The Literary/Postmodern View

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Literary approaches are varied and they are employed by scholars for many different reasons and in service of many different ends."[1] So says Mark Allan Powell at the end of a recent survey of literary-critical interpretations of Matthew's Gospel. Throw in "sociological" and "postmodern" ingredients—which scholars increasingly mix with their literaryrich stock—and the methodological stew becomes even thicker, spicier and harder to outline in recipe form. But those of us who happily and profitably dive into this interpretive smorgasbord would like to think there is some logic in the methodological madness. While this essay provides no foolproof recipe, perhaps it at least explains a few key ingredients.

Regarding the now familiar triad of author-, text- or reader-oriented approaches to biblical interpretation, current literary-focused critics concentrate on the latter two options. Generally frustrated with elusive excavations for authorial identity and intention, these interpreters prefer the more palpable company of texts and readers. Simply put, for example, we do not know for sure who wrote the first Gospel or what he intended. Its early attribution to Matthew the tax collector turned apostle may be correct, but the best available manuscripts remain anonymous. Likewise, we have no advance "book proposal" or statement of "goals and objectives" outlining "Matthew's" intended aims for his Gospel. But whatever we lack, we at least have in hand Matthew's text (more or less) as well as written responses from real readers—not the original ones, to be sure—but many others throughout Christian history.

Still, a text and readers in the hand hardly nullify an author in the bush. *Someone* wrote the first Gospel and did not do so willy-nilly, slapping traditions together in haphazard fashion. Judging from the final, polished narrative product—which recent literary analysis has particularly demonstrated—this "someone" was an intelligent, careful and purposeful writer. Literary-oriented criticism, chiefly concerned with narrative strategies in Matthew's case, thus offers a sample "index" of likely objectives the author had in

[1] Mark Allan Powell, "Literary Approaches and the Gospel of Matthew," in *Methods for Matthew,* ed. Mark Allan Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 82.

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mind.[2] And in turn, this narrative-based index provides a set of controls for assessing the multiplicity of reader responses.

In sum, I'm assuming considerable fluidity in the hermeneutical triad sketched above[3]—more like an interrelated "trinity." But if we must prioritize, I maintain that, in their best-practiced forms, literary/postmodern approaches cohere in giving prime attention to the *text* at the high point of the triangle, with *readers* especially (texts do not read and interpret themselves) and *authors* (texts do not produce themselves) providing vital base support. Thus I turn to describe briefly several *textual foci* of these approaches before applying these to the *focal text* of Matthew 2:7–15.

TEXTUAL FOCI

Final text. Historically oriented critics have typically treated the Gospels as archaeological tells underneath which they burrow to discover the foundational layers or building blocks of the "authentic" words and deeds of Jesus. Their concern is chiefly *diachronic:* to determine how the various sources, forms, traditions and redactions (edits) have developed *through time* toward the construction of final Gospel editions. The archaeological model breaks down, however, at the point of *material artifacts*. In place of hard coins, pottery shards and the like, which archaeologists actually dig up, historical Gospel critics base much of their work on reconstructed *hypothetical* documents and tradition units *theorized* from final texts.

More than questioning these shaky underpinnings of historical-evolutionary criticism, however, literary-centered interpreters have especially lamented the relative neglect of the Gospels as *complete and compelling literary works* designed to be heard, read and viewed in one sitting, like a novella, play or painting.[4] Their concern is largely *synchronic:* to ascertain how various scenes, seams and segments *fit together in the time frame* of the overall narrative. It is best to appreciate and approach the Gospels as the finely textured works of theological art they are. We must carefully analyze and scrutinize their complex portraits of Jesus from every angle, but not claw through them to find some safe to crack in the wall behind, only to find it full of fool's gold.

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[2] Mark Allan Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star: Adventures in Biblical Reader-Response Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), pp. 67–69.

[3] Cf. Joel B. Green, "Narrative Criticism," in *Methods for Luke,* ed. Joel B. Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 75: "Today, narratology increasingly blurs the lines between author, text, and reader."

[4] Of course, the more compelling the work, the more "sittings" it will invite; and each fresh encounter *with the entire product* will spark new insights.

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However, unlike a certified Leonardo or Michelangelo piece we might view at the Louvre, we cannot contemplate a complete, *original* Gospel composition. The best we can do is to sift through myriad manuscript copies, none of which are identical. Fortunately, however, the situation is not that ominous: thanks to the painstaking work of textual critics, we possess a reconstructed Greek text of each New Testament Gospel, closely approximating the "autograph," or original document. Where questions remain, footnotes offer the most significant variants—which literary scholars must adjudicate if they really want to engage the *final text*. In this initial exercise of determining a final Gospel text, not to mention the basic work of *reading* it in a dead, ancient language, literary critics thus inescapably participate in historical-linguistic investigation *behind* as well as *within* the narrative.

Cotext. Using discourse analysis, Joel Green describes *cotext* as "the string of linguistic data within which a text is set, the relationship of, say, a sentence to a paragraph or a pericope in Luke's Gospel to the larger Lukan narrative."[5] As an interpretive strategy, attention to cotext "invites a close reading of the text for its structural elements and argumentative development."[6] Following on the holistic interest in final texts, cotextual analysis stresses the linear connectedness and logical coherence of plot, characters and themes across the narrative. As a final-text focus resists plowing up narratives, cotextual concerns resist pulling them apart into discrete units. Where form critics tend to treat the Gospels as a chain of variable individual pearls randomly strung together by juvenile artists, narrative critics appreciate the mature craftsmanship of the entire necklace. On a more popular level, this proclivity toward atomization is evident in much Sunday school curricula and congregational preaching, concentrating on "focal texts" from one to several verses, often with little or no connection to the biblical book from which they derive.

Exploring cotextual connections and patterns constitutes the bread and butter of *narrative criticism*.[7] In terms of *plot*, this approach assumes an orderly, step-by-step progression through the story,[8] one scene preparing for the next, and indeed for the balance of the entire work, by establishing a database of information for the (implied) reader and creating expectations for what follows. Likewise, *characters'* reported actions and words,

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[5] Joel B. Green, "Discourse Analysis and New Testament Interpretation," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 226.
[6] Ibid., p. 228.
[7] For standard monograph surveys, see Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* GBS (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).
[8] In the preface, Luke explicitly identifies the ensuing narrative as an "orderly [*kathexēs*] narrative" (Lk 1:3; cf. Lk 8:1; Acts 3:24; 11:4; 18:23).

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which drive the plot, build over the course of the narrative into more or less static (flat) or dynamic (round) portraits. Such steady plot progression and character construction, however, do not proceed in complex narratives like the Gospels and Acts in a smooth, sanitized fashion. Serious conflicts, surprising twists and turns (the stuff of irony), and puzzling gaps and hiccups maintain suspense and dramatic interest. Yet the prime thrust of narrative criticism has been to negotiate and resolve these tensions in the interest of thematic coherence and unity.

Intertext. For all the value of narrative criticism's final and cotextual emphases, rigid devotion to such approaches runs the risk of myopically treating each Gospel narrative as "a hermetic and self-sufficient whole."[9] No text, however, as Mikhail Bakhtin and other literary theorists have stressed, is produced or, still less, interpreted in some pristine isolation chamber. All texts—indeed, all language and communication—are influenced by other texts and voices they answer, both directly and tacitly. The traffic does not run on a one-way racetrack, where new texts, as it were, simply load up cargo and baggage from prior texts and hurtle toward their destinations. Relationships between texts truly function *intertextually* or *dialogically,* mutually addressing and responding to each other. In the process, a welter of changes can occur: the traffic can cruise, race, skid, spin, bump or jam around the intertextual, interpretive oval.

At a fundamental level, the entire New Testament engages in thoughtful, respectful and intimate conversation with Israel's Scriptures, or what Christians call the Old Testament. This becomes clear from the opening words of Matthew's Gospel, in which the author identifies Jesus as "the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" and then unpacks his full genealogy over forty-two generations (Mt 1:1–17). This opening passage assumes readers' competent understanding of an extensive Old Testament literary repertoire beyond a fuzzy recognition of a few key names. More than simply acknowledging Matthew's conviction that these and other episodes in the literary-canonical stream of Israel's biblical story are "made right" and find their fulfillment in Jesus the Christ (as important as such a claim is), an intertextual approach urges readers to allow the accounts of Genesis's Tamar, for example, and of Matthew's Jesus to stand side-byside—or better, face-to-face—and talk with each other, shape and reshape each other, illuminate and interpenetrate each other. Obviously, this interpretive strategy challenges reducing New Testament use of the Old Testament to a set of mechanical operations and random proof-texting.

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[9] Patricia K. Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application,* ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, rev. and exp. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), pp. 166–67, citing Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), pp. 273–74.

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Similarly, in Gospel study, intertextuality compels comparative analyses among Synoptic and Johannine narratives, but (1) *more* with a view to full-throated synchronic dialogue among these distinctive later first-century portraits of Jesus than to straight diachronic mapping of literary dependence;[10] and (2) *less* constrained by pressures toward harmonization and conformity with tightly defined "rules of faith."[11] Further, I follow most scholars in mining the rich *contextual* resources of Hellenistic-Jewish and Greco-Roman literature to illuminate the cultural world of the New Testament Gospels. Here, as elsewhere, terms blur together; *intertexts* fund a major part of a work's *contexts*.

Context. Along with encompassing intertextual perspectives, *context* also relates closely to *cotextual* matters. Rather than simply referring to what comes before and after a given text, in this essay, *context* refers more to the wider "worlds" or surroundings in which texts are embedded, with special attention to their *temporal, spatial* and *social* coordinates.[12]

On a literary level, these categories map the settings or backdrops of scenes and their symbolic significance within the "story world."[13] For example, the "tax collectors" in Luke reflect a complex economic (rich milking the poor), political (quislings supporting foreign rule) and religious ("sinners" serving self rather than God and others) web of social relations.

On a historical level, context focuses on the shared temporal, spatial and social environments of the "cultural world" engulfing the Gospels. Although technically *outside* the narratives, such information is presumed by the narrator for all competent readers within the thick milieu of first-century life. For example, the barest of allusions to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple evoked a painful cluster of memories for post-a.d.-70 Jews (including those confessing Jesus as Lord and Messiah) as poignant as those sparked by the mere mention of 9/11 for twenty-first-century Americans. Moreover, in addition to assuming knowledge of major group conflicts and watershed events of the era, Gospel narratives also take for granted, with little explanation, readers' deep

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[10] Cf. Gail R. O'Day, "Intertextuality," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation,* ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 1:548: "Intertextual studies provide a bridge between strictly diachronic and strictly synchronic approaches to biblical texts, challenging traditional notions of influence and causality while at the same time affirming that every biblical text must be read as part of a larger literary context."

[11] For reasons pertaining to both my theological and ecclesial commitments and my literary and historical judgments, I train my main attention on the interplay among the four canonical Gospels (and the Old Testament) rather than on later, "apocryphal" accounts of Jesus' life and teaching. See F. Scott Spencer, *What Did Jesus Do? Gospel Profiles of Jesus' Personal Conduct* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2003), pp. 1–24. But, of course, others may opt to stretch their intertextual nets much wider.

[12] For a sustained attempt to map the book of Acts according to this "trifocal cartography," see F. Scott Spencer, *Journeying Through Acts: A Literary-Cultural Reading* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004).

[13] Cf. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* pp. 69–83.

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awareness of pervasive ancient eastern Mediterranean cultural values concerning, for example, honor-shame codes, patron-client systems, and dyadic (versus individualistic) identities.[14] But as time marches on memories fade, and implied contexts must be made explicit through historical research. As Green avers, without exaggeration, "Every reading of every New Testament text today is an exercise in intercultural communication and understanding."[15]

Accordingly, literary-oriented approaches that respect the integrity and distinctive presentations of the first-century Gospel narratives are by no means antihistorical or unconcerned with ancient materials outside the text.[16] Yet the historical interests of the narrative critic focus again more on the synchronic social, political and cultural environment surrounding and permeating the text than on the diachronic stages leading up to and generating the document.[17]

Open text. Having started with privileging the final text, recent literary approaches to biblical interpretation by no means end there. Or, put another way, the final text proves to be not so final after all—that is, not a closed, self-evident system of meaning that veritably leaps off the page and hits the reader in the face. Especially in the Protestant tradition, nothing is more basic than an *open Bible open for everyone's engagement.* Any evangelical sermon worth its salt begins with exhorting the congregation, "Open your Bibles to [such and such chapter and verse]," which introduces the focal text for explication and application. While the preacher then does all the talking from an elevated pulpit, the communication event is well out of his or her hands, because all those open Bibles in the pew are being concurrently read and interpreted by independent thinkers. Readers, even within shared cultural and theological traditions, bring their own perspectives, experiences and competencies to bear on the interpretive event. Open texts become open to multiple readings, rereadings and misreadings; not only the preacher but also the texts themselves lose a measure of control, as hearers/readers inevitably both create meaning from texts and are shaped by them. Here we are back to Bakhtinian "dialogism," but now, instead of focusing on interchange among comparative texts, we

[14] See Jerome H. Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991); David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000).
[15] Joel B. Green, "The Challenge of Hearing the New Testament," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 6.
[16] See F. Scott Spencer, "Acts and Modern Literary Approaches," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, vol. 1, *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 381–414.
[17] Cf. Stephen C. Barton, "Historical Criticism and Social-Scientific Perspectives in New Testament Study," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 42–47.

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attend to conversation between texts and their diverse readers. The reader factor pushes the notion of dialogue miles beyond a simple two-way variant on the singular "monologue" into an intricate communication network of "polyphonous" (multivoiced) and "heteroglot" (other-tongued) circuits.[18]

If this is true for more or less homogeneous groups, how much more for a highly diversified biblical readership, as increasingly confronts us in our global, Web-wired world? The last few decades have witnessed an explosion of distinctive New Testament readings from various grass-roots as well as academic Asian, Latin American and African perspectives, complementing—and often counterpointing—more traditional Western viewpoints. Such "other" readers tend to lay their social and ideological cards on the table and respectfully insist that others do the same, since we all bring our baggage, for good and ill, to the meaning-making experience. Hiding under a smug cloak of alleged objectivity is getting harder to justify, and it sometimes makes it harder to carry on a civil conversation.

With all these added voices, polyphony easily becomes cacophony, and counterpoint slides into discord. But that is what happens when voices that have been muffled and stifled finally get a hearing. It should not surprise us that nontraditional readers of the New Testament, who have not typically enjoyed access to ecclesiastical power structures, become *resistant readers,* exercising, to various degrees, a *hermeneutic of suspicion* toward texts that have been used to oppress them, but more than that, toward *dominant readers* who have twisted those texts for exploitative purposes.[19] At root the gospel of Christ heralds good news to the poor, the bound, the afflicted and the disenfranchised (cf. Lk 4:16–21). Many of these resistant ("protest-ant") voices are helping the global church rediscover this truth.

Two major strains of resistant New Testament reading have avowed *feminist* and *postcolonial* interests, the former stemming from women's equal rights movements of the 1960–1970s and the latter stoked by the pervasive multicultural, global-village, World

[18] On the intersection of Bakhtin and biblical studies, see Carol A. Newsom, "Bakhtin," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation,* ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), pp. 20–27; and Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000).

[19] The classic work on resistant readers is by Judith Fetterly, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978); for an application to New Testament narrative, see Robert M. Fowler, "Reader-Response Criticism: Figuring Mark's Reader," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies,* ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), pp. 83–91.

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Wide Web interfaces of the 1990s.[20] In biblical studies, both approaches share a *liberationist* agenda, seeking, through critical engagement with the text, to promote the flourishing of historically marginalized and colonized persons on the basis of gender (feminism) and geopolitical (postcolonialism) hierarchies. This big ideological tent covers a wide range of particular expressions, from virtually rejecting the Bible in whole or part as hopelessly oppressive to enthusiastically reclaiming it as an emancipation proclamation. For example, in Matthean studies, major voices have weighed in both (1) exposing the First Gospel as an insidious patriarchal and imperialist manifesto,[21] and (2) emphasizing Matthew's inclusive, egalitarian, *anti*imperial thrust.[22]

With this stress on polyglot perspectives and power dynamics among texts and readers, we jump full-square into the precarious world of postmodern criticism, which staunchly resists absolutist "claims about determinacy, universality, univocity, and legitimacy" in biblical interpretation.[23] In this worldview, an open Bible does not merely allow for multiple readings; it intrinsically demands them! Grand assumptions of narrative unity and coherence are *deconstructed* as interpretive power plays that smooth over contentious voices *within* the text as well as among readers. All texts carry the wild seeds of their own de(con)struction, loose threads of their own unraveling, and the postmodern, deconstructive critic loves to pull the dangling threads to see what happens, both seriously and playfully. Gaps, breaks and tensions in the text are appreciated and teased out more than negotiated and ironed out. Influenced by the French literary theorist Jacques Derrida, postmodern interpreters particularly eschew rigid dualistic, hierarchical, binary-oppositional analytical categories pertaining to gender (male/female), ethnicity (native/foreign), government (ruler/subject), class (master/slave) and other sociopolitical relations.[24] Both sides—better, all sides—must be given their due and their say.

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[20] These theories are often traced to Edward Said's trenchant analysis in 1978 of East-West political and cultural perceptions. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

[21] See, for example, Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), pp. 144–55; for discussion and critique of Dube and other postcolonial feminist readings of New Testament texts, see F. Scott Spencer, "Feminist Criticism," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation,* ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 303–4, 317–18.

[22] Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000); idem, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2001); see helpful discussion of both Dube's and Carter's positions in Fernando F. Segovia, "Postcolonial Criticism and the Gospel of Matthew," in *Methods for Matthew,* ed. Mark Allan Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 216–37.

[23] A. K. M. Adam, "Post-Modern Biblical Interpretation," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation,* ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 1:307.

[24] See Stephen D. Moore, "Deconstructive Criticism: Turning Mark Inside-out," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies,* ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis:

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So where does all this openness lead us? Into "hermeneutical anarchy,"[25] where anything goes? It certainly runs that risk. Yet nothing requires us to be postmodern, deconstructive purists—pushing instability and indeterminacy to the brink. Common experience and seasoned exegetical practice confirm that meaningful communication happens despite propensities toward misunderstanding; texts support some readings more than others; some voices come through louder and clearer than others; and complex narratives struggle, with varying degrees of success, to arbitrate fairly between different viewpoints. David Seeley strikes a keynote in this regard:

> The point of deconstruction is not to make nonsense of a text, but to locate structural, systemic faultlines within it.… Deconstructionist or not … what I am suggesting … is not a Matthew who is foolish or devious, but rather one who is intelligent, and doing the best he can with materials that possess varying degrees of resistance to one another.[26]

In brief, amid all the panoply of readings an open Bible generates, there remain legitimate "limits of interpretation" constrained by the text itself and authorial intentions, however restricted our access to those might be. Kevin Vanhoozer cites an extreme example from literary critic Umberto Eco, but one that effectively scores its point. As Eco poses: "If Jack the Ripper told us that he did what he did on the grounds of his interpretation of the Gospel according to Saint Luke, I suspect that many reader-oriented critics would be inclined to think that he read Saint Luke in a pretty preposterous way." I certainly hope so. "There *is* such a thing as misinterpretation," as Vanhoozer concludes.[27]

Fortress, 2008), pp. 95–110; idem, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

[25] Adam, "Post-Modern Biblical Interpretation," 306.

[26] David Seeley, *Deconstructing the New Testament*, Biblical Interpretation Series 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 38–39; cf. Mark K. George, "Postmodern Literary Criticism: The Impossibility of Method," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen,* ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), p. 467: "Deconstruction undertakes very close readings of texts; in fact, Derrida himself is a model of rigorous exegesis.… trac[ing] the logic of texts in order to reveal their instability, the result of inevitable jumps in logic, the surplus meanings of language, and other inconsistencies. The goal of such readings is not nihilism or the end of civilization, critics notwithstanding."

[27] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Reader in New Testament Interpretation," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation,* ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 284, citing Umberto Eco, "Interpretation and History," in Umberto Eco with Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, and Christine Brook-Rose, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation,* ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 24; cf. Vladimir E. Alexandrov, *Limits to Interpretation: The Meanings of Anna Karenina* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p. 65: "I seek to work in the middle space between the impossible goal of complete objectivity and the chaos of unconstrained interpretation."

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FOCAL TEXT: MATTHEW 2:7–15

We now seek to apply the approaches sketched above to Matthew 2:7–15, a key text from Matthew's birth narrative; for clarity's sake, we reprise the same textual categories.

Final text. The lack of significant textual variants leaves us a consensus final Greek text. The unparalleled content might also suggest the futility of quests for underlying sources. Historical materials that influenced this text remain concealed in the final product. But that has not deterred scholars from trying to extract sources from it. A leading hypothesis isolates separate "Herod" and "magi" strands, which Matthew stitched together in Matthew 2:1–23, leaving certain breaks and seams as tell-tale markers of his patchwork.[28] As source critics turn redaction critics, asking why and how Matthew brought these two sources together (in not the smoothest fashion), answers typically highlight an aim to contrast sinister and sincere motives for seeking Christ on the part of different professional (royalpriestly/astrological) and ethnic (Jew/Gentile) groups.

Such juxtaposition of characters and viewpoints is quite transparent from a narrative analysis of the final text without proposed source divisions.[29] Thus, beyond grounding Matthew's work on more solid historiographical foundations,[30] we might ask what interpretive gain we derive from positing discrete Herod and magi traditions behind our text. More to the point, from more recent literary perspectives, we should ask what is potentially *lost* in treating Matthew 2 as a composite account rather than a single continuous story. A key difference surrounds the assessment of gaps and breaks noted above. While the source critic interprets these as patchwork sutures, the narrative critic negotiates them as creative tensions and complex connections. For example, the supposed inconsistencies of Herod's intelligence gathering serve a *narrative* interest of characterizing Herod as paranoid, unbalanced, out of control, flailing around for answers and ultimately exploding in maniacal rage (Mt 2:16). The awkward *seams* in the story thus show the *unraveling* of Herod's character and authority.

Cotext. Building on the narrative-critical viewpoints just offered regarding the seamless—or better, masterly woven—interconnectivity and literary integrity of Matthew 2:7–15 within its immediate cotext of Matthew 2:1–23, I briefly canvass some wider linkages of setting, plot and characters within the first Gospel. I pay particular

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[28] See Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, updated ed., ABRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 104–19, 188–96; John Nolland, "The Sources for Matthew 2:1–12," *CBQ* 60 (1998): 283–300.
[29] See David R. Bauer, "The Kingship of Jesus in the Matthean Infancy Narrative: A Literary Analysis," *CBQ* 57 (1995): 306–23.
[30] Note the thoughtful defense of Matthew as "a creative innovator with conservative instincts" in Nolland, "Sources," p. 300 (cf. pp. 298–300).

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attention to the coherence of our focal text with (1) the larger birth/infancy narrative (Mt 1–2), which sets the stage for the entire Gospel, and with (2) the closing death/passion narrative (Mt 26–28), which completes the *inclusio* framing the whole story.

First, in terms of geographic *setting,* Matthew 2:7–15 charts a path from Jerusalem to Bethlehem in Judea to Egypt within a longer journey in Matthew 2 commencing outside of Palestine somewhere in "the East" (Mt 2:1) and concluding in Nazareth of Galilee (Mt 2:23). While such a trek could be tracked on a map of the ancient Near East, literary-oriented critics are more concerned with the *symbolic relations* among these places. Ironically, the holy Jewish city of Jerusalem represents the center of opposition to the true Jewish king Jesus, who finds a welcome home in small outlying villages of Judean Bethlehem and Galilean Nazareth and even in the non-Jewish "East" and Egypt, both notorious regions of bitter exile in Israel's history. Matthew's narrative opens with a sweeping genealogy of Jesus Messiah structured around the Babylonian (Eastern) "deportation" (Mt 1:17). At the end of the Gospel, though Jesus enjoys an initial royal reception as he enters Jerusalem (Mt 21:1–9), it soon devolves into confused tumult over his lowly Nazareth origins (Mt 21:10–11), and, by week's end, the whole city clamors for his crucifixion (Mt 27:22–23). After this tragic ending is gloriously overcome by Jesus' resurrection, he launches a fresh plan to extend his mission through his followers. By design, Matthew sets this final episode in *Galilee;* and *from there* Jesus commissions his "worshiping"[31] Galilean deputies "to make disciples of all nations," thus appearing to bypass an inhospitable Jerusalem (Mt 28:16–20; cf. Mt 23:37–39).

Second, regarding *plot,* we may further unpack the *precarious journey* motif that dramatically propels Matthew's story through suspenseful conflict and resolution. The "hard time of it" the magi had on "such a long journey" to the Christ child,[32] though unique in many respects, echoes other excursions and pilgrimages. For example, tracking Jesus' lineage back to the great patriarch Abraham (Mt 1:1–2) and the mention of foremother Ruth (Mt 1:5) recall both of their challenging journeys. In Matthew's closing chapters, Jesus' *itinerant* ministry ends with his ill-fated trip to Jerusalem, as we have seen. In the final days before his crucifixion, he tells provocative parables featuring travel (Mt 21:33–46; 25:14–30); and following his resurrection, he dispatches his disciples as missionary journeymen (Mt 28:19–20). Matthew's plot thus moves along through the plotted movements of its characters.

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[31] The same verb *(proskyneō)* describes the "worship/homage" paid to Jesus by both the magi at the beginning of Matthew (Mt 2:2, 11) and the disciples, female and male, at the end (Mt 28:9, 17).

[32] T. S. Eliot, "Journey of the Magi," in *Collected Poems and Plays: 1909–1950* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1952), p. 68.

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Speaking of *characters*, the incumbent Judean King Herod, the visiting Eastern magi and the Bethlehem-born Christ child (and parents) resonate with Matthew's wider birth and death narratives, even though, except for Jesus, these figures drop out of the story after Matthew 2. The foreign magi follow in the train of the four foremothers spotlighted in the genealogy (Mt 1:3, 5–6), all of whom have Gentile connections and secure their own survival and preserve the messianic line through some form of divinely sanctioned "trickery" (cf. Mt 2:16).[33] Moreover, the magi pave the way for surprising foreign advocates for Jesus at his trial and death: Pilate's wife affirms Jesus' "innocence" and seeks to deter her husband's judgment against him (Mt 27:19); and a Roman centurion and cohorts at the cross are ultimately stirred to certify Jesus' identity as "Son of God" (Mt 27:54). This major Christological *divine sonship* motif in Matthew—inextricably tied to *covenantal* and *royal* traditions associated with *Israel* as God's son/people (Ex 4:22; Jer 31:9; Hos 11:1) and *David* as God's anointed son/king (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:1–7)—reverberates in Matthew 2:7–15 and throughout the birth and death narratives.[34] Amazingly, this Jesus of Nazareth via Bethlehem, though targeted for extermination as an innocent "child" by a ruthless client ruler of Rome and in fact executed as an adult on a Roman cross, is the true viceroy of God's kingdom (not Caesar! not Herod!) and true representative of God's people.

Intertext. Dramatic tales featuring omen-signaled births of heroic figures and "persecution and preservation of a royal child" abound in the ancient world, providing a rich intertextual repertoire for our focal text.[35] Of course the Jewish Scriptures offer the clearest and deepest resonances for Matthew, evidenced in Matthew 2 not only in the four "fulfillment" citations (Mt 2:5–6, 15, 17–18, 23), three drawn from the Old Testament prophets, but also in various allusions to historical narratives surrounding Joseph, Moses,

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[33] See F. Scott Spencer, "Those Riotous—Yet Righteous—Foremothers of Jesus: Exploring Matthew's Comic Genealogy," in *Are We Amused? Humour About Women in the Biblical Worlds,* ed. Athalya Brenner (London: T & T Clark, 2003), pp. 7–30; idem, *Dancing Girls, "Loose" Ladies and Women of "the Cloth": The Women in Jesus' Life* (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 24–46; on these ancestors' Gentile roots, see Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 17–46.

[34] See collocation of Davidic/messianic/Israelite/filial elements in Mt 1:1, 6, 17, 20; 2:4–6, 15 (birth narrative); 21:4–9, 15; 22:41–46; 26:63–68; 27:11–14, 17, 22, 29, 37, 39–43, 54 (passion narrative); and discussion in Bauer, "Kingship of Jesus"; and R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 61–62.

[35] The citation is from Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), p. 119 (cf. pp. 119–20); cf. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC 29 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 1:233–34, 258–59.

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and Balaam, as well as David.[36] Current literary approaches encourage both telescopic (zoom lens) and panoramic (wide angle) engagement with these intertexts, expanding beyond strict chapter-and-verse boundaries of cited passages[37] and attending to points of divergence as much as correspondence. The goal is much less to itemize particular hermeneutical operations Matthew performs on Old Testament texts than to bring Matthew and the Old Testament into rigorous dialogue and debate with each other for purposes of mutual illumination.

Regarding the quotation of Hosea 11:1 in our focal text, "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Mt 2:15), Matthew follows the Hebrew "my son" *(bĕnî)* (that is, God's son), from the mt, over the Greek "his children" *(ta tekna autou),* from the lxx. Thus Matthew connects "God's son" with the individual Son of God, Jesus, who will be taken to Egypt and then return to the Jewish homeland (cf. Mt 2:19–21). Hosea 11:1 clearly focuses on a *people* rather than an individual—specifically the people or children of *Israel*, whom God indeed brought out of Egypt during the days of Moses. Thus, we detect something of a tension between the communal and the individual in Matthew's thought.

Another tension, more problematic, soon comes into play with the verses in Hosea immediately following the sentence Matthew cites. The prophet laments Israel's tragic pattern of *disloyalty* and *disobedience* to God since first being delivered from Egypt (Hos 11:2–7), a pattern that will soon lead them *back to bondage in Egypt* under Assyrian rule (Egypt = Assyria in Hos 11:5). But all is not lost, as God promises to *restore his estranged people* yet again from Egyptian/Assyrian exile (Hos 11:11). Hosea 11 frankly makes one a little dizzy: in the space of a dozen verses, the prophet takes us on a rollercoaster ride with Israel: (1) brought out of Egyptian slavery through God's love (Hos 11:1); (2) forced back into Egyptian/Assyrian bondage because they have rejected God (Hos 11:5); yet still with the hope of (3) returning home from Egypt/Assyria through God's mercy (Hos 11:11). The dizziness all but knocks us out cold when we try to fit all this into *Matthew's* portrayal of the infant Jesus' migration *to Egypt* as a *place of refuge* from violent pursuit and then later being brought back safely *from Egypt* and settling in Galilee (Mt 2:21–22). And here's the real kicker: none of this stressful back-and forth itinerary owes one iota to Jesus' or his parents' faithlessness to God.

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[36] See Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, pp. 104–19, 188–96; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 61–64; David Instone-Brewer, "Balaam-Laban as the Key to the Old Testament Quotations in Matthew 2," in *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew,* ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 207–27.

[37] See Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

MT Masoretic text

LXX Septuagint

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So what's a poor interpreter to do? By all means, don't flatten this complex intertextual collage into some mechanical, step-by-step procedure. Instead, by way of illustration, we might suggest a couple of angles amenable to the literary approaches outlined in this essay. First, the tension between the righteous, Spirit-guided individual son Jesus and the rebellious, God-forsaking collective "son" Israel finds some meaningful resolution in a representative typology of Jesus as embodying the people of God and reenacting, as it were, their exodus-exile history, but in a wholly faithful and "fulfilling" way that potentially restores Israel and "saves his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21).[38] Such a reading gains momentum beyond the brief Hosea citation with Jesus' *baptism*, where he reprises Israel's passage through the Jordan waters and "fulfills all righteousness" as God's Spirit-anointed "beloved son" (Mt 3:13–17), and the subsequent *temptation*, where he retraces, so to speak, Israel's forty-year slog through the wilderness (Mt 4:1–2), redeeming their repeated failures to obey and trust God with his staunch resistance of the tempter's schemes as the faithful, Spirit-led "Son of God" (Mt 4:1, 3–11).[39]

Second, the awkward placement, routinely noted by commentators, of "out of Egypt" in Matthew 2:15 just after young Jesus has *entered* Egypt, rather than at the "more logical point"[40] after Matthew 2:19–21, when he leaves Egypt, may not be so clumsy after all from a typological-intertextual and narrative-cotextual perspective. Though Egypt was known in biblical tradition as a place of *refuge* for Israelites escaping persecution in the Promised Land, bitter twists of tragedy and irony complicate this scenario.[41] For example, the patriarch Joseph finds protection, and eventually prominence, in Egypt, but only after he is sold into slavery there by his violent, jealous brothers and endures a period of unjust punishment (Gen 37–50). Something is terribly askew when Israelites must flee from *their own* oppressive rulers in *their own* sacred land to find safety *in Egypt*, which, in the dominant exodus tradition, echoed in Hosea and throughout the Old Testament, constitutes the principal site of Israel's brutal *bondage* (not refuge) that threatens the people's very existence.

So when Matthew first reports Jesus' family's evacuation to Egypt, alarm bells go off: things must be very bad again in the homeland; the tyrannical "king of the Jews" is on

[38] Representative typology, in which an Old Testament figure standing for the people of God is applied to Jesus, is also evident with Isaiah's "Suffering Servant" (Mt 8:17) and Daniel's "Son of Man" (Mt 10:23); cf. France, *Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 80–81; Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 1:263; Dan McCartney and Peter Enns, "Matthew and Hosea: A Response to John Sailhamer," *WTJ* 63 (2001): 103.
[39] Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 214–15; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 123.
[40] France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 79.
[41] Cf. George M. Soares-Prabhu, "Jesus in Egypt: A Reflection on Mt 2:13–15, 19–21 in the Light of the Old Testament," *EstBib* 50 (1992): 241: Biblical Egypt "is both a place of refuge in distress or danger … and a 'house of bondage.' … The word thus carries ambiguous associations."

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the rampage; we have to make a hasty flight to Egypt to survive; but are we just going from the frying pan to the fire? We know what happened in Egypt long ago during Moses' days. Are we safe anywhere in the empire? It sure would be nice in these desperate times to hear a word of hope—sooner rather than later. *And Matthew provides just that via Hosea:* no sooner does he mention the ominous departure to Egypt than he also signals the sure return "out of" there with the biblical hope for God's mighty deliverance, covenant love and patient guidance to reclaim the land of promise. It takes a few verses in Matthew to report the actual homecoming of Jesus' family, but we can wait, even through the unspeakable horror of the slaughtered innocents (Mt 2:16–18), clinging, if only by a thread, to the biblical hope of restoration.

Context. Having just considered the symbolic *spatial* context of Matthew 2:7–15 in conjunction with the Egypt-focused intertext of Hosea 11:1, we turn to concentrate on its *social* context, particularly concerning the identity and status of the famed magi in Matthew's narrative and cultural environments. At this point, it is methodologically significant that two established, frontline Matthean *literary-oriented* critics, Mark Allan Powell and Warren Carter, have pioneered fresh understandings of the magi's *social* roles within the ancient world as well as Matthew's story. Simply put, popular profiles of the magi (*magoi* in Greek) as *kings* and/or *wise men* fall apart under contextual analysis.[42]

Our starstruck seekers of the Jewish king are themselves never called "kings" in Matthew's text, and the *magoi* term—most literally rendered "magicians"—carries no royal status. In fact, typically they *serve* manipulative monarchical interests as sycophants and favor-granters, and when they fail to satisfy the despotic king, as often happens, they are quickly ridiculed, replaced and even exterminated. Witness the expendable *magoi* of Nebuchadnezzar, who barely escaped execution by the maniacal Babylonian king for their failure to interpret his disturbing dream (Dan 2:1–24). This case bolsters Powell's conclusion that court magicians were "victims of injustice, specifically at the hand of the king they serve," and "more oppressed *by* royal power than possessed *of* it."[43] Notice, too, that this biblical example features a *non-Israelite*, even *anti-Israelite,* king ill-served by ineffectual wizards.[44] The exercise of magical arts (sorcery, astrology, divination, necromancy etc.) was characteristic of the "abhorrent practices" of idolatrous nations, which Israel must avoid at all costs (Deut 18:9–14; cf. Is 47:12–15).[45] Hence magi appear

[42] Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star*, pp. 131–96; Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, pp. 73–89.

[43] Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star*, pp. 142–43 (emphasis original).

[44] Other examples following the same cues include magicians of Pharaoh (Ex 8:18–19) and the mercenary diviner-sorcerer Balaam (Num 22–24).

[45] This pattern continues in the New Testament with the manipulative Samaritan *magos* Simon (Acts 8:9–24) and the Ephesian practitioners of worthless magical arts (Acts 19:18–19); another *magos* in Acts,

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doubly ostracized in the Bible—as reprobate Gentiles alienated from and antagonistic to Israel, and as "menial underlings"[46] exploited by their capricious royal masters.

The dealings of King Herod with the Eastern magi in Matthew fit this basic pattern, with the twists that Herod is the so-called *Jewish* king (but hardly serving Israel's interests), and the magi are *visiting* rather than local court servants. Far from rolling out the red carpet, Herod summons them "secretly" and promptly dispatches them on his self-serving mission (Mt 2:7–8); and when they fail to report back, as he had ordered, Herod explodes in a vicious rage à la Nebuchadnezzar (Mt 2:16). Herod and the magi occupy opposite poles of the social spectrum: the former representing the elite establishment; the latter, the subservient stranger. The magi *may* approximate Herod's *economic* status; but their offer of precious gifts to Jesus does *not necessarily* signal their wealth (cf. "gold" in Mt 10:9) and, in any case, scarcely impresses Herod. As Carter stresses, the social gap is stretched even wider by the magi's "liminal," "mobile," nomadic status versus Herod's entrenched Judean power base.[47] Far from being viewed as exotic dignitaries traveling from afar on a diplomatic mission, the magi appear more as quixotic, wandering star chasers—literally and figuratively—following an astrological sign in quest of a newborn celebrity ("star search").

The real *royal* juxtaposition in Matthew 2 is not between Herod and magi, but between Herod and *Jesus,* the true messianic regent of Israel. But here too a yawning spatial and social gap opens up: Jesus is identified six times in Matthew 2:7–15 as simply "the child [*pais*]," a weak, vulnerable, "helpless, dependent"[48] figure, who might easily be squashed by the powerful tyrant Herod. This "child" is fixed firmly *outside* the Herodian hub of power within the holy city. Jesus' context thus correlates more closely with the "marginal magi"[49] than the hierarch Herod.

Open text. While socioliterary analysis complicates binary *royal* opposition between Herod and magi as bad Judean *king*/good Eastern *kings,* it still retains a patent *moral* dichotomy between *good/bad characters*. And who can argue with that? Feigning a desire to "pay Jesus homage," the diabolical Herod only aims to eliminate a potential rival (Mt

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variously known as Bar-Jesus and Elymas, was Jewish in origin but described as a "false prophet" and "son of the devil" (Acts 13:6–12).

[46] Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star,* p. 145.

[47] Carter, *Matthew and the Margins,* pp. 73–74, 80–82.

[48] Dorothy Jean Weaver, "Power and Powerlessness: Matthew's Use of Irony in the Portrayal of Political Leaders," in *Treasures New and Old: Contributions to Matthean Studies,* ed. David Bauer and Mark Allan Powell, SBLSymS 1 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), p. 185 (cf. pp. 184–87); cf. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins,* pp. 80–81.

[49] Carter, *Matthew and the Margins,* p. 82.

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2:8, 13, 16), whereas the magi truly honor the Christ child with gifts worthy of a king (Mt 2:11). As David Bauer states:

> Matthew draws clearly the lines of demarcation between the *magoi* (and Joseph) on one side and Herod (and "all Jerusalem" …) on the other.… [Jesus] necessarily evokes a response that separates persons into two categories: those who seek to kill him, and those who worship him. Matthew allows no middle ground between Herod and the *magoi*.[50]

But is the ground really so flatly and smoothly graded? Or does it begin, on closer analysis, to shift, destabilize and *open up* under our feet? At this point we do well to reappraise the traditional "wise men" portrait of the magi in contrast with the foolish, misguided Herod—or, more simply, the *wise/fool* polarity common in Israel's wisdom tradition and, indeed, in Matthew's Gospel (Mt 7:24–27; 10:16; 24:45; 25:1–10). The magi are never dubbed "wise men" (*sophoi* or *phronimoi*); respected *sages* in the ancient Near East were serious scholars of sacred wisdom texts and of the natural world and were not dabblers in magic. Sages might study the stars and other celestial phenomena (astronomy), but they would not follow the stars (astrology), traipsing after some comet to an unknown destination. Thus "magicians" in the biblical world were associated more with bungling court *fools* than with respected counselors.[51]

Surely Matthew's magi break the mold: do they not show their consummate wisdom in following the star to Bethlehem and paying homage to God's true king? Well, yes they do, eventually, but along the way they hardly prove to be the sharpest tools in the box. Notice the following "gaffes" of the magi.[52] First, they follow the star as far as Jerusalem and start inquiring about the new king's birthplace in the power center where the current King Herod rules (Mt 2:1–2)! Then they become Herod's "secret" agents, clueless about his nefarious intentions. The magi get their Bethlehem destination from Herod; and only "when they heard the king, they set out" (Mt 2:9), resuming their "OnStar" trail to the special child's house. Finally, after the Bethlehem visit, the magi must be warned in a dream not to return to the devious Herod, implying that, without this divine intervention, that's exactly what they would have done. At the end of the day, our "wise guys" are hardly worthy of the name. They appear more like naive fools blindly following the shiny star here and the shady king there. Their hearts are in the right place with their humble worship of Jesus, but their minds are more than a little muddled. To be sure, by returning east "by another way" (Mt 2:12), they have the last laugh—out-tricking the devious Herod, making him play the fool (Mt 2:16). But the final result is anything but funny, as

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[50] Bauer, "Kingship of Jesus," pp. 319–20.

[51] Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star*, pp. 148–56.

[52] Cf. Spencer, *Dancing Girls*, pp. 37–39.

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the outsmarted king erupts in unspeakable outrage, venting his frustration against myriad innocents (Mt 2:16). Foolishness has fatal consequences in Matthew 2—a foolishness in some sense *shared* by Herod and magi. Though distinct in their *intentions*, the magi function partly as Herod's *accomplices* in his terrorist plot. Character boundaries become more porous, more *open* than we might have noticed on a first reading or on a more pious, traditional reading. But let the reader beware! Let the reader not play the fool, but be "wise as a serpent" (Mt 10:16).

And let the reader not presume that I have tracked all the vast horizons opened up by our rich focal text. I have sketched a few constructive and deconstructive lines of interpretation seen through recent literary and postmodern lenses. But of course I have still seen fundamentally through *my eyes*—my male, middle-class, middle-aged, Western professorial, parental, churchly (etc.) eyes. Others will doubtless see things quite differently, and for that I can only be gratefully open to the fresh insights they will provide.[53]

CONCLUSION

Though insisting that literary/postmodern approaches to biblical interpretation can happily coexist and even cooperate with historical studies, this essay has stressed their primary focus on synchronic connections in, around and in front of the text in contradistinction to diachronic developments behind the text. By way of review, we may replot this synchronic matrix of the literary/postmodern view in terms of *centrifugal motion*—tracking its various textual orientations concentrically, or inside out.

We begin by closely concentrating on the linguistic, stylistic, structural and thematic elements of the *final text* under investigation. From there, we widen out to connective *cotexts* within the larger narrative or book; then to suggestive *intertexts*, especially those ripe for fruitful "canonical conversation";[54] then to informative *contexts* in the surrounding rhetorical and cultural environments; and finally, to expansive horizons of different readers from diverse social locations and power positions, staking their distinctive claims to a dynamic *open text*. But no sooner do we fan out as far as we dare than we are drawn back in, with centripetal force, bringing our enhanced perspectives to bear on interpreting the focal text. And once in motion, the hermeneutical pulsing continues apace: popping back and forth, zooming in and out, cropping and recropping

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[53] E.g., see J. Enuwosa, "The Soteriological Significance of Matthew 2:15 in His Use of Hosea 11:1 from an African Perspective," *African Theological Journal* 24 (2001): 39–52; Aquiles Ernesto Martínez, "Jesus, the Immigrant Child: A Diasporic Reading of Matthew 2:1–23," *Apuntes* 26 (2006): 84–114.

[54] Robert W. Wall, "Reading the New Testament in Canonical Context," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 384–86.

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the picture, getting the full measure of forest and trees; and in the process we begin to find the text opening—and closing—in fresh and sometimes surprising ways.

But the proof of this, as with other hermeneutical processes, is in the product. Theory is well and good—but what is the exegetical payoff? Our literary/postmodern analysis of Matthew 2:7–15 especially (1) delineated part of the thick web of intertextual strands woven by the creative-redemptive God with and through chosen "sons" Israel and Jesus; and (2) deconstructed, with the aid of corrective contextual lenses, facile dichotomies between Herod and magi, Jew and Gentile, wise and foolish, in the interest of resisting premature and hypocritical judgments of the "other"—or in Matthean terms, dislodging the log in one's own eye in order to see others justly and honestly, eye to eye (Mt 7:1–5). I make no claim, however, that these points can only be discovered through literary/postmodern methods, and I anticipate that scholars from other viewpoints (such as those in this volume!) will provide confirmation and critique.[55]

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[55] Spencer, F. S. (2012). "The Literary/Postmodern View." In S. E. Porter & B. M. Stovell (Eds.), *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (pp. 48–69). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

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