mainly focuses on the contribution of the temptation pericope to the reading of Luke-Acts from the macro perspective (Luke 4.1-13). To do this, some preliminary commentary is necessary. This episode can be located at the beginning of the 'raveling' sequence (Luke 4.1-23.56) in which narrative tension develops mainly around the reader's encounter of the various reac-

⁶² Barthes, p. 4 (my translation).

⁶³ Tannehill, p. 8.

tions—especially the increasing opposition—to Jesus.⁶⁴ Using Baroni's narrative tension curve (Figure 2), this episode constitutes the initial 'knot' or 'complication' in Luke-Acts, because it displays the first explicit opposition against the hero, thus triggering acute development of narrative tension. It is an abrupt transition for the reader as it concerns the highest threat to what has been promised about Jesus. On the discourse level, narrative tension in Luke-Acts develops primarily through the reader's existential interest in Jesus, as well as through curiosity concerning information that the reader already knows but about which he does not know how and why the pieces fit together. In Baroni's model, this reflects 'diagnostics' rather than 'prognostics'; that is, how and why things happened rather than what is going to happen next. Also, the pure sense of 'being there' (*qualia*) or reliving the temptation is enough to cause an interested reader to revisit this scene with passion.⁶⁵ In addition, new story elements may also allow the reader to experience suspense and surprise.

Up until this point, the implied reader has already encountered various types of pericopes and voices in the 'initial orientation' (Luke 1.4-3.38) that bring an increasing focus on Jesus. Angelic and human beings have announced Jesus' identity and mandate, and the God of Israel has confirmed it (Luke 3.22). Strategically placed, Jesus' genealogy (Luke 3.23-38) closes the initial orientation, which—through the narrator's voice and point of view—settles the question of Jesus' identity: He is not the son of Joseph but the son of God (3.23, 38). Through stylistic features as well as references and allusions to Jewish scriptures and their prophetic tradition, the implied reader—both informed and sympathetic to the story—has virtually entered the world of Israel's metanar-

⁶⁴ The quinary scheme from the reader's perspective can be applied to Luke-Acts as follows: Initial orientation (Luke 1.5-3.38), Raveling (Luke 4.1-23.56), Pivot (Luke 24.1-Acts 2.13), Unraveling (Acts 2.14-28.15), Final orientation (Acts 28.16-31). See James M. Morgan, 'The Thoroughfare Motif in Luke-Acts: Its Poetic Value and Theological Implications', (PhD diss., Leuven: Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, 2010), p.88.

⁶⁵ The term 'qualia' is used in cognitive studies to describe properties that are felt and subjectively related to a certain experience. Recently this concept has been applied to the analysis of the relationship between narrative and mind. See David Herman, *Basics of Elements of Narrative* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 143-45.

rative. This confirms his or her already favorable disposition to Jesus. The effects of 'normalization' are at work, for the stage is now set for the reader's encounter. The reader knows much about Jesus' mandate from the text, yet up until this point Jesus has not yet begun to implement it. How will his mandate be carried out? Who supports or opposes him? And why? Prior to the reading, the implied reader—the profile of 'Theophilus' and those like him—had already received information about Jesus and those who received him or rejected him (Luke 1.4). The rest of Luke-Acts confirms repeatedly these principal antithetical reactions and groups.

Thus, at the beginning of Chapter 4, the reader encounters the first scene of explicit opposition, which begins in the spiritual realm ('led by the Spirit into the wilderness, for forty days, being tempted by the devil', Luke 4.1b-2a). Therefore, the raveling sequence begins with conflict in the spiritual realm and is immediately followed by conflict in the human sphere in Nazareth. Through the reader's privileged position, knowledge of this episode shapes his or her encounter and judgment of characters in the spiritual and human realms. On the mimetic level, categories of protagonists and antagonists are gradually being developed for the reader.

For the above reasons, the 'devil' enters with no introduction or description. It may be inferred that the reader had already encountered this personage through other texts or situations.⁶⁶ This episode illustrates the other-worldly power of this character because of this character's audacity to contradict God and attempt to usurp God. The mention of 'darkness' and 'the shadow of death' has foreshadowed an oppressive presence (Luke 1.79). Further details are given in Luke-Acts about this character, but the narrator does not make it a point to provide a detailed profile. Throughout the story, the reader will encounter the devil and demons in their opposition to Jesus and his disciples. Thus, the devil enters here unannounced in the story and begins to wield influence.

⁶⁶ It is plausible that the reader knew ὁ διάβολος as the 'Satan' from the LXX (e.g. Job 2.1; Zech. 3.1-2; 1 Chron. 21.1; and Wis. 2.24). This is confirmed in Luke-Acts where Luke uses the terms alternatively to refer to the same character: 'Satan' (Luke 10.18; 11.18; 13.16; 22.3, 31; Acts 5.3; 26.18) and 'the devil' (Luke 4.2, 3, 6, 13; 8.12; Acts 10.38; 13.10).

The reader witnesses the devil's attack on two main points: Jesus' identity and his mandate. In light of the narrative's aims and initial orientation, these questions are thematically crucial to the reader. Jesus must make a decision. He can choose to fulfill his identity and mandate as God's son and heir to David's throne (1.32), savior (2.11), the glory of Israel and a revelation for the nations (2.32). Or he can renounce his divine sonship in order to rule over the nations according to the devil's proposal. Due to assumed prior knowledge of the story, the reader probably does not wonder whether Jesus will resist; rather, he might wonder what would have happened to Jesus if he had not resisted the devil's temptation. And what would have been the consequences? Satan knows not only Jesus' identity but also Jesus' mandate to make an impact on the nations.

The reader arrives here at the narrative's ideological crossroads of two competing programs concerning humanity. It may be defined as the story's major 'counterplot': the story that the reader would have encountered if Jesus had succumbed to the devil's temptation. The devil attempts to sabotage Jesus' mandate by proposing another way to have an impact on the nations (4.5-6). His scheme to rule 'the kingdoms of the world' (4.5) is in direct contrast to Jesus' mandate to preach 'the kingdom of God' (4.43). The presence of this counterplot functions as a control for the proposal that the plot of Luke-Acts is essentially constructed on the encounter of Jesus' mandate to bring spiritual transformation to the Jewish people and to the nations. By resisting the temptation, Jesus has affirmed and activated what others have said about his identity and mandate. Consequently, he has made bitter enemies in the spiritual realm who will oppose him and his disciples. It is the point of no return in the narrative. As the narrative progresses, negotiation is no longer possible with the devil or with the religious leaders. The only alternatives to prevent the hero's mandate are the complete elimination of Jesus' mandate and, later, the possible failure of the disciples to bring news about Jesus to the nations. The religious leaders, for example, are portrayed as unconsciously working toward Satan's plan to sabotage the hero's mandate.

Pragmatically, the reader can imagine the consequences of an unfulfilled mandate, not only in the storyworld but in his or her own existence. In light of the pragmatic aim (Luke 1.4), the reader receives

certainty of faith by witnessing the initial victory over the devil, since Jesus is depicted as being more powerful. Mimetically, he or she may consider the reality of opposing forces in the spiritual realm against Jesus and their influence upon his or her own context. Thus, this may be a confirmation for the reader who encounters opposition because of his or her faith in Jesus. Nevertheless, returning to the temptation episode, the reader understands from the narrator's aside that this spiritual opposition has just begun: 'So when he had completed every temptation, the devil departed from him until a more opportune time' (Luke 4.13). Thus, the reader is prepared for other appearances, when, for example, Satan 'enters' Judas and asks 'to sift' the other disciples as well (Luke 22.3, 31).

The above demonstration describes the reader's encounter of a single episode in light of the greater narrative. This provides some background for the discussion below on the characterization of 'the devil' in Luke-Acts as an illustration for plot analysis of narrative techniques and literary devices.

The Contribution of Narrative Techniques and Literary Devices to Plot

Plot analysis can also help the interpreter to evaluate the contribution of narrative techniques (e.g. characterization, types of narration, temporal and spatial description) and literary devices (e.g. symbols, motifs, themes). Again, the question is how an element enhances the reader's encounter of the story. Especially relevant for plot is the analysis of the contribution of a particular character or group to a micro or macro narrative.⁶⁷ Who is the central protagonist (or 'hero', which may be an individual or group)? Who are the protagonists and antagonists? When do the characters appear in the plot's development, and do they evolve for the good or the bad? And how does this shape the reader's evaluation of the characters? Do the characters enhance the plot? Are they plot-intensive or peripheral to the reader's gradual encounter of the story? For example, the introduction to the character, the devil or Satan, can be traced through the various sequences of Luke-Acts, either individu-

⁶⁷ Robert Tannehill provides this type of analysis in the first volume of *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, focusing on four groups: the oppressed and excluded, the crowd or people, the authorities and, finally, the disciples.

ally or collectively with other antagonistic spiritual forces. Thus, how does the reader encounter the devil's presence in the raveling and unraveling sequences—that is, in the increase and decrease of narrative tension? Is there a sense of closure concerning the devil's or the demons' relation to Jesus and his disciples (and perhaps also to the reader)?

For example, subsequent scenes in Capernaum substantiate for the reader Satan's presence but also Jesus' superiority over spiritual opposition. The demons also know Jesus' identity (Luke 4.33-35, 41), but he exercises his authority over them (as his disciples also do). This reinforces the reader's confidence in the hero as well as in the disciples whose success in mission elicits a significant remark from Jesus that also identifies the devil: 'I was watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven' (Luke 10.18). The disciples thus take part in a conflict that goes beyond flesh and blood. Yet, as the narrator carefully depicts in a humorous yet daunting episode, woe to those—like the sons of Sceva—who try to exercise authority over demonic forces without Jesus (Acts 19.13-17). Other episodes like this one show that demons, like Satan, also wait for 'a more opportune time' to sabotage Jesus' mandate (Luke 22.3, 53; Acts 5.3; 13.9-12).

In addition to the use of characterization in plot development, recurring figures such as themes and motifs and non-recurring elements such as symbols, when used to enhance the plot and its variations of tension, can also assume significant ideological and pragmatic values. Recurring elements have greater potential for enhancing the plot because of their presence encountered in various and perhaps key moments of the reading. Themes, which are generally abstract ideas such as grace and hatred, can be developed by various elements. This includes motifs which are normally considered tangible, concrete recurring elements. For example, if vision is a story's theme, then eyeglasses, contact lenses, and telescopes might be placed here and there in the story, thus forming a motif and contributing to the theme. In Luke-Acts, salvation is generally recognized as one of Luke's central themes. Among other elements, salvation is illustrated by citations and allusions to Israel's scriptures, internal prophetic utterances, Jesus' sayings and acts, the disciples' discourses and acts as well as the 'evaluation' of Luke-Acts, which confirms the patterns of ironic rejection of salvation among the Jews and the unexpected inclusion of the nations (Acts 28.25-28). Yet this theme and the

plot are also enhanced by a motif of various thoroughfares. An important occurrence of this motif is encountered very early in the narrative in Zechariah's song (Luke 1.67-79). He describes a transformational image in which a rising sun from on high (ἀνατολή ἐξ ὕψους, v. 78) guides people out of darkness into 'the way of peace' (v. 79). Throughout Luke-Acts, figurative and non-figurative uses of ways, roads, and paths contribute to the development of this proleptic image of Jesus' mandate. Perhaps this initial picture of transformation—assuming its programmatic value—is culminated by Luke's unique use of 'the Way' to describe Jesus' disciples (Acts 9.2; 19.9, 23; 22.4; 24.14, 22).⁶⁸ Plot analysis can help determine what effect particular occurrences of a motif can have in the reader's cognitive and affective encounter of the story. Are they plot-intensive? Or are they somewhat weak and peripheral?

Conclusion

This article has attempted to contribute to the theoretical basis of plot analysis for biblical exegesis, arguing that it is a constructive tool for the study of biblical narratives. Significant attention has been given to its application to factual narrative with referential emphasis and a strong ideological backdrop. The approach may be thought of as a contribution to a pragmatic or rhetorical narratology. Plot analysis elucidates the beauty and the force of narrative within the exploration of certain central questions. It concerns narrative's dual teleological thrust: the employment of various literary and narrative techniques for the story's 'point' toward a degree of closure and its engagement of the reader in light of its pragmatic aims and explicit and implicit values.

For improving comprehension and application, plot should be distinguished from emplotment. Emplotment concerns the processes involved in the composition of a narrative; it is thus author-oriented. Plot, on the other hand, is oriented to the reader (implied or empirical), be-

⁶⁸ See my book *Encountering Images of Spiritual Transformation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, forthcoming) on the plot-intensive thoroughfare motif in Luke-Acts, which enhances the reader's encounter of Luke's representation of the spiritual transformation that Jesus brings as savior not only to the Jewish people but also to all nations.

cause it represents the reader's progressive encounter of the storyworld. Therefore, plot analysis focuses on the internal dynamic of the text and the reader's reception, his or her progressive understanding and experience of the story (what happened and what might have happened if ...). Applied to various narrative media, if 'story' is the product of the process of emplotment, then plot is the process of engaging the story, whether it is reading the scrolls of Luke-Acts or viewing *Titanic* on DVD. Plot or *intrigue* needs an interpreter; it is a process, a progressive encounter that involves both cognitive and affective dimensions, that happens within the reception of a narrative.

Finally, to bring the discussion a further step, from the world of the past to the world of the reader, 'explotment' describes the process by which an actual reader evaluates the rendition of the story, the implicit and explicit values for its eventual integration in his or her world as well as how that might influence the revisitation of the narrative. Explotment inquires about the relationship between narrative and reader, which may be sympathetic or antagonistic; it explains why narratives are able to evoke in readers love and animosity for those very texts. This final step of plot analysis provides an additional link between narrative-critical and reader-response studies, allowing a comparison between the (eventual, probable or real) pragmatic effects in the post-reading phase in the lives of the implied reader or any reader.

Thus, emplotment, plot and explotment describe the processes involved in writing, reading and post-reading with a possible return to the text—processes that are linked by the central question(s) responsible for eliciting interest in the author and the reader. Composition, encounter and evaluation all presuppose a receiving consciousness that is able to understand and engage the textual representation of those central questions. They simultaneously describe the journey of ideas and the people involved in contemplating them. Perhaps, with this emphasis on reception theory, this triad could be expressed as 'intriguement', 'intrigue' and 'ex-intriguement', thus bridging the gap between French and English terminology. Yet this might confuse the matters further. Regardless, despite plot's somewhat ambiguous past, the continued interest in plot theory in narratology and biblical exegesis demonstrates that plot's chances for survival and utility are very good. It will always be relevant to interpretation as long as readers continue to encounter stories.