

CHAPTER SIX

Postmortem Passion Play: John 18:28-19:42 and the Erosion of the Reader

as "[No] one has ever done exegesis of John's writings until the reader has received, a vital reality, the message of the work and has felt its impact in his own life and existence." Crossan

"I am going to . . . read the Gospel of St. John as an Indian. Secondly, this Indian is not a hypothetical being, . . . whom I have imagined. This Indian is myself."
Amaladoss

"[R]eading is a species of self-discovery, but it may also be a neurosis or hysteria." Freund

"Let us . . . cast lots for it to see who will get it." Jn 19:24

Prologue

As a literary genre, the Christian passion play had its historical origins in medieval Europe and in the liturgy of the church. But as Mikhail Bakhtin points out, its social roots go back much earlier, to the ancient marketplace and the chthonic carnival, "which celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; [and] marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions."¹

The earliest reference to passion dramas comes from the tenth century English monk Ethelwold, who "described the 'praiseworthy custom' of celebrating the death and resurrection of Christ by a representation, with mime and dialogue, to be performed in church during or after the liturgical rites."² In the same century, Hrosvit, a Benedictine nun from Saxony, began writing the first Christian dramas, based largely on the martyrdoms of saints. Hrosvit envisioned the dramatic form as a way of instilling Christian virtues in the laity, and before long, the form was being adapted to the life of Christ.

The passion play owed much of its popularity to the mixture of folk traditions and cultural stereotypes, especially after the thirteenth century when it was gradually banished

¹Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10; cf. McKenna, *Violence and Difference*, 35, 172.

²Cross and Livingstone, eds., "Christian Drama," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 425. This "praiseworthy custom" probably had its origins in the Quem quaeritis trope which was especially well developed in the liturgical worship of the Gallican Rite (ibid).

from performances on church property and began to be presented in town squares and in the vernacular.³ Today, the most famous European passion drama is that performed by the villagers of Oberammergau, in upper Bavaria, Germany. Except for the years 1870 and 1940, it has been performed every ten years since 1634 when, as legend has it, it began as an expression of gratitude for the cessation of a plague.⁴

One of the most popular, long running passion plays in the United States is the annual summer production at Spearfish, South Dakota. First performed in 1938, with the Black Hills as an expansive backdrop (hills which had been stolen seventy years earlier from the Lakota and Cheyenne Indians for its gold-bearing streams), its geographic setting subtly combines the mythic themes of American Manifest Destiny with Jesus' victory over Satan and death. But I am interested in readers and readings of the passion narrative, not in the history of the dramatic genre. Thus, this chapter's passion play will not be set in Spearfish, South Dakota or Oberammergau, Germany, but somewhere within the postmodern struggle against totalizing theories of texts and selves.

Like the formless, wordless memories of our professional, pre-autobiographical selves, in John's gospel the physical pain of the crucified victims has no voice. In sharp contrast to Mark's gospel, there is no cry of dereliction nor are there any dying screams.⁵ Although the beaten and crucified Jesus can speak (he converses with Pilate, with his mother, and with the beloved disciple; he says he is thirsty; and he acknowledges the completion of his divinely appointed task, Jn 19:1-12, 26-30), he is never portrayed as suffering.⁶ The Johannine narrator and the crucified victim remain silent, for to acknowledge the pain is to confess the mastery and power of the one inflicting it, and this neither Jesus nor the narrator can do (19:1-3, 10-11).⁷ Like others who have undergone torture, the Johannine Jesus somehow seems to have disciplined himself to transcend the limits of physical pain. From an ideological perspective, perhaps the "food" he has to eat and his commitment to "laying down his life" have made the pain of a tortuous death bearable (4:32; 10:17).⁸

³Mikhail Bakhtin points out the numerous parodic connections between the medieval carnival and the liturgy and mystery plays of the Church (*Rabelais and His World*, 5, 15, 27, 78-88, 229-231, 347-348).

⁴According to Richard Pierard, "Hitler admired the play for its alleged anti-Semitic qualities, and it was rewritten for the tricentennial performance in 1934 to make Jesus and the disciples appear as Aryan heroes" ("Oberammergau," 720).

⁵Compare Mk 15:34 and Jn 19:26-28; compare Mk 15:37 and Jn 19:30.

⁶As Robert Brawley rightly notes, the narrator's aside explaining Jesus' statement "I thirst" as "a completion of Scripture" (19:28), argues against interpreting it as a sign of agony ("An Absent Complement and Intertextuality in John 19:28-29," 427; see also Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament*, 54-57).

⁷See, for example, Elaine Scarry's discussion of pain and interrogation (*The Body in Pain*, 28-38, esp., 37-38), and her observation that in the Christian symbol of the cross, the relationship between power and pain has been eliminated. She notes, "[t]hey are no longer manifestations of each other: one person's pain is not the sign of another's power. The greatness of human vulnerability is not the greatness of divine invulnerability. They are unrelated and therefore can occur together: God is both omnipotent and in pain" (*ibid.*, 214).

⁸Perhaps the Roman soldier in Mark's gospel exclaims, "This man must have been a son of God" (Mk 15:39), because he is impressed with Jesus' fortitude. See, for example, Judith Perkins' gruesome examples of self-inflicted pain ("Representation in Greek Saints' Lives," 260-265), and closer to home, the descriptions of both Euroamerican settlers' and Indians' apparent stoicism when tortured (Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction*, 185-212; and Namias, *White Captives*, 3-4, 54-56). Scarry is aware of the wide variety of

Yet if that physical agony were to find its voice, if Jesus' pain had a pen, I believe that it would begin to tell another story. And, as Elaine Scarry writes, the story that it would tell would be "about the inseparability of . . . three subjects, their imbeddedness in one another."⁹ For her, these three subjects are: "first, the difficulty of expressing pain; second, the political and perceptual complications that arise as a result of that difficulty; and third, the nature of both material and verbal expressibility. . . ."¹⁰

In the following passion play, Scarry's trinity of subjects can be viewed as a plot that is given its peculiar shape by the conversation of the three corpses on their crosses. These three imaginary voices can, in turn, be associated to a certain extent with the hermeneutical voices that Mieke Bal discusses in her theoretical work, although there is actually no one-to-one correspondence between Bal's hermeneutical voices and those of the corpses. Her voices are the text (which is a subject that speaks to us), the interpretation (the plausible interaction with the text), and the witness (who checks what happens in interpretation and "will refuse to go along when the interpreter overwrites the text").¹¹ I have appropriated these three voices in an effort to raise up my own resistant, painful silences and the resistant, painful silences of the Johannine text.

To paraphrase and interweave Scarry's and Bal's insights, the "difficulty in expressing pain" gives rise to "political and perceptual complications" as the characters in the passion play wrestle with the Johannine text's silences. Next, the characters propose various interpretations, or "plausible interactions with the text" in response to the text's resistance to expressing Jesus' pain.¹² Finally, the characters act as witnesses who check what happens in interpretation and "refuse to go along when [an] interpreter overwrites the text."

I think that Elaine Scarry's threefold theory of pain as an experience out of which worlds are made and unmade, and Bal's three hermeneutical voices both may be suggestive for contemporary communities dedicated to the liberation of oppressed peoples in a postcolonial world, and help to orient the reader to the discussions of the three corpses which follow. But neither Scarry's nor Bal's theories are meant to act as metanarratives which somehow seek to legitimate or center any one of the interpretive voices over the other. In other words, my exegetical play does not represent a postmortem autopsy on postmodernism's resistance to totalizing theories.¹³ It has no obvious savior figure. So with these introductory comments in mind, let the Roman begin the postmortem task.

cultural responses to pain described by anthropologists, but does not discuss the differences in any detail (see, for example, *The Body in Pain*, 5, 109-110; cf. Collard, *Rape of the Wild*, 60-64; Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 135-136).

⁹*The Body in Pain*, 3.

¹⁰Ibid. Similarly Andrée Collard, in writing about the pain inflicted in animal research, says: "Researchers go to great lengths to avoid naming it, even when they purposely set out to study pain. To look at pain without naming it is to objectify pain, to transmute it into a category of knowledge" (*Rape of the Wild*, 60).

¹¹*Death and Dissymmetry*, 240-241.

¹²Traditionally, in the commentaries and exegetical articles on the Fourth Gospel's passion narrative, christological questions have dominated these "political and perceptual complications."

¹³Is postmodernism's resistance to metanarratives and totalizing theories simply another Western European metanarrative (see, for example, Krupat, *Ethnocriticism*, 9-13; Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 14-17; Holub, *Crossing Borders*, 194-195, 200-201; Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, 18-20)? Perhaps.

Act I

A Roman soldier begins to cut the leather thongs that hold the three bloodied bodies to their crosses. He rips the valuable iron nails from the still-warm flesh. They will be saved, straightened, and reused another day for another grim demonstration of Pax Romana.¹⁴ As he drops the first corpse on the ground, Death rattles their throats and the tale begins.¹⁵

The first corpse falls in a heap, face in the dirt, and one of those left hanging addresses the other two. "You know, I must confess to you that I have never written about the Johannine passion narrative before, primarily because it has always struck me as a passionless passion. Ignace De la Potterie has recently said the same thing, only more in terms of character analysis. He says, 'The careful reader will be struck by two details: the complete self-awareness of Jesus, several times indicated, and also the majesty with which he goes forward to his Passion.'¹⁶ But Raymond Brown describes it in a manner which I find to be more disturbing theologically; as a passion narrative where 'there is no victimizing of the Johannine Jesus, [who] is in such control that only when he affirms 'It is finished,' does he bow his head and hand over his Spirit' (19:30).¹⁷ Suddenly, those strategies of subversion and victimization that so intrigued me in my earlier analysis of the Fourth Gospel's story world seem to have disappeared. If they're here at all, I'll have to work hard to find them."¹⁸

The corpse lying face down in the dirt intones, "And I'm absolutely repulsed by this Johannine Jesus, a person sent from God who is so sure of himself, so hypersensitized and aware of the hour's significance that 'he passes through death without turmoil and with jubilation.'¹⁹ So how can I be anything less than a radically resistant reader to this 'take-two-aspirin-and-call-me-in-the-morning' story? I've got to know this passion narrative in a painful, passionate way; in a carnal way. I will find a way to strip it and lay it bare, shuddering and convulsing, before the faithful mother and beloved disciple."

The third corpse, still hanging on its cross, enters the conversation: "Frankly, I'm repulsed by both of you. One of you has refused to talk about this text previously because it annoys your sophisticated literary and theological sensitivities, while the other of you dislikes the text's passionless characterization of Jesus, yet has decided to read it anyway--any way you want. You both seem to recognize intuitively that these crosses

¹⁴"Roman crucifixion was state terrorism; . . . its function was to deter resistance or revolt, especially among the lower classes . . ." (Crossan, *Jesus*, 127).

¹⁵"To degrade an object does not imply hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 21; cf. Booth, *The Company We Keep*, 394-416; esp., 402, 410).

¹⁶*The Hour of Jesus*, 16.

¹⁷*The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 118.

¹⁸See, for example, Chapter 3.

¹⁹Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus According to John 17*, 20; Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, 87-89.

reflect the radical difference between two social worlds--the ancient Mediterranean and the contemporary Euroamerican--yet you can't let the difference stand by itself and try to understand that cultural difference for what it is.²⁰ So why don't we just let our crosses stand for difference, for the Other? Let's investigate, critically evaluate, question, and interpret the text, but then let's leave our crosses to turn to stone in the sun. Let them be discovered by chance as artifacts of a different time, culture, and place."²¹

The second corpse, oblivious to the previous comments, plunges on in its soliloquy. Its voice deepens and grows more confident as it continues. "Listen to me for a minute, you two wind-filled bags of bones! From my vantage point up here I can see that the passion narratives are the most carefully, proleptically plotted parts of the synoptic gospels, and the Fourth Gospel is no exception to this. Straightforward predictions, fore-shadowings, allusions, and reliable commentary all work together to announce significant elements of Jesus' final days, and purposely leave little room for passion, surprise, or imagination in the narrative. As many scholars have pointed out, from the opening scenes of the gospel incidental characters, the narrator, and Jesus himself all make oblique or explicit references to his death and its significance. John's witness starts things off (1:29), Jesus alludes to it²² and seems actually to contrive it (6:70-71; 13:11-21; 17:12), the narrator expands upon it (2:21-22; 11:51-52; 12:33), and eventually even a minor character such as Caiaphas inadvertently prophesies it" (11:49-50).²³

The other hanging corpse impatiently interrupts to interject a slightly different perspective. "I can play your literary game too, although I reject your anachronistic, ethnocentric notion of story worlds.²⁴ But, assuming for the sake of argument that I am reading the text as so-called closely as you are, I note that within the passion narrative itself the actions of political powers dominate the sequence of events as nowhere else in the story.

"For example, this is the only section of the narrative where Jesus is passively moved from one place to the other. Only in the passion narrative is Jesus bound (*deo*, 18:12, 24; 19:40),²⁵ brought (*sullambano*, 18:12), or led to someone (*ago*, 18:13, 28; 19:4, 13). And it is the actions and intentions of the soldiers and temple police that move your

²⁰Part of that difference has to do with the contrasting experience of personhood in the ancient Mediterranean world and the contemporary Euroamerican world (see Chapter 5, notes 1, 2). Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey, following Mary Douglas, would argue that the Jesus of the Johannine passion narrative is a typical "strong group person" ("First Century Personality," 72; see also Bal, "The Point of Narratology," 731-732).

²¹Elaine Scarry writes that "in any culture, the simplest artifact, the simplest sign, is the single mark on wood, sand, rock, or any surface that will take the imprint" (*The Body in Pain*, 238). Here, as in the ancient Hebrew tradition, that sign is blood on a human made surface (cf. 220, 233-241, 325-326).

²²See, for example, Jn 2:4, 19; 3:14-16; 10:14-18; 12:7-8, 23-24, 31-32; 15:13; 18:11.

²³Alan Culpepper correctly discusses many of these references within the context of "plot," (*Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 86-98; see also Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, 31-44).

²⁴The term "story world" expresses the biblical narrative critics' notion that stories can have their own natural laws, social codes, and symbolic connections which might be quite different from any "real world" outside the text. For example, science fiction and fantasy are two contemporary genres that construct story worlds which are often at odds with the world as we know it (cf. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 6-8; Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 8-10).

²⁵Note Sylva's discussion of the word ("Nicodemus and his Spices," 148-151).

plot along --not Jesus' moment-by-moment decisions.

"As a matter of fact, earlier in the gospel the chief priests had sent the temple police to arrest Jesus (7:32), but precisely because they were reluctant to do so, the action was not carried out (7:45-52). And at other times Jesus quite easily escaped or withdrew from people whenever he wished.²⁶ Finally, when Jesus was asked to intervene in situations of need, there was always an immediate sense that Jesus' own prerogatives governed the plot movement--not the second party's interests.²⁷ So the intentions of both the protagonist and the antagonists do seem capable of affecting plot developments. Clearly, then, the Fourth Gospel's plot is not based upon a Greek idea of the Fates. Rather, Jesus is acting like a good and loyal son in a Mediterranean household. To paraphrase Malina and Neyrey, the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is one who internalizes and makes his own what God, his 'father' says, does, and thinks about him because he believes it is necessary, if he is to be an honorable son, to live out the expectations of God, his 'father.'²⁸

"Furthermore, although your encoded reader has been given numerous clues early on that Jesus would willingly be 'lifted up,'²⁹ in the passion narrative there are only minimal references to Jesus' ultimate power over the events or the plot. These come equally from Jesus (18:5-8, 11; 19:28-29) and the narrator (18:4, 9; 19:30), but only at the beginning and end of the passion narrative. They seem to be clumsily tacked on by your timorous implied author. One would think that in such an important part of the story, your implied author could have given your encoded reader consistently stronger clues regarding Jesus' self-awareness or commitment to God's purposes. But the closest we come to this is a remark by Jesus in his conversation with Pilate (19:11). By comparison, in the raising of Lazarus your encoded reader can find numerous references to Jesus' control and his near manipulation of events (11:4, 11-15, 23-27, 40-42).

"It seems to me, then, you could argue that in this juxtapositioning of power and powerlessness there is a subversive and doubly ironic undermining of the passion plotting. Jesus may indeed willfully step forward into his captors' arms at the beginning of the passion narrative (18:4-11),³⁰ but once he does that, he becomes a mere pawn in the hands of Jewish and Roman authorities. And for a few moments, anyway, you can legitimately say that things move beyond Jesus' personal control. Why? Simply because the socio-political order (*kosmos*) hates and persecutes him (15:18-25; 18:36; cf. 11:50).³¹

²⁶See, for example, Jn 4:3; 5:13, 18; 6:15; 7:1, 10, 19, 25, 30, 44; 8:20, 37, 40; 9:12; 10:39; 11:8, 54; cf. Stibbe, "The Elusive Christ," 21-25.

²⁷Note especially Jn 2:3-7; 4:46-49; 7:2-14; 11:1-6. In his study of these texts, Givin concludes that "there is [no] inconsistency or change of mind on Jesus' part." For Jesus is disassociated "from the predominantly human concerns of those who, by merely human standards, would seem to be rather close to him. . . . He never fails to attend to the situation presented to him, but in doing so he acts radically on his own terms." ("Suggestion, Negative Response and Positive Action in St. John's Portrayal of Jesus," 210).

²⁸Malina and Neyrey, "First Century Personality," 73; cf. Jn 5:19-20, 22.

²⁹See, for example, Jn 3:14-16; 10:17-18; 12:32; cf. Nicholson, *Death as Departure*, 164-165.

³⁰Stibbe wonders rhetorically whether Jesus' captors falling on the ground couldn't be understood as a response of amazement. Couldn't it be "[t]hat after so many great escapes Jesus is at last in a place where he will not and does not escape? Where he can be sought *and found*" ("The Elusive Christ," 23)?

³¹Or to put it another way, "that which resists integration," or "elude[s] the security umbrella of order" (like Jesus does) is the originating "chaos" that makes "cosmos" possible (White, *Myths of the Dog-Man*, 3-4).

Even Jesus can't control that."

Act II

"Dogs! Dogs! There are dogs all around me!" The first corpse, face still in the dirt, suddenly screams out in its darkness. "Thin ones, with ribs protruding, ears down, and their tails between their legs. There are dogs in this story, *lé chaa'i*, hungrily sniffing and licking my dried sweat, blood, and excrement--just like the dogs of Jezreel that gnawed Jezebel's bones.³² First come the flies and dogs, then come the beady-eyed rats!"

The second corpse interrupts: "You're out of your mind! Lift your head out of the dirt and look about carefully, you babbling idiot! If you just open your eyes you'll see that there are no dogs in this story world. Sheep, shepherds, and sheepfolds, yes. But nowhere in John will you find a dog mentioned. They're only the mad dreams of your disembodied mind."

"It may be true that there are no dogs in your Johannine story world," the third corpse breaks in, "but every Mediterranean crucifixion scene would have had them: the shameless dogs; watching, silently sitting on their haunches, waiting for the corpses to be dropped so they could finish the work left undone. The scavenging dogs surrounding crucified victims would have been one more element of the public shaming of criminals in that ancient social world."³³

"So now you believe it too? A corpse with its nose stuck in our filth shrieks 'dogs,' and just like that you're off in the world of cultural-anthropology and honor/shame societies!³⁴ That's precisely what I find so disconcerting about your kinds of interpretive moves," the second corpse says exasperatingly. "You have no sensitivity for how implied authors imaginatively create story worlds. You want to bring any and every detail of the ancient Mediterranean social world into the gospel--all from other first century *texts*, of course--and then you act as though they are part of this particular story world. But not

With regard to Pilate, who is a representative of the cosmos, David Rensberger astutely observes that "he is callous and relentless, indifferent to Jesus and to truth, and contemptuous of the hope of Israel that Jesus fulfills and transcends. . . . Pilate is thus a hostile figure second only to 'the Jews' themselves" ("The Politics of John," 406).

³² Kgs 9:30-37.

³³In his study of honor in the ancient Mediterranean world, Paul Friedrich has shown how dogs are "an illuminating key to the Illiadic idiom of honor. [They] emerge in the fourth line of the epic and reappear at least once in all but five of the remaining twenty-three books, thirty-five times in connection with the eating of corpses, mainly in metaphors, invectives, and similies. Dogs come in pairs, and packs, devouring the myriad corpses on the battelfield [sic] or even rushing in to gnaw the testicles of their dead master. . . . Numerous threats and entreaties involve being thrown to the dogs, the worst form of defilement" ("Sanity and the Myth of Honor," 289; see also Crossan, *Jesus*, 123-127, 153-154; Neyrey, "'Despising the Shame of the Cross,'" 15; Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 167-169; and Scobie, "Slums, Sanitation and Mortality in the Roman World," 418-420).

Recent films on the life of Jesus have depicted dogs at the crucifixion scene. Note, for example, the narrator's comments in the crucifixion scene of the film *Jesus of Montreal*, and the pictorial representation of the crucifixion in the film *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

³⁴For a comprehensive analysis of the ancient Mediterranean world as one whose values center around honor and shame, see Malina and Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts," 25-65.

every aspect of that ancient social world is in here!"

"Oh no, it *is* all here," replies the third corpse. "It's just that the ancient Mediterranean world is a 'high context society' which 'produce[s] sketchy and impressionistic texts, leaving much to the reader's or hearer's imagination. . . . Hence, much can be assumed.'³⁵ Western Europeans and Euroamericans, on the other hand, are 'low context societies,' which 'produce detailed texts, spelled out as much as possible, and leave little to the imagination.'³⁶

"Everyone here knows what a crucifixion is like. We don't have to spell out all the gory details."

"Your two-fold description may work for societies at large, but it won't work for storytelling," interjects the second corpse, trying to stretch out tall on its cross. "It seems to me that narratives always reflect 'high contexts.'³⁷ No story can hold its hearers' attention if every detail of that narrative world must first be spelled out. Authors who had to do that would never get around to telling their stories! This is part of what is meant by beginning a story in *media res*, and it is as much a dictum of modern Euroamerican prose as it was of Greek literature when Aristotle first observed it. Enormously high context demands are placed upon readers of all narratives. It's not just a peculiar identifying mark of ancient stories from Mediterranean cultures.

"I will grant you the point that it is important to know how shaming and how shameful crucifixions were in your so-called honor/shame society. But I will still maintain after all is said and done, that it is just as important to recognize how this implied author refuses to dwell on its most shameful details.³⁸ This implied author's narrowly constructed story world--no less socially constructed than any so-called real world, mind you--wishes to convince its encoded reader of a different ideology: that in spite of outward appearances, the final event of Jesus' life is bringing honor to his 'father.' Thus, many shameful, real world elements have been purposely omitted from this particular 'fantastic' story world.³⁹ So don't go bringing into the story those elements which the author may have purposely left out."

"You don't think I understand how stories work? Well, you don't understand how different cultures work!" snaps the third corpse. "Don't you see that you can't understand what was 'left out' of a text without first understanding what was socially implicit 'in' the

³⁵Malina, "Reading Theory Perspective," in The Social World of Luke-Acts, 20.

³⁶Ibid., 19.

³⁷Bruce Malina's concept of the socio-rhetorical "context" would be called the text's "repertoire" in Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response, which for him, "consists of all the familiar territory within the text. This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged . . ." (The Act of Reading, 69). Yet Iser can go on to make the important observation that "[l]iterary communication differs from other forms of communication in that those elements of the sender's repertoire which are familiar to the reader through their application in real-life situations, lose their validity when transplanted into the literary text. And it is precisely this *loss* of validity which leads to the communication of something new" (ibid., 83; emphasis his).

³⁸The author of 4 Maccabees graphically depicts the torture of the Jewish faithful (4 Mac 5:28-6:30; 9:10-11:27; see also Perkins' examples of ancient Mediterranean torture narratives in "Representation in Greek Saints' Lives," 257-265; and Hengel, Crucifixion in the Ancient World, 22-32, 87).

³⁹Ernst Käsemann says: "Judged by the modern concept of reality, our [Fourth] Gospel is more fantastic than any other writing in the New Testament (The Testament of Jesus According to John 17, 45; cf. Aichele, "Literary Fantasy and the Composition of the Gospels," 56-59).

text? Your ethnocentric dogmatism just appalls me!"⁴⁰

The corpse crumpled on the ground tries to jerk out of its deathly slumber. "What is all the yapping I keep hearing? I've dreamed of those damned dogs, and I can still hear them sniffing and barking around me. Hidden inside every mad dog is a god, damned to suffer for our sins.⁴¹ So I say let's keep them here beside us. They add a realistic note of passion to an otherwise passionless story. And besides, it's two against one. You're the odd corpse out."

"Say, all your talk about dogs reminded me of a joke someone once told me.⁴² Have you heard the one about the dyslexic atheist?

"No, I haven't. And I hope it's not funny. It hurts like hell when I laugh."

"He didn't believe there was a dog."

"Ha, Ha. Thank Dog, my ribs didn't move."

"Oh, stop encouraging the fool!" the second corpse retorts. "Your joke stank, and you're beginning to sound just as absurd as the corpse below us."

"And as for you"--the corpse continued, trying to look down--"you've got to stop bringing your personal, autobiographical '*lé chaa'i*' into this story world just because you've seen them in your dreams! Everything is so arbitrary, so cynical with you! You have no sense of argumentation or logic."

"Where's the scholarly discourse; any semblance of plausible interaction with the text? At least the corpse hanging beside me has a reason for bringing in its scavenger dogs. Historical, social world reconstructions of first-century crucifixions would demand their presence. But you shamelessly add elements to the story based simply upon your own idiosyncratic desire to have them here."

"Oh, so you want a reason for the dogs' presence, do you? Some 'plausible interaction with the text?' If you require that for legitimizing interpretations, I can give it to you.⁴³ Everyone knows there are intertextual allusions to Psalm 22:14-18 in John 19:24 and 28. The narrator even adds, 'This was to fulfill what the scripture says.' So what do you think is the referent of the third person plural verb 'they divided' and the antecedent of the reflexive pronoun 'themselves' in the phrase 'They divided my clothes among themselves' (19:24)? It's the 'dogs' of Psalm 22:16 and 20 (Ps 21:17/21 [LXX])!⁴⁴ So you see, the dogs are too here. Some may watch us silently from their haunches, waiting to gnaw our bones. Others merely playfully tug and rip apart our discarded clothing."

⁴⁰See Mieke Bal's criticism of ethnocentrism in biblical literary criticism and ethnographers' need for narrative theory ("The Point of Narratology," 730-737).

⁴¹David White writes, "There is much of man in his dogs, much of the dog in us, and behind this, much of the wolf in both the dog and man. And, there is some of the Dog-Man in god" (Myths of the Dog-Man, 15). Or, I might add, there is some of the Dog-Man in Christ (cf. Sloterdijk and Crossan who both describe much of Jesus' behavior as dog-like, or Cynic-inspired [Critique of Cynical Reason, 161-162; The Historical Jesus, 72-88, 421-422; see also Kitchell, God's Dog, 19-23]).

⁴²"Whatever is sacred *must* become, somehow or other, a joke, if we want to free ourselves from mental tyranny (Ostriker, Feminist Revision and the Bible, 29; emphasis hers). For "laughter is always transgressive. The moment of laughter ruptures the principles of authority, whatever they may be" (ibid., 125; cf. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, 13-15, 73).

⁴³To paraphrase Mieke Bal, "the argument I am trying to make is to prove the presence of the absent, and it is up to the reader to evaluate to what extent they are there or not" (Death and Dissymmetry, 239-240).

⁴⁴Brawley recognizes this ("An Absent Complement and Intertextuality in John 19:28-29," 438).

But the second corpse continues to speak from its cross, dismissing its companions' voices with an attempted twitch of its head. "You can't have those dogs either. In Psalm 22:16 and 20 'dogs' is a pejorative epithet for 'evildoers.' Even there the dogs aren't real. They're just a metaphor. And besides, it's neither the third person plural verb nor the reflexive pronoun that is significant here in John, but rather the action of dividing the clothes. That's what fulfills Scripture."

"You bitches! You just don't get it, do you? What I want is the metaphor: people as dogs, or dogs as people--either way, it doesn't make any difference to me.⁴⁵ You say

⁴⁵Andrée Collard argues that in Pavlov's "scientific experiments" on dogs, he faulted his animals for exhibiting antisocial behavior in much the same way that women's resistance to oppressive male power is often used to label them as "men-haters" (*Rape of the Wild*, 62). And David White notes the reciprocal relationship between the "domestication" of the dog and the "'humanization' of the human species" (*Myths of the Dog-Man*, 12-13; cf. McKenna, *Violence and Difference*, 132).

The Last Supper

Sebastiano Ricci, 1713/1714

(Samuel H. Kress Collection, © 1994 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington)

A dog lies near Judas Iscariot's feet as Judas leaves the Last Supper with the money bag, on his way out to betray Jesus (Jn 13:21-30).

Road to Calvary

Albrecht Dürer, 1527

(Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

In the lower right hand corner a dog excitedly runs along side Jesus as Jesus carries his own cross to Golgotha (Jn 19:17). Following on the heels of the dog are Veronica, with a cloth in her hands; the curly-headed apostle John; Mary, the mother of Jesus; and John's mother, Salome.

Crucifixion at Calvary

Albrecht Dürer, ca. 1500

(Foto Marburg/Art Resource, NY)

Although many of Dürer's woodcuttings of Christ's passion include a dog in the foreground, only one of his renditions of the crucifixion depicts a dog near the cross. In this Johannine-inspired scene, a slinking dog is strategically positioned between Jesus' grieving mother, the curly-headed apostle John, and John's mother Salome on the left (Jn 19:25-27); and the Roman soldiers on the right, who are casting lots for Jesus' clothing (Jn 19:23-25; cf. Ps 22:16-18).

your implied author has historicized the Psalmist's metaphor, turning it into a prophetic reference to events at Jesus' crucifixion.⁴⁶ Well, I just want to keep the Psalm's original metaphoricity.⁴⁷ What's wrong with that? Can't you hear my pain and my groaning? 'I have given a name to my pain and call it 'dog.' It is just as faithful, just as obtrusive and shameless, just as entertaining, just as clever as any other dog--and I can scold it and vent my bad mood on it as others do with their dogs. . . .'⁴⁸ So you can keep the shepherders, the sheep, and the rock-enclosed corrals. I just want the dogs. And you can't take them away from me! They're here, they're mine, and they're eating me up inside!"

Act III

Attempting to get the scholarly debate back on course, the second corpse decides to ignore the last outrageous outburst. "Frankly, I think we've all been barking up the wrong tree for some time. Hadn't one of you just brought up the issue of irony before we were led off track? Now there's an important topic in the Fourth Gospel and a Johannine strategy that we can all agree on. Everyone says the Johannine passion narrative is highly ironic.⁴⁹ And, I believe, we were just talking about the contrasting views of power in the

⁴⁶According to Ernst Haenchen, "[t]he scene itself, the division of the clothes and the casting of lots for 'the tunic without seams,' is derived from Ps 22:18(19)" (*The Gospel of John*, 2:193). Raymond Brown, however, thinks that "the interpretation of the psalm is stretched to cover an incident that the evangelist found in his tradition rather than vice versa," since one would expect to find the psalmist's expression *ebalon kleon* for casting lots rather than the verb *lachomen* (Jn 19:24) if the evangelist were simply inventing the scene (*The Gospel according to John*, 2:920, cf. 2:903).

⁴⁷Eric Cheyfitz writes: "Figurative language, of which metaphor, or translation, is the model, is the driving force of interpretation, that is, of language itself. For this language within language that is the force of language opens up a space between signified and signifier, a rupture of identity, where the conflictive play of dialogue takes place that constitutes the speakers (writers/readers) for and significantly through each other" (*The Poetics of Imperialism*, 38).

⁴⁸Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 249-250. Or as John Crossan writes, "if you seek the heart of darkness, follow the dogs" (*Jesus*, 127).

⁴⁹For example, see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 173-174; Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*,

text, weren't we? Who is really in control? God, or the earthly, ruling authorities? Surely, as you said, the contrast between Jesus willfully stepping forward at his arrest and being led here and there is ironic.⁵⁰ And of course, Jesus' conversations with the 'powers that be' are ironic (18:19-24, 28-19:16).

"As everyone notes, those so-called powerful characters in the text think they are in control, but, in fact, the encoded reader knows all along that they are not. Clearly, all Jesus' and the narrator's talk about "the hour (*hora/kairos*) has been supplying the encoded reader with that ironic, binocular perspective from the first scenes of the gospel.⁵¹ So I don't see your focus on the contrasts in power and powerlessness as *subversively* undermining the theological theme of God's salvific power (10:17-18). As with the portrayal of the Jewish leaders' concern for pollution (18:28; 19:14, 31), these multifaceted ironies simply bind the implied author's and encoded reader's ideological/theological points of view more closely together over against those of the ruling authorities: in spite of earthly appearances, God and Jesus are in control. Or to put it in your terms, the faithful, honorable son is acting out his socially prescribed role according to his father's wishes."

Another leather thong is cut and the third corpse drops to the ground beside the first. "I suppose it's time for me to jump back into your interpretive game. So answer me this. Wouldn't you say that one of the most dramatic ironies is when Pilate asks the offhanded question 'What is truth?' (18:38) of the very one who had earlier told his disciples, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. . . .' (14:6)?⁵² Yet curiously, neither Jesus, the narrator, nor Pilate respond to the question. In John 19:9-10 Jesus will again fail to answer Pilate, and there both the narrator and Pilate note Jesus' silence. But here, strangely, there is no narrative mark of the silence. Why not? Jesus responded to the high priest's earlier question, and he has responded to every other question of Pilate up to this point. Why is there no response, no uptake, not even a narrator's remark 'And he said nothing?'"

The second corpse quickly answers. "Well, obviously the implied author expects the encoded reader to fill in the correct answer: 'Jesus is the Truth.'⁵³ And Pilate's question--is it asked in jest? pensiveness? or sarcasm?--proves only that he is an outsider.⁵⁴ So at Pilate's expense, Jesus, the implied author, and encoded reader are all joined together. Ideologically they are one."

129-137; Senior, The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John, 68, 152; and Giblin, "John's Narration of the Hearing before Pilate (John 18,28-19,16)," 238; et al.

⁵⁰Stibbe, "The Elusive Christ," 20-25, 29.

⁵¹See Jn 2:4; 4:21-23; 5:25-29; 7:6-8, 30; 8:20; 12:27; 13:1; 17:1. Paul Duke, following many before him, speaks of the "double-layered" quality of irony in the Fourth Gospel (Irony in the Fourth Gospel, 14).

⁵²Foucault, Power/Knowledge, 66.

⁵³Paul Duke writes, "It is just as possible that the unanswered question concludes the scene because the Johannine ironist invites us to reflect upon what--and who--the Answer is" (Irony in the Fourth Gospel, 131; cf. Edwards, "The World Could not Contain the Books," 192; Neyrey, "'Despising the Shame of the Cross,'" 12).

⁵⁴Following Rudolf Schnackenburg (The Gospel according to St. John, 3:251) and Raymond Brown (The Gospel according to John, 2:869), David Rensberger says that "Pilate's final 'What is truth?' (18:38) [is not] the question of a serious seeker; if it were, he would stay for an answer" ("The Politics of John," 403; cf. Stibbe, John as Storyteller, 107).

"But I'm not so sure," the third corpse interjects. "Did you know that this is the last time the noun 'truth' is used in the book? Pilate and your implied author both know that the answer to the question 'What is truth?' does not lie in some abstract quality of historical accuracy or confessional correctness (cf. 1:49-51; 7:27, 52; 11:27, 40). Irrespective of 'the truth,' Jesus only becomes a threat in this gospel when people rightly or wrongly 'believe in him' and 'follow him' (6:15; 7:3-9, 12, 45-49; 11:45-53; 12:12-19). So whether Jesus really is or is not a king is beside the point. Pilate's inscription on Jesus' cross and the chief priests' objections to it will be the ultimate joke here (19:19-22).⁵⁵ Contrary to your opinion, here I think Pilate and Jesus are both aligned with your implied author."

"Yes! I think you've found the correct answer to this text's question, 'What is truth?' I would only want to add that whether Jesus fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish is also beside the point for your implied author (6:15, 21-65). Maybe even whether he is or is not a son of God is beside the point (5:18; 10:31-39). Neither who Jesus historically is, nor what people confess him to be--nor even who Jesus confesses himself to be--is the crucial question for your implied author or Pilate at this juncture. As the next dialogue between Jesus and Pilate will show (19:8-11), the important question underlying all others is whether Jesus is a threat to power (11:45-53; 12:12-19). The question of truth cannot be separated from the body that stretches out the hand" (18:22; 19:3; 20:27).⁵⁶

"So as I was about to say, in handing over Jesus (18:30), the chief priests have safeguarded their positions of power against the threat of their Roman overlords (11:48-50). In handing over Jesus (19:16), Pilate is safeguarding his position of power (*eksousia*, 19:10-11) against the possible threat of Caesar (19:12). And in handing over his spirit (19:30), Jesus will safeguard his place of power (*eksousia*, 17:1-5) before God (10:17-18). We all know that '[p]ower is cautious. It covers itself.'"⁵⁷

"Thus, the power of the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate resides precisely in Jesus' possible threat to Roman power--not in the truth or falsity of his claim to kingship.⁵⁸ So Jesus doesn't answer Pilate's question and there is no uptake. Why? Because in the presence of power, the question of some independent truth source is ultimately irrelevant. Jesus, your implied author, and Pilate know that."⁵⁹ I guess what I'm trying to say is that '[t]ruth is a thing of this world [kosmos]: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint.' It 'is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it.'"⁶⁰

⁵⁵Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, 136-137; Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, 153-154.

⁵⁶In the ancient Mediterranean world, the hands of the human body represented power (Malina, *The New Testament World*, 60, 66; cf. Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 173, 252-253). And in the words of Page DuBois, "the desire to create an other and the desire to extract truth are inseparable" (*Torture and Truth*, 152).

⁵⁷Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 59; cf. McKenna's discussion of "state agents" in *Violence and Difference*, 160-172.

⁵⁸Charles Griblin instinctively recognizes this when he says, in regard to Jn 18:38b-40, that "[t]o Pilate's mind *thus far in the hearing* [my emphasis], the King of the Jews is no threat to Roman rule or to Pilate's own position" ("John's Narration of the Hearing Before Pilate (John 18,28-19,16)," 227). Once he perceives Jesus to be a threat to his position, however, he immediately moves to get rid of him (19:12).

⁵⁹Cf. Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, 106-109, 118-119; and Kitchell, *God's Dog*, 93-95.

⁶⁰Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 131, 133. See also Mailloux, *Rhetorical Power*, 141-144.

"That's the most absurd, convoluted argument I've ever heard!" The second corpse shouts, its voice shaking with anger. "Why do you have to jump into this discussion too? First you tried to force your ridiculous Navajo dogs into the story, and now you're trying to turn one simple, off-handedly ironic question of Pilate into some radically deconstructive metaphor that shapes the entire narrative and empties its claim to truth. I wish you would just keep your mouth shut and your head buried down there in the dirt!"

"From my vantage point up here, it is perfectly clear that right at the very start of the narrative the prologue revealed an implied author who would be vitally concerned with truth--who it is, where it comes from, what it does, and where it goes (1:14, 17).⁶¹ I mean, 'truth' and its cognates occur 48 times in the book! So let me tell you, your deconstructive agenda simply won't work here. I won't let it happen!"

"But I do think the former observation, that there is no narrative uptake to Pilate's question, is an interesting one. Yet I can't see how it is significant--other than as a joke between the implied author and encoded reader both of whom, I will still maintain over your objections, are laughing at Pilate and his earthbound sensibilities.

"And if you really want to talk about power in the passion narrative, then talk about it in the resurrection account, where God's power is ultimately triumphant over human power.

"Now, let's move on to talk about something more basic; something more objective, empirical, and countable. Let's look at the implied author's use of repetition in the story. This is an important topic, and the passion narrative is full of repetitions."

"Now wait just a minute! Who's talking about poststructuralist literary theory and a Johannine metaphor that deconstructs itself? I wasn't! I was thinking that perhaps what is operative in the Fourth Gospel is a commonly overlooked, ancient Mediterranean social-world code of patronage 'based on a strong element of inequality and difference in power.'⁶² It does seem to fit. I mean, think of it this way: Jesus is the truth because he is the broker who has been 'sent' from the patron 'above,' the place of ultimate honor and power.⁶³ That's the language of patronage.

"Now, listen to what you were just saying. You were agreeing with me that in this narrative, power (illustrated by your reference to the resurrection) is ultimately more important than some anachronistic, abstract quality of truth. The one with the power at the end, who has the right connections, is therefore the one who is 'the truth.' Power--either honorably acquired or ascribed--is truth, and in the Fourth Gospel truth does not exist apart from authority and power. That, my friend, is a description of the patronage system in an honor/shame society."

"All your talk of patronage sounds objective and scientific, but how far can you really press it in the Fourth Gospel? After all, Jesus never calls God his 'patron' in this story.⁶⁴ Instead, he always uses the relational language of father and son. Isn't that difference in metaphors significant? Isn't fictive kinship finally more important than

⁶¹ Warner, "The Fourth Gospel's Art of Rational Persuasion," 176-177.

⁶² Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts," 242.

⁶³ Cf. Jn 3:31-36; 5:31-44; 7:16-18; 8:12-18; 10:36-39; 12:44-50; 17:25-26.

⁶⁴ Cf. 1 Cl 36:1; 61:3; 64.

patronage?⁶⁵

"You know me, I'd hate to have to give up any Johannine metaphor for some broader, ancient social-world scenario--regardless of its apparent usefulness--if it meant destroying the peculiar ideology and narrative world of the Fourth Gospel in the process."

"Well, don't forget that 'father/son' language is often used interchangeably with patron/client language in the Mediterranean world.⁶⁶ Fictive kinship and patronage are much more closely linked than you might think."⁶⁷

"God! I'm confused. Am I awake or dreaming? Now that the two of you are on the ground, your voices are beginning to erode, intermingle, and coalesce. Perhaps if I could just lift my head from my chest to look at you. . . . But I can't. And I can't seem to connect voices with bodies anymore. Ancient Mediterranean social code of patronage or deconstructive metaphor--name it what you will, the effect still seems to be the same.

"For example, just look around us! No one is really listening to our conversation. Everyone who cared about us has left, convinced that we're dead. The only one still here is the cursing Roman, trying to cut me down from my cross before sunset. Needless to say, I'm worried that both of your strategies, no matter how necessary or novel for the modern world, will cut us off from the very communities we're seeking to nourish. This exercise is really beginning to bring me down."

"Oh come off it! You're the only corpse left up there with its head in the clouds, and you talk about us being cut off from community? As far as I'm concerned, the sooner you join us down here, the better off you'll be."

Act IV

After a few moments of painful silence, the corpse remaining on its cross decides to ignore its own misgivings and the grunts and groans of the two on the ground below. Once more it picks up its commentary.

"Look,⁶⁸ let's try this conversation one last time. As I noted earlier, the passion narrative is the most carefully plotted section of the story. Throughout it, repetitions of key words and phrases fill out and confirm the author's theological point of view. For example, the basic plot line is fourfold: 1) arrest (18:1-18); 2) legal charges (18:19-19:16); 3) crucifixion (19:17-37); 4) burial (19:38-42). But plot developments in each of the first three narrative sequences are slowed down by the numerous repetitions,

⁶⁵Cf. Jn 19:7, 26-27; 20:31.

⁶⁶For example, see Mt 5:43-6:15.

⁶⁷Halvor Moxnes writes: "In Roman models of society the relations between public, professional life and personal, family life were different from those of most modern societies. We make a clear distinction between the role of individuals as parents, spouses, or friends on the one hand and their role as public officials on the other. Within one set of relations we might expect them to show preferential treatment (parents, friends), but in others we expect strict impartiality (public officials). In Roman ideology, however, there were no such distinctions. . . . Even the emperor played a patronal[/paternal] role. He was looked upon more as a powerful father figure than as an imperial administrator" ("Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts," 245).

⁶⁸"Looking may be called enchanted when the act of attention draws a circle around itself from which everything but the object is excluded, when intensity of regard blocks out all circumambient images, stills all murmuring voices" (Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse*, 176).

repetitions which primarily assess blame for the final events of Jesus' life. From the implied author's perspective, Jesus' arrest, trial, and death are the result of collusion within the *kosmos* of Jewish and Roman power.⁶⁹

"The three most dominant repetitions are those which deal with 'the handing over' of Jesus to someone, the attempt to release Jesus, and his ultimate punishment by crucifixion. In the first case, the Greek verb *paradidomi* is used twice as the narrator's epithet for Judas (18:2, 5). It is also used four times in reference to the Jewish leaders (by the Jewish leaders themselves, 18:30; by Pilate, 18:35; and by Jesus, 18:36, 19:11). Finally, the narrator uses it once in reference to Jesus' spirit (19:30). Interestingly, the six references of 'handing over' earlier in the gospel are all related to Judas. Moreover, the narrator never implicates 'the Jews' in Jesus' *paradidonai*. This is something 'the Jews' themselves do, almost with a sense of pride (18:30), and it is echoed by Jesus and Pilate.

"The most common repetitions in the passion narrative are those that mention the crucifixion. There are fifteen references to it: 19:6 (twice), 10, 15 (twice), 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 25, 31, 32, and 41. The narrator uses the verb 'crucify' or noun 'crucifixion' ten times, while 'the Jews' (chief priests and servants) only use the verb in the imperative mood (two times). Pilate, on the other hand, always uses the verb in questions (three times). Similarly, references of the kingship charge leveled against Jesus are repeated five times (18:33, 37, 39; 19:14, 15), four of which are couched in questions which Pilate asks. The remaining reference is the chief priests' climactic response to Pilate, 'We have no king but Caesar' (19:15). Finally, there are eight different references to Pilate's acquittal and intended release of Jesus (*aitian* in 18:38; 19:4, 6; *apolyo* in 18:39 [twice]; 19:10 and 12 [twice]). Six come from Pilate, one comes from the narrator, and one comes from 'the Jews.' Clearly, all these repetitions strongly reinforce the implied author's ideological point of view, one which cannot be misinterpreted by the encoded reader."

The third corpse grins up at the second one still hanging above it. "Whenever I interrupt one of your dramatic soliloquies, you're forced to shut up for a while. So let me thrust another splinter in your tender, bloated side. Someone once said 'Sometimes the challenge posed by a text is not excessive obscurity but, rather, some form of excessive clarity.'⁷⁰

"You talk of repetitions in the passion narrative, and how they seem to slow down the plot and emphasize your implied author's ideological point of view. But curiously, it is not until one gets to the crucifixion itself, which you argued earlier was the most emphasized element in the narrative's plot, that the action begins to speed up significantly. While it takes from 18:12-19:16 (five pages of Greek text) just to get a death verdict against Jesus, it only takes from 19:16b-42 (two and a half pages of text) to get Jesus crucified, dead, and buried. Thus, in the first half of the passion account, narrative time and story time more closely parallel each other. But in the second half, narrative time is greatly constricted, while story time remains roughly the same.⁷¹

⁶⁹Jn 15:18-19; 17:14-16; 18:36. David Rensberger correctly points out that "Pilate too becomes an agent of the 'world'" in the Johannine trial scene ("The Politics of John, 403-406).

⁷⁰Johnson, "Teaching Deconstructively," 145.

⁷¹Alan Culpepper describes this narrative duration nicely, but in a general manner, without trying to point out the variations in duration on the last day of Jesus' life. He says: "The 'speed' of the narrative reduces

"Furthermore, there are fewer repetitions in John 19:16b-37, more scene changes, and more characters on stage than in the first half of the passion narrative. Only the four unusual references to scripture being fulfilled (19:24, 28, 36, 37), the five references to Jesus' mother (19:25 [twice], 26 [twice], 27),⁷² and the narrator's five necessary references to crucifixion (19:18, 20, 23, 31, 32) reflect those earlier, emphatic repetitions. Finally, and most importantly, at the crucial moment when Jesus is 'lifted up,' your encoded reader's eyes are immediately averted from that central glorious event. Paradoxically, at this point, your encoded reader is made to look anywhere but at Jesus" (19:19-25).

"If you ask me, you've still listed quite a number of repetitions for that section of text," snaps the hanging corpse. "And I must say that you've failed to mention one of the most fascinating redundancies in the entire passion narrative: the six additional references to writing which introduce the crucifixion scene (19:19 [twice], 20, 21) and conclude with Pilate's final words, 'What I have written I have written' (19:22). It can hardly be inconsequential that Pilate's own writing, in a gross parody of Jewish Scripture, will not be modified (cf. 7:23; 10:35), and is an object of debate among 'the Jews' who read it (cf. 1:45-46; 7:51-52).⁷³ Nor can it be insignificant that it directly precedes the last three explicit citations of Jewish Scripture in the gospel."

"Yes, Pilate seems to be saying, 'I am one thing, [but] my writings are another matter,'"⁷⁴ the first corpse mumbles drowsily.

"What's that?"

"Oh nothing. It's just something else about intertextuality. An echo of another text, I suppose," responds the third corpse, trying to look at its companion.

"Well, I'm not interested in those sorts of intertextual echoes," the hanging corpse says. "That corpse beside you exasperates the hell out of me. Can't you get it to shut up? It has absolutely nothing to add to our conversation.

"Anyway, irrespective of your failure to note the important repetition I just pointed out, you would still need to account for the change in narrative point of view at the crucifixion scene. The focalization in 19:26-28 is from the perspective of Jesus. Jesus is the focalizer. This, I think, is really significant, for it means that the encoded reader is indeed with Jesus at the moment of his glorification, gazing down at those around his cross.⁷⁵ There are, therefore, other ways of emphasizing the implied author's ideological perspective besides repetition. And in this case, the encoded reader is

steadily [throughout the gospel], . . . until it virtually grinds to a halt at the climactic day" (Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 72).

⁷²Robert Brawley notes the fivefold repetition, calling it a "sentimental scene" ("An Absent Complement and Intertextuality in John 19:28-29," 435), but surely this misses the rhetorical implications of the repetitions (see below).

⁷³Rudolf Bultmann correctly observes that Pilate's "inscription . . . is undoubtedly to be understood as a prophecy" (The Gospel of John, 669), and Thomas Brodie calls it the "implication of a new scripture" (The Gospel According to John, 546). But Robert Brawley, strangely, fails to discuss any possible metaphorical or ironic connection between these references to writing and the subsequent fulfillment of Scripture ("An Absent Complement and Intertextuality in John 19:28-29," 431-432).

⁷⁴Nietzsche (Ecce Homo, 259), as quoted in Derrida, The Ear of the Other, 20.

⁷⁵For, as Bultmann can say, in the crucifixion "everything has happened that had to happen; the work of Jesus is completed; he has carried out that which his Father had commanded him" (The Gospel of John, 674-675, cf. 632).

uniquely made to share both Jesus' view of 'his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her' (the latter being a person whom the narrator had left out of his earlier scenic description [19:25]), and Jesus' knowledge 'that all was now finished' (19:28). So even if there isn't as much repetition here, the encoded reader is clearly in a most privileged position."

The first corpse is aroused out of its restless dreams by this new turn. "Are the dogs gone yet? I'm sick of hearing them panting and sniffing around my head. Where the hell did they go?"

"It's true that your encoded reader is where Jesus is, seeing what Jesus sees, and knowing what Jesus knows, but I wouldn't say your encoded reader is in a privileged position because of that. Your encoded reader is actually offered only the most literal, rudimentary interpretation of Jesus' words. Jesus' statements to his mother and the beloved disciple (19:26) are interpreted by the narrator simply as Jesus' interest in her welfare ('the disciple took her into his own home' [19:27]), something which is a rather mundane concern for oldest sons in ancient Mediterranean kinship structure.⁷⁶ And Jesus' next statement initially seems to be a straightforward fulfillment Scripture (19:28). Yet almost everyone sees Jesus' 'mother/son' language as reflecting more than a mundane concern for his mother, and Jesus' thirst as more than a request for a drink. People say these must be symbolic, related somehow to the foundation of the new community and Jesus' mission.⁷⁷ But why do people say that? Where are the explicit textual clues?"

"Damn it! The dogs are back. Now I think they're beginning to dig a hole to bury my bones."

"You know, I once heard how in ancient Mesopotamia (which is not too far to the east of here, I need hardly add) dogs were often severed in two, split longitudinally, so that the offerer could then 'pass between . . . [the] two parts which, like a magnet, attracted . . . impurit[ies].'⁷⁸ Rituals such as this are good illustrations of how 'the body tends to be brought forward in its most extreme form only on behalf of a cultural artifact or symbolic fragment or made thing (a sentence) that is without any other basis in material reality: that is, it is only brought forward when there is a crisis of substantiation.'⁷⁹ Well, as far as I'm concerned, our own little 'crisis of substantiation' here makes this the perfect time to cut up those cowering canines. Now, if I could just find something sharp. . . ."

"Well you can forget about chopping up your phantasmic dogs. There are actually substantive, intratextual clues that Jesus' mother, the beloved disciple, and thirst have symbolic significance here. Just look up John 2:1-11; 4:1-30; 6:52-56; 7:37-39; and 13:21-25."

"Yes, you're probably right," adds the third corpse. "Those probably are intratextual cues. But I think what really interests my companion is how real readers get

⁷⁶Neyrey, "Despising the Shame of the Cross," 15. Cf. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 161-166.

⁷⁷Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2:922-927, 929-930; Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, 113-120; Foster, "John Come Lately," 127-128; Brawley, "An Absent Complement and Intertextuality in John 19:28-29," et al.

⁷⁸Wapnish and Hesse, "Pampered Pooches or Plain Pariahs?," 72; cf. Stager, "Why Were Hundreds of Dogs Buried at Ashkelon?," 30-42.

⁷⁹Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 127, cf. 14; Gen 15:7-11.

sidetracked, entangled, and mesmerized by the narrator's seemingly mundane observations, wanting to turn them all into deeply symbolic codes. I mean, here, at what appears to be the moment of greatest clarity, when the 'hour' comes, when all things converge at the cross--that place of Jesus' 'lifting up'--your encoded reader is suddenly overwhelmed by the narrator's excruciatingly attentive descriptions of seemingly peripheral and extraneous details."⁸⁰

"For example," chimes in the first corpse, "why should anyone care that Jesus' robe is 'seamless, woven in one piece from the top' (19:23-25)? Simply because your encoded reader knows Psalm 22:18? Or is it because your encoded reader also knows the high priest's vestments were seamless (Ex 39:27-31)?⁸¹ Perhaps your encoded reader is expected to recall Mark 15:38 and the ripping of the temple veil. Who knows?"

"And just to continue that line of questioning," the third corpse adds, staring up into the sky, "how much ink has been spilled over the symbolic significance of the hour of crucifixion (19:14); the mother and the beloved disciple near the cross (19:25-27); the jar and the hyssop stalk which cannot support a sponge dripping with wine (19:29); the thirst that completes Scripture; the lance thrust, the unbroken bones, and the wound that pours forth water and blood (19:34-35)?⁸² As the extensive repetitions we talked about earlier diminish, readers have a need to find more and more intertextual and intratextual allusions in order to give themselves some interpretive direction and a sense of control over the text.⁸³ But instead, overt opacity and a strange, metaphoric murkiness abound."⁸⁴

"So it's not the referentiality of all the scenic minutiae which I find so intriguing," says the first corpse, trying one last time to lift its face out of the dirt. "Rather, it's the fact that the inconsequential details are so concentrated here and tied so tenuously to the fulfillment/completion of Scripture--or to anything else, for that matter. What clues is your encoded reader given in order to understand these concrete statements as allusions and metaphors? Why don't these kinds of illusive allusions appear earlier or elsewhere in the passion narrative?"

"Most think that a seismic semeion is on the verge of erupting. If so, it would appear to be one which calls into question the apparent clarity and translucence of those carefully constructed semeia preceding this climax.⁸⁵ Ironically, when Jesus whispers 'It is

⁸⁰Robert Brawley writes, "Petty detail repeatedly takes on notable importance," and "[t]he insignificance of details can be the other side of their importance as symbols" ("An Absent Complement and Intertextuality in John 19:28-29," 434; cf. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament*, 54-59).

⁸¹Cf. Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, 105-107; de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus*, 98-104.

⁸²For the relationship between the human body and the belief system of the Judeo-Christian tradition, see Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 214-221.

⁸³Michael Riffaterre tries to determine the sorts of indices which would "direct readers towards the specific and relevant intertexts" of a given narrative, but without much success ("Compulsory Reader Response," 58, 76-77, note especially 60-62; see also his "The Mind's Eye," 7-8, 20-21; and Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 117-119).

⁸⁴Marianne Thompson has a nice summary of the text's various symbolic possibilities and intertextual connections (*The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, 109-110; cf. Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, 99). For a deconstructive analysis of the Johannine crucifixion and its signs, see Stephen Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament*, 54-59.

⁸⁵For example, at this point in his interpretation of the crucifixion scene, Stephen Moore says that he is "as interested in what might be out of the control of the Johannine writers . . . as in anything that has

finished,' or 'It is completed' (*tetelestai*), your encoded reader's task is just beginning."

"Well, at least we've established from the preceding narrative that the encoded reader knows this is the key scene in the gospel," sniffs the hanging corpse. "And if that is the case, the encoded reader has been primed in every way to overread the death scene."

"Yes, I can agree with that. Like Jesus, we have been led to cry 'I am thirsty!'⁸⁶ We want to wring the text dry; to squeeze from it every last bit of wet, slippery symbolism that we can, in order to satisfy our craving for unity and meaning."

Act V

"Wait, you can't do this to me!" screams the last hanging corpse as it is finally cut loose from its cross and dropped down on the ground next to the other two. "I'm not finished! I still want to talk about the use of emphatic pronouns in the passion narrative. *Ego! Su! Hymeis!* They're all over the place, and no one has ever made a detailed study of their usage here. I think I can squeeze them in, if you'll let me--but you're not going to! Now I can't even find them! Someone help me! Tie me back up where I belong!"

"Oh no, it's dogs! My God! It's the dogs! I can hear them sniffing around my face. They're here and the bitches are gnawing⁸⁷ my eyes! My eyes! They've eaten my eyes!"

"Don't get so upset," laughs one of the dogs, its mouth full of dirt, sinew, and bone. "Just think of it as part of erosion."⁸⁸

"Yes, that's it," whispers the second corpse. "It must be erosion, and it's going to destroy the text in the same way that it's eating away every trace of us."

"Once upon a time there was an encoded reader, who, with penetrating force, was erected upon this hallowed, hollow hill. But now there is only an eroded reader.⁸⁹ Our titular should have read, 'Here hung the eroded reader. Broken and pierced, stripped bare of its outer and inner tunics, it was finally devoured by the dream dogs of a croaking

traditionally been said to be within their control" (*Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 162).

⁸⁶Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 86.

⁸⁷The Greek verb here would be *trogo* (Jn 6:56; cf. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 296; Scobie, "Slums, Sanitation and Mortality in the Roman World," 418). For as David Jasper argues, "the text itself . . . becomes the sacred space of eucharistic celebration," a physical sign of "dismemberment" and "fragmentation" (*Rhetoric, Power, and Community*, 161).

⁸⁸In this play I have tried to avoid the danger of the "Lone Ranger" mentality (Hillerman, *Talking God*, 39-40), or the "would-be practitioner of ethnocriticism," that is, "to speak *for* the 'Indian' [dogs], 'interpreting' . . . [them] in a manner that would submit . . . [them] to a dominative discourse" (Krupat, *Ethnocriticism*, 30). However, as with Arnold Krupat, "the danger *I* run . . . is the danger of leaving the Indian [dogs] silent entirely in my discourse. I don't know of any way securely to avoid this danger, for all that I hope it may somewhat be mitigated by a certain self-conscious awareness" (*Ethnocriticism*, 30; cf. Parsons, "Anatomy of a Reader," 24; Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," 24-29; Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism*, 139-140; McKenna, *Violence and Difference*, 172).

For two recent examples of writing which intermingle Native American and biblical stories, see Warrior, "A Native American Perspective," 287-295; and Jahner, "Transitional Narratives and Cultural Continuity," 176-179; cf. The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible*, 284-286.

⁸⁹"Listen to this. 'The top of the hill is round and smooth, worn down by centuries of eroticism.' Is she pulling my leg . . . ?"

"I suppose she means 'erosion.'"

"I suppose she does. But yearning speaks between the lines" (Stegner, *Crossing to Safety*, 49).

corpse.' Put that in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, hang it over our heads, and see what real readers do with it."

"At least the image of erosion fits you," chuckles the third corpse. "And by the time rosy-fingered Eos appears you'll be completely gone. But perhaps the dog was inventing some narratological neologism, and yelped 'errrorscission.' Maybe the cut of that Roman blade is beginning to bring you to your senses."

"No, no, you two still haven't gotten it!" hisses the first corpse. "The dog said 'erosion.' 'Eros-eon.' It's all about eros, can't you see? 'The cravings for unity, for essence, for the total picture, for the real and the true, are primitive,'⁹⁰ and eros will live on in readers for eons, regardless of what happens to us or the text. No wine-sopped hyssop can quench the *tanha*-like thirst for completion, nor will a tightly wrapped linen cloth ever silence its voice."

Epilogue

"Socialization is training in allegorical interpretation," Barbara Johnson says,⁹¹ and the strong temptation for me at the end of this drama is simply to defer any conclusion, allowing my readers, in good postmodern fashion, to infer their own allegorical preferences from their own particular ideological perspectives and social locations. However, if confessions and original intentions count for anything in allegory (and I suppose that they do not), I should also add that I did not intend to write this chapter as a drama. I did not begin with a plan to fictionalize our scholarly discourse.

The chapter began like any other academic project: with sniffing out a text, developing a bare-boned thesis, digging into the secondary literature, and carefully covering the various perspectives.⁹² But as I began to reflect on some of the objections raised against reader-response criticism and how I might "own my own views,"⁹³ I realized that I could not simply write autobiographically as I did in the last chapter and then let that stand apart from any critical discourse on the Johannine text. To do that would be to perpetuate uncritically the very fiction which I have been attempting to problematize in the last two chapters. That fiction, composed as it is of a number of rhetorical conceits within the discourse of modern, scientific exegesis, allows us scholars to talk to each other and "separate" our nonprofessional selves from our professional readings of texts.⁹⁴

⁹⁰Szabados, "Autobiography after Wittgenstein," 10. Cf. Ostriker, *Feminist Revision and the Bible*, 122.

⁹¹"Teaching Deconstructively," 148. Cf. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 89; and Bloomfield, "Allegory as Interpretation," 301-302.

⁹²"[T]he writer's emblem is the badger, Old High German *dahs*, an animal who builds; thus the critic's symbol would be that animal specially bred for ferreting out badgers, the *dachshund*, like so many of my colleagues, long of nose and low of belly" (Holland, "Unity Identity Text Self," 118; cf. Vizenor, *The Trickster of Liberty*, xi-xii).

⁹³Tolbert, "A Response from a Literary Perspective," 206. Cf. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 105-106; and Porter, "Why Hasn't Reader-Response-Criticism Caught on in New Testament Studies?," 283-290.

⁹⁴The rhetorical tropes of scientific discourse have become common knowledge since Hayden White's seminal work on historiography and Clifford Geertz's work in anthropology (not to mention Derrida's work in philosophy). For example, see Mieke Bal's references to the problems of "third person narrative" and "the . . . notion of subjectivity," in narratology and ethnography ("The Point of Narratology," 732, cf. 750).

Thus, in spite of a growing sense that "autobiographical intention begins in contradiction, ends in falsification, and is characterized throughout by the writer's alienation from the very self the writer seeks to remember and present,"⁹⁵ I decided that I would somehow have to find a way to integrate that "autobiographical self" into my professional reading in such a way that whatever came out would express both the polyvalence and intersubjectivity of the autobiographical self, and the polyvalence and intersubjectivity of the Johannine text.

As Stephen Moore states, "you must be several in order to write, and you must write with several hands."⁹⁶ So, at the risk of error or self-deception, the double-edged polyvalency of text and reader has been represented by a triad of voices in my exegetical play. No doubt there are more voices in me,⁹⁷ but three is a fine number--especially since I was the completion of my parents' trinity of sons, all born within a three year span.⁹⁸ Of course, the number three has also held a position of honor in the Christian tradition, and sounds surprisingly contemporary when placed alongside postmodernism's rejection of the modernist fascination with binary oppositions. Besides all that, the three subjects were right there in the text from the very beginning.⁹⁹

But, "Whatever happened to narratology?" asks Christine Brooke-Rose plaintively.¹⁰⁰ Is there still a place in biblical exegesis for the more formalist type of reader-response criticism with which you began this book?

I stammer for an answer. After all, my professional career began with narratology, with Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal, Christine Brooke-Rose, Seymour Chatman, and others as my guides. Indeed, what *has* happened to narratology? But Christine replies before I can collect my thoughts.

"It got swallowed up into story seems to be the obvious answer," she responds to her own question. "It slid off the slippery methods of a million structures and became the

To skirt and hide the shame of subject in biblical criticism, we use the passive voice or the first person plural as circumlocutions for "I," then tacitly agree to name these grammatical choices "objectivity" (cf. Tompkins, "Me and My Shadow," 31-33; Carlton, "Rereading Middlemarch, Rereading Myself," 241-242; and Ostriker, Feminist Revision and the Bible, 113, 122). Thus, "even ordinary pronouns become a political problem" (Rich, Blood, Bread, and Stone, 224).

⁹⁵Kaplan, "The Rhetoric of Circumstance in Autobiography," 71-72; cf. Sloterdijk, Critique of Cynical Reason, 537-547.

⁹⁶Paraphrasing Derrida in Truth in Painting, 152 (Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives, 154-155; cf. 3). In biblical criticism, I might add, we have more often had to pretend we were writing with severed hands than with "several hands" (see Scarry, The Body in Pain, 176; Tompkins, "Me and My Shadow," 31-36).

⁹⁷To paraphrase Bela Szabados, "I have a feeling that many people speak through my mouth. Yet my aim has been to create myself out of this chaos of voices" ("Autobiography after Wittgenstein," 5). Or as Mikhail Bakhtin puts it: "Language . . . lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. . . . [T]he word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language . . . but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own" (Discourse on the Novel, as quoted in Gates, "Editor's Introduction," 1; cf. Booth, The Company We Keep, 238-239).

⁹⁸Our birth years are 1949, 1950, 1951, respectively, and the last two digits of each of those years add up to the number 150. 150 is a deeply theological number made up of threes and sevens: $3 \times (7 \times 7) + 3$.

⁹⁹Cf. Bal's three hermeneutical voices as discussed at the beginning of this chapter (Death and Dissymmetry, 240-241).

¹⁰⁰"Whatever Happened to Narratology?," 283.

story of its own functioning. . . ."101

And then comes her final challenging query. "[So] was it a good story?"102

Again I'm silent. I don't know, and I'm not sure I care. Let others be the judge of that, if it is important. But, like a pup happily chasing its own tail, I can't resist telling one more story; the true tale of how the dogs made their way onto the paper, or how they were housebroken.¹⁰³

The dogs were not a part of the first draft of this chapter or the preceding chapter, which were originally part of one paper read at the Pacific Northwest Regional Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, in May, 1992. The dogs made their way into the project, first into the preceding chapter, in order to illustrate dramatically the difference between Navajo values and the dominant values of my Euroamerican home. Only after some thought did I decide to add the dogs to the developing exegetical drama of the passion narrative. In this latter part of the project, they were simply intended to stand as a metaphor for how we read our own interests and proclivities into canonical texts--or better yet, they would become a sinister allegory for the intermingling of text and reader--the erosion of the one into the other.

The more I thought about the dogs, the more they seemed the perfect metaphor for this intermingling phenomenon. First, dogs were despicable creatures in some ancient Mediterranean cultures, and thus could symbolize the "social world" perspective of many New Testament scholars. Secondly, dogs were despised animals in Navajo culture, and thus reflected my own crosscultural childhood experiences and memories (only much later, and purely by chance, did I discover the mythic significance of dogs).¹⁰⁴ Thirdly, and most importantly, I knew that there were no dogs in the gospel of John, and so any imposition of them on the Johannine text would appear incongruous and artificial.

But now I had a real problem: how could I make dogs "appear" in a text where they were so obviously absent? The narratologist in me wanted some quirky evidence of their presence in the Fourth Gospel--and the more fantastic the argument for their presence, the better. An illusory sighting of dogs in John would point out the arbitrariness and subjectivity of some types of reader-responses, and the masked illogic of some of our guild's interpretive moves. Knowing the Greek word for dog (*kyon*) did not appear in the Fourth Gospel, I began by looking for a backwards *kyon*. The genitive form

¹⁰¹Ibid. Perhaps Christine Brooke-Rose has exaggerated slightly in saying, "It slid off the slippery methods of a *million* structures . . ." (my emphasis). In my story, for example, only three methods have slid off their slippery structures.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Leif Vaage describes "Cynic 'transgression'" as "less a 'criminal' crossing over of an imagined or inscribed line of containment, and more like the movement of children 'criss-crossing' every attempted ordering of things, like excited puppies, never housebroken, wreaking havoc in the living room" ("Like Dogs Barking," 37-38). Vaage's description of "Cynic transgression" can be assimilated nicely within Bakhtin's literary theory of the carnivalesque (*Rabelais and His World*, 5-17)--or with Vizenor's postmodern literary criticism, which has its roots in the "comic sign" and "social antagonism" of the trickster figure (often a coyote) of Native American mythologies ("Trickster Discourse," 192, 207; cf. McKenna's discussion of the court fool, in *Violence and Difference*, 179-181).

¹⁰⁴I found David White's book *Myths of the Dog-Man* by browsing through the University of Chicago book display at the national AAR/SBL meeting in San Francisco, November, 1992. Coincidentally, an hour later I met the author when he overheard me telling a friend about his strange book which I had just discovered. David then came over and introduced himself to me.

of night (*nyktos*) seemed to offer possibilities, as did several Greek participial constructions. But nothing fit "perfectly." I couldn't find a dog in John to save my soul, no matter how cynically I toyed with the text. It made no difference whether I was reading the text forward or backward, up or down.¹⁰⁵

Then, totally by chance, and to my complete surprise, the dogs reared up in the passion narrative itself, in the quotation from Psalm 22. I just hadn't seen them there before--or had I? If I had seen them before, they had long since been reburied, like an old bone, deep in the dirt of my subconscious.¹⁰⁶ But they were obvious to me now. Why hadn't I seen them there before? Suddenly, arguments about the arbitrariness of signifiers and signifieds took on new meaning. For what had begun as a conscious attempt to read something purely arbitrary into a text had ended up cohering nicely, intertextually stuck in the muck of a Johannine narrative world.

I found myself wanting to go back and reread that neglected, subjectivist reader-response critic, Norman Holland. For example, according to Holland's theory of reader-response, the phenomenon of "nice coherence" in my interpretation would be evidence of a psychological "identity theme," where "*interpretation is a function of identity*,"¹⁰⁷ "a fantasy pushing for gratification, pressing upward toward coherence and significance."¹⁰⁸ Even the subsequent historical evidence that John Crossan has lent me, supporting my argument that there were dogs at Jesus' crucifixion,¹⁰⁹ could be seen as another part of my own "press upward toward coherence and significance."

As I sit typing these lines, I recall a phone conversation I had with my family just

¹⁰⁵I guess I'm not the first person to read the Fourth Gospel in peculiar ways. For example, Ernst Käsemann writes: "Eighteen hundred years of [Johannine] exegesis have investigated each line and each syllable from all possible perspectives, reading it backwards and forwards, turning it upside down. . . . It is [therefore] easy for outsiders to ridicule us, that we think we can hear the grass grow and the bedbugs cough" (*The Testament of Jesus*, 75, n. 1). For the relationship of the apostle John to bedbugs, see *The Acts of John*, 60-61.

¹⁰⁶I realize now that the dogs first made their appearance in a poem I wrote for Easter, 1984; the day after my mother's funeral. The poem, written in the structure of four linked haiku, is entitled "The Stone."

Like friends at midnight,
we pleaded for bread, O Lord.
But you gave us stone.
We took it, shaped it;
then grim-faced, rolled it upright
on a fresh filled grave.
Dawn came; it was gone,
crushed and mixed with blood-flecked sweat,
a finely ground flour.
Now gaunt bellies roam,
stop and sniff the altered stone--
cryptic, hand-held crumbs.

No, that can't be right. The dogs must go back much earlier, to the countless times Donald Perrault, the senior missionary at Immanuel Mission, stood up during Morning Meeting and with tears rolling down his cheeks, read Ps 22.

¹⁰⁷"Unity Identity Text Self," 123; emphasis his. For an important, postmodern critique of Holland's view of the self, see The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible*, 28-29, 52-53.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 127. Cf. Michaels, "The Interpreter's Self," 199.

¹⁰⁹See his chapter entitled "The Dogs Beneath the Cross," in *Jesus*, 123-158.

last night. It began with my seven-year-old son getting on the line and barking like a Chinese dog. Once, twice.¹¹⁰ Then a long, pregnant pause.

"Daddy, two big dogs chased Allie tonight and knocked her down."

My wife picks up the phone in the bedroom. "Yes, that's right. And she has cuts and bruises all over her face to prove it. Your baby was flat on her back, in the middle of the street, screaming, and these two dogs were pawing her and drooling in her face. She was petrified, but the dogs just thought it was a game. One of the neighbors kept yelling at the dogs' owner, 'God damn it, that's why cities have leash laws! To keep dogs like yours under control!'"¹¹¹

"Keep your dogs under control!" I can hear my fellow biblical scholars echoing that response. "You can't do critical, responsible exegesis with a bunch of half-wild dogs cavorting about your neighborhood, living room, or study, continually disrupting your work and pissing all over it."¹¹²

If, indeed, my readers (both the formalist ones inside the text and the autobiographical ones outside the text) have proven to be fictions, fossilized remnants on the verge of eroding away into nothing, then who--or what--is left to control the free-roaming, boundary-breaking, barking dogs that remain behind?¹¹³ For as surely as the sun rises, there will be canonical constraints and controls. I suppose the answer to that question, dishearteningly, is to be found among the same whos and whats that have always been in control: those cosmos-creating, socio-political structures which stand together as a human wall against the ever present chaos outside. Paradoxically, however, those structures are nourished by the "life-giving power" of the monstrous chaos they seek to exclude.¹¹⁴

But sometimes I like to imagine a different scenario. I pretend that some form of postmodern ethnocriticism is really possible. I bring the nightmare out of the closet and dance with it in the privacy of my room.¹¹⁵ The dancing monster will combine the Native American trickster, medieval carnivalesque, and the cynocephalic and lycanthropic creatures of Eurasian mythologies in such a way so as to traverse the borderlands of theories, epistemologies, and genres with humor and abandon.¹¹⁶ At the same time,

¹¹⁰There is an ancient Zen koan that goes something like this: "When asked by a monk, 'Is there a Buddha-nature in a dog?' Chao-chu barked, 'Wu.'" (Wu is the negative symbol in Chinese, meaning "No thing" or "No.")

¹¹¹Cf. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, 12-13.

¹¹²Using words that, today, still describe many New Testament scholars' dogged resistance to new developments in biblical studies and hermeneutics, Robert Roberts admirably wrote fifteen years ago of Rudolf Bultmann: He "has not ambled through his career sniffing every pole and fire hydrant of modernity [or postmodernity, we might now add] for an object upon which to bestow his theological blessings" (*Rudolf Bultmann's Theology*, 9; Vaage, "Like Dogs Barking," 38).

¹¹³Or, as Jane Tompkins writes: "The questions that propose themselves within this critical framework therefore concern, broadly, the relations of discourse and power. What makes one set of perceptual strategies or literary conventions win out over another? If the world is the product of interpretation, then who or what determines which interpretive system will prevail?" ("The Reader in History," 226).

¹¹⁴Smith (*Map Is Not Territory*, 98), as quoted in White, *Myths of the Dog-Man*, 4; cf. Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," 99.

¹¹⁵Cf. Berg, "Suppressing the Language of (Wo)man," 15-24.

¹¹⁶For the significance of borders in literary theory, see Diane Freedman's discussion "Border Crossing as Method and Motif in Contemporary Feminist Writing" in *An Alchemy of Genres*, 31-65; esp., 47-50; cf.

however, the monster will try not to lose sight of the crucial fiction--or any cursive fiction¹¹⁷--that is connected and committed to those inhabitants on both sides of the border, the burghers and the peasants, who are forever seeking to define, categorize, and constrain it.¹¹⁸

I am a man of the American West. I wonder if I could construct a postmodern, ethnically and gender sensitive biblical criticism based upon that indigenous western carnival: the rodeo.¹¹⁹

Bach, "Slipping Across Borders," 1-7.

¹¹⁷For me, of course, at the heart (cœur) of the crucifixion are the curs, who represent both curse and cure.

¹¹⁸Articulating a theory of ethnocriticism which exhibits a concern for community, Arnold Krupat says, "there will always be something paradoxical about a criticism that insists on its betweenness [which is a particularly canine characteristic, I might add]--while seeking a certain privilege or centrality; a criticism that insists upon a commitment to dialogue and the shifting processes of 'transculturalization'--in the name of such apparently monologous and fixed categories as accuracy, knowledge, and truth. But this is only to recognize that ethnocriticism is not only *at* but *of* the frontier, its situation and its epistemological status the same" (Ethnocriticism, 28; see further, 25-26, 36-37; cf. Clifton, "Alternate Identities and Cultural Frontiers," 24, 29-30; and Freedman, "Bordercrossing as Method and Motif in Contemporary American Writing, or, How Freud Helped Me Case the Joint," 14-15).

¹¹⁹The metaphorical foundation for this project has already been laid by the Idahoan, Robert Kysar, who wrote a book on the gospel of John and entitled it John: The Maverick Gospel (the term "maverick" refers to an unbranded calf).

The Spanish word *rodeo* translates as "roundup," and both words originally described the *vaquero* or the cowboy's task of gathering cattle together and driving them to pasture or market (Russell, The Wild West, 1-10). While many Indians compete on the professional rodeo circuit today, the rodeo-carnival is indigenous only to the American West of the *conquistadores*. It was not a part of any ancient Native American tribal tradition (cf. Lawrence, Rodeo, 44-47, 157-160, 270).