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GENRE BENDING IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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Contemporary Johannine scholarship displays remarkable methodological diversity. There remain historical critics, interested in the ways in which texts such as John are embedded within, reflect the values of, and interact with the context of the ancient world. Some attend to the structural features of ancient society that provide the framework within which the Gospel might have meaning.¹ Others wrestle with the text's diachronic development.² Some scholars, such as our colleagues who are inaugurating a consultation on "Jesus, John, and History," pursue the historical-critical quest to what other colleagues would judge to be a Quixotic end. Still others worry not so much about the historical Jesus lying behind the text as about a sectarian community, defining itself through the text, against a dominant group.³

Presidential Address delivered at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Denver, Colorado.

¹ For a comprehensive application of social sciences models to the Gospel, see Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 1998).

² Important work includes Robert Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 11; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); idem, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel* (Studies in the New Testament and its World; Edinburgh: T & T Clark; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989); Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Earliest Version of John's Gospel: Recovering the Gospel of Signs* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1989); Thomas L. Brodie, *The Quest for the Origin of John's Gospel: A Source-Oriented Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). For a judicious but skeptical survey of this line of research, see Gilbert van Belle, *The Sign Source in the Fourth Gospel: Historical Survey and Critical Evaluation of the Semeia Hypothesis* (BETL; Leuven: Peeters, 1994).

³ A seminal article pursuing this line of investigation is Wayne Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72, reprinted in *The Interpretation of John*

Some of our colleagues thus do business as usual, or as it has usually been done for the last two hundred years, with, of course, ever greater methodological sophistication. Others say that there may be a different and perhaps better way to analyze the genius of the text. Some are interested in how the Gospel in its final form works in various liberating or oppressive ways, negatively, to ground Christian anti-Judaism,⁴ to valorize and yet marginalize women,⁵ or positively, to ground an egalitarian community striving for the liberation of its members.⁶ At least since the work of Alan Culpepper,⁷ Johannine scholars, like their counterparts working on other early Christian narratives, have focused their attention on the literary dynamics of the Gospel, asking how its symbolism

(ed. John Ashton; London: SPCK; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 141–73. More recently, see Jerome Neyrey, S.J., *An Ideology of Revolt: John's Christology in Social-Science Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988). For a review of the state of Johannine scholarship with sectarianism as a leitmotif, see John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).

⁴ For a critical assessment of the Gospel, see Maurice Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996). Many scholars have wrestled with the issue of the Johannine attitude toward the Jews. See also Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Johannine 'Jews': A Critical Survey," *NTS* 28 (1981–82): 33–60; R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of John and the Jews," *RevExp* 84 (1987): 273–88; James H. Charlesworth, "Judaism and the Gospel of John," in *Jews and Christians: Exploring the Past, Present, and Future* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; Shared Ground among Jews and Christians 1; New York: Crossroad, 1990), 76–99; Adele Reinhartz, "The Johannine Community and its Jewish Neighbors: A Reappraisal," in *What is John?* Vol. 2, *Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia; SBLSymS 7; Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), 111–38; John Ashton, "The Identity and Function of the Ἰουδαῖοι in the Fourth Gospel," *NovT* 27 (1985): 40–75, reprinted in David E. Orton, *The Composition of John's Gospel: Selected Studies from Novum Testamentum* (Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 1999), 215–50; most recently, see *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel: Papers of the Leuven Colloquium, 2000* (ed R. Bieringer, D. Pollefeyt, and F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville; Jewish and Christian Heritage Series 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001).

⁵ For interesting feminist readings of the Gospel, see Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, "Love and Footwashing: John 13.1–20 and Luke 7.36–50 Read Intertextually," *BibInt* 2 (1994): 190–206; eadem, "Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala—Two Female Characters in the Johannine Passion Narrative: A Feminist, Narrative-Critical Reader Response," *NTS* 41 (1995): 564–86; eadem, "How Can This Be (John 3:9)," in *What is John?* Vol. 2, ed. Segovia, 19–41; Lyn M. Bechtel, "A Symbolic Level of Meaning: John 2.1–11 (The Marriage in Cana)," in *A Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament* (ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 241–55; and Adeline Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998).

⁶ David K. Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988); and Richard J. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992).

⁷ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (FF; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

functions,⁸ how it develops its characters,⁹ works its ironic ways,¹⁰ uses narrative rhetorically,¹¹ and spins out its complex, often dramatic,¹² plot.¹³ Some colleagues have moved beyond formal analysis to a more playful, yet often insightful, engagement with the text and with the lives of its interpreters, offer-

⁸ Gale Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1989); and Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

⁹ See J. A. du Rand, "The Characterization of Jesus as Depicted in the Narrative of the Fourth Gospel," *Neot* 19 (1985): 18–36; idem, "Plot and Point of View in the Gospel of John," in *A South African Perspective on the New Testament* (ed. J. H. Petzer, P. J. Haring; Leiden: Brill, 1986), 149–69; Norman R. Petersen, *The Gospel of John and the Sociology of Light: Language and Characterization in the Fourth Gospel* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993); Jeffrey Staley, "Stumbling in the Dark, Reaching for the Light: Reading Character in John 5 and 9," *Semeia* 53 (1991): 55–80; Marianne Meye Thompson, "'God's Voice You Have Never Heard, God's Form You Have Never Seen': The Characterization of God in the Gospel of John," *Semeia* 53 (1993): 177–204; David R. Beck, "The Narrative Function of Anonymity in Fourth Gospel Characterization," *Semeia* 53 (1993): 143–58; idem, *The Discipleship Paradigm: Readers and Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Biblical Interpretation Series 27; Leiden: Brill, 1997).

¹⁰ Herbert Leroy, *Rätsel und Missverständnis: Ein Beitrag zur Formgeschichte des Johannes-evangeliums* (BBB 30; Bonn: Hanstein, 1968); George W. MacRae, "Theology and Irony in the Fourth Gospel," in *The Word in the World: Essays in Honour of F. L. Moriarty* (ed. Richard J. Clifford and George W. MacRae; Cambridge, MA: Weston College, 1973), 83–96, reprinted in *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (ed. Mark W. G. Stibbe; NTS 17; Leiden/New York/Cologne: Brill, 1993), 103–13; Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985); Gail O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); Eugene Botha, "The Case of Johannine Irony Reopened I: The Problematic Current Situation," *Neot* 25 (1991): 209–20; idem, "The Case of Johannine Irony Reopened II: Suggestions, Alternative Approaches," *Neot* 25 (1991): 221–32; R. Alan Culpepper, "Reading Johannine Irony," in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Clifton Black; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 193–207.

¹¹ Wilhelm Wuellner, "Rhetorical Criticism and Its Theory in Culture-Critical Perspective: The Narrative Rhetoric of John 11," in *Text and Interpretation: New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament* (ed. P. J. Martin and J. H. Petzer; NTS 15; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 171–85; D. M. H. Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 51; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

¹² "Dramatic" is a word often used loosely of episodes in the Gospel. Some recent critics take the category more seriously; see Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 73; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and idem, *John* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

¹³ Narrative-critical concerns characterize the work of Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading John 1–4* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); idem, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5–12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); idem, *Glory Not Dishonor: Reading John 13–20* (21) (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); and, his commentary, *John* (SP 4; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998).

ing a reading of John among the missions of the Southwest¹⁴ or in the places where bodies are dissected and built, from the butcher shops of Limerick to the treadmills of God's gym.¹⁵ The Fourth Gospel, in other words, is a microcosm of the discipline of NT studies, itself but a segment of the larger world of humanistic scholarship.

It would be difficult to diminish the cacophony of competing voices, even if it were desirable. Yet there might be some interesting ways of encouraging new avenues of fruitful dialogue among them. Let me try, ever so briefly, to do so, taking a clue from one of the oldest interpretive strategies of modern NT study, a version of form criticism.

The attempt to analyze the formal features and generic affinities of the Fourth Gospel in general and its various discourse materials in particular has always encountered a certain degree of frustration.¹⁶ The enterprise is not quite what it is in the Synoptic Gospels. The forms seem to be more fluid; the generic markers less clear-cut. Nonetheless, some formal and generic judgments are not particularly controversial. Formally, the Fourth Gospel as a whole combines narratives and dialogue or discourse, perhaps juxtaposed in an odd sort of way, when compared with the Synoptics. The narratives offer a selection of deeds of Jesus, perhaps prepackaged in a miracle catena or proto-Gospel,¹⁷ perhaps derived directly from the Synoptics¹⁸ or at least in part from oral tradition.¹⁹ However attenuated or refined, the ghost of Bultmann's Signs

¹⁴ Jeffrey L. Staley, *Reading with a Passion: Rhetoric, Autobiography, and the American West in the Gospel of John* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

¹⁵ Stephen Moore, *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York/London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁶ Much of the earlier scholarship on the subject was usefully surveyed by Johannes Beutler, "Literarische Gattungen im Johannesevangelium: Ein Forschungsbericht 1919–1980," *ANRW* 2.25.3 (1985): 2506–68.

¹⁷ See n. 2 above.

¹⁸ For a concise history of the question and the recent revival of the discussion of John and the Synoptics, see D. Moody Smith, *John Among the Gospels: The Relationship in Twentieth-Century Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). He has made other important contributions to the discussion in "John and the Synoptics in Light of the Problem of Faith and History," in *Faith and History: Essays in Honor of Paul W. Meyer* (ed. John T. Carroll, Charles H. Cosgrove, E. Elizabeth Johnson; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 74–89; idem, "The Problem of John and the Synoptics in Light of the Relation between Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels," in *John and the Synoptics* (ed. Adelbert Denaux; BETL 101; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 147–62; idem, "John and the Synoptics and the Question of Gospel Genre," in *The Four Gospels, 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (ed. F. van Segbroeck, Christopher M. Tuckett, Gilbert van Belle, and J. Verheyden; BETL 100; 3 vols.; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1992), 3:1783–97; and idem, "Historical Issues and the Problem of John and the Synoptics," in *From Jesus to John: Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology in Honour of Marinus de Jonge* (ed. Martinus C. de Boer; JSNTSup; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 252–67.

¹⁹ Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadel-

Source lives on as one major way of thinking about the Gospel. Particular narratives do show distinctive Johannine touches,²⁰ but a healing remains a healing, a fish story remains a fish story, at least on the surface. It would be of interest to explore how narrative forms are bent in the Gospel, but this essay focuses primarily on the more intractable discourse material.

The other half of Bultmann's famous division of the Fourth Gospel never fared quite as well as did his hypothesis of a Signs Source. Bultmann's notion that the Fourth Gospel's lengthy discourses could be considered representatives of a genre of Revealer Discourses broke down rather rapidly in the face of the diversity of the Gospel's discourse material.²¹ Proposals have been made about the generic affinities of some of the elements of the discourses, and there are some useful parallels to be found both in Jewish apocalyptic texts and in the *mélange* of literary forms—dare we call them Gnostic?²²—from the Nag Hammadi collection. Yet by and large the dialogue and discourse materials in the Gospel are just too complex to be reduced to a single formal type.

It may be tempting to agree with the well-known characterization by scholars such as Raymond Brown that the Johannine discourses consist of a long tradition of homiletic reflection on and rereading of Jesus traditions.²³ However they came to be, they now display both common overarching patterns and a great deal of particular diversity. The division by C. H. Dodd of the

phia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 244–72. Note also his discussion (pp. 205–16) of P. Edgerton 2. Equally problematic is the relationship of the Fourth Gospel to sayings traditions, such as the *Gospel of Thomas* or Q. See Barnabas Lindars, "Discourse and Tradition: The Use of the Sayings of Jesus in the Discourses of the Fourth Gospel," *JSNT* 13 (1981): 83–101, reprinted in *The Johannine Writings: A Sheffield Reader* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 13–30; Harold W. Attridge, "'Seeking' and 'Asking' in Q, Thomas, and John," in *From Quest to Q: Festschrift James M. Robinson* (ed. Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, Kristin de Troyer, and Marvin W. Meyer; BETL 146; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 295–302.

²⁰ E.g., Gail O'Day, "John 6:15–21: Jesus Walking on Water as Narrative Embodiment of Johannine Christology," in *Critical Readings of John 6* (ed. R. Alan Culpepper; Biblical Interpretation Series 22; Leiden/ New York/Cologne: Brill, 1997), 149–60.

²¹ The theory received some development from Heinz Becker, *Die Reden des Johannesevangeliums und der Stil der gnostischen Offenbarungsreden* (FRLANT n.F. 50; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956).

²² Difficulties in the use of the category have been highlighted by Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

²³ For Brown's influential construction of the five-stage development of the Gospel, see his commentary, Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (2 vols.; AB 29, 29a; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966, 1970), 1:xxxiv–xl, and idem, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (Paramus, NJ: Paulist/Newman, 1979). For the notion of "rereading" of the material in the Gospel, see Jean Zumstein, "Der Prozess der Relecture in der johanneischen Literatur," *NTS* 42 (1966): 394–411.

Gospel into “narratives,” “dialogues,” and “monologues” illustrates the phenomenon and the problem. Much of the Gospel’s discourse material emerges from or within dramatic encounters, either with women, such as Jesus’ mother, the Samaritan, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, or with men such as Nathanael, Nicodemus, a paralytic, the disciples, Jesus’ brothers, a blind man, Pilate, Thomas, and finally,²⁴ Peter. There is, then, at least a certain formal similarity that marks all of these episodes, a stylistic touch that betrays perhaps a guiding literary hand.²⁵ These “encounter discourses,” where a single interlocutor is present for at least a part of the episode,²⁶ constitute one important subset of the discourse material. A slightly different form of “encounter discourse” is found in the polemical controversies with the Pharisees and the *Judaioi*.²⁷

Dialogic discourse, with either friendly or, more often, hostile interlocutors, is common in the Gospels. What Dodd called “monologues,” which usually make solemn declarations of some sort, are equally common and often emerge from a dialogic situation.²⁸ Some are brief, such as the monologues of 3:14–21 and 31–36. As the Gospel progresses, Jesus speaks more at length, often saying things about himself, as in the declarations concerning bread, water, and light in chs. 6–8 and the shepherd discourse of ch. 10. The largest block of nondialogic discourse material resides in the last supper or farewell discourses, although they too begin, in ch. 14, with at least some minimal dialogic elements.²⁹ In any case there are superficial formal elements that seem to organize discourse materials.

Despite the superficial unity of the subsets of discourse, the relevant chapters also contain a variety of generic markers. To name but a few:

²⁴ For most commentators, ch. 21 appears to be a redactional appendix, perhaps written after the death of the Beloved Disciple, to whom the text is ascribed. Yet the function of the chapter and its reference to the special Disciple need further consideration.

²⁵ The stylistic uniformity of the Gospel has been recognized since the work of Eugen Ruckstuhl, *Die literarische Einheit des Johannesevangeliums: Der gegenwärtige Stand der einschlägigen Forschungen* (SF n.F. 3; Freiburg, Schw.: Universitätsverlag, 1951; 2d ed. NTOA 5; Freiburg, Schw.: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987).

²⁶ The interlocutor often fades fast, as does Nicodemus after 3:9; although he appears again in 7:50 and 19:39.

²⁷ Note the controversial interventions at 5:9b–16; 7:10–36; 8:21–59; 10:19–39.

²⁸ Thus 3:14–21 consists of a monologue on judgment and grace; 3:31–36, a monologue on accepting testimony, which ends in a saying on judgment; 5:17–47 consists of a monologic defensive discourse; 6:30–58, an exegetical monologue with some interruptions in vv. 30–31, 41, 52; 7:37–39, a solemn proclamation on last day of festival and the significance of “water”; 8:12–20, a similar proclamation on the significance of Jesus as “light.” Each follows some portion of dialogue. The list could be extended.

²⁹ Disciples intervene in 14:5, 8, 22, then fall silent. They are heard from again near the end of the discourse (16:17, 18, 29–30).

- The nocturnal dialogue between Jesus and the religious seeker Nicodemus offers perhaps one of the strongest comparisons with the dialogic quests of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, on which C. H. Dodd heavily relied for his reading of the Fourth Gospel.³⁰

- The dialogue with the woman at the well, as many commentators have noted, evokes a type scene, rich with sexual innuendo, of a patriarch encountering his future bride.³¹

- The speech of Jesus in ch. 5 on his and the Father's work, which perhaps has embedded a similitude of a youthful apprentice watching his father work,³² displays many of the hallmarks of a formal forensic discourse as defined in Greek rhetorical theory.³³ In that speech, Jesus defends himself against a pair of charges, that he broke the Sabbath and, more ominously, that he blasphemed. After making an initial defense (5:19–30), Jesus also makes standard forensic moves (5:31–40) in discussing the witnesses who can testify on his behalf. His final ploy of blaming his accusers (5:40–44) and contrasting them with himself is also a move that Cicero and Quintilian would recognize in a good defense lawyer.

- The Bread of Life discourse in John 6, as Peder Borgen persuasively argued,³⁴ looks every bit like a homiletic midrash, as it plays with the wording of a citation from the Psalms and finds in the biblical text a new meaning applicable to the present reality of the homilist's audience.

- The encounter with the hostile *Judaioi* in ch. 8 echoes the themes of the forensic oratory of ch. 5,³⁵ but slips quickly into an invective mode most at home in the most extreme polemical political oratory.

- Chapter 10 seems to offer a parable, whose subject matter at least is familiar from traditional parabolic speech, both in the biblical tradition (see

³⁰ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953, 1968).

³¹ See Jerome Neyrey, S.J., "Jacob Traditions and the Interpretation of John 4:10–26," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 436–37; Lyle Eslinger, "The Wooing of the Woman at the Well," *Literature and Theology* 1 (1987): 167–83, reprinted in *Gospel of John as Literature*, ed. Stibbe, 165–82; from a more general theoretical perspective, Jo-Ann A. Brant, "Husband Hunting: Characterization and Narrative Art in the Gospel of John," *BibInt* 4 (1996): 205–23.

³² C. H. Dodd, "A Hidden Parable in the Fourth Gospel," in idem, *More New Testament Studies* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1968), 30–40.

³³ See my treatment of John 5 in the *Proceedings of the Lund Conference on Rhetorical Argument and the New Testament* (forthcoming).

³⁴ Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (NovTSup 10; 2d ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1981).

³⁵ See Jerome Neyrey, S.J., "Jesus the Judge: Forensic Process in John 8:21–59," *Bib* 68 (1987): 509–42.

2 Sam 12:1–6; Ezek 34) and from the tradition of Jesus' teaching (Matt 18:12–14; Luke 15:3–7).

• The generic affinities of the farewell discourses have perplexed interpreters. Without adjudicating among the competing theories, one may simply note some of the ways in which they have been analyzed: as a farewell discourse or testament, like Deuteronomy or the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*,³⁶ as a symposium, like a long list of classical exemplars inspired by Plato's famous drinking party;³⁷ or as a piece of consolation literature.³⁸ The discourses end with a prayer in ch. 17.³⁹

Despite some organizational similarities and a uniform linguistic tone, Johannine discourses are generically quite diverse, with parallels to a wide range of literary patterns and generic forms. The Gospel seems to delight in that diversity, in what Hebrews might call the "multiple and manifold" ways

³⁶ For recent work on the last supper discourses in general, see Johannes Beutler, *Habt keine Angst: Die erst Johanneische Abschiedsrede (Joh 14)* (SBS 116; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1984); Udo Schnelle, "Die Abschiedsreden im Johannesevangelium," *ZNW* 80 (1989): 64–79; William S. Kurz, *Farewell Addresses in the New Testament* (Zacchaeus Studies, NT; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990); Fernando F. Segovia, *Farewell of the Word: The Johannine Call to Abide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Ernst Bammel, "The Farewell Discourse of the Evangelist John and Its Jewish Heritage," *TynBul* 44 (1993): 103–16; Johannes Neugebauer, *Die eschatologischen Aussagen in den johanneischen Abschiedsreden* (BWANT 140; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994); Andreas Dettwiler, *Die Gegenwart des Erhöhten: Eine exegetische Studie zu den johanneischen Abschiedsreden (Joh 13,31–16,33) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung ihres Relecturecharakters* (FRLANT 169; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995); D. F. Tolmie, *Jesus' Farewell to the Disciples: John 12:1–17:26 in Narratological Perspective* (Biblical Interpretation Series 12; Leiden/New York/Cologne: Brill, 1995); Wayne Brouwer, *The Literary Development of John 13–17: A Chiasmic Reading* (SBLDS 182; Atlanta: SBL, 2000). A useful review of much of this literature is Hans-Josef Klauck, "Der Weggang Jesu: Neue Arbeiten zu Joh 13–17," *BZ* 40 (1996): 236–50.

³⁷ Like that of Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*, Jesus' conversation with his disciples focuses on the theme of love and interprets the action that follows. Alternatively, for affinities with Plato's *Phaedo*, see Francis J. Moloney, "The Function of John 13–17 within the Johannine Narrative," in "What is John?" Vol. 2, ed. Segovia, 43–66.

³⁸ For the discourses as consolation, see Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ihr werdet mich sehen: Die Abschiedsworte Jesu nach Joh 13–17* (Freiburg/Basel/Vienna: Herder, 1985). For treatments of the genre involved in these discourses, see Segovia, *Farewell*, 6–7; and Martin Winter, *Das Vermächtnis Jesu und die Abschiedsworte der Väter: Gattungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung der Vermächtnisrede im Blick auf Joh 13–17* (FRLANT 161; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994). See also William S. Kurz, "Luke 22:14–38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Farewell Addresses," *JBL* 104 (1985): 251–68. A Yale dissertation currently under way, by George Parsenos, will treat particularly the play on generic forms within the discourses.

³⁹ Most recently, see Francis J. Moloney, "To Make God Known: A Reading of John 17:1–26," *Salm* 59 (1997): 463–89; Segovia, "Inclusion and Exclusion in John 17: An Intercultural Reading," in "What is John?" Vol. 2, ed. Segovia, 183–209.

that words work in order to express the significance of the Word. To use the categories of some of our colleagues who work with social-science models, the Word is honored by the manifold variety of the words used to express it, words that charm, words that challenge, words that evoke, and words that provoke.

That analysis all seems fitting and proper, hardly worth the trip to Denver, but not objectionable. It seems right, that is, until one looks again at the various genres that seem to be at play in the Gospel. In many cases where it is possible to identify significant generic parallels, and therefore to presume that the form in question generates regular expectations, the reader encounters something quite odd about the way in which the generic conventions seem to work.

The dramatic encounters of the first chapter between Jesus and his initial disciples perform several important functions, introducing the reader to the “lamb of God” (1:36), the clairvoyant Jesus, who receives a number of titles of honor. Formally, however, the two pericopes, John 1:35–42 and 43–51 are *chreiai*, elaborate *chreiai* perhaps, but classical *chreiai*.⁴⁰ Each ends with a striking pronouncement of Jesus. The first concludes with the declaration that Simon, son of John, is now to be called Cephas, translated for us as Peter (1:42). The second ends with the solemn promise, introduced with the first double “Amen,” that the disciples would see the heavens opened and accessible on an angelic escalator.

Pronouncement stories deliver punch lines that bring the story to a dramatic conclusion and may have import for the larger narrative, such as Mark’s declaration that the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath (2:28). The renaming of Simon foreshadows his important role in what follows, where he will often play the stodgy straight man to the Beloved Disciple.⁴¹ But what of the declaration about the Son of Man? It certainly brings to a conclusion the roster of messianic titles, but it does so on a portentous and ambiguous note. Messiah, Son of God, King of Israel, all may be true, but they do not compare to the reality of angel-bearing Son of Man! How does the Son of Man function as Jacob’s ladder, and when will the disciples have this curious vision? Answers to those questions probably involve some hypothesis about the complex intertextual character of this Son of Man saying. Is John evoking Dan 7:13 and its early Christian derivatives?⁴² If so, does he mean his readers to assume an eschatological temporal

⁴⁰ See Ronald Hock and Edward O’Neil, *The Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).

⁴¹ The two appear in tandem in 13:21–26; 20:3–10; 21:7.

⁴² Mark 13:26; 14:62 and *parr.* On the Johannine treatment of the title, see Francis J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man* (Biblioteca di scienze religiose 14; 2d ed.; Rome: LAS, 1978); Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man in the Gospel of John* (JSNTSup 56; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991). For history of the discussion of the Son of Man in general, see Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation* (SNTSMS 107; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

referent or to be surprised at its absence? How does the juxtaposition with Gen 28:12 modify an evocation of Daniel? Perhaps by substituting notions of access for one of judgment? Where the conclusion of a traditional chreia brings stark clarity and closure, the ending of this chreia introduces only questions. Apophthegmatic complexity bends a genre.

Next, consider Nicodemus, the questing seeker, the maladroit interlocutor, who, like his counterparts elsewhere in the Gospel just does not understand what this birth *ἄνωθεν* is all about. Inquiry ends as disclosure begins and Jesus tells of the one who can really discuss about birth *ἄνωθεν*, namely, the “man from heaven.” At 3:13 the dialogue with Nicodemus seems to reach a certain closure, with a rather solemn pronouncement about the Son of Man. But as dialogue slips into monologue, the simple declaration becomes more complex. The Son of Man is likened to a biblical serpent (3:16), who provides healing but also an occasion for self-judgment (3:17–20), which is yet somehow determined by God (3:21). Thematic complexity accompanies the altered form. The flow is seamless, and the transition from the declaration about the Son of Man in v. 13 to what follows makes, in a larger way, the same move made in the apophthegm of 1:51. Like that verse, where the image of Jacob’s ladder seemed to resignify the title Son of Man, the discourse in ch. 3 introduces new complexity, by associating the image of the healing serpent with the same title. Expectations about the function of a revelatory genre have not yet been disappointed. The juxtaposition yields a new form of revelation, perhaps, in the football-stadium theology of John 3:16. Yet that revelation, that God so loved the world, is immediately rendered problematic by the riddles about judgment and hints of a notion of election. A revelatory genre has been bent, and the bending seems to move in the same direction as the bent chreia of John 1.

One might entertain the hypothesis that the formal jumble or bent genre results from the layering of successive redactional elements, each designed to make its own discrete theological point. It is indeed possible that literarily insensitive redactors made a mess of the Beloved Disciple’s work, but in the case of John 3:17–21, it is noteworthy that the issue of judgment is intimately tied up with traditions about the Son of Man, the title that appears in v. 13. The tensions within the pericope are generated by the connotations of its core image.

There is, finally, something odd about the way in which Jesus’ comments in 3:17–21 do not simply correct the christological revelation of 3:13 and 16 with further eschatological and soteriological reflections. These reflections introduce a set of considerations about divine grace or election that seem to render problematic the declaration of God’s universal salvific will which initially seems to be at the heart of the revelation. The whole revelator discourse in this case does a very good job not of revealing but of raising questions. John 3 is

a paradigmatic revealer discourse, yet no sooner does it make a dramatic revelation than it points to ambiguities and tensions within the terms of that revelation. A revelatory genre is bent.

Next consider the encounter of Jesus and the Samaritan woman with its evocation of the paradigmatic quest for a mate. The eroticism implicit in the genre of the story is transformed in this encounter between Jesus and the unnamed woman. The woman, who already had had more than her share of marital experiences (4:18), is no longer the object of desire, but the one who conceives of a desire for deeper acquaintance with Jesus. In learning to ask about the “living water” (4:15), she models a questing discipleship to parallel that of Nicodemus. So, an erotic tale may have become a vehicle for moral example, an act of genre bending worthy of a reader of the *Song of Songs*. Yet the most interesting twist on the expectations generated by the genre affects not the woman, but Jesus. Jesus, who appears initially in the formal position of the suitor, quickly becomes the one to be courted and sought. For a while he seems to be an incarnate image of Aristotle’s god, or Plato’s Socrates of the *Symposium*, one who moves by being desired. In the process, an erotic tale becomes a vehicle for suggesting a christological confession. Yet the genre twists again before story and dialogue end. The comments on the encounter that Jesus makes to his disciples (4:31–38) redefine his role once more, from lover or beloved to worker, seeking to do the will of the one who sent him. A story begins in eros and ends in mission.

The next example is the more monologic apology of John 5:19–47, which, as I have suggested, makes many of the moves of a set piece of forensic rhetoric. Yet throughout those moves there are unconventional, and highly ironic, twists. Part of Jesus’ task is to defend himself against a charge of blasphemy (John 5:18). He seemingly does so by subordinating himself to the Father, a point that some commentators take to be the main thrust of the apology.⁴³ Yet the details of Jesus’ defense cut oddly against the grain of the defensive proposition that he initially seems to argue. Both to claim precedent for working on the Sabbath and to show that he does not make himself equal to God, Jesus argues that he was simply following the example of his Father’s action. Yet what Jesus invokes is not the precedent of God’s showering his blessings on just and unjust alike, a precedent that Jesus cites in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:45). John’s Jesus invokes a vision of the Father’s action as his model, the action of giving life and raising from the dead (John 5:19–21). To have such a vision and to be in a position to be honored as the Father is honored (5:23) are characteristics that seem rather to support the truth of the oppo-

⁴³ The reading by Ernst Haenchen tends in this direction (*A Commentary on the Gospel of John* [Hermeneia; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984], 1:249–51).

nents' reading of Jesus' claim. The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple is not proto-Sabellian, but its subtle Christology is a high one indeed. At the level of genre, this all seems to be an apologetic defense with a rather emphatic wink.

If the reader senses an ironic use of apologetic conventions at the beginning of the discourse, that sense becomes even greater in the second half of the speech, when Jesus moves on, still in good forensic fashion, to detail the witnesses on his behalf. And abundant witnesses there are: John the Baptist, the scriptures, the Father who speaks through them, all testifying to Jesus. While the form is suitable and utilizes regular forensic considerations, the message it finally delivers is distinctly odd, for in order to accept those witnesses, the jury has to accept Jesus' own claim that the witnesses are indeed speaking about him. Thus a forensic discourse first defends Jesus by reinforcing the charge against him and then supports its defense by undercutting the independent value of the witnesses it calls! For the Fourth Gospel there may be many witnesses that testify to what Jesus is about, but there is only one witness who really counts. As that point is scored, another genre is bent.

That there is a formal problem with the Bread of Life discourse, John 6:30–58, was recognized long before Peder Borgen demonstrated its generic affinities with homiletic midrash. The shift at 6:51 to what appears to be more graphic language about eating the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking his blood, seems to be *prima facie* evidence of an ecclesiastical redactor's hand, destroying the beautifully proto-Zwinglian sapiential Bread of Life discourse with an allusion to magically tinged proto-Catholic sacramentalism.⁴⁴ A Bread of Life discourse fallen from the grace of faith into a graceless piety of works does not seem to be an effective arrow in the fourth evangelist's quiver. Of course, not all commentators have made the same judgment. Borgen, for instance, argued that 6:51–58 was of a piece with what precedes, despite the formal redundancy of these verses.⁴⁵ Others, such as Paul Anderson, have argued for the coherence of the discourse as an example of dialectic theology.⁴⁶

To analyze this problem in literary terms is again to find a bent genre. The thrust of the homiletic midrash in a sapiential key is to actualize the scripture, to find how it points to a reality contemporary with that of the midrashist's audi-

⁴⁴ For the history of the discussion of the unity of the chapter, see Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (WUNT 2.77; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995).

⁴⁵ In Borgen's analysis, each segment of the discourse interprets one element of the Ps 78:24, cited in John 6:31. But the verb "to eat" has already received an interpretation in John 6:44–47. The new interpretation of "eating" in vv. 53–58 would seem to be otiose. For a critique of Borgen on form-critical grounds, see Georg Richter, "Zur Formgeschichte und literarischen Einheit von Joh 6,31–58," in idem, *Studien zum Johannesevangelium* (BU 13; Regensburg: Pustet, 1977), 88–119.

⁴⁶ See n. 44. For an earlier version of the notion, see also C. K. Barrett, "The Dialectical Theology of St. John," in idem, *New Testament Essays* (London: SPCK, 1972), 49–69.

ence. So far, so good—and, insofar as Jesus is an object of faith—so far, so unproblematic. One could believe in Jesus as the “Bread from Heaven” who teaches wisdom in some form. This seems to be precisely the move made in John 6:45, where “eating” the bread from heaven is equated, through the use of Isa 54:13, with being “taught by God,” which is equated via solemn pronouncement in 6:47 with belief in Jesus. Jesus’ teaching, which reveals the Father (6:46), makes lofty claims, but it is still teaching, in the same genre as other purveyors of wisdom. One might view the claim as grandiose or pretentious, but not necessarily offensive.

The concluding lines of the discourse (6:51–58) insist, to the contrary, that the actualization of the scriptural message is necessarily offensive. The midrash at this point does not allure its hearers to the latest avatar of Lady Wisdom, but it drives even supposed intimates of Jesus away. One need not resolve all the difficulties of the final portion of the Bread of Life discourse to see its function in the economy of the chapter. The language of eating flesh and drinking blood is deliberately provocative. It finally confronts not only the characters in the text, but the hearer of the Gospel with the stark reality of the cross and perhaps also with the memory of the cross in the meal that Jesus’ followers share. Such is not a confrontation for which the allegorical method of the midrash was designed, but the confrontation with the crucified Son of Man is precisely what the Gospel as a whole desperately strives to achieve. As the discourse reaches its climax, another genre is bent.

Chapter 10 presents one of two passages that have often been styled Johannine “parables,” the other being the vine and the branches of ch. 15. The Gospel acknowledges that Jesus uses figurative speech in these cases and labels them *παροιμίας*.⁴⁷ But what kind of figurative speech is it? The oddities of the use of shepherd imagery in the chapter have long been noted.⁴⁸ Anyone who teaches the Fourth Gospel is likely to recall the comment of Dodd that the chapter contains “the wreckage of two parables fused into one, the fusion having partly destroyed the original form of both.”⁴⁹ The two might be characterized as, on the one hand, a similitude about a sheepfold and the thieves who try

⁴⁷ John 10:6 and 16:25, 29, the only places in the NT where the word is used.

⁴⁸ For several treatments of the pericope, see A. J. Simonis, *Die Hirtenrede im Johannes-Evangelium: Versuch einer Analyse von Johannes 10,1–18 nach Entstehung, Hintergrund und Inhalt* (AnBib 29; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1967); Johannes Beutler and Robert Fortna, *The Shepherd Discourse in John 10 and Its Context* (SNTSMS 67; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Robert Kysar, “Johannine Metaphor—Meaning and Function: A Literary Case Study of John 10:1–18,” *Semeia* 53 (1991): 81–111.

⁴⁹ C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 363, cited by Robert Kysar (“Johannine Metaphor—Meaning and Function”), who offers a useful discussion of other approaches to the pericope.

to sneak into it, and, on the other, a story about a shepherd who dies defending his sheep.

Dodd's observation is apt. Even though since his day interpreters have come to appreciate the subtlety and polyvalence of Jesus' parables,⁵⁰ there is nothing quite like the shepherd imagery among them. Shepherd imagery appears, of course, in Matt 18:12–14, where it conveys Matthew's message of warning to those who would shepherd the "little ones," and Luke 15:3–7, which celebrates repentance as a cardinal virtue. Added layers of meaning in both pericopes may derive from the traditional connotations of shepherds in the biblical tradition. Similar imagery in John, perhaps with added connotations derived from the *kriophoros* image in Hellenistic and Roman art,⁵¹ acquires a christological focus. Perhaps the allegorizing impulse in the style of parabolic interpretation evident in the cases of the sower in Mark 4:3–20 or the husbandmen in Matt 21:33–41 has provided our evangelist with tools for his manipulation of the parabolic imagery. Yet, in comparison with what has come before, the parabolic form that confronts us in John 10 is radically different.

Both Renoir and Picasso created paintings, and did so using similar materials, in the same general cultural setting within a few years of one another, but the former's *Après le bain* (of 1910) and the latter's *Sitting Nude* (of 1908) display radically different visions of how to paint the female form. There is as much difference between John's Noble Shepherd, to use Jerry Neyrey's label for the passage,⁵² and the searching shepherd of Matthew and Luke as there is between impressionism and cubism. The Fourth Gospel has transformed an already flexible and subtle genre into something at once complex and yet simple. A pastoral image yields two contrasting readings. Different elements of the pastoral image, the gate and the one who passes through it, point beyond the sheepstead, in a fairly transparent way, to one referent, the Noble Shepherd, who calls to his own both in the story world of the Gospel and the real world of its hearers. If Synoptic parables are either windows on the world of the kingdom, or mirrors challenging their hearers to examine themselves, the parable

⁵⁰ E.g., John D. Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989).

⁵¹ For classical shepherd imagery in general, see Walter Nikolaus Schumacher, *Hirt und "Guter Hirt": Studien zum Hirtenbild in der römischen Kunst vom zweiten bis zum Anfang des vierten Jahrhunderts unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Mosaiken in der Südhalle von Aquileja* (Rome: Herder, 1977); Nikolaus Himmelmann, *Über Hirten-Genre in der antiken Kunst* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1980).

⁵² See Jerome Neyrey, S.J. ("The 'Noble Shepherd' in John 10: Cultural and Rhetorical Background," *JBL* 120 [2001]: 267–91), who argues that the development of the imagery uses categories of praise and blame from epideictic oratory.

of John is a prism, focusing different streams of light on a single reality. While the beams of light are steady, another genre is bent.

Yet, as in the other cases of genre bending, there is at least one more twist. While “gate” and “shepherd” both point beyond themselves to a single reality, they do so in tandem. Jesus is the stable gate precisely as the one who calls his sheep to follow him in a life of self-giving love. The discourse shamelessly mixes metaphors, bends genres, and makes an emotional appeal, achieving in a small compass what the Gospel does as a whole.

The farewell discourses present the greatest complexity for formal analysis. As already suggested in the brief survey of generic elements present in the Gospel, the farewell discourses are enormously complex in both form and content. To do full justice to the text one would have to sort out the various formal features and examine their interaction, and more than one genre would appear bent in the process. A single suggestion will have to suffice here.

One element that has drawn commentators to identify the genre of the discourses from 13:31 on as “testamentary” is the strong thematic insistence on the imminent departure of Jesus. Like the patriarchs on their deathbed, Jesus gives instructions to his disciples in virtue, in his case to love one another (13:34; 14:15; 15:17). Like the sage in the face of his impending death, he talks of his departure (13:33, 36; 14:5–6, 12, 28), and he tries to console those who will be left behind, urging them not to be troubled (14:1); they will not be orphans (14:18); and he gives them peace (14:27). Consistent with this discourse are promises that Jesus and his disciples will be reunited. They will later follow in his path (13:36); he will prepare an apartment in a heavenly skyscraper for them (14:2). He will return and take them to be with him (14:3, 18, 28). Hence they should rejoice at his departure (14:28).

Running against the grain of this testamentary farewell discourse, and doing so from the start of ch. 14, is another set of affirmations that blur the clean lines of the testamentary genre. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:4). Those who see him already see and know the Father, who is in him as he is in the Father (14:10–11). If one lives in obedient love, Jesus and the Father will establish their residence with them now. The language of abiding presence reaches its climax in the second of the Gospel’s “parables,” the vine and the branches of John 15.⁵³ Here, as dialogue shifts to monologue, the future temporal perspective of the testament modulates into the present of relationship

⁵³ On this crucial text, see Rainer Borig, *Der Wahre Weinstock: Untersuchungen zu Joh 15,1–10* (SANT 16; Munich: Kösel, 1967); Annie Jaubert, “L’image de la vigne (Jean 15),” in *Oikonomia: Heilsgeschichte als Thema der Theologie: Oscar Cullmann zum 65. Geburtstag gewidmet* (Hamburg: Reich, 1967), 93–99; Francis J. Moloney, “The Structure and Message of John 15:1–16:3,” *ABR* 35 (1987): 35–49; Fernando F. Segovia, “The Theology and Provenance of John 15:1–17,” *JBL* 101 (1982): 115–28; idem, “John 15:18–16:4a: A First Addition to the Original

between the Father, Jesus, and his disciples. And, as the testamentary perspective recedes, the language becomes that of moral philosophy. The lapidary formulation of the superlative love of friends (John 15:13) finds its closest parallels in literature on true friendship, such as the *De amicitia* of Cicero!⁵⁴ If the farewell discourses are testamentary, they are substantially bent at this crucial point. Jesus foretells his absence, but hints at his presence, a presence made possible by the commanding example of how to love that constituted his departure.

Thus far this paper has explored some of the forms and genres that comprise this kaleidoscopic Gospel, or at least portions of its discourses. One might also pose the question at a macro level and ask whether the evangelist has similarly bent the genre of “gospel.” Although delimiting this genre is more difficult than might be the determination of what an apophthegm is, the shape of the whole narrative suggests that the evangelist has given some considerable thought to what a narrative is supposed to do. Like Luke (1:2–3), the Fourth Gospel was probably aware of other attempts to offer a version of the good news that consists of a narrative about Jesus. Among those attempts he probably even knows a Synoptic Gospel or two. The debate about John’s relationship to the other Gospels that became canonical has raged for more than a century⁵⁵ and cannot be resolved here. Whether he drew on the Synoptics, a Signs Source or two, or on other narratives, the fourth evangelist certainly knew other ways of telling the story of Jesus. But the creation of this Gospel is not simply an extension of other narratives. This Gospel offers a judgment on whatever pre-

Farewell Discourse,” *CBQ* 45 (1983): 210–30; Jan van der Watt, “‘Metaphorik’ in Joh 15,1–8,” *BN* 38 (1994): 67–80.

⁵⁴ Cicero *De amicitia* 24 reports on a play by Pacuvius, modeled on Euripides *Iphigeneia at Tauris*: “What shouts recently rang through the entire theatre during the performance of the new play, written by my guest and friend, Marcus Pacuvius, at the scene where, the king being ignorant which of the two was Orestes, Pylades, who wished to be put to death instead of his friend, (Pylades Oresten se esse diceret, ut pro illo necaretur), declared, ‘I am Orestes,’ while Orestes continued steadfastly to assert, as was the fact, ‘I am Orestes!’ The people in the audience rose to their feet and cheered this incident in fiction; what, think we, would they have done had it occurred in real life? In this case Nature easily asserted her own power, inasmuch as men approved in another as well done that which they could not do themselves.” On friendship language in general, see John T. Fitzgerald, *Friendship, Flattery, and Frankness of Speech: Studies on Friendship in the New Testament World* (NovTSup 82; Leiden: Brill, 1996); and idem, *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997). On friendship language and John, see Sharon H. Ringe, *Wisdom’s Friends: Community and Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1999).

⁵⁵ For the history of the discussion, see Smith (n. 18 above). For a recent attempt to argue that the lines of dependence move in the other direction, from John to Luke, see Mark A. Matson, *In Dialogue with Another Gospel? The Influence of the Fourth Gospel on the Passion Narrative of the Gospel of Luke* (SBLDS 178; Atlanta: SBL, 2001).

decessors there may have been, be they a Signs Source or a Synoptic Gospel. They were not to be supplemented, but displaced, by a Gospel that showed the relationship between Jesus and his community as mirror images of each other, a Gospel that confronts its hearers time and again not with a multiplicity of truths taught by a wise man, but with what it understands to be the one Truth, the compelling, liberating power of the loving Word incarnate. The Gospel's narrative not only tells an open-ended tale, but forces, or, more likely, reinforces, a judgment, a *krisis* in the present which it takes to have eternal consequences.

There is certainly an element of ultimate seriousness in the appropriation and reinventing of the gospel genre, but there is also an element of playfulness with what the gospel genre was coming to be by the end of the first century. One of the ways in which that playful genre bending occurs is through the figure of the Beloved Disciple.⁵⁶ That mysterious figure does a considerable amount of work in the Gospel. In part, he is a paradigm. He models intimacy and fidelity, by remaining faithful to Jesus through and beyond death⁵⁷ and by displaying a faith that understands signs and eschews further empirical verification (John 20:8). He may also serve as a hero of the community that lies behind the text, a hero in tension with, yet finally in harmony with, Peter.⁵⁸ Despite constant attempts to identify the figure, extending from Irenaeus in the second century to Martin Hengel and James Charlesworth in the twentieth,⁵⁹ he remains resolutely anonymous.⁶⁰ Yet both in ch. 19⁶¹ and in ch. 21, he is identi-

⁵⁶ For more on this point, see my essay "The Restless Quest for the Beloved Disciple" *FS François Bovon* (forthcoming).

⁵⁷ John 19:26–27, and probably 19:35, although the identity of the "one who has seen" is disputed.

⁵⁸ See Kevin Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple: Figures for a Community in Crisis* (JSNTSup 32; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989).

⁵⁹ Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (London: SCM, 1989). The German expands these lectures: *Die johanneische Frage: Ein Lösungsversuch mit einem Beitrag zur Apokalypse von Jörg Frey* (WUNT 67; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1993). See James H. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995). On the history of interpretation, see also R. Alan Culpepper, *John the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Studies on Personalities of the New Testament; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994; reprint, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

⁶⁰ For insistence on the unavoidable anonymity of the figure, see, e.g., Franz Neirynck, "John 21," *NTS* 36 (1990): 321–36, esp. 335 (= idem, *Evangelica II 1982–91: Collected Essays* [BETL 99; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1991], 601–16); and from a very different point of view, Patrick Chatelion Counet, *John, A Postmodern Gospel: Introduction to Deconstructive Exegesis Applied to the Fourth Gospel* (Biblical Interpretation Series 44; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 183–86.

⁶¹ If, as most commentators assume, the "one who has seen" in 19:35 is the Beloved Disciple mentioned in v. 27. Another possibility is that the "one who has seen" is the soldier who pierced the side of Jesus. See J. Ramsey Michaels, "The Centurion's Confession and the Spear Thrust," *CBQ* 29 (1967): 102–9; Paul Minear, "Diversity and Unity: A Johannine Case-Study," in *Die Mitte des Neuen Testaments: Festschrift E. Schweizer* (ed. Ulrich Luz and H. Weder; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 162–75.

fied as a witness who either wrote, or perhaps caused to write, the Gospel's story of Jesus.⁶²

Howard Jackson has made an interesting proposal about the final reference to the Disciple in ch. 21, which contains the allusion to the Disciple's writing activity. He argues that the closest formal similarities to the third-person remarks about the figure at the end of that chapter are to be found in documentary papyri in which the legal actor identifies himself in precisely such a fashion.⁶³ Jackson's argument yields a bit of a paradox, but one that should not now be surprising.

If the Fourth Gospel, as most critics suspect, was written in its more or less final form sometime around the end of the first century, there were certainly other narratives in circulation. One might suspect that the later custom of attributing these narratives to faithful early witnesses may have been a part of the social scene. The impulse which was a few decades later to drive Papias on his quest for authentic sources, may already have been in the air. To that quest the Fourth Gospel responds with its own prized witness, someone who touched and saw the Word incarnate and testified to that experience. Yet, in all other attempts to define authentic witnesses, it is precisely their identity that grounds their testimony. Here the witness, supposedly attested by a quasi-legal form for assuring proper identification, remains cloaked in secrecy. The Disciple's anonymity drives the reader or hearer back to the story again and again, in an ultimately fruitless search for clues to the identity of the witness. What the curious reader may find, after being baffled by a bent identity form and a transformed gospel genre, is another who bears testimony, the testimony encountered in ch. 5, the only testimony that, for this evangelist, counts.

Why does the Fourth Gospel exhibit so much interest in playing with generic conventions, extending them, undercutting them, twisting traditional elements into new and curious shapes, making literary forms do things that did not come naturally to them? Various answers, no doubt, are possible, but one lies in the intense reflection in the text on the process of transformation inaugurated by the Word's taking on flesh. With only a little suspension of disbelief it is possible to see one strand of reflection in the Gospel focusing on what happens to flesh as a result of the encounter. One might even see at work a process of sacred alchemy, as the too, too solid flesh first melts into life-giving water, a water strangely muddied by blood (19:34), then evaporates into the eternally present spirit. That spirit, first exhaled from the dying flesh on the cross (19:30), then infused into the bodies of the disciples on Easter night (20:22),

⁶² For the Beloved Disciple in this capacity, see also Richard Bauckham, "The Beloved Disciple as Ideal Author," *JSNT* 49 (1993): 21–44.

⁶³ Howard M. Jackson, "Ancient Self-referential Conventions and their Implications for the Authorship and Integrity of the Gospel of John," *JTS* 50 (1999): 1–34.

again condenses, as it were, into the metaphorical water that Jesus promised would flow from the belly of everyone who believes (John 7:38).

Perhaps inspired by something like Paul's notion of what happens to bodies in the eschaton (1 Cor 15:35–57), the Fourth Gospel's trope on transubstantiation is only one-half of its reflective equation. If something quite spectacular happens to flesh when the Word hits it, something equally wondrous happens to ordinary words when they try to convey the Word itself. Revealing words reveal riddles; realistic similitudes become surreal; words of testimony undercut the validity of any ordinary act of testifying; words of farewell become words of powerful presence; words of prayer negate the distance between worshiper and God; words that signify shame, death on a cross, become words that enshrine value, allure disciples, give a command, and glorify God.

In the imagination of the fourth evangelist, genres are bent because words themselves are bent. The evangelist's strategy was not unprecedented in antiquity. Fiddling with generic convention is the stuff of which literature great and small was ever made, from Virgil's adaptation of epic to early Christian transformations of romantic novels.⁶⁴ At another level Diogenes the Cynic was accused of doing something similar, adulterating the coinage,⁶⁵ and developing a whole new way of expressing himself philosophically. The fourth evangelist has something of the literary artist and the popular philosopher in him, but the motivation for his genre bending is his own. His appropriation of a variety of words, of formal types of discourse, is not so much, as this essay originally suggested, a way of using a variety of forms to convey a message. Rather, the use of most of these forms suggests that none of them is adequate to speak of the Word incarnate. John's genre bending is an effort to force its audience away from words to an encounter with the Word himself.

⁶⁴ See Mikail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁶⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 6.20.