CHAPTER SIX

TIME IS WARPED

L’horloge du palais, elle va comme il lui plaît.
—14th Century French Colloquialism

6.1. The Tempo of the Text

Most narratives are anything but simple. When a reader encounters a seemingly innocuous enough narrative such as a fable or a news story, it is easy to overlook their complexity—a closer scrutiny reveals those narratives are indeed intricate—and this fact only serves to underscore the inherent complexity of narrative. Even the most polished, absolute modern narratives are pockmarked with knots and chunks in narrative space and time. Ancient narratives are often a heterogeneous coagulation of scenes, themes and intrusions in a dimensional timescape. By its very nature, narrative conforms more to temporal discontinuity than uniformity. For this very reason, an unvarying flow of time in narrative is nothing more than a persistent modern myth. As a reader moves through a narrative, time progresses accordingly, and the very fabric of a narrative universe is at once warped to accommodate the movement of time and the pull of gravitas.

Narrative tectonics shape and contour time within the text as a function of its mimetic nature (Section 2.2.1.5.), just as with the nature of a universe where time is not a container but a participant (Section 2.1.5.5.). While narratives are composed of various temporal dimensions, their inherent determinism allows time to coherently twist, dance, and warp its way from finite beginning to finite end through an assortment of events and episodes. In this chapter, I will lay a general foundation for the progression of narrative time by discussing tempo and its role in the Fourth Gospel. Following this, I will introduce the

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1 Bearman and Stovel, “Becoming a Nazi,” 77.
2 Cf. Ermarth, Sequel, 77.
3 Cf. Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, 2:79.
idea of temporal events and temporal discontinuities, and concern myself with the function of various types of events. Finally, I will trace a temporal geodesic through the Gospel text. Given its pre-modern and non-absolute nature, the Gospel should reveal a rich opportunity for narrative warpage in its temporal mechanics.

6.1.1. The Variability of Narrative Tempo

The first step in delineating the temporal warpage of the Fourth Gospel is to posit an overview of the tempo of the text. One of the primary barriers to understanding and applying narrative tempo is its implicit and elusive nature; unfortunately, texts and episodes are equipped with neither adagio nor prestissimo markers, nor epigrammatic time signatures. In order to define narrative tempo, there are three antinomies of inquiry: reader versus text, speed versus rhythm, and Structuralistic versus aesthetic. Given that the reading process is an interaction between reader and text, critics often define tempo primarily as a function of the reader’s speed and movement; however, a text-based analysis of tempo is possible as well as profitable. Further, the majority of recent studies of narrative have focused on speed rather than rhythm. Speed is always defined as a contrast between the reader and the text, or perhaps the fabula and the sjuzhet, while rhythm is derived from textual clues in the mechanics of narrative. Finally, a Structuralistic approach relies in large part upon quantifiable oppositions, whereas an aesthetic approach is more concerned with the quality and function of tempo. In general, critical theorists have considered the latter of the three areas far less than the former, but it is to the latter three I will turn to examine best how aesthetic textual rhythms enrich and bring a sense of Gestalt to an ancient, non-absolute Gospel.

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4 Scholars often derive the contemporary idea of narrative tempo from Günther Müller’s groundbreaking work; see Günther Müller, Morphologische Poetik: Gesammelte Aufsätze (ed. Elena Müller; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1968).
8 For example, Gérard Genette’s popular, decoding study of speed; see Genette, Narrative Discourse Revisited, 34.
9 Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, 2:79.