

# MATTHEW: GENDER AND READING

Janice Capel Anderson  
Moscow, Idaho

## ABSTRACT

In keeping with the self-definition of *Semeta* this is an experimental article. It explores the usefulness of certain literary approaches for a feminist exegesis of the Gospel of Matthew. It begins with a comparison of the paths taken by feminist literary and biblical criticism. It then offers two tentative analyses. The first is an analysis of the symbolic significance of gender in the gospel. The second is an analysis of the role of the implied reader in relationship to a feminist's reading of the gospel.

### Feminist Literary Criticism and Feminist Biblical Criticism

There are a number of interesting parallels between feminist literary criticism and feminist biblical criticism. The first steps in both fields included (1) the highlighting of androcentrism in canonical texts and the interpretations of those texts and (2) attempts to recover positive images of women and attitudes toward women in the texts along with revisions of previous androcentric exegesis.<sup>1</sup> In feminist literary criticism a third direction has also been pursued. Women writers have become a center of attention:

Female experience displaced male bias as the center of analysis;  
female literary genealogies jostled male traditions. Literary studies

<sup>1</sup> For biblical criticism see C. Christ, "Women's Studies in Religion," *BCSR* 10 (February 1979) 3. Christ offers representative examples. See also P. Tribble, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Biblical Studies," *Christian Century* (Feb., 1982) 116 ff. and K. Doob Sakenfeld, "Response to Ruether's 'Christology and Feminism: Can a Male Savior Help Women?'" (paper circulated to SBL/AAR Liberation Theology Working Group, April, 1981) 3-7. For literary criticism see E. Abel, "Editor's Introduction," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981) 179-84. For parallel developments in history see J. Kelly-Gadol, "The Social Relations of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History," *Signs* 1 (1976) 809-24.

emphasized the distinctive features of female texts and traced lines of influence connecting women in a fertile and partially autonomous tradition<sup>2</sup>

This focus has included examination of the ways women writers have responded to androcentric literary tradition and conventions, translating "sexual difference into literary differences of genre, structure, voice and plot" and revising "prevailing themes and styles."<sup>3</sup> As a result there has been a renewed interest in how sexual difference has influenced male texts: "Women emerge in these analyses no longer as the passive victims of male authorial desire but rather as powerful figures that elicit texts crafted to appropriate or mute their difference."<sup>4</sup> In literary history it has become important to ask: "... 1) How do contemporary women's lives, women's concerns, or concerns about women constitute part of the historical context of this work? and 2) What is the symbolic significance of gender in this text?"<sup>5</sup> Interpreters must take seriously not only language, class, ethnic, and other analytic categories, but also gender.

Corresponding to the focus on the author and text in various types of feminist literary criticism there has been a focus on the reader. Judith Fetterley in *The Resisting Reader*, for example, concentrated on the way in which women readers are often forced to read as males in American literature.<sup>6</sup> Annette Kolodny in a stimulating article "A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts" argued for "... the crucial importance of the sex of the 'interpreter' in that process which Nelly Furman has called 'the active attribution of significance to formal signifiers'"<sup>7</sup> She used two short stories, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Susan Keating Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers," as paradigms. In Glaspell's story men and women look for clues to the motive for a woman's murder of her husband. Only the women are able to see the clues because the men are unable to "read" the importance and significance of the women's arena of activity and meaning. Men and women can learn to read and understand each other's texts, she argues. However, they must be aware of "the fundamental problem of 'reading correctly within cohabiting but differently structured worlds'"<sup>8</sup> Such an awareness requires a "revisionist rereading" of the literary canon and the expansion of that canon to include the work of women writers. This, in turn, offers "us all a potential enhancing of

<sup>2</sup> Abel, 173-74

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 174

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> A. Kolodny, "Turning the Lens on 'The Panther Captivity' A Feminist Exercise in Practical Criticism," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981) 345

<sup>6</sup> *The Resisting Reader* (Bloomington Indiana University, 1978)

<sup>7</sup> *New Literary History* 11 (1980) 460

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 464

our capacity to read the world, our literary texts, and even one another, anew."<sup>9</sup>

In religious studies there has been a parallel concern for women's experience and women's texts.<sup>10</sup> However, in biblical studies scholars have had to try to recover repressed women's traditions within and without the canon. There are few Jewish or Christian texts known to have been produced by women prior to the modern period. As theologians have sought to develop a feminist hermeneutic, complex questions concerning the nature and authority of Scripture and canon have been raised.<sup>11</sup> Are only non-androcentric Scriptural traditions authoritative? What is the status of marginalized or "heretical" texts which preserve women's traditions and experiences absent or muted in canonical texts? What attitude should be taken toward androcentric traditions of interpretation? These questions have their counterparts in literary studies,<sup>12</sup> but take on unique dimensions in the context of Jewish or Christian theology and praxis. Two directions that have not been explored fully are (1) how patriarchal biblical texts embody responses to female difference and (2) how the sex of woman reader/interpreters influences their readings of male texts. These directions, suggested by feminist literary criticism, bear investigation. Not only would exegeses which ask these questions be interesting in their own right, they would also contribute to the discussion of difficult issues raised in feminist hermeneutics. For example, how has it been or could it be possible for women *positively* to appropriate androcentric texts as authoritative texts for their religious experience?

This article attempts to move in the two directions mentioned above. First, it begins to explore the symbolic significance of gender in the Gospel of Matthew. Second, it looks at the role of the implied reader<sup>13</sup> in relationship to a feminist's reading of the gospel. These analyses are experimental and limited in a number of ways. Literary methods alone, primarily rhetorical criticism, are used.<sup>14</sup> The gospel as a narrative

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 465.

<sup>10</sup> Christ, 3.

<sup>11</sup> For two articles which raise these issues sharply see E. Schüssler Fiorenza, "Toward a Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics: Biblical Interpretation and Liberation Theology," in *The Challenge of Liberation Theology: A First World Response* (ed. Mahan and Richesin; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981) 91-112; and R. Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology: Methodology, Sources and Norms," in *Sexism and God-Talk* (AAR/SBL Liberation Theology/Feminist Hermeneutic Project; Dec., 1982) 1-18.

<sup>12</sup> For example: Should blatant chauvinists such as Norman Mailer continue to be part of the literary canon? Do the early female Gothic novelists belong alongside the male authors now accepted as significant for their period? Is anything to be gained by adapting admittedly male-biased methods such as Freudianism or New Criticism?

<sup>13</sup> For a definition of the implied reader see note 19 below.

<sup>14</sup> For a definition of rhetorical criticism see M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary*

whole is the context for interpretation. Neither source nor redaction criticism is employed. Only the most basic competence in the text's linguistic, historical, and social codes is assumed. The full historical dimensions of the questions posed are not explored. This is due partly to the limitations of space and expertise and partly to the fact that we have a limited knowledge of the social world(s) of early Christianity.<sup>15</sup> The examination of the interplay between the representation of gender in New Testament texts and the actual roles of men and women in various early Christian communities awaits further study. Similarly, the response of actual first century women reading or listening to the Gospel of Matthew remains an area of conjecture. Furthermore each reader, male or female of whatever historical matrix, will have a unique response to the gospel. This article only focuses on the role of the implied reader and possible feminist responses to that role. Finally, although it is an exercise in feminist biblical criticism there is no attempt to articulate a nuanced feminist position. The article operates within a broad definition of feminism as beliefs and actions which support the possibility of authentic existence for both females and males and oppose the oppression of either sex by the other.

#### Gender in Matthew

The first question to be approached is the symbolic significance of gender in the text. This, as noted above, is an important approach in feminist literary criticism. As Annette Kolodny has written, this approach is crucial

because it acknowledges the often subtle distinction between the depiction of male or female characters for their recognizable gender behaviors and the manipulation of gender for symbolic purposes that may have only incidental relation to actual contemporary sex roles. Pursuing this second concern thus sometimes reveals little about the authentic reality of men and women but much about the symbolic terms through which a given cultural group struggles to define the meaning of its most perplexing dilemmas.<sup>16</sup>

Although gender roles are not a major theme in the Gospel of Matthew, its norms and values incorporate attitudes toward gender. The

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*Terms* (4th ed., New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981) 160-61. The term is used as in literary studies. It should be distinguished from OT Rhetorical Criticism inspired by James Muilenburg ("Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 [1969] 1-18) although their interests are related.

<sup>15</sup> We simply cannot yet discuss with depth "the significance of the presence of women (as readers, writers, and as societal participants)" when dealing with the historical contexts of NT texts as Kolodny does when she turns her lens on "The Panther Captivity," 339.

<sup>16</sup> A. Kolodny, "The Panther Captivity," 339.

narrator, Jesus, and other characters speak about men and women. Women and men also appear as characters.<sup>17</sup> In this section the overall androcentric perspective of the gospel will be briefly established. Then several passages which deal with women will serve as examples of ways in which the gospel treats gender. These passages include the genealogy (1:1-17); two scenes concerning the faith and initiative of marginal women characters (the woman with the hemorrhage, 9:20-22, and the Canaanite woman, 15:21-28) and passion and resurrection scenes involving women characters (the woman at Bethany, 26:6-13, the women at the cross, 27:55-56, and the two Marys, 27:61; 28:1-10).

### *The Androcentric Perspective of the Gospel*

There is no doubt that the author of the Gospel of Matthew wrote from an androcentric perspective. Whether the author was male or female, the story world embodies patriarchal assumptions. There are many examples which illustrate the pervasive androcentrism. The opening genealogy is patrilineal and the birth story centers on Joseph. Positions of power and status including those of the Jewish leaders and the disciples are male. God is repeatedly pictured as Father.<sup>18</sup> Patriarchal marriage and inheritance practices are assumed (1:18-25; 5:31-32; 19:1-12; 21:33-43; 22:23-33, etc.) The narrator speaks in a brief but telling phrase of "four thousand (five thousand) men besides women and children" (14:21; 15:38) in the feeding stories. Even Jesus' teaching often assumes a male audience. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warns "everyone who looks on a woman with desire" and "everyone divorcing his wife apart from a matter of unchastity" (15:28,32).

### *The Genealogy*

The narrator begins the gospel of Matthew with a superscription and genealogy (1:1-17). This passage is a form of direct commentary to the narratee. Since the implied author and narrator and the implied reader and narratee are virtually identical in Matthew,<sup>19</sup> direct commentary

<sup>17</sup> For a list of references to women in the gospel see the Appendix.

<sup>18</sup> Although God is imaged as a woman in 13:33 and 23:37. The Fatherhood of God may also be seen as a challenge to a patriarchal worldview. E. Schussler Fiorenza ("Luke 2:41-52," *Int* 36 [1982] 403) argues that the father symbol for God in the gospels "relativizes all claims of earthly fatherhood and rejects all power of a patriarchally institutionalized society."

<sup>19</sup> The term implied author was coined by W. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961) 70-76, 151. It refers to the "creating person who is implied by the totality of a given work when it is offered to the world" (Booth, *Critical Understanding* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979] 269). This voice or persona is the authorial presence the reader experiences in the text. See also M. H. Abrams, *Glossary*, 126. The term implied reader was coined by W. Iser who discusses it in *The Implied*

guides the reading process. It may explain or call attention to the significance of a narrative element, provide criteria for evaluation, etc. Actual readers are free to accept or reject this guidance but must respond to it as they read. The superscription and genealogy set the stage for reading the rest of the gospel.<sup>20</sup> They establish the implied reader's initial understanding of Jesus' identity. The heading characterizes Jesus as the Christ, the Son of Abraham, and the Son of David. The genealogy begins to supply clues to the content of these titles. The expectations or associations evoked in actual readers will be confirmed or denied, expanded or narrowed as they read.

In terms of gender, the genealogy substantiates Jesus' patrilineal claim to the titles. It also locates him in the sweep of salvation history from Abraham to David, from David to the exile and from the exile to the Christ. This salvation history is viewed essentially as a male enterprise. The stereotyped pattern of the genealogy—male δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν male(s)—repeats itself thirty-nine times. The most striking break in this patriarchal pattern<sup>21</sup> is the inclusion of five female names in the line of descent, four of whom are named in another repeated pattern:

ἐκ τῆς Θαμάρ (1 3)  
 ἐκ τῆς Ῥαχάβ (1 5a)  
 ἐκ τῆς Ῥούθ (1 5b)  
 ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Οὐρίου (Bathsheba, 1 6)  
 Μαρίας ἐξ ἧς ἐγεννήθη Ἰησοῦς (1 16)

Why has the narrator included these women? What is the symbolic significance of these obvious breaks in an otherwise male genealogy? Raymond E. Brown summarized the three most common interpretations offered by actual readers over the years in *The Birth of the Messiah*. These are

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*Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1974) and *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978). The implied reader is distinguished from the flesh-and-blood reader past and present because it includes the textual structure which must be realized as well as the structured act of realization. It is the role the real reader must play. It is *not*, however, an exact counterpart to Booth's implied author because the implied reader is not entirely within the text. The aspect of the implied reader contained within the text can be referred to as the inscribed reader. This is the counterpart of Booth's implied author.

<sup>20</sup> This is true whether the superscription is understood as the heading of the entire gospel, the infancy narrative, or merely the genealogy.

<sup>21</sup> There are a few other breaks. The labels "David the King" in 1 6 and "Jesus the one called Christ" in 1 16 and the references to the Babylonian exile in 1 11, 12 highlight the periods of time confirmed as divisions in 1 17. According to R. E. Brown (*The Birth of the Messiah* [Garden City: Image Books, 1979] 71) the addition "and his brothers" in 1 2 and 1 11 may accent points at which God exercised selectivity in carrying forward the messianic line.

(1) "... the four Old Testament women were regarded as sinners and their inclusion for Matthew's readers foreshadowed the role of Jesus as the savior of sinful men."

(2) "... the women were regarded as foreigners and were included by Matthew to show that Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, was related by ancestry to the Gentiles." (This would not apply to Mary.)

(3) The women share two things in common: "(a) there is something extraordinary or irregular in their union with their partners—a union which, though it may have been scandalous to outsiders, continued the blessed lineage of the Messiah; (b) the women showed initiative or played an important role in God's plan and so came to be considered the instrument of God's providence or of His Holy Spirit."<sup>22</sup>

The variety of interpretations indicates the important part the reader plays in creating textual meaning. The first interpretation reads the first four women in terms of the Eve/Mary polarity. Women, sexuality, and sin are linked. The second ignores the fact that the four persons viewed as Gentiles are women and paradoxically thereby—perhaps—characterizes women as foreign. This interpretation, however, is supported by the identification of Bathsheba as the wife of the Gentile Uriah. It also takes into consideration the role of outsiders—the poor, blind, Gentiles, women, etc.—in the gospel. Justification of the mission to the Gentiles is a major theme. The key to the third interpretation is that it asks what Mary and the other four women have in common. This eliminates the first and second interpretations. Mary is neither a sinner nor a Gentile. The third interpretation also points to the unusual circumstance that Jesus has no male progenitor. The irregularities in the ways the first four women produced the male heirs prepares for the irregularity of Jesus' birth. The initiative of the women and the role of the Spirit have the same function. The difference between Mary and the others is also taken into account. The shift of the verbal pattern from "(male) begot child 'out of' (woman's name)" to "Mary, *of whom* was born Jesus" indicates this difference. There is no father. The genealogy raises the question about Jesus' birth and identity. Why does Jesus have no father? How can Jesus be the heir of Abraham and David with no father from whom he can trace his descent? The birth story begins to offer a more complete explanation. Jesus was conceived *ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου* (1:18,20) and becomes Joseph's legal heir when Joseph names him. Jesus is thus both "Son of God" and a Davidid.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, 71-73

In what way does the text deal with female difference? If the third reading is adopted, the patrilineal genealogy and the birth story's concentration on Joseph can be seen in part as attempts to come to terms with female difference. Birth belongs to the female sphere. Not only does Mary give birth to Jesus, she produces him without male assistance. The Holy Spirit employs no male partner. The gospel speaks of Mary as Jesus' mother, but never of Joseph as his father. Although in later passages the gospel views God as Jesus' ultimate Father (Jesus is the Son of God), this does not ameliorate the difficulty of a woman conceiving without a male. The text does not portray God or the Spirit as a male progenitor.<sup>23</sup> The genealogy and Joseph's role in the birth story incorporate Jesus back into the male sphere, the ordinary scheme of things. They place him within an androcentric perspective. From that perspective a genealogy traced through Mary would be of questionable validity. Yet the problem of the "otherness" and divine mystery of Jesus' birth remains. The inclusion of the women in the genealogy foreshadows and explains Mary's role. It provides a means of pointing to and at the same time coming to terms with the female production of the Messiah. God has acted in a radically new way—outside of the patriarchal norm. Although Jesus is Son of David through Joseph, he is Son of God through Mary.<sup>24</sup>

#### *The Faith and Initiative of the Marginal*

There are five major character groups in the gospel of Matthew: the Jewish leaders, the disciples (οἱ μαθηταί), the crowds (οἱ ὄχλοι), the supplicants, and the Gentiles.<sup>25</sup> Each group is primarily characterized in

<sup>23</sup> See H. C. Waetjen, "The Genealogy as the Key to the Gospel According to Matthew," *JBL* 95 (1976) 220–25, esp. 223–24. He argues that in Matthew the Spirit "generates Jesus by a direct act of creation." <sup>224</sup> Waetjen notes that the aorist passive participle γεννηθὲν used as a substantive in 1:20 contrasts with the 39 repetitions of ἐγέννησεν in the genealogy. The phrase ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου does not imply a male impregnator. Investigation of the LXX reveals that ἐκ only indicates a male agency with ἐν γαστρὶ λαμβάνεσθαι/συλλαμβάνεσθαι never with ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχειν as in Matt 1:18b.<sup>23</sup> Γεννᾶν plus ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου is found only in Johannine tradition where it represents divine generation as opposed to human sexual generation. See also Brown, 124–25, 137. He writes "There is never a suggestion in Matthew or in Luke that the Holy Spirit is the male element in a union with Mary, supplying the husband's role in begetting. Not only is the Holy Spirit not male (feminine in Hebrew, neuter in Greek), but also the manner of begetting is implicitly creative rather than sexual," 124.

<sup>24</sup> See Brown's comments on the "who" and "how" of Jesus' identity as Son of David and Son of God, 133–43.

<sup>25</sup> Although various sub-groups of the Jewish leaders are named, there are no sharp distinctions made and all function together as Jesus' opponents. See S. Van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 1–7. For recent articles on the disciples in Matthew see M. Sheridan, "Disciples and Discipleship in Matthew and Luke," *BTB* 3 (1973) 235–55; U. Luz, "Die Jünger im Matthäusevangelium," *ZNW* 62 (1971) 141–71. See also P. S. Minear, "The Disciples and the Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew," *ATRSup*

terms of its relationship to Jesus, the protagonist. Their interactions with Jesus are compared and contrasted. They serve as foils for one another. To the extent that characters change in the course of the narrative they do so primarily in terms of their acceptance and/or understanding of Jesus and his mission. After the exposition, the plot moves forward as Jesus interacts with the various groups and the individuals who make them up. The most obvious conflict is, of course, with the Jewish leaders. Other tensions are apparent as well. Will the disciples come to full understanding and mature faith and thus fulfill their calling? Will the crowds side with Jesus or the Jewish leaders? Will Jesus' mission be extended to Jewish outcasts and Gentiles? The implied author guides the implied reader's response to each group by arranging the episodes to highlight the comparisons and contrasts between them. He or she also guides the implied reader's response by means of Jesus' reactions to each group. As the most central and consistently reliable character, his judgments are virtually equivalent to those of the implied author.<sup>26</sup>

The woman with the hemorrhage (9:20–22) and especially the Canaanite woman (15:21–28) play important roles in the narrative. Both are supplicants and members of marginal groups. The woman with the hemorrhage is ritually unclean.<sup>27</sup> The Canaanite woman is a Gentile. Both, of course, are also women. They appear alone with no indication of an embedded status in a patriarchal family. The way they are introduced emphasizes their double marginality:

καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ αἱμορροῦσα δώδεκα ἔτη (9:20)  
καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ Χανααῖα ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρίων ἐκείνων (15:22)

Both exhibit initiative and faith in their approach to Jesus. Jesus highlights their faith:

Be of good cheer, daughter: Your faith has  
healed (σέσωκέν) you. (9:22a)  
O woman, great is your faith. (15:28b)

3 (1974) 28–44. Minear, however, treats the supplicants and Gentiles as members of the crowds. The view of this article is that Jesus and the Jewish leaders vie for the loyalty of the crowds until the crucial shift to ὁ λαὸς in 27:25. J. D. Kingsbury ("The Title Son of David in Matthew's Gospel," *JBL* 95 [1976] 599–600) differentiates as I do between the crowds and the "no-accounts." Although the supplicants appear as individuals the similarity between them, especially in relationship to Jesus, justifies treating them as a group. The same is true of the Gentiles, although not to the same extent. There is some overlap between the supplicant group and the Gentiles. The Gentiles also can be considered a group because of the important role they play in the development of the theme of the justification of mission to the Gentiles.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the use of "reliable" characters see Booth, *A Rhetoric of Fiction*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Leviticus 15 deals with the status of male and female genital discharges. Lev 15:25–39 seems to apply here.

In both cases the healing takes place "from that hour" (9:22b; 15:28c). Jesus' treatment of both explodes the boundaries of acceptable association. This is also true of other healing episodes with which these two scenes have links. Jesus responds positively to the blind, the lepers, women, etc. Jesus' healing of these outcasts characterizes him as the messianic salvation bringer.<sup>28</sup> The Jewish leaders, crowds, and disciples are characterized in contrast to these figures. Reactions to Jesus' healings are part of the developing plot.

*The Woman with the Hemorrhage.* The woman with the hemorrhage episode occurs early in the gospel. It forms part of the so-called Matthean "Miracle Chapters," 8-9.<sup>29</sup> Scholars often subdivide chapters 8-9 thematically.<sup>30</sup> The healings of 9:18-31—the ruler's daughter (9:18-19, 23-26), the woman with the hemorrhage (9:20-22), and the two blind men (9:27-31)—focus on the faith of the suppliant. These scenes form the immediate context for the hemorrhaging woman episode. It is intercalated into the healing of the ruler's daughter. This intercalation creates a suspenseful interlude between the ruler's request and the healing of his daughter. It also encourages the implied reader to read each story in the light of the other. The socially acceptable ruler<sup>31</sup> publically approaches, does obeisance to Jesus, and makes his request. The ritually unclean woman approaches Jesus from behind, hoping only to touch the fringe of his garment. The intercalation indicates that although not equal in status, they are equal in faith. If anything the intercalation emphasizes the faith of the doubly marginal woman. Her faith, which Jesus commends, also contrasts with the ridicule of the flute-players and the terrified crowd. She is healed (saved, *σέσωκέν, ἐσώθη*, 9:22) while they are cast out (*ἐξεβλήθη*, 9:25).<sup>32</sup>

The healing of two blind men (9:27-31) immediately follows the

<sup>28</sup> According to Kingsbury ("Son of David," esp. 598-99) this is underlined by the use of Son of David in connection with healing. D. Duling ("The Therapeutic Son of David," *NTS* 24 [1978] 392-410) argues that in general Matthew's "Messiah of Deed is primarily a therapeutic Messiah," (399), and that Son of David is used in conjunction with healing. See also Matt 4:23-24; 8:16-17; 9:35; 11:4-6; 15:30-31.

<sup>29</sup> For discussion of the miracle chapters see H. J. Held, "Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 249f.; W. G. Thompson, "Reflections on the Composition of Matthew 8:1-9:34," *CBQ* 33 (1971) 365-88; and J. D. Kingsbury, "The 'Miracle Chapters' of Matthew 8-9," *CBQ* 40 (1978) 559-73.

<sup>30</sup> Held (248-49) offers the following division: 8:2-17, Christology; 8:18-9:17, discipleship; 9:18-31, faith; and 9:32-34, conclusion to the whole composition. C. Burger offers a modification of Held discussed by Kingsbury ("Miracle Chapters," 562): 8:1-17, Christology; 8:18-34, discipleship; 9:1-17, separation of Jesus and his followers from Israel; and faith, 9:18-34.

<sup>31</sup> The word *ἄρχων* (9:18) could designate either a Jew or Gentile, but most commentators argue that the presence of flute players (9:33) indicates a Jewish household.

<sup>32</sup> Thompson, "Reflections," 381-82.

combined ruler's daughter-hemorrhaging woman episodes. This juxtaposition underscores similarities between these scenes. The blind men are outcasts like the woman. They "approach" Jesus as did the ruler and woman. Faith also plays a role in their cure. They are healed by physical contact. The report of their healing goes out as did that of the ruler's daughter "in all that land" (9:26,31). Yet the blind men differ from the ruler and the woman in at least two ways. First, they address Jesus as Son of David and Lord, recognizing him as the messianic healer.<sup>33</sup> Second, they receive and disobey a command to tell no one of their cure. Despite their confession, the blind men's faith contrasts negatively with that of the woman. Jesus says to her, "Your faith has healed (saved, *σέσωκέν*) you" (9:22). To the blind men he says somewhat ambiguously, "According to your faith let it be to you" (9:29b). Their eyes are opened, but are they fully healed?

The stories which precede and follow 9:18-31 also cause the implied reader to compare and contrast the hemorrhaging woman and her fellow supplicants to the Jewish leaders, crowds, and disciples. Opposition between Jesus and the Jewish leaders figures strongly in the three previous scenes. The faith of the supplicants contrasts with the reactions of the Jewish leaders and the crowds in 9:1-8. The Jewish leaders think Jesus blasphemes by forgiving sins (9:3), while the crowds fear and glorify "God who gives such authority to men" (9:8). In the next two episodes the leaders and even the disciples of John the Baptist challenge Jesus' and his disciples' violation of accepted norms. They associate with tax collectors and sinners (9:9-13) and do not fast (9:14-17). This prepares for Jesus' healings of the ritually impure in 9:18-31: a dead girl, a hemorrhaging woman, and two blind men. In fact, the ruler approaches Jesus while he is still speaking of putting new wine into new wine skins (9:18). Instead of challenging Jesus, the supplicants put their faith in Jesus. The final episode in the miracle chapters which immediately follows the healing of the two blind men summarizes the developing reactions of the Jewish leaders and the crowds. Jesus' healing of a dumb demoniac evokes two responses. The crowds marvel, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel" (9:33b). The Pharisees condemn Jesus, "By

<sup>33</sup> The significance of the use of Lord is a matter of dispute. G. Bornkamm ("End-Expectation and Church in Matthew," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963] 41-43) associates the use of *κύριε* with a recognition of divine majesty and discipleship. J. M. Gibbs ("Purpose and Pattern in Matthew's Use of the Title Son of David," *NTS* 10 [1963-64] 450) views the use of Lord by the blind men here and those in 20:29-34 as well as that of the Canaanite woman in this light. Kingsbury (*Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 109-10) sees the use of *κύριε* as subordinate to the title Son of David in the blind men and Canaanite woman stories. The outcasts attribute to Jesus as Son of David a high status and the power to heal.

the ruler of demons, he casts out the demons" (9:34). In comparison to the woman with the hemorrhage and the other supplicants in 9:18-31, the Jewish leaders have no faith. They are Jesus' enemies. The crowds are amazed and perhaps can be led to faith. Indeed, following the transitional summary passage of 9:35, Jesus' compassion on the crowds leads to the missionary discourse of chap. 10. What of the disciples? In chap. 10 Jesus gives them the authority to undertake a preaching and healing mission to Israel, replicating many of his own activities. However, in at least one episode in chapters 8 and 9 their faith is negatively contrasted to that of faithful supplicants like the hemorrhaging woman. In the stilling of the storm (8:23-27) instead of confidently trusting Jesus, they exhibit "little-faith."

The woman with the hemorrhage rendered doubly marginal by her gender and gender-related affliction serves as an outstanding example of faith and initiative. Along with the characterization of Jesus as healer of the most marginal members of society, her faith is the focus of 9:20-22. This faith is contrasted with that of the Jewish leaders, crowds, and disciples in chapters 8 and 9.

*The Canaanite Woman.* The Canaanite woman episode accomplishes many of the same objectives as that of the woman with the hemorrhage. She approaches Jesus as an unembedded female. However, she is a Gentile. Jesus' initial response to her verbally echoes his restriction of the disciples' mission in 10:6: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). Her faith and persistence lead him to expand his mission and heal her daughter. Her confession of Jesus as Lord and Son of David casts the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leaders and crowds in a dark light. Together with direct narratorial comments (4:14-16; 12:18-21) and the Magi (2:1-12) and Roman centurion (8:5-13) episodes, this episode makes a powerful argument justifying the mission to the Gentiles. This is an important theme in the gospel, coming to a climax in the Great Commission. Thus the Canaanite woman scene is more significant for the gospel as a whole than that of the hemorrhaging woman.

The significance of this pericope is reinforced structurally. It is the fulcrum of a chiasmic pattern of nearly identical Matthean doublets:

|    |                                        |
|----|----------------------------------------|
| A  | Two Blind Men (9:27-31)                |
| B  | Sign of Jonah (12:38-42)               |
| C  | Feeding of 5,000 (14:13-21)            |
| D  | Canaanite Woman (15:22-28)             |
| C' | Feeding of 4,000 (15:32-38)            |
| B' | Sign of Jonah (16:1-4)                 |
| A' | Two Blind Men (20:29-34) <sup>34</sup> |

<sup>34</sup> For a more complete discussion of this chiasmic pattern see Janice Capel Anderson "Over and Over and Over Again: Studies in Matthean Repetition" (Ph.D. diss., University

The Canaanite woman is included in this pattern because it forms a triad with the blind men doublets. It follows the same pattern as the other two members: cry for help, (attempt to silence), renewed request—questioning by Jesus, healing on the basis of faith. The supplicants also offer word for word the same request for help:

... cried out saying: "Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David."  
(15:22)

... cried out saying: "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David."  
(20:30)

... crying out and saying: "Have mercy on us, Son of David."  
(9:27) "Yes, Lord." (9:28)

The chiasmic pattern draws sharp comparisons between character groups. The repetition with slight variation of similar episodes also causes the implied reader to read each member of a doublet in light of the other. The faith of the outcast supplicants—the blind men and the Gentile woman—contrasts with the sign seeking of the Jewish leaders who would reject them and with the wavering faith and understanding of the disciples in the feeding stories. The second sign of Jonah episode emphasizes the contrast with the Jewish leaders. There the Jewish leaders try to "tempt" Jesus. If their first request is genuine, their second is not. The second episode also serves as a transition to Jesus' condemnation of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees in 16:5–12. It recalls Jesus' condemnation of their teaching on defilement (15:1–20) which immediately precedes the Canaanite woman scene. The second feeding episode underlines the disciples' failure in understanding. Why do the disciples wonder where the loaves to feed the crowd will come from when they have so recently participated in the first feeding? The motif of bread introduced by the first feeding ties together a number of episodes. Since the feeding of the four thousand immediately follows the Canaanite woman episode, the contrast between the disciples and the woman who is willing to receive "*bread* crumbs" is strong. It is also highlighted by the disciples' subsequent difficulty in understanding Jesus' teaching about the *leaven* of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:5–12). They do not understand until Jesus reminds them of the *loaves* involved in the two feedings.

The faith of the Canaanite woman also contrasts with the faith of her fellow outcasts in the blind men episodes. As noted above, the first pair of blind Jewish men are healed according to their faith (9:29) but immediately disobey Jesus. She calls Jesus Lord three times and worships

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of Chicago, 1983). The expanded doublets 8:23–27 = 14:22–23 and 9:32–34 = 12:22–37 are not included in this pattern since they are not as completely identical. The second member is expanded.

(προσκυνεῖν) him<sup>35</sup> Jesus declares her faith to be great. He heals her daughter "from that hour." In comparison to the second pair, who overcome the objections of the crowds (20:31), she must overcome objections from the disciples (15:23) and Jesus himself (15:24).

What is the significance of gender in the hemorrhaging woman and Canaanite woman scenes? Female gender is paradoxically a strength and weakness. Gender makes these women doubly marginal, heightening their accomplishments. It creates a greater contrast between their model faith and the failings of those more privileged such as the Jewish leaders and disciples. Gender is not a barrier to faith. Indeed, these women unembedded in any patriarchal family structure show great initiative and are rewarded. Yet their roles are limited. The episodes involving these women are isolated and self-contained. The women never reappear in the narrative nor become members of the inner circle of disciples. This is also true of other outcast supplicants.

As noted above, the supplicant episodes characterize Jesus as the messiah who heals the outcast. They illustrate the theme of God's concern for all and provide the occasion to show various reactions to Jesus and his ministry. The supplicants serve as models of faith and foils for other character groups. Nevertheless, they do not have a continuing narrative role in the same way as the Jewish leaders, disciples, or crowds.<sup>36</sup> Although some commentators argue the blind men's and the Canaanite woman's confessions of Jesus as Lord and Son of David,<sup>37</sup> or the blind men's following (ἀκολουθεῖν) in 20:34<sup>38</sup> indicate discipleship, other commentators deny this. The difference in evaluation depends on whether "discipleship" is viewed as membership in the character group "the disciples" or as the proper response to belief in Jesus. If the first definition is adopted, none of these supplicants is a disciple. They are never pictured as

<sup>35</sup> Προσκυνεῖν appears in Matt 2:2,8,11, 8:2, 9:18, 14:33, 15:25, 18:26, 20:20, 28:9,17. BAG lists Matt 2:2,8,11, 8:2, 9:18, 14:33, 15:25, John 9:38, Matt 20:20 as examples of its use where Jesus is "revered and worshipped as Messianic King and Divine Helper." It lists Matt 28:9,17 as examples of worship of the risen Lord. W. G. Thompson (*Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community* [AnBib 44, Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970] 214-15 n. 62) follows J. Horst in distinguishing Matthew's use of προσκυνεῖν in the imperfect as supplication (8:2, 9:18, 15:25, 18:26) and in the aorist as worship/adoration (2:11, 14:33, 28:9,17).

<sup>36</sup> See R. Tannehill's description of the supplicants in Mark ("The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," *Semeia* 16 [1979] 67-68).

<sup>37</sup> See note 33 above.

<sup>38</sup> J. D. Kingsbury ("The Verb *Akolouthem* as an Index of Matthew's View of His Community," *JBL* 97 [1978] 57) lists eight who hold this view, to which add J. M. Gibbs (454-55, 460). If so, then they have gone beyond the first pair who disobey Jesus and perhaps the Canaanite woman who does not "follow" Jesus. However, if the confession Lord and Son of David is taken as an indication of discipleship then a distinction between the woman and the second pair is less likely.

members of "the disciples" as a character group. Although in contrast to Jesus' enemies who call Jesus rabbi or teacher, certain supplicants and disciples call Jesus Lord, the disciples never call Jesus Son of David. In addition to God and the Roman centurion in 27:54, only they call Jesus Son of God. Finally, "following" often refers metaphorically to a disciple or discipleship in Matthew. J. D. Kingsbury, however, argues it does so only when Jesus speaks and not in the narrator's voice<sup>39</sup> as in 9:27 or 20:34. Kingsbury has also argued that two factors are always present when ἀκολουθεῖν is to be understood metaphorically: "personal commitment," where Jesus summons disciples or addresses those who are already disciples; and "cost," where following involves sacrifice or leaving one's former life.<sup>40</sup> With these two factors as criteria, Kingsbury limits himself almost entirely to contexts involving members of the character group.<sup>41</sup> One might add that the supplicants' function as foils would be limited if they became disciples.

The dispute over the "discipleship" of supplicants including women points beyond itself to the reading experience. What role do the supplicants and the disciples play in the rhetoric of the gospel? Does the implied reader identify with both groups, with one, with neither? How do actual readers respond? Do they view any of the character groups as role models? The questions of gender and discipleship and the reading experience emerge also in the next set of passages.

### *The Women at Bethany, the Cross, and the Tomb*

The final set of passages to be examined is associated with the passion and resurrection narratives. The woman at Bethany (26:6-13) and the women at the cross and tomb (27:55-56,61; 28:1-10) serve as foils for the disciples and play important roles the disciples should have played.<sup>42</sup> They also are the means by which the disciples are reunited with Jesus and receive the great Commission. Their gender allows them to take on these functions without supplanting the disciples.

*The Woman at Bethany.* As the passion narrative begins a woman anoints Jesus at Bethany (26:6-13). She is described only as "a woman (γυνή) having an alabaster vial of very expensive ointment" (26:7). She anoints Jesus' body beforehand for burial, possibly with messianic overtones. The disciples protest her action. They do not understand its significance although Jesus has just uttered the final preparatory passion

<sup>39</sup> Kingsbury, "Akolouthein," 58, 61

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 58

<sup>41</sup> With the exception of 8:19 and 19:20-22

<sup>42</sup> Norman Perrin (*The Resurrection According to Matthew, Mark and Luke* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977] 29-31) makes the observation that the women in Mark's passion narrative take the place of the disciples

prediction in 26:2. Judas, "one of the Twelve," leaves the scene to make his bargain with the chief priests. The failure of the disciples, but also their reconciliation with Jesus, is highlighted by Jesus' concluding declaration foreshadowing the Great Commission. The woman is to be memorialized "wherever this gospel is proclaimed in all the world" (26:13)

This unembedded woman succeeds where the disciples fail. Her gender highlights their failure. Her actions honor her and shame them. Nonetheless, the woman's gender and limited role prevent her from becoming a rival despite her "good work" (26:10).

*The Women at the Cross and Tomb.* As the woman at Bethany provides a non-threatening contrast with the disciples so do the women at the cross and tomb. The women at the cross (27:55-56) stand with Jesus in the hour of his passion when the disciples have forsaken him and fled. Two of them, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, watch over his burial (27:61). Later the two Marys are the first to learn of Jesus' resurrection. They receive an angelic commission to tell the disciples of Jesus' resurrection and future appearance in Galilee (28:1-7). As they run to tell the disciples, the resurrected Jesus appears to them and reiterates the angel's commission (28:8-10). These women, not the disciples, are "last at the cross and first at the tomb." They remain faithful to Jesus, and their faith enables the disciples to be reunited with Jesus. Details of the resurrection appearances also underscore a contrast with the disciples. When the women meet Jesus they hold his feet and "worship (προσεκύνησαν)" him (28:9), a favorite Matthean term indicating the proper attitude toward Jesus.<sup>43</sup> When Jesus appears to the eleven, some "worship" Jesus, but some doubt (28:17).<sup>44</sup>

What is the status of these women? Why do they pose no threat to the disciples? The women at the cross are described as women "who followed (ἠκολούθησαν) Jesus from Galilee serving (διακονοῦσαι) him; among whom was Mary the Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee" (27:55-56). Some commentators treat the women as disciples.<sup>45</sup> Four pieces of evidence shape this interpretation. One is the verb "followed," often indicative of discipleship in Matthew. Second is the verb "serving" or "ministering." Third is the phrase "ὃς καὶ αὐτὸς ἐμαθητεύθη τῷ Ἰησοῦ," used to describe Joseph of Arimathea in 27:57. Fourth is the character of the

<sup>43</sup> See note 35 above

<sup>44</sup> Despite the efforts of some commentators to make verse 17 include disciples other than the eleven, verse 16 unambiguously indicates that the characters present are the eleven

<sup>45</sup> For example, Gundry, *Matthew A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 578-79, Schweizer, 517-18, A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1915, reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980) 426

women's actions. Other interpreters do not raise the issue or deny that the women are disciples. Kingsbury argues that *ἠκολούθησαν* does not characterize the women as disciples.<sup>46</sup> As with the two blind men in 20:34 (discussed in the previous section), the word "to follow" appears in the narrator's voice and the criteria of "personal commitment" and "cost" are absent. He adds, "The appended notation that they were 'waiting on him' is not meant to characterize them as disciples of Jesus in the strict sense of the word but instead explains why they had been in his company."<sup>47</sup> An examination of Matthew's use of *διακονέω* (wait on, serve, minister to) supports Kingsbury's contention. In 4:11 the angels minister to Jesus following the temptation. In 8:15 Peter's mother-in-law ministers to Jesus after he enters Peter's house and cures her fever. In 25:44 those on the left in the parable of the sheep and goats say, "Lord, when did we see you hungering or thirsting or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison and did not minister to you?" In 20:25b-28 Jesus responds to the anger of the Ten at the sons of Zebedee:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and great ones have authority over them. It is not so among you; but whoever among you wishes to become great, will be your servant (*διάκονος*), and whoever among you wishes to be first, he shall be your slave; as the Son of Man came not to be served (or ministered to, *διακονηθῆναι*), but to serve (or minister, *διακονῆσαι*) and to give his life as a ransom for many

In the first three cases "ministering" or "serving" connotes caring for primarily physical needs. In the last instance, "service" involves taking on the role of a slave and dying for others. The Twelve never serve in this fashion in the narrative nor are they ever described as "ministering" or "serving." Thus the description of the women at the cross as "ministering to Jesus" seems to indicate that they cared for Jesus' needs on the journey from Galilee. That women would perform these tasks is not unusual given the narrative's social world. The use of *διακονέω* perhaps also characterizes the women as servants, the role that the disciples should have pursued. As with the discussion of whether or not certain supplicants are disciples, the difference between "discipleship" and being a member of the character group "the disciples" influences interpreters' readings.

The same is the case with various interpretations of 27:57. Joseph is described as "a rich man from Arimathea who also was discipled (*ἐμαθητεύθη*) to Jesus."<sup>48</sup> Does *μαθητεύω* indicate that Joseph is one of

<sup>46</sup> "Akolouthein," 61

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>48</sup> *Μαθητεύω* appears two other times in Matthew. In 13:52 Jesus speaks of "every scribe made a disciple (*μαθητευθεὶς*) to the kingdom of heaven." In 28:19 Jesus commands

"the disciples"? Does *ὁ καὶ* indicate that in addition to being a rich man from Arimathea Joseph was discipled to Jesus, or that "he, as well as the women, had become a disciple"?<sup>49</sup> No critical consensus has emerged in answer to these questions.<sup>50</sup> The phrase "who was also discipled to Jesus" may explain why this particular rich man would want to bury Jesus. It also prevents a negative comparison between Jesus and John the Baptist whose disciples retrieve and bury the body of their master in 14:12. Certainly neither the women nor Joseph are members of the Twelve, the disciples who fail and (with the exception of Judas) are reunited with Jesus in the passion and resurrection scenes.

Although the women play an important part in the narrative, gender seems to prevent their identification as disciples. They are an auxiliary group which can conveniently stand in for the disciples. Their presence at the cross is explained in terms of caring for Jesus' needs on the journey to Jerusalem. One of the three women named in 27:56 is identified as the mother of the sons of Zebedee, two of the Twelve. Earlier in the gospel she accompanied Jesus and the Twelve on the way to Jerusalem (20:20). This accords with the description of the women in 27:55-56. She accompanied them but was not privy to the private instruction given the Twelve. She approached Jesus after he took the disciples aside to predict the passion and resurrection in 20:17-19. The only role of this mother was to request places of honor for her sons. Like Peter's mother-in-law, who, like the women at the cross, "ministers" to Jesus, her relationship to Jesus is related to that of her sons.

Perhaps most telling are the references to "the disciples" after the resurrection. These references clearly distinguish the women from the disciples. The angel commands the two Marys to "tell *his disciples*" of Jesus' resurrection and appearance in Galilee (28:7). The narrator describes them running to tell "*his disciples*" (28:8). Jesus commands them to "tell *my brothers* to go to Galilee" (28:10). When they obey, "*the eleven disciples*" go to Galilee, "to the mountain where Jesus appointed them" (28:16). The women are not strangers or outsiders, but neither are they among the inner circle of disciples.

As with the supplicants discussed in the previous section, interpreters' readings of the women as disciples are influenced by whether they define discipleship as membership in the character group or the proper relationship to Jesus. Attitudes toward gender also influence various readings. Although it has been argued here, some interpreters simply

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the eleven to " make disciples (*μαθητεύσατε*) of all the Gentiles "

<sup>49</sup> McNeile, 426

<sup>50</sup> These questions are related to the broader question of whether "the disciples" are limited to the Twelve. See Luz, 141ff, Minear, 27, Sheridan, 235-40, Thompson, *Advice*, 71-72. In these discussions confusion exists between the disciples as a character group and the way in which a reader or listener responds to the gospel.

assume that the women are not "disciples." Other interpreters assume women can be "disciples" or that "discipleship" is not a gender-related category. When an interpreter reads "the disciples" as allegorical representations of church leaders, his or her view of gender requirements for church leaders may also influence interpretation. Patriarchy has sometimes perpetuated itself by insisting female readers are to see themselves only in the women of the gospel.

### *Tensions in Matthew*

The exploration of the symbolic significance of gender has revealed tensions in Matthew. There is a tension between the treatment of female gender as a positive attribute or irrelevant in comparison to other values and its treatment as a mark of subordinate status. Women are not characterized as deficient in faith, understanding, or morality due to gender. In fact, with the exception of Herodias and her daughter in 14:1-12 and Jesus' family in 12:46-50, women are portrayed favorably. The important roles of women and Jesus' response to women supplicants strain the boundaries of the gospel's patriarchal worldview. Yet female gender renders the exemplary behavior of women as more of an achievement and heightens contrasts with male characters. It ensures for women subordinate and auxiliary positions. Mary's extraordinary role is contained by a patrilineal genealogy and birth story. The important roles of the female supplicants and the women at Bethany, cross, and tomb are contained within a model that assumes male gender as a requirement for becoming a disciple.

The exploration of the symbolic significance of gender has also revealed how these tensions in Matthew have evoked various responses in readers. Interpretations are affected not only by the treatment of gender in the gospel, but by the ways interpreters are predisposed to view gender as they approach the text. The presence of the women in the genealogy has led to at least three different readings. Various interpretations of the status of women as "disciples" have emerged.

### Gender and the Implied Reader

Two aspects of the role of the implied reader in Matthew begin to shed light on how actual women readers may respond to that role and how different readings of gender in the text arise. Both involve point of view. One is the effect of the ideological alignment of the points of view of the narrator and Jesus on the implied reader. The other is the frequent alignment of the temporal perspectives of the narrator, Jesus, and the implied reader.

The implied author of the Gospel of Matthew shapes the role of the implied reader in many ways. Among them are direct commentary, the

arrangement of episodes, the use of characters as foils, etc. Examples of these were seen in the exegeses above. Real readers respond to the role of the implied reader as they read. Part of this role is internal to the text and is sometimes called the inscribed or ideal reader. Part is external, the vantage point outside the text from which textual structures are actualized. To oversimplify, the implied reader is a set of instructions for reading the text. That set of instructions, however, includes gaps and areas of ambiguity. Real readers do not create identical readings of a text. The crucial question is often whether a particular reading violates or ignores textual instructions or whether it is a legitimate actualization.

Point of view is one of the most important means of shaping the role of the implied reader and determining actual readers' responses. Point of view involves the perspectives from which a narrative is presented and viewed. Narrator, narratee, and characters have various interrelated points of view. Boris Uspensky has proposed a helpful typology of point of view.<sup>51</sup> It includes four levels or planes: the ideological, "the system of ideas which shape the work";<sup>52</sup> the phraseological, speech characteristics which indicate point of view; the temporal and spatial, position in and view of time and position in space; and the psychological, the subjective perspective inside a mind

#### *Ideological Alignment of Points of View*

In Matthew one of the most significant factors in shaping the implied reader is the alignment of the ideological points of view of the narrator and Jesus. This alignment is supported by the partial alignments of their points of view on the other planes.<sup>53</sup> Among other things Jesus and the narrator share certain speech characteristics such as the use of the phrase "in their synagogues" (4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9, into; 13:54; and 23:34, in your synagogues). For most of the narrative their spatial positions are nearly identical. The narrator follows Jesus in much the same way as a movie camera. The narrator offers frequent sympathetic inside views of Jesus. Like the narrator, Jesus possesses a certain degree of omniscience. From time to time he correctly reads the minds of other characters and predicts the future. The implied author also accomplishes the ideological alignment of Jesus and the narrator by bestowing upon Jesus the "badge of reliability."<sup>54</sup> The heading and genealogy, the birth

<sup>51</sup> *A Poetics of Composition* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973)

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

<sup>53</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the basis of these claims see N. Petersen, "Point of View in Mark's Narrative," *Semeia* 12 (1978) 97-121, and J. Capel Anderson, "Point of View in Matthew: Evidence" (paper delivered at SBL Symposium on the Literary Analysis of the Gospels and Acts, December, 1981)

<sup>54</sup> Booth, *Rhetoric*, 18

story, and the baptism and temptation scenes establish Jesus' identity and reliability before his ministry begins. Since their ideological points of view are aligned, the narrator and Jesus serve as reinforcing vehicles for the implied author's norms and values—the norms and values he or she imposes on the implied reader.<sup>55</sup>

What is the significance of the alignment of the ideological viewpoints of Jesus and the narrator for a female reader? On the one hand responding to them is negative. If the actual reader uncritically adopts the patriarchal worldview represented by the narrator and Jesus, she assumes a worldview which abridges the full humanity of female and male. The reading experience is destructive.

On the other hand the fact that both the narrator and Jesus serve as vehicles for the ideology of the implied author is constructive. The narrator provides the implied reader with knowledge unavailable to characters within the narrative. He or she does this, for example, through the use of direct commentary and the provision of privileged inside views of characters including Jesus. In the case of the genealogy the implied reader has a superior knowledge of Jesus' identity, an identity which includes his being the Son of God through Mary. In addition to standing with the narrator, the implied reader also stands with Jesus as he evaluates characters and events. The implied reader evaluates characters regardless of ordinary status markers. Wealth, occupation, purity, ethnicity, and family ties are less important than the stance characters take in relationship to Jesus. The Jewish leaders, the story world's male establishment, are judged negatively; the male disciples positively and negatively, and so on. While it is true that the disciples become the new establishment with special teaching and governance responsibilities (16:18–19; 18:15–20; 28:19–20), their strengths and weaknesses are revealed. This reinforces anti-hierarchical aspects of Jesus' teachings on discipleship such as 20:25–28 and 23:8–12. Marginal characters including women receive fairly positive evaluations.

In accepting the role of the implied reader, then, an actual female reader is free to judge the ideological stances of the various character groups, male and female. In following the guidance of the narrator and Jesus, the actual reader may also be led to judge some of the patriarchal assumptions implicit in their ideological viewpoints.

Since the norms and values of the implied author are lodged with the narrator and Jesus, the implied reader is also directed to see in various characters traits to be prized or eschewed. No one group embodies the implied author's ideology nor serves as a single role model. This

<sup>55</sup> The narrator is undramatized, reliable, omniscient, and intrusive. He or she, in effect, serves as the implied author's voice. For all practical purposes their ideological viewpoints are identical. The narrator is one device the implied author uses to shape the reader's response.

explains why some actual readers call characters like the Canaanite woman and the women at the cross and tomb disciples. If "discipleship" is defined as the norms and values the implied author wishes the implied reader to adopt rather than as membership in the character group, then various male and female characters embody aspects of discipleship. The superiority of the implied reader to all character groups also gives the lie to any interpretation which insists certain readers must identify with certain character groups. Although actual readers—male or female—may identify with the points of view of various character groups ultimately they must judge all of them. A single reader might see his or her own worldview partially embodied in the Jewish leaders, the crowds, the disciples, or any combination of character groups. If an actual reader assumes the role of the implied reader, he or she will evaluate all ideological points of view from the aligned perspectives of the narrator and Jesus.

#### *Alignment of Temporal Perspectives*

Another important aspect of Matthew's implied reader is the occasional alignment of the temporal position of the implied reader with those of the narrator and characters, especially Jesus.<sup>56</sup> Most of the narrative takes place in the narrator's and reader's past. This is marked by the past tense. However, at important junctures their temporal positions are synchronized with that of Jesus. This is accomplished through the narrator's use of the historical present,<sup>57</sup> extended speeches by Jesus, and the introduction of direct discourse with the present participles of λέγειν.

A typical example of the narrator's use of the historical present is Matt 22 41–46.

When the Pharisees were assembled, Jesus questioned them saying "What does it seem to you concerning the Christ? Whose son is he?" *They say* to him "of David." *He says* to them "How then does David call him lord in the spirit saying 'The Lord said to my lord, Sit on my right until I put thy enemies underneath thy feet?' If then, David calls him lord, how is he his son?" And no one was able to answer him a word nor dared anyone from that day to question him any more.

<sup>56</sup> For a more detailed examination see Capel Anderson, "Point of View," 10–14.

<sup>57</sup> J. C. Hawkins (*Horae Synopticae* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1909, 2d ed., reprinted 1968] 148–49) offers a list of Matthew's historical presents. To which add by narrator 2 22 βασιλεύει, 21 45 and 26 25b, λέγει, and by Jesus 11 17, 18, 19, 12 44, 45 (4 times) and 26 18. The function of the historical present is discussed by BDF §321, Uspensky, 71, A. A. Mendilow, *Time and the Novel* (New York: Humanities Press, 1965) 98, and in regard to Matthew, Thompson, *Advice*, 219.

The introduction and conclusion in the past tense frame the central conversation. The characters, the narrator, and the implied reader are contemporaneous during that exchange. This means that the characters' words are addressed to the implied reader as well as each other. This example is typical because the narrator overwhelmingly uses the historical present in conjunction with Jesus' speech.<sup>58</sup>

Obvious examples of extended direct discourse are Jesus' five major discourses. Dialogue produces "the illusion of immediacy and presentness in the reader."<sup>59</sup> The length of Jesus' uninterrupted discourses enhances this effect greatly. It is as if Jesus speaks in the implied reader's present. The discourses, then, become addresses to the implied reader as well as the audiences designated in the narrative.

Three of the five major discourses as well as the woe discourse of chap. 23 are introduced with a present participle of "to say" (5:2; 10:5; 13:3; 23:1-2). This is true of shorter sections of direct discourse as well such as Jesus' speech in 22:41-42 above. This device reinforces the temporal alignment of narrator, characters, and implied reader. The action denoted by the present participle, speech, occurs at the same time as the action denoted by the main verb. Thus the main verb freezes the moment of action and the participle indicates what was said at that moment as if it were being spoken in the present. Thus λέγων is often translated as "saying" even though the main verb is an aorist.

The importance of the frequent synchronization of the temporal perspectives of narrator, implied reader, and characters associated with Jesus' speech is that Jesus' speeches are addressed to the implied reader as well as characters. Through the medium of Jesus the implied author presents his or her ideology in the moment of reading. Actual male or female readers "hear" the Sermon on the Mount with its two level narrative audience of crowds and disciples as well as privileged instructions such as the Missionary Discourse or the Great Commission. Although no women are portrayed as disciples, women readers are addressed as "disciples." Even though Jesus' speeches are colored by androcentrism, actual women readers have read "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (5:9) inclusively and have responded to the Great Commission. Such readings could be destructive if women thus adopt an anti-female perspective and deny their own. However, since the androcentrism of Jesus' speeches consists for the most part in using non-inclusive language and he often attacks oppressive norms, this is not necessarily the case. The speeches often reflect tension

<sup>58</sup> Of the narrator's 80 uses of the historical present λέγει occurs 46 times (with Jesus as subject 43 times); λέγουσιν, 14 times (13 times when the subjects are speaking to Jesus); and φησίν, once.

<sup>59</sup> Mendilow, 112.

between patriarchal and non-patriarchal values.

The reception by the implied reader of speeches addressed to the disciples also challenges certain interpretations of the gospel. Some interpreters limit the ultimate addressees of such discourses to male church leaders or members—either in Matthew's community or in any age. In addition to committing the referential fallacy<sup>60</sup> by positing a *direct* correlation between the disciples and persons in the real world, they ignore the fact that a variety of actual readers may assume the role of implied reader.

### Conclusion

This article has tentatively explored the symbolic significance of gender and the reading process in Matthew from a feminist perspective. More questions are raised than answered. It can only be hoped that readers will be stimulated to offer criticism and proposals of their own.

### APPENDIX

#### Verses Concerning Women in Matthew (There is some overlap between categories.)

##### *Women Characters*

Mary, Jesus' mother—birth narrative 1:18–2:23, see especially 1:18–25;  
2:13; 2:19–21

mother and brothers—12:46–50

Mary, brothers and sisters—13:53–58

Peter's mother-in-law—8:14–17

Ruler's daughter—9:18–19, 23–26

Woman with hemorrhage—9:20–22

Herodias and daughter—14:1–12

4,000 (5,000) men besides women and children—14:21; 15:38

Canaanite woman—15:21–28

Mother of the sons of Zebedee—20:20; 27:56

Woman at Bethany—26:6–13

Pilate's wife—27:19

Maid who confronts Peter—26:69

Women at the cross and tomb—27:55–56, 61; 28:1–10 including Mary  
the mother of James and Joseph, Mary Magdalene and the mother of  
the sons of Zebedee

<sup>60</sup> N. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 40.

*Women in Jesus' Teaching*

Lust—5:27-30  
Divorce and Marriage—5:31-32; 19:1-12  
Enmity in families—10:21,35-39; 19:29  
Children in Marketplace—11:16-17  
Wisdom—11:19  
Queen of the South—12:42  
True family—12:46-50  
Woman and leaven—13:33  
Honoring father and mother—15:1-9; 19:19  
“with his wife and children”—18:25  
Tax collectors and harlots—21:31,32  
Controversy with Sadducees involving Levirate marriage—22:23-33  
Jerusalem, hen, brood—23:37-39  
Birth pangs of new age—24:8  
Those who give suck and are with child—24:19  
Two women grinding—24:41  
Wise and foolish maidens—25:1-13

*Female Imagery*

Woman (Rachel) represents Israel—2:18  
Woman with leaven represents God—13:33  
Daughter of Zion—21:5  
Jerusalem as mother—23:37  
Birth pangs of new age—24:8

*Women in Direct Narratorial Comments*

Genealogy—1:1-17  
Israel as Rachel—2:18  
Besides women and children—14:21; 15:38  
Pilate's wife—27:19