

In addition to Jesus, readers meet literally dozens of characters in John's Gospel. The authors of this book shine a light on them, investigating the ways they contribute to the narrative. Employing different methods, the contributors attempt to tell the story of the Gospel through the eyes of these major and minor characters.

Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel

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Edited by

STEVEN A. HUNT,
D. FRANCOIS TOLMIE, and
RUBEN ZIMMERMANN



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Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John

Edited by

Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie,
and Ruben Zimmermann

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Table of Contents

Foreword	XI
An Introduction to Character and Characterization in John and Related New Testament Literature <i>Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann</i>	1
Table on the Characters in the Fourth Gospel <i>Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann</i>	34
John (the Baptist): The Witness on the Threshold <i>Catrin H. Williams</i>	46
The World: Promise and Unfulfilled Hope <i>Christopher W. Skinner</i>	61
"The Jews": Unreliable Figures or Unreliable Narration? <i>Ruben Zimmermann</i>	71
The Priests and Levites: Identity and Politics in the Search for a Messiah <i>Sherri Brown</i>	110
The Pharisees: A House Divided <i>Uta Poplutz</i>	116
The Disciples of John (the Baptist): Hearers of John, Followers of Jesus <i>Gary T. Manning, Jr.</i>	127
An Anonymous Disciple: A Type of Discipleship <i>Derek Tovey</i>	133
Andrew: The First Link in the Chain <i>Martinus C. de Boer</i>	137
Simon Peter: An Ambiguous Character and His Narrative Career <i>Michael Labahn</i>	151
Philip: A Connective Figure in Polyvalent Perspective <i>Paul N. Anderson</i>	168

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Nathanael: Under the Fig Tree on the Fourth Day <i>Steven A. Hunt</i>	189
The Mother of Jesus: A Woman Possessed <i>Mary L. Coloe</i>	202
The Disciples: The "Now" and "Not Yet" of Belief in Jesus <i>Susan E. Hylan</i>	214
The Servants/Steward at Cana: The "Whispering Wizard's" Wine-Bearers <i>Mary L. Coloe</i>	228
The Bridegroom at Cana: Ignorance is Bliss <i>Edward W. Klink III</i>	233
The Brothers of Jesus: All in the Family? <i>Joel Nolette and Steven A. Hunt</i>	238
The Animal Sellers/The Money Changers in the Temple: Driven Out - But Why? <i>Mark A. Matson</i>	245
Nicodemus: The Travail of New Birth <i>R. Alan Culpepper</i>	249
"A Jew": A Search for the Identity and Role of an Anonymous Judean <i>Mark Appold</i>	260
The Samaritan Woman: A Woman Transformed <i>Harold W. Attridge</i>	268
The Men of the Samaritan Woman: Six of Sychar <i>Steven A. Hunt</i>	282
The Samaritans of Sychar: A Responsive Chorus <i>Peter Phillips</i>	292
The Galileans: Interpretive Possibilities and the Limits of Narrative Critical Approaches <i>Andy M. Reimer</i>	299
The Royal Official: Not so Officious <i>Peter J. Judge</i>	306

The Son of the Royal Official: Incarnating the Life Giving Power of Jesus' Word <i>Gilbert Van Belle and Steven A. Hunt</i>	314
The Slaves of the Royal Official: Servants of the Word <i>Peter J. Judge</i>	329
The Ill and the Sick: Those Who Were Healed and Those Who Were Not <i>D. Francois Tolmie</i>	332
The Invalid at the Pool: The Man Who Merely Got Well <i>J. Ramsey Michaels</i>	337
The Crowd: A Faceless, Divided Mass <i>Cornelis Bennema</i>	347
The Boy with Loaves and Fish: Picnic, Plot, and Pattern <i>Dieter T. Roth</i>	356
Judas (the Betrayer): The Black Sheep of the Family <i>Cornelis Bennema</i>	360
The Authorities: Indeterminate Complex Identities <i>Susanne Luther</i>	373
The Chief Priests: Masterminds of Jesus' Death <i>Cornelis Bennema</i>	382
The Temple Police: Double Agents <i>Gary T. Manning, Jr.</i>	388
The Greeks: Jesus' Hour and the Weight of the World <i>Sherri Brown</i>	397
The Scribes and the Elders: Mirror Characterization of Jesus and His Opponents in the <i>Pericope Adulterae</i> <i>Chris Keith</i>	403
The Adulterous Woman: Nameless, Partnerless, Defenseless <i>Peter Phillips</i>	407
The Devil: Murderer, Liar, and Defeated Foe <i>Dave L. Mathewson</i>	421

The Man Born Blind: True Disciple of Jesus <i>Andy M. Reimer</i>	428
The Neighbors of the Man Born Blind: A Question of Identity <i>Matthew D. Montonini</i>	439
The Parents of the Man Born Blind: The Reason for Fear without True Reason <i>Michael Labahn</i>	446
The Believers Across the Jordan: On Location with Jesus <i>Ruben Zimmermann</i>	451
Lazarus: "Behold a Man Raised Up by Christ!" <i>Marianne Meye Thompson</i>	460
Mary (of Bethany): The Anointer of the Suffering Messiah <i>Susan Miller</i>	473
Martha: Seeing the Glory of God <i>Gail R. O'Day</i>	487
Thomas: Question Marks and Exclamation Marks <i>Thomas Popp</i>	504
Caiaphas and Annas: The Villains of the Piece? <i>Adele Reinhartz</i>	530
The Beloved Disciple: The Ideal Point of View <i>James L. Resseguie</i>	537
Judas (not Iscariot): What's in a Name? <i>Catrin H. Williams</i>	550
The Roman Soldiers at Jesus' Arrest: "You Are Dust, and to Dust You Shall Return" <i>Steven A. Hunt</i>	554
Malchus: Cutting Up in the Garden <i>Christopher W. Skinner</i>	568
People in the Courtyard: Escalating Darkness <i>Helen K. Bond</i>	573

Pontius Pilate: Failing in More Ways Than One <i>D. Francois Tolmie</i>	578
Barabbas: A Foil for Jesus, the Jewish Leadership, and Pilate <i>David L. Mathewson</i>	598
The Soldiers Who Crucify: Fulfilling Scripture <i>Michael Labahn</i>	601
The Co-Crucified Men: Shadows by His Cross <i>Chelsea N. Revell and Steven A. Hunt</i>	607
The Women by the Cross: Creating Contrasts <i>D. Francois Tolmie</i>	618
Mary Magdalene: Beginning at the End <i>Jaimie Clark-Soles</i>	626
The Mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple: How a New Family is Established Under the Cross <i>Jean Zumstein</i>	641
Joseph of Arimathea: One of "the Jews," But with a Fearful Secret! <i>William John Lyons</i>	646
The Angels: Marking the Divine Presence <i>Jan van der Watt</i>	658
The Sons of Zebedee and Two Other Disciples: Two Pairs of Puzzling Acquaintances in the Johannine Dénouement <i>Christos Karakolis</i>	663
List of Contributors	677
Index of References	679
Index of Modern Authors	701
Index of Subjects	710

narratives," since a narrative approach emphasizes the poetic/artistic nature of the work, measured in terms of "aesthetic standards" but the Gospels are "not only literary artefacts" but also "ideological discourse that originated in a particular real-life context."³ They continue: "The primary goal of the Gospels was not beauty but truth."⁴

The recent study by Cornelis Bennema (fn. 2), on characterization in John makes a start in developing not simply a method or language for analyzing characters, but a comprehensive theory of character. In addition to the explicit characterization in Gospel texts, Merenlahti and Hakola draw attention to the way readers try to "fill the gaps"⁵ by drawing on what is known about the events and circumstances. "What readers of a non-fictional narrative think of a character depends not only on what the narrator reveals but also on what else the readers may know about the person who is portrayed as a character in the narrative."⁶ This comment is particularly pertinent when dealing with non-fiction narratives, such as the Gospels, where the narrative world needs to relate to the first-century setting. Yet another aspect of contemporary narrative criticism, important in Gospel studies, is called "the point of view," for as Bennema notes, "a narrative is not neutral since it has an inbuilt perspective."⁷ In the case of the Fourth Gospel, this perspective is made explicit (20:31) but it can also operate implicitly within the deeper structural levels. The ideological point of view includes "the beliefs, norms, evaluations and value system of the text."⁸ Resseguie asks how a narrator uses "setting, rhetoric, character, and plot to persuade the reader to adopt his evaluative point of view."⁹

In this essay, I will take up some of these approaches in my analysis of the characterization of the Mother of Jesus,¹⁰ in particular I will make use of the insight of Resseguie and those other narrative critics who consider not only the

³ Merenlahti and Hakola, "Reconceiving Narrative Criticism," 14-17.

⁴ Merenlahti and Hakola, "Reconceiving Narrative Criticism," 32. For further on the truth claims of the Gospel that are extrinsic to the text itself, see pp. 33-34. Since the Gospels make truth claims that refer to the historical reality beyond the text, these claims are quite different to the claims of fictional works, and this makes a difference in the reading experience.

⁵ Meir Sternberg seems to have been the first to speak of "filling the gaps" in examining the story of David. See Meir Sternberg, "The King through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Reading Process," *Poetics Today* 7 (1986): 275-322. This was originally published in Hebrew in *Ha-Sifrut* 1.2 (1968): 263-92.

⁶ Merenlahti and Hakola, "Reconceiving Narrative Criticism," 40.

⁷ Bennema, "Theory of Character," 394.

⁸ James L. Resseguie has undertaken an analysis of the Fourth Gospel examining ways in which the narrator communicates his point of view to the reader. In this study, he considers the spatial, phraseological, temporal, psychological, and ideological point of view (idem, *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John* [BIS 56; Leiden: Brill, 2001], 4-5).

⁹ Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 2.

¹⁰ Where the term "mother" is used as a title to replace the personal name Mary, "mother" is capitalized, e. g. the Mother of Jesus; similarly the title "Woman."

The Mother of Jesus: A Woman Possessed

Mary L. Coloe

Characterization and Theology

Since the rise of New Criticism, to speak of characterization in narrative fiction invites vigorous debate as "character" is dissolved into a cipher to be understood solely within the text itself with little relationship to external considerations such as the historical circumstances of the text, or biographical information about the author, or the possible author's intention for writing the text.¹ To raise the issue of characterization in a Gospel is particularly problematic due to the ideological goal of the evangelist, which is made explicit in the Gospel of John. "These things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).

There is also concern whether modern theories of narrative criticism and characterization are applicable when considering ancient texts. In the words of Mark Allen Powell, "[N]arrative critics may be charged with anachronistically applying modern concepts to ancient literature or with treating the Gospels as though they were novels or works of fiction."² Merenlahti and Hakola ask, "whether narrative-critical readings do justice to the nature of the Gospel

¹ A helpful introduction to various approaches in narrative criticism can be found in Elizabeth Struthers Malbon's analysis of Markan characters. See Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2000), ch. 1. See also the brief overview of the origins and development of narrative criticism in Petri Merenlahti and Raimo Hakola, "Reconceiving Narrative Criticism," in *Characterization in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism* (ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni; London: T&T Clark, 1999), 17-23.

² Mark Allan Powell, "Narrative Criticism," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. Joel B. Green; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 239-55, here 254. A similar concern is raised by Cornelis Bennema in his study when he asks, "whether it is legitimate to apply modern methods used in fiction to ancient narratives and whether we can compare Hebrew and Greek literature regarding character" (idem, "A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature," *BibInt* 17 [2009]: 380). Bennema concludes that it is appropriate to apply modern methods of analysis to ancient narratives providing necessary precautions are taken such as being aware that by using modern methods "we fuse the modern and ancient horizon, and use modern terminology to understand characters in ancient literature" (ibid., 396).

quality of the characterization as such, but also raise the deeper question of how this characterization serves the ideological purpose or "point of view" of the writer since it is the characters "who transmit the significance and values of the narrative to the reader."¹¹ In other words, my interest is how the character "works" to contribute to the theological perspective of the Gospel.¹²

The questions I bring to the text are: why is the Mother of Jesus never given her personal name? Does it make a difference that she is present at Cana and the cross? Could her place in these scenes be substituted by any other character, male or female? Given that she speaks fewer than ten words, is she essential to the Johannine plot?

The Wedding at Cana¹³

The first character introduced in this scene is the Mother of Jesus, signaling her importance.¹⁴ Her initial words, "They have no wine" (2:3), and Jesus' first response, "What [is this] to me and you, Woman" appear to be simply statements of fact. As guests at the wedding, the supply of wine is not a matter for

¹¹ Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTSup 70; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 47. Petri Merenlahti also emphasizes the importance of considering characterization in relation to the ideological or theological perspective of the Gospel. "Rather than static elements of design picked by a master author to fill a distinct literary or rhetorical purpose, they [characters] are constantly being reshaped by distinct ideological dynamics. This ideologically attuned nature of character presents a challenge for any theory or model of characterization for the Gospel narrative... analysis of ideology should be an integral part of the analysis of the formal features of narrative" (idem, "Characters in the Making: Individuality and Ideology in the Gospels," in *Characterization in the Gospels: Reconciling Narrative Criticism* [ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni; London: T&T Clark, 1999], 49-72, here 50).

¹² In this essay, due to limits of space, it is not possible to engage with the positions taken by other scholars in their studies of the role of the Mother of Jesus in John. In this note I can only mention some of the more significant recent studies. Judith M. Lieu, "The Mother of the Son in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 117 (1998): 61-76. In this article, in addition to the Cana miracle and the cross, Lieu discusses the figure of the woman in labour in John 16:2. This present study focuses on the two explicit appearances of the Mother of Jesus, where both scenes are linked by the characters, mother and son, and by the mention of the "Hour." See also the very poignant reflection on the Mother standing at the cross by Ingrid R. Kitzberger, "Stabat Mater? Re-birth at the Foot of the Cross," *Biblit* 11 (2003): 468-87.

¹³ In his study, Calum M. Carmichael, connects Cana with the second day of creation in Genesis 1 (idem, *The Story of Creation: Its Origin and Its Interpretation in Philo and the Fourth Gospel* [Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996]). I do not find his arguments convincing and follow the suggestion of Francis Moloney in linking "the third day" reference to the revelation of God's glory "on the third day" (Exod 19:11², 15, 16) at Sinai which was commemorated in the Jewish Festival of Pentecost. See Mary L. Coloe, "The Johannine Pentecost: John 1:19-2:12," *ABR* 55 (2007): 41-56.

¹⁴ Lieu notes, "John generally uses the formula 'there was ...' to introduce an individual who plays a significant role in the ensuing scene" (idem, "The Mother of the Son," 50).

their concern.¹⁵ As the narrative will later reveal, it is the bridegroom's responsibility to provide wine. Jesus' further words, "my hour has not yet come" (2:4), indicate that he has heard in his mother's words more than a simple statement of facts. He has heard a request to "fill the gaps." "Being given only sparse example of the need for the reader to do something about this issue. This is an and ambiguous information, the reader simply has to infer, make guesses and interpretations."¹⁶ At this point, the work of the sociolinguist Deborah Tannen on gender related modes of communication can add to our understanding of the interplay between the Mother and Son. Tannen describes her work as "discourse analysis" which "focuses on connected language 'beyond the sentence.'"¹⁷

The Mother's apparently neutral comment, "they have no wine," can be understood as a linguistic strategy of indirectness where without making an explicit request, she presumes, because of her relationship with her son, that he will hear the implied request. Jesus' response indicates that her presumption is correct. He hears the implicit request. Tannen comments that "those who feel entitled to make demands may prefer not to, seeking the payoff in rapport."¹⁸ She also notes that cultures vary in their use of indirect communication as an appropriate communication strategy.

One of the deeply puzzling aspects of the Cana episode is the sharp response Jesus makes to his mother when she indicates that the wine has run out; it reads literally, "What to me and to you?" (2:4).¹⁹ In all its uses in the LXX²⁰ this statement has a corrective, if not harsh, tone in a situation "in which two parties have nothing in common, or no relationship to each other."²¹ The reply to his mother is strange, but then the puzzle deepens when Jesus acts in accordance with her wishes. There is more to this dialogue than meets the eye. Tanner cautions about the tendency for scholars to see only one aspect of a

¹⁵ Similarly, Ritva H. Williams, "The Mother of Jesus at Cana: A Social-Science Interpretation of John 2:1-12," *CBQ* 59 (1997): 679-92, here 688.

¹⁶ Merenlahti, "Characters in the Making," 53.

¹⁷ Deborah Tannen, *Gender and Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 1996), 5. I wish to acknowledge the unpublished work of one of my Master's students, Sandra Jebb, who introduced me to Tannen's work and how it can contribute to understanding the implied nuances of language when gendered relationships are taken into account.

¹⁸ Tannen, *Gender and Discourse*, 32.

¹⁹ The use of the vocative, "Woman" when addressing his mother will be discussed in the next section in examining the scene at the foot of the cross.

²⁰ Judg 11:12; 2 Sam 16:10; 19:22; 1 Kgs 17:18; 2 Kgs 3:13; 2 Chr 35:21. Similarly in the New Testament it has the negative sense "leave me alone" (Matt 8:29; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 4:34; 8:28).

²¹ Arthur H. Maynard, "TI EMOI KAI SOI," *NTS* 31 (1985): 582-86, here 584. For a discussion of its use in the LXX and the possible Semitism lying behind the expression, see Jean-Paul Michaud, "Le signe de Cana dans son contexte johannique," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 18 (1962): 247-53. Williams cautions that context is important to interpret the meaning of this exchange and not presume that words and phrases remain constant over time or remain constant regardless of context (idem, "The Mother of Jesus at Cana," 687).

conversation between men and women when in fact there is ambiguity and the polysemy of both power and solidarity.²² The contradiction between Jesus' words and his later actions suggest that his response is not simply a rebuff of his mother's request. Tanner notes that many cultures see "arguing as a pleasurable sign of intimacy" and in this context she notes that among men and women of Jewish backgrounds "a friendly argument is a means of being sociable" and that when a Jewish couple appear to be arguing, "they are staging a kind of public sparring match, where both fighters are on the same team."²³

In spite of the seemingly harsh response of Jesus, there must be a deeper level of intimacy, as Tanner suggests, within this exchange, for with no further rejoinder, the Mother turns to the servants and says, "Do whatever he tells you" (2:5). Clearly, she presumes that Jesus will act. Whatever the apparent harshness at the surface level of the dialogue with her son, at a deeper level she has understood his compliance with her implied request. When commenting on indirectness as a strategy used between men and women, Tanner states, "The interpretation of a given utterance, and the likely response to it, depends on the setting, on individuals' status and their relationship with each other, and also on the linguistic conventions that are ritualized in the cultural context."²⁴ As a twenty-first century Western woman, trying to make sense of this exchange when I only have a text, I need to be aware of possible cultural conventions operating here that I may never fully grasp. Jane Kopas' comments express the demands placed on the modern interpreter when seeking to make sense of this exchange.

[T]he level of understanding that exists between them transcends the words exchanged. In one sense, they seem to be talking past each other, and one gets the impression of a lack of real contact. On the other hand, Mary's reaction suggests that she understands all as she tells the servants to do whatever he tells them. As we ponder the kind of communication that was going on, we realize that there was an exchange of invitation and response, initiated and answered from each side. The words themselves are not the most important vehicle of meaning; the relationship is. The degree to which the relationship yields its meaning depends upon the willingness and ability of the participants to hear more than what was spoken, and to let the communication unfold in its own way.²⁵

The very strangeness of the exchange draws the readers' attention to the relationship between Jesus and his mother and to the indication that this relationship will be particularly significant in the future, when "the Hour" arrives.²⁶

²² Tanner, *Gender and Discourse*, 46.

²³ Tanner, *Gender and Discourse*, 44.

²⁴ Tanner, *Gender and Discourse*, 34.

²⁵ Jane Kopas, "Jesus and Women: John's Gospel," *ThTo* 41 (1985): 202.

²⁶ The theme of Jesus' "Hour" will develop across the narrative and take on a meaning related to the Passion, as the "Hour" of Jesus' death, exaltation and glorification (7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). The presence of the Woman/Mother at Cana and at the cross link these two scenes and require that the "Hour" named here be understood in terms of the Passion.

Considering Jesus' subsequent actions in changing the water into wine, his words to his mother must be understood primarily as a narrative strategy directing the reader's attention to the future "Hour."²⁷ It is then that the relationship between Jesus and his mother will be critical. The importance of her relationship as mother of Jesus, in this Gospel, will only be revealed in "the Hour." The Cana miracle happens, but Jesus' apparent reprimand creates a puzzle that will not be resolved until the Passion.

As the Cana episode develops, the words of the steward to the bridegroom indicate that it was the role of the bridegroom to provide the wine for the wedding (2:10). This exchange implicitly identifies Jesus as the real bridegroom in this scene, which John the Baptist will later confirm (3:28-30).²⁸ Since Jesus is the bridegroom, then his mother becomes the "mother of the bridegroom." The Mother's role at Cana concludes with the narrator's comment, "After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and sisters and his disciples; and they dwell there for a few days" (2:12). A household is being formed around Jesus and his mother. This narrative comment prophetically introduces a theme that will be further developed at the cross.²⁹

To summarize: In this episode, the Mother of Jesus is portrayed as an active agent. She is introduced first indicating her significance; she then notices the lack of wine, initiates the miracle by speaking to her son (implicitly making a request), and then gives explicit directives to the servants. The "gaps" in the discourse between mother and son, and the directives to the servants suggest a deeper communication that depends upon their relational intimacy. The strangeness of Jesus' response points ahead to a future time, "my Hour." There is no report on the Mother's response to this miracle, as there is the disciples' (2:11) but the episode concludes with Jesus, his mother, his family and disciples together at Capernaum. Her role at this time is finished. What she has done and said is sufficient – for now!

The Hour

The Mother of Jesus returns to the narrative at the foot of the cross. Here she says nothing. But this scene marks the climax of the Gospel, for immediately

²⁷ So also Lieur: "we are led to look for a deeper meaning that has yet to be revealed. There is unfinished business" ("The Mother of the Son," 66).

²⁸ See in this same volume, Mary L. Coloe, "The Servants and Steward at Cana."

²⁹ I have developed in greater detail the significance of the nuptial theme in John 1 and 2 in an earlier study. See Mary L. Coloe, "Witness and Friend: Symbolism associated with John the Baptist," in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes and Theology of Figurative Language* (ed. Jörg Frey et al.; WUNT 200; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 319-32.

following it the narrator states: "After this, knowing that everything had been finished (τετέλεσται) so that the scriptures might be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I thirst.' After taking the vinegar Jesus then spoke aloud, 'It is finished (τετέλεσται), and bowing his head he delivered over the spirit' (19:30).³⁰

These words of completion, following the scene with his mother, emphasize the importance of this scene where Jesus changes the relationship between his mother and the Beloved Disciple: "Woman, behold your son" (19:26), "Behold your mother" (19:27). Jesus' words are frequently interpreted as simply a dying son showing filial care for his mother in seeing that she is given into the care of another.³¹ Such an interpretation does little justice to the significance of the scene and Jesus' ensuing judgment "τετέλεσται."³²

When Jesus turns to his mother, and says, "Woman, behold your son," and then turns to the Beloved Disciple and says, "Behold your mother," he effectively alters their relationship. The double use of the term "behold" (ἴδε; vss. 26, 27) informs the reader that Jesus' words are a prophetic revelation, while the form of words is very similar to the formula of adoption.³³ The woman is now "mother" to the Beloved Disciple, and the disciple is now "son." But with this change, the disciple's relationship with Jesus also changes. If they now have the same "mother" then the disciple is now brother to Jesus and therefore participates in Jesus' relationship with God.³⁴ This is the moment of divine filiation when disciples become brothers/sisters to Jesus and children of God.³⁵

³⁰ On the importance of the use of τετέλεω following this scene (19:28, 30), see Jean Zumstein, *Kreative Erinnerung* (ATANT 84; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2004), 266–68, and Klaus Scholtissek, *In Ihm sein und bleiben: Die Sprache der Immanenz in den Johanneschen Schriften* (Herders Biblische Studien 21; Freiburg: Herder, 2000), 237. Both scholars show that this statement gives Jesus' words to his mother and the Beloved Disciple the character of a Last Testament.

³¹ See for example C. Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (2d ed.; London: SPCK, 1978), 552.

³² Raymond E. Brown comments, "we doubt that Jesus' filial solicitude is the main import of the Johannine scene. Such a non-theological interpretation would make this episode a misfit amid the highly symbolic episodes that surround it in the crucifixion episode" (idem, *The Gospel According to John* [2 vols.; AB 29–29a; New York: Doubleday, 1966, 1970], 2:923).

³³ Michel de Goedt proposes that ἴδε introduces a revelatory formula (idem, "Un Schème de révélation dans la quatrième évangile," *NTS* 8 [1961–62]: 142–50). Barrett states that the words are both revelatory and adoptive (idem, *John*, 552).

³⁴ "[L]e disciple bien-aimé est adopté par Jésus comme frère" (De Goedt, *Un schème de révélation*, 145). Without specifying the mutual change of relationships, Zumstein also concludes that the crucifixion constitutes a new family (idem, *Kreative Erinnerung*, 273). The scholar who has done some of the most significant work on the "family" metaphor and its significance in the Fourth Gospel is Jan G. van der Watt. He writes, "The extent to which the family imagery is developed in the Gospel, clearly gives priority to the idea of being born as a child of God, living in the family of a Father, as the basic, and most important image used to metaphorize the believers" (idem, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John* [BIS 47; Leiden: Brill, 2000], 432).

³⁵ Following the gift of the Spirit (19:30), the Father of Jesus is called the Father of the

In fact the Prologue had already hinted that this was the ultimate goal of the narrative when it stated, "He came to his own (εἰς τὰ ἴδια) but his own did not receive him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (1:11–12). The phrase, "εἰς τὰ ἴδια" (1:11) is repeated at the cross, "and from that hour the disciple took her" (εἰς τὰ ἴδια; 19:27). The *inclusio* formed by this phrase indicates that what was promised in the Prologue is brought to completion at the cross. The Beloved Disciple, representative of all disciples, is born anew as a child of God.³⁶

This scene of Jesus' death and the bestowal of the Spirit is also a scene depicting the disciple being born anew of the Spirit (3:3, 5), born into the household of God.³⁷ The flow of blood and water from the pierced side of Jesus (19:34) is evocative of birth when the mother's waters break at the onset of labor and the flow of blood in which the new child is born.³⁸ Lee comments, "The connection between the flow of blood and water and childbirth is not one that is generally made by commentators ... Yet with an understanding of the flexible nature of Jesus' flesh as it is symbolically presented in the Fourth Gospel, and its capacity to take on cosmic significance, the imagery makes perfect sense – of the elements themselves ... and the significance of the crucifixion as

disciples, "go to my brothers and sisters (τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς μου) and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (20:17). I read τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς μου as an inclusive expression since Mary Magdalene is surely included in "your Father."

³⁶ Scholtissek also links what happens at the cross to the statement in the Prologue (1:12–13) and so calls the scene at the cross the "semantische Achse" of the Gospel (idem, *Sein und Bleiben*, 238).

³⁷ This has been a theme of my work, see in particular Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001), ch. 9. Where I use the term "household" Jan van der Watt uses "family" (idem, *Family of the King*, 432) and Ruben Zimmermann identifies the household/family as one of the major metaphorical concepts of the Gospel (idem, *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium: Die Christopoetik des vierten Evangeliums unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Joh 10* [WUNT 171; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 172–83).

³⁸ On the birth imagery in this scene see Dorothy A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 152–59. Brown identifies Jesus' mother as the New Eve and Lady Zion "giving birth to a new people in the messianic age" (Brown, *John*, 2:926). While I agree that the titles "Woman" and "Mother" are part of a constellation of images that evoke the Genesis creation narrative, I see the Johannine imagery pointing more towards God as the one "giving birth" in the Hour. Here, we need to allow Johannine imagery to have greater subtlety and even obscurity than allegorization, rather than looking for exact one-to-one equivalence. As R. Alan Culpepper explains, "Symbols ... often span the gap between knowledge, or sensible reality, and mystery. They call for explanation and simultaneously resist it" (idem, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 183). The flesh of ὁ Λόγος makes visible in history, the presence of ὁ Θεός (1:1, 14). The blood and water flowing from the flesh of Jesus symbolizes the rebirth of disciples, as children, born of God (1:14). Ingrid R. Kitzberger also speaks of the cross as a moment of birthing ("Synoptic Women in John: Interfigural Readings," in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Re-viewed* [ed. idem; BIS 43; Leiden: Brill, 2000], 107).

life-giving.³⁹ Jesus, as the one whose flesh makes God known, depicts the birthing moment when children are born of God. In his "labor" of death, Jesus' work is now finished (τετέλεσται, 19:28, 30; cf. Gal 4:19).

The verb τελέω reiterates God's judgment at the completion of his six days creative work – "thus the heavens and the earth were finished (συνετέλεσθησαν) ... And on the seventh day God finished (συνετέλεσεν) the work" (Gen 2:1-2).⁴⁰ God's work, which was begun in creation, is brought to its completion at the cross as Jesus dies and breathes down the Spirit to the couple standing beneath the cross. In the next verse we are told that it was the day of Preparation before the Passover and the eve of Sabbath, and the narrator notes "that Sabbath was a great Sabbath" (19:31), the seventh day of blessing and rest when God's work of creation is ended. "So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation" (Gen 2:3). But, throughout the Fourth Gospel Jesus had claimed that God in fact was still working (5:17), that the creative work of God had not yet been completed, and that he has been sent to complete (τελέω) this work (4:34; 5:36; 17:4). In the Hour, Jesus brings the work he was sent to accomplish to its conclusion. It is only with the death of Jesus that creation can truly hear the word "τετέλεσται" and this word ushers in the great Sabbath, marking the completion of God's creative work that has been in process since the dawn of time "in the beginning" (Gen 1:1; John 1:1).

Woman and Mother

At both Cana and the cross, only two titles are given to this woman, known in the Synoptics as "Mary." In the Fourth Gospel in both scenes, she is described by the narrator using the title, "Mother" (2:1, 19:25) and spoken to by Jesus, with the title, "Woman" (2:4; 19:26). These two titles were names given to the first woman: "She shall be called Woman" (Gen 2:23). "The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the *mother* of all the living" (Gen 3:20). These two titles, when considered with other unique features of the Johannine

³⁹ Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 80. One ancient commentator who perceived birth symbolism in the flow of blood and water was Jacob of Sarug (450–520), who wrote, "Christ came and opened up baptism by his cross, so that it should be a mother of life for the world in place of Eve, water and blood for the fashioning of spiritual infants flowed forth from it, and baptism became the mother of life" (Homily on Three Baptisms), cited in Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *John 11–21* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IVb; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2007), 328.

⁴⁰ Martin Hengel, "The Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel," in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel* (JSNTSup 104; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 380–95, here 393–94.

Passion, suggest a deliberate evocation of the primordial Garden of Eden, and a theology of creation.⁴¹

Only in this Gospel, is Jesus arrested and buried in a garden (18:1; 19:41). As Frédéric Manns notes, "The symbol of the garden frames this section."⁴² John emphasizes that the cross is in the center, "So they took Jesus ... to the place called the place of a skull ... There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus in the middle" (19:17–18).⁴³ The Johannine addition, "in the middle (μέσση)" echoes the phrase in Genesis where God plants "the tree of life in the middle of the garden" (LXX Gen 2:9: ἐν μέσση τῆ παραδείσου).⁴⁴ The evangelist depicts the crucifixion with the iconography of Gen 2: there is a garden, and in the middle of the garden is the cross, the tree of life, and at the foot of the cross stand a man, the Beloved Disciple and a woman, who is never named but called only "Woman" (John 2:4; 19:26) and "Mother," (2:1; 19:25), echoing the names given to the first woman (Gen 2:23; 3:20).

The Mother of Jesus: Her Characterization

The characterization of this woman from the ideological point of view of the Gospel lies in her two titles: Mother and Woman. The title "the Mother of Jesus" by which she is first introduced immediately emphasizes her relation-

⁴¹ The theme of "creation" and "recreation" then continues in John 20 where Jesus is misunderstood to be the "gardener" by Mary Magdalene, the naming of the day as the first day of the week (20:1, 19), and "eight days" later (20:26), and when Jesus breathed (ἐνεφύσησεν) the Spirit upon his disciples with the same expression used in Genesis when God breathed (ἐνεφύσησεν) life into the face of the earth creature, and Adam becomes a living being (Gen 2:7). For more on the use of creation symbolism in John 20 see Mary L. Coloe, "Theological Reflections on Creation in the Gospel of John," *Pacific* 24 (2011): 1–12; Jeannine K. Brown, "Creation's Renewal in the Gospel of John," *CBQ* 72 (2010): 275–90; Ruben Zimmermann, "Symbolic Communication between John and His Readers: Garden Symbolism in John 19–20," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore; Resources for Biblical Study 55; Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 221–35.

⁴² The theme of creation is very richly developed in Frédéric Manns, *L'évangile de Jean à la lumière du judaïsme* (SBFA 33; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1991), 401–29 (quotation p. 409). He draws attention to many Genesis motifs within the Johannine Passion: the Kedron torrent (18:1), the tree of life in the middle of the garden (cf. 19:18), the rabbinic location of Eden beside the Jerusalem Temple. See also Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991), 57–95.

⁴³ The Synoptic Gospels mention the two criminals crucified with Jesus "one on the right and one on the left" (Mark 15:27; Matt 27:38; Luke 23:33), but only John adds, "and Jesus in the middle."

⁴⁴ The phrase, "in the middle of the garden" is repeated in Gen 3:3 (Marie-Émile Boismard and Arnaud Lamouille, *L'évangile de Jean* [Synopse des quatre Évangiles en Français 3; Paris: Cerf, 1977], 452; Manns, *L'évangile de Jean*, 426–27).

ship with Jesus. At Cana, because of this relationship, she presumes to speak to him about the wine shortage, which, ordinarily, should be no concern either to her or to Jesus. Jesus' strange "distancing" response sets up a dilemma for the reader, for while appearing to rebuff her, he then acts in accordance with her implicit request. The strangeness of his response also highlights his words that his Hour has *not yet* come, suggesting that there will be a time in the future when the relationship between mother and son will be important. Similarly, the use of the term "Woman" when Jesus speaks to his mother is strange. While it is not necessarily impolite, since it is the way Jesus later speaks to the Samaritan Woman (4:21), and Mary Magdalene (20:15),⁴⁵ it is unusual and again seems to suggest a distance between son and mother. Paradoxically the apparent "distancing" only emphasizes the relationship between Jesus and his mother.

At Cana, the two titles therefore arouse some discomfort in the reader due to Jesus' form of response.⁴⁶ This discomfort is not resolved until the cross where, in conjunction with other aspects of the Johannine crucifixion recalling the garden and tree of life (Gen 2) the titles "Mother" and "Woman" are part of a narrative strategy where the Johannine crucifixion is portrayed as an act of re-creation. And here, in this scene, the Mother's presence is crucial. Given that the Gospel is a narrative, the change in the status of the believer from disciple to brother of Jesus and child of God, could only be depicted in such a scene which has similarities to the formal process of adoption which brings about a change of relationship between two people.⁴⁷ From this point on disciples are children of God.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See also the woman caught in adultery (8:10).

⁴⁶ Resseguie identifies a narrative strategy he calls, "phraseological point of view" where there is ambiguity or strangeness in how the narrator or a character speaks. Names and titles are one aspect of this strategy (idem, *The Strange Gospel*, 10-15).

⁴⁷ Barrett states: "The form of words [your son] recalls formulas of adoption ... Adoption means the creation of a new relationship; the formula reveals what the new relationship is to be" (idem, *John*, 552; also Kitzberger, "Synoptic Women in John," 101).

⁴⁸ Karl Olav Sandnes studied ancient households and the importance of ties of kinship and friendship in relation to conversion to Judaism and Christianity. His primary focus was the sociological implications of conversion and the need to transfer bonds of kinship from one's birth family to the new community one is joining, which becomes like a family (idem, *A New Family: Conversion and Ecclesiology in the Early Church with Cross-Cultural Comparisons* [Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 91; Bern: Peter Lang, 1994]). While not disagreeing with Sandnes on the social significance of the family metaphor for the Christian community, I am arguing that the Fourth Gospel directs this metaphor to the believers' relationship with God. The believer, in being drawn into the family of Jesus, is drawn into the communion of life with God, what Scholtissek names "die *Koinonia mit dem Vater und dem Sohn* (1 Joh 1, 3)" (Scholtissek, *Sein und Bleiben*, 239). The Fourth Gospel therefore takes this familial metaphor even further than the Pauline and Synoptic usage in describing believers as being "born anew" (3:5, 7), and participating in ζωὴ αἰώνιον - i. e., the very life of God in eternity (e. g. 3:15, 16, 36). The scene at the cross depicts this moment of rebirth, a moment of divine filiation.

Following Jesus' words, the narrator states, "from that hour the disciple took her" (εἰς τὴν ὥραν; 19:27). These words, are frequently understood in terms of the Beloved Disciple taking the Mother of Jesus, now his "mother," into his care. Such interpretations miss the theological and ecclesiological point of this passage. This phrase form an *inclusio* with it earlier use in the Prologue, "He came to his own (εἰς τὸ ἴδιον) but his own did not receive him" (1:11). Here at the cross, this statement in the Prologue is brought to fulfillment and the plot of the narrative reaches its conclusion - believers become children of God. The characterization of the Mother of Jesus plays an essential role in this plot. In fact, the Mother's relationship to her son initiates his public ministry at Cana, and then enables it to be brought to fulfillment at the cross. For this reason Jean Zumstein speaks of the presence of the Mother at Cana as the ἐπίκλησι and at the cross as the τέλος of Jesus' revelatory mission.⁴⁹

In discussing characterization, Merenlahti places an emphasis on characters "in the process of becoming,"⁵⁰ rather than static "types" such as the heroes of Greek epics.⁵¹ He makes use of the characterization of Judas across the four Gospels as a way of illustrating this claim. He states: "Both Luke and John report the exact moment when Judas the man, a greedy thief who stole from the common purse of the disciples (John 12:6), turns into Judas the betrayer occupied by Satan (Luke 22:3; John 13:27) - an intriguing case of a character becoming possessed by his narrative role" (italics mine).⁵² This final phase aptly describes the significance of the Mother of Jesus. On one level, her explicit characterization declines. At Cana, she is active: she initiates, she responds, she directs. At the cross, she is passive: she stands, she says nothing, she receives directives. But when considering her characterization in relation to the ideological point of view of the Gospel, her role at the cross is where *she is possessed by her narrative role*. At the cross, there is no need for her to do or say anything. Her presence, her being "Woman and Mother" is sufficient for the theological goal of the narrative to be completed as disciples become children of God (1:12). Apart from Jesus, no other character is as important to the ideological point of view of this Gospel's narrative, than the Mother of Jesus.⁵³

⁴⁹ Zumstein, *Kreative Erinnerung*, 271.

⁵⁰ Merenlahti, "Characters in the Making," 54.

⁵¹ "Thus in the Gospels, characters are only in the process of becoming what they are" (Merenlahti, "Characters in the Making," 50).

⁵² Merenlahti, "Characters in the Making," 61.

⁵³ Important though the Beloved Disciple is as eye witness, here at the cross, any disciple could have been present to achieve the ideological goal of divine filiation, but, by virtue of her unique relationship with her son, the Mother of Jesus was essential.

The Disciples: The "Now" and "Not Yet" of Belief in Jesus

Susan E. Hylén

Interpreters often describe the disciples in John's Gospel as representatives of belief. Toward the end of the Farewell Discourse, Jesus says to his disciples, "The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God" (16:27).¹ This straightforward declaration that the disciples have loved and believed in Jesus corresponds with many readers' expectations of the disciples as a character. In the words of R. Alan Culpepper, the disciples are "marked especially by their recognition of Jesus and belief in his claims."²

Such statements about the belief of the disciples always come with qualifications, however, because John's disciples are not whole-hearted in their belief. The verses that follow 16:27-28 bring the disciples' belief into question. Although Jesus has just said the disciples have believed he came from God, they indicate they only believe this now: "Yes, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure of speech! Now we know that you know all things, and do not need to have anyone question you; by this we believe that you came from God" (16:29-30). The disciples' word choice, "now we know," suggests that something has recently changed in their understanding, that this belief is new. Their speech creates a tension with what Jesus has said.

Even more surprisingly, Jesus' subsequent words clash with his prior certainty about the disciples' love and belief. He says, "Do you now believe? The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and you will leave me alone" (vss. 31-32). Jesus questions the disciples' belief and predicts their desertion of him at the crucifixion.

¹ Translations are from the NRSV.

² R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 115. See also Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 589; Claude Coulot, "Les figures du maître et ses disciples dans les premières communautés chrétiennes," *RevScRel* 59/1 (1985): 1-11, here 10; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (3 vols.; New York: Seabury, 1982-1990), 3:206; Fernando F. Segovia, "Peace I Leave with You; My Peace I Give to You: Discipleship in the Fourth Gospel," in *Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 78, 90.

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Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel

Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John

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