

Reading Darkness: The Burial of the Johannine Christ

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Abstract

This thesis identifies and develops the discourse of darkness in the Gospel of John. It approaches the theme as both a textual motif, Johannine σκοτία, and a discussion of negative elements within the text, viewed from a feminist perspective. Scholars have long considered the aspect of light, φῶς, in the Gospel and Jesus' characterisation as 'the light.' The motif of darkness, however, has been relatively underexplored and an association made between Jesus, his burial, and the theme of σκοτία, rarer still. This thesis considers Johannine σκοτία in terms of death, trauma, and abjection, and traces the descent of the motif through the passion account to its nadir in the burial scene. Historical enquiry is used to establish what might be considered expected first-century norms with regards to the crucified Jewish corpse in first-century Palestine and this thesis proposes a reading of the burial text which problematises positivistic interpretations of the burial ritual that Joseph and Nicodemus undertake. A study of the mother of Jesus in the Gospel reveals maternal abjection as a negative force within the text and identifies that when she fails to make the narrative journey from cross to grave, all is not well. Finally the thesis presents a detailed study of John 19:42b, the closing depiction of Jesus' corpse laid out in the tomb. The painting of Hans Holbein the Younger *The Dead Christ in the Tomb*, the writing of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and the theory of Julia Kristeva, are drawn into a discussion of the image, or the 'last look,' at the corpse of Christ contained in this verse.

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Abbreviations

ATLA	American Theological Library Association
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BBC	Blackwell Bible Commentaries
BCT	The Bible and Critical Theory
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. 3d ed. Chicago, 1999.
BJA	British Journal of Aesthetics
BTB	Biblical Theology Bulletin
BZ	Biblische Zeitschrift
CBR	Currents in Biblical Research
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CEFSAP	Carolyn and Ernest Fay Series in Analytical Psychology
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series
CRINT	Compendia rerum iudicarum ad Novum Testamentum
ExpTim	Expository Times
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
IER	Irish Ecclesiastical Review
JAAR	Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JFT	Journal of Feminist Theory
JSHJ	Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series

JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSJ	Liddell H. G., R. Scott, H. S. Jones, <i>A Greek English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford, 1996.
MTZ	Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift
NTR	New Testament Readings
NTS	New Testament Studies
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
SBL	The Society of Biblical Literature
StBL	Studies in Biblical Literature
SBLDS	The Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	The Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
ST	Studia Theologica
SupJSJ	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
TJT	Toronto Journal of Theology
ThTo	Theology Today
VD	Verbum Domini
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WSPL	Warwick Studies in Philosophy and Literature
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Ancient Documents

Apuleius <i>Metam.</i>	Apuleius <i>Metamorphoses</i>
Euripides <i>Phoen.</i>	Phoenician Maidens

Homer	
<i>Il.</i>	Iliad
<i>Od.</i>	Odyssey
Horace	
<i>Ep.</i>	Epistles
Josephus	
<i>J.W.</i>	Jewish War
<i>Ant.</i>	Jewish Antiquities
<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	Against Apion
Juvenal	
<i>Sat.</i>	Satirae
Ovid	
<i>Metam.</i>	Metamorphoses
Philo	
<i>Flacc.</i>	In Flaccum
Pliny	
<i>Nat.</i>	Natural History
Sophocles	
<i>Aj.</i>	<i>Ajax</i>
Suetonius	
<i>Aug.</i>	Divus Augustus
<i>Tib.</i>	Tiberius
<i>Vesp.</i>	Vespasianus
Tacitus	
<i>Ann.</i>	Annales
Virgil	
<i>Aen.</i>	Aeneid
<i>b.Sem.</i>	Babylonian Talmud Semahot
<i>m. ^ᵒOhal.</i>	Mishnah <i>Ohalot</i>
<i>m. Sanh.</i>	Mishnah <i>Sanhedrin</i>
<i>m. Šabb.</i>	Mishnah <i>Shabbat</i>
<i>t. Ohiloth</i>	Tosefta <i>Ohiloth</i>
<i>t. Sanh.</i>	Tosefta <i>Sanhedrin</i>

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Introduction

“The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection.”¹

Julia Kristeva

The closing verse of the passion narrative in the Gospel of John ends with the words,

ὅτι ἐγγύς ἦν τὸ μνημεῖον, ἔθηκαν τὸν Ἰησοῦν.
and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. John 19:42b.

Here, set within the text, is a depiction of the executed corpse of Jesus at the conclusion of the burial act, the moment of burial abandonment. If we were to approach the Gospel of John from a literary perspective, prioritizing the narrative, what affect would that have on our interpretation of the burial of Jesus? How might we interpret the Christ-corpse at the moment in the text where crucifixion is completed and the resurrection has yet to be disclosed; a

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (trans. L. S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3–4.

moment where bodily resurrection appears, at best, improbable. If we were to then consider the Johannine themes of light and darkness, φῶς and σκοτία, what questions would we bring? And if we were to strip from this burial text the dense theological layer of interpretation, which has accrued with centuries of singularly theological readings of the passion in John, what might we reveal beneath? Finally, if we turn our attention from corpse to characters and scrutinize who ‘they’ are, and ask why ‘they’ are there, and who ‘they’ could, or perhaps should, have been, what answers do we find? These are some of the questions we set out with at the start of this thesis.

The burial of Jesus in the Gospel of John is regularly interpreted as a primarily positive event. In his magnificent work, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave. A Commentary on the Passion Narratives of the Four Gospels*, Raymond Brown conclusively claimed, “There is nothing negative about the act of burying Jesus, for once he died, he had to be buried. John’s conviction that Jesus is ‘the resurrection and the life’ (11:25) did not make burial unnecessary; rather it made burial insignificant.”² Rudolf Schnackenburg is not exceptional in his opinion that it is nothing less than “a finale in peace and rest.”³ We have noticed that evidencing the restoration or preservation of Jesus’ honour, status, or victory, in the burial ritual in John, appears to be a significant scholarly concern that, when suitably established, seems to negate the need for the interpretation of Jesus’ executed corpse. The bold new disciples, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus,⁴ the abundant offering of aloes,⁵ the new garden tomb,⁶ all appear more noteworthy in the interpretation of John 19:38–42

² Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave. A Commentary on the Passion Narratives of the Four Gospels* (vol. 2; London: A. Cassell, 1994), 1267.

³ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John Volume 3* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1982), 299. Mark Stibbe suggests, “. . . there is something idyllic in this quiet garden scene.” See, Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John As Storyteller* (SNTSMS 73; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1992), 119.

⁴ For example see, Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (vol. 2; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 1157. Ingrid Kitzberger suggests that Nicodemus ‘spoke up for Jesus’; see, Ingrid R. Kitzberger, “Transcending Gender Boundaries in John,” in *A Feminist Companion to John Volume 1* (ed. Levine A. J.; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 173–207, 193–194. However, Marinus de Jonge offers a less positive interpretation of Nicodemus, see, Marinus de Jonge, *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God* (ed., and trans. J. E. Steely; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 29–42. See, Chapter Four, 4.3.3 ‘Strangers and Strangeness: Revisiting Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus,’ for discussion.

⁵ For example, see, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1258–1261.

⁶ George Beasley-Murray suggests that Joseph of Arimathea shows courage and sympathy with Jesus in the extravagant tomb-burial he undertook. George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (2d ed.; WBC 36; Nashville: Thomas

than the dead body of Christ. Has Johannine scholarship overlooked the importance of the Christ-corpse in its interpretations of the Johannine passion?

Ernst Käsemann provoked considerable debate when he claimed that the death of Jesus was of little importance within the Gospel of John.⁷ When such arguments are made around the death of Jesus, it is unsurprising that the seemingly lesser event of burial has followed a similar interpretative direction. This, of course, provokes questions of epistemology, where are we to find the 'meaning' of John's passion? There is a long tradition that the real meaning lies in its theological interpretation,⁸ however, more recent studies have forged a new space for literary and theoretical questions to be advanced; not least the reexamination of the role gender plays within both text and analysis.⁹

This thesis hopes to reconsider the theme of burial in the Gospel of John from a number of perspectives. We will examine how a narrative of unjust execution affects the theme of burial and we will consider expectations around who could or should undertake the burial of a crucified body in first-century Palestine. We will also consider if attention to the theme of

Nelson Publishers, 1999), 358. Beasley-Murray also considers the nature of the unused tomb to be an "unmistakable witness to the victory of the Lord of life over death." Beasley-Murray, *John*, 360.

⁷ Käsemann stated, "His death is rather the manifestation of divine self-giving love and his victorious return from the alien realm below to the Father who had sent him." See, Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (trans. G. Krodel; London, SCM, 1968), 10. He also claimed, "the world of suffering and death had no power over him [Jesus] even in his dying." Käsemann, *Testament of Jesus*, 12. Brown commented on Jesus' death, "In *John* Jesus, who has come from God, has completed the commission that the Father has given him, so that his death becomes a deliberate decision that all is now finished, taken by one who is in control." Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1078.

⁸ C. H. Dodd exemplifies this tendency in his acknowledgement that the passion in John is, in fact, on the whole a straightforward narrative, but meaning should be found with the aid of theological steers from both inside and outside the text. Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 432. Keener states, "This [Jesus' words from the cross] portrayal of Jesus' triumph in death fits John's emphasis on Jesus' glorification through death . . ." Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1147.

⁹ For example see, Alison Jasper, *The Shining Garment of the Text* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). See also, Helen C. Orchard, *Courting Betrayal: Jesus as Victim in the Gospel of John* (JSNTSup 161; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). However, it is not to be assumed that literary or feminist approaches depart from a historic theological agenda in interpretation. See for example Kathleen Rushton's discussion of birth imagery in the death of Jesus. Rushton states, "These features [Jesus' words on the cross, Jesus' death "action," and the flow of blood and water], of course, are telling the story of Jesus' death-glory theologically in terms evocative of what has preceded in the narrative. The reader, certainly not a first-time but an informed reader, must in fact re-read the Gospel in light of its climatic end These three strikingly distinctive features of the portrayal of the death-glory of Jesus impose theological layering on a violent shameful death." Kathleen P. Rushton, *The Parable of the Woman in Childbirth of John 16:21. A Metaphor for the Death and Glorification of Jesus* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), 251. Alan Culpepper's work, R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), is regarded as a pivotal text. A number of recent studies betray a vibrant and engaging area of discussion, not least: Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

burial could contribute to our understanding of the characters portrayed in the Johannine crucifixion account. Our study centers upon John 19:38–42 and concludes with a reading of the textual tableau of Jesus laid in the tomb for burial, depicted in John 19:42b. We will ask how should we interpret the Johannine depiction of the crucified corpse of Jesus at the point of burial abandonment? What affect does recognizing and reading Jesus-as-corpse have for our interpretations of the Gospel of John? We set out to scrutinize the commonly accepted opinion that the Johannine burial is a peaceful and un-extraordinary text depicting nothing more significant than the practicalities of Jesus' burial. Brown stated, “. . . it is a violation of the whole flow of the Johannine crucifixion-burial narrative to suggest that the final episode [burial] is no more than ‘a dead end.’”¹⁰ In this thesis we will, in fact, suggest that interpreting Jesus' executed corpse in the Gospel of John as actually “dead,” ending or otherwise, is vital.

In this study of burial, we will also research σκοτία in John, and explore a link between the two themes of burial and darkness. Darkness and light are profoundly Johannine subjects which have a long and detailed interpretative history, however we believe that, while there has been much scholarly consideration of light, φῶς, in the Gospel of John, the discourse of darkness, σκοτία, appears comparatively underdeveloped.¹¹ Of course, we must admit, this is a logical and perfectly explicable state of affairs. Light is a hugely significant motif within the Gospel and demands considerable attention. It is directly associated with Jesus (John 1:4–5; 1:8; 3:19) and more importantly it converges with his identity.¹² Jesus *is* the φῶς in the Gospel of John (John 8:12; 9:5). However, we would like to find out if there is value in moving beyond a view of σκοτία as a simple, necessary foil for the victorious φῶς. In this

¹⁰ Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 1268.

¹¹ For example, Jan G. van der Watt states, “In contrast to light, we encounter darkness. Metaphorically it reflects the same characteristics as light, but is the other side of the coin. Therefore only a brief discussion of darkness will be given.” Watt, Jan G. van der. *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel According to John* (BIS 47; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 256. For a thorough introductory discussion of light and darkness in the Gospel of John, see, Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (vol. 1; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 381–7. For further discussion see, Chapter Two, 2.1.2 ‘Johannine Φῶς.’

¹² Watt provides a sophisticated discussion of the Johannine presentation of Jesus as the light. See, Watt, *Family*, 248–56.

thesis we hope to pursue a reading of σκοτία which seeks a new depth of engagement with the motif. Our approach will be twofold. We will seek to form a discussion of σκοτία in the Gospel of John, and we will also 'read darkness' in a discussion of the burial account from a feminist perspective that brings new questions to, and values different perspectives within, the burial narrative. The common feminist concern to make women's experience visible, will be brought to our discussion of the literary world of the Fourth Gospel, in a desire to inform the making of meaning and the arbitration of what might be considered good or bad, positive or negative, 'light' or 'dark.'

The consideration of theory and the Gospel of John will be an essential element of our thesis and in Chapter One we begin with an overview of work in this area. In this first chapter we will reflect on our own methodology and the epistemology which underpins the use of literary theory and critical theory in New Testament studies. We hope to set a firm foundation for the research we undertake and demonstrate that our work fits into a significant and developing field which exhibits the value in theoretical approaches to work on New Testament texts. We will also include in this chapter a presentation of the key theories of Julia Kristeva. While we do not undertake a Kristevian reading, her work on abjection, melancholia and depression will prove useful to bring into our discussions on the Gospel of John. Themes of death, darkness, the corpse, motherhood, and loss of hope, all appear in Kristeva's work and we will make use of her theoretical insights at various turns.

In Chapter Two we will undertake a close analysis of the σκοτία motif in the Gospel of John. We will attempt some redress in the scholarly focus which has so often lent towards φῶς at the expense of σκοτία. We will look in detail at the Gospel's introduction to the motif that is found in John's prologue and ask if the initial interpretative context for it suggests a Johannine bond between death and darkness. Moreover, what significance might such a bond have in respect of the unfolding narrative? We will then move our focus to form a reading strategy for Johannine darkness and examine how reading it with the indicators of

death, trauma, and abjection can expose the motif in a new way. We will particularly give attention to the crucifixion narrative, and ask if the darkness motif should be considered present, even dominant, here when read in these terms. This will prepare for our discussion of burial and the place of darkness, Johannine darkness, within the text of John 19:38–42.

In Chapter Three, we will depart from our theoretical and literary discussions with a detailed analysis of present scholarly knowledge of the expected fate of the crucified Jewish corpse in first-century Palestine. We will examine the Roman and Jewish attitudes to the crucified body and consider the suggestion that Jesus' burial could have been a routine dishonorable interment, performed under the jurisdiction of the Jewish courts. We will also review normative Jewish funerary tradition, looking at practical undertakings as well as ritual mourning and lamentation. We will pay attention to gender and expectations within the post-mortem processes, in preparation for our reading of the burial account.

In Chapter Four we will attempt to offer a fresh examination of the significance of the appearance of Jesus' mother at the cross in John 19:25. Why does the Gospel of John, unlike the Synoptics, specifically identify Jesus' mother here?¹³ The question of her presence has long been interpreted with a huge range of scholarly opinion, including many theological and mariological perspectives,¹⁴ but we will ask if the theme of burial is significant here. When Jesus' mother is approached as a character in a first-century narrative, witnessing her son's execution, could an explanation for her presence be pertaining to a desire to reclaim

¹³ Keener points out that “. . . John surely has an interest in reporting Mary's presence that both Mark and the pre-Markan passion narrative may not have had.” Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1143.

¹⁴ According to Bultmann, she is representative of Jewish Christianity, (Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (eds. R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches; trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray; Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 673). Brown proposes that the significance of the scene is not in the symbolic nature of Jesus' mother, but in the theme of discipleship and the new relationship that is inaugurated between Jesus' natural family and his family of disciples. Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1024–26. Keener too suggests that the message is discipleship, and Jesus' mother's transition from family to disciple, completing Jesus' journey, in her eyes, from son to saviour. Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1143–4. Lightfoot exemplifies a traditional understanding of Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple as the Church and its members. R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel: A Commentary* (ed. C. F. Evans; Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 317. And, of course, there is a long held Catholic mariological tradition which supposes she is to be interpreted here as the mother of all believers. See for summary, Beasley-Murray, *John*, 349–50.

her son's body and undertake the burial ritual of his corpse?¹⁵ We will move on to our interpretation of the burial narrative of John 19:38–42 with this perspective in mind, prioritizing a discourse of the unexpected absence of Jesus' mother and the female cohort narrated at the cross in John 19:25. How might this affect our interpretation of the two powerful and political male figures that arrive on the scene and orchestrate the activities around Jesus' corpse?

In our final chapter, Chapter Five, we will continue our discussion of the corpse of Christ in the Gospel of John. Looking at the body of Jesus and its depiction in John 19:42b, at last laid in the tomb, we will consider what affect this scene might have and what interplay may exist with the theme of Johannine darkness. Here we will draw into our thesis the reflections of David Ford, on the dead face of Christ on the cross.¹⁶ We will also consider Hans Holbein the Younger's painting, *The Dead Christ in the Tomb*, and the responses which it invoked in Fyodor Dostoyevsky and his disturbing novel *The Idiot*.¹⁷ We also find contemplation on Dostoyevsky and Hans Holbein's painting, in the psychoanalytical theories of Julia Kristeva and we will consider what her perspective in this area may contribute to our thesis. We hope that widening our discussions to include these elements will prove a fruitful endeavour in our study of the burial of Jesus in the Gospel of John.

Before we move on it would be prudent to make clear that in our work we are not pursuing questions concerning the original readers of the Fourth Gospel or historical facts around its content or creation. Our approach is aiming to offer an interpretation of the text as a literary unity, as read within the New Testament canon. We hope to approach the literary world of John's Gospel with twenty-first-century literary and critical theory, including feminist theory,

¹⁵ Kathleen Corley suggests the presence of the women at the cross in Mark may be directly linked to their desire to perform burial rites. See: Kathleen E. Corley, "Slaves, Servants and Prostitutes: Gender and Social Class in Mark," in *A Feminist Companion to Mark*. (ed. A. J. Levine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 191–221, 211.

¹⁶ David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 191–215.

¹⁷ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* (trans. A. Myers; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992).

and twenty-first-century research into the first-century historical situation, to reconsider what the text may 'mean' from this perspective. To this theoretical discussion, and those already working on the Gospel of John in literary and theoretical ways, we should now turn.

Chapter One

Theory and the Gospel of John

“Theory tended to be regarded as secular, sexy, demystifying stuff that a few adventurous or despairing biblical scholars could import from elsewhere in order to sex up a discipline that seemed hopelessly behind the times.”¹⁸

1.1 Approaching Theory: Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to review the discourse of literary theory and critical theory, as it has been applied in work on the Gospel of John; to then consider our own methodology, giving particular attention to our feminist perspective as well as the work of theorist Julia Kristeva; and finally to present a discussion of issues around the methodology and epistemology of theory in New Testament studies. A substantial amount of space has been given to this discussion, not least because theoretical approaches to the Gospel of John

¹⁸ Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, “Biblical Studies ‘after’ Theory: Onwards Towards the Past. Part Three: Theory in the First and Second Waves.” *BibInt* 18 (2010): 191–225. 218.

remain a dynamic field and continue to generate challenging new perspectives which redefine the boundaries of contemporary New Testament scholarship.

In 1.2, 'Reviewing Theory: Critical Theory, Literary Theory and the Gospel of John,' we will undertake a survey of theoretical work, literary and critical, on the Gospel of John. This section will mainly review, rather than comment on, previous scholarship, allowing us to gain a perspective of the seismic shift in Johannine studies that was witnessed at the end of the Twentieth Century. The foregrounding of this review serves to establish the main currents of debate. This provides us with an indication of how theoretical discussions have made their way, with various points of ease and difficulty, into New Testament studies. In addition, this review is useful when we later situate the methodology of our own thesis within this continuing conversation. It is prudent at this point to make the reader aware that while our own theoretical position moves considerably away from narrative criticism (narratology), much of our review will necessarily focus upon its development. It holds a central aspect in the development of theoretical work on the Gospel of John, and our work presupposes many of its conclusions.

In the section 1.3, 'Reconsidering Theory: Methodology and Epistemology in this Study,' we move from historical documentation of theoretical work to a critical engagement with the current twenty-first-century discourse. We begin to examine our own methodology and epistemology, including discussion of diachronic and synchronic approaches to the Gospel of John as well as our textual focus, which withholds discussion of authorial intentionality or historical reality in a bid to facilitate a deeper engagement with the text. We make a case for our integration of historical research into reading the first-century literary world of the Fourth Gospel and give an account of our own epistemological perspective and its possible value within the field.

1.2 Reviewing Theory: Literary Theory, Critical Theory and the Gospel of John

In this section we will deliberately focus on work on the Gospel of John, which has proved to be a prolific place of exploration in literary and critical theory's engagement with New Testament studies. A substantial tome such as *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*¹⁹ published in 2013, betrays in its title the volume of work that continues to be produced in this area.²⁰ We will take a preliminary look at the beginning of literary work on the Gospel of John and then look in more detail at the reception of Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*²¹ and the rise of narrative criticism. We will then discuss critical theory in Johannine studies before moving on to consider twenty-first-century work that is of particular importance to our study and methods.²²

Within New Testament studies the diversity of new theoretical approaches, using both literary and critical theories, were often gathered under the broad title 'literary criticism,' at times simply because its primary definition was predicated upon what it was not: the traditional and recognisable historical criticism. Occasionally, the discipline polemicised over the debate, with resistance from more traditional historical-critical scholars flaring towards scholars who openly discarded the old mode as they experimented with new approaches. At times this left little room for the nuances of difference within the new approaches to be fully appreciated

¹⁹ Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie and Ruben Zimmermann, eds., *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

²⁰ See also, for recent work in this area: Christopher W. Skinner, ed., *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John* (LNTS 461; T&T Clark: London, 2013). Skinner suggests in the introduction to the volume, that "In the new millennium narrative criticism and its related hermeneutical trajectories have become organic elements within the exegetical process, even when practitioners are unaware of their methodological choice." Skinner, *Characters*, xvii. As we do below, Skinner also undertakes a survey of the growth of these methods in Johannine studies. While we attempt a comprehensive survey of relevant material, Skinner produces a useful commentary on the more notable elements of the movement. See, Skinner, *Characters*, xviii–xxxii.

²¹ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

²² For another contemporary overview of the development of literary theory in Johannine studies see, Tom Thatcher, "Anatomies of the Fourth Gospel: Past, Present and Future Probes," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past Present and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. T. Thatcher and S. D. Moore; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 1–35. Stibbe makes an earlier assessment of New Testament engagement with literary theory in, Stibbe, *John As Storyteller*, 5–12. See also, Ruben Zimmermann, "Imagery in John: Opening up paths into the tangled thicket of John's figurative world," in *Imagery in the Gospel of John* (Frey, Jörg, Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann eds.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 1–43, for a discussion of scholarship concerning imagery in the Gospel of John, which particularly notes the literary turn in Johannine studies as relevant to burgeoning studies on symbolism and metaphor in John (Zimmermann, "Imagery," 4–9).

and considered. Previously, study of the Gospel of John had been dominated by the source-critical work of Rudolf Bultmann, and later Robert T. Fortna.²³ In addition, the work of J. Louis Martyn and Raymond E. Brown encouraged interest in the dynamics and influence of a possible Johannine community behind the composition and redaction of the finished Gospel.²⁴ The new theoretical approaches were both novel and challenging.

1.2.1 The Beginning of a Movement

Narrative criticism, sometimes termed narratology, was to dominate the initial pursuit of literary theory in New Testament studies.²⁵ In work on the Gospel of John literary approaches were not completely unheard of, but the proliferation of interest in literary theory and its application in the 1970s consolidated a movement.²⁶ Scholars drew upon theoretical work from other academic fields to inform and shape innovative approaches to the New

²³ Bultmann first published his monumental work on John in German in 1941. It was translated into English in 1971. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (eds. R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches; trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray; Oxford: Blackwell, 1971). And, Robert T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 11; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Both of these works examined the textual fragmentation of the Gospel of John, highlighting, contemplating and offering explanations for the disunity and *aporias* in the text. For an account of the term *aporia*, see, Fortna, *Gospel of Signs*, 2.

²⁴ See: J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (2d. ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1979). Martyn first published his thesis in 1968. Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979).

²⁵ This is particularly evident in work on the Gospel of John, certainly in part due to Culpepper's seminal text that was firmly embedded within narrative criticism. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). Culpepper points to C. H. Dodd's approach as the "precursor to narrative criticism," See, R. Alan Culpepper, "C. H. Dodd as a precursor to narrative criticism," in *Engaging with C. H. Dodd on the Gospel of John: Sixty Years of Tradition and Interpretation* (eds. T. Thatcher and C. H. Williams; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 31–48. Culpepper highlights that Dodd worked on the Gospel of John as a literary unit, unlike Bultmann. Also, Culpepper and Thatcher note Herbert Leroy's *Rätsel und Missverständnis* (Riddles and Community) 1968 as part of the early swell of work from a literary perspective working on the Gospel of John. See: Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 153–4; Thatcher, "Anatomies," 9–12.

²⁶ Mark Stibbe makes the case for an *inclusio* of literary concerns in the twentieth century: literary questions first arising between 1900–30 that died down with the onset of source and redaction's dominance until the 1970–2000 period. See, Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John's Gospel* (NTR; London: Routledge, 1994), 1–3. Stibbe over-interprets much of the 1900–30 material, the earlier evidence being far less advanced in quantity and technique. Indeed he does admit that literary approaches at the opening of the century were the exception rather than the norm. See, Mark W. G. Stibbe, ed., *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 6. However, Stibbe does identify the early stirrings of the later movement. While the 1970s and 1980s constituted a watershed in theoretical approaches it was not entirely unheard of or unprecedented. For example see: F. R. M. Hitchcock, "Is the Fourth Gospel a Drama?" in *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (ed. M. W. G. Stibbe; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 15–24; Hans Windisch, "John's Narrative Style," in *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (ed. M. W. G. Stibbe; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 25–64; James Muilenburg, "Literary Form in the Fourth Gospel," in *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (ed. M. W. G. Stibbe; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 65–76.

Testament.²⁷ Early literary approaches to the Gospel of Mark were also particularly dynamic.²⁸ David Wead made an early literary approach to the Gospel of John in *The Literary Devices in John's Gospel*.²⁹ Hans Frei's work *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*,³⁰ also proved to be of significance.³¹ Marinus de Jonge presented eight studies which assumed the literary unity of the Gospel of John.³² This work related closely to structuralist approaches to both New Testament and Hebrew Bible texts. Moore points out, three journals founded to publish alternative work to the historical-critical norm were all launched on the tide of the new structuralist interest: *Linguistica Biblica* (1970), *Semeia* (1974), and *Sémiotique et Bible*

²⁷ For example, Wayne C Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961). Interestingly Booth himself opens his work with an example of authorial authority from the book of Job. He states, "This form of authorial authority has been present in most narrative until recent time." Booth, *Rhetoric*, 3–4. The prominent criticism which was to be levelled at biblical critics using literary theory—that it was intended for novels etc. and not ancient texts—was not completely adhered to by the literary critics themselves. See also: Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (trans. J. E. Lewin; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

²⁸ For example see: Norman R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 49–80; Norman R. Petersen, "'Point of View' in Mark's Narrative." *Semeia* 12 (1978): 97–122; Robert C. Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," *Semeia* 16 (1979): 57–122; Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Mythic Structure and Meaning in Mark: Elements of a Lévi-Straussian Analysis," *Semeia* 16 (1979): 97–132; Jean Calloud, "Toward a Structural Analysis of the Gospel of Mark," *Semeia* 16 (1979): 133–165. For an overview of early narrative criticism and the Gospel of Mark see, Bible and Culture Collective, *Postmodern Bible*, 85–8. See also, Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 7–13. The 10-year Markan Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature (1971–80) was pivotal in its provision of a place for narrative criticism in the Gospel of Mark to be developed, although it was not until its final year that David Rhoads presented "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark" and consolidated the term 'narrative criticism' for the new approaches. See, David Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark," *JAAR* 50 (1982): 411–34. For narrative criticism and the Gospel of Mark see also, David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

²⁹ David W. Wead, *The Literary Devices in John's Gospel* (Basel: Freidrich Reinhardt, 1970). This study occupied itself with features of the text such as the post-resurrection point of view of the author, Johannine signs, irony and metaphor, although without much of the discussion of methodology which was to take such priority later. See for comment: Thatcher, "Anatomies," 12. In addition, Wead squarely resisted any suggestion of 'hermeneutics' and his endeavours were primarily to retrieve, and remain within, the perspective of the original author. See, Wead, *The Literary Devices*, vii.

³⁰ Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

³¹ Frei built a case for a return within biblical studies to recognition of meaning within the narrative world and function of the text, rather than its history and historicity alone. Frei states, "But in effect, the realistic or history-like quality of biblical narratives, acknowledged by all, instead of being examined for the bearing it had in its own right on meaning and interpretation was immediately transposed into the quite different issue of whether or not the realistic narrative was historical." Frei, *Eclipse*, 16. For a discussion of Frei's thesis see: Petersen, *Literary Criticism*, 20–1; Thatcher, "Anatomies," 2–4.

³² de Jonge, *Stranger from Heaven*, vii.

(1975).³³ Structuralist approaches primarily engaged the text alone, without recourse to the usual historical-critical panoply of questions.³⁴

Although work on the Gospel of John began to include the new literary method as a plausible and meaningful component of scholarly work, source criticism and redaction criticism, along with discussion of a historical Johannine community, remained dominant for some years. However, a few significant publications were to put literary theory firmly on the agenda for both work on the Gospel of John and in New Testament studies as a whole.

1.2.2 Culpepper's *Anatomy* and Beyond

Alan Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*³⁵ was a seminal contribution to the integration of literary theory, namely narrative criticism, into the Johannine field.³⁶ Culpepper radically introduced a whole new lexicon. Terms such as real author, implied author, narrator, narratee, real reader and implied reader, were presented and their use in reading the Gospel of John explored.³⁷ Both at the time and in the following decades, *Anatomy* received considerable critique and criticism.³⁸ Perhaps one of the most interesting readings of Culpepper came in the work of Stephen D. Moore.³⁹ With an eye on the scientific

³³ Stephen D. Moore, "Afterword: Things Not Written in This Book," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past Present and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. T. Thatcher and S. D. Moore; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 253.

³⁴ For an introduction to structuralism within biblical studies, The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1995), 70–118. See for example of a structuralist approach to John: John D. Crossan, "It is Written: A Structuralist Analysis of John 6," *Semeia* 26 (1983): 3–21.

³⁵ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

³⁶ 1983 also saw the publication of the literary study: Godfrey C. Nicholson, *Death as Departure: The Johannine Descent–Ascent Schema* (SBLDS 63; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983).

³⁷ Culpepper derived his theoretical model from Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 1978. See, Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 6. Tom Thatcher summarises, "Culpepper boldly declared that a close reading of the Gospel of John as a unified narrative could produce striking new insights." Thatcher, "Anatomies," 1.

³⁸ Gail R. O'Day highlighted Culpepper's lack of consistent application of the terminology he had expounded. More critically, O'Day resisted the dispensing with theological questions about the *gospel* narrative. Gail R. O'Day, review of R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, *JBL* 104 (1985): 544–7. Jeffrey Staley also made a detailed critique of *Anatomy*, which highlighted shortcomings in Culpepper's work. Staley also picked out the inconsistencies in Culpepper's terminology and the limitations of Culpepper's discussion of the reader. See, Jeffrey L. Staley, *The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 8–15.

³⁹ Stephen D. Moore, *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (London: Routledge, 1996), 50–62. For discussion of Moore's critique see, Tat-siong Benny Liew, "The Word of Bare Life: Workings of Death and Dream

practice of anatomy he produced a critique which explored Culpepper's approach to the New Testament and reread Culpepper's position. Moore comments,

On Culpepper's own account, therefore, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* is not an *Anatomy* at all, not the result of an anatomical dissection; rather it is a physical examination. "Let's have a look at you," is what Dr. Culpepper intends to say to John—not "Let's open you up and have a look." . . . And yet I wonder if Culpepper's methods are really so bloodless. By the time he is through with his examination, does he too not hold a dripping scalpel in his hand?⁴⁰

It was the matter of historical positioning—that to a certain extent Culpepper had dispensed with in his synchronic approach—which propagated the most criticism. Culpepper presented a literary study with the desire that it fit within a field of primarily historical criticism.⁴¹ To this end he included conjectures on historical questions that might be addressed by literary means, somewhat losing his way in his literary agenda.⁴² Some criticism of *Anatomy* suggests that Culpepper remained too wed to the historical agenda. Peter Phillips makes the comment that,

. . . the chapter on the implied reader becomes a discussion of the intended reader, or even of the original readers and then a discussion on the Johannine community. Culpepper spends most of his work showing how the text should be used as a mirror only to revert in the end to seeing the text as a window.⁴³

Inevitably, the opposite criticism also came: that Culpepper had dispensed with the historical perspective of an ancient religious text and thus diminished his interpretation.

Mark Stibbe sought to position his work both within the stream that Culpepper had defined, but also within the wider field. On a number of matters Stibbe was critical of *Anatomy*,

in the Fourth Gospel," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past Present and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. T. Thatcher and S. D. Moore; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 168.

⁴⁰ Moore, *God's Gym*, 54.

⁴¹ Culpepper makes clear at the outset that *within the remit of this particular study* he is dispensing with a desire to use the Gospel of John as a window on a historical community or as a subject for classification of layers and contradictions, but he also clearly states, "While the approach of literary criticism is clearly distinct from that of historical-critical scholarship, there needs to be dialogue between the two so that each may be informed by the other. . . . It [this book] is intended not as a challenge to historical criticism or the results of previous research but as an alternative by means of which new data may be collected and readers may be helped to read the Gospel more perceptively by *looking at* certain features of the Gospel." Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 5.

⁴² For example, Culpepper comments, "The possibility remains, however, that by studying the authorial audience implied in the gospel a clearer picture may emerge of the audience for which the evangelist intended to write." Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 207.

⁴³ Peter M. Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading* (LNTS 294; T&T Clark: London, 2003), 20–1.

namely he sought to re-integrate historical-critical concerns into literary readings of John.⁴⁴ Stibbe himself made a significant contribution to the Johannine literary agenda. He published a number of books all relating to John from a literary perspective.⁴⁵ He attempted to reshape narratology's interface with biblical studies highlighting how text-immanent approaches applied singularly and aggressively to New Testament texts fail to take into account a Gospel's undeniable and vital historical position. He points out that ultimately the Gospels are not novels.⁴⁶ Stibbe states, "It [the Gospel of John] is also a report in story-form of past history. One cannot ignore the question of the historical audience or the historical Jesus of John's story without reducing and restricting the functions of narrative."⁴⁷ Stibbe goes on to shape his own approach to bring narrative criticism into dialogue with theological concerns and historical readers. However, Stibbe's approach remained very much in a structuralist mode, and his work exemplified the trend of "exposing" a particular text to a particular form of literary theory.⁴⁸

What united the likes of Moore, Phillips and Stibbe in their criticisms of Culpepper was their position *within* the discourse of theory and the Gospel of John. All were engaged in the bid to work out better methods. This was not always the case, and other criticism came from quarters which saw literary theory as an inappropriate method that, at best, might be considered an interesting accompaniment to the proper work of historical criticism. Martinus de Boer critiqued much of Culpepper's *Anatomy* with the argument that narrative criticism is not an appropriate method for biblical studies. The only point at which de Boer appears to

⁴⁴ On the first page of *John as Storyteller* Stibbe states, "We cannot properly appreciate John's storytelling art unless we are prepared to expose his story to a comprehensive exegetical approach which has room for historical as well as literary questions." Stibbe, *John As Storyteller*, 1. See below for discussion of Stibbe's contribution.

⁴⁵ See: Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John As Storyteller* (SNTSMS 73; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1992); Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Mark W. G. Stibbe ed., *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993); Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John's Gospel* (NTR; London: Routledge, 1994). Note also Stibbe's article exploring the literary qualities of the 'elusive' Christ of the Fourth Gospel. See, Mark W. G. Stibbe, "The Elusive Christ: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel," *JSNT* 44 (1991): 19–38.

⁴⁶ Stibbe, *John As Storyteller*, 11–12.

⁴⁷ Stibbe, *John As Storyteller*, 12.

⁴⁸ Stibbe, *John As Storyteller*, 23. Interestingly, early in narrative criticism's advent in literary studies, Scholes and Kellogg were making a strong case that "narrative literature" had become "hopelessly novel-centred." They advocated recognition of narrative literature which went beyond the previous two centuries of novelistic history and into the literary prehistory. Scholes and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative*, 8.

see some merit in *Anatomy* is in Culpepper's discussions of the implied reader and how it might shed light on real readers or the Johannine community.⁴⁹ As we have noted, this particular aspect has also been criticised for muddling narratological terminology and aims.⁵⁰

Although Culpepper had set narrative criticism at the centre of theoretical studies in the Gospel of John, other methods, notably poststructuralist and reader response criticism, were gaining momentum. Alison Jasper points out Culpepper's lack of interaction with gender awareness or feminist concerns.⁵¹ Gail R. O'Day took literary work on the Gospel of John in another direction when she used her literary study of irony in the Fourth Gospel to answer questions regarding theological revelation.⁵² In Jeffrey Staley's *The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel*,⁵³ Staley's stated aim was to approach the text from a 'physiological' rather than an 'anatomical' perspective, with an eye on the formation and transformation of the implied reader.⁵⁴

Stephen Moore dedicated a section of his work *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge*⁵⁵ to the interpretation of the Gospel of John.⁵⁶ The bulk of Moore's contribution was to present a bird's-eye-view of the discipline, in his own terms a "book about

⁴⁹ Martinus C. de Boer, "Narrative Criticism, Historical Criticism, and the Gospel of John," JSNT 47 (1992): 35–48.

⁵⁰ Colleen M. Conway undertakes a retrospective analysis of the criticisms made of *Anatomy* in her article, "There and Back Again: Johannine History and the Other Side of Literary Criticism." Colleen M. Conway, "There and Back Again: Johannine History on the Other Side of Literary Criticism," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past Present and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. T. Thatcher and S. D. Moore; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 77–91.

⁵¹ Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 31.

⁵² Gail R. O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986). For another example of work on the Gospel of John at this time, see, Adele Reinhartz's "Jesus as Prophet: Predictive Prolepses in the Fourth Gospel." Here she makes a study of the prolepses with the Johannine Jesus' speech and considers the effect of such on the characterisation of Christ. See, Adele Reinhartz, "Jesus as Prophet: Predictive Prolepses in the Fourth Gospel," JSNT 36 (1989): 3–16.

⁵³ Jeffrey L. Staley, *The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

⁵⁴ Staley, *Print's First Kiss*, 15. Outside Johannine scholarship, *Semeia* dedicated two of its issues in the 1980s to explore the role of the reader in New Testament interpretation: R. Detweiler, ed., *Reader Response Approaches to Biblical and Secular Texts* (Semeia 31 Decatur: Scholars Press, 1984); Edgar V. McKnight, ed., *Reader Perspectives on the New Testament* (Semeia 48; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

⁵⁵ Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁵⁶ Moore, *Literary Criticism*, 151–170.

books and essays, a map of secondary literature.”⁵⁷ In it he focuses his efforts on two particular aspects of literary theory—narrative criticism and reader-response criticism—before making some assessment and projections for a significant third: poststructuralism, notably Derridean deconstruction.⁵⁸

1.2.3 Critical Theory in Johannine Studies

As we have reviewed, the latter part of the Twentieth Century saw the introduction of literary theory, and to a certain extent critical theory, in the field of New Testament studies, but it was during the final decade of the Twentieth Century that these methods became more widely utilised, appreciated and accepted. There was a proliferation of work, all broadly gathered under the banner of literary theory or critical theory—but now quite diverse—interacting with the Gospel of John.⁵⁹ Significantly the narrative criticism that Culpepper had set at the heart of work on the Fourth Gospel was evolving in method and methodology. In addition, critical theories such as postmodern theory, feminist theory, poststructuralism, postcolonial criticism, and reader-response criticism were becoming more integrated within biblical studies. But this growing area was not without opposition and the 1990s also saw the consolidation of strong criticism of the new methods and we will review this in a separate section below.⁶⁰

The rise of critical theory’s interaction with New Testament texts saw a number of significant contributions. The methods and methodology that were being refined and tested were all crucial in the establishment of critical theory’s place within New Testament studies and this

⁵⁷ Moore, *Literary Criticism*, 3. Moore undertakes his own review of the entry of literary, notably narrative, criticism into biblical studies. He points to the Markan Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature (1971-80) as a source of much energy and focus of the first forays of narrative criticism. See above for discussion. Moore, *Literary Criticism*, 7–13.

⁵⁸ Moore later pursues deconstruction, see: Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994). He uses two passages in John, presenting a reading of the Samaritan Woman (John 4) and the Cross (John 19). See, Moore, *Poststructuralism*, 43–64.

⁵⁹ *Semeia* 53 (1991) was an edition devoted entirely to literary perspectives on the Gospel of John. R. Alan Culpepper and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *The Fourth Gospel from a Literary Perspective* (*Semeia* 53; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991).

⁶⁰ See, Chapter One, 1.2.4 ‘Criticisms and Resistance.’

proliferation of theoretical approaches certainly provides the theoretical background to the questions, methods and theory which we pursue here in this thesis. Much of the new scholarship appeared in *Semeia*.⁶¹ Fernando F. Segovia edited two tomes of essays which contributed significantly to the momentum, quality and diversity of literary and critical work in studies on the Fourth Gospel: *“What is John” Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel*⁶² and *“What is John?” Volume 2 Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel*.⁶³ Jeffrey Staley attempted to bring together reader response criticism and aspects of rhetorical and textual criticism to discuss the narrator in relation to John 18:12–24.⁶⁴ Dorothy Lee explored the Fourth Gospel from a literary theological perspective.⁶⁵ Lee’s subsequent article rereading the characters of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in John 20 produced a refreshing new perspective on the Johannine resurrection narrative.⁶⁶ Colleen M. Conway undertook a study of the role of gender in Johannine characterization.⁶⁷

⁶¹ *Semeia* 51 (1990) and *Semeia* 54 (1991) explored poststructuralism and exegesis: Gary A. Phillips, ed., *Poststructural Criticism and the Bible: Text/History/Discourse* (*Semeia* 51; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); David Jobling and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Poststructuralism as Exegesis* (*Semeia* 54; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991). *Semeia* 69/70 (1995) worked on intertextuality and the bible: George Aichele and Gary A. Phillips, eds., *Intertextuality and the Bible* (*Semeia* 69/70; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). *Semeia* 62 (1993) and 71 (1995), probed the concept of textual determinacy, with particular reference to deconstruction, reader response and feminist criticism: Robert C. Culley and Robert B. Robinson, eds., *Textual Determinacy: Part One* (*Semeia* 62; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); Robert C. Culley and Robert B. Robinson eds., *Textual Determinacy Part Two* (*Semeia* 71; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). *Semeia* 72 (1995) entered into the controversial new autobiographical criticism: Janice Capel Anderson and Jeffrey R Staley, eds., *Taking it Personally: Autobiographical Biblical Criticism* (*Semeia* 72; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). *Semeia* 73 (1996) took up the challenge to ‘read with’ others outside the white western academy of biblical studies: Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, eds., *“Reading With”: An Exploration of the Interface between Critical and Ordinary Readings of the Bible: African Overtures* (*Semeia* 73; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996). *Semeia* 75 (1996) offered an entire edition to the task of postcolonial readings: Laura H. Donaldson, ed., *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading* (*Semeia* 75; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996). *Semeia* 78 (1997) continued the interest in postcolonial readings, this time from a feminist perspective: Phyllis A. Bird, ed., *Reading the Bible as Women: Perspectives from Africa, Asia, and Latin America* (*Semeia* 78; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

⁶² Fernando F. Segovia, ed., *“What is John?” Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

⁶³ Fernando F. Segovia, ed., *“What is John?” Volume 2. Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

⁶⁴ Jeffrey L. Staley, “Subversive Narrator/Victimised Reader: A Reader Response Assessment of a Text-Critical Problem, John 18:12–24,” *JSNT* 51 (1993) 79–98.

⁶⁵ Dorothy A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The interplay of Form and Meaning* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994).

⁶⁶ Dorothy A. Lee, “Partnership in Easter Faith: The Role of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in John 20,” *JSNT* 58 (1995) 37–49.

⁶⁷ Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterisation* (SBLDS 167; Atlanta: SBL, 1999). Other publications of note include: Johannes Nissen and Sigfred Pedersen, eds., *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives. Essays from the Scandinavian Conference on the Fourth Gospel in Århus 1997* (*JSNTSup* 182; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (*JSNTSup* 69; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); Adele Reinhartz, *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel* (SBLMS 45; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); D. Francois Tolmie, “The Characterization of God in the Fourth Gospel,” *JSNT* 69 (1998): 57–5; Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word. Reading the Fourth Gospel: John 1–4* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Francis J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5–12* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

Exemplifying the heart of critical theory's engagement with biblical studies was the publication of *The Postmodern Bible*,⁶⁸ not least with its curious designation of the author as 'The Bible and Culture Collective.' In this move it sought not only to define and integrate critical theory into biblical studies, but also to model a pioneering way of collective authorship in a deliberate attempt to re-conceive the epistemology of western academic biblical studies. The introduction states,

This collective process became our means to contest an epistemology and a set of disciplinary practices that privilege the autonomous self, an ideology that values private ownership, and a professional discursive practice that legitimates the production and dissemination of knowledge in one form at the expense of another.⁶⁹

The volume stands as a vital tome with different aspects of theory being brought into biblical studies, including reader response theory, narratological criticism, poststructuralism and feminist theory. Perhaps the only immediately noticeable absence is its lack of any real engagement with postcolonial theory. Elsewhere in biblical studies at the time, postcolonial criticism was gaining significant credence.⁷⁰

1.2.4 Early Criticisms and Resistance

The reception of literary and critical theory to New Testament studies was not without conflict.⁷¹ At times the discussion became entrenched in a dichotomy between the 'threatened' historical criticism and the 'threatening' new approaches. Scholars working with literary and critical theoretical approaches sought to either unify or diversify their work, to

⁶⁸ The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁶⁹ Bible and Culture Collective, *Postmodern Bible*, 16.

⁷⁰ For example see: Laura H. Donaldson, ed., *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading* (Semeia 75; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Fernando F. Segovia, "My Personal Voice: The Making of a Postcolonial Critic," in *The Personal Voice in Biblical Interpretation* (ed. I. R. Kitzberger; New York: Routledge, 1999), 25–37.

⁷¹ Although at times there appeared a tentative, but promising, harmony. For example the harmony of diachronic and synchronic approaches to the Gospel of John in, Johannes Beutler and Robert T. Fortna, eds., *The Shepherd Discourse of John 10 and its Context* (SNTSMS 67; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

varying extents, from the dominant field of historical criticism.⁷² Commonly, when seeking to dispense with historical-critical concerns, it was a methodological move within a particular study to allow the text to be interpreted from a theoretical perspective⁷³; occasionally this was a universal dismissal in the belief that future study of the Gospel of John lay within a singularly synchronic approach.⁷⁴ Some historical-critical scholars retaliated with polemical rhetoric.⁷⁵ At times some who were working with literary approaches also concluded that the two could not coexist. Fernando F. Segovia comments,

Despite such common and repeated allowances, however, there can be little doubt that the gulf between the more traditional approach and the newer approaches becomes increasingly wide and extremely difficult to negotiate: the more any text is shown to be meaningful and coherent as it stands, the more difficult it becomes to accept the presence of aporias as traditionally conceived and defined, to argue for substantial reconstructions of underlying sources and subsequent redactions, and to begin with the prehistory of the text in the search for meaning.⁷⁶

Martinus de Boer produced a polemical article that criticised and diminished the growing trends in narrative work on the Gospel of John.⁷⁷ Adding his voice, John Ashton delivered a scathing critique and a gloomy outlook for the future stating, “I shall argue that narrative criticism is more of a fad than a fashion, and that since it misconceives the true nature of the Gospels the results it yields are trifling, if not altogether illusory.”⁷⁸

⁷² For example see, Derek Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 151; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 23. Of course, not all scholars who undertook theoretical studies in the Gospel of John made explicit their position with regards to this debate.

⁷³ For example see: Staley, *Print's First Kiss*, 29–30.

⁷⁴ For example see: Nicholson, *Death*, 15–6. Nicholson states, “For the meaning of the text does not lie outside the text, but in the text as a text, a communication between author and reader. We would agree that the text appears to have a long pre-history However, the meaning of the present text is not dependent upon the recovery of these sources. It does not matter where this earlier material comes from. What does matter is what the author does with it within his writing.” (15) It must be noted that even here Nicholson has not dispatched entirely historical-critical concerns (e.g. discussion of the intent of the real author).

⁷⁵ For example see Ashton’s misrepresentation of Staley’s comments in: John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 17–8.

⁷⁶ Fernando F. Segovia, “Towards a New Direction in Johannine Scholarship: The Fourth Gospel from a Literary Perspective,” *Semeia* 53 (1991): 1–22, 14.

⁷⁷ de Boer, “Narrative Criticism,” 35–48. de Boer returns to the debate in, Martinus C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 45–52. Although we have identified it as polemical, some considered de Boer’s article an ‘attempt to resolve the impasse.’ See, Steve Motyer, “Method in Fourth Gospel Studies: A Way Out of the Impasse?” *JSNT* 66 (1997): 27–44.

⁷⁸ John Ashton, *Studying John: Approaches to the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 141. In his second edition, 2007, of *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, Ashton returns to the debate and acknowledges that his early predictions of narrative criticism’s demise have proved incorrect. However, he continues in his early polemical vein. See, Ashton, *Understanding*, 11–13.

Steve Motyer published a JSNT article with the expressed wish to find a “way out of the impasse.”⁷⁹ However the ‘appeal’ was mainly towards the narrative critics to ‘engage with historical questions’⁸⁰ and recognise the ‘indispensability’ of historical approaches.⁸¹ There was little parity given to the two approaches. The following year, John Barton wrote a considered defence against the supposed demise of historical criticism in the opening chapter of *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (1998). He claimed that, “It [historical criticism] is now under a cloud. There is much talk of a ‘paradigm shift’ away from historical methods and towards ‘text-immanent’ interpretation which is not concerned with the historical context and meaning of texts”⁸² Whether historical criticism was undermined within the guild to the extent that some perceived is unlikely. The thriving historical-critical work that dominates the field today is evidence of its centrality within biblical studies both then and now.

1.2.5 Twenty-First-Century Perspectives

The volume of material in the contemporary arenas of these approaches to the Gospel of John prevents us attempting a comprehensive review of individual studies. That literature which is of significance for this study will be considered in the second half of this chapter. Here we will turn our attention to the methodological and epistemological discourse which continues in theoretical approaches to the Gospel of John.

Three recent publications stand out in Johannine studies: Francisco Lozada Jr. and Tom Thatcher’s (editors) *New Currents Through John: A Global Perspective* (2006)⁸³; Tom Thatcher’s (editor) *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future*

⁷⁹ Steve Motyer, “Method in Fourth Gospel Studies: A Way Out of the Impasse?” JSNT 66 (1997): 27–44.

⁸⁰ Motyer, “Method,” 31.

⁸¹ Motyer, “Method,” 33.

⁸² John Barton, “Historical-critical approaches,” in *The Cambridge Companion To Biblical Interpretation* (ed. J. Barton; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9–20, 9.

⁸³ Francisco Lozada Jr. and Tom Thatcher, eds., *New Currents Through John: A Global Perspective* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).

of *Johannine Studies* (2007)⁸⁴; and Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore (editors) *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (2008).⁸⁵ Together these books have gathered a snapshot of contemporary thought on the position and future of theoretical work on the Gospel of John and have helpfully supplied a relatively recent survey of much scholarly opinion. We must also point towards the online journal *The Bible and Critical Theory*, edited by Julie Kelso and Roland Boer and published by the Bible and Critical Theory Seminar.⁸⁶ Although not exclusively Johannine, the journal offers a place for the publication and discussion of work in critical theory and biblical studies.⁸⁷ Kelso writing in 2008 acknowledges that the use of literary and critical theory within biblical studies still remains a marginalised enterprise. Indeed, part of the motivation to start *The Bible and Critical Theory*, was the termination of the journal *Semeia* (which, as we have seen in our own review, was a prolific place of publication and debate of theory's place in biblical studies). Kelso states,

In the broader context of international biblical studies, including SBL (Society for Biblical Literature), there is still a sense that those of us interested in the connections between biblical texts and, say, Continental philosophy, cultural studies, literary theory, postcolonial theory, feminist theory and political theory, are still in the great minority. There is, of course, a handful of sophisticated journals out there with a similar focus (journals like *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts and Contemporary Worlds*, *Biblical Interpretation*, *The Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* and *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, along with the now defunct *Semeia* and the short-lived *Biblicon*), all providing the necessary space, past and present, in which to allow scholars with such interests to have their research read and critically engaged with in the process, productively changing the discipline (*albeit* slowly).⁸⁸

This online open-access journal (the journal is published under a creative commons licence) adds another dimension to the debate, in the free sharing of work and research. Boer and

⁸⁴ Tom Thatcher, ed., *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007).

⁸⁵ Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

⁸⁶ The Journal publishes here: <http://novaajs.newcastle.edu.au/ojsbct/index.php/bct/index>. Cited 11th July 2014. Articles pertaining to Johannine studies include: Jonathan Bernier, "The Consciousness of John's Gospel: A Prolegomenon to a Jaynesian-Jamesonian Approach," *BCT* 6 (2010): 20.1–20.11. Peter-Ben Smit, "Jesus and the Ladies: Constructing and Deconstructing Johannine Macho-Christology," *BCT* 2 (2006): 31.1–31.15.

⁸⁷ The previous website stated, "From 2004 to 2010, the journal was published on a subscription basis by Monash University ePress. From 2011 it is published as an open-access journal by the Bible and Critical Theory Seminar." [cited 9 July 2013]. Online:

<http://bibleandcriticaltheory.org/index.php/bct/about/editorialPolicies#openAccessPolicy>.

⁸⁸ Julie Kelso, "Us Versus Them: On Biblical (Studies) Identity Production," *BCT* 4 (2008): 01.1–01.4, 01.1.

Kelso point out, “Now, twenty percent of journals are published as open-access (according to the Directory of Open-Access Journals), any new journal barely considers print as an option any more, and even subscription journals offer online publication as the primary option and print as an extra.”⁸⁹ There is an interesting symmetry in the new ideas of critical theory and the new media being employed in the debate.

Presently the picture of theory in Johannine studies is much changed from that which proliferated in the previous century. Stephen D. Moore captured a sense of the zeitgeist concerning literary and critical theory in New Testament studies in his two pieces: “A Modest Manifesto for New Testament Literary Criticism: How to Interface with a Literary Studies Field that is Post-Literary, Post-Theoretical and Post-Methodological”⁹⁰ (2007) and, specific to Johannine studies, “Afterword: Things Not Written in this Book”⁹¹ (2008). Moore highlights that much of what was considered ‘new’ in the literary and critical theoretical approaches of the previous decade, were in fact comfortable extensions of that which was already in place, pointing particularly to the continued preoccupation with the intentions of the original author.⁹² As we have seen throughout this chapter, Moore is a central voice in the wider debate regarding theory (in all its forms) in New Testament studies. This is not least because he has positioned himself as both a prolific practitioner and reflective analyst, spending considerable time documenting the ebb and flow of the relationship between them.⁹³ Of particular recent note are his series of three articles co-authored with Yvonne Sherwood,

⁸⁹ Roland Boer and Julie Kelso, “Editorial: The Bible and Critical Theory, Resurrected,” *BCT* 7 (2011): i–ii, i.

⁹⁰ Stephen D. Moore, “A Modest Manifesto for New Testament Literary Criticism: How to Interface with a Literary Studies Field that is Post-Literary, Post-Theoretical and Post-Methodological,” *BibInt* 15 (2007): 1–25.

⁹¹ Moore, “Afterword,” 253–8.

⁹² Reflecting on narrative criticism’s situation in studies on the Fourth Gospel in the 1980’s he considers its relationship to redaction criticism such that, retrospectively, it is hardly identifiable as a separate unit. Moore states, “Narrative criticism, for all its undeniable novelty twenty years ago, seems in retrospect to have been a singularly painless extension of redaction criticism. What yokes narrative criticism to redaction criticism is a shared preoccupation (ordinarily unstated in the case of narrative criticism) with uncovering the evangelist’s original intentions.” Moore, “A Modern Manifesto,” 5. See also Moore and Sherwood’s wider critique of biblical studies, which proposes that contemporary biblical studies, is still propagated on a (limited) Enlightenment epistemology. See, Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, “Biblical Studies ‘after’ Theory: Onwards Towards the Past. Part Two: The Secret Vices of the Biblical God.” *BibInt* 18 (2010): 87–113. 90.

⁹³ For an early example of this in Moore’s work see, Moore, *Literary Criticism*, 7–13.

“Biblical Studies ‘after’ Theory: Onwards Towards the Past.”⁹⁴ These make a wide-angle assessment of theory and its current position. The prognosis is far from positive and Moore and Sherwood liken those undertaking work using theory in biblical studies to a small group of islands flanked by the more powerful empires of the discipline (the Falklands perhaps, compared to America).⁹⁵ Moore and Sherwood position their articles as a discussion which relates to the move away/on from theory, outside the field of biblical studies, that literary studies has experienced; the post theoretical turn.⁹⁶ As they both note however, the scene in biblical studies is considerably different.⁹⁷

One of the crucial matters that Moore repeatedly raises in his discussion concerning the integration of theory into biblical studies is the recognition of what ‘difficulty’ biblical studies and (the separate discipline of) literary/critical theory set themselves. He concludes that

. . . literary studies is a field that embraces difficulty of one sort—the sort monumentalized in disciplinary landmarks such as Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* or Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*—whereas biblical studies is a field that embraces difficulty of another sort—the sort enshrined in the Documentary Hypothesis or the Synoptic Problem.⁹⁸

In this, Moore identifies a substantial concern in the integration of theoretical work into biblical studies: does biblical studies desire new lines of enquiry within its discourse, or is it content with its traditional pursuits? Moore considers the impact of literary studies “superficial.”⁹⁹ Moore also identifies that predominantly the use of theory has been modelled upon a singular application of a particular theorist or theory. Commonly, the detailed

⁹⁴ Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, “Biblical Studies ‘after’ Theory: Onwards Towards the Past. Part One: After ‘after Theory’, and Other Apocalyptic Conceits.” *BibInt* 18 (2010): 1–27; Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, “Biblical Studies ‘after’ Theory: Onwards Towards the Past. Part Three: Theory in the First and Second Waves.” *BibInt* 18 (2010): 191–225; and Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, “Biblical Studies ‘after’ Theory: Onwards Towards the Past. Part Two: The Secret Vices of the Biblical God.” *BibInt* 18 (2010): 87–113.

⁹⁵ Moore and Sherwood, “One: After ‘after Theory,’” 4.

⁹⁶ For a discussion of the post theoretical turn in literary studies see, Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); Michael Payne and John Schad, eds., *Life. After. Theory* (London: Continuum, 2003).

⁹⁷ Moore and Sherwood, “One: After ‘after Theory,’” 3–5, 18–24. Essentially Moore and Sherwood propose that the current fall/ousting/apocalypse ending the use of theory in literary studies is not being felt in biblical studies, because, for various reasons that they go on to explore, theory never achieved enough status in biblical studies to merit a ‘fall.’ They state, “In biblical studies, in contrast, Theory can hardly be said to have risen to sufficiently Luciferian heights to undergo any meaningful fall. Rather than being cast from celestial heights, it would have to be thrown from a basement window.” Moore and Sherwood, “One: After ‘after Theory,’” 4.

⁹⁸ Moore, “A Modern Manifesto,” 16.

⁹⁹ Moore, “A Modern Manifesto,” 16.

abstracted presentations of the key components, along with a considered justification for its use, are presented before finally exposing the New Testament text to that theory. Moore comments:

Most obviously, our obsession with method has made for a mountainous excess of dull and dreary books, essays, and articles: here, first, in numbing dry detail is my method; now watch and be amazed while I apply it woodenly to this unsuspecting biblical text. Can we move beyond methodology in biblical studies without writing sermons pure and simple? That, I would suggest, is an important, perhaps even a central, challenge for those of us in biblical studies interested in engaging in authentic interdisciplinary dialogue with contemporary literary studies.¹⁰⁰

As Moore highlights, the risks of abandoning mountainous excesses of methodology include the conflation of biblical studies with homiletic discourse. While Moore has certain justifiable frustrations here, the focus on the presentation of (a) theory is not necessarily a wholly negative thing. Certainly as literary and critical theories were brought into New Testament studies, some detailed work in the presentation of these new ideas was important, but Moore is astute in his analysis that things cannot necessarily remain in this mode.

In Adele Reinhartz's contribution to *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*,¹⁰¹ she takes a different approach and makes a compelling case to suggest that historical and literary analyses are perhaps not as far removed as previously considered. She claims that literary criticism is an "implicit foundation"¹⁰² for historical criticism, offering the suggestion that the work of Bultmann, Fortna, Martyn and Brown all use literary analysis, without specific recourse to literary theory.¹⁰³ In addition, she observes that the two approaches, historical and literary, need not compete with each other, but rather should be seen as complementing each other. She says,

Logically, there would seem to be inherent contradiction between literary and historical criticism. As *Anatomy* explained, these two approaches can exist alongside

¹⁰⁰ Moore, "A Modern Manifesto," 24. Moore and Sherwood return to this discussion in, Moore and Sherwood, "Three: Theory," 209–10.

¹⁰¹ Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

¹⁰² Adele Reinhartz, "Building Skyscrapers on Toothpicks: The Literary-Critical Challenge to Historical Criticism," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past Present and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. T. Thatcher and S. D. Moore; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 57.

¹⁰³ She particularly notes Meeks's 1972 article "The Man From Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism" which uses literary analysis to contribute to historical-critical conclusions concerning the Johannine community. Reinhartz, "Skyscrapers," 57–9.

one another because they ask different sets of questions that are not mutually exclusive. An inquiry into the ways that the narrative functions with respect to the reader does not contradict the fact that the narrative was produced in particular historical circumstances that may well have left their mark on the narrative as such.¹⁰⁴

Like Moore, Reinhartz highlights the asking of different questions and the subsequent value of the different answers—the different discourse of knowledge—as critical, and at times lacking, in the development of the epistemology of contemporary New Testament studies.

Paul Anderson (again, in the *Anatomies* volume) presents his case for a polyvalent approach to the Fourth Gospel and its meaning. Drawing on the Bakhtinian theory of dialogism, Anderson calls for three areas of interaction with the Gospel: theological dialogism, historical dialogism, and literary dialogism.¹⁰⁵ He proposes that these three must be considered dialectically, stating:

Again, the interpretative paradigms of Bultmann, Brown, and Culpepper have made enduring contributions precisely because they worked with multiple disciplines and approaches, addressing the polymorphic character of the Johannine riddles with complementary hypotheses that provide suggestive ways forward for understanding matters Johannine: literary, historical, and theological.¹⁰⁶

Anderson's points are salient to discussion of the wider interaction of differing approaches to the Gospel text. However, his reliance upon the motivating factors of the "Johannine riddles" seems to undermine his consideration of literary dialogism. In this he diverts from Reinhartz's and Moore's 'different difficulties'¹⁰⁷ and appears to return, albeit via an interesting route, to the same historical questions. If literary analysis merely seeks explanation for various Johannine questions of Synoptic difference or internal contradiction, the opportunities of literary and critical theory are lost. In addition the danger, pointed out by Moore,¹⁰⁸ of the collapsing of literary critique into homiletic discourse is made apparent in Anderson's

¹⁰⁴ Reinhartz, "Skyscrapers," 57.

¹⁰⁵ Paul N. Anderson, "From One Dialogue to Another: Johannine Polyvalence from Origins to Receptions," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past Present and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. T. Thatcher and S. D. Moore; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 93–119, 108–18.

¹⁰⁶ Anderson, "From One Dialogue to Another," 108–9.

¹⁰⁷ Moore, "A Modern Manifesto," 16.

¹⁰⁸ Moore, "A Modern Manifesto," 24. See below for discussion of Moore's perspective and the situation of this study.

discussion of literary features.¹⁰⁹ The exhortation that the reader ‘believes’ (John 20:30–31) is claimed as the “primary *literary purpose*.”¹¹⁰ We would not deny the merit of the consideration of passages such as John 20:30–31, but what of the Gospel’s ‘primary literary purpose’? What indeed is meant by primary literary purpose? It may be more helpful to consider its primary literary function? Or perhaps we may really only speak of its collection of literary functions, dispensing with the idea of primacy and singularity among them.

Finally in recent publications we can see a snapshot of the changes in the field, reflected in Robert Kysar’s attitude in the course of his New Testament work.¹¹¹ In the twenty-first century, after a lengthy career, he considers himself as coming to terms with new and challenging ways of interpreting the Gospel that would have been unthinkable in previous decades. He offers his thoughts on this seismic shift and reflects upon what the future may hold. Kysar considers the historical-critical agenda largely redundant.¹¹² In what he confesses to be a postmodern perspective, he believes the search for meaning lies to a greater extent with the reader than the text or its history. Kysar identifies the instability of language and the ‘problematic character of meaning,’ and holds that meaning is social, constructed on one’s own experience, rather than an objective entity.¹¹³ He also takes a polemical position, stating, “historical studies are their investigators’ fictionalized constructs.”¹¹⁴ For example, his own position on the Johannine Community hypothesis is changed and he now considers it a dubious conjecture.¹¹⁵ Interestingly Kysar, a convert in terms of theory, does not remark on the apparent marginal position that theoretical approaches hold in relation to the still-dominant historical-critical mainstream.

¹⁰⁹ See, Anderson, “From One Dialogue to Another,” 114–8.

¹¹⁰ See, Anderson, “From One Dialogue to Another,” 115.

¹¹¹ For an extended discussion of the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel throughout his career see: Robert Kysar, *Voyages with John: Charting the Fourth Gospel* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005); Robert Kysar, “What’s the Meaning of This? Reflections Upon a Life and Career,” in *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past Present and Future of Johannine Studies* (ed. T. Thatcher; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 163–177.

¹¹² For a detailed presentation of Kysar’s 2007 position see, Kysar, “What’s the Meaning of This?” 163–177.

¹¹³ Kysar, “What’s the Meaning of This?” 169–72. See also, Kysar, *Voyages*, 218–9, 247–50.

¹¹⁴ Kysar, “What’s the Meaning of This?” 172.

¹¹⁵ Kysar, “What’s the Meaning of This?” 173.

Although we have only charted the debate in work on the Gospel of John, and left much consideration of the content of specific work to our following discussions, we have endeavoured to offer a comprehensive survey. Our own thesis builds on, departs from, and reconsiders again at various turns, this discourse on the place of theory in the study of the Gospel of John. Our aim in the next section will be to give an account of the methods and methodology we have adopted, before pointing towards the wider discussion about the assumptions and epistemological propositions we have worked upon.

1.3 Reconsidering Theory: Methodology and Epistemology in this Study

In our own thesis, the length of the present chapter signals that we have clearly not entirely abandoned the lengthy 'dry' theoretical discourse which Moore criticises.¹¹⁶ But, while it is not our intention to move beyond methodology or theory per se, we have moved beyond the strict presentation and application of a particular theory to a New Testament text. Although we highlight the work of Julia Kristeva as an essential element in our work, we maintain a conscious dialogue with various theories and utilize them diligently, we hope, as suitable tools rather than draconian regimes in reading the Gospel of John.

This study situates itself largely in the field of critical theory and literary theory, with a specific emphasis on poststructuralist theory and feminist theory. We have aimed to engage the text in a form of exegesis which takes account of both the literary nature of the text along with its first-century position. We have used historical research to enable our reading of the literary world found within the Johannine first-century text, rather than attempting a description of the historical world behind the text. Although a discussion of the original readers might ensue from our work, we have deliberately refrained from it. The discussion around what might have been originally understood by the text and, pre-empting that, what the author might have originally intended, sits outside of our remit. This demands some explanation and we

¹¹⁶ Moore, "A Modern Manifesto," 24.

will consider our use of historical research more carefully below. But first we might ask, what do we intend by the 'literary world'? In this thesis we have sought a dynamic relationship between first-century text and twenty-first-century critical theory and historical research. In this, we have approached the text and the world it constructs as an independent literary world, alongside which we might bring both historical information and present critical theory to understand and interpret it with a conscious theoretical stance.

Before we move on, it will be helpful to note that which we do not attempt and that which relates closely to, but falls outside, the boundaries of our own study. Our task has not been theological. We have not sought to read or develop the theology, particularly the Christology, found in the Gospel of John. Our study of Jesus' burial remains occupied with the literary world of the Gospel and with Jesus as the protagonist of that world. Excluding theological questions has enabled us to interact with the text, and with the death and burial of Jesus depicted in the text, without the constraint of the 'high' Christology which commonly dominates the interpretation of Christ in the Fourth Gospel. We believe this has enabled a fresh dynamic between reading and text that has allowed this study to re-engage with the narrative's events and the 'story'¹¹⁷ which forms the primary context of the text. However, we must be clear, while this approach allows, within our study, aspects of story and narrative to crystallize, we do not wish to take a wider position that permanently excludes theological questions from the discourse of textual meaning, or that sees no relationship between theological and literary aspects of the Fourth Gospel. However, we maintain that unless literary aspects of narrative and text are properly attended to, without theological assumptions, the literary or critical task will be merely a servant of theological concerns.

¹¹⁷ We use the term 'story' here, but will go on to note that we deliberately move away from the term and will use 'narrative' instead. See, Chapter One, 1.3.3 'Diachronic versus Synchronic Approaches: A Methodological Cul-de-Sac?'

The postmodern virtues of the theoretical turn in approaches to the bible have been widely documented, however we have resisted directly entering the discourse of postmodernism.¹¹⁸

The discourse of postmodern theory is a complex and contentious field which demands discussion and attention that would consume this thesis if appropriately entered into. Therefore we have largely left this discussion outside the work of this present study, but recognise that particular aspects of our study would fit comfortably within a postmodern definition. Our task will be to focus on the relevant developments and the particular situation of method, methodology and epistemology within this study, rather than a discussion of the significance of developments for the identification of postmodern frameworks and agendas.

The literary and theoretical work on the Hebrew Bible has been a prominent place of development of important scholarship that has approached texts in new and innovative ways. In addition there has been much work in Hebrew Bible Studies which uses both literary and critical theories as interpretative approaches, some of which closely relates to our study.¹¹⁹ However, the trajectory of literary theory's engagement with the Hebrew Bible has been markedly different to that of New Testament studies. This is highlighted by the different terminology, at times "poetics" rather than "narratology" employed in its study.¹²⁰ For this, and reasons of space limitations, we have largely left discussion of developments in Hebrew Bible studies outside the boundaries of this survey and included only those works that are particularly important for our own discussion.

¹¹⁸ A sample would include: A. K. M. Adam, ed., *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000); A. K. M. Adam, *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Edgar V. McKnight, *Postmodern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Orientated Criticism* (2d ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990); The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1995). For an introductory discussion of the postmodern aspects within biblical studies, see, Bible and Culture Collective, *Postmodern Bible*, 8–15.

¹¹⁹ For example see: J. Cheryl Exum, ed., *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989); Mieke Bal, *Death and Dyssymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988); Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Mieke Bal, *Loving Yusuf: Conceptual Travels from Past to Present* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008); Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For examples of work in this period on the Hebrew Bible see, *Semeia* volume 46, entitled *Narrative Research on the Hebrew Bible* (1989).

¹²⁰ See for discussion: Bible and Culture Collective, *Postmodern Bible*, 89–95.

1.3.1 Gender Studies and Feminist Theory

An increased sensitivity to gender and the construction and depiction of gender in ancient texts, along with contemporary attitudes, is a prevalent feature of contemporary biblical studies. Along with feminist theory, biblical scholars have utilised masculinity studies and queer theory as a theoretical framework to analyse gender.¹²¹ Some scholars have seen the diversion of gender analysis away from its feminist origins as suspicious. We however are inclined to agree with Colleen M. Conway when she justifies her work in masculinity studies thus:

... the absence of an analysis of masculinity as a constructed category reinforces the notion that masculinity is a natural, normative, or essential mode of being—a category immune to deconstruction. This study is founded on the conviction that gender categories are deeply embedded and entangled in the symbolic systems of any culture. It also assumes that such symbolic systems are open to analysis, critique, and deconstruction.¹²²

However, questions still remain around the integration of gender analysis in general, and in particular our own area of feminist theory, into the discipline of mainstream biblical studies.¹²³

In the discourse of gender theory various feminisms, masculinity studies, and queer theory are recognised, but what of the central mainstream of biblical studies which supposes a gender neutral approach? Feminist scholars have long considered this a thinly veiled masculine construct. The continuing denial, in practice if not always in principle, of gendered aspects of biblical studies—namely the text, the scholarly perspective, and the reading subject—perpetuates a normalised masculine perspective.¹²⁴

¹²¹ For a discussion of masculinity studies and queer theory's development in Biblical Studies from 1987–2007 see, Moore, "A Modern Manifesto," 1–25. For an extensive collection of work in masculinity studies in New Testament studies see, Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, eds., *New Testament Masculinities* (SBL SemeiaSt 45; Leiden: Brill, 2004).

¹²² Conway, *Behold the Man*, 9.

¹²³ For a discussion of feminist criticism's relationship with mainstream biblical studies see, Adele Reinhartz, "Feminist Criticism and Biblical Studies on the Verge of the Twenty-First Century," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies* (eds. A. Brenner and C. R. Fontaine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 30–8; Pamela J. Milne, "Toward Feminist Companionship: The Future of Feminist Biblical Studies and Feminism," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies* (eds. A. Brenner and C. R. Fontaine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 39–60.

¹²⁴ Carole R. Fontaine (writing in 1997) states, "avoidance of feminist questions seems to have become the method of choice for dealing with this challenge to the authority of elite, male interpreters." Carole R. Fontaine, preface to *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies* (eds. A. Brenner and C. R. Fontaine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 12. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza criticises the

Furthering the theoretical debate of gender theory in biblical studies is not a central aspect of our project, but we would hope that this work can contribute to the continued questioning of mainstream scholarship which fails to properly address the gendered dynamics of power in creating texts, narratives and readings. Jorunn Økland and Roland Boer ask (2008),

. . . why, after 40 years of consistent and increasingly widespread feminist biblical scholarship, such scholarship remains an unstable entity that can be dispensed with and ignored by mainstream scholarship. This mainstream scholarship may be 'sympathetic' to feminist matters, but more often than not it acknowledges feminism in passing and then goes on with the same old task.¹²⁵

As with many feminist biblical scholars, we hope to dispense with the 'same old task.' We occupy a reading position which has an awareness of gender and at various points in our thesis specifically explores that gendered aspect from a feminist theoretical stance. We desire to inhabit a scholarly place in which gendered discourse is a normative and essential recourse in a wider project. In other words, we maintain that both in our approach and in our work, gender-awareness is considered indispensable to interpretation, rather than a curious sideline for the ideologically inclined.¹²⁶ In this, we would add our voice of challenge to the mainstream ignorance of the critique feminism has brought to western ideology in general and biblical studies specifically.

We will develop various elements of feminist and gender analysis throughout our study of the Johannine burial. Our primary aim will be to bring to the fore aspects of gender at work within the burial text. Reading from a literary perspective we will seek to read aspects of gender

plethora of postmodern approaches, which reduces feminist criticism to one-among-many. See, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 20–1. Moore makes a more positive assessment, suggesting that feminist critique sits apart from other methodologies and contributes “a critical sensibility, an encompassing angle of vision that, in a more fundamental fashion than a methodological framework, brings previously unperceived or disavowed data into focus.” Moore, “A Modern Manifesto,” 23.

¹²⁵ Roland Boer and Jorunn Økland, eds., *Marxist Feminist Criticism of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 2.

¹²⁶ Moore and Sherwood point to the “containment” of such readings in biblical studies. They note, “. . . the moral and political force of feminist biblical criticism has become hamstrung by the trope of 'reading as' and the dissipating force of a generic theory of reader-response or text reception fusing with identity politics. . . . they can be both visible from the mainstream of the discipline and extraneous to it, and need have no deep or lasting effect on how mainstream practitioners of biblical scholarship go about their daily business.” Moore and Sherwood, “Three: Theory,” 216–17.

within the unfolding burial narrative. We are conscious that we have deliberately centralised a feminist perspective while working on a text which does not contain any female characters (John 19:38–42). In this, we have sought a.) to integrate a feminist approach into a broader literary approach to interpretation, and b.) to highlight the absence of specific female characters as an overlooked element in the discourse of textual meaning. The legitimacy and integration into mainstream scholarship of feminist approaches to texts which do not necessarily deal with female characters is essential in the future development of feminist and gendered discourse within the field.¹²⁷

However, we do also work on a reading of John 19:25–7, where female characters are present. We will spend substantial time reconsidering the mother of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel; in preparation to consider her absence at the burial scene, we will seek to interpret her presence earlier in the text. In this, we will aim to read the mother of Jesus primarily as a social and cultural character situated within the narrative, rather than a theological tool, metaphor or historical figure. In our foregrounding of the literary world, we will bring her down from her lofty theological position and imbue her once more as an individual character with position and perspective to be considered and explored.

Finally, in our discussions of our feminist perspective we must note that we approach the text without any stated objective either to ‘redeem’ it for women or to ‘reject’ it. While we are explicit about our feminist questions, and our challenge to the scholarly community to embrace gendered discourse, we consider an investigation into what our reading might mean for religious communities to be outside the remit of this study.¹²⁸ Indeed, such an

¹²⁷ This is widely recognised in various ways. See for example Alison Jasper’s feminist approach to John’s prologue. Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 19. See also, Ela Nutu, *Incarnate Word, Inscribed Flesh: John’s Prologue and the Postmodern* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007).

¹²⁸ For an alternative approach to feminist studies of the Fourth Gospel see, Margaret M. Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel: A Genuine Discipleship of Equals* (JSNTSup 242; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 11–17. Beirne firmly places her study in relation to the discipleship of men and women, both in the Gospel, and in present day Christianity, proposing that Johannine discipleship is essentially inclusive. This builds on a tradition in feminist scholarship which has pursued a redemption of the biblical text for women and the Church, the most notable proponent being Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.

investigation would easily constitute another thesis. The stance we have adopted is valuable in allowing us an interpretative space to consider the text without attempting to steer our findings into a discourse of female equality either found in the text, endorsed by the text, hindered by the text, or denied by the text. Finally we will not suppose a neutral text; along with other feminist biblical scholars, we recognise its inherent patriarchal and andro/phallogocentric nature.¹²⁹

1.3.2 Julia Kristeva

Julia Kristeva is a key theorist whom we draw upon in our study and whose theories provide a unique perspective which we consider valuable in work on the Gospel of John. Kristeva's contributions to contemporary thought have spanned a number of disciplines as well as decades and resist easy definition. Unsurprisingly, her early work has evolved into new areas and new ideas. She writes in a number of fields including philosophy, feminist literature (although she would hesitate to define herself as a feminist), art, religion, politics and psychoanalysis. Specific aspects of her work make unique contributions to our methodology and necessitate some initial examination. Here we will introduce the most significant aspects of her theories and those related to this study. We present a small précis of her theories of the semiotic, the abject, and her work on melancholia, and finally open a discussion of her relationship with feminist theory. The writings of Julia Kristeva include a number of themes which are also found in the Gospel of John. These include the role of the mother, abjection, absence, mourning and aspects of light and darkness. While this is not a prolific area of research, some others have recognised value in using Kristevian theory in work on the Fourth Gospel. Andrew P. Wilson picks up some of these themes and uses Kristevian theory in his work.¹³⁰ Alison Jasper also cites Kristevian theory as part of the methodological

¹²⁹ For a discussion of feminist biblical scholars who have moved away from the sole aim of the redemption of the text towards a more critical engagement see, Milne, "Toward Feminist Companionship," 46–8.

¹³⁰ In his article "Stabat Maria: Marian Fragments and the Limits of Masculinity," he draws on Kristeva's theories about the traditions of the Virgin Mary and brings them into dialogue with both Johannine studies and contemporary opera music. See, Andrew P. Wilson, "Stabat Maria: Marian Fragments and the Limits of

background to her work on John's prologue in *The Shining Garment of the Text*.¹³¹ Ela Nutu presents a detailed discussion of Kristevian psychoanalytic theory and skilfully weaves Kristeva's theories into her work, also on the prologue.¹³²

Bringing Kristevian theory into dialogue with feminist theory necessitates some discussion and we will address this below. The continuation of her position within an at times modified, but nonetheless Freudian, framework proves problematic. From a feminist and psychoanalytic perspective her adherence to Freudian theories, remains a minority opinion which problematises a full integration of her perspective in those fields. Although she modifies them through a Lacanian lens and also adjusts and redefines them in her own terms, ultimately she remains committed to some Freudian theories. Finally let us reiterate that we do not undertake a specifically Kristevian psychoanalytical reading, but rather seek to integrate the Kristevian insights which we have found valuable in the interpretation of the Gospel of John.¹³³

1.3.2.1 The Semiotic

One of Kristeva's most significant and enduring principles is that of the semiotic and although we do not overtly utilise this concept within this study, it would be prudent to allow some discussion of it, such is its significance within Kristevian theory. Kristeva laid out her concept of the semiotic in her 1974 PhD thesis *La Révolution du Langage Poétique*¹³⁴ and in the

Masculinity," in *The Recycled Bible: Autobiography, Culture, and the Space Between* (SBL, SemeiaSt 51; ed. F. C. Black; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 27–44. See also, Andrew P. Wilson, "Poetic Crossings: Reading the Philipppians Christ Hymn Alongside Blanchot's Orpheus and Kristeva's Dead Christ," *BCT* 7 (2011): 29–41.

¹³¹ Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 24–5 and 28–9.

¹³² Nutu, *Incarnate Word*, 78–84, 110–120. For a study in the Gospel of Mark using Kristevian theory see, Manuel Villalobos Mendoza, *Abject Bodies in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 101–107.

¹³³ For an examination of Kristeva's work from a psychoanalytical perspective in biblical studies see, Bible and Culture Collective, *Postmodern Bible*, 211–17. Andrew Wilson also contributes a survey of Kristevian thought to the *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*. See, Andrew Wilson, "Kristeva," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (ed. A. K. M. Adam; St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 144–50.

¹³⁴ Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du Langage Poétique: L'Avant-Garde a la Fin du XIX^e Siècle: Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974). Translated into English ten years later: Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (trans. M. Waller; New York: Columbia University Press, 1974). However, this translation was only the theoretical first third of Kristeva's thesis and not the detailed exploration of the application of her theory when applied to the works of two early modernist poets, Lautréamont and Mallarmé.

subsequent decades her theory has been highly influential and much considered. Kristeva presented a re-envisioning of language and discourse, the signifying process, which was not a unified structure, but a relationship of two aspects: the symbolic and the semiotic.¹³⁵ The relationship between these two spheres is accounted for in Kristeva's re-imagination of Plato's *chora*.¹³⁶ The Kristevian *chora* acts as a pre-symbolic drive, which is present in the initiation of all signifying processes. She states,

The *chora* is not yet a position that represents something for someone (i.e. it is not a sign); nor is it a *position* that represents someone for another position (i.e. it is not yet a signifier either); it is however, generated in order to attain to this signifying position. Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm.¹³⁷

Kristeva forms her ideas of the semiotic in relation to Freud's pre-Oedipal stage, when a child is pre-language and makes certain intuitive and extra-linguistic bonds with the mother, and also to Lacan's three (interactive) orders of, the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real. Neither Freud's nor Lacan's theory is used without amendment and reinterpretation by Kristeva.¹³⁸ The Kristevian semiotic takes its genesis in the pre-language stage of a child's life. It is then found and expresses itself as a disruptive force in all symbolic discourse; it both inspires and disturbs, moving as an unchecked force behind every articulation and representation. Kristeva points to the preverbal echolalia of children (the babbling sounds and noises pre-speech/words in babies and young infants), the tone and rhythm of poetry, and fragmented communications of the psychotic as evidence of the semiotic at work.¹³⁹

Kristeva's theory of the semiotic has been accused of conceding to patriarchy, essentialism and sanctioned heterosexuality (at the exclusion of homosexuality). Judith Butler launches a critique of the Kristevian semiotic suggesting that the subordination of the semiotic and the

¹³⁵ Kristeva lays the foundation for her theory of the semiotic and the symbolic in the first chapter: Kristeva, *Revolution*, 19–106. For discussion see, Michael Payne, *Reading Theory: An Introduction to Lacan, Derrida, and Kristeva* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993), 162–211.

¹³⁶ For an insightful assessment of the Kristevian *chora* see, Miglena Nikolchina, "The Lost Territory: Parables of Exile in Julia Kristeva." in *The Kristeva Critical Reader* (ed. J. Leche and M. Zournazi; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 158–72, 162–64.

¹³⁷ Kristeva, *Revolution*, 26.

¹³⁸ On the Kristevian semiotic and its relation to the theories of Freud and Lacan see: Anne-Marie Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Speaking the Unspeakable* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 14–29.

¹³⁹ See: Smith, *Julia Kristeva*, 18–21; John Lechte, *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1990), 127–31. Lechte makes an assessment of Kristeva's use of Freud's theories, particularly his theories of drives in, John Lechte and Maria Margaroni, *Julia Kristeva: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2004), 20–3.

hegemony of the symbolic, within which knowledge and articulation of the semiotic is restrained, perpetuates the paternal law.¹⁴⁰ Butler also takes issue with Kristeva's positioning of female homosexuality as a regressive state of psychosis, forever desperate to apprehend the lost mother, while unable to properly enter the symbolic.¹⁴¹ We do not deny that, in some aspects, Kristeva's theory is controversial, even problematic, however her exploration of the semiotic has provided an invaluable discourse of that which is 'other' to, and repressed by, the symbolic. It has allowed meaning and intention to be recognised outside the usual boundaries of communication.

1.3.2.2 The Subject

Kristeva defines the subject in terms of it being neither subject nor object.¹⁴² It is rather that which repels and repulses one and, significantly for Kristeva, all abjection flows from the archetypal abjection of that which one must exclude in the establishment of oneself as an independent speaking subject: the mother.¹⁴³ Kristeva states, "Thus, fear having been bracketed, discourse will seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confronts that otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the subject."¹⁴⁴ This root of psychoanalytical matricide in her theory of the subject is certainly not something we desire to import uncritically into our thesis and methodology. Imogen Tyler in her article "Against Abjection"¹⁴⁵ suitably problematises it. She points out the

¹⁴⁰ Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," in *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing* (ed. K. Oliver; New York: Routledge, 1993), 164–178.

¹⁴¹ Butler, "Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," 169–171. Butler concludes, "The relation between heterogenous drives and the paternal law produces an exceedingly problematic view of psychosis. On the one hand, it designates female homosexuality as a culturally unintelligible practice, inherently psychotic; on the other hand, it mandates maternity as compulsory defence against libidinal chaos. Although Kristeva does not make either claim explicitly, both implications follow from her views on the law, language and drives." 171.

¹⁴² Kristeva, *Powers*, 1–2. For an essay on the Kristevian abject see, Elizabeth Gross, "The Body of Signification," in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva* (eds. J. Fletcher and A. Benjamin; WSPL; London: Routledge, 1990), 80–103.

¹⁴³ Kristeva, *Powers*, 5–6, 13. For a closer reading of the Kristevian understanding of the pre-Oedipal abjection of the mother see, Noëlle McAfee, "Abject Strangers: Toward an Ethics of Respect," in *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing* (ed. K. Oliver; New York: Routledge, 1993), 116–134, 117–9. See also, Smith, *Julia Kristeva*, 32–5.

¹⁴⁴ Kristeva, *Powers*, 6.

¹⁴⁵ Imogen Tyler, "Against Abjection." *JFT* 10 (2009): 77–98.

re-inscription of violence against actual maternal bodies that it unwittingly perpetuates in its universalisation of a psychoanalytic theory of maternal abjection. She states,

. . . the repeated framing of the maternal as abject shapes the appearance and experience of maternal bodies in the social world. Feminist theory needs to shift its focus away from ‘observational reiteration’ of maternal abjection as it manifests within cultural realms. This doesn’t mean abandoning the concept of abjection, which is perhaps unique in its ability to articulate the psychosocial dimensions of violence. However, we need new theories of social abjection to wrench this concept from a purely Kristevian paradigm.¹⁴⁶

Although we find ourselves with Tyler, questioning the wholesale import of Kristevian abjection in feminist theory, the dismantling of this complex psychoanalytical theory is beyond the remit of this thesis. Tyler points out that what Kristeva lacks is an awareness of “ . . . what it might mean *to be* [sic] that maternal abject, to be the one who repeatedly finds themselves the object of the other’s violent objectifying disgust.”¹⁴⁷ What Kristeva’s theory of abjection offers to our reading is a valuable language, a symbolic representation, of this most semiotic of forces. Kristeva depicts abjection as a continual inscribing of one’s borders which sustains the speaking *sujet-en-procès*. It manifests itself in a variety of situations: personal loathings and phobias¹⁴⁸; responses of horror towards criminal behaviour and atrocities¹⁴⁹; religious prohibitions (as a means of controlling the abject) and cleansing rituals (as a means of purifying the abject)¹⁵⁰; and some modern literature.¹⁵¹ The corpse is a particular point of abjection. Kristeva writes,

The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ Tyler, “Against Abjection,” 95.

¹⁴⁷ Tyler, “Against Abjection,” 95.

¹⁴⁸ Kristeva, *Powers*, 2–3, 35–48. Kristeva leans heavily on Freud’s work in this aspect.

¹⁴⁹ Kristeva, *Powers*, 4.

¹⁵⁰ Kristeva, *Powers*, 17.

¹⁵¹ Kristeva, *Powers*, 18–26.

¹⁵² Kristeva, *Powers*, 3–4.

In this thesis we adopt the terminology of abjection and it forms a key element of our reading. We will particularly explore abjection in relation to Johannine darkness and the corpse of the crucified Christ depicted in John 19:42. Our adoption of the terminology of abjection follows that which may be identified as invoking feelings of horror, revulsion and that which is routinely excluded from the symbolic, remaining neither subject nor object.

1.3.2.3 Melancholia

Kristeva delivers an extensive thesis on melancholia and depression in her 1989 text *Black Sun*. In it she explores the psychoanalytic terrain of despair expressed as depression and melancholia.¹⁵³ She likens the state to residing under a black sun, a potent image of hopelessness and unnatural paradox. For Kristeva, both the origins and the treatment of depression and melancholia stem from the recognition of a Freudian object-loss.¹⁵⁴ Kristeva likens melancholia to a living death where the melancholic's ability to engage in the symbolic universe becomes inhibited and fragmented. Lechte states,

. . . it [depression and melancholia] is a way of barely clinging to the symbolic and confronting the unnameable before the onset of complete psychosis. The loss of words, of taste, of motivation go to form an intense despair—the basis of the mourning already mentioned. This is the other face of narcissism where despair *is* meaning. By contrast, love is a union with an external object in the symbolic; thus, it has no place in the melancholic's universe.¹⁵⁵

In this thesis we will particularly draw on Kristeva's focus on symbolic representation as a path out of the pit of complete despair. By re-entering the world of symbolic representation the subject has renewed her/his place in the symbolic and prevented the collapse of her/himself into meaninglessness. The representation of death, as Kristeva explores in Holbein's painting of Christ,¹⁵⁶ offers a way to signify the great unsignifiable mystery of death

¹⁵³ Kristeva does draw some definition between depression and melancholia, namely the more serious nature of melancholia than its milder counterpart depression, but throughout *Black Sun* on the whole she uses the terms interchangeably. See, Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (trans. L. S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 9–11.

¹⁵⁴ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 10.

¹⁵⁵ Lechte and Margaroni, *Julia Kristeva*, 82.

¹⁵⁶ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 107–138.

into which, ultimately, all human life must fall. In Chapter Five we will draw these elements together and bring them into dialogue with the Johannine burial narrative.

1.3.2.4 Feminism and Kristevian Theory

As we have seen, some aspects of Kristeva's theories are not at ease within a feminist agenda. Kristeva herself has an ambiguous relationship with the feminist movement. She deliberately resisted joining second wave feminist movements in France, stating that she believed they " . . . often adhered to the very dogmatism they opposed."¹⁵⁷ However, she maintains an interest in feminist questions, particularly those which address the concept of the mother as well as women's writing and art. Even so, some maintain that she has made a valuable contribution towards feminism's agenda.¹⁵⁸ Her theories sit within the field of French philosophy and this has often had a tempestuous relationship with its Anglo-American counterpart, particularly in the arena of feminism.¹⁵⁹ Kristeva herself acknowledges that her concepts of femininity are at odds with those across the Atlantic. She contends an image of woman as the "irrecuperable foreigner"¹⁶⁰ in a masculine (symbolic) universe and a conceptualisation of the feminine in discourse as inherently indefinable, destined always to be the subversive voice.¹⁶¹ This area in particular has been challenged in the writings of Judith Butler, who presents a robust critique of Kristeva's adherence to the paternal law and argues against Kristeva's characterisation of lesbianism as a form of psychosis.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Ross Mitchell Gubermann, *Julia Kristeva Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 7. For Kristeva's position relative to feminism during the 1970's, see 101–2 and 104–112. See also, Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 9–12.

¹⁵⁸ See: Guberman, *Interviews*, 7; Lechte and Margaroni, *Julia Kristeva*, 24.

¹⁵⁹ For discussion of Kristeva's position and conflict within Anglo-American Feminism see, Tina Chanter, "Kristeva's Politics of Change: Tracking Essentialism with the Help of a Sex/Gender Map." in *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing* (ed. K. Oliver; New York: Routledge, 1993), 179–195.

¹⁶⁰ Guberman, *Interviews*, 45.

¹⁶¹ See: Guberman, *Interviews*, 32–3, 45–6.

¹⁶² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 101–119. Butler states, "By projecting the lesbian as 'Other' to culture, and characterizing lesbian speech as the psychotic 'whirl-of-words,' Kristeva constructs lesbian sexuality as intrinsically unintelligible. This tactical dismissal and reduction of lesbian experience performed in the name of the law positions Kristeva within the orbit of paternal-heterosexual privilege." Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 111.

The position of the mother and the maternal body in Kristeva's theories—namely its association with the unknowable, and inexpressible Kristevian chora—has been problematic for feminists seeking to reinstate the female (including the maternal) body in language and discourse. At times Kristeva has been charged with essentialism and biological determinism.¹⁶³ Karen Tatum makes a survey of this aspect of Kristeva's theory in an attempt to account for the lack of recognition of Kristeva in the Anglo-American feminist canon.¹⁶⁴ Tatum takes a position that defends Kristeva's recognition of the unique maternal body and the necessity to allow women in contemporary feminism a voice to express their experience of maternity. Tatum's expressed aim is to "argue that feminism must account for the female body, because its abjection simply results in further violence against it."¹⁶⁵ In this observation we follow Tatum and our reading will go on to consider the maternal body of the mother of Jesus within the Gospel of John and the dynamics at work in its presence and absence, its account and its abjection.¹⁶⁶

Although Kristeva has occasionally offered some criticism of Freud,¹⁶⁷ ultimately, in all of Kristeva's work her dependence on the theories of Sigmund Freud has served to problematise her relationship with contemporary feminism. Her work is heavily influenced by his theories and she takes a number of his proposals as a framework of reference for her psychoanalytic theory and practice. This commitment has not diminished with time. Her proposal in 2000 that a return to Oedipus is a progressive path out of postmodern displacement of the paternal was met with dismay.¹⁶⁸ Maria Margaroni sets out her response,

¹⁶³ Karen E. Tatum, *Explaining the Depiction of Violence Against Women in Victorian Literature: Applying Julia Kristeva's Theory of Abjection to Dickens, Brontë, and Braddon* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 11, 13.

¹⁶⁴ Tatum, *Explaining*, 8–37.

¹⁶⁵ Tatum, *Explaining*, 14.

¹⁶⁶ Kristeva makes a reading of the mother of Jesus in her essay *Stabat Mater* (1976). Here she lays a discussion of Mary alongside her more poetic discourse of her own experience of motherhood. See, Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," in *Tales of Love* (trans. L. S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 234–263.

¹⁶⁷ Kristeva undertakes an interesting discussion of the "dark area" in Freud which she recognises as an absence of the subject of motherhood. See, Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love* (trans. L. S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 254–6.

¹⁶⁸ Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* (vol. 1 of *The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*; trans. J. Herman; New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 68–87. Kristeva sets out to, "... convince readers that returning to Oedipus is not only important but indispensable." (68).

highlighting that it is the essential elements of the Oedipal theory—phallogentric, paternal authority defined as the symbolic—that elicits from feminist quarters the most passionate criticism. She notes “Despite such overwhelming resistance, Kristeva does not hesitate to suggest (to the dismay of many of her colleagues in both feminism and psychoanalysis) that the way out of our current deadlocks need not take us beyond Oedipus.”¹⁶⁹

As we consider the various aspects of Kristevian thinking in this thesis we recognise that a problematic Freudian perspective remains at the heart of her work. This matter is not easily resolved and we do not presume to attempt a resolution here, but rather we identify that this tension sits in her work. However, the uniqueness of her theoretical contribution and the dynamic this offers our reading is undeniable.

1.3.3 Diachronic versus Synchronic Approaches: A Methodological Cul-de-Sac?

An area necessitating clarification is our approach to the textual unity of the Gospel of John. In this, we approach the text in a manner that is commonly termed ‘synchronic.’ This has been a contentious element of literary and critical theory’s engagement with the New Testament, particularly given narrative criticism’s controversial desire to read the text as a *seamless* and *intentional* literary unity. Historical-critical scholarship has been sceptical at the suggestion of approaching the text as a unified whole, while new literary criticisms have been overly hasty to dismiss some aspects of historical scholarship. Much has been written at the lines drawn between the two and the heat of the debate has continued well into the twenty-first century. Tom Thatcher’s (ed) tome *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies* (2007)¹⁷⁰ polemically revisits the diachronic/synchronic approaches debate in its first chapter. John Ashton takes issue with synchronic approaches that work on the text as it stands and he highlights the attempt of

¹⁶⁹ Lechte and Margaroni, *Julia Kristeva*, 35–6.

¹⁷⁰ Tom Thatcher, ed., *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007).

narrative critics to dispense with (particularly) source criticism's account of the aporias within the text.¹⁷¹ While many of his points merit some consideration, his approach remains polemical, even inflammatory. He states, "I cannot take this [discussion of textual gaps and the real and implied authors] seriously."¹⁷² In his zeal to identify flaws within literary approaches, he fails to engage with the wider issues raised by the inclusion of these methods in work on the Gospel of John. Indeed his comments in 2007 have moved little beyond the initial responses of literary theory in biblical studies made by its critics in the previous decades, while theoretical approaches, as we have seen, have evolved considerably.

Retrospectively, we can observe that the desire of narrative critics to make historical methods redundant in the dazzle of their new approach was misguided, but with hindsight we may concede that it was perhaps necessary to embrace the perspective with such zeal to gain some ground in the historically entrenched guild. The long-dominance of historical-critical questions left little possibility for new approaches to quietly and persuasively enter discussions. Now we would hope that a less polemical position might be attained. In the second chapter of Thatcher's collection "In Search of a New Synthesis,"¹⁷³ Johannes Beutler presents a more positive outlook than Ashton, considering the two approaches—diachronic and synchronic—to be moving towards a more compatible situation in Johannine studies.¹⁷⁴ In our own study we have attempted to utilise an approach which is openly synchronic. But we have moved beyond the strict narrative criticism practiced as a tight science on a stable, intentional text.¹⁷⁵ We need not deny source criticism's recognition of aporias and we do not attempt to smooth over obvious dislocations within the text, because our method does not require that the text is a *seamless* or even intentional piece of literature before we may work

¹⁷¹ See, Ashton, "Second Thoughts," 2–9.

¹⁷² Ashton, "Second Thoughts," 9.

¹⁷³ Johannes Beutler, "In Search of a New Synthesis," in *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past Present and Future of Johannine Studies* (ed. T. Thatcher; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 23–34.

¹⁷⁴ Beutler, "In Search," 26–7. However, Beutler still expresses reservation about the achievement of such (27).

¹⁷⁵ As exemplified in: R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). Culpepper held that even if its origin was in doubt, there was unity in its present form, Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 49.

on it. Stephen Moore points to poststructuralist deconstruction as a mode which allows for unity of the text, while maintaining a discourse of textual fragmentation and contradiction.

Moore asks,

But what if our diachronic accounts of the building up and tearing down in John, and in the other gospels, were to be given a synchronic twist (we invoke that opposition reservedly)? This would be done not to drown out the undercurrent of cacophony, of difference in the text, in the manner of holistic reading, but to listen in on it more closely instead, and not to ascribe what we overhear to different intentionalities within our account of the gospel's composition history, but to tease out "the warring forces of signification within the text itself" (Johnson, *Difference*, 5) in as rigorous a manner as possible Deconstructive criticism . . . enables a detailed tracing of the weave of figure and trope within the fabric of the gospel text—a tracing attentive to any tears in that fabric or to any inconsistencies in its pattern.¹⁷⁶

Our own position is very close to that which Moore elucidates here. Although we do not explicitly draw upon Derridean deconstruction, our use of Julia Kristeva and our poststructuralist position allows recognition of different textual forces and permits fragmentation.¹⁷⁷ We will particularly explore this in our discussion of complexity within the σκορία motif. Because we have embraced difference rather than sought conformity within our critical approach, we can interpret disparity without recourse to traditional source or redaction explanations of the text as irredeemably fragmented. The value of this approach for our study lies in its insight into how the narrative functions within the Gospel of John—as it is read in the New Testament canon—with recognition of the 'weave of figure and trope within the fabric' that Moore points out. We are reminded of Reinhartz's assertion that the literary agenda primarily asks different questions to historical-critical approaches,¹⁷⁸ and of course regard for the literary nature of the Gospels in this way is not unheard of.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Moore, *Literary Criticism*, 166–7. Also citing: Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980).

¹⁷⁷ Stibbe also posits Derridean deconstruction as a way out of the synchronic/diachronic impasse. See, Mark W. G. Stibbe, "Magnificent but Flawed: The Breaking of Form in the Fourth Gospel," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past Present and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. T. Thatcher and S. D. Moore; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 149–65, 159–65.

¹⁷⁸ Reinhartz, "Skyscrapers," 57.

¹⁷⁹ For example see: Petersen, *Literary Criticism*, 20–3; McKnight observed in 1980 that "historical study of the biblical text has come to see the necessity of genuine literary criticism to complete the historical task." Edgar V. McKnight, "The Contours and Method of Literary Criticism," in *Orientation by Disorientation: Studies in Literary Criticism and Biblical Literary Criticism* (PTMS 35; ed. R. A. Spencer; Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1980), 61. However, McKnight was overly confident in his belief that all historical study saw the necessity for a literary perspective and, in addition, debate continues as to what a 'genuine' or appropriate literary criticism might look like in biblical studies.

A further element of our exegetical position demands clarification. For the purposes of this thesis, we have excluded from our consideration speculation of authorial intentionality. This can at times prove a complex and contentious position.¹⁸⁰ While many scholars acknowledged that the 'original' intention of the author is difficult to retrieve, others have sought to maintain a defence of the author's meaning, others find some path between the two extremes.¹⁸¹ Our reading seeks to interact with the text alone rather than the concept of authorial intentionality.

Roland Barthes announced the 'death of the author' in 1968, but what he actually propagated was not the death, but a new discussion, of the author and the text.¹⁸² Our discussion has been centred upon the internality and the functions of the text, studied with literary and critical theory, rather than conjecture of what the author might or might not have intended. A. K. M. Adam delivers a useful summary of authorial intention as a contribution to the debate of postmodern interpretation of the bible.¹⁸³ Alison Jasper helpfully summarises the argument, highlighting that it is the hegemony of supposed authorial intentions which is the problematic nub of the debate.

Naturally enough, an author's view of what he or she is doing presents one obvious interpretative framework! But such perceived intentions cannot be exclusively authoritative. In the first place, an author's conscious intentions very rapidly become—in an ultimate sense—a matter of speculation once they are no longer on hand to explain. Some authors never explain. And even intentions stated publically by

¹⁸⁰ Scholarly books, articles and monographs on the intention and indeed the identity of the author of the Gospel of John are considerable. A small survey would include: Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John 1–12* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966), LXXXVII–CII. Brown makes a helpful discussion of the possibilities of authorship. Barrett also presents a thorough discussion: Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 3–26. Keener devotes a substantial section to the discussion: Keener, *John vol. 1*, 81–122. See also: Schnackenburg, *John vol. 1*, 75–104. For taste of more recent turns in the discussion see: Tom Thatcher, "Why John Wrote a Gospel," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (SBL Semeia St 52; eds. A. Kirk and T. Thatcher; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 79–97.

¹⁸¹ For example, Kevin J. Vanhoozer writes an extensive defence of authorial intentionality and original 'meaning' in: Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollon, 1998). He assumes that the meaning of a text is limited exclusively to the one intended by the author. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 252–5.

¹⁸² Published in France 1968. See, Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text* (trans. S. Heath; New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142–9.

¹⁸³ A. K. M. Adam, "Author," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (ed. A. K. A. Adam; St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 8–13.

authors may be, or may be accounted, lies or self-deceptions, or unsatisfactory and insubstantial, particularly by later commentators in search of 'truth'.¹⁸⁴

Derrida firmly planted the concept of *différance* at the heart of poststructural theory, allowing the consideration that language is far from a fixed and stable entity.¹⁸⁵ More relevant to our work is Kristevian intertextuality, which affords us a theoretical background that acknowledges meaning as fluid, indeterminate and produced from a complex network of referential layers.¹⁸⁶ Whether the desire behind the Fourth Gospel is to relate historical fact, theological justification, or community rhetoric, remains outside of our question. Rather we recognise, with other literary and critical theorists, that the text itself, as it is received and read within the New Testament, exerts its own force of meaning apart from any intentionality of author (or redactor, or history of source variants) and this force of meaning requires work and interpretation in the spectrum of our studies in the Gospel of John.

Finally in this section we must address one more issue of terminology. We have identified that the term 'story' is problematic in that it implies *deliberate* fictionality. This has been a stumbling block to those scholars who wish to defend and encourage a discourse of the historical accuracy of the Gospel of John. Additionally, it has proved problematic with those who wish to discuss the Fourth Gospel as a historical, ancient text, which may or may not be accurate, but which is not intended as a fiction tale. Furthermore, the term story leaves little room to absorb the various aporias which are identified within the text. The implication behind the term 'story' has often been that all disclosures are deliberate and vital and the

¹⁸⁴ Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 29–30.

¹⁸⁵ Derridean *différance* is based on the assumption that the meaning of words, or rather signifiers, is based on the continual recognition of what they are *not*, rather than any distinct essence of what they *are*. Moreover the abstract concept which signifiers conjure, the signified, is also defined by what it is not, what it *differs* from and what it *defers*. Finally, the link between the two is random and arbitrary. For a presentation of Derridean linguistics see, Moore, *Poststructuralism*, 13–41. See also, Nutu, *Incarnate Word*, 21–27.

¹⁸⁶ See, Kristeva's essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel" (1966) reproduced in Moi, *Kristeva Reader*, 34–73. Kristeva herself favours the term 'transposition' rather than intertextuality to remove her discourse from the more straightforward study of sources. See, Kristeva, *Revolution*, 59–60. For a short discussion of how Kristevian intertextuality intersects with Derridean and Barthean concepts of intertextuality see, Moore, *Poststructuralism*, 130. Jasper exemplifies this in her work, allowing different reading of the same text to sit within her study on the prologue. See, Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 28–9.

term resists recognition of the considerations around the historical position of the Gospel of John as an ancient text, to address this we have instead used the term 'narrative.'

G rard Genette documents three different applications of the term narrative.¹⁸⁷ He settles on applying the term 'narrative' to 'narrative discourse' (or more specifically 'narrative text' when dealing with literature), at the exclusion of the signified 'narrative content' (to which he reassigns the term 'story') and the act of 'narrating' for the production of discourse (the real or fictional situation in which the narrative is created).¹⁸⁸ This definition is the foundation of much of the structuralist and narratological analysis in New Testament studies. However, in our own work, we have significantly departed from narrative criticism, narratology, and its structuralist origins. In the matter of terminology we see fit to maintain the definition of 'text' as the actual read signifiers inscribed on the page and retain the use of the word 'narrative' primarily in relation to the *story-form content* of the words.

This enables us to discuss the literary world, the events, turns, and disclosures of the text as a wider category than simply the story. It also allows us to distinguish between the narrative as a series of events revealed by the text and the story as those elements of the narrative which make up a trajectory of plot, cause and effect. We may then consider the narrative without the literary constraint of highlighting an intentional story-arc or diminishing the aporias or inconsistencies that the text includes. By deploying the term narrative, rather than story, we allow greater possibility for disjuncture, complexity, and contradiction to be examined without undermining our methodological presuppositions. Derek Tovey uses the term narrative within his study, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel*¹⁸⁹ similarly (but not identically). Using Chatman,¹⁹⁰ he identifies narrative as containing two elements: *story* (what is being related) and *discourse* (how it is related), and then draws out his own conclusion that

¹⁸⁷ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 25–7.

¹⁸⁸ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 27.

¹⁸⁹ Derek Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 151; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

¹⁹⁰ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 19.

a narrative is “an act of mediation,”¹⁹¹ allowing him to pursue his discussion of narrative as an act or performance.¹⁹² Perhaps the most significant work which relates to our use of the word narrative is Mark Stibbe’s definition of John’s story as narrative Christology/genre/history and community narrative.¹⁹³ However none of Stibbe’s four definitions allows discussion of the literary world without recourse to a superior agenda (the Christology of the writer, the historicity behind the text and the original community behind the text).

1.3.4 An A-Historical Perspective or A Historical Perspective?

The role of historical research within this thesis necessitates some discussion and explanation. As we have stated, our literary and feminist methodology has not dispensed with historical questions, indeed they have proven central to the development of this thesis. However, our approach has in some ways been unorthodox. Our primary aim in this area, although we must be clear that it is not the primary aim of our study as a whole, will be to situate the text of the Gospel within its first-century universe and use historical information to contribute information to our reading of the events of the literary world depicted. In particular we will utilise this method in our reading of the mother of Jesus. In our historical enquiry in Chapter Three, ‘Bodies for Burial: First-Century Burial of the Crucified and Jewish Funerary Traditions,’ we document that a mother’s prominence in funerary custom appears to be a first-century assumption. The presence of Jesus’ mother at the cross in the Johannine passion account (John 19:25) and her subsequent absence from the burial account, interpreted in light of this information, delivers a significantly different reading from that which is generally presented in Johannine studies.

Colleen M. Conway exemplifies a similar approach in her own work on the Gospel of John. Her doctoral thesis *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine*

¹⁹¹ Tovey, *Narrative Art*, 35.

¹⁹² See, Tovey, *Narrative Art*, 33–5, for discussion.

¹⁹³ Stibbe, *John As Storyteller*, 12–13.

Characterization,¹⁹⁴ to a certain extent, reads the literary aspects of John's Gospel in light of some first-century historical information. However, it is in her later book *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*,¹⁹⁵ that Conway positions herself in a historical discourse, but not in a traditional historical-critical mode. Conway uses historical information to interpret the Greco-Roman reception of New Testament texts and their presentation of Jesus' masculinity, along with their subsequent contribution to the formation of Greco-Roman gender ideology.¹⁹⁶ She reflects on her own position,

. . . *Behold the Man* is still a far cry from traditional historical-critical studies of the New Testament. Although I study presentations of Jesus in the New Testament, I do not treat the historical Jesus, and I do not attempt to reconstruct the historical communities behind the New Testament texts. Also, questions of source, composition, and redaction are not on the table.¹⁹⁷

Tat-siong Benny Liew also moves towards an integration of historical information into a literary reading in the essay "The Word of Bare Life: Workings of Death and Dream in the Fourth Gospel."¹⁹⁸ In a bid to move beyond the formalist critique of Culpepper's *Anatomy*, Liew introduces a Derridean concept of an 'exorbitant' reading and seeks to open a reading of John's Gospel to that which lies beyond the scope of anatomical inspection.¹⁹⁹ Liew draws a number of disparate perspectives together: historical enquiry into first-century death in Roman-occupied Palestine; contemporary postcolonial critiques of the situation of oppressed peoples; literary identification of currents and themes in the Gospel; and the idea of dreaming as a space which relates to the death experience (bare life) of one who is subjugated, and in turn can be identified in the Fourth Gospel. Liew asks,

How may John's story of this "flesh" or "bare life" that straddles between "worlds" come across in light of Rome's colonisation of Jews in general and Rome's "spectacles of death" in particular? Is there a space to talk about Jesus' death in John as a human condition (*pace* Koester 2005)? Is there room to read the Fourth Gospel

¹⁹⁴ Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterisation* (SBLDS 167; Atlanta: SBL, 1999).

¹⁹⁵ Colleen M. Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁹⁶ See for comment, Conway, *Behold the Man*, 14.

¹⁹⁷ Conway, "There and Back Again," 90.

¹⁹⁸ Liew, "The Word of Bare Life," 167–193.

¹⁹⁹ Liew, "The Word of Bare Life," 168.

without making close reading and historical contexts of both John and his twenty-first century interpreters—mutually exclusive?²⁰⁰

Liew achieves a great deal in the reading, successfully weaving a fresh insight into John's Gospel. However at certain critical points Liew's approach diverges significantly from our own. In the bid to allow the text both historical as well as literary form, Liew conflates text, writer, and implied author at various points under the name "John", at times with little clarity as to which is being referred to.²⁰¹ In our own reading, we will try to remain clear which of these aspects we are discussing in our conclusions, although, as Liew has shown, this can at times prove difficult. Primarily, although not exclusively, we will seek to interpret the text itself—rather than draw conclusions about the writer's intention—from the various perspectives which we elucidate.

Overall this study does not deliberately sit in opposition to historical-critical work or seek to jettison historical-critical questions from the field. The polemic that literary and critical inquiries pose a threat to the advancement of historical analysis of the Gospel of John is a misjudgement which we expect will soon take its place in history as an initial wariness of a new turn. The field appears to be opening, not only to the possibility and necessity of theory, but also to the recognition of the limits and subjectivity of the hegemonic historical-critical task.

1.4 Concluding Reflections

Reflections upon the status of theory within New Testament studies are not easily articulated, concluding reflections even less so. Literary theory and critical theory are quite different

²⁰⁰ Liew, "The Word of Bare Life," 175.

²⁰¹ For example, "John's ambiguity between symbolic and literal death The problem then is more than just what John thinks While John makes it a point to distance John's appeal to the Father may function to resist the power of imperial Rome" Liew, "The Word of Bare Life," 189.

entities.²⁰² We ourselves have at times discussed the two approaches as a unity for ease of discussion, when their main union only stems from being 'not historical criticism.'²⁰³ In this section we will make some observations which are intended to draw together our discussions within this chapter and hopefully summarise the small contribution of our thesis to the epistemological discourse in New Testament studies.

What is the place of theory now and in the future of New Testament studies? Let us first say that we do not believe we can return to a pre-theory time in which New Testament studies sat isolated from developments in academic discourses such as philosophy, linguistics and literary studies. The survey of the last forty or so years of work and the study we have undertaken in this thesis all sit within a theoretical discourse which has profoundly impacted the field and has raised some challenging epistemological questions in biblical studies. Literary and theoretical work certainly now can be found alongside historical-critical methods within the field. While, we recognise there is a recurring sentiment that literary and critical theory in New Testament studies is in some way inferior or merely supplementary to the real work of historical-critical studies, we suspect that it is limited to a vocal minority.²⁰⁴ The discourse that arises from literary and critical theory is essential in the field and when scholars recognise it, they are recognising a movement that has left the study of texts, all texts, in a completely different position at the end of the twentieth century than it was at the beginning. The future position of theory lies in the negotiation of this work within the discipline and the scholarly will to continue to adapt and reconsider perspectives, readings and interpretation in light of the theoretical challenge to historical-critical norms.

²⁰² As we have seen, much of literary theory's application in New Testament studies has been in the form of narratology, as it has become known in our field, or narrative criticism, as it is more commonly understood in literary studies. And so the work of critical theory in New Testament has been defined in relation to this. Moore adopts a more literary vocabulary when he discusses literary studies as inclusive of post structuralism, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, queer theory and masculinity studies. See, Moore, "A Modern Manifesto," 1.

²⁰³ Moore and Sherwood also make this observation saying, "Theory came to stand for a 'literary' that was 'anything but history.'" See, Moore and Sherwood, "Three: Theory," 219.

²⁰⁴ de Boer makes the somewhat patronizing claim that, "There is no reason, it seems, why narrative criticism cannot be another useful tool in the repertoire of the historic critic. For the historic critic, however, the real work of interpretation has only begun when the work of the narrative critic is finished." de Boer, "Narrative Criticism," 48. For other examples see: Ashton, "Second Thoughts," 1-18; Nielsen, "Johannine Research," 13.

The specific challenge to New Testament studies is epistemological, to embrace the 'different questions' and, more importantly, the different answers and the different discourse of meaning which ensues. As we have noted, those scholars fully immersed in literary and critical theory now also ask, what of the post theoretical turn in literary studies? Certainly biblical scholars working with theory must remain aware of the continuing discourse of theory, but as Moore and Sherwood so skilfully discuss, biblical studies interacts in an entirely different way with theory and from a different point of origin.²⁰⁵ It is not hard to imagine that it will also have a different future, and not inevitably follow the same course as literary studies. Ultimately, even the biblical text remains a text, and the supposed immunity it, along with the discipline of New Testament studies, has enjoyed in some quarters from the questions of literary and critical theory—linguistic questions, postcolonial questions, gender and ideological questions, to name a few—is long gone. With a flourishing discourse of theoretical work within biblical studies, a discourse that enjoys equal status, if not equal size, with an older historical-critical counterpart, we have some hope of finally dispelling the myth that all our findings are conclusive, unassailable and free of ideology.

Chapter Two

²⁰⁵ See for discussion, Moore and Sherwood, "Three: Theory," 191–225. See also, Moore, "A Modern Manifesto," 25.

Σκοτία: Journeys on the Dark Path

2.1 Beginnings

Our aim in this chapter will be to make a detailed discussion of σκοτία in the Gospel of John and offer an interpretation of Johannine darkness in the crucifixion texts of 19:1–24, 28–37. In this thesis, the chapter will act as a reference point for detailed analysis of σκοτία as we go on to our main focus of the burial passage of John 19:38–42. Our primary interpretative position here will be our twenty-first-century literary-critical perspective. We will seek to further understanding of the role of darkness within the narrative, specifically drawing on literary theory as well as aspects of Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection.²⁰⁶ By the conclusion of this chapter we hope to have made the case for recognising σκοτία as an essential element in understanding the Gospel narrative and that darkness is a central motif in the discourse of Jesus’ death. In this, we hope to show that σκοτία within the Gospel of John has a much more significant frame of reference than that which is usually recognised.

In our discussion we will not conjecture as to the perspective of original readers or author.²⁰⁷

We will explore how the text introduces the concept of darkness and what initial interpretive directions the narrative constructs around the motif and then we will go on to form our own

²⁰⁶ See, Chapter One, 1.3.2.2 ‘The Abject,’ for discussion.

²⁰⁷ Others have made considerable contributions in this area. For an interpretation of the dualistic nature of light and darkness in the Gospel of John which primarily considers the historical position of the author see, Ashton, *Understanding*, 208–214. Keener makes a thorough survey in, Keener, *John vol. 1*, 381–387. Schnackenburg also makes a worthwhile investigation into light and darkness in, Schnackenburg, *John vol. 1*, 245–9. Dodd discusses light and darkness, (and λόγος) in Hermetic literature in, Dodd, *Interpretation*, 36–8. Brown believes the conflict of light and darkness in John 1:5 to be a specific reference to the Fall, see Brown, *John 1–12*, 27. See also for comment, Barrett, *John*, 158–9. For a detailed discussion of the Johannine symbolism of light and darkness as it relates to the Qumran literature see, Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 127–136.

method for the interpretation of Johannine darkness. Crucially, in our reading of Johannine darkness we will not draw in perspectives based upon the resurrection passages of John 20 and 21. This allows us to fully explore the crucifixion text as it stands in the narrative timeline and enables us to interpret the gravity of the events within the literary world the Gospel of John constructs. In effect we are withholding disclosure of the resurrection from our interpretative selves to allow a closer examination of the execution narrative. It allows us to consider death as 'ending' rather than passage-to-resurrection.²⁰⁸ The idea of sequential reading is not unheard of in New Testament studies. Peter Phillips presents the arguments for approaching texts in this linear manner.²⁰⁹ He highlights that texts, by their nature, are sequential while biblical studies is inclined to paragrammatic or critical readings. Phillips points out,

In other words, just as an author can introduce a flash-back or flash-forward into a text, or can pause the action by moving into descriptive mode, so the sequential flow of the reading process can also be influenced by the introduction of material that has not yet been provided for the reader by the author. This process short-circuits or bypasses that affective quality of the narrative by filling gaps inappropriately.²¹⁰

It is the 'affective quality' of the crucifixion narrative which we hope to illuminate in this strategy. We might also speculate that the revelation of the resurrection in the Gospel accounts is perhaps the most significant 'introduction of material' to the interpretation of pre-resurrection narrative in New Testament studies. Of course this is a fundamental part of the interpretation of the Gospels, but at times the unacknowledged assumption of such, eclipses the narrative drama that the Gospels contain and can normalise and neutralise the unique and surprising revelation of the resurrection. An assessment of the text without drawing in foreknowledge will add depth and insight to interpretation. However, we do not intend to make a strict verse-by-verse sequential reading our aim, as Phillips does. The concept will be applied to the metanarrative of the text with regards to resurrection disclosure. This

²⁰⁸ While, in our literary approach, we do not engage with it here, there is a significant argument proposing the value of approaching the work of historical criticism without the perspective of the resurrection or Christian faith. For discussion see, James G. Crossley, *Why Christianity Happened: A Sociohistorical Account of Christian Origins (26–50CE)* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 24–6.

²⁰⁹ See, Phillips, *Prologue*, 26–34.

²¹⁰ Phillips, *Prologue*, 27.

present chapter will consider σκοτία in the Gospel of John up to and including chapter 19 in detail and offer a new interpretation of the motif with an initial reading of John 19:1–24 and 28–37.

We highlight the Prologue as an important element in the extant Gospel that establishes certain aspects of the σκοτία motif. Crucially, we explore the relationship between φῶς, ζωὴ and λόγος in the Prologue and consider the necessity to recognise and examine the oppositional group of relationships between σκοτία, death and λόγος within the unfolding narrative. In our reading, using these tensions as a frame of reference, we can identify that the stakes are heightened as the protagonist Jesus (λόγος), established as life and light, moves through the events of the passion narrative, seemingly into death and darkness. The multivalent κατέλαβεν of John 1:5, which describes the nature of the conflict between σκοτία and φῶς, becomes tainted with violence and, when reading sequentially before the narrative moves on to the revelation of the resurrection, the assertion of the Prologue that φῶς triumphs over σκοτία appears redundant.

The σκοτία motif has a reasonably well-documented frame of reference including death, blindness, night, doubt and disbelief, but we will reconsider its literary framework and present a reading in which death is considered the primary association. We then use the themes of trauma and abjection as lenses to provide a language to discuss the negative qualities of the σκοτία motif. Death, trauma and abjection all mark prominent signs of darkness within the unfolding narrative. Before we move onto this chapter's study of Johannine darkness, let us first consider the language we employ and the scholarly work on the themes of Johannine light and glory.

2.1.1 Language

The terminology of symbol, sign, metaphor, and motif that has been adopted in biblical studies from literary studies, can at times become confused in their deployment. In this thesis we have deliberately not followed a strict structuralist vision of literary theory and so it is not within this project to form and apply a tight definition of symbol, sign, metaphor, and motif. While we do reconsider the definition of some language adopted from literary theory (namely story and narrative) it is not our intention to do so with symbol, sign, metaphor, and motif.²¹¹ However, as we presently make use of this language, some definition is required. Here a brief summary of the terms will suffice.²¹²

A symbol is usually considered to be a descriptive agent that functions without explicit explanation. It commonly bears some significant relationship with that which it symbolises and it usually has a spectrum of available interpretations rather than a singular meaning.²¹³ A sign, in contrast, has a definite interpretation which is necessarily singular and bears no inherent connection to the thing which it conveys. It is usually arbitrary and its meaning needs to be learnt. However, symbols may act as signs in a community group and in the Gospel of John we may consider ὁ λόγος as this kind of sign/symbol.²¹⁴ A metaphor has both tenor (the thing of which it speaks) and vehicle (the means of elaboration).²¹⁵ For example in “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12), the tenor “I” is elaborated by the vehicle “light of the world.” Jan G. van der Watt writes extensively on metaphor in John.²¹⁶ Finally, a motif has a symbolic function and is primarily defined by its repetition and cumulative effect within a

²¹¹ See, Chapter One, 1.3.3 ‘Diachronic versus Synchronic Approaches: A Methodological Cul-de-Sac?’

²¹² R. Alan Culpepper’s work *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* offers a comprehensive review of the terms. See, Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 180–190. See also, Zimmermann, “Imagery,” 16–27 for a discussion of metaphor, symbol and narrative images in the Gospel of John. Mark Stibbe outlines literary strategies, briefly including symbolism, in, Stibbe, *John As Storyteller*, 17–21.

²¹³ For a discussion of symbol and symbols in the Gospel of John see: Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 65–9; Dorothy A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 14–6; Wai-yee Ng, *Water Symbolism in John: An Eschatological Interpretation* (StBL 15; New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001), 5–43.

²¹⁴ See for comment, Phillips, *Prologue*, 140–141.

²¹⁵ See for a discussion of metaphor in the Gospel of John: Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 16–20.

²¹⁶ See, Watt, *Family*, 6–24. Watt’s work is an important contribution to the literary approach to John’s Gospel, however, it significantly differs from our own in that he undertakes a tight structuralist approach and pursues definitive meanings for the Johannine metaphors he investigates. For a discussion of metaphor in John see also, Rushton, *The Parable*, 32–43.

certain context.²¹⁷ Σκοτία in the Gospel of John can be interpreted at various points in the text as symbol, sign, metaphor and motif. In our study we will primarily identify it as a motif.

We must also make some initial observations about the language of and for ‘darkness’ that we use. Darkness, σκοτία, and Johannine darkness are all terms which we employ within this study, and while all of them essentially originate from the same concept, all have a slight nuance of emphasis which should be made clear. We use the term ‘darkness’ to discuss the metaphors, symbols and motifs of darkness in their common forms. This means that we can draw in conventional concepts of darkness as understood in the present day and consider in general terms darkness within the Gospel of John. The term ‘σκοτία’ is used to talk of the motif within the text of the Fourth Gospel. Its usage enables us to reference the particular use of the term ‘σκοτία’ within the Gospel of John and allows us to explore its symbolic and metaphorical usage as a motif which runs through the text. ‘Johannine darkness’ is a term which we use to talk about our reading of darkness in the text signified by the markers of death, trauma and abjection. We are not claiming that Johannine darkness’ as a deliberate authorial concept in our terms is embedded beyond question within the text but we do suppose that it is a legitimate and enlightening means of interpretation which makes a valuable contribution to Johannine studies. If we were to deliberate authorial intentionality, Johannine darkness is certainly a plausible line to consider. Of course these three terms overlap at various points both in this chapter and the thesis as a whole and defining them as three separate fields is not entirely possible. Therefore we highlight the nuances above but are wary of making them draconian in their employment.

2.1.2 Johannine Φῶς

We cannot undertake our study of Johannine darkness without first addressing the predisposition that Johannine scholarship has displayed towards the study of φῶς. Usually

²¹⁷ See, Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 183–4, for a discussion of motif.

the study of σκοτία in the Gospel of John remains firmly within the study of the light–darkness coupling. In this it does not appear as an equal topic for reflection but is rather a very small part of the greater study of light.²¹⁸ Of course, this is a logical interpretative position. Light is a much more developed motif within the Gospel, it is directly associated with Jesus²¹⁹ (John 1:4–5; 1:8; 3:19) and moreover it converges with his identity (John 8:12; 9:5), Jesus *is* the φῶς in the Gospel of John.²²⁰ However, although the text remains the story of the φῶς (in that it narrates the story of Jesus), an understanding of σκοτία is essential in our interpretation of the text. The tendency in Johannine studies to remain focussed on light has prematurely curtailed work on the σκοτία motif. It is our desire to move beyond the view of darkness as a necessary but essentially passive opposition, required only to develop the Johannine plot. Indeed, examination of how the σκοτία motif interacts with Jesus and challenges his identity as φῶς is a question we will pursue in this study.

When σκοτία is discussed in purely oppositional terms—it is simply the ‘opposite’ of all that light is—there is *opportunity* to explore the complexity of the darkness motif but in practice it is rarely *realised*. Darkness is routinely consigned to a kind of ‘not-φῶς’ framework, delivered with an assumption that no further examination is worthwhile. Jan G. van der Watt states explicitly, “Metaphorically it [darkness] reflects the same characteristics as light, but is the

²¹⁸ On light and darkness in the Gospel of John see the following. Otto Schwankl, *Licht und Finsternis: Ein metaphorisches Paradigma in den johanneischen Schriften* (Freiburg: Herder, 1995). Craig R. Koester delivers a comprehensive discussion about light and darkness in the Gospel of John in his chapter ‘Light and Darkness.’ See, Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery and Community* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 141–73. See also, Craig R. Koester, “What Does it Mean to be Human? Imagery and the Human Condition in John’s Gospel.” in *Imagery in the Gospel of John* (Frey, Jörg, Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann eds.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 414–16. Jan G. van der Watt presents a thorough structuralist analysis of the metaphors of light and darkness, Watt, *Family*, 245–60. Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 190–192. Günter Stemberger, *La symbolique du bien et du mal selon saint Jean* (Paris: Éditions Du Seuil, 1970), 25–49. Arthur H. Maynard, *Understanding the Gospel of John* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 47–51.

²¹⁹ Watt provides a particularly detailed discussion of the Johannine presentation of Jesus as the light. Watt, *Family*, 248–56.

²²⁰ Koester points out John’s link between Jesus’ identity, light and Galilee. He states, “From the perspective of the Gospel, the link to Galilee does not discredit Jesus, but identifies him as the fulfilment of God’s promise to bring Galilee the light.” Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 94. Other characters are drawn into the φῶς motif to illustrate and strengthen Jesus’ identity as the φῶς, most significant of which is John the Baptist. See for comment, Catrin H. Williams, “John (the Baptist): The Witness on the Threshold,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (trans. S. Buchanan; eds. S. A. Hunt, D. F. Tolmie and R. Zimmermann. WUNT 314. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 46–60, 49–50, 57.

other side of the coin. Therefore only a brief discussion of darkness will be given.”²²¹ Craig R. Koester states, “The text establishes basic configurations of meaning by connecting light with God, life, and knowledge, and by associating darkness with their opposites.”²²² Otto Schwankl’s substantial tome *Licht und Finsternis: Ein metaphorisches Paradigma in den johanneischen Schriften*²²³ remains primarily focused on the subject of light, with comparatively less discussion on darkness.²²⁴ Phillips notes that any Johannine characterisation of σκοτία is purely for the benefit of φῶς, a “foil to the main characters.”²²⁵

2.1.3 Theological Glory

This predilection towards light relates closely to a theological discourse which has formed a primary part of the interpretation of the Johannine passion and indeed the Gospel of John as a whole. Specifically, we must highlight the usually accepted consensus that the passion in John is depicting glory and triumph over and above death and defeat. While fully researching δόξα and the impact of its theological interpretations is beyond the limits of this piece of work, a small attempt to survey the key implications for this study will be made.

As we know, the latter section of the Gospel of John is commonly termed the ‘Book of Glory.’²²⁶ Since Rudolf Bultmann concluded, “the cross [in the Gospel of John] is the exultation and glorification of Jesus,”²²⁷ and Ernst Käsemann claimed that the death of Jesus was superfluous within the Gospel,²²⁸ this approach has held dominance, often termed the

²²¹ Watt, *Family*, 256. However, although limited, his section on darkness provides a useful overview of the metaphor from a structuralist perspective.

²²² Koester, *Symbolism*, 142.

²²³ Otto Schwankl, *Licht und Finsternis: Ein metaphorisches Paradigma in den johanneischen Schriften* (Freiburg: Herder, 1995).

²²⁴ For his focussed discussion of darkness, based on John 1:4–5, see, Schwankl, *Licht und Finsternis*, 90–96.

²²⁵ Phillips, *Prologue*, 169.

²²⁶ See for discussion Brown, *John 1–12*, cxxxix. Sigve Tonstad also points out the detrimental effect of making such a demarcation. See, Sigve K. Tonstad, “‘The Father of Lies,’ ‘the Mother of Lies,’ and the Death of Jesus (John 12:20–33),” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (ed. R. Bauckham and C. Mosser; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 199.

²²⁷ Bultmann, *John*, 669. For Bultmann’s further exposition of this see Bultmann, *John*, 632–633, 673.

²²⁸ See Käsemann, *Testament of Jesus*, 7.

'Bultmann-Käsemann paradigm.'²²⁹ Interestingly, Bultmann and Käsemann hold contradictory Christological opinions, Bultmann emphasises Christ's humanity and incarnation while Käsemann focuses on his divinity, yet both consider Jesus' death in the Gospel of John to be of little import. For the former it was simply 'departure' (his 'going' mirroring the equally incredible event of his 'coming') from this world for the human Jesus whose task was completed. For the latter it was immaterial because of Jesus' divine nature: his incarnation had been about his 'transition' from heaven to earth and his death simply marked his 'exit' and point of glorification.²³⁰

If we take this theological reading of triumph (in the passion) and read it alongside the established Johannine symbols of σκοτία and φῶς, the result is a 'triumph' which, framed in Johannine light–darkness terms, is the victory of (the) φῶς over σκοτία. Essentially, at the point in the narrative where one would expect darkness to take pre-eminence and dominate as a motif (the crucifixion/death/burial narratives) scholarly writings on the Gospel of John have favoured an interpretation which makes glory the dominant motif, with triumph as its primary tone.

Scholars are not unaware of this contradiction. Keener comments, "This is truly Johannine paradox: "exultation" and "glorification" in their positive sense hardly fit the shame of the cross, even the thought of which typically evoked horror."²³¹ Martinus C. de Boer, in his study *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, exemplifies the tendency. He states,

The terminology of suffering is in fact completely absent and there is thus no 'passion' narrative, strictly speaking, in the Fourth Gospel. John's so-called passion narrative is actually a non-passion [sic] narrative. Not only is the specific terminology absent, the

²²⁹ See for discussion, John Dennis, "Jesus' Death in John's Gospel: A Survey of Research from Bultmann to the Present with Special Reference to the Johannine Hyper-Texts," *CBR* 4.3 (2006): 331–363.

²³⁰ For a discussion of Bultmann and Käsemann's positions on the death of Jesus see, Dennis, "Jesus' Death," 331–9. For a survey of Christological research in the Gospel of John see, Maarten J. J. Menken, "The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: A Survey of Recent Research," in *From Jesus to John: Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology in Honour of Marinus de Jonge*. (ed. M. C. De Boer; JSNTSup 84; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 292–320.

²³¹ Keener, *John* vol. 2, 881.

Gospel also tends to remove or downplay any possible inference that Jesus may actually have suffered.²³²

Jerome H. Neyrey goes further and deliberately draws in historical details of the brutality of crucifixion, through the lens of honour and shame, to then construct a reading of the Johannine passion which frames the elements of Jesus' execution as an ironic subtext of honour to be recognised by the 'insider' or enlightened Johannine reader.²³³ Neyrey does acknowledge that one may also employ the perspective of the perpetrators as a lens for honour and shame and the very same events would be viewed as bringing shame on Jesus, not honour. He states,

As regards his body, Jesus is shamed by being stripped naked, bound and beaten in the public forum of the Roman soldiers. . . . But if the actors in the drama are portrayed as shaming Jesus, it does not follow that the readers of this Gospel concur. . . . In short the Gospel inculcates an ironic point of view such that death and shame mean glory and honour.²³⁴

What Neyrey does not make explicit, in his reading of honour in the Johannine passion, is that honour, though it may be an authentic construction of first-century values, remains a construction nonetheless. We might speculate that a construction of this sort is often necessary when the actual substance of the physical events convey a different experience; here, Neyrey joins 'death and shame' and interprets them as 'glory and honour.' However, while shame may be reinterpreted such, death may not. Actual physical death remains a raw corporeal state rather than a socially constructed disposition. The physical events within the narrative upon Jesus' body would be painful and bring death.²³⁵ What we are seeking to highlight is that it is not just the perspective of the 'actors in the drama' which conflicts with a victorious reading of honour and glory. If we locate our interpretation in the narrative of Jesus' body as it undergoes crucifixion within the text, its experience is one of death. From a

²³² de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives*, 20. Basing his work on Robert T. Fortna's scholarship, de Boer works on the assumption that the death of Christ is a necessary, but problematic, element which the first redactor of the first Gospel of John, primarily a Book of Signs, was compelled to cover to allow the Gospel to climax with the greatest sign of all: the resurrection (92–3).

²³³ See, Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 412–38.

²³⁴ Neyrey, *John in Cultural*, 426–7.

²³⁵ We could even add humiliation to this. Although humiliation is not a straightforward physical event there is a case to be made that it is certainly a bodily sensation when exposed to violation.

theological perspective Neyrey's argument stands, but from a narrative perspective, honour in these terms, claimed in relation to an explicit and intentional dishonourable experience, is a thin veil indeed. Neyrey also acknowledges that this honour-shame structure is limited to reading the "male half of the gender divided world of the first-century"²³⁶ and the introduction of a gender dynamic is interesting. But this recognition falls short of fully disclosing that the male honour–shame structure is not an objective, neutral or indeed 'right' viewpoint which one can incorporate unquestioningly. What a first-century female perception may be remains unclear and we are not inclined to propose one at this point in our discussion, but our twenty-first-century feminist perspective must question the hegemony of present day interpretations of the honour–shame lens.

As we have highlighted, theologically the interpretation of glory in the passion is perfectly legitimate, but in terms of narrative and plot there have been only small hints within the text of John's Gospel to suggest that Jesus' execution should be read in such a triumphant light. We would suggest that a reading direction focused on narrative would expose the execution of the innocent, essentially peaceable, protagonist, as a primarily negative event. It would require significant textual material of appropriate quality and/or quantity for the reader to reverse that trajectory. Commonly cited verses in this argument include those which claim Jesus' knowledge, agency and glorification in his own death.²³⁷ Koester points out Jesus' words in John 12:23–4, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."²³⁸ John 10 is drawn upon by Neyrey, pointing out Jesus both " . . . *knows* that all is now completed (v. 28) and *chooses to die*" (italics his).²³⁹ We remain unconvinced that the significance such references are usually accorded is appropriate, particularly in a light of a text-based reading which focuses upon the unfolding narrative. We

²³⁶ Neyrey, *John in Cultural*, 435, see also 436.

²³⁷ Reference to Jesus' hour and glorification: John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 12:27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1. References to Jesus' death: 8:20–22; 11:50–1; 12:33; 18:14; 18:32.

²³⁸ For an initial discussion of this see, Koester, *Symbolism*, 167.

²³⁹ Neyrey, *John in Cultural*, 433.

might suggest that rather than those verses 'shedding light' on the passion narrative, the passion narrative pulls those references into darkness and obscurity with the ferocity of its horrific drama.

We are not the first to point out that a theological agenda has affected the interpretation of the death of Jesus in John's Gospel. Helen C. Orchard's work on violence in the Gospel of John contributes significantly in this area. She states, "It is, in fact, probably the case that it is the belief in a high Christology that has prevented scholars from discerning the amount of material relating to violence in John's Gospel."²⁴⁰ Orchard also considers Synoptic comparisons with John's passion to have contributed in this matter: Matthew, Mark and Luke seemingly offering the 'violent and harrowing' passion accounts.²⁴¹ Notably she examines and compares the occasions of violence across the Gospels and finds that John's Gospel is comparative to Mark in quantity (but elaborates less than Mark) and it is actually Luke's text which makes least of the violence overall.²⁴² She makes a refreshing and coherent case that the Johannine passion is a traumatic account of the death of the 'victim,' Jesus, and she suitably dismantles the vast amount of scholarship which makes blind assumptions that this is not the case. Interestingly, though it is not the focus of her work, she acknowledges the dominance of the darkness motif in the passion, commenting, "That night has now come [John 13:30] indicates that the moment for the power of darkness has arrived and the hatred of the world has closed in on Jesus."²⁴³

Perhaps one of the most creative recent discussions that intentionally problematises this predisposition within Johannine studies is Jeffrey Staley's 'exegetical drama' in "Reading

²⁴⁰ Orchard, *Courting Betrayal*, 20. For an interesting study of masculine Christology in the Fourth Gospel see also, Colleen M. Conway, "'Behold the Man!'" Masculine Christology and the Fourth Gospel," in *New Testament Masculinities* (SBL SemeiaSt 45; eds. S. D. Moore and J. C. Anderson; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 163–180.

²⁴¹ Orchard, *Courting Betrayal*, 190–5.

²⁴² Orchard, *Courting Betrayal*, 194, 213.

²⁴³ Orchard, *Courting Betrayal*, 177.

Myself, Reading the Text: The Johannine Passion Narrative in Postmodern Perspective.”²⁴⁴ Staley uses the term ‘exegetical drama’²⁴⁵ to describe a creative discussion of the Johannine passion, dramatised with the three corpses (of the three crosses) as characters representing three different scholarly perspectives. The first corpse acts as a ‘radically resistant reader’ declaring, “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.”²⁴⁶ The second corpse declares, “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.”²⁴⁷ Finally the third corpse makes a case for Jesus’ loss of power and agency in the Johannine passion concluding “Jesus may indeed willfully [sic] step forward into his captors’ arms at the beginning of the passion narrative (18:4–11), but once he does that, he becomes a mere pawn in the hands of Jewish and Roman authorities.”²⁴⁸

While Staley does not offer a conclusive verdict—indeed he deliberately includes the ‘three voices’ as representations of the three conflicting opinions within his own interpretation²⁴⁹—he effectively problematises a singular glory-filled, pain-free perspective of the Johannine passion and, along with Orchard, offers the possibility of an alternative perspective. In this reading we will seek to interpret Johannine darkness beyond the confines of an oppositional identity and interpret the death narrative beyond the limits of an inconsequential execution—we hope to bring, and read, darkness, as it were, out of the shadows.

2.2 Σκοτία in the Text

²⁴⁴ Jeffrey L. Staley, “Reading Myself, Reading the Text: The Johannine Passion Narrative in Postmodern Perspective,” in *“What is John?” Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (ed. F. F. Segovia; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 59–104.

²⁴⁵ Staley, “Reading Myself,” 78.

²⁴⁶ Staley, “Reading Myself,” 78–9.

²⁴⁷ Staley, “Reading Myself,” 78.

²⁴⁸ Staley, “Reading Myself,” 81–2.

²⁴⁹ Staley, “Reading Myself,” 101.

2.2.1 Significant Studies

Although we have recognised that darkness has been overlooked somewhat as a Johannine motif in its own right, there remains a body of scholarship that addresses the subject.²⁵⁰ Dorothy Lee's chapter 'Walking in Darkness: Symbols of Sin and Evil' in her book *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John*²⁵¹ stands out among the literature. Lee presents a sustained discussion of the development of darkness as a symbol, delivering a number of significant observations. Critically, she proposes that the most important symbol of sin and evil is the σκοτία motif. She also identifies the symbolic field of the light-dark continuum as a 'manifestation' of the death-life theme.²⁵² These two observations are highly significant within this piece of research. Both the recognition that the σκοτία motif is the pinnacle of the symbolic field for evil, as well as the identification of the unique bond that light-dark has with life-death, are valuable perspectives as we explore the significance of this dynamic within the text.

Further, Lee identifies that the σκοτία symbol is so ingrained in the first half of the Gospel its potency is unaffected by the lack of direct references in the second half.²⁵³ She also notes that there is no account of the substance of darkness, where or whence it came, but it simply exists, presenting as a 'virulent' opponent of the light, but never with equal standing.²⁵⁴ Importantly Lee highlights the nuanced relationship between σκοτία and humanity; it is not one of direct oppression—humanity at times actively welcomes and embraces σκοτία—and that σκοτία is expressed both through absence of knowledge of Christ (the Light) as well as

²⁵⁰ For specific attention to the discussion of darkness in the Gospel of John, see, Watt, *Family*, 256–8; Koester, *Symbolism*, 143–7, 150–2, 166–8; Schwankl, *Licht und Finsternis*, 90–96; Phillips, *Prologue*, 169–70, 172–4; Keener, *John vol. 1*, 386–7.

²⁵¹ Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 166–196.

²⁵² Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 167.

²⁵³ Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 173.

²⁵⁴ Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 172. Bultmann deems even the question of the creation or substance of σκοτία redundant, preferring to conceptualise the motif fully as a necessary effect of φῶς and ζωή, but without its own agency. See below for discussion. Bultmann, *John*, 47. Dodd suggests that the dualism of light-darkness in John is "not ultimate" and refers to the suggestion within the Prologue that nothing came into existence apart from the λόγος, thus including darkness. See Dodd, *Interpretation*, 36.

fear and hatred of Christ's light.²⁵⁵ Lee briefly links Jesus' absence to the night and σκοτία motif with reference to Jesus' comments in John 9:4–5.²⁵⁶ Lee recognises that,

... the one who illuminates the darkness and reveals the liberating truth in love—who embodies the divine light and life, truth and freedom, love and joy—himself enters the darkest shadow, the deepest level of hostility and untruth, and defeats it in the light of Easter morning.²⁵⁷

Lee pinpoints Jesus' passion as entering the 'darkest shadow.' She may be quick to note the triumph of Easter morning, but the recognition of Jesus' entry into darkness, the σκοτία motif, is important to highlight.

We must also draw attention to Craig R. Koester. In his work *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*²⁵⁸ he dedicates a chapter to the discussion of light and darkness.²⁵⁹ Although, unlike Lee, Koester's discussion is made in terms of the connection between darkness and light, he does produce a detailed analysis. He discusses light and darkness in terms of "archetypal symbols"²⁶⁰ which contribute to the fabric of human experience. This fundamental element of their qualities is important to recognise. Whether we are living in first-century Palestine without modern systems of electricity or whether we are living now with a scientific understanding of how life on earth is only possible with the energy from the sun, humanity's perception remains the same: without light there is no life. Darkness without light, or the promise of light, brings death. However, before we consider ourselves to be on firm interpretative ground, Koester reminds us that although light and darkness are fundamental in this way, they are not routinely straightforward to interpret. As signs or metaphors, light and darkness do not always directly correlate to good and bad situations. To put it in crude terms, light can be too bright, hot or exposing, and darkness can be subtle, calming, or

²⁵⁵ Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 168–70.

²⁵⁶ Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 170.

²⁵⁷ Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 172.

²⁵⁸ Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery and Community* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

²⁵⁹ For discussion of light and darkness in the Gospel of John see also, Koester, *The Word*, 188–91.

²⁶⁰ Koester takes the expression from Phillip Wheelwright. See Koester, *Symbolism*, 141. Culpepper also notes Wheelwright, Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 190.

intimate. Koester highlights the story of the healing of the man who was born blind as an example of this complexity. He identifies,

They [original readers] would also know that light could produce blindness as well as sight. When the sun rises it makes it possible for those who have been in darkness to see, but those who are obstinate enough to stare at it and refuse to recognise its power will become blind.²⁶¹

He goes on to review day/night, sight/blindness, faith/doubt, living in accordance with God's will/sin, life/death and loyalty/betrayal as metaphors and themes which contribute to the central light/dark motif.²⁶² Koester effectively identifies a matrix of symbols which contribute to the light-dark metaphor. He summarises that darkness represents: (a) the malevolent powers of sin and evil: human rebellion, hostility towards Jesus and the power of the devil; (b) death, both physical and theological; and (c) ignorance and unbelief. He proposes this focused core of meaning, but also recognises its vague edges, which are more fluid and less specific in their reference. Importantly he highlights that the σκοτία/φῶς motif in John consists of consistently recurring references which hold greater significance in their cumulative effect than their individual appearances.²⁶³ As we go on to work with death, trauma and abjection as markers for the motif, some of Koester's symbols are encompassed directly in our approach. For example, betrayal resonates with trauma: Judas' betrayal can easily be read as an assault on his friendship with Jesus and a violation of trust. Other symbols that Koester highlights remain a legitimate part of the motif, but are not our primary focus in this reading, the most significant of these being faith and doubt.

We must note that Koester, unlike Lee, considers the light–darkness motif to lose significance at the point of the Last Supper and Judas' exit to betray Jesus (13:30). While he identifies the subsequent references (19:39; 20:1; 21:3–4) he considers them to be lacking in prominence.²⁶⁴ In this Koester conflicts with Jan G van der Watt who notes that as a stylistic Johannine feature, themes (light–darkness/Son of Man/eternal life) are established and then

²⁶¹ Koester, *Symbolism*, 161. See also, Koester, *The Word*, 70.

²⁶² See particularly, Koester, *Symbolism*, 160–8.

²⁶³ Koester, *Symbolism*, 142.

²⁶⁴ Koester, *Symbolism*, 167.

specific reference to them disappears from the text leaving the reader to continue to make connections.²⁶⁵ Culpepper also holds the view that the reader will easily make assumptions regarding the light/dark theme in the second half of the Gospel.²⁶⁶ He states

It is appropriate that Mary Magdalene goes to the empty tomb in darkness (20:1) and that the disciples find fishing at night to be futile but enclose an astonishing catch when it is early morning (21:4). The symbol has by the latter half of the gospel has expanded to the point of explosion so that the mere suggestions of its presence evoke the heavy thematic and theological load it acquired in its earlier, more explicit development.²⁶⁷

In this study we too disagree with Koester and hold the opinion that the darkness motif is a firmly established point of reference in the latter half of the Gospel.

2.2.2 A Place for Satan in the Σκοτία Metaphor?

Theologically it is usually upon Satan that the concept of evil and darkness converges in representative form and while we are not pursuing a theological agenda, it remains useful to briefly consider if there is any legitimate narrative connection between σκοτία and Satan.²⁶⁸ The text makes some reference to the devil, and there is a reference to Judas being 'a devil' (6:70), but depiction of the devil is limited and at no point is the devil or any demon given verbal representation in speech. He appears with various titles: the devil (8:43, 13:2); the ruler of this world (12:31, 14:30, 16:11)²⁶⁹; the evil one (17:15); and Satan (13:27). Jesus

²⁶⁵ Watt, *Family*, 258.

²⁶⁶ R. Alan Culpepper, "Designs for the Church in the Imagery of John 21:1–14," in *Imagery in the Gospel of John* (Frey, Jörg, Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann eds.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 382. See also, Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 192 for discussion of the cumulative use of the light symbol in John's Gospel.

²⁶⁷ Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 192.

²⁶⁸ For discussion of Satan in the Fourth Gospel see: Tonstad, "Father of Lies," 193–208; Judith Kovacs makes a case for the death of Jesus in the Gospel of John to be interpreted as a cosmic battle between Satan and God. See, Judith Kovacs, "'Now Shall the Ruler of this World be Driven Out': Jesus' Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12:20–36," *JBL* 114 (1995): 227–247; April D. DeConick, "Why are the Heavens Closed? The Johannine Revelation of the Father in the Catholic-Gnostic Debate," in *John's Gospel and Intimations of Apocalyptic* (eds. C. H. Williams and C. Rowland; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 147–79; Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer, "The Ruler of the World, Antichrists and Pseudo-Prophets: Johannine Variations on an Apocalyptic Motif," in *John's Gospel and Intimations of Apocalyptic* (eds. C. H. Williams and C. Rowland; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 180–199; Loren T. Struckenbruck, "Evil in Johannine and Apocalyptic Perspective: Petition for Protection in John 17," in *John's Gospel and Intimations of Apocalyptic* (eds. C. H. Williams and C. Rowland; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 200–32.

²⁶⁹ There is a small amount of debate surrounding this term and its attribution to the devil. See, Keener, *John vol. 2*, 879–80.

identifies in John 8 that the Jews he is conversing with cannot understand his words because their father is the devil.²⁷⁰ He states,

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer in the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and a father of lies. John 8:43–4

Here Jesus offers the most extended description of the devil within the Gospel. This primarily focuses upon the devil's relationship with deception and murder, with a strong emphasis on the devil's very being as based on lies: he is a liar and all lies have some origin within him. Jesus also discloses that the devil is a murderer but there are no details—other than the imprecise time reference of “the beginning”—as to the nature of this murder. Place, victim(s), motive, significance and punishment all remain undisclosed. However, what scholars have identified in this discourse is that the devil's purpose, made apparent through the actions of ‘his children,’ is Jesus' death. The passage concludes as Jesus flees and the Jews raise stones to execute him.²⁷¹ Later, Jesus calls Judas a devil (6:70) and the text links this to Judas' future betrayal (6:71). The devil is identified as the one who put the betrayal of Jesus in Judas' heart (13:2). John 13:27 is the single occasion where the devil is named as Satan and he is documented as entering Judas, as Judas takes the bread of the Last Supper from Jesus.

Satan's identity is never directly linked with σκοτία, but the descriptions and motives associated with him are connected to the motif, primarily death, betrayal and deception.²⁷² As Judas moves to betray Jesus, immediately after “Satan entered into him” (John 13:27), the text notes with a sombre air, “And it was night” (John 13:30). Clearly Satan makes up an aspect of the darkness, perhaps we may even speculate that he orchestrates some of its activity, but the character of the devil cannot be said—in the Gospel of John—to be a sole

²⁷⁰ For discussion see, Raimo Hakola, “The Believing Jews as the Children of the Devil in John 8:44: Similarity as a Threat to Social Identity,” in *Evil and the Devil* (LNTS 481; Ed. I. Fröhlich and E. Koskeniemi; London: T&T Clark, 2013), 116–126.

²⁷¹ See for discussion, Brown, *John 1–12*, 364.

²⁷² For a discussion of Satan and light and darkness within the Gospel of John see, Koester, *The Word*, 74–7.

representation of σκοτία nor its primordial genesis.²⁷³ Interpretation of the character of the devil in John's Gospel is a substantial debate and beyond the scope of this thesis and so we have limited our discussion to highlighting these few points and will now move on to consider σκοτία from our literary perspective.

2.3 Reading Σκοτία

It would be helpful at this point for us to gain an overview of the appearances in the Gospel of σκοτία and φῶς, either as metaphors or regular adjectives. In the table at the end of this chapter we have listed all appearances of the lexemes and have included the table as a useful point of reference. Σκοτία appears in John 1:5; 3:19; 6:17; 8:12; 12:35; 12:46; 20:1. In the table we have also included the noteworthy appearances of the terms 'day' and 'night.' Night appears in John 3:2; 9:4; 11:10; 13:30; 19:39; 21:3. Of all the companion metaphors of light/dark that Lee and Koester note, we consider day and night as particularly significant.

Day and night are perhaps the closest coupling to light and dark and include elements of physical times of light and darkness in their natures. This means that the relationship of day with light and night with darkness can, when used metaphorically, have a representative element. Night can therefore be used to represent the presence of the σκοτία motif in a direct way. This is particularly developed in Jesus' remarks. He says, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:4–5). Later Jesus reiterates, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see

²⁷³ For Richard Bauckham's discussion of the relationship between the Qumran depiction of the Angel of Darkness and the devil in John's Gospel, see, Bauckham, *Testimony*, 131. Bauckham points out that the devil is "never" related to darkness in the Gospel of John. For a short discussion of the Johannine depiction of Satan as 'the Prince of this World' see, Brown, *John 1–12*, 468.

the light of the world. But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them” (John 11:9–10).

Interestingly, day appears comparatively frequently, some 31 times.²⁷⁴ Of these appearances only three have any significant metaphorical overtones in relation to the light–day motif, John 9:4, 11:9 and 21:3–4, and on two of these occasions its appearance is directly related to night/darkness imagery (9:4 and 11:9). Otherwise day functions largely as a regular adjective, apart from symbolic references to: the third day (2:1); the last day (6:39; 6:40; 6:44; 6:54; 7:37; 11:24; 12:48; 14:20; 16:23; and 16:26); and the day of Jesus’ burial (12:7). Night, however, appears only 6 times. Of these appearances 2 are overtly metaphorical (9:4; 11:10) and 4 are adjectival with significant metaphorical functions (3:2; 13:30; 19:39; 21:3). And so we may note that it is night, the companion of the darkness motif, which is developed more fully within the text.

We will now consider the reference to σκοτία in John 1:5 in detail and consider other occurrences relevant to either our initial reading of John 19 in this chapter or to our reading of Jesus’ burial in John in this thesis as a whole. Limitations of space do not allow us to make an extended discussion of every darkness and night reference in John.

2.3.1 The Prologue

The first appearance of σκοτία in the Gospel of John comes at the very beginning, in the Prologue.²⁷⁵

Καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν. (John 1:5)

²⁷⁴ John 1:29; 1:35; 1:39; 1:43; 2:1; 5:9; 6:22; 6:39; 6:40; 6:44; 6:54; 7:37 (twice); 8:56; 9:4; 9:14; 11:9; 11:24; 11:53; 12:7; 12:12; 12:48; 14:20; 16:23; 16:26; 19:14; 19:31; 19:42; 20:1; 20:19 (twice).

²⁷⁵ As any Johannine scholar is aware, there is considerable and ongoing debate as to the Prologue’s authorship and its relationship to the rest of the Gospel. This is a question which falls outside of the remit of this thesis and we will make no attempt to address it. For a detailed discussion see, Brown, *John 1–12*, 18–23. And, Alexander S. Jensen, *John’s Gospel as Witness: The Development of the Early Christian Language of Faith* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 84–88.

The reference of John 1:5 is of particular significance in the formation of the σκοτία motif and warrants considerable attention. Here Σκοτία is introduced early in the narrative and immediately placed in its adversarial, yet ultimately doomed, position. This σκοτία reference has prompted a considerable amount of scholarship; if one is seeking a discussion of σκοτία in John it will usually be found in relation to John 1:5.²⁷⁶ It is not our aim to propose any new theories with regard to the specific interpretation of John 1:5 but rather we will look in detail at this crucial verse as an important aspect of our reading of the σκοτία motif. Schnackenburg²⁷⁷ highlights the fact that the very lexeme σκοτία can be identified as a Johannine characteristic. Σκοτία appears 8 times, whereas the alternative lexeme σκότος appears only once in the Gospel (3:19). In the rest of the New Testament σκοτία appears 8 or 9 times,²⁷⁸ while σκότος appears 26 (27) times. BDAG lists σκοτία as 1. state of being devoid of light, darkness, gloom and 2. darkening of the mind or spirit. It highlights the Johannine situation with regard to ‘darkening of the mind or spirit’ noting that it includes everything that is “at enmity with God, earthly and demonic” with particular reference to John 1:5; 8:12; 12:35a; and perhaps also 35b; and 12:46.

We might speculate that σκοτία is a suitable contender to be included in Phillips’ concept of Johannine antilanguage,²⁷⁹ particularly considering Phillips’ characterisation of it by semantic shift or ‘resemanticization’ rather than relexicalization. In essence Phillips’ suggests that the author of John is inclined towards redefining the semantic field of a particular lexeme, rather

²⁷⁶ Peter Phillips makes one of the most comprehensive investigations into the verse. See, Phillips, *Prologue*, 169–74. Craig Keener offers a sustained and thorough discussion of light, life and darkness. Keener, *John vol. 1*, 381–7. See also: Bultmann, *John*, 45–8; Schnackenburg, *John vol. 1*, 245–9; Ernst Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 1–6* (trans. R. W. Funk; ed. R. W. Funk with U. Busse; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 114–6; Peder Borgen, *Logos was the True Light and Other Essays on the Gospel of John* (Trondheim: Tapir, 1983), 106–9.

²⁷⁷ Schnackenburg, *John vol. 1*, 245. See also, Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief. An Analytical Study of the Text* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1948), 306.

²⁷⁸ Σκοτία appears six times in 1 John and twice elsewhere according to Merrill Tenney. See, Tenney, *John*, 306. Schnackenburg states σκοτία only appears 2–3 times in the rest of the New Testament. There is some discrepancy and one wonders if Schnackenburg has discounted 1 John without making it completely clear. Either way this bears no impact on our observation that σκοτία is a characteristic of the Gospel of John.

²⁷⁹ Phillips uses M. A. K. Halliday’s concept of antilanguage, but in a modified way, particularly with regard to the open or closed nature of the community using the language. While Halliday maintains antilanguage as part of an exclusive isolated community, Phillips defines Johannine antilanguage as open to new community members. See, Phillips, *Prologue*, 61–2, for Phillips’ discussion of Halliday.

than relexicalization (creating a new word) or overlexicalization (using a plethora of words).²⁸⁰ As he points out “ . . . John develops a lexeme’s semantic domain through his use of the word in metaphors and in placing the word in unexpected contexts. In other words, John allows the categories to be stretched and redesigned all the time.”²⁸¹ And so, we may note that the Johannine use of σκοτία as a metaphor and motif, along with this alternative choice of lexeme, and the development of an oppositional σκοτία identity (distinct in its Johannine understanding) would all suggest that it forms part of a deliberate antilanguage. Although the full investigation of such must wait for another place and time, it is certainly of significance to this thesis to note the possibility that, like λόγος or φῶς, σκοτία may also play a much more significant and fuller role in the Johannine Community’s understanding of world and text.

Σκοτία in John 1:5 is presented with a certain amount of ambiguity. Throughout the ages scholars have asked to which ‘darkness’ is the text referring and what is its nature? Unsurprisingly there is a considerable range of opinion. To some it is the primordial darkness seen at the beginning of creation in Genesis. This interpretation satisfies those wishing to develop continuity from the creation references of John 1:1, while also withholding any disclosure of the incarnation until 1:14.²⁸² Others draw upon extra-textual concepts of light and darkness ranging from gnosticism, the Hebrew Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls and ancient philosophers.²⁸³ Some consider it a kind of ‘nothingness’ where its sole identity is that which it is not, primarily *not φῶς* or *against φῶς*.²⁸⁴ Bultmann states, “For darkness is neither a substance nor the sheer power of fate; it is nothing other than the revolt against the light.”²⁸⁵ Finally some look within the text to how ‘darkness’ is revealed in the Gospel narrative. Van

²⁸⁰ See, Phillips, *Prologue*, 63–5 for Phillips’ discussion of what he terms semantic shift.

²⁸¹ Phillips, *Prologue*, 68. Phillips’ primary consideration in his work is the resemanticization of ὁ λόγος.

²⁸² Brown, *John 1–12*, 26–7. See also for discussion: Dodd, *Interpretation*, 268–72.

²⁸³ Craig Keener makes a thorough summary of the possibilities. See Keener, *John vol. 1*, 382–7. Schnackenburg briefly discusses the relationship between the σκοτία of John’s Gospel and the darkness found in the Qumran texts. Schnackenburg, *John vol. 1*, 246.

²⁸⁴ Bultmann is resolute that, “The σκοτία is not an autonomous power existing alongside the φῶς, but it is only because of the light that there is darkness at all . . .” Bultmann, *John*, 47.

Schnackenburg, also in this vein, is decisive, “‘Darkness’ in John means primarily the world estranged from God, the place of man’s [sic] existence not yet (or no longer, if the dawn of creation is considered) illuminated by divine light . . .” Schnackenburg, *John vol. 1*, 245.

²⁸⁵ Bultmann, *John*, 47.

der Watt notes that, unlike light, the darkness metaphor is expressed without a tenor. He identifies,

The tenor [of darkness] is, however, not stated in the context [the Prologue], and should perhaps be associated with Satan (8:44), although the figure of Satan or the ruler of the world only occurs later in the Gospel and not in the Prologue. However, the people who do not accept the light (1:9–11), might be the tenor of darkness in 1:5. The tenor might also be the comprehensive opposition to Jesus.²⁸⁶

Van der Watt concludes that the tenor for darkness is the opposition against Jesus in the rest of the Gospel. As we have seen Craig R. Koester describes three levels of interpretation of darkness based on an oppositional identity drawn from the text: ignorance, sin and evil, and finally death.²⁸⁷ For Phillips, through the lens of his sequential reading, the ambiguity of the σκοτία of John1:5 is not problematic. Phillips states,

For the time being the text itself offers little guidance about whether σκοτία is the cosmic darkness of Genesis 1:1 or a manifestation of evil as in the Qumran literature or simply the negative activity of humanity in rejecting divine revelation. . . . This is all for the future or the rereader to note in passing with a knowing wink towards the author. The innocent reader, the first time reader, the non–Johannine reader are left, for the time being, to their own devices, to add their own details to John’s sketchy outline. However, they have been warned. Association with λόγος brings life and light, whereas separation from λόγος brings darkness and opposition.²⁸⁸

Phillips’ observation, ‘they have been warned,’ is astute. It is not necessarily the *substance* of the σκοτία that is of primary importance at this point, but the *threat*. There is a foreboding in the disclosure of the existence of σκοτία and a question mark raised in the text as to where and how this conflict happened or happens.

To begin to uncover what nature the threat holds we can start with the interpretation of κατέλαβεν. The LSJ lists a range of meaning for the lemma καταλαμβάνω: 1.1. *seize, lay hold of, arrive at, seize for oneself* 1.2. *befall, overtake* 1.3. *seize with the mind, comprehend* 1.4. *accept*. 2.1 *catch, overtake, come up with* 2.2 *find on arrival, detect, to be taken by surprise* 2.3 *it happens to one, it is one’s fortune to* 2.4 *that had befallen, what had*

²⁸⁶ Watt, *Family*, 256.

²⁸⁷ Koester, “What Does it Mean,” 415.

²⁸⁸ Phillips, *Prologue*, 170.

happened, the circumstances 3.1 *hold down, cover, fasten down, to be compressed* 3.2 *keep under, repress, check, stop, inquiries being checked, hold* 3.3 *bind, enforced, concluded* 3.4 *compel, constrain one to do* 3.5 *convict, condemn*. LSJ lists the John 1:5 appearance under 1.3, as ‘seize with the mind, comprehend (perhaps overcome)’ and in Johannine studies the debate has centered upon the potential for κατέλαβεν to be interpreted as seize intellectually, or overcome physically, or perhaps to accept/receive.

Origen and most of the Greek Fathers took the hostile reading which contained a desire to conquer.²⁸⁹ Bultmann preferred a reading which interpreted κατέλαβεν as a mental process of comprehension and belief (in Jesus by humanity) and rejects out of hand any notion of physical hostility.²⁹⁰ Schnackenburg also follows this single-minded line.²⁹¹ Here again, Phillips is much more at ease with the possibility of ambiguity within the text; in his reading it could mean either or both.²⁹² Craig Keener points out, “More than likely John, whose skill in wordplays appears throughout his Gospel, has introduced a wordplay here: darkness could not “apprehend” or “overtake” the light, whether by comprehending it (grasping with the mind) or by overcoming it (grasping with the hand).”²⁹³ To add further to the puzzle, the aorist κατέλαβεν sits at odds with the present φαίνει and suggests a single, past point when the darkness made an attempt to grasp the light and failed.²⁹⁴ Again, we find that the scholarly lines are drawn on what that past event is believed to be and when it occurred. Could it be a reference to the Fall in Genesis?²⁹⁵ To an event (or the events) after the Fall, but before the incarnation?²⁹⁶ Is it an event yet to come in the text? The cross? The opposition to Jesus’

²⁸⁹ See, Brown, *John 1–12*, 8, and Keener, *John vol. 1*, 387. See also, Kovacs, “Now Shall,” 231.

²⁹⁰ Bultmann, *John*, 48.

²⁹¹ Schnackenburg, *John vol. 1*, 246.

²⁹² Phillips, *Prologue*, 172–4.

²⁹³ Keener, *John vol. 1*, 173. Barrett also considers both meanings possible. Barrett, *John*, 158.

²⁹⁴ See, Phillips, *Prologue*, 173–4 for a detailed discussion of the Greek. Phillips suggests there are three possible types of aorist: “1. Ingressive – the darkness initiated some form of aggression but this never came to a completed state. 2. Complexive – the darkness kept on trying to apprehend the light but at some point this attempt came to an end. 3. Gnostic – this would suggest that the act is valid for all time.”

²⁹⁵ Brown, *John 1–12*, 27. Borgen, *Logos*, 107.

²⁹⁶ Haenchen suggests it refers to “the fruitless activity of the Logos in the generations prior to the incarnation of the Logos” Haenchen, *John 1*, 115.

ministry?²⁹⁷ It is beyond the remit of this thesis to attempt to suggest a definitive interpretation of κατέλαβεν based upon the details of the Greek text, however our literary reading position, with its emphasis on text and narrative, may contribute to this debate.

The aspect of threat is crucial in this. If we consider the Johannine metanarrative, the Gospel of John presents the person of Jesus in a supremely positive manner, Jesus then suffers a violent execution that appears definitively unjust. The narrative delivers the physical subjugation and death of Jesus. The resurrection does not rewrite or expunge the death narrative, it reintroduces (and we may well question the extent of this) the person of Jesus after it. In this study we must ask what happens to the σκοτία/φῶς motifs in this? If Jesus is *the φῶς* in the Gospel of John, and φῶς is associated with all that is good and life-giving within the narrative world, we must acknowledge that σκοτία is present in the violation of those ideals. As we will explore below, at the crucifixion, σκοτία takes on an indisputable physical dimension. Whether we interpret that darkness as a physical presence/character, or as a position of hostile opposition against Jesus, or a position of unbelief or misunderstanding, the physical consequences remain in the course of narrative: Jesus is crucified. We would suggest that if we take into account the metanarrative context there is a compelling argument that κατέλαβεν may contain an element of violence. This does not mean that we may say that John 1:5 is definitively referring to the crucifixion, but the context of the Gospel narrative suggests that it might.²⁹⁸

2.3.2 A Method to Interpret Johannine Darkness

A significant aspect of this project is the re-examination and redefinition of Johannine darkness from a critical theoretical perspective. This study allows us to ask again: what *is* Johannine darkness? How are we to read σκοτία? What form does this nothing, this non-

²⁹⁷ Keener considers the suggestion that it is the fall unlikely. He proposes that if it is referring to a historical event is it probably Jesus' incarnate ministry in total. See, Keener, *John vol. 1*, 387.

²⁹⁸ Kovacs also points out it may be a reference to the crucifixion. See, Kovacs, "Now Shall," 231.

being, the not-light take? Is σκοτία predatory? Is it evil? Conscious? *Where* is σκοτία? *When* is it in the text? *How* is it imbued within the narrative? Is it of an ethical or moral nature? Is it explicit or implicit? Is the symbol akin to its natural aspect, only present when light is absent? We may make some initial observations that Johannine darkness is a negative force, whether purposeful or incidental. In addition, the frames of reference that the Gospel provides—the threat which we have identified in John 1:5 as well as the narrative trajectory culminating in the execution of Jesus—points towards some element of deliberate malevolence within the motif.

Previously we have noted that night, blindness, unbelief, doubt, sin, death and betrayal have all been considered contributors to the motif. For the purposes of our study we have identified three main elements which reveal the motif at work: death; trauma; and abjection. We will read these three elements as indicators within the text which reveal the presence of σκοτία. Each indicator has its own symbolic field which relates to its central tenet. We hope that reading the motif in this way will allow new insight into its place within the narrative world of the Gospel of John and possibly allow us to recognise a much more significant discourse of the motif in the text. The three elements relate closely to, and form the pinnacle of, their own symbolic field. We summarise them as follows:

1. Death. Encompassing: absence; loss; irrevocable unique loss; grief; silence.
2. Trauma. Encompassing: violation; violence; the unexpected; injustice; deceit; betrayal; disorder; accusation.
3. Abjection. Encompassing: expulsion (society, life); execution; rejection; traumatic silence held under duress; traumatic absence enforced by self or other; disposal of the dead.

Primarily our attention will remain on death, trauma and abjection, however it is useful to note the wider symbolism around them and to draw it into our discussions in the appropriate

places. It would require another thesis to do justice to reading σκοτία in these terms throughout the entire Gospel of John and this is not possible within the remit or length of this study. Indeed even selecting John 19 as we have, space will only allow an initial discussion using this method. Before moving on to this text-based discussion, we will first consider the three areas of death, trauma and abjection themselves. Their selection fundamentally stems from the Johannine union of light and life. Of these three symbolic fields death is the most crucial element and so we will keep our main focus and extended discussion on death. Trauma and abjection are literary-critical reading tools that we employ because of their relationship to this Johannine death–darkness bond and so time spent on them will focus on their definition and be comparatively less than death.

2.3.3 Death

We have identified death as having a symbolic field which includes absence, loss, irrevocable unique loss, grief and silence. All these elements are in some ways part of death or akin to death. However in our discussion at this point we will primarily discuss death as a physical end of life.

In literature the metaphor of darkness (shadows, blackness, void) is commonly used to talk about death. We have identified that death can form the opposite relationship with darkness in John: the presence of death can indicate Johannine darkness. This presents us with an interesting reversal in the symbolic relationship between death and darkness. This observation is particularly consistent with the reading of Johannine darkness as more than a simple generic symbolic ‘darkness’ within the text. As we have begun to explore, Johannine darkness takes on a particular form and role within the Gospel and relates to an important concept within the narrative. It has elements of mystery (presented as a metaphor in 1:5 without tenor) and malice (presented in oppositional terms to the heroic protagonist Jesus the φῶς, towards whom we are invited as readers to be sympathetic). Whereas generally in

literature ‘death’ is the mystery that the metaphor of ‘darkness’ helps humanity express and understand, uniquely in the Gospel of John, Johannine darkness appears to be the mystery to which death can offer some insight. As we consider this relationship we will refrain from naming death as either a symbol, metaphor or motif for Johannine darkness and continue to use the simplified term ‘indicator.’ This will allow us to explore the complexity in this bond without limiting our discussion to ‘proving’ a particular literary premise.

Before we move onto the body of our discussion of death and darkness, it is worthwhile to consider an early association made in the Gospel of John between Jesus’ absence and darkness. This holds significance as we steer our later discussion towards one focused on Jesus’ absence in death. In John 6:16–21 we see in the text a connection between darkness and the disciples’ separation from Jesus. The sea-crossing episode notes both that it is “evening” (6:16) and that it is “dark” (6:17), and then a storm breaks. It reads,

καὶ σκοτία ἤδη ἐγεγόνει καὶ οὐπω ἐληλύθει πρὸς αὐτοὺς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἢ τε θάλασσα ἀνέμου μεγάλου πνέοντος διηγείρετο
It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. (John 6:17b–18)

Schnackenburg makes a detailed discussion of this σκοτία reference, highlighting the insertion of the term into the Johannine account and the direct link that the text goes on to make between σκοτία, Jesus’ absence, and the ensuing storm. He states, “τε connects the darkness and Jesus’ absence closely with the further remark that a strong wind whipped up the lake (18). . . . The disciples, left to themselves, are in ‘darkness’ (cf. 1:5), far from Jesus and exposed to the onslaughts of hostile forces.”²⁹⁹ This connection in John 6, between the presence of σκοτία and the absence of Jesus, is significant in our reading. The darkness appears when Jesus disappears (John 6:15), and a disturbing episode ensues.

The disciples, separated from Jesus, are beset by the storm; when Jesus does finally reappear the only emotion they can muster is terror (6:19). The text also notes, “the sea

²⁹⁹ Schnackenburg, *John vol. 2*, 26.

became rough” (John 6:18a) and we can note that the sea has its own symbolic field that includes associations with chaos, evil and even death.³⁰⁰ This adds a further symbolic aspect to the scene. This episode, set both in darkness and on rough seas, should not be underestimated. John 6:16–21 suggests that the reader should consider any significant absence of Jesus, as well as the isolation of Jesus’ followers from him, as a potentially negative event linked to the presence of σκοτία with the possible introduction of themes of chaos, evil and death. To how the Gospel addresses the ultimate absence of Jesus in death, and death’s relationship with σκοτία, we will now turn.

The beginning of our discussion of death and σκοτία takes us once more to the Prologue and to a discussion of two diametrically opposed symbolic relationships: life/light and death/darkness. The formation of this literary association is initiated at the very beginning of the Gospel and is rooted in the bonds between φῶς, ζωὴ and λόγος. John 1:4 states,

ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων·
in him was life and the life was the light of all people.

The Prologue’s links between λόγος, φῶς and ζωὴ are undisputed. Culpepper makes the observation, “The prologue links *logos*, life and light so powerfully that the cluster dominates the symbolic system of the entire narrative.”³⁰¹ Keener identifies, “For John, “life” and “light” are not simply abstractions: the Life raises Lazarus (11:25, 43–44); the Light gives light to blind eyes (9:5–7); the Word becomes flesh (1:14).”³⁰² Koester states, “Life is described as light, which is associated with knowing God and his Word (1:4, 9–13).”³⁰³ Phillips talks of a λόγος–θεός–ζωὴ–φῶς ‘matrix.’³⁰⁴ We are aware of the complexity and discussions around the λόγος identity³⁰⁵ but for our purposes we will adhere to the predominant view that within

³⁰⁰ Stibbe highlights the significance of the sea as an archetypal setting. He notes that, “The sea is a chthonic (underworldly) archetype; it is associated with chaos, with monsters, with evil.” Stibbe, *John*, 87. Lee also makes the connection between the sea and “chaos and death,” Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 83.

³⁰¹ Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 190. See also, Schnackenburg, *John vol. 1*, 241–4.

³⁰² Keener, *John vol. 1*, 382.

³⁰³ Koester, *The Word*, 56.

³⁰⁴ Phillips, *Prologue*, 168.

³⁰⁵ Others have produced significant work in this area. Craig R. Keener surveys the term extensively. See, Keener, *John vol. 1*, 339–363 and 374–381. Peter Phillips also makes a detailed study, Phillips, *Prologue*, 73–141. See also: Brown, *John 1–12*, 519–524 and Barrett, *John*, 152–6. Dodd, *Interpretation*, 263–85.

the Gospel of John the λόγος is representative of Jesus. As Phillips puts it, “. . . λόγος, which we have seen could mean so many things, will ultimately lose its semantic domain completely and be identified wholly with Jesus.”³⁰⁶

We can see that in John 1:1–4 λόγος–ζωή–φῶς or Jesus–light–life are set in a union. This union is constantly reiterated in the text. Jesus is defined as *the* φῶς in John’s Gospel (John 1:4, 1:9, 3:19, 8:12, 9:5, 11:9, 12:36), the source of ζωή (John 1:4, 3:15, 3:36, 4:14, 5:21, 5:24, 5:40, 6:27, 6:35, 6:40, 6:47–8, 6:51, 6:53–4, 6:63, 6:68, 8:12, 10:10, 10:28, 17:2, 20:31) and, additionally, *the* ζωή (John 11:25, 14:6). We will return to our discussion of the role of Jesus in relation to these bonds below. For now we can identify that life and light have a union, which is sealed and elevated in importance by their relationship with Jesus.

It is this relationship between light, life and Jesus that unites darkness and death. Although we find no ontological statement uniting darkness and death, when we acknowledge the light–life union, darkness and death falls into an alliance in their oppositional identity: life–death and light–darkness.³⁰⁷ The four elements, light–life–darkness–death, are interrelated in a symbolic matrix. John 1:4 suggests that “the life was the light of all people”, therefore we may consider the possibility that the darkness of John 1:5, in which the life–light shines, might be death, or contain death as a predominant feature. This logic also draws on the material reality we have highlighted. At a fundamental level, when darkness, light, life, and death are considered from the perspective of the biological sciences it is immediately apparent that the four are connected: light brings life and darkness leads to death.³⁰⁸ While

³⁰⁶ Phillips, *Prologue*, 168.

³⁰⁷ While we acknowledge we are in danger of straying into definitions of darkness that spring from an oppositional identity—as we have highlighted in other scholarship—some definition at this point occurs through the association made with light and life; we hope however to remain focused on our purpose of the definition of darkness.

³⁰⁸ Bultmann makes this point in passing with regards to darkness and death. See, Bultmann, *John*, 41.

biblical scholars have recognised the darkness–death bond, little work has been done to examine the implications.³⁰⁹

Moving on from the Prologue we can see that the theme remains strong and develops throughout the narrative. John 8:12 states, “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Jesus announces himself as τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου, light is again embedded in his person, this time with his own acknowledgement. Jesus follows this statement with a definition of where others may situate themselves in relation to this ‘light of the world.’ If they ‘follow’ Jesus their walking will not be ‘in darkness,’ but they will receive a ‘light of life.’

We can note that there is a subtlety even here, which means that darkness is not presented as fully overcome: the sentence remedies *where* they will walk περιπατήσῃ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ with *what* they will have ἔξει τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς. Rather than confirming they will now walk in light, it is disclosed that they walk with light, suggesting they continue to walk in darkness. The transformation is localised to the individual; the darkness remains abroad. Importantly the light is titled as the ‘light of life.’ After the links established in the Prologue it is an unsurprising connection and like so many other things in the Gospel of John we can see it has a multilayered quality; there is light for living but there is also light for life. The oppositional connection with death is evident: if the light contains life, in darkness there is a sense of death, blindness and futility. Indeed, why would one need a light if the darkness did not hold something one would desire to dispel? A ‘light of life’ suggests that the darkness holds death in any of its forms: spiritual, emotional, physical, eternal.

John 12:35–6a also picks up this theme.

Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes (καταλάβῃ) you. The man who

³⁰⁹ As we noted earlier Dorothy Lee has pointed out this dynamic, asserting that the light–dark continuum in John’s Gospel is a ‘manifestation’ of the death–life theme. Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 167.

walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light”

It is of great interest that the verb καταλάβη reappears again. In John 1:5 it related to what the σκοτία may do to the φῶς in a general sense, here Jesus relates it specifically to the disappearance of the light. This concludes Jesus’ discourse on his approaching execution (John 12:20–36) and so directly relates σκοτία to his death. As we discussed above, the John 1:5 reference has a nuanced meaning which potentially holds a violent aspect of subjugation. Here we have the suggestion within the text, voiced in public by the protagonist, that Jesus’ death will be a point where darkness overwhelms the people. This acknowledgment within the text itself that at Jesus’ death the darkness motif is present and powerful is significant for this study. It offers further confirmation of the legitimacy of reading death, notably Jesus’ death, as an indicator of Johannine darkness.

Jesus’ characterisation within the Gospel as the one who saves from death—physical and eternal—stands in stark contrast to the trajectory towards his own death that his character makes. The text concerning the Official’s son, John 4:46–54, marks the first occasion where Jesus exhibits the ability to save people from physical death. The boy is narrated as at the ‘point of death’ (4:47) when Jesus heals him. In the discourse of 5:19–29 Jesus explicitly speaks of his ability and authority to raise the dead and to give eternal life. In 6:44, 47 and 50–1 Jesus again speaks of eternal life obtained through him and the choice to avoid death that his listeners can make. However 6:51–69 takes a shocking turn when Jesus directly links eternal life with his death and the requirement to “eat his flesh and drink his blood.” In the narrative world of John it seems that Jesus *has* the life and *is* the life, whatever extraordinary or confusing recourse that may entail. Peter summarises his acceptance of this challenging teaching with the words, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (6:68). This is a significant moment which reveals a deep contradiction: Jesus as ‘life’ enfolds Jesus in death.

In John 8:1–11 Jesus saves the woman caught in adultery from death by stoning. Rather than with miraculous power, here Jesus uses clever evasion of the accusation of the scribes and Pharisees.³¹⁰ Of course, the most striking occasion that Jesus defeats death is in the Lazarus narrative of John 11. Lazarus is brought back to life four days after burial. It stands out in the text as a remarkable act of power and, at one level, it certainly problematizes a wholly negative reading of Jesus' corpse in a tomb. Surely if Lazarus can return from the tomb, so can Jesus? However, the matter is one of emphasis. The Lazarus episode of John 11 does not establish that, in the literary world of the Fourth Gospel, it is plausible to consider death as a temporary situation, and that a corpse in a tomb may return easily to life. Rather, it establishes that Jesus is a remarkable character, who may command that even death release its victim and a tomb give up its corpse. But the emphasis is upon Jesus, as the character who holds the power to accomplish this. It is he who declares himself "resurrection and life" (John 11:25). Our reading goes on to ask, what if the one who calls Lazarus' corpse to come forth from the tomb (John 11:43), is the one who lies silent in the tomb (John 19:42)? What if the one who speaks the words of power, is wordless? Will anyone come forward to take his place?

An interesting matter in the Lazarus account is that the light/darkness (night) imagery is explicitly used to illustrate the threat of death that Jesus is under in any return to Judea rather than the death that Lazarus has experienced. John 11:9–11 states,

Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.'

However the act that Jesus performs in raising Lazarus from the dead also resonates with the σκοτία motif. Both in the Lazarus passage and the Gospel as a whole there appears to be two categories of death: death in general and death as it relates to Jesus. Both contribute

³¹⁰ Barbara A. Homes and Susan R. Homes Winfield's article on this passage is of note. They present a dynamic reading of the power play at work in the scene. See, Barbara A. Homes and Susan R. Homes Winfield, "Sex, Stones, and Power Games: A Woman Caught in the Intersection of Law and Religion (John 7:53–8:11)," in *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible* (SBL SemeiaSt 44; ed. C. A. Kirk-Duggan; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 143–162.

to the development of the darkness motif. The former includes more simplistic references where the reader is comfortable with the symbolic overtones: death is bad and considered a part of the (evil) darkness, which Jesus (the φῶς) overcomes. The latter is a more significant and complex relationship narrated between death and Jesus, where at times Jesus fulfils the conqueror role, but at other times Jesus is himself dominated by death.³¹¹

It is this connection with Jesus which is possibly the most important aspect which defines Johannine darkness and sets it apart from a simplistic symbolic reference. This presents a conflict in Jesus' identity that is seldom recognized between light and darkness. Now we must ask could Jesus become more powerfully associated with darkness and death than light and life and what happens in the text if that is the case? What consequences are there if the one who saves from death is himself conquered by death and what if the one who is defined as φῶς, enters Johannine darkness?

2.3.4 Trauma

We could have easily titled this category 'violence,' following Helen Orchard in her study,³¹² however we have decided that, in the representation of Johannine darkness, trauma is a more useful term. It encompasses physical violence (which unrestrained leads to death) but also offers us a broader category that allows us to recognise other elements of shock within the text. We have described the symbolic field around trauma above as that which encompasses violation, violence, the unexpected, injustice, deceit, betrayal, disorder and accusation. For our purposes we will define trauma as predominantly 'violation.' This violation is generated by a negative contravention of familiar or safe boundaries (physical, emotional, social). It is a point at which there is a breach of norm or expectation. Importantly

³¹¹ Philip Esler and Ronald Piper point towards the note of Mary's future anointing of Jesus (John 12:1–8) appearing in the account of Lazarus' death (John 11:2), while there is no mention of any anointing of Mary's brother Lazarus. Philip F. Esler and Ronald A. Piper, *Lazarus, Mary and Martha: A Social-Scientific and Theological Reading of John* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 59–61.

³¹² Helen C. Orchard, *Courting Betrayal: Jesus as Victim in the Gospel of John* (JSNTSup 161; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

trauma can be of varying degrees, a small violation inflicts a small effect and a significant breach would inflict a more disturbing effect.

Douglas Geyer in his book *Fear, Anomaly and Uncertainty in the Gospel of Mark*³¹³ defines “the anomalous frightful” as a literary reading tool for the Gospel of Mark. His work is a useful reference point in our own designations of death, trauma and abjection, particularly trauma. He defines the anomalous frightful as that which contains ‘perplexing uncertainty and fear.’³¹⁴ His recognition of ‘bewilderment and uncertainty’³¹⁵ as valid reading outcomes allows Geyer to reread Mark with a fresh understanding that is at ease with the more confusing and distressing dynamics of the narrative. He states,

I shall argue that the narrative materials in Mark 4:35–6:56 are so semantically robust that they easily entangle the properly sensitized reader in the dimensions of anomaly, fear, indeterminacy, perplexity, revenge, terror, impurity, and violence. The cycle is verily put together so that these dimensions rain down upon the reader. It is worthwhile getting drenched by them.³¹⁶

Although our own work approaches the text with a less historical agenda than Geyer, as well as being less intent upon the intentionality of the author, his approach essentially looks to the narrative and the content before tradition or theology in an attempt to take seriously its less desirous features. In this, his recognition of that which is anomalous and frightful sits in close proximity to our reading of that which is traumatic and negatively violates boundaries. Geyer’s chapter ‘Mark and Violent Death: Crucifixion as Horror and Riddle’³¹⁷ is of particular interest. Geyer pricks the biblical scholar to question again crucifixion as a literary element, and not only crucifixion but the crucifixion of a man who is a peaceful and positive character. He highlights that crucifixion was a particularly horrific event which other ancient literature appears to shy away from and asks why does the author of Mark make it the main narrative

³¹³ Douglas W. Geyer, *Fear, Anomaly and Uncertainty in the Gospel of Mark* (ATLA Monograph 47; Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2002).

³¹⁴ Geyer, *Fear*, 19.

³¹⁵ Geyer, *Fear*, 65.

³¹⁶ Geyer, *Fear*, 84–5.

³¹⁷ Geyer, *Fear*, 1–18.

event?³¹⁸ Geyer poses the critical questions, “How are we to read Mark’s stories about the healer who later suffers anomaly and utter abjection through state-sanctioned violent death? What literary sense are we to make of a mix of promise and horror, of hope and anomaly?”³¹⁹ Of course we can see that similar questions can be asked of the Gospel of John. Indeed, asking such questions of the Gospel of John allows us to take seriously the trauma within the text, particularly within the narrative of crucifixion and allows us to reposition our approach outside of the predominant view that John’s Gospel has a passionless passion.

Again in this motif we find an element of conflict in the character of Jesus. While we cast Jesus as an essentially peaceful character upon whom violence is inflicted, we must recognise that the Gospel of John also includes an act of violence which emanates from Jesus. John 2:15–16 states, “Making a whip out of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.” Jesus appears as the agent of violence in this passage. Not only does he act violently he also fashions an implement (whip) to deliver the violence. Dare we point out that he appears confident and comfortable, even calculated, in the violence of this scene? Jennifer Glancy presents a compelling reading of the passage in her article “Violence as a Sign in the Fourth Gospel.”³²⁰ She makes the shrewd yet uncomfortable observation that “. . . although we are more accustomed to thinking of whips slicing Jesus’ back into ribbons, Jesus as the lamb-like victim of violence, the whip first touches Jesus’ skin when it is nestled in the palm of his hand.”³²¹ Reading darkness as violence we can see that Jesus’ identity as $\phi\omega\varsigma$ appears to be violated by σκοτία far earlier in the Gospel of John than the passion narrative, and in this instance Jesus is an *agent of* violence rather than the recipient (John 2:15–16). Furthermore this particular incident adds the challenging dimension of Jesus’ participation in the act. While we may consider the crucifixion as something done-to

³¹⁸ Geyer, *Fear*, 1–2. See also, Mark T. Finney, “Servile Supplicium: Shame and the Deuteronomic Curse—Crucifixion in Its Cultural Context.” *BTB* 43 (2013): 124–134, 125.

³¹⁹ Geyer, *Fear*, 2.

³²⁰ Jennifer A. Glancy, “Violence as a Sign in the Fourth Gospel,” *BibInt* 17 (2009): 100–117.

³²¹ Glancy, “Violence,” 111.

Jesus, thus preserving Jesus' victimal role, the clearing of the temple is certainly done-by Jesus. Glancy is right to point out that commentators have skirted this uncomfortable element of the narrative.³²²

2.3.5 Abjection

Our concept of abjection is founded upon the theories of Julia Kristeva. Although it is a multifaceted concept we have begun to define it with our initial overview of it as encompassing expulsion (society, life), execution, rejection, traumatic silence held under duress, traumatic absence enforced by self or other, and disposal of the dead. Employing abjection as part of our literary approach offers us a vocabulary for the discussion of it within the Gospel and allows us to recognise it within the text. Kristeva develops her own theory of 'biblical abjection,' however we will refrain from using it in our reading.³²³ Her discussions of biblical abjection focus on questioning a socio-religious metanarrative of both Old and New Testaments rather than bringing her theory of abjection into relationship with a specific text. Our interest lies with how we might read abjection in the Gospel of John.³²⁴ Of particular interest are the links between abjection, execution, burial and Johannine darkness. If darkness relates to death in a tight symbolic relationship, abjection can be found in the darkest corner of that bond.

Abjection, as we have reviewed in our introduction, is a process of expulsion from the symbolic in order to live. It invokes feelings of horror and revulsion and one finds a particular potency of it around death. For this reading we will principally draw upon abjection found in the presence of death-without-hope. As Julia Kristeva articulates, "The corpse, seen without

³²² Glancy, "Violence," 108–110.

³²³ See, Kristeva, *Powers*, 90–132.

³²⁴ An exploration of Kristeva's interaction with the bible would be an interesting project, however limits of space and restrictions of task inhibit us from pursuing this agenda here. Roland Boer makes some attempt at a version of this task in his article in, Roland Boer, "Julia Kristeva, Marx and the Singularity of Paul," in *Marxist Feminist Criticism of the Bible* (ed. R. Boer and J. Økland; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 204–228.

God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection.”³²⁵ Death, as a fact of life, incurs a certain amount of abjection; the reality of death must be pushed aside in order to live. The processes around death act as formal routines of abjection and in turn facilitate a place where abjection is manifest. When we consider the symbolic field created around the person of Jesus in the Gospel of John, abjection surrounding his person and his corpse is a significant event.

Acknowledging points of abjection within the text and reading them in a symbolic relationship with Johannine darkness is also useful in our identification of a nadir in darkness motif.³²⁶ We can ask just how dark does the darkness become? Reading abjection can help us identify particularly potent moments of Johannine darkness and specifically how that converges upon Jesus’ corpse. At the conclusion of the execution sequence of John 19 we can identify that Johannine darkness, its threat, specter of death and trauma of violation, have all discharged into this one body. Through the Johannine narrative Jesus has made a journey from resplendent λόγος to brutalized corpse. Johannine darkness as that which is abject—not only dark, not only dead, but filled with horror and repulsion—is a significant force within John 19. An untimely death for Jesus within the narrative would have been a tragedy. An execution by crucifixion is a shocking and disturbing course of events, but an execution contrived by betrayal and injustice is thoroughly reprehensible. Reading abjection as a part of the darkness motif allows us to recognise this important narrative moment.

2.4 Reading Johannine Darkness in the Crucifixion Narrative

³²⁵ Kristeva, *Powers*, 3–4.

³²⁶ We have deliberately used the term ‘nadir’ in our discussion of the escalation of the darkness motif. This decision reflects the substance of the motif and an idea of deepening darkness. Rather than a loss of impact or low ebb, we use the term nadir to illustrate the darkest point: the motif’s peak.

In this section we will make an initial reading of Johannine darkness viewed through the lens we have outlined: death, trauma and abjection.³²⁷ We will focus our attention on John 19:1–24 and 28–37.³²⁸

The chapter opens with an extreme physical violation of Jesus in the act of flogging (19:1). Previously he has been bound (18:12) and struck in the face (18:22) but this act of excessive violence is the first of this kind upon his body. It surpasses all physical violation of Jesus previously and is the first significant step towards the subjugation of Jesus' body in execution and death.³²⁹ This act has an element of shock and marks the gravity of the situation: Jesus is not spared this violence nor does Jesus 'save' himself from it. The threat of his death moves from a theoretical/prophetic proposition into a physical reality. He is vulnerable and violated, the possibility of death is immediate. Flogging was a serious physical assault, which at times lead to death without further action.³³⁰

The death 'threat' has breached the boundary of Jesus' body. This is a significant point in our reading of Johannine darkness. There is some mirroring in the motif in the journey from threat to action, from theory to substance. If Jesus is personified as the φῶς and holds within his physical body that identity, an assault upon him of this sort betrays the nature of Johannine darkness. As his body is attacked and diminished, so too φῶς is diminished and

³²⁷ Helen Bond points out the darkness motif 'escalating' in the previous narrative of the courtyard scene in the passion. See, Helen K. Bond, "People in the Courtyard: Escalating Darkness," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (eds. S. A. Hunt, D. F. Tolmie and R. Zimmermann. WUNT 314. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 573–77. Bond notes, "The events of the passion narrative so far have all taken place at night (13:30); in the garden, the officers and soldiers bring "lanterns and torches and weapons" (18:4); later they light a charcoal fire to keep warm (18:18); and we are reminded of the fire in v. 25 by the repetition of the detail that Peter stood warming himself." Bond, "People in the Courtyard," 576. However Bond's discussion remains on the characters rather than the motif's prominence in the Johannine passion. For a reading of Jesus' death in the Gospel of Luke see, Anne Elvey, "Touching (on) Death: On 'Being Toward' the Other in the Gospel of Luke," BCT 2 (2006): 15.0–15.17, 15.10–15.12. Elvey reflects on touch and death and then presents her reading with "an eye to the materiality of Jesus' death" (15.10).

³²⁸ As we have discussed, John 19 does not contain an explicit reference to σκοτία, although John 20:1 does and we make reference to this. Our focus highlights the most significant death of the entire narrative and it is the potency of this element which demands examination in the discourse of σκοτία in John.

³²⁹ Staley raises the issue of Jesus' agency in the passion reflecting on power and powerlessness, see Staley, "Reading Myself," 81–2.

³³⁰ Beasley-Murray discusses three forms of Roman flogging: *fustigatio* (less severe, designed to reprimand); *flagellatio* (severe, but considered standard); *verberatio* (very severe, scourging, associated with crucifixion). Drawing on Blinzler, he agrees that it was the most severe *verberatio* inflicted on Jesus. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 335–6. Keener presents a detailed discussion: Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1118–1120.

darkness moves from absent to present in his corporeal demise. In addition, the violation (flogging) is purposeful and deliberate (Jesus' body has not been subject to accidental injury) suggesting that Johannine darkness may also hold deliberate intentionality. At this point Johannine darkness is presented as a violent, destructive and malevolent force primarily targeted at Jesus, the φῶς.

John 19:2–3 narrates further physical violation, this time blended with humiliation. A crown of thorns is fashioned and placed on Jesus' head and he is dressed in a purple robe: both acts reiterate his loss of personal boundaries and agency. He sustains more blows to the face and is subject to ridicule (19:3). The humiliation adds a further aspect to the trauma and to the darkness motif. There is something gratuitous and unwarranted in the soldiers adding humiliation to the physical assault, "They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face" (John 19:3). It is an attack on his public and personal self as well as an attack on his physical self, targeting and twisting the character of Jesus which has been built up within the narrative thus far.³³¹ Although we have seen that Johannine darkness is presenting as a primarily physical threat at this point (a threat unto death), in this highly political statement the reader is reminded that it is not purely a physical threat. We might consider our aspect of abjection present in this. The soldiers betray a desire not only to violate Jesus physically, but also to humiliate him. The reader glimpses part of the process of abjection that ends with his corpse in the tomb: the violent abjection of the soldiers towards his personhood as they not only carry out the act of violence but also *get carried away with* the act of violence.

³³¹ There is evidence to suggest that mockery of this kind was commonplace for the victim of first-century crucifixion, including references to them being 'king.' See, Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According To John 13–21* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1970), 888–9. This does not detract from our interpretation of the dynamics that occur within the Gospel narrative between this incidence of mockery and the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus as ruler and king.

In the text, Jesus' identity is being systematically 'spat out.'³³² It is interesting to note that the text twice refers to Jesus being crucified outside of the city. In John 19:17 it is narrated, "he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull" and John 19:20 clarifies "the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city." As his bodily location moves, it seems that Jesus' body is 'spat out' by the city, just as his identity is violently rejected by those in power within the text. Kristeva writes of abjection, "The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. The shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery."³³³ Treachery is certainly evident here. Within the text a series of betrayals have combined: Jesus' betrayal by Judas and various betrayals by authority figures. In John 19 it is Pilate who believes Jesus to be innocent yet bows to the calls for crucifixion (John 19:4–6, 12 and 15).³³⁴ Here, Pilate's most significant betrayal is himself, which then results in betraying the man he believes is innocent. These acts of betrayal, including the humiliation of Jesus' identity, all combine to despoil the personhood of Jesus.

The general threat of death becomes specific in the shouts for crucifixion in John 19:6 and 19:15. This is the first time in John 19 the actual method of death is identified. From a perspective where the knowledge that Jesus dies by crucifixion is almost ubiquitous one can only speculate at the element of shock that this would hold for the innocent reader. I need not repeat the large amount of information on the brutality of death by crucifixion here, but perhaps what requires explicit attention is the application of that information to the Johannine passion account. Execution by crucifixion is a terrifying and terrible form of death. The death of the Johannine Christ will be a bad death, a violent death, a painful death and a humiliating death. This death will be filled with violation, trauma and attack, to mete death upon an otherwise physically healthy body, and traumatise subject, witnesses and indeed

³³² Kristeva talks about food loathing as a basic form of abjection and considers her own repulsion at the skin on heated milk. She says, "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I *abject* myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*." Kristeva, *Powers*, 3.

³³³ Kristeva, *Powers*, 2.

³³⁴ Beasley-Murray notes the "cruel streak" that is often pointed out in Pilate's character. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 335.

community.³³⁵ If we read a bond between death and Johannine darkness in the Gospel of John, crucifixion is the worst of death's repertoire to be marshaled against Jesus. It is a potent expression of darkness. There is nothing redeemable about the direction in which the narrative is taking its protagonist.

John 19:16 brings the point of decision. Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified. Jesus is a 'dead man walking.' The act of Jesus' death begins to crystallise in the narrative as the decision is made. Jesus is described as carrying his own cross (19:17). Contrary to the popular interpretation that Jesus' needs no help such is his strength, we will interpret this moment as a moment of trauma: there is no help, no relief as his already significantly wounded body must bear the weight of the cross, or cross-beam.³³⁶ The narrative recounts a physically demanding act (carrying a significant weight of wood) undertaken by a physically depleted character, and he is isolated in this act. Indeed since John 18:12, when Jesus was arrested and bound, there has been no narration of any character with Jesus who holds any loyalty or affection for him, or is even desirous to help him in any way.³³⁷ The deed arrives swiftly and only two verses after the decision, the act of crucifixion is narrated (John 19:18). Here, companions are noted either side of him. There is no intervention or affection, but we can note that characters who are not part of the process of subjugation and execution return to the text at this point.³³⁸

John 19:23–5 sees the soldiers take Jesus' clothes and cast lots for his tunic. Are these just outer garments or undergarments also? Is Jesus' body now naked? The question is not answered explicitly within the text, but the depiction of his clothes being distributed

³³⁵ For discussion of the role crucifixion had in community oppression see, 3.1 'The Roman Attitude to the Crucified Body.'

³³⁶ Victims were usually required to carry their own *patibulum*, or cross-beam, which would then be attached to the vertical stake. See, Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1134; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 344–5; Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 7–21* (trans. R. W. Funk; ed. R. W. Funk with U. Busse; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 192.

³³⁷ Note that Pilate makes some attempt to 'help' Jesus and 19:12 suggests that he actively attempts to release him. The complexity in Pilate's character and role cannot be fully explored here.

³³⁸ Jesus' mother, the beloved disciple and companions are narrated soon after this in 19:25–7.

separately, as his body is crucified, certainly strongly suggests it.³³⁹ Jesus' vulnerability and nakedness creates another layer of violation and humiliation. We can see here violation that easily flows into abjection. It is a profound act of disassociation and an inversion of norms established in the text: the life of Jesus is of no value but the clothes he wore become of great value. The warm still-living body of Jesus is abjected by the soldiers while his cold inanimate garments are valued. John 19:25–7 contains the scene with Jesus, his mother, other women, and the beloved disciple. We will not reflect on that moment here, as we will go on to make a detailed study of it in the next chapter.

Jesus then states, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28). The wine Jesus drinks (19:28–9), like the carrying of the cross, is usually interpreted positively—Jesus as controlled saviour, fulfilling scripture and finishing his task³⁴⁰—but it is a futile drink. Bodily thirst will never be quenched and what does the thirst for the fulfilment of scripture matter now as Jesus' death arrives in the narrative? It is only the theological re-reader who ascribes positivity in this instance. At best it is a neutral moment, at worst it is the futile act of a dying man tragically discharging his body's and his religion's desire that he might resist death.

As Jesus is dying his physical body becomes, like any dying body, a site of conflict between life and death and, as we have explored, the life–death continuum offers the most crucial representation of the φως–σκοτία motif. The vital matter in our reading is the established symbolism and identity that Jesus has as the φως. What happens when the life-light dies? Through any execution act death prevails and life is extinguished. As Jesus' life leaves the text, so too Jesus' φως leaves the text. Johannine darkness becomes the dominant force within the narrative world, and the corpse that remains is the toxic vessel at its centre. Within the narrative, that which kept darkness at bay, the living body of Christ, is destroyed. All that

³³⁹ Nakedness was a common in Roman executions. There is some debate about whether a different practice may have been in place in Judea, but consensus remains that Jesus would most likely have been naked. See, Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1138. For a discussion of the shame of the particular exhibition of nakedness and the loss of bodily function see, Finney, "Servile Supplicium," 126–7.

³⁴⁰ See for example, Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1145–1147.

has been invested in the body of Jesus appears to be eradicated. The life is dead, the light is dark, and the λόγος is silent.

Interestingly the narrative includes reference to both the demise of the body (bows head) and also the spirit (gives up spirit) at the point of death in John 19:30. Orchard offers a striking rereading of the act of Jesus giving up his spirit, enfolding it into her theme of betrayal. She states,

The concept of Jesus betraying his spirit is a very difficult one, and a betrayal could be seen to imply that Jesus had failed either in his work or in his death. It begins to make some sense, however, if it is interpreted in with reference to his victimal role. This betrayal is his final collusion with darkness. It is the last act of a man who has both longed for and dreaded his fate and has played a conscious role in ensuring it comes to pass.³⁴¹

Orchard picks up a challenging theme: Jesus as colluding with darkness. This relates to our own work and the contradiction which we identify in the character of Jesus: at times (namely the crucifixion and burial narratives) he is more definitively associated with Johannine darkness than φῶς. It is a perspective that we will return to and discuss in more detail in later chapters.

John 19:31–4 narrates both the threat, and then the act, of posthumous violence to Jesus' corpse. The threat first enters the narrative and is directed towards what is believed to be his dying body (that his legs might be broken to hasten death) but as his death is confirmed, the act of breaking his legs becomes unnecessary (John 19:33). An apparently gratuitous act of mutilation, with no reason made explicit, still takes place.³⁴² Jesus' side is pierced with a spear, and blood and water are noted in the text (19:34). In this act we can see the three elements of death, trauma and abjection coming together: his dead body experiences further trauma in the actual violation of his skin, which spills his blood. This invokes a sinister air of

³⁴¹ Orchard, *Courting Betrayal*, 223.

³⁴² It is suggested that the soldiers may have stabbed Jesus to ascertain that he was truly dead. See, Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1151.

abjection. The text however does go on to deliver an interpretation for the violence (19:36–7) suggesting that scripture is again being fulfilled.

John 19:34 is the first time that Jesus' blood is narrated in a textual reference in the crucifixion narrative. Julia Kristeva suggests blood is a “. . . fascinating semantic crossroads, the propitious place for abjection where *death* and *femininity*, *murder* and *procreation*, *cessation of life* and *vitality* all come together.”³⁴³ Jesus' has previously talked of his blood (and flesh) and the necessity to drink it. It is mentioned four separate times in John 6:53–6. Here in John 19 his blood actually appears. It is a macabre connection from a narrative perspective. Is this truly the moment Jesus' blood must be consumed? Who will consume it? Perhaps Tina Pippin's vampire theories would be a suitable excursus here? She asks, “What can vampire theory tell us about violence, desire, death, and eternal life? How are we to understand the absurd statement of Jesus, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life’ (John 6:54)?”³⁴⁴ Of course the disciples previously exclaimed, “This teaching is difficult, who can accept it?” (John 6:60) and the matter became a source of discussion about belief and betrayal, suggesting that those who literally believed it was true turned back (John 6:66) and now no one steps forward to undertake the deed. The moment stands in the narrative as a puzzle, what of this blood? Could this semantic crossroads of blood and life signify something else, as Kristeva suggests? Of course this is not an uncommon theological avenue when examining this passage, there is a long and dense history of theological and spiritual associations with the blood of Christ. As we pursue a critical and literary approach, with our focus on text and narrative, we can consider another account of blood and life. We will go on to consider aspects of complexity in Johannine darkness and explore these themes further in later chapters.

³⁴³ Kristeva, *Powers*, 96.

³⁴⁴ Tina Pippin, “Feasting with/on Jesus: John 6 in Conversation with Vampire Studies,” in *The Recycled Bible: Autobiography, Culture, and the Space Between* (SBL, SemeiaSt 51; ed. F. C. Black; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 87–100, 88.

Finally, as we close our reading of John 19 mention must be made of John 20:1. Here σκοτία returns to the text explicitly.

Τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ἔρχεται πρῶτῃ σκοτίας ἔτι οὔσης εἰς τὸ μωμεῖον
Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb (John 20:1)

There is considerable debate around the nature of this σκοτία reference and the validity of reading it as more than as a simple practical detail.³⁴⁵ The practical element remains, linking to the disclosure of early morning, but we are reminded that day and night also form a strong symbolic connection to the σκοτία motif. More significantly, reading darkness through the lens of death, trauma and abjection clearly places it as a reference to the Johannine darkness motif that has dominated the text through Chapter 19. Its reappearance in 20:1 holds recognition of the darkness that has overwhelmed the narrative in Jesus' death and burial and it points to a possible continuation of that motif into the resurrection narrative.

What is particularly important to notice at this point is the *positioning* of the σκοτία reference at the burial site. Although time has moved on in the narrative world, Johannine darkness lingers at the site of Jesus' tomb, close to Jesus' corpse. Presently Mary arrives, in darkness, from darkness and to darkness as the moment and place of burial stands within the text, before revelation of the resurrection. It is the burial event of John 19:38–42 within the narrative which will occupy this thesis. We will move on in our project having made this small study of death and crucifixion to focus our attention on the burial act. We have established our discourse of Johannine darkness and the language of death, trauma, and abjection, and now we will move on to examine the burial narrative and propose an interpretation of it as a negative event which encompasses elements of violation and abjection.

³⁴⁵ We have reviewed the various opinions regarding the σκοτία motif in the second half of the Gospel above.

2.5 Table of References

	Light	Darkness
John 1:3b–5 <i>light</i> <i>darkness</i>	What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines	in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.
John 1:6–9 <i>light</i>	There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.	
John 3:2 <i>night</i>		He [Nicodemus] came to Jesus by night . . .
John 3:19–21 <i>light</i> <i>darkness</i>	And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.	and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.
John 5:35–36b <i>light</i>	He [John] was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But I have testimony greater than John's.	
John 6:16–17 <i>darkness</i>		When evening came his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark and Jesus had not yet come to them.
John 8:12 <i>light</i> <i>darkness</i>	Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world.	Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life"
John 9:4–5 <i>day</i> <i>night</i> <i>light</i>	Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."	We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.
John 11:9–10 <i>light</i> <i>night</i>	Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this	

<i>day</i>	world.	But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.”
John 12:35–6 <i>light</i> <i>darkness</i>	Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.	so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going.
John 12:46 <i>light</i> <i>darkness</i>	I have come as light into the world,	so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness.
John 13:30 <i>night</i>		So, after receiving the piece of bread, he [Judas] immediately went out. And it was night.
John 19:39 <i>night</i>		Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.
John 20:1 <i>darkness</i>		Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.
John 21:3–4 <i>night</i> <i>daybreak</i>	Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.	They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Chapter Three

Bodies for Burial: First-Century Burial of the Crucified and Jewish Funerary Traditions

3.0 Introduction

In the Ancient Palestinian world, the matter of the burial and disposal of bodies was varied and complex. Local customs, personal economics and Roman dictates blend with religious, superstitious and cultural beliefs in the post-mortem processes and all of these were brought to bear—in varying degrees—upon the final dealings with the human body. This chapter offers a detailed examination of current knowledge of the likely fate of the first-century crucified corpse, along with a survey of Jewish funerary traditions. We will address both

Roman and Jewish practices³⁴⁶ as well as considering the theory of Jesus' burial as a dishonourable ritual, practiced by the Jewish Courts as proposed by Raymond Brown and Byron McCane.³⁴⁷ We will survey the historical documentation and scholarly discussions to present the debate around the theoretical likelihood of the burial of Jesus' crucified body in first-century Judea. In the second half of the chapter we will move on to survey funerary practices which might be considered normal for the (uncrucified) Jewish deceased of the same time period. It is our intention to offer a brief, but thorough, documentation of existing research on the matter of burial in the ancient Palestinian world. However, we refrain from proposing any significant new theories in this area.

As with many historical investigations, assumptions about first-century burial are, for a great part, informed hypotheses. Archaeological and textual indicators combine to depict a picture of what is likely to have been evident, but in many aspects the historical reality behind the scholarship remains mysterious and impenetrable. Levi Rahmani reminds us that, “. . . we must remember constantly that all our statements, despite the best of our knowledge and the greatest endeavour at objectivity, may be proven partially or even completely wrong by future research.”³⁴⁸ That said, burial and funerary traditions are among some of the most fruitful areas of investigation because of their time-capsule like repositories: tombs. Often undisturbed—possibly because of both the sacred and fearful place they hold in the human mind, or simply because their location has fallen out of memory—burial sites are regularly a bountiful archaeological find. Our survey draws material from a wide spectrum of historical

³⁴⁶ We have sought to focus on these two social bodies to address the two groups who were directly involved in the burial of Christ. For a survey of Greek funerary traditions see: Donna C. Kurtz, and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 142–161; Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and the Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (trans. W. B. Hills; London: Routledge, 1925), 162–6; Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 34–48; Byron R. McCane, *Roll Back the Stone: Death and Burial in the World of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 135, and for particular reference to how Hellenistic practice influenced first-century Palestinian practice, see 7–13. For a survey of women's roles in Greek burial customs see: Kathleen E. Corley, *Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2002), 108–111.

³⁴⁷ Initial arguments were made in the following: Raymond E. Brown, “The Burial of Jesus (Mark 15:42–7),” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 233–45; Byron R. McCane, “Where No One Had Yet Been Laid: The Shame of Jesus' Burial,” in *Authenticating The Activities of Jesus* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 431–452.

³⁴⁸ Levi Y. Rahmani, “Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part One,” *BA* 44 (1981): 171–177, 172.

documents, some of which are later than the first-century, such as the second/third-century Mishnaic and the fifth/sixth-century Talmudic texts. This is certainly problematic and we may only make assumptions of their earlier significance and application. We are not unaware of the debate surrounding the employment of their use in work on New Testament texts.³⁴⁹ However, in the absence of earlier relevant texts and taking this reservation into account we make our survey with their inclusion, but are very much aware of the limitations of our use of them here and so we will refrain from drawing any decisive conclusions from later texts alone.

In later chapters we will adopt a theoretical perspective which brings this historical information about post-mortem and funerary practices into discussion with feminist critical theory and offers us the opportunity to frame new questions and perspectives of the Johannine burial text. This survey will provide a frame of reference as we go on to discuss the abnormal, dissenting and unusual aspects of the burial scene in John's Gospel. The discourse forms part of our investigation into elements of death, trauma and abjection and our reading of Johannine darkness. In later chapters we will ask, does the historical data about burial offer our reading a new insight into the text and, more significantly, does our feminist perspective offer a new insight into the interpretation of the Johannine burial account when read in light of the historical data?

3.1 The Roman Attitude to the Crucified Body

³⁴⁹ Catrin Williams articulates the matter concisely in, Catrin H. Williams, "John and the rabbis revisited," in *Engaging with C. H. Dodd on the Gospel of John: Sixty Years of Tradition and Interpretation* (eds. T. Thatcher and C. H. Williams; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 107–125, 114–16 and 122–3.

There is no categorical indication of what the Roman attitude would have been towards crucified cadavers in the province of Judea in the first century.³⁵⁰ Indeed, much of the scholarship about burial in Judea conflicts with the evidence of general Roman practice and suggests an abnormal and extra-ordinary situation at work. In Roman penal systems, crucifixion itself was applied to the dead corpse as readily as to the living convict. It was an explicit form of corpse abuse and posthumous shame, as much as a method of execution. It varied in implementation, often being subject to immediate practicalities. Along with normal regulations and directives, consideration would be made of concerns such as, how many bodies/people were to be crucified, what was the locality, was the situation military or judicial? Even the whims of the executioner and/or soldiers played their part.³⁵¹ Disposal of the crucified body comes in the aftermath of the cruel and dramatic event of crucifixion, and the practices concerning corpse disposal were subject to similar variants as was the act of crucifixion itself.

Roman society, in normal circumstances, regarded the denial of burial as deeply offensive.³⁵² Burial was a matter of huge importance and undertaken with all seriousness. Jocelyn Toynbee identifies two basic notions that informed and fuelled the Roman impetus for burial:

1. That death incurred pollution and there was necessity for purification and expiation.
2. That the peace of the departed soul was at stake if a burial was not completed.³⁵³

In dire circumstances the absolute minimum activity that constituted 'burial' and secured honour and posthumous peace was the throwing of a handful of dirt on the deceased.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁰ For a survey of crucifixion which highlights the lack of evidence around the subject see, Gunnar Samuelsson, *Crucifixion in Antiquity: An Inquiry into the Background and Significance of the New Testament Terminology of Crucifixion* (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

³⁵¹ For a detailed survey of crucifixion and the various elements and variants of it see, Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion* (trans. by J. Bowden; London: SCM, 1977), 24–7. See also, Finney, "Servile Supplicium," 124–128.

³⁵² So too in Greek culture. See, Dag Øistein Endsjø, *Greek Resurrection Beliefs and the Success of Christianity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 33–5.

³⁵³ Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 43. Kyle sums up the Roman attitude to the lack of burial as, 'an abuse of decent humans . . . a form of damnation beyond death.' Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1998), 131.

However, the Roman Empire showed no restraint in the violation of this social norm in its penal system. Although it usually only occurred in exceptional circumstances, when a harsher retribution than even death was required, denial of burial served this purpose well.³⁵⁵ As Roman beliefs about the afterlife, restless spirits and haunting ghosts contributed to the impetus for burial and appropriate laying-to-rest of the deceased, in its turn, the violation of these practices contributed to the maltreatment of executed criminals and victims and the shaming of their living relatives.³⁵⁶ The Romans appeared to hold in tension the dichotomy of their essential beliefs about peaceable burial and their disturbing practices of exposure or abuse of corpses.³⁵⁷

At times, this posthumous punishment came when the nature of the execution itself limited burial: death by fire or at the savagery of beasts in the arena left little chance of a complete body to bury.³⁵⁸ In other ancient texts we see denial of burial attached to the punishment of certain crimes and often in specific circumstances. Pliny (*Nat.* 36.107) records the suicides of construction workers to escape the gruelling work of building sewers under Tarquinius Priscus. The remedy employed by the king to discourage them was post-mortem crucifixion and the denial of burial; their bodies were eaten by animals and the shame which was heaped on the dead, pressed on the living as a deterrent.³⁵⁹ Here, the escape from labour,

³⁵⁴ Toynbee, *Death*, 43.

³⁵⁵ See, J. S. Kennard Jr, "The Burial of Jesus," *JBL* 74 (1955): 227–238, 235.

³⁵⁶ See, Kyle, *Spectacles*, 128–131.

³⁵⁷ Kyle examines the Roman understanding of the spectacle and sport of death (particularly arena deaths in Rome) and discusses the Roman practice of killing (animals and humans) as entertainment. The question of contradiction between a 'civilised' society and their brutal recreation and punishment system is most evident here. He sees the justification of these mass deaths and corpse abuses as an ubiquitous universal understanding that it was simply 'necessary' and/or entertaining. Although condemnation is evident about aspects or motives of the spectacles, he considers no ancient text to offer an outright condemnation of the practice. He says, "Criticisms of aberrations or elements (e.g. *meridiani*) do not amount to opposition to the phenomena in general. There simply was no widespread opposition to the inhumanity of the games." Kyle, *Spectacles*, 4–5. Similar contradiction was to be found in Greek society which also regarded denial of burial as an anathema (which incurred the wrath of the Gods) and yet it was also used as a posthumous punishment. See, Kurtz and Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*, 143; Parker, *Miasma*, 44–6.

³⁵⁸ Although, even in these cases, there would have been some remains to be dealt with. While it was a spectacular and painful form of execution, fire was an expensive and inadequate form of disposal. The human body does not burn easily away to discreet ash. Ulpian suggests that remains of bones and ash may be sought by relatives for burial. See, Digest of Justinian 48.24.1. Even in normal cremations the collection of remains for burial may not have been thorough, although the reasons behind this are disputed. See, Valerie M. Hope, *Death in Ancient Rome: A Sourcebook* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 114. Similarly, the savagery of animals would easily kill, but not consume the corpse; some form of disposal was required.

³⁵⁹ See for comment, Kyle, *Spectacles*, 131–2. See also, Finney, "Servile Supplicium," 126–7.

rather than the act of suicide, is the primary issue. In contrast, at other times suicide was used as a means to escape the denial of burial.

Under the reign of Tiberius, suicide became preferable to death when convicted of *maiestas*—treason—because, as well as execution, a *maiestas* conviction carried with it the denial of interment to the executed and the forfeit of one's estate.³⁶⁰ Levick particularly notes the denial of burial, along with especially violent execution and posthumous exposure, as an opportunity to display further anger against the *maiestas* convicts and horror at their crimes.³⁶¹ In Tacitus we find the sorry story of Pomponius Labeo who “opened his veins and bled to death” (Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.29 [Jackson, LCL]) followed shortly by his wife, Paxaea. The double suicide was motivated by such fears. In fact, Tacitus remarks that suicide in these circumstances had been ‘rendered popular’ because of the post-execution penalties. Suetonius (Suetonius, *Tib.* 61.4–5) notes the horrors of the execution system in Rome under Tiberius including documentation of the bodies of men, women and children dragged daily to the Tiber and unceremoniously thrown into the waters. Here the river served not only as a means to dispose of executed corpses, but it also carried them out of the city and precluded any burial rites.³⁶²

The denial of interment for the crime of *maiestas*³⁶³ appears as a regular part of the Roman penal and military system. As Kyle succinctly puts it, “traitors were an exception.”³⁶⁴ Suetonius also notes (Suetonius, *Aug.* 13.1) that no burial was afforded the conquered Brutus whose head was sent to Rome to be thrown at the feet of Caesar's statue. Brutus' soldiers receive equally harsh treatment when they make a vain plea for interment. Augustus

³⁶⁰ See, Kyle, *Spectacles*, 132–3.

³⁶¹ Barbara Levick, *Tiberius The Politician* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1976), 187.

³⁶² For an extended investigation of the role of the river Tiber in Rome's execution system see, Kyle, *Spectacles*, ch. 7. He says, “Very simply, use of the Tiber was logistically pragmatic and symbolically reassuring: denial of burial thoroughly extended the process of damnation, and disposal by water cleansed the city and its people of filth and guilt.” (214). Sadly Kyle does not comment on the use of water or rivers, apart from in Rome, to dispose of the executed.

³⁶³ For a discussion of the *maiestas* charge see: Kyle, *Spectacles*, 97–8; Levick, *Tiberius*, ch. 11.

³⁶⁴ Kyle, *Spectacles*, 133.

denies the request harshly remarking, “The birds will soon settle that question” (Suetonius, *Aug.* 13:1–2 [Rolfe, LCL]).³⁶⁵ And in Suetonius, *Vesp.* 2.3 the denial of burial is appropriated explicitly as an additional punishment to those who conspired with the enemy. Ulpian (*Duties of Proconsul* 9), notes that those who have committed treason are refused the usual procedural burial afforded the executed. His writings, recorded in *The Digest of Justinian* 48.24.1, state:

The bodies of those who suffer capital punishment are not to be refused to their relatives; and the deified Augustus writes in the tenth book of his *de Vita Sua* that he also had observed this [custom]. Today, however, the bodies of those who are executed are buried in the same manner as if this had been sought and granted. But sometimes it is not allowed, particularly [with the bodies of] of those condemned for treason.³⁶⁶

When considering crucifixion specifically, there is evidence to suggest that corpses were routinely left on the crosses to decompose. Callu notes that the pain suffered by the offender was reinforced by the dealings with the dead body, even though religion required burial and—in principle—justice was not opposed to it, the crucified corpse was routinely left as carrion.³⁶⁷ Kyle states, “Victims of crucifixion died slow, agonizing deaths, and they were guarded—certainly until death and probably longer . . . Crucifixion should be seen as a form of exposure to the elements and beasts, for, outside Judea, it is unlikely that most corpses were taken down, let alone buried, after crucifixion.”³⁶⁸ He identifies denial of burial as part of the crucifixion punishment and brings to the fore exposure as an actual part of the death process.³⁶⁹ However, Kyle identifies Judea as an exceptional situation and to this we will shortly turn.

³⁶⁵ The following all draw upon this citation: John D. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 161; McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*, 90; Kyle, *Spectacles*, 132; Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1208. Brown suggests there are some comparisons to be drawn in the case of Christ because of the nature of the *maiestas* judgement which Augustus would have condemned Brutus by.

³⁶⁶ Theodor Mommsen, Paul Krueger and Alan Watson, eds. *The Digest of Justinian* (4 vols.; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 864.

³⁶⁷ Jean-Pierre Callu, “Le Jardin des Supplices au Bas-Empire,” in *Du Chatiment dans la Cité: Supplices Corporels et Peine de Mort dans le Monde Antique* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1984), 313–59, 337.

³⁶⁸ Kyle, *Spectacles*, 169.

³⁶⁹ For a detailed survey of proposed physiological causes of Jesus’ death on the cross see, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1088–1092.

In Petronius' ancient work of fiction *Satyricon* (Petronius, *Satyricon* 111–2), the character Eumolpus recounts the tale of a soldier charged to guard crucified corpses to prevent them from being stolen and buried by grieving family or friends.³⁷⁰ He neglects his duty when romancing a widow at the tomb of her dead husband nearby and one such body is stolen. The soldier, in fear of the consequences, considers suicide. However, the macabre solution of the now enamoured widow and soldier is to provide the body of the dead husband to hang on the cross instead! While the tale is fantastical it reveals an assumption of the normality of leaving bodies to decompose on crosses. We can also note that the text includes in its fictive world a soldier deployed to guard the corpses and the severe consequences if this duty was neglected, which might indicate similar occurrences in reality. It also makes clear that stealing such corpses was a known practice, presumably usually by relatives who wished to administer burial.

A further cultural reference addressing the assumption that crucified bodies would be left as carrion is provided in the prose of Horace. The text includes the quip: "If a slave were to say to me, 'I never stole or ran away': my reply would be, 'You'll have your reward; you are not flogged.' [If he were to say] 'I never killed anyone.' [I would say] 'You'll hang on no cross to feed crows'" (Horace, *Ep.* 1.16.48 [Fairclough, LCL]).³⁷¹ Again, there appears to be an assumption that crucifixion and post-mortem exposure to carrion animals and birds went hand-in-hand. It is a grim picture of this aspect of the Roman penal system. Questions as to how long bodies were left and until what state of decomposition was reached, are largely left unanswered.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ Cicero highlights the torment of parents that the corrupt Sicilian governor Verres induced. He notes: the parents who were forbidden to take provisions to their condemned sons in prison; mothers who waited by the prisons at night in order to catch the last breath or kiss of their offspring before they were executed; and the bargaining that both the condemned and their parents entered into with executioners for speedy death and then burial (rather than exposure) for the bodies once the execution had been completed (Cicero *Verr.* 2.45.117–120).

³⁷¹ See for comment: Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1208.

³⁷² Callu suggests that, for those killed by fire, the unburnt bones and skulls were piled into mass graves where the remains became mingled and confused. See, Callu, "Le Jardin," 338.

The Romans appeared to be consistent over the denial of burial to the crucified, with posthumous violation of burial rites routinely functioning as an element of the punishment. Clemency was, however, sometimes possible and burial might well be obtained for a victim of crucifixion in special circumstances. Philo offers some evidence that on occasions, usually on the eve of a festival or Emperor's birthday, the bodies of the crucified were taken down and given to relatives for burial.³⁷³ He comments, ' . . . it was thought well to give them burial and allow them ordinary rites. For it was meet that the dead also should have the advantage of some kind of treatment upon the birthday of an emperor and also that the sanctity of the festival should be maintained' (Philo, *Flacc.* 83–84 [Closon&Whitaker, LCL]).

3.1.1 The Roman Attitude in Judea

As well as concessions for burial of the crucified made at times of public celebration, some have suggested that the denial of burial to the crucifixion victim was not enforced faithfully throughout the Empire and that regional sensitivities played a part in deciding the crucified body's ultimate fate. The Romanization of even standard funerary practice in the provinces of the Empire is a complex and diverse topic, with integration, resistance, and indifference all influencing the local situation.³⁷⁴ Burial of the crucified adds a highly charged political question to the process and the forces affecting it appear to differ from those that affect general funerary traditions.

³⁷³See for comment: Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 89; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 693; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Augsburg: Fortress, 2007), 775.

³⁷⁴For example, Fontana suggests that wealthy and higher-class people at Leptis, Africa sought to incorporate Roman traditions, whereas poorer people remained more faithful to older, local practices. See Sergio Fontana, "Leptis Magna. The Romanization of a Major African City Through Burial Evidence," in *Italy and the West: Comparative Issues in Romanization* (ed. S. Keay and N. Terrenato; Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001), 161–172. Struck suggests that 'integration' may not equate to 'romanization' and that, at times, local burial customs in the Provinces affected funerary practices in the wider Empire. See, Manuela Struck, "Integration and Continuity in Funerary Ideology," in *Integration in the Early Roman West: The Role of Culture and Ideology* (ed. J. Metzler et al.; Luxembourg: Dossiers d'Archéologie du Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art 4, 1995), 139–150, 139.

The key, and at present only, piece of archaeological evidence suggesting that the crucified might be afforded a burial in Judea comes from the Jewish tombs excavated at Giv'at ha-Mivtar in 1968. This complex of tombs lies north-east of Jerusalem and dates from the Second Temple Period.³⁷⁵ Found within Ossuary 4 (tomb 1) was the skeletal remains of a crucified man.³⁷⁶ The remains suggest that, at the time of crucifixion, the nail holding the heel bone was bent back and unable to be removed from the joint. The nail also carried evidence of a wooden plaque.³⁷⁷ In addition the lower calf bones of the man had been broken with a forceful blow³⁷⁸ and the feet had been amputated with a sharp tool.³⁷⁹ Nico Haas interprets the broken legs to be evidence of a “coup de grâce”³⁸⁰ (an act to hasten death) and the amputation of the feet as a direct result of the inability to remove the nail and therefore necessary to take the body down.³⁸¹ Joseph Zias and Eliezer Sekeles later disputed the leg and ankle breaks as evidence that death was hastened or the body removed by an amputation.³⁸²

Donald Kyle draws on this archaeological find, proposing that the region of Judea was an exception in the Roman exposure of the crucified.³⁸³ Raymond Brown also suggests that the *juxta ordinem* law in Rome for Roman citizens may not have been applicable for a Jewish man in the province of Judea where the matter would have been dealt with *extra ordinem*—and thereby the decision of the local magistrate.³⁸⁴ Yet Brown points out that while there may be some leniency in offering burial to the crucified generally, certain legal convictions may still preclude burial, even in Judea. As we have highlighted, a charge of *maiestas* included in

³⁷⁵ For the presentation of evidence from four of the tombs in the complex, including the tomb of our interest see: Vassilios Tzaferis, “Jewish Tombs at and Near Giv'at ha-Mivtar, Jerusalem,” *IEJ* 20 (1970): 18–32.

³⁷⁶ For a detailed assessment of the crucified skeletal remains see: Nico Haas, “Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv'at ha-Mivtar,” *IEJ* 20 (1970): 38–59, 49–59.

³⁷⁷ Haas, “Anthropological Observations,” 55–6.

³⁷⁸ Haas, “Anthropological Observations,” 57.

³⁷⁹ Haas, “Anthropological Observations,” 58.

³⁸⁰ Haas, “Anthropological Observations,” 57.

³⁸¹ Haas, “Anthropological Observations,” 58–9.

³⁸² Joseph Zias and Eliezer Sekeles, “The Crucified Man from Giv'at ha-Mivtar: A Reappraisal,” *IEJ* 35 (1985): 22–34. Zias and Sekeles identify a number of errors in Haas' work and draw new conclusions about the type of crucifixion the man received. Yadin also disputes Haas' conclusions and suggests that the heels were nailed together and, rather than being attached to the cross, were flanked by two plaques of wood, the nail then being bent back manually to secure them. See: Yigael Yadin, “Epigraphy and Crucifixion,” *IER* 23 (1973): 18–22.

³⁸³ See, Kyle, *Spectacles*, 169 and 181, n. 93.

³⁸⁴ Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 1208.

its punishment a denial of burial and Brown believes this to be an uncompromising policy where the Judean crucified would still be exposed to decay. While the bodies of the crucified in the region of Judea may have been granted for burial in the case of other crimes, the Roman Empire took the threat of treason and rebellion far more seriously and may not have overlooked the opportunity to use the bodies of the dead to serve as a warning to the living. Had this been the charge against Jesus, Brown considers it likely that his body would not have been released to his family or followers. He states,

I have contended in §31B that Pilate was not overly brutal, and as a Roman governor he would not have been likely to punish needlessly a criminal's family. But in charges of treason Roman governors were anxious that the convicted criminal not be regarded as a hero to be imitated. Whether the case of Jesus should be considered an example of *maiestas* (§31D) is debatable; but if it was, little indeed would be the likelihood that the prefect of Judea would have given the body of this crucified would-be-king to his followers for burial.³⁸⁵

However, Brown goes on to consider the slim possibility that the directive to expose the body could possibly still be waived, and he looks to the specific circumstances of *who* is requesting the body to be a significant mitigating factor. We will go on to consider Brown's theory of a dishonourable burial at the hands of the Jewish authorities (represented in Joseph of Arimathea) below. In this Brown offers an explanation as to why, if Jesus was charged with *maiestas*, his body was then, as in New Testament narratives, released and afforded a burial.³⁸⁶

John Crossan, who strongly contests the notion that the exposure of the crucified corpse was being waived in Judea, gives an alternative interpretation of the Giv'at Ha-Mivtar evidence. He maintains that the bodies were most likely left on their crosses in the Province as elsewhere in the Empire,

. . . I see in Josephus no evidence that it [Jewish burial of the crucified by sunset] was observed in actual practice, and the Temple Scroll indicates the opposite. Essene law, extending the rules for dead to live crucifixion, decrees what they would

³⁸⁵ Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1208.

³⁸⁶ Brown's theory of Jesus' dishonourable burial, as indicated in Mark, suggests that Joseph, as a member of the condemning Jewish council, was granted Jesus' body for a dishonourable burial as he was neither disciple, friend nor family. Raymond E. Brown, "The Burial of Jesus (Mark 15:42–47)," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 233–45. For further discussion see below.

do if they ran Jerusalem and thereby emphasizes what was not being done at that time.³⁸⁷

Crossan concludes with his belief that if there were *any* burial of Christ's body it would probably have been at the hands of the Roman soldiers in a shallow grave.³⁸⁸ He regards the archaeological evidence as confirmation that a) by *some* means—bribery, mercy, indifference—a crucified body could find burial (indeed honourable burial in a family tomb). And b) that the presence of only one obviously crucified skeleton in the sum of archaeological evidence suggests that it was an extraordinarily rare occurrence.³⁸⁹

If we turn to the literary evidence we can see that burial in general was of utmost importance for the Jewish community of first-century Palestine. As with the Romans, the Jewish people regarded the lack of burial as intolerable.³⁹⁰ Unlike the Romans however, their necessity for burial was in practice universal, extending to suicides (after a day's exposure) and enemies. Josephus writes, "With us it is ordained that the body of a suicide should be exposed unburied until sunset, although it is thought right to bury even our enemies slain in war" (Josephus, *J.W.* 3.377 [Thackeray, LCL]). So too, Josephus records that criminals condemned by Jewish courts are secured burial:

. . . and, after remaining for the whole day exposed to the general view, let him be buried at night. Thus shall it be too with all who howsoever are condemned by the laws to be put to death. Let burial be given even to your enemies; and let not a corpse be left without its portion of earth, paying more than its just penalty. (Josephus, *Ant.* 4.264–5 [Thackeray, LCL])³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 169.

³⁸⁸ Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 188. See also John D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 391–2. Sawicki also considers a tomb burial unlikely and a lime-lined pit the most plausible reality for the disposal of Jesus' body. See: Marianne Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord: Resurrection and Early Christian Practices* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 180, 257. For consideration and critique of Crossan's position see, W. John Lyons, "On the Life and Death of Joseph of Arimathea," *JSHJ* 2 (2004): 29–53, 46–9; and Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Re-Reading Resurrection." *TJT* 16 (2000): 109–129, 117. D'Angelo considers the Giv'at Ha-Mivtar evidence to rather suggest that crucified remains would not normally be identified and it is only in these extra-ordinary circumstances that a nail has remained to testify to death-by-crucifixion. See, D'Angelo, "Re-Reading," 128, n. 44.

³⁸⁹ Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 167–8.

³⁹⁰ In his Matthew commentary Keener makes an extensive survey of textual evidence concerning Jewish burial practices including: cultures which did not bury; the place of burial in Jewish and broader Mediterranean culture; the role of burial societies to ensure the burial of the poor; the lavish burials of the wealthy; the burial of enemies; and circumstances for the prohibition of the burial of enemies or public mourning. See, Keener, *Matthew*, 692–3.

³⁹¹ For comment see: Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 1209; and Keener, *John* vol. 2, 1157.

For a stray unburied corpse, the directive of interment is also evident. Josephus states, “We must . . . not leave a corpse unburied” (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.211 [Thackeray, LCL]). The later text *b.Semahot* 4.16–17 lays out precise directions for the Jewish priests concerning the burial of a *met miswah*, an unburied corpse found alone, “until enough pallbearers and those to inter it are there” (*b.Sem.* 4.17 [Zlotnick]).³⁹² The text is clear that a priest must enter ritual uncleanness and bury the corpse rather than leave it unburied. The primary issue in the text is clarifying who is required to undertake the matter if there are priests of different standing present, rather than whether burial should be undertaken at all.³⁹³

Concerning the crucified, it is often assumed that the Deuteronomical directive of Deut 21:23 was applied: “When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse.”³⁹⁴ Josephus testifies to this practice saying “ . . . the Jews are so careful about funeral rites that even malefactors who have been sentenced to crucifixion are taken down and buried before sunset” (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.317 [Thackeray, LCL]). However, Josephus recalls that Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BC) had eight hundred (male) captives crucified at Jerusalem; their wives and children were also summoned and killed in front of them. No mention is made of the burial of either crucified captives or the bodies of the women and children.

. . . he [Alexander] brought them up to Jerusalem as prisoners. So furious was he that his savagery went to the length of impiety. He had eight hundred of his captives crucified in the midst of the city, and their wives and children butchered before their eyes Such was the consternation of the people that, on the following night, eight thousand of the hostile faction fled (Josephus, *J.W.* 1.97–8 = *Ant.* 13.380 [Thackeray, LCL])

³⁹² *The Tractate “Mourning,” Semahot: Regulations Relating to Death, Burial and Mourning* is dated between the third and eighth century. Medieval scholars took its Talmudic origins for granted, however this has been disputed by modern scholars. See, Dov Zlotnick, introduction to *The Tractate “Mourning” Semahot: Regulations Relating to Death, Burial and Mourning* (trans. D. Zlotnick; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 1–6.

³⁹³ See for comment on the debate over who should undertake burial and become unclean, James G. Crossley, *The New Testament and Jewish Law: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 47–8.

³⁹⁴ See, Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave. A Commentary on the Passion Narratives of the Four Gospels* (vol. 1; London: A. Cassell, 1994), 532; and Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 1209. Hengel notes the Deuteronomic directive as part of the shame of crucifixion. See, Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 87; Corley, *Women*, 117.

Logistical questions of the burial of such a number of bodies, as well as how so many could simply be left unburied “in the midst of the city” can only be answered by speculation. Josephus records a later, but similar, spectacle of 500 or more Jewish prisoners being crucified a day, under the orders of Titus (Josephus *J.W.* 5.450). Again, no comment about the disposal of the corpses is made. However, both these extravagant accounts take place in the context of conflict/war, and the relevance to the practice in the context of Roman occupation is somewhat restricted.

When discussing Judea as, to borrow Brown’s term, an *extra ordinem* situation, the question which comes to the fore is how far Jewish concerns could and did influence the burial of those executed by Rome. The evidence certainly points to some moderation of the exposure directive at certain times and in certain locations, but questions remain as to a wholesale concession by Rome for the burial, rather than exposure, of the crucified corpse in the province of Judea.

3.1.2 Was Jesus’ Burial A Routine Dishonourable Interment?

In this section we will discuss the suggestion that for executed criminals of the first-century Jewish Courts there may have been a regulation that necessitated their bodies being buried in a separate burial site to the usual ancestral one.³⁹⁵ This site, though communal, was seemingly one which may have allowed identification of the remains. A body was initially placed there to decompose in a first burial, and then the bones gathered and interred in secondary burial.³⁹⁶ The later second/third-century Mishnah *Sanhedrin* records two plots

³⁹⁵ A number of scholars make this suggestion. Two of particular note are, Raymond Brown and Byron McCane whom we will discuss in detail below. See: Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1211–1219; Byron R. McCane, “Where No One Had Yet Been Laid: The Shame of Jesus’ Burial,” in *Authenticating The Activities of Jesus* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 431–452; Byron R. McCane, *Roll Back the Stone: Death and Burial in the World of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003). For further discussion see: William L. Craig, “Was Jesus Buried in Shame? Reflections on B. McCane’s Proposal,” *ExpTim* 115 (2004): 404–409. See also, Richard C. Carrier, “The Burial of Jesus in Light of Jewish Law,” in *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave* (ed. R. M. Price and J. J. Lowder; Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2005), 369–392.

³⁹⁶ See below for a survey of secondary burial.

being available for this purpose to which the bodies of the executed were assigned as to the form of execution they received:

And they would not bury him in the graves of his forefathers, but two cemeteries were prepared for the Court, one for those who were beheaded or strangled and the other for those who were stoned or burned. When the flesh has been consumed, they collect the bones and bury them in their place. (*m. Sanh.* 6.5–6 [Kehati])³⁹⁷

Some debate remains as to whether these ‘cemeteries’ constituted tombs or earth graves.³⁹⁸

The rarity and expense of rock tombs may indicate that earth graves are more likely.³⁹⁹ Also, it is unclear as to whether the family were given the bones back to inter in ancestral graves or the Courts administered the secondary burial as well as the first. The Tosefta, a Jewish text thought to be a later clarifying text to the Mishnah,⁴⁰⁰ states that, “When his flesh has rotted, agents of the court gather up the bones and bury them in a sarcophagus. And even if he were the king of kings, they would not bury him in the burial ground of his ancestors, but in the burial grounds of the court” (*t. Sanh.* 9.8 [Neusner]). In both the Mishnah and Tosefta references it is unclear whether actual identification of an individual’s bones takes place, or whether unidentified skeletons were collected and interred. Certainly the matter of who was administering this secondary burial would play a significant part in answering this question. Only a court burial would be able to dispense with identification (interring remains, as complete as identification and availability allowed, but not necessarily with the knowledge of who each was); presumably a familial burial would necessitate some identification of the correct remains.

³⁹⁷ See: Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 1210; David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1956), 310.

³⁹⁸ See, Craig, “Was Jesus Buried in Shame,” 405.

³⁹⁹ Finegan estimates that tomb burials accounted for only 5 per cent of the burials around Jerusalem during the active use of the tombs. Jack Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 292. See below for discussion.

⁴⁰⁰ Neusner dates The Tosefta between the Mishnah (circa. 200AD) and the Palestinian Talmud (circa. 450AD), he makes clear this is no more than a guess. See, Jacob Neusner, preface to *The Tosefta. Sixth Division: Tohorot (The Order of Purities)*, (trans. J. Neusner; New York: Ktav, 1977), ix–x. For discussion of the dating of the Tosefta and the implications to the passages of interest to us see, Beth A. Berkowitz, *Execution and Invention: Death Penalty Discourse in Early Rabbinic and Christian Cultures* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), 134. Berkowitz includes more recent proposals that the Tosefta may predate the Mishnah.

Beth Berkowitz highlights the dichotomy between the place of family as the ideal and proper place of the burial ritual (functioning both as undertakers and interring the body in a familial place, with deceased ancestors) and the courts, who explicitly deny this right to the condemned. She states:

The Tosefta makes the dichotomy between court and family even sharper, adding two elements not found in the Mishnah . . . the Tosefta thus doubly substitutes the family with the court, not just in the location of burial but also in its preparations. Moreover, the Tosefta emphasizes the utter unbreachability of criminal separation: “even a king of kings” is subject to criminal burial.⁴⁰¹

Raymond Brown and Byron McCane have both forwarded theories that the burial of Jesus was a routine dishonourable interment afforded executed criminals in Judea.⁴⁰² Brown turns to the Gospel of Mark as the source of the most compelling evidence in his argument and for an initial presentation of his hypothesis we must turn to Brown’s article ‘The Burial of Jesus (Mark 15:42-47)’.⁴⁰³ Here he identifies evidence which he suggests indicates that the burial that Joseph of Arimathea undertook, was a formal and routinely dishonourable burial. Regularly undertaken by the Jewish authorities to comply with the Jewish imperative to see all buried, this dishonourable burial posthumously maintained the condemnation of the Jewish Courts. Brown gathers his argument around two suppositions: 1. that the probability of Pilate and the Roman authorities releasing the body of Jesus to a disciple would be low⁴⁰⁴; and 2. the presumption that the Jewish authorities were preoccupied with the matter of removing the body of Jesus from the cross (which may be assuaged by the administration of some kind of dishonourable burial rite). However, Brown is clear that the decision for dishonourable burial was not universal, extending to all crucified corpses, but made in accordance with a delicate balance of variables.

Whether the Jewish Council saw it as necessary for Jesus to be buried dishonourably rests, for Brown, upon the question of whether they understood him as executed in accordance

⁴⁰¹ Berkowitz, *Execution*, 136.

⁴⁰² For Raymond Brown’s hypothesis see, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1211–1219. For Byron McCane’s see, Byron R. McCane, “Where No One Had Yet Been Laid: The Shame of Jesus’ Burial,” in *Authenticating The Activities of Jesus* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 431–452. See also the later, more detailed, presentation of his hypothesis in, Byron R. McCane, *Roll Back the Stone: Death and Burial in the World of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003).

⁴⁰³ Raymond E. Brown, “The Burial of Jesus (Mark 15:42–47),” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 233–45.

⁴⁰⁴ Brown, “The Burial,” 236.

with their own charge of blasphemy (which Josephus indicates is subject to dishonourable burial: Josephus, *Ant.* 4.202, 5.44) or whether the fact that Pilate condemned him as 'King of the Jews' exempted Jesus because it was regarded as not in accordance with Jewish law and therefore not necessarily qualifying for dishonourable burial.⁴⁰⁵ In the case of the Gospel of Mark, Brown's article moves steadily towards a conclusion that the Markan burial was dishonourable and prescribed.⁴⁰⁶ He notes that Mark speaks of the 'whole' Sanhedrin deciding that Jesus should die (Mark 14:55, 15:1) and does not make special note to exclude Joseph from the decision.⁴⁰⁷ He believes it tenable that a Sanhedrist would be concerned that the body of the condemned and executed Jesus be buried and that this desire would be "perfectly consistent with Jewish piety."⁴⁰⁸ With regard to actually obtaining the body from Pilate, Brown claims that Joseph's status as a Sanhedrin member and fellow judge of Christ would have afforded him some protection against an accusation of collaboration, when he went forward with 'daring' (Mark 15:43) to make the request. Therefore, Pilate could maintain any directive not to release *maiestas* criminals to family, friends or followers. Brown also points out his opinion that a traditional reading of the Markan burial as rushed, but honourable, is untenable.⁴⁰⁹

Overall, Brown proposes that Joseph of Arimathea was acting as a pious Sanhedrist who had been responsible for sentencing Jesus and simply went forward to request to bury Jesus to fulfil the interpretation of the Deuteronomic law which required that bodies hanged (or crucified) be buried before sunset.⁴¹⁰ Brown considers the later Gospels' burial passages to be attempts to obscure the fact of Jesus' dishonourable interment and perhaps incorporate a later tradition of the Christianization of Joseph of Arimathea. Concerning the Gospel of

⁴⁰⁵ See, Brown, "The Burial," 238.

⁴⁰⁶ Brown proposes that the later addendums to the Lukan and Matthean burial narratives may indicate a reformation of the Markan tradition into one which includes an honourable burial. See, Brown, "The Burial," 242–3.

⁴⁰⁷ As does Matt 27:57 in its omission of the information that Joseph was a Sanhedrist, and Luke 23:51 in its explicit mention that Joseph had not consented. See, Brown, "The Burial," 239.

⁴⁰⁸ Brown, "The Burial," 240.

⁴⁰⁹ Brown, "The Burial," 243.

⁴¹⁰ Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 1219.

John's account of the burial of Christ, Brown only briefly addresses the Johannine text, choosing to focus his investigation on the Markan account as the place where his theory is most persuasively upheld. In the Johannine burial Brown finds the interpretation of Jesus' burial as dishonourable harder to sustain.⁴¹¹ Here, according to Brown, the development of the Joseph figure as a disciple and believer is substantially evolved and the appearance of the Nicodemus tradition, specifically the copious offering of spices, offers compelling evidence of the writer of John narrating an honourable burial.⁴¹² Fellow scholars have born this interpretation out. Schnackenburg speaks of an "exceedingly dignified burial";⁴¹³ Ernst Haenchen says, ". . . Jesus, in spite of everything, received an honourable burial and not the ignominious end of a law breaker."⁴¹⁴

Byron McCane makes a different pan-Gospel case for the dishonourable-burial theory in his article "*Where No One Had Yet Been Laid' The Shame of Jesus' Burial.*"⁴¹⁵ McCane's argument is based on the assumption that an honourable Jewish burial required 1. to be interred in a family grave with one's ancestors and 2. to be publicly mourned. Jesus experiences neither in the Gospel texts.⁴¹⁶ McCane draws upon a body of evidence which takes its root in the Old Testament (1 Kgs 13:21–22; Jer 22:18–19) and goes on to identify an example found in the writings of Josephus of an "ignominious burial proper to the condemned" (Josephus, *Ant.* 5.44). The two specific requirements he proposes are drawn from the Mishnah⁴¹⁷ (*m. Sanh.* 6:6) which, as we have noted above, indicates that criminals condemned by a Jewish court were not interred with family in a first burial and there is some

⁴¹¹ Brown does however include the Johannine account in his reflection on who may have buried Jesus (John 19:31) and their motivation for doing so. His interpretation, drawing on Acts 13:27–29, is that the Jewish authorities requested that the body be buried. See, Brown, "The Burial," 242 and 244.

⁴¹² Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1258.

⁴¹³ Schnackenburg, *John vol. 3*, 298.

⁴¹⁴ Haenchen, *John 2*, 202.

⁴¹⁵ Byron R. McCane, "Where No One Had Yet Been Laid: The Shame of Jesus' Burial," in *Authenticating The Activities of Jesus* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 431–452.

⁴¹⁶ McCane, "Where," 440.

⁴¹⁷ McCane defends the centrality of the Mishnah in his theory citing: 1. It has some proven reliability concerning burial practices and 2. Burial customs are very slow to alter or change. See, McCane, "Where," 437, n. 9. The Mishnah is a source which Brown discounts as a reliable informant of Jewish first-century burial customs maintaining that a change in burial style was reported to have been introduced in the intervening time. See, Brown, "The Burial," 242. O'Rahilly also limits the usefulness of reference to the Mishnah and the Talmuds see, Alfred O'Rahilly, "Jewish Burial," *IER* 58 (1941): 123–135, 123.

uncertainty concerning second burial. This also implies that mourning rites associated with first burial were kept private amongst the family unit.

McCane, like Brown, makes the assumption that the Jewish sentencing court had some kind of responsibility to fulfil the dishonourable burial requirement of its condemned. For McCane, the believer and follower Joseph-character is a christianized personification of the Sanhedrist who fulfilled this task.⁴¹⁸ Interestingly, unlike Brown, McCane believes that the Johannine account actually contributes evidence to the claim that Jesus' burial was dishonourable. He points to the Johannine definition of Jesus' tomb as unused, asserting that it offers no redemption from the shame of this ritual. He states,

In fact a new tomb, never before used by sinner or saint, would be the only culturally acceptable alternative to a criminal's burial place, for it would be the only other way to preserve the boundary of shame which separated Jesus from his people . . . they [the Gospel writers] do not deny the shame of Jesus' burial; they merely spare him the disgrace of being placed in a criminals' tomb.⁴¹⁹

When addressing the scholarship which claims that the Johannine burial was honourable because of Nicodemus' offering, McCane circumvents a conflict by relegating Nicodemus to a matter of Christian theology and fantasy rather than a historical figure to be considered in this debate.⁴²⁰ McCane holds to the opinion that all four Gospels are consistent in depicting Jesus' burial as shameful.⁴²¹

William Craig offers an extensive critique of McCane's thesis. He marshals his argument around two weak areas of the proposal: the scant knowledge of what dishonourable burial actually might be and might prescribe in the first century (a problem Brown openly recognises) and the difficult question of why, if the burial was routine and dishonourable, was it in an expensive and exclusive rock tomb rather than a dirt grave?⁴²² Regarding McCane's conjecture of what dishonourable burial constituted, Craig sees as insufficient and overly simplistic McCane's reduction that, because a family tomb and mourners constituted an

⁴¹⁸ McCane, "Where," 448.

⁴¹⁹ McCane, "Where," 448.

⁴²⁰ See, McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*, 99–102.

⁴²¹ McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*, 102.

⁴²² See, William L. Craig, "Was Jesus Buried in Shame? Reflections on B. McCane's Proposal," *ExpTim* 115 (2004): 404–409.

honourable burial, the reverse must be true and the absence of them must be indicative of a dishonourable burial.⁴²³

Craig goes on to make a case that an opulent tomb being used as a communal criminal burial plot is an untenable proposal and, following Crossan, thinks a dirt grave more likely.⁴²⁴ Interestingly Brown, like McCane, maintains the possibility of a tomb as a criminal burial site, identifying as evidence its nearness to the place of execution (John 19:42) and the unlikely situation of a respected Sanhedrin member having a family tomb close to a public execution site (Matt 27:60).⁴²⁵ Beasley-Murray plots a fine course between the two, proposing that the Jewish authorities of John 19:31 would have gained permission to bury the body of Jesus in the communal criminal plot and that Joseph of Arimathea takes an “uncommonly courageous” step when he acts to “disassociate himself from the Sanhedrin and to show his sympathy with Jesus” in the tomb-burial he undertook.⁴²⁶ Finally, Craig adds to his argument the suggestion that the early church would have had no more a problem with a dishonourable burial than they did with Jesus’ dishonourable death [Blinzer]⁴²⁷ and the belief that the ‘laying’ rather than ‘casting’ of the body terminology to be indicative of respect rather than dishonour.⁴²⁸

The dishonourable burial theory is at times inconsistent in its evidence, primarily dividing between Brown’s case for a historical dishonourable burial, with evidence drawn only from Mark, and McCane’s case which encompasses all the Gospels as evidence. In addition we can identify that the later sources are considered problematic in some quarters. However, it

⁴²³ He states, “In general McCane’s analysis suffers from the tendency to think in terms of black and white, of treating ‘dishonourable burial’ as the synonym of ‘not an honourable burial’ But why think in such black and white categories, rather than take honourable burial and dishonourable burial as two poles of a spectrum linked by shades of grey? We know that different degrees of honour could be conferred on a burial, regal burials being the epitome of honour.” Craig, “Was Jesus Buried in Shame,” 406–7.

⁴²⁴ Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 188; Craig, “Was Jesus Buried in Shame,” 405.

⁴²⁵ Brown, “The Burial,” 243.

⁴²⁶ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 358. And so for Beasley-Murray the Johannine ‘new’ tomb secured by Joseph was not the criminal resting-place supposed by Brown and McCane.

⁴²⁷ McCane cites Blinzer, ‘Die Grablegung Jesu in historischer Sicht’, in Resurrexit, ed. Edouard Dhonis (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974). See, Craig, “Was Jesus Buried in Shame,” 408.

⁴²⁸ Craig, “Was Jesus Buried in Shame,” 408–9.

is clear that within the debate there appears to be substance to the idea, and certainly some merit in considering the possibility, of the dishonourable burial of criminals when reading the burial of Jesus. Within this thesis we will go on to consider the dynamics in the Johannine burial viewed through the lens of dishonourable burial and explore the possible ramifications of this information within our reading of the Johannine burial. Our discourse of Johannine darkness in terms of death, trauma and abjection takes an interesting turn if we bring the possibility of dishonourable burial at the hands of the authorities into dialogue with our feminist perspective. To this we will return in Chapter Five.

3.2 First-Century Jewish Funerary Customs

We will now move on to survey normative first-century Jewish funerary practices. This information will offer a frame of reference in later chapters. In our consideration of the burial account in John's Gospel, recourse to normal expectations and practices, not just normal practice after execution, offers a measure of what, within the literary world, has been dispensed with and violated in the narrative. This will be particularly relevant in our discussion of the characters of Jesus' mother and relatives, and their supposed funerary traditions and values. Placing our attention on the burial ritual, we acknowledge that just as the expectations around 'normal' death are violated in the crucifixion narrative, expectations around 'normative' burial may well be violated in the burial account, and so we make this study of normal burial in preparation for this discussion.

The Jewish sensitivity towards burial is apparent from the available literature and evidence, and their religious and cultural expressions of that priority are complex. Of course, no conclusive survey is attainable and we acknowledge that vital evidence may have been lost. However, below we endeavour to put together a comprehensive picture of normative first-century burial schema and funerary practices. Again, we do not propose to contribute new hypotheses to this area, but our aim is to survey that which is already available.

3.2.1 Preparation of the Body

Concerning ritual burial practices, the Jewish faith laid down various directives and recommendations. If we turn again to Babylonian Talmud *Semahot* we see from its first chapter that the primary instruction is that no mourning ritual or observance should be undertaken until the dying person has passed on.

His jaws may not be bound, nor his orifices stopped, and no metal vessel or any other cooling object may be placed upon his belly until the moment he dies
He may not be stirred, nor may he be washed, and he should not be laid upon sand or salt, until the moment he dies
His eyes may not be closed. Whosoever touches him or stirs him sheds his blood.
Rabbi Meir used to compare a dying man to a flickering lamp: the moment one touches it he puts it out. So, too, whosoever closes the eyes of a dying man is accounted as though he has snuffed out his life. (*b.Sem.* 1.2–4 [Zlotnick])

The instructions of *b.Semahot* 1 show concern to preserve the rights of the dying person up until the moment of death and also to convey the belief that anyone who, even accidentally, hastens the death with actions of mourning is then accountable for that death.⁴²⁹ After this moment of death has been assured, the text delivers a rich account of initial processes. Among the first actions was the ritual closing of the deceased's eyes. Safrai refers to this practice linking back to Gen 46:4 and God's promise to Jacob that Joseph will 'close his eyes [at death].'⁴³⁰

The practice of closing the eyes of the dead was also vital in Roman mourning ritual.⁴³¹ *b.Semahot* also relates laying out the dead body upon sand or salt, placing cooling items in the body and the stopping of bodily orifices as part of the post-mortem rituals. In the late twentieth century there was a heated debate over the proposal that Jewish people laid coins

⁴²⁹ At times the religious desire for a speedy burial sometimes meant that a person was interred before death had occurred. *Semahot* 8.1 relates stories of two such instances of people who went on to live a number of years after being discovered buried alive. For comment see, McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*, 31. And S. Safrai and M. Stern, eds., *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (CRINT; vol. 2; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974–1976), 773.

⁴³⁰ Safrai and Stern, *The Jewish People*, 773.

⁴³¹ Hope, *Death*, 94; Toynbee, *Death*, 44; Safrai also notes that it may be attested to as an early custom by observance in Roman and Hellenistic traditions see, Safrai and Stern, *The Jewish People*, 773.

on the deceased's eyes as a burial custom. After the discovery of coins in skulls in tombs outside Jericho, it was suggested that the laying of coins on the eyes of the dead, may have been a ritual more widely practiced amongst the Jewish people than previously thought.⁴³² It was generally concluded that it was highly improbable that this practice had been adopted by the Jewish people.⁴³³

b.Sem. 12.10 contains a gender-specific directive about whom may handle the corpse. Women may prepare and dress the corpse of either men or women, but men may only attend other men. Safrai notes a burial on the eve of the Passover where the women undertook it because the men did not want to become ritually impure (*t. Ohiloth* 3.9).⁴³⁴ O'Rahilly identifies Acts 9:37 as the solitary example of washing a corpse (here Tabitha/Dorcas) in the New Testament.⁴³⁵ Although there is only one New Testament reference, the washing of the body is considered a standard post-mortem practice in the first century and the scarcity of references may be indicative of a universal assumption of the ritual.⁴³⁶ The third-century Mishnah *Shabbat* (*m. Šabb.* 23.5) lays out detailed directives concerning what may and may not be undertaken on a Sabbath when preparing a corpse. Washing, anointing and laying out the corpse on sand for preservation purposes, as well as the practice of binding the chin are all permitted. However moving even a limb is not permissible, nor is closing the eyes of the dead. This effectively inhibited preparing a corpse on a Sabbath.⁴³⁷

⁴³² This conjecture was linked in an earlier discussion in the desire to authenticate the Turin Shroud. See, Virginia Bortin, "Science and the Shroud of Turin," *BA* 43 (1980): 109–117, 112 and Francis L. Filias, "The Shroud of Turin: Roman Coins and Funerary Customs," *BA* 44 (1981): 135–137. For a rebuttal of Bortin's suggestion that it was practiced see: Levi Y. Rahmani, "The Shroud of Turin," *BA* 43 (1980): 197.

⁴³³ Rachel Hachlili and Ann Killebrew, "Was the Coin-on-Eye Custom a Jewish Burial Practice in the Second Temple Period?" *BA* 46 (1983): 147–153. Note also: William Meacham, "On the Archaeological Evidence for a Coin-on-Eye Jewish Burial Custom in the First Century AD," *BA* 49 (1986): 56–9. Meacham concedes the custom was 'rare' but nonetheless practiced amongst Jews. Kurtz and Boardman attest to the Greek custom of putting one or two coins in the mouth, hand or tomb of the corpse as an offering to the mythical ferryman *Charon* who was to take the deceased across the river *Styx* in their journey to the other world. See, Kurtz and Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*, 211. However they consider this practice to be only "occasional" (331). Hope notes it as a Roman custom: Hope, *Death*, 98. Juvenal *Sat.* 3.257–278 (2nd c.) laments the lack of a coin in the mouth to pay the ferryman.

⁴³⁴ Safrai and Stern, *The Jewish People*, 781.

⁴³⁵ He also notes that there are no examples in the Old Testament. See, O'Rahilly, "Jewish Burial," 123.

⁴³⁶ Corley points out that the Hebrew Bible also does not include mention of the washing of corpses. See, Corley, *Women*, 114, n. 74.

⁴³⁷ Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1162.

They may make ready all the needs of a corpse, they may anoint and wash it, provided that they do not move its limb. They may take away the cushion from under it, and place it on the sand so that it will keep. They may tie the jaw—not so that it will rise, but so that it may not increase They may not close the eyes of a corpse on Shabbat, and not on a weekday with the departure of the soul. And if one closes the eyes with the departure of the soul, then such a one sheds blood. (*m. Šabb. 23.5* [Kehati and Levin])⁴³⁸

In Roman burial washing of the corpse is also considered typical. The women of the house or male *pollinctores* (a slave specifically hired to wash and/or anoint a corpse⁴³⁹) would have then anointed, dressed and placed flowers on the body.⁴⁴⁰ Keener considers evidence sufficient to regard washing a corpse as ordinary practice in Mediterranean antiquity.⁴⁴¹ Safrai also attests to the practice as being well established in the first century.⁴⁴²

Concerning the burial of Jesus, none of the canonical Gospel burial accounts include any narration of washing the body of Jesus, although the Gospel of Peter does: “And he [Joseph] took the Lord and washed him and wrapped him in linen and brought him unto his own sepulchre, which is called the Garden of Joseph” (*Gos. Pet. 6:24*). Schnackenburg identifies this peculiarity, noting that: “The washing of the body, the most important service rendered to a dead person, is, extraordinarily, not mentioned by any evangelist.”⁴⁴³ Brown goes on to point out that washing the corpse of a crucified person would have been a basic and necessary service for the victim of this particularly bloody form of execution. He also notes that Mishnah *Ohalot* (*m. °Ohal. 2:2*) specifies that blood on a corpse is unclean.⁴⁴⁴ However, Brown maintains that even washing may not be rendered to the body of Jesus if the burial that Joseph performed was a matter of religious duty.⁴⁴⁵ Other arguments have been forwarded that the corpse might not have been washed due to a Mishnaic directive to leave

⁴³⁸ See for comment: Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1243; Safrai and Stern, *The Jewish People*, 773.

⁴³⁹ Valerie M. Hope and Eireann Marshall, *Death and Disease in the Ancient City* (London: Routledge, 2000), 158–9.

⁴⁴⁰ Hope, *Death*, 97.

⁴⁴¹ Keener references *Homer Il. 18.345, 350; 24.582; Euripides Phoen. 1667; Virgil, Aen. 6.219; 9.487; Ovid Metam. 13.531–532; Apuleius Metam. 9.30; Acts 9:37 as examples*. He also attests to evidence that anointing appeared to be a ‘frequent’ practice as well. He identifies *m. Šabb. 23:5* as legitimising these two actions on the Sabbath. Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1162, n. 827. See also, Toynbee, *Death*, 44.

⁴⁴² Safrai and Stern, *The Jewish People*, 776.

⁴⁴³ Schnackenburg, *John vol. 3*, 298.

⁴⁴⁴ Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1244.

⁴⁴⁵ Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1246.

life blood or mingled blood (that which is a mix of blood from the dying body and blood from the corpse) upon the body. This has particularly been referenced in relation to the twentieth-century debate over the authenticity of the Turin Shroud.⁴⁴⁶

3.2.2 Grave Clothes

The Jewish corpse would be bound and wrapped in cloth.⁴⁴⁷ Alfred O’Rahilly believes this may have included some binding to secure the hands either together or alongside the body and also the tying of the ankles.⁴⁴⁸ The Lazarus story makes some indication of this process, “The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth” (John 11:44). Jack Finegan indicates that bodies were usually “wrapped in a winding sheet”⁴⁴⁹ before interment. The linen cloth was usually expensive and is thought to have added to the financial hardship of the grieving family. Around the close of the first century a social shift towards flax, a cheaper cloth than linen, as acceptable burial dress is evident. The funerary tradition of Gamaliel II identifies his funeral as the definitive moment when the tradition changed. He was buried in startlingly inexpensive flaxen grave cloths, by his prior arrangement, thus legitimizing for the poorer masses the use of flax in this manner.⁴⁵⁰ While we recognise that this story may be a reflection of rather than the instigation for this social move, it offers evidence that acceptable grave dress was changing.

⁴⁴⁶ See, Bonnie B. Lavoie et al., “Jesus, the Turin Shroud, and Jewish Burial Customs,” *BA* 45 (1982): 5–6.

⁴⁴⁷ For archaeological evidence of linen found in Second Temple tombs see, Rachel Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rights in the Second Temple Period* (SupJSJ 94; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 480–1.

⁴⁴⁸ However, O’Rahilly makes reference to *Semahot* 1.2–5 which does not appear to offer evidence of tying limbs, only noting binding the chin. See, O’Rahilly, “Jewish Burial,” 126. McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*, 30.

⁴⁴⁹ Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, 267.

⁴⁵⁰ See, Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, 1,4; Daube, *The New Testament*, 311–2.

When we look at the Gospel descriptions of the grave clothes of Jesus, we find that there is a measure of incompatibility between the Gospel of John and the Synoptic accounts. The Synoptic Gospels narrate that Joseph of Arimathea wrapped Jesus in a σινδών or *sheet*. According to Brown, σινδών can indicate “. . . linen material of good quality . . . something like a tunic, drape, veil, or sheet of that material.”⁴⁵¹ However, the exact nature or size of the Synoptic σινδών remains unclear. The Johannine account lacks the singular σινδών and uses the plural ὀθόνιον, *cloths*.⁴⁵² The Gospel of John also diverges from the Synoptic tradition in its use of the verb δεῖν (*to bind*), where the Gospel of Mark takes ἐνειλεῖν (*to tie up*) and Matthew and Luke ἐντυλίσσειν (*to wrap up*). And finally, later in the text—John 20:7—we find the unique Johannine inclusion of a σουδάριον (*face napkin*) as part of Jesus’ burial dress.

The canonical inconsistency of the Johannine ὀθόνιον has provoked a number of explanations, including a brief moment of notoriety in the twentieth century m \acute{e} l \acute{e} e to prove or disprove the historicity of the Turin Shroud.⁴⁵³ Irrespective of the Shroud debate, in mainstream biblical scholarship a reading of bandage strips of cloth and an Egyptian style wrapping is largely discounted,⁴⁵⁴ as is the idea that Joseph of Arimathea tore the σινδών into ὀθόνιον, or that the σουδάριον was actually the σινδών.⁴⁵⁵ Haenchen dismisses the Johannine ὀθόνιον as an outright authorial error stating, “The author of this verse [19:40] was not acquainted with Jewish burial customs, nor did he know much about embalming”.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵¹ Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 1244–5.

⁴⁵² For an alternative case that the four Gospels are in harmony on this point see, Alfred O’Rahilly, “The Burial of Christ,” *IER* 58 (1941): 302–316 and 493–503; 311–12. William M. Thompson also does not consider the two descriptions to be mutually exclusive, interpreting ὀθόνιον as a genetic plural of σινδών. Thompson’s argument is engaged in the Shroud debate. See, William M. Thompson, *The Jesus Debate: A Survey and Synthesis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 240.

⁴⁵³ A number of scholars turn to the Gospel of John’s indication of a plurality of grave wrappings to make their case against the Shroud, or alternatively they, in the contending position, address the matter of the Johannine σινδών in their arguments. For a sample see: Mary P. Shorter, “The Sign of the Linen Cloths: The Fourth Gospel and the Holy Shroud of Turin,” *JSNT* 17 (1983): 90–96; Edward A. Wuenschel, “The Shroud of Turin and the Burial of Christ 2—John’s Account of the Burial,” *CBQ* 8 (1946): 135–178; Bonnie B. Lavoie et al., “Jesus, the Turin Shroud, and Jewish Burial Customs,” *BA* 45 (1982): 5–6.

⁴⁵⁴ Again this particularly appears in connection with the Shroud debate. As a proponent of this position Brown references, Bulst W., “Novae in sepulturam Jesu inquisitiones” *VD* 31 (1953), 257–74, 352–59 (on the Shroud of Turin). German form in *MTZ* 3 (1952), 244–55. See, Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 1264.

⁴⁵⁵ See, Shorter, “The Sign,” 91–2.

⁴⁵⁶ Haenchen, *John* 2, 196.

Brown identifies the absence of an established burial tradition upon which to draw as the reason for the Gospel's differences and believes the writers to have simply drawn upon that which they knew in the descriptive elements of the burial narratives.⁴⁵⁷

3.2.3 Grave Goods

Along with sourcing suitable grave wrappings for the deceased, a number of funerary articles could be collected and interred along with the body. Excavations of first-century tombs have produced items such as lamps, perfume bottles, ointment jars, jewellery, weapons, and mirrors.⁴⁵⁸ Rachel Hachlili identifies three types of grave goods:

1. Personal Possessions.
2. Common everyday items.
3. Objects made especially for the grave (these however were very rare in Jewish tombs).⁴⁵⁹

Hachlili highlights the presence of *unguentaria*—clay vessels—within Second Temple tombs as “common.”⁴⁶⁰ What they were actually used for is somewhat disputed. The form of the vessel indicates that they would have contained some form of liquid—water, oil, wine, honey—although other scholars propose dried herbs or spices, and some even suggest that they provided a small light. Their contents may have been left intact as a grave good offering, or may have been consumed either during the preparation of the body or, some have suggested, in a post-interment act of anointing. This may have been motivated by a desire to aid decomposition or perfume the tomb.⁴⁶¹ Hachlili states,

Other possibilities are that the liquid contained in the *unguentaria* could help decompose the body; the perfume in some of the vessels could add a pleasant scent and prevent bad odor (BT Brachot 53A; Rubin 1997: 123–128). Another suggestion is that ceramic *unguentaria*, common in the grave goods of the Greek, Hellenistic, and

⁴⁵⁷ Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1265.

⁴⁵⁸ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 376. See also, Robert H. Smith, “The Tomb of Jesus,” *BA* 30 (1967): 74–90, 89.

⁴⁵⁹ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 376–446.

⁴⁶⁰ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 383.

⁴⁶¹ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 383–5.

early Roman periods, functioned as a popular offering throughout the Mediterranean world (Anderson-Stojanovic 1987:106).⁴⁶² Donna Kurtz and John Boardman note the use of oil in Greek customs, “The oiling of the body was an important part of the ritual but the offering of oil after the burial seems also to have been a regular practice, at least in Athens, and at the time of burial the offering of one or more oil flasks may have become a normal practice for kin or guests.”⁴⁶³

Overall there is a wide diversity of Jewish grave goods, but Hachlili points out that, comparatively, Jewish use of grave goods appears restrained. She says, “The grave goods were generally frugal and sparing, displaying restraint; the custom in Jewish tombs was to bury the corpse with few belongings or offerings, signifying that the buriers in most cases were trying not to demonstrate affluence and suggesting eschewal of display.”⁴⁶⁴ In contrast, in the Roman world, Toynbee identifies the use of grave-goods, which include diverse items such as cooking vessels, children’s toys, gaming counters, pottery and funerary portraits.⁴⁶⁵ In the Roman context it appears that expense and desire were the only inhibitors in what one might inter with their deceased loved ones. As for the Greek tradition, Kurtz and Boardman identify similar extravagance in funerary customs and “splendid offerings” for the dead.⁴⁶⁶ However, they point out that an absence of grave goods may not indicate an absence of wealth, especially noting extravagantly constructed tombs which, when opened, are found to be without grave offerings.⁴⁶⁷

3.2.4 Tombs

⁴⁶² Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 385.

⁴⁶³ Kurtz and Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*, 209.

⁴⁶⁴ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 375.

⁴⁶⁵ Toynbee, *Death*, 52.

⁴⁶⁶ Kurtz and Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*, 200.

⁴⁶⁷ Kurtz and Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*, 203.

When tombs were used for burial there were often dramatic variations in size and designs of that which we could term a ‘tomb.’⁴⁶⁸ Some were elaborately carved and finished with artwork and ornamental designs,⁴⁶⁹ while others appeared rough and clumsily hewn with poor construction, even making the space awkward and impractical. It has been documented that most Jewish tombs in the vicinity of Jerusalem were of the latter, less elaborate, kind. Their dimensions were largely irregular and the quality of excavation poor with little decoration.⁴⁷⁰ Some *loculus* niches were so badly dug at clumsy angles that, on occasion, they actually ran into each other.⁴⁷¹ Toynbee does note however, that there are examples of more elaborate tombs excavated in the Jerusalem vicinity; particularly impressive of which are those hewn into cliffs or walls of rock and combining Jewish funerary tradition with Greco-Roman architecture and sculpture.⁴⁷² The tombs were mainly located outside Jerusalem’s walls, in accordance with Jewish purity regulations and few have been found within the old city limits. Around 800 tombs have been excavated around the city providing a rich amount of data about Jewish burial customs.⁴⁷³

The *loculi* or *kokhim* (*kokh*) niches were body-sized tunnels cut into the rock in which to slide a body either head or feet first.⁴⁷⁴ There is some evidence to suggest that the body was placed first into a wooden coffin and then inserted into the *loculi*.⁴⁷⁵ The small opening could then be closed with a stone slab and sometimes the name of the deceased was inscribed on or just above it.⁴⁷⁶ Alternatively an *arcosolia* niche was a lateral ledge hewn into the rock with

⁴⁶⁸ Drawing information predominantly from the fourth-century lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem Finegan presents a reconstruction of the style and shape he believes the tomb of Jesus to have been. See, Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, 267–8. Perhaps the most striking suggestion is that of a rock-cave anti-chamber, which the entrance of the tomb is situated within.

⁴⁶⁹ See, Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 29–30.

⁴⁷⁰ Toynbee notes that any decoration was usually non-figurative and symbolic of new life and hope beyond the grave. See, Toynbee, *Death*, 190.

⁴⁷¹ McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*, 35.

⁴⁷² Toynbee, *Death*, 188.

⁴⁷³ For an extensive survey of the tombs around Jerusalem see, Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 1–4.

⁴⁷⁴ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 10–11, 55–7.

⁴⁷⁵ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 75–94, 457–60. It is held that the wooden coffin was probably used more widely than can be evidenced, because of the decomposition of the wood. See also, Amos Kloner, “A Tomb of the Second Temple Period at French Hill, Jerusalem,” *IEJ* 30 (1980): 99–108, 108.

⁴⁷⁶ Smith, “The Tomb,” 87.

an arch over it. These tombs are less evident and were probably more expensive to create. The usual practice for *arcosolia* tombs was to dig only three ledges, one on each wall, for three bodies, making the tomb less economical, although some evidence suggests that the *arcosolia* tombs were used for ossuaries as well as bodies or they were combined with *loculi* niches.⁴⁷⁷ Bodies could also be laid on a low shelf around a standing pit or, within richer tombs, in limestone sarcophagi.⁴⁷⁸ It is often assumed that the writer of John had the latter *arcosolia* niche or the stone-shelf in mind when narrating the interment of Jesus. The mention of angels seated where the body of Jesus had been laid, “one at the head and one at the feet” (John 20:12) appears to suggest the open *arcosolia* niche or the stone-shelf position to make this possible.⁴⁷⁹ Some Jerusalem tombs also featured a seating area outside the entrance where relatives could gather and mourn or conduct ritual meals with the dead; occasionally a ritual bath was included in the complex.⁴⁸⁰

While considering the possibilities in the nature of the Johannine tomb, we must also highlight the apparent rarity of a rock-hewn tomb being used at all for a burial. Toynbee points out that inhumation was largely a Semitic peculiarity at a time when the majority of the Roman world was cremating its dead.⁴⁸¹ Finegan offers the surprising estimation that approximately 500 tombs are known around Jerusalem and that, over the totality of their active use, they would have served a mere 5 per cent of the burials that would be assumed for a city of Jerusalem’s size.⁴⁸² Finegan proposes that they were utilised only by a wealthy minority and that the mass population interred remains in simple graves in the earth or, for some, a natural cave.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁷ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 69–70.

⁴⁷⁸ See, Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 10–11; Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, 267–8, 292–318. See also, McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*, 33–6.

⁴⁷⁹ See, Smith, “The Tomb,” 89; and Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, 268. Smith also considers viable the fact that the writer of John may have been confused about Palestinian customs.

⁴⁸⁰ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 10, 57–61. Hachlili notes that the Jewish practice of eating with the dead and death-anniversary meals is disputed.

⁴⁸¹ Toynbee, *Death*, 190.

⁴⁸² Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, 292.

⁴⁸³ Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, 292.

3.2.5 Stone Seal

A rock-hewn tomb nearly always featured a type of stone seal to close the tomb off. The style of stone varied significantly, ranging from a spherical boulder shape to a heavy flat wheel shape, to simply a large mass of rock. Hachlili suggests that small, more easily moved stone seals were used while the tomb was still active and the larger, more permanent stones, were put in place when the seal was final.⁴⁸⁴ An exception to the single large stone seal is the rarer use of multiple small stones or bricks with plaster to secure the tomb; in particular single *Kokh* tombs at Jericho have been found with this feature.⁴⁸⁵ Finegan suggests that the rolling-disc stone was exemplary of Jewish practice pre AD.70.⁴⁸⁶ Stone doors were rare, but examples have been discovered around Jerusalem. Hachlili helpfully presents a comprehensive list⁴⁸⁷ and a rare ornate carved-stone door, complete with metal hinges, is documented by Robert Smith.⁴⁸⁸

Brown identifies the issue of whether Jesus' tomb was cut as a vertical or horizontal shaft as pertinent to the question of the form of the stone seal. He proposes that the Gospels' descriptive use of the verbs "to roll" (προσκηλειν, αποκηλειν, ανακψηλειν) are indicative of a horizontal rather than vertical entrance shaft (which would necessitate that an adult stoop or crawl in) and he concludes that a disc/wheel shaped stone or a boulder would be most likely.⁴⁸⁹ Hachlili notes that the *loculi* tombs usually had a small entrance, which required that one stoop to enter.⁴⁹⁰

3.2.6 Secondary Burial

⁴⁸⁴ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 64.

⁴⁸⁵ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 64.

⁴⁸⁶ For photographic examples of early tomb stones see, Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, 294–5 (early/late Bronze Age boulder and rock-mass stones); 314, 319 (first-century rolling-disc stone).

⁴⁸⁷ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 64–66.

⁴⁸⁸ Smith, "The Tomb," 87.

⁴⁸⁹ Brown concludes his preference to be a boulder shaped stone to offer sufficient space for the angel of Matt. 28:2 to be able to sit upon it. Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1247–8.

⁴⁹⁰ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 62.

For secondary burial, the body was allowed to decay, either in tomb or earth, until the flesh had decomposed (*b.Sem.* 12.7). Some propose that this time was one year,⁴⁹¹ although evidence is questionable.⁴⁹² Hachlili comments,

Moreover, many years would have to elapse for a body to decompose inside a closed tomb in the dry Jericho climate. Perhaps there was a special structure where the deceased were placed, or an area where they were buried in shallow graves, until only the bones remained Another possibility is that some special sort of spice was sprinkled on the body that accelerated decomposition and enabled relatives to collect clean bones sometime later.⁴⁹³

After decomposition the relatives of the dead person may have gone and, in a final ritual of mourning, collected the bones, usually into an ossuary.⁴⁹⁴ *b.Sem.* 12.3–9 contains specific directions concerning ossilegium. These small boxes of wood or stone (usually limestone) and occasionally clay could be plain or ornate. Ossuaries were prevalent around the Jerusalem area from the first century (usually dated around the reign of Herod) until early third century.⁴⁹⁵ Although popular, secondary burial did not necessarily involve an ossuary collection and other forms of secondary burial are evident. Bones could be gathered into pits or niches carved out of the wall of the tomb; they could simply even be swept together on the floor.⁴⁹⁶

Levi Rahmani highlights the secondary burial of the condemned in his survey of Jewish funerary practices.⁴⁹⁷ He proposes that bones were gathered and given back to the family after a year had passed and this was motivated by the belief that decomposition of the flesh was an atoning and pain-filled experience for the deceased, after which sins were

⁴⁹¹ Rahmani, "Ancient, Part One," 175.

⁴⁹² Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord*, 257.

⁴⁹³ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 483–4.

⁴⁹⁴ *Sem.* 12.7 specifies that a person may not collect the bones of his or her parents. For a detailed survey of ossuaries see, Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, 335–8; Levi Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part Four," *BA* 45 (1982): 109–119.

⁴⁹⁵ Rahmani, "Ancient, Part Four," 109. See also: McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*, 39.

⁴⁹⁶ McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*, 39.

⁴⁹⁷ Rahmani writes an in-depth series of four articles in *Biblical Archaeologist* detailing various aspects of Jewish funerary customs. See, Levi Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part One," *BA* 44 (1981): 171–177; Levi Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part Two," *BA* 44 (1981): 229–235; Levi Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part Three," *BA* 45 (1982): 43–53; Levi Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part Four," *BA* 45 (1982): 109–119.

cleansed.⁴⁹⁸ Eric Meyers made a detailed study of this belief in his book *Jewish Ossuaries: Reburial and Rebirth* with particular reference to the rabbinic literature that attests to it.⁴⁹⁹ Marianne Sawicki takes this perspective.⁵⁰⁰ However, Beth Berkowitz makes a thorough study of the relevant texts and concludes that the belief in the atonement of sins through the decomposition of the flesh as motivation for secondary burial is “shaky.”⁵⁰¹ She points rather to suggestions that the practical necessity for space in a tomb, and the inhibiting expense of buying new tombs for families, made bone collection a popular option.⁵⁰²

3.2.7 Mourning Ritual, Lamentations and Women’s Roles

The death of a person in first-century Judea brought the ritual task of mourning to the members of their household. The practical ritual of mourning was a vital routine that expressed grief and framed the passage from life to death and, finally, helped steer those remaining back once more to life and living. A picture of likely first-century Jewish mourning rituals can be put together from various sources, including some reference to Greek and Roman customs.

The family was central to the implementation of funerary arrangements and the family home housed the body while it was prepared and awaiting burial. A tomb would have been dark and cramped thus making bodily preparations difficult, although not impossible, within.⁵⁰³ As we have highlighted, preparations for burial were immediately undertaken after death was confirmed. Jewish burials necessitated completion on the day of death in all but exceptional circumstances. After moving, washing, anointing, and dressing, the corpse, as surveyed above, the family were likely to have rent their garments in a display of grief. Hachlili

⁴⁹⁸ Rahmani, “Ancient, Part One,” 175.

⁴⁹⁹ Eric M. Meyers, *Jewish Ossuaries: Reburial and Rebirth. Secondary Burials in their Ancient Near East Setting* (Rome, Biblical Institute Press, 1971), 80–5.

⁵⁰⁰ Marianne Sawicki, “Making Jesus,” in *A Feminist Companion to Mark*. (ed. A. J. Levine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 136–170, 159. See also: Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord*, 257.

⁵⁰¹ Berkowitz, *Execution*, 129–135.

⁵⁰² Berkowitz, *Execution*, 133.

⁵⁰³ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 480.

suggests that this was obligatory.⁵⁰⁴ Candles may have been lit and placed at the head and feet.⁵⁰⁵ Lamentations would begin for the dead, led by the women of the household.⁵⁰⁶ Keening women and sometimes pipers would join in with the family.⁵⁰⁷ The wrapped corpse was born on a bier or mattress by relatives, friends and neighbours from home to burial place.⁵⁰⁸ Others from the community would join the lamentations and procession. Upon arrival at the location of burial, the body would probably be placed in a coffin and the immediate family would put the body in the tomb or ground.⁵⁰⁹

Kathleen Corley argues that women of the family and the community were central to the ritual around death, including lamentations.⁵¹⁰ Indeed, women's association with death and mourning is certainly heavily evidenced in the Ancient World,⁵¹¹ however Corley acknowledges that the first-century evidence for Jewish burial ritual, concerning either male roles or female roles, is scarce.⁵¹² Irina Wandrey puts forward an alternative reading of the later texts which concludes that rabbinic women may have actually been only afforded a minor role in mourning.⁵¹³ Although, as Wandrey points out, getting to the imagined gender roles, let alone the historical reality behind a specific text, is challenging.⁵¹⁴ Corley widens her argument and goes on to suggest that it is the association between women, birth and death

⁵⁰⁴ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 480.

⁵⁰⁵ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 480.

⁵⁰⁶ Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord*, 255. In Greek custom the women of the family, with the possible addition of professional mourners, gathered around the body after it had been prepared, dressed and garlanded and began the formal lamentation of the dead, lead by the most prominent women, mother or wife, among them. See: Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (2d ed.; Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 4–6.

⁵⁰⁷ Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 480.

⁵⁰⁸ Hachlili suggests the use of mattresses may have been because the person died on the mattress making it contaminated and of no further use. See, Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 481.

⁵⁰⁹ See, McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*, 37.

⁵¹⁰ For a detailed study of the role of women in the burial rituals of ancient Greek, Roman and Jewish cultures see: Corley, *Women*, 107–128.

⁵¹¹ Crossan draws on the suggestions of Sawicki and Corley to make the interesting proposal that the laments of the women who followed Jesus to the cross and tomb are an underlying layer in the Gospel passion narratives. See, John D. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 528–9, 572–3.

⁵¹² Corley, *Women*, 114.

⁵¹³ For Wandrey's full discussion see, Irina Wandrey, "Mourning Rituals for Women and for Men," in *A Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud: Introduction and Studies* (ed. T. Ilan, T. Or, D. M. Salzer, C. Steuer, I Wandrey; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 269–88.

⁵¹⁴ Wandrey concludes, "We are aware of the fact that rabbinic literature confronts us with a more or less subtly designed picture of what life should be like for the male elite. . . . it is hard to draw a coherent picture of the imagined gender roles, let alone historical reality. Wandrey, "Mourning Rituals," 285.

which contributes to a certain anxiety, in patriarchal culture, around women.⁵¹⁵ She notes that in any form of patriarchy where women's power is being withheld or heavily regulated, the female sex having control in two crucial bodily rites of passage, birth and burial, is an obvious source of tension.

Marianne Sawicki discusses the desire for an understanding of death that Jewish women sought through their lamentations.⁵¹⁶ She also conjectures that part of the emotion in their weeping may be because of the belief that the decomposition of the body was painful and the process of dying was not 'culturally complete' until after a year and the collection of the bones for secondary burial.⁵¹⁷ Corley makes a survey of lament as stereotypically women's behaviour in the Hebrew Bible.⁵¹⁸ Of it she notes: women would teach the skill of lamentation to their daughters (Jer 17:21); it was usual for the dead to be addressed in the lament (2 Sam 1:26 and 3:34, Ezek 32:2); lacerating one's body was forbidden (Deut 14:1); and the leaving of food at tombs for the deceased was discouraged (1 Sam 28:3–9; Deut 26:14). Valerie Hope identifies that the traditional role of women in ancient Roman custom was to wail, lament and sing dirges at the graveside and male relatives were to make speeches. Professional mourners were common in the late Republic and contributed to this "spectacle" of grief."⁵¹⁹

The period during which a Jewish family was expected to be in a state of mourning was a specific set time, however its length remains subject to variables in period and place that are difficult to judge. Rahmani suggests that in the first century the shiv'ah (ritual mourning period) was seven days starting at the burial, but there is earlier attestation to only two or

⁵¹⁵ Corley, *Women*, 108–9.

⁵¹⁶ Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord*, 257–8.

⁵¹⁷ Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord*, 256–7. Sawicki makes no reference to those that would not have afforded or had secondary burial. Rahmani also suggests this: Rahmani, "Ancient, Part One," 175.

⁵¹⁸ Corley, *Women*, 114–5.

⁵¹⁹ Hope, *Death*, 104. Rahmani suggests that professional mourners were not a feature of early first-century Jewish funerary ritual. See, Rahmani, "Ancient, Part Three," 44.

three days, as well as indications of thirty days or a year.⁵²⁰ During this period, mourners were forbidden to work (*b.Sem.* 5.1) and remained in the home. *b.Sem.* 6.1 states: “A Mourner is forbidden to read from the Torah, the Prophets, or the Writings; to recite the Mishnah or Talmud . . . and is forbidden bathing, anointing, wearing shoes, or the marital bed. He is required to cover his head and to invert the bed.” The time was spent receiving visitors’ condolences.⁵²¹ The mourners may visit the tomb or grave for a number of days. *b.Sem* 8.1 suggests thirty (some manuscripts read three⁵²²) is sufficient to continue to look for signs that the person may not actually be dead and limited enough to not be considered to be straying into heathen practices.

There is some indication that the mourning period after the *execution* of a family member was subject to certain regulations. Again we turn to the later Mishnah and we find a directive immediately following the previously discussed regulations about the provision of a separate burial plot for those executed by the Jewish courts.

And they would not bury him in the graves of his forefathers, but two cemeteries were prepared for the Court, one for those who were beheaded or strangled and the other for those who were stoned or burned. When the flesh has been consumed, they collect the bones and bury them in their place. And the relatives come and greet the judges and the witnesses indicating that we have nothing against you in our hearts, for you delivered a true judgement. And we would not openly mourn, but they might grieve, for grieving is in the heart alone. (*m. Sanh.* 6.5–6 [Kehati])

Berkowitz discusses this at length and makes a detailed investigation into the comparison between interpretations of open or full mourning (*avelut*) and grief or limited mourning (*aninut*).⁵²³ *Avelut* included rituals such as a eulogy, self-affliction, lamentation, clapping and praise for the deceased that could last up to a year. *Avelut* was a deliberate and public expression of grief designed to publically recognise and honour the dead. *Aninut*, however, was the exemption of religious duties such as prayer, on the day of the death only.⁵²⁴ The

⁵²⁰ Rahmani, “Ancient, Part One,” 175. Rahmani, “Ancient, Part Three,” 44–5.

⁵²¹ Rahmani, “Ancient, Part One,” 175; Safrai and Stern, *The Jewish People*, 783.

⁵²² Safrai and Stern, *The Jewish People*, 784 n. 6.

⁵²³ Berkowitz, *Execution*, 127–141. Corley also makes comment on the politicisation of mourning rituals. See, Corley, *Women*, 117.

⁵²⁴ Berkowitz, *Execution*, 128–9.

contrast that Berkowitz highlights in the Mishnaic text is between the public *avelut* prohibited for executed criminals and the private *aninut* allowed for them. She concludes:

The Mishnah itself tells us its purpose in making this prohibition—to avoid *public* recognition of the dead. The Mishnah allows *aninut* because it is “only in the heart”; it refuses only those honours that are of a public character. The restriction of full mourning thus has the same significance as separate burial; just as the criminal is not literally reincorporated into the community through family burial, neither is his memory symbolically reincorporated through the activities of mourning. Precedents and parallels of criminal execution reveal the logic of prohibitions on public mourning: It can imply that the criminal did not deserve to die, either because he did not commit the crime or because the act he committed should not be considered a crime. In short, mourning can function as a form of resistance.⁵²⁵

Berkowitz sets these findings in her argument to suggest that Rabbinic Judaism was in conflict and competition with the family and community structure. She suggests that the execution of criminals was used to display publically a family’s allegiance to the court, and its decision, over and against loyalty to the executed relative.⁵²⁶ In addition to the prohibition of mourning (*b.Sem* 2.6), the Mishnah Sanhedrin text demands one deliberate act which would usually be forbidden in normative mourning circumstances. The greeting that must be made to the judges—the *she’ilat shalom*—is a deliberate and highly symbolic contravention of the usual abstention of the *she’ilat shalom* greeting in the first three days of mourning.⁵²⁷

Finally, in this section, we must highlight Berkowitz’s examination of Roman attitudes to the mourning family and the concept of mourning as political resistance.⁵²⁸ Public mourning for the executed was a situation which, depending on circumstances, could be construed and charged as rebellion against the Emperor. She states, “Public mourning over the death of a traitor itself becomes an act of treason.”⁵²⁹ Berkowitz identifies the complicated nature of public mourning after execution and especially highlights its political potential. Jewish authorities were certainly aware of this in the third century and we might conjecture that there was at least equal awareness, if not equal regulation, around the matter in the first century.

⁵²⁵ Berkowitz, *Execution*, 136.

⁵²⁶ Berkowitz, *Execution*, 140–1.

⁵²⁷ Berkowitz, *Execution*, 139.

⁵²⁸ Berkowitz, *Execution*, 136–8.

⁵²⁹ Berkowitz, *Execution*, 137.

3.3 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have offered a survey of historical information about first-century burial of the crucifixion victim, as well as first-century normative Jewish funerary traditions. While we have not endeavoured to contribute any new hypotheses in this field, we have produced a thorough and detailed survey of contemporary thought. This includes discussion of the suggestion that elements of the Gospel accounts reveal the historical reality of a routine dishonourable interment of Jesus rather than a burial of devotion or honour. In the next chapter we will move on to present our reading of absence and presence in the burial text of John 19, with a particular focus on a reading of the mother of Jesus and a discussion of the Johannine burial text as politicised masculine space.

Chapter Four

Female and Male Space: Absence and Presence in the Burial Text of John 19:38–42

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter we will undertake a reading of Jesus' burial in John 19:38–42 which highlights the discourse of female character's presence and absence, as well as their roles and viewpoints, within the text. Our feminist hermeneutic will offer a new perspective on the passage and scrutinize some of the accepted interpretations of the Johannine burial narrative. We will then go on to develop our discussion of gender to include questions of space, power and politics as we examine the characters of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. The text portrays burial without family, mourning or community, and we will reflect on what effect the consideration of these absences has on a reading of the text and the characters who appear in it. We will find that this problematizes an interpretation of the act of burial as a purely positive event, distinct from the previous negative event of Jesus' crucifixion. We propose that themes of trauma and violation are to be found in the burial text of John 19:38–42, and become startlingly apparent when we give proper attention to the discourse of the female characters.

In our first section, 'The Female and the Text,' we will make an initial discussion of Jesus' burial when read in light of our historical enquiry of first-century burial of the crucified. In 'A Proleptic Anointing' we will briefly consider the earlier episode of Mary's anointing of Jesus for burial, which appears in John 12:1–8, and how our reading of John 19 offers us a new

perspective on it. We will go on to our discussion of Jesus' mother and her absence from the Johannine burial in 'Maternal Absence.' With reference to the Kristevian definition of the term abjection, we will discuss the abjection which accrues around her character. In detail, we will consider her appearances in the Gospel and then focus on how maternal loss in the burial narrative—of her son and her role—is a deeply disturbing undertone to the whole episode. As Dorothy Lee (in discussion of John 7:5) wonders, "If it is her [Jesus' mother's] faithful *presence* that is of real importance in the Johannine narrative, then we may ask whether her absence possesses a corresponding significance."⁵³⁰ To this we will turn.

In the second half of our chapter we will introduce postcolonial theory to inform our rereading of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. In our section entitled 'Masculinised Entrances and Exits in Male Space' we will discuss the burial of Christ as politicised masculine space, which displaces the normative familial and feminine space of burial ritual. We will move our discussion on from the absences in the narrative and will focus on the presence of two powerful men and their anomalous role at this point in the text. We will seek to reread the characters of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, looking beyond prevailing positivistic interpretations, to a more challenging stance.⁵³¹ Identifying matters not only of gender, but also space, power and politics, allows us to question and interpret the Johannine burial from a new perspective.

In our discussions of the nature of the 'space' of burial we recognise that a sweeping identification of female with private and domestic, and male with public and political is to be avoided. Positioning the discourse in binary opposition is problematic and overly simplistic and falls short in recognition of both the dilemmas in applying twenty-first-century gender theory to first-century life as well as the nuances of gender identity within first-century culture.

⁵³⁰ Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 146.

⁵³¹ It must be noted that, in recent history, Nicodemus is commonly interpreted as ambiguous rather than solely positive. Alan Culpepper makes this point clear, listing some seven publications which use the term 'ambiguous.' See, R. Alan. Culpepper, "Nicodemus: The Travail of New Birth," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (eds. S. A. Hunt, D. F. Tolmie and R. Zimmermann. WUNT 314. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 249–59, 251–2.

Marianne Sawicki highlights this in terms of popular anthropology and it merits quoting at length,

Theoretical criticism of the domestic/public conceptualization follows along familiar poststructuralist lines. It is pointed out that the binary pairing creates a value and a disvalue, reductively defines the latter in terms of the former, and tends to force the data to fit the categories of explanation. *Empirical* criticism of the domestic/public distinction is more devastating, coming as it does from field anthropologists Whether the activities in question, and the spaces where they occurred, were more “public” or more “private” depend on other factors, including the gender status and the kin status of the people doing them. The putative association of the female gender with domestic space appears particularly tenuous; we know that in contemporary traditional societies the gender of a place can shift with the time of day and season of the year.⁵³²

It is clear that a reductive application of *domestic/female/feminine* versus *public/male/masculine* onto our reading is unhelpful. This would be especially problematic if we sought to locate burial in only domestic space; some elements of funerary customs are public, and vitally so. The public display of grief and the public acknowledgement of an individual’s passage from life to death are important moments in community identity. However, we do recognise that first-century mourning rituals at the point of death (establishing death, closing the deceased’s eyes, witnessing the last breath), along with the subsequent preparation and anointing for burial, are all rooted in feminine, domestic space. And so, in our later section we take care to avoid generalisation, but employ a discussion of gendered space within our argument.

Before we proceed, it is appropriate to make note of what is commonly termed ‘argument from silence.’⁵³³ While we do not fully engage in the traditional use of argument from silence, at times our discussion does focus on what has not been included in the text, rather than what has, with particular attention on what is absent rather than what is present. However,

⁵³² Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord*, 247.

⁵³³ Arguments from silence have been made more readily in recent feminist biblical scholarship because the texts on which scholars work exclude female discourse, authorship and perspective in their patriarchal androcentric form. Schüssler Fiorenza states the case for them in her work *Bread Not Stone*, see, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984), 112. See also: Shelly Matthews, “Elite Women, Public Religion, and Christian Propaganda in Acts 16,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. A. J. Levine with M. Blinkenstaff; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 111–133, 131; Ruth Hoppin, “The Epistle to the Hebrews is Pricilla’s Letter,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews* (ed. A. J. Levine with M. Mayo Robins; London: T&T Clark, 2000), 147–170, 152.

we hope our argument appears robust in its careful concentration on *unexpected* absence and our detailed enquiry into first-century norms as evidence of the anomaly we highlight within the text.⁵³⁴ In this we will draw attention to the deviations from what we suppose to be a reasonable expectation of burial of the crucified Jewish body in the first century. In addition, we do not attempt to deploy an argument from silence to substantiate claims about authorial intent or historical hypothesis. We are not so much concerned as to why the writer of John does not narrate any female attendance at the burial, but the effect that the absence of the female gender, as well as the presence that the all-male scene, has within the text and its interpretations.

Finally, we must reiterate that in no way are we attempting to assess the historicity of the Johannine burial narrative nor create a historical construct of the world behind the text.⁵³⁵ Our use of historical data is to understand and inform the interpretation of the narrative and story within this first-century text as it appears in the New Testament. We are not seeking to add to any historical debate over Jesus' life and its events, our interest lies within the text and its interpretations, its narrative and its readings. Our feminist literary perspective has recognised a considerable gap between the historical information about first-century Jewish burial, gleaned from archaeological and literary sources, and the application of that information to the interpretation of the Johannine burial narrative. This is particularly relevant with regard to: the absence of any considered discourse of the female characters; the expectation of burial ritual; and the dynamics of trauma and grief as they appear within the narrative. To this discussion we will now turn.

4.1 The Female and the Text

⁵³⁴ For a unremitting and singular critique of argument from silence see, David R. Hall, *The Seven Pillories of Wisdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990), 55–64. However, the conjecture and criticism of that method bears little relevance in this instance.

⁵³⁵ Others have made this the object of their study. For example see, Corley, *Women*, 79–139; Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 527–573.

As we have seen in our historical enquiry, female roles in Jewish burial ritual are a reasonable historical expectation of first-century Palestine, however, John 19:38–42 portrays no such female attendance for the body of Jesus. Moreover, we can highlight a previous familial and female presence within the text, narrated during the crucifixion, which is lost in the death–burial trajectory. Our discussion of burial must begin with the scene of Jesus’ mother and accompanying women, narrated at the cross, close to Jesus as he died, identified and named but without dialogue in the text.

Ειστήκεισαν δὲ παρὰ τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀδελφὴ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, Μαρία ἡ τοῦ Κλωπᾶ καὶ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνή.
Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (John 19:25)

The theme of burial, and the rising concern pertaining to it, at the death scene of Jesus is rarely identified, but recognition of this dynamic within the text fills this female cohort with desire and force.⁵³⁶ Are the Johannine women, like Kathleen Corley’s Markan women, waiting to take, or at least plead, their social role once death had come?⁵³⁷ Are the four women, so often contrasted to the four male soldiers of John 19:23, actually there to undertake a burial role: four men to bring death, four women to administer burial? Their brief appearance at the scene of death is rarely read in terms of what the female characters might desire to do next. As with many literary women, the recognition that they may have will or even power to act is largely overlooked. Reading the text in these terms, and in light of the historical evidence around the possible burial of the crucified, their presence acquires an implication of their role in any possible burial to come.

There has been no indication within the text that anyone else would appear to bury Jesus. After the crucifixion, Brown suggests that the women of the Gospels would have been in the

⁵³⁶ For example, Francois Tolmie’s character study of the women at the cross, does not consider burial at all as a reason or motive for their presence at the cross. See, D. Francois Tolmie, “The Women by the Cross: Creating Contrasts,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (eds. S. A. Hunt, D. F. Tolmie and R. Zimmermann. WUNT 314. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 618–25.

⁵³⁷ Corley considers the presence of the Markan women to be directly linked to their desire to perform burial rites. See: Corley, “Slaves,” 211.

most favourable position to procure the body of Jesus from Pilate for burial.⁵³⁸ Their status as women offered them some protection. They would not have been considered dangerous disciples, but grieving friends and family. Where public mourning may have been perilous, practical undertakings of burial would have posed little political threat. In the Gospel of John, the presence of Jesus' mother was a significant advantage, and we will discuss her particular presence in more detail below. In addition we see the presence of another female relative—his mother's sister and two female followers, Mary Magdalene and Mary wife of Clopas.⁵³⁹ It may be considered within the expected social order for these women to undertake any burial ritual. Keener points out that a women's gender or a family relationship with the condemned would have given some amount of privilege in such situations.⁵⁴⁰

If we revisit the details of our historical assessment the presenting possible outcomes for Jesus' corpse are:

1. Jesus' body is left exposed as carrion to be consumed and decompose in public.
2. The Roman soldiers will take the body down and put it in a communal burial plot.
3. Members of the Sanhedrin will come, under obligation, and perform a ritual dishonourable interment.
4. Women and relatives of Jesus may plead for the body to be released to them for burial.

The primary matter that we have identified in this thesis is that outcomes 1, 2 and 3 are all varied continuations of *punishment*, specifically in the denial of familial and normative burial rites. This posthumous punishment—as we have seen in our historical enquiry—is, through

⁵³⁸ Brown discusses at length the likelihood of the family or disciples obtaining the body themselves. His discussion centres on the reason for execution being treason—*maiestas*—which may have compelled Pilate to refuse a request from the family (it is unlikely the non-related disciples would have been able to make such a request). However, this debate does not address their stark absence from the burial narrative at all, either making, or desiring to make, their own request. See, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1207–1208.

⁵³⁹ Because of matters of punctuation in the Greek, the number of women at the cross scene in John 19:25 could be read as 2, 3, or 4. For the purposes of our study we will adhere to the common reading of 4 women. For discussion see, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1014–5. See also, Tolmie, "The Women," 618–21.

⁵⁴⁰ Keener, *Matthew*, 690. In addition Keener also points out that, "the culture allowed family members to gather around the person being crucified . . . and women were allowed greater latitude in mourning." (689). This remains questionable in our investigation. Some concessions seem apparent, however public mourning could be a highly political act and as we have seen there is some evidence of its regulation.

explicit violation of burial practices, meted on the deceased and their relatives. Reading the Gospel of John's burial narrative as a continuation of punishment and penalty is a little explored avenue.

b.Sem 2.9 makes a statement, which relates to this matter: it directs, "No rites whatsoever should be denied those who were executed by the state. At what point should the family begin counting the days of mourning for them? From the time they despair of asking for the body, even though they may still hope to steal it." This suggests that mourning rituals, apart from the actual burial, should be undertaken as usual by the family. The resistance in the mourning ritual to the state's decision is apparent (and, we might recall, is notably prohibited for those executed by the Jewish court, *b.Sem.* 2.6). Moreover, *b.Sem.* 2.9 indicates that the family is the ideal situation for the state-executed body to be given burial and retrieval of the body is often sought even at the expense of other laws. Despair at asking for the body is assumed, so much so that one may then use the event as the marker to begin mourning rituals.

John 19:31–37 indicates that the bodies of all three executed men would be removed and put *somewhere*, and so the text already suggests some clemency on Pilate's part to allow the body to be buried rather than demand the body be exposed. In the narrative construct of John's Gospel, the women of v. 25 are in the most powerful position to intercede for the body at this point. The text delivers a surprise and a stranger, Joseph of Arimathea, at v. 38 who, with the concession of Pilate, takes the body ἤλθεν οὖν καὶ ἤρην τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ. *So he came and removed his body* (John 19:38). Nicodemus, a previously established character, and council member, later joins him.

These events initially suggest that option 3, a routine criminal burial, may be a plausible interpretation of the scene. However, elements of the narrative suggest this is not the case. The Johannine text delivers details which problematise a straightforward interpretation of the

burial as a criminal procedure. Joseph is introduced as a disciple (19:38), although a secret one. Nicodemus comes laden with spices the like of which it is unimaginable to conceive as being supplied for a criminal burial. And the tomb, although not impossible as a dishonourable burial site, seems highly improbable. Therefore, we have a new fifth option: that something extra-ordinary, something unexpected, is happening to Jesus' body. The question which we must then ask is, "Is this a continuation of punishment? If we interpret the burial as an act of devotion on the part of Joseph and Nicodemus, an element of posthumous punishment remains for the living family in the denial of their involvement. And so, option 4—Women and relatives of Jesus may plead for the body to be released to them for burial—remains the only option which averts the posthumous punishment of both the executed and their familial group.

Let us hold the questions and turn to the burial text itself. The burial, notably the binding of Jesus' body with spices and linen (John 19:39–40), that Joseph and Nicodemus undertake is narrated as *καθὼς ἔθος ἐστὶν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ἐνταφιάζειν according to the burial custom of the Jews* (John 19:40). A striking omission from the narrative is the act of washing the corpse. It is reasonable to assume that the corpse of Christ would have been encrusted with bodily fluids and would require cleansing for burial, but there is no narration of this act.⁵⁴¹ Of course, there is some indication that it took place in the disclosure *καθὼς ἔθος ἐστὶν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ἐνταφιάζειν*, if we were to consider it a routine part of traditional custom, however the absence of the acknowledgement of the act is reflected by the more crucial absence of the people whose social role it was to undertake the washing. Not only the group in John 19:25, but Jesus' wider circle of friends and disciples—including the beloved disciple who is present at the cross (19:26)—have disappeared from the narrative. The character ensemble close to Jesus, defined by their presence in the text, is now markedly absent. The *followers* of Jesus, previously dwindled throughout the passion account, now fail to follow at all. There is no

⁵⁴¹ As we have discussed, this would be a primary act for a crucifixion victim who would be covered in blood and most likely faeces and urine. See, Chapter Three, 3.2.1 'Preparation of the Body.' The Johannine text discloses that Jesus has been flogged (19:1), a crown of thorns put on his head (19:1), struck in the face (19:1) as well as the posthumous injury to his side that leaked blood and water (19:34).

show of devotion or bid to reclaim control of Jesus' body after death.⁵⁴² It is not unexpected that men might bury men, but it is anomalous that *strangers* might bury an executed man when friends and relatives are available.⁵⁴³

There is a tension between the narrator's disclosure of attendance to custom, and what we know of the historicity of custom itself, which reflects the more striking tension between the absence of the ones who would customarily undertake those rituals and the presence of Joseph and Nicodemus. There is a certain air of confusion within the narrative. If Joseph and Nicodemus are undertaking a routine dishonourable burial, the spices and linen are superfluous. However, if we interpret the text as implying that their actions of co-opting the corpse to bury it are because of some devotional desire, why do they not restore Jesus' body to, or at least include, the appropriate people?

4.1.1 A Proleptic Anointing

At this point we must divert our discussion to consider the anointing of Jesus, which takes place in John 12. For, although no female presence occurs at his actual burial, in an episode at the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, Mary anoints Jesus' feet with nard; Jesus then defends her actions, esoterically stating that she had bought the nard for the day of his burial.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴² An interesting contrast might be drawn with the disciples of John the Baptist (Matt 14:12) who do reappear after the execution/murder of their leader. They exemplify faithful discipleship when they rescue and bury his body. See, Keener, *Matthew*, 402. He comments, "John's disciples, however, risked their own lives to show up and bury John's body (14:12) . . . they were determined to provide the final, basic act of loyalty to their master that they could."

⁵⁴³ b.Semahot 12.10 reads: "A man may shroud and gird the corpse of a man, but not that of a woman. A woman may shroud and gird the corpse of a man or woman."

⁵⁴⁴ Mary's act of anointing is subject to a wide and diverse range of interpretations. Some have suggested that Mary's anointing is to be recognised as concerning Jesus' kingship instead of/as well as his burial. See for comment: Keener, *John vol. 2*, 865; Barrett, *John*, 409. There is little to substantiate this within the text, the feet (as would be anointed in burial) and not the head (as would be anointed for a king) of Jesus are anointed and the direct reference within the passage is of burial rather than kingly anointing. Susan Miller proposes that the anointing points towards the 'abundant life' which the death of Jesus brings. Susan Miller, "Mary (of Bethany): The Anointer of the Suffering Messiah," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (eds. S. A. Hunt, D. F. Tolmie and R. Zimmermann. WUNT 314. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 473–86, 483–6. C. H. Giblin suggests that the act holds a twofold prophecy: the initial pouring out of the nard symbolizes Jesus' death and then the wiping away of it, his resurrection. See, Charles H. Giblin,

εἶπεν οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς · ἄφες αὐτήν, ἵνα εἰς τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ ἐνταφιασμοῦ μου τηρήσῃ αὐτό
Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. John 12:7

Here, in the text of chapter 12, we find burial ritual directly linked with female attendance, set within domestic space, and legitimised by Jesus' own words. What are we to make of this episode? How does Mary of Bethany's action at this point in the narrative contribute to our reading of the actual burial of John 19? What does the action of this woman, recognised as a pre-emptive burial ritual, mean for our discourse of female gender and the burial text? The limits of our discussion mean we will exclude Synoptic comparisons and deliberately limit our investigation to the Johannine text, although we recognise that such an investigation would make an interesting topic.⁵⁴⁵

Initially we must highlight the textual dilemmas in the translation of John 12:7. In the Greek text, Jesus' words translate most accurately as "Leave her alone, in order that to the day of my burial she may keep it." This presents an obvious conflict: the narrative has already presented Mary as pouring out the oil (v. 3 and v. 5). What then is there left to keep?⁵⁴⁶ The suggestion that there might be any nard left to save is routinely dismissed. Some later textual variants supply τετήρηκεν instead of ἵνα in an attempt to alleviate the problem⁵⁴⁷ and most translations add some kind of explanatory phrase—NRSV (cited above) adds "she bought it"—to smooth the meaning. Brown suggests that the addition of the words "the purpose was [that she might keep it . . .]" is the most suitable amendment and faithful to the meaning

"Mary's Anointing for Jesus' Burial-Resurrection," *Biblica* 73 (1992): 560–564. Colleen Conway draws parallels between Mary and Jesus' mother, linking them both, as well as perhaps overstating them as "keenly sensitive", to Jesus' hour. See, Conway, *Men and Women*, 151–3. Magda Misset-van Weg examines the Hebrew imagery of love from the Song of Songs in the Johannine episode. See, Magda Misset-van de Weg, "Of Love, Life and Belief: The Story of Mary of Bethany (John 12:1–8)." in *Common Bodies: Everyday Practices, Gender and Religion* (ed. M. De Haardt and A.-M. Korte; Lit Verlag: Münster, 2002), 27–42.

⁵⁴⁵ For a discussion of the Synoptic Gospel's relationship with, and variations of, this episode see, Brown, *John 1–12*, 449–52. J. L. Coakley discusses the pericope in relation to the priority of John. See, J. F. Coakley, "The Anointing at Bethany and the Priority of John," *JBL* 107 (1988): 241–256.

⁵⁴⁶ Scholars continue to wrestle with the inconsistency. For example see, Wendy E. S. North, "The anointing in John 12:1–8: a tale of two hypotheses," in *Engaging with C. H. Dodd on the Gospel of John: Sixty Years of Tradition and Interpretation* (eds. T. Thatcher and C. H. Williams; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 216–30, 226–8.

⁵⁴⁷ See for comment: Beasley-Murray, *John*, 205; Brown, *John 1–12*, 449.

intended by the author.⁵⁴⁸ He notes that Mary does not later appear at the actual burial and that “. . . the extraordinary amount (about 100 lbs) of burial spices bought by Nicodemus (19:39) would seem to exclude any significant role that a few remaining drops of Mary’s pound of perfume might have.”⁵⁴⁹

In either instance—the confusion that a faithful translation to the original Greek brings or the introduction of an extra-textual clause to make sense of the text—from our perspective, it remains that the anointing act undertaken by the character of Mary is not only defended as appropriate, but is also positively affirmed as an act related to (even contributing to) the later burial ritual. The text is clearly linking Mary, a female character, with appropriate burial rites. But, of course, the situation is extraordinary: Jesus is not dead and it is unlikely that Mary actually intended it to be an act of mourning.⁵⁵⁰ The critical matter in our interpretation is that something is clearly awry if this anointing, on the living Jesus, is highlighted and commended as anointing for burial. Keener offers some recognition of the significance of a pre-death anointing before an execution. He states, “When executed criminals were buried, they usually would have been denied anointing; thus the anointing takes place in advance, by anticipation, in Matthew and Mark (Matt 26:12 Mark 14:8); John’s wording is more ambiguous because of a further anointing in 19:39–40.”⁵⁵¹ He makes exception in the Johannine case, because of the later offering of Joseph and Nicodemus. However, if we consider the anointing by Joseph and Nicodemus as an extension of punishment, Mary’s anointing, and Jesus’ affirmation of it, illustrates and delivers prematurely the faithful devotional burial ritual which Jesus’ body is later denied.

In the Gospel’s literary world, the female gender is affirmed in its funerary role, which is in accord with the historical assumptions of what supposed Jewish funerary rites consisted of.

⁵⁴⁸ Brown, *John 1–12*, 449.

⁵⁴⁹ Brown, *John 1–12*, 449.

⁵⁵⁰ Nothing within the text suggests that Mary’s act was consciously related to Jesus’ burial. Suggestions that it was an act motivated by gratitude for the restoration and resurrection of her brother are more convincing.

⁵⁵¹ Keener, *John vol. 2*, 865.

The intimation of Jesus' comments, that ideally this nard would have been reserved for his burial, from this perspective, becomes a deliberate reference to its later exclusion from that act (hence necessitating its present use). Mary's act now goes beyond simply an early prophetic offering of something which would later become redundant, displaced by Nicodemus' aloes. It is rather a proleptic reference that we fully understand later as the authentic burial ritual in light of an illegitimate later ritual that contains elements of punishment and estrangement.

If we return to the issue contained in the Greek, Barrett makes the suggestion of a different translation, which is of particular relevance to our reading. He proposes the following:

The simplest suggestion is that here τηρεῖν means not "to keep" but "to keep in mind", 'to remember'. We should then translate ' . . . let her remember it (the ointment, or the act of anointing) on the day of my burial'. As the gospel now stands this would mean, 'Let her, when Joseph and Nicodemus anoint my body, remember that she has foreshadowed this act of piety and thus shared in it'⁵⁵²

Barrett's opinion is that the text suggests that Mary might believe that she simply foreshadowed and shared in Joseph's and Nicodemus' later 'act of piety' by her present actions. However, interpreted in the context of our reading, Barrett's translation would strongly suggest that, in the course of the unfolding drama in the text of the Fourth Gospel, Mary's act is to be considered and recalled in the face of adverse circumstances as the legitimate and authorized act of devotional burial ritual which is later denied to all Jesus' family and friends. In Jesus' words, "let her remember it" there is set in the text as a note to all readers to recollect this proleptic act at his actual burial. Mary's anointing, along with Jesus' affirmation of it, understood from the perspective of female and devotional exclusion from the John 19 burial ritual, can be interpreted as an earlier warning that the appearance of male strangers who take and bury Jesus' body should not be read without scrutiny.

4.2 Maternal Absence

⁵⁵² Barrett, *John*, 414.

Jesus' mother in the Gospel of John has been widely documented with equally wide and variable conclusions about her characterisation, her role and any symbolic or theological dimensions of her person.⁵⁵³ The limitations of this thesis will not indulge in a comprehensive assessment of every aspect of this vast literature.⁵⁵⁴ We will rather take up two strands of discussion. Firstly, our task will be to assess the character of Jesus' mother and her maternal role in the Gospel from a literary perspective and, secondly, we will move our focus from general female and familial absence in the burial narrative, to a discussion of the particular absence of Jesus' mother.⁵⁵⁵ We will not attempt to enter into the debate surrounding Jesus' mother's symbolic function or any historical or theological representation; we will remain focused on her literary role within the narrative, the dynamics of her character and unique bond with Jesus. In our discussions we will deliberately reference her as Jesus' mother

⁵⁵³ There are many varying suggestions and interpretations around what symbolism Jesus' mother might be imbued with. Reinhartz proposes that the mother of Jesus represents wise female elders within the Johannine community. See, Adele Reinhartz, "Women in the Johannine Community: An Exercise in Historical Imagination," in *A Feminist Companion to John Volume 2* (ed. A. J. Levine; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 14–33, 18–21. At the John 2 appearance, drawing on references from Gen 3 and Rev 12, Brown sees her as a symbol of the Church: Brown, *John 1–12*, 107–9; Sr Vandana makes an interesting and entirely positivistic comparison between Jesus' mother and the water used in the scene. See, Sr Vandana, "Water—God's Extravaganza: John 2:1–11," in *Voices From the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 156–67, 158–61; For a close discussion of the symbolism of Jesus' mother in John 2 see, Raymond E. Brown et al., eds., *Mary in the New Testament* (London: G. Chapman, 1979), 189–190.

⁵⁵⁴ Concerning the John 19 scene: Culpepper makes a thorough and useful survey of eight interpretations of Jesus' mother's symbolic value at the cross scene in his article "Symbolism and History in John's Account of Jesus' Death," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past Present and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. T. Thatcher and S. D. Moore; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 39–54; Bultmann proposes Jesus' mother represents Jewish Christianity (Bultmann, *John*, 673); Schnackenberg makes a similar case, Schnackenberg, *John vol. 3*, 277–9. See also, Schnackenberg, *John vol. 3*, 279–82 for a survey of alternative interpretations; Brown contests this and proposes the significance of the scene is not in the symbolic nature of Jesus' mother, but in the new relationship that is inaugurated between Jesus' natural family and his family of disciples, see Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1024–26; Karlsen Seim proposes that Jesus' mother is representative of *kinship* and the physical role of mother is made redundant at the inauguration (the cross) of the new community where motherhood is based on God's will and not physical relationship. Turid Karlsen Seim, "Descent and Divine Paternity in the Gospel of John: Does the Mother Matter?" *NTS* 51 (2005): 361–375, 373–5. See also, Brown et al., *Mary*, 212–8. However, Mark Stibbe confidently claims, "it is not John's intention to encourage wild symbolic interpretations of the mother of Jesus here [John 19]." Stibbe, *John As Storyteller*, 152. Barrett contests a symbolic role for Jesus' mother, claiming there is not sufficient evidence to suggest it. Barrett, *John*, 552; Dodd also denies her any symbolic meaning, Dodd, *Interpretation*, 428, n. 2. Haenchen tersely points out, ". . . there is nothing in the story that points to such a symbolic meaning for these figures [Jesus' mother and the Beloved Disciple]." Haenchen, *John 2*, 193. In a recent discussion, Mary Coloe claims, "Apart from Jesus, no other character is as important to the ideological point of view of this Gospel's narrative, than the Mother of Jesus." See, Mary L. Coloe, "The Mother of Jesus: A Woman Possessed." in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (eds. S. A. Hunt, D. F. Tolmie and R. Zimmermann. WUNT 314. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 202–13, 213. See also, Jean Zumstein, "The Mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple: How a New Family is Established Under the Cross," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (trans. S. Buchanan; eds. S. A. Hunt, D. F. Tolmie and R. Zimmermann. WUNT 314. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 641–45.

⁵⁵⁵ Beverly Gaventa takes up a similar literary approach in her detailed investigation into the portrayal of the mother of Jesus in the New Testament and Protevangelium of James. For her work on the Gospel of John see, Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 79–99.

rather than Mary. This reminds us that she is never named within the Gospel of John and her Johannine identity is not formed with a name, 'Mary.'⁵⁵⁶

Often recourse to symbolic or theological discussions has conveniently smoothed over the more confusing and challenging elements depicted in the Gospel of John between mother and son. Dorothy Lee comments on John 19:25–7,

At the literal level, the scene is difficult to understand If the giving of Jesus' mother and beloved disciple to one another as mother and son does not make sense at a literal level, then a second-level metaphorical and symbolic meaning can and must be sought. The symbolic level is hard to avoid, even if it means stepping into a whirlpool of conflicting interpretations.⁵⁵⁷

While we have some sympathy with Lee's rationale, we feel that there is value in addressing the imperfect 'literal level' even if our reading takes an uncomfortable turn.

4.2.1 The Abjected Mother

Jesus' mother's position in the Gospel of John is complicated. The mother of Jesus appears or is mentioned in the following passages:

- 2:1–11 The wedding at Cana.
- 2:12 Jesus' mother (and brothers and disciples) accompany Jesus to Capernaum.
- 6:42 The Jews claim to know Jesus' mother and father. Jesus is noted as the Son of Joseph, his mother remains unnamed. (Jesus is also named as the son of Joseph in John 1:45.)
- 19:25–7 Jesus' mother at the cross.

Most striking is the Gospel's lack of a birth narrative, and the lack of a name for Jesus' mother. Never named as 'Mary', known only as ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (*the mother of Jesus*), she

⁵⁵⁶ The name Mary is routinely reinserted into discussions of Jesus' mother in the Gospel of John. While this is understandable, it sometimes serves to obfuscate the absence of her name. Mary Coloe takes up the discussion of why Jesus' mother is not afforded a name in the Gospel of John. Interestingly, Coloe explicitly opts to capitalise not only 'Mother' but also 'Woman' in an attempt to distinguish the character. Coloe, "The Mother," 203.

⁵⁵⁷ Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 153.

is titled mother by the narrator (2:2; 2:12; 19:25) and the Jews (6:42), but never her son. On the two occasions Jesus himself addresses her directly she is called γύναι (*woman*) and the only time the lemma μήτηρ (*mother*) appears on Jesus' lips is to define his mother as someone else's ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου (*here is your mother*) (19:27). Reading the mother of Jesus and the discourse around Jesus' natural birth in John is awkward on many counts. Interpreters may desire to see her as an essential and respected character, but evidence in John's Gospel to substantiate such a claim can at times be elusive.⁵⁵⁸

The language of the Kristevian abject is helpful in our discussion. Jesus' mother and her maternal body are very much present within the text. Of her two appearances one is early (Cana) and the other is at a moment of heightened drama (cross), both acquire additional significance because of these dynamics.⁵⁵⁹ However there is a strong feeling of disassociation around her, radiating from both narrative and son. Her pregnancy and nurture are absent in the text, but her body, and the bond of motherhood that her body betrays, is not easily minimised. The story of the Gospel of John is the story of the adult Jesus, his ministry, death and resurrection. However, his mother does appear, and when she does, there is a curious air of abjection.

The possible psychoanalytical discussion surrounding Kristeva's archetypal maternal abjection, and how it may be evident in Jesus' relationship with his mother, is not one we will pursue in this study. However, the evidence of maternal abjection both at Cana and the cross

⁵⁵⁸ In feminist biblical scholarship the mother of Jesus has often been swept up in the move to see the Gospel of John as a sympathetic and liberating text for women. For example see, Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 119; Judith M. Lieu, "Scripture and the Feminine in John," in *A Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament* (ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 225–40, 225.

⁵⁵⁹ Scholars have pointed out that Jesus' mother's appearances at Cana and the cross form an *inclusio* of his earthly ministry, which marks its beginning and end. See: Adeline Fehribach, "The 'Birthing' Bridegroom: The Portrayal of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel," in *A Feminist Companion to John Volume 2* (ed. A. J. Levine; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 23; Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 143. Joseph Grassi reads it explicitly the last sign (and Cana as the first) which is marked by Jesus' mothers' appearance once more. Joseph A. Grassi, "The Role of Jesus' Mother in John's Gospel: A Reappraisal," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 67–80.

certainly merits consideration.⁵⁶⁰ We can recall Imogen Taylor's critique of Kristeva's theory of archetypal maternal abjection, she asks " . . . what it might mean *to be* [sic] that maternal abject . . . "⁵⁶¹ This must form part of our discussion of the character and narrative of Jesus' mother. What does it mean to interpret and recognise this dynamic around Jesus' mother? For our study, we can go on to consider: if Jesus' mother accrues a sense of abjection, we may then ask if her absence at the burial ritual also contributes to this theme? If the initial encounter at Cana sets a distance between mother and son, which degrades rather than improves at the scene of the cross, what might this add to a consideration of her unexpected absence at burial?

4.2.2 Cana

The wedding at Cana introduces Jesus' mother for the first time in the Gospel. As we have highlighted, the absence of her name is a striking feature of her portrayal.⁵⁶² As Brown et al. point out, " . . . the author is not loath to mention women by name and refers to Marys some fifteen times (Mary the sister of Martha, Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Clopas.)"⁵⁶³ As many have recognised, the missing name of the mother of Jesus is a significant omission.⁵⁶⁴ Adele Reinhartz makes an impressive study of a selection of anonymous characters in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament and, although she does not refer to the anonymous status of Jesus' mother in the Gospel of John,⁵⁶⁵ she offers some interesting thoughts on

⁵⁶⁰ Kristeva herself makes a reflection on motherhood and Jesus' mother. See, Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," 234–263. For discussion see, Wilson, "Stabat Maria," 29–35.

⁵⁶¹ Tyler, "Against Abjection," 95.

⁵⁶² David Beck conducts a thorough investigation into the function of anonymous characters in the Fourth Gospel. He concludes, after a study of contemporaneous Greek, Hebrew and Synoptic literature, that the Gospel of John utilises anonymous characters in a unique way. He suggests that lack of a proper name does not, as usually is the case, signify unimportance, but rather an invitation for the reader to make strong identification with the character. See, David R. Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm: Readers and Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 17–50.

⁵⁶³ Brown et al., *Mary*, 179, n. 405.

⁵⁶⁴ Judith Lieu makes the suggestion that her anonymity may have been the received tradition of the author of John, and not a deliberate attempt to suppress her name. She goes on to note the "arresting" nature of this omission in a Gospel that persistently focuses on individuals. See, Judith M. Lieu, "The Mother of the Son in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 117 (1998): 61–77, 62–3.

⁵⁶⁵ Reinhartz does briefly discuss the anonymity of Jesus' mother in John in, Reinhartz, "Women in the Johannine Community," 18–21. Her agenda is a historical one seeking to reconstruct who Jesus' mother might represent in

how a mother's anonymity within the text affects the reading and interpretation of the character.⁵⁶⁶ She says,

Unnamed mothers abound. As in the case of unnamed wives, the anonymity of these mothers allows the reader to evaluate the degree to which they fulfil, define, or negate the role by which they are formally defined. Like many named mothers, unnamed mothers are portrayed solely in relation to male offspring, whether as children or as adults. Their portrayal centres on the role of mother as one who nurtures, or fails to nurture, her infant or as one who admires her adult son to excess. Some of the stories also challenge aspects of the stereotypical maternal picture and pass judgement on the ways in which specific women execute their roles. Throughout, the mothers' personal identities are both subsumed by and expressed in their maternal roles.⁵⁶⁷

While we are not unaware that Jesus' mother's anonymity has been a foundation in many symbolic interpretations of her character, briefly considering Jesus' mother as an anonymous mother character-type is a useful perspective.⁵⁶⁸ Inhabiting this character type, in text and at times interpretations also, gives a narrow lens of focus which defines Jesus' mother solely in terms of her relationship with her son. Does Jesus' mother play the part of an ideal mother, anonymous but exemplary? What is her place in this adult son's life? Does she illustrate failure or success in her motherly position and how is that defined? From the moment that she anonymously enters the text in John 2:4, Jesus' mother is surrounded by questions and expectations.⁵⁶⁹

the Johannine community (wise female elders) and she proposes the anonymity of Jesus' mother contributes to this interpretation.

⁵⁶⁶ Reinhartz makes a survey of a collection of unnamed mothers. See Adele Reinhartz, *"Why Ask My Name?" Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 101–113. Some scholars reinsert the Synoptic proper noun 'Mary' in their discussion of Jesus' mother in the Fourth Gospel.

⁵⁶⁷ Reinhartz, *Anonymity and Identity*, 102.

⁵⁶⁸ For discussion see: Troy W. Martin, "Assessing the Johannine Epithet 'the Mother of Jesus,'" *CBQ* 60 (1998): 63–73, 65–6. Martin makes a detailed study of anonymous mothers in ancient texts of the first two centuries C.E. and concludes that the mother of Jesus—based on the commonality of the anonymous mother character-type—may be anonymous for one of three reasons: that the name was unknown; that the name was disputed; or that the name was well known. He holds that the inclination to attribute symbolic value to her is mistaken and her symbolic status is 'doubtful.' He states, "The Johannine use of the epithet cannot bear the significance attributed to it by exegetes who adopt the symbolical, polemical or historical interpretation of Mary." See Martin, "Assessing the Johannine Epithet," 68–73. See also, Karlsen Seim, "Descent," 370.

⁵⁶⁹ Of the anonymity of a character, Reinhartz goes on to say: "Anonymity is a negative feature; it focuses not on what is present within the text but on what is absent from it. Whereas the proper name ascribes stability, unity and individuality to the named figure, its absence calls these aspects into question. Yet anonymity in and of itself is not meaningful beyond the fact that it designates the absence of a proper name; that is, we cannot know what the person is, whether he or she is important, and how we might relate to the person based on anonymity alone." Reinhartz, *Anonymity and Identity*, 188.

Having identified that the maternal role is placed at the fore of her characterisation by her anonymity, the absence of a maternal address from Jesus is rendered all the more striking. Instead we see the term γύναι (*woman*) (John 2:4; 19:26). Although a minority of scholars consider the term problematic, twentieth-century interpretation has been almost unanimous in interpreting it as acceptable, or at least without offensive or malicious intent.⁵⁷⁰ Brown et al. claim it is “not an impolite address” and points to Jesus using the term to address other Gospel women (Matt 15:28; Luke 13:12; John 4:21; 8:10; 20:13).⁵⁷¹ However, these comparisons to *any* woman are problematic in their failure to consider the status and role of a mother: mothers are not *any* woman.⁵⁷² The relationship is a distinct and exclusive one which, almost universally, takes a unique form of address. Whether they are good mothers or bad mothers, absentee, estranged or involved mothers, the role of mother is a uniquely and irrevocably influential one. Are we to suppose that just because Jesus calls other females ‘woman’ it is acceptable for him to address his mother so?⁵⁷³ This denial of maternal address, here at the first instance of Jesus’ mother’s appearance in the text is deeply problematic. What appears to be lacking is any substantial evidence that the term should be read *without disrespect* when used for a mother.⁵⁷⁴

If we had any doubt about the tone of the address, Jesus’ words that precede it have already set a note of antagonism. τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου. *Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come* (John 2:4). Notably, the order of the

⁵⁷⁰ See for discussion, Peter-Ben Smit, “Jesus and the Ladies: Constructing and Deconstructing Johannine Macho-Christology,” *BCT* 2 (2006): 31.1–31.15, 31.2–31.5.

⁵⁷¹ Brown et al., *Mary*, 188. Barrett claims there is “no harshness or even disrespect in the vocative γύναι.” Barrett, *John*, 191. This reasoning is commonly made, for example see, Lieu, “Mother,” 65. See also, Gaventa, *Mary*, 85–6.

⁵⁷² Culpepper goes some way to recognise this: “Jesus’ sharp response to his mother is not to be glossed over in a misguided effort to rescue Jesus’ civility. By his response he distances himself from his mother. Henceforth, flesh and blood relationships will be secondary to those that are born of the spirit and sustained by faith.” See, R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (IBT; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 233.

⁵⁷³ Bultmann and Haenchen both concede that the term is “surprising.” Bultmann, *John*, 116; Haenchen, *John* 2, 173. However, Bultmann maintains that “it is not disrespectful or scornful” (116) and Haenchen states that it is “understandable” (173).

⁵⁷⁴ Beasley-Murray considers the term to have caused “needless perplexity” and offers one occurrence in Josephus (Josephus, *Ant.* 17:74) where it is used in an affectionate manner for a wife, not a mother, as evidence. See, Beasley-Murray, *John*, 34. Craig Keener offers a survey of when it may be used for one’s wife: Homer *Od.* 4.266; 8.424; 23.350; and possibly 19.555. Sophocles *Aj.* 293. He concludes, “it is not natural for one’s mother,” Keener, *John vol. 1*, 504. Colleen Conway is one of the few scholars to address this matter directly. See, Conway, *Men and Women*, 73. As does: Karlsen Seim, “Roles of Women,” 60.

Greek text sets the phrase ‘τί ἔμοι καὶ σοί’ before the term of address ‘γύναι.’ This indicates a deliberate distancing from his mother and is harder to interpret without hostility. τί ἔμοι καὶ σοί is a phrase in Greek which has no direct translation and the meaning of which shifts in various contexts. Mark Edwards points out that the Church Fathers follow Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.16) and interpret Jesus’ words as a rebuke.⁵⁷⁵ Lieu makes a survey of instances of this phrase in both the Septuagint and New Testament: 2 Sam 16:10; 19:22; 1 Kgs 17:18; 2 Kgs 3:13; Jer 2:18; Josh 22:24; Judg 11:12; 2 Chr 35:21; Matt 8:29; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 4:34; 8:28. All are points of denial of community, denial of obligation, or open hostility. Although Lieu initially states the case for γύναι to be regarded as an acceptable form of address, she takes this clause to clarify the hostility of the phrase. She notes, “The force of the rebuke comes from the natural assumption that there were mutual obligations, and it implies too that these have been violated by the person addressed.”⁵⁷⁶

Brown et al. make the more specific proposal that there are two forms of the phrase: one when the request is an unjust grievance and the injured party makes use of the phrase to rebut the request (Judg 11:12; 2 Chr 35:21; 1 Kgs 17:18); and secondly, to express distance and questioning when asked to be involved in something in which a person felt they had no place (2 Kgs 3:13; Hos 14:8).⁵⁷⁷ In all the cited New Testament instances, the words are found on the lips of those who are demoniacs and are part of their anguished cries addressed to Jesus. Jeffery Staley highlights the discord that the term induces, not just between mother and son, but also between implied author and implied reader. The ‘trick’ or ‘joke’ on the implied reader who has been led to expect a miracle, but then—initially—finds a

⁵⁷⁵ Mark Edwards, *John* (BBC; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 37. Beasley-Murray claims the expression is “ambiguous” and can be either peaceful or hostile. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 34. See for a detailed assessment: Keener, *John vol. 1*, 506.

⁵⁷⁶ Lieu, “Mother,” 65. Curiously, Lieu talks of the phrase *following* the term γύναι and, although she is clearly referring to the Greek text, this appears to be overlooked. Lieu, “Mother,” 65. Keener also makes the assumption that Jesus first addresses his mother γύναι, and then makes the statement τί ἔμοι καὶ σοί. Keener, *John vol. 1*, 506. Critically, both Lieu and Keener make comment that the phrase retrospectively hardens the tone of address ‘γύναι,’ however when read in the Greek, the phrase comes first. The tone is already harsh, and into this air Jesus casts the address γύναι.

⁵⁷⁷ See, Brown et al. *Mary*, 191.

rebuke on the lips of Jesus, has their expectations shattered as well as their trust [in the implied author] undermined.⁵⁷⁸

Many commentators identify the Cana episode as an essential moment in Jesus' wider agenda to identify himself as his divine Father's agent, over and against any earthly bond, notably (primarily?) that of his mother.⁵⁷⁹ Jesus' reference to his 'hour' (John 2:4) is a prolepsis and usually taken as the explanatory clause for Jesus' words.⁵⁸⁰ Jesus' mother's immediate and bafflingly expectant directions to the servants (John 2:5), along with the subsequent miraculous delivery of a huge quantity of wine, are both interpreted as remedying the blow or softening the harsh refusal.⁵⁸¹ The suggestion is that Jesus must distance himself from his earthly blood ties, he must demand of his mother the greater, and eternal, calling to discipleship and interpretation of this episode must be through the lens of the later encounter at the cross where all is (apparently) made well.

What is foremost from our perspective is not so much a debate over tone or level of hostility, but the matter that the anonymous mother, named 'mother' by the narrator, is addressed

⁵⁷⁸ Staley, *Print's First Kiss*, 83–6.

⁵⁷⁹ Brown, *The Community*, 195. Karlson Seim, "Descent," 368. Charles H. Giblin, "Suggestion, Negative Response and Positive Action in St John's Portrayal of Jesus (John 2:1–11; 4:46–54; 7:2–14; 11:1–44)" *NTS* 26 (1980): 197–211, 202–3. Jerome Neyrey highlights John's distinction between birth/blood ties as opposed to new discipleship/adoption ties between Jesus and his followers. Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 67–8. Lieu questions this common assumption. She says, "the narrative of Cana does not speak of Jesus disengaging himself from his mother's parental authority Neither does the narrative present a tension between the physical family and the family of faith. With 2:12 the leading role played by the physical family, and pre-eminently the mother of Jesus, remains intact." See, Lieu, "Mother," 67. See also for comment: Lightfoot, *St. John's*, 101; Haenchen, *John* 2, 173; Barrett, *John*, 191; Ben Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus' Attitudes to Women and their Roles as Reflected in his Earthly Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 84; Ernest Cadman Colwell and Eric Lane Titus, *The Gospel of the Spirit* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 113.

⁵⁸⁰ The reference to Jesus' hour has also been subjected to diverse interpretation. Keener explicitly interprets it as the hour of the cross—as he recognises most scholars do—and with that interpretation he believes the primary reason for Jesus' rebuke to his mother to be because she is ignorant of the cost of the Cana sign, in that it sets in motion his journey towards the cross and his 'hour.' See, Keener, *John vol. 1*, 506–7. See also: Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 144. Derrett proposes a less common reading, which prioritises the historicity of the situation, as well as the literal context, and suggests that it refers to the moment, or hour, when Jesus should make the offering of the new wine to the wedding party. He suggests the timing of the presentation of the gift would have been crucial in the success or failure of the festivities. See, J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Water into Wine," *BZ* 7 (1963): 80–97, 93. Calum Carmichael notes rabbinic thought that the 'hour' of a man was the hour of his birth. Thus Jesus confuses his 'mother' by claiming his birth has not yet come. Carmichael sees it as a reference to his coming birth in resurrection. See, Calum Carmichael, "The Marriage at Cana of Galilee," in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F. A. Sawyer* (ed. John Davies, Graham Harvey and Wilfred G. E. Watson; JSOTSup 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 310–320, 317–8.

⁵⁸¹ Jane Klopas comments, "The words themselves are not the most important vehicle of meaning; the relationship is. The degree to which the relationship yields its meaning depends upon the willingness and ability of the participants to hear more than what was spoken, and let the communication unfold in its own way." Jane Klopas, "Jesus and Women: John's Gospel." *ThTo* 41 (1984): 201–5, 202.

and, in our opinion crucially, demoted to γύναϊ by her son. Perhaps the appearance of the wine is not the only trick that the implied author plays in this episode. Twice billed as ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ in John 2:1 and 2:3, when Jesus not only fails to recognise her maternity, but also substitutes it with a generic term for any female, the implied reader is left confused. In addition, the term is set directly in the context of an esoteric phrase which highlights the distinction between them. By the use of oppositional personal pronouns: *me* and *you* ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί Jesus' words spilt their unified identity as mother and son. Here there is no 'we.'⁵⁸² Instead there enters a question, a doubt, driven between mother and son here at the first moment we see them together. Are we really to suppose the quantity of miraculous wedding wine can wash away the initial rupture set between mother and son?

4.2.3 Cross and Burial

The final encounter of Jesus' mother with her son (John 19:25–26) is commonly interpreted as redemptive of both their relationship and Jesus' depiction as the devoted son. The usual interpretation of this brief but significant interaction is encapsulated in Mark Stibbe's assessment here, "In vv. 25–27, the evocative and moving centrepiece of this section, Jesus thinks not of his own pain but the needs of his mother. The selfless heroism of a divine figure."⁵⁸³ Sentimental and subtly patronising, this exemplifies a reading of the divine, heroic,

⁵⁸² Derrett assesses the canonical precedents of the term in detail, but makes a radically alternative interpretation of it. He suggests that there is no trace of antagonism and it should be viewed as a unifying clause, which affirms Jesus and his mother in a mutual perspective. Derrett, "Water into Wine," 92. John McHugh also suggests that the phrase unites Jesus and his mother over and against the trivial matters of the world. He notes that the term of address γύναϊ may be interpreted as confirmation that Jesus' mother's position and relationship with his is as a (superior) disciple rather than a (inferior) blood relative. See, John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), 393–4. Lieu suggest there is "little support here for [McHugh's] optimistic readings": Lieu, "Mother," 65. Ritva Williams too, concludes that the phrase is one of unity rather than discord. Ritva H. Williams, "The Mother of Jesus at Cana: A Social-Science Interpretation of John 2:1–12," *CBQ* 59 (1997): 679–692, 688–9.

⁵⁸³ Stibbe, *John*, 197. Brown does contest an interpretation of this nature saying, "I find little in Johannine thought to recommend this interpretation To interpret the relationship between the Johannine Jesus and his mother in terms of filial care is both to reduce Johannine thought to the level of the flesh and to ignore the distancing from the concerns of natural family that took place in Cana in 2:4." Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 1021. Brown goes on to interpret Jesus' mother symbolically instead. Ben Witherington considers the episode the climax of the passion narrative in John's Gospel. Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1995), 310.

masculine, patriarchal crucified Christ in the Gospel of John. Jesus' character is denied pain and Jesus' mother is denied power.

Jesus again uses the term γύναι (*woman*) towards his mother. Often this second use is interpreted positively with less reservation than the first⁵⁸⁴; indeed Beasley-Murray cites this encounter as retrospective evidence for a lenient reading of John 2:4.⁵⁸⁵ However, we propose that this encounter heightens rather than redeems the confusion between mother and son. In a potent scene of emotion, Jesus appears to reject his mother's unique bond, not only with the use of the term γύναι, but with the expressed wish that she identify herself as someone else's mother.⁵⁸⁶ Adele Reinhartz offers some acknowledgement of discord in this scene, ". . . whereas he makes his home with the divine father (14:2), he sends his mother off to live with the beloved disciple (19:27). One can, and probably should, construe this latter act as one of love, but the physical impression of physical estrangement remains."⁵⁸⁷ So too, Beverly Gaventa acknowledges that the Gospel of John might be accused of 'slighting this significant female,' however Gaventa is keen to defend the position of the writer of John and the characterisation he delivers of Jesus' mother.⁵⁸⁸ As we have already highlighted, when Jesus finally utters the lemma μήτηρ (*mother*) it is to the mother he has never acknowledged, in renunciation of his own place as son, and to inaugurate her as someone else's.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁴ See for example, Barrett, *John*, 191. As in much Catholic scholarship, McHugh interprets this address as an explicit reference to Mary as mother of all believers, where Jesus overlooks his blood tie to her in favour of extending a motherly bond to the beloved disciple and henceforth to all disciples. See, McHugh, *Mother*, 401–3.

⁵⁸⁵ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 34. Italics mine.

⁵⁸⁶ A minority of interpreters interpret this exchange differently and take the initial son in "woman, behold your son" as a reference that Jesus is making, in the third person, to himself. See, Lyn M. Bechtel, "A Symbolic Level of Meaning: John 2:1–11 (The Marriage in Cana)," in *A Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament* (ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 241–55, 55.

⁵⁸⁷ Adele Reinhartz, "'And the Word Was Begotten': Divine Epigenesis in the Gospel of John," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 81–103, 94.

⁵⁸⁸ Gaventa, *Mary*, 96–7. Gaventa points out that other characters receive the same treatment.

⁵⁸⁹ Beverly Gaventa sees this event as primarily to demonstrate Jesus' utter separation from all earthly life and things. Jesus' mother's role is directly and singularly related to reveal information about Jesus, not herself. This, for her, is unproblematic: "Mary receives the same treatment that male characters do, because John's is a story solely about Jesus." Gaventa, *Mary*, 96–7. For a detailed discussion of the scene see, Conway, *Men and Women*, 80–5. Conway concludes that Jesus' mother has a key role in the Fourth Gospel and is presented as in harmony with Jesus' heavenly father. She points to this episode at the cross as significant in the creation of the family of faith.

F. Scott Spencer in his article “‘You Just Don’t Understand’ (Or Do You?): Jesus, Women and Conversation in the Fourth Gospel”⁵⁹⁰ explores the textual miscommunication and interpretative errors that arise in cross-gender discourses and cross-gender interpretation. He employs Deborah Tannen’s work on gender communication to study male–female discourses in the Gospel of John.⁵⁹¹ Though he does not critique the short mother-son interaction at the cross, his techniques are of some use to us. Spencer comments, “If Jesus and women always perfectly understood one another in the Fourth Gospel, we would be dealing with fantasy or nonsense.”⁵⁹²

Spencer highlights Tannen’s basic principle that male thinking and discourse, “. . . typically serves the interests of competition and status enhancement, while female speech forges bonds of connection and interpersonal intimacy.”⁵⁹³ It is clear that many scholars identify that Jesus is responding to his mother’s presence at the cross in terms of provision, honour and status: his mother must be provided for after his death and so he makes arrangements for her. However, interpreting with Spencer’s lens, we may speculate that a mother, witnessing her son’s unjust torture, execution and death, would actually be seeking, and possibly giving, words of intimacy and love; future practical arrangements are unlikely to dominate her present grief and loss.⁵⁹⁴ Instead Jesus’ mother receives words of alienation and the renunciation of her maternal bond. We must question the scholarly view of her as passive and helpless, primarily defined by gratitude that her future physical needs will be met. In this mode, sonship is reduced to meeting the needs of his mother and motherhood, being burden

⁵⁹⁰ F. Scott Spencer, “‘You Just Don’t Understand’ (Or Do You?): Jesus, Women and Conversation in the Fourth Gospel,” in *A Feminist Companion to John Volume 1* (ed. A. J. Levine; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 15–47.

⁵⁹¹ Tannen writes both academic and popular literature on gender communication. Spencer primarily draws on: Deborah Tannen, *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue, and Imagery in Conversational Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Deborah Tannen, *Gender and Conversational Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Deborah Tannen, *Gender and Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁵⁹² Spencer, “‘You Just Don’t Understand,’” 19.

⁵⁹³ Spencer, “‘You Just Don’t Understand,’” 21. Spencer takes into account the pitfalls of mapping twentieth-century sociology onto a classical religious text and looks at its similarities (male honour conduct) and divergences (Tannen’s assertion of female drives for intimacy and community does not fit with female shame conduct) and he convincingly considers the biblical exceptions to female shame conduct and presents a biblical (Hebrew) case for female intimacy and community (21-26).

⁵⁹⁴ Spencer comments that, “the mother-son bond was and is among the closest kinship bonds in the Middle East.” Spencer, “‘You Just Don’t Understand,’” 27.

of need to the son. In the body of scholarship which sees this as a positive encounter, at the very point of maternal grief and loss, the substitution of her son appears to be an acceptable, indeed welcomed, proposal.⁵⁹⁵ Moreover, recognition of her complete loss of agency as a person, and the negotiation over her in terms of an object, seems to be lost in scholarly interpretation of what appears to be Jesus giving away his earthly mother.

We may, like Reinhartz, assume that Jesus expresses his love and devotion to his mother through this act, but whether Jesus acts in love or loathing for his biological mother we cannot actually tell. If Jesus is indeed fulfilling a patriarchal duty it could be carried out with either disposition. If the event is interpreted in patriarchal terms, Jesus certainly fulfils his obligation, however, if we allow the mother of Jesus agency and power, if we embody our reading of her, the fulfilment of obligation is eclipsed by present love and grief. What might an embodied reading of Jesus' mother in John 19 look like? An interpretation of Jesus' mother's grief at the cross has a long and rich history in theological, church and faith settings, encompassing art and music, particularly in the Stabat Mater tradition, and while we do not make specific recourse to this mariological literature here, others have noted the comparative silence within the Johannine text. Andrew Wilson points out, "Where the Gospel narrative glosses over Mary as a grieving mother, the tradition of piety marked by the Stabat Mater tradition quickly makes up for any loss of prominence."⁵⁹⁶ How can we allow the maternal body voice, emotion, will and power in a scholarly reading without straying into devotional or mariological discourse?

⁵⁹⁵ For example see, Neyrey, *John in Cultural*, 433. Neyrey hypothesises that Jesus' mother's social situation was precarious without a male relative. Neyrey presumes that she is a widow and suggests she has no other sons, even though the Gospel of John contains references to Jesus' brothers (as distinct from his disciples) John 2:12, 7:3, 7:5 and 7:10. Keener suggests the point is that the brothers were unbelievers and Jesus' was raising the status of the Christian community to 'family' in his recognition of the beloved disciple as a brother. See, Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1144–5. Beasley-Murray presents a discussion of scholarly opinion, see, Beasley-Murray, *John*, 349–50. Rudolf Schnackenburg presents a lengthy discussion of the breadth of interpretation of the scene, see, Schnackenburg, *John vol. 3*, 277–82. For a recent discussion of Jesus' brothers in the Gospel of John see, Joel Nolette and Steven A. Hunt, "The Brothers of Jesus: All in the Family?" in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (eds. S. A. Hunt, D. F. Tolmie and R. Zimmermann. WUNT 314. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 238–44. Interestingly Nolette and Hunt conclude that the brothers of Jesus were "negative characters." Nolette and Hunt, "The Brothers," 244.

⁵⁹⁶ Wilson, "Stabat Maria," 31.

We have seen in our historical enquiry that her presence at the cross may be considered within the expected behaviour of the family of the condemned. Jesus' execution has been clearly portrayed as unjust and there is nothing within the text to suggest that Jesus was rightly condemned. Indeed, to the contrary, he is portrayed as a subject of a betrayal. While we have highlighted that the text has suggested some division of mother and son, primarily in the Cana encounter, little of that division radiates from the character of Jesus' mother. Although the limits of this study mean that an extensive exploration of Jesus' mother's character is not possible here, some points become immediately apparent. If we consider her as an embodied woman, watching her son die and with the possibility of her potential resistance to the transference of her maternal devotion to the beloved disciple, her character's voice, emotion, will and power begin to be revealed. In addition, Jesus' mother's grief is not only for the execution of a son, but the unjustified and wrongful execution of her child. Even in a society that was accustomed to public executions, this scene, in the literary world of John's Gospel, appears extraordinarily distressing.

In many ways, Jesus' mother's silent presence in John 19:25–7 betrays her refusal to go away and be just 'γύναϊ.' Her body testifies to her motherhood and her bodily presence at the cross demands attention and recognition. The tensions between mother and son, silent body and speaking body, nurturing body and violated body, between birth and death, are unavoidable in her appearance. Hers is the maternal body, speaking of childbirth and life, standing in contrast to the dying body of her son. It is perplexing that scholars appear to overlook in interpretation the inevitable complexity of grief and pain between them at this encounter. We may question whether we overestimate Jesus' mother's love and devotion? Does she love and grieve with the passion that we assume? Or, alternatively, might we underestimate her interpretative ability? Maybe she has functioned within her family and her society long enough to understand her son's words to be of love? While all this may be recognised, one cannot deny the fissure set between them. She remains present but

wordless as she is handed over to another. Viewed in this light, is it surprising that a woman with such a commanding and verbal role in her first appearance now holds her tongue?

Ultimately however, the crucifixion narrative that holds Jesus' final moments of life also contains her final record in the text. Jesus' mother fails to reappear in the Gospel of John: as he dies physically, she disappears textually. It is this perspective on the presence of Jesus' mother at his death scene which is crucial in our consideration of the burial narrative. From both our literary perspective and our historical perspective we can identify that when the mother of Jesus fails to make the journey from cross to grave, all is not well.⁵⁹⁷ There is no reason to suspect that she would not desire to undertake the burial ritual. Reading her character alongside first-century crucifixion and Jewish burial discourse, we can identify that her presence in any arrangements should have been central and could even have been essential in securing a post-execution burial.

Indeed, Jesus' mother's claim to the body and burial ritual of her son is further strengthened by the presence of another family member, her sister, as well as two close women.⁵⁹⁸ It is not unreasonable to assume that this familial and feminine unit, present at execution, would hold all and any hope for the burial of Jesus' body. Our primary observation is that the mother of Jesus is the most significant disappearance from the text as the narrative moves from crucifixion to burial.⁵⁹⁹ Jesus' mother's loss is threefold; she sustains the loss of her title, the loss of her son, and the loss of her role in burial.

⁵⁹⁷ In the spirit of Jerome Neyrey's article, we might ask of the burial text, 'What's wrong with this picture?' See, Jerome H. Neyrey, "What's Wrong With This Picture? John 4, Cultural Stereotypes of Women and Public and Private Space" in *A Feminist Companion to John Volume 1* (ed. A. J. Levine; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 98–125.

⁵⁹⁸ As previously stated, because of matters of punctuation in the Greek, the number of women at the cross scene in John 19:25 could be read as 2, 3, or 4. For the purposes of our study we adhere to the common reading of 4 women. For discussion see, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1014–5. See also, Tolmie, "The Women," 618–21.

⁵⁹⁹ Brown makes a small note, appearing only in parentheses, which is of interest to our enquiry. He indicates that without information to the contrary, one would have assumed that the burial of Jesus would have been the task of Jesus' relatives, especially considering the presence of Jesus' mother recorded in 19:25. However he doesn't explore this anomaly any further. See, Brown, *John 13–21*, 938.

In other ancient literature, mothers whose sons are violently killed are at times afforded a voice.⁶⁰⁰ A particularly helpful comparison is found in the first-century Virgil's *Aeneid* and we can note it here as a warning not to make assumptions of the indifference of Jesus' mother.

The mother of Euryalus, who was slain in battle, cries out:

Now you are given to Latin dogs and vultures to plunder.
Sprawled in a foreign land, your wounds unwashed by your mother,
your eyes not shut, your corpse not part of a death-march.
This robe won't cover you now—I hurriedly wove it
night and day, easing my old concern with some weaving.
Where will I follow? What ground will hold your dismembered
body and torn flesh? Virgil *Aen.* 9.485–91

This mother laments after hearing of her son Euryalus' death and seeing his head displayed on a spear. While the details of the situation are different—Euryalus' corpse is exposed and clearly this mother had some time to, albeit hurriedly, prepare for burial—what remains striking is the length of discourse pertaining to the maternal loss of role in burial. This is no light matter. Although we are wary to overstate the significance of the comparison, we are aware that it does make a contribution to our reading in the form of a voice. Where the mother in the Fourth Gospel has no voice, this mother, of a comparable time and culture, does, and she speaks of burial ritual. Euryalus' mother's desperate concern about the burial of her dead son's corpse offers us a possible response of a mother who is denied involvement in burial rituals after the violent death of her child. This has highlighted the fact that the maternal loss of funerary rites is too easily underestimated and overlooked as an aspect in the interpretation of the Johannine burial text.

In this section, *Maternal Absence*, we have identified a conflict between what would have been reasonable first-century expectations around the character of Jesus' mother and what actually unfolds as depicted in the narrative world of John's Gospel. We have problematised

⁶⁰⁰ For a detailed discussion of mourning and mothers in ancient Greek literature see, Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning with the essay Of Amnesty and Its Opposite* (trans. C. Pache; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). We previously noted that Cicero highlights the torment of parents that the corrupt Sicilian governor Verres induced. He notes: the parents who were forbidden to take provisions to their condemned sons in prison; mothers who waited by the prisons at night in order to catch the last breath or kiss of their offspring before they were executed; and the bargaining both the condemned and their parents entered into with executioners for speedy death and then burial (rather than exposure) for the bodies once the execution had been completed (Cicero *Verr.* 2.45.117–120).

a reading of the term $\gamma\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota$ as positive when used as a substitute for the title ‘mother.’ We have also considered an embodied discourse of Jesus’ mother’s character, attempting to resist reading her as a passive female, without voice, emotion, will or power. Finally, we have proposed that Jesus’ mother is a character who is subjected to the loss of title (in the use of the term $\gamma\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota$ and the ‘giving’ of her to the beloved disciple), son (in his execution and death), and role (in her disappearance from the burial narrative). To the discourse around this final loss we will now turn.

4.3 Masculinised Entrances and Exits in Male Space

In our discussion of masculinised entrances and exits we will consider birth and burial in the Gospel of John. The terminology of ‘entrance’ and ‘exit’ serves our purpose well. It reflects the first-century prominence of feminine involvement in the events and rituals around the beginnings and endings of life, but it also allows us to frame our discussion around the bodily presence and absence of Jesus, his entrance and his exit, within the text of the Fourth Gospel. With the lack of a birth narrative in the Gospel of John, using the term entrance allows us to consider Jesus’ introduction to the world of the text. Unlike the Gospel of Mark—which simply overlooks the birth and starts at John’s ministry (Mark 1)—the Gospel of John supplements the mariological tradition for a cosmic explanation of Jesus’ existence and entry to earth. When we identify burial, rather than death, as ‘exit’ it allows us to discuss the body of Jesus in terms of presence and absence rather than simply alive or dead. This highlights the element of presence that Jesus’ body has in the text during the burial narrative: dead yet still present, a theme we will take up in the next chapter. Presently, we will review scholarly readings of Jesus’ birth as divine male space and move on to propose a reading of Jesus’ burial as politicised male space.

4.3.1 Birth as Masculinised Divine Entrance

The consideration of the Johannine entrance of Jesus into the human world is the focus of considerable scholarship. This section will seek to survey that which is relevant to our reading of the text. We do not propose to add any significant contribution to the consideration of Jesus' birth/entry narrative in John. Our primary focus remains the burial text. However, the displacement of the female gender in the in the birth/entrance discourse, which other scholars have highlighted, mirrors the marginalisation of the female gender in the Johannine burial narrative where our contribution lies.

The ancient disposition towards women around birth and death has, for some, provided an explanation for the patriarchal, masculinised first-century discourse around conception and reproduction. It betrays an attempt to redress the ambiguity surrounding paternity. Whereas maternity is obvious and unequivocal in its bodily presence, paternity was mysterious and vulnerable to doubt. Karlsen Seim comments,

In a patriarchal social universe continuity and connection are defined through symbolic generative relations between men. The male ability of genesis provides the right of legitimate affiliation. The *dilemma* is that in the reality of human life as different from myth, where parturition might well be within the powers of the supreme male deity, male incorporation can only occur by way of women. The *irony* is that whereas motherhood manifests itself bodily and unmistakably, fatherhood is not visible and evident in the same compelling manner; it is in fact fragile and vulnerable.⁶⁰¹

Often, 'birth' as a theme in John's Gospel is transferred to Jesus himself in the interpretation of his moment of death.⁶⁰² Adeline Fehribach's work makes an interesting contribution in this area in her presentation of a reading of Jesus as the birthing messianic bridegroom on the cross.⁶⁰³ She uses Thomas Laqueur's research on ancient gender conceptualisation (particularly that which claimed men and women had the same reproductive organs, simply situated in different places) to reconceptualise Jesus' death as the conception of his spiritual children of God. At other times the motif appears, but is drained of its earthly (physical,

⁶⁰¹ Karlsen Seim, "Descent," 362.

⁶⁰² See for example, Deborah Sawyer, "Water and Blood: Birthing Images in John's Gospel," in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F. A. Sawyer* (ed. John Davies, Graham Harvey and Wilfred G. E. Watson; JSOTSup 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 300–309.

⁶⁰³ Adeline Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 129–31.

female) qualities and replaced by the necessity of a birth from above, a birth of the spirit.⁶⁰⁴ Wayne Meeks' descent/ascent motif presents an interpretation of the Gospel of John, which highlights for us the absence of Jesus' birth in both the text and its interpretations.⁶⁰⁵ Meeks, building on Bultmann's suggestions, considers it central to the Gospel.⁶⁰⁶ Meeks makes no attempt to reconcile a descent motif with the presentation of a human mother.

If we look to the Prologue, we find an esoteric piece of poetic prose, which features 'flesh,' but not a woman's flesh, in the entrance of God's λόγος. The actual birth of Jesus merits no reference. The female antenatal body is unacknowledged and Jesus arrives in the text as powerful and pre-existent, in male human form. At his first bodily appearance Jesus is an adult on the cusp of his ministry (John 1:29–34). The Christ needs only the Spirit's seal to enter the text as the Son of God (1:34&49), the Son of Man (1:51), even the son of Joseph (1:45), but not the son of (a) woman. Gail Patterson Corrington makes a similar assessment:

. . . the two scenes in which she [Jesus' mother] does have a part seem deliberately designed, either by the evangelist or a later editor, to disassociate Jesus not only from the act of physical birth, but from his biological mother. Once again, for John as for Luke, Mary appears to be the means by which the Word became flesh, by which the spiritual became physical, but the evangelist does not wish to dwell upon the process. For John, Jesus, like all the true children of God, takes his origin "from above" . . .⁶⁰⁷

Alison Jasper in her book *The Shining Garment of the Text*⁶⁰⁸ makes a fascinating intertextual, and explicitly feminist, journey through five interpretations of John's Prologue, culminating in her offer of three distinct readings. Jasper traces the response to maternal absence in the readings and interpretations of Augustine, Hildegard von Bingen, Martin

⁶⁰⁴ Lieu proposes that there is no dichotomy or dualism between earthly birth or heavenly birth in John. Earthly birth illustrates and expounds its heavenly counterpart. See, Lieu, "Scripture and the Feminine," 237–8.

⁶⁰⁵ Wayne M. Meeks, "The Man From Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72. Later published: Wayne M. Meeks, "The Man From Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," in *The Interpretation of John* (2d ed.; ed. J. Ashton; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 169–205. Meeks admits that a descent narrative is not included in the text, even in the Prologue, but considers the evidence that Jesus "belongs elsewhere" as sufficiently convincing to disregard the matter. Wayne M. Meeks, "The Man From Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72, 50. See also, Nicholson, *Death*, 51–67.

⁶⁰⁶ Bultmann suggests the descent/ascent motif betrays a Gnostic myth tradition behind the Fourth Gospel. See, Wayne M. Meeks, "The Man From Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72, 44–5.

⁶⁰⁷ Gail Paterson Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation: Female Saviours and Formative Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 165.

⁶⁰⁸ Alison Jasper, *The Shining Garment of the Text* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

Luther, Rudolf Bultmann and Adrienne von Speyer. In Augustine's (354–430) writing Jesus' mother/the feminine is made present but subordinate.⁶⁰⁹ Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) is keen to introduce Jesus' mother as a representative and confirming presence of the 'enfleshing' of the Word, while keeping her virginal purity to guard the margins to the sexual and sinful feminine sphere.⁶¹⁰ Martin Luther (1483–1546), who himself jettisoned the Catholic veneration of Mary in his reforming work, is pleased to find John's Prologue equally debasing, erasing Mary from the incarnational narrative.⁶¹¹ Rudolf Bultmann's (1884–1976) demythologising project required the 'quiet' re-insertion of Mary the mother into the text.⁶¹² And Adrienne von Speyr (1902–1967) inserts Mary the mother into the Prologue as paradigmatic of Trinitarian love.⁶¹³ All but one of these five readings reintroduce Jesus' mother. We can note that in these examples, with the exclusion of Luther, there is a predilection for the masking of the Fourth Gospel's abjection of the maternal presence.

In Jasper's own readings she initially introduces an interpretation of John the Baptist who, in his representation of humanity, becomes the "proto-incarnate, lending fully human authority to the embryonic divine."⁶¹⁴ Jasper herself can see the weakness in her attempt to prioritise 'humanity' and substitute Jesus' mother with, the male, John the Baptist.⁶¹⁵ But, even with her appeal to Schüssler Fiorenza's work, Jasper's "male mother"⁶¹⁶ and her desire to divide pregnancy from the female body is problematic at best, and farcical at worst.⁶¹⁷ Jasper goes on to produce a more fruitful and engaging discussion around the term σάρξ *flesh*, which appears in John 1:13 and 1:14. She identifies that John initially derides the flesh and its

⁶⁰⁹ Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 42.

⁶¹⁰ Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 81–2.

⁶¹¹ Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 95–99. However Mary is not erased from his theology by any means, see 99–108.

⁶¹² Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 122–3.

⁶¹³ Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 146.

⁶¹⁴ Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 179.

⁶¹⁵ Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 179.

⁶¹⁶ Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 180.

⁶¹⁷ Deborah Sawyer discusses the imagining of female biological function onto the masculine body of Christ, with particular reference to medieval tradition. She finds the attribution of distinctive female roles—birth, breastfeeding—a failure of feminist critique and a collapse of the female into the male patriarchal world. "In Christian tradition the 'female' Christ figure is not a 'counter-tradition' reflecting a less patriarchal form of that religion, but a reinforcement of its misogyny. Woman subsumed into man cannot mean the inclusion of the female in the Godhead." Deborah Sawyer, "John 19:34: From Crucifixion to Birth, or Creation?" in *A Feminist Companion to John Volume 2* (ed. A. J. Levine; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 130–139, 134.

desires (v. 13) only, in the very next verse, to suggest that the incarnate λόγος became that very flesh. This conflict within the text betrays a conflict between a desire to explain the incarnation in terms of the λόγος becoming human, but to also marginalise the maternal female body.⁶¹⁸ Jasper follows this through in a phallogocentric critique to identify the devaluation of the female and the feminine.⁶¹⁹

Adele Reinhartz employs the lens of Aristotelian epigenesis with which to interpret Jesus' incarnation.⁶²⁰ In this ancient explanation of conception, the sperm of the male is the carrier of life and soul (the πνεῦμα), as well as all the physiological determinants for the growing life. The female acts as a host, a place for the embryonic life to grow, her body supplying the matter, not the form. Both male and female are believed to produce semen, although of differing strengths and functions, but overall the value of the female is diminished.⁶²¹ Reinhartz assesses the Fourth Gospel from this perspective and finds compelling evidence that this process is alluded to. She concludes,

Thus the first few verses of the prologue, when read against the background of Greek notions of generation, declare that God is the first principle of generation, whose λόγος, or rational principle, was given human life and form and sent into the human world as Jesus, the divine father's only begotten son. This reading provides content for the assertion that the Word became flesh by alluding to the process of epigenesis through divine seed.⁶²²

Reinhartz's hypothesis firmly exiles Jesus' mother as an inconsequential host. Indeed, while the theory of epigenesis allows a small place for the maternal body, the Gospel of John barely seems to at all. As Karlsen Seim succinctly phrases it: "In the Gospel of John, women may be positively, even affirmatively, portrayed in their role as disciples. But there is no female principle involved in the divine begetting and birth-giving. The mother does not matter

⁶¹⁸ Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 183–197.

⁶¹⁹ She states, "... the predominant and underlying association of the word σάρξ in the Prologue is with the symbols of women and the feminine, representing precisely the devalued terms within any scale of values determined by a phallogocentric context." Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 188.

⁶²⁰ Adele Reinhartz, "And the Word Was Begotten": Divine Epigenesis in the Gospel of John," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 81–103.

⁶²¹ Reinhartz, "And the Word Was Begotten," 88–90.

⁶²² Reinhartz, "And the Word Was Begotten," 93.

because matter is what she provides.”⁶²³ In terms of Jesus’ birth, the divine Father has eclipsed the earthly mother; his entry to world and text is firmly planted in divine masculinised space.⁶²⁴

As we can see, Jesus’ entrance in the Gospel of John is distinctly theological and masculine, rather than personal and female.⁶²⁵ It is ‘entrance’ rather than ‘birth.’⁶²⁶ The primary agency and force, in the coming of Jesus, is divine paternity, the divine Father. It is not unknown that the Fourth Gospel places particular emphasis on this term.⁶²⁷ The Johannine designation of God as Father appears approximately 118 times in the Gospel and is primarily used to define the Father as *Jesus’* Father.⁶²⁸ However, the extra-textual event of female maternity is not completely erased. As we have previously considered, a mother’s presence and body reveals a birth, and the fleshy, messy, biological, and social connection is present if we allow the character of Jesus’ mother voice, emotion, will and power. We can trace and recognise this feminine ‘other’ or alternative discourse within the narrative. The character of the mother of Jesus bears a connection to him and her body becomes a site of resistance which refuses to hide the bond that mother and son share. It speaks both in her awkward presence and her notable absence.

⁶²³ Karlsen Seim, “Descent,” 375.

⁶²⁴ Reinhartz comments, “This aspect [physical estrangement between mother and son] of the Gospel serves to focus attention squarely on the importance of the father both in Jesus’ formation and also in Jesus’ ongoing mission in the world.” Reinhartz, “And the Word Was Begotten,” 94. See also, Peter-Ben Smit’s article for a more detailed discussion of the masculinity of Jesus: Smit, “Jesus and the Ladies,” 31.7.

⁶²⁵ Some Catholic textual critics prefer the one example of a variant reading of John 1:13 which turns “who were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man” into the singular “he was born . . .” making it into a possible reference to the virgin birth. See, Brown et al., *Mary*, 181–2.

⁶²⁶ An alternative perspective which highlights the network of Jesus’ familial relationships which span the opening of John’s Gospel may be found in Beverly Gaventa. She says, “Given the references to Jesus’ father and hometown, and the reference to Jesus’ brothers in 2:12, the appearance of Jesus’ mother in 2:1 is not as abrupt as it might at first glance appear. It occurs, in fact, within a small network of references to Jesus’ relatives and his home. The Logos is not a disembodied spirit, after all, but has a family and location just as does any other flesh-and-blood human being. Jesus is simultaneously God’s only son and the son of Mary and Joseph.” Gaventa, *Mary*, 82. Gaventa highlights that although scholars may claim that the prologue negates the place of Jesus’ mother, she sees the Cana story as directly *investing* Jesus with a mother (89).

⁶²⁷ The Father of Jesus has been a well-documented concept, particularly in more recent feminist scholarship seeking to address the matter. Adele Reinhartz, ed., *God the Father in the Gospel of John* (Semeia 85; Atlanta: SBL, 1999) is a particular text to highlight. It brings together a variety of contributions around the subject. See also, Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 110–134.

⁶²⁸ The exact number is obscured by manuscript variants. Thompson points out that it appears more than in all the Synoptics combined. See, Marianne Meye Thompson, “The Living Father,” *Semeia* 85 (1999): 19–31, 19.

4.3.2 Burial as Politicised Masculine Space: Identifying Space, Power and Politics

As we now look more closely at burial, and the two men who undertake it, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, what might we reveal in an examination of the issues of space, power, and politics in the Johannine burial text? Opening a discourse about the nature of gendered space in the burial narrative allows us to consider it as politicised masculine space which, crucially, displaces the normative female and familial space of Jewish burial custom. This makes a contribution to our discussion of the burial narrative as a continuation of the punishment and trauma of execution rather than relief from it. Usually the burial narrative in John's Gospel is considered serene and unproblematic.⁶²⁹ Our work joins the scholarly minority we identify below, which contends that the burial task should not be interpreted positively with quite such haste.

In addition to our feminist hermeneutic we will introduce postcolonial questions and perspectives, which further problematise an optimistic reading of Joseph and Nicodemus.⁶³⁰ Postcolonial criticism adds to our questions of gender, questions of wealth, politics and authority that highlight the challenging and uneasy balance of power within the narrative.⁶³¹

⁶²⁹ Brown holds that in John, Jesus receives an honourable burial. He suggests that Nicodemus' public act of burial, along with the gift of spices, redeems his character and his presence gives Joseph's action in a more favourable tone. See, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1258–1261. Barrett considers Jesus as "appropriately buried." Barrett, *John*, 555. Haenchen suggests that the Johannine story is designed to show that, "Jesus, in spite of everything, received an honourable burial and not the ignominious end of a law breaker." Haenchen, *John 2*, 202. Schnackenburg suggests that Nicodemus' act is one of love. Schnackenburg, *John vol. 3*, 296. Mark Stibbe suggests, "Nothing in this short passage indicates that John's tone is hostile towards these minor characters. Indeed there is something idyllic in this quiet garden scene." Stibbe, *John As Storyteller*, 119. Francis Moloney makes a huge interpretative move and calls Joseph and Nicodemus Jesus' 'new-found friends.' Moloney states, "Now he [Jesus] is surrounded by his new-found friends, a community that handles his crucified body in a royal way." Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP vol. 4; ed. D. J. Harrington; Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1998), 511.

⁶³⁰ For an introduction to postcolonial criticism see: R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Uriah Y. Kim, "Postcolonial Criticism: Who is the Other in the Book of Judges?" in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (ed. G. A. Yee; 2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 161–182; Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); Musa M. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000); Laura H. Donaldson, ed., *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading* (Semeia 75; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); For postcolonial criticism specifically related to the Gospel of John see, Musa M. Dube and Jeffery L. Staley, eds., *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space and Power* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

⁶³¹ For a postcolonial reading of the death and burial of Jesus in the Gospel of John see, Fernando F. Segovia, "The Gospel of John," in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (eds. F. F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 156–93, 185–7.

While the limits of this thesis do not allow for a full exploration of a postcolonial reading of this text, the introduction and awareness of postcolonial matters is vital to our perspective. Recognition of the unequal power dynamics within patriarchy between men and women, can be—some say must be—complemented by the recognition of unjust power dynamics between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, coloniser and colonised, the West and ‘the Rest.’⁶³² Indeed, Fernando F. Segovia notes that the Gospel of John has “decidedly political overtones”⁶³³ and we will no doubt benefit from being mindful of these in our reading of the burial text. In accordance with our text-based perspective we will deliberately limit ourselves to applying postcolonial questions to the Johannine literary world and its interpretation. We will not make an attempt to conjecture history behind the text or, as is common in postcolonial criticism, consider other specific social locations.

Assumptions of the gendering of space are difficult and assumptions of the gendering of space across a number of centuries are to be made with caution. However, there is significant value in consideration of this topic. Jorunn Økland makes a thorough and careful study of the gendering of ancient space.⁶³⁴ Moving past a simple *description* of space, and drawing on the work of historian Yvonne Hirdman, Økland helpfully identifies three elements in the genderization of ancient space.

1. Where it is (public/private).
2. Who inhabits it (male/female).
3. What activities they undertake (masculine/feminine labour).⁶³⁵

Birth and burial, entrance and exit, of the body from the first-century world were both areas of female and feminine space. A baby’s body came from a woman’s body, in private, usually

⁶³² See, Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 23–43.

⁶³³ Segovia, “The Gospel of John,” 156.

⁶³⁴ Jorunn Økland, *Women in their Place: Paul and the Corinthian Discourse of Gender and Sanctuary Space* (JSNTSup 269; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 58–77.

⁶³⁵ Økland, *Women in their Place*, 59. Notably the definition of masculine and feminine labour does not derive from any inherent gender of *labour*, but rather accrues from surrounding cultural notions inscribed in and through laws, traditions and attitudes of what confirms gender identity and shapes gendered expectations of particular tasks.

into the hands of a woman. A dead body was equally handled and dressed by female hands as it made its ritual exit from the world of the living.⁶³⁶ Birth was, and of course still is, a *physically* female event; burial was predominantly considered *socially* feminine labour, undertaken primarily by women, with both private and public elements. Although men were included in the ritual of burial, women led and governed its practicalities. Marianne Sawicki points out that these “bodily events” brought duties that only women could fulfil and, in turn, became spaces of female community where women could commune and communicate.⁶³⁷

In a normative first-century context, after a natural death, we can identify that the preparation of a body for burial is usually in a private setting (home), undertaken by female relations or friends.⁶³⁸ It is commonly designated feminine labour by tradition, practicalities and the Jewish law. The transportation of the body from home to tomb then changes in nature to a public activity, which includes men and women and would have strong elements of masculine and feminine activity: eulogising the deceased being typically masculine and public mourning and lamenting being typically feminine.

In the Johannine burial narrative we have previously considered at length the feminine labour of burial ritual and the displacement of the female with the male in the burial. Using Økland’s three reference points we can see this firmly suggests that the space of burial in the Gospel of John is male. What remains to be considered here is whether it is private or public? The actual death of Jesus by execution is firmly placed in public space and his corpse certainly remains in that space to a certain extent (the body is taken from the public space of execution with the public permission of Pilate). What is the likelihood that the space becomes private during the process of interment? It is unclear as to whether the act of burial of an

⁶³⁶ Alison Jasper writes, “The reason for the symbolic identification of ‘flesh’ as feminine has clearly to do with the bodily and material site of human sexual desire, fragility and subjection to death. Feminist writers and commentators argue that the roots of the association lie in perceptions of a woman as connected with the male sexual desire but also with birth and nurturing, with sickness and death. Women, traditionally, are those who deal with the very young, the sick and the very old.” Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 184–5.

⁶³⁷ See, Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord*, 255.

⁶³⁸ See, Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 480. See also, Corley, *Women*, 107–128. For discussion see, Chapter Three, 3.2.7 ‘Mourning Ritual, Lamentations and Women’s Roles.’

executed corpse inhabits public or private space, and indeed how that space would move from one to the other. The absence of female, familial or trusted characters in the burial narrative certainly problematises a smooth transition. Can we really consider Joseph and Nicodemus as partaking in the familial feminine labour of burial preparation? Økland also points out the question of *who* defines ancient space. She states,

Whereas public space was established as public and as male through public male discourse, it is impossible to know if domestic space was established as private and as female through domestic female discourse. As far as we can know, domestic space was established as private and female through the same public discourse that established the public space as male.⁶³⁹

The power to name space in the first-century world lay within the masculine public discourse and so the female space of burial was vulnerable to, and at the mercy of, male authority. This highlights a dynamic of power, at the scale of metanarrative of ancient space, to which we will now turn in the micronarrative of John's Gospel.

Postcolonial criticism presents a suitable perspective from which to consolidate our questions of power and powerlessness within the text and to reassess the impact of the scene as we highlight the political and social aspects of the Joseph and Nicodemus characters. Uriah Y. Kim makes a comprehensive introductory list of the types of questions that postcolonial criticism poses of the text and its interpreters including: "Are there suppressed and neglected voices in the text?" and "Who are the marginalised or Other in the text?"⁶⁴⁰ Most certainly we have identified a body of characters, including Jesus' mother, who are excluded from the space of mourning and burial rites, a space that in normal circumstances they would inhabit and control. These questions, highlighted here in our literary context, draw attention to the power dynamics in their displacement.

The characters who perform the burial ritual are socially, politically and economically more powerful characters than those that they displace. Contention of the space of Jesus' burial

⁶³⁹ Økland, *Women in their Place*, 65.

⁶⁴⁰ Kim, "Postcolonial Criticism", 168.

ritual has not been between characters of equal standing. Instead, the personal (feminine) familial space of burial, usually protected by tradition, has been taken over by the more powerful political (masculine) discourse. The uncritical acceptance of Joseph's and Nicodemus' presence and agency in the burial narrative has often been lubricated by the perceived standing, wealth and power of the characters. Postcolonial criticism offers us a point of departure, which allows the loss of the *powerless* family and friends/disciples in the act of burial to be exposed as problematic. This reveals the negative qualities of the power and wealth that Joseph and Nicodemus display, the control they take, and the loss they incur upon the characters that are denied by their action.

We have discussed the theory that Jesus' burial was a criminal burial performed as a matter of course by the Jewish authorities. Reading the burial of Christ in the Gospel of John in the context of this theory would set the Johannine burial firmly within a politicised (and masculine) discourse. However, as we have seen, there are elements in the text, as well as doubts within the available evidence, for such a process. This means that the suggestion must be at this point be dismissed from our discussion and our argument of political aspects of the burial made without recourse to the theory. Indeed, it is not simply the presence of an official designation that makes this burial a politicised masculinised space, but the presence of political men who deliberately take control—whether with legal, devotional, or an unknown, motivation—of the body and burial ritual of Jesus in the Gospel of John.

The Gospel has already introduced Nicodemus as a highly political figure. He entered the text in John 3:1 where his status as both a religious and political authority—a Pharisee—is reiterated by a secondary note that he is a 'leader of the Jews': Ἦν δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων, Νικόδημος ὄνομα αὐτῷ, ἄρχων τῶν Ἰουδαίων. *Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.* Later in the passage, set in Jesus' direct speech, is another title: ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ *the teacher of Israel* (John 3:10). Further confirmation about Nicodemus' political status is disclosed in John 7:50 εἷς ὢν ἐξ αὐτῶν *who was one of*

them. The narrator makes clear that Nicodemus is counted as one of the collection of chief priests and Pharisees previously described (7:45).

Joseph of Arimathea is a stranger when he enters the text at 19:38. His political status is not made explicit, John's Gospel does not openly disclose that he was a member of the council (as do Mark 15:43 and Luke 23:50–1), but there are strong indications that Joseph is a political figure. His association with Nicodemus must not be underestimated. In addition, it is Joseph who approaches Pilate and requests Jesus' body. He has both Pilate's ear to make the request and gains his permission to carry it out: two positive interactions with Pilate—the authority who sanctioned Jesus' execution—suggests that Joseph might hold some political power of his own. Notably, Pilate's jurisdiction, remains over the burial Joseph and Nicodemus carry out. While it may not have been a specifically public burial, the characterisation of Joseph and Nicodemus as overtly political indicates that, by their very presence, to a certain extent, Jesus' burial remains in a political sphere.

Finally in our discussion of the politics of Jesus' burial, we can also highlight the political aspect of lamentation, and the absence of such in the Johannine burial text. Any public mourning would have, by its nature, offered a political site of resistance to Jesus' execution. If we recall the (later) regulations around *avelut* (full, public and political) mourning and *aninut* (limited, private and personal) mourning it is apparent that public mourning after an execution could act as a subversive force and form of protest, so much so that it was regulated and, at times, prohibited. In Tacitus' *Annals* we find a brief reference to a mother who was killed because of the political nature of her lament. "Even women were not exempt from peril. As they could not be accused of grasping at sovereignty, they were indicted for their tears; and the aged Vitia, mother of Fufius Geminus, was put to death because she had wept at the killing of her son." (Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.10 [Jackson, LCL]). Public lament was often interpreted

as a political act of resistance with serious consequences.⁶⁴¹ The absence of possible lament, and the political resistance it may have indicated, leaves the politics of Jesus' death unchallenged in this way.

4.3.3 Strangers and Strangeness: Revisiting Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus

Finally in this study of Jesus' burial in terms of gender and space, it remains for us to consider the interpretation of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.⁶⁴² Many commentators take the appearance of these two characters as a positive fulfilment of Jesus' promise that when lifted up, he would draw all people to himself (John 12:32),⁶⁴³ but questions linger around who they are and why they act in this way.

Joseph of Arimathea appears in all four Gospels. Some comparison with the Synoptics of the different portrayals of his character are helpful at this point to highlight significant points of divergence within the Gospel of John. Matthew introduces him as ἄνθρωπος πλούσιος, a *rich man*, who αὐτὸς ἐμαθητεύθη τῷ Ἰησοῦ *had himself become a disciple of Jesus* (Matt 27:57). This is a relatively positive introduction, with only the possible exception of Joseph's

⁶⁴¹ Berkowitz makes an interesting observation on this topic. She states: "The Mishnah might well have chosen to exclude the family from execution completely, as biblical law does, or alternatively to simply punish them, as the biblical God sometimes does. But, instead this chapter of Mishnah gives the relatives their own work—they must publically choose their alliances." Berkowitz, *Execution*, 140.

⁶⁴² For a recent character study of Nicodemus see, R. Alan. Culpepper, "Nicodemus: The Travail of New Birth," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (eds. S. A. Hunt, D. F. Tolmie and R. Zimmermann. WUNT 314. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 249–59. Culpepper suggests Nicodemus' character is closely linked with the themes of 'birth from above' and 'recognising Jesus' true identity.' See, Culpepper, "Nicodemus," 249. Culpepper also highlights the ambiguity, questions and uncertainty which persist around his character. He claims, "John leaves his status unresolved." Culpepper, "Nicodemus," 259. See also, Jaime Clark-Soles, "Characters who count: the case of Nicodemus." in *Engaging with C. H. Dodd on the Gospel of John: Sixty Years of Tradition and Interpretation* (eds. T. Thatcher and C. H. Williams; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 126–45. For a recent study of Joseph of Arimathea see, W. John Lyons, "Joseph of Arimathea: One of 'the Jews,' But with a Fearful Secret!" in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (eds. S. A. Hunt, D. F. Tolmie and R. Zimmermann. WUNT 314. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 646–57.

⁶⁴³ Jesus makes three "lifted up" statements in John's Gospel (John 3:14; 8:28 and 12:32) but it is only the final one which promises "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 12:32. See, Brown, *John 13–21*, 959; Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1268; Koester, *Symbolism*, 229–30; Schnackenburg, *John vol. 3*, 295. Interestingly, the verse has been used to interpret the presence of Jesus' mother, other women and the beloved disciple's presence at the cross in John 19:25, keeping the focus on theological positive faith-filled actions and people surrounding Jesus in execution and burial, rather than the unfolding events and narrative. See for example: Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1019; Tolmie, "The Women," 624.

status as 'rich,' which could be interpreted as a negative attribute.⁶⁴⁴ In the Gospel of Matthew there is no question of Joseph's entitlement to the status of disciple.⁶⁴⁵

The Gospel of Mark's praise has a more lavish quality. Joseph sweeps into the fray as εὐσχήμων βουλευτής, ὃς καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν προσδεχόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ, *an honourable councillor, who himself was expecting the kingdom of God* (Mark 15:43). Not only is his status high and worthy, but also his desire and expectation (of the kingdom of God) is in keeping with a model disciple.⁶⁴⁶ Mark acclaims him with *τολμήσας taking courage* (Mark 15:43) when he goes and requests Jesus' body from Pilate.

However, it is in Luke's Gospel we find the highest regard for Joseph. He is described as βουλευτής ὑπάρχων ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς καὶ δίκαιος οὗτος οὐκ ἦν συγκατατεθειμένος τῇ βουλῇ καὶ τῇ πράξει αὐτῶς *a councillor, a good and righteous man, who had not agreed to their [the Council's] decision and action* (Luke 23:50). Luke's Gospel offers us an explanation of his membership of the Council, which sits uncomfortably with the profession of Joseph's discipleship. He is recorded in Luke as being in disagreement with not only their βουλή *judgement* but also their following πράξει *action*. This is a strong commendation of his character from the writer of Luke.

In contrast the Gospel of John appears to depict a less acclaimed character with conflict at the centre of his presentation. Positive aspects of Joseph's character are limited to

⁶⁴⁴ Patte fleetingly notes this. See, Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 391.

⁶⁴⁵ John Heil contrasts the active devotion of Joseph in Matthew's Gospel with what he sees as the comparative passivity of the female 'substitute disciples'. He says, "A 'rich man,' in contrast to the passivity of the 'many women' (27:55) 'came' on the scene in the evening (27:57) . . . Nevertheless, that Joseph is a 'rich' disciple gives him the status that enables him to perform the important service of burying Jesus, which neither the other male disciples who have fled (26:56) nor their substitutes, the women who are helplessly passive (27:55–56), are in a position to perform." See, John P. Heil, "The Narrative Structure of Matthew 27:55–28:20," *JBL* 110 (1991): 419–438, 425. Even though Heil himself recognises that the appearance of this 'rich' man is problematic for the implied reader of Matthew "shockingly incongruous in view of what Jesus had earlier told his disciples" there is no further effort made to pursue this interpretation and it is quickly overlooked and the women are viewed in the more negative light.

⁶⁴⁶ Mark's portrayal of Joseph's actions has alternatively been interpreted as, "an act of piety in obedience to the law. It does not necessarily imply acceptance of Jesus as God's agent or of Jesus' message . . . The descriptions of Joseph as a disciple of Jesus in Matthew and John provide early evidence for the growth of a legend about him . . ." See, Collins, Mark, 776.

recognising him as a disciple; no other aspirational qualities, the like of which we see in the Synoptics, are listed. Moreover, we see for the only time negative terms—secrecy and fear—associated with his person. The text discloses that Joseph is ὢν μαθητῆς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ κεκρυμμένος δὲ διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων, *a disciple of Jesus, in secret because of the fear of the Jews* (John 19:38).

Though we must acknowledge, in the Gospel of John, the revelation of Joseph’s discipleship is a striking commendation of his person,⁶⁴⁷ Joseph’s ownership of the title ‘disciple’ does not sit with ease in the narrative. It is problematic at a number of points:

1. Joseph is a new character in the text. We have not seen any previous evidence of interaction with Jesus, a commitment to Jesus, or acceptance by Jesus.
2. Joseph’s clandestine discipleship conflicts with previous presentation of exemplary discipleship. Public commitment to Jesus, along with the persecution that brings, has been already been highlighted in the text (John 9: 20–41; 12:42–6).⁶⁴⁸
3. The text presents Joseph in isolation from the community of legitimized disciples, including the women who could have undertaken his burial.⁶⁴⁹
4. The only direct association that Joseph has is with another ambiguous character—Nicodemus—with whom he completes the task of burial.

⁶⁴⁷ Curtis notes, “whereas John frequently uses the noun μαθητῆς (78 times), nowhere else does he make a comparable ascription of discipleship to an individual outside the Twelve. The present instance is unique in John and an explanation must be sought for it. The most likely explanation is that John was familiar with a written version—Matthew’s version—of the burial story in which Joseph was described as a disciple.” See, K. Peter G. Curtis, “Three Points of Contact Between Matthew and John in the Burial and Resurrection Narratives,” *JTS* 23 (1972): 440–4, 443. For a discussion of discipleship in the Gospel of John see: de Jonge, *Stranger from Heaven*, 12–17.

⁶⁴⁸ We would particularly highlight John 12:42–6. This passage explicitly recognises that some of the Jewish ruling elite believe in Jesus, but will not confess him. Jesus resolutely condemns this as remaining in darkness, when those that believe should come into light. Culpepper views Joseph and Nicodemus as part of this group, who crucially remain outside those counted as believers. See, Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 136. While Brown notes the contempt in which crypto-disciples were held he is quick to interpret John’s record of Joseph’s request for the body of Christ as a redemptive act, which exonerates him in the eyes of the writer. Brown, *John 13–21*, 939. Beasley-Murray follows after Brown and also expounds this line, making an impassioned case that the act of Joseph going and requesting Jesus’ body was of heroic proportions. Beasley-Murray states, “It was therefore an uncommonly courageous act for Joseph to disassociate himself from the Sanhedrin and to show his sympathy with Jesus, who had been so ignominiously condemned and killed. He will have been aware that he had no right to make the request, since he was unrelated to Jesus. But he was equally aware that none of the brothers of Jesus would attempt to take this step.” Beasley-Murray, *John*, 358.

⁶⁴⁹ Brown suggests (in his later work) that the women’s absence (and by implication their fear) indicate that Joseph is not counted among the disciples at this point. See, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1218. Keener adds that even if he had been an open disciple the women’s trust of him may still have been withheld on account of their probable lack of acquaintance with him. Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1159.

The conflict between appearance of the noun μαθητής *disciple* (19:38) and the context of its use sets an uncomfortable question in the text, and specifically Joseph's character, that refuses to be easily resolved.

Nicodemus appears in the garden under different terms to Joseph of Arimathea. Unlike Joseph, readers, as well as Jesus, already know him (although we remain unaware if other disciples have any knowledge of him). His first appearance is at the beginning of the Gospel in John 3:1–21. He also appears in 7:50, named within the group of chief priests and Pharisees in the temple courts debacle of John 7:14–53. In chapter 7 as well as in chapter 19, we are reminded of his appearance in chapter 3. For Nicodemus that nocturnal conversation with Jesus is definitive for his Johannine representation. Furthermore, his identity as one who 'came at night' is picked out at two of his three appearances (his first and last), linking the σκοτία motif in John directly with his character. As we have discussed in our previous chapter this is a powerful and negative association, directly linked to death and in direct conflict with the character of Jesus the φῶς.

Despite this, Nicodemus is often read with lavish hermeneutical favour. For example, Ingrid Kitzberger, in her article "Transcending Gender Boundaries in John,"⁶⁵⁰ introduces him, along with Joseph, as disciples who "render a service of love to their dead Rabbi" and she claims that Nicodemus "spoke up for Jesus and defended him against their [the chief priests and Pharisee's] accusations."⁶⁵¹ However, unlike Joseph, Nicodemus' status as 'disciple' at this point is ambiguous. There is no explicit textual disclosure of discipleship and, throughout the Gospel, his conversation with Jesus in chapter 3 remains woefully unresolved.

⁶⁵⁰ Kitzberger, "Transcending," 173–207.

⁶⁵¹ Kitzberger, "Transcending," 173–207, 193–194.

Marinus de Jonge offers an alternative interpretation of Nicodemus as an unbeliever, who is mistaken in thinking that Jesus' death was final.⁶⁵² He concludes, "He [Nicodemus] plays the typical Johannine part of the interlocutor who understands Jesus wrongly (v. 4) and asks: "How is this possible?" (v. 9). In fact, he reacts as an outsider; he does not belong to the children of God."⁶⁵³ Jouette M. Bassler also identifies that "he is no more clearly a disciple at the end of the Gospel than at the beginning"⁶⁵⁴ and that Nicodemus does not seem to have passed through the life-changing 'birth from above' which Jesus has commended to him. So Nicodemus is, in Johannine terms, retaining the "damning and dangerous connections with darkness, the 'Jews' and the world."⁶⁵⁵ Dennis Sylva, in his study of the word *δέω* to bind, reflects unfavourably on Joseph and Nicodemus' actions. He suggests that, not only were they ignorant of Jesus' life beyond death, but that, "By his use of *δέω* in 19:40 the author has Nicodemus and Joseph participate in the handing over of Jesus to the power of death."⁶⁵⁶

Nicodemus comes, now at his last encounter with Jesus, with a sizable offering of myrrh and aloes (v. 40).⁶⁵⁷ The amount of spices Nicodemus carries has been widely interpreted positively as a sign of Jesus' kingship,⁶⁵⁸ however, kingship is far from a straightforward motif within the Gospel.⁶⁵⁹ There is considerable evidence to suggest that Jesus may be hailed

⁶⁵² See, de Jonge, *Stranger from Heaven*, 29–42.

⁶⁵³ de Jonge, *Stranger from Heaven*, 42.

⁶⁵⁴ Jouette M. Bassler, "Mixed Signals: Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 108, no. 4 (1989): 635–646, 646. Bassler concludes that the overarching feature of Nicodemus is his ambiguity and that misplaced attempts to push him into either the positive disciple/convert role or the negative seeker/undecided role are contrary to the text. Colleen Conway in her article 'Minor Characters in the Fourth Gospel' also deems that Nicodemus' character is ambiguous rather than 'flat' and easily categorised. See, Colleen M. Conway, "Speaking Through Ambiguity: Minor Characters in the Fourth Gospel," *BibInt* 10 (2002): 324–341.

⁶⁵⁵ Bassler, "Mixed Signals," 646.

⁶⁵⁶ Dennis D. Sylva, "Nicodemus and his Spices," *NTS* 34 (1988): 148–151, 149.

⁶⁵⁷ For an extensive discussion of what Nicodemus actually brought and the processed form it would have been in see, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1261–1264. Brown makes the case that no oil, and thus no anointing, would have been present in the Johannine burial. He investigates the possibilities of reference that the myrrh, aloes and spices encompass and concludes that the myrrh and aloes would have been a solid/power form and the spices is a reference to the combination of the two.

⁶⁵⁸ For example Brown states, "John transformed the crucifixion into the triumph of Jesus; so also he has transformed the burial into a triumph. One who reigned as king on the cross receives a burial worth of his status." Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1268.

⁶⁵⁹ Koester, *The Word*, 71. See also, Koester, *Symbolism*, 228. Kingship in the Gospel of John can at times be a misunderstood concept. In John 1:49 it is introduced on the lips of Nathanael who hails Jesus as the 'King of Israel,' *ὁ βασιλεὺς εἰ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ*. This is left to stand without question by both Jesus and narrator, Nathanael appears to have revealed an insight into who Jesus is. However, by John 6, a corporate recognition of Jesus' kingship from the crowd makes Jesus flee up the mountain (John 6:5). The recognition of kingship and the desire to "make him king" is left unrequited by Jesus—it seems Jesus does not want to be king. Moving to the passion

king in both positive and wholly negative terms. Repeatedly, there is a Johannine distinction between the correct manner of recognising Jesus' kingship and an errant or even malevolent recognition. If we are to recognise the theme of kingship on this occasion, how are we to judge its authenticity? Brown points out,

If powdered or fragranced spices are meant, such a weight would fill a considerable space in the tomb and smother the corpse under a mound. Puzzlement about where such a quantity could have been got on short notice and how it was brought has caused scholars to seek to explain the amount away. . . ⁶⁶⁰

It is certainly a display of considerable wealth. While his offering is clearly sizable, it is not necessarily appropriate or genuine; we have already considered in this chapter the earlier and legitimised anointing that Mary of Bethany undertakes (John 12:1–8). Wayne Meeks raises the possibility that Nicodemus' offering of spices is misguided.⁶⁶¹ Meeks problematises Nicodemus' offering from the perspective that he has misunderstood Jesus' 'lifting up.' While these views are perhaps different in method to our own, they nonetheless offer interpretations that hesitate before assuming Nicodemus' abundant offering is a positive incident.

Perhaps Herold Weiss articulates the controversy surrounding Joseph and Nicodemus most succinctly,

Out of nowhere appear a secret disciple who fears the "Jews" (Joseph of Arimathea), who asks for the body, and a creature of the night (Nicodemus), who supplies one

account Jesus' is hailed again by the crowd as king on his entry to Jerusalem (John 12:13), and we are given a narrator's aside to confirm that this is indeed the King of Zion, as prophesied, riding in on a donkey (John 12:15). Later in the passion account however, Jesus is asked directly by Pilate "Are you the King of the Jews?" (John 18:33), his answer is elusive: Jesus speaks of his kingdom, yet not of being a king. Pilate, presses the matter "So you are a king?" (vs.37) and still Jesus evades answering him directly, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." (vs. 37). Pilate continues to use the terminology of kingship when asking the crowd if they want the King of the Jews released, (vs.39). John 19:3 delivers a shocking new twist—misunderstanding of kingship gives way to violent hostility. "They kept coming up to him saying, "Hail King of the Jews!" and striking him in the face." The association between misunderstanding of Jesus' kingship and the violence of the passion account is cemented in the brief but pivotal interaction between Pilate and the crowd of John 19:12–16; and further reiterated 19:19–21. By the point of Jesus' burial, the motif of kingship is as bruised as Jesus' body. We cannot assume that a 'kingly' offering of spices is a positive event.

⁶⁶⁰ Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 1260. He goes on to suggest that, "it is better to recognise that large numbers are employed in various Johannine scenes as symbolically suggestive of messianic abundance." Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 1260.

⁶⁶¹ This is the private suggestion of P. Meyer, whom Meeks credits in his footnotes. See, Wayne M. Meeks, "The Man From Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72, 55. In this vein, Koester also notes Nicodemus' offering of spices as a right recognition of Jesus' kingship, but a failure to believe or even perceive that death may not be the end for Jesus and, in resurrection, he will not need *any* burial spice. Koester, "What Does it Mean," 403–420, 419.

hundred pounds of ointments The sanctimonious overkill of the “great Sabbath”, the profuse pouring of spices, the repeated references to the careful observance of Jewish customs, the total absence of “true” disciples, and the fact that on Sunday Mary’s journey to the tomb is not related to the anointing all militate against reading this scene as an example of true piety. Jesus’ dead body is the concern of half-believing persons on the periphery of Christianity. The ironic tongue in cheek cannot be overlooked.⁶⁶²

In this section, and overall in this chapter, we hope to have disturbed a reading of Joseph and Nicodemus which uncritically assumes they perform a ‘good deed’ in the burial of Jesus.

We have identified that doubts form around their characters when we consider the following:

- They are unexpected.
- They are strangers.
- They are political.
- They undertake a ritual usually defined as familial, female space.
- They displace the expected characters, most notably Jesus’ mother.

Even though they seem to offer something far better than exposure or communal burial pit, ultimately we can observe that, in the Johannine burial narrative Jesus remains in the hands of powerful men to the last. Often the generous amount of *what* Joseph and Nicodemus bring is the interpretative focus, rather than *who* is bringing it and *how* that affects the discourse of burial. Identifying space, power and politics within the text has provided evidence for a reinterpretation of the burial narrative and the characters that undertake it. The postcolonial questions employed in this reading, asking whose voice is suppressed and who becomes marginalised by these actions, have aided our discussion to identify that, in Jesus’ burial, the Gospel of John replaces the personal with the political, the female with the male, and the feminine with the masculine. It is indeed politicised male space.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

⁶⁶² Herold Weiss, “The Sabbath in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 311–321, 320.

In this chapter, we hope we have shown that a feminist reading of the text, employing lenses of gender and power, produces a fruitful and compelling new perspective on the burial of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Seeking ‘the other’ and accentuating the alternative voices in the text, by our recourse to the historical information available, we have highlighted the discourse of Jesus’ mother’s absence as a crucial unrealised perspective in the burial narrative. Reading the characters of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus with this in mind has made elements of their depiction that were previously presented as minor puzzles, appear as disturbing anomalies. This has produced a reading of the burial passage of John 19:38–42 that suggests it is a negative and distressing event which maintains the motif of punishment, abjects the female and familial and preserves the balance of power in favour of the ruling authorities under whose jurisdiction Jesus was executed.

In our final chapter we will now present a focused reading of the final scene of John 19:42, the literary depiction of Jesus’ corpse lying alone in the tomb.

Chapter Five

The Last Look: Reading the Darkness of John 19:42

5.0 Introduction

Here in our fifth and final chapter, we will consider the closing verse of the Johannine burial narrative,

ὅτι ἐγγὺς ἦν τὸ μνημεῖον, ἔθηκαν τὸν Ἰησοῦν.

and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. John 19:42b.

This is the final depiction with which the Gospel of John leaves the reader of the death and burial of Jesus, before the narrative moves on in time and focus to the revelations to come

on the 'first day of the week' (John 20:1). We have identified a number of aspects that make an extended discussion of this closing scene worthwhile. Primarily, we will consider the importance of this textual moment as, what we will term, the Gospel of John's 'last look' of the passion narrative. It is the readers' final gaze at the dead and entombed body of Jesus and it is the final text in the passion narrative which has already delivered a crescendo of critical traumatic moments.

In this chapter title, as in this thesis title, we have used the term 'reading darkness,' and it would be prudent briefly to remind ourselves of this perspective. We use the term to encompass our reading as it disturbs previously accepted or positivistic scholarly opinion. The idea of 'reading darkness' also is useful to depict our feminist perspective on androcentric text and interpretations. And, of course, we have worked on the interpretation of darkness as a specific motif in the Gospel of John. In our second chapter we examined Johannine darkness using death, trauma and abjection to read its presence within the text and made a case for its recognition in the crucifixion and burial narrative. In our fourth chapter we considered how female abjection is an unacknowledged dynamic within the burial text. Here, we will look at the final literary representation of the corpse of Christ in the tomb and make a case for it to be interpreted as a powerful source of darkness and significant point in the theme of Johannine darkness.

In our discussion, we will begin by drawing some comparisons between the Gospel of John's burial account and the burial accounts found in the Synoptics. We have identified that the Johannine account is markedly underdeveloped in comparison, missing a considerable amount of the story-arc that the other Gospels depict. We will discuss how this heightens the importance of the textual representation of Christ's dead body in John and invites readerly attention to linger on the scene. We then move on to draw on the work of theologian David Ford to highlight the importance of giving the dead body of Christ recognition within both narrative and interpretation. Ford's work considers the dead face of Christ as theologically

akin to a 'black hole' and we will discuss the powerful negative associations of that image when considered in our reading of the burial text and the theme of darkness.⁶⁶³

Finally, in this chapter, we will expand our methodology to include intertextual relationships with both art and literature. Specifically, we will use Hans Holbein the Younger's painting, *The Dead Christ in the Tomb*, as well as Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *The Idiot*,⁶⁶⁴ and once again we will utilise the psychoanalytical theories of Julia Kristeva. The selection of these elements to be brought into dialogue with John 19:42b derives from their, at times deliberate, intertextual relationship with the image of the corpse of Christ laid out in burial. We will explore the connections to be found between art and text and consider the painting's reception and interpretations, and how this finds its way into the life of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and his writings. Painting, novel and theorist, and the discussions they have brought about, offer us greater insight and richer understanding of the role of Johannine darkness, read in death, trauma and abjection, within the Johannine text.

5.1 The Synoptic Tradition: Textual Comparisons

The Synoptic Gospels offer an important and illuminating comparison in our exploration of the closing image of the burial narrative in John's Gospel and a short discussion of them is useful at this point. These comparisons highlight for us the visibility and prominence of the corpse of Christ in the Johannine burial account.⁶⁶⁵ To comparatively view the sequence of events in the burial narratives of each Gospel, we have produced the table below. It charts the final images of the burial narratives in all four Gospels. The bold type represents the closing image and the preceding information reveals to us what images are included, or indeed excluded, before the final scene is disclosed. Plotting each image or scene beside the corresponding scene in the other Gospels also offers us an overview of what is and is not

⁶⁶³ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 205–6.

⁶⁶⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* (trans. A. Myers; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992).

⁶⁶⁵ For a thorough examination and commentary of the comparative burial texts see, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1201–1283.

featured in a particular text. This presents us with what seems to be a strikingly curtailed Johannine burial narrative.

5.1.1 Burial Sequence Table

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Body prepared by Joseph (27:59)	Body prepared by Joseph (15:46)	Body prepared by Joseph (23:53)	Body prepared by Nicodemus and Joseph in garden (19:40)
Body laid out by Joseph (27:60)	Body laid out by Joseph (15:46)	Body laid out by Joseph (23:53)	Body laid out by Joseph and Nicodemus (19:42)
Stone rolled across entrance (27:60)	Stone rolled across entrance (15:46)		
Joseph leaves (27:60)			
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary watch (27:61)	Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of Joses watch (15:47)	Women from Galilee watch (23:55)	
<i>NB:(The next day a seal is placed on the stone and a guard posted outside (27:66)⁶⁶⁶)</i>		Women go home (23:56)	
		Women prepare spices and perfumes (23:56)	
		Women rest on Sabbath (23:56)	

⁶⁶⁶ Matthew's Gospel is the only one of the four to disclose an event which happened on the intervening Sabbath, before going on to the day of resurrection. We have noted it here, but consider Matt.27:61 as the close of the actual account of the burial.

Source criticism identifies the priority of the Markan text and its contribution to the Lukan and Matthean texts. Brown claims there is ‘no solid reason’ to suppose that Matthew or Luke made any additions to the Markan burial tradition. He also believes evidence in John to identify a pre-Gospel tradition of which both John and Mark drew from for their burial stories.⁶⁶⁷ However, other scholars have made the case for John’s reliance on the Matthean burial text⁶⁶⁸ or even the Lukan burial text.⁶⁶⁹ The limits and focus of this thesis mean that a detailed discussion of sources will not be entered into here, however, a few comments can be made in light of our comparative table. The Gospel of Luke clearly contains significantly more information than the Gospel of Mark, making Brown’s claim that there was no additional information problematic. We must also raise the question, if the Johannine author was using any of the Synoptic Gospels as a source, why was such a considerable amount omitted from the account? Additionally, the garden setting is a unique addition in the Gospel of John.⁶⁷⁰

While we may not pursue these source questions here, the implications of the lack of story-arc demands further discussion. How does this abrupt ending affect the tone, feeling and style of the narrative in John? Below we will consider the absence of the stone in the Johannine account and review the scholarly interpretation of the Synoptic women.

5.1.2 The Absent Stone

A striking absence in the Gospel of John’s burial narrative is that of the stone. While John 20:1 makes clear that there was a stone, the closing of John 19:42 distinctly lacks one. In the

⁶⁶⁷ Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1211.

⁶⁶⁸ See, K. Peter G. Curtis, “Three Points of Contact Between Matthew and John in the Burial and Resurrection Narratives,” *JTS* 23 (1972): 440–4.

⁶⁶⁹ Barrett makes a brief comment to this effect suggesting a reliance of John on Luke given the textual similarities between a portion of Luke’s burial narrative (23:53) and John 19:41. See Barrett, *John*, 560.

⁶⁷⁰ Keener suggests that the garden setting might be a case of Johannine irony, “. . . John may heighten the irony: gardens are normally pleasant places (e.g. Eccl 2:5; Song 4:12, 15–16; 6:2, 11), but there Jesus was unjustly arrested, and after his unjust execution he was deposited in one. They were appropriate places to be buried (2 Kgs 21:18, 26, LXX), but the connection with the arrest may be in the background.” Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1165. See also, Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1077. Heil takes an alternative view considering the Johannine burial garden as symbolic of Jesus’ relationship with his disciples. John P. Heil, *Blood and Water: The Death and Resurrection of Jesus in John 18–21* (CBQ Monograph Series 27; Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1995), 116. For a detailed discussion of the garden imagery in John see, Ruben Zimmermann, “Symbolic Communication Between John and his Reader: The Garden Symbolism in John 19–20,” in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past Present and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. T. Thatcher and S. D. Moore; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 221–36. See also, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1270.

narrative's story-time John's stone is not depicted until the first day of the week and only after it has been removed from the entrance to the tomb. John never narrates, only implicates, the stone across the entrance to the tomb. Interestingly, even though the Gospel of Luke has the most protracted burial account, it too excludes mention of the stone on the day of burial,⁶⁷¹ but assumes it had been there after it had already been removed (Luke 24:2).⁶⁷²

The absence of a stone during the Johannine burial scene has considerable impact on the tenor of the close of the burial narrative. The failure of the text to narrate any closure of the tomb at this stage or to move the narrative on into a new scene (as does Luke 23:54ff.) potentially alters the usually banal comment that the tomb was ἐγγύς *near* the site of the crucifixion into something more ominous. The missing stone affords no protection to the protagonist's body: soldiers, animals⁶⁷³ or even Staley's dogs,⁶⁷⁴ could run in and further desecrate the corpse. This explicit nearness to the site of the torture and death of Jesus is unique to the Gospel of John, and remains only implicit in the Synoptics.⁶⁷⁵

However, perhaps the most significant effect of a lack of narration of the closing of Jesus' tomb is that the dead body of Jesus remains explicitly in 'view' and exposed to the readers' gaze. Matthew and Mark both include some narration of the stone that Joseph sets in place, and both texts acknowledge the eyes of the watching women finally resting on the stone. The readers' eyes, along with the women's eyes, are drawn in a collective gaze from body to stone, as the final physical mark of separation is set between followers and Jesus. In John's Gospel however, there is no stone-shield to screen the corpse. Any closure that the stone offers in Matthew and Mark—both practically and emotionally—is missing in John.

⁶⁷¹ This is often attributed to Luke's economising of the Gospel of Mark. See, John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53* (WBC 35c; Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 1165.

⁶⁷² For a discussion of the interplay of absence and death in the Lukan passion account see, Anne Elvey, "Touching (on) Death: On 'Being Toward' the Other in the Gospel of Luke," *BCT* 2 (2006): 15.0–15.17.

⁶⁷³ "The normal purpose for such a stone was to prevent animals from gaining entry, especially those that would eat the bodies" See, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1247. See also Keener, *John vol. 2*, 1158, n. 790.

⁶⁷⁴ In his creative postmodern reading of John's Passion narrative Staley explores at length the likelihood that dogs would have been present at the crucifixion. See, Staley, "Reading Myself," 82–7.

⁶⁷⁵ Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1268 and 1273.

5.1.3 The Synoptic Women

The second significant absence in the Johannine account is that of the female followers of Jesus. We have considered their absence at length in the previous chapter and there is no need to recount our discussion at this point. However, it is of some value to take a moment to consider the Synoptic accounts as a contrast to the Johannine peculiarity which affords the women no presence whatsoever. To explore this question we will briefly consider some New Testament perspectives on the effect the women have in the Synoptic burial accounts. It must be noted that scholars, at times, appear to be preoccupied with a desire to emphasise the women's witness of the right tomb, to confirm that they then return to the correct one after the Sabbath (thus mitigating the possibility that they looked into the wrong tomb and declared Jesus gone).⁶⁷⁶ While we recognise that this is an important detail, we will focus on those who move beyond it.

The devotion and courage that the female characters embody within the text is at times pointed out. This stands in sharp contrast to the violent malevolence which has gone before.

Susan Miller states,

The anointing of the dead is a last act of intimacy, carried out by those closest to the dead person (Ezek 16.9; 2 Chron 16.14; Josephus *Ant.* 16.61) The service of the women [in Mark's Gospel], however contrasts with the plots of powerful men, who seek to put Jesus to death. In the midst of betrayal and violence women bring gifts to Jesus and show their care to him.⁶⁷⁷

Their grief appears genuine and consistent and offers some relief from the events of the Synoptic passion narratives. Keener highlights that the Gospel of Matthew focuses on their

⁶⁷⁶ For examples see: Craig A. Evans, *Mark: 8:27–16:20* (WBC 34B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 251–2; Keener, *Matthew*, 690; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (SP vol. 1; ed. D. J. Harrington; Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1991), 405; Ivor H. Jones, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Epworth Press, 1994), 169; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (WBC 33B; Dallas, Word Books, 1995), 859; John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (SP vol. 2; ed. D. J. Harrington; Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2002), 455.

⁶⁷⁷ Susan Miller, "'They Said Nothing to Anyone': The Fear and Silence of the Women at the Empty Tomb (Mark 16.1–8)," *Feminist Theology* 13 (2004): 77–90, 79.

courage and faithfulness in the deeds of burial as opposed to their social duty.⁶⁷⁸ Some scholars consider their appearance so powerfully positive that they deem the women's presence to be a forward-looking portent of resurrection.⁶⁷⁹ This perhaps demonstrates the most radical interpretation of the women's textual presence as a positive force (one that metamorphoses the burial narrative into resurrection narrative), and while our study by no means concurs with this interpretation, it perhaps illustrates the depth of feeling which can be drawn from the presence of the women in the burial narrative and the textual force which they become.

The presence of the Synoptic women in the burial scenes also highlights the questions of aloneness versus community. In Matthew, Mark and Luke all three Gospels take the narrative focus away from Jesus' isolated body and move it towards the community of women who watch on. Daniel Harrington's comment on Matthew's Gospel could equally be applied to all, except John, "When everyone else had deserted the cause of Jesus, they [the women] remained faithful until the end."⁶⁸⁰ Hisako Kinukawa states of the women in Mark, "'Watching' also symbolizes their expression of interest, concern, care and sorrow. Even though they cannot do a thing to reverse the crisis, their relationship to Jesus is not broken."⁶⁸¹ Matthew and Mark's narrative is moved on from the corpse of Jesus to the followers and their grief. The Lukan text goes further and moves the narrative physically

⁶⁷⁸ "Their 'ministry' to Jesus' needs (27:55) probably largely followed the roles assigned their gender and social rank in their culture (8:15), but this narrative [of them at the tomb] evaluates and bestows honour on the basis of their courage and faithfulness rather than their social prominence." Keener, *Matthew*, 689.

⁶⁷⁹ Giblin initially explores the idea that Matt 27:57 ff should be regarded in literary unity with what follows it rather than what precedes it. See, Charles H. Giblin, "Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Matthean Burial-Resurrection Narrative (Matt. 27:57–28:20)" *NTS* 21 (1974–5): 406–420. Heil also makes this case in his article, John P. Heil, "The Narrative Structure of Matthew 27:55–28:20," *JBL* 110 (1991): 419–438. Heil's suggestion is discussed and quickly dismissed by Brown in, Brown, *Death* vol. 2, 1300–1. Reeves explicitly includes the burial scene in his study of Matthew (27:55–61) within the section of Matthew he defines as the 'Resurrection Narrative,' calling the burial passage a "precursor to the resurrection." The presence of the women is critical to his argument acknowledging them as "a common thread that runs through the whole resurrection narrative" See, Keith H. Reeves, *The Resurrection Narrative in Matthew: A Literary Critical Examination* (Lampeter: Mellen Biblical Press, 1993), 11–14.

⁶⁸⁰ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 407. This point is also made by R.A. Horsley concerning the Gospel of Mark. See, Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 226.

⁶⁸¹ Hisako Kinukawa, "Women Disciples of Jesus (15:40–41; 15:47; 16:1)," in *A Feminist Companion to Mark*. (ed. A. J. Levine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 171–190, 176.

away from the site of the tomb and back into the home, the usual first-century place of grief and mourning.

In Luke we witness the women preparing spices and perfumes and resting in obedience to the Sabbath.⁶⁸² In many ways it is an idealized image of grief. There is order in the preparation of the anointing materials, devotion in its undertaking, and religion and ritual in both the burial rite and the Sabbath observance. The *dis*-order, violence and terror of the crucifixion have been left behind both physically (we are no longer gazing on the broken corpse as in John's account) and emotionally (love and positive actions are again restored to the text, albeit ones which process grief). Luke moves the narrative setting to a comparably safer and more bearable place, the home. Moreover, we witness the actions of mourning restored to the characters we expect—the female followers of Jesus.

Although a full discussion of Synoptic comparisons is outside the remit of this thesis, considering them has usefully highlighted certain points for our work on John's Gospel and interesting questions, perhaps to be pursued at a later date. We will now move into in our discussion of John 19:42b and the 'last look' of the Johannine burial text.

5.2 The Last Look of John 19:42

Here we turn to our reading of the closing image of the Johannine burial narrative, Jesus' corpse laid out in the tomb, which we have highlighted in our table above. Not only is this text the final part of the burial sequence, but it also contains the final narration of Jesus post-crucifixion. In this section we will begin to ask what does it mean to consider this 'last look' of the Gospel of John at the corpse of Christ? If we bear in mind the context of John 19:42b, we can identify it as the point where, post-crucifixion, Jesus' body is no longer being moved,

⁶⁸² Brown suggests that the role of the Lukan women in the burial "gives them almost parity with Joseph in the burial story." Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1235.

anointed, wrapped, or handled in any way. John 19:42b is the moment that the Gospel of John depicts Jesus' corpse as *left*. The theme of abandonment of a corpse, of abjection, is important in the discussion we will have. For, as with any corpse, Jesus' body must be abandoned in burial and at last left alone to decompose, and although, as we well know, the text goes on to resurrection, this is the very essence of burial itself. Our reading will draw attention to the implications of this scene within the unfolding narrative. This 'last look' does not belong to any watching women, or even Joseph and Nicodemus' eyes, but the eyes of the reader, drawn by the narrator, beholding the scene after Joseph and Nicodemus have completed their work. The final picture of John 19:42b presents the isolated corpse of Jesus, laid in the tomb, abandoned to decompose, as the task of burial concludes.

But before we move on to 'look' at the scene, we must first 'listen.' Silence prevails, and has prevailed since Jesus uttered his last words, "It is finished" in John 19:30. Moreover we find that there will be no recorded words of the speech or dialogue of any character in the text until Mary's exclamation of John 20:2. While silence can at times signal power and resistance in adversity, the silence of the corpse of Christ is a more complex matter.⁶⁸³ Jesus has been defined throughout the Gospel as a figure and character of significant speech and words, which are related to life and bringing life in death.⁶⁸⁴ However, he is now characterised by absence of voice and life.⁶⁸⁵ Scholars have noted the prominence of discourse and its significance in John, often characterising the Gospel itself as one that has a profuse amount of dialogue and speech.⁶⁸⁶ Ian Boxall posits Jesus to be ". . . the rather

⁶⁸³ For an interesting discussion of Jesus' silence during the Markan passion see, Mendoza, *Abject Bodies*, 116.

⁶⁸⁴ For example see, Gilbert Van Belle and Steven Hunt's discussion of the "life giving power of Jesus' word" in, Gilbert Van Belle and Steven A. Hunt, "The Son of the Royal Official: Incarnating the Life Giving Power of Jesus' Word," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (eds. S. A. Hunt, D. F. Tolmie and R. Zimmermann. WUNT 314. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 314–331, 323–28.

⁶⁸⁵ For a discussion of Jesus' written word in relation to his identity as λόγος see, George Aichele, *Simulating Jesus: Reality Effects in the Gospels* (London: Equinox, 2011), 115–137. Interestingly Aichele points out the significance of Jesus' silence in John 8, noting that Jesus' voice is silenced in "the silence of writing". Aichele, *Simulating Jesus*, 126.

⁶⁸⁶ Barrett notes the 'striking feature' of discourse material within the Gospel of John. See, Barrett, *John*, 19. Spencer identifies the Fourth Gospel as distinctive in its inclusion of a comparative abundance of discourse and dialogue. See, Spencer, "You Just Don't Understand," 18.

talkative Christ of the Fourth Gospel . . .”⁶⁸⁷ What of his silence in death? Viewed from this perspective, the absence of any words, Jesus’ or otherwise, within the burial timeframe is striking.

More important still is Jesus’ earlier depiction as λόγος (John 1:1). The powerful preexistent λόγος *the word*, is now silenced in death. Jesus, the λόγος *the word*, who previously called people to follow him with his words (1:43), who transformed material reality with his words alone (2:5–8), who healed bodies with just his words (4:50–3), and who brought back Lazarus from the dead with the words of his ‘loud voice’ (11:41–3), is now incapable of any words. The silence of the corpse of the λόγος is a powerfully disturbing element of the scene. Is this the point when the reader is to ask, “Has the darkness of John 1:5 overcome the light?” As we have explored in Chapter Two, we consider death to be the most significant indicator of Johannine darkness, in these terms, the image of the λόγος-corpse, Jesus-in-death, laid out and abandoned to the tomb, is perhaps the nadir of the σκοτία motif. Just as Jesus’ identity as divine φῶς and ζωὴ (John 1:4–5) now provokes a stark comparison as he inhabits death and darkness, so too, the silence he exhibits contrasts with the identity Jesus held as the λόγος, in the beginning, with God, as God, bringing all things into being (John 1:1–3). The silence of the λόγος-corpse is a significant inversion of the characterization of Jesus that the text has previously established and an important element for us to ‘hear’ as part of our ‘looking’ at the scene.

5.3 The Dead Face of Christ

Theologian David Ford presents a theological discourse of the dead face of Christ on the cross in his book *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*.⁶⁸⁸ His work is a detailed study in

⁶⁸⁷ Ian Boxall, “From the Apocalypse of John to the Johannine ‘Apocalypse in Reverse’: Intimations of Apocalyptic and the Quest for a Relationship,” in *John’s Gospel and Intimations of Apocalyptic* (eds. C. H. Williams and C. Rowland; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 58–78, 71. In his article Boxall particularly examines a comparison between the speech of Christ in the Fourth Gospel and the speech of Christ in Revelation, posing the question “. . . to what extent does the Christ of the Apocalypse speak with the accents of the Johannine Jesus?” Boxall, “From the Apocalypse,” 73.

the face (of God, people and the worshipping community) and the act of facing, encompassing theology, Old and New Testament literature, as well as some reflections on sociology and psychology. Our interest lies in his exploration of the importance of ‘facing’ the dead face of Christ on the cross.⁶⁸⁹ Ford takes a theological stance that recognises the suffering and death of Christ as present in all Christology. He states,

. . . this is the face of one who lived for God and for others, who suffered abandonment by God and others, who was humiliated and tortured to death, and who on the cross is an image of utter powerlessness. He was a disappointment to his followers, a cause of grief to those who loved him, a sign of victory for lies and violence. If, in the light of the resurrection, he comes to be acknowledged as ‘Lord’ (cf. Acts 2.37) there is yet no simple reversal of all that preceded.⁶⁹⁰

Although Ford’s task is one of the Christian theologian, and his reflections are never completely without the theological and soteriological perspective of resurrection, he creates a space of reflection and discussion which at least offers a pause, and works towards a narrative of, the time that Jesus is dead. In this, he does not discount resurrection, but states, “. . . there is an acute danger of not doing justice to the particular event of the death of Jesus because of its sequel, as if the resurrection were just giving in to the temptation to “come down from the cross” (Mark 15.29-32) a couple of days late.”⁶⁹¹ His attention to the reality of death, and the gravity of Jesus’ execution is a helpful perspective in our consideration of the burial of Jesus as a sequential event within the unfolding narrative of John, specifically interpreted in a linear manner, without disclosure of the resurrection. As we shall explore below, our textual—rather than theological—encounter with death in the image of Jesus’ corpse in John 19:42b negates any speculation of actual bodily resurrection. This aspect becomes particularly apparent reading with the Holbein painting we will go on to discuss.

Ford speaks of ‘remembering’ this ‘time of utter deadness.’⁶⁹² He proposes that the image of the dead face of Christ has been missing in doctrines of atonement and attempts some

⁶⁸⁸ David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁶⁸⁹ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 191–215.

⁶⁹⁰ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 204.

⁶⁹¹ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 203.

⁶⁹² Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 204.

redress as he brings to the fore and centres his argument on the often-overlooked moment that ensues *after* the final depiction of death on the cross.⁶⁹³ He presents a theology of the death of Jesus which finds its genesis in the dead face of Christ, rather than the dying face, the moment of the defeated countenance rather than the living act of sacrifice. He says, “And so we are left with a dead face on the cross. If we follow the story that is unavoidable. The transition from life to death is signified by Jesus speaking and breathing for the last time [as narrated in the four Gospels] after which there is his dead face.”⁶⁹⁴ This is the moment *after* death rather than the moment *of* death, a moment easily missed, yet crucial to acknowledge, in our case, within the text.

Ford’s task is the theological implications of the dead face of Christ on the cross. He recognises ‘bodily and mental’ death and points out the lack of ‘immanent continuity’ to the resurrection. He states, “The only continuity is the corpse, with this dead face . . .”⁶⁹⁵ Perhaps the most interesting image, for us, which Ford invokes, is his likening of Jesus’ dead face to a ‘black hole.’ He says,

This face as dead matter is like a ‘black hole’ for all familiar and comforting images of this event. It sucks into it other reality, represented in the inexhaustible stream of metaphors, drawing on every area of creation, and their conceptual elaborations They may indeed all be sucked into the black hole in order to be reconstituted with reserve as appropriate metaphors, but the dead face is a vital criterion of appropriateness and signifies a radical rupture at the heart of relating.⁶⁹⁶

For Ford, Jesus’ dead face is not only ‘dark,’ but it is an engulfing, destructive force which pulls in life and light itself, rewriting reality and challenging every facet of knowledge and belief. The image of a black hole, taken into our discussions of Johannine φῶς and σκοτία, is a striking concept and resonates with our suggestion of Jesus’ corpse as a toxic vessel of Johannine darkness.⁶⁹⁷ Can we consider Jesus’ corpse as the ‘black hole’ of Johannine darkness, a celestial body which draws in light and produces darkness? Surely this does this not heighten the desire for a stone to cover the open tomb and shield the readers’ gaze from

⁶⁹³ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 203.

⁶⁹⁴ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 192.

⁶⁹⁵ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 205.

⁶⁹⁶ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 205–6.

⁶⁹⁷ See for our initial suggestion, Chapter Two, 2.4 ‘Reading Johannine Darkness in the Crucifixion Narrative.’

such a prospect? Ford's image offers us a conceptualisation of darkness which goes beyond simply darkness as the absence of light, but when witnessed in the dead form of Jesus, becomes the source of something much more powerful and sinister.

If we recall our designation of the 'last look' at Jesus' corpse, Ford's recognition of the moment immediately after Christ's last breath is what we might here term the 'first look' at the dead Jesus, still warm and in place on the cross. In the Gospel of John, it is John 19:30 which depicts the moment of death and so John 19:31 is the first verse in which Jesus' inhabits the narrative as a corpse. The time between the two moments, John 19:30 to John 19:42, the first and the last look at the corpse of Christ, is the narrative space in which the dead body of Jesus is present. It is in the view of the reader and is being dealt with in various processes of burial. It is the time between bodily death on the cross and the abandonment of the body in burial, in terms of practicalities (as with every corpse, Jesus has a time after death and before burial/abandonment), time (the story is picked up three days later in John 20:1) and narrative (the story then turns to focus on Mary, Peter and the beloved disciple).

We must then ask, what of the relationship between these two textual moments? Is the moment in the tomb a different representation of death? Does one hold more 'deadness' than the other? Ford's purpose is to provoke recognition of the dead face of Christ and explore its implications for theology, self and the worshipping community, rather than examine the role of the dead face of Christ within a particular Gospel text. He does not consider the dead face of Jesus in any context other than the cross, leaving us curious as to his further reflections on the corpse of Jesus as viewed from another point in the narrative. The limits of this thesis do not permit a detailed study of this time between cross and grave, and any enticing theological discussion is beyond our remit, but we will make some initial observations as to the relationship between the first and the last look.

The dead face of the cross is close to life, warm, its last breath lingering in the air around it. The death-moment is fresh and the processing of the death in terms of bodily functions, responses of characters, the unfolding story, and the reader who watches on, has only just begun. The body is yet to be handled or moved in any way. When we turn to the body depicted in John 19:42b it is now cold and post-mortem decomposition will already have initiated some of its gruesome work. The last look at the body in the tomb is steeped with finality—not only of life, but now of textual presence. Our themes of abandonment and abjection are strong. We would suggest that these two moments work together to frame a time of the dead Christ in John's Gospel, in which the situation, air and emotion of the narrative becomes increasingly despairing and desolate, indeed 'dark.' This descent is marked by its quiet terror and contrasts to the crescendo of fear and horror that marked the bodily journey *to* rather than *from* the cross. In the first look at the face of the dead Jesus, the corpse still holds traces of the life it has just lost, in the last look, the corpse faces the death that has taken mind and soul and will now devour body. For us, the last look is a point of complete Johannine darkness, and Ford's image of a black hole is a fitting vision for us of its impact within the text.

5.4 A Melancholic Journey

5.4.1 *The Dead Christ in the Tomb* by Hans Holbein the Younger



The Dead Christ in the Tomb painted by Hans Holbein the Younger in 1521⁶⁹⁸ is an artistic interpretation of the body of Jesus laid out in the tomb. This sixteenth-century painting offers an extraordinary contribution to our reading. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Holbein was prioritising the Johannine burial image over any other Gospel, and the textual presence of the ὀθονίοις *cloths* (19:40) which wrap the body of Jesus are a point of difference, the painting has a strong resonance with the John 19:42b text and our interpretation of it. We can identify that within this painting, its interpretations and history, is found an alternative perspective from which to view the burial of Christ's corpse: primarily, that of human bodily death.

In our reading we draw in Holbein's painting as a significant intertextual image which offers a visual experience of the 19:42b tableau. Textually, the Johannine closing scene of the burial of Jesus might appear minor, insignificant and easily passed over. It is a few simple words expressing practicalities of where they put the corpse of Jesus and why. As we have discussed throughout our thesis, it is usually considered to be the muted close of a dramatic and spectacular passion narrative.

ὅτι ἐγγύς ἦν τὸ μνημεῖον, ἔθηκαν τὸν Ἰησοῦν.
and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. (John 19:42b)

We have already identified in this chapter the significance of beholding, or 'facing,' the representation of the dead body of Jesus. However this is often overlooked in interpretations of the burial passage. As we noted in our introduction, Brown proposes that, to the writer of John, "There is nothing negative about the act of burying Jesus, for once he died, he had to be buried. John's conviction that Jesus is 'the resurrection and the life' (11:25) did not make burial unnecessary; rather it made burial insignificant."⁶⁹⁹ Beasley-Murray also holds a conviction that the mind of the author was elsewhere, "Without doubt John in his whole account of the burial of Jesus has his eye on the resurrection morning."⁷⁰⁰ Foregone

⁶⁹⁸ Presently owned by Kunstmuseum, Basel.

⁶⁹⁹ Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1267.

⁷⁰⁰ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 360. While Bultmann suggests that the Cross is primarily glorious he notes that the burial scene "in no way prepares for the Easter story," Bultmann, *John*, 667. See also, 681. This is based on his

conclusions of the scene as comparatively unimportant have no doubt been a contributory factor in the moment being rendered of only minor interest and little consequence. In our reading of the final view of the Johannine Christ-corpse the interpretative lens is focussed on bringing the implications of this scene to the fore. The closing burial image of John's Gospel is a vignette of stillness after the violence of the preceding passion account, but we will ask if this reflects its potency rather than its insignificance?

The *Dead Christ* painting lends voice to this quiet moment and reveals something of the impact of viewing the corpse of Christ. It deals graphically with bodily death and leaves the viewer somewhat (perhaps suitably) disturbed at the scene of burial. Moreover, we consider Holbein's painting to be a rare expression of the significance of the burial image from a perspective, or indeed the point in the narrative sequence, where there is no immediate hope of bodily resurrection for Jesus.

The painting includes these key components:

1. It is a realistic depiction of a dead body. The head is slumped back, the eyes roll and the mouth gapes wordlessly open. It is not primarily concerned with depicting the body of Jesus, the Christ, rather it is concerned with the depiction of the dead body of Jesus, the human.
2. The body of Christ lies alone. There are no accompanying figures in the image. The isolation of the corpse is harshly apparent.
3. The Johannine gash of 19:34 is evident in Christ's side, although as we have identified, by John 19:42b it has been disclosed that Joseph and Nicodemus have ἔδησαν αὐτὸ ὀθονίοις *wrapped it with linen* (John 19:40).

observations on the complete burial performed by Nicodemus and the fact that there is no mention of the stone pre 20:1.

As a painting of stark bodily death, undiluted with relational or resurrectional tones, it contrasts with both artistic interpretations of the burial of Christ that display the devotion of those handling his body, and paintings which depict a body slumbering peacefully, hardly appearing dead at all.⁷⁰¹ The very form of the painting, long and thin, the upper edge of the canvas hovering claustrophobically close to the chest and face of the body in coffin-like proximity, disturbs the viewer and emphasises the containment of the sad figure within. Of course, one may point out that there appears, at least, to be light within the Holbein tomb. Where is the light coming from so that we may see the figure of Jesus? Could this be interpreted as the moment before the tomb is closed? Such an interpretation would present a pertinent comparison to the John 19:42b scene where, as we have pointed out, John does not seal the tomb with a stone (within the burial narrative of John 19:38–42) but allows the reader’s gaze to look in at the final moment of burial abandonment.

The art historian Erika Michael, in her paper “The Legacy of Holbein’s *Gedankenreichtum* (Wealth of ideas)”⁷⁰² translates a monologue by Swiss writer Jules Bailloids from “Le Christ Mort” which speaks in an imaginative reconstruction of the implied voice of Holbein about the image,

I, Hans Holbein, do not lie! There is your God. He is dead. You cannot doubt it, can you? Look at him Look at those long thin legs with drawn sinews, those rigid, swollen feet, those long emaciated arms, like wings with their feathers plucked, this hand swollen by the nail, this hand with long skeleton fingers, like the claws of a dead bird Look at this bruised chest. Count the ribs, the frightening thinness will permit you. Finished, it will never again know the breath of life . . . it is pierced bellows... But above all the head, trimmed beard, and open mouth, swollen lips, dry lips, shrunken nose, vulgar, and the eyes, behold those eyes of a cadaver—are you weeping?—the eyes turned up, turned toward somewhere else in limitless desperation, in total defeat, absolute surrender. Look at your God. I [Holbein] have not lied to you. Believe me. He is really dead.⁷⁰³

⁷⁰¹ Kristeva recognises this comparative element in her interpretation of Holbein’s painting (see below for discussion). She notes that Italian iconography ‘embellishes’ or ‘ennobles’ Christ’s face during the passion and she also recognises that the presence of mourners within other depictions of the passion and burial scenes suggest an attitude of devotional grief and resurrectional hope which the viewer should adopt. In contrast, Holbein leaves his Christ-corpse alone. See, Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 112–13.

⁷⁰² Erika Michael, “The Legacy of Holbein’s *Gedankenreichtum*,” in *Hans Holbein: Paintings, Prints and Reception* (ed. M. Roskill and J. O. Hand; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 227–246.

⁷⁰³ Michael, “The Legacy,” 232. For the original French text see: Jules Bailloids, *Images. Donatello, Holbein, Durer, Breughel, Titien, Urs-Graf, Michel-Ange, Tintoret, Cimabue, Greco, Rembrandt, Velasquez, Verrocchio, Leonard De Vinci, Fra-Angelico, Bellini, Masaccio, Botticelli, Gozzoli, Mantegna, Poussin, Signorelli, Courbet* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1942) 21–23.

Baillods captures the impressive and depressive force of the painting in this description. Just as in the painting there is no room to look above, below or past the head or feet of the corpse. Here in this monologue there is no room to look beyond or before the body. It is a moment to look at death in the corpse of Jesus in all its fullness, destruction and horror.

The recognition that Jesus is 'really dead' chimes with our sequential reading which interprets the burial narrative while withholding disclosure of the resurrection. Baillods highlights it in his monologue, Holbein represents it in his painting, and its recognition heightens the passion of the scene in John 19:42b. This scene depicting the last moment of Jesus in the text, laden with the crushing reality of bodily death, now concluding in burial abandonment, leaves little room for speculation of resurrection. It is this 'last look' which both John's Gospel and Holbein's painting, capture; it is the moment before the observer turns away from the image in the knowledge that Jesus is truly dead. Surely we must ask, is this not the darkest moment of the text, where the Johannine darkness appears triumphant?

5.4.2 Dostoyevsky and Kristeva: Introduction

The painting of Holbein's *Dead Christ* has appeared in the work of both Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Julia Kristeva. In the pages of Dostoyevsky's dark and complex novel *The Idiot*⁷⁰⁴ we find a replica print of Holbein's *Dead Christ* hung on the wall in a character's home. Its authentic depiction of Christ's corpse disturbs and unsettles both characters and text, acting as a disconcerting presence within the narrative. In addition, when we look to Dostoyevsky's own life, we find the painting there too, marking a significant point of reflection in a life dominated by traumatic experiences of death and execution. Viewed en-route to Geneva, where Dostoyevsky lived for a time while writing *The Idiot*, his encounter with the painting

⁷⁰⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* (trans. A. Myers; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992).

marked the onset of grief, in the death of a friend, and then the death of his own newborn daughter.⁷⁰⁵

Julia Kristeva too has drawn together the works of Holbein's *Dead Christ* and Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*.⁷⁰⁶ She reflects on the image, referencing Dostoyevsky's text, from a psychoanalytic perspective in her discourse of melancholia and depression.⁷⁰⁷ As we have discussed at length in Chapter One, methodological dependence upon Kristeva is complex and complicating, and we have deliberately avoided a methodologically singular Kristevian reading in this thesis, however her contribution to the discussion here is valuable. In her definition of the image of a 'black sun' as a depiction of depression, and her identification of the Holbein painting as a visual representation of this feeling, she gives us an interesting perspective on our discussion of Johannine darkness in the burial text of John 19:42b. In addition, her theories, in their recognition of the signification of the deepest point of melancholic despair in the face of death, ultimately challenge our reading to go through the abyss of death and consider the destabilisation of Johannine darkness, even as we trace it to its nadir in the burial of Jesus.

5.4.3 Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* and Holbein's *Dead Christ*

Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *The Idiot*⁷⁰⁸ is a challenging and dark text, centring upon the question of what might become of a man who was, in Dostoyevsky's own words, "an absolutely wonderful person"⁷⁰⁹; the answer Dostoyevsky provides is troubling. The 'wonderful person' is Prince Myshkin 'the idiot,' who, at the start of the novel, returns to St

⁷⁰⁵ See, Anna Dostoevsky, *Reminiscences* (trans. B. Stillman; London: Wildwood House, 1976), 133–150. For an account of the visit to the Basel Museum where the painting was displayed see, Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (ed. M. Petrusewicz; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 549–550. For an account of the period in 1868 when Dostoevsky's daughter was born and then died, see, Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer*, 566–74.

⁷⁰⁶ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* (trans. A. Myers; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992).

⁷⁰⁷ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 107–138. Kristeva also undertakes an extended discussion of Dostoyevsky's life and works, see, Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 173–217.

⁷⁰⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* (trans. A. Myers; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992).

⁷⁰⁹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Complete Letters. Volume Two 1860–1867* (trans. and ed. D. A. Lowe; Ann Arbor: Ardis 1989), 297. See for comment, Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer*, 577.

Petersburg from his time in a sanatorium and becomes embroiled with men (Rogozhin, Ippolit) and women (Nastasya Filippovna, Aglaya), who ultimately crush his spirit and sanity. Myshkin is commonly likened to Christ in interpretations of *The Idiot*, Joseph Frank points out that the Prince is “surrounded with a pervasive Christian penumbra that continually illuminates his character and serves to locate the exalted nature of his moral and spiritual aspirations.”⁷¹⁰ Dostoyevsky himself outlined that Myshkin’s love for Nastasya Filippovna was to be ‘Christ-like’ in its quality.⁷¹¹ Interestingly, Mills Todd points out that, unlike Christ, Myshkin elicits no sympathy from the world, or faith-filled followers within the narrative, making the Gospels appear ‘rather tame’ in comparison.⁷¹² If Myshkin is Christ-like, the likeness extends only to Christ’s love and sacrifice; for Myshkin there is no resurrection, and he ends the novel as a broken, mentally ill man whose worst fears have been realised. This brief outline sketches the wider perspective into which Dostoyevsky then brings the Holbein image. Frank states, “If Holbein’s picture and Myshkin’s tirade are introduced so awkwardly and abruptly at this point [the beginning of Part II], it is probably because Dostoyevsky wished immediately to establish the framework within which the catastrophic destiny awaiting the prince would be rightly understood.”⁷¹³

The painting is a significant element of the narrative world of Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot*⁷¹⁴ and has been discussed at length from a number of perspectives.⁷¹⁵ Such is the significance of its literary role, at times *The Dead Christ* has been considered as a ‘text within the text’ of the

⁷¹⁰ Frank, *Dostoyevsky: A Writer*, 580. See Frank, *Dostoyevsky: A Writer*, 578–80, for discussion.

⁷¹¹ William Mills Todd III, introduction to *The Idiot* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky (trans. D. McDuff; Penguin Books: London, 2004), xi–xxxiv, xxviii. Interestingly, Edward Wasiolek points out that Dostoyevsky, in the seventh plan of *The Idiot*, consolidates Christ-like qualities from a number of characters into just Myshkin. See, Edward Wasiolek, introduction to *The Notebooks for The Idiot*, by Fyodor Dostoyevsky (ed. E. Wasiolek; trans. K. Strelsky; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 132. Dostoyevsky added an unelucidated reference in his notes on *The Idiot*, which simply says “Prince Christ.” See, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Notebooks for The Idiot* (ed. E. Wasiolek; trans. K. Strelsky; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 198.

⁷¹² Mills Todd III, *Introduction*, xxxiii.

⁷¹³ Frank, *Dostoyevsky: A Writer*, 582.

⁷¹⁴ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot* (trans. A. Myers; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992).

⁷¹⁵ For examples see: Liza Knapp, ed., *Dostoyevsky’s The Idiot: A Critical Companion* (Illinois: Northwest University Press, 1998), 19, 38–9; Michael, “The Legacy,” 232; Joseph Frank, *Dostoyevsky: The Miraculous Years 1865–1871* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 327–8, 332–3; Robin F. Miller, *Dostoyevsky and The Idiot: Author, Narrator and Reader* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 212–13.

novel.⁷¹⁶ The image, with all its theological, moral and spiritual connotations, adds a metaphorical richness, which plays and pricks with menace. But it is not only within the text of *The Idiot* that we find the painting's unsettling force, but also without. Before we go further, we must first make a brief survey of the biographical context of the author to see Dostoyevsky's formative interpretative experience of Holbein's *Dead Christ*. When Dostoyevsky comes face-to-face with the painting, his response is both disturbed and disturbing.

Death and trauma marked Dostoyevsky's life in significant and terrible ways. His life was blighted by severe epilepsy, which constantly degraded his health and wellbeing. He became a widower in 1864 when he lost his first wife Marya Dimitriyevna. He also faced execution personally; his last-minute reprieve from the executioner's gun barrel in Semenovskiy Square (1849) and his subsequent exile in Siberia were, for him, a type of 'death' from which he experienced a comparable 'resurrection' upon his release.⁷¹⁷ The confrontation of his own, seemingly inevitable, death left a lasting mark on him and was an ongoing source for his writings.⁷¹⁸ Reading both his life and novel it is easy to connect the terrifying threat of capital punishment in Dostoyevsky's personal experience, and the vision of that threat corporeally realised in the image of Jesus' corpse. The Holbein painting of a body after execution graphically depicts the threats and fears that plagued him.

When Dostoyevsky encountered the painting for himself, he was deeply moved. Anna Dostoyevskaya, Fyodor's second wife, records the occasion in her diary,

The painting had a crushing impact on Fyodor Mikhailovich. He stood before it as if stunned. And I did not have the strength to look at it—it was too painful for me, particularly in my sickly condition—and I went into other rooms. When I came back

⁷¹⁶ See, Michael, "The Legacy," 232, who quotes Hungarian scholar István Molnár and his research into this theory. See, István Molnár "'One's Faith Could Be Smashed by Such a Picture': Interrelation of Word and Image (Icon) in Dostoyevsky's Fiction—Holbein's *Christ in the Tomb* in the Ideological and Compositional Structure of the Novel *The Idiot*" *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 32, nos. 3–4 (1990), 245–258.

⁷¹⁷ See, Knapp, ed., *Dostoyevsky's The Idiot*, 15–16.

⁷¹⁸ In *The Idiot* Myshkin reflects upon the torment of a man faced with his own death, sudden and irrevocable, in execution and the psychological trauma which it induces. See, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot* (trans. D. McDuff; London: Penguin Books, 2004), 26–7.

after fifteen or twenty minutes, I found him still riveted to the same spot in front of the painting. His agitated face had a kind of dread in it, something I had noticed more than once during the first moments of an epileptic seizure.⁷¹⁹

It induced in him a conflict between Jesus the miracle-worker Christ, essentially a peaceable figure, and the brutalized violent end to which he was put.⁷²⁰

Dostoyevsky, after seeing the painting, travelled on to Geneva, where he was to write *The Idiot*. It was a time of great personal distress and upheaval. He and his wife had left Russia under threat of mounting debts and escaped to Europe. Dostoyevsky's addiction to gambling left them at the mercy of loans and more creditors. His emotional and mental health were as much of a concern as his ongoing epilepsy. The couple were desperately homesick and adrift in an unfamiliar culture. Further personal experience of death and grief were to come. A friend, and fellow epileptic, was found dead in a ditch after a violent attack, and shortly afterwards Dostoyevsky suffered the greater loss of his daughter. The birth of his first child had brought him delirious joy and she had provided a beacon of hope in this difficult time, but devastation struck in her death at three months old. Inconsolable in grief, Dostoyevsky writes in a letter to a friend, "Where is that little person for whom I state boldly that I would accept crucifixion if only she could be alive?"⁷²¹ It is a poignant image of sacrifice that he should consider crucifixion in this manner, and makes an interesting connection with Holbein's image of the crucified Jesus in his writing.

The sections of *The Idiot* written before the child's death are marked out by their different style from those written after. There are two occasions when Holbein's *Dead Christ* appears in the novel, the first written before the tragedy, the second after. In the first encounter of Part

⁷¹⁹ Dostoyevsky, *Reminiscences*, 134.

⁷²⁰ Michael, "The Legacy," 232.

⁷²¹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Complete Letters. Volume Three 1868–1871* (trans. and ed. D. A. Lowe; Ann Arbor: Ardis 1989), 76. His daughter's death affected Dostoyevsky profoundly and the depth of his pain and despair is clear in his letters of the time. See also, Frank, *Dostoyevsky: The Miraculous Years*, 293. Anna writes in her diary of her husband's grief: "I cannot express the desolation that took hold of us when we saw our lovely daughter lying dead. Profoundly shaken and afflicted by her death as I was, I was even more afraid for my broken-hearted husband. His grief was stormy. He sobbed and wept like a woman, standing in front of the body of his darling as it grew cold, and covering her tiny white face and hands with burning kisses. I never knew such paroxysms of grief." Dostoyevsky, *Reminiscences*, 147.

2, Chapter 4, the protagonist, Prince Myshkin, exclaims that the painting could 'cause a man to lose his faith!' but, with a discourse on humanity's religious spirit, the painting's unsettling influence is soon disbanded.⁷²² The second encounter is altogether more negative, with the storm clouds of Dostoyevsky's grief darkening the authorial tone. The complicated and troubling character of Ippolit sees it as an illustration of the uncompromising tyranny of death.⁷²³ Dostoyevsky writes (Part 3, Chapter 6):

But in Rogozhin's painting there was no trace of beauty; this reality was the corpse of a man who had endured endless torments even before the cross, wounds, tortures, beating from the guards, beating from the mob while he carried the cross and fell beneath it, and, at last, the agony of the cross which lasted six hours (by my calculations, at least). . . here there is only nature, and this is truly what the corpse of a man, whoever he may be, must look like after such torments.⁷²⁴

Robin Miller contrasts the two character's responses and the marked differences of the men's encounters. "Myshkin can maintain his faith, his belief in the possible resurrection of beauty even in the face of such a painting, but Ippolit cannot. The Holbein painting of the dead Christ sows an evil seed in him. . ."⁷²⁵ In essence, Prince Myshkin can and does see past the deathly form to a hope and resurrection beyond, but Ippolit gazes at the painting without hope and without the promise of resurrection. Frank identifies the source of Ippolit's terror as his inability to see beyond the destruction of Christ's death (and therefore all death) to the belief in Christ's 'triumph over death.' Ippolit cannot understand how the real disciples of Christ could have witnessed his corpse and gone on to believe.⁷²⁶ We find in this novel a resonance with our own identification of the Johannine textual experience of the Christ-corpse, seen without resurrectional tones, stripped of the expectation or hope of restoration.

William Leatherbarrow also identifies the depressing lack of any suggestion of resurrection or eternal life in the painting. Leatherbarrow comments:

⁷²² For a discussion of Prince Myshkin's response to the Holbein image see, Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years*, 327–8.

⁷²³ See, Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years*, 332. Knapp makes the overt connection between the two reactions and the state of grief that Dostoyevsky is in at the time of writing. See, Knapp, ed., *Dostoevsky's The Idiot*, 19–20.

⁷²⁴ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot* (trans. D. McDuff; London: Penguin Books, 2004), 475–6.

⁷²⁵ Miller, *Dostoevsky and The Idiot*, 213.

⁷²⁶ Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years*, 332.

. . . Dostoyevsky remarked that such a painting could make a man lose his faith, and similar words are put into Myshkin's mouth in *The Idiot*. In fact, Holbein's painting has an almost anti-iconic significance in Dostoyevsky's novel: a copy of it hangs in Rogozhin's house and a full description of its horrific effect is given by the dying Ippolit Terentyev . . . ⁷²⁷

In *The Idiot*, Dostoyevsky presents us with an insight into the contrast in viewing the Holbein painting with hope and without. The desire of Holbein himself to induce these feelings of faithlessness through his work is somewhat uncertain and Dostoyevsky has been criticised for reaching the 'wrong conclusion' regarding the image. Art historian John Rowlands presents his opinion that the painting is a result of " . . . uncompromising realism that was an abiding element in late medieval meditations on Christ's Passion Far from conveying despair, its message is intended as one of belief, that from the decay of the tomb Christ rose again in glory on the third day." ⁷²⁸ However, the painting does provide a vision of Christ's death that prioritises the post-mortem corporeal reality of the tomb, and Dostoyevsky's life and work certainly presents a challenging presentation of its depressive force.

5.4.4 Kristeva: The Christ-Corpse as Melancholic Burden

Julia Kristeva draws Holbein's painting into her writings on depression and melancholia. In her psychoanalytical text *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* ⁷²⁹ she reflects on both the painting and some of its interpretations, including Dostoyevsky's. ⁷³⁰ For her, the painting is a tool to explore the idea of complete melancholy, the full weight of the force of depression bearing upon the human psyche. To depict utter depression and melancholia, Kristeva uses the image of a 'black sun' which bears no light, but radiates darkness, she asks, "Where does this black sun come from? Out of what eerie galaxy do its invisible, lethargic rays reach me, pinning me down to the ground, to my bed, compelling me to silence, to renunciation." ⁷³¹

Kristeva does not develop a discourse of the image and it is beyond the limits of this thesis to

⁷²⁷ William Leatherbarrow, introduction to *The Idiot* by Fyodor Dostoevsky (trans. A. Myers; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992), xi.

⁷²⁸ See, John Rowlands, *The Paintings of Hans Holbein The Younger* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1985), 52–3.

⁷²⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (trans. L. S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

⁷³⁰ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 107–138.

⁷³¹ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 3.

fully explore the concept of the black sun, with its rich and complex Jungian and psychoanalytical history.⁷³² However, it is an interesting image which provides a further conceptualisation of a force which is not just dark, but has a oppressive and consuming quality; just as Ford's black hole symbolism offered to our discussion.⁷³³

Kristeva, like Dostoyevsky, points to the lack of any resurrection hope within the painting.⁷³⁴ Her discussion centres on the painting's depiction of death perceived from three aspects: the "unadorned representation of human death"; the certainty of anguish within the relative human experience of death; and Holbein's message of terror beheld in the death of God.⁷³⁵ Kristeva recognises and expounds how Holbein's painting illustrates a point of complete despair. She states, "The unadorned representation of human death, the well-nigh anatomical stripping of the corpse convey to the viewers an unbearable anguish before the death of God, here blended with our own, since there is not the slightest suggestion of transcendency."⁷³⁶ For Kristeva, the melancholic burden of the painting centres upon its compositional isolation, the long shallow rectangle of the canvas contains the corpse it depicts, in coffin-like proximity, with no room for another presence. She identifies this as a major element of the painting's force: "Holbein, on the contrary, leaves the corpse strangely alone. It is perhaps that isolation—an act of composition—that endows the painting with its major melancholic burden, more so than delineation and colouring."⁷³⁷ Within Holbein's image of the Christ-corpse, stripped of life, companions and God, there resides a darkness, which Kristeva defines as "a melancholy moment"⁷³⁸

⁷³² For a thorough study of the black sun image see, Stanton Marlan, *The Black Sun: The Alchemy and Art of Darkness* (CEFSAP 10; College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005). Marlan summarises, "Jung's exploration was influenced by seventeenth-century alchemist Mylius, who refers to the ancient philosophers as the source of our knowledge about Sol niger. In several places in his collected works, Jung writes of Sol niger as a powerful and important image of the unconscious. . . . The black sun, blackness, *putrefactio*, *mortificatio*, the *nigredo*, poisoning, torture, killing, decomposition, rotting, and death all form a web of interrelationships that describe a terrifying, if most often provisional, eclipse of consciousness or of our conscious standpoint." Marlan, *The Black Sun*, 11.

⁷³³ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 205–6.

⁷³⁴ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 110.

⁷³⁵ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 110.

⁷³⁶ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 110.

⁷³⁷ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 112–3.

⁷³⁸ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 128.

In our reading of John 19:42b we have recognised that a distinguishing feature of the Johannine Christ-corpse is that it is left alone. Not only practically (burial abandonment to decay) but left alone *in the reader's gaze*, with no stone to close the tomb and no further narrative of burial ritual, attendance or grief. If we adopt Kristeva's term, Jesus' body, laid out and isolated in the tomb, is a 'melancholic moment' within the Gospel text. Its presence disturbs and disrupts, acting as a depressive force. Kristeva uses this term to encapsulate "an actual or imaginary loss of meaning, an actual or imaginary despair, an actual or imaginary razing of symbolic values, including the value of life."⁷³⁹ In the loss of life, we can identify that Jesus, previously established as the life, no longer *has* nor *is* life and this must also challenge our interpretation of Jesus as light. Is Jesus now a 'black sun?'⁷⁴⁰ A light which gives no light, instead radiating something dark and oppressive? Is Jesus himself depositing death, trauma and abjection in the text? If we recall once again the language of abjection, in John 19:42b Jesus indeed inhabits a truly abject state. Manuel Villalobos Mendoza's discussion of abjection in the Gospel of Mark points out that, ". . . Jesus' ministry, miracles and deeds could easily be classified as abject because they question recognized borders. So in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus voluntarily touches a leper (Mk 1.40–45) and takes a corpse by the hand (Mk 5.41)." In our reading of John, through death and burial, Jesus has crossed the ultimate border of abjection, Jesus *becomes* the abject corpse within the text. Mendoza talks of Jesus calling the abject to be part of his 'abject kingdom'⁷⁴¹; we can point out that it is in the literary image of John 19:42b that Jesus, dead and alone, most completely inhabits the role of abject king.

Jesus' corpse as a source of Johannine darkness is a challenging inversion of that which we have previously discussed. Both Jesus as 'black hole' and Jesus as 'black sun' are images

⁷³⁹ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 128.

⁷⁴⁰ Although it is beyond the remit of this thesis to pursue Synoptic comparisons here, darkness is a significant event and theme in all three accounts. Some interpretations suggest there could be an actual 'black sun' solar eclipse in the sky as Jesus dies. See, Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44. See for discussion, including discussion of the historical possibility of an eclipse, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1034–43.

⁷⁴¹ Mendoza, *Abject Bodies*, 95.

which depict his corpse as a powerful negative element in the depiction of burial abandonment, the 'last look' at Jesus' corpse. For Kristeva, a melancholic moment's loss of meaning disrupts the symbolic universe, leaving fissures in the fabric of symbolic actualisation; in our reading, the Christ-corpse of John 19:42b as Johannine darkness, is the pit into which the text, with its previous principles now fully undermined, cannot help but collapse. But of course, the text does not collapse, it remains. The representation of death in Holbein's painting, brought into our discussion with Dostoyevsky's and Kristeva's thinking, has led us to a nadir in our reading of Johannine darkness and the burial text, however now we are challenged to confront complexity within the darkness and the contemplation of its destabilisation.

5.4.5 Signification as a Path Through the Abyss

Kristeva's interpretation of the Holbein painting does not end at the point of recognition of the melancholic burden it cradles. A turn to biography, specifically Holbein's biography, continues her developing thesis. Looking closely, perhaps a little speculatively, at the 'artist-subject,'⁷⁴² Holbein, she proposes that the melancholy within the painting may be born from a personal melancholia within the artist's life, but in expending himself in the artistic endeavour, the melancholia was overcome and the loss of meaning which had delivered the stylistically melancholic *The Dead Christ* painting was then countered by the creation of it: new meaning springing from the act of creation itself.⁷⁴³ Therefore the painting holds in tension this paradox: that it may be simultaneously a melancholic burden, suffocating and absolute, but also, within its very presence and existence—*its signification of death*—offers the possibility of redemption from that melancholy.

⁷⁴² Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 129.

⁷⁴³ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 128–9.

John Lechte, in his article “Kristeva and Holbein, Artist of Melancholy,”⁷⁴⁴ summarises Kristeva’s theory as “[weaving] a passage between the symbolic and semiotic dimensions.”⁷⁴⁵ Ultimately, for Lechte, Kristeva recognises this graphic, lonely and disturbing representation of death by Holbein as a representation of the semiotic (unsignified, uncontrollable, instinctive space) within the symbolic world.⁷⁴⁶ The transcendent experience of death, which usually uncontrollably disturbs and disorders the symbolic world, is represented and ordered within the realm of signs and the symbolic. And, for Kristeva, the move made from the mysteriously closed semiotic experience-of-death to the recognised symbolic representation-of-death offers, perhaps surprisingly, a path to the resurrection of the melancholic self. The great unsignifiable ‘death’ is captured, even subjugated, in signs, making it possible to travel through the melancholic moment rather than be arrested by it. Of *The Dead Christ*, she asks, “. . . truth is severe, sometimes sad, often melancholy. Can such a truth also constitute beauty? Holbein’s wager, beyond melancholia, is to answer, yes it can.”⁷⁴⁷ Lechte summarises,

Kristeva’s insight regarding Holbein’s Corpse of Christ in the Tomb thus derives from the fact that perhaps for the first time in the modern era, the ‘Minimalist’ style is used to introduce an image of a crucifixion without resurrection, but with the result that a way has been found to put death into signs, thereby bringing about the resurrection of the depressed subject who identifies with the dead Christ.⁷⁴⁸

Finally, Kristeva goes on to turn to theological aspects of the subject matter of the Holbein painting as a further contributory element of her theory.⁷⁴⁹ She identifies Christ as the ‘absolute subject’ and the Christ-corpse laid out in death puts at the centre of this being a ‘rupture.’⁷⁵⁰ This rupture of the absolute subject offers a moment of identification for the depressed subject with Christ. The theological message of Christ’s resurrection then offers a

⁷⁴⁴ John Lechte, “Kristeva and Holbein, Artist of Melancholy” *BJA* 30 (1990): 342–350.

⁷⁴⁵ Lechte, “Kristeva and Holbein.” 347.

⁷⁴⁶ For our discussion of the Kristevian semiotic see, Chapter One, 1.3.2.1 ‘The Semiotic.’

⁷⁴⁷ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 127.

⁷⁴⁸ Lechte, “Kristeva and Holbein.” 345–6.

⁷⁴⁹ For a discussion of Kristeva’s use of the Holbein painting see also, Lechte and Margaroni, *Julia Kristeva*, 81–

⁷⁵⁰ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 132.

psychological process of 'imaginary identification' for the depressed subject to associate with Christ, which may then offer a 'resurrection' of the depressed subject.⁷⁵¹

Ultimately, Kristeva's thesis contains the possibility of the destabilisation of our understanding of Johannine darkness. While our reading of John 19:42b does not draw in resurrection theology, as Kristeva does in her psychoanalytic theory, her discussion of signification and representation is useful. In terms of the Johannine text, if we recognise that it too depicts Jesus' corpse in a similarly abject and melancholic way, a melancholic burden within the Gospel of John, so too must we recognise that the very depiction of such, ordering the semiotic into the symbolic, rescues text and reader from the abyss of death. It is the textual representation in signs, in the symbolic, which gives a path away from the uncontrolled despair of the semiotic encounter with death and pierces the hegemony of Johannine darkness. Kristeva's theory has allowed us to acknowledge it here and our reflections in our thesis conclusion will pick up this thread.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have undertaken an extended intertextual discourse of the final scene of the Johannine burial narrative as depicted in John 19:42b. Using Synoptic comparisons, theologian David Ford's work, Hans Holbein's *The Dead Christ in the Tomb*, as well as the interpretations and the discussions it has instigated in the literature of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and theorist Julia Kristeva, we have made a discussion of the image of Jesus' corpse laid alone in the tomb at the close of the Johannine burial. We hope that we have shown that the image is a powerful element within the text and is a moment of deepest despair in the depiction of the death which now consumes the Christ-corpse, a 'melancholic moment.' The key elements of the isolated figure of Christ, the confrontation of bodily death and the absence of transcendence, all may be identified within the Johannine text and the final

⁷⁵¹ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 132–135.

tableau of the burial sequence. Viewed without resurrectional hopes, in a sequential reading of the narrative, the depiction is a powerful oppressive force and we have used the images of Ford's 'black hole' and Kristeva's 'black sun' to elucidate significance of the Johannine Christ-corpse of John 19:42b, this toxic vessel of Johannine darkness set within the text.

Conclusion

This thesis has presented a reading of the burial of Jesus in the Gospel of John with a focus on the discourse of darkness. Our theme of darkness has encompassed the following four areas:

1. Examination of the σκοτία motif.
2. Development of an interpretation of 'Johannine darkness' as a unique motif in the Gospel of John which recognises a relationship between σκοτία and death, and reads death as an indicator for Johannine darkness.
3. A feminist perspective which disturbs the commonly accepted positive interpretation of the burial of Jesus in the Gospel of John, with particular attention on the character of Jesus' mother.
4. A reading of the final literary depiction, in John 19:42b, of the corpse of Jesus laid out in the tomb at the moment of burial abandonment.

The text of our discussions has been John 19:38–42. However, both our reading of this episode and our reading of the σκοτία motif has demanded that other parts of the Gospel be examined in detail, notably the prologue's references to σκοτία and φῶς in John 1:1–5 and the scene at the cross in John 19:25–7, depicting Jesus' mother; Jesus' mother's sister; Mary Magdalene; and Mary wife of Clopas.⁷⁵²

We have considered and re-imagined the integration of theory, particularly literary theory, into the field of New Testament studies. Our first chapter was occupied with this discussion.

⁷⁵² For the purposes of our study we have adhered to the common reading of 4 women in this scene. For discussion see, Brown, *Death vol. 2*, 1014–5. See also, Tolmie, "The Women," 618–21.

We focused on how theory has been employed in work on the Fourth Gospel, and we presented an overview of the growth of theoretical approaches and the proliferation of work in this area. We then reconsidered the methodology and epistemology associated with the interface of theory and the biblical text. We concluded that there are signs of a new harmony being established, based on the mutual respect of the different questions that each approach asks. We situated our own thesis at this junction and pointed out that much of the initial wariness, at times outright contempt, for literary approaches, has eased, and their value for New Testament studies is more readily, often enthusiastically, recognised. Finally, in this chapter, we presented the methodology of this thesis which used first-century historical enquiry to inform twenty-first-century literary analysis. At this point we also introduced the work, theories and language of Julia Kristeva, whose attention to themes of abjection and melancholia, offered our reading a useful perspective. This opening discussion laid the theoretical and epistemological foundation for our following work.

In our second chapter we presented a detailed study of the motif of darkness, σκοτία, within the Gospel of John. We proposed that studies on the theme of darkness in John have perhaps been underdeveloped because of scholarly preoccupation with Johannine φῶς. We found attention to the depiction of σκοτία proved to be a valuable area of research. The chapter presented a reading which identified the distinctive motif of Johannine darkness within the text and we made a case for a Johannine relationship between the σκοτία motif and death. It was highlighted that, in the Gospel of John, the usual literary relationship between the two elements, where commonly darkness is used to symbolize and illustrate death, appeared to be reversed. We suggested that death is a symbol or 'indicator' within the text for Johannine darkness, based upon the explicit relationship established in the Gospel between φῶς and ζωή. We then expanded our interpretation to include reading the motif with the additional indicators of trauma and abjection.

Finally in Chapter Two, having examined Johannine darkness in these terms, we focused our attention on the passion narrative texts of John 19:1–24 and 28–37 and concluded that, when identified with death, trauma and abjection, Johannine darkness, is a dominant motif in the death of Jesus in the Gospel of John. This chapter prepared for our discussion of darkness in the burial narrative by assessing the motif's prominence in the preceding crucifixion narrative. We suggested that the burial narrative should be approached from this perspective, firmly placing any discussion of burial and Johannine darkness within the wider discourse of darkness and death already established in the crucifixion text.

In Chapter Three we surveyed historical research into burial of the crucified. In many ways this departed from the discussions of the preceding chapters, however it prepared the way for our thesis to move beyond previously established axioms pertaining to the burial of Jesus in John. The chapter provided a frame of reference for what might be considered expected norms with regard to the burial of the crucified. It also undertook a survey of normative Jewish funerary tradition. The chapter highlighted that the place of the familial and the female was a significant element in the historical understanding of burial, suggesting the priority and agency of family and women in both normal ritual and post-crucifixion possibility of burial. Our feminist perspective asked why this information appeared to be missing in application to the Johannine burial text and the interpretation of the burial ritual that Joseph and Nicodemus undertake. To this matter we moved onto in Chapter Four. 'Reading darkness' evolved from an investigation of Johannine darkness within the text, to an explicit feminist exercise in problematising the usually positivistic interpretation of John 19:38–42.

Though temptation to divert into historical or theological discussions abounded, we remained with our literary approach to the text, prioritizing literary unity and keeping our attention on dynamics within the text as well as dynamics between first-century text and twenty-first-century interpretation. Rather than pursuing questions of authorial intention or historical reality, we used our historical survey on first-century norms and expectations to inform our study and proposed a rereading of the burial narrative. Chapter Four offered an extended

discussion of absence and presence within the burial text of John 19:38–42, and we followed some of the presenting lines of discussion from Chapter Three. We concluded that maternal abjection is a theme within the Gospel that is dramatically apparent in Jesus' mother's absence from the burial ritual. After we highlighted the presence of the women at the cross in John 19:25 and made a case for a reading of their attendance as exhibiting a legitimate concern for burial. We proposed that their subsequent absence from the burial narrative is a negative and problematic feature of the text heretofore overlooked. We also drew upon postcolonial theory to consider the dynamics of power within the Johannine burial. This revealed further negative aspects of the two powerful political figures of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, and the control they exert over the crucified corpse of Jesus.

In our final chapter we undertook an extended discussion of the closing scene of the burial narrative in John 19:42b, and considered the effect in the narrative of this final depiction of Jesus' corpse laid out in the tomb. Here we returned explicitly to our theme of Johannine darkness and it became apparent, when Synoptic comparisons were made, that the burial narrative in John came to an abrupt and dramatic close. We opened our discussion to include intertextual elements of theology, art and literature. The theological work of David Ford, the life and writings of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, as well as the theories of Julia Kristeva, were brought together in their shared analysis of the image of Jesus' corpse. We concluded that the narrative time, within the Gospel of John, in which Jesus is dead, is a significant period in the text which demands further attention. We proposed that this dynamic held a cumulative dramatic element which reaches its peak in the John 19:42b scene, the last look at the corpse of Jesus at the moment of burial abandonment.

When we considered our conclusion of Chapter Two, that death is a significant indicator of Johannine darkness, we proposed that this final scene of the burial narrative created a nadir in the σκοτία motif. We identified that Jesus is presented as 'corpse,' the λόγος-corpse, and any resurrection possibility is discounted, both as a narrative expectation, and in the

sequential approach that we adopted to metanarrative. It became apparent that it is this point of corpse-abandonment depicted in the John 19:42b scene, rather than crucifixion, where death most fully dominates the person of Jesus within the narrative. This lead us to the conclusion that, mirroring the strength of its indicator death, Johannine darkness too appears most powerful at this moment, indeed victorious, and any hope of overcoming its power appears least likely. Finally, we reflected on the inversion of the Gospel's established norms which the scene of Jesus' corpse, alone in burial abandonment, holds: the ζῶη is dead, the φῶς is σκοτία and the λόγος is silent.

This thesis has problematised, in a number of aspects, a reading of the burial of Jesus in John as a positive or peaceful element of the narrative and there are a number of areas which could be considered more deeply than this present study's limits have permitted. Perhaps the most challenging point we have presented is how the unique Johannine absence of mother, females or family in the burial account of Jesus should affect scholarly interpretations of the text. It is apparent that attention to the narrative of the female characters depicted at the cross of Jesus, conspicuously Jesus' mother, and their subsequent absence in the burial ritual in the Gospel of John, could be examined beyond a literary approach. Historical and theological questions concerning their absence and identity may prove a fruitful line of enquiry. Indeed, limits of space and focus have meant that the three further women depicted in John 19:25, Jesus' mother's sister, Mary Magdalene and Mary wife of Clopas, have had little examination, literary or otherwise. Their narratives, particularly that of Mary Magdalene the sole member of the female cohort to return to the text (John 20), would be valuable areas for further study. In addition, study of the Synoptics' burial accounts in light of our conclusions and questions raised in Chapter Three (our historical survey of burial and funerary tradition) and with a similar feminist perspective, would be an interesting point of investigation and comparison.

In John 16:16–24, Jesus indicated that the pain of the disciples will quickly fade and turn to joy. Is the grief of Jesus' death so easily overcome? This thesis has reconsidered how we should interpret this time of pain, a time of the dead Christ, this 'little while' (John 16:16–19).⁷⁵³ Further work could be done in this area. What of this 'little while' which is so hotly debated in John 16? Questions could be asked again of the theme of Johannine darkness. Having studied darkness as a motif in the burial text, without the disclosure or hope of resurrection, we could go on to consider how the theme of darkness is dealt with in the resurrection narratives of John 20 and 21. The motif explicitly returns to the text in the σκοτία reference of John 20:1 (that it was 'still dark'), renewing and reiterating its presence. The discourse of the diminishing σκοτία motif in the resurrection texts would be a fascinating line of enquiry, particularly if discussion originated in the recognition of the dominance of the motif within the burial text. Does the σκοτία disperse quite so easily as Jesus' comments of John 16 suggest? Indeed, Jesus draws comparison between the disciples' grief and a woman in labour. He claims, "she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy" (John 16:21). Experiencing, remembering and forgetting pain in women's experiences of childbirth is surely a set of assumptions ripe for scrutiny.

Investigation into the juxtaposition between the point where all seems lost, and the narrative of resurrection which then follows, would be an important discussion to pursue, to pinpoint and explore the dramatic tension between the diminishing σκοτία motif and the escalating resurrection narrative in John 20–1. If the reader has been brought to a point where all previous indications of the resurrection appear redundant in the face of the cataclysmic events within the narrative plot of John 19, how will this heighten the drama of the revelation of resurrection that ensues? Our reading has highlighted the point where the reader is drawn to question all the previous indications in the text: that light will triumph over darkness, good over bad, and life over death. This does not make previous signs of future resurrection

⁷⁵³ Ian Boxall points to the 'little while' of John 16 and the woman as a symbol for a vulnerable community. See, Boxall, "From the Apocalypse," 74.

redundant (in our focus on the supreme point of doubt within the text) rather we begin to expose how dramatic the narrative revelation of resurrection then appears. Further work on John 20 and 21, and the transformation that occurs in the text, between the climax of utter desolation and abandonment of hope we have traced and the narrative of resurrection that unfolds, would be a suitable continuation of this research.

Finally, as with all good conclusions, we must point out the main methodological limitation in our work. We are not unaware that in our discussion of darkness in this thesis we have, on the whole, followed a traditional understanding of the dualistic nature of light and dark, and have conducted our discussion within a straightforward value system whereby darkness is negative (death, absence) and light is positive (life, presence). However, as we briefly pointed out in Chapter Two, even the practical nature of light and dark betrays elements of a reciprocal rather than oppositional relationship between the two: the presence of a bright light creates the presence of a dark shadow. Moreover, the designation of light and darkness in terms of 'good' and 'bad' symbols or motifs is not without ambiguity. Our conclusions of Chapter Five in some ways hinted at the discussion which may develop in this direction, a discussion of light and darkness, of Johannine darkness and $\phi\omega\zeta$, which destabilized the dualistic opposition we have engaged with. We moved towards this perspective with Julia Kristeva's theory of signification and considered artistic expression as a path through the 'abyss' of hopelessness and, in terms of the burial narrative, the apparent victory of Johannine darkness. We pointed to the very continuation of the text into John 20 as a part of the destabilisation of the hegemony of Johannine darkness. This small theoretical reflection we made in 5.4.5 'Signification as a Path Through the Abyss,' points towards a deeper and more challenging theological discussion which could be pursued in this area.

Ultimately, we believe the value of our thesis lies in two areas. Firstly, the presentation of historical information of first-century burial to inform our rereading of Jesus' mother and the Johannine burial text depicting Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. And secondly, the

discussion we have provoked around the theme of darkness and the interpretation of the motif of Johannine darkness in relationship to Jesus' identity as φῶς. Overall, the interplay of death and darkness, of absence and presence, and of burial and abandonment, with the journey Jesus makes through the Gospel of John from λόγος, to body, to corpse, observed in this study from a historical, literary and feminist perspective, has revealed a challenging new perspective on the Johannine burial account.

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