

**READING “THIS WOMAN” BACK INTO JOHN 7:1-8:59: LIAR LIAR AND  
THE “PERICOPE ADULTERAE” IN INTERTEXTUAL TANGO**

Jeffrey L. Staley, Seattle University

A Brief History of Reading

I began writing this essay in 1985,<sup>1</sup> just after completing my dissertation; just after securing my first teaching position, and just after the birth of our first child. It was boy. Our only son.

I presented the paper in an unpolished form at the first Pacific Northwest regional SBL meeting I ever attended. That was 1986, in Portland, Oregon. The paper had a rather mundane title: “The Rhetorical Structure of John 7:14-8:59,” and in it I argued that a close reading of that lengthy Johannine dialogue revealed an intricate rhetorical unity. At the time I knew that “reading” was a problematical category for many literary critics, but for me the words “reading” and “reader” were unambiguous terms that referred to a textual entity and process evoked by those little pesky black marks on white paper. For me, “reading” and “the reader” had no existence apart from texts. They were, in fact, rhetorical constructs within texts (thus the title of my 1986 paper); they were constituent elements of an “implied reader” which could be carefully reconstructed by eagle-eyed critics like myself.<sup>2</sup>

As this essay will make clear, today I believe in many other kinds of readers (yea verily, even in different kinds of viewers) besides just an implied, textually encoded

reader/viewer. I now give credence to supplied and replied reader/viewers; to the single-plied and the double-plied; to the real and the unreal; to historical and hysterical reader/viewers; and to multi-plied combinations of all of these. Even more importantly, I believe that all these reader/viewers and their attendant reading/viewing processes are fictional constructs in some way; whether I am talking about an intratextual “implied reader/viewer,” a first century reading audience, or myself as a “real, intertextual reader/viewer.” Every audience is an intentional, fictional construct with its own distinct rhetorical purpose and ideology.<sup>3</sup> This essay, then, is an attempt to explore some of those intergalactic, intercalations between contemporary audiences and ancient texts.

Sometimes reading and viewing are subtexts for other experiences; they may represent hopes deferred; or they may be painful reminders of lost innocence. Such is the case with my reading today. I don’t really want to be reading John’s gospel. I have fallen out of love with it, but I don’t know how to tell it goodbye. Perhaps this essay is part of that goodbye.

It is an early fall morning at Holden Village in Washington’s North Cascade Mountains. Shadows from a recent snow shroud the east side of 8,500 foot-high Dumbell Mountain. A coppery crush of leaves spin lazily in an eddy of Railroad Creek. The sky is sapphire blue. The air is crisp and clean. I don’t want to be sitting here, writing at this rickety, wooden table. I want to be outside, hiking up to Copper Basin. Some place I’ve never been before.

When I first started writing about John 7-8 I wanted to show how a literary and rhetorical analysis of the text could reveal the unity of one of the most fragmented of Johannine scenes.<sup>4</sup> I had not spent much time thinking about lengthy direct speech

segments like John 7-8 when I wrote my dissertation. But I knew that in the history of the text (both real and imagined), this direct speech section of John seemed to have undergone more corruption than any other Johannine monologue or dialogue. If I could show that there was a rhetorical unity to John 7-8 in its present canonical state, then my literary reading of the entire gospel would gain credibility, and my construction of its “implied reader” would be vindicated before the academic world.

The most obvious corruption of this Johannine text is, of course, that lady come lately—“the woman caught in adultery” (7:53-8:11). “This woman” somehow had forced her way into the canonical gospels, and from there, had been thrust splayed-legged into the midst of Jesus’ Johannine conversation without so much as a “thank-you ma’am.” Eventually she strutted out into the open; into the full-color of Hollywood movies and the red-hot exegetical debates of contemporary scholarship.<sup>5</sup> But she was no concern of mine when I was writing in 1986. She didn’t play any role in my earliest interpretations of John 7-8, since there was excellent manuscript evidence for excluding her from the text. However, in the imaginations of many Johannine scholars who had studied John 7-8, the text displacement theories of Bultmann, Schnackenburg, and others before them lay not far beneath this woman’s abrupt textual eruption. These scholars proposed transposing chapters 5 and 6, and then parts of chapters 7 and 8, in order to make sense out of the peculiar narrative sequencing of John 4-8.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the multiple narrative disjunctions, textual corruptions, and aporiae of John 7-8 (whether real or imagined) were the perfect ground on which to test my unitary theories of the Johannine implied reader.

While working on my dissertation, I thought I had detected a certain argumentative pattern in Johannine dialogical style, one that consistently moved from

what I termed a “less personal” to a “more personal” tone and content.<sup>7</sup> This movement could be seen in the specific metaphors that the narrator used to describe Jesus, in terms of Jesus’ own argumentative strategies, and in the broad, overall outline of the book’s plot. For example, with regard to the narrator’s language, many scholars have noted how the Johannine prologue moved the Logos from God, to the world, and back to God again.<sup>8</sup> But what had not been observed were the changes in metaphors that went along with this progression. Curiously, in the chiastic structure of the prologue, the abstract language of logos, light, and God (1:1-4) moves to the more personal language of kinship (only child, bosom, father) in John 1:17-18.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in the narrative’s second monologue (5:19-47), the same progression can be found. There, Jesus begins by speaking vaguely about “the father,” “the son,” and “everyone” (5:19-29). But then in the second half (5:30-47), his language becomes more direct and personal with “I” (ego), “my,” “you” (hymeis), and “my father” becoming more prevalent. Finally, this same movement can be traced in the general plot of the book as a whole. For example, in the second half of the Gospel (chs. 11-21) Jesus speaks for the first time of his love for friends and followers, the narrator describes Jesus’ love for individuals, and Jesus gives a lengthy farewell speech to his disciples. These elements all point to a more personal turn in the narrative.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in my early reading of the Fourth Gospel, a remarkable argumentative unity permeated the book’s narrative design.

I turn my uncomfortable wooden chair to face a window in the cramped Holden Village Library, hoping to catch a glimpse of the late afternoon sun as it filters through dusky green cedars. The sharp blast of an air horn stirs me out of my imaginary hike to Copper Basin, and I stare outside as a group of staff members chase a stubborn yearling

brown bear down the village main street and back into the wilderness from whence it came.

I have a sudden urge to follow that bear.

### A Rhetorical Analysis of the Text

I began my 1986 regional SBL paper by arguing that despite the seemingly confused, disjunctive dialogue of John 7-8, there was a clear chiasmic structure to the narrative unit and an overarching progression in its argument. Thus, despite any proposed source-critical or displacement theories, the final form of John 7-8 was coherent and unified on at least two rhetorical levels: symmetry (stylistics) and argumentation. An underlying subtext in my paper made the additional point that if one really wanted to enjoy Johannine rhetoric, one needed to move beyond the mere analysis of narrative symmetry. The critic should also explore the narrative's argumentative structure—which might or might not follow its symmetric, chiasmic divisions.<sup>11</sup>

Now what I didn't say in the title of that 1986 paper (or explain anywhere in the body of the paper) was why I had excluded John 7:53-8:11 from my rhetorical analysis of 7:1-8:59. The answer to that implicit question was all too obvious. John 7:53-8:11 just didn't belong in John. It was a late addition to the text, as proven by manuscript study and vocabulary analysis. But still, why should I leave John 7:53-8:11 out of my reassessment of the rhetorical structure? Especially since I was struck at the time (though I didn't voice the opinion out loud), with the fact that "this woman's"<sup>12</sup> story was actually positioned near the center of my chiasmic divisions and fit into them rather nicely. But of course I was writing nearly ten years before the "moicheia" of Bill and Mo[n]icheia (8:3); long before President Clinton dropped his "chiton" for "that woman" in the sacred Oval

Office of the White House. It is perhaps not coincidental that “this woman” has enjoyed a fairly wide appeal of late in Johannine studies.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps “that woman” might even be the underlying cultural pretext for why I eventually put “this woman” back into the Johannine narrative of John 7-8.

But with or without “this woman,” my 1986 analysis of Johannine narrative structure argued that John 7-10 stood together as a narrative unit whose primary focus was on two central Jewish institutions: synagogue and temple. Surrounding the two dialogical temple scenes with its “police” (7:14-8:59; 10:22-39) was the story of the man born blind and Jesus’ monologue about the good shepherd, both of which seemed to focus on the synagogue and the Pharisees.<sup>14</sup>

Here, then, is my 1986 analysis of John 7:14-8:59—now filtered through the bifocals I was finally forced to purchase a few years ago. My first look at the text focused on stylistic analysis—that is to say, on the text’s chiasmic structure and the repetition of ideas or vocabulary within that structure. I hoped that by highlighting the repetition of certain words and ideas I would convince the uninitiated reader of a symmetrical structure which might otherwise appear highly imaginative or grossly idiosyncratic. My second look at the Johannine text focused on its argumentative structure, borrowing heavily from Chaim Perelman’s analysis of rhetoric in his The New Rhetoric.<sup>15</sup>

Now as anyone working with chiasms knows, their beginnings and endings are often the easiest parts to delineate. That is because those segments usually deal with important plot developments.<sup>16</sup> In John 7-8, for example, the rhetorical unit 7:14-8:59 is clearly marked off by Jesus’ entrance into and exit from the temple. But as I mentioned earlier, I did not include the textually suspect John 7:53-8:11 in my analysis, even though

it lay near the center of the exposed chiasm and made reference to another exit and re-entrance to the temple (7:53-8:2).

The second movement of the chiasm was not as easy for me to delineate. But after many hours of slow, tortuous reading, I was able to isolate the next inward chiastic step. This segment focused on the crowds' (ochloi) arguments with Jesus over the authority of his teaching (7:15-24). I believed its seven argumentative points were paralleled in chapter 8, but with important new elaborations and developments in plot. There, "the Judeans" (Ioudaioi)<sup>17</sup> argue with Jesus over the implications of his teaching (8:31-58).<sup>18</sup> I tried not to worry about the fact that the segment in John 8 was nearly twenty verses longer than its parallel segment in John 7.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the only way that I could come up with a convincing delineation of these two parallel segments was by not requiring that their seven argumentative points be repeated slavishly in consecutive order.

Up to this point, the argumentative points I highlighted in John 7:14-8:59 were these:

**A Jesus goes up secretly to Jerusalem, enters the temple, and begins to teach**

**7:10-14**

**A' Jesus hides himself and leaves the temple 8:59**

**B The crowds argue with Jesus over the authority of his teaching 7:15-24**

- i) "Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God" 7:17
- ii) "Those who speak on their own seek their own glory" 7:18
- iii) "Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps (poiei) the law." 7:19
- iv) "Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?" 7:19

- v) “You have a demon!” 7:20
- vi) “I performed one work” 7:21
- vii) an analogy: circumcision on Sabbath 7:22-23

(an allusion to Abraham [“the fathers,” Gen 17:9-14])

**B' The Judeans argue with Jesus regarding the implications of his teaching 8:31-58**

- i) “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth” 8:31-32  
(“whoever keeps my word will never see death” 8:51)
- ii) “I do not seek my own glory” 8:50
- iii) “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing (epoieite) what Abraham did” 8:39
- iv) “you are trying to kill me” 8:40
- v) “Are we not right in saying . . . you have a demon?” 8:48
- vi) “You are indeed doing what your father does” 8:41
- vii) an analogy: a slave in a household 8:34-38  
(an allusion to the Abraham story [Gen 21:8-15; cf. Gal 4:21-31])<sup>20</sup>

The third symmetrical movement of the chiasm was the most difficult for me to frame. For although John 7:25-36 is easily delineated by the arguments Jesus has regarding his identity (7:25-36),<sup>21</sup> John 8:13-30 does not fall as easily into a discernable segment.<sup>22</sup> However, a certain parallel framework became evident when I compared the latter with John 7:25-36.

**C Arguments with Jesus regarding his possible identity 7:25-36**

(the first subdivision emphasizes who Jesus might be [the Messiah], the one who sent him, the Jerusalemites, and Jesus as one doing signs 7:25-31)

- i) “You know me, and you know where I am from” 7:28
- ii) They tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him 7:30
- iii) his hour had not yet come 7:30
- iv) Yet many in the crowd believed in him 7:31

(the second subdivision emphasizes where Jesus might be going and the Pharisees 7:32-36)

- v) “You will search for me but you will not find me” 7:34
- vi) “Does he intend to go to the Dispersion . . . ?” (indirect question) 7:35
- vii) “Where I am you cannot come?” 7:36

### **C' Arguments with Jesus regarding his true identity 8:13-30**

(the first subdivision asks where Jesus’ Father is, emphasizes the Pharisees, and Jesus as witness 8:13-20)

- i) “you do not know where I come from” 8:14
- ii) no one arrested him 8:20
- iii) his hour had not yet come 8:20

(the second subdivision asks who Jesus is, emphasizes the Judeans, and Jesus as one doing what is pleasing to his Father, 8:21-30)

- iv) many [Judeans] believed in him 8:30
- v) “you will search for me, but you will die in your sin” 8:21
- vi) “Is he going to kill himself?” (indirect question) 8:22
- vii) “Where I am going you cannot come?” 8:21-22

So far this chiasmic arrangement looks pretty nice. However, I may have cheated a bit to make it look as neat as it does. To be honest, in 1986 I thought that both John 7:25-36 and John 8:13-30 could be broken down into two additional segments (7:15-31, 32-36; and 8:13-20, 21-30). But when I did that, the following imperfection was revealed:

**C The Jerusalemites wonder whether Jesus might be the Messiah, and Jesus responds by talking about the one who sent him 7:25-31**

- i) “You know me and you know where I am from.” 7:28
- ii) they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him 7:30
- iii) his hour had not yet come 7:30
- iv) many in the crowd believed in him 7:31

**D The Pharisees and Judeans wonder whether Jesus might be going to the Dispersion when he talks about where he is going and about the one who sent him 7:32-36**

- i) “You will search for me, and you will not find me” 7:34
- ii) “Does he intend to go to the Dispersion?” (indirect question) 7:35
- iii) “Where I am you cannot come?” 7:36

**C' The Pharisees challenge Jesus' testimony and ask where his father is 8:13-20**

- i) “you do not know where I come from” 8:14
- ii) no one arrested him 8:20
- iii) his hour had not yet come 8:20

**D' The Judeans wonder whether Jesus is going to kill himself when he talks about where he is going and about the one who sent him 8:21-30**

- iv) many [Judeans] believed in him 8:30

v) “you will search for me, but you will die in your sin” 8:21

vi) “Is he going to kill himself?” (indirect question) 8:22

vii) “Where I am going, you are cannot come” 8:21-22

Clearly, if one wants a “perfect” chiasm, John 8:13-20 should come after 8:21-30 (e.g. **C-D, D-C**). And so the only way that I could keep my chiasm “perfect” was by combining **C** and **D** under one general heading (“**C**”). A generation ago I could easily have reconstructed an “Urtext” with these two segments reversed, and invented a redactional argument for the present (corrupt) state of the text. No doubt a reputable journal would have published the “research.” But my training had been in literary and rhetorical criticism, and a reconstruction like that was not a viable option for me. Back in 1986 I still wanted perfection in my John, but it would have to come from the argumentative and stylistic structure of the text as it now stood (excluding, of course, 7:53-8:11), rather than from some hypothetical, reconstructed pre-text.

Thankfully, the final two segments of the chiasmic structure of John 7:14-8:59 were much easier to identify than **B** and **C**.

**D Jesus’ metaphorical proclamation regarding his true identity 7:37-39<sup>23</sup>**

(“the one who believes in me . . . shall flow rivers of living water”)

**D’ Jesus’ metaphorical proclamation regarding his true identity 8:12**

(“whoever follows me . . . will have the light of life”)

**E Arguments among the crowd regarding Jesus’ identity 7:40-43**

(“the Messiah does not to come from Galilee”)

(Jesus is not on the scene)

**E’ Arguments among the authorities regarding Jesus’ identity 7:45-52**

(“no prophet is to arise from Galilee”)

(Jesus is not on the scene)

**F The second attempt to arrest Jesus ends in failure 7:44**

Thus, the simplified chiastic structure that appeared in John 7:14-8:59 was:

- A Jesus goes up secretly to Jerusalem, enters the temple, and begins to teach  
7:10-14
- B The crowds argue with Jesus over the authority of his teaching 7:15-24
- C Arguments with Jesus regarding his possible identity 7:25-36
- D Jesus’ metaphorical proclamation regarding his true identity 7:37-39
- E Arguments among the crowds regarding Jesus’ identity 7:40-43
- F A second attempt to arrest Jesus ends in failure 7:44
- E’ Arguments among the authorities regarding Jesus’ identity 7:45-52
- D’ Jesus’ metaphorical proclamation regarding his true identity 8:12
- C’ Arguments with Jesus regarding his true identity 8:13-30
- B’ The Judeans argue with Jesus regarding the implications of his teaching 8:31-58
- A’ Jesus hides himself and leaves the temple 8:59

What gradually became apparent to me as I struggled to make John 7-8 chiastically coherent was that I was operating on two different rhetorical levels. While my large chiastic segments focused on the development of Jesus’ arguments with his opponents, the miscellany of words and themes simply isolated common material—regardless of plot or direct discourse arguments. So I wrote in my unpublished 1986 regional SBL presentation,

We have clearly established that the narrative unit delineated by Jesus' entrance and exit from the temple has a chiasmic structure, determined by the clustering of certain themes and motifs (a kind of "surface structure"). However, we want to show that there is also a rhetorical cohesiveness from an argumentative perspective. Here we will be looking not so much at the repetition of similar motifs, as at the differences and development of thought in John 7-8.

Jerome Neyrey has published extensively on the argumentative structure of John 7-8 since I first wrote these lines in 1986.<sup>24</sup> In his analysis of the text he argues that John 7 and 8 are best understood as a "trial" in which Jesus undergoes a "formal forensic process."<sup>25</sup> "Forensic" rhetoric is simply another term for what Perelman and Kennedy call judicial rhetoric; that is, a species of argumentation where the speaker "is seeking to persuade an audience to make a judgment about events occurring in the past."<sup>26</sup> More appropriate to John 7-8, however, is Malina and Rohrbaugh's phrase "challenge and riposte"—an expression Neyrey also uses in the second half of one of his essays.<sup>27</sup>

But when I first analyzed the argumentative structure of John 7-8, the two chapters seemed to reflect the deliberative genre of rhetoric, rather than the judicial or forensic genre as Jerome Neyrey has argued.<sup>28</sup> The deliberative genre is directed toward persuading an audience of a future decision. This made the most sense to me at the time, since Jesus' opponents raise questions about the authority of his teaching (7:15), after which he reacts with a statement that is oriented toward the future ("Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own" [7:17]).<sup>29</sup> A judicial argument would have focused more on the

past: e.g., “Rabbi Joseph was my teacher, and you all respect him, so go ask him what he taught me” (cf. John 18:21). Obviously, Jesus cannot put forward a judicial argument in his own defense, since the origin of his teaching is not open to the same kind of external verification (God is his teacher, not a human).<sup>30</sup> Thus, challenge and riposte, insinuation, innuendo, and gossip—all informal means of argumentation and exhortation, will play a more prominent role in John 7-8 than any formal “forensic trial.”

Yet the classification of rhetorical species is not always easy to make, as George Kennedy has made abundantly clear through his rhetorical analysis of New Testament texts. In his argument with Hans Dieter Betz over the classification of Paul’s rhetoric in Galatians, Kennedy states, “the basic argument of deliberative oratory is that an action is in the self-interest of the audience, or as Quintilian prefers to put it, that it is right (8.3.1-3).”<sup>31</sup> On the basis of this distinction, Kennedy goes on to categorize Galatians as deliberative rhetoric rather than as judicial rhetoric, a position for which Betz had earlier argued.

Like Galatians, the rhetorical species of John 7-8 is not easy to define. But following Kennedy’s lead in Galatians, I believe that the language of judgment and the strategy of attack and defense evident in John 7-8 are not in themselves proof of judicial (“forensic”) rhetoric. The key question that needs to be asked is: To what end are these argumentative devices being used? In John 7-8, Jesus’ use of the future tense and his focus on future benefits clearly show that these argumentative devices are being used in a deliberative framework. Jesus is acting as a prophet, not judge. His audience recognizes this, but is unconvinced by his prophetic message (8:12-13). Of course, the strongest

piece of forensic/judicial rhetoric in John 7-8 is found in the “pericope adulterae”—the one section I had left out of my rhetorical analysis.

In John 8:12-59, Jesus manages to put the issue of his authoritative teaching back into the maelstrom of ultimate authority—“the Father who sent me” ([8:18] “. . . though you do not know him” [8:55])—which is an issue he has been trying to raise since John 7:15. But the changes in vocabulary between John 7 and 8 are significant here. Now the personal pronouns “ego” and are more prevalent, as is kinship language (pater, hyios, and Abraam). The word ‘ego’ occurs four times in John 7:14-52, but twenty-one times in John 8. Similarly, the pronoun “hymeis” is only found four times in John 7:14-52, but fourteen times in John 8. Moreover, the kinship nouns “pater,” “hyios,” and “Abraam” are found one and seventeen times respectively; zero and three times, and zero and ten times in their respective chapters. The noun “theos” is found only one time in John 7:14-53, but seven times in John 8. Finally, the climactic inclusio “ego eimi” (8:12, 24, 28, 58) exemplifies the heightened drama of the challenges and ripostes between Jesus and his opponents.<sup>32</sup> Now theo-logy mutates into christology as Jesus’ deliberative claims begin to center more and more on himself (e.g., “Anyone who resolves to do the will of God” (7:17), “If you continue in my word” (8:31, my emphasis), and “whoever keeps my word” (8:51, my emphasis); and “You will search for me, but you will not find me” (7:34), and “you will search for me, but you will die in your sin” (8:21). Just as in the prologue, the monologue of John 5:19-47, and in the Gospel as a whole, the movement from John 7 to John 8 moves always toward a more personal, revelatory, and confrontational climax.

I concluded my 1986 paper with the following paragraph:

John 7-8 is framed by the inclusio of Jesus' entrance and exit from the temple, and within this inclusio the plot to arrest Jesus and put him to death is highlighted. These repetitions, along with others, help to separate the text into a chiasmic superstructure. But this seemingly static superstructure undergirds a deliberative argument that is only revealed by subtle changes in the language between John 7 and 8. These changes are similar to other argumentative developments in the Fourth Gospel, and thus they are not isolated argumentative devices. What once were thought to be aporiae and editorial glosses in John 7-8 are, in reality, evidence of a remarkable narrative unity.

My interaction with John 7-8 is much messier than this antiseptic textual analysis would lead one to surmise. I spill coffee on the white pages of my Greek text, smudging the black letters. My children interrupt my early morning study with their cries of "What's for breakfast, dad?" And I hurry off to meet their needs. I am much more easily distracted now than when I wrote the first draft of this essay back in 1986. I work now in fitful starts. My body can't take long periods of sitting without aches and pains intruding upon my consciousness, and I can't stay up as late at night as I once could. And then there is my preoccupation with my son. My only son. He is nearly grown now, and already I miss him. He is only eleven, but I know I will not have him forever.<sup>33</sup> Yet I will have him forever. I am not ready for him to go away, and so I let him talk me into doing strange things. Sometimes he pulls me away from my writing, from the Johannine text with its blotches and stains. And I am quickly in another place. And it is not my study. And it is not Copper Basin above Holden Village.

An Intertextual Rereading<sup>34</sup>

Here is my son. He is the one who made the following intertextual rereading possible. He is in junior high and out of control. He is standing beside me, begging me to take him to the most recent Jim Carrey movie. Jim Carrey is his favorite actor and my son has seen every major movie that Jim Carrey has been in. Jim Carrey is responsible for making my son the way he is.

“Is it supposed to be better than Dumb and Dumber?” I start at a point below which I will not go.

“Oh yeah, way better.” He replies much too quickly, and there is a tenor of conviction in his pubescent voice that I find somewhat unsettling.

“Better than Ace Ventura, Pet Detective?” I’m holding out for something more intellectually challenging—maybe a film like The Cable Guy or Mask.

“No contest, dad. My friends say this is his best movie yet.”

“What friends?”

“Jeez, dad, come on! Just look at his initials! J. C. Don’t you get it dad? J. C.? Carrey’s got the same initials as Jesus does, and you’re always talking about Jesus. So maybe you need to see this movie too! Come on! Please? Maybe this is one you’ll be able to use in one of your classes.”

“Oh, yeah, I’m sure. Well, do your chores first and then we’ll see.”

My son finishes his Saturday tasks in record time, and against my better judgment I take him to the movie. It’s called Liar Liar,<sup>35</sup> and I manage to sit through the entire thing without taking even one twenty minute potty break. In fact, I watched the film and came away a believer. Liar Liar is, indeed, a Bible film. Jim Carrey, a.k.a. Fletcher

Reede,<sup>36</sup> actually quotes the New Testament in the movie—John 8:32, to be exact. With arms raised in triumph, after having just won a settlement for his client Mrs. Samantha Cole, he shouts out the much abused phrase to a packed courtroom: “And the truth shall set you freeEEEE!”

The film begins with nothing, with a blank, black screen. Then a voice speaks out in the darkness, just as in Genesis 1:1. It is the feminine voice of a schoolteacher—wisdom personified—spelling out the word “work” for her students. Work is an important theme of Genesis 1 and one that the film develops in some detail. Furthermore, the implications of Jesus’ teaching and his “work” (ergon) just happen to be the starting point of Jesus’ volatile argument with the Judeans in John 7-8 (7:14-17, 21; cf. 5:17-20; 6:27-29).

“W-O-R-K. Today we are going to share what our parents do for work.”<sup>37</sup>

Suddenly we are in the light, in an elementary school classroom.

A little girl pipes up, “My mommy is a doctor.”

A boy chimes in, “My dad is a truck driver.”

Then a third child adds, “My mom is a teacher.”

“And your dad?” the teacher asks the same child.

“Mmm, my dad? He’s a liar.”

“A liar?? Oh, I’m sure you don’t mean a liar!”

“Well, he wears a suit and goes to court and talks to the judge.”

“Oooh, I see, you mean he’s a lawyer!” The teacher says with a relieved smile.

But the boy just shrugs bewilderedly.

And thus we are introduced to Max (Maximilian), only child of Fletcher Reede, and to two important themes from John 7-8—lying (8:44) and the law (7:19-24).

The premise of the film is a simple one: Can a white, upper-middle-class, male lawyer make it through one business day without lying? Fletcher Reede has recently been divorced and is trying to make senior member in a southern California law firm. His son Max is almost five years old and Fletcher seems to care about him—but can rarely fit the boy into his busy schedule. And so he never keeps his promises to his son. After Fletcher fails to show up to his son’s fifth birthday party, Max makes a wish: “Please, make it so my daddy won’t be able to tell a lie for one whole day.”

Unbeknownst to Fletcher, the little boy’s wish comes true. And as soon as Fletcher realizes he cannot lie, he knows it will be impossible for him to win his next court case. Fletcher has a twofold problem. First, to remain true to his own materialistic values, he must lie in order to win a large monetary settlement for his client Samantha, who is divorcing her husband and wants half of his wealth. However, according to her signed prenuptial agreement, she is not entitled to any of her husband’s wealth if she has committed adultery. And she has—with several different men. Fletcher, therefore, cannot represent her without lying, and his future status in the law firm depends on his winning this case. Fletcher’s second problem is that his former wife is planning to remarry and move across the country to Boston to be with her new husband. If she does that, father and son will never see each other again.

His son’s birthday wish fulfilled, Fletcher is forced to find a way to win both the court case and his son—without ever lying. And so the plot goes careening off in the

wacky style typical of Jim Carrey films. Faithful to the genre, Fletcher finds a way to win in the end.

I must confess the quote of John 8:32 in this film has gotten to me. Over the next few years I rent the movie a number of times and watch it again and again, looking for other hints of Johannine themes. I don't really expect to find any, but then I didn't expect to hear Jim Carrey quote John 8:32 either. Suddenly I am struck by another Johannine thunderbolt.

Liar Liar seems to evoke explicit christological metaphors from the Gospel of John. John is well known for its seven “I Am” metaphors, and the film quotes what is perhaps the best known secular “I Am” saying in contemporary American culture—that of Dr. Seuss’ Green Eggs and Ham.<sup>38</sup> When Fletcher finally discovers the wish his son made on the night of his fifth birthday, he shrieks “Oh my God!”<sup>39</sup> and drives off to Max’s school to try and get him to reverse the wish.<sup>40</sup> Fletcher bursts into his son’s classroom in the middle of storytime, just as the teacher is reading the famous lines, “I do not like them Sam I am, I do not like green eggs and ham. . . .”

I hesitate to put this “finding” in my essay. Surely I have watched the film too many times by now. I am giving the producer far too much intellectual credit. This connection is too bizarre to be “real.” But then I remember that someone once published a book arguing that the Gospel of John was a midrash on the book of Esther.<sup>41</sup> Can my intertextual reading be any stranger than that? At least there was an actual quotation from John in “Liar Liar” which got me started on this adventure. As far as I know, no one has ever found an explicit quotation from Esther in the Gospel of John.

Encouraged by this thought, I start noticing a myriad of other Johannine motifs in the film.

Time is also a significant plot device in both the film and the Fourth Gospel (esp. 7:6, 30; 8:20). However, unlike Jesus or his Father, Fletcher is never able to keep his promises about the “appointed hour.” He forgets every important meeting he has promised his son, and nearly misses his son’s leaving (on a jet plane to Boston; cf. John 7:33-36; 8:21-23). As in the Fourth Gospel, the references to time are closely linked to the father/son relationship (7:28-30; 8:19-20).

Water and light play significant symbolic roles in the festival of Booths (John 7-8) and in the film as well. Three times in Liar Liar candles are blown out (five candles, then one, then six—does that make twelve?), and with each extinguishing of the light, a promise is made or remembered. With regard to water imagery, a revelatory moment occurs during Samantha’s divorce hearing when Fletcher sees a pitcher of water sitting on the table in front of him. He pours himself one glassful, then another and another, until he drinks the entire pitcher empty. Fletcher then asks the judge for a short recess so that he can take a bathroom break. I am reminded of “from his side shall flow rivers of living water” (7:38). Fletcher’s ensuing prolonged absence from the courtroom represents his desperate attempt to postpone the inevitable verdict for a few hours. The incongruous ruse nearly works, for the judge is ready to grant Fletcher a reprieve—until Fletcher’s truth-telling forces him to continue the case. However, the additional time gained helps Fletcher “save” Samantha and his own career. Thus, in both the film and the Gospel, water is linked to salvation.

This hokey film is beginning to look like a piece of art to me, a grand theological expression, the work of a mastermind. The Johannine connections are coming fast and furious, and I begin to worry about myself. Somewhere in the film Fletcher says, “The madman is me”—which now reminds me of the accusation against Jesus, “You have a demon” (8:48, 52). Perhaps his madman is also in me, and I won’t be able to contain it. Do I see John everywhere, anywhere I look? I know the answer to that is no. I am not completely insane. But I am beginning to think I need to go for a walk to clear my head. Maybe that hike up to Copper Basin would be perfect now. I need an interruption—my son, to sneak up behind me and wrestle me to the ground. But my son is hundreds of miles away from me, in Bothell, and so my mind continues to work, long after I’ve asked it to shut down.

Then suddenly I realize I’ve missed the film’s most obvious connection to John 7-8: Samantha Cole, the woman Fletcher is asked to represent in court. Because I had excluded John 7:53-8:11 from my original rhetorical analysis of John 7-8, I had overlooked what was the clearest narrative connection between the Gospel of John and the film.

As with Fletcher, Samantha Cole’s entire life is held together by lies. She lied about her age in order to get married at the age of seventeen, without parental consent; she lied about her weight and hair color on her driver’s license; and she is in court now because her voice was caught on a tape recorder, as she was in the very act of committing adultery. She is the adulterous woman of John 7:53-8:11, and is so carefully set into the plot of the film that her story is easily overlooked—until J.C. shouts out “The truth shall set you free!”

Like Jesus who writes mysteriously on the ground in front of the adulteress' accusers, Fletcher writes furiously on pieces of paper—his desk, his face—trying to force himself to lie so that he can win the looming case with Samantha Cole. And although no one in the film picks up stones to throw at Samantha because of her sin—or at Fletcher either, for that matter (John 8:5, 7, 59; cf. 10:31), throwing is an important motif in the film. Fletcher gives his son Max a baseball and glove for his birthday, but father and son never actually play catch; they just make plans to play. The only person who actually throws anything in the film is Fletcher himself, who throws his shoes at a jet plane as it taxis down the runway, with his ex-wife and son on board. After the shoes bounce off the plane's windshield, the pilot stops taxiing, and Fletcher saves his son and ex-wife from leaving him. In the film, then, the act of throwing is a motif that reflects familial love and brings about ultimate redemption. The motif is not connected with violence and hatred as it is in John 8 and 10.

I am exhausted by this tango of reading and viewing. I'm ready to leave "this woman" behind and go outside to skip stones in Railroad Creek. Thanks to my son, my reading of John 7-8 has been forced out into the open, but I have "revealed myself to the world" in ways I never intended. His toothy grin has set me free.

#### Postmodern Intertextuality and Canonical Authority

A postmodern sense of text and intertextuality does not require that the writers or director of Liar Liar have John 7-8 in mind when making their film. Rather, it argues that all texts, simply by being texts, are intertwined with other texts.<sup>42</sup> They feed on each other and nourish each other. So by explicitly quoting John 8:32, Liar Liar invites biblically attuned viewers to look for other Johannine allusions in it. And surprisingly, I have

found fragmentary connections. For some people, assessing the significance of these allusions may threaten their political, scholarly, or religious commitments. Minimally, one can argue that viewing the film against the backdrop of John 7-8 gives the viewer an appreciation for a Jim Carrey movie that otherwise might appear to have no redeeming qualities.<sup>43</sup> But a postmodern sense of intertextuality moves in more than one direction.

Unlike the “adulterous woman” of John 7:53-8:11, Samantha Cole is not an arbitrary addition to the plot of Liar Liar. However, she is a flat character with no positive character traits. She is a “bad” woman who only cares about herself, and Fletcher feeds upon her selfishness. Yet without her, Fletcher himself would not be redeemed. Samantha’s one true insight—that her husband, who has just divorced her, is a good father—is the catalyst that causes Fletcher to see himself in a new light and sends him running back to his former wife and son. By way of contrast, the adulterous woman in John 8 has been viewed as an unnecessary intrusion into Jesus’ controversy with the Judeans, with no particular plot function. But can the film Liar Liar lead one to reassess “this woman’s” connection to John 7-8? Can she somehow redeem the biting challenges and ripostes of Jesus and the Judeans?

As a Johannine scholar and first time viewer of Liar Liar, Fletcher’s grand exclamation, “The truth shall set you free,” was my entrance to another intertextual level of the film. Until that moment, nothing in the film would have made me think about the Gospel of John. It was pure entertainment. Funny, but not worth watching more than once. The divorce proceedings with Samantha Cole were easily forgotten, since they seemed like an unnecessary subplot to the “lying” conceit that drove the film. That is to say, any type of legal proceeding, any cast of characters could have been used to make fun

of Fletcher, the stereotypical lying lawyer. However, once the choice was made for an adulterous woman to be the catalyst for Fletcher's turnabout, she became a necessary character in the movie's plot.

When the Johannine intertext is evoked (8:32), "this woman's" voice, Samantha's voice—caught on tape in the very act of adultery—becomes another important Johannine connection. But in John 7-8 "this woman" intrudes, interrupts, and arrests the fierce diatribe in the temple. In contrast to Samantha Cole, she has no name. And she has no voice, except when she says "No one, sir" (8:11). In the Johannine text she is a narrative interlude, a glaring, in-your-face, disconnected question mark that turns the virulent, disembodied, deliberative voices of John 7-8 into an intensely personal, judicial confrontation. She literally brings the rhetorical situation of John 7-8 down to stony earth. She is the canonical counterpoint to Fletcher's intrusive, jarring quote of John 8:32; that intertextual connection that raises the movie to another level.

I have come a long way from the reading of John 7-8 I did in 1986, where the boundaries of "text," "rhetoric," and "reader" were clear and distinct; where I was careful to keep my personal experience out of my scholarly discourse on the biblical text. Today I am more apt to find John anywhere, and apt to consider all sightings seriously. Some people may challenge what seems to be an idiosyncratic reading, wondering at the end whether I am even reading John at all. What is at stake in a postmodern sense of rhetoric and intertextuality? If Liar Liar gains some credulity from its intertextual repertoire, is it not conceivable that John 7-8 could also gain something from its connection to Liar Liar? Need it lose in the exchange? If Jesus can stoop so low as to write in the gritty dirt of ordinary human experience, then perhaps we should feel empowered to lift up popular

culture's allusions to the Christian canon into serious dialogue with postmodern rhetoric and textuality.<sup>44</sup> So I shall go back and read John 7:53-8:11 once again. Perhaps this time, in the midst of a complex Johannine chiasm, an adulterous orgasm, I will find J.C. poised, contorted in silence, ready to cast the first shoe. And perhaps I will find "this woman," now named, embodied, shouting with a voice that moves her beyond the confines of patriarchal stereotypes; with a voice strong enough to redress the judicial subtleties that have thrust her and her rescuer so dangerously into the spotlight of imperial power.

And when I am done reading, I will step outside this cramped Holden Village library in the North Cascades, and make that hike up to Copper Basin, to a place I have wanted to go for the past three days and have never yet been. And if I get up there, I just might never pick up the Gospel of John again.

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this essay was finally published as “Liar Liar and ‘This Woman’ in John 7:1-8:59: From Rhetorical Analysis to Intertextual Rereading,” in New Testament Greek and Exegesis: Festschrift in Honor of Gerald F. Hawthorne. Edited by Amy M. Donaldson and Timothy B. Sailors (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 99-119.

<sup>2</sup> And thus I defined the “implied reader” as “an intratextual entity evoked by the temporal quality of narrative” (The Print’s First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel SBLDS 82 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 34.

<sup>3</sup> See my Reading with a Passion: Rhetoric, Autobiography, and the American West in the Gospel of John (New York: Continuum, 1995), esp. 113-146, 198-199.

<sup>4</sup> “Die Kapitel 7-10 sind ‘ein sinnloses Durcheinanderer,’” wrote E. Schwartz in 1908 (quoted by Ludger Schenke, “Joh 7-10: Eine dramatische Szene” ZNW 80 [1989], 172). Similarly Gérard Rochais quotes J. Wellhausen as saying about John 7:14-8:59: “‘On peut pa découvrir un fil conducteur, un progrès. C’est toujours la même chose qui est répétée, dans quantité de variantes, et l’on n’avance pas d’un pouce’” (“Une Construction Littéraire Dramatique, à la Manière d’un Scénario” NTS 39 [1993], 355).

<sup>5</sup> See especially, Bart D. Ehrman, “Jesus and the Adulteress: [Jn 7:53-8:11]” NTS 34 (1988): 24-44; John Paul Heil, “The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress (John 7:53-8:11): Reconsidered” Biblica 72 (1991): 182-191; Gail R. O’Day, “John 7:53-8:11: A Study in Misreading” JBL 111 (1992): 631-640; Daniel B. Wallace, “Reconsidering ‘The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress Reconsidered’” NTS 39 (1993): 290-296; John Paul Heil, “A Rejoinder to ‘Reconsidering ‘The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress Reconsidered’ (John 7:53-8:11)’” Eglise et Theologie 25 (1994): 361-366; James I. H. McDonald “The So-Called Pericope de Adultera” NTS 41 (1995): 415-427; T. van Lopik, “Once Again: Floating Words, Their Significance for Textual Criticism” NTS 41 (1995): 286-291; Brad H. Young, “‘Save the Adulteress!’ Ancient Jewish Responsa in the Gospels” NTS 41 (1995): 59-70; Rita

Nakashima Brock and Susan Thislethwaite, Casting Stones: Prostitution and Liberation in Asia and the United States (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996); Alan Watson, "Jesus and the Adulteress" Biblica 80 (1999): 100-108; Larry J. Kreitzer and Deborah W. Rooke, eds. Ciphers in the Sand: Interpretations of the Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11) The Biblical Seminar 74 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000); Leticia A. Guardiola-Sáenz, "Border-crossing and Its Redemptive Power in John 7.53-8.11: A Cultural Reading of Jesus and the Accused." In John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space, and Power, edited by Musa W. Dube and Jeffrey L. Staley (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 129-152; Jean Kim, "Adultery or Hybridity?: Reading John 7:53-8:11 from a Postcolonial Context." In John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space, and Power, edited by Musa W. Dube and Jeffrey L. Staley (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 111-128; Barbara A. Holmes and Susan R. Holmes Winfield, "Sex, Stones, and Power Games: A Woman Caught at the Intersection of Law and Religion (John 7:53-8:11)." In Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible. Semeia Studies 44 (2003), 143-162.

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, The Gospel of John: A Commentary. Translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 209-325; Rudolf Schnackenburg, The Gospel According to St. John Vol. 1. Translated by Kevin Smyth (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 55-56.

<sup>7</sup> The Print's First Kiss, 55-56, 69. No doubt some would use the term ethnocentric to describe my choice of the word "personal" (e.g., Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998], 163-164). Nevertheless the language of the monologues does change, with many more personal pronouns being used in the second halves of each.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. R. A. Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," NTS 27 (1980): 1-31.

<sup>9</sup> Staley, The Print's First Kiss, 55-56.

<sup>10</sup> Staley, Reading with a Passion, 63-66.

<sup>11</sup> This could be one of the real values of Malina and Rohrbaugh's work on John ( Social-Science Commentary), which has an appendix arguing for a chiasmic structuring of the entire Gospel (295-319).

For other models for the symmetrical structuring of John 7-8, see John Breck, The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1994), 191-232; Wes Howard-Brook, Becoming Children of God: John's Gospel and Radical Discipleship (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 171-210; and Stephen Motyer, Your Father the Devil? A New Approach to John and 'The Jews' (Cambridge: Paternoster, 1997), 141-159. Although there are quite a few differences between other scholars' structural analyses of John 7-8 and my own, I will not attempt to delineate all those differences here. For the most part, other analyses do not see any overarching chiasmic structure in John 7-8, nor do they see an argumentative progression between John 7 and 8 (but cf. Howard-Brook, Becoming Children of God, 172).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. 2 Sam 13:17; 2 Kgs 6:28.

<sup>13</sup> Actually, a number of articles on John 7:53-8:11 were written during the first Bush presidency (no pun intended). But the title of Holly Joan Toensing's recent study seems to reflect more the Clinton years ("The Politics of Insertion: The Pericope of the Adulterous Woman and its Textual History," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. Vanderbilt University, 1998; cf. also Loren Glass, "Publicizing the President's Privates" Postmodern Culture 9:3 [1999]: 7-13).

<sup>14</sup> The Print's First Kiss, 64-66. There I called this section "The Third Ministry Tour." Fernando Segovia is much clearer on the issue of the Johannine plot than I originally was ("The Journey(s) of the Word of God: A Reading of the Plot of the Fourth Gospel" Semeia 53 [1991]: 22-35, 42-43). See also Schenke "Joh 7-10," 172-192; Rochais, "Une Construction Littéraire Dramatique," 355-378; and Catherine Cory, "Wisdom's Rescue: A New Reading of the Tabernacles Discourse (John 7:1-8:59)" JBL 116 (1997): 95-116.

<sup>15</sup> Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation.

Translated by John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> George A. Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 34.

<sup>17</sup> In my original 1986 regional SBL presentation I called the Judeans “the Jews.” I’m still not entirely convinced of the value of the word “Judean” over “Jew” for the Fourth Gospel, but like Agrippa in Acts 26:28, I am “very nearly persuaded” by recent anthropological arguments (Malina and Rohrbaugh, Social-Science Commentary, 44-46).

<sup>18</sup> Raymond E. Brown’s commentary on the Gospel of John had made this same text division (The Gospel According to John I-XII AB 29a [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966], 315, 361). However, Raymond Brown was not particularly interested in dividing Johannine narrative into large chiasmic segments (Brown, The Gospel According to John, 343; cf. Breck, The Shape of Biblical Language, 192). But if Brown had been so inclined, he might well have divided John 7-8 exactly the way I have.

<sup>19</sup> I can now take solace in Breck’s argument that one should not be overly concerned about the “unequal length of parallel subsections” (The Shape of Biblical Language, 196, 197), even though I am not completely convinced by this argument.

<sup>20</sup> Jerome Neyrey makes a strong case for connecting this seemingly innocuous metaphor of slavery with the ancient Abraham story (“Jesus the Judge: Forensic Process in John 8.21-59” Biblica 68 [1987]: 522).

<sup>21</sup> Again, I seem to be tracing over Raymond Brown’s fingerprints (The Gospel According to John, 317).

<sup>22</sup> Brown, The Gospel According to John, 342.

<sup>23</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh dislike the word “identity” when talking about ancient Mediterranean constructions of personhood (A Social-Science Commentary, 143-145, 163-164), but that is the term I used in my 1986 presentation.

<sup>24</sup> An Ideology of Revolt: John’s Christology in Social-Science Perspective (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 37-58; “The Trials (Forensic) and Tribulations (Honor Challenges) of Jesus: John 7 in Social Science Perspective” BTB 26 (1996): 107-124.

<sup>25</sup> “The Trials (Forensic) and Tribulations (Honor Challenges) of Jesus,” 110, cf. 109, 116. See also Mark W. G. Stibbe, John. Readings: A New Biblical Commentary (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 99; and Stephen Motyer, Your Father the Devil?, 141-159.

<sup>26</sup> Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation, 19. Kennedy, following Aristotle, identifies three species of rhetoric: judicial, deliberative, and epideictic (New Testament Interpretation, 19-20, 23-24; cf. Perelman, The New Rhetoric, 47). “[D]eliberative . . . aims at effecting a decision about a future action, often in the very immediate future; and epideictic . . . celebrates or condemns someone or something, not seeking an immediate judgment or action, but increasing or undermining assent to some value” (Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation, 36).

<sup>27</sup> Social-Science Commentary, 146-167; “The Trials (Forensic) and Tribulations (Honor Challenges) of Jesus,” 116-123. Interestingly, Malina and Rohrbaugh do not use the terms “forensic” or “trial” in their social-scientific analysis of John 7-8, even though they list Neyrey’s essay in their bibliography.

<sup>28</sup> “Jesus the Judge,” 510-511.

<sup>29</sup> Kennedy shows how important exhortation and the future tense are in deliberative rhetoric (New Testament Interpretation, 145-147); compare John 7:24, 28, 34, 37; 8:12, 21, 24, 28, 31-32, 36, 46, 51.

<sup>30</sup> By way of contrast, Jesus’ hearing before the high priest (John 18:19-24), is clearly couched in judicial rhetoric. There, when asked about his teaching, Jesus responds with references to the past: “I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple. . . . Ask those

who heard what I said to them. . . .” (my emphasis).

<sup>31</sup> New Testament Interpretation, 146. Kennedy therefore categorizes Galatians as deliberative rhetoric rather than as judicial rhetoric, a position for which Betz had earlier argued.

Like Galatians, the rhetorical species of John 7-8 is not easy to define. But following Kennedy’s lead in Galatians, I believe that the language of judgement and the strategy of attack and defense evident in John 7-8 are not in themselves proof of judicial (“forensic”) rhetoric. The key question that needs to be asked is: To what end are these argumentative devices being used? In John 7-8, Jesus’ use of the future tense and his focus on future benefits clearly show that these argumentative devices are being used in a deliberative framework. Jesus is acting as a prophet. His audience recognizes this, but is unconvinced by his prophetic message.

<sup>32</sup> This increasingly agonistic language is well noted by Malina and Rohrbaugh (Social-Science Commentary, 162).

<sup>33</sup> As I redact this essay a final time, my son, now eighteen, is away at college in southern California.

<sup>34</sup> For an excellent introduction to the theoretical issues of postmodern intertextuality, see Graham Allen, Intertextuality. The New Critical Idiom (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>35</sup> Directed by Tom Shadyac and written by Paul Guay and Stephen Mazur, the movie was released in March, 1997. Interestingly, Tom Shadyac’s next film, Patch Adams, also combined christological themes with a Gospel-like plot.

<sup>36</sup> Note that Jim Carrey’s character (Fletcher Reede) carries within himself a homonym for the reading experience.

<sup>37</sup> All quotes from the film are taken from the DVD subtitles (Liar Liar, Tom Shadyac, director. Universal Studios, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> Written by Theodor Seuss Geisel (New York: Random House, 1960). Interestingly, one of Jim Carrey’s next feature film roles was “the Grinch” in Dr. Seuss’ The Grinch Who Stole Christmas

(released in November, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> While this is not the first reference to God in the film, the very next sentence is the “I Am” saying from Green Eggs and Ham. The close temporal connection between Fletcher’s divine expletive and the “I Am” saying can hardly be coincidental. It is the narrative marker of Fletcher’s first revelatory experience, and a subtle interpretive key to the film’s central miracle. Interestingly, Tom Shadyac uses the same “kyrios” strategy in his next film, Patch Adams, which helps the viewer associate Patch’s metaphoric death and resurrection with Jesus’ passion (Staley, “Meeting Patch Again for the First Time: Purity and Compassion in Marcus Borg, the Gospel of Mark, and Patch Adams.” In Screening Scripture: The Bible and Classic Film. Edited by George Aichele and Robert Walsh [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002], 223). The technique occurs in a more exaggerated fashion in the science fiction thrillers, The Matrix (1-3), where it functions as a marker to connect the main character, Neo, with Jesus Christ.

<sup>40</sup> As in the first two Johannine signs (2:1-11; 4:46-54), we as viewers know a miracle has happened long before the characters in the film know it. And as I have argued elsewhere, John is unique among the gospels in employing this rhetorical device (The Print’s First Kiss, 84-86). Furthermore, the proof that this “miracle” has occurred comes to us through the experience of someone (Fletcher) who has no idea a miracle has happened (ibid.).

<sup>41</sup> John Bowman, The Fourth Gospel and the Jews: A Study in R. Akiba, Esther, and the Gospel of John. Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series 8 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1975).

<sup>42</sup> Allen, Intertextuality, 174-199.

<sup>43</sup> More recently, Jim Carrey has starred in The Truman Show (1998), The Majestic (2001), and Bruce Almighty (2003), all of which reflect even stronger christological and theological themes.

<sup>44</sup> I have written to this issue recently, arguing that Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel Ceremony opens up a new way of envisioning biblical border women (“Changing Woman: Postcolonial Reflections on Acts

16.16-40” JSNT 73[1999]: 134-135).