

Stephen D. Moore's Poststructuralist Criticism of Mark and Luke: An Exegetical Retrospective

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Abstract

Stephen D. Moore's 1992 monograph *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* continues to pack a provocative literary punch over three decades after its initial publication. However, despite its frequent acclaim for being a methodological innovation, detailed interaction with its numerous interpretive proposals has been scarce, and thus this kind of analysis remains an important but underexplored area of the history of biblical interpretation. It is the intention of this study to offer such an exposition and appraisal. Accordingly, this essay proceeds by briefly describing the intellectual context of Moore's poststructuralist biblical criticism, documenting the superficial nature of much interaction with this monograph, and offering an overview and critical discussion of five major interpretive topics found throughout *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*. Specifically, this study does not focus on engagement with the philosophical foundations of poststructuralism itself but rather performs careful analysis of the textual observations found in Moore's *Mark and Luke* to inquire whether these results offer anything that might unsettle more conventional reading strategies. Moore often uses the biblical text to develop applications for questions of textual meaning itself, reflecting the larger poststructuralist worldview regarding the elusiveness of textual meaning. Since these implications are themselves part of his "interpretation," I interact with these by drawing from recent developments in theoretical linguistics, specifically regarding mechanisms for using texts to reconstruct their social contexts, principles of lexical semantics, the nature of and criteria for discerning literary genres, and definitions of authorial intention.

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Introduction

Stephen D. Moore's 1992 monograph *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* continues to pack a provocative literary punch over three decades after its initial publication.² However, despite its frequent acclaim for being a methodological innovation (as documented below), detailed interaction with its numerous interpretive proposals has been scarce, and thus this kind of analysis remains an important but underexplored area of the history of biblical interpretation.³ It is the intention of this study to offer such an exposition and appraisal. Accordingly, this essay proceeds by briefly describing the intellectual context of Moore's poststructuralist biblical criticism, documenting the superficial nature of much interaction with this monograph, and offering an overview and critical discussion of five major interpretive topics found throughout *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*.

Intellectual Context and Rationale

Any discussion of poststructuralism necessarily requires some introduction to its predecessor movement, structuralism. Structuralism is notoriously difficult to define.⁴ This is, in part, because structuralism manifested itself in diverse ways in different fields.⁵ Structuralism can be summarized at the most abstract level by noting that it views meaning as being primarily dependent on the “‘deep structure’ (foundational truths that span culture, time, and language).”⁶ This “‘deep structure’” itself possesses far more agency or significance than the conventional channels of authorial intent or sentence grammar, and, indeed, these latter phenomena are viewed as a mere means of working backwards to discern these underlying structures rather than being of central importance, as in traditional approaches.⁷

Poststructuralism is an umbrella term for certain theoretical approaches that

2 Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). This is evident in the numerous instances of risqué innuendo throughout, as exemplified in its closing sentences on pp. 157–58. John Drury, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *JTS* 44 (1993): 313–14 (314), refers to this tendency of Moore's, stating “he ... shocks the bourgeoisie with hit-and-miss scatological references.” Similarly, Robert M. Fowler, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *CBQ* 55 (1993): 812–14 (812), opens with “It is hard to imagine a lukewarm response to this book. It is a tour de force, demanding passionate response, whether that be hot or cold.” For further documentation, see the “Reception” section below.

3 See the “Reception” section below for documentation of this state of affairs.

4 J. T. Robertson, “Structuralism,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (London: Routledge, 2007), 345–46 (345) states, “there are no universally accepted definitions for structuralism.”

5 Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 195–96, gives separate examples from the fields of linguistics, social anthropology, and psychology. A similarly diverse lineage is traced in Stanley E. Porter and Jason C. Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 155–67.

6 Robertson, “Structuralism,” 345.

7 Robertson, “Structuralism,” 345.

reject these universally valid abstract frameworks.⁸ Runions identifies three key streams of poststructuralism: (1) “The endless play of texts,” (2) “Analytics of power,” and (3) “Ethics and the face of the Other.”⁹ The first of these elements is encapsulated in what is known as deconstructionism.¹⁰ Deconstructionism was popularized by Jacques Derrida, who “argues that difference and deferral in meaning infects and prevents any possible claim to presence or original meaning.”¹¹ In practice, this opened up a wide range of possibilities for reading against the grain of a text, ranging from analyses of deliberate conceptual tension¹² to attempts to eliminate any stable or coherent meaning.¹³ Unsurprisingly, due to deconstructionism’s inherently skeptical stance towards questions of meaning, truth, or metaphysics, much (although not all) evangelical Christian thought is antagonistic towards it.¹⁴

- 8 Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 196–97. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 201 states “It became clear ... that the so-called structures were just as arbitrary as other aspects of language.” For further background on structuralism, see Robertson, “Structuralism,” 345–46; Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 195–201; Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 154–67.
- 9 Erin Runions, “Poststructuralism, Deconstruction,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (London: Routledge, 2007), 287–89.
- 10 Thus, in literary circles, the terms “poststructuralism” and “deconstructionism” are often used interchangeably, although the latter is technically a subset of the former. Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 119.
- 11 Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 199. Robertson, “Structuralism,” 74, succinctly summarizes this platform: “Deconstruction ... critically undermines conventional notions of truth, reality, and knowledge ... there is no transcendentally signified ... truth or grounding.... There is only a ‘play’ that connects signs to other signs.... Texts have no decidable meaning but are full of internal tensions and contradictions that make their truth claims ... no more than the reflections of the free play of language—an infinite play of signs.” For discussion of the implications of poststructuralism for human subjectivity, see David J. Fuller, “Roland Barthes: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, and the Pleasure of the Writing Subject,” in *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 3: Further Essays on Prevailing Methods*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Zachary K. Dawson, McMaster Biblical Studies Series 6 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), 409–43 (423).
- 12 One of the canonical works of literary poststructuralism is Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974). For discussion, see Fuller, “Roland Barthes,” 423–27. For application to biblical studies, see Edward L. Greenstein, “An Equivocal Reading of the Sale of Joseph,” in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives. Volume 2*, ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992), 114–25.
- 13 Robert Dale Parker, *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 101, states, “if everything is about the free play of language, the free play of signifiers, the dissemination of meaning, and so on, then all texts are alike. It seemed that every high deconstructionist interpretation reached the same conclusion about every text, and experienced readers could predict the ending of a high deconstructionist interpretation while they were still reading the beginning or before they started to read it at all.”
- 14 A representative dialogue regarding different Christian perspectives on deconstructionism is found in the interaction between Patricia A. Ward, “Worldly Readers and Writerly Texts,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 17 (1988): 425–35, and David Lyle Jeffrey, “Caveat lector: Structuralism, Deconstructionism, and Ideology,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 17 (1988): 436–48. See especially the nine theses in Ward, “Worldly Readers,” 434–35 regarding what evangelicals should learn from poststructuralism. For discussion of possible weaknesses in the typically negative reactions to deconstructionism, see Alan Jacobs, “The Values of Literary Study: Deconstruction and Other Developments,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 16 (1987): 373–83. See also James K. A. Smith, *Jacques Derrida: Live Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

Stephen D. Moore's first monograph, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge*, came out in 1989 and sought to survey both narrative and reader-response approaches while also pushing beyond them towards deconstructionism.¹⁵ His deconstructionist period is encapsulated in 1992's *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* (the focus of the present study)¹⁶ and 1994's *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross*.¹⁷ Moore's subsequent work moved away from deconstructionism and towards ideological and cultural studies.¹⁸

Although the purpose of the present study is to focus on tangible interpretive results more than underlying theory, it is worth noting one of the major methodological points in *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (hereafter *MLPP*). Moore follows Derrida by emphasizing the agency of language itself over and above the conscious intentions of human authors.¹⁹ Furthermore, Moore merges this with a Freudian sensibility for the deep well of "unconscious" meanings latent in the multiple senses of isolated words.²⁰ Arguing that the subcon-

15 Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 287–91. For biographical background on Moore, see Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 286–87; Roger Allonby Latham, "Talking with Strangers: Towards a Christian, Postmodern, Academic Model for Biblical Interpretation" (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2006), 75–76, 87–90. For context on the major streams of postmodern biblical criticism more broadly through the mid-1990s, see Bible and Culture Collective, *Postmodern Bible*, 13.

16 Moore, *Mark*.

17 Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). This monograph was much more broadly accessible than the earlier *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* and accordingly received much published interaction. It is widely known for containing Moore's deconstructive reading of the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4. For discussion, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 91; Latham, "Talking," 84–86; Andrew P. Wilson, *Transfigured: A Derridean Rereading of the Markan Transfiguration*, LNTS 319 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 36–38; David I. Yoon, "Literary Criticism and New Testament Interpretation: A Critique of Formalism, Structuralism, Reader-Response Criticism, and Deconstructionism" (ThM thesis, The Master's Seminary, 2010), 106–112.

D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 134, memorably states "When a scholar as brilliant as Stephen D. Moore offers us a post-structuralist exegesis of John 4 that is full of the kind of word-association games that are trained out of the work of first-year exegesis students, we are right to infer that something is amiss with the theory."

18 Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 287; Latham, "Talking," 76–81, 84, 86.

19 Moore, *Mark*, 61–62.

20 Some definitions of Freudian terms are necessary here. Nandor Fodor and Frank Gaynor, eds., *Freud: Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), cite Freud defining the "unconscious" areas of the self as that which "the individual knows nothing of their contents and that it requires an expenditure of effort to make him conscious of them" (194). Freud's tripartite constitution of the self consists of the id, ego, and superego. The id is purely unconscious and "contains everything that is inherited" (90). The ego processes experience and governs the desires of the id (62). Finally, the superego represents the pressure to repress the ego that is inherited through life experiences (179–80).

scious operates through making puns,²¹ Moore asserts that such juxtapositions of different meanings have an ontological significance far removed from light-hearted wordplay, as “Puns babel ... [of] an ecstasy of meaning so immense that one could forever lose one’s self in it,”²² and hence, efforts to discern unitary meaning are driven more by fear of this chaotic depth than anything rational.²³ For Moore, writing that drives home a single clear “point” is a mere accessory to the patriarchal regime, while “unweaned” writing instead revels in this abyss of unconstrained signification.²⁴ Moore points to Derrida’s metaphor of “dredging” with a crane to describe this kind of writing, in which one plunges a bucket to the bottom of a lake of infinite meanings, only to watch as this body of aqueous connotations “re-forms herself.”²⁵

Moore approvingly notes this leads to Derrida’s practice of “exploiting chance associations between words across several languages,”²⁶ and other similar moves. This means that Derrida’s overall approach was a kind of “textual congress with the *letter* of the text being read ... as opposed to the ideality of its content.”²⁷ Thus, Derrida’s exploratory works (such as *Glas*) that play on the meanings a given lexeme may have in different languages are anything but idle paronomasia—they are “miming the movements of the unconscious.”²⁸ If this intense exploitation of homonyms is no less than a full-fledged “epistemology,”²⁹ then it follows that one can pursue “an academic writing no longer fixated on the voice ... that picks its steps through horizontal, single-tiered, associated, open-ended word clusters.”³⁰

Since the literature assessing deconstructionism based on its *philosophical*

21 Moore, *Mark*, 64.

22 Moore, *Mark*, 65. The punning in the quotation above is original and part of Moore’s writing style. For more information on puns as they pertain to the Bible (specifically) see Russell Jay Hendel, “Biblical Puns,” *JBQ* 34 (2006): 190–97.

23 Moore, *Mark*, 65.

24 Moore, *Mark*, 65.

25 Moore, *Mark*, 66, citing Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 204b–205b.

26 Moore, *Mark*, 66.

27 Moore, *Mark*, 66.

28 Moore, *Mark*, 66.

29 Moore, *Mark*, 67, citing Gregory Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), xii.

30 Moore, *Mark*, 68. Some of the critics cited in the “Reception” section below seem to have missed this point, complaining about the abundance of wordplay without recognizing the psychoanalytic rationale underlying it. Since I mentioned above that Moore had largely abandoned deconstructionism by the mid-1990s, it is worth noting two more recent essays discussing his later views on the nature of textuality and textual meaning (or lack thereof): Stephen D. Moore, *The Bible After Deleuze: Affects, Assemblages, Bodies Without Organs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 58–110; Stephen D. Moore, “A Bible That Expresses Everything While Communicating Nothing: Deleuze and Guattari’s Cure for Interpretosis,” in *Biblical Exegesis Without Authorial Intention?: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Authorship and Meaning*, ed. Clarissa Breu, *BibInt* 172 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 108–125.

merits is already vast and deep, there is no need to duplicate that effort here.³¹ What is worthwhile, though, is a careful analysis of the textual observations arising out of the vantage point briefly sketched above, to inquire whether these results offer anything that might unsettle more conventional reading strategies.³² This admittedly does involve passing over vast swaths of *MLPP*, such as its extended reflection on how the “Son” is like a “Sponge,”³³ or how the Gospel of Mark itself is like the “mark” of an “X.”³⁴ Whatever merit these discourses might have as exercises in creative writing, they simply are too dissimilar to traditional exegesis to warrant comparison.³⁵ Nonetheless, *MLPP* still offers testable assertions meant to expose shortcomings in previous New Testament scholarship, and, as documented in the “Reception” section below, these have yet to be catalogued and given detailed consideration. This study thus seeks to work carefully through Moore’s claims in the instances where they do overlap with the questions being asked by conventional scholarship.³⁶ Carrying this out often requires both syn-

31 See, for example, Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 331–36; Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 209–211; Vanhoozer, *Meaning*, 98–140; Robert Wicks, *Modern French Philosophy: From Existentialism to Postmodernism* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2003), 204–216.

32 This is the reason for the use of the word “Exegetical” rather than “Hermeneutical” in the title of this article.

33 Moore, *Mark*, 48–54.

34 Moore, *Mark*, 54–60.

35 For the purpose of establishing a reference point, the present study uses conventional historical criticism as a “home base” with which to compare the findings of Moore, *Mark*. Craig L. Blomberg, “The Historical-Critical/Grammatical View,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 27–47 (28, 41) argues that historical-grammatical criticism should be viewed as the foundation of all other legitimate interpretive practices, and in doing so, he represents what is likely the consensus viewpoint. However, it should be noted that this stance can be challenged on both metaphysical and historical grounds. See, for example, Hans Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018); Yael Almog, *Secularism and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

36 This, of course, raises the question of how *MLPP* would compare with *unconventional* readings such as those of other poststructuralists. As documented in the “Reception” section below, some poststructuralists fault Moore for producing results that too closely resemble the conventional task of exegesis (see the second category), while others chide him for writing in an anti-propositional vein that virtually defies outside critique (see the fourth category). As noted above in the discussion of the history of Moore’s work, by the mid-1990s, he had moved away from the deconstructive focus of *MLPP* into more explicitly ideological territory, a trend reflected in the literary guild as a whole, resulting in a situation where later poststructuralists would have little to say about a work such as *MLPP*. Michal Beth Dinkler, *Literary Theory and the New Testament*, Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 106, notes that current iterations of poststructuralist theory are generally not only ideological in nature (as opposed to promoting the referential instability of texts) but usually are steeped in the confluence of multiple ideological perspectives. She states, “today’s literary theorists are conversant with and draw on a range of poststructuralist discourses to explore how any number of variables—sexual, social, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, national, physical, and others—intersect and together constitute diverse ways of being and forms of meaning-making.” This trend is immediately visible in the topics of the essays comprising Moore’s own *festschrift* (K. Jason Coker and Scott S. Elliott, eds., *Bible and Theory: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Stephen D. Moore* [Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020]). An example of an exception to this trend could be a monograph

thesizing treatments of topics throughout *MLPP*, since its organization is hardly systematic, and regularly stepping outside of Gospel scholarship into general hermeneutical questions, since Moore's poststructuralist framework often leads him towards drawing conclusions about the nature of meaning and the interpretive task as a whole.³⁷

In short, the present study is an attempt to test Lindsay's assertion that *MLPP* uncovers "original insights into the text that should fascinate any traditionalist,"³⁸ while consciously transgressing Adam's warning that "a summary would leave out precisely that which is characteristic and remarkable in this performance."³⁹

Reception

Some documentation of general trends in the citations and discussion of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* is necessary to justify the relevance of the present study.

Within academic journal reviews of *MLPP* shortly after its release, there was both support and criticism. To first engage positive responses, Fowler praised Moore's documentation of the role of sensory perception in Luke, his application of Foucauldian theory to the "narrative ... omniscience"⁴⁰ in Luke-Acts, and his diagnosis of biblical scholarship's obsession with consuming the entire meaning of texts as being ultimately rooted in capitalism. He states, "Leaving no morsel undigested in the body of the biblical corpus, biblical criticism acts out a fantasy of the totality and unity of the biblical authors' intended meanings."⁴¹ However, he did wish that Moore had more fully developed the concept of "local theology" that he mentioned in passing.⁴²

written by one of Moore's doctoral students (although note the use of the word "after" in the title), Scott S. Elliott, *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus: Narrative Criticism after Poststructuralism*, Bible in the Modern World, 41 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011). Richard Walsh, review of *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus*, by Scott S. Elliott, *BCT* 8.2 (2012): 72–74, notes that Elliott tends to view the reader's situatedness as ultimately determinative for meaning, but still sees the final referent of the text as pointing towards the agency of discourse itself, a move not dissimilar to those made in *MLPP*, but done in a way less hostile to the task of theology itself.

37 As seen in the "Analysis" section below, Moore often uses the biblical text to develop applications for questions of textual meaning itself. Since these implications are themselves part of his "interpretation," I interact with these by drawing from recent developments in theoretical linguistics, even though the focus of this essay is more practical than methodological. In other words, Moore's ultimate application is aimed towards the larger poststructuralist worldview regarding the elusiveness of textual meaning. As a result, my engagement is not with the philosophical foundations of poststructuralism itself but rather with the points about interpretation and meaning that proceed from his allegorical connections made with the biblical text.

38 Alan G. Lindsay, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *Religion & Literature* 25 (1993): 93–94 (94).

39 A. K. M. Adam, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *ATR* 75 (1993): 261.

40 Fowler, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 813.

41 Fowler, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 814.

42 Fowler, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 813–14.

Lindsay found *MLPP* worthwhile because of the novel readings of the text it generated.⁴³ Mottram evaluated *MLPP* highly, simply due to its playful, exuberant spirit.⁴⁴ Staley deemed *MLPP* useful for raising important questions about language, the ultimate referent of theology, the nature of reality, and authorial intent.⁴⁵ At the same time, he was concerned about the absence of non-Western scholarship and the lack of clarity regarding what kind of community would be served by such work.⁴⁶ Templeton applied the descriptors “useful and pleasant”⁴⁷ on account of the appropriateness of creating literature as a means of evaluating other literature, and for the power of such a style to evoke “transcendence.”⁴⁸ Upton lauded *MLPP* for being “invigorating and entertaining”⁴⁹ and only pauses to question who will read the book and whether it will have its intended impact on the scholarly guild as a whole.⁵⁰

Others were not as enthusiastic. Kingsbury was dubious of its viability simply due to its dependence on a philosophical framework that few would find viable.⁵¹ Vickery faulted Moore for slavishly forcing the conclusions of select postmodern thinkers onto the biblical text to the point where the latter virtually vanishes, and for failing to account for the strident historical claims, particularly those about miracles, made by the texts themselves.⁵²

Drury criticized the apparent anachronism of using postmodern theory to interrogate a premodern text without devoting equal attention to the historical setting of the latter.⁵³ Drury also derided Moore for wholeheartedly embracing his postmodern sources without considering any of their shortcomings, labeling Moore a “propagandist and sprightly performer.”⁵⁴

By far the most notable voice critical of Moore is Adam, as the latter himself

43 Lindsay, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 94.

44 Gillian Mottram, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *Faith and Freedom* 45 (1992): 138–40 (139).

45 Jeffrey L. Staley, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *JBL* 114 (1995): 152–54 (153–54).

46 Staley, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 154.

47 Douglas Templeton, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *Literature and Theology* 8 (1994): 218.

48 Templeton, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 218.

49 Bridget Upton, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *Theology* 96 (1993): 72–74.

50 Upton, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 73–74. Specifically, she states, “Is it, in the end, a form of gnosis, highly seductive for those with the energy and willingness to be seduced, but somehow outside the arena of most main-line biblical studies? I hope not—developing a dialogue would be well worth the effort.”

51 Jack Dean Kingsbury, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *Int* 48 (1994): 92–93.

52 John B. Vickery, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *Christianity and Literature* 42 (1993): 344–46 (346).

53 Drury, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 313–14.

54 Drury, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 314.

produced a number of publications contributing to the field of postmodern biblical criticism.⁵⁵ Despite their shared engagement in this idiom, Adam ultimately decides *MLPP* is “more ingenious than convincing.”⁵⁶ He further expresses concern that “Moore’s unequalled wordplay and his vast erudition sometimes become the center of attention, so that Mark and Luke are engaged principally as foils for Moore’s exhilarating wit.”⁵⁷

Above and beyond book reviews proper, some general trends can be charted in other sources that interact with Moore. The first such trend is that *MLPP* is considered a landmark work, innovative for introducing literary deconstruction in New Testament studies. Adam calls it “extraordinary”⁵⁸ and a “key reference point,”⁵⁹ in stark contrast to his review summarized in the paragraph above. Similarly, Aune’s history of literary criticism applied to the New Testament credits *MLPP* as being a pioneering work.⁶⁰

The second category contains sources that interact with certain details in *MLPP* while appraising it positively. Wilson’s extended discussion of *MLPP* gives it high praise for putting into practice the assumptions about language introduced by Derrida,⁶¹ only faulting it for retaining the traditional academic conventions of proposing defined interpretations.⁶² In a more constructive vein, Troost uses Moore’s overall approach to Luke as the foundation for his monograph on gender in Luke 1–2, particularly Moore’s metaphors of Luke as a painter and as being an “obese androgyn.”⁶³

A third category exists for works that cite *MLPP* in passing to indicate points of dissent. Clivaz critiques Moore’s proposal of an omniscient narrator in Luke by instead positing the diversity inherent in the multiple witnesses drawn upon by the author.⁶⁴ Similarly, Hatton deviates from Moore’s reading of the naked young man in Mark as an analogy to the vanishing author by seeing an intentional

55 A. K. M. Adam, *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); A. K. M. Adam, ed., *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000).

56 Adam, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 261.

57 Adam, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 261.

58 Adam, *What Is Postmodern*, 68.

59 Adam, *What Is Postmodern*, 70.

60 David E. Aune, “Literary Criticism,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 116–39 (117).

61 Andrew P. Wilson, *Critical Entanglements: Postmodern Theory and Biblical Studies*, Brill Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 24–28.

62 Wilson, *Critical Entanglements*, 27. He also admits that Moore had few disciples in this idiom due to the difficulty of matching his inventive use of language.

63 Ari Troost, *Exegetical Bodybuilding: Gender and Interpretation in Luke 1–2* (Gieten, Netherlands: Drukkerij Zwinderman, n.d.), 69–80 (69). This monograph was based on his dissertation completed at Utrecht University.

64 Clair Clivaz, “‘Asleep by Grief’ (Lk 22:45): Reading from the Body at the Crossroads of Narratology and New Historicism,” *The Bible and Critical Theory* 2.3 (2006): 9, 11–12.

parallel with the seizing of Jesus,⁶⁵ the application being that the clothing left behind is comparable to “the Gospel of Mark textually reifying Jesus.”⁶⁶

The fourth category is sources that evaluate *MLPP* negatively. Pearson dismisses Moore’s poststructuralism as being a self-indulgent diversion, block-quoting extended excerpts from Moore’s punning on how Mark is like the letter “X” and concluding that it is “counterproductive” and unlikely to create “anything of lasting value.”⁶⁷ Pearson later evaluates *MLPP* as providing “a good example of why deconstruction should be avoided as a critical method.”⁶⁸ More abstractly, Selby faults Moore for being unable to apply the critical gaze of deconstruction to his own work, for being inconsistent in treating Derrida authoritatively while being dismissive of the claims of Mark, and for being anachronistic in applying English wordplay to a Greek text.⁶⁹

Wilson’s engagement is particularly remarkable. Although he is a proponent of deconstruction himself, he faults Moore’s work for being an overly autobiographical form of play that has little to offer the broader academic community,⁷⁰ stating “at times it takes on a certain opacity and threatens to be reduced to a series of virtuosic displays of wit and creative imagining.”⁷¹ Blomberg briefly points to Moore’s wordplay on the names of Mark and Luke along with his comparison between these Gospels and the acts of “marking” and “looking,” concluding that this approach is “unstable” and clashes with the idea that even deconstructionist authors want their readers to understand them.⁷² Finally, Donahue finds *MLPP* deficient in that it lacks “respectful and powerful engagements with religious texts”⁷³ when compared with works such as Derrida’s *The Gift of Death* (1995). The notable commonality of all these critiques is that they only engage selectively with aspects of Moore’s work, and they often do not consider the theoretical foundation that drives the moves he makes.

The fifth category, and by far the most vastly populated, is works that simply make passing reference to Moore for specific exegetical points. Two examples of themes in *MLPP* that are repeatedly pointed to (if not engaged in any depth)

65 Stephen B. Hatton, “Dialectic of Seizing and Leaving Behind: Mark’s Young Man in Gethsemane,” *BibInt* 26 (2018): 207–218 (212–13).

66 Hatton, “Dialectic,” 218.

67 Brook W. R. Pearson, “New Testament Literary Criticism,” in *A Handbook to the Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 241–66 (247).

68 Pearson, “New Testament,” 266.

69 Rosalind M. Selby, *The Comical Doctrine: An Epistemology of New Testament Hermeneutics* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 133–35.

70 Wilson, *Transfigured*, 36.

71 Wilson, *Transfigured*, 50.

72 Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2022), 170. Similarly, see William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 133.

73 John R. Donahue, “The Literary Turn and New Testament Theology: Detour or New Direction?” *JR* 76 (1996): 250–75 (261).

are Moore's treatment of the distinction between insiders and outsiders in Mark⁷⁴ and his general interest in the themes of sight and other sensory organs in Luke.⁷⁵

While *MLPP* has been evaluated both positively and negatively, the conclusion emerging from the above survey of its reception is that very few sources devote significant space to considering its direct observations on the biblical text. To summarize, some scholars reject *MLPP* for its "laborious inventiveness"⁷⁶ or for its underlying views of language, but there is a notable dearth of sources that comprehensively mine what it might have to offer by way of challenging conventional interpretations.

Analysis

The Messianic Secret and the Indeterminacy of Meaning: Overview

Much of the content of the first two chapters of *MLPP* is devoted to an extended reflection on the theme of miscommunication in Mark, as exhibited by the disciples' frequent failure to grasp the point of Jesus's teachings or his identity. This perennial failure of Jesus's message to hit home is then used by Moore as an allegory of the inevitability of written language drifting from its original intention.⁷⁷ This section will first review Moore's key textual observations, followed by some snapshots of his application of these phenomena to the domain of language and meaning.

Moore documents the numerous places in the Gospel where the disciples misunderstand Jesus and fail to follow his example, ironically noting that while the disciples are repeatedly contrasted with the "outsiders" throughout the book, they nonetheless often display of level of insight more suited to "outsiders" than "insiders." He states, "the only thing that distinguishes disciples from outsiders is that disciples long to be inside, to *be* the insiders they are said to be."⁷⁸ This ineffectiveness of Jesus's teaching even seems to be divinely ordained (Mark 6:52; 8:17).⁷⁹ Paradoxically, it is often the "outsiders" who grasp Jesus's messianic identity, whether demons (as in 3:11) or the well-known case of the

74 See Scott S. Elliott, "'Witless in Your Own Cause': Divine Plots and Fractured Characters in the Life of Aesop and the Gospel of Mark," *R&T* 12 (2005): 397–418 (404); Christy Cobb, *Slavery, Gender, Truth, and Power in Luke-Acts and Other Ancient Narratives* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 59. See further discussion in analysis section.

75 Brittany E. Wilson, "Hearing the Word and Seeing the Light: Voice and Vision in Acts," *JSNT* 38 (2016): 456–81 (459); Christy Cobb, "Entangled Tongues: A Poststructuralist and Postcolonial Reading of Acts 2:1–13," *Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies* 4 (2022): 1–16 (2).

76 Adam, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 261.

77 Moore, *Mark*, 17 states, "Like Jesus, who drifts from misunderstanding to misunderstanding across the surface of Mark's page, writing has always been a wandering outcast, drifting from (mis)reading to (mis)reading."

78 Moore, *Mark*, 13, italics in original.

79 Moore, *Mark*, 15.

centurion (15:39),⁸⁰ who is an “outsider abruptly pulled inside to substitute for the disciples,”⁸¹ who themselves are suspiciously absent. But even in the case of the centurion, the apparent confession of Jesus’s identity is prompted not by clear teaching but rather by Jesus’s declaration of being forsaken by God and his final cry of agony from the cross (15:34, 37), which leads Moore to conclude “A writing of absence and inarticulation accomplishes what ‘plain’ speech (8:32) could not, speech that should have been laden with present, self-evident meaning.... Understanding occurs only at the moment when Jesus becomes absent, and when his speech decomposes as it is delivered up to death.”⁸² But even though Mark establishes an expectation that the disciples will understand Jesus’s words after the resurrection (9:9; 16:7), the book instead ends with the women not sharing what they had seen in the tomb (16:8),⁸³ which Moore takes as indicating that “Mark narrates the flight of meaning—the meaning of Jesus’s death fleeing with the women disciples, threatening to sink into silence ... Mark’s own meaning ... [is] incessantly in flight from itself.”⁸⁴

In keeping with Derrida’s interpretation of the function of signifiers in Saussurean linguistics,⁸⁵ Moore sees Jesus’s full presence as something that is merely endlessly deferred in Mark, as seen in the great promises of the second coming (9:1; 13:26) and especially in the contrast between the promise of seeing Jesus in 16:7 and the response of fear and speechlessness in 16:8.⁸⁶ Moore compares Jesus’s message to a letter that was only read by someone to whom the letter had not been written, the centurion,⁸⁷ and that any glimpses the disciples had of this letter only provoked fear (9:32; 10:32).⁸⁸

Furthermore, Mark even makes an insertion in the direct speech of Jesus, acknowledging the role of the audience of the written Gospel (13:14), which, for Moore, demonstrates that “everything that passes between Jesus and his disciples

80 Moore, *Mark*, 24.

81 Moore, *Mark*, 24.

82 Moore, *Mark*, 25. He does note the alternative interpretation that the centurion’s confession is instead triggered by the tearing of the veil in 15:38.

83 This is, of course, assuming that the original version of Mark ended at 16:8. See below for discussion of Moore’s treatment of this text-critical issue.

84 Moore, *Mark*, 26–27.

85 Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 195, provides essential background on Saussure, stating that he “saw language (*la langue*) as a general system of structure from which particular words or acts of speaking (*la parole*) were selected. Within the system or structure, the internal relations between words, especially relations of contrast, were crucial.” Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 155, helpfully articulate one further point in Saussure’s thought relevant to the discussion above: “the arbitrary nature of the sign: Saussure distinguishes between the *signifié* (thing signified) and the *signifiant* (signifier), and he sees their relationship as unmotivated; that is, there is no necessary correlation between the concept and the sounds used to speak of it.”

86 Moore, *Mark*, 39. See also the further discussion of presence in Moore, *Mark*, 54.

87 Moore, *Mark*, 42.

88 Moore, *Mark*, 43.

is surreptitiously rerouted to us.”⁸⁹ Moore observes that the women attending the crucifixion (15:40–41) show greater faithfulness than the disciples, but then seemingly fail to deliver the message entrusted to them at the empty tomb (16:8).⁹⁰

Turning to the broader issues of meaning and language, Moore, as noted above, compares the Marcan Jesus to a written letter, and draws parallels between the crucifixion and the whims of readers.⁹¹ Even in resurrection this letter remains opaque, as Moore states, “Mark’s Jesus does transgress the common law of writing by finally uniting with his Father. But even then his status remains more that of an inscription than of a logos, marked as it is by absence (‘he has been raised; he is not here’—16:6) and exposure to the accidents of (mis)reading (‘they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid’—16:8).”⁹² Since writing inherently drifts from its original context,⁹³ the Gospel of Mark is ideally suited to function as a kind of substitute for the historical Jesus after his ascension, but furthermore, “The story told in Mark can be read as a parable of the destiny of every written Mark.”⁹⁴ This agenda is applied even to the detail of the young man who ran off without his linen cloth in Gethsemane (14:51–52), in which Moore finds a fitting parallel for the tendency of scholarship to greedily grab the smallest of clues but be left unable to obtain anything of substance.⁹⁵ Moore further seeks to turn this into an indictment of the critical scholarly guild, stating “the discredited hypothesis identifying the young man as Mark lays bare a truth it did not reach for: the truth that criticism is a fantasy of violent possession.... In attempting to pronounce the truth of this scene, what have we effected?... we ourselves stand exposed. The text has slipped away, having stripped *us* on its way out.”⁹⁶ He then suggests that perhaps there is no grand mystery to be deciphered in this short detail after all.⁹⁷

The Messianic Secret and the Indeterminacy of Meaning: Discussion

As seen in the summary above, Moore presents his reflections in a playfully unsystematic way. The discussion of Moore in the present study will accordingly organize the topics covered to eliminate redundancy.

Although Moore’s chosen plane of application, the slipperiness of language, is unsurprisingly far removed from the interpretive questions raised in most scholarly discussions, it is still possible to evaluate the viability of his overall proposal

89 Moore, *Mark*, 43.

90 Moore, *Mark*, 44–45.

91 Moore, *Mark*, 17.

92 Moore, *Mark*, 17.

93 Moore, *Mark*, 18.

94 Moore, *Mark*, 19.

95 Moore, *Mark*, 31–33.

96 Moore, *Mark*, 36–37.

97 Moore, *Mark*, 37.

by testing the coherence of the underlying textual conclusions upon which he bases his allegorical application.⁹⁸

Moore finds the confession of the centurion significant for its role reversal of the insider and outsider categories and for its prompt being the agony of suffering rather than informative teaching, leading him to connect this instance of understanding to the paradoxical vanishing of Jesus and his speech.⁹⁹ However, other perspectives on this account must be considered.

The centurion's capacity to grasp who Jesus is apart from miracles or instructional speech, which many others had witnessed firsthand without believing, stands as an example of God-given faith worthy of imitation.¹⁰⁰ Having a gentile recognize Jesus as the Messiah at the end of the Gospel crucially mirrors God the Father's similar announcement at Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:11) and points forward to a time when many more gentiles would come to faith.¹⁰¹ That this recognition was accomplished through Jesus's crucifixion also provides a corrective to the earlier reluctance of the disciples to accept that Jesus's rule would come through "suffering" rather than "conquest."¹⁰² Moore neglects to interact with these more conventional interpretations, and consequently his application to meaning in language is rendered vulnerable.¹⁰³

98 For discussion of the difference in definitions between allegory and typology, see Iain Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), 99–105. Crucially, typology is more closely tied to the surface of the text when multiple books are read together, whereas allegory is associated with drawing connections not found in the text itself. Cf. James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology—Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns: How Old Testament Expectations are Fulfilled in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022).

99 When contrasted with other poststructuralist treatments, Moore's reading comes off as remarkably conservative in that it takes the centurion's confession of Jesus's divine identity essentially at face value. A more consistently suspicious reading of the narrative is modelled by Matt Valler, "Eluding the Strong Man: A Poststructuralist Postcolonial Reading of Myers' Mark" (MA diss., London School of Theology, 2010), 36–46, who sees not only the centurion's confession, but even the announcements of Jesus's divine sonship in the baptism and transfiguration accounts as hopelessly mired in merely reiterating the demonic agenda of imperial Rome. Valler does a more consistent job than Moore at integrating the "analytics of power" noted by Runions to be one of the facets of poststructuralist criticism (Runions, "Poststructuralism," 288).

100 M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 433–34.

101 Mark L. Strauss, *Mark, ZECNT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 706. Robert H. Stein, *Mark, BECNT* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 719, also supports this view that the centurion's confession anticipates the spread of the gospel among the gentiles.

102 Strauss, *Mark*, 706.

103 Other lines of evidence that are potentially relevant include Davis's argument that the centurion's confession deliberately echoed Peter's denial in Mark 14:71, providing resolution to the problem of how Jesus can be both God and man (as cited in Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 659) and Wright's analysis of Mark as Greco-Roman tragedy, in which the "reversal" accomplished by the tearing of the veil in the temple, an institution which typified opposition to Jesus, was expected in this genre to lead to the "recognition" of the hero character. See Adam Z. Wright, *Of Conflict and Concealment: The Gospel of Mark as Tragedy*, McMaster Biblical Studies Series 5 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), 145–46.

Although there is a full section below dedicated to Moore's take on the implications of the abrupt ending of Mark at 16:8, one particular detail found in this section is best addressed here. Mark variously creates the expectation that after the resurrection the disciples will finally grasp Jesus's message (9:9; 16:7) and see him again (16:7) only for the story to derail as the women, seized with fear, fail to report the message they are given at the tomb (16:8). Moore uses these details to support his reading of Mark as an allegory of the endless deferral of meaning and of the uncontrollable proliferation of the connotations attached to written language over time. At the surface level, there does seem to be a tension created as 16:7 contains a command for the women to share what they saw with the disciples, but v. 8 records that the women remained silent. However, Collins argues that v. 8 only focuses on the initial response of the women and leaves open the possibility that they delivered the message later.¹⁰⁴ Regarding the final comment in 16:8 that the women were afraid, there are two possibilities: the women were in awe due to their encounter with the divine or they were simply frightened.¹⁰⁵ Strauss prefers the latter option, but sees its purpose as prodding the audience to instead "respond with faith."¹⁰⁶ Collins furthermore argues that it was unnecessary for Mark to narrate what happened after 16:8, since it assumed this knowledge on the part of the audience.¹⁰⁷ Read in context, these provide a much more plausible explanation than Moore's deconstructionist framing of the collapse of meaning.

Another anomaly Moore finds in Jesus's message is that his own disciples tended to collapse with confusion and fear whenever they were told that he would suffer and die (9:32; 10:32), suggesting that the significance of Jesus's message remained endlessly elusive. However, a much simpler explanation is possible: if Jesus was going to be persecuted and put to death by Rome and the religious authorities in Jerusalem, Jesus's followers' lives would be in danger as well.¹⁰⁸ Collins further unpacks the significance of this fear, stating "their lack of understanding is closely related to the instinct of self-preservation ... [it] is related to resistance to Jesus and his teaching, a classic example of 'hardness of heart.'"¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the disciples' fear was not so much a matter of failure to grasp meaning, but concern for personal well-being in the immediate present.

Another detail of interest to Moore is the short aside, "let the reader understand" (ὁ ἀναγνώσκων νοεῖτω), in Mark 13:14, which serves for Moore as a sign that Jesus's own words have been hopelessly reworked and recontextualized by the

104 Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 800.

105 Stein, *Mark*, 733.

106 Strauss, *Mark*, 723.

107 Collins, *Mark*, 801.

108 Strauss, *Mark*, 452; Stein, *Mark*, 479; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27—16:20*, WBC 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 58; Collins, *Mark*, 441.

109 Collins, *Mark*, 441.

author of the Gospel. However, there is no reason to view this note in such a suspicious way. While scholars naturally differ on whether the Gospel of Mark was written before or after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE,¹¹⁰ this insertion could reasonably be instructions for a lector,¹¹¹ a warning that the original audience will soon experience these trials,¹¹² or a cue to consider the context of the link to Daniel.¹¹³ There is thus no need to attribute nefarious intent to this device meant to aid in the understanding or proclamation of the words of Jesus.

The final relevant textual comment in this section is Moore's work with the naked young man in Mark 14:51–52,¹¹⁴ in which he sees the tendency of scholarship to compound speculation as indicative of the capacity of a text to leave its readers empty-handed and symbolically denuded. However, other interpretations prove more convincing. While this detail could simply be a means of depicting the confusion and drama that attended Jesus's arrest,¹¹⁵ a more contextually grounded reading would suggest that the fact that even someone of little importance chose to run away in a shameful manner rather than support Jesus signifies the degree to which his followers have been entirely unfaithful.¹¹⁶ This example additionally offers a negative counterexample to the commitment required by true discipleship,¹¹⁷ and of course also contrasts with the complete faithfulness unto death exhibited by Jesus himself.¹¹⁸

One global matter must be dealt with before moving forward. At the beginning of this discussion section (and the overview section above), Moore's overall approach was described as allegorical in the sense that it chooses to read Mark as symbolic of the ineffability of written language. Allegory, of course, is found throughout the history of biblical interpretation, extending at least as far back as Philo of Alexandria (who lived approximately between 20 BCE and 50 CE), who, for example, taught that the four rivers branching out of Eden in Gen 2:10–14 correspond to the four virtues of prudence, courage, temperance, and justice, which all proceed from the goodness and wisdom of God (*Alleg. Interpr.* 63–73). There

110 Compare Boring, *Mark*, 366–68 with Strauss, *Mark*, 580.

111 Compare Boring, *Mark*, 366–68.

112 Strauss, *Mark*, 580; France, *Mark*, 524.

113 Evans, *Mark*, 320, points to the connection between the questions about when these future events will happen in Dan 12:5–13 and Mark 13:4. He specifically argues that Mark wants his readers to connect Jesus's speech with the prophecy of the abomination in Dan 12:11.

114 On the meaning of the word for “naked” (γυμνός) here, see L&N 49.22, “pertaining to wearing no clothing or being very scantily clothed.” BDAG 208 provides three main categories of usage: (1) “pert. To being without covering ... naked, stripped, bare”; (2) “pert. To being inadequately clothed, poorly dressed”; (3) “pert. To being lightly clad, without an outer garment.” It puts Mark 14:51–52 in the first category, while, in comparison, Peter's disrobed state in the boat in John 21:7 falls into category 3.

115 Strauss, *Mark*, 646.

116 Evans, *Mark*, 429; France, *Mark*, 597; Collins, *Mark*, 694–95.

117 Boring, *Mark*, 403–404.

118 Collins, *Mark*, 695.

is admittedly nothing stopping an interpreter from making these kinds of subjective symbolic leaps with a text. When considering language in isolation, without some metaphysical framework or additional contextual grounding, there is little to aid in establishing boundaries for which abstract associations are legitimate and which are not.¹¹⁹ Moore, of course, would see all attempts at imposing context or limits on meaning to be equally arbitrary, and this claim would appear initially to have force if the only evidence available (as is often the case in biblical studies) is the text itself. However, recent advances in the application of modern linguistic theories to biblical languages have made it possible to derive relevant social context from the text itself, at least to a degree where the range of possible interpretations is significantly constrained.

Stanley Porter proposes a model for context and how it can be inferred from a text based on Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL). This model has three layers of context. The first is the “co-text,”¹²⁰ which is simply the syntactical structures and lexical choices of the text itself. The co-text both governs the meaning of the smaller units, as it “constrains the choices that will be made by the speaker”¹²¹ and often provides clues about the “physical context”¹²² of the text’s compositional setting. The second layer of context is the “context of situation,”¹²³ which refers to “how a linguistic situation enables and determines the creation of a set of meanings that constitute a text.”¹²⁴ In terms of analysis, it “is a means of describing the immediate linguistic environment of a linguistic act in terms of content, participants, and textual features.”¹²⁵ The third layer is the “context of culture,”¹²⁶ which broadly involves “all the various knowledge systems that may exist within the individuals of any particular culturally defined ... group.”¹²⁷ Following

119 This, of course, relates to a longstanding hermeneutical debate of its own. Proponents of allegory would use appeals to ultimate reality to justify their associations, while detractors dismiss it as being inherently subjective. See further discussion in David J. Fuller, “Fault Lines in Evangelical Hermeneutics: Divergent Accounts of Patristic and Reformation-Era Interpretive Approaches in Recent Works by Carter and Provan,” *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 23 (2021–2022): 41–102 (especially 42–49, 56–59, 64, 73–76, 81–83, 85–92).

120 Stanley E. Porter, *Hermeneutics, Linguistics and the Bible: The Importance of Context*, T&T Clark Library of New Testament Greek 3 (London: T&T Clark, 2024), 119.

121 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 119.

122 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 120, citing Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

123 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 121.

124 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 122.

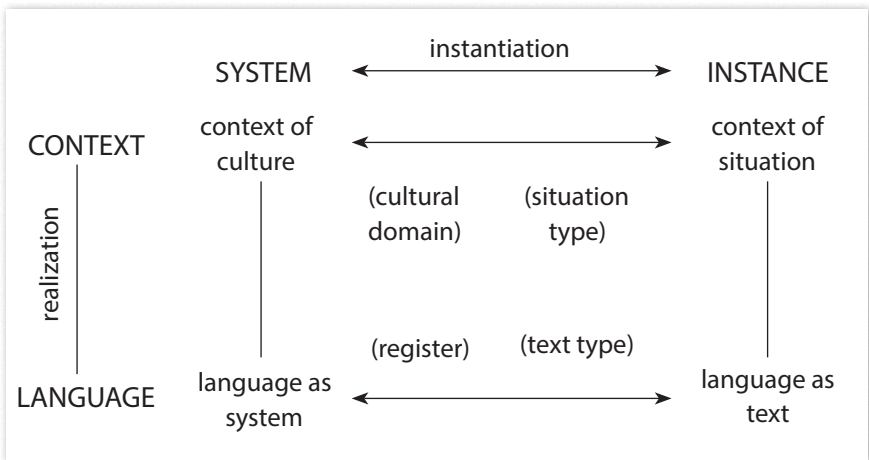
125 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 123.

126 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 124.

127 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 125. W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 19, follows this tripartite approach, but erroneously interprets Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1989), 16, as stating that co-text and context of situation are related to “semantics” while the context of culture relates to “pragmatics.” For further discussion of Tate see Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 97. For further discussion of how the traditional categories of “semantics” and “pragmatics” relate to Porter’s SFL mode, see Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 78–79.

Leckie-Tarry, this knowledge can be divided into “ideational,” “interpersonal,” and “textual”¹²⁸ categories, in a manner similar to the field, tenor, and mode components of the context of situation. Such a definition crucially transforms the often-mysterious notion of cultural background into a “reservoir of meaningful data,”¹²⁹ in which the context of situation helps determine which elements from the broader culture are relevant for a specific text.

With this background in place, Porter sums up his proposed mechanism for using a text to reconstruct its original context based on the dialectical relationship between text and situation. To do this, he first turns to Hasan’s diagram, which contains a horizontal axis of “instantiation” with the “system” and the “instance” on opposite ends. Meanwhile, the vertical axis is “realization,” with “context” at the top and “language” at the bottom. Within the “system” column, this puts “context of culture” in the “context” row and “language as system” in the “language” row, while in the “instance” column, “context of situation” is in the “context” row and “language as text” is in the “language” row.¹³⁰



This schema allows for an interpretive process in which one can use a given text to “reconstruct the set of meaningful choices of the language system, and the knowledge environments of which the context of situation is an instantiation.”¹³¹ The second illustration offered by Porter is a flowchart by Hasan (see below) that captures the process of language production, moving successively through “situation types” (defined as “social contexts ... [and] settings”),¹³² “meaning potential” (defined as

128 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 127–28.

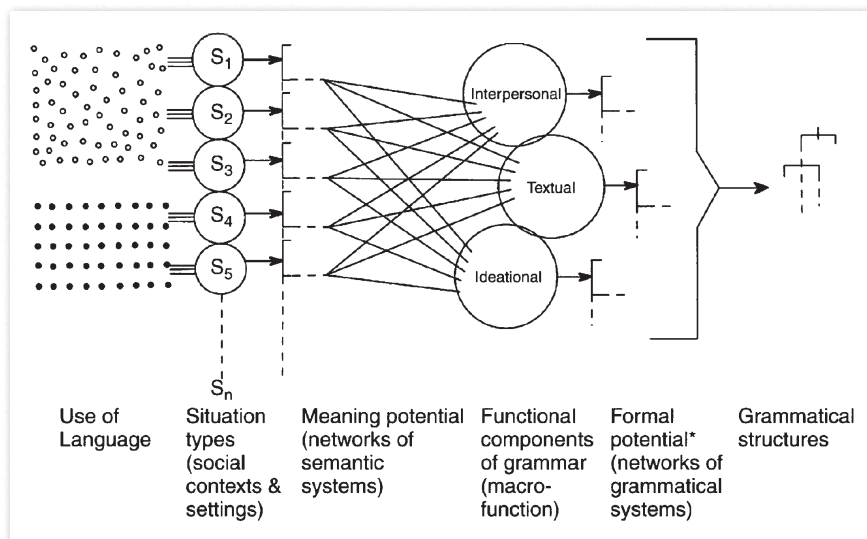
129 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 129.

130 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 131.

131 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 132.

132 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 132.

“networks of semantic systems within the language”),¹³³ “functional components of grammar,”¹³⁴ “formal potential,”¹³⁵ and finally the “grammatical structures” (that is, the actual language used) of a given instance of communication.¹³⁶



The takeaway for analysis here is that one can work backwards from a text and place it “within its own context of situation as an instantiation of the context of culture.”¹³⁷

Porter also provides a sample application of this model to John 1:1. Porter summarizes the linguistic data regarding patterns of cohesion, lexical metaphor, word order, and parallelism in John 1:1–18, and uses this data to draw conclusions about the field, tenor, and mode components in its context of situation.¹³⁸ From this information, he infers that the field must be “religious and philosophical.”¹³⁹ The field in John 1:1–18 largely describes the nature and actions of the “Word” (λόγος) and how it functions alongside other entities. The tenor describes the

133 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 133.

134 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 133. These “functional components” are Halliday’s three kinds of meaning at the clause level, along with their grammatical realizations. These correspond to the field, tenor, and mode, in the context of situation described above.

135 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 133. This is “a series of networks of grammatical systems that represent the (semantic) potential of the language and are then realized in the actual grammatical structures chosen.”

136 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 132.

137 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 133.

138 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 75. To review the definitions of these three terms, “The field is concerned with what the text is about, the tenor with relationships among the participants, and the mode with the role that language plays in constructing the text.”

139 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 138.

social positioning of the Word as compared to God, John, and others. The mode reveals that this section is a “prologue” that demonstrates the connection between the Word and other key characters. Turning to the usual interpretive question of whether the Word here better aligns with the “Jewish ... creative and prophetic word” or “Hellenistic (and possibly Jewish) ... Greek philosophical thought,”¹⁴⁰ Porter concludes:

The depiction of the independent character of the “Word” has many similarities to the personified word of Hellenistic Judaism that is seen to be at the beginning, in relationship with God as would be a son, in some ways functioning as a second or parallel God, related to light and grace, and the performer of the divine will.¹⁴¹

This analysis does not identify a “specific historical context,” but rather uses the available linguistic data to infer “its situational context within a larger cultural context.”¹⁴² While this model still may leave some open questions—for instance, regarding the roles played by ideology,¹⁴³ metaphysics,¹⁴⁴ assumptions about social roles and hierarchy embedded in SFL itself,¹⁴⁵ or the challenges raised by multiple historical contexts being represented in a single text¹⁴⁶—the fact remains that there is often much within a text itself that significantly clarifies its overall point without surrendering to outright anarchy or nihilism,¹⁴⁷ striking a fatal blow to Moore’s chosen interpretive framework and consequent treatment of the text.

140 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 139.

141 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 139.

142 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 140.

143 See discussion in David J. Fuller, “The Sublime Object(s) of Idolatry: Prophetic Aniconism and the Ideological Formation of the Subject,” *The Bible and Critical Theory* 16.1 (2020): 117–39 (120), and also the discussion of how merely looking at empirical facts cannot expose an operative ideology in Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 2nd ed. (London/New York: Verso, 2008), 48–50.

144 For one example, see the Christian Platonism of Craig Carter, which follows certain patristic precedents by allowing the “literal” meaning of the biblical text to be controlled by a theological metaphysic (which he contrasts to the naturalism of the Enlightenment), as explained in Fuller, “Fault Lines,” 42–49, with evaluation on pp. 49–55. See further discussion in the context of a critique of the canonically-grounded literalism of Provan in Fuller, “Fault Lines,” 74–81.

145 See David J. Fuller, “The Limits of Linguistics: Subjectivity, Metaphysics, and the Interpretive Enterprise,” in *Linguistics and the Bible: Retrospects and Prospects*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Christopher D. Land, and Francis G. H. Pang, McMaster New Testament Studies Series 9 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019), 112–42 (137–38).

146 See M. A. K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (Baltimore: University Park Press, 1978), 145–47. See also David J. Fuller, *A Discourse Analysis of Habakkuk*, SSN 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 26–27. See examples in Mark J. Boda and Mary L. Conway, *Judges*, ZECOT 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), 44–46.

147 See also the similar analyses performed on the Hebrew Bible in Colin M. Toffelmire, *A Discourse and Register Analysis of the Prophetic Book of Joel*, SSN 66 (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Colin M. Toffelmire, “Sitz Im What? Context and the Prophetic Book of Obadiah,” in *The Book of the Twelve and the New Form Criticism*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Michael H. Floyd, and Colin M. Toffelmire, ANEM 10 (Atlanta: SBL, 2015), 221–44.

Parables: Overview

Moore's treatment of the parables is significant enough to deserve its own section. Following the blunt statement in Mark 4:11–12, he notes that the parables “[keep] those explicitly labeled outsiders outside.”¹⁴⁸ While Mark 12:12 shows that the religious leaders had some level of awareness that Jesus was criticizing them, their reaction shows that they did not have the “understanding” described in 4:12–13, and, therefore, “In seeking to arrest him they have been taken captive by his theory.”¹⁴⁹ Moore curiously declares a parable to be “a speech deeply scored with the traits of writing,”¹⁵⁰ nodding appreciatively to Miller's description of the prefix *παρά*, “signifying at once proximity and distance ... the screen which is a permeable membrane connecting inside and outside.”¹⁵¹ Thus, parables not only keep outsiders out, they have a tendency to alienate insiders as well.¹⁵² Moore even suggests a connection with the word *παράβολος* (“counterfeit,” “false”)¹⁵³ to suggest that a parable is “duplicitous.”¹⁵⁴

Parables: Discussion

While Moore accuses the parables of being hopelessly “abstruse,”¹⁵⁵ their contextual function is far more nuanced.¹⁵⁶ While Mark's citation of Isa 6:9–10 may at face value appear to confirm Moore's view—that the parables intentionally bar access to the message of the kingdom—this was certainly not the case in the original context of Isaiah, as Isa 6:13 eventually turns to hope (“like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled.” [The holy seed is its stump.]”),¹⁵⁷ and this promise of eventual restoration is even more pronounced by Isa 9. Isaiah 6:9–10 can also be taken as an ironic reminder that the prophet's message will meet with widespread rejection rather than a command to deliberately alienate the audience.¹⁵⁸

148 Moore, *Mark*, 13. Of course, as documented in the above section, the distinction between insiders and outsiders is hardly airtight in Mark.

149 Moore, *Mark*, 14.

150 Moore, *Mark*, 21.

151 Cited in Moore, *Mark*, 21, from J. Hillis Miller, “The Critic as Host,” in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1979), 219.

152 Moore, *Mark*, 22. A parable is thus “a pocket in Mark, one that turns (the) inside(r) out.”

153 Moore, *Mark*, 23.

154 Moore, *Mark*, 23.

155 Moore, *Mark*, 13, 14. He later (22) states, “Possibly *parabolē* is the key to this pocket book, Jesus's address book, the book of his enigmatic addresses.... But does the key unlock the book or ensure that it stays shut? Could the author have used it to lock the book, and then thrown the key away—into the book? If so, Mark cannot be contained in the pocket we cut for it; Mark is what makes a hole in our pocket.”

156 For conventional guidelines to interpreting the parables, see Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); Richard Lischer, *Reading the Parables* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014).

157 Strauss, *Mark*, 186.

158 France, *Mark*, 201.

In the context of Mark 4:11–13, then, this reference serves to clarify that “the line between insider and outsider is not the line that separates Christianity and Judaism or church members from others, but is determined by one’s response to Jesus.”¹⁵⁹ Parables thus only serve to reveal the preexisting state of one’s heart.¹⁶⁰ For those who do respond in faith, this is a reminder that the capacity for response is a gift of God, not grounds for human boasting.¹⁶¹ As France states regarding the “secret of the kingdom of God” in 4:11, “it takes nothing less than divine revelation to enable people to grasp it.”¹⁶² This is evident in the characterization of the disciples, whose own poor understanding and shortcomings (4:10, 13) teach much about God’s patience and the need for simple dependence upon him.¹⁶³

In the larger context of Mark, future hope is visible in the increased understanding that would happen at the resurrection, meaning that this apparently dire warning is hardly “the last word.”¹⁶⁴ Even within Mark 4 itself, vv. 21–22 speak of everything eventually coming into the light, leaving open the possibility that those who are outsiders can still become insiders.¹⁶⁵ The case of Mark 12:12 can be understood in a much more straightforward way—here Jesus was perfectly clear and the leaders simply choose to reject him.¹⁶⁶

Finally, Moore’s *linguistic* claims must be addressed as well, as he appears to have made a major discovery if the meaning of the word for “parable” is not what it seems to be. His citation of the *παρά* prefix as having the features of a “membrane” is not supported in recent grammatical resources. Porter defines the core meaning of *παρά* as “position ‘alongside, parallel to or beside.’”¹⁶⁷ But more fundamentally, this appeal to a prefix to ascertain the meaning of a word is itself fallacious, as compound forms inevitably have usages unique to the whole that cannot be explained in terms of the component parts. Carson refers to this error

159 Boring, *Mark*, 123.

160 Robbie Booth, “The New Testament’s Use of Isaiah 6:9–10: A Call to Faith and Repentance” (MDiv thesis, Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary, 2015), 63.

161 Boring, *Mark*, 127–28.

162 France, *Mark*, 197.

163 Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, WBC 34A (Dallas: Word, 1989), 220–221. Similarly, Strauss, *Mark*, 186 comments, “Jesus is the only true model of discipleship in the gospel.”

164 Boring, *Mark*, 128. Booth, “New Testament’s Use,” 63, additionally points to the description of the obtuseness of the disciples in Mark 8:17–18 as an example of something that even insiders could barely comprehend prior to the resurrection.

165 France, *Mark*, 201.

166 Boring, *Mark*, 332–33. See also Francis Watson, “The Social Function of Mark’s Secrecy Theme,” *JSNT* 24 (1985): 49–69 (54).

167 Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., Biblical Languages: Greek 2 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 166. See the virtually identical definition in David Mathewson and Elodie Ballantine Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar: Syntax for Students of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 104, and the similar definition separated by case in Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 378. Rodney A. Whitacre, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 5.255 closely follows Wallace.

as the “root fallacy,”¹⁶⁸ and its problematic nature is obvious if one considers a modern English example, such as trying to understand the word “butterfly” by breaking it down into “butter” and “fly.”¹⁶⁹ This principle of lexical semantics likewise disproves Moore’s attempt to associate “parables” with παράβολος.¹⁷⁰ Additionally, the thorough treatments of BDAG¹⁷¹ and TDNT¹⁷² make no room for such a connection.¹⁷³

The Genre of Mark: Overview

Moore takes great care to justify his reading on the grounds that Mark is intentionally impressionistic and full of the kind of symbolic juxtapositions that might emerge in Freudian dream analysis, as opposed to the more straightforward biography or historical narrative that it is often treated as being. He frequently utilizes comparisons to (along with quotations from) James Joyce’s legendarily impenetrable *magnum opus*, *Finnegans Wake*.¹⁷⁴ To flesh this out, he approvingly cites Berg’s reading of Mark 5:25–34, which inserts the story of the healing of a woman who had bled for twelve years (v. 25) within the larger account of the healing of a twelve-year-old girl (v. 42). This connection with the number twelve leads Berg to conclude that Mark has “the qualities of a Freudian dream landscape, where linguistic logic rather than narrative logic causes things to happen.”¹⁷⁵ Moore similarly points to Tolbert’s identification of connections between the various Greek words beginning with κατά (“down”) throughout Mark 15, in which “Reporting the splitting of the curtain from top to bottom (15:38) immediately after Jesus’s death as the conclusion of this series of wordplays connects the tear with Jesus’s cry [of desire to join his Father above] and further supports its symbolic role as an image of transportation from realm to realm.”¹⁷⁶ For Moore, these support the

168 D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 28–33.

169 Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 30. See also Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 49–51; Benjamin J. Baxter, “In the Original Text it Says”: *Word-Study Fallacies and How to Avoid Them* (Gonzalez, FL: Energion, 2012), 14–15.

170 See the similar example from Hebrew given in James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 103.

171 See entry in BDAG 759–60.

172 See TDNT 5:745–51 for discussion of usage in non-biblical and LXX Greek, where no such sense is evident. Likewise LEH s.v. provide glosses of “proverb ... byword ... poem, figurative discourse ... taunt, mocking speech.” Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, rev. ed. (Louvain: Peeters, 2009), 524–25 uses two categories, “mocking or hurting speech” and “proverbial saying.”

173 See also James Diggle et al., eds., *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1063, which likewise has no such sense in its six glosses.

174 Moore, *Mark*, 71.

175 Cited in Moore, *Mark*, 69, from Temma F. Berg, “Reading in/to Mark,” *Semeia* 48 (1989): 187–206 (199–200).

176 Cited in Moore, *Mark*, 70, from Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark’s World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979), 282.

conclusion that Mark is “more like a dream than a dissertation,”¹⁷⁷ and that it is similar to “unconscious discourses”¹⁷⁸ full of “concrete word-images.”¹⁷⁹ Moore later explains that his analysis seeks to allow the potentialities of the images in Mark to come into bloom through the Joycean strategy of playing on the multiple potential meanings of single words,¹⁸⁰ and affording significant agency to language itself.¹⁸¹

The Genre of Mark: Discussion

While Moore expends many words claiming that Mark is a much different literary creation than it is usually believed to be, his main pieces of evidence (aside from his playful Joycean intertexts) are the number twelve connecting the bleeding woman to the young girl in Mark 5, and the recurrence of words beginning with *κατά* in Mark 15. Regarding the former, mainstream scholarship has found other ways to explain the significance of this shared number. The general consensus is that these two twelves should not be taken as having symbolic import.¹⁸² Furthermore, plausible explanations exist for both occurrences of “twelve” (δώδεκα) in Mark 5. For the woman (v. 25), twelve years of suffering is a long time and makes it clear that she had a dire condition.¹⁸³ For the girl (v. 42), being twelve years old indicates that she is “ready to launch on a meaningful and fulfilled life.”¹⁸⁴ The fact that two accounts featuring this same number are arranged together could point to their originally being transmitted orally and linked by this number.¹⁸⁵

Regarding the case of the words beginning with *κατά* in Mark 15, I was unable to find a discussion of this claim elsewhere. However, the assumption that this shared prefix alone indicates shared meaning constitutes the root fallacy, as explained in the discussion of Moore’s analysis of the parables above. Doubt is also cast on the relevance of this claim when considering the sheer number of words with this prefix. In the UBS⁴ dictionary, I counted 116 words beginning with *κατά* alone, not counting the additional forms in which the final vowel of the prefix is contracted. Additionally, the presence of wordplay alone cannot be determinative for the genre of a work.

Although Moore does not explicitly frame his claims about the nature of Mark

177 Moore, *Mark*, 71.

178 Moore, *Mark*, 72.

179 Moore, *Mark*, 72.

180 Moore, *Mark*, 82. Towards this end, Moore offers a short list of uncontroversial instances of wordplay in the Bible (83–84).

181 Moore, *Mark*, 83. In a footnote acknowledging some overlap between poststructuralism and pre-critical modes of interpretation, Moore mentions that his consequent constructions of Jesus have precedent in Gnosticism, but does not develop this further.

182 Collins, *Mark*, 286.

183 Stein, *Mark*, 267; Collins, *Mark*, 280.

184 Boring, *Mark*, 162. Similarly, see France, *Mark*, 240.

185 Stein, *Mark*, 275.

in terms of genre, it is still worthwhile comparing his conclusions with those of more conventional scholarship. Given that his outright textual evidence is quite thin, as documented above, the question remains whether it is possible to derive from the evidence of the text alone what kind of writing Mark is. Much recent discussion of the Gospels in general has centered around their possible similarities with “Greco-Roman biographies or Greek and Jewish ‘historiography.’”¹⁸⁶ In the particular case of Mark, proposed options include a new genre altogether, Greek tragedy, biography, or historical narrative.¹⁸⁷ More recent linguistic approaches have critiqued previous approaches to the notion of genre in Gospel studies as lacking clarity and relying on problematic illustrations.¹⁸⁸ This has led to the use of functional linguistics to redefine genres based on their social functions¹⁸⁹ with quantifiable analytic criteria found in different linguistic features and their organization in a text.¹⁹⁰ Applications of methods derived from this framework include the work of Wishart, who looked for the social functions advanced within the four Gospels,¹⁹¹ Pitts, who compared select linguistic features in Luke-Acts with those found in Greek histories and biographies,¹⁹² and Brown, who similarly used specific linguistic features to compare Mark with historical and fictitious narratives from Second Temple Judaism.¹⁹³ Turning back to Moore, while debate continues regarding the precise genre of the Gospels and the degree of overlap they may share with preexisting Greek or Jewish genres, a comparative approach using

186 Blomberg, *Jesus*, 173. See the broader historical survey in Nathan L. Brown, “Mapping Mark: Quantitative Study of Clause Thematization as a Means of Illuminating the Gospel Genre” (PhD diss., McMaster Divinity College, 2020), 9–26.

187 Stein, *Mark*, 19–21. For a more detailed discussion, see Collins, *Mark*, 15–43, who surveys multiple options and concludes that Mark is best described as “an eschatological historical monograph” (18).

188 Zachary K. Dawson, “The Problem of Gospel Genres: Unmasking a Flawed Consensus and Providing a Fresh Way Forward with Systemic Functional Linguistics Genre Theory,” *Biblical and Ancient Greek Linguistics* 8 (2019): 33–77 (51–52). Dawson argues that the widely adopted work of Burridge incoherently blends ideas from different literary theorists, and that the concepts he draws from are problematic as well. Similarly, Ryder A. Wishart, *Gospels or Biographies? The Gospels as Folk Literature*, *Linguistic Biblical Studies* 25 (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 88–89 argues that the concerns of genre studies are ultimately inadequate on their own, as they try to discern what kind of literature the Gospels are without sufficient room for the role of sociological factors and literary style.

189 Dawson, “Problem,” 60–61.

190 Dawson, “Problem,” 63.

191 Wishart, *Gospels*, 251. Wishart defines a “Gospel” as: “a folk literature collection about Jesus that does the following: it invites a polarized and galvanized response to an existing conflict by creating a complete account of Jesus’s ministry and teaching that vilifies unsympathetic readers, warns and instructs sympathetic readers, and attempts to persuade its unsure readership.”

192 Andrew W. Pitts, *History, Biography, and the Genre of Luke-Acts: An Exploration of Literary Divergence in Greek Narrative Discourse*, *BibInt* 177 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 173–74. Pitts concluded that Luke-Acts is closer to the Greek histories than the biographies based on his chosen criteria.

193 Brown, “Mapping Mark,” 375–76. Brown argues that Mark is more closely aligned with the historical than the fictional (his terms being “referential” and “non-referential”) narratives, although by a slim margin.

quantitative criteria such as those used in the studies referenced above would undoubtedly reveal that the use of language in Mark (or the other Gospels) is still hopelessly far removed from the avant-garde modernism of *Finnegans Wake*.¹⁹⁴

Textual Criticism and the Ending of Mark: Overview

In a manner perhaps surprising of an archetypal “postmodern” critic, Moore is adamant that 16:8 is the authentic ending to Mark’s Gospel. He appeals to a scholarly consensus on the short ending of Mark being original,¹⁹⁵ and revels in the way this brings the narrative to a shocking conclusion with the women in silent terror. In contrast to the other Gospels, which end with Jesus commanding proclamation, Mark lacks such an ending, which, for Moore, means that Mark provides no evidence of the possibility of oral witnesses leading to its composition.¹⁹⁶ Moore later suggests that the long ending of Mark “embodies ... the desire to circumvent physical pain and death,”¹⁹⁷ as exemplified in the disciples’ fleeing when Jesus was arrested (14:50).¹⁹⁸ The longer ending of 16:9–20 also exemplifies the “closure,” “circumvention of contingent human response,” and the “unambiguous presence of Jesus” that was “thwart[ed]” by the short ending in 16:8.¹⁹⁹

Textual Criticism and the Ending of Mark: Discussion

Of course, much more needs to be said about the ending of Mark. While few believe that any of the extant longer endings are authentic,²⁰⁰ much discussion exists regarding whether 16:8 was intended to be an ending, and if so, what its significance is. On the first point, Stein provides eight arguments for why the original ending, extending beyond 16:8, must have been lost.²⁰¹ For example, he points to Jesus’s prediction of what would happen after the resurrection in 14:28, which would be unfulfilled if the book ended at 16:8.²⁰² Similar literary arguments are made by Evans.²⁰³ France finds the viewpoint that Mark deliberately ended at

194 For a readable summary of the basic concept behind the *Wake*—a dreamworld in which history repeats itself in the tropes of the unconscious—see Anthony Burgess, *Re Joyce* (New York: Norton, 1965), 188–93. For an exposition of the basic themes present in the characters throughout the book, see Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake: Unlocking James Joyce’s Masterwork* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2005), 4–13, especially the discussion of universal “polarities” on pp. 12–13.

195 Moore, *Mark*, 5.

196 Moore, *Mark*, 6–7. He compares this situation in which “Mark’s ending undercuts its beginning” (7) with the Freudian death-drive.

197 Moore, *Mark*, 29.

198 Moore, *Mark*, 29 lists 15:50 in parentheses but this almost certainly was intended to mean 14:50 instead.

199 Moore, *Mark*, 29.

200 Evans, *Mark*, 545.

201 Stein, *Mark*, 734–36.

202 Stein, *Mark*, 736.

203 Evans, *Mark*, 539.

16:8 to be overly “modern”²⁰⁴ in that an ancient audience could not conceivably have recognized the supposed literary effects that have been detected in it. But while there are notable voices (although they may be a minority) arguing that 16:8 was not intended to be the end of the book, it is also worth considering other interpretations of a possible end at 16:8.

In contrast to Moore’s maximally skeptical interpretation of the implications of Mark ending with 16:8, Boring has worked out the literary implications of this scene in a different direction, arguing that it functions as an “address to the reader.”²⁰⁵ Faced with the women silent and fearful in 16:8, Boring states, “the readers stand at the brink of the incomplete narrative in which all have failed, and, with terrible restraint, the narrator breaks off the story and leaves the readers, who may have thought the story was about somebody else, with a decision to make....”²⁰⁶ Thus, rather than casting doubt on the coherence of the account, the ending in 16:8 can be taken as a challenge for the reader to consider how they will respond to the story.²⁰⁷ The readers are encouraged to put themselves into the position of the women and consider their personal response. In other words, this abrupt ending is a literary device to force the audience out of a detached, distanced way of reading and toward personal commitment. Thus, there are more plausible ways to account for the significance of this literary feature than Moore’s interpretation.

Understanding after the Resurrection in Luke: Overview

While a thorough overview of the five chapters Moore devotes to Luke is beyond the scope of the present study, it is appropriate to cover one of the most relevant and unique (as compared to the treatment of Mark) examples found in this section.

Moore makes the observation that, although the resurrected Christ provides spoken instruction on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:25–27), it is not until he breaks bread that the audience recognizes him (24:30–31, 35).²⁰⁸ Moore then points out that in the appearance in Jerusalem the next day, although the narrator says that Jesus opens the audience’s minds (24:45), there is no explicit affirmation that they comprehended his message, which he connects with the apparent failure for illumination to take place on the road to Emmaus when Jesus “opened” the Scriptures (24:32).²⁰⁹ Moore concludes from this that in Luke, understanding is not dependent on the words of Jesus alone, but on their connection to previous

204 France, *Mark*, 671, 673.

205 Boring, *Mark*, 449.

206 Boring, *Mark*, 449. Ellipsis in original.

207 See Boring, *Mark*, 451–52 for a summary of other interpretations.

208 Moore, *Mark*, 96.

209 Moore, *Mark*, 100.

revelation (24:44–45).²¹⁰ Moore thus states, “Jesus opens his disciples’ minds not to the self-sufficiency of his word but to its intertextuality,”²¹¹ a point he bolsters by noting the key role played by the Hebrew Bible in the preaching at the end of Acts (Acts 28:23).

Moore similarly argues that it is actually Jesus’s eating of the fish (Luke 24:42–43) that decisively inspires belief in the disciples, rather than the preaching, appealing also to the testimony of Acts 10:41 about those who ate and drank with the post-resurrection Jesus.²¹² He punctuates the textual observations above with examples of secondary sources that draw the opposite conclusion, that is, that Jesus’s words were the primary means of nurturing faith in the disciples. The implication drawn by Moore from these observations is that scholarship fixated on authorial intention is really a “fixation with voice and presence” that leads to a “search for an absent author”²¹³ and is ultimately a quest “to return the material text to an immaterial intentionality.”²¹⁴ This “intentionality sought in the text is ghostly or ideal quantity,”²¹⁵ one that scholars fruitlessly seek to reconstruct from the polyvalent witness of the written text.

Understanding after the Resurrection in Luke: Discussion

Comparing Moore to conventional scholarship on these matters is a challenge, since their respective guiding questions are widely divergent. On the matter of Jesus being recognized in the breaking of bread, current approaches take a both-and approach, seeing the conversation and teaching working together to facilitate recognition.²¹⁶ Green notably connects this account to other places in Luke where illumination takes place during a meal.²¹⁷ Regarding Moore’s argument that the “opening” of minds (Luke 24:32, 45) did not necessarily lead to comprehension, Marshall deduces that the disciples were only later able to understand the experience they had on the road to Emmaus.²¹⁸ Moore’s apparent dichotomy between the words of Jesus and the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament is apparent when one considers that most scholars simply do not see a problem here,

210 Moore, *Mark*, 100–101.

211 Moore, *Mark*, 101.

212 Moore, *Mark*, 101.

213 Moore, *Mark*, 102.

214 Moore, *Mark*, 103.

215 Moore, *Mark*, 103.

216 David E. Garland, *Luke*, ZECNT 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 956; John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, WBC 35C (Dallas: Word, 1993), 1206; François Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*, Hermeneia, trans. James Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 375.

217 Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 849–50.

218 I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 899. For a similar argument, see Darrell L. Bock, *Luke. Volume 2: 9:51–24:53*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1920–21.

as the most conventional interpretation is that Jesus made it possible for his audience to understand what was being predicted in the Old Testament.²¹⁹ Moore's final textual point, that Jesus eating a fish was the real cause of the disciples' belief, rather than his teaching, is somewhat easier to bring into dialogue with current interpretive trends.²²⁰ The general consensus is that eating the fish primarily served to validate that Jesus was truly physically present.²²¹ Green concludes that it is the "scriptural illumination" that ultimately serves to inspire belief, pointing to multiple places in the chapter where merely witnessing the resurrected Christ does not itself bring people to the correct response.²²² Nolland specifically argues against the eating being decisive on the grounds that (1) vv. 44–49 have similar occurrences of "scriptural exposition"²²³ as do vv. 25–27, which suggests that it is the Old Testament exegesis that is ultimately key for overcoming unbelief; and (2) that the "great joy" of v. 52 builds on the "joy" of v. 41, indicating that Old Testament interpretation, along with other factors, inspires faith in a way that simple physical evidence cannot.²²⁴

As seen above, Moore's textual arguments swing rather wide of the mark and are mostly dependent on false dichotomies. However, this still leaves open the question of his application to the concept of authorial intention. Is the search for an authorial "voice" hopelessly doomed to failure? While a simplistic approach to authorial intention that seeks to dig into the psyche of the author would be vulnerable to Moore's critique, far more nuanced models of our ability to recover authorial meaning exist. Pertinent here is the discussion provided by Porter, who provides a critical evaluation of the canonical dismissal of authorial intent by Wimsatt and Beardsley,²²⁵ and similarly identifies some shortcomings in the reactionary works of Hirsch and Juhl (although ultimately being sympathetic to the goals of the latter).²²⁶ Shifting his attention to the field of linguistics, Porter notes that intention has always been a core part of how linguists have conceived of the nature of meaning.²²⁷ However, in many cases this has been articulated using a problematic distinction between "sentence and utterance meaning,"²²⁸ resulting in a situation where these types of meanings are hopelessly disconnected, and

219 Marshall, *Luke*, 905; Bock, *Luke*, 1937–38.

220 See Merrill G. Greene, "'A Ghost Does Not Have Flesh and Bones': An Apotropaic Reading of Luke 24:36–43," *Canadian-American Theological Review* 10.2 (2021): 1–19, for an important study on the significance of the fish from the perspective of its role in warding off demons in contemporary Jewish and Greek literature.

221 Garland, *Luke*, 966; Marshall, *Luke*, 903.

222 Green, *Luke*, 855.

223 Nolland, *Luke*, 1214.

224 Nolland, *Luke*, 1214–15.

225 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 52–58.

226 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 59–61.

227 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 61.

228 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 64.

the analysis only moves in a bottom-up direction. As a means of moving forward, Porter proposes two relevant points that insightfully reorient how interpreters should view authorial intention: “the psychology or consciousness of the author is ultimately inscrutable and finally irrelevant to interpretation and not necessary to have a useful theory of authorial intention,”²²⁹ and “the text itself is the product of intention, and therefore in some definable way reflects the intention of the author as a linguistically embedded textual intention.”²³⁰ This nuanced understanding of intent helps interpreters focus on the evidence available rather than an elusive authorial psyche, and, at the same time, dismantles Moore’s position that intentionality is entirely unavailable.

General Discussion

The analysis of the present study looks at five different areas of *MLPP* that can be placed in conversation with mainstream scholarship. In the vast majority of cases, it is documented that Moore neglects to consider more plausible interpretations and narrowly fixates on ways of reading that support his chosen allegorical application. When considering these allegorical applications on their own merits, the plausibility of their level of skepticism regarding the possibility of meaning to be effectively transmitted through language is significantly diminished when these positions are placed in conversation with recent developments in theoretical linguistics regarding mechanisms for using texts to reconstruct their social contexts, principles of lexical semantics, the nature of and criteria for discerning literary genres, and definitions of authorial intention. As a result, in none of these test cases did Moore’s poststructuralist approach succeed in generating textual observations that could challenge traditional interpretations on their own merits.²³¹

Conclusion

Is it, then, appropriate to say that the emperor simply has no clothes? That judgment ultimately lies in the eye of the beholder. Indeed, readers fervently committed to the underlying (anti?)metaphysical stance of deconstructionism would likely dismiss most of the above analysis as missing the point. But the above exercise is nonetheless a crucial task, that of clarifying exactly what is being claimed in a landmark work of biblical criticism and placing such claims in their broader

229 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 65.

230 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 65.

231 Although the present study sought to chart a fresh course away from the usual critiques of the monochromatic conclusions about meaning and language that are typical of much deconstructionist criticism, it is hard to avoid agreeing with Vickery, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 346, as he states, “In each case, if the initial claim for cogency lies in the nature of language and the text, then the same assertions can be made in connection with any language and any text and thereby the significance of the particular instance is diminished.”

context in the field of biblical studies. Returning to the trends in reception noted above, this need for careful review of what exactly is being advocated in oft-referenced works of scholarship, and the consideration of these works in their respective intellectual contexts, remains more pressing than ever, and thus should be a priority for all practitioners of academic biblical studies.²³²

232 For example, see the detailed studies encompassing biography, intellectual context, methodology, and interpretive examples in the Pillars in Biblical Interpretation series: Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, eds., *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 1: Prevailing Methods Before 1980*, McMaster Biblical Studies Series 2 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016); Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, eds., *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 2: Prevailing Methods After 1980*, McMaster Biblical Studies Series 2 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016); Stanley E. Porter and Zachary K. Dawson, eds., *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 3: Further Essays on Prevailing Methods*, McMaster Biblical Studies Series 6 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021); Stanley E. Porter and Zachary K. Dawson, eds., *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 4*, McMaster Biblical Studies Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, forthcoming).