Anti-Judaism in the Gospel According to John: A Consolidation of Historical and Narrative-Critical Research

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Abstract

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Grayson Arthur Thompson

The portrayal of the Jews in John's gospel has been one of the most controversial subjects in biblical studies since the events of World War II, which prompted the church to seriously examine its texts and doctrines for their potential to contribute to anti-Semitism. The Fourth Gospel has been crucial in establishing essential Christian theology and its influence within the church and in broader Western Civilization should not be underestimated. The aim of this thesis is to analyze John's anti-Jewish problem using a synergistic approach that blends historical and narrative-critical research to present a conclusion that respects the text's genre and purpose. Scholars have rightly proposed that the gospel writers were presenting their unique views of Jesus using literary devices and larger narratives that sway their readers toward their perspective of who he was and why he died. Concurrently, the history of the Johannine community that lies behind the words of their gospel helps to support a narrative-critical reading and provides valuable insights into John's harsh treatment of the Jews. The application of this methodology follows the author's intended course of rhetorical argumentation and frames it within the context of an early Jewish-Christian conflict that sparked the anti-Jewish polemic that finds harsh expression in the gospel. The research put forward in this thesis finds that the Jews' damning characterization and the author's supersessionistic Christology cannot be limited to the gospel's late first-century context, but have universal, long-term ramifications that ought to be addressed by the church.

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Introduction and Methodology

In the year 2000, a theological conference was held in Leuven, Belgium where twenty-four of the world's most renowned scholars of New Testament exegesis were called together to discuss one of the most controversial topics in the world of post-Holocaust biblical studies: the portrayal of the Jews in the Gospel of John.[1] Each of the attendees was given the opportunity to present their approach to the problem based on their individual area of academic expertise, resulting in a wide range of hermeneutics and theological perspectives being represented in an effort to push the field of Johannine studies toward some semblance of a solution to this glaring moral issue. Though the conference was a success in exposing elements of the conversation that make the subject exceedingly complex and problematic, it also demonstrated the profound dissent amongst experts about what the text means and how it should be handled by the church, with some arguing that accusations of anti-Judaism are simply the result of a misinterpretation of the text,[2] while others have condemned it as an "embarrassment of history"[3] because of its apparently blatant anti-Jewishness. Given the shameful history of anti-Semitism being promulgated and supported by the church,[4] the lack of consensus on such a sensitive and pertinent subject within a text that is of crucial importance to central Christian doctrines is a significant cause for concern.

The conundrum of interpreting the Jews in the Fourth Gospel exposes a deeper, more fundamental question regarding the authority of Scripture,[5] the nature of divine revelation and how the church should handle troublesome texts that inevitably take on new meaning as they move through unexplored historical landscapes that they were not intended to interact with. This constitutes a serious obstacle in any discourse surrounding John's portrayal of the Jews and other problematic elements of authoritative literature: Christianity is a belief system that is deeply rooted in its ancient texts, and it would be an understatement to say that the church would be reluctant to simply remove a text or even a portion of a text that is central to its theology. Such an elevated view of Scripture has no doubt established motives for Christian scholars to "explain away"[6] seemingly anti-Jewish passages in the Bible, along with other questionable themes that have been venerated as divinely inspired. In addition to this, it is not even clear that orthodox Christology as

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[1] Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, *Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel.* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

[2] Martinus C. de Boer, "The Depiction of 'the Jews' in John's Gospel: Matters of Behavior and Identity," in *Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel,* ed. Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 141-157.

[3] James D.G. Dunn, "The Embarrassment of History: Reflections on the Problem of 'Anti-Judaism' in the Fourth Gospel," in *Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel,* ed. Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 41-60.

[4] Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of John and the Jews," *Review & Expositor* 84, no.2 (1987): 273. "The general observation that the vilification of *hoi Ioudaioi* in John has contributed to the bloody record of persecution of Jews can hardly be contested." See also,
Sussanah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008) and,
Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1995).

[5] Judith M. Lieu, "Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel: Explanation and Hermeneutics," in *Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel,* ed. Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 117.

[6] Adele Reinhartz, *The Gospel of John and Jewish-Christian Relations* (London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018), xvii.

it has been expressed throughout history could survive a complete reinterpretation and overhaul of the role of the Jewish people within its ideological framework, as expressed by Rosemary Ruether: "there is no way to rid Christianity of its anti-Judaism, which constantly takes social expression in anti-Semitism, without grappling finally with its Christological hermeneutic itself."[7] Such a radical accusation calls into question the reliability and function of authoritative texts and the doctrines they establish.

The problematic portrayal of the Jews subtly pervades John's gospel in the form of rhetoric and literary devices that can be difficult to identify for the modern reader, but it also appears on the surface-level of the text in the specific reference to "the Jews" as a group. In John, Jesus' opponents are usually characterized as Ἰουδαῖοι, or simply "the Jews", which differs from the synoptic gospels that typically refer to a particular group within the greater Jewish community, like the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, or religious leaders. In John, Ἰουδαῖοι appears seventy times[8] and the referent of the term seems to vary greatly throughout the gospel depending on the context. Scholars have proposed a wide variety of theories as to the identification of "the Jews" in John, including non-Johannine Jewish Christians, Judeans, and the Jewish leaders specifically.[9] Alan Culpepper states the problem succinctly: "the gospel does not attempt to distinguish and separate these groups; all are called Ιουδαίοι. They are one group in John."[10] By failing or refusing to differentiate between brands of Judaism in his condemnation of "the Jews", the author leaves his gospel highly susceptible to interpretations that convict the Jewish people as a whole.

This broad characterization of the Jews as the antagonists of the Fourth Gospel becomes more unnerving as the reader traverses deeper into the theological cosmos constructed by the author and discovers the role they play in his belief system. One of John's most distinctive Christological characteristics is its portrayal of Jesus as the spiritual embodiment of ancient ideas. This can be seen in the seven ἐγώ εἰμι ("I am") statements that appear throughout the gospel;[11] "I am the bread of life" (6:35), "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6), "I am the true vine" (15:1), in the discourses that follow his miracles (2:3-11) and in his identification with things like the temple (2:19). Though many have correctly noted that these sayings express the gospel's emphasis on belief in the person of Jesus for eternal life,[12] many of the statements also present Jesus as the superior replacement of a particular Jewish idea, story or custom. Jesus is the spiritual bread that eternally nourishes the soul, in contrast to the manna the Jews ate in the wilderness that did not last; he is the spiritual temple that will never be destroyed; and he is the spiritual wine,

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[7] Ruether, *Faith and Fatricide,* 116.

[8] Stanley. E. Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 150;

Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Johannine 'Jews': A Critical Survey," *New Testament Studies* 28, no. 1 (1982): 33–60. Von Wahlde identified 31 hostile uses of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the gospel, as well as 7 additional uses that carry a strong possibility of hostility. Von Wahlde argues that most hostile uses of the term refer to the authorities rather than to the common people.

[9] Porter, *John*, 151.

[10] R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 126.

[11] Porter, *John*, 120.

[12] Rudolf Bultmann, "The Gospel of John: A Commentary," in *The Johannine Monograph Series* (Oregon: Westminster Press, 1971), 227;

Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1966), 269.

"taking over and transforming the water pots of the Jewish rites of purification, when the earlier 'inferior wine' had run out."[13]

In this way, John's gospel is thoroughly Jewish, as many have observed and argued for based on its incorporating Jewish ideology and practices,[14] but it only does so to have these ideas denounced and replaced by the person of Jesus. Adele Reinhartz correctly affirms that John is both Jewish and anti-Jewish in that it "appropriates Jewishness at the same time as it repudiates Jews."[15] This forms a basis for the Christian problem of supersessionism, which refers to Jesus' replacement of aspects of the Jewish faith and in turn, the church's replacement of the Jews as the people of God.[16] Jesus' status as the superior manifestation of important Jewish ideas is so integral to John's ideology that it is unclear whether the anti-Jewish elements of his gospel could be surgically removed without fatally rupturing the Christological heart that gives life to his theology.

Thus far, John's negative portrayal of the Jews has been demonstrated in its vague terminology and its supersessionistic theology, but the author also promotes anti-Judaism in the crafting of his narrative, carefully guiding his intended audience to a particular conclusion and subsequent response. The purpose of the gospel is stated in 20:31, for those hearing to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"[17], and the evangelist masterfully persuades his audience of this reality through his use of rhetorical methods like narration, plot development and characterization[18] as well as socially effective literary tools such as affiliation and disaffiliation[19] that further inflame the anti-Jewish polemic. The bulk of my thesis will be dedicated to analyzing the Gospel of John from this narrative-critical perspective and identifying the Jews' role in the Johannine belief system as revealed by the author's utilization of persuasive literary methods.

A crucial methodological element of my research is the incorporation of important historical-critical developments in the field of Johannine studies into my narrative-critical analyses. Some scholars who have employed narrative-criticism in their study of John have insisted upon the importance of excluding historical-critical data so that the pre-eminence of the gospel's story is respected and unobscured by imprecise reconstructions. More specifically, for our purposes, the function of the Jews would be properly understood within the narrative without needing to appeal to historical findings that might restrict enigmatic interpretations of their literary purpose. Gerald Caron argues that Martyn's ἀποσυνάγωγος theory, for example, should not factor into the narrative-critic's judgment of John and that "the text must be taken in itself and not as a window onto the world of the Johannine community at the end of the first century."[20]

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[13] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 111.

[14] Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, *The Jewish Gospel of John: Discovering Jesus, King of All Israel* (Tel Mond: Israel Study Center, 2015).

[15] Adele Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John* (Maryland: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018), xxi.

[16] David Novak, "Supersessionism Hard and Soft," *First Things* 290 (February 2019): 27.

[17] A textual variant exists for "believe" in this text – whether the aorist subjunctive (πιστεύσητε) or present subjunctive (πιστεύσητε) should be used (believe vs. come to believe). The present subjunctive seems to be the more widely attested reading and is more in line with Johannine usage. See Brown, *John*, 1056.

[18] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*.

[19] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*.

[20] Urban C. Von Wahlde, "'The Jews' in the Gospel of John: Fifteen Years of Research (1983-1998)," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 76, no. 1 (2000): 32.

Caron's objection is in line with Bultmann's traditional understanding of the Jews functioning as a purely literary character that exists to serve the evangelist's *kerygma*, which will be discussed at length in a later section. This thesis will agree with the prioritization that Caron gives to evaluating the text as a narrative, but will argue that historical-critical theories, especially those of Martyn, provide part of the justification for the utilization of this approach. Martyn recognized that the stories of Jesus within John whisper to the reader about the experiences of a later community through various proleptic literary devices,[21] and this discovery strengthens the case for reading the gospel as a kerygmatic message concealed by complex narrative features. Refusing to incorporate these historical presuppositions into research on the Jews within the text would only limit potential gains in comprehending it both narratively and historically. Considering the work of Martyn and others in deciphering the historical world behind the text also addresses critiques from scholars like Ashton who argue that a narrative-critical reading of John "is vitiated by a neglect of any diachronic perspective, so necessary if one is to make any real progress in the study of a many-layered text like the Fourth Gospel."[22]

My intention is not to dismiss or diminish the work of figures like Culpepper who have made compelling and necessary contributions to narrative-criticism of John without any reference to the leading historical reconstructions that dominated the preceding decades.[23] In fact, approaches like Culpepper's seem to have emerged as a natural "swing of the pendulum" in response to the field's preoccupation with uncovering the community that lies behind the Fourth Gospel, at the expense of its supremely important kerygmatic message. Following in the footsteps of Frank Kermode, who viewed the gospels as fictional novels and interpreted them as such,[24] Culpepper recognized the narrative plot as the evangelist's foremost concern and argued that analysis of the gospel should account for this by prioritizing literary features that conceal the author's consciously communicated message, over historical details that can be gleaned from the periphery of his intended course.[25] If we are to respect the gospel's genre and purpose, we must bear in mind that "the experience of reading the text is more important than understanding the process of its composition."[26]

Tannehill's categorization of the New Testament gospels as narrative Christology also supports my proposed methodology. His work on the gospel of Mark dealt with the enduring problem of clarifying the genre of the gospels, and he argued that first and foremost, they are intended to present the author's view of who Jesus was using various stories that constitute a

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[21] J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel: Third Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003) 58-59.

[22] John Ashton. *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 114;
Von Wahlde, *15 Years of Research*, 35.

[23] Brown, *John*;
Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.

[24] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979);
Mark W.G. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 11.

[25] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 5. "Primarily at least, it is the literary creation of the evangelist, which is crafted with the purpose of leading readers to 'see' the world as the evangelist sees it" … "its meaning is produced in the experience of reading the gospel and lies on the side of the text, between the reader and the text."

[26] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 5.

coherent narrative.[27] The authors of the gospels were drawing from historical material but altered certain details in service of their beliefs regarding the person of Jesus. All four canonical gospels are rooted in the same historical tradition but emphasize different elements and even present entirely novel stories to the central account to shape Jesus according to their theological views. Identifying the idiosyncrasies unique to each gospel's retelling of events is exceedingly helpful in discerning the authors' individual Christology. Without question, the gospel of John modifies the account of Jesus' life more freely than the three synoptic gospels. The evangelist tells us plainly of his hope for the audience's belief in Jesus, the Son of God in 20:31, and John's significant deviations from the synoptics should be understood as hints that can be compiled to decipher the Fourth Gospel's distinct Christological qualities. This narrative Christological view of John calls for a narrative-critical approach, in that it acknowledges the evangelist's storytelling as the primary means of communicating his view of Jesus, as well as historical-critical considerations, since unique Johannine literary qualities are reflective of a real historical group, their experiences and their understanding of Jesus. This principle naturally applies to the particularly harsh treatment of the Jews in John's gospel, which will be addressed at length in chapter 3.

Culpepper addresses the potential objection that modern methods like narrative-criticism cannot be imposed upon ancient texts that were written many centuries earlier, as these texts would not be making use of the same literary devices that the method is meant to detect and deconstruct. The gospels, after all, are not comparable in genre to any text from the ancient world, let alone from modernity.[28] This is important to acknowledge, though Culpepper argues that modern methods like narrative-criticism are relevant in studying ancient texts like John insofar as they exhibit characteristics like narration, plot development and characterization, that literary methods will help to understand.[29] Even though certain literary devices have only been grasped in their complexity in recent centuries, "features of the narrative can be observed and analyzed using modern concepts without presuming that they were understood by the ancient writer."[30] This thesis will not be arguing that the evangelist was always conscious of his use of persuasive literary tools, but that in the communication of his *kerygma*, he carefully shaped his narrative to guide his readers into his own perception of the world and that his manner of doing so can be effectively dissected using modern methods.

The goal of this thesis is to analyze the Fourth Gospel from a narrative-critical perspective, consolidating findings with mainstream historical-critical understandings of the text to present a coherent explanation of the function of the Jews and John's anti-Judaism. It will not address the gospel's tangible anti-Semitic impact throughout the history of the church, as that would make its scope too broad, but will primarily remain within the confines of the implied reader with general reference to possible later interpretations that could be problematic because of the evangelist's terminology and supersessionistic themes. The purpose is not to condemn the author or the Johannine community, but to better understand their historical situation, their view of the Jews, the role the Jewish people play within their theological system and how the narrative could be harmful with subsequent readings.

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[27] Robert C. Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," *Semeia* 16 (1979): 57.

[28] William A. Beardslee, *Literary Criticism of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 3-5. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 8.

[29] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 9.

[30] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 9.

Chapter 1 will venture to reconstruct an image of the Johannine community with reference to prevailing research of the 20ᵗʰ century to provide a context in which John's narrative can be properly understood. Of primary importance for this section are Brown's theory of iterative composition, Martyn's two-level drama, Malina and Rohrbaugh's social-scientific study and Meeks' presentation of Johannine sectarianism. The purpose of evoking this research is not to construct a thorough composition history of the gospel or precisely identify the identity of the Johannine community, nor is it to offer a perfunctory sketch of Johannine history. Instead, these sources will help to prepare a firm foundation of unique details of John's community and gospel that explain its narrative qualities and justify a narrative-critical reading, as well as provide a context that made possible the gospel's alleged anti-Judaism.

With the portrait of the Johannine community established in the first chapter, chapter 2 will explore narrative-critical methods and their application to John's gospel. For this section, de Saussure and Tannehill's work will be reviewed to cover relevant methodological concerns for our intended approach as well as the contentious discourse about the distinctive genre of the gospels, which significantly informs the manner in which the text should be read and interpreted. This will be followed by Culpepper's seminal work in the field of Johannine narrative criticism, which provides innumerable helpful examples of literary devices that appear throughout the gospel, and by Stibbe's work that aims to connect this approach to an author-oriented reading that takes into consideration various historical details that enrich the process and bring about more thoroughgoing conclusions. The assertions regarding Johannine history made in chapter 1 justify the emphasis on John's narrative and necessitate a hermeneutic that prioritizes the author's literary goals over his adherence to the historical tradition from which he draws. The gospel's portrayal of the Jews must be pursued from this narrative-critical vantage point, with historical-critical observations subsequently helping to understand the author's context rather than representing an active variable in determining his view.

Chapter 3 will apply the narrative-critical principles demonstrated in the previous section to John's characterization of the Jews specifically. The Jews' script throughout the gospel will be surveyed to understand their role in the gospel account and their place in the evangelist's worldview in light of their supersessionistic portrayal. The work of Adele Reinhartz will then be explored to acknowledge the rhetorical power of John to encourage further insulation and disaffiliation from Jews. Finally, the historical assertions made in chapter 1 will be revisited with the insights gained from narrative-critical analysis in an effort to posit an historical circumstance for the alleged anti-Judaism of John's gospel account. The thesis will then conclude with a statement regarding the gospel's potential to convey anti-Jewish sentiment and its place in Christianity.

Chapter 1: The Johannine Community

1.1 Brown – The Five-Stage Hypothesis

In 1966, Raymond Brown published his thorough and acclaimed commentary on the Gospel of John. Though much has changed in the field of New Testament studies in the intervening decades, his work on the Fourth Gospel remains a benchmark for understanding the convoluted composition history of the text.[31] He proposed a five-stage process in which the gospel tradition was gradually shaped and elaborated through the various historical circumstances of its community, eventually culminating in the characteristically Johannine work that existed by the end of the first century:[32]

1. Traditional material – words/works of Jesus.
   - Primarily circulated orally in the form of parables and stories of Jesus, possibly originating from eyewitness testimony of the Beloved Disciple.[33]
2. Individual episodes are fleshed out by the Evangelist.
   - As stories of Jesus are taught within the community, they are imbued with Johannine qualities that describe and interpret them in a unique way.
3. Organization of material into a coherent narrative.
   - Bulk of the gospel is compiled and given written form.
4. Process of editing by the Evangelist to address emerging problems.
   - Issues include misinterpretations of John the Baptist[34] and expulsion from the synagogue, which will be addressed in the next section.
5. Later redactions by another member of the Johannine community.
   - Likely not entirely new material, but stories and ideas that had been circulating for decades within the community but had not been formally included in the gospel account.[35]

It should be noted that Brown recognized the impossibility of reconstructing the innumerable factors involved in the text's composition with perfect accuracy,[36] as the process would have been very fluid with many traditions interacting and imbricating for decades, but the purpose of his proposed paradigm was heuristic rather than algorithmic. The enduring influence of the five-stage hypothesis was the plausible assumption that interpolations from within the Johannine community adequately addresses the confusion surrounding the "material of different

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[31] Francis J. Moloney, "Raymond Brown's New Introduction to the Gospel of John: A Presentation and Some Questions," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2003): 2.

[32] Some scholars date John as early as A.D. 65, while others push its date of composition as late as A.D. 160, though the consensus is somewhere between A.D. 90 and 100. For an up-to-date and complete survey of the date of John's Gospel, see Porter, *John*, 15-18.

[33] That the canonical gospels are based on the testimony of eyewitnesses rather than on anonymous communal traditions is a view that has gained significant traction in the 21st century. See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 2008).

[34] 1:6-8 could be a redaction clarifying John's subordination to Jesus. See Ernst Haenchen, "A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-6," *Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 116-117.

[35] Brown, *John*, xxxiv-xxxvii.

[36] Brown, *John*, xxxiv.

style, the presence of duplicate discourses, the insertions that seem to interrupt,"[37] as well as the portrayal of the Jews, all while maintaining the essential theological unity of the gospel.

In 1979, Brown published another work dedicated to expanding upon his theory of iterative composition and providing plausible explanations for the complicated history of the group responsible for it.[38] He identifies many of John's departures from the synoptics and Johannine aporias and attributes them to pivotal events within the life of the community that had a significant impact on their interpretation of the gospel message as well as their relationship with other Jewish and Christian groups.[39] For example, Jesus' ministry in Samaria in John 4 does not occur in the synoptics and he even forbids his disciples from entering a Samaritan city. (Mt. 10:5) According to Brown, this segment of the gospel does not represent a historically reliable event in the life of Jesus, but reflects a time in which the Johannine community admitted a group of Samaritans into their fold that drastically altered the future of their interactions with opposing sects.[40] The author's views of other groups contemporaneous to his community are implicit in various literary details that appear throughout the gospel, and Brown identifies six opposing historical groups that are judged by the evangelist's storytelling: the world, the Jews, adherents of John the Baptist, Crypto-Christians, Jewish Christians of inadequate faith and apostolic Christians.[41] The author presents his theology by contrasting representatives of these groups with figures that depict his own community and that he believes exemplify the proper response to Jesus, like the Samaritan woman and the Beloved Disciple. John's use of characterization will be detailed at length in chapter 2, but Brown's work provides two valuable insights for historical-critical reconstruction of the Johannine community: first, that the gospel's account of the life of Jesus contains anachronisms that interpret his ministry in light of a particular group's own experience, and second, that the community defines itself in opposition to other Jewish and Christian sects of the first century.

1.2 Martyn - The Two-Level Reading Hypothesis

J. Louis Martyn's *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel,* published just a year after Brown's commentary, proposed a tangible circumstance that gave historical, incarnational validation to Brown's theoretical and somewhat abstract process of composition and redaction. Martyn identified three instances in John's gospel that make use of the term ἀποσυνάγωγος (9:22, 12:42, 16:2), a peculiar Greek word used to refer to those who had been expelled from the synagogue that does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament.[42] He connected this term to the *Birkat ha-Minim,*[43] which was a Jewish benediction that some scholars have argued was composed by Gamaliel II to specifically target and denounce Jewish Christians,[44] and might have

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[37] Brown, *John*, xxxix.

[38] Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

[39] Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 22-24.

[40] Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 34-40.

[41] According to this theory, John judges some groups more harshly than others. The Jews, for example, are "children of the devil" (8:44), while the Petrine/apostolic Christians are generally portrayed favorably but are somewhat lacking in the height of their Christology. See Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 85.

[42] Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. 3rd ed.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 123.

[43] J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel: Third Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003) 58-59.

[44] Stephan Joubert, "A Bone of Contention in Recent Scholarship: The 'Birkat Ha-Minim' and the Separation of Church and Synagogue in the First Century AD," *Neotestamentica* 27 no.2 (1993): 351–53.

been contemporaneous with the writing of John's Gospel. Martyn speculated that this event could represent a motive in the history of the Johannine community that makes sense of the Fourth Gospel's simultaneous Jewishness and anti-Jewishness, and that parts of the text like the ἀποσυνάγωγος passages should not be tied to the life of Jesus but should be understood as theological reflections of the trauma experienced by the community in the decades following Jesus' ministry.

This understanding of the text led to a hermeneutic that sought to establish which parts of the narrative had been tied to historical tradition and identify how these retellings had been infused with the Jewish-Christian conflict that occurred decades later.[45] Martyn called this a "two-level drama"[46] in which theological interpretations of events that trace back to Jesus' ministry are profoundly informed by the community's process of wrestling with and coming to understand their traumatic experience resulting from the *Birkat ha-Minim*. In looking back upon the events that have come to define his belief system, the evangelist sees his own community's conflict with the Jewish authorities as "the same struggle as Jesus' struggle with Pharisees in the first half of the same century."[47]

Martyn's theory faced significant criticism in the decades that followed, specifically because of its evocation of the *Birkat ha-Minim* in the bolstering of its claims. His calling attention to the event is certainly not unfounded, but many scholars have argued that there is no way to precisely determine when the benediction would have been instituted and whether it was in use in synagogues prior to John's composition.[48] The importance of his work, however, is not sustained by this historical detail alone. Whether or not the conflict shaping the Fourth Gospel can be positively identified as the *Birkat ha-Minim,* the supreme contribution of Martyn's theory was its recognition of the gradual "parting of the ways" between Jews and Christians in the first century as the source of many Johannine idiosyncrasies, including its aggressive condemnation of the Jews. The division between Christians and Jews cannot be linked to one specific event but occurred over the course of decades.[49] Both the *Birkat ha-Minim* and the Gospel of John are expressions of this separation, "at least in one locality."[50]

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[45] Martyn later made use of the source-critical work of Robert Fortna to support his hermeneutic. Fortna proposed a "two-layer hypothesis" in which a collection of Johannine material was later elaborated with various elements that provided it with a coherent narrative, resulting in the final gospel. These findings were well suited to Martyn's more precise historical claims. See Robert T. Fortna, *The Gospel of the Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970).

[46] Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel,* 40.

[47] D. Moody Smith, "The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John," in *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel: Third Edition,* by J. Louis Martyn (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 18.

[48] Wayne Meeks contested that there was no way to definitively place the benediction before John's gospel chronologically and that its purpose cannot reasonably be narrowed to Christian exclusion. Nonetheless, he asserts the validity of Martyn's approach. See Wayne Meeks, "Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity's Separation from the Jewish Communities," in *"To See Ourselves as Others See Us": Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity,* edited by Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frierichs, 93-115 (California: Scholars' Press, 1985), 102.

[49] James Dunn identifies many historical factors that contributed to the gradual separation between Judaism and Christianity over the course of decades. See James D.G. Dunn, *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways.* (Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999).

[50] R. Alan Culpepper, "Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel as a Theological Problem for Christian Interpreters," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel,* edited by Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 63.

Martyn's two-level reading of John that resulted from his historical-critical theories has become fundamental in understanding how the text functions[51] and why the conflict between Jesus and the Jews is so exaggerated. The narrative-critical approaches that will be of substantial importance in the following sections are largely dependent on the assertion that the author is making use of literary devices that not only tell a story in a particular way, but also help to make sense of later historical events that had been experienced and were being experienced by the implied reader.

1.3 Malina and Rohrbaugh – Johannine Antilanguage

With backgrounds in social-scientific study of the Bible, Malina and Rohrbaugh sought to "present a historically sensitive, cross-cultural, comparative set of lenses with which to hear (or read) the Gospel of John as its original audience did."[52] They follow in the footsteps of the form critics of the early 20th century who attempted to reconstruct the settings of communities that existed behind New Testament texts by examining patterns of speech and the function of different genres that appear throughout.[53] Malina and Rohrbaugh differ from their predecessors in that they are keenly aware of the form critics' tendency to inject their own 20th century concerns into their reconstructions of New Testament societies and consciously identify potential anachronisms that would misrepresent a 1st century Mediterranean community.[54] Their goal was to determine what set of circumstances and what type of group could adequately explain the distinctive events and themes that are characteristic of John's gospel.

Malina and Rohrbaugh argue that the gospel of John uses "antilanguage" which exists to consciously oppose the larger society in which the community operates.[55] The author engages in this by attaching new terminology to ideas that are expressed differently in mainstream culture, a process referred to as relexicalization.[56] The axiomatic recognition within New Testament studies that John repetitively uses a set of terms somewhat unique to his gospel often misattributes this phenomenon to a community thoroughly disconnected from other Jewish and Christian groups,[57] rather than one that was familiar with their ideas and intentionally reinterpreting them.[58] The Johannine Christians were familiar, for example, with the early Christian notion of having "faith

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[51] Culpepper, *Theological Problem for Christian Interpreters*, 63.

[52] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L Rohrbaugh. *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), ix.

[53] Form criticism dominated the field of biblical studies in the early 20th century through the work of Hermann Gunkel, who developed it for study of the Old Testament, and the later work of Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann, who applied it to the gospels. Its main concern is linking biblical genres with specific social contexts. Modern scholars are much more skeptical of its utility. See W.G. Kummel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1973), 263-265;
Ilona N. Rashkow, "Current Trends in Academic Biblical Studies," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 50, no.2 (2022): 74;
Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 4.

[54] Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 4.

[55] Michael A.K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (Baltimore: University Park, 1978), 164-82;
Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 7.

[56] Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 4.

[57] Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament.* (London: Yale University Press, 1997), 362-63. Brown references Percival Gardner-Smith, *St. John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), as well as the general work of Bultmann and Dodd as being particularly influential in establishing the widespread view in the 20th century that John's composition was independent of the synoptic tradition.

[58] Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 7.

in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-27) but relexicalized this concept to "believing into Jesus." (Jn. 3:16) Over the course of the dialogue in chapter 3, βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ (the kingdom of God), a central theme in the synoptics, is relexicalized to ζωὴ αἰώνιος (eternal life).[59] It is also demonstrated in the gospel's many dualistic contrasts between spirit and flesh, life and death, light and darkness, etc. to convey the same essential message about "opposing modes of living and being."[60]

John's prologue introduces the important themes that recur through the gospel, and thus is filled with antilanguage that would be peculiar and somewhat concealed to an outsider. The author bombards the reader with a plethora of loaded terms like "Word", "light" and "life" that are enigmatically linked in ways that are unclear to the uninitiated or the opposing "world" (1:10) who are presented as the negative side of the Johannine binary throughout. The harsh dichotomies drawn in the introduction reinforce the community's exclusive identity as "children of God" (1:12) in stark contrast to those who fail to receive Jesus and encourages a radically sectarian attitude that Malina and Rohrbaugh claim is indicative of an "antisociety".[61]

The antisociety behind John's gospel is a group that has "experienced…socially sanctioned depersonalization,"[62] consistent with the community of marginalized ἀποσυνάγωγος Jews proposed by Martyn. The purpose of the antilanguage that appears throughout is "to maintain inner solidarity in the face of pressure from the wider society."[63] This is in line with the characteristics depicted by Brown and Martyn who envisaged a group that had been traumatized by their experience under the *Birkat ha-Minim* and as a response, began to define themselves by their theological differences with other sects. The Johannine community was not disconnected from mainstream Christianity and Judaism but was familiar with competing ideologies and believed it possessed the proper interpretation of Jesus' life and death and exhibited an appropriate response to his teachings. The radically high Christology of John indicates that such an elevated view of Jesus is what alienated them and made them highly susceptible to persecution and dereliction.[64] According to Malina and Rohrbaugh, the higher pressure experienced by the community because of their theological views would have driven adherents to hold more rigorously to their distinct

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[59] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 152, n.2.

[60] Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 5.

[61] Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 30.

[62] Malina and Rohrbaugh*, Social-Science Commentary*, 10. Grace G. Harris, "Concepts of Individual, Self and Person in Description and Analysis," *American Anthropologist* 91, no.3 (1989): 606.

[63] Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 11.

[64] This is exemplified by Jesus' conflict with the Jews in 5:16-18. Jesus' working ἕως ἄρτι (until now) has him violating the Sabbath, but more importantly it makes him ἴσον (equal) to God. Barrett claims that there was considerable discourse in the first century (from Philo in particular) about God's continued activity on the Sabbath despite man's rest. Jesus' assertion here, along with the κἀγὼ of v. 17, gives the Jews the impression that he is identifying himself as a second God, on equal footing with Yahweh. This transgression initiates the constant tension between Jesus and the Jews that permeates the rest of the gospel and introduces the author's understanding of why Jesus was persecuted and why his own community had been marginalized: an unacceptable Christology. See Charles Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text, Second Edition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978): 255-256. See also, Charles Harold Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953): 319. Brown states that: "The Johannine Christians were proclaiming a second God, and thus violating the basic principle of Israelite identity. (Deut. 6:4)": Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 47.

beliefs while more viciously condemning opposing views and would have strongly encouraged solidarity with their fellow members while discouraging interaction with outsiders.[65]

Malina and Rohrbaugh's work contributes two valuable insights to reconstructing the Johannine community and understanding the Fourth Gospel. First, the antisociety and resulting antilanguage adds an extra layer of complexity in the task of deciphering John's message. Interpreting texts from the Mediterranean world is already a strenuous undertaking given the vast cultural differences between the ancient writers and modern readers. Typically, a historian would engage in recontextualization to adequately recognize and respect the world in which the text was originally written and how it was intended.[66] John's linguistic feature of antilanguage would have required for it to have been recontextualized even for readers of the first century, since its message was coded in terminology meant to reinforce the ideologies of a sectarian group. This means that for modern scholars, the gospel of John has to go through a process of recontextualization "twice removed"[67] to address the time period in which it was written, as well as the unique antisociety from which it developed.

The second insight that can be drawn from Malina and Rohrbaugh is that John's themes should not necessarily be interpreted as indigenous to the Johannine community but should be considered in opposition to competing ideologies. The history of the Johannine Christians is central to the way in which the author recounts the events of Jesus' life, and much of their story involves their relationship with other Jewish and Christian groups. This reality can easily be taken for granted by the modern reader who does not have the benefit of understanding the diversity of ideas that circulated in the first century world and were being referenced in the gospel of John. It should not be assumed that the author has provided all the necessary details to interpret his message as he intended, as he would have leveraged cultural norms that would not have needed further explanation for his implied readership. It must be considered as we dissect John's narrative that certain features expound a theology that was cultivated out of animosity towards other groups and is not presented as wholly detached from the greater Christian world but is to be understood as the purest interpretation of Jesus in a landscape of widely varying Christologies. The antilanguage characteristic of the Fourth Gospel reflects this Johannine interaction with the surrounding world.

1.4 Meeks – Johannine Sectarianism

Wayne Meeks' 1972 article focuses on the theme of the descending and ascending redeemer and provides many theological examples within the gospel of John that are indicative of the sectarian attitude identified by Malina and Rohrbaugh. The motif runs through the entire gospel and has typically been associated with unity, symbolizing the convergence of heaven and earth, the spiritual and the physical.[68] Meeks argues that this common interpretation results from an erroneous approach to the gospel that seeks to place its ideas at a point on the evolutionary spectrum of early Christian theology, rather than focusing on how the text's conceptual metaphors

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[65] Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 11. Brown echoes this sentiment: "Such persecution would have made the Johannine community even more adamant in insisting on the divine status of Jesus." See Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 47.

[66] Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 18.

[67] Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 19.

[68] J.N. Sanders and B.A. Mastin, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Harper, 1968): 19. Wayne A. Meeks, "Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no. 1 (1972): 67.

function to communicate a message within a particular group.[69] Upon appropriate inspection, John's use of the descending and ascending redeemer archetype is not an exhortation toward theological or ecclesial unity but is indicative of a community that sees itself as estranged and misunderstood.

Bultmann gave significant attention to the descending and ascending redeemer motif and recognized its importance in understanding John's many peculiarities.[70] Throughout his commentary, he emphasizes Jesus' role as the mysterious "Revealer"[71] who descended from οὐρανὸν (heaven) and who accordingly has authority to testify about ἐπουράνια (that which is heavenly). (3:9-21) To Bultmann, Jesus' κατάβασις (descent) from οὐρανὸν is John's eschatological event that replaces earlier Jewish and Gnostic expectations of a dramatic cosmic judgment.[72] Instead, it is the earthly μαρτυρία (testimony) of the pre-existent Son that brings about judgment and alters the state of the cosmos by dividing the world into those who accept or reject the Revealer.[73] Bultmann understands this distinctive Johannine quality to be rooted in an earlier Gnostic tradition and that the Evangelist demythologized certain elements that had to be abandoned in favor of a differing Christology and a rejection of the pre-existence of souls.[74]

Though groundbreaking and undeniably influential, Bultmann's analysis of the descending and ascending Revealer is incomplete and misattributed to the gradual Christological evolution of the first century church. Rather than analyzing John's repeated motifs in relation to previous and contemporary Christian ideologies to precisely determine their roots and later influence, Meeks aims to discern their social function to understand their intended purpose within a particular community. He argues that whenever the theme appears in the gospel, its emphasis is on the failure or inability of outsiders to recognize and ultimately accept Jesus.[75] His otherworldly perspective is so abstract to the world and "the Jews", that any kind of mediation between them and those who have been enlightened to understand and accept Jesus seems impossible. In response to this reality, the author utilizes the descending and ascending motif to enforce the idea that "coming to faith in Jesus is for the Johannine group a change in social location."[76]

One of John's primary representatives of the world's utter ineptitude to grasp Jesus' heavenly testimony is Nicodemus. He seems to function as an example of the Jews mentioned in the preceding verses who believe in Jesus because of the signs he performed but who he refused to entrust himself to because "he himself knew what was in man."[77] (2:23-25) The dialogue with Nicodemus revolves around a misunderstanding of Jesus' claim that to see the kingdom of God, one must be born ἄνωθεν, which is a purposely ambiguous Greek word that can mean either "again", which is Nicodemus' interpretation, or "from above", which is the meaning intended by

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[69] Meeks, *Man from Heaven*, 68.
[70] Meeks, *Man from Heaven*, 44.
Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 151-53.
[71] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 143.
[72] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 155.
[73] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 155.
[74] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 143, n.1;
Meeks, *Man from Heaven*, 52.
[75] Meeks, *Man from Heaven*, 58.
[76] Meeks, *Man from Heaven*, 69.
[77] Meeks, *Man from Heaven*, 55.

Jesus.[78] Nicodemus' misinterpretation demonstrates to the reader the drastically different perspective with which Jesus views the world and frames the rest of the dialogue in which Nicodemus repeatedly fails to grasp "heavenly things" (3:12) because of his earthly worldview. The double entendre, analogies of water and spirit and opaque allusions to Moses are encoded and incomprehensible to an uninitiated reader who is not already intimately familiar with the entirety of the gospel as well as the antilanguage of its community. Nicodemus, then, functions as a well-intended outsider who is intrigued by Jesus but has not come to understand the deeper truths of the faith reserved for those who have been transformed by the testimony of the one who has ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς (descended from heaven). (3:13) For unenlightened outsiders, the Johannine idiosyncrasies are puzzling and indecipherable.

The theology behind Jesus' descent in John promotes isolation by implying a certain exclusivity regarding knowledge of heavenly realities, and similarly, his ascent envisages a closed community that is not of this world. The meaning of Jesus' ascent is mysterious and consistently misunderstood throughout the gospel by the Jews, who think he means to go to the diaspora to teach among the Greeks (7:33-36), by the disciples, who fail to recognize the sacrifice involved in following after Jesus,[79] (13:33-38) and it is presented most starkly in the farewell discourse as the experience of the Johannine community gradually becomes more and more visible through John's transparent recounting of Jesus' final days on earth. Throughout this section of the gospel, Jesus constantly refers to his ἀνάβασις and these statements are coupled with warnings for his followers of the separation that they will experience from the world who will "hate them." (15:18) The dichotomous nature of John's theology escalates here, as clear lines are drawn between those who fail to abide in Christ and are thrown away to wither and burn by the Father (15:6) and those who recognize Jesus' identity and are "sanctified in truth." (17:19) Jesus' descent from heaven and eventual ascent provides readers with an explanation for their persecution and necessary isolation from the surrounding world: "the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." (17:14) The evangelist's reminiscence of the community's expulsion from the synagogues even bleeds into the discourse in the final ἀποσυνάγωγος passage of the gospel in which his extradiegetic audience is exhorted in their suffering by Jesus' assertion of its occurrence decades earlier.[80] (16:2)

Meeks' analysis of the descent and ascent of Jesus is, in some ways, a demythologization of a theological claim to extract a functioning principle that helped a marginalized group to cope under difficult circumstances. He claims that the motif "provided a symbolic universe which gave religious legitimacy, a theodicy, to the group's actual isolation from the larger society."[81] A crucial takeaway from Meeks is the idea that the behaviors and social situation of the Johannine community in some ways precede and determine the theological qualities of the gospel, rather than the gospel's unique theology dictating its followers' strenuous experience with the surrounding

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[78] Barrett argues that both meanings of ἄνωθεν are relevant here, Nicodemus' interpretation is simply incomplete, rather than outright incorrect. This is in line with the depiction of Nicodemus as zealous yet imperfect on the spectrum of Christological understanding amongst the Johannine cast. See Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 205-06. Brown sees Nicodemus as an example of believers who are initially confused but are accepted and gradually grow in their understanding of Jesus. See Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 72.

[79] Meeks, *Man from Heaven*, 64.

[80] According to Brown, much of the farewell discourse was "tacked on" to the primitive version of the gospel by a later redactor, in stage 4 or 5 of his composition theory. This is reflected in the prediction of Johannine persecution that can be sensed in Jesus' words. See Brown, *John*, 586-587.

[81] Meeks, *Man from Heaven*, 70.

world. It would be an oversimplification to claim that either theology or behavior came first and gave life to the other, but an intermingling of the two certainly led to the community's distinctive gospel and history. Much like Martyn's ἀποσυνάγωγος theory, later experiences informed a theological interpretation of past events. Johannine themes like the isolation from the world encouraged by the descent and ascent motif should not be understood as arbitrary doctrines that simply led to the marginalization of a group but should be scrutinized for their functional benefit to a community that had already been marginalized for decades.

1.5 Conclusion of Historical Reconstruction

Scholarship in the field of Johannine studies in the late 20th century has made considerable strides in painting a picture of the community behind the Fourth Gospel that provides plausible explanations for many of its problems. The works that have been reviewed in this chapter gradually narrow in upon this sectarian group and allow for us to determine an appropriate hermeneutic for reading the gospel they have left behind, which will be foundational for the research in the remainder of this thesis.

From Brown's five-stage composition theory, we have learned that the community behind the gospel has experienced a complex history, and that this is reflected in virtually all aspects of the text. We are not dealing with a single author, but likely several from the same sect who espouse unified beliefs regarding the traditional material that they are working with.[82] John is not a static gospel that was written at a particular time by a single author, but was molded over the course of decades by a community's experiences that continually advanced the way in which they interpreted the material that formed the basis of their faith. The text must be understood in light of this reality.

The ἀποσυνάγωγος theory proposed by Martyn suggests a history characterized by persecution and marginalization that defines the Johannine community and helps to explain some of its unique qualities. Whether or not this was the *Birkat ha-Minim* as he claimed, we can confidently affirm that some kind of traumatic experience, likely under Jewish leadership near the turn of the first century, resulted in many of the anachronisms and anti-Jewish sentiments that are littered throughout the gospel. This trauma profoundly impacted the way in which the community interacted with other groups, which was addressed in 1.3 and 1.4, and the way in which the story of the gospel is told, providing a firm basis for Martyn's two-level reading, which will be of great significance for the methods employed in the second chapter.

Malina and Rohrbaugh's social-scientific study adds more specific details to the sketch of the community provided by Brown and Martyn. The Johannine trauma impacted the group's self-definition and their behavior in relation to other Christian and Jewish sects, and the designation of an "antisociety" helps to explain much of the relexicalization and strong dualistic themes that appear throughout the gospel. The group behind John was aware of mainstream Christian ideas and intentionally reinterpreted and relabeled them in an effort to oppose the surrounding culture. They were not disconnected from the Christian world but were consciously manipulating pre-existing ideas to define their belief system by contrasting with other, lesser Christologies.

The work of Meeks brilliantly demonstrates the way in which the circumstances of the Johannine community have infiltrated their theological ideas and their interpretation of the life of

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[82] Brown argues for a process of redaction, based on structural issues, but that the redactor was "a close friend or disciple of the evangelist, and certainly part of the same school of thought", based on similar theology. See Brown, *John*, xxxvi.

Jesus. By his examination of the descending and ascending redeemer motif, he asserts the importance of identifying the social function that undergirds many of the themes of the gospel. The evangelist was not detailing the events of Jesus' life and narrating their theological significance by the authority of some kind of mystical revelation but was working off traditional material and altering it in the service of the exigencies of his community. John's gospel is not a theological treatise, but "an etiology of the Johannine group"[83] that encourages insiders in the midst of their suffering by imbuing it with meaning and rooting it in the ministry and death of Jesus.

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[83] Meeks, *Man from Heaven*, 70.

Chapter 2: Narrative-Critical Methods and John's Gospel

2.1 Structuralism and the Synchronic/Diachronic Dialectic

Before delving into John's narrative peculiarities, a section will be dedicated to providing a more detailed look at some issues of methodology. Firstly, the field of biblical scholarship's ongoing discourse regarding historical and narrative hermeneutics and consistent dichotomization of synchronic and diachronic readings ought to be addressed more thoroughly. What was the original intent behind these categories of interpretation, how have they been misunderstood in recent decades and how can they be appropriately utilized for our research purposes? Secondly, a very brief overview of structuralism will be given to justify our position and provide a basis for the following section. Each of these issues will involve a survey of the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, with reference to others who have examined his ideas and applied them to biblical studies.

The terms "diachrony" and "synchrony" originated with the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and were not intended to deal with narratives but served a function in the field of linguistics. De Saussure was concerned with identifying universal cognitive structures by determining common functions that existed over various independently evolved languages by employing methods that analyzed linguistic features within a closed system, as well as across distinct systems.[84] Synchrony would seek to analyze a mode of communication for a particular group at one point in time, whereas diachrony would understand it by comparison to its utilization by various groups at various times. De Saussure's methods were famously applied to myth in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss and later to the biblical texts in an effort to determine the function of their distinct literary features.[85]

Unfortunately, adherents of de Saussure's methods in biblical scholarship seem to have gradually strayed from an authentic application of his principles in favor of an insistence upon dichotomizing historical and final-form studies while maintaining the diachronic and synchronic labels.[86] The reluctance in scholarship to blend narrative-critical and historical-critical methodologies stems partly from this false dichotomy between diachrony and synchrony and has resulted in many scholars of the late 20th century asserting the supremacy of one while avoiding contamination of the other in their analyses. In his assessment of this problem, Koog P. Hong argues that the recent emphasis on the reader in narrative-critical studies has brought about problems and polemicizes diachronic and synchronic hermeneutics by its introduction of a new variable into the process, which necessitates an updated terminology and framework.[87] The heuristic function of the dichotomy in the field of biblical studies would have been to identify those interpretations that were more historical or ahistorical when such differences were more apparent and representative of the variety of approaches that were being utilized by scholars. The drastic changes that have transpired over the 20th century have introduced a plethora of complex

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[84] Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966);
Koog-Pyoung Hong, "Synchrony and Diachrony in Contemporary Biblical Interpretation." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (2013): 522.

[85] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (London: Allen Lane, 1968), 211;
Stibbe, *John as Storyteller,* 35.

[86] Hong, *Synchrony and Diachrony*, 526.

[87] Hong, *Synchrony and Diachrony*, 529.

factors that render the use of diachronic and synchronic poles overly simplistic, incomplete and misleading in many cases.

The continued usage of the diachronic and synchronic binary in biblical studies evidently deviates from de Saussure's analytical purposes and becomes burdensome in the face of the complexities of modern scholarship. Helmut Utzschneider has suggested viewing biblical interpretation as a "trichotomy", making use of the more recent work in semiotics of Umberto Eco, who identified three main axes of interpretation: author-oriented, text-oriented and reader-oriented.[88] This framework, though still heuristic in nature and by no means exhaustive, adequately accounts for the new emphasis on the reader and the many perplexing components of dissecting a given text. Each axis of interpretation is distinct and ought to be treated as such, but a dogmatic separation of various methods is unrealistic considering the overlap that typically exists between the literary and the historical. The narrative function of the Jews in John's gospel for example, is largely informed by historical realities that are unavoidable if we desire a complete understanding of the meaning behind the text. Eco's tripartite structure of author, text and reader serves to remind us of crucial interpretive complexities that can easily be forgotten in the process of exegesis, without dividing the intermingling narrative and historical features crafted by the author.

An important concept proposed by de Saussure that bolstered his methods was the differentiation between *langue* and *parole* in his analysis of language.[89] *Langue* can be described as the universal rules that govern human communication and exist across cultures, irrespective of time and place. *Parole* refers to the unique manifestations of these particular rules that vary with the context of a language's birth and gradual evolution.[90] The goal of structuralism, initiated by de Saussure, was to discover the deep cognitive structures of language that were unchanging and universal.[91] When applied to narratives by figures like Propp, Lévi-Strauss and Greimas, structuralism seeks to identify rules that we subconsciously adhere to in our crafting of stories that help to make sense of commonalities that exist between narratives of otherwise dissimilar cultures.[92] In other words, we can learn more about what a text is and how it is meant to function by comparing it to other texts that display similar features and seem to follow the same sets of rules. When examining parts of John, we might ask ourselves, "what is the universal *langue* behind this text that is concealed by unique Johannine *parole*?"

The purpose of surveying structuralism in biblical studies has not been to rely upon Saussurian methods for my research, but to provide an ideological basis for the inseparability of

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[88] Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation: Advances in Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 44-63;

Helmut Utzschneider, "Text-Reader-Author: Towards a Theory of Exegesis: Some European Viewpoints," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures,* no. 1 (1996): 7;

Hong, *Synchrony and Diachrony*, 530.

[89] Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 33.

[90] De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*;

Terence Hawkes*, Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen, 1977), 20;

Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 33.

[91] Stibbe*, John as Storyteller*, 45.

[92] This is based in de Saussure's fundamental claim that we understand particular entities and experiences by compartmentalizing and comparing them to other things. Lévi-Strauss expressed similar ideas in his interpretations of myths where he noticed a universal pattern of "the resolution of things existing in binary opposition" … "Immortal/Mortal, Male/Female, Parent/Child." See Lévi-Strauss*, Cultural Anthropology*, 230. See also;

Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 35.

what has previously been referred to as the diachronic and synchronic. The structuralist movement of the 20th century has certainly contributed to a depreciation of the author by its central principle that people derive common meaning not from their unique individuality, but by universal cognitive structures. Figures like Barthes have gone so far as to say that the process of writing is the "neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost."[93] We can confidently affirm the notion that compelling and enduring narratives are not entirely novel and abide by rules that have in some sense been imprinted upon the human psyche, resulting in various genres emerging in independent contexts. In their constant compliance with these systems, however, the author is not immune to distinguishing characteristics of their time and culture, their own biases or their own agenda. In biblical studies especially, authorial intent is paramount in determining a text's meaning and should not be neglected for the sake of a purely narratological analysis.[94]

Taking into consideration what we have gleaned from structuralism and cautioning ourselves to avoid misusing it, we will venture to identify the structures lying behind John's gospel to classify it as a text. Once we have determined its genre and explored its more specific literary details, we can integrate historical data covered in chapter 1 to present more complete conclusions.

2.2 Tannehill – Gospel as Narrative Christology

A persistent problem in the field of biblical scholarship has been the categorization of the New Testament gospels as a genre. Though significant parallels have been drawn between the gospels and the Roman bioi,[95] many scholars have correctly noted crucial differences that should not be overlooked in constructing a proper hermeneutic for the ancient texts.[96] A specific classification of the gospel's genre may seem inconsequential in the process of discovering the meaning behind the narrative, but the reader's interpretation of what they are reading is highly dependent upon their impression of what the text is meant to be.[97] In order to properly analyze the message of John's gospel and more specific details like the portrayal of the Jews, we ought to have a confident perception in place regarding its genre.

In 1979, Robert Tannehill proposed the groundbreaking idea of a narrative Christological reading of the Gospel of Mark. He claimed that the author was presenting his view of Jesus using literary means because of the variety of ways in which narrative can uniquely communicate a desired message.[98] It is a common and erroneous notion that stories are simply dilutions of rationally deduced principles, spread across a wide array of relatable characters and situations, to make certain complicated ideas simple and easier to understand. Walter Fisher has argued that what can be learned from narrative is distinct from the fruits of rational discourse and constitutes

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[93] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author". In *Image, Music, Text: Essays,* translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 142.

[94] Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 45.

[95] Pasquale Basta, "The Gospel as Literary Genre and Form of Language," *The Biblical Annals* 11, no.3 (2021): 441–57.

[96] The gospels differ from the bioi in that they are written anonymously, they have theological emphases, missionary implications and goals and they are used for community worship. See Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament,* 103.

[97] "An interpreter's preliminary generic conception of a text is constitutive of everything that he subsequently understands." See E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967), 74. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller,* 31.

[98] Robert C. Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology." *Semeia* 16 (1979): 57–95.

an entirely independent mode of knowing.[99] Because human experiences are themselves understood by the individual within the paradigm of a larger narrative, stories are "our primary way of organizing and giving coherence to our lives."[100] Without denigrating the importance and contribution of logical reasoning in historical endeavors and our day to day living, it can be asserted that certain complex ideas can be communicated and understood more effectively through the use of narrative. Tannehill reasoned that the author of Mark was capitalizing on this feature of human perception and used various literary threads that presented the person of Jesus powerfully to his audience.

Mark's narrative centers on Jesus' question of "who do you say that I am?" (8:29). The gospel provides its answer primarily through Jesus' relationship with other key characters in the story, namely the disciples, the religious leaders, those who request healing and demons.[101] Jesus is not a static figure who can be lucidly defined and understood but is deeply complex and varies in his behavior depending upon who he is relating to. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon labels this practice as deflected Christology, where the audience uncovers the layers of Jesus' perplexing nature by his diverse responses to different types of people and their conduct.[102] Tannehill explains that particular tasks or "commissions" are given to each of the key characters near the beginning of the narrative that are gradually either fulfilled or frustrated over the course of the story, and these threads provide a framework by which the characters can be judged in relation to Jesus.[103] The disciples, for example, are assigned their commission in several instances within the first half of the gospel where Jesus promises to make them "fishers of men" and gives them authority to heal the sick, cast out demons and preach repentance. (1:16-20; 6:7-13) Though initially successful (4:10-12), the disciples' lack of faith becomes a persistent problem that disrupts their positive development and gives the reader a sense of what Jesus expects from his followers. (6:45-52; 8:14-21) The clarification given in the ensuing chapters divulges to the audience through Jesus' dialogue with his followers that proper discipleship conforms with Mark's Christology: that Jesus' mission was that of a suffering servant. (8:34) The remainder of the disciples' development centers on their struggle to believe this puzzling reality, most starkly in the figure of Peter who from the outset expressed the apparent absurdity of Jesus' claim. (8:32-33) Jesus' confession at his trial before the council is intentionally contrasted with the infamous scene in which Peter denies Jesus three times (14:53-72), which woefully marks the end of the disciples' story in Mark. The readers are left with the impression that Peter and the disciples were unable to overcome their disbelief in Jesus' claim that the Son of Man would suffer and die.[104] To the author, the role of suffering servant was

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[99] "The narrative paradigm challenges the notions that human communication – if it is to be considered rhetorical – must be an argumentative form, that reason is to be attributed only to discourse marked by clear identifiable modes of inference and/or implication." See Walter R. Fisher, "Narration as Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 1–22.

[100] Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1998), 56;
Michal B. Dinkler, "A New Formalist Approach to Narrative Christology: Returning to the Structure of the Synoptic Gospels," *HTS Theological Studies* 73, no.1 (2017): 2.

[101] Tannehill, *Mark as Narrative Christology*, 62.

[102] Malbon lists 5 ways in which the canonical gospels convey their unique Christologies. Mark primarily makes use of enacted Christology, which is centered on Jesus' embodied actions, and deflected Christology, which provides nuance through Jesus' response to different members of the gospel's cast. See E.S. Malbon, "The Christology of Mark's Gospel: Narrative Christology and the Markan Jesus." In *Who Do You Say that I Am? Essays on Christology*, edited by M.A. Powell & D.R. Bauer, 33–48 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

[103] Tannehill, *Mark as Narrative Christology*, 69.

[104] Tannehill, *Mark as Narrative Christology*, 82-84.

essential to understanding Jesus' character and mission,[105] and a failure to recognize this was fatal to one's discipleship.

Like its portrayal of the disciples, Mark's gospel uses each of its significant narrative threads to paint a Christological picture for the reader, and the same goal is pursued in the author's use of various literary devices. Throughout his article, Tannehill indicates countless instances in which irony in particular is employed to emphasize characteristics of Jesus' depiction that the author wants highlighted to the reader. This can be seen most plainly in the passion story leading up to Jesus' proclamation before the Sanhedrin in 14:61-62, which signals an end to Jesus' own divine commission shrouded in his Messianic secret, as he is attributed such weighty titles as "Christ", "Son of Man" and "Son of the Blessed."[106] This occurs as a result of the religious leaders' narrative thread and commission intersecting with that of Jesus, as it is his divinely appointed mission to suffer and die.[107] The gospel writer attributes expressions of mockery to the antagonists that actually depict Jesus accurately, a detail that the readers would have been able to detect because of additional contextual information provided by the author.[108] For example, the Roman soldiers mock Jesus by saluting him as "King of the Jews" while placing a purple cloak on him, spitting on him and beating him. (15:16-20) For the soldiers within the paradigm of the narrative, this is evidently a genuine act of ironic mockery, but as Tannehill explains, the readers are meant to interpret "the soldiers' irony ironically."[109] For Mark's audience that had been ushered down a path toward his view of Jesus up to this point, the irony of this scene points to a "hidden truth" regarding the kingship of Jesus.[110]

There are two other instances of irony in Mark's passion narrative that add important features to the author's image of Jesus. In 14:65, he is once again beaten and ironically commanded to prophesy after his blasphemous citation of Daniel 7 in 14:62. For the enlightened reader, a host of prophecies really are being fulfilled in Jesus' suffering; the rejection by the religious leaders, Peter's denial and the violence committed against him.[111] In 15:30-32, the crowds mock him for claiming to be able to save others but being unable to save himself. The readers see this irony through the lens of 8:35, that "whoever seeks to save his life will lose it," and once again the antagonists' sarcastic jeering conveys a hidden meaning for the extradiegetic audience. These three instances of mockery use irony to bestow Jesus with the traditional designations of king, prophet and savior, all within the crucial Markan framework of the suffering servant.[112] The author of the gospel brilliantly responds to the overwhelming challenge of how the Messiah could suffer and die by crafting a narrative that primes his readers for the passion story through deliberate characterization of various figures and presents a reinterpretation of the final moments of Jesus' life by imbuing the mockery of the antagonists with irony.

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[105] "Readers (of Mark) can learn much about Jesus from the traditions of his parables and mighty deeds; but unless that is intimately combined with the picture of his victory through suffering, they cannot understand him or the vocation of his followers." See Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 126.

[106] Tannehill, *Mark as Narrative Christology*, 87.

[107] Tannehill, *Mark as Narrative Christology*, 78.

[108] Francis C. Rossow, "Dramatic Irony in the Bible - with a Difference," *Concordia Journal* 8, no.2 (1982): 48.

[109] Tannehill, *Mark as Narrative Christology*, 79.

[110] Tannehill, *Mark as Narrative Christology*, 79.

[111] Tannehill, *Mark as Narrative Christology*, 80.

[112] Tannehill, *Mark as Narrative Christology*, 80.

It would be overly simplistic to label the Gospel of Mark as an historical biography of Jesus given the theological notions conveyed by literary devices like irony and characterization. Tannehill demonstrates how the author prods his readers towards his view of Jesus and builds his narrative upon his fundamental Christological image of the suffering servant. The description of the text as a narrative Christology adequately encapsulates its purpose of presenting the author's view of Jesus and its dependence upon storytelling to accomplish this goal. The gospel genre, whether it originated with Mark or elsewhere,[113] carried on with other iterations that present different images of Jesus but contain the same narrative Christological framework.[114] The gospel of John is no exception, as it plainly states belief in Jesus as the Son of God (20:31) as the purpose of its narrative.

2.3 Culpepper – Narrative Criticism of John

Prior to the 1980s, the field of Johannine studies was primarily concerned with methods like form criticism, historical criticism and source criticism that sought to uncover contextual details behind the composition of the text, which can roughly be traced through the 20th century in the work of Bultmann, Brown and Martyn. The narrative-critical work of figures like Tannehill was evidence of a change in the way scholars were approaching the synoptics[115], and study of John naturally followed suit. In 1983, Alan Culpepper published his "Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel", which remains a benchmark for narrative-criticism of the gospel of John.

The latter part of the 20th century seems rather late for such a development given Bultmann's emphasis on *kerygma* in his renowned work on the New Testament and John specifically, perhaps due to his deeper preoccupation with Johannine aporias and sources.[116] His Heideggerian framework for reading the New Testament can be found in his *New Testament and Mythology* essay in which he proposes a reading of the ancient text that seeks to identify the essential message or *kerygma* of the gospel and determine its applicability for modern readers, demythologizing it of its enigmatic, spiritual elements in the process.[117] Here, Bultmann is not concerned with the individual historical details involved in religious belief but sees these details as contextual elements that conceal a more universal message. In the Gospel of John, Bultmann sees belief in Jesus as the Son of God (20:31) as the *kerygma* that transcends its first-century context, and that the gospel's narrative is ultimately used to proclaim.[118]

Culpepper builds off Bultmann's idea in his analysis of John's narrative. In applying Martyn's two-level drama and the evangelist's kerygmatic agenda to his study of John, Culpepper

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[113] Some scholars believe the NT gospels are derivative of texts in the Hebrew Bible, like Jeremiah, some believe them to be imitations of secular biographies, while others believe them to be an entirely new genre introduced by the author of Mark. See Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 102-107.

[114] Tannehill approached the gospel of Luke similarly. See Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996). Mark Stibbe also built upon Tannehill's designation of narrative Christology extensively in his analysis of the gospel of John, which will be explored in this thesis. See Stibbe*, John as Storyteller*, 8-9.

[115] See also David M. Rhoads, Joanna Dewey and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).
Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

[116] For an in-depth overview of Bultmann's theory, subsequent critiques and the attitude regarding his approach around the time of the emergence of narrative-critical studies of the Bible, see D.A. Carson, "Current Source Criticism of the Fourth Gospel: Some Methodological Questions," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97, no.3 (1978): 414-419.

[117] Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings,* Translated by Schubert M. Ogden, (Fortress Press, 1941).

[118] Bultmann, *John*, 699.

recognized the Fourth Gospel's potential to impact modern readers "insofar as parallels and similarities can be drawn between the first- and twentieth- century contexts."[119] He saw the world of John as a carefully crafted literary creation whose purpose is to convince its readers of Jesus' status as the Son of God, and to alter their perception of the world.[120] The most suitable approach to the text, therefore, is one that is focused on the experience of reading the gospel as the implied reader to identify the ways in which the evangelist has shaped his retelling of events to persuade his audience, rather than dissecting it in search of its historical origins. With Culpepper, we will temporarily disregard historical-critical concerns and allow ourselves to be immersed in the world of the author and swayed by his rhetorical methods.

Many of John's unique characteristics that separate it from the synoptic tradition can be attributed to the evangelist's usage of various literary tools to provide the reader with his intended understanding of the events of Jesus' life. A significant feature of the Johannine story is the narrator and how they uniquely operate in the Fourth Gospel. A narrator can serve a multitude of functions within a story; they can guide the reader through relevant events, introduce them to key characters and ensure that they come away with the interpretation of the narrative intended by the author.[121] Culpepper describes the Johannine narrator as *intrusive*, in that they interrupt the flow of the narrative to comment on it;[122] *self-conscious,* in that they are acutely aware of their communicating to a particular audience; and *omniscient*, in that they provide details to the reader that could not possibly be known otherwise.[123] These elements employed by the evangelist allow for the narrator to build rapport with the reader as the story progresses and convince them that the account is trustworthy.

The task of the narrator, ultimately, is to help the author move the plot forward effectively. The plot of any given narrative is crucial in defining its meaning. By ordering the events and having them narrated in a particular way, the implied author gives hints as to his interpretation of the story and how he wishes for it to be received.[124] The discrepancies in the ordering of parts of Jesus' ministry among the four canonical gospels can be explained by this literary feature; the particular sequence of events is a significant aspect of the plot that is shaped by the meaning intended by the author.[125] Though the four gospels recount the same essential story, many of the

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[119] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 4.

[120] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 4-5.

[121] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 17.

[122] Merrill Tenney identified 59 instances in the gospel in which the narrator makes explanatory comments. See Merrill C. Tenney, "The Footnotes of John's Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 117:468 (Oct. 1960), 350. John O'Rourke broadened the criteria to 109 "asides" made by the narrator, though these are more difficult to adequately define as narrative intrusions. See John J. O'Rourke, "Asides in the Gospel of John," *Novum Testamentum* 21, no. 3 (Jul. 1979), 212.

[123] Culpepper identifies 15 instances in the gospel where the author displays omniscience, beginning with his intimate knowledge of the Word's pre-eminence in the prologue. See Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 21-22.

[124] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 85.

[125] A simple example of this can be seen in Jesus' cleansing of the Temple, which appears at the beginning of his ministry in John and at the end in the synoptics. Brown argues that the evangelist placed it at the beginning so that the Jews' motive for killing Jesus would be attributed to his raising Lazarus from the dead rather than any other event leading up to his death. See Brown, *John*, 118 as well as,
Derek Brewer, "The Gospels and the Laws of Folktale: A Centenary Lecture," *Folklore* 90, no. 1 (1979), 45 and, Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 85.

plot details vary greatly due to the contextual beliefs and difficulties of the communities from which they emerged.[126]

The plot of John's gospel is one that is marked by its heightened conflict in comparison to the synoptic accounts. As the narrative unfolds, the hostility from the Jews gradually escalates from "murmurs" and "quarrels" (6:41-52) about his outlandish claims, to his climactic crucifixion. The role of the narrator is imperative in this process, in that they provide the reader with details of the growing anger amongst the Jews and their malicious intentions that would not be known by a simple historical retelling. The audience is given inside information about why the Jews were persecuting Jesus (5:16), the dispute among the Jews (6:52), the peoples' fear of the Jews (7:13; 9:22; 12:42) and their motives and plans to have him arrested and put to death (5:18; 12:53). This culminates when the Jews "in effect commit blasphemy and renounce their heritage by claiming 'we have no king but Caesar'"[127] (19:15) in a reckless effort to ensure Jesus' crucifixion. The evangelist does not change any of the essential details of the tradition regarding the life, ministry and death of Jesus,[128] but employs narration and meticulous plot development to carefully guide the reader toward his intended conclusion about who Jesus was, why he was rejected and who was ultimately responsible for his death.

The evangelist's use of characterization is critical in conveying the *kerygma* of his gospel account. Culpepper evokes the work of E. M. Forster, who distinguishes between flat characters, who are somewhat static and embody a particular quality, and round characters, who are more complex and exhibit many qualities that can change drastically over the course of a narrative.[129] In the gospel of John, Jesus is the only character given significant screen time, while the rest of the cast is made up of flat characters that are meant to complement the portrayal of the main character. The characterization of each actor in the evangelist's screenplay revolves around his proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God and his desire for his readers to accept this reality. Each figure represents a potential response to Jesus: the disciples are exemplars of those who have faith in Jesus but typically misunderstand the nature of his dominion[130] (4:31-34; 11:11-15; 16:16-19), Nicodemus is a man who is on the fence about Jesus' identity and who "refuses to confess lest he be put out of the synagogue"[131] (3:1-15; 12:42) and the Beloved Disciple is representative of the ideal disciple, who follows Jesus unquestionably and never misunderstands his mission (21:7).[132] The characterization by the evangelist is by no means arbitrary but elicits legitimate experiences and struggles to believe in the person of Christ for the implied reader. This is further ensured by the rather vague background attached to each character that allows the audience to neatly classify the cast by various archetypal qualities. "The characters are individualized by their position in

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[126] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 85.

[127] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 96.

[128] This is not to dismiss the many events unique to the Johannine tradition, but to affirm the general coherence of the gospel with the other canonical traditions; Jesus preached a message as one sent from God, was crucified under Pontius Pilate and resurrected from the dead.

[129] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (United States: Mariner Books, 2001); Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 102.

[130] Culpepper also identifies separate depictions for many of the individual disciples based on their struggle to believe aspects of Jesus' character. See Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel,* 115-125. Misunderstanding also serves an important literary role in John, particularly to provide opportunities for Jesus or the narrator to further explain certain ideas. See Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 152-165.

[131] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 136.

[132] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 121.

society and their interaction with Jesus",[133] which casts a wide net and makes it likely that readers will identify with a particular figure based on their response to the person of Jesus.

The Fourth Gospel also makes use of irony in the communication of its message, much like the gospel of Mark, as presented by Tannehill. Culpepper evokes the work of D.C. Muecke and Wayne Booth on irony in analyzing its function in the gospel of John, that being a kind of superiority that is shared by the implied author and reader. They describe a "two-story phenomenon"[134] in which the author proposes an elevated, more sophisticated interpretation of an event that simultaneously denigrates other, potentially more surface-level perspectives. In doing this, the author invites the reader to "come and live at a higher and firmer location"[135] than those who simply misunderstand. It is difficult at this point to overlook this literary detail's probable grounding in the circumstances of the community that established the two-level drama recognized by Martyn and the dualism associated with John, which Culpepper references in its most basic binary: τὰ ἐπίγεια (earthly things) and τὰ ἐπουράνια (heavenly things).[136] The gospel's ironic tweaks on traditional narratives are rooted in a community's perceived separation from the world around them, though along with Culpepper, we will resist the urge to prematurely draw historical conclusions in our narrative-critical analysis.

The Johannine prologue plays a crucial role in granting the reader access to the author's privileged perspective by revealing Jesus' identity and relationship to the Father before the narrative begins, that he was ὁ λόγος who was ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν (in the beginning with God).[137] Spoiling such a significant element of the gospel from the outset may seem like poor storytelling on the part of the evangelist, but providing this information to the audience was strategic and in accordance with rhetorical practice of the age. The author was engaging in what Aristotle labeled as *exordium,* which involved giving readers a taste of what was to come to appropriately prepare them for the story.[138] In a way, using *exordium* at the beginning of a narrative helps ensure that the audience will interpret the content as intended, and the evangelist does this by immediately introducing the second level of the story that is essential for understanding the events of Jesus' life from his vantage point. The irony employed throughout is partly made possible by these morsels of information that are incrementally fed to the reader that antagonists within the story had no access to.

The prologue of John paints a portrait of Jesus for the reader that allows the author to make subtle claims about Jesus' identity using irony throughout the narrative. By its repetitive use of unique and perhaps relexicalized notions like ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν (in him was life), ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω (the world did not know him) and ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο (the Word became flesh), the opening of the gospel makes it plain to the audience that Jesus is of some divine origin and has been tragically misunderstood by the world.[139] With this revelation, the reader can stand alongside

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[133] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 145.

[134] D.C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen & Co., 1969), 19.

[135] Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 36.

[136] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 167.

[137] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 168.

[138] "When rhetoricians, then, compose *exordia*, they understand them as 'beginnings', whose purpose is to inform an audience about what is to come, and thus to pave the way for what follows." See Jerome H. Neyrey "Rhetoric and the Prologue of John: An Invitation to a New Conversation," *Biblica* 101, no. 3 (2020): 376.

[139] The evangelist uses the Wisdom tradition as a substructure for his cosmic story, a narrative familiar to Jewish readers. Like Lady Wisdom, ὁ λόγος was with God at the creation of the world as a "supervising architect", is rejected by mankind, and so returns to heaven. See Haenchen, "A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-6," 101.

the author on higher ground and look down upon those in the narrative who fail to recognize Jesus' true identity. Throughout the account, Jesus is ironically referred to simply as a man (5:7; 7:46; 9:16; 10:33), often in instances where characters are baffled by what he says and does, where a Johannine explanation of his identity would unlock the true meaning of the event that is shrouded in a worldly view of who he is. This motif culminates at his trial in 19:5, where Pilate says plainly to the crowd, "behold the man."[140] Without the context provided by the author, Jesus really is just a man, as declared by Pilate, and his brutal crucifixion nullifies any claims he had made as interpreted by the antagonists of the narrative. But for those who have ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ (seen his glory) (1:14), Jesus' rejection and crucifixion were indispensable and foretold; for the Son of Man had to be ὕψωσεν (lifted up) (3:14; 9:28). If the reader accepts the Christological claims of the author, a new perspective behind Jesus' ministry and death is unlocked that imbues the events of the gospel with a deeper meaning that is alluded to by the use of irony.[141]

Culpepper's analysis of John demonstrates the profound capability of literary devices to sway the trajectory of a reader's interpretation of a narrative. Much of the Fourth Gospel's ingenuity in the context of first-century Christianity is expressed through the author's creative use of rhetoric in his unique rendition of the early Jesus tradition. The evangelist is crafty enough to communicate his Christology with methodical narration, relatable characterization and tacit irony that intimately ties his audience to the cast and plot, rather than simply presenting his theological treatise. The gospel's characterization and irony, in particular, play a vital role in its portrayal of the Jews, and we will give them considerable attention in the final chapter.

2.4 Stibbe and Lincoln – Bridging the Gap Between the Narrative and Historical

In the final section of this chapter, we will explore the work of Mark W.G. Stibbe and Andrew T. Lincoln to bridge the gap between the historical and narrative elements of John's gospel. Stibbe published his brilliant work "John as Storyteller" in 1992 with the intention of proposing an "integrative multi-disciplinary narrative methodology"[142] in the wake of narrative critics like Culpepper who emphasized the reader's experience of encountering the text at the expense of its historical distinctions.[143] Stibbe argues that these approaches have neglected crucial aspects of John's gospel, including how the narrative genre of the gospels functioned within a particular community, their social utility as well as important historical details regarding the life of Jesus that have been overlooked because of the overexpressed truism that John is the literary and poetic[144] of the canonical gospels. Instead, Stibbe argues for the indispensability of a narratological paradigm in historical reconstruction and that the gospel of John is a complex expression of this phenomenon.

Stibbe makes the case that a flawed epistemology of historical understanding[145] creates an unnecessary division between historical and narrative analyses. He argues against the

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[140] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 172.

[141] For a more in-depth analysis of the types and functions of irony in John, see Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), which expands on the ideas of Culpepper.

[142] D. Francois Tolmie, "John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel," *Neotestamentica* 28, no. 1 (1994): 245.

[143] "The narrative world of the gospel is neither a window on the ministry of Jesus nor a window on the history of the Johannine community. Primarily at least, it is the literary creation of the evangelist…" See Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 4.

[144] Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 333.

[145] Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 73.

misconception that history occurs randomly and without structure, and therefore any record that displays a coherent "cause and effect"[146] in its retelling is likely the result of some kind of tampering, which in the case of the gospels would be the theological agenda of the author. He appeals to the work of W.B. Gallie who, much like Walter Fisher referenced in 2.2, advocated for the necessity of narratives in human deliberation and more specifically in historical understanding, "which occurs when the past human actions which have special interest to a particular community are interconnected with other human actions and formed into a coherent narrative."[147] History and narrative, then, are not mutually exclusive. It should be expected in analysis of the gospel of John to see an intermingling of these phenomena as a real historical group came to grips with their situation by codifying it into the narrative tradition that exists today.

Stibbe calls for the philosophy of figures like Gallie to replace that of earlier Enlightenment thinkers like Kant and Leibniz whose work stressed a "rationalist dichotomy"[148] between the empirical and theoretical, which infiltrated the field of biblical studies in the early 20th century through Bultmann and others and has continued to have an influence.[149] In the case of John's gospel, it ought to be recognized that the sources used carry an inherent narrativity that was not fully crafted by the evangelist. This is certainly not to affirm that the author had no part in shaping the story to communicate his own theology, as was demonstrated extensively in the previous section, but that "the ultimate source of John's story is already a narrative calling out for a storyteller."[150] In short, the literary character of John's gospel should not hastily lead to the conclusion that it is simply devoid of historical information, because the life of Jesus itself carries inherent narrativity. The disparate sources and views of the evangelist should be understood as reflections of a real historical group struggling to connect their circumstances to larger human realities through the use of narrative.

How exactly can narrative features of John's gospel reveal historical information about the Johannine community and early Christianity? A motif of the Fourth Gospel mentioned by Stibbe is that of judgment expressed through courtroom imagery throughout the text. He argues that this "probably reflects his community's sense of being on trial at the hands of Pharisaic Judaism"[151] and likely has roots in the courtroom of Yahweh depicted in Isaiah 41. Andrew Lincoln explored this theme extensively in his work "Truth on Trial",[152] in which he makes the case that the Johannine trial motif is crucial for understanding the gospel[153] and demonstrates how this narrative theme can reveal historical realities behind the text. Lincoln moves slowly through the text and reveals the overwhelming presence of the theme throughout; once the reader's eyes are opened,

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[146] Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 73.

[147] Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 72.

[148] Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 74,

[149] This can be seen in Bultmann's desire to demythologize the New Testament texts of their purported historical elements in an effort to derive some universal ethic. See Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*.

[150] Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 75.

[151] Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 89.

[152] Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000).

[153] Lincoln is certainly not the first to make this observation, see Théo Preiss, "Justification in Johannine Thought," in *Life in Christ* (London: SCM, 1957): 9-31;

Josef Blank, *Krisis: Untersuchungen zur johanneischen Christologie und Eschatologie* (Freiburg: Lambertus, 1964);

J.M. Boice. *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

Lincoln is returning to the discussion of the trial motif in light of the Johannine developments of Brown, Meeks and Martyn as well as the narrative-critical developments of Culpepper and Stibbe. See Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 7.

the "dominant metaphor"[154] of judgment cannot be ignored or unseen. He reasons that there must have been a tangible, historical basis for the author to infuse his account of Jesus' life with this particular set of ideas, and he seeks to ground this literary device in some sort of lived reality.

Much of Lincoln's approach involves insights from the work of figures like Martyn and Culpepper who recognized the two-level drama, or "two-storey story,"[155] that allowed for the author to nudge his readers toward an intended interpretation. He argues that the entire narrative is framed as a trial in which the audience is encouraged to take the side of Jesus against his accusers or adversaries.[156] This begins with the μαρτυρία (testimony) of John in 1:19, in which he ὡμολόγησεν (confessed) that he is not the Christ, in response to priests and Levites sent by the Jews. The motif continues in the mounting tension between Jesus and the Jews throughout the gospel, as they bring charges against him of being a violator of the law (5:16; 7:23; 9:16), a blasphemer who claims equality with God (5:17; 10:30-39), and a danger to his fellow Jews (11:46-53).[157] This theme culminates when Jesus is charged before Pilate and ultimately faces the judgment of crucifixion (18:28-19:42). The two-level drama and irony allow for the reader to see these events in a completely different light; in reality, it is Jesus who is both chief witness and judge, and those who fail to comprehend his relationship to the Father come under cosmic judgment. (5:26-27)

Lincoln consistently refers to the lawsuit motif of Deutero-Isaiah as the body supporting the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, and that the audience's knowledge of this story helped to establish a connection between their experiences and the life of Jesus. In response to the fear and shame brought upon the Israelites by the exile, the author of the ancient text interprets his peoples' situation in the framework of a lawsuit in which their oppressors are put on trial for their victimization of God's people and are judged by Yahweh. Understanding their tragic experiences brought about by the exile within this narrative paradigm served as a kind of eschatological reminder that their God was ultimately in control and would bring judgment upon those who subjugate his people.[158] Much like the Johannine Christians, the persecution experienced by the Israelites does not lead to an abandonment of their faith, but leads to a deeper interpretation in which they are affirmed of their righteousness and status before God.

In the same way that Deutero-Isaiah's trial sheds light on Israel's exile, the lawsuit motif throughout John subtly refers to the historical situation of the Johannine community. The evocation of Deutero-Isaiah is a clever tactic used by the evangelist, as his community's persecution and expulsion from synagogues would have brought about shame and marginalization that was easily comparable to that which was experienced by their ancestors in exile.[159] Like other aspects of the Fourth Gospel the trial motif abides by the two-level drama, as Jesus is judged on the surface level by the narrative's antagonists but acts as witness and judge on the spiritual level. This thematic thread crafted by the evangelist allows for readers of his community to ground the trauma of their exile in a larger narrative that frames their experience in a cosmic picture in which their faith and

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[154] Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 263.

[155] Lincoln*, Truth on Trial*, 21.

[156] D. Moody Smith, "Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 58, no.1 (2007): 222.

[157] Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 24.

[158] Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 289.

[159] Lincoln dedicates a subsection to the social honor and shame involved in lawsuits in the ancient world. See Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 285-301.

behavior is not ultimately judged by their oppressors, but by their God. It suggests a sectarian group that feels it has been misunderstood and is seeking some kind of reassurance of its peculiar beliefs in the face of various social pressures. The narrative is answering a question that would naturally arise out of such circumstances: "are we justified in staking our identity, our security, and our lives on belief in Jesus?"[160] For the evangelist, the lawsuit motif helps to address this pressing question by averting his readers' attention away from earthly powers that might seek to condemn them and toward the divine verdict[161] of God who judges them rightly.

2.5 – Conclusion of Narrative Analyses

The intention of this chapter has been to demonstrate the gospel narrative's importance in communicating the author's ideas, as well as its ability to shed light on the historical circumstances of the Johannine community. The methodological details that can be drawn from said research equip us to study the anti-Jewish problem within John's narrative, consolidate the conclusions with our historical reconstruction and hopefully provide a coherent contribution to the discourse.

Our brief survey of de Saussure's work on structuralism and the synchrony/diachrony dialectic has demonstrated the complex overlap of the narratological and historical in ancient texts and has brought to the fore a number of literary components, like the axes of interpretations, that necessitate a clearly defined hermeneutic. The methodological aim of chapter 3 is to strike a balance between reader and author-oriented approaches and avoid uncompromising interpretations. An analysis of John that adequately respects its genre should eschew stark historical conclusions like those of early 20th century critics who lost sight of the gospel's invaluable *kerygma,* as well as postmodern oversimplifications that impetuously proclaim "the death of the author."[162]

Tannehill's classification of the gospels as narrative Christology helps provide a basis for my proposed approach to John and centers our attention upon the evangelist's depiction of Jesus. The gospels were intended to communicate the author's interpretation of Jesus' life and identity through various narrative traditions that were shaped by literary devices and deliberate storytelling. Analysis of the ancient texts ought to respect this reality by employing a hermeneutic that prioritizes the image of Jesus that is given shape by traditional sources and is colored with detail by the author's portrayal of characters, ironic revisions and pointed dialogue.

Culpepper's preeminent contribution to the discourse demonstrates the many ways in which the author of John guides his readers toward the Johannine Jesus. The evangelist uses plot development, characterization and irony to accomplish his goal of bringing his audience to belief in Jesus, the Son of God. (20:31) These tools allow him to pull the reader up to his level of the drama and see the true meaning of the events of Jesus' life, and look down upon those in the narrative, as well as those in the surrounding world, who fail to recognize the nature of Jesus' identity, mission and death. An investigation of the portrayal of the Jews in the gospel should recognize these literary devices as the primary mechanism by which the text expresses its alleged anti-Jewish ideas.

The final section on Stibbe and Lincoln was intended to deal with 20th century objections to an integration of historical and literary approaches in the study of the gospel texts, and to

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[160] Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 326.
[161] Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 327.
[162] Barthes, "The Death of the Author."

demonstrate the narrative's capacity to convey historical information. The work of Stibbe deconstructs some of the older ideas behind these objections and emphasizes the inextricable relationship between narrative and history in the ancient sources. Lincoln's analysis of the courtroom motif serves as an example of the late first century Johannine situation bleeding into the gospel's account of Jesus' life. The evangelist recognized a larger narratological pattern of earthly and divine judgment that was manifested throughout history in the exile of the Israelites, the life of Jesus and the persecution of the Johannine community.

Chapter 3: The Narrative Function of the Jews in John's Gospel

3.1 – An Introduction to the Problem

The problematic portrayal of the Jews in John's gospel has been dissected exhaustively by scholars employing countless methodological approaches to the text. Many, like von Wahlde and de Jonge, have fixated on the blanket usage of the term Ἰουδαῖοι, which understandably sparks much of the initial outrage at the gospel. The broader the meaning being associated with the author's use of the term, the further it implicates the text in condemning the Jews as a people, and so a narrowing of the intended referent would seemingly exonerate the gospel to a degree.[163] De Jonge argues that the gospel was engaging in a polemic against non-Johannine Christians of the late first century, and that the Jews of the gospel acted as "spokespersons"[164] for this group, since they were understood to be the oppressors of Jesus in much the same way other Christian sects oppressed the Johannine community. Von Wahlde has similarly made the case, to much criticism, that the author's use of the term refers exclusively to the Jewish authorities, who would have been representative of the synagogue leaders responsible for their expulsion.[165] The aim of such scholars is to narrow the referent of the term so as to limit the "transfer of hostility" to Jews more broadly when the text is read outside the confines of its historical context.

The problem with the approach of narrowing the meaning of Ἰουδαῖοι is that the term is littered throughout the gospel in instances that could infer a multitude of referents, and the author makes no effort to specify. Countless proposals by scholars have not led to a consensus on the identity of John's Jews. As demonstrated by the previous sections of this thesis, respecting the genre of the text is paramount in constructing a hermeneutic for any given issue within it, and Bultmann recognized this for John's portrayal of the Jews decades ago. His Heideggerian framework for reading the New Testament inspired an approach to the ancient text that seeks to identify the essential *kerygma* of the gospel and determine its applicability for modern readers, demythologizing it of its enigmatic, spiritual elements in the process.[166] He was not concerned with the individual historical details involved in religious belief but saw these details as contextual elements that concealed a more universal message. In the Gospel of John, Bultmann recognized belief in Jesus as the Son of God (20:31) as the *kerygma* that transcends its first-century context, and that the gospel's narrative is ultimately used to proclaim.[167] Regarding the Jews, Bultmann's understanding of their place in John's gospel would be in relation to accomplishing this kerygmatic goal rather than as a portrayal of a real group. Demythologized, the Jews no longer depict any of the various sects that existed at the time of Jesus, but instead serve as a representation of those who fail to accept him as the Son of God.[168] To the reader, they are exemplary of those who are

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[163] Bieringer, Pollefeyt, and Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, *Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel,* 15.

[164] Henk J. De Jonge "'The Jews' in the Gospel of John." In *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel,* edited by Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 122.

[165] Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Johannine 'Jews': A Critical Survey," *New Testament Studies* 28, no. 1 (1982): 49; 6:41 and 6:52 of John make it particularly difficult to view the term as consistently referring to the authorities. See Bieringer, Pollefeyt and Vandecasteele-Vanneuville*, Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel*, 17.

[166] Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings,* Translated by Schubert M. Ogden, (Fortress Press, 1941).

[167] Bultmann, *John*, 699.

[168] Bultmann, *John*, 647.

blind to the *kerygma,* and they provide reasons for which one may wrongfully reject Jesus as the Revealer.[169]

Bultmann's view of the Jews functioning as a literary device to serve the gospel's foremost purpose provides a solid starting point from which to understand them in John's narrative, but it also comes with a host of problems that cannot be overlooked. Adele Reinhartz rightly points out that the Gospel of John makes use of many historical figures, like Jesus, Caiaphas and Pilate, whose presence in the narrative infers some kind of a claim to historicity and will naturally lead the reader to conceive of the Jews as a real historical group as well.[170] In addition to this, there are essential characteristics of Johannine theology, as well as Christianity more broadly, that are intrinsically tied to Jewish ideas. A full demythologization of the Judaism of John risks throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Bearing this in mind, one should be careful not to excuse any anti-Jewish elements of the gospel on the grounds of the Jews functioning more as a tool of rhetoric than as a real historical group.[171]

The lack of external evidence on the subject only increases the necessity of a rhetorical analysis of the text. It would be wrong, however, to completely ignore the intended conception of Ἰουδαῖοι for the author since the hateful polemic against the Jews in the text "turned into so much more than a first-century dispute."[172] In the same way, a narrowing of the referent like those suggested by von Wahlde and de Jonge seems to partially be functioning to absolve the divinely inspired Fourth Gospel of anti-Jewish elements that would jeopardize its ethical status. Our approach to the problem, then, will be to follow the kerygmatic message of the author that is concealed in his narrative using methods discussed in chapter 2 to determine the role of the Jews within his theology. Any meaning that can be derived from this process will be consolidated with the historical reconstruction of chapter 1 in an effort to present a thoroughgoing explanation of the anti-Jewish phenomenon, whether the findings exonerate the Gospel of John or further convict it.

3.2 – John's Characterization of the Jews

As discussed in 2.3, the characterization of various figures in John are in service to the gospel's ultimate purpose: belief in Jesus, the Son of God (20:31). Each of the characters can be understood as representing a point on the spectrum between a proper understanding of faith in Jesus and a complete misapprehension and failure to recognize who he is.[173] The beloved disciple represents the correct view of Jesus (21:7), the other disciples and figures like Nicodemus represent views that have some kernel of the truth but ultimately fall short for various reasons (3:9-12; 4:31-

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[169] Bultmann, *John*, 655.

[170] Adele Reinhartz, "The Jews of the Fourth Gospel," in *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies,* ed. Judith M. Lieu and Martinus C. de Boer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) 126-127.

[171] To absolve the gospel of anti-Jewish guilt on this basis is to engage in the intentional fallacy. See Barthes, "The Death of the Author."
Bieringer et al. discuss the potentially dangerous readings of John throughout history. See Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, "Wrestling with Johannine Anti-Judaism," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 6-7. Most who argue that John is anti-Jewish do not allege that the author was himself anti-Jewish, but that the text has a high probability of cultivating anti-Judaism in its compliant readers. See Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, xxxv;
Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 104-105.

[172] Reinhartz, "The Jews of the Fourth Gospel," 129.

[173] Brown famously suggested that these characterizations were not mere literary devices, but each represented groups contemporary with the Johannine community that displayed different inadequacies in their understanding of Jesus. See Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*.

34; 11:11-15; 16:16-19), while the Jews represent a complete failure to understand and believe in Jesus, as noted by Bultmann.[174] This section will explore how the author shapes this damning characterization throughout his narrative.

The plot of the Fourth Gospel is guided by the author's Christological *kerygma* and the Jews play a significant role in this unfolding narrative. Their "script"[175] begins in 5:16-18, where their desire to kill Jesus is expressed, establishing what Tannehill might label as their commission throughout the remainder of the account. In their eyes, Jesus was guilty of two violations of the law: the breaking of the Sabbath and more importantly, the blasphemous claim of equality with God. Jesus' statement in v.17 that Ὁ Πατήρ μου ἕως ἄρτι ἐργάζεται, κἀγὼ ἐργάζομαι (my Father has been working until now, and I am working) implies that the privilege of working on the Sabbath reserved for God the Father also applies to him.[176] The audience was primed for this storyline by the prologue: "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." (1:11)

The tension continues to escalate at the Feast of Booths in chapter 7, where it is expressed from the outset that the Jews were still seeking to kill Jesus (7:1) and we first hear mention of the fear of the Jews amongst the crowds (7:13). The dialogue that follows in 7:25-36 regarding Jesus' identity repeatedly displays the utter inability of the Jews to understand him, given their vastly different worldview. The author evokes the descending redeemer motif in the words of Jesus here, claiming authority on the basis of his having been sent by the Father (7:28-30). This comes in response to the Jews' assertion that he could not be the Messiah because they knew that he was from Nazareth. (7:27) The author wants to stress here the earthly perspective of the Jews and how distant they are from an enlightened understanding of Jesus, and their various objections are "in typical Johannine style, shown to betray ignorance, the ignorance of human wisdom when shown up in the penetrating light of incarnate Wisdom."[177] They misunderstand him again a few verses later when he speaks in heavenly terms regarding where he is going, but they think in earthly terms of him going to the Diaspora to teach the Greeks (7:33-36). For the readers, this dialogue operates ironically, since the gospel really had reached the Gentiles by the time the gospel had been written.[178]

After the infamous Abraham dialogue with the Jews in chapter 8, which will be analyzed in a later section, the gospel recounts the first of the ἀποσυνάγωγος stories. The author provides clarity regarding the "fear of the Jews" expressed in 7:13 and seemingly injects his own experience into the time of the gospel of having been expelled from the synagogue for his belief in Jesus as the Son of God (9:22). Their contention to the man born blind, who testifies that Jesus gave him his sight, seems to contradict that of 7:27; they "do not know where he comes from (9:29)," when they previously rejected him precisely because they knew exactly where he came from. Johannine dualism and the author's divulgence of Jesus' origin to the reader layer this misjudgment with irony such that the Jews misunderstand Jesus while simultaneously speaking truthfully about

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[174] "The term Ἰουδαῖοι, characteristic of the Evangelist, gives an overall portrayal of the Jews, viewed from the standpoint of Christian faith, as the representatives of unbelief (and thereby, as will appear, of the unbelieving 'world' in general)." See Bultmann, *John*, 86.

[175] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 127.

[176] See note 64.

[177] Brown, *John*, 317.

[178] Brown, *John*, 318.

him.[179] Jesus really did come from Nazareth, but they are blind as to his heavenly origins. The Jews' refusal to accept this reality is heightened throughout the passage and contrasts with the blind man's physical restoration of sight. Some of them initially seem to accept the possibility of the healing in 9:15-17, but they begin to display serious doubt when they question his parents about whether the man was ever blind and have him repeat the details of the event. (9:18-27) Eventually, they resort to disparaging the blind man's witness altogether and remaining spiritually blind. (9:34) This passage powerfully incriminates the Jews beyond mere ignorance, as the evangelist "has drawn his portraits of increasing insight yet hardening blindness."[180] They are given ample opportunity to recognize Jesus' identity and origin, but instead come to fulfill the desolate extremity of his judgment: "that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind (9:39)."

The Jews' hardening toward Jesus escalates through his ministry until they eventually decide to have him executed after the raising of Lazarus, as the Sanhedrin feared conflict with Rome (11:48).[181] The climax of their commission comes in chapter 19 where Pilate seems to be trying to persuade them not to have Jesus crucified, which results in a dialogue that unquestionably implicates the Jews in Jesus' death. When Jesus is brought before the crowd, Pilate asks, "shall I crucify your king?" to which the chief priests respond, "we have no king but Caesar (19:15)," a declaration that is imbued with profound and tragic irony. Throughout the long history of Israel's oppression, they had trusted in Yahweh as their king and his Messiah as their liberator, and here they renounce that privileged status as God's people, bringing to completion John's supersessionistic portrait. For the reader, "the real trial is over, for in the presence of Jesus 'the Jews' have judged themselves; they have spoken their own sentence."[182] Lincoln makes reference to the Nishmat hymn of the Passover liturgy, which could have very well existed and been known at the time the gospel was composed, which reads, "From everlasting to everlasting you are God; Beside you we have no king, redeemer or savior. No liberator, deliverer, provider, none who takes pity in every time of distress and trouble. We have no king but you."[183] This detail accentuates the irony of the Jews' declaration, as it occurred just as the Passover had begun, (19:14) "the feast that annually recalls God's deliverance of His people."[184] The author brilliantly, though viciously, condemns the Jews of forsaking their allegiance to Yahweh and being responsible for the death of Jesus by creating a scene with an irony that permeates every detail and produces an impression of divine significance for the reader.

The Jews' renunciation of their king represents the completion of their commission in the gospel and is meant to be understood as the result of their behavior in the narrative up to that point.

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[179] "Each allegation is however, to John, false, and each ironically true; they do not point to the use of different sources. The Christian revelation began not with an awe-inspiring theophany, but with the incarnation of the Word, a process in which both the divine Word and the flesh which he took must be taken seriously." See Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John,* 363.

[180] Brown, *John*, 377.

[181] Haenchen argues that this motive was morally insufficient for the narrator and led him to attribute to Caiaphas the saying that "it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish (11:50)." He claims that this notion is likely rooted in an older source because of it containing the only usage of the term ἔθνος in the entire gospel, perhaps 2 Sam. 20:20-22 or Jonah 1:12-15. See Ernst Haenchen, "A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 7-21," *Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 79.

[182] Brown, *John*, 894.

[183] Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 136.

[184] Brown, *John*, 895.

Their condemnation is not related to their inherent Jewishness but is correspondent to their aberrant response to Jesus. They prove that they have never heard the voice of the Father by their refusal to believe in the witness of Jesus (5:37), they love darkness rather than light (3:19-21), they are spiritually blind because of their perspective being limited to that which is earthly (9:40-41) and they fail to recognize Yahweh's Messiah despite having "all the advantages of the heritage of Israel."[185] It is by carrying this "burden of unbelief"[186] that the Jews are attributed all of the negative descriptors of John's dualistic language; darkness, sin, the world, from below, blindness and death, the very antitheses of Jesus' divine identity. This negative characterization is meant to further emphasize the evangelist's Christological portrait by depicting him in stark contrast to the Jews' destitute understanding of the world to serve the gospel's "salvific aim"[187] of encouraging belief in its view of Jesus. The function of such dualistic language is to accomplish the author's merging of his community's circumstances with the life of Jesus in a way that urges his readers "to appropriate the Jesus story as a foundational pattern for their own life and faith and as a help for coping with their own experiences of unbelief and rejection."[188] In addition to this, it promotes insulation and solidarity within the community in the face of persecution from the unbelieving world, as explored in 1.4.

At this point, there may be a temptation to partially absolve John of its alleged anti-Judaism, given the fact that its negative portrayal of the Jews seems to be innocuously targeting failure to believe in Jesus rather than a real historical group. The problem with this conclusion is that the light, life and truth found in Christ is set against unmistakably Jewish notions in the binary of the narrative program of the author. The markedly Johannine virtues and symbols function as concepts that have completely overridden essential components of the unique Jewish identity and history. Jesus represents the spiritual, resurrected temple that will never be destroyed, the "good wine" of true spirituality, the water of eternal life in contrast to the water of Jewish and Samaritan rites that is finite and the spiritual bread that nourishes the soul, unlike the manna provided to the Jews in the wilderness that ran out.[189] John wants his readers to recognize Jesus as the good shepherd who represents the true fulfillment of the scriptures, and to see the Jews who teach the Torah apart from him as "thieves and robbers" (10:8) who lead their followers into darkness. Judaism is utterly subsumed by the person of Jesus, and those who read the scriptures and fail to believe in him as the Son of God are hopelessly guilty. He is the "true vine," and those who do not abide in him are thrown away to wither and burn. (15:1-7) In this way, the Jews are not simply representatives of a more general lack of belief that can be applied universally but reflect the author's qualms with specific Jewish ideas that he believes have been superseded by Jesus. Endowed with the privileged status of being God's people and yet refusing to accept Jesus as having been sent by their God, the Jews represent the worst possible manifestation of hardened unbelief. Their Jewish heritage is inextricably linked to the author's characterization and their role in the gospel should not be understood broadly as the unbelieving world; it is precisely because they are Jews and can "see" yet fail to believe that their guilt remains, and they are left in spiritual blindness. (9:35-41)

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[185] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 129.

[186] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 130.

[187] Jörg Frey, "Dualism and the World in the Gospel and Letters of John," in *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies,* edited by Judith M. Lieu and Martinus C. de Boer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 288.

[188] Frey, "Dualism and the World in the Gospel and Letters of John," 287.

[189] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 112.

John's characterization of the Jews serves its narrative Christological purpose of demonstrating the most negative possible response to Jesus, but also carries historical significance in its denunciation of essential components of Jewish heritage. Their spiritual blindness impeded them from believing in the true Son of God, it led to their being responsible for Jesus' death and their revoking of the status of Yahweh's people. For the reader, the Jews function as the unbelieving world, but they also serve to cultivate a particular communal behavior and attitude towards their contemporary Jews, which will be explored in the next section.

3.3 Reinhartz – John's Rhetorical Program Against 'the Jews'

In her work "Cast Out of the Covenant," Adele Reinhartz employs a rhetorical analysis of John's narrative and argues that the gospel has two persuasive purposes: "to construct a new and idealized identity for its audience, and to urge their estrangement from the *Ioudaioi*."[190] She references George Kennedy who made the case that the Fourth Gospel makes use of classical rhetoric and can therefore reap valuable insights from an approach that examines these rhetorical tools utilized by the author.[191] Her goal is to "extrapolate – imaginatively construct – a rhetorical situation for which those aims, arguments and strategies might plausibly have a persuasive impact."[192] This section will give an overview of Reinhartz's analysis and ascertain the gospel's rhetorical competence in persuading its readers of its two aforementioned purposes. The subsequent section will examine her proposed historical setting in light of the Fourth Gospel's rhetoric as well as her critiques of antecedent theories, like Martyn's expulsion hypothesis.

Reinhartz's analysis begins with her proposition of a hypothetical figure she calls "Alexandra" that is meant to represent a compliant reader of John's gospel.[193] She distinguishes compliant readers from resistant readers, who would for example, read the gospel from a Jewish perspective and therefore be reluctant to accept its claims about the Jews, and sympathetic readers, who would seek to understand the traumatic roots of the Jews' portrayal. To adequately determine the persuasive scope of the narrative's anti-Judaism, Reinhartz suggests an implied reader that is highly suggestible and likely to "sincerely, enthusiastically, and uncritically accept the Gospel's claims,"[194] which is likely an accurate reflection of at least some of the Johannine demographic.[195] The discipline of approaching the gospel from Alexandra's perspective allows us to understand the experience of the implied reader and more deeply immerse ourselves in the ideological guidance of the evangelist, giving us a more informed comprehension of his gospel's ability to incite anti-Jewish ideas to those more susceptible to persuasion.

Along with the central goal of exhorting his readers to belief in Jesus as the Son of God, Reinhartz argues that the evangelist is suggesting that their faith should lead pragmatically to association with a particular group, through his utilization of a rhetoric of affiliation.[196] He

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[190] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, xxvii.

[191] George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33-38;
Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, xxvii.

[192] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, xxvii.

[193] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, xxiii.

[194] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, xxiv.

[195] For an extensive overview of theories regarding John's audience, see E. W. Klink, *The Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of John,* SNTSMS 141 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
See also Porter, *John*, 37-62.

[196] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 3.

accomplishes this by exposing Alexandra to her innate desire for eternal life and promotes the ability of Jesus to provide it through Aristotelian appeals made throughout the gospel[197] that validate the testimony of Jesus (1:1-14; 1:49; 6:69; 14:6) (*ethos*),[198] emotionally attach her to the narrative through emotive language (2:10; 4:53; 9:15) and metaphors (4:14; 6:35; 8:12) (*pathos*),[199] and by deductive proofs that bolster the logical cogency of the gospel message (4:22; 5:26; 8:16) (*logos*).[200] The evangelist masterfully weaves these elements into his story to stir up Alexandra's nascent yearning for life after death and to conveniently supply the solution to this problem in the person of Jesus.

For the evangelist, the gospel message should go beyond a solely personal confession of belief in Jesus as the Christ and should transform the life of its adherents, especially in terms of their communal identity. Reinhartz identifies a fundamental aspect of the Fourth Gospel that leads to this assertion: that "encounters with Jesus must be mediated by another's witness to Jesus' identity."[201] Throughout the narrative, the evangelist stresses the importance of characters believing in the proclamation of the truth rather than being dependent on visual proofs for its validity. (4:7-29; 46-54; 5:8; 9:3-6) The clearest example of this can be found in the story of Doubting Thomas that constituted the original concluding exhortation of the gospel.[202] Here, Thomas refuses to believe in Jesus' resurrection without physical evidence, and the evangelist uses this as an opportunity to instruct his readers through Jesus' words: "Blessed are those who have not seen yet have come to believe." (20:29) This theme of faith without sight functions as an encouragement for John's extradiegetic[203] audience to trust the testimony of his gospel that, in Jesus' physical absence, is imparted by others who believe in his name[204] and should instill in the reader a sense of the importance of their Christian community.

It is this principle of faith in the testimony of another that fortifies the evangelist's assertion of the indispensability of interpersonal connection in the application of the gospel message. Disciples of Jesus are responsible for the substantiation of one another's faith, as well as for sustaining it through self-sacrificial love for one another, as demonstrated by Jesus in his washing of the disciples' feet (13:6-16). Reinhartz emphasizes that this love advocated in the Fourth Gospel is not meant for all people, but "implies separation, even estrangement, from outsiders to their

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[197] Aristotle, "Rhetoric," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle,* edited by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 2001), 1318-1451;
Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 8.

[198] The evangelist establishes Jesus' ethos with references to Jewish titles of authority that would have been significant to readers (Lamb of God, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, King of Israel, etc.). See Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 9.

[199] Emotive language helps the evangelist convey to Alexandra the experience of Jesus' presence. Communicating truths of eternal importance through metaphors helps her to understand how it comes to bear on her own life, however ordinary it may seem. See Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 10-11.

[200] The gospel frequently makes use of entyhmemes, which are arguments that take the form of a claim followed by a reason that supports the claim. See Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 12.

[201] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 25.

[202] See Brown, *John*, 1051. See also,
Barrett, *St. John*, 573.

[203] Reinhartz distinguishes between the diegetic audience, being those within the text, and the extradiegetic, being those to whom the gospel was written. See Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 8-9.

[204] "The contrast is not between seeing and touching, but between seeing, and believing apart from sight, between Thomas who saw, and the later Christian believers who did not." See Barrett, *St. John*, 573.

group."[205] Such an attitude is characteristic of a community that has been persecuted or marginalized because of their beliefs, resulting in them clinging to one another and their common worldview even more tightly. This is most perceptible in the High Priestly Prayer in chapter 17, in which the evangelist seems to hint through a vague historical prolepsis,[206] that his followers will face future hostility on account of their belief in Jesus. The prayer does not give the impression of an encouragement towards an embracing of outsiders who persecute them, since Jesus "does not pray for the world" (17:9) and his disciples "do not belong to the world" (17:16), but instead reinforces the unique aspects of their identity in Christ that separate them from "the world."[207] This provides a cathartic explanation to the extradiegetic audience, and a compliant reader like Alexandra, for their predicament: the marginalization they experience at the end of the first century was predicted by Jesus and it substantiates the insulated affiliation encouraged by the Fourth Gospel.

As perceived by Malina and Rohrbaugh and other social scientists, one's communal identity is strongly reinforced not only by their adherence to ideologies and practices of their group, but by clear distinction and opposition of another.[208] The evangelist exploits this facet of human nature not only in the centering of his community around the controversial figure of Jesus, but also in the exclusivism that is inherent to his Christology and subsequent ecclesiology. The supersessionistic character of John's *kerygma* means that Jesus was not ushering in an entirely new set of ideas and practices but was fulfilling or replacing aspects of the Jewish tradition that had existed for centuries prior. In addition to this, those who believed in Jesus as the Son of God had replaced Israel as God's children (3:16; 17:15) and were entitled to the benefits that had historically been "reserved for the Jews alone."[209] The gospel condemns the Jews of failing to perceive Jesus' centrality to precious elements of their faith, resulting in God revoking their privileged status; they have lost the benefits of the Torah by failing to see Jesus' presence within them (5:39-47),[210] they have lost their authority over Temple worship by failing to recognize Jesus as the greater, spiritual Temple,[211] and more broadly, the Jews have lost their status as beneficiaries of a covenant with Yahweh, as they have been "cast off" for failing to abide in the true vine (15:1-6).[212] The Fourth Gospel leaves no room for alternative interpretations of Judaism but creates a harsh dichotomy

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[205] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 38.

[206] Culpepper details the evangelist's handling of narrative time, specifically with his usage of analepses and prolepses. An historical prolepsis, as mentioned here, refers to the evocation of an event that has happened since the events described in the narrative. See Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 56-61.

[207] The use of κόσμος ("the world") varies in the Fourth Gospel (i.e., 3:16 vs. 17:14); at times it is the object of Jesus' love and at others of his rejection. In instances like 1:11, 17:14 and 15:19, it seems to function as a term referring to those who fail to believe in Jesus, much like Bultmann's observation of Ἰουδαῖοι. See Bultmann, *John*, 56. See also, Barrett, *St. John*, 163. See also,
Brown, *John*, 28, 695.

[208] Chad Kile, "Feeling Persuaded: Christianization and Social Formation," in *Rhetoric and Reality in Early Christianities,* ed. Willi Braun (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2005), 233;
Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 43.

[209] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 51.

[210] Scholars have drawn parallels with the Torah and the Wisdom tradition, and in turn, with the Torah and the Logos of John's gospel that seems to be rooted in the characterization of Lady Wisdom – the manifest wisdom of the Logos can be understood as being a superior replacement to the Torah. See Haenchen, "A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-6," 126.

[211] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 58.

[212] Brown provides numerous examples that suggest that references to the "vine" could be rooted in passages from the Hebrew Bible "dealing with the chastisement of Israel." See Brown, *John*, 674.

that necessitates belief in Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of the faith, lest one be abandoned by God.

In addition to its supersessionistic ideas, Reinhartz identifies a rhetoric of vituperation[213] within the Fourth Gospel that produces a distancing effect[214] between the community and the Jews. Freyne defines Johannine vituperation as "irony which flows over into caricature and parody."[215] The evangelist promotes separation from the Jews by associating them with all the negative poles of the Johannine binaries, like darkness, death, and rejection, and setting them in stark contrast to the gospel community who embody all the opposite traits. The most serious example of this can be found in chapter 8 in which Jesus refers to the Jews as children of the devil, in opposition to the children of God who believe in the person of Jesus. (8:44) Jesus' denial of the Jews' filial relationship to Abaraham and God is rooted in Aristotelian epigenesis. Reinhartz refers to Neyrey who explains Aristotle's claim that "paternity can be attested by the likeness or similarity between father and son,"[216] a litmus test failed by the Jews because they do not do the works of Abraham or love the Father. (8:39-42) Instead, their behavior and response to Jesus shows a resemblance to the devil, their true father. The author creates a sharp division between those who rightly perceive Jesus, presumably his community, and the Jews by associating them with the divine embodiments of good and evil in God and the devil. Such a radical contradistinction emphasizes the profound difference between the two groups and would encourage the readers to "distance themselves from these children of Satan."[217]

John's anti-Jewish agenda is further reinforced by the "rhetoric of fear"[218] that appears throughout the gospel, in which characters behave in a particular way "for fear of the Jews," (7:13; 19:38; 20:19) which consistently reminds the reader of the Jews' role in hindering Jesus' ministry and drawing various figures away from acting in faith. It appears overtly in some cases, like when the parents of the man born blind would not speak for their son because they "feared the Jews" and did not want to be put out of the synagogue, (9:22) but the author also cleverly inserts the idea subtly into the early stages of the text and has it escalate as the general tension between Jesus and the Jews heightens throughout the narrative. An unspoken fear of the Jews is implied in Nicodemus' visiting Jesus at night (3:2), and in Jesus' departure from Judea after the Pharisees hear that he is baptizing, (4:1-3) two scenes that perhaps prime the reader for the emergence of the Jews as the antagonists later in the script. The fear becomes more explicit when the Jews begin to try and kill Jesus (7:1) and the concern is expressed by his disciples. (11:6) Ultimately, the fear of the Jews conveyed through the gospel proves to be well-founded when they have Jesus crucified. The rhetoric of fear permeates John in such a way that the Jews are depicted as a looming, merciless threat to those who profess faith in Jesus. The author does not restrict this frightful sentiment to

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[213] Vituperation was common practice in ancient rhetoric and involved accusations that were not always accurate. See Donald L. Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (Westport, Greenwood Pr., 1977), 198; Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 76.

[214] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 76.

[215] Seán Freyne, "Vilifying the Other and Defining the Self: Matthew's and John's Anti-Jewish Polemic in Focus," in *"To See Ourselves as Others See Us": Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity,* ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs and Caroline McCracken-Flesher (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 131; Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 76.

[216] Jerome Neyrey, *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009), 10.

[217] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 78.

[218] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 79.

his gospel but claims through the words of Jesus that "the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God." (16:2) This theme represents an additional motive for John's readers to steer clear of the Jews.

Reinhartz's analysis of John's rhetoric helps to reveal the author's intentions of further insulating Johannine Christians and encouraging estrangement from the Jews. In addition to his ruthless characterization of the Jews within his account of the gospel, the author makes his case through various rhetorical strategies that his readers ought to disassociate themselves with contemporary Jews who do not believe in Jesus. He crafts this sentiment by prodding his audience's emotions, through logical argumentation, by appealing to their concern for their own community and by cultivating fear, all bolstered by a narrative that validates these negative feelings with both the life of Jesus and the history of the Johannine community.

3.4 – Extrapolating an Historical Circumstance from the Narrative Analysis

Because the meaning behind John's Ἰουδαῖοι is determined by a blend of author-oriented and reader-oriented factors, it is important that we revisit, and perhaps revise some of the historical data presented in chapter 1. In this final section, we will return to the historical Johannine community, equipped with new insights regarding the gospel's narrative that can aid us in our pursuit of an informed explanation to the problem. We will begin by revisiting the ἀποσυνάγωγος theory championed by Martyn and Brown, will subsequently consider some objections to the theory as well as an alternative hypothesis proposed by Reinhartz.

The narrative analysis has demonstrated the author's anti-Jewish agenda in his harsh demonization of the Jews and his encouragement of total disaffiliation with them in his gospel. A naturally puzzling aspect of this reality is the fact that the author himself was a Jew.[219] What kind of circumstances led to the dramatic reinterpretation of the evangelist's Jewish identity, as well as the identity of his fellow Jews who did not profess faith in Jesus? Brown describes a resultant process of the two-level drama that Malina and Rohrbaugh may label as relexicalization, in which the usage of the term Ἰουδαῖοι within the Johannine community was gradually altered in response to their expulsion. He speculates that Johannine Christians might have dispensed with their Jewish identity, despite their Jewish ancestry, because of their expulsion and being told that they could not worship with other Jews.[220] Their epigenetic identity is no longer primarily determined by their Abrahamic bloodline, but by their response to the one who was sent by their heavenly Father. This change in Johannine self-understanding is conveyed in the words of Jesus, who speaks of Ἰουδαῖοι as an adversarial, antagonistic group with whom he has no association. The indeterminate use of Ἰουδαῖοι when compared to the synoptics might be explained by this change in identity; the evangelist typically does not postulate a more specific subsect from within the larger Jewish community because he no longer values his Jewish ancestral heritage. Condemnation of the Pharisees and Sadducees in the synoptic gospels leaves the fundamental Jewish identity intact and only denounces inadequate interpretations within their religious framework. The Johannine Christians, however, see their Jewish heritage as completely devoid of meaning and to be spiritually blind if Jesus is not recognized as its focal point. Their traumatic marginalization at the hands of the Jews near the end of the first century led the Johannine church to define themselves by that which most distinguished them from their oppressors: belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

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[219] Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 370.
[220] Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 41.

Martyn's expulsion theory is appealing for a variety of reasons, including its ability to address the gospel's simultaneous Jewishness and anti-Jewishness by its reference to an intra-Jewish conflict at the turn of the first century that led Johannine Christians to draw sharp dividing lines between themselves and Jews who did not believe in Jesus.[221] It also proves exceedingly helpful in its reinforcement of the two-level reading hermeneutic that seems to provide explanations for many of John's anachronisms and general peculiarities. Reinhartz warns against a potentially problematic motive ungirding the instinct to accept the hypothesis on these grounds: the natural desire of the church to absolve the Fourth Gospel of any anti-Jewish sentiment.[222] Part of the theory's appeal is that it seems to isolate the anti-Jewish polemic within a particular point in history by identifying some kind of Johannine conflict with the Jews that proposes a vague referent for the group, as if such an explanation provides enough context to "explain away" any anti-Jewish interpretations.[223] The problem with this conclusion is that John's gospel expresses a theology that goes beyond the community's predicament at the end of the first century and extends to the Jews more broadly, namely its supersessionism and the author's association of core Jewish ideas with hardened unbelief. Reinhartz references Samuel Sandmel who summarizes the problem well: "one may…explain the historical circumstances, but one cannot deny the existence of a written compilation of clearly expressed anti-Jewish sentiments."[224]

Reinhartz's warning of Christian bias ought to be heeded in any discussion of the historical origins of the gospel's anti-Judaism, but it does not debunk the legitimacy of Martyn's claims. Her main critiques for the expulsion theory involve the contentious evocation of the *Birkat ha-Minim* in his approach as well as the all-encompassing application of the two-level drama in the entirety of the gospel.[225] Without any external evidence linking the gospel to the *Birkat ha-Minim,* it is plausible that the ἀποσυνάγωγος passages can simply be attributed to the evangelist's rhetoric of fear throughout the narrative, like much of the other abhorrent behavior ascribed to the Jews in his account. As for the axiomatic application of Martyn's two-level drama to the gospel, Reinhartz argues that this hermeneutic is not rooted in any external evidence, but in an interpretation of John 9 that paints a picture of the Johannine community and its relationship to the Jews, which is then used to understand the rest of the gospel. She presents two cases, in John 11 and 12, in which entirely different historical scenarios could be deduced regarding the community's association with Jews that completely diverge from Martyn's hypothesis.[226] In other words, the author's anti-Jewish characterization and rhetoric could have easily been expressed in the construction of narrative events that did not necessarily reflect a real historical situation.

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[221] Identifying key differences between Christians and Jews was a major part of the gradual "parting of the ways" that occurred in the first few centuries of the common era. Recognizing heretical views was a key mechanism by which the early Christians shaped their religion. See Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

[222] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 116-117.

[223] Reinhartz, *The Gospel of John and Jewish-Christian Relations*, xvii.

[224] Samuel Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 119; Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 117.

[225] Reinhartz*, Cast Out of the Covenant*, 116-120.

[226] "The story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus implies that known Christ-followers were comforted in their mourning by Jews who did not have prior faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The comments of the Jewish leadership in 12:11 express alarm concerning those who were leaving the community – apparently of their own volition – in order to join the Johannine church." See Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 120.

Reinhartz's alternative hypothesis, which she calls "the propulsion theory",[227] centers upon the radically new identity that John's gospel promises for those who profess belief in Jesus. She argues that the anti-Jewish phenomena of the gospel should not be tied to a particular event like the synagogue expulsion but should be understood as expressing an emerging theology that saw Christ-believers replacing the Jews as God's people. The readers were being encouraged to step into this newfound identity, and much of this process involved setting clear boundaries that delineated them from surrounding peoples.[228] Their central, defining characteristic of belief in Jesus as the Son of God was emphasized by the Jews' outright refusal to believe. A major part of her argument is the idea that John's audience was not Jewish, as claimed by Martyn, and that the readers are being persuaded to "undergo rebirth as the children of God who have usurped the Jews as God's covenantal partners."[229]

The question of John's readership is important in that any theory regarding the historical origins of the gospel would have to conform to a circumstance implied by the audience. Scholars have gravitated towards 20:31 for decades, since it seems plausible that the textual variant for the verb "believe" could be concealing the answer to the gospel's audience. The variants are the present subjunctive πιστεύητε (continue to believe), which would suggest a Christian audience, and the aorist πιστεύσητε (come to believe), which would suggest a Gentile audience. Reinhartz argues that referring to the external evidence in the text's manuscripts is futile, since ancient attestation is somewhat evenly divided.[230] Based on the implications of internal evidence throughout the narrative, she makes the case that John's gospel was a mission-oriented one targeting non-Jews. She references a number of scholars who argue using various grammatical points, but her issue with this approach is that the text remains far too ambiguous given the existing variant.[231] We will examine the work of some of these scholars in an effort to propose a Jewish-Christian audience that is more in line with Martyn's theory.

Scholars dealing with the variant of 20:31 typically return to the work of Riesenfeld, who draws attention to the purpose clause ἵνα that precedes the contested verb and compares it to its other appearances in the Johannine corpus, namely the similar statement of purpose in 1 John 5:13 which reads: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that (ἵνα) you may know that you have eternal life." Riesenfeld's claim is that the Johannine ἵνα is typically used when dealing with the present tense, and that its appearance in 20:31 suggests that John's gospel is written to Christians who he is encouraging to "continue to believe."[232] This is a significant observation that ought to be taken into account but is by no means conclusive given the highly contested relationship between John's gospel and the Johannine epistles.[233]

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[227] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 131.

[228] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 132.

[229] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 135-136.

[230] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 141.
The aorist reading seems to have more widespread attestation but appears later, as its first representation is in Bezae in the 5th century. See Eberhard Nestle, Barbara Aland, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland and Holger Strutwolf, *Novum Testamentum Graece 28th Edition, English Standard Version* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgellschaft; Illinois: Crossway, 2012), 748.

[231] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 141-143.

[232] Brown, *John*, 1056.

[233] Bultmann has argued, along with Haenchen, that the Johannine epistles do not share authorship with the gospel, since they are "directed against different fronts." The gospel is directed against the unbelieving world or "the Jews",

Waetjen approaches the problem differently and considers the *lectio difficilior* in solving the textual variant. He argues that the aorist subjunctive is more difficult to explain given the rest of the gospel's content, and so based on text-critical principles, it is more likely to have been the original reading and redacted later.[234] This claim cooperates nicely with his larger theory of a second edition of the gospel in which features of the narrative were changed to give it a more exhortative purpose, while its earliest version was in fact "evangelistic".[235] This revision would have also altered the other appearances of the verb, namely 6:29 and 19:35, for the same reasons. Waetjen's favoring of the *lectio difficilior* for the sake of his two-edition theory comes at the expense of significant grammatical considerations, however, as argued by Porter who criticizes Waetjen for assuming that the present tense denotes continuous action, while the aorist suggests punctiliar action, that is, occurring at a specific point in time.[236] In short, more recent study of Greek language theory suggests that the aorist does not necessarily imply that the action is punctiliar and the evangelist's use of it cannot adequately establish a distinct moment of belief for the reader. Frank Stagg offers a plethora of examples in the New Testament in which the aorist tense is used but a punctiliar interpretation is simply not possible, given the context.[237] In reality, the aorist has a wide array of usage in ancient Greek and its nature should not be oversimplified. This insight complicates the discussion of 20:31, since an assertion of the aorist as the correct reading would still be insufficient in confirming Waetjen's two-edition theory. In addition to this, his evocation of *lectio difficilior* does not seem particularly relevant in this case and seems to be strictly in the service of bolstering his presupposed assumptions of the origins of John's Gospel.

In 1987, D.A. Carson offered a thorough treatment of the subject in his article exploring the purpose of the Fourth Gospel and whether it can be deduced from 20:31.[238] He makes reference to the grammatical analyses of McGaughy and Goetchius who identify instances in the New Testament in which certain descriptive rules involving the verb ἐστίν are understood to have been circumvented, specifically when Christological claims are professed and Jesus is the anarthrous

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while the epistles seem to be directed against members within the Christian community. See Rudolf Bultmann, "A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles," *Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary of the Bible.* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 1.

[234] Herman C. Waetjen, *The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple: A Work in Two Editions* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2014).
Porter*, John*, 238-239.

[235] Waetjen, *A Work in Two Editions*, 7.

[236] Porter, *John*, 241.

[237] Stagg criticizes many renowned scholars for assuming the use of the aorist tense implies punctiliar or immediate action (Brown, Schnackenburg, Dodd and others). He provides some NT examples in which continual interpretation of the aorist is necessary: 2 Cor. 11:24-25; Jn. 2:20; Lk. 19:13. He quotes Ernest De Witt Burton who succinctly summarizes the universal characterization of the tense: "The constant characteristic of the aorist tense in all its moods, including the participle, is that it represents the action denoted by it indefinitely; i.e., simply as an event, neither on the one hand picturing it in progress, nor on the other affirming the existence of its result. The name indefinite as thus understood is therefore applicable to the tense in all its uses." See Frank Stagg, "Abused Aorist." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no.2 (1972): 222–31;
Ernest D. Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament* Greek (5th ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1903), 16.

[238] D.A. Carson, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:31 Reconsidered." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, no.4 (1987): 639-651.

subject.[239] Typically, "the word or word cluster determined by an article is the subject"[240] and so interpreters like McGaughy have concluded that examples like 20:31 are rare exceptions to this rule. Carson takes the view of Goetchius, however, who does not see these instances as exceptions, but instead shifts his understanding of the subject in these seemingly anomalous situations. The reconstructed translation in light of this interpretation would read: ". . . that you might [come to] believe that *the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus…*" where the focus of the sentence is on identification of who the prophesied Christ is rather than on who the man Jesus is.[241] This change in subject is significant in that it implies the author's purpose is to address the question of who the Messiah is, rather than who Jesus is. Only a Jew would be kept in suspense with regard to the identity of the Messiah, and the author centers his gospel around this fundamentally Jewish question.

Carson's theory provides compelling answers to the question of whether John's audience was Jewish or Gentile, but it does not solve the problem posed by the variant. Carson himself argues that John was intended to convert non-Christian Jewish readers, though the work of Riesenfeld, as well as the historical circumstances constructed by figures like Brown and Martyn make a strong case for the present-subjunctive reading that would suggest the text is written exhortatively to an existing Jewish-Christian community. A more exhaustive analysis of the question is not possible here, but we can conclude that Carson's work pointing to a Jewish audience abides comfortably with the thoroughly Jewish character of the text, and the emphasis on Jesus' messianic status in 20:31 aligns with the community's process of distinguishing themselves from other Jews by emphasizing the very idea that marginalized them.

Taking into consideration all of the aforementioned evidence, Martyn's theory of synagogue expulsion remains the most plausible. Reinhartz is correct to question the veracity of the link between the gospel and the *Birkat ha-Minim,* but the heuristic function of proposing some kind of Jewish-Christian conflict as the source of many of John's idiosyncrasies proves exceedingly helpful in approaching the gospel and the historical accuracy based on internal and external evidence is relatively reliable, even if it is somewhat lacking in its specific details. The gospel of John is a text produced by a Jewish community that experienced persecution and oppression at the hands of their fellow Jews, because of their belief in Jesus as the Messiah. They imbued the gospel tradition that was passed down to them with the trauma they experienced decades after the fact, and the anti-Jewish elements of the text are due in large part to this two-level phenomenon.

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[239] Lane C. McGaughy, *Toward a Descriptive Analysis of EINAI as a Linking Verb in New Testament Greek.* Dissertation Series (Society of Biblical Literature) 6. Missoula: Univ of Montana, Soc of Biblical Literature, 1972; E.V.N. Goetchius, "Toward a Descriptive Analysis of Einai as a Linking Verb in New Testament Greek," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95, no.1 (1976): 147–149.

[240] McGaughy lists 3 rules for the functioning of εἶναι as a linking verb, where every occurrence of the verb can be classified by its accordance to one of these rules – the 5 exceptions he identifies in the NT are Jn. 20:31; 1 Jn 2:22; 4:15; 5:1; 5:5. Goetchius also points out the same phenomenon appearing in Acts 5:42; 18:5; 28, in similar Christological claims. See McGaughy, *EINAI as a Linking Verb.*
Goetchius, "Einai as a Linking Verb."

[241] Carson, "John 20:31 Reconsidered", 644.

Conclusion

Martyn's expulsion theory provides an explanation for John's anti-Judaism, but it does not exonerate it. As mentioned previously, there has been temptation to understand the text as an isolated case of anti-Judaism that can be explained away by its historical context, but it has been made clear that the text has done long-term damage to Jewish-Christian relations by its merciless supersessionism, its characterization of the Jews as hopelessly blind and dangerous and through its encouragement to disaffiliate with those responsible for the death of the Messiah. The problematic nature of these elements of the gospel and the harm they have caused ought not to be ignored simply because those who have committed atrocities in its service have misinterpreted its historical context; its anti-Judaism goes far beyond the author's intention.

It is difficult to ignore the universal and timeless impact of John's supersessionistic ecclesiology. The idea that those who profess faith in Jesus have replaced the Jews as God's people has in no way been limited to Johannine Christianity but has become central to the way Christians understand their place in God's cosmic plan, as well as how they understand the Jews as having been abandoned by God because of their failure to recognize his Messiah. As this idea has been codified into Christian theology over the centuries, there is little doubt that the interpretation of Jews as God's forgotten people, the hardened unbelievers and "benighted Christ-killers destined for perdition"[242] has contributed to the anti-Jewish sentiment that has existed for millennia and has seen loathsome expression in the 20th century.

How Christians should handle a text with such troubling theology is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it should be mentioned that the Fourth Gospel is not wholly invalidated by its problematic elements. John's anti-Judaism can and should be addressed intentionally by the church, though loyalty to the divinely inspired status of the text often complicates such endeavors. There is a tendency amongst Christians to favor explanations that ethically absolve their sacred texts in some way, such as attributing John's anti-Judaism to something like a misunderstanding or a purely circumstantial phenomenon, which allows readers to avoid wrestling with the flagrant issue that plagues their gospel. Unfortunately, providing a justification that may satisfy a segment of the church that has no anti-Semitic inclination does not alleviate the problem and it leaves the text highly susceptible to exploitation by those with more heinous intentions. If the anti-Jewish problem of John is not addressed, it will remain a dangerous tool to be used when dormant anti-Semitism bubbles to the surface of public discourse. Christians have a duty to denounce aspects of John's gospel that leave the door open for such a shameful application of their faith.

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[242] Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 164.

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