CHAPTER SIX

THE NARRATEE’S EXPERIENCE – CONNECTEDNESS OF LIFE

Interpretation of reality is based upon a quite unique position.
Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed. ¹

Building on the analysis of narrative positioning in Chapter Four and on narrator perspectives in Chapter Five this chapter focuses on the narratee’s experience from two angles: the connection between the experience and narratological schemata such as indirect exposure to the told events or deictic expressions, and the relation to otherness. Since the role of the reader as narratee is central to a cognitive narratological approach, I will elaborate in this chapter on the sense of otherness, experienced by the reader, as well as on the concept of connectedness, created by the very same narrative. These are the two relevant aspects for the understanding of my argument about the seamless movement, back and forth, between two participatory locations, the internal and external experience of the narratee.

Reader/Narratee Experience. Much of the discussion about how readers construct what they read, including various theories of possible worlds, hinges on what position readers take as members of their temporal and cultural community. What I want to emphasize here is not the immediate historical context of the reader/narratee but rather, with respect to the reading experience, how his or her situatedness reflects the mental attitude to reality and to the nature of existence.² For example, the understanding of heaven and earth, the idea and explanation of time, the demarcation between the secular and religious are notions that affect the reading experience. Modern notions are in tension with those in the Apocalypse. Telling and reading are positioned

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¹ In order to illustrate that narrative provides understanding for human experience, Lawrence Durrell points out that the perspective is shifted by a combination of ellipsis and supplement, as the narratee seeks a precedent for the ‘he’, ‘my’ and ‘she’ that occur in the text. Durrell, L. The Alexandria Quartet: Justine, Balthazar, Mountolive, Clea (1957–1960) (London: Faber and Faber, 2005) 210.

between these temporally and culturally diverting notions. However, thinking in terms of implicit, historical, ideal or any other specifically constructed types of readers is not helpful for an analysis of the narratee experience. This chapter deals with how the reading experience enhances the reader/narratee’s freedom to hear and understand. The real-life frames are both challenged and set free to produce the experience of the narrated world. In the analysis of the narratee, the core issues hinge on how the cognitive narratological approach that has not traditionally structured biblical exegesis changes the concept of the reader. Cognitive narratological reading shows that the narration of the Apocalypse constitutes a series of interacting fields of reference extending out of the world of the Apocalypse to the first-century Biblical and Mediterranean world and beyond, involving each new narratee.

At the textual level, the analysis looks at how the reader encounters the deictic expressions in the Apocalypse. As discussed in Chapter Four, the usage of deictic expressions indicates that the narrative does not address its audience directly but in a subtle manner. The analysis shows that this mechanism creates an experience of involvement but also invites the narratees to narrativize. To give an example, the reader/listener overhears what is told to the messengers of the assemblies. The narratees are also allowed to witness the making of the book, how John is shown places and spaces and told what to write and what not. What the narratee experiences as relevant, as a crucial message, is not addressed to the narratees but comes through a report of what is told to the heavenly agents and to Babylon.

At the experiential level, the analysis examines how the experiences the readers or listeners encounter as narratees may pass through a

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3 Narration is seen as anchored in everyday experiences, which implies that comprehension of action as such is a form of narration. In psychology, stories are seen as means of shaping lives, and life is seen as shaping stories. Narrative analysis is concerned with the experience of the world as seen through someone’s eyes. Riessman, C.K. “Analysis of Personal Narratives.” J. A. Holstein and J. F. Gubrium, eds. Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2003) 331–46.
4 Carey, G. Elusive Apocalypse 106.
5 Narratology distinguishes between internal and external narratees; internal narratees are found within the narrative. They do not surpass the spatio-temporal parameters of the action, whereas external narratees are outside the narrative, any reader/viewer/listener engaging with the artefact. Prince, G. “Introduction to the Study of the Narrative.” J. Tompkin, ed. Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-