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Macy McDonald

Questioning the Mentality Behind Mark's Gospel

Stanley Fish performed a study between two of his classes. The first class "was interested in the relationship between linguistics and literary criticism" and the other gave emphasis to "English religious poetry of the seventeenth century" (268). The experiment was one in which he used information left on the board from the first class and presented it to the second as if it was intended for them. He performed this study multiple times with different classes and found that, no matter how disconnected the words he chose were, each class was able to relate them directly to Christianity with meaningful explanations (271). Fish, through this experiment, reveals a truth in all literature, which is that individuals can abuse practically any text in order to shape it to fit their perspective because "interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing" (271). We therefore then see that there are no exact answers in most literature, especially in a text as scrutinized as the Bible.

Many individuals, scholars, and non-scholars have discovered their own truths from the Bible. Most of these are religiously centered because the text is primarily seen as an untouchable religious authority. Even so, it remains a piece of literature. It is an unhidden fact that the text has been adapted countless times throughout history, which may then cause its interpretations to begin to represent the truth of individual editors rather than the truth of the language. Due to the conception that there is no fact in literature, almost any reading of the text is possible, even my own in which I find that the author of Mark's gospel may have not written the text with the belief that Jesus was the Messiah. Instead, his intention in writing could have been to create a narrative of Jesus' life in which he would confront his own contemplations about the possibility that Jesus was simply a successful prophet. Some of the author's potential questioning of Jesus' validity

reveals itself through the use of a structured narrative filled with literary elements, which would then make it appear as if the author were crafting a seemingly perfect version of the Jesus story, even if Jesus, himself, may not actually be.

The book of Mark is part of the Synoptic Gospels, which is a collection of books, Matthew, Mark, and Luke respectively, that all tell the story of Jesus' life, death, and possible resurrection. The book of John also tells the story of Jesus' life and is regarded as the passion narrative due to its elaborated scenes. Although Mark appears second in sequence, it is actually the oldest. No specific dates are known about the exact time of the composition of these texts; however, the overwhelming majority of scholars now believe that "Matthew and Luke, independently of each other, drew on Mark as their basic narrative source" (Harris 331). Even with this knowledge, it has been "very difficult to determine the possible dates of origin of the Gospels. It is a very complex theoretical exercise in which several arguments are weighed before conclusions can be drawn, which cannot be considered as definite proof" (Malan 7).

Many scholars look at the three books in comparison with one another in an attempt to understand the "real" Jesus according to the verses that appear in all three accounts. There are vast amounts of uncertainties associated with this topic. Malan reveals that "we do not have the original versions, or the exact wording of any of the canonical Gospels. In the more than six thousand New Testament manuscriptal variants one cannot find two documents with identical wording. It is therefore highly unlikely that we can accurately reconstruct the actual compositional processes of the Gospels" (3). Although this may frustrate some readers, its lack of an answer works as a freeing revelation, because it opens up the possibility for numerous translations and interpretations.

The study of this text as a piece of literature instead of primarily a religious text is necessary in order to discover the true intent and purpose of the author. Even at the time of composition, “both Mark’s and Matthew’s Gospels also evince self-awareness of their written status. The narratorial interruptions, (Mark 13:14; Matt.24:15) address the lector, who would read the text aloud for a largely illiterate audience” (Keith 328). The author of Mark is unknown and “the anonymity of the Gospels indicates that their authors were not concerned to promote their own status but likely saw themselves as serving the message and movement for which they wrote” (Hortado 298), which in Mark’s case, appears less revolutionary and more contemplative. “Early Christianity was also remarkably invested in the composition, copying, distribution, and reading of texts” (Hortado 300), which is most likely why the author of Mark felt driven to configure his own beliefs in a manner that was both personal and perfected. If the author of Mark knew without a doubt that Jesus was the true Messiah, it would be expected that ample evidence would be included; yet, there are few definitive statements that point to Jesus as the son of God. It then seems that this work may be representational of an individual's self-deliberations on the matter.

In order to fully expand on my analysis of Mark, it must be seen in contention with what came before, which is the earlier portion of the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. It is not only the book of Mark that is set up narratively in order to give it strength, but it is the Bible in totality. Even the character of God is seen to follow a literary pattern in which he “manifests his glory and his exalted nature first in acts of judgment; then, he manifests them in acts of salvation” (Mzebetshana and Asumang 156). From this, the reader is presented God as an adapting figure who has evolved and changed throughout the text rather than a stagnant almighty and all-knowing being. With the Old Testament being Mark’s predecessor, it is understandable

that the author of Mark would gravitate toward creating a Jesus character that also changes and shows growth rather than crafting him as the singular, perfected, Son of God, especially if the author is unsure himself.

The Gospel of Mark begins with an introduction of what the reader should expect going further into the story, which is “the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Mark 1.1). If an individual was to read this as it is given presently, they would not need to question any further that Jesus is the one true Son of God, because the author tells us immediately that he is; however, “[o]ther ancient authorities lack the Son of God” (Horsley 1792). Without this specific title, the reading can shift dramatically. Through this, we are already witness to the manipulation of the text by future men in their attempts to prove that Jesus is the Son of God, when the author of the book may have never stated it himself. The following verses which are part but “not all a quotation from Isaiah suggests that it is rooted in a popular, non-scribal, oral conflation of ‘prophecies’” (Horsley 1793) and are not a part of an actual scene related to Jesus. Before even making it to the fourth line, it is seen that “the written forms that we know are simply textual artifacts (residue?)” (Ore 296). This should immediately lead the reader to question and attempt to discover what Mark actually wrote in his text, although we will never know his true intent as we do not even know who he is.

Once the introduction is established, immediately we are placed into a mystical world where we hear “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness” (Mark 1.3), thus setting the stage for the main character to appear as the wilderness “was a place where other popular prophets and movements often originated” (Horsley 1792). John the Baptist is the first character introduced, and he comes into this scene only to baptize Jesus. This posits the idea that John may be superior to Jesus, at least prior to his baptism, which the author addresses later in the narrative.

The Jesus character is often associated with his divine birth by the Virgin Mary but the author of Mark makes no comment on his birth or even adolescent years. Instead, we are introduced to Jesus at the time in his career that the author would have had the most knowledge of due to its popularity in oral history. There is no account of Jesus' life as a child. Research has uncovered manuscripts from this period of his life but none of them have been cemented into the canonical Bible as they are often seen as the imaginative works of scribes instead of factual accounts of his childhood (Harris 297). This derives mostly from the understanding that "scribes continued to write psalms" and "rearrange material based on various thematic perceptions" (Allan 67), even after the primary texts were published. The lack of his divine birth rids Jesus of his innate spirituality and instead crafts him as a blank canvas that the author can work with.

Jesus' baptism, to most Christian faith-based readers, has been read with the implication that Jesus was baptized so they must also be baptized. However, it is just as probable that the author of Mark included it, not to show individuals what rules they should follow, but instead because he felt Jesus needed cleansing before he could be a successful prophet due to his past sins. Beginning with Jesus, the atmosphere appears as one which is metaphorical and filled with literary elements rather than literal actions. This is further expanded on in the opening of the story in reference to the character John. He begins to lose shape after being placed in prison (Mark 14). Later in the narrative, however, there is another character, by the name of John, whom we learn is James' brother. This new John becomes one of Jesus' first disciples, which acts as an echo to the John who baptized Jesus. Both individuals were unwaveringly devoted and initially believed that Jesus was the Messiah with no proof, evidence, or example. Williams reveals that such "echoes related to certain minor characters serve to heighten their role as positive examples" (922), which is exactly what the name John acts as in this narrative.

We are then given direct dialogue from a spirit, which the reader is meant to assume to be God. It is never directly stated who this mystical being is. This narrative is told from “the perspective of the seemingly omniscient narrator whose voice guides the reader’s interpretation” (Powell 2); therefore, with the thematic presentation of the voice coming from the clouds, the narrator instills a God-like image for the reader to automatically assume. The voice states, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1.11). Again, this statement would at first glance appear to designate the role of being the Messiah to Jesus. However, “[a] traditional designation for the king was ‘son of God’, as in 2 Sam. 7.14” (Horsley 1793) We then see that this spirit calling Jesus his son does not single Jesus out because many individuals held this title. It is also common to refer to a follower of God as a son or child of God, which could also be understood in this context.

Jesus’ first quote is, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news” (Mark 1.15), which is followed by, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people” (Mark 1.17). The author has already established that Jesus is special by including the voice in the clouds, and this first quote acts as verification that, in the least, Jesus believes the voice to be God. We then see Jesus in action where he tells others that they will be successful in life if they follow him. All those who he asks this of immediately relinquish their past to follow him. Their decision to drop everything they had in order to be guaranteed a life where they would “fish for people” (Mark 1.17) could very easily be read as selfish. Over time, this reading of the text to those of faith has become blasphemous as these individuals are the ones who will become the symbolic twelve disciples. Due to the lack of historic detail available to attribute to Jesus, the author quickly moves on to show how Jesus gathered the other disciples, which is by the same manner. The reader can then understand this portion of the narrative as not

factual, but rather a summed-up portion of how the disciples came to be. They make an active appearance soon after Jesus' own introduction; therefore, the author needed to quickly, but with some respect, introduce them. A quick oversimplification eases this process, but it has also, over time, given Jesus an image more mystical than factually possible. Many Christians read the text with the implication that Jesus was fantastic due to the fact that he was able to make people abandon everything by just telling them they would be successful. It could just as likely have been that the author was pressed for time and space, because as we know from John, "there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down; I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21.24-25).

After the author has clearly set the stage, Jesus is able to begin working. He performs his first exorcism when a demonic spirit identifies him (Mark 1.23-28). This scene appears in none of the other gospels, but it is then from this one scene that Jesus' fame spreads. In the other gospels, the Jesus character performs many more miraculous signs that are not in Mark's account. Due to the variances, it could be postulated that all of the gospel authors were struggling with what they could accurately attest to the character Jesus. All three needed some event to signify how Jesus became known; otherwise their stories would have no concrete foundation to expand upon and thus lack attestation. The author of Mark's substantiation was a battle with the devil himself. The other gospels, due to the many deeds they attest to Jesus, appear to view Mark's singular exorcism as insufficient due to the fact that scholars have confirmed both "Matthew and Luke used Mark independently" (Malan 5). Many could, and have, argued that the author's inclusion of a demonic figure being able to identify Jesus would constitute his status as Son of God. This claim is not sufficiently supported as stories range all around from prophets performing similar deeds, but seldom, if ever, do they claim Godly status. As the story

progresses, the presence of demonic activity increases. It then becomes only the demonic spirits and the disciples who are able to access that Jesus is more than a prophet, and it is also both of these characters that are found to be questionable throughout. It then can be concluded that when this spirit identifies Jesus, it is of no factual or religious significance to the author, but rather the first of many scenes in which his shifty characters will begin to fit their predetermined characterizations.

In Mark 1.40, a leper begs to be healed and when Jesus heals him, he informs him not to tell anyone, but then the leper goes off and thus Jesus' fame is spread even wider. This is a portion of the story where the use of literary elements initially becomes most evident. The juxtaposition of Jesus' fame spreading followed with his insistence that nobody know who he is works as an oxymoron. It also adds a trait to the Jesus character that remains throughout where he insists nobody knows about him. Jesus is known for this character trait; be that as it may, if he truly has insisted that nobody know of him, he would not continue to act in the manner that he does. This trait could then be seen as a Markan ideology that the authors of the other gospels continued in their works (Malan 5). The author is seen struggling with this dichotomous perception of Jesus while still maintaining a fluid and believable narrative. The reason for its inclusion is because, as stated, it is a trait of the Jesus character, which can be seen in Mark 1.34, 8.29, and 4.10-12. It is understandable that the author would create this theme for his main character, because if everyone were to know about Jesus and his miraculous deeds, then they would all realize he was the true Messiah. As it remains a conclusion of mine that the author of Mark appears unsure about this fact, his Jesus character uses silence to create a mystery behind the truth of his powers.

Jesus' dining with the sinners and tax collectors is an image indefinitely attributed to him. The typical understanding of the matter has been that he dines with them because he is trying to fix them. The sinner's inclusion Marks a point in the narrative where the reader can question Jesus' actions, just like Pilate does in the conclusion. We can accept his explanation that he is only dining with them because he has come "to call not the righteous but sinners" (Mark 2.17), or we can remain wary, as the author appears to, of the fact that so honorable a man would even be seen with them since he knows the implication it carries. This scene further increases the involvement of literary elements in the story because we can see it as a way for the author to incline all types of people into reading or hearing his book. Whether or not one is a sinner, they are in good tidings with Jesus, Mark's main character, which proves that the book he is writing is not just for the righteous, but it is also for the tax collectors to read. A sinner would most likely never pick up the book unless they hear that they play a significant role in it. Like any good author, Marks' makes his work universal.

The following scene questions why Jesus did not make his followers fast, but John did, thus once again referencing the name John. This scene is also in Matthew; however, it is another individual asking the question and in Luke, it is explicitly the Pharisees who ask. Due to these differences, the symbolism and the scene in itself can be seen to be mostly an element of foreshadowing and not a factual account. It works as foreshadowing because Jesus' answer points to his death at the end of the narrative. Williams finds here also a strong connection between Jesus and the John character through their individual deaths because "Mark describes the arrest, death, and burial of John the Baptist with terms that foreshadow those same events for Jesus" (921). Although a minor character, the name John is an impactful literary element used to further a theological interpretation.

Another of Jesus' more memorable scenes is that in Mark 2.27-28, where the audience learns that "[t]he Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." "Son of man could mean either human being or the future Jesus as an exalted figure representing a renewed Israel" (Horsley 1796), thus revealing that Jesus is still mostly acting as a blank canvas, even when given seemingly specific titles. The included quotes for Jesus strengthen the validity that they truly did come straight from Jesus' mouth. Many scholars will point to the Q source in this case in order to reveal that it may have been an exact quote from him. In the other Synoptics, the wording is not the same. In Matthew and Luke, it is worded in a manner that indisputably identifies Jesus as Lord over them; however, Mark's uncertainties cannot allow such a claim. Jesus' "quote" is thus adapted to fit this specific narrative.

In the next scene, Mark 3.5-6, Jesus directs a man to stretch out his hand and it is miraculously healed. The Pharisees then use this as ammunition for their decision to execute Jesus. If this event had occurred, the Pharisees should have praised him and immediately believed because of the astounding undeniable evidence that was just shown to them. This scene, rather than appearing factual, works to create a new theme of absurdity that is attached to the antagonists of Jesus, revealing how "misguided the religious leaders are in their opposition to Jesus and to heighten the irony of their actions and attitudes" (Williams 923). This absurd irony may also be included in order for the author to initiate his own theological belief (Powell 3-4), which will be revealed once his Jesus character is sentenced to death.

Following are many scenes that seem to prove Jesus as the Messiah, but the claim is never definitely stated. In these instances, we read the verse multiple times that "he explained everything in private to his disciples" (Mark 4.34). This continues the already developed theme

of the silent or hidden Jesus character as well as the idea that the disciples are not to be trusted. The author includes specific information, which would be expected due to the many popularized stories about Jesus, but by letting us know that everything was done in private, he admits that even he does not know the truth of the scene.

As stated, most instances where Jesus is directly called the Son of God is in scenes where he is speaking with unclean or non-religious spirits and therefore the reader is meant to question the validity of these spirits from the moment they enter the scene. In Mark 4.30, Jesus encounters Legion, an unclean spirit who also has many others with him. To solve the problem of their existence, Jesus sends them into the bodies of 2,000 pigs, which then kill themselves by rushing into the sea. There is so much left unanswered in this scene, and the answers given do not appear reliable, thus the inclusion of this scene was most likely due to another established story attributed to Jesus, which by the time it made it to the author of Mark, had already become vastly fantastic. In Mark 8.29, "Peter answered him, 'you are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him." It is important that it is Peter who identifies Jesus as the Messiah because he is the most untrustworthy of the disciples due to his actions taken to betray Jesus as well as for the fact that Jesus calls him Satan directly. Along with this verse encompassing thematic repetition for shifty characters being able to "identify" the Messiah, Jesus' desire to not let anyone know of his work continues his own character trait as well. This silenced response also creates an easy detachment from the specific scene for the author because he will not have to worry with everyone else's reaction to the 2,000 dead pig bodies that are left in the water.

One of the most famous scenes in the Bible is the feeding of the 5,000 where Jesus uses only five loaves of bread and two fish to feed 5,000 individuals outside of himself and the

disciples. If there were five thousand men, and Jesus was able to feed them all with only five loaves of bread and two fish, it raises the question of what happened to the individuals. None of those who received the food were amazed like others have been in the narrative; instead, they disappeared. In Matthew, the number is 5,000 excluding the women and children, which implies that the number could have been closer to 15,000. After this account, Jesus walks on water, and the disciples continue to maintain their trait of misunderstanding. Even the most revelatory actions performed by Jesus cannot dissuade the unbelievers. Not long after, in Mark 8.1-9, we are given another bread and fish story, which again ends in disbelief. The repetition of Godly acts, followed by misunderstanding, appear as fictional repetitions. It is not explained how long it took to feed the people or how so much food was created. This would be a great place for Mark to add evidence with detail, but because he has none, he must leave the scene and in turn leave the reader stuck with the same problems he is most likely facing. Heilmann proposes that this inclusion of the bread story multiple times could also be due to the metaphorical nature of eating and drinking that was important for followers of Jesus (487). This is evident still today as people take part in communion, where they eat bread in reverence of Jesus' body and drink wine as a substitute for his blood. Heilmann also says, "According to the conceptual metaphor theory of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, the basic conceptual metaphor eating/drinking is adopting teaching" (487); therefore the inclusion of bread being multiplied to thousands and their intake of it is metaphorical and representational of the followers of Jesus accepting his guidance as in Jer.15.16 and Isa. 55.1-3,10-11 (488). The author does not comment on the event, but rather leaves the metaphor for individuals to decipher. This theme may have begun with Mark and was carried over into the other gospels, because "[n]othing in the Bread of Life discourse indicates to the reader that the pericope has to be understood against the background of their own meal

practice; the entire discourse is a textual phenomenon that makes use of the imagery of eating and drinking but does not refer to a specific meal practice of early Christians” (Heilmann 496). Through this understanding, the crowd is given a purpose that leads the reader to believe more in the idea of what the scene may represent rather than the reality of it. The disappearance of the crowd remains a confounding element.

In Mark 7.6, Jesus is questioned about why he does not make his disciples follow the old law, and instead of using his divine self as proof, he turns to the Old Testament. This is a good source to use, but it is not clear whether or not Jesus would really have replied with quoting scripture. By connecting the Old Testament with the New, the story is given more validity. The author rarely refers to Old Testament text, but when he does it is clear it is due to the fact that Jesus “must take the center stage, as all OT types and OT texts remain in the background persistently pointing to Jesus” (Mzebetshana and Asumang 158). As all works in the Bible encapsulate others, Mark may have felt the need to incorporate the old with his new.

The author lets Jesus claim authority once again in Mark 8.38 through the verse, “Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” This line, although it may appear direct, is quite perplexing. Jesus refers to the Son of Man, which we saw was a common title, but Jesus now posits the idea that the Son of Man is someone who will come from heaven with angels. Its perplexing nature is due to the fact that it is quite clear that Jesus is not referring to himself. He depicts himself with the words “me” and “my,” but they do not refer back to the Son of Man he is talking about. Jesus then becomes a much more troublesome character to understand because the Son of Man that this book depicts the main character as being, initially from the mouth of what is most likely God, declares that he is not.

This could be a mistake made by the author; however, his attention to detail throughout the rest of the narrative does not coincide with this idea. We can then see this as potentially intentional on behalf of the author; nonetheless, its implication can only be speculated. It could be read as a subversive attempt to reveal that even Jesus knows he is not the Son of God. This would be considered blasphemous; therefore, he speaks no more on the matter and instead brushes past it as if it were never there. This potential tactic to avoid the question he raises here is confirmed as successful by the readings and assumptions that modern society has given specifically to this text.

In Mark, as in any story, the tension increases as the narrative makes its way to the climax. As Jesus is moving closer to Jerusalem, it becomes an opportune time for God to appear. When he does, he directly calls Jesus his son, but once again, this direct labeling occurs only to two of Jesus' own disciples, in private, which we as readers must take as cautionary in nature. We are told that the two who heard God's voice were terrified, and it must also be remembered that although they are disciples, they are still human and have, up until this point, been unable to understand anything told to them. With all of these elements working together, it is possible that Mark isn't being as subversive as it appears. He emphasizes that they went up to the mountain alone, thus creating an uncertain atmosphere for the reader, and Peter, who has already been depicted as the shiftest of the disciples, is one of the two who gets to go. The author then includes the announcement that Jesus will rise from the dead because, without his resurrection, all would be for nothing. From this point, the author of Mark devalues the truth in Jesus' own quotes with a greater impact because he never gives him the resurrection promised to the disciples.

The scene, as a whole, is a clear case of dramatic irony as well as metaphorical in nature. Domeris reveals that the “[d]ramatic irony, in the Gospel of Mark, occurs at two levels, namely at the level of the plot and at the level of the dialogue” (51). We see Jesus repeat, almost verbatim, certain instances which reveals that the event was not historical but rather meant to remind the reader of a time from the Old Testament, which he referenced only a few lines prior. “As Jeremiah challenged the priests of his time in the Jerusalem temple for their worship of Baal,” Jesus is seen challenging other priests for their misguided worship at the temple (51).

The use of dramatic irony is once again evident because “[f]or Elijah, his destiny took him to Mount Carmel, where he fought against the prophets of the Tyrian Baal. For Moses, his destiny took him to Mount Sinai, where he received the ten commandments. For Jesus, too, his destiny would take him to the mountain of the transfiguration” (Domeris 53). From this point, we can conclude that the rest of this portion of the Jesus story is meant to segue the audience into understanding that there is something unique about Jesus in his relation to God, just like with Moses and Elijah; however, he is no Messiah just like they were not. He is able to predict his death correctly but when he predicts his resurrection, the readers are left with no clear answer. Even the moment where we see God's glory, “it is said to be reminiscent of Moses (Exod 34:29; cf. Matt17:2) and of heavenly beings (as in Daniel 7:9)” (54). Due to the unconventional nature of the scene, the author draws upon Old Testament texts as validation. Peter’s absurd lack of understanding adds another layer of dramatic irony to the plot and furthers the confirmation that he will never understand the glory of God. Domeris also reveals how “[t]he discussions on both the role of Elijah and the resurrection (Mark 9:9–13) are filled with ambiguity, heightening the sense of irony” (56). This ambiguity could also be due to the lack of ample validation the author was able to provide.

Jesus then goes on, in Mark 11.18, to teach by which “The whole crowd was spellbound,” which could act as a verification that the author of Mark believed that Jesus was skilled in manipulating his followers; therefore, his need for manipulation restricts his title to that of a coercive prophet rather than a truly successful one, and as Young points out, “[T]here could be only two kinds of prophets: false-prophets and ‘the prophet’” (298). When he called on his disciples, we are informed only that he told them they would be successful in life. The assumption, as previously stated, could be that Mark was pressed for time and needed to get on with the rest of the narrative, but it could also be another subversive attempt to hint at the idea that we do not truly know how Jesus persuaded his crowds. The mention that they were spellbound has the implication that they were blindly listening, obeying, following, preaching, and so on. The disciples may have been in a similar trance when doing the will of Jesus and that is why they were always so confused.

In Mark 13.11 Jesus prophesizes about what is to come. Prior to this verse, the author includes the idea that ordinary people also can have God speak to and through them to accomplish his works. This, once again, offers us the idea that Jesus is not vastly different from a prophet. Jesus then goes on to inform the people that there will be many who will claim to be the Messiah and they are all lying, which is another use of paralleled contradictory statements, with regard to Jesus, in order to lead the audience into questioning. The idea that there will be more to come who will claim to be the Messiah, demands the assumption that he has not yet come and therefore is not Jesus. The author becomes so invested in this portion of the narrative that “In Mark 13.14, the narrator actually interrupts a speech being given by Jesus to his disciples to speak directly to the reader. Such a practice assumes that the reader is empathizing with the

disciples at this point (Powell 4). The author appears aware of his text functioning as historical fiction instead of it being seen as a divine revolutionary source.

After Jesus informs them that there will be false prophets, he goes on to offer his own prophecy. To juxtapose the idea that there will be false prophecies alongside Jesus' own prophecy instills the idea, once again, that the reader should be questioning of it. The next verse then further validates the author's potential confusion because he has Jesus deflate almost the entirety of his preaching through one verse in which he says that "this generation will not pass away until all of these things have taken place" (Mark 13.30). Due to the simple fact that there have been no reports of "the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13.26) , the audience can see this as something still to come and therefore conclude that Jesus is not and was not the Messiah. The author continues to give the reader evidence for potential disbelief in the following verses where Jesus states, "[F]or you do not know when the master of the house will come . . . he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly" (Mark 13.35-36). He doesn't allow Jesus to use the pronoun I; therefore, he could be talking in reference to himself in the third person or he could be alluding again to the real Messiah that has yet to come. The author cannot make any direct claims, so he leaves the text as ambiguous and metaphorical as possible.

In many stories, the reader knows more than the characters, and in this one, the readers know more than Jesus. Jesus says in Mark 14.21, "It would have been better for that one not to have been born" because Peter's treachery has been physically witnessed by Jesus. The audience already knew that Peter had been looking for a way to betray Jesus, and as a result, this revelation that Jesus makes is no revelation for the reader. The Jesus character can be seen as no more important to the plot than those with whom he interacts. We can then see the author of

Mark as building this Jesus character with very humanistic traits (14.34-39) rather than Godly ones.

At this point in the plot, the narrator finally has Jesus claim himself to be the Messiah. This appears to only occur so that he can be justifiably condemned due to the fact that “during the time of Jesus’ death, mocking speech against God's Messiah—as God's chosen leader—could have been regarded as blasphemy in the first century” (Williams 927). This idea of his singular self-condemnation is further justified when we see that once he has been charged and is asked again by a different individual, his answer changes to “you say so” (Mark 15.2) and another time there is no answer at all. As we see, the author only allows him to make his claim once because “the great prophets of the past not only lived for, and spoke to their people; they died for them” (Young 298). Jesus, like the others, needs to be accused and put to the test in order to be seen in correspondence with any other prophets.

Jesus last words are “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15.34). The centurion who has already been seen corroborating the idea that Jesus is innocent states, “Truly this man was God’s Son” (Mark 15.39), but some manuscripts have, “a son of God” (Horsley 1820). These are similar in diction; however, they carry different connotations because the latter appeals more to the theme that is present in Mark. Jesus’ final scenes are further fictionalized through their reflection of the language of the baptism scene at the beginning of Mark’s Gospel (1.9–11). The most obvious connections “involve the splitting of the temple veil as a parallel to the splitting of the heavens (the only two uses of *σχίζω* in Mark’s Gospel) and the confession of the centurion as a parallel to the voice from heaven declaring Jesus to be the Son of God” (Williams 924). Through this, we find that the author included structured characters, as well as a

structured narrative, in which he did not let his own personal contemplations overwhelm the greatness of this work.

In the conclusion, three women make their way to honor Jesus' death. On their way, they ask "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" (Mark 16.3), but we are told prior to this that a man named Joseph, who was the one who buried Jesus, rolled the stone into place himself. It then reveals a common depiction of women as weak when the three of them claim to not be able to do the work that one man did. When the women arrive at the tomb, it is empty. This is the portion of the narrative that gets most diluted in current depictions. The women see "a young man dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side" (Mark 16.5). It is never told who the man is, but he claims to know why they are there and informs them that Jesus has been resurrected. Instead of them being exuberant at this news, "they fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16.8). This continues the idea of seeing women as weak, and it is also the final confirmation of the questioning of Jesus' Godly status and thus his ability, or inability, to resurrect. In writing the gospel, the author presents an irresolute ending which allows for various interpretations. Theodore Weeden, for example, assesses that "Mark's ambiguous ending is due to his desire to cast the disciples in a negative light" (Powell 4), because they seem to essentially disappear. This would prove most probable, aside from the fact that the author has made it clear throughout the whole narrative that the disciples are a group of people who are incapable of understanding. It would then be easy to include them at the end of the narrative and continue their misunderstanding as a way to further cast them in a negative light, but instead, they are simply left out, not further tarnished.

It is worth mentioning that “all four gospels depict women’s prompt response and involvement in Jesus’ death and burial in accordance with Jewish custom” (Berg 217) as it has been proposed by many scholars that Jesus would not have actually been given a burial at all. As “the Romans used crucifixion not only as punishment for criminals but also as a deterrent bearing the maximum punitive effect, it was the norm that a proper burial be denied to those condemned to this manner of death. Literary and archaeological evidence attest to this fact” (224). Although Jesus could have been an exception to this rule, the inclusion of women and their full recognition of funerary rights reveals further that the ending of the gospel is at least a somewhat fictionalized account in order to preserve the solemnity of this narrative while remaining constant in the questioning of the truth of who Jesus really was.

Because Mark was the original gospel on which Matthew, Luke, and even John elaborated, this raises questions as to why they felt the need to craft their own version. Keith supposes that it is due to the imperfect ending we are given in the narrative (328). He reveals also that John directly mentions this in his gospel, believing his own account to be the superior of the Jesus stories (328). John’s version of Jesus’ life has far more details and includes extended scenes along with a comment at the end, letting the reader know that even all he has written was not all that occurred in Jesus life. It then causes one to wonder what the other gospels lack that led John to come to this conclusion about his own narrative. For the book of Mark, at least, it appears to be the lack of proof that Jesus is the Messiah. If this is the case, it also leads one to question why readers still refer to specific parts of Mark for information if John is meant to act as the supreme account of Jesus, which, once again according to the author of John, himself, is the case. There are also some contemporary individuals, like Mzebetshana and Asumang, who assert that “[t]here is no longer a need to compare John's gospel against the Synoptics, instead,

scholarship should focus on the reliable and independent and complementary contribution of John's account" (159). It then becomes clear that dichotomous personal truths can be found in each of the gospels, changing with the individual reader.

Through all of this, we see most evidently that “narratives work to communicate meaning. How the story is told makes a difference for what the story can mean” (Williams 929). These biblical texts were based on oral "bodies of material heavily ‘shaped in the telling’” (Heilmann 297); thus, it would not be right for the author of Mark to be expected to relate us a historical account since he did not witness the events. The ending of Mark has similar implications as the whole of the New Testament, which is that, as revealed by Bultmann, ““it is by nature a personal address questioning an individual’s self-understanding, rendering it problematic and demanding a decision’” (Malan 9). The focus in the narrative’s conclusion is left on the silent women, who remain silent in order to let the reader place themselves in their shoes and decide what they believe and what they will go on to tell others to believe in. During Mark’s composition, there was not one defined prophet who was expected to be the Messiah, and it appears to have been the goal of the people to discover him (Young 295). The book of Mark offers up possibilities, and the reader must determine his or her own conclusion based on the literature given.

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