

4. On Cycles and Roads: Plot and arrangement in Mark

Narrative Criticism
Orality Studies

What is a story?

'Every story encompasses three elements: events, characters and settings.
Somebody does something to someone, somewhere, at some time'

Mark Allan Powell, What is Narrative Criticism? 35.

Which is a story?

The king died in 1834. The queen's cat died in 1837.

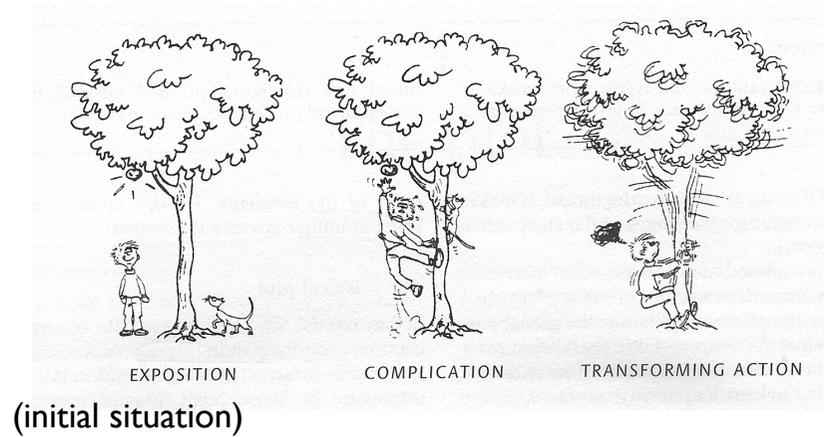
The king died in 1834. The queen died of grief four years later.

How are events used in a story?

events + relationship = plot

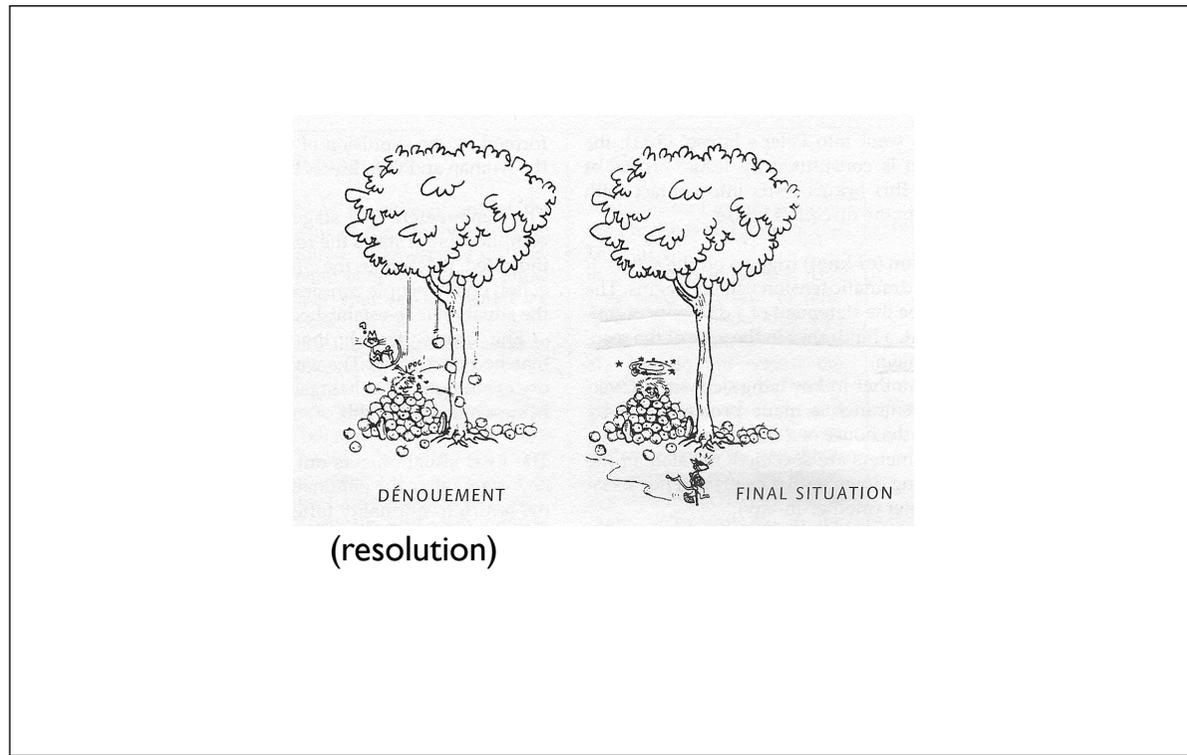
Aristotle defined the plot (muthos) as the arrangement of the incidents

A Plot's Five Stages

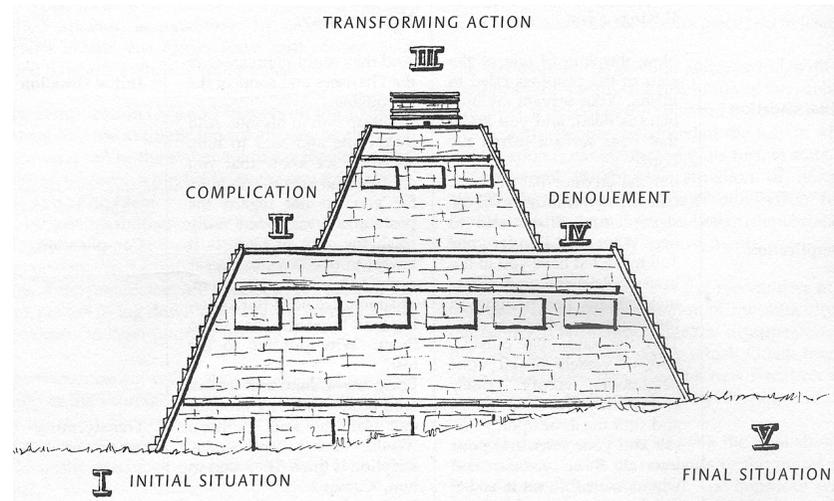


Marguerat & Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories*, 43

1. Exposition - initial situation
2. complication is what triggers off the action, a difficulty, a conflict, an incident, a hindrance.
3. The transforming action aims at removing the difficulty, the shortage or the disturbance announced by the story.



4. This is symmetrical with the complication. It describes the effects of the transforming action.
5. The final situation sets out the recognition of the new state.



Marguerat & Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories*, 37

Mark 1:29-31

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

Initial Situation

Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.

Complication

He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up.

Transforming action

Then the fever left her,

Resolution

and she began to serve them.

Final situation

Mark 12:13-17

Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians

Initial Situation

to trap him in what he said. 14 And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? 15 Should we pay them, or should we not?" But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why are you putting me to the test?"

Complication

Bring me a denarius and let me see it." 16 And they brought one. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's."

Transforming action

17 Jesus said to them, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

Resolution

And they were utterly amazed at him.

Final situation

Plots and Sub-Plots

Which of the following is the dominant conflict in Mark?

Jesus and the Jewish authorities

Jesus and the disciples

Jesus and Satan/demons

Jesus and the Romans

The Plot of the Gospel?

Jesus heals and preaches (chapters 1-2)	Initial Situation
Jesus is rejected (e.g. rulers, 3:6; Nazareth, 6:3) and betrayed (Judas, 3:19)	Complication
Jesus is betrayed and killed (e.g. 14:10-11; 15:33-39)	Transforming action
The Jews are rid of Jesus (15:42-47)	Resolution
Jesus is risen (16:1-8)	Final situation (???)

This could be read in kingdom of God terms.

The Plot of the Gospel?

Why did Jesus die in Mark?

How does this relate to early Christian origins?

Arrangement in the Gospel

Imagine you didn't have a copy of the Gospel and had to learn it by heart.

What 'narrative pegs' would aid the memorisation process?

Note that these pegs are my suggestion. However, there is wide agreement that Mark reflects oral patterning.

Cycles in the Gospel

Summary	Disciples	Ministry	Opposition
1:14-15	1:16-20	1:21-3:5	3:6
3:7-12	3:13-19	3:20-5:43	6:1-6a
6:6b	6:7-13	6:14-?	?

Note the intensification as we go through the cycles.

A String of Pearls: Matt 8 & 9

- Leper
- Centurion's Servant
- Peter's mother-in law
- Discipleship
- The Storm
- Gadarene Demoniacs
- Paralytic
- Discipleship
- Girl/woman
- Two blind men
- Demoniac

The Road to Jerusalem

Journey	Related Stories
'As he was setting out on a journey' (10:17)	The Rich Man
'They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem' (10:32)	Passion prediction, James and John request positions
'They came to Jericho' (10:46)	Blind Bartimaeus
'When they were approaching Jerusalem' (11:1)	Jesus enters Jerusalem on a colt
'Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything.....he went out' (11:11)	Passion Week

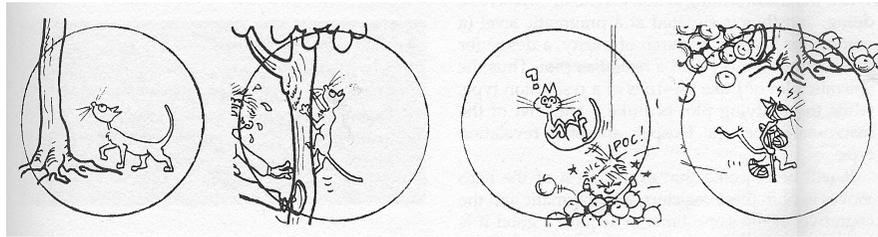
The journey motif acts as a mental framework upon which you can hang various stories.

The Passion Week

Time Reference	Related Stories
‘Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything.....as it was already late, he went out’ (11:11)	First temple visit
‘On the following day’ (11:12; 11:19)	Second temple visit (cleanses temple)
‘In the morning’ (11:20, 27)	Third visit (prolonged disputes, eschatological discourse)
‘Two days before the Passover’ (14:1)	Anointing at Bethany
‘On the first day of Unleavened Bread (14:12)	Lord’s supper, Gethsemane, arrest
‘As soon as it was morning’ (15:1) ‘When it was noon’ (15:33) ‘When evening had come’ (15:42)	Jesus before Pilate, crucifixion
‘When the sabbath was over’ (16:1)	Empty tomb

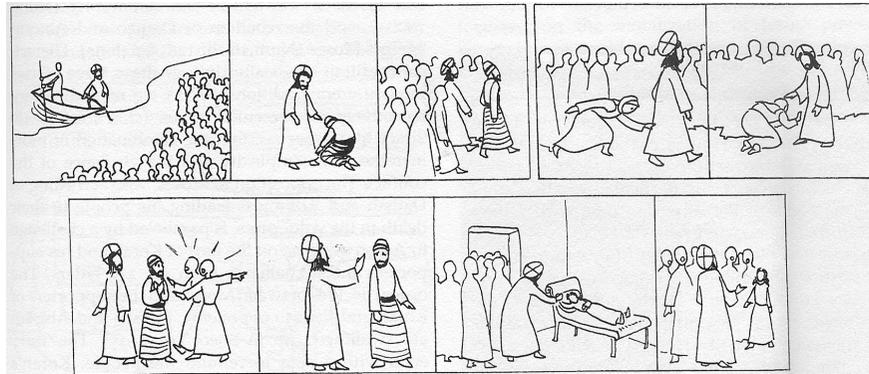
The progress of time is used as a mental peg for hanging events. Clearly early Christians sought to pin down the order of events of the passion week.

Episodic Plots



Marguerat & Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories*, 55

Markan 'sandwiches'



Mark 5:21-43 in nine scenes: Look for the sandwich....

Marguerat & Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories*, 53

Passage	Insertion
3:20-35 (Family of Jesus outside)	vv. 22-30 (Scribal view of Jesus)
4:1-20 (Parable of Sower)	vv. 10-13 (Secret of the Kingdom)
5:21-43 (Jarius' daughter)	vv. 25-34 (Woman with Hemorrhage)
6:7-30 (Mission of the Twelve)	vv. 14-29 (Death of John the Baptist)
11:12-21(Fig Tree)	vv. 15-19 (Jesus cleanses the Temple)
14:1-11 (Plot to kill Jesus)	vv. 3-9 (Anointing at Bethany)

Papias gives also in his own work other accounts of the words of the Lord on the authority of Aristion who was mentioned above, and traditions as handed down by the presbyter John; to which we refer those who are fond of learning. But now we must add to the words of his which we have already quoted the tradition which he gives in regard to Mark, the author of the Gospel. It is in the following words: "This also the presbyter said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things done or said by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord's discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely." These things are related by Papias concerning Mark. But concerning Matthew he writes as follows: "So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able." And the same writer uses testimonies from the first Epistle of John and from that of Peter likewise. And he relates another story of a woman, who was accused of many sins before the Lord, which is contained in the Gospel according to the Hebrews. These things we have thought it necessary to observe in addition to what has already been stated. Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.14-17)

Papias (pre-70 to c. 155 AD), Bishop of Hieropolis, recounts hearing traditions from the presbyters who themselves heard the apostles.

Eusebius of Caesarea, c. 263–339 AD, called *Eusebius Pamphili*, became the Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine about the year 314. Eusebius was a supporter of Arias, and as such, fell out of favour.

Luke 1:1-4 Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

