

Expected and Unexpected Readings of Matthew: What the Reader Knows

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We learn how to read stories at an early age. We recognize when a story is not affecting us in its intended fashion. We perceive that the story is supposed to be humorous, even though we do not think it is funny. We realize that the story is supposed to be scary, even though we are not scared. When this happens, we usually regret the distance between the story's intended and actual effects, and may attempt to bridge this gap to make the reading experience more satisfactory.¹

If the fault lies with the narrative itself, little can be done. Perhaps the story is just not a very good one, at least in our estimation. Or, perhaps, the story itself is all right, but is not told well. We think the story could be funny, or scary, or whatever, if only it were told by a more gifted author.

At other times, the fault may lie with us. The story may be a good one, exquisitely told, but over our heads. There are too many big words that we don't understand, too many obscure concepts or allusions that escape our grasp. We recognize that we are not appreciating the story as we would if we knew everything that we are expected to know. What do we do? If the story is important to us, we try to increase our knowledge in order to appreciate it more fully. We look up words in the dictionary, do some research on the period of history in which the story takes place, or do whatever else is necessary to gain the knowledge we are expected to have.

Then again, stories sometimes fail to affect us as they might because we know too much. If we have seen a motion picture version of the story or talked with a

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friend who has read the book, we may find our reading experience compromised. Associations imported from the film or advance knowledge regarding how the story will turn out may prevent us from appreciating the narrative as intended. What do we do? If the story is important to us, we may pretend that we do not know whatever we are not expected to know. We approach the story on its own terms, pretending to forget whatever extraneous information we have acquired. Thus, we may think it sad when the hero appears to have died, even though we know that the apparent death is only a ruse. If we realize that we are not supposed to know something, we pretend that we don't, and so allow the story to affect us in its intended fashion.

Narrative critics attempt to read the Gospel of Matthew as a story.² In doing this, they recognize the gap between the effect that this Gospel is intended to have on its readers and the effect that it actually does have on many real readers today.³ Narrative criticism attempts to bridge this gap by enabling readers to experience the story in the manner expected of its "implied reader"; that is, the reader presupposed by the narrative.⁴ The implied reader of Matthew's Gospel may be defined as an imaginary person for whom the intention of the text always reaches its fulfillment.⁵ The implied reader of Matthew's Gospel knows everything that the Gospel expects him or her to know, but does not know anything that the Gospel does not expect him or her to know.⁶ According to this model of literary criticism, interpretations offered by real readers may be called unexpected readings⁷ if they (a) fail to take into account knowledge possessed by the implied reader, or (b) depend upon knowledge not possessed by the implied reader.

What does the implied reader of Matthew's Gospel know? At the very least, this implied reader must possess linguistic competence to receive the text, in Greek if that is the narrative we are to imagine being read, or in some other language if we prefer to discuss reception of a translated version.⁸ In addition, four other types of knowledge⁹ may be assumed to belong to the repertoire¹⁰ of Matthew's implied reader.

I.

The implied reader of Matthew's Gospel has **knowledge that might be considered universal**; that is, knowledge that is generally assumed for all people everywhere.¹¹ Matthew's implied reader knows that five loaves and two fish would not normally be enough food for 5,000 people (14:17), and so regards what happens in 14:15-21 as extraordinary. Similarly, Matthew's implied reader knows that a camel is larger than a gnat and cannot really be swallowed by a human being; therefore, Jesus' comment in 23:24 must be taken figuratively. This type of knowledge does not need to be spelled out within the narrative itself, but can be taken for granted, because it is based on universal human experience.¹²

With regard to this type of knowledge, real readers should be at one with the implied reader. By definition, this knowledge derives from universal human experience and, so, the knowledge of real readers on such matters should coincide with what is expected of the implied reader.¹³

II.

The implied reader of Matthew's Gospel also has **knowledge of what is revealed within the narrative**. Matthew's implied reader pays attention to what he or she reads

and accepts what the narrator reports as reliable.¹⁴ Thus, the implied reader of this Gospel knows that Hezron was the father of Ram (1:3), that John the Baptist was beheaded at the command of Herod (14:9-10), and that the Sadducees say there is no resurrection (22:23). All this knowledge is conveyed to the reader within the narrative.

Real readers are typically less attentive to what is revealed within the narrative than the implied reader is expected to be. Many people who have read Matthew's Gospel several times may find it difficult to recall whether Hezron was the father of Ram or vice versa. The narrator states this clearly in 1:3 but, unlike the implied reader, real readers tend to forget.

One reason, then, that real readers arrive at unexpected interpretations is that they fail to notice or remember information provided within the narrative. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus identifies himself with needy people whom he describes as his "brothers." He says that deeds of mercy performed for these people are done for him. Real readers of Matthew's Gospel may interpret this to mean that all people throughout the world are Jesus' brothers, and that any deeds of mercy performed for the needy qualify as ministry to Jesus himself. Matthew's implied reader, however, would not be expected to interpret the passage in this way. Matthew's implied reader would be expected to recall that, earlier in the narrative, Jesus' "brothers" were defined as people who do the will of God (12:50). Accordingly, Matthew's implied reader understands Jesus' reference to "the least of these, my brothers" in 25:40 as applying not to all needy people everywhere but, specifically, to needy people who do the will of God.¹⁵

But now we must pause to consider another option: is it possible, ever, for real readers to miss the interpretation expected of the implied reader because they are more attentive to what is revealed within the narrative than the implied reader is expected to be? We know that this can happen with some narratives. In a recent film,¹⁶ for example, the leading female character asks a doorman for the apartment number of a man she wishes to visit. The doorman replies, "2D." Later, we see the woman being admitted to the man's apartment, but the number on his door clearly reads, "2A." A host of questions might flood our minds: Was the doorman lying? Did the man change apartments? How did the woman find the right one when she had been given wrong information? Actually, all of these questions are irrelevant. The mix-up of numbers in the film is simply a mistake, a gaffe that the audience is not supposed to notice. When members of the audience do notice the numbers and try to read some significance into them, they are interpreting the film in a way that its implied audience would not.

In Matthew 12:40, Jesus tells the religious leaders of Israel that, "as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." This saying is a prediction by Jesus of his own resurrection, which is reported later in the narrative. If one reads very carefully, however, one may notice that Jesus does not actually spend "three days and three nights" in the heart of the earth as he predicted. At most, he is in the tomb for portions of three days and two nights. Does the implied reader of Matthew notice this discrepancy and wonder what it means? I suspect that, at this point, the implied reader is less attentive than some real readers have been. The implied reader is expected to hear this prediction as parallel to other statements Jesus makes, statements that indi-

cate he will rise from the dead “on the third day” without bothering to enumerate the exact number of nights (16:21; 17:23; 20:19; cf. 27:63-64).¹⁷

Real readers, then, may miss the interpretation expected of the implied reader if they are either more or less observant than the implied reader is expected to be. How can we tell just what the implied reader is expected to notice? Absolute certainty with regard to this matter may not be possible, but we can at least test our suppositions according to certain criteria:

(1) **Recurrence.** Is the knowledge that we suppose the reader is expected to notice found more than once in the narrative? This criterion suggests that the reader is more likely to notice information that is repeated within the narrative, although this certainly does not mean that the reader is never expected to notice information that is provided only once. Our supposition that the reader is expected to notice a connection between 12:50 and 25:40 would be strengthened if Jesus also identified his “brothers” as people who do the will of God elsewhere in the narrative. The fact that he doesn’t, however, does not prove our supposition false. Likewise, the fact that Jesus refers only once to the Son of Man being three days and three nights in the heart of the earth does not, in and of itself, indicate that the reader is not expected to notice the discrepancy between 12:40 and 27:57-28:10. But our supposition that the reader is not expected to note this discrepancy would be less tenable if the “three days and three nights” information was provided more than once.

(2) **Thematic coherence.**¹⁸ Does the knowledge that the reader is expected to notice yield a reading that seems reasonable within the context of the narrative as a whole? To presume that the implied reader does notice the connection between 12:50 and 25:40 seems reasonable, because for Jesus to identify himself with needy persons who do the will of the Father in heaven would match his identification elsewhere with (a) humble children who are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (18:2-5), (b) disciples who gather in his name to pray to the Father in heaven (18:19-20), and, (c) people who baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (28:19-20). To presume, however, that the implied reader notices a discrepancy between the saying in 12:40 and the actual narrative of the resurrection in 27:57-28:10 does not seem reasonable. Jesus is not elsewhere portrayed in this narrative as a person who fails to get his predictions right.¹⁹

Even professional readers²⁰ of Matthew’s Gospel who follow such criteria may sometimes disagree in their conclusions regarding just what Matthew’s implied reader is expected to know. One question that has evoked some discussion, for instance, is whether the implied reader should be thought of as a person who is reading the narrative for the first time.²¹ In other words, when we focus on any particular passage in Matthew’s Gospel, should we assume that the implied reader will understand this passage in light of the entire Gospel? Or, should we assume that the implied reader knows only that portion of the Gospel that precedes this passage? Different answers to these questions may yield different interpretations.

We may illustrate these different interpretations with reference to Matthew 9:15. When Jesus is challenged to explain why his disciples do not fast, he responds, “Can the wedding guests fast as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.” The implied

reader may be expected to recognize this saying as a prediction of Jesus' death, which will be narrated later in the Gospel. If, however, the implied reader is assumed to be reading this narrative for the first time, the passage will simply be mysterious, for nothing in the narrative up to this point has told the reader that Jesus is going to die.

The question of whether Matthew's implied reader should be thought of as experiencing the narrative for the first time remains unresolved, but may not be as significant for our appreciation of the Gospel as it first appears. For one thing, suspense is not a major motif in Matthew's Gospel. Even if we do posit a first-time reader for Matthew, the saying in 9:15 will not remain mysterious for long. Jesus soon predicts his death in terms that are much more explicit (16:21; 17:23; 20:19), and even a first-time reader would be expected to remember the earlier saying and interpret it in light of these new revelations. Thus, the question regarding 9:15 is not whether the implied reader understands the saying as applying to Jesus' death, but when the implied reader comes to understand this. In neither case is the implied reader envisioned as being held in suspense concerning what will happen to Jesus until the story reaches its conclusion.

Another reason this question is not as crucial as it might at first appear is that real readers must be able to adopt the perspective of one who does not know how the story is going to turn out regardless of whether or not this is the perspective ascribed to the implied reader. Even if we do not assume that Matthew's implied reader is reading the story for the first time, we must recognize that the implied reader is able to understand the perspectives of the various characters in the narrative. To focus on 9:15 again, even if Matthew's implied reader recognizes the saying immediately as a reference to Jesus' death, the people to whom Jesus is speaking in the story cannot be expected to understand what he says in this way. The implied reader knows that the characters who hear Jesus' response in 9:15 find that response mysterious. Accordingly, our task as real readers is the same regardless of whether we assume Matthew's implied reader is experiencing the story for the first time. In any case, we must be able to pretend that we do not know how the story will turn out in order to hear the words of Jesus the way the characters in the story would hear them.

To summarize the main points of this section, real readers who wish to receive Matthew's narrative in the manner expected of its implied reader must (a) be attentive to information within the narrative that the reader is expected to notice; and (b) be willing to overlook certain things in the narrative that the reader is not expected to notice. We should be cautious in ascribing knowledge revealed within the narrative to the latter category, but we may find warrant for doing so when such knowledge is not provided repeatedly and when consideration of such knowledge leads to an interpretation inconsistent with the narrative as a whole.

III.

The implied reader of Matthew's Gospel also has **knowledge that is presupposed by the spatial, temporal and social setting of the narrative**. Such knowledge is not explicitly revealed within the narrative, nor can it be derived from universal human experience. Rather, it is knowledge intrinsic to this particular narrative, assumed by all of the characters as well as by the narrator to be common knowledge within the world of this story.

Matthew's implied reader knows some geography. He or she knows what is meant by references to Judea (2:1), Galilee (2:23), Egypt (2:14), Israel (2:21), the Decapolis (4:25), Gennesaret (14:34), Magadan (15:39), and many other locales. These places are cited in the narrative with such brevity of detail that some familiarity must be assumed. At the very least, the reader is expected to know which place names refer to nations and which to cities. Beyond this, the reader is expected to have some inkling of the distances traversed as the characters move from place to place, and to know, for instance, that Egypt was not a part of Herod's jurisdiction (2:13-14). Some of the stories also seem to assume particular associations regarding settings. Matthew's reader is expected, for example, to know that Jerusalem is "the holy city" (4:5; 27:53).

Matthew's implied reader also knows some history. He or she knows what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah (10:15; 11:24) and understands what is meant by the expression, "deportation to Babylon" (1:11, 12, 17). This information, of course, would be available from the Hebrew Scriptures that are cited repeatedly throughout the narrative (see Section IV below), but other historical information would not be. For example, Matthew's reader apparently knows who Caesar is (22:17, 21) and recognizes what time period is meant by the phrase, "in the days of Herod the king" (2:1). Characters such as Simon the leper (26:6) and Mary Magdalene (27:56) are introduced so casually that their names alone may be expected to strike a familiar chord.

Matthew's implied reader has knowledge concerning the social and cultural realities of life in Palestine during the time of Jesus. This reader knows what synagogues are (4:23), and understands what it means for a person to be crucified (20:19), or for a man and woman to be betrothed (1:18). The reader is expected to know the difference between broad and narrow phylacteries (23:5), and to understand why someone would whitewash a tomb (23:27) or pour ointment over another person's head (26:9). If Matthew's reader can be assumed to know that two sparrows sell for an assarion (10:29), then surely this reader can also be counted on to know that 10,000 talents are worth more than 100 denarii (18:23-35). Indeed, when our English Bibles report that Peter was accosted by collectors of "the temple tax" (17:24; NEB, NRSV, REB, TEV), they are being generous to modern-day readers. The Greek text of Matthew's story refers only to those who collect the didrachma. The implied reader of Matthew's Gospel not only knows how much a drachma is worth, but also knows that two drachma was the amount charged for the temple tax. In the same way, the implied reader of Matthew's Gospel is expected to know something about many other areas of life: sowing (13:3-9), harvesting (13:3-9), winnowing (3:12), fishing (4:18-21; 13:47-50), shepherding (25:32), tenant farming (21:33-46), court proceedings (5:25-26, 40-41), and customs associated with weddings (25:1-13) and funerals (9:23).

Matthew's reader is also expected to understand symbolic language that is used throughout the narrative, even though the meaning of such language is often culturally determined. Matthew's reader knows that being called "the salt of the earth" (5:13) is a compliment, while being called a "brood of vipers" (3:7) is not. This much, of course, might be determined from narrative context, but the fuller sense in which such metaphors and epithets²² are to be understood derives from the social context of the narrative's setting. The same is true for euphemisms: Matthew's reader knows that

the saints who have "fallen asleep" (27:52) are actually dead,²³ and understands the expression "kingdom of heaven" to be synonymous with "kingdom of God."

Symbolic speech also includes religious words and phrases. Matthew's narrative makes reference to abstract religious concepts without providing any precise definition of what is meant. A partial list of such concepts would include blasphemy (9:3), forgiveness (26:28), gospel (4:23), hypocrisy (6:2), judgment (10:15), law (5:17), piety (6:1), repentance (3:1), righteousness (5:20), salvation (1:21), sin (1:21), wisdom (11:9), and witness (10:18). Matthew's reader is expected to understand these concepts in a manner appropriate to the social and cultural setting of the narrative. When Jesus says, "Do not give dogs what is holy" (7:6), the reader is not just expected to know what dogs are, and to recognize that the reference to dogs here is metaphorical rather than literal. The reader is also expected to know what Jesus means by the phrase "what is holy."

What is said of symbolic speech also holds true for symbolic actions. When Jesus falls on his face in Gethsemane (26:39), the reader does not think he is clumsy but realizes he has assumed an appropriate posture for prayer. When the high priest tears his robes (26:65), or when Jesus' disciples are instructed to salute a house (10:12) or to shake off the dust from their feet (10:14), Matthew's reader is expected to understand the symbolic meaning that attends these gestures.

One can easily imagine how unexpected readings may result when real readers of Matthew lack knowledge presupposed by the setting of the narrative. People who are frequent victims of spouse abuse, for instance, might read Matthew 5:39 as counseling passive acceptance of their fate. But in Matthew's story, when Jesus says, "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other as well," he does not mean that victims of violence should allow themselves to be repeatedly brutalized. Matthew's implied reader is expected to understand the reference to a slap on the cheek as more of a ritual insult than a physical attack.²⁴

What happens, then, if information that is assumed for the setting of Matthew's narrative is no longer available to us today? We may find that it is impossible for us to assume perfectly the role of the implied reader that is expected of us. If this is the case, our most honest response should be an admission of inadequacy. Such an admission, I believe, is more responsible than the suggestion that unresolved ambiguities be embraced as indications that the text is open to multiple interpretations. Robert Fowler, for instance, has suggested that since Jesus' metaphor of the wineskins is not clearly defined within the narrative of Mark's Gospel (Mark 2:21-22), we are "encouraged to launch out on our own" in making sense of this particular metaphor.²⁵ I suspect, rather, that the metaphor is not clearly defined because Mark's implied reader is expected to understand it without explanation. In other words, the metaphor may be ambiguous to real readers today, but it is not ambiguous to Mark's implied reader. If we are unable at this point to achieve the goal of reading Mark in the manner expected of its implied reader, so be it. Let us at least admit this, and not take the easy way out by claiming that the text is supposed to be ambiguous and that, accordingly, we are not supposed to know things that are difficult (or impossible) for us to know.²⁶

Unexpected readings may also result when the real reader possesses knowledge of the setting that is not presupposed by the narrative; that is, knowledge that the implied reader is not expected to have. The most obvious manner in which a real reader might be over-informed in this way is through the acquisition of false knowledge. We may imagine a reader who has been told that there was a narrow gate in the walls of Jerusalem called "the needle's eye," through which a camel could conceivably pass with difficulty. Matthew's implied reader would not know about this gate, which, in fact, never existed. Matthew's implied reader understands Jesus' comment in 19:24 as hyperbolic speech stressing the complete impossibility of a rich person entering the reign of heaven without divine intervention (19:26). The over-informed real reader, however, may take Jesus' words literally and arrive at an interpretation at variance with that expected of the implied reader.

Real readers may be over-informed in other ways as well. Some real readers may know that salt cannot actually lose its flavor (5:13) and that mustard seeds are not the smallest of all seeds (13:32). While this knowledge is not incorrect, it is inappropriate for the setting of Matthew's narrative. The implied reader of Matthew's Gospel would never evaluate Jesus' words regarding salt and mustard seeds in light of such knowledge. In the same way, modern-day readers of Matthew may sometimes find that they know more details about matters referred to in this story than the implied reader would be expected to know. Matthew's implied reader, for example, is probably not expected to know which Caesar's image was found on the coin shown to Jesus in 22:19. Interpretations that build on such an identification may pursue directions that the implied reader would not follow.

We said earlier that, because unexpected readings can result either from under-observance or over-observance of what is revealed within the narrative, real readers must struggle to determine what the implied reader is expected to notice. The same principle holds for knowledge presupposed by the setting of the narrative. Unexpected readings may result if readers are either under-informed or over-informed concerning the narrative's setting. Thus, real readers who wish to read the narrative in the manner expected of its implied reader must struggle to determine what information the reader is assumed to possess.

Once again, certain criteria may guide us in making these determinations:

(1) **Availability.** Was the knowledge we are to regard as assumed for the setting of the narrative available to the author?²⁷ It makes sense to assume that the reader is expected to know that 10,000 talents are worth more than 100 denarii, because the author of Matthew's Gospel probably would have known this. It does not make sense to assume the reader is expected to know that orchid seeds are smaller than mustard seeds, because the author of Matthew's Gospel probably would not have known this.

(2) **Recurrence.** Is the knowledge we are to regard as assumed for the setting of the narrative relevant for understanding the text in repeated instances? The likelihood that the reader is expected to have certain knowledge increases when this knowledge appears to be presupposed more than once. This does not mean, however, that we can assume the reader is not expected to know things that are presupposed only once. Both the relative value of talents and denarii (18:23-35) and the identity of the Caesar

whose image is on the coin (22:19) may be classed as information that would be relevant only once in Matthew's narrative. Still, we have said the former information is presupposed, while the latter probably is not. This decision takes other criteria into account. But, if the identity of the Caesar whose image appears on the coin was information that would be relevant several times in the narrative, then our supposition that this information is not presupposed would be less tenable.

(3) **Thematic Coherence.** Is the reading gained by assuming that the reader possesses certain knowledge related to the setting of the narrative consistent with the narrative as a whole? The supposition that Matthew's reader is expected to know the identity of the Caesar whose image appears on the coin would fail to meet this criterion, for nowhere else in this narrative is Jesus presented as a critic or supporter of any individual ruler or authority.

These criteria do not allow for certain results. The struggle to determine what knowledge concerning the narrative's setting the reader may be expected to know is not always an easy one. We might ask, for instance, whether Matthew's implied reader is expected to know that the temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed within forty years of Jesus' death. Jesus predicts in the story that the temple will be destroyed (24:2) and many real readers today know that this did in fact occur in 70 A.D. Matthew's narrative, however, ends without reporting the event. So, does Matthew's implied reader understand 24:2 in light of what is known to real readers today, or does Matthew's implied reader simply take the prediction as an imprecise forecast regarding something that still lies in the future?

The supposition that the reader is expected to know the temple will be destroyed within a generation of Jesus' death can be defended with regard to all three criteria suggested above. If, as most scholars believe, Matthew's Gospel was written later than 70 A.D., then this information would have been available to the historical author. References to predictions by Jesus of an impending destruction of the temple are found not only in 24:2, but also in 26:61 and 27:40. And, finally, the supposition that the reader has this knowledge yields an interpretation that regards Jesus as a reliable prophet whose predictions are fulfilled, an interpretation that coheres well with the presentation of Jesus elsewhere in the narrative.

The problem in supposing that the reader is expected to possess this particular knowledge is that the knowledge is not really presupposed by the setting of the story Matthew tells. None of the characters in the story hear Jesus' words in the way that we are suggesting the reader is expected to hear them. In literary terms, we have shifted from a focus on the setting presupposed by the narrative's story (its content) to a focus on the setting presupposed by its discourse (its rhetoric).²⁸ In other words, we are now assuming that the reader is expected to have knowledge presupposed by the setting in which the story was written, even if this knowledge is not presupposed by the setting of the story itself. Is this valid?

Literary critics sometimes face analogous questions in their consideration of secular literature. A recent book by William Demby²⁹ is set in the early 1960s and has John F. Kennedy as one of its characters. Real readers of Demby's book say they experience a sense of impending doom as the story progresses because they know that Kennedy

is going to be assassinated when the events of the novel reach November 22, 1963. Since the story itself does not contain any advance warnings that this is going to happen, one may ask whether this response of real readers is at variance with the anticipated response of Demby's implied reader. Critics such as Peter Rabinowitz and Wayne Booth have concluded that it is not.³⁰ Because the book was written at a time when the fact of Kennedy's assassination was well known, knowledge of this event may be regarded as presupposed for the narrative.

The same logic employed by Rabinowitz and Booth in consideration of Demby's book may be applied to the question of whether Matthew's implied reader knows the details concerning how and when Jesus' prediction of the temple destruction would be fulfilled. The facts of the temple destruction could have been considered common knowledge at the time when this book was written. But what Booth and Rabinowitz are really suggesting is that the criterion of availability discussed above be extended to apply not only to a work's author, but also to its original audience or first readers. I am uncomfortable with this suggestion because the concept of the implied reader is a heuristic device that should not be defined with reference to any real audience, original or otherwise.³¹ The use of this device is not compromised by the fact that no real person may ever be found who fulfills the narrative's expectations perfectly. So what if Matthew's real readers have from the very first possessed knowledge not available to the implied reader? Perhaps Matthew (and Demby, too, for that matter) has created a narrative that will never be received by real readers in the manner intended, unless they pretend not to know any more than what is presupposed for the setting of the story. Perhaps Matthew's narrative invites its readers to hear Jesus' prophecy in 24:2 in the same way that it would be heard by the characters in the story—as a vague forecast rather than as a precise prediction.

I would like to say, in defiance of Rabinowitz and Booth, that Matthew's implied reader knows only what is presupposed for the story itself. I do not believe that knowledge presupposed by the narrative's discourse should be ascribed to the implied reader in most cases. With regard to the text at hand, however, there is an overriding factor to consider. In Matthew 24:15, Jesus offers what is probably a further reference to the temple's violation³² and, this time, the narrative is interrupted by a direct appeal to the reader. The narrator interrupts Jesus' speech to say, "Let the reader understand." This rather remarkable narrative interruption would seem to have the opposite effect of what was suggested above. Rather than being invited to hear Jesus' words in the same way that they are heard by characters in the story, Matthew's implied reader is explicitly invited to hear Jesus' words with understanding that transcends what is available to those characters. We should conclude, therefore, that Matthew's implied reader probably is expected to know what happened to the temple in 70 A.D., even though this knowledge is presupposed by the narrative's discourse rather than by its story. This conclusion is made cautiously, however, and is based on the exceptional circumstance of an explicit cue to the reader provided within the narrative itself.

Should we ever assume that the implied reader's knowledge extends beyond what is presupposed for the setting of the story when such cues are not provided? I can think of one more instance in which such a move might be justified: the use of

anachronism. One of the most famous instances of anachronism in all literature is Shakespeare's reference to a clock striking in the play *Julius Caesar*. Many members of this play's real audiences have known that such clocks are inappropriate for the setting presupposed by the story, but the play's implied audience (like the characters in the play itself) do not consider the clock to be remarkable.

Does Matthew's Gospel contain any anachronisms? The references that Jesus makes to a "church" in 16:18 and 18:17 should probably be understood as such. Real readers may know that no such institution existed during the lifetime of Jesus, but the characters in the story are not the least bit puzzled by Jesus' references to this institution. Accordingly, Matthew's reader is probably expected to understand these references in light of the setting presupposed for the discourse of the narrative rather than in light of that which would actually be appropriate for the story.

To summarize the main points of this section, real readers who wish to receive Matthew's narrative in the manner expected of its implied reader must (1) have the knowledge concerning the spatial, temporal and social setting of the narrative, that the reader is expected to have, and (2) amend or pretend not to have knowledge concerning the narrative's setting that the reader is not expected to have. Real readers may consider such criteria as availability, recurrence and thematic coherence when determining which knowledge concerning the setting is presupposed. Typically, the knowledge that the reader is expected to have will be that which pertains to the narrative's story or content. In some exceptional circumstances, presupposed knowledge might also include that which pertains to the narrative's discourse or rhetoric.

IV.

The implied reader of Matthew's Gospel has **knowledge of other literature that is cited (by reference or allusion) within the narrative**. Such knowledge might be considered basic to this story's spatial, temporal, and social setting, in which case this class of knowledge is but a sub-set of what has already been mentioned. Still, this type of knowledge is worthy of special mention because it exemplifies what literary critics refer to as "intertextuality"; that is, the presumption that readers of one text have prior acquaintance with another.³³

Most instances of intertextuality in Matthew's Gospel are references or allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures; that is, to the several writings that Christians now refer to as "the Old Testament." Occasionally, these citations are explicit, such as when the writings of David (22:43-44), Isaiah (3:3), or Jeremiah (2:17-18) are referred to by name. More often, however, the reader's ability to make this connection is simply assumed. When Jesus responds to Satan three times by declaring, "It is written..." (4:4, 7, 10), the implied reader is expected to realize that what follows are quotations from Scripture. Other phrases used to introduce scriptural quotations include "Have you not read...?" (12:3, 5; 19:4; 22:31) and "Have you never read...?" (21:16, 42). The use of the latter two phrases is ironic, playing off the assumption that the implied reader has indeed read the texts that characters within the story have neglected to consider. But Matthew's implied reader is able to recognize scriptural citations even when no such phrase is used. When John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask Jesus whether he is

“the one who is to come,” Jesus replies, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (11:3-5). Jesus does not specify here that he is quoting Scripture, nor for that matter that he is quoting at all, but Matthew’s implied reader recognizes that he is responding to John’s question with words drawn from Isaiah (35:5-6; 61:1). Similarly, when Jesus tells the religious leaders to “go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (9:13), the implied reader recognizes that he is quoting Hosea (6:6) and that the referent for the first-person pronoun “I” is therefore God rather than Jesus himself.

Matthew’s implied reader also knows the Hebrew Scriptures well enough to recognize subtle allusions to them. When Jesus is offered vinegar to drink on the cross, the implied reader notices the connection to Psalm 69:21. The description of John the Baptist as dressed in camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist (3:4) summons images of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). When Judas is paid thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus (26:15), the implied reader thinks of Zechariah 11:12, and when Joseph of Arimathea places Jesus in his tomb (27:57-60), the implied reader thinks of Isaiah 53:9.

Unexpected readings may result, then, if real readers of Matthew’s Gospel do not know the Hebrew Scriptures as well as is expected of the Gospel’s implied reader. A real reader who is not familiar with Deuteronomy may have trouble making sense of Jesus’ conversation with the Sadducees in Matthew 22:23-32. In the latter passage, the Sadducees, who do not believe in resurrection (v. 23), try to stump Jesus with a trick question. Drawing on the teaching of Moses presented in Deuteronomy 25:5-6, they describe a scenario through which one woman becomes the wife, successively, of seven different men. Then they ask Jesus, “Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?” When Jesus says the Sadducees do not know the Scriptures (v. 29), an uninformed reader might conclude that he thinks the description of Moses’ teaching they have offered in the preceding verses is incorrect. The implied reader knows that this is not the case. Moses really did say that a man should marry the childless widow of his brother, just as the Sadducees have described. The Sadducees’ error lies elsewhere, in their failure to understand that the Scriptures teach a resurrection of the dead.

Or, again, when Jesus cries out from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (27:46), readers who do not know the Hebrew Scriptures might think he has lost hope or abandoned trust in God. The implied reader is expected to recognize that, even in his hour of desolation, Jesus understands his destiny in terms of the Scriptures he must fulfill (Psalm 22:1).

We must also ask whether unexpected readings may result when real readers know the Scriptures too well; that is, to a degree not expected of the implied reader. This can certainly happen when readers bring a modern critical understanding of the Old Testament to bear on Matthew’s narrative. Real readers, for instance, might question whether David was really the author of the words ascribed to him in Matthew 22:43-44. They might attribute laws concerning levirate marriage (22:24) to the “P” strata of the Pentateuch rather than to Moses. But Matthew’s implied reader is expected to regard David as the author of Psalm 110 and Moses as the author of the legal material in Deuteronomy.

Unexpected readings may also result when real readers scrutinize the texts cited in Matthew in a manner not expected of the Gospel's implied reader. Matthew says that Jesus' birth in Bethlehem fulfills a prophetic saying: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah" (2:5-6). Modern readers of Matthew often discover that the words "by no means" are not actually found in Micah 5:2. The implied reader is not expected to notice this. Again, Matthew 27:9-10 quotes the prophet Jeremiah as saying, "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me." Real readers have been unable to find this quotation anywhere in the writings of Jeremiah, or anywhere else in the Old Testament for that matter. Instead, the citation appears to be a composite quote, based primarily on Zechariah 11:13, with some assistance from such passages as Jeremiah 18:1-12 and 32:6-15 and, possibly, some phraseology drawn from the Pentateuch.³⁴ But Matthew's implied reader would never argue with the narrator over such details. If real readers want to read the Gospel of Matthew in the manner expected of its implied reader, they will sometimes have to set aside their own knowledge concerning the Scriptures and simply take what Matthew says about the Scriptures at face value.

We move on now to the question of whether Matthew's implied reader has knowledge of texts other than the Hebrew Scriptures. The best candidate for such consideration would be the Gospel of Mark, which most scholars believe was written prior to the Gospel of Matthew and used as a source for the composition of that work. Matthew's Gospel does draw heavily from the Gospel of Mark, but the indebtedness is never acknowledged. In other words, Matthew's reader is never told that some of the material in the narrative is derived from Mark's Gospel, or even that the latter work exists. Furthermore, the material drawn from Mark is often presented in redacted form without defense. For example, the account in Matthew 22:34-40 is derived from Mark 12:28-34. The story in Mark's narrative tells of a scribe who asks Jesus an apparently sincere question, agrees with the answer that Jesus gives, and is commended by Jesus for his insight. In Matthew's story, however, the scribe is presented as an opponent of Jesus who attempts to put him to the test (22:35). Readers familiar with Mark's Gospel would find it difficult to accept such a reinterpretation without explanation, but no explanation is provided. The assumption seems to be that Matthew's reader does not know about the Gospel of Mark and, so, does not wonder why such changes have occurred.

Since most real readers of Matthew today are familiar with Mark's Gospel, we must recognize that this familiarity may result in unexpected readings. In fact, much of the work of redaction criticism, which has dominated biblical studies for three decades, produces unexpected readings in the sense in which we are employing that term. Redaction critics typically compare Matthew's Gospel to that of Mark and attempt to explain the reasoning behind the changes that have been made. This approach has enhanced modern understanding of the Bible in significant ways but has not managed to read Matthew's narrative in the manner expected of its implied reader.³⁵

Unexpected readings result from what we may call "extratextuality"; reading the narrative in light of texts not known to the implied reader.³⁶ Matthew's implied reader is not expected to know the identity of the disciple who cuts off the ear of the high

priest's slave in Gethsemane (26:51; cf. John 18:10), or that the slave was subsequently healed by Jesus (cf. Luke 22:51). Matthew's implied reader is not expected to know that one of the two robbers crucified with Jesus rebuked the other and appealed to Jesus for mercy (27:38; cf. Luke 23:39-42). Real readers who are familiar with the entire New Testament must pretend that they do not know these things if they wish to experience the effect that Matthew's narrative is intended to have on its implied reader.

We recognize, then, that misreadings may occur when real readers have either too little or too much knowledge of other texts. Accordingly, real readers must struggle to discern which texts the implied reader is expected to know and how well the implied reader is expected to know them. As with other types of knowledge discussed above, this struggle is not always an easy one. Four criteria are significant for determining whether the implied reader of Matthew's Gospel is expected to recognize a proposed intertextual connection.³⁷

(1) **Availability.** Was the alleged precursor text available to the author of the successor text? There is no question that the Hebrew Scriptures were available to the author of Matthew's Gospel, for he refers to them explicitly. It would be ludicrous, however, to infer from Matthew 12:25 that the implied reader of this narrative is familiar with the speeches of Abraham Lincoln, for those texts did not exist at the time when Matthew's Gospel was written. Lincoln's claim that "a house divided against itself cannot stand" should be regarded as an intertextual allusion to Matthew's Gospel, rather than the other way around.

(2) **Degree of Repetition.** To what extent are features of the alleged precursor text repeated in the successor text? Jesus' citation of Hosea 6:6 in Matthew 9:13 rates high in this regard because the words "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" are repeated verbatim. The allusion to Psalm 22:18 in Matthew 27:35 is less direct, although the reference to dividing garments and casting lots in both passages suggests a possible connection. Our suggestion that Matthew 3:4 alludes to 2 Kings 1:8 is also tenuous, but the descriptions of both Elijah and John the Baptist as persons who wore hairy garments and leather girdles is noteworthy.

(3) **Recurrence.** Does the successor text refer to the alleged precursor text elsewhere? The supposition that Matthew 27:35 is an allusion to Psalm 22:18 is strengthened by the observation that Psalm 22 is also referenced by 27:46 ("My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?") where the degree of repetition is extremely high.

(4) **Thematic Coherence.** Is the meaning or effect suggested by the proposed connection consistent with that produced by the narrative as a whole? The proposal that Matthew 3:4 alludes to 2 Kings 1:8 is likely (in spite of the low degree of repetition) because John the Baptist is identified with Elijah elsewhere in the narrative (17:11-13).

With such criteria in mind, we may examine three potentially difficult cases. First, what is the implied reader to make of Jesus' comment in Matthew 5:43, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" The introductory phrase, "You have heard that it was said..." implies that what follows is a citation familiar to the reader. The implied reader knows, furthermore, that the phrase, "you shall love your neighbor" is a quotation from Leviticus (19:18). The degree of repetition here is almost exact and the factor of recurrence is also strong (Lev. 19:18 is also cited in Matt. 19:19 and 22:39). But what of the phrase, "hate your enemy"? It has

been suggested that this derives from Essene writings, where children of light are directed to hate children of darkness (1 QS 1:4, 9-11).³⁸ But it seems unlikely that Matthew's implied reader is expected to know these texts. We have no evidence that they were available to the Gospel's author. The degree of repetition between 1 QS 1:4, 9-11 and Matthew 5:43 is slight, consisting more of parallel ideas than of similar wording. Recurrence is nil, for the Qumran text is not cited anywhere else in Matthew's narrative. Nor would the criterion of thematic coherence be satisfied by this connection, for Jesus is not presented in Matthew's narrative as a critic of Essene doctrine.

Another suggestion makes more sense: the implied reader regards the entire phrase, "you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy" as deriving from the Hebrew Scriptures. The only problem with this proposal is that the degree of repetition for this full phrase is low. The words "hate your enemy" cannot be found explicitly in Leviticus or anywhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures. The basic thought, however, is present. Psalm 139:21-22 reads, "Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them as my enemies." The degree of repetition here is at least as great as for the Qumran passage, and other criteria are met as well. In terms of availability, there is no question that the Gospel's author would have had access to the book of Psalms. In terms of recurrence, obvious quotations and allusions to Psalms are found throughout Matthew's narrative. And in terms of thematic coherence, the presentation of Jesus as one who supplements what has been revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures with new insight is consistent with his characterization throughout the narrative (5:17). In fact, the very phrase used to introduce this citation, "You have heard it said..." occurs several times in the narrative material immediately preceding this passage (5:21, 27, 33, 38; cf. 5:31) and in every instance is used to introduce a citation from the Hebrew Scriptures. For these reasons, we may conclude that Matthew 5:43 offers no warrant for concluding that the implied reader of Matthew's narrative has knowledge of Essene writings. The verse can be understood in terms of the implied reader's knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Another potentially difficult case involves the reference to the "tradition of the elders" in Matthew 15:2. Pharisees and scribes who come to Jesus from Jerusalem ask him, "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." Since no further explanation is given (cf. Mark 7:3-4), we might assume that the implied reader is expected to know what the tradition of the elders says about washing hands before eating. The content of this tradition would probably have been available to the author, and explicit reference to the tradition counts as a high degree of repetition. In addition, Matthew's narrative probably alludes to this tradition of the elders elsewhere, although the phrase itself is not used again.³⁹ Some knowledge of what is contained in this tradition of the elders is necessary for thematic coherence. If, for instance, the reader thinks the scribes and Pharisees are concerned about hygiene rather than ritual purity, he or she will miss the significance of Jesus' comments on defilement in 15:10-20.

It seems safe, then, to assume that the implied reader of Matthew's Gospel is expected to know what the tradition of the elders says about the washing of hands. The prob-

lem for us is that we do not possess any definitive copy of this tradition of the elders today.⁴⁰ Reading this text in the manner expected of its implied reader may be impossible, because the implied reader is expected to have knowledge of a precursor text no longer available to us. The significance of this lapse is difficult to determine. Perhaps the implied reader is expected to know no more than that the issue was one of ritual purity. If this is the case, we may be missing nothing.⁴¹ But, perhaps, the implied reader is expected to have more detailed knowledge concerning the tradition of the elders, knowledge that would introduce nuances of meaning real readers cannot discern today.

A third difficult case involving questions of intertextuality concerns the references in Matthew 26:61 and 27:40 to Jesus' claim that he is able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. Jesus himself is never quoted as saying this. In 26:61, witnesses at Jesus' trial accuse him of having made this claim,⁴² and in 27:40 the charge is taken up by mockers who deride Jesus as he hangs on the cross. Real readers of Matthew may know that, according to John 2:19, Jesus really did make such a claim. Still, the implied reader of Matthew's Gospel is not expected to know the Gospel of John. What, then, is Matthew's implied reader expected to make of the charges that Jesus made this claim? Is the implied reader expected to regard them as false charges, since Jesus is never represented in the narrative as saying what he is accused of having said?

Another possibility exists. Perhaps Matthew's implied reader is expected to be familiar with a body of oral tradition that attributes this saying to Jesus. This body of oral tradition would then be regarded as the precursor text from which an intertextual connection is now drawn. Such tradition may certainly have been available to the Gospel's author. The high degree of repetition between what Jesus is alleged to have said in Matthew 26:61, 27:40 and what he is quoted as saying in John 2:19 argues for the likelihood of such a saying being known in contexts independent of either Gospel. With regard to the criterion of recurrence, we must admit that there are no other instances in Matthew's narrative in which the reader is expected to know sayings of Jesus not reported in the narrative itself. As we have previously noted, however, there are instances in which the reader might be expected to have some prior knowledge of Christian tradition. The implied reader may be expected to understand Jesus' reference to the bridegroom being taken away (9:15) as an allusion to his impending death. The implied reader may be expected to have already heard of such persons as Simon the leper (26:6) and Mary Magdalene (27:56), who are introduced without description. And, the implied reader is expected to know what the "church" is (16:18; 18:17). Is it too far-fetched, then, to assume that Matthew's reader might also be expected to know that Jesus claimed he could destroy and rebuild the Temple in three days? The assumption that the reader knows Jesus did make such a claim coheres thematically with other information in the narrative. Jesus does, after all, claim that his ministry represents "something greater than the temple" (12:6), and he does predict an eventual destruction of the temple (24:1-2).

Thematic coherence, however, can also be ascribed to interpretations that do not assume the reader has intertextual knowledge of Jesus making this claim. The reader may, for instance, be expected to regard the charge in 26:61 as a somewhat mangled version of what Jesus has said previously: he has claimed the temple would be

destroyed (24:1-2), that he would rise from the dead in three days (16:21; 17:23; 20:19; cf. 12:40), and that he would build a church (16:18). In light of sayings such as these, the implied reader may take the charge that Jesus said he was able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days as the witnesses' misconstrual of what Jesus has actually said.⁴³ The reader would thus regard the charge as false in a literal sense (Jesus did not really say this), but as ironically true in its representation of what will now take place. Jesus' death will in fact signal the demise of the temple cult (27:51), and his resurrection after three days will grant him the authority to begin a new community of disciples from all nations (28:18-20). This interpretation does not require knowledge of traditions about Jesus that are not reported within this particular narrative.

The question of whether Matthew's implied reader is expected to interpret 26:61 and 27:40 in light of intertextual allusions to a body of oral tradition cannot be answered with certainty. Personally, I believe that it is best not to presume intertextual connections to a body of material that is not clearly cited or referenced, when a meaningful and consistent interpretation can be obtained apart from such connections. Still, the possibility that knowledge of traditions not preserved within Matthew's narrative may be presupposed by it cannot be entirely discounted and may provide a viable explanation for these particular verses. Richard Hays says

we must reckon with varying degrees of certainty in our efforts to identify and interpret intertextual echoes. Sometimes the echo will be so loud that only the dullest or most ignorant reader could miss it; other times there will be room for serious differences of opinion about whether a particular phrase should be heard as an echo of a prior text and, if so, how it should be understood. Precision in such judgment calls is unattainable....⁴⁴

Still, we note as before a distinction between admitting unresolved ambiguity due to the ignorance of modern readers and supposing intentional ambiguity in the expected perceptions of Matthew's implied reader. Uncertainty is not expected of Matthew's implied reader. When we are unsure of what connection the text is making, it is not because we have succeeded in exposing the text's openness to multiple interpretations. Rather, we have failed to read the text in the manner expected of its implied reader. Admission of such failures is necessary for methodological integrity.

To summarize the main points of this section, real readers who wish to receive the Gospel of Matthew in the manner expected of its implied reader must (1) have the knowledge of texts cited by quotation or allusion that the reader is expected to have, and (2) be willing to set aside knowledge concerning these texts that the reader is not expected to have, as well as knowledge concerning other texts that the reader is not expected to know. Criteria such as availability, degree of repetition, recurrence and thematic coherence help real readers to determine which intertextual connections the implied reader is expected to make. Even so, detection and interpretation of intertextuality can be a struggle, and determination cannot always be made with certainty.

The foregoing observation may apply to other types of knowledge attributed to the implied reader in this article. Determining what the implied reader is or is not expected to know is not an exact science, but neither are such determinations made arbitrar-

ily. As we have reviewed four types of knowledge that Matthew's implied reader may be expected to have, the determinations regarding which knowledge can be ascribed to the implied reader have become progressively more difficult. At the same time, the number of criteria available for guidance have also increased.

The goal of reading Matthew's Gospel in the manner expected of its implied reader remains legitimate even if it cannot be attained with perfection. By monitoring the narrative's expectations of its reader's knowledge, real readers gain the opportunity to increase or limit the knowledge with which they approach the narrative. Reading Matthew's narrative in light of the knowledge expected of its implied reader allows real readers today to appreciate the Gospel on its own terms.

NOTES

1. Sometimes, however, we do not regret this distance, but celebrate it. We may, for example, be proud of the fact that we are offended by sexist or ethnically insensitive features that we are expected to experience as humorous. I will explore this phenomenon of "resistant reading" in another study. See Judith Fetterly, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).
2. See, for example, Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988). On the methodology of narrative criticism, see Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).
3. Discerning the intended effect of narrative is, to be specific, the task of formalist literary criticism of which narrative criticism is one variety. Other types of literary criticism have other goals. See Mark Allan Powell, Cecile G. Gray and Melissa C. Curtis, *The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992).
4. On the concept of an implied reader, see Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), esp. pp. 421-431; Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), esp. pp. 149-150; Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); and *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).
5. Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, p. 38. See also Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, esp. pp. 19-21.
6. The implied reader of Matthew's Gospel also believes everything that the Gospel expects him or her to believe but does not believe anything that the Gospel does not expect him or her to believe. What the implied reader of Matthew believes will be the topic of a subsequent article.
7. The neutral term "unexpected reading" is preferable to the pejorative label, "misreading." An unexpected reading is one that would not be adopted by a narrative's implied reader. Unexpected readings are not necessarily undesirable or wrong. The implied reader of Isaiah, for instance, would never be expected to interpret Isa. 7:14 as a reference to the virgin birth of Jesus, but Christians today often affirm the legitimacy of this unexpected reading. Similarly, feminist, Marxist and other ideological interpretations may produce unexpected readings that are regarded as legitimate within the interpretive communities that embrace those ideologies. On "interpretive communities," see Stanley E. Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).
8. On assumption of linguistic competence, see Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 123-124; Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?*, pp. 48-49. Note that, contra Culler and

Fish, I do not assume literary competence on the part of Matthew's implied reader. Literary competence is a presumption of the modern era that should not be imposed on ancient texts, whose implied and actual audiences may have consisted of more hearers than readers. The very term "implied reader" is admittedly anachronistic in this regard. Matthew's implied reader is one competent of receiving the text in a language that he or she understands, regardless of whether that text is received aurally or visually.

9. These categories of knowledge are roughly analogous to Philip Wheelwright's classes of symbolic speech, especially as the latter are interpreted by R. Alan Culpepper. Cf. Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), pp. 99-110; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 184.

10. On the concept of a reader's "repertoire," see Iser, *The Implied Reader* (see subject index for references).

11. I am not interested (here) in entering epistemological debate as to whether any knowledge is truly universal (i.e., free of cultural determination). The point, simply, is that some knowledge has been typically regarded as universal by both authors and readers, in ancient times and the present.

12. Actually, in the examples cited, both universal knowledge and cultural knowledge are assumed. The reader must know what loaves, fish, camels, and gnats are, and this knowledge is not universal but, rather, is intrinsic to the social setting of the story. What is defined here as universal knowledge is the expectation that readers who know what these entities are will be able to recognize as incongruous the functions ascribed to them in this text.

13. We are, of course, assuming an audience that does not contain infants, the severely retarded, the insane or other exceptional persons who, hypothetically, might not possess what is typically regarded as universal knowledge.

14. On the notion of "reliable narrators," see Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, esp. pp. 169-209; Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, pp. 25-27.

15. Of course, Matthew's Gospel makes it clear elsewhere that disciples of Jesus are to do good to all people, even their enemies (5:44). But the point of Matthew 5:31-46 seems to be that an especially close identification can be made between Jesus and needy persons who do God's will. The thinking is parallel, perhaps, to that expressed by Paul in Gal. 6:10.

16. *Soapdish*, 1991. *Premiere* magazine runs a regular column listing such gaffes in feature films.

17. Poststructuralist schools of literary criticism have a heyday with inconsistencies that occur in texts, citing them as evidence of the inevitable tendency for texts to "deconstruct" and resist interpretation. On the opposite end of the methodological spectrum, redaction criticism has often ascribed large scale textual phenomena, such as doublets, to compositional sloppiness. Narrative criticism takes a middle, more realistic approach. The repetition of Matt. 12:38-39 in Matt. 16:1, 4 is too conspicuous to be dismissed as a mistake that the reader is not expected to notice. But to assume with the deconstructors that the reader is troubled or confused by every unexplained detail no matter how trivial is to beg the argument in a way that abandons reasonable discourse.

18. Iser talks about the process of "consistency building," by which the implied reader will always strive to fit everything in a narrative together into a coherent pattern. See *The Implied Reader*, p. 283.

19. Compare, for example, 26:21 with 26:47-49, 26:31 with 26:56, and 26:33 with 26:69-75.

20. George Steiner distinguishes between typical readers and professional readers (or "critics"). See "'Critic'/Reader", *NLH* 10 (1979): 423-452.

21. For a reading of Matthew from the perspective of a "first-time reader," see Richard A. Edwards, *Matthew's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

22. Epithets may include names and nicknames, which in this narrative would include the so-called titles for Jesus (such as "Son of God," "Son of Man," "Messiah"). In Matthew, however, the meaning for names and nicknames is sometimes provided within the narrative itself (for "Jesus" see 1:21 and for "Peter" see 16:18, cf. 7:24-25) and, at other times, is influenced by intertextual connections to the Hebrew Scriptures (see Part IV of this article).
23. By contrast, the implied reader of John's Gospel is not necessarily expected to understand this euphemism, since an explanation of it is provided within the narrative (John 11:11-13).
24. David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1956), pp. 260-263; Joachim Jeremias, "The Sermon on the Mount," *FBBS* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 29. Even Ulrich Luz, who rejects Daube's and Jeremias's interpretations, agrees that "the insult and not the pain stands in the foreground." See *Matthew 1-7* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), p. 325.
25. Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 179.
26. Fowler attributes the ambiguity of the wineskin metaphor in Mark 2:21-22 (as well as many other ambiguities in Mark's Gospel) to the rhetoric of the narrator rather than to the ignorance of modern readers. Although I suspect that this judgment is too hasty even with regard to Mark's Gospel, I am all the more certain that it cannot apply to Matthew's use of the same metaphor in 9:17. Even Fowler agrees that Matthew's Gospel does not display the sort of "rhetoric of indirection" that he thinks he sees in Mark (pp. 233-260). When Matthew's and Mark's narratives are compared, it can be seen that numerous potential gaps and ambiguities in Mark's Gospel are closed or resolved in Matthew's. For example, the "leaven" metaphor in Matt. 16:12 is clearly defined, while the same metaphor in Mark 8:15 is not. Accordingly, we must assume that the wineskin metaphor in Matt. 9:17 is undefined because the reader is expected to understand it. Matthew's narrative is not intentionally ambiguous. Matthew's implied reader understands everything relevant to the setting of the narrative, even when Matthew's real readers do not.
27. Narrative criticism tries to interpret texts without reference to the historical intentions of a work's "real author." Rather, narrative criticism strives to determine the intention of the "implied author," whose perspective is embodied within the text itself. See Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, pp. 66-77; Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, pp. 157-151; Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, pp. 5-6. Still, narrative criticism recognizes that the implied author is a literary creation of the real, historical author. Accordingly, the implied author cannot possibly intend for the reader to know something that was not in fact known by the real, historical author.
28. The distinction between "story" (what the narrative is about) and "discourse" (how the narrative is told) comes from Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 19, though he himself derives it from various structuralist theorists.
29. *The Catacombs* (New York: Random House, 1965).
30. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 21. Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 423.
31. On distinguishing the implied reader of Matthew from the book's original readers, see Jack Dean Kingsbury, "Reflections on 'the Reader' of Matthew's Gospel," *NTS* 34 (1988): 442-460.
32. The only scholars who doubt that this verse alludes to Titus's invasion of the Temple in 70 A.D. are those who, for various reasons, date the composition of Matthew's Gospel earlier than this. If a post-70 date for Matthew is accepted, the connection becomes inescapable.
33. This somewhat narrow definition suits our purposes. Some literary critics use the term "intertextuality" to include the full range of knowledge to which a work alludes—the "texts" taken up in the work may be cultural scripts or codes rather than actual documents. I prefer the narrow definition, for clarity's sake, though I am willing to grant that some texts may be oral rather than written.

34. See Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew's Use of the Old Testament*, NovTSup 18 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), pp. 122-127.

35. We should not think that redaction criticism has "failed" in this regard, for reading Matthew in this manner was never a goal of this methodology. An approach should not be denounced for failing to accomplish what it never attempted.

36. Gérard Genette uses the analogy of a palimpsest to understand this phenomenon. In ancient times, parchment manuscripts were sometimes reused, resulting in manuscripts called "palimpsests" that actually had two texts written on them, one on top of another. See Genette, *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré*, CP (Paris: Seuil, 1982). Readers treat Matthew's Gospel as a palimpsest when they read it in light of knowledge gained from the other Gospels.

37. These criteria correspond to four of the seven tests for hearing intertextual echoes suggested by Richard B. Hays in *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 29-33. What I call "degree of repetition," Hays calls "volume." Two of Hays's tests (historical plausibility, history of interpretation) strike me as too concerned with responses of real readers to be of help in determining what is expected of the implied reader. And another of his tests (satisfaction) seems redundant with thematic coherence. I note that Robert L. Brawley came to similar conclusions regarding Hays' tests in "Intertextuality in John 19:28-29," a paper presented to the Literary Aspects of the Gospels and Acts Groups at the 1991 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.

38. E. Stauffer, *Die Botschaft Jesu. Damals und heute* (Bern: Francke, 1959), pp. 128-132; O. Seitz, "Love Your Enemies," *NTS* 16 (1969/70): 39-54. See also the discussion by W. D. Davies in *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 245-248.

39. See 16:12; 23:2-3, 16, 18, 23; 24:20. Jesus' attitude toward this tradition is ambivalent. See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 2d ed., *PCB* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 88-89.

40. Although some portions of this tradition were no doubt incorporated into such writings as the Mishna, Gemara and Talmud, the "tradition of the elders" referred to in Matt. 15:2 was, by definition, an oral code, and we cannot know how faithfully it has been preserved in the later written versions.

41. A vague or general knowledge of the tradition of the elders would fall into my category of "knowledge presupposed by the setting of the narrative," discussed in part III of this article.

42. Some scholars think that Matthew's reader is expected to accept the charge as accurate because (1) Matthew does not explicitly describe the persons who bring it as false witnesses (contrast Mark 14:57-58); (2) the presence of two witnesses satisfies the requirement for reliable testimony according to Deut. 17:16; and, (3) the wording of the claim attributed to Jesus ("I am able to..." as opposed to "I will..." in Mark 14:58) is in keeping with something that the Matthean Jesus would say (cf. 12:6). See e.g., Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1985), pp. 92-93. Other scholars think that Jesus' silent response is an indication that the charge should be regarded as false. See Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, p. 87.

43. One problem with this explanation is that Jesus' words about the temple's destruction, his own resurrection and the building of the church were all directed to the disciples in contexts where the witnesses at the trial would not have been present. But this might explain for the reader why the witnesses' testimony is so far off the mark. The reader, who was present with the disciples, knows what Jesus really said and is able to compare the actual sayings with the mangled report of persons who weren't even there. Note that the witnesses do not claim to have been present or to have heard with their own ears the words that they allege Jesus said (26:61; cf. Mark 14:58).

44. Hays, *Echoes*, p. 29.

