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## Gradations of Symbolization in the Johannine Passion Narrative:

Control Measures for Theologizing Speculation Gone Awry

*Paul N. Anderson*

The Fourth Gospel is well-considered “the Spiritual Gospel,” and indeed it is filled with rich imagery, theological meaning, and symbolic reference. At the same time, however, John has more archaeological content and empirical references than any of the other Gospels – canonical or otherwise. This being the case, much of John’s distinctive material defies explanation on the basis of symbolization alone. Thus, “the theological interest of the evangelist” too easily becomes a facile panacea for explaining the epistemological origin of John’s distinctive material: a factor of unchallenged speculation rather than critical judgment by biblical interpreters. What is needed is a set of control measures for making such decisions. This being the case, four levels of symbolization – *explicit*, *implicit*, *correlative*, and *innocent* – provide an aid to making sound judgments on the theology-history continuum. In addition to John 6, John 18–19 provides a fitting case study, which of course, has implications for analyzing the rest of the Gospel as well.

The need for finding a means of curbing speculation on these matters is acute. In previous eras, biblical scholars might have erred on the side of overemphasizing John’s historicity. If indeed the Fourth Gospel were written by an eyewitness, so the thinking *went*, everything in it must have been historically accurate – the very stuff of apostolic historiography. With the rise of the Modern era, though, given John’s differences from the Synoptics and theological presentation of the Jesus story, another heuristic lens for explaining nearly everything in John has arisen. John’s distinctive presentation of the Jesus story, so the thinking *goes*, is due totally or in part to *the theological interests of the evangelist*. Johannine distinctives, whether theological emphases or mundane details, are thus consigned to the canons of “historicized drama,” whether or not contemporary parallels support modern novelistic and post-modern fictive literary theories. Therefore, John’s divergences from the Synoptics, inclusion of distinctive material, and exclusion of Synoptic material are seen to have as their epistemological origin the theological imagination and spiritualizing interests of

the Fourth Evangelist. This may be an attractive inference for any number of reasons; the question is whether or not it stands up to critical scrutiny.

Such a move seems appealing on several bases. First, because John is different from the Synoptic Gospels, John has tended to lose most battles for historicity on the basis of a 3 to 1 majority. Therefore, John's differences from the Synoptics can thereby be accounted for as a factor of the Synoptic majority framework dominating over the Johannine minority witness. Second, rather than consider John a historical loser, the epistemic origin of John's numerology, chronology, and narratology is taken to be theological and symbolic rather than historiographic. Third, because the Fourth Evangelist clearly employed symbolism theologically, the origin of John's order and presentation of events is taken to be a factor of the theological interests of the evangelist. Fourth, because it is assumed that narrators will often add graphic detail to make a narrative more meaningful, such a precedent is taken to explain the presence of such detail in John. And fifth, because detail in John is supposedly not rooted in historical or topographical knowledge, it thus cannot be taken as having any historical value. While the first and fifth points are interesting, they are beyond the scope of the present essay.<sup>1</sup> The middle three points, however, on the intended function, inferred origin, and contemporary precedence of interpolated graphic detail in John, will here be engaged critically. The present essay cannot pretend to solve the larger question of determining the origins of John's traditional or redactional material; what it can do is to offer a set of control measures for theologizing speculation gone awry.

## 1. Imagery and Semeiology in John – On Hermeneutical Approaches and their Limitations

A genuine asset to exploring the imagery of John is that it can be analyzed in terms of its function and effect without being concerned as to its origin. One may simply focus on how imagery works within narrative, and recent advances in literary-critical Johannine studies have opened new vistas for interpretation beyond the historical-critical impasses.<sup>2</sup> Alan Culpepper's

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<sup>1</sup> Points 1 and 5 are developed more fully in the author's *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (LHJS/LNTS 321; London 2006), as is a critical analysis of the modernist de-historicization of John and the de-Johannification of Jesus (1–99).

<sup>2</sup> See A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Foundations and Facets: New Testament; Philadelphia 1983), for an application of the literary works of Frank Kermode, Seymour Chatman, Erich Auerbach, Wayne Booth,

ground-breaking work, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, deserves consideration as one of the most important works in the last three decades of Johannine studies, as it analyzes John as a narrative-proper, having a plot, characters, and an omniscient narrator who welcomes the reader into the inside perspective of the narrative. Gail O'Day's *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* shows how the Johannine story operates as a narrative mode with a theological claim, and Jeff Staley's *The Print's First Kiss* introduces a reader-response analysis to the interpretation of John. In *Reading with a Passion*, Staley shows how to get the reader back into the story of the text, having been excluded by objectivist and modernist readings.<sup>3</sup> The two volumes of collected essays edited by Fernando Segovia argued the case that a new paradigm for Johannine interpretation was well underway, and in John Ashton's expanded edition of *The Interpretation of John*, that sentiment was confirmed.<sup>4</sup>

With Craig Koester's *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, a new set of analyses regarding the symbolic functions of Johannine imagery were developed. David Wead's *The Literary Devices in John's Gospel* had already contributed to a sense of how particular aspects of the Johannine narrative functioned rhetorically, and Paul Duke had contributed a significant analysis of *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, but Koester's work added a systematic analysis of how different aspects of Johannine symbolism functions, and the second edition of the book in 2003 furthered the analysis incisively.<sup>5</sup> Dorothy Lee's work on *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel* showed how story continues to speak in later generations, and her second major work on the subject, *Flesh and Glory*, contributed insightful analy-

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Gérard Genette, Boris Uspensky, Meier Sternberg, Wolfgang Iser, Hans Frei, and David Wead to the Johannine text.

<sup>3</sup> G. O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim* (Philadelphia 1986); J. Staley, *The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel* (SBLDS 82; Atlanta 1988), and *Reading with a Passion: Rhetoric, Autobiography, and the American West in the Gospel of John* (New York 1995).

<sup>4</sup> F. F. Segovia, ed., *What is John? Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (SBLSS 3; Atlanta 1996), and *What is John? Vol. II: Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (SBLSS 7; Atlanta 1998). In John Ashton's new introduction to the revised edition of *The Interpretation of John* (2nd ed.; SNTInt; Edinburgh 1997), 1–5, he comments on the development of a new literary-critical paradigm for reading John and includes several new literary essays in his collection.

<sup>5</sup> See D. W. Wead, *The Literary Devices in John's Gospel* (ThDiss 4; Basel 1970), for one of the earliest rhetorical analyses of John, contributing to the works of Culpepper and others. Likewise, P. D. Duke's, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta 1985), built upon the significant essay of G. MacRae, "Theology and Irony in the Fourth Gospel," in *The Word and the World: Essays in Honor of Frederick Moriarty* (eds. R. J. Clifford and G. W. MacRae; Cambridge, Mass. 1973), 83–96.

ses of symbolism, gender, and theology in John. Sandra Schneiders' book, *Written that You May Believe*, developed further some of her earlier work on history and symbolism in John, and readers were thereby helped to appreciate the symbolic function of the Johannine narrative whether or not the material had a historical root or set of implications.<sup>6</sup>

On the European scene, the work of Ruben Zimmermann is especially significant, as it explores the rich imagery in John and contributes meaningfully to its interpretive implications. In his 2004 monograph, *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium*, insightful analyses of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and the Gate for the Sheepfold function christologically. In his important essay that same year, "Jesus im Bild Gottes," the emphasis shifts from the uses of images to represent theological understandings of Jesus to the Incarnation as a dynamic representation of God. The great advantage of these critical interests in Johannine imagery and symbolization is that understanding *how* an image conveys meaning greatly facilitates a more accurate and profound understanding of *what* that meaning is and how it should be embraced.<sup>7</sup>

These developments certainly reflect advances over less nuanced approaches to the symbolic function of gospel narrative that had been in effect for over a century within European, British, and American biblical studies alike. As a prime example of these older approaches, Rudolf Bultmann, in his epoch-making commentary, argues that the Johannine evangelist has added two types of material: theological content and narrative construction. As examples of historicizing interpolations, Bultmann is willing to list the nearness of the Passover in John (John 2:23; 6:4; 11:55) and many other connective units (John 4:43–45; 7:1–13; 10:19–21, 40–42; 11:55–57; 12:17–19, 37–44) as additions required to string disparate sto-

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<sup>6</sup> See C. R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis 2003); S. Schneiders, *Written that You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York 1999); D. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbol, Gender, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York 2002), and *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (JSNTSup 95; Sheffield 1995). See also C. K. Barrett, "Symbolism," in his *Essays on John* (London 1982), 65–79; and X. Léon-Dufour, "Towards a Symbolic Reading of the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 27 (1980–1981): 439–456.

<sup>7</sup> R. Zimmermann, *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium; Die Christopoetik des vierten Evangeliums unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Joh 10* (WUNT 171; Tübingen 2004), and Idem, "Jesus im Bild Gottes," in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums: Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditionsgehistorischer Perspektive* (eds. J. Frey and U. Schnelle; WUNT 175; Tübingen 2004), 81–116. See also the literary-critical essays in *Aspects on the Johannine Literature: Papers presented at a conference of Scandinavian New Testament exegetes at Uppsala, June 16–19, 1986* (eds. L. Hartman and B. Olsson; ConBNT 18; Uppsala 1987), especially the essay by R. Kieffer, "Different Levels in Johannine Imagery," 74–84.

ries into a coherent unity. *Meta tauta* (after these things) serves thus as a connective pattern, rather than an indicator of known sequence. According to Bultmann,<sup>8</sup> “Although the arrangement of the material in the Gospel has been dictated by the particular theological interests of the evangelist, he nevertheless gives the Gospel the appearance of an historical narrative.” Likewise, Bultmann infers that theological content has been added by the evangelist, which is required by the fact that several passages attributed to inferred alien sources have particularly Johannine insights embedded in them. On symbolism-versus-history at the entrustment of the mother of Jesus to the Beloved Disciple in the Passion narrative, Bultmann boldly asserts.<sup>9</sup>

Doubtless this scene, which in face of the Synoptic tradition can make no claim to historicity, has a symbolic meaning. The mother of Jesus, who tarries by the cross, represents Jewish Christianity that overcomes the offence of the cross. The beloved disciple represents Gentile Christianity, which is charged to honour the former as its mother from whom it has come, even as Jewish Christianity is charged to recognize itself as ‘at home’ within Gentile Christianity, i.e. included in the membership of the one great fellowship of the Church.

While the theological insight here is commendable, and even imaginative, how is it *known* that symbolic meaning excludes any claim to historicity? Likewise, because the evangelist inserts interpretive comments along the way, how is it known that the tradition he was commenting on was an alien tradition rather than his own? An understandable tendency within scholarship is to apply a robust hermeneutical tool to as many issues as it can suitably address, but not until an approach reaches its breaking point can its limitations be properly ascertained. Consider, for instance, several cases where imagery in John has been *wrongly* assessed as an inferred explanation of the origin and character of particular details.

First, one speculative assumption has been that the five porticoes (πέντε στοάς) mentioned in John 5:2 must be a symbolic reference because buildings in that era were rarely pentagonal in shape – if ever. Indeed, that point is true. Based upon such an inference, great schemes of interpretation have been laid over the passage, imagining that just as Israel had wandered in the wilderness for 38 years, having become paralyzed by the legalism of the Pentateuch, Jesus showed how the bondage of the Law is overcome by grace through faith, which is always an affront to religiosity. Therefore, the entire scene is taken as a symbolized enactment of gospel faith and nothing more; fine. Interestingly enough, however, archaeological excavations have discovered the Pool of Bēthzatha, which actually involves two

<sup>8</sup> R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches; Philadelphia 1970), 130.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., 673.

rectangular pools with three rows of columns running parallel to the longer sides, sustaining an awning or roof, and two rows of columns running the length of the other sides of these pools.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, there *were indeed* five porticoes, and the number five was here first descriptive of a topographical fact rather than a symbolic point. Whether the number five as a reference to the number of husbands of the Samaritan woman deserves a symbolic reading in John 4 is another consideration; in the case of the colonnades at the Pool of Bēthzatha, however, the number deserves a reading that is innocent of inferred symbolization.

A second example is the explicitly theological reference to the Pool of Siloam, to which the narrator adds parenthetically, “which means sent” (John 9:7). Despite the fact that Josephus mentions “the fountain of Siloam” (*JWR* 5:145, 410; and simply Siloam in *JWR* 2:340; 5:140, 252, 505; 6:363, 401), many a Johannine interpreter has taken the cue from the explicitly symbolic reference to the name and associated events, that the name and place were fictitious – crafted only as a signpost for suggesting the apostolic character of the blind man’s recovery of sight and witness to Jesus. The problem with such a view, meaningful as it might seem hermeneutically, is the archaeological fact that recently construction workers uncovered a large wading pool in Jerusalem that was fed by a spring – the very Pool of Siloam, itself. Again, the imagery of “sentness” might be rich with associated meanings, but symbolic function in and of itself says nothing of the epistemological origin of the detail. Symbolic implications of a topographical fact account for the reference to the pool in John 9, and this may suggest something of how the Johannine narration and symbolization worked together. These cases point to the operational dramatizing of history, or the symbolizing of topography, rather than the historicizing of drama as the characteristic pattern of Johannine narratology.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See treatments by W. F. Albright, “Recent Discoveries in Palestine and the Gospel of St John,” in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology: In Honour of Charles Harold Dodd* (eds. W. D. Davies and D. Daube; Cambridge 1956), 153–171, and by R. E. Brown, “The Problem of Historicity in John,” *CBQ* 24 (1962): 1–14; also published in *New Testament Essays* (Garden City et al. 1965), 187–217.

<sup>11</sup> This feature can also be seen in the independently Johannine rendering of the events clustered around the feeding of the multitude. Rather than inferring a homiletical expansion on a biblical text, we have in John 6 an extended reflection – drawing in and overturning conventional Jewish manna-rhetoric – upon an independent memory of an associated set of events. See P. N. Anderson, *Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (WUNT 2/78; Tübingen 1996), 52–61, 90–251, 272–273; see also Idem, “The *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and Its Evolving Context,” in *Critical Readings of John 6* (ed. A. Culpepper; BIS 22; Leiden 1997), 1–59.

A third example represents one of the most common abuses of symbolizing speculation; it supposes that the “paschal theology of the evangelist” accounts for a variety of John’s distinctive presentations, including the early Temple incident and earlier dating of the last supper. Whereas John the Baptist declares, ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου (“Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!”) in John 1:29 (see also John 1:36), the Fourth Gospel really has very little evidence of an atonement theology – certainly *not* in the Pauline sense.<sup>12</sup> The “lamb of God” sayings of the Baptist are more likely references to the Suffering Servant motif of Isa 53:7–12, heightening the redemptive effect of the Servant’s faithful obedience. Also, rather than indicating a factor of a “paschal theology” interest, the references to ἐγγὺς τὸ πάσχα (“the Passover was near”) in John 6:4; 2:23; 11:55 imply a particularly political set of overtones. In each of these larger passages (John 2:12–25; 6:1–67; 11:45–57), tensions with the Romans, nationalistic hopes of expelling them from Palestine, and fears of potential Roman retaliation are associated *most* clearly with the nearness of the Passover – ranging from the eventual destruction of Jerusalem to the Messianic revolt in the desert. The Jewish leaders are already intending to kill Jesus after his second visit to Jerusalem in John 5, a reference is made to the signs Jesus had been doing in Jerusalem at the Passover (John 2:25), and a reference is made in John 4:54 to Jesus’ having come into Galilee from Judea, so it cannot be said that an early Temple cleansing was entirely a factor of theological construction apart from chronological and ordering considerations. Without a second southern visit in John 2, Jesus would not have needed to pass through Samaria up to Galilee in John 4. Again, the point is not to argue that John is historically accurate or reliable; it is to question an entire chronological and geographical reconstruction of the Johannine presentation of Jesus’ early ministry on the basis that John’s supposedly theological references to the Passover have eclipsed more mundane features of the narration.

Here, paschal symbolization is present, but that which is signified is more palpably *political* rather than theological. Were it not for the Synoptics, inferences of theological bases for Johannine ordering and presentation of these events would not even be a consideration. And, as the Markan

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<sup>12</sup> Despite the unwitting prophecy of Caiaphas in John 11:49–53, which expands the statement from “one man dying *instead of* the multitude” to “one man dying *on behalf of* the multitude,” the primary emphasis of the cross motif in John is the *lifting up of the Son of Man* – a focus on revelation rather than atonement soteriologically (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34). On this score, John’s lamb motif is much closer to the Christology of Revelation (Rev 5:6; 7:17; 14:10; 15:3; 19:9; 21:3; 22:3). The propitiation theme of 1 John 2:2 is atonement oriented, but its author is not necessarily that of the Fourth Gospel.



association of the last supper with the Jewish Passover meal does not pass the test of emerging Christian cultic dissimilarity, the Johannine placing the supper and the crucifixion on the day before the Passover is far more historically plausible than inferring that the supper and the death of Jesus both transpired on the Passover. Even Mark appears divided on this matter. Also, while the day of preparation is mentioned three times in John (John 19:14, 31, 42) the reference to the slaying of the lambs the day before the Passover is *not* in John, but only in Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7. Therefore, inferring that such was a Johannine insight, motivating an independent chronology, on the basis of a specious paschal theology is critically weak. Extending the transactional compromise of Caiaphas to hermeneutics, the modernistic scholar might be overheard to declare: "It is better for the chronology of one gospel (John) to be sacrificed on instead of (on behalf of?) the chronology of the many (the Synoptics)." This speculation, however, does not make it so. If Mark is indeed a compilation of disparate units, some aspects of Mark's ordering (all Jerusalem events within a *singular* visit, presenting the last supper cultically as a Passover meal, and locating Jesus' judgment teachings and eschatological proclamations at the *climax* of his ministry) may be factors of conjecture and culminative presentation rather than known chronology and history. Thus, if Mark got it wrong, so did Matthew and Luke.

The point here is not to argue for John's historicity; that may be impossible to demonstrate, either way.<sup>13</sup> The point is to apply critical scrutiny to the extremely loose and questionable practice of assuming all distinctively Johannine imagery both functioned *and* originated as a factor of the evangelist's theological interests and symbolizing work. Did the number of fish being 153 imply a symbolic number as a factor of gematria or mathematical symbolism, or was someone within the tradition taken by an impressive catch of large fish? If a representative number were being concocted, why not employ 144, or 40, or even 1,000?<sup>14</sup> Again, if a compelling explanation

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<sup>13</sup> Although see a fuller arguing of the issues in Anderson, *Fourth Gospel* (n. 1), 158–171.

<sup>14</sup> On this matter, I find myself agreeing with Koester, *Symbolism* (n. 6), 134–136, 311–316, although I would be happy to learn that as a number, 153 had a readily recognizable symbolic meaning to anyone in its original setting – either audience or author. If not an apparently transparent meaning to original audiences, why not assume it refers to the number of theories about the great catch of fish (counting only the major ones)? Or, if one does infer an ecclesial reference – the number of nations that are evangelized and "brought to shore" by "fishers of men" (also *not* a Johannine image) – what *does* one do with Jesus' *cooking* fish on a fire and inviting the disciples to *eat* the fish? If the number of fish is a metaphor for evangelized people groups, why not apply the same association to what is *done* with the fish? Can one remain consistent within the larger passage in one's inference of symbolization, or do we go from physical cooking, to symbolic

that would have been readily comprehended by the original audiences lends itself to the interpreter, that is one thing; but the less apparent the symbolic function originally, the less plausible will be the yoking of symbolization to the fictive origins of the material. Likewise, regarding the assumption that symbolization implies an alien interpolation, more critical evidence is needed than simply making an assertion. On that matter, Craig Koester reminds us of the obvious: symbolism and historicity are not necessarily exclusive.

As we attempt to identify symbols in John's Gospel, we will bear in mind that something can both be symbolic and historical. We can discern symbolic significance in images, events, or persons without undercutting their claims to historicity, and we can recognize that certain images, events, and people are historical without diminishing their symbolic value. Historically, it seems certain that Jesus died on a cross, yet the cross became the primary symbol for the Christian faith. Peter and Jesus' mother were people who actually lived in Palestine in the first century, yet both came to have symbolic significance for the church.<sup>15</sup>

While imagery, semeiology, and theology studies can certainly be of help in furthering a greater understanding of the meaning of a biblical text, they are less helpful in either confirming or challenging matters of historicity and the epistemological origin of a particular unit or detail. Other measures must be employed for making advances in those directions, and the misappropriation of a tool also erodes its authority as the results are considered critically. Like any good tool, inferred symbolization and theologization function best when employed as they are meant to be used. Applying them to chronology, historiography, and topography, though, stretches their adequacy to the breaking point and most often proves nothing in terms of the originative character of the tradition.

## 2. Mimetic Interpolations and Critical Assumptions

Of course, the reason scholars must reason that distinctively Johannine topographical and chronological imagery has been added by a later narrator hinges upon the assumption that John cannot represent an independent Jesus tradition. Because the Synoptic-Johannine differences are seen as a 3-against-1 decimating of Johannine historicity, an alternative theory of the epistemological origin of Johannine topographical imagery must be posed.

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catching and landing, and back to physical eating again between verses 9–13? Again, are there control measures for inferring symbolization, or is any inference as good as another? If so, is this *critical* work, or simply imaginary speculation – creative and interesting as it might be?

<sup>15</sup> Op. cit., 7–8.

If John's tradition might be construed as having its own historical perspective and voice, however, the need for such explanations largely falls to the ground. Nonetheless, the critical assumptions that underlie the inference of mimetic interpolations as the *function and origin* of John's imagery deserve to be considered critically, on their own merits. Their being established critically, however, is essential if they are to be meaningfully employed over the long term.

The inference of mimetic interpolations in John is based upon the three central assumptions mentioned above: a) because contemporary writers added graphic detail as mimetic imitations of reality, this explains the epistemological origin of Johannine imagery and detail; b) because the Fourth Evangelist clearly operated theologically, much of John's distinctive material was a factor of theological interest rather than historical knowledge; and c) these factors thus demonstrate that John is a historicized drama rather than a dramatized history. Indeed, these views have merits, but they also bear daunting critical problems.

### *2.1. Contemporary Interpolations of Detail as a Demonstrated Practice: Fact or Fiction?*

The first thesis, that contemporary authors added graphic detail, often enlists Philostratus' narration of *The Life of Apollonius* as a primary example of this phenomenon. While this narrative does indeed enlist many graphic details, however, does that prove either that Apollonius did not exist or that Philostratus' sources (whether by Moeragenes, Damis, or others) did not possess first-hand familiarity with the regions described? Indeed, some first-hand familiarity with some of the places described is not impossible, although much of the material is also clearly mythological, and magic-oriented. Then again, Philostratus diminishes the magical component far more than Moeragenes, and he clearly imposes his philosophical orientation over the presentation of Apollonius as a sage. Still another question is whether the graphic detail was embedded in the sources used by Philostratus or whether they were inserted mimetically by the final author. Given the fact that Philostratus seems to be glossing over some of the more fantastic material, the more plausible inference is that most of the detail probably resided within the sources used by Philostratus rather than being features of his own interpolative additions.

On the larger question of historicity, one may question the number and character of Apollonius' wondrous deeds as presented by Philostratus, but even if they were embellished, does this prove that all of the stories about him – and in particular the graphic details – were fabricated? Questioning the wondrous is one thing; questioning all the topographical detail is quite another. By corollary inference, if Josephus' writing about his own life

possesses more graphic details on the average than the rest of his historical works, would this prove that he was writing fictively about his own life, with no first-hand connection to the places, persons, and events being narrated? If one makes this claim for John, must one not also make it for Josephus? Indeed, some historicizing of narrative may have been the case, but to argue a pervasive incidence of mimesis as the standard epistemological origin of narrative detail in the ancient Greco-Roman world – long before the emergence of the modern novel – is less than critically adequate.<sup>16</sup>

How about the other Gospels, though? Since Matthew and Luke are longer than Mark, might one infer that Matthew and Luke added graphic detail as a means of historicizing Mark? Given that John is much more similar to the other Gospels than to Josephus or Philostratus, if such *were* the case, it could provide a basis for inferring the Johannine interpolation of graphic detail. This inference, however, has at least three problems. First, assuming Matthew and Luke made use of an earlier Mark, they most characteristically *leave out* non-symbolic details rather than adding them. Such details as 200 and 300 *denarii*, the greenness of the grass, names of places and disciples, the young man's fleeing without his clothes, and other graphic uses of imagery are *not* embellished by Matthew and Luke; they are *omitted*. What Matthew and Luke tend to add, instead, are *units* of material rather than illustrative detail or symbolic content. Given that John is more like the canonical Gospels than any other piece of literature, the inference of graphic interpolation on the basis of conventional precedence falls flat.

Second, where Mark makes an interpretive comment, such as Jesus had compassion on the multitudes "because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34), it is often omitted by Matthew, Luke, or both. Likewise, often where Mark mentions a theologically-oriented detail, such as the day before the Passover being the day on which the lambs were killed (Mark 14:12), it is omitted by Matthew, although Luke includes it. Conversely, as the discussion of the meaning of the loaves is discussed in Mark 8:14–21, Luke all but condenses it into one sentence (Luke 12:1), and Matthew leaves out the clearer scriptural allusion to Isa 6:9–10 in Mark 8:17–18. While Matthew and Luke will add theological interpretations here and there, in these and other instances the inference of theological interpolation as the norm also fails the test of a standard conventional precedent. If John may have been similar to its closest parallels, the Synoptics, the interpolation of graphic detail and theological asides is precisely what the Fourth Evangelist is *unlikely* to have done!

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<sup>16</sup> See E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (trans. W. R. Trask; Princeton, N.J. 1953).

Third, the most impressive similarities between Mark and John are precisely these sorts of details and theological asides, although commonalities between the details – while not identical – are more prevalent than the theological ones.<sup>17</sup> This might imply contact between the Markan and Johannine traditions at some level, and yet there are no identical similarities between the Johannine and Markan traditions, so a theory of Johannine dependence on Mark cannot be inferred on the basis of evidence. Thus, any contact is more likely to have taken place during the oral stages of their respective traditions, or have been a factor of secondary orality, rather than reflecting one gospel's dependence upon a written form of the other.

## 2.2. *Johannine Detail: A Factor of Symbolization or Traditional Knowledge?*

The second thesis, that John's distinctive material is a factor of theologization or symbolization rather than traditional knowledge, is also problematic. While the historicity of the Synoptic accounts is generally preferable to that of John (especially on Jesus' teaching in parables about the Kingdom of God, challenging Jewish leaders on their approaches to the Torah, and having a ministry of exorcism), John renders some parts of Jesus' ministry with greater historical plausibility than represented in the Synoptics. His going to and from Jerusalem and attending Jewish feasts, as any observant Jew would have done, is certainly more credible than a one-time visit to Jerusalem in the Markan Gospels – the Synoptics. Also, a longer ministry than one year, involving at least three Passovers, would have allowed the momentum of the movement to develop, as it likely did. Over two dozen archaeological and topographical references are made distinctively in John, and the case can be made for an early Temple cleansing rather than a conjecturally climactic one.<sup>18</sup>

It may go without saying, but it deserves to be pointed out that a 3-versus-1 majority of the Synoptics' patent winning the historicity battle over John is based upon a false premise. If Matthew and Luke built upon Mark, as most scholars have believed now for a century or more, it is not a case of 3-against-1, but the Johannine versus the Markan witness. Given the fact that Papias declares Mark to have rendered Peter's occasion-oriented preaching in a worthy narrative – though not in the correct or-

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<sup>17</sup> Note the many non-symbolic details common to John and Mark in the author's "John and Mark, the *Bi-Optic* Gospels," in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (eds. R. Fortna and T. Thatcher; Louisville 2001), 175–188.

<sup>18</sup> For a fuller analysis of these matters, see the author's "Aspects of Historicity in John – Implications for the Investigations of Jesus and Archaeology," in *Jesus and Archaeology* (ed. J. Charlesworth; Grand Rapids 2006), 587–618.

der,<sup>19</sup> we actually have a Johannine-Markan dialogue when it comes to historicity. Further, if John and Mark may be representing *bi-optic* perspectives, both traditions may have historical origins, and at least some of John's departures from Mark may have been a factor of an alternative historical opinion. Fictional is the view that there was only one gospel tradition, or memory, at *any* stage of tradition-history developments. The Johannine and pre-Markan perspectives may have been in tension from day one.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.3. *The Fourth Gospel: A Historicized Drama, or a Dramatized History?*

The third thesis, that the Fourth Gospel represents a historicized drama rather than a dramatized history, would be arguable if the evidence were to support it, but it does not. In addition to John's closest contemporary precedents' omitting graphic detail from earlier sources rather than adding it, the Johannine redactor claims that the evangelist was a first-hand source of at least some of the events being narrated. While more has been made of the eyewitness attestations of John 19:35 and 21:24 than is deserved, this does not prove the converse to be true. "Not necessarily so" is not the same as demonstrating that a tenet is "necessarily not so," and upon this fallacy many interpretive approaches have faltered as a factor of eliminating possibilities unnecessarily. Again, it may well be that John is best considered a historicized drama, but this view must be maintained against the closest parallels and against the blunt opinion of the Johannine redactor.

To a large degree, the inference of theological and illustrative interpolations into the Johannine text, either by the evangelist or the redactor, is less a factor of seeking to address problems that emerge directly from the text itself and more a requirement of having to deal with the facts of the text as it stands, given one's de-historicization of John for other reasons. Many asides adorn the Johannine narrative, and they clarify some meanings while adding new knowledge and perspective as a means of heightening an insight beyond the surface of the text. They add meaning as well as explaining outcomes. While they may indeed have been mimetic interpolations, the basis for inferring such an operation is flimsy, and the rea-

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<sup>19</sup> Note that Eusebius attributes this opinion to the Johannine Elder (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39). Does this imply that part of the interest of the Johannine Gospel was to set some of the Markan presentation of Jesus' itinerary straight? Concoction is here *unlikely*.

<sup>20</sup> In Cognitive-Critical perspective, this is not an unlikely inference. See ch. 7 of Anderson, *Christology* (n. 11), 137–165; see also Idem, "The Cognitive Origins of John's Christological Unity and Disunity," in *Psychology of the Bible: A New Way to Read Scripture*, vol. 3: *From Gospel to Gnostics* (eds. J. H. Ellens and W. Rollins; Westport, Conn. 2004), 127–148; also published in *HBTh* 17 (1995): 1–24.

sons requiring the resorting to such a device are factors of limiting other possibilities along the way.

### 3. John 6 and 18–19 as Case Studies for Johannine-Synoptic Analysis – A Theory of Gospel-Tradition Interfluentiality

A study such as this one may be performed on any number of passages throughout the Johannine narrative, but the two sections most similar to parallel passages in the Synoptics are John 6 and John 18–19. Units describing the feeding, sea crossing, debate over the loaves, and confession of Peter are found together in all four Gospels, so John 6 marks the clearest place for analysis when comparing and contrasting the ministry of Jesus in John's "book of signs" and in the Synoptics.<sup>21</sup> The closest passage between John and the Synoptics in John's "book of glory," however, is the Passion Narrative, including the arrest, trials, and death of Jesus in John 18–19. While studies of John 6 and their implications have been conducted elsewhere and will only be summarized here, the Johannine Passion narrative offers a special opportunity to consider the distinctive imagery in John.

When considering the distinctive vocabulary of John, it has 60 words that are distinctive singulars (*hapax legomena*, words occurring only once in the New Testament) and approximately 24 words that are distinctive multiples (words occurring more than once, but only in John). Of the distinctive multiples, 25% (6 out of 24) and 20% of the distinctive singulars (12 out of 60) are found in John 18–19. This is over twice the frequency of the normal distribution of distinctive vocabulary in the rest of John (excluding John 7:53–8:11), as the 82 verses in John 18–19 contain only slightly more than 10% of the total number of words in the Fourth Gospel. Interestingly, most of the uniquely distinctive vocabulary in John is not found in the teaching or dialogue sections, but in the narrative sections. That could explain part of the distribution anomaly, as most of John 18–19

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<sup>21</sup> Raymond Brown and others have come to refer to John 1:19–12:50 as the "book of signs" and to John 13:1–20:31 as the "book of glory" in John, although this designation should not be confused with the empirically flawed inference of alien sources underlying the Johannine text. For an extensive treatment of John 6 and its corollary passages in the Synoptics, see Anderson, *Christology* (n. 11). Within that study, an application of all of Bultmann's stylistic, contextual, and theological criteria for inferring alien sources is performed, using John 6 as a case study – the prime passage which should be the showcase of John's diachronic origin and development. When applied to John 6, however, the distribution of stylistic evidence for disparate sources is not only non-compelling; it is non-indicative. As scientific explanations of John's distinctive history of development, theories of the Fourth Gospel's having been a derivative tradition rather than an autonomous one are evidentially insufficient.

is narrative rather than discourse in form, but not entirely. Given the fact also that John 18–19 is the largest section in John most closely parallel to those in the Synoptics, the remarkably distinctive vocabulary – tending to involve primarily nouns and adjectives rather than verbs – makes for an exceptional section in which to conduct such a case study. If there ever were a place where mimetic interpolations in John were to be showcased, this would be it!

While John 6 does not have the same degree of distinctive vocabulary as John 18–19 (*no* equally large part of John does), John 6 contributes other insights to a theory of relations between John and the other gospel traditions. Of the leading theories regarding John's composition and traditional development (source dependence, a spiritualization of Mark, rearrangement, multiple editions) only one stands up consistently to scrutiny.<sup>22</sup> Summarizing the findings of research demonstrated elsewhere, first, when all of Bultmann's evidence is tested for four of John's five sources supposedly underlying John 6, the stylistic evidence is randomly distributed, contextual aporias are inconclusive, and theological tension shows itself to be a factor of the dialectical thinking of the evangelist rather than a narrator-source literary dialogue. Second, when 45 contacts between John 6 and Mark 6 and 8 are analyzed, *zero* of the similarities are identical. Therefore, literary dependence upon Mark is highly implausible based on evidence, although some traditional contact is likely. Third, John's imagined rearrangement is only slightly less credible than its supposed disarrangement. The inference that disruptions of the text of John 6 should occur no fewer than 10 times in a row, precisely between sentences averaging 80 characters per sentence, hinges upon a likelihood ratio of 1:10 quintillion. For a rationalist, such probabilities are inconceivable. Fourth, the one theory that explains John's composition by accounting for all of the major aporias with the least amount of speculation is a two-edition theory. The best evidence points to a first edition of the Johannine Gospel being produced around 80–85 C.E. as the second Gospel, and I believe it was finalized after the writing of the Epistles by the Johannine Elder, who authored the Epistles and edited the Gospel of John around 100 C.E.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For a full analysis of literary, historical, and theological approaches to John and their interpretive implications, see Anderson, *Christology* (n. 11), 1–136.

<sup>23</sup> Among all the composition theories available, that of B. F. C. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCB; London 1972), 46–54, is the most convincing. While his view that the Lazarus material was added to a later edition of John is not compelling, most of the other components of his argument are. A modification of his theory includes the following tenets: a) a first edition of John was completed between 80–85 C.E. as the second written gospel, written by the Beloved Disciple, gathering his own presentations of Jesus' ministry. b) The teaching ministry of the Beloved Disciple continued, though, making connections with the ministry of Jesus and emerging issues. c) The Johannine Elder, another



For these reasons, it cannot be maintained that John is a derivative gospel; the Johannine tradition is an autonomous one, and while finalized the latest among the Gospels, it still reflects an independent Jesus tradition that hangs together with a remarkable impression of unity.<sup>24</sup> While autonomous and independent, though, this does not mean that it developed in complete isolation. Rather, it appears to have engaged other traditions along the way, and some of them appear to have engaged the Johannine tradition as well. Each set of relations with other traditions, however, deserves its own analysis, and the following theory of John's *dialogical autonomy* and *interfluent relations to the Synoptics* is summarized, involving the following elements.<sup>25</sup>

### 3.1. John and Mark

Contacts between the Johannine and Markan traditions reflect several stages and different types of relationship. First, *an interfluent set of contacts* seems likely during the oral stages of the pre-Markan and early Johannine traditions. Evidence of such contacts comes primarily in the form of memorable words and descriptions of events, characteristic of oral narration and transmission of memory. Humanizing the phenomena, *whoever* they might have been, at least two preachers, hearing each others' stories about the ministry of Jesus, appear to have shared a common set of details – close enough to have been repeated more than once.<sup>26</sup> Because it

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leader within the Johannine situation, wrote the Epistles between 85–95 C.E., calling for unity and for believers to love one another as a means of furthering group cohesion. d) After the death of the Beloved Disciple, the Elder finalized the Gospel, adding a worship hymn (John 1:1–18), chapters 6, 15–17, and 21, and the Beloved Disciple/eyewitness passages. e) The Fourth Gospel was circulated among the churches as a complement to the other Gospels and as a means of providing a pneumatic and organic way forward in terms of serving the ecclesial needs of the early Christian movement.

<sup>24</sup> I stand with Moody Smith in his affirmation of John's originitive independence from the other gospel traditions. Note, however, that in his articulation of his own theory at the end of the second edition of the most important book on the subject, *John Among the Gospels* (2nd ed.; Columbia, S.C. 2001), 195–241, Professor Smith asserts that the Fourth Evangelist was not unfamiliar with Mark and perhaps other gospel traditions. In that sense, I would also affirm that John's autonomy was not a disengaged independence. It was an autonomous-yet-engaged independence.

<sup>25</sup> Fuller treatments of this theory are available in the author's essay, "Interfluent, Formative, and Dialectical – A Theory of John's Relation to the Synoptics," in *Für und wider die Priorität des Johannesevangeliums* (ed. P. Hofrichter; TTS 9; Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York 2002), 19–58. See also *Fourth Gospel* (n. 1), 101–126.

<sup>26</sup> 200 *denarii* is the value of the bread (Mark 6:37; John 6:7); the grass is described at the feeding (green, Mark 6:39; much, John 6:10); the loaves are blessed, distributed, and gathered up in 12 baskets (Mark 6:41–43; John 6:11–13); there were 5,000 men present (Mark 6:44; John 6:10). See the author's essay, "Mark, John, and Answerability: Aspects of Interfluentiality between the Second and Fourth Gospels," n.p. [cited 21 July

cannot be determined which direction the influence may have flowed, and because John's pervasive lack of identical similarities with Mark makes it impossible to infer a derivative relation to Mark, "interfluentiality" is the more plausible critical explanation of the origin of these details. Again, it is precisely these sorts of graphic details that Matthew and Luke *leave out* of their augmentations of written Mark.

Second, because the first edition of John appears to have shown some familiarity with Mark,<sup>27</sup> it appears to have *augmented it in a complementary* way. Thus, for hearers and readers of Mark, John appears to have clarified several things: a) some events in Jesus' ministry happened *before* John the Baptist was thrown into prison (John 3:24; Mark 1:14); b) despite Jesus' having said that a prophet was not without honor except in his hometown, unlikely audiences, such as Samaritans and Romans, believed (John 4:44; Mark 6:4); c) the first two signs in Cana of Galilee were performed *before* the ones mentioned in Mark 1 (John 2:11; 4:46); d) Judean signs were performed as well as Galilean ones (John 5, 9, 11); and e) the fact that Jesus had performed many signs "not written in *this* book" acknowledges Mark's presence and relative absence from the Johannine narrative (John 6 was added later as a more coherent feeding/sea-crossing narrative). Within the later material a more transcendent Prologue (John 1:1–18), extended discourse material (John 15–17), and a fuller post-resurrection narrative (John 21) fill out the picture, continuing this tendency.

Third, in addition to augmentive complementarity, however, John appears to have set the Markan record straight *correctively* at various points: a) Jesus ministered for more than one year and went to and from Jerusalem several times; b) the Temple cleansing was an inaugural sign rather than a culminative one; c) the typologies of Elijah and Moses are reserved for Jesus rather than John the Baptist; d) Messianic secrecy was countered by Messianic disclosure; and e) the last supper was not a formalistic Passover meal but a corporate meal the evening before the Passover. Within the later material, a more unitive and fuller rendering of the scene involving a feeding, sea-crossing, discussion, and Peter's confession is added to the first edition, emphasizing a contrast to the prevalent Markan valuation of the feeding (*not* that they "ate and were satisfied," John 6:26). The emphasis is made that Jesus never said what was attributed to him in Mark 9:1

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2006]. Online: <http://catholic-resources.org/John/SBL2001-Anderson.html>, for 20 contacts regarding graphic detail between the Markan and Johannine Gospels as well as 17 contacts regarding memorable phrases and sayings.

<sup>27</sup> Despite the excellent observations by P. Gardner-Smith, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge, 1938), the study that changed my mind on this subject was the work by I. D. MacKay, *John's Relationship with Mark* (WUNT 2/182; Tübingen 2004).

(he only said to Peter, “what is it to you if he lives until I come again?” – a saying the editor feels was misunderstood and purveyed wrongly). Even after the death of the Beloved Disciple, the Johannine augmenting – and correcting – of Mark continued. Interestingly, the final ending of Mark also has within it several Johannine details suggesting an extended history of interfluentiality between John and Mark – the *Bi-Optic Gospels*.<sup>28</sup>

### 3.2. John and Luke

The relations between the Johannine and Lukan traditions suggest different sorts of contact. Wrong-headed is the question: “Where does John agree with Luke?” Just because John was finalized last, probably around 100 C.E. or shortly thereafter, this does not mean that the origin of the Johannine tradition is late and only late. Nor does it imply that John is dependent upon, or even knew of, written Luke.<sup>29</sup> Because many of Luke’s characteristic interests and sections are completely missing from John and because Luke’s dependence on Mark is a reliable inference, the more fitting approach is to ask *why Luke departed from Mark and sided with John* no fewer than three dozen times. The most plausible answer is that the Johannine tradition appears to have served as a formative source of material and insight for Luke’s two-volume project.

First, notice the ways Luke *makes “orderly sense”* out of John’s presentation: a) he goes with one feeding and sea crossing instead of two, placing the confession of Peter after the *other* feeding – that of the 5,000 – as it is in John; b) Luke conflates the confession of Peter in Mark (ὁ χριστός; “*the Christ*”) and John (ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ; “*the Holy One of God*”) to become τὸν χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, “*the Christ of God*,” apparently reconciling Mark and John; c) Luke changes the anointing of Jesus’ head to the anointing of his *feet* (an unlikely move to have been made without a

<sup>28</sup> See the author’s essay, “Answerability” (n. 26), for an outlining of six phases of Markan and Johannine development and interfluential contact.

<sup>29</sup> This is the mistake made by J. A. Bailey, *The Traditions Common to the Gospels of Luke and John* (NovTSup 7; Leiden 1963), and others who infer Johannine dependence on Luke or on an undiscovered source. Far more adequate is the approach of F. L. Cribbs, “The Agreements that Exist between St. Luke and St. John,” in *SBL 1979 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta 1979), 215–261; “A Study of the Contacts that Exist between St. Luke and St. John,” in *SBL 1973 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta 1973), 1–93; “A Reassessment of the Date of Origin and the Destination of the Gospel of John,” *JBL* 89 (1970): 38–55. M. Matson, *In Dialogue with another Gospel? The Influence of the Fourth Gospel on the Passion Narrative of the Gospel of Luke* (SBLDS 178; Atlanta 2001), builds effectively on Cribbs’ approach, inferring Lukan familiarity with the written Johannine tradition. However, the number of times Luke does *not* follow John’s order and overall portrayal weakens the case for Lukan familiarity with a Johannine text. More plausible is the view that Lukan familiarity with the Johannine tradition occurred in the *oral* stages of John’s traditional delivery (Anderson, *Christology* [n. 11], 274–277).

traditional basis); d) Luke moves the discussion of servanthood among the disciples to the last supper – where it is in John; and e) the post-resurrection narratives begin in Jerusalem. Does John's tradition contribute to the "orderly" account Luke seeks to provide on the basis of traditional material he has received from those who had been rendering the Jesus story *from the beginning* (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς; Luke 1:2)?

Second, Luke also *adds distinctively Johannine details and units of material* to his adaptation of Mark: a) at the Transfiguration the disciples beheld his *doxa*; b) Satan entered Judas in the Passion narrative; c) two women named Mary and Martha are added to the story, as is a dead man named Lazarus; d) a great catch of fish is narrated (although Luke places it at the first calling narrative rather than at the re-calling of Peter); e) Luke describes the tomb as one in which no one had ever been laid; f) the 'right' ear of the servant was severed; g) Pilate claims to 'find no crime in' Jesus; h) Peter saw the linen cloths of the Lord lying in the tomb; i) the ascension is mentioned only in Luke and John; and j) Jesus bestows peace upon his followers and eats fish with them after the resurrection. Other examples could be listed, but an impressively distinctive set of Johannine details have been added by Luke to his redaction of Mark, and Johannine traditional influence upon Luke is the most plausible explanation of these facts.

Third, Luke also *adds theological motifs* that are prevalent in John, including: a) references to the Holy Spirit – including the mentioning of the Holy Spirit as *wind*; b) sympathetic presentations of Samaritans; and c) embellished presentations of women. Because the Johannine additions to Luke are not always in their original order and because Luke makes no explicit mention of an early Temple cleansing, it is more likely that Luke's access to the Johannine tradition was only partial and that it probably occurred during its oral stages of delivery – parallel, perhaps, to Mark's access to at least some of Peter's reports of the Jesus narrative. Luke's dependence on the oral Johannine tradition even appears to have been acknowledged in his Prologue, where he expresses gratitude to eyewitnesses and servants of the *Word* (αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου; Luke 1:2). Given the additional fact of Luke's apparent linking of an apostle with a Johannine saying in Acts 4:19–20,<sup>30</sup> and Luke's dependence upon the Johannine tradition becomes highly arguable on the basis of

<sup>30</sup> This unwitting connection between a Johannine phrase, οὐ δυνάμεθα γὰρ ἡμεῖς ἃ εἶδαμεν καὶ ἠκούσαμεν μὴ λαλεῖν ("For we cannot help speaking about *what we have seen and heard*," Acts 4:20; see the proximity of the first-person plural past reference in 1 John 1:3: ὃ ἐωράκαμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν, ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν, "*What we have seen and heard* we announce to you..."; see also John 3:32, where Jesus imparts what he has *seen and heard* from the Father) and the apostle John has been totally overlooked on all sides of the debate (Anderson, *Christology* [n. 11], 274–277). This moves the connecting of the apostle John and the Johannine tradition a *full century before* Irenaeus.

Luke's departures from Mark and his many incorporations of Johannine material.

### 3.3. *John and Q?*

The Q tradition also appears to have depended on the Johannine tradition, as the "bolt out of the Johannine blue" is otherwise inexplicable (John 3:35; 7:28–29; 10:14–15; 13:3–4; 17:1–3, 22–25 → Matt 11:25–27; Luke 10:21–22). Indeed, there could also have been some aspects of Johannine-Q tradition interfluentiality, but the clearest contact involves a Johannine saying embedded within the Q tradition. Thus, Q's dependence upon the early stages of the Johannine oral tradition is a plausible inference, although it is the most extended part of this larger theory of Johannine-Synoptic interfluentiality. Another possibility is that the Father-Son mutuality of knowing reference in Q and John may have gone back to Jesus, or an even more primitive tradition than Q, but no such tradition is known. It is less conjectural to infer that Q simply has accessed a characteristically Johannine motif as a factor of its contact with the early Johannine tradition.

### 3.4. *John and Matthew*

Contacts between the Johannine and Matthean traditions appear to have been later in the histories of their respective traditions, reflecting an interfluential set of relations. These similarities appear to display several distinctive features. First, the Johannine and Matthean traditions appear to be *mutually reinforcing* in their Jewish-Christian apologetic attempts to present Jesus as an authentic messianic agent, fulfilling the Prophet-like-Moses typology of Deut 18:15–22.<sup>31</sup> These appeals appear to answer allegations that Jesus was a presumptuous prophet rather than authentic one, and both Matthew and John present Jesus as taking on Jewish authorities intensively. Second, there appears to have been a set of *dialectical engagements* between these two traditions on matters of ecclesiology and how to hold the church together. Third, in the juxtaposition of Peter and the Beloved Disciple in John, the Fourth Gospel appears to be asserting a pneumatic and egalitarian *corrective* to rising institutionalism in the late first-century church. In doing so, the Johannine emphasis calls later audiences back to an earlier and less formalized mode of organizational work and community living. This explains why the structural and charismatic features of Matthean and Johannine ecclesiologies became formative for differing models of church governance in the history of Christianity; it was

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<sup>31</sup> Note the connections between the elements of Deut 18:15–22 and Jesus' agency in John; see the author's essay, "The Having-Sent-Me Father – Aspects of Agency, Irony, and Encounter in the Johannine Father-Son Relationship," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 33–57.

precisely because these differences reflected distinctive centripetal approaches to centrifugal tensions in the late first-century Christian situation, and both claimed an apostolic mantle.

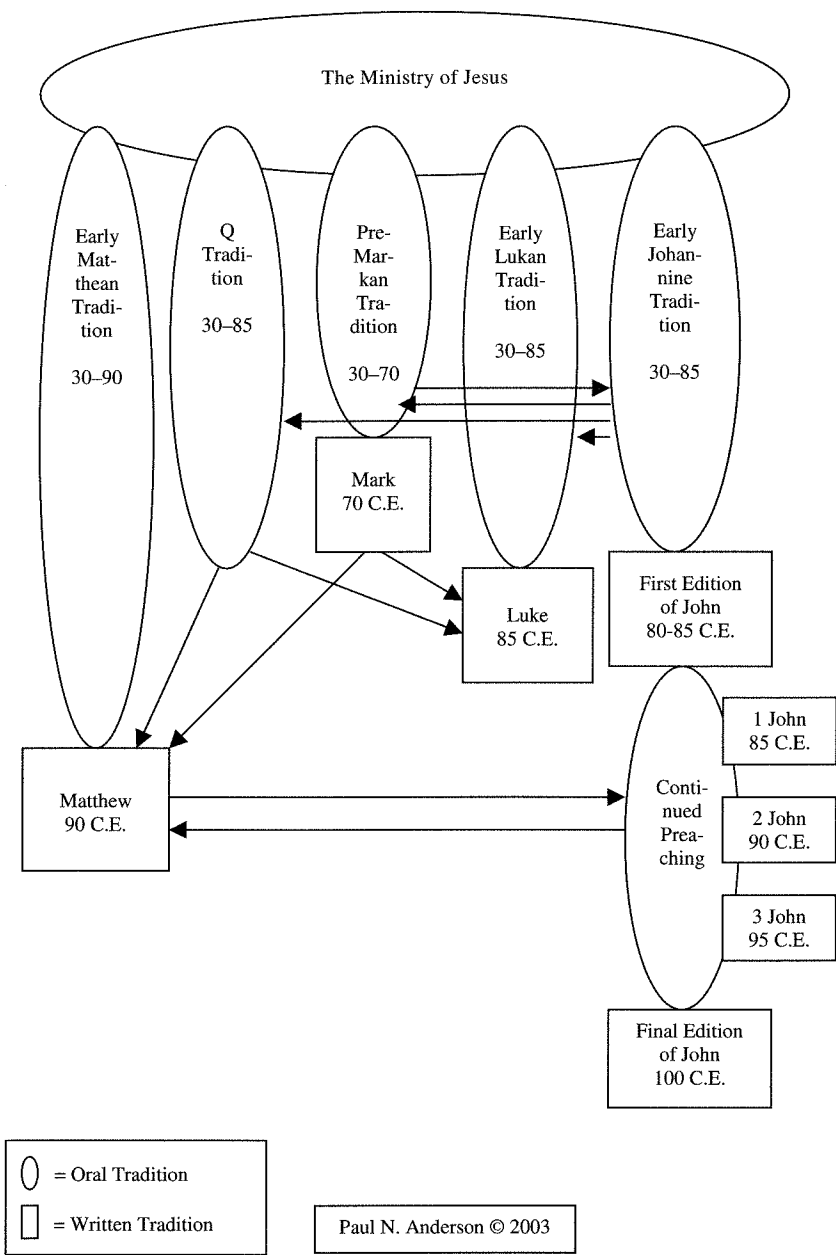
### 3.5. *The Dialogical Autonomy of John*

Rather than representing a derivative tradition, either as an amalgam of non-Johannine sources for which there is no compelling evidence, or as a spiritualization of Mark when none of the contacts are identical, John represents an autonomous tradition reflecting an individuated impression of the ministry of Jesus developed dialogically over at least seventy years. John's *dialogical autonomy*, however, reflects several kinds of dialectical reality. First, the subject involves the divine-human dialogue of revelation, whereby God or God's agents address the world, and the world responds either believingly or unbelievingly to the divine initiative. Second, the evangelist is a dialectical thinker, who considers issues from more than one perspective. This reflects a first-order inductive approach to one's subject, rather than second-order deductive ones. Third, this mode of thought is especially characterized by the evangelist's reflective dialogue with his own tradition, whereby earlier perceptions appear to find new meanings in the light of subsequent and contravening experiences. That is how constructive theology proceeds. Fourth, the developing Johannine tradition also appears to have engaged dialectically other traditions – especially the Markan and Matthean traditions – posing reinforcements and alternative perspectives along the way. Fifth, the evangelist seeks to engage the hearer/reader in an imaginary dialogue with his subject, Jesus, in the way he constructs the Johannine Gospel as a dramatic narrative. Therefore, as with all instructive historiography and engaging narrative, fictive or otherwise, the past comes alive precisely because it speaks to the present. That, in turn, leads to a sixth dialogical reality – a transformative encounter in the experience of the Johannine audience, whereby later audiences become full participants in the original story and its unfolding meanings.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> These levels and forms of dialogue are developed more fully in Anderson, *Christology* (n. 11), especially the cognitive dialectic of the evangelist thought in ch. 7 (137–165). In terms of intra-traditional dialogue and inter-traditional dialogue, Table 1 portrays in a charted form a two-edition theory of John's composition, relations between oral and written stages of development, and the inter-traditional dialogue that may have existed between the Johannine and Synoptic traditions; this chart also appears in the author's *Fourth Gospel* (n. 1), 126.

Table 1: A Charting of Johannine-Synoptic Interfluent Relations



#### 4. Gradations of Symbolization in John

Whether or not a detail or aspect of imagery in John may have originated in the theologizing and constructive work of the evangelist, gradations of symbolization can be inferred in terms of their degrees of explicitness. By means of identifying the criteria by which particular details and presentations will be assigned to one category or another, the basis for such moves will be transparent. As a test case, the Johannine Passion Narrative serves as the optimal passage within which to make such designations. In addition to John 6, it is the closest passage in John to the Synoptics, and it is filled with an abundance of theological and historical content. The same may be applied to other sections of John, but given its distinctly narrative form, chs. 18–19 make for an excellent setting in which to apply one's criteria for determining gradations of symbolization in John.

##### 4.1. Explicitly Symbolic – Declarative

The most explicit level of symbolization is the *declarative* – when the narrator or a character directly tells the reader that something is theologically or symbolically important. Here the omniscient narrator includes the hearer-reader in the inside perspective of the story by highlighting the importance of an element within it.<sup>33</sup> When the narrator declares the meaning of an event or a saying, or when Jesus or another figure is presented as explaining the theological importance of something, this may be taken as explicitly symbolic. In addition to declarative statements by the narrator, other features characterize particular manifestations of this device.

First, *direct witnesses to significance by actors in the narrative* involve the declaration that something was meaningful, or theologically important, for particular reasons. For instance, when John the Baptist explains why he has come baptizing – to point Jesus out, or when he declares the meaning of Jesus' mission, these are examples of direct references to meaning. Nothing is left to the imagination of the audience. Likewise, when Jesus is presented as explaining the purpose of his mission (John 6:38; 12:46; 16:28) or the significance of his works and words, this device injects meaning into the story directly. Here, the testimonials of Nathanael, the Samaritan woman, the seeing blind man, and climactically Thomas become highly theological witnesses to the authenticity of Jesus' mission. Even the echo from heaven in John 12:28 becomes a testimony from God that

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<sup>33</sup> Alan Culpepper lucidly describes the omniscient work of the narrator (Idem, *Anatomy* [n. 2], 15–49), casting light upon the thoughts and dispositions of actors in the narrative as a means of including the reader in the inside story.



something in the narrative is highly significant – the intentionality of effect is unambiguous. Interpreting the meaning, of course, is another matter.

Second, *the fulfillment or anticipation of another saying or event* can also convey symbolic meaning explicitly. For instance, when Jesus tells his disciples that he says something in advance so that when it comes true they will know he had predicted it, this is an explicit theological presentation, clearly showing Jesus as fulfilling the characteristics of the Mosaic Prophet (Deut 18:15–22), whose word invariably comes true. Likewise, when it is pointed out that something which happened had been predicted or anticipated by Jesus, the fulfilled word is also presented as significant. The deconstructed-reconstructed “temple” is a clear example of such a device. While the disciples did not understand Jesus’ words at first, “after the resurrection” they caught the full meaning of the statement as a prediction of Jesus’ body being raised up from the dead (John 2:19–22). Both fulfillment and anticipation add weight to theological meaning in John.

The fulfilled word takes place in several ways in John, including *the proleptic sayings of Jesus*: a veiled reference to the resurrection (John 2:19–22); the lifting up of the Son of Man as a paradoxical reference to the cross (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32–33; 18:31–32); the healing of the official’s son (John 4:50–53); Jesus’ life given for the life of the world (John 6:51); the prediction of some who would not believe (John 6:64–66); Jesus’ prediction of his departure (John 7:33–34; 8:21; 13:33; 16:5–7, 16, 28); Jesus’ prediction of the pouring out/sending of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38–39; 14:18–20, 26; 15:26; 16:7); Jesus’ declaration that he will lay down his life for the sheep (John 10:11, 15); Jesus’ prediction that Lazarus’ sickness will not end in death (John 11:4, 23); and Jesus’ prediction that Peter would deny him thrice before the rooster had crowed once (John 13:38). In all of these ways, when a word is fulfilled, this confirms the claim that Jesus has been sent from God. Such is its *significance*.

Sometimes this feature is mentioned explicitly, both wittingly and unwittingly. Wittingly, Jesus declares to the disciples that an event happens in order to fulfill the Scripture (John 13:18–19; 14:25–29; 16:2–4), an explicit mention of an event’s occurrence is made in order to help his followers believe after it has transpired (John 6:39; 17:12; 18:9), and the signification of by what means Jesus’ death and paradoxical glorification would take place is declared so as to lead his followers to belief (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32–33; 18:31–32). The double entendres of Caiaphas, however, is taken as an unwitting prophecy – being the Chief Priest that year (John 11:47–53). Climactically, then, the prophecy comes true not only in the death and resurrection of Jesus, but also in the coming to Jesus of the Hellenistic seekers in John 12:20–36. In both instances, the “hour” of Jesus is come.

A third explicit work of symbolization involves *the explicit fulfillment of Scripture*, either mentioned by the narrator, John the Baptist, or Jesus. Indeed, Scripture fulfillment is meant to be taken as a symbol of divine authorization, and particular details in the story bearing an association with a particular scriptural motif are enough to ring true as a fulfillment of Scripture. The narrator even gives a clue or two as to how such connections might have been made. While parts of the Johannine narrative were simply elements of the story, a hearing or reading of a Scripture passage in later settings appears to have made a connection with the detail in the thought of either the narrator or a furtherer of the tradition. An earlier statement apparently made no sense at the time, such as tearing down “this temple” and raising it up in three days (John 2:22), but later it was understood to be a reference to the resurrection, and other Scriptures became attached to the saying. Likewise, an otherwise insignificant detail becomes adorned with semeiotic value when connected with an otherwise random Scripture passage. Such was the gambling for the robe of Jesus and the piercing of his side by the soldier’s spear (John 19:23–37). The explicit connecting of Scripture with a saying, detail, or event is always a direct theological reference.

In these passages, the fulfillment of Scripture is mentioned directly by the narrator as a factor of connectivity between the memory of earlier events and later recognitions in Scripture reading/hearing (Isa 40:3 → John 1:20–23; Ps 69:9 → John 2:17; Ps 118:26 → John 12:13; Zech 9:9 → John 12:14; Isa 53:1 → John 12:38; Isa 6:10 → John 12:40; Ps 22:18 → John 19:24; Exod 12:46; Num 9:12; Ps 34:20; and Zech 12:10 → John 19:36–37). Jesus is likewise portrayed as declaring prophecy to be fulfilled in the events surrounding his ministry (Isa 54:13 → John 6:45; Isa 44:2–3 and perhaps Zech 14:8 → John 7:37–38). While the particular scriptural passage may be in question here, the evangelist connects this saying with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was yet to come.

A fourth explicit presentation of symbolic value involves *the direct description of comprehension or miscomprehension presented on behalf of characters within the narrative*. Where people respond believably to agents from God, whether they be Jesus, John the Baptist, Moses, Abraham, or the Scriptures, this is always a positive and exemplary presentation of the way forward for later audiences. Where people fail to believe or are presented as misunderstanding the workings of the Spirit or the words of Jesus, this is always a corrective and rhetorical presentation. Misunderstanding is always corrective in narrative, and when the evangelist presents people as rejecting Jesus or as failing to comprehend his words and works, this is a highly significant feature of value-laden narration. Later audiences

are thus invited to respond adequately instead of inadequately to the message.

Finally, when an explicit theological typology or theme is described metaphorically or is connected to another statement of meaning or purpose, this is a clear indicator of symbolization. For instance, when Jesus is presented as fulfilling the typologies of Moses and Elijah, this reflects an intentionally theological move on behalf of the evangelist. Likewise, christological titles employed in John and the metaphorical I-Am sayings of Jesus in John all function symbolically and theologically and are intended to be taken as such, especially when explicitly emphasized.

Table 2: *Explicitly Symbolic Material in John 18–19*

- 18:2a Now Judas, who betrayed him – pejorative reference.  
 18:4 Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” – Jesus’ omniscience is declared.  
 18:8–9 Jesus answered, “... let these men go” – fulfilling Scripture.  
 18:14 Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people – the significance is declared.  
 18:17 Peter’s first denial – predicted earlier.  
 18:19–23 The questioning of Jesus’ teaching, openly attested – before and after.  
 18:25 Peter’s second denial – predicted earlier.  
 18:27 Peter’s third denial and the crowing of the cock – fulfilled word.  
 18:29–32 The Roman trial as a fulfillment of the kind of death he was to die – fulfilled word.  
 18:33–37 The character of Jesus’ kingship: it is one of truth – a central theological motif.  
 19:6–12 Pilate attempts to release Jesus, but the Jewish leaders intimidate him – intense political and religious drama.  
 19:23b–25a The soldiers cast lots for Jesus’ robe – fulfilling Scripture.  
 19:25b–27 Jesus entrusts his mother to the Beloved Disciple – a significant transfer of custody.  
 19:28 Knowing it was finished, Jesus said “I thirst!” – fulfilling Scripture.  
 19:31 The breaking of Jesus’ legs and piercing of his side with a spear – fulfilling Scripture.

#### 4.2. *Implicitly Symbolic – Associative*

Themes may be understood to be implicitly symbolic when their meaning is not explicitly articulated, but they are associated with particular values. The first category presents itself especially *when related to John’s dualistic categories* of light/darkness, good/evil, life/death, sick/well, from above/from below, God/Satan, and so forth, the reference is held to be rife with implicit symbolic effect. The overall thrust of John’s dualistic categories tends to serve two major interests. First, it explains *why* people responded to Jesus as they did – either believingly or unbelievingly. Espe-

cially as an accounting for why “his own” rejected Jesus (John 1:11) and why “the world” opted for darkness rather than light (John 1:5; 3:17–21), the answer posed is that they neither knew God to begin with (John 7:28; 8:55; 15:21; 16:3; 17:25); they were not willing to come to the light lest their conventions be exposed as being of creaturely origin rather than of divine origin. Dualism in John thus explains why the beloved world rejected Jesus, and also the later outreach of his followers. The second function of dualism, though, is to motivate life-producing responses to the gospel message rather than death-producing ones (John 6:27). In that sense, believing, abiding, loving, and obeying are presented as the viable ways forward versus their lesser alternatives. Therefore, dualistic presentations comprise the first feature of implicit theologization and symbolization in John.

Second, a detail might be implicitly symbolic, or associative, when *it is mentioned more than once in John*. This might not be a sure criterion, but the repetition of a particular theme or detail suggests emphasis, and that emphasis implies conveyance of meaning beyond a particular use of an image. For instance, when Peter is given the opportunity to confess his loyalty to Jesus three times in John 21:15–17 having denied him thrice in John 18:17–27, with both scenes happening “around a charcoal fire,” the restorative function of the repetition is palpable. Implicitly symbolic is the restoration of Peter, although his reinstatement is not itself free of ambiguity. Therefore, when a detail is mentioned more than once in John, this may be taken as a feature of implicit symbolization.

A third feature of an implicitly symbolic presentation involves *the use of extended irony*. Where religious and political leaders are presented as claiming knowledge and wisdom, but then are exposed as foolish and unknowing, this ironic presentation will always convey implicit symbolic meanings. Especially the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, Pilate as a representative of Roman authority, and Peter as a representative of Christian leadership, all serve implicitly the function of deconstructing conventional authorities in contrast to truth and the liberating power of revelation. A particular set of ironic presentations at the trial scene in John 18–19 presents Pilate as not knowing even how to approach the truth; while he claims to have all authority to set Jesus free or to put him to death, he is reduced to the “impotent potentate,” begging the crowd to let him let Jesus go free. The chief priests and Pharisees refuse, charging Jesus of blasphemy while ironically at the same time committing blasphemy, claiming to have no king but Caesar. Then, Peter, the chief of the apostles is nowhere to be found at the crucifixion, although the Beloved Disciple is indeed present. Extended irony is always implicitly symbolic, especially when marked by *double entendre*.

A fourth characteristic of implicitly symbolic, or associative imagery, becomes apparent when *it is associated with known religious themes or typologies*. Therefore, actions commensurate with Jesus' association with Moses, such as his providing bread in the wilderness and his facilitating the safe sea crossing, are implicitly symbolic of Jesus' fulfilling the Prophet-like-Moses typology. Likewise, the mention of barley loaves and the raising of Lazarus are reminiscent of the Elijah typology (2 Kgs 4:42–45 – complete with the command to give people something to eat and with leftovers), confirming Jesus' Messiahship according to the Kings tradition and Malachi (Mal 4:5). This may be *why* John omits the Transfiguration account of the Synoptics and why the Baptist is presented as denying being “the Prophet,” and likewise Elijah. Both of these typologies are *reserved for Jesus alone in John*. Likewise, the nine metaphors underlying the I-Am sayings – bread of life, good shepherd, gate for the sheepfold, light of the world, resurrection and the life, the way, the truth, and the life, and the true vine – will always bear implicit associations with theological significance if not mentioned explicitly.<sup>34</sup> The same is true regarding such themes as life-producing food and water and other positive associations in John.

A fifth feature of associative value is present when a detail or incident *moves the narrative forward in particular ways*. When the followers of John the Baptist come and follow Jesus, when the Samaritans and the royal official receive him, when the Jewish leaders begin to oppose him and even some of his followers abandon him to walk with him no longer, these are all significant events in presenting the reception of Jesus and the progression of the story. In the Passion narrative, when Jesus declares “ἐγὼ εἰμι!” after the soldiers come looking for the Nazarene, the soldiers themselves fall to the ground, ironically as before the theophany of Exod 3:14 (or perhaps reminiscent of the spontaneous response to the angelophany of Judg 13:20). Likewise, the maltreatment of Jesus escalates the tension, and Pilate's refusal to change his dictum on the cross furthers the plot dramatically. In these and other ways, implicit symbolization functions powerfully in connecting associations with theological motifs and heightening the significance of Jesus' words and deeds.

Table 3: *Implicitly Symbolic Material in John 18–19*

<sup>18:5</sup> They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus replied, ἐγὼ εἰμι – an implicit Christological reference.

<sup>34</sup> See an analysis of the Johannine I-Am metaphors plus the Exod 3:14 theophanic motif, as found in the *Synoptic* traditions in Anderson, *Fourth Gospel* (n. 1), 55–58. For some reason these connections have gone relatively unnoticed by critical scholars.

<sup>18:6</sup> When Jesus again declared to them, ἐγώ εἰμι, they stepped back and fell to the ground – an ironic response to an implicit theophanic association.

<sup>18:7</sup> Again he asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” – repetition, escalating the tension.

<sup>18:11</sup> Jesus’ word to Peter commands putting away the sword and asserts Jesus’ willingness to drink of the cup – mentioned in the Synoptics and a clear reference to Jesus’ martyrdom.

<sup>18:18a,c</sup> Around a charcoal fire ... Peter and others were warming themselves – mentioned also in John 21.

<sup>18:26</sup> A relative of Malchus questions Peter – previous allusion, escalating the tension.

<sup>18:38</sup> Pilate asks “What is truth?” – A highly ironic presentation.

<sup>18:39</sup> The releasing of a hostage, but the crowd’s choosing Barabas, a bandit – highly ironic.

<sup>19:1-2</sup> The soldiers place a crown of thorns and a purple robe on Jesus – mocking his “kingship.”

<sup>19:3</sup> Continued mocking and maltreatment of Jesus by soldiers – escalating the tension.

<sup>19:4-5</sup> Pilate’s presentation of Jesus: “Behold the man!” – Ironic drama.

<sup>19:14c</sup> The chief priests declare to have no king but Caesar, and Jesus is handed over to be crucified – intense politically and theologically ironic.

<sup>19:17</sup> Jesus carries the cross to “The Place of the Skull” (in Hebrew “*Golgotha*”) – a double entendre.

<sup>19:19-20</sup> Pilate had posted the inscription, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek – significance is implied, also double entendre.

<sup>19:21-22</sup> Pilate’s insistence, “What I have written I have written.” – A reference to Jesus’ kingship, repetition.

<sup>19:30</sup> Jesus said, “It is finished!” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit – a double entendre, pivotal event.

<sup>19:31,42</sup> The day of Preparation for the Sabbath is mentioned – repeated in John.

#### 4.3. Possibly Symbolic – Correlative

The material which is *possibly* symbolic, but not probably so, may simply be considered *correlative*. Correlation does not imply causation, or even symbolizing intentionality, although such is also not impossible. The criteria for identifying the possibly symbolic include details that might be alluded to in parallel traditions, but directly not in John. This is why this third category is *not* described as “implicitly symbolic or theological.” Implicitness implies intentionality as well as subtlety, and such an inference extends beyond the facts of textual evidence. A correlative image or detail need not have served any intentional function by its design or inclusion. It simply is a symbolizing possibility, and yet cannot be said to be devoid of semeiological functionality. Several identifiable criteria thus mark such a detail or presentation as fitting better within this category than in others.

First, a detail is possibly symbolic, or correlative, when *it is alluded to in parallel traditions, but not elsewhere in John*. One detail in Mark and Luke receives an overly large amount of consideration in the interpretation

of the Fourth evangelist's theological and symbolizing interests involves the mention that the Day of Unleavened Bread was the time when the Paschal lambs were slain (Mark 14:12; followed by Luke 22:7). While neither the killing of lambs nor the day of Unleavened Bread is mentioned in John, amazing conjectures are levied claiming to explain why the dating of the last supper in John is described on the Day of Preparation, and likewise to account for the early Johannine Temple cleansing as factors of the evangelist's so-called "Paschal theology." There may be a possible connection here, as the Synoptic day of Preparation appears to be more explicitly the Preparation for the Sabbath (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; see also John 19:31), whereas it is the Preparation for the Passover that is referred to in John (John 19:14). John even appears to associate the Passover and the Sabbath as being on the same day that year (John 19:31). However, the reference to the slain lambs does not occur in John, and the foundational basis for such a revisionist platform cannot sustain much interpretive weight. It is best left as a correlative relationship, not critically as strong as an implicit or associative one. The same applies to Jesus' having been crucified between two others: nothing is said in John about their being thieves, so chronological revisionism on this basis would also be weak.

Second, a detail is possibly symbolic, or correlative, when *it moves the narrative forward in general ways without necessarily intensifying the tension*. Because one detail is mentioned, other parts of the story develop, but the contribution is weaker than posing a turning point in the plot. The point is that the reference is possibly symbolic, but not probably so. Examples include Peter's cutting off the right ear of the high priest's servant, Jesus' being sent bound from Annas to Caiaphas, and his being taken to the Praetorium first thing in the morning. The plot remains relatively unaffected, but its progression is furthered by such details.

Third, *local irony* is possibly an indicator of symbolic reference, although it is not as strong an indicator as more extended presentations of irony. The mentioning of the hyssop branch as the means of lifting up the sponge filled with sour wine might possibly be symbolic, although it is less than clear what the signifying object might have been. It could refer to the cultic function of the hyssop branch that was used to spread the blood of the sacrificial animal on the altar – a reference to the theological significance of Jesus' death. Then again, it could have been a reference to the irony that such an unlikely and pliable instrument was used; perhaps nothing else was available. Irony can be mundane as well as theological.

Fourth, *a mentioning of personal relationships and connections* might be taken as a symbolic reference, especially if the relationship were an important one. The fact that Malchus was the servant of the high priest marks him as not just being an irrelevant bystander; he was someone significant

within the story. Likewise, the fact that it was his right ear that was severed might imply something about the action itself. Here is a case where Luke follows the Johannine rendering in mentioning that it was the right ear, and Luke might thus have felt something in the event was at least possibly of signifying value. The place where Jesus met with his disciples is given as an explanation for why Judas knew where to find Jesus, and the other disciple's having been known to the high priest appear to reflect personal knowledge of relationships. Left undeveloped, but possibly significant, is the mention that Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, and such connections imply at least a possible symbolic reference. This is not to say, though, that it was implicit.

Fifth, a detail is possibly symbolic, or correlative, when *it appears to connect with other themes that are more probably symbolic*. The familiar-to-Judas place where Jesus was found, the mentioning of Joseph of Arimathea, the reference to the day of Preparation, and the sending of Jesus from Annas to Caiaphas could possibly reflect intentional connections with other significant themes. Sometimes even a contrastive detail, such as the time of day, especially if posing a contrast to Mark or Matthew might imply an intentional corrective, so at least the potential signifying function of such a detail should be considered within one's analysis. The mention of themes central to John's dualism and theological constructs also deserves consideration within this category, even if it appears more subtle than an implicit symbolizing reference.

Table 4: *Possibly Symbolic Material in John 18–19*

<sup>18:2b</sup> Judas knew the place where Jesus was meeting – familiarity and relationships implied.

<sup>18:10a</sup> Simon Peter is the one who cut off the high priest's servant's right ear – intensifies the tension.

<sup>18:12</sup> The soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him – intensifies the tension.

<sup>18:13a</sup> Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year – knowledge of relationships, significance of timing.

<sup>18:15–16</sup> Peter and the other disciple (who is known to the high priest) follow Jesus – descriptions of relationships.

<sup>18:16</sup> The "other disciple" is able to get Peter access to the courtyard – furthers the plot.

<sup>18:22</sup> The soldier struck Jesus with his hand – raises the tension.

<sup>18:24</sup> Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest – intensifies the tension.

<sup>18:28a</sup> Jesus is taken to Pilate's headquarters, the *Praetorium*, early in the morning – intensifies the tension.

<sup>19:14a</sup> It was the day of Preparation for the Passover (versus the Sabbath) – mentioned only in John.



<sup>19:18</sup> Jesus is crucified between two others – undeveloped here but mentioned in the Synoptics.

<sup>19:19</sup> Many of the Judeans read the title – only in John, but a potentially significant aside.

<sup>19:29b</sup> A sponge full of sour wine was lifted to Jesus' mouth on hyssop branch – possibly of ironic or religious significance.

<sup>19:38</sup> Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, requested the body of Jesus – mentioned also in the Synoptics.

<sup>19:41</sup> There was a new tomb in the garden in which no one had ever been laid – personal detail, followed by Luke.

<sup>19:42</sup> On the Jewish day of Preparation Jesus was laid in the tomb – religious knowledge, followed by Luke.

#### 4.4. *Unlikely Symbolic – Innocent*

Some details appear to be innocent of symbolizing functions, and they should not be granted more theological or semeiological value than they deserve. Indeed, their function and value might lie elsewhere, and the over-application of a worthy tool, such as symbolizing inference, should be resisted in the name of critical integrity. While the basis for identifying unlikely symbolism might be the dearth of alternative evidence, other markers might point more adequately to characteristics of such references. In addition to the absence of narrative indicators of symbolic meaning, following are several other criteria for identifying details that appear innocent of symbolizing function and design.

First, a detail is less likely to be symbolic and innocent of theologization if *it is not mentioned elsewhere in John or in the Synoptics*. While this is not an indicator in itself, distinctive details that are mentioned only in John and only once are more difficult to maintain as symbolic if the functional value of such an image is not confirmed elsewhere. Here the argument might be forwarded that mimetic imitations of reality provide the epistemological basis for the proposed origin of such details, but this inference is essentially speculative and is disconfirmed by the closest contemporary precedents. An imitation of reality poses no theoretical or practical advantage over a representation of reality, so the *hapax legomena* and the distinctively singular references deserve to be regarded as theologically innocent unless there is compelling reason to consider them otherwise.

Second, a detail is unlikely to be symbolic, and innocent of theologization, if *its content does not appear to further the plot*. A particular detail might explain why a related action or reaction developed, but if such does not further the plot in any significant way, the case for its having a symbolic or theological function is weakened. The audience does not need to know that it was cold in order for people to be standing around a fire in the middle of the night, but the narrator includes the detail just the same;

knowing the number of soldiers and the divisions of the clothes was four makes little difference in the development of the plot; the type and weight of the embalming material is left undeveloped; and little is done with the newness of the tomb. Again, these details may indeed have been fabricated and introduced for theological and symbolizing reasons – or for any other reason – but their symbolic function and theological significance must be regarded as *undeveloped* in making such a conjecture.

Third, a detail is unlikely to be symbolic and is innocent of theologization if *its inclusion seems more of an explanatory aside or a corrective reference*, introduced either by the narrator or the editor. This is especially the case if it appears to go against another detail mentioned in John or in the Synoptics. One of the features of the Johannine narrative is that it is filled with incidental asides, pointing out Jewish customs, commenting upon the names of places, and informing the reader of motives and constraints of individuals. The mention that John had not yet been thrown into prison (John 3:2), the emphasis that Jesus himself never baptized (John 4:2), the reminder that Jesus himself had testified that a prophet is not without honor except in his home town (John 4:44), the mention that not even his brothers believed him (John 7:5), the emphasis on Judas being a thief (12:6), the clarification of which “Judas” was being discussed (John 14:22), the mention of the sixth hour as being the timing of the crucifixion (John 19:14 – a knowing corrective of the third hour in Mark 15:25?), the assertion of the and the translation of “*Rabboni*” (John 20:16) all simply clarify a detail for the benefit of the reader, perhaps to avert a misunderstanding. Some asides are more explicitly theological, especially with reference to the fulfilled word, but when it is simply a reference to a graphic detail, the degree of symbolizing explicitness must be considered low.

Fourth, a detail is likely to be innocent of theologizing value if *it appears to represent personal or cultural knowledge that is left undeveloped*. Why the name of the high priest’s servant is mentioned, and only in John, is not apparent unless it conveys some level of personal knowledge. Likewise, the taking of Jesus first to Annas before Caiaphas (including the familial connection between them), and familiarity with the place where Jesus had often gathered with his followers represent personal knowledge explaining why things turned out as they did. Likewise, religious and cultural knowledge are implied by the mention of the reluctance of the Jewish leaders to enter the Roman Praetorium so as to not defile them for eating the Passover, the type of preparations used to prepare Jesus for burial, and the emphasis upon it being an unused tomb all represent religious and cultural knowledge.

Finally, a detail is unlikely to be symbolic and is thus innocent of theologization *if it is simply an empirical reference to a graphic or topographical detail*. John's baptizing beyond the Jordan (John 1:28), the five porticoes at the Pool of Bēthzatha (John 5:2), and the *Lithostrōton* on which the judgment seat was located (John 19:13) all reflect topographical and archaeological knowledge, some of which would not have survived the Roman destruction of Jerusalem between 67–70 C.E. The second name given for Pilate's tribunal setting, *Gabbatha*, is not a translation of the name for the Stone Pavement, but involves a different Hebrew name for the site, meaning "the ridge of the house." The winter-flowing Kidron is mentioned only in John,<sup>35</sup> as is the site's being a garden (Gethsemane in the Synoptics is not explicitly described as a "garden"), and these and other sorts of details imply first-hand knowledge rather than symbolizing or theologizing devices added to the narrative. Therefore, unless there is a critical reason for considering them otherwise, these sorts of details are best considered innocent of symbolization and theologization, at least given the facts of their presentation.

Table 5: *Non-Symbolic Detail in John 18–19*

- 18:1a Jesus went out with his disciples across the winter-flowing Kidron (χειμάρρον) – mentioned only here.
- 18:1b They went to a place where there was a garden – mentioned only in John.
- 18:2b The place was one where Jesus had often met there with his disciples – first-hand familiarity implied.
- 18:3 The guards came with lanterns, torches and weapons – lanterns and torches mentioned only here.
- 18:10b The slave's name was Malchus – mentioned only here.
- 18:11 Jesus commands Peter to return the sword to its *sheath* (εἰς τὴν θήκην) – a word found only in John.
- 18:13b First they took Jesus first to Annas – particular knowledge implied.
- 18:16–17 The maid who kept the door (ἡ παιδίσκη ἡ θυρωρός) is mentioned twice – particular knowledge of roles.
- 18:18b It was cold – an empirical detail mentioned only in John.
- 18:28b The Jewish leaders did not enter Pilate's headquarters (the *Praetorium*) in order to be able to eat the Passover – socio-religious knowledge implied.
- 19:13 Pilate is seated on the judge's bench on the Stone Pavement (λιθόστρωτον), but in Hebrew called *Gabbatha* (meaning "ridge of the house") – particular archaeological and cultural knowledge, in two languages, implied.
- 19:14b The time was the sixth hour – a corrective to Mark 15:25?
- 19:23a The soldiers divided Jesus' clothes into four parts, one for each – an incidental detail.
- 19:23b The robe of Jesus was seamless, woven from top to bottom – a graphic detail.

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<sup>35</sup> Although Josephus writes that the valley of Kidron stretched to the Mount of Olives (*J.W.* 5:504) and mentions it eight other times in his writings.

19:29b A bowl of vinegar was nearby – a graphic detail.

19:39a Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes – particular knowledge implied.

19:39b The mixture weighed about a hundred pounds – a particular weight measure.

19:40 The body of Jesus was wrapped with spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews – religious knowledge implied.

Whether or not the epistemological origin of details and presentations within the Johannine narrative can be inferred on the basis of such an analysis, the degree of explicitness with reference to symbolic and theological function can be inferred critically. Indeed, much detail in the Johannine Passion Narrative functions theologically, with great symbolizing effect, but John 18–19 also presents a great deal of independent material that does not appear to be crafted for theologizing purposes. While this analysis shows a good number of passages and details falling within the explicitly theological and symbolic category (15), each of the other gradations drew slightly more references (17, 16, and 18), and this distribution is not insignificant. What it shows is that explicit markers of symbolization cannot be used to explain the origin and function of over 75% of the detail in the Johannine Passion Narrative. Other means of analysis must thus be employed.

## 5. Disclaimers and False Dichotomies

Despite the fact that gradations of explicitness in the Johannine presentation of symbolization can be critically inferred, several disclaimers deserve to be made. First, just because a detail or image is theologically developed and functions symbolically, this *says nothing of its originative history*. Indeed, the more significant an event in history, the more symbolic and theological value will be attached to it. As Koester mentions above, just because theological and symbolic value is attached to the crucifixion, this does not imply that Jesus did not die on the cross. Quite the contrary, especially in John, where events and details in the world of the sensory are attributed value in the world of the transcendent. Therefore, it cannot be claimed that a higher degree of theologization and symbolization diminishes accordingly the degree of historical and empirical connectedness.

Second and conversely, just because a detail appears innocent of symbolization, this *does not mean that its origin was rooted in an actual event or that it implies historical accuracy*. Historical intentionality may have been a reality, but it must be confirmed or disconfirmed on bases other than symbolizing operation or innocence. Whereas the stone pavement of Pilate's judgment seat might be confirmed by archaeological findings,

whether or not lanterns and torches were brought to the garden cannot be confirmed without an independent witness. Neither, of course, can they be denied. It simply remains a fact that the lesser the degree of explicitness regarding the symbolic function of a detail or presentation, the less compelling will be the case for historical challenges on that particular basis.

Third, just because a detail appears devoid of symbolic interest, this does not mean that the narrator has not crafted it so as to contribute theologically and symbolically to the meaning of the narrative. Even if the detail appears to have no intentional theological or signifying value, it might nonetheless contribute such. For instance, why was the right earlobe of Malchus mentioned as that which Peter cut off, and why does John alone mention that it was Peter who drew the sword? Unless Peter was left-handed, this action might have implied a threat rather than an attempt to injure the high priest's servant. Just as turning the other cheek, having been smitten on the right cheek implies the willingness to take a fore-handed blow (that which is threatened) after sustaining a backhanded slap,<sup>36</sup> it makes one wonder if Peter is being presented as resorting to the same sort of worldly intimidation that the domination-free order of God stands against. Perhaps the presentation of the violence-free Kingdom of God in John 18 (esp. vv. 36–38) is not as far from the presentation of the same in Matt 5:38–48 as one might have imagined. Then again, that might be stretching it. The significance of some non-symbolic details may be unwitting, but in other cases they still may possess intentional significance. Such must be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

A fourth disclaimer also deserves to be made. While the criteria for determining gradations of symbolization have been outlined above, and while they have been applied in the above designations in John 18–19, determining the particular reality being symbolized is not to be taken for granted. For instance, why was a hyssop branch mentioned as the means by which the wine was raised to Jesus' lips? Was this detail intended to contribute associations of sacrificial atonement motifs, where the blood of a sacrificial animal was daubed on the altar with a hyssop branch, or did its mention imply historical knowledge of an odd occurrence? As a hyssop branch would likely have been flexible and not very sturdy, could it really have borne the weight of a wine-filled sponge? Then again, might the reference imply a historical reference precisely because it was an *unlikely* choice of means? Perhaps nothing else was available, and an actual event was experienced and remembered as a factor of its ironic overtones. While explicit symbolization is not the case in this instance, one can imagine changing the designation as a factor of new considerations; for now,

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<sup>36</sup> See Walter Wink's significant work here, in chapter 9 of his book, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis 1992), 175–193.

though, “possibly symbolic” seems the most critically feasible. Indeed, new knowledge or considerations could move one’s assignment of a detail to another category. The significance of such a move, though, remains another matter.

## 6. Implications

The implications of such a study are several. First, while the Johannine narrative is indeed symbolic, this does not imply that everything has been added for symbolizing reasons versus alternative ones. Some details may have been included for traditional reasons, and even as factors of historical knowledge. Just as the Fourth Gospel possesses more archaeological and topographical details than all of the Synoptics put together, John also makes greater reference to personal knowledge and relationships than any of the gospel traditions, canonical or otherwise. Given the fact that John’s tradition is not dependent on alien sources or the Synoptics, the burden of proof still remains on the shoulders of those who would claim to know the epistemological origins of Johannine detail on the basis of inferred symbolization. Most of the Johannine imagery in the Passion Narrative, and in the rest of the Gospel for that matter, is not explicitly symbolic.

Second, if the imagery that qualifies as implicitly symbolic in the Johannine Passion Narrative were added to the first category, this would total just less than half of the references, and such a measure would probably bear itself out in the rest of the Gospel. Therefore, because slightly less than 50% of the imagery in John 18–19 is either explicitly or implicitly symbolic, the analysis of how Johannine symbolization and semeiology functions deserves to be of central interest for interpretation. Indeed, new clusters of meanings arise with every considered association, and such connections contribute to the polyvalence of meaning within the Johannine narrative. Not only in considering the degree of explicitness, but also in considering the character of such, interpretive insights will be bolstered by such an analysis.

Third, despite the interpretive value of considering the richly symbolic and highly theological Johannine narrative, the interpreter is also helped by taking seriously the dearth of symbolizing function. In addition to staying with the facts of the text rather than reading more into a passage than it suggests, a more nuanced approach forces one to consider other features of the Johannine presentation. For instance, given John’s theological character, the tendency to deal with Synoptic-Johannine differences as a 3-versus-1 trumping of the Johannine tradition historically, some aspects of the Johannine presentation of Jesus’ ministry cannot be harmonized away

so readily. Indeed, there may be ways that the Johannine tradition is superior to the Markan traditions, and taking serious note of the presence of non-symbolic illustrative detail in John might lead to other approaches to the perdurant Johannine riddles.

Finally, while the theological and symbolic function of Johannine imagery is indeed a fact, an oversubscription to such features as a means of accounting for the origin and development of the Johannine tradition itself stretches a valid set of inferences beyond the breaking point. Where hyper-historicization may have been a flaw in previous interpretive ages in their approaches to the Johannine Gospel, hyper-symbolization in the present age marks the overly-extended use of an otherwise good and serviceable tool. As a corrective to such speculation, and in the interest of a more critical and nuanced approach, noting gradations of symbolization may offer a set of controls for testing one's interpretive approaches to the distinctive features of the signifying Johannine narrative.

## 7. Conclusion

While noting gradations of symbolization cannot confirm or disconfirm the historicity, or even the theologization, of a Johannine passage or detail, it can do one thing. It can provide a critical tool for ascertaining the degree to which a detail or presentation of a scene is explicitly symbolic. If not explicitly symbolic, though, this does not imply implicit symbolization proper. Some details may simply be correlative with symbolic motifs, or even innocent of symbolizing narration, and such possibilities should at least be acknowledged. Where "the theological interest of the evangelist" has become an interpretive panacea for addressing nearly every feature of the Johannine text, at least noting gradations of symbolization may provide a control measure for determining the certainty with which a symbolizing inference is made. The greater the degree of explicitness, the stronger one's claim will be; and conversely, the lesser the degree of explicitness, one's claim to theologizing symbolization is accordingly weakened. What to do with such an inference, of course, is yet another matter; it simply poses a control measure for symbolizing speculation gone awry.