

**TRANSCENDING ALTERITY:
STRANGE WOMAN MEETS SAMARITAN WOMAN**

**TRANSCENDING ALTERITY:
THE PROVERBIAL STRANGE WOMAN MEETS THE
JOHANNINE SAMARITAN WOMAN**

By

JANE SUZANNE WEBSTER, B.Th.

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AUTHOR: Jane Suzanne Webster, Hons. B.Th. (McGill University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Adele Reinhartz

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Abstract

In the Gospel of John (4:1-42), a story is told of a Samaritan woman who goes to a well to draw water. While she is there, she encounters Jesus. They converse about living water and true worship. This encounter so impresses the woman that she returns to the Samaritan city of Sychar and tells the people about him. In response, the Samaritans come to meet Jesus, invite him to stay, and, after two days, declare him to be the “savior of the world.”

Legitimated by a comparison between Wisdom motifs and the Johannine presentation of Jesus, this narrative is interpreted against the background of the Wisdom tradition of early Judaism. The Samaritan Woman follows the paradigm of the Strange Woman found in Proverbs 2:16-19, 5:1-23, 6:23-35 and 7:5-27. Like the Strange Woman, the Samaritan Woman is depicted as an adulteress, as a foreign woman and as a foolish woman. Moreover, the Strange Woman is constructed as the polar opposite of Lady Wisdom and the Samaritan Woman is constructed as the opposite of Jesus: she is female, he is male; she is a Samaritan, he is a Jew; she does not know, he does know. In this way, both the Strange Woman and the Samaritan Woman symbolize alterity.

The narrative genre of the gospels, however, allows development of character to take place - a movement which is not possible within the didactic genre of Proverbs. Within the symbolic layer of the Johannine community, she is no longer an adulteress, but she finds her “legitimate husband” in Jesus. No longer a foreign woman, she is given the possibility of rebirth “from above.” No longer ignorant, she brings others to belief through her word. The symbols of alterity are thus reconfigured in the new community.

The emphasis on the symbolic representation of this character undermines the recent historical-critical arguments which claim that the Samaritan Woman narrative is based on the story of a historical person.

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Introduction

The account of the Samaritan Woman is found only in the Gospel of John 4:1-42. It tells the story of a meeting between Jesus and a woman of Samaria at a well near Sychar. Jesus' request for a drink opens a discourse on such subjects as water and true worship. Jesus discloses to the woman that he is the Messiah. When she tells the people in her town about him, they come out to meet Jesus themselves and, after two days, declare him to be the "saviour of the world." Meanwhile, the disciples are told about the work of Jesus and an eschatological harvest.

In attempting to interpret this narrative, scholars have looked at various literary or historical keys which might help to unlock its meaning. Literary critics often focus on traditional images and themes, arguing that these motifs provide the backdrop against which this gospel should be read; familiar traditional words and images evoke older historical, theological and social aspects which contribute to their deeper meaning. Thus, one image such as "water" evokes the theological notions of the creation story of Genesis 1, the provision of water in the wilderness in Exodus 17, the purifying water of the Holiness code, the prophetic water of Isaiah 41, and the eschatological water of Zechariah 14:8. It also evokes the historical notions of the great flood in Genesis 7 and the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 14. Finally, an image such as water speaks to the social reality of a people living in a semi-desert climate: as a necessity of life, water is to be protected, drawn, and consumed with discretion. Thus, the use of this one image, "water," elicits a wide variety of individual interpretations which emphasize one motif over another. For example, focusing on the sin, purification and reconciliation themes of

the story of the Samaritan Woman will emphasize the water motif found in the Holiness code tradition or the prophetic material.¹

One source of traditional literary images which has received limited attention in the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel as a whole is the Wisdom tradition. From the body of early Jewish wisdom literature which includes some of the Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (or the Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach), and Baruch, a dominant motif develops around the personification of divine wisdom.² Personified Wisdom (Σοφία [*Sophia*] in Greek) in this literature emerges as a divine agent of God who intermediates on behalf of the human race and makes them “friends of God” (Wis.7:14). She is strongly associated with purification and the spirit, with truth and instruction (Wis.7:22-8:21). Ben Sira and Baruch equate her with the Torah, the gift of God (Sir.24:23; Bar. 4:1). She pre-exists with God and participates in creation, then comes to dwell with Israel (Pr.8:22; Wis.7:22; Sir.24:9-12; Bar. 3:37). She is pictured as a child of God (Pr.8:30). The composite picture of Wisdom which emerges from these texts resonates with the Johannine description of Jesus who is said to pre-exist with God, to participate in creation, to dwell on earth as the son of God, and to reconcile people to God (Jn.1:1-19). Similar themes, such as light, food and drink, are used for both Jesus and Wisdom.

These themes resonate so soundly with images of Jesus as presented in John that it is somewhat surprising that the Wisdom tradition within this gospel has not been a

¹Raymond Brown surveys the various interpretations of this motif in *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966)176ff.

²For the sake of this thesis, I have limited my investigation on the biblical books as the main source for my discussion. Other rewarding references to Wisdom may be found in Philo (where she is mentioned over 200 times), the Similitudes of Enoch and the Tannaitic literature.

focus of attention by Western theologians - especially Protestant scholars - until recently. Wisdom figured prominently in debates of christology in the early church,³ and has remained the centre of mystical thinking for many Orthodox and Catholic Christians in the East. In the Western Catholic tradition, she is associated with Mary because Sophia texts are read on Marian feast days.⁴ Protestant scholars, however, have for the most part not been interested in her. Part of this disinterest is the fact that the Apocrypha, with its extensive descriptions of Wisdom, is excluded from the Protestant canon.⁵ The feminine gender of Wisdom, similarly, resists identification with a decidedly male Jesus,⁶ and, for some, suggests the possibility of ancient pagan goddess worship, a notion which threatens a strict monotheistic faith.⁷ Recent feminist theologians, however, have dusted the images of Wisdom off as a possible source for theological reflection on feminine aspects of God,⁸ and have also stimulated more recent discussion concerning Wisdom christology.

Martin Scott is one such scholar who has explored the Gospel of John giving primary attention to the Wisdom motif.⁹ Scott considers the role of the Samaritan

³For example, Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolytus*, 10; Athenagoras, *On Defense of the Faith*, 10; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 61; Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 6-7; cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, iv.3. D. Williams, "Proverbs 8:22-31," *Interpretation* 48 (July 1994): 275-279.

⁴L. Lefebure, "The Wisdom of God: Sophia and Christian Theology," *Christian Century* (Oct. 19, 1994): 951-956.

⁵Note Moeller's justification for drawing on the Apocrypha in order to argue for a Wisdom christology, in "Wisdom Motifs and John's Gospel," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 6 (1963): 96.

⁶E. A. Johnson, "Jesus, The Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for Non-Androcentric Christology," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 61 (1985): 261-294.

⁷So also S. Schroer, "The Book of Sophia," *Searching the Scriptures, Vol. 2: A Feminist Commentary* (edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; New York: Crossroad, 1994) 18.

⁸For example, E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

⁹M. Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

Woman in John 4, and concludes that she takes on the role of Wisdom's servant-girl who, like the Samaritan Woman, goes out to invite people to Wisdom/ Jesus' banquet (Prov.9:3). However, this interpretation does not take into account the emphasis that the text places on the Samaritan Woman as female, as foreign and as unknowing, over against Jesus as male, Jewish and knowing. These attributes of the Samaritan Woman suggest, rather, that she corresponds not to Wisdom's handmaid but to her polar opposite, **Strange Woman**.

The figure of **Strange Woman** is found mainly in Proverbs in the biblical Wisdom literature (Pr.2:16-19; 5:3-6; 7:10-27). She is referred to variously as an "adulteress," as "foreign," and as "foolish" or "ignorant." This figure represents various threats to a peaceful society: as an adulteress, she poses a threat to stable family life; as a foreign woman, she threatens the cohesive unicultural solidarity of a community in transition; as a foolish woman, she oversteps social norms especially through ill-advised speech. She also represents a threat to a covenant community joined by a common heritage and faith: as an adulteress, she represents apostasy; as a foreigner, she represents the influence of the various religions in the Ancient Near East; as a foolish woman, she misdirects with her teaching. Finally, **Strange Woman** represents the dangerous alternative in religious mythology: as an adulteress, she plays the role of fertility goddesses; as a foreign woman, she represents foreign cults; as a foolish woman, she teaches a mythology of death. In the Book of Proverbs, **Strange Woman** is presented as the formal "other" in comparison to Wisdom. Whatever Wisdom *is*, **Strange Woman** is *not*, and *vice versa*. In this way, the picture of Wisdom is deepened and enhanced by the presentation of the antithetical figure, **Strange Woman**, in the Book of Proverbs.

The Fourth Gospel adopts the image of **Strange Woman** in the figure of the Samaritan Woman. Like the **Strange Woman**, the Samaritan Woman is cast in the role of

an adulteress, a heretical foreigner, and one who does not know. Like the Strange Woman, she also poses as a threat to the individual, to the covenant community and to that community's mythology. Furthermore, she is cast as the polar opposite of Jesus: whereas Jesus is a male, she is a female; whereas Jesus is a Jew, she is a Samaritan; whereas Jesus knows, she does not know. However, unlike the figures of Wisdom and the Strange Woman in the Book of Proverbs who are constructed as literary opposites and who do not interact with each other in any narrative sense, Jesus and the Samaritan Woman actually speak face-to-face in the Gospel of John narrative. And within this encounter, the possibility of change for the figure of the Strange Woman suggests itself. In fact, the text suggests that alterity, whether gender, nationality or knowledge, may be transcended in the new context of the Christian community. In this way, the symbol of the Proverbial Strange Woman is reconfigured in the Samaritan Woman of the Fourth Gospel. The profound symbolic element of this presentation challenges the historical existence of this woman; in other words, it questions whether the Fourth Gospel identifies a real person in the Samaritan Woman or if it is merely adopting a biblical motif for theological reflection.

In order to develop this thesis, Chapter 1 will survey the state of the question with particular attention paid to historical, literary and reader-response interpretations dealing with the identity of the Samaritan Woman as well as those which deal with the influence of Wisdom literature on the Fourth Gospel. Chapter 2 will explore personified Wisdom in Job, Proverbs, Ben Sira, Baruch and the Wisdom of Solomon. Chapter 3 will highlight the Wisdom themes found in the Fourth Gospel in order to demonstrate the prevalence of this motif. Chapter 4 will look in detail at the figure of Strange Woman in Proverbs as adulteress, foreign woman and foolish woman in three symbolic fields: that of personal experience, that of the covenant community and that of mythological reflection. The

next chapter will consider the figure of the Samaritan Woman within these same three fields. Chapter 6 will reflect on this same figure within the context of the Christian community and, in particular, how her alterity is transcended. In the concluding chapter, I will consider the implications of this interpretation in relation to historical criticism.

A note about the style adopted for this paper is necessary. As in all studies of this nature, various themes and interpretations are considered as they directly relate to the thesis. For this reason, and because of the limited scope of this study, various issues such as sources and textual questions will be set aside for the most part. The abundant literature on the interpretation of John 4:1-42 has been consulted and is cited through footnote notation where relevant. Throughout this study, the *New Revised Standard Version* of the biblical text is used in quotation, with my own more literal translations of the *Greek New Testament* (UBS, 3rd Edition) provided where relevant. For the sake of clarity, I will use capitalized “Wisdom” to designate personified divine wisdom, and lower case “wisdom” for all other instances. Finally, out of respect for the character who threads her way through this thesis without a name, I will capitalize the designator “Samaritan Woman.”

Chapter 1: The State of the Question

Interpretation of John 4 has included extensive work in the area of historical and literary criticism. As I will be exploring the interpretation of the figure of the Samaritan Woman in particular, I will focus on those interpretations which directly address the question of her identity. The results are often varied and, at times, quite contradictory.

The Historical Approach

The historical critical approach explores the social, political and historical context from which this text arises. By understanding the context, the meaning of the text becomes clear. Conversely, the text contributes to the understanding of the historical setting from which it comes. In this way, the text acts as a window into the past. In John 4, the major areas of concern revolve around three things: the historicity of the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman, the relationship of Jews and Samaritans in the Johannine community, and the role of women in the early church.

The historicity of the encounter between the Samaritan Woman and Jesus did not come under serious question until the twentieth century. Rudolf Bultmann, in his controversial commentary on the Gospel of John, claimed that the narrative of the Samaritan Woman is used as a vehicle through which the evangelist presents Jesus as the revealer.¹⁰ For example, Bultmann says that “the old distinction between Jews and Samaritans has lost its force in the light of the revelation which confronts man [*sic*] in

¹⁰R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (1941 edition translated by G. Beasley-Murray, R. Hoare and J. Riches; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971).

Jesus.”¹¹ The request that the woman call her husband is only used to demonstrate Jesus’ omniscience. Her “cry of amazement” (4:19) is not a cry of guilt, but a response to Jesus’ self-disclosure and, only incidentally, her own self-disclosure. Her questions represent the ability of humans to question God and receive answers; as such, true worship is only a response to God’s revelation. Jesus reveals himself as the eschatological saviour, but the woman does not understand; she expects some kind of spiritual proof which is not yet forthcoming. Her expectation, however, “makes it possible for Jesus to reveal himself.”¹² Even the question, “Might this be the Messiah?” is seen as an indication of the Samaritans’ quest, rather than the woman’s hypothesis. Finally, the Samaritans’ belief based on the word of Jesus renders the testimony of the woman unimportant. Bultmann therefore sees the narrative role of the Samaritan woman solely as a foil for the revelation of Jesus.¹³

Raymond Brown, in his extensive commentary, also sees the Samaritan Woman as a foil for the revelation of Jesus, but unlike Bultmann, he claims that this character is presented as an individual with substance, quite possibly because her story has a basis in fact. “If we analyze the repartee at the well, we find quite true-to-life the characterization of the woman as mincing and coy, with a certain light grace [Lagrange, p.101]... Either we are dealing with a master of fiction, or else the stories have a basis in fact.”¹⁴ The historical kernel is shaped and molded into a powerful drama.¹⁵

¹¹Bultmann, *John*, 179.

¹²Ibid., 192.

¹³C. Dodd (*Historical Traditions in the Fourth Gospel* [Cambridge: University Press, 1965] 318) identifies the Samaritan Woman as one of several interlocutors who is “there to misunderstand,” and rarely can be seen “to make any positive contribution”; she is passive and serves as a foil.

¹⁴R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (1-xi)* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966) 176. J. Bligh, “Jesus in Samaria” *Heythrop Journal* 3 (1962): 332, claims that this historical woman was remembered because the event was marked by a solemn

In this scene John has given us the drama of a soul struggling to rise from the things of this world to belief in Jesus. Not only the Samaritan woman but every man [*sic*] must come to recognize who it is that speaks when Jesus speaks, and must ask Jesus for living water.¹⁶

In *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, Brown also explores the relationship of the Jews to the Samaritans in the Johannine community based on this narrative. He concludes that the Samaritans were a catalyst in the formation of the theology of this growing group of Christians by introducing, in particular, prophet-like-Moses themes.¹⁷

In an appendix of this later book, Brown considers the specific role of the Samaritan Woman in the narrative. He claims that she fits into a movement from disbelief to more adequate belief: the “Jews” are skeptical about Jesus’ signs (2:18-20); Nicodemus believes because of Jesus’ signs but does not fully understand Jesus (2:23ff); the Samaritan Woman “is led to the brink of perceiving that Jesus is the Christ” (4:25-26, 29); then she brings others to belief “through her word” (4:39, 42; cf. 17:20). As the “inserted” dialogue with the disciples in 4:31-38 makes clear, the woman has a “real missionary function” in sowing the seed which would be later reaped by the disciples. In this way, the Samaritan Woman has a “quasi-apostolic role.”¹⁸

Rudolf Schnackenburg takes the historicity of the Fourth Gospel seriously while at the same time recognizing the evangelist’s voice in the presentation. The Samaritan Woman may be interpreted allegorically - her peculiar life-story evokes the image of the apostate Samaritan nation - but her personal role in the narrative is of such importance

pronouncement by Jesus.

¹⁵Agreeing in substance is C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (second edition; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978) 229.

¹⁶Brown, *John*, 178.

¹⁷*Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 38.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 34ff, 187ff.

that she may be regarded primarily as an individual, even if she might come to symbolize the Samaritan nation in the eyes of the evangelist.¹⁹ Her chequered past is mentioned in order to reveal Jesus' superhuman knowledge and thus lead her to belief in him to "bring about a decisive change in her way of life."²⁰ Like Bultmann, Schnackenburg denies a primarily symbolic interpretation: "The evangelist obviously combines two things, seeing in the historical figure the 'typical' picture of the religious story of the Samaritan people."²¹

Barnabas Lindars focuses on the missionary motif in John 4. He calls the narrative of the Samaritan Woman a "little model of the future missionary work of the Church."²² Lindars argues that "John's way" is to reflect theologically on an actual historical occurrence; thus, the Samaritan Woman was a historical person who is seen to represent a larger group of Samaritans. Any allegorical reflection on her five husbands contributes nothing to the interpretation.

Robert Kysar includes the narrative of the Samaritan Woman as one among other narratives which contribute significant titles to the identity of Jesus (Messiah, Saviour of the World, prophet).²³ The identification of Jesus is the over-riding theme of the gospel. Within the context of the whole, this story demonstrates that "those who stand outside the fold," those "despised half-breed" Samaritans, are able to embrace the truth of God though the religious establishment has failed to do so. As such, this story "hammers

¹⁹R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John: Vol. 1, Introduction and Commentary on Chapters 1-4* (translated by Kevin Smyth; New York: Seabury, 1980) 420-421.

²⁰Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 432. Cf. E. Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-6* (translated by R. Funk; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 226-228.

²¹Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 433, 459.

²²B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCB; London: Butler and Tanner, 1972) 173.

²³*John's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 29-40.

away at two essential themes”: “the transformation of the Hebraic- Jewish tradition, resulting from the revelation of God in Christ, and the role of witnesses to Christ.”²⁴

Kysar’s focus precludes close attention to the role of the Samaritan Woman in John 4.

What all of these commentators have in common is a tendency to see the Samaritan Woman as some sort of social outcast. She is off-limits because she is a Samaritan, and as such a “perpetual menstruant” and thus unclean. They claim that her presence at the well at noon suggests that she resides at the edge of the community; most women fetch water in the morning and in the evening.²⁵ None of these commentators suggest that she is anything but a woman of questionable morality. Brown is the most generous in suggesting that she has a semi-apostolic role and a role of some significance in the Johannine community.

The fact that John 4 is a narrative about a woman draws the attention of many feminist theologians. Many speculate as to what kind of relationships would exist between men and women in the Johannine community based on this “window into the community.” Raymond Brown, for example, states that, “The unique place given to women in the Fourth Gospel reflects the history, the theology and the values of the Johannine community.” The evangelist indirectly “tells us something about the role of women in his own community.”²⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s path-breaking work in her book, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, challenges the heavily biased historical scholarship which has failed to consider the role of the Samaritan Woman in the early church. By applying what she calls a

²⁴Ibid., 38.

²⁵Cf. Gen.24:11; 29:7; Brown, *John*, 169; Bultmann, *John*, 178; Haenchen, *John*, 219.

²⁶Brown, *Community*, 183, 185 n.328, respectively.

hermeneutic of suspicion - which allows her to read women's participation between the lines of the text - she concludes that the Samaritan Woman narrative is

probably based on a missionary tradition that ascribed a primary role to a woman missionary in the conversion of the Samaritans. Exegetes agree that the Johannine community had a strong influx of Samaritan converts who might have been the catalysts for the development of the high christology of the Gospel. The present Johannine community reaps the harvest made possible by the missionary endeavors of a woman who initiated the conversion of the Samaritan segment of the community. In the "interlude" about missionary work (4:31-38) Jesus uses the Pauline verb *kopian* to describe her missionary work, "I have sent you to reap what you have not labored for. Others have labored, and you have come in to enjoy the fruits of their labor" (4:38). Since the term is used here in the technical missionary sense, the woman is characterized as the representative of the Samaritan mission.²⁷

Schüssler Fiorenza therefore claims that the Samaritan Woman was a historical figure who was used as an example of both missionary and disciple. Schüssler Fiorenza was the first of many to offer an alternative interpretation of John 4 focusing on the particular role of this woman.

Ben Witherington III surveys Jesus' views of women by considering first the historical roles of women in the first century and then by comparing Jesus' attitude to them.²⁸ Concerning John 4, he concludes that Jesus does not accept the stigma of the "sinful Samaritan Woman," but reverses social conventions: he speaks to a woman in a public place, "especially a woman who was a known sinner"; he defies the Jewish distinction of clean and unclean; he rejects the cultic and religious distinctions of Jews and Samaritans and he accepts the witness of the Samaritan woman. In this,

²⁷*In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 327.

²⁸*Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus' Attitudes to Women and their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Witherington claims that the narrative in John 4 reflects an early historical tradition which has been shaped by the evangelist - though *not* to the extent that the evangelist allegorizes the woman as a representative of the Samaritan woman, since

she plays an individual's role in summoning her fellow countrymen to Jesus (verses 28-30), and more significantly, since it appears from 2 Kgs. 17:30-31 that it was *seven*, not five, strange deities that were introduced into Samaria *simultaneously* (not in succession).²⁹

In this story, Witherington focuses on the change wrought by Jesus to the role of women in first century Palestine.

In another approach, John Rena explores the stories which feature women as prominent characters in the Fourth Gospel in an attempt to study their role in the early Christian community, concluding that there is no one role for women: they are active and passive; they are weak and strong; they listen and proclaim. In other words, there is no stereotypical behaviour. In addition, their presence in the narrative of Jesus' life is important for they participate and bear witness to key events. In fact, the key points of the gospel narrative may be told entirely through the narratives involving women. Furthermore, there is no distinction between the role of the men and the women in this gospel; both have equal rights and responsibilities. Women are also symbols of the social, ethnic, historical and theological variants in the Johannine community. Thus, the Samaritan Woman "is important for what she says, believes and does, neither because of nor despite her sexuality."³⁰ She is therefore a model of the future missionary work of the church; she "functions as student, searcher, skeptic, historian, defendant and believer but above all as missionary."³¹ She is the "ideal missionary" because she, unlike others,

²⁹Witherington, *Women*, 59.

³⁰J. Rena, "Women in the Gospel of John," *Eglise et Theologie* 17 (1986)139.

³¹*Ibid.*, 140.

“decreases” while Jesus “increases.” Rena argues that the prominence of women in this gospel serves as a subtle polemic against the authority of the Twelve or any other human authority and concludes that, as such, the church today should focus on discipleship rather than authority.

Turid Karlsen Seim, in an examination of the roles played by women in the Fourth Gospel, argues that the Samaritan Woman plays a significant role in the Johannine community based on her presentation in this gospel. First, Seim remarks that the character of the Samaritan Woman is well-developed: the text presents the woman as an “individual” and as such “implies a representative function if not a symbolic one.”³² Given the emphasis on her nationality and gender, the Samaritan Woman represents both women and Samaritans. Furthermore, this woman is considered ritually unclean as a “perpetual menstruant.” Whether the Samaritan Woman is to be considered immoral is far less certain; Seim argues that her immorality is usually assumed without taking into account that matters of marriage and divorce are primarily the privilege of men.³³ In spite of the characterization of the Samaritan Woman as alienated, the text presents her as the one to whom Jesus reveals a new form of worship. In this new worship, the antagonism between different groups is eliminated along with the criteria which alienate the Samaritan Woman. She is thus free to engage in a new and public role - signified by leaving her water jar behind - a role which is set in the context of calling and mission.³⁴

Mission in the gospel of John is not reaching out, but collecting and bringing to Jesus, a gathering into one the scattered children of God as

³²“Roles of Women in the Gospel of John,” *Aspects on the Johannine Literature: Papers Presented at A Conference of Scandinavian New Testament Exegetes at Uppsala, June 16-19, 1986* (edited by Lars Hartman and Birger Olsson; Coniectanea Biblica NT Series 18; Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1987) 58.

³³*Ibid.*, 68.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 69.

expressed in 11:52 In the light of this the Samaritan woman is assigned a missionary task and the transition from the woman to Jesus means that she fulfilled it.³⁵

Seim uses the story of the Samaritan Woman as a window into the early Christian community. In John 4, the disciples are surprised that Jesus speaks “to a woman” but they do not voice their complaint; noting this, Seim states: “As readers we are in this way presented both with objections that might be raised and with the argument for not offering any objection.”³⁶ This implies the shock of a new role pattern for men and women in spite of the fact that it was authorized by Jesus, for Jesus initiated the conversation. The harvest insert emphasizes and interprets the missionary function of the woman and her pioneering work; the disciples are asked to “look around,” and to appreciate the seed that she has sown and which they reap. The narrative “gives some insight into the problems that are prerequisites of shared leadership and partnership in mission.”³⁷

By asking a different question of the text, that is: What is the role of the Samaritan Woman in the narrative and thus in the Johannine community, these authors have found rich resources to mine in John 4. Rather than finding a woman known only for her immorality and ethnic distinction, they unearth a woman who is remembered for her apostolic witness - or as a representative of women or Samaritans in general - as a full member of the historical Johannine community in spite of controversy. However, as in the nature of all historical criticism, conclusions depend on circular reasoning and unverifiable evidence. Though they fuel the fires of contemporary debate for women in

³⁵Ibid., 69.

³⁶Ibid., 59.

³⁷Ibid., 70.

the church by challenging traditional exclusion on the basis of a male-centered religion, these historical assumptions remain speculative, at best.

The Literary Approach

In reaction to this historical approach, literary critics using the “New Critical” or Formalist approach consider the text as an independent artistic object; the text itself provides all the information necessary for an accurate interpretation of the text. Instead of seeing the text as a window into the historical Johannine community, they find meaning in the use of symbols, literary devices, structure and intertextuality.

The most notable and extensive work on John 4 in this regard was undertaken by Birger Olsson in 1974. Although Olsson draws on extensive extra-textual evidence at times and considers the historical implications of his exegesis, he relies heavily both on the use of signs and symbols and on the textual heritage which creates in them a profound source of meaning as well as the overall structure of the text which brings various elements centre stage. For example, Olsson regards the well as significant because the action always moves in relation to it: the well for the Samaritans is a symbol of their heritage and the locus of their salvation.³⁸ Moreover, the woman is identified as a Samaritan on numerous occasions and is representative of Samaritan apostasy because of her “five husbands.” Thus, when Jesus sits down at the well and meets the woman, Samaritan belief encounters the divine revelation in Christ.³⁹ The Samaritan Woman functions narratively to symbolize the Samaritan collective.

³⁸*Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel: A Text-Linguistic Analysis of John 2:1-11 and 4:1-42* (translated by Jean Gray; Lund, Sweden: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1974) 139ff.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 212.

P. Joseph Cahill, in an article entitled, “Narrative Art in John IV,” applies this critical approach more narrowly to the story of the Samaritan Woman.⁴⁰ He considers four main aspects: structure, repetitive devices, motifs and themes. From this, he concludes that the prominent betrothal motif acts as an introduction to the principal theme of the text, namely, true worship.⁴¹ Through the disclosure of this theme, the character of the woman develops from a “woman of Samaria” to a “prototype of woman.”⁴²

Past dispensations and differences between Jews and Samaritans, under the controlling metaphor of betrothal, become subsumed into a fertility unforeseen by all but the principal antagonist [Jesus].⁴³

In this way, Cahill identifies the Samaritan Woman as part of a literary device brought to a theological purpose.

In contrast, Teresa Okure argues that the theme of “witness” is central to this pericope.⁴⁴ She concludes that John 4:1-42 is a literary reworking of a story based on a historical encounter. The evangelist’s primary role in the narrative, according to Okure, is to project the all-embracing character of Jesus’ mission directed at both believers (vv. 1-26) and unbelievers (vv. 27-42). The woman is the vehicle through whom Jesus acts out his mission:

the woman represents the lowest grade of humanity to whom Jesus’ mission of salvation could be directed. If such a woman, then, can be deemed worthy of Jesus’ self-revelation, then nobody can be excluded from his saving mission.⁴⁵

⁴⁰P. J. Cahill, “Narrative Art in John IV,” *Religious Studies Bulletin* 2 (1982): 41-8.

⁴¹This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

⁴²Cahill, “Narrative,” 47.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁴T. Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1-42* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988).

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 184.

Dorothy A. Lee demonstrates how the complex interplay between narrative and symbol contributes to the theological notion that material reality becomes symbolic of the divine.⁴⁶ The narrative of the Samaritan Woman is one of the clearest examples: water, the place of worship and food/harvest - at one time the objects of misunderstanding - develop into symbols of the faith community. The reader progresses through the text by sharing the misunderstanding of the Samaritan Woman and appropriates these symbols as his/her own. In this way, Lee incorporates the aspects of both literary and reader-response criticism.

The Reader-response Approach

Rather than finding meaning in the historical reconstruction of the Johannine community or in the structural elements of the text, reader-response criticism finds meaning through the act of reading.

Meaning is produced in the experience of reading the text as a whole and making the moves the text calls for its readers to make, quite apart from questions concerning its sources and origins.⁴⁷

These moves, implicitly designed by the author, function to “alter irrevocably the reader’s perception of the real world” - a real world redefined by the gospel; “the text is therefore a mirror in which readers can ‘see’ the world in which they live.”⁴⁸ The experience of reading therefore becomes the focus of interpretation.

Alan Culpepper was the first to apply this approach in a systematic way to the Fourth Gospel. He concludes that the character of the Samaritan Woman plays a part in

⁴⁶D. A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994).

⁴⁷A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of a Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) 4.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 4-5.

the progression of Jesus' self-revelation. As such, she is a *ficelle*, a character who is easily recognizable by the readers but not so thoroughly individualized; she still has representative or symbolic value.⁴⁹ She evokes the Samaritan mission and is given an apostolic role. She is, thus, a "model of the female disciple and possibly a model of Samaritan believers also."⁵⁰ Not just an example, the Samaritan Woman serves various literary functions. She poses ironic and rhetorical questions which force the reader to make decisions about Jesus: Is he greater than Jacob? Is he the Messiah?⁵¹ Her misunderstandings warn the reader not to accept superficial meanings but to share the elevated understanding of the author and to appreciate the "surplus of meaning" inherent in the multi-layered symbols.⁵²

In contrast to Bultmann who stresses the *Dass* (the fact of Jesus as revelation) and the *Was* (the content of Jesus' self-revelation) in the Fourth Gospel, Gail O'Day focuses on the *how* of Jesus' self-revelation.⁵³ In other words, she explores the narrative mode of revelation as it relates to the theological claims of the gospel. Building on the work of Culpepper and Duke, O'Day argues that narrative irony is used both to create a portrait of Jesus as revealer and to recreate the revelation experience for the reader. As such, the narrative invites the reader to participate in the revelation of Jesus by entering into the

⁴⁹Ibid., 104.

⁵⁰Ibid., 137.

⁵¹Ibid., 176ff. For a full discussion on the use of irony see P. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985).

⁵²Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 199.

⁵³G. R. O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) 48. J. Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* (Leiden: Brill, 1991) 191, argues essentially the same point drawing on multiple literary devices. Cf. H. Boers, *Neither on this Mountain nor in Jerusalem: A Study of John 4* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 179, argues that this text is not about revelation because the reader already knows who Jesus is.

ironic wordplay. Unlike the characters who misunderstand, the reader is invited to do other than or more than the characters. For example, decisions and judgments must be made in the first half of the dialogue with the woman, in order to comprehend the second half with the disciples. In other words, the reader must move from the woman who understands on a mundane level towards understanding Jesus on a higher level in order to make sense of the rest of the dialogue. Irony, therefore, provokes the reader to engage in Jesus' revelation; like the Samaritan woman, the reader is invited to discover who Jesus is for him/herself.⁵⁴ Reader-response theory has contributed significantly to the interpretation of the narrative in John 4.

This rich variety of historical, literary and reader-response interpretations of the narrative of the Samaritan Woman, especially in terms of her narrative and historical role, provides the basis for an in-depth study of the symbolic role of this figure in the light of the Wisdom tradition.

A Review of the Literature Concerned with Wisdom Themes in the Fourth Gospel

The influence of the Wisdom tradition on the Fourth Gospel has been accepted generally since the beginning of this century. In particular, scholars have seen this influence on the prologue. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, D. F. Strauss sought the origins of the Prologue hymn in Proverbs 8. R. Reitzenstein (1901) and J. Rendel

⁵⁴O'Day, *Revelation*, 90-95. P. Harner, *Relation Analysis of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Reader-Response Criticism* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1993), explores the function of "interpersonal" relationships between God, Jesus, and believers and the effect these relationships have on the reader. J. Staley, *The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), discusses the relationship of the reader to the implied author and claims that the reader is "victimized" by frustrated expectations spawned by such literary devices as the betrothal motif.

Harris (1917) further developed this work. Today, it is almost unanimously accepted by scholars, though with some variations.⁵⁵ Bultmann, for example, in his early work argues that the Jewish Wisdom tradition lay behind the prologue's origin, though he was later to posit its source in a pre-Christian redeemer myth.⁵⁶ Haenchen acknowledges the influence of wisdom on the prologue but sees it as a hymn which was adapted by the evangelist and which was tacked on to the beginning of the gospel.⁵⁷ Even though many scholars would accept the argument for wisdom influence on the prologue, however, many separated the prologue from the rest of the gospel - arguing for different sources - and mentioned wisdom influence on the core of the gospel only in passing.⁵⁸

Raymond Brown's important commentary appreciates the abundant and prolific Wisdom motifs which feed the whole portrait of Jesus created in the Fourth Gospel, not just the wisdom influence seen in the prologue.⁵⁹ He states that "the Wisdom literature offers better parallels for the Johannine picture of Jesus than do the later Gnostic, Mandeian, or Hermetic passages sometimes suggested."⁶⁰ He argues further that the Fourth Evangelist modifies the Wisdom tradition by placing the incarnation of divine Wisdom, i.e., Jesus, in a particular time and place, somewhat as Baruch and Ben Sira had

⁵⁵R. Reitzenstein, "Schöpfungsmythen und Logoslehre," *Zwei religionsgeschichtliche Fragen* (Strassburg, 1901): 47-132; R. Harris, *The Origin of the Prologue of St. John's Gospel* (Cambridge, 1917).

⁵⁶R. Bultmann, "Der religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Prologs zum Johannesevangelium," *Eucharisterion: Festschrift für Hermann Gunkel* (Part II; Göttingen, 1932) 1-26; *John*, 23.

⁵⁷Haenchen, *John*, 135ff.

⁵⁸For example, James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) 239-245, who restricts his study of wisdom influence in the Fourth Gospel to the prologue, though he developed this work in later years.

⁵⁹*The Gospel According to John (1-xii)* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966) cxxii.

⁶⁰Brown, *John*, cxxiv; so also C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953) 263-285.

done by referring to the Torah as the locus of divine Wisdom.⁶¹ Furthermore, Brown draws on various wisdom motifs to explain the concepts of “living water,” the “gift of God” and the “spirit.”⁶² He also argues that the use of wisdom motifs is not unique to the Fourth Gospel for traces of it may be seen in the other New Testament texts, so it is likely that a wisdom christology was in play in the primitive tradition.⁶³

Others who have discussed the impact of wisdom on the Fourth Gospel include James D. G. Dunn, who reflects on the implications of wisdom on the Johannine community;⁶⁴ Charles Talbert, who focuses on the wisdom (and angelological) myth of descent and ascent in the retelling of the story of Jesus;⁶⁵ F.-M. Braun, who argues that wisdom and prophetic themes are interwoven in the gospel;⁶⁶ and, to a lesser extent, Feuillet, Moeller, and Borgen.⁶⁷

Karl-Gustav Sandelin concentrates on the relationship between the gospel of John and the Jewish wisdom tradition connecting these two through the theme of Wisdom/ Jesus as nourisher.⁶⁸ Jesus gives “living water”: this is a biblical idea meaning “fresh

⁶¹Okure (*Johannine*, 214) argues that the Fourth Gospel modifies this portrait so much that the identification of Wisdom with Jesus is no longer possible.

⁶²*John*, 178-179.

⁶³Brown, *John*, cxxv.

⁶⁴“Let John be John: A Gospel for its Time,” *Das Evangelium und Evangelien: Vorträge vom Tübinger Symposium, 1982* (edited by Peter Stuhlmacher; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983) 330-337.

⁶⁵*What is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 56-57.

⁶⁶F.-M. Braun, *Jean le Théologien: Les grandes traditions d’Israël et l’accord des Écritures selon le Quatrième Evangile* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1964) 49-152.

⁶⁷A. Feuillet, “The Principal Biblical Themes in the Discourse on the Bread of Life,” *Johannine Studies* (translated by T. Crane; Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1964) 53-128; Moeller, “Wisdom,” 92-100; P. Borgen, *Bread From Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (NovTSup, X; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965).

⁶⁸K. G. Sandelin, “The Johannine Writings within the Setting of their Cultural History,”

from wells” or “running water” (Gen. 26:19). The text does not state exactly what the living water of Jesus is: his words (6:68), the spirit (7:39), or the gift of eternal life itself (4:14, 6:35). The call to drink in Jn 7:37 is like Wisdom’s in Pr.9:5 and Sir.24:19. Therefore, there is a clear affinity with descriptions of drink-offering by Wisdom and Jesus. However, God is also a drink-offerer (Jer.2:13) of life-giving water (Ps.36:10 πηγή ζωῆς; Is.55:1). When the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as the one who offers living water, then, it may be referring to God rather than Wisdom, or it may have both in mind. However, the son has a much closer relationship to God than Wisdom does (the image of God’s goodness, Wis. 7:26): Wisdom is never called God (Jn.1.1) nor begotten son (1:18). There is no Wisdom parallel to “I and the Father are one.” Jesus is not just a copy of wisdom.⁶⁹ For these reasons, Sandelin argues that it is unlikely that Jesus is Wisdom incarnate: “The author of the Gospel of John has used elements from the Wisdom tradition in a free and creative manner... he has created an artful synthesis.”⁷⁰ In fact, Sandelin argues that Jesus supplants Wisdom: Wisdom does not satisfy unto eternal life (Sir.24), but Jesus does (Jn. 4:14).

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza looks at the wisdom tradition as a possible source for her historical reconstruction of Christian origins.⁷¹ Wisdom literature, though shaped to serve kyriarchal interests of elite men, also expresses the need of wo/men for a powerful divine savior figure. Wisdom theology permeates all of Christian literature;

Aspects on the Johannine Literature: Papers Presented at a Conference of Scandinavian New Testament Exegetes at Uppsala, June 16-19, 1986 (edited by Lars Hartman and Birger Olsson; Coniectanea Biblica NT Series 18; Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1987).

⁶⁹Ibid., 15-21.

⁷⁰Ibid., 22.

⁷¹*Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

Jesus receives titles such as savior and lord which are also Isis-Sophia titles.⁷²

Concerning the Fourth Gospel, she says:

Wisdom mythology seems all-important for understanding the life and fate of Jesus. The logos title of the prologue, therefore, seems not to lessen but to increase the possibility that the Fourth Gospel understands Jesus as making Sophia present in and through his/her work.⁷³

John marginalizes and “silences” the traditions of G*d as represented by Divine Woman Wisdom. By masculinizing language about God, Christians have forgotten that such conventional language is as metaphoric as the grammatical feminine gender language for Sophia.⁷⁴

In contrast, Ben Witherington III, in an extensive survey of wisdom themes, has also found dramatic evidence of the wisdom tradition behind the text of the Fourth Gospel and claims that what distinguishes the Gospel of John from the synoptics is the integration and adaptation of wisdom themes.⁷⁵ In particular, he traces the path of ascent and descent which marks the journey of Wisdom in her role as God’s agent for redemption as “*the key*” (his emphasis) for understanding the identity of Jesus.⁷⁶ He also traces the relationship between wisdom, the word and spirit and claims that what the Wisdom of Solomon, in particular, says about these ideas can be traced throughout the Fourth Gospel. He does not, however, even mention the narrative of the Samaritan Woman.

⁷²Ibid., 132-139.

⁷³Ibid., 152.

⁷⁴Ibid., 153-154.

⁷⁵B. Witherington, *Jesus the Sage* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 380.

⁷⁶Ibid., 373.

Michael Willett was the first to undertake a thorough investigation of Wisdom themes in the Fourth Gospel.⁷⁷ He explores the images and traditions associated with Wisdom in early Jewish literature, including a survey of both canonical and extra-canonical texts, and these same themes in the Fourth Gospel. Under the six headings of preexistence, descent-ascent, revelation-hiddenness, acceptance-rejection, intimacy with disciples, and glory and life, he demonstrates how the wisdom tradition is a plausible milieu out of which Johannine Christology emerged. Wisdom themes, in fact, unify the prologue and the gospel. From the literary perspective, the metaphor, myth and symbol of Wisdom are transformed in the person of Jesus; “both Wisdom and Jesus are redefined.”⁷⁸ From the socio-historical perspective, Willett reflects on the type of community which would produce this literature. Because his approach is thematic, however, he does not consider individual Johannine narratives within their relationship to this background.

In a book published almost at the same time as Willett’s, Martin Scott has undertaken the most extensive study of wisdom themes in the Fourth Gospel to date.⁷⁹ Intrigued by the strength of the women characters in this gospel, Scott investigates the possible reasons why women should be so central to the description of Christian discipleship. He finds his answers in the relationship between the feminized Wisdom figure in the pre-Christian documents and the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel who is presented as Wisdom Incarnate. The Johannine Jesus, he argues, “is not mere man, but rather the incarnation of both the male and the female expressions of the divine, albeit

⁷⁷M. Willett, *Wisdom Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992) 47.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 128.

⁷⁹Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

within the limitations of the human flesh.”⁸⁰ Likewise, the church reflects both male and female gender; the gospel offers strong examples of women disciples: Mary (the serving disciple) and Martha (who confesses full belief in Jesus as the Son of God), the mother of Jesus at the cross (who recognizes Jesus as Wisdom and stays until the end, as a disciple rather than family), and Mary Magdalene (who encounters the risen Jesus as Wisdom, obeys his command to tell others and confesses him as Risen Lord). Furthermore, wisdom motifs permeate the whole presentation of these women as disciples of Jesus. They are Wisdom’s disciples and servant-girls (Pr. 9:3). Scott suggests that the necessity to “switch” the gender of female Sophia to male Jesus is redressed in the centrality of these female disciples, arguing that female leadership is as much a part of the early Christian community as female Wisdom is a part of Jesus.

Challenging the work accomplished by Scott, Judith Lieu also considers what part the Hebrew scriptures play in the presentation of women in the Fourth Gospel.⁸¹ She, too, begins with an examination of wisdom motifs in the prologue. She argues against Scott that Jesus is both the female and male incarnation of Sophia because John has no interest in wisdom: this word is not found in the gospel. The parallels of Jesus, which Scott claims reflect wisdom, in no way reflect female gender; this biblical motif has been *redefined* in the person of Jesus. Furthermore, in a review of the various female characters in the Fourth Gospel, Lieu argues that scriptural motifs are constantly transcended. For example, the encounter of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman recall similar encounters of the patriarchs with their future wives;⁸² unlike Rachel, Rebecca

⁸⁰Ibid., 172.

⁸¹J. Lieu, “Scripture and the Feminine in John,” *A Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament* (edited by Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

⁸²Chapter 5 will examine this motif in detail.

and Zipporah, the Samaritan Woman is not significant because of her family and her male relatives, but because of her own “discovered identity.”⁸³ Therefore, the Fourth Gospel challenges the old securities of traditional scripture and hints at new possibilities. Lieu has accurately described the use of scriptural motifs in the Fourth Gospel - motifs which are reshaped in this new setting.

The diverse studies of the historical, literary and reader-response aspects of the Samaritan Woman narrative have produced an abundant harvest of food for thought. Only a few studies, however, have combined the interests of symbolism, women’s studies and the Wisdom tradition. This thesis will attempt to sow a few seeds to add yet more variety to the harvest.

⁸³Lieu, “Scripture,” 232.

Chapter 2: Wisdom Personified

Behind the Christological language in the Fourth Gospel and the symbolism of the Samaritan Woman lie the influence of the Wisdom tradition. Encountered in the biblical wisdom literature, the concept of divine wisdom is personified with appealing and extensive imagery. Referred to as “Lady Wisdom” (*Chokmâh* in Hebrew; *Sophia* in Greek), the metaphor for divine wisdom develops from a warm wifely figure in the Book of Proverbs to an omnipresent and omniscient cosmic figure in the Wisdom of Solomon. Wisdom is God’s agent on earth, bridging the gap between divine and human. In this chapter, I will study the vocabulary and images of Wisdom in Job, Proverbs, Ben Sira, Wisdom of Solomon, and Baruch. I will not attempt to interpret the meaning of these images here, but rather to outline their various elements in order to lay the foundation of a comparison between this motif and the presentation of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel.

Job

Job is the oldest extant text which presents wisdom as a concrete image.⁸⁴ It asks the question: “Where is wisdom to be found?” It is “hidden” from humankind, but

God understands the way to [Wisdom], for he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens... then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out (Job 28:23-7).

Not merely an attribute of God, these verses depict Wisdom as “in a place.” They underscore the distinction of Wisdom from God. At the same time they preserve the

⁸⁴Most commentators, such as R. MacKenzie and R. Murphy, “Job,” *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (edited by R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, R. Murphy; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989) 467, assign a postexilic date to this text. P. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (London, 1967), claims that the poem to Wisdom is a later addition.

unique relationship between Wisdom and God, for only God knows where to find Wisdom (28:23). Furthermore, the relationship between God and Wisdom is associated with the act of creation, for

When he gave to the wind its weight, and apportioned out the waters by measure; when he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the thunderbolt; then he saw [Wisdom] and declared it; he established it and sought it out (28:25-7).

Finally, wherever Wisdom might be, the only approach to it is through “the fear of the LORD” (28:28). Though Job identifies Wisdom as separate from God, the notion of divine wisdom is not yet personified.

The Book of Proverbs

Divine Wisdom is more developed in Proverbs. Agreeing with Job, Proverbs claims that Wisdom cannot be found by a human’s searching; Wisdom is found because of the “fear of the LORD” (1:28-9). Unlike Wisdom in Job, however, Wisdom in Proverbs is not just a concretization of an abstract attribute, but a personification in female form. Wisdom, in Proverbs, is personified with feminine pronouns and does “womanly” tasks such as providing both nourishment and nurture. Wisdom has a voice of her own and speaks the words of truth and life that have previously only belonged to God. Contributing to the picture of Wisdom in this text is the strong comparison with Wisdom’s opposite, Strange Woman. Let us consider these motifs in more detail.

The most remarkable aspect of Wisdom in Proverbs is the use of feminine pronouns to describe her. Granted, the Greek word *Sophia* (Σοφία) and the Hebrew word *Chokmâh* (חכמה) both reflect grammatical feminine gender. Some scholars argue that

Wisdom is feminized for this reason alone.⁸⁵ However, this does not account for the thorough treatment of Wisdom in feminine metaphors and images such as wife and mother.⁸⁶ Nowhere in Proverbs is there a hint that Wisdom is anything but feminine.

Wisdom arises from the text dressed as a woman. Like a mother, she teaches her children (8:6-7). She prepares her home, and offers food and hospitality:

She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town, “You that are simple, turn in here!” To those without sense she says, “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight” (9:1-6; cf. 1:31; 4:17).⁸⁷

Accepting her hospitality causes one to enter into her life-giving path (9:6). Like a fertile woman, Wisdom is imagined as the “tree of life” (3:18) whose fruit is “better than gold” (8:19). Similarly, the response to Wisdom evokes the actions of a husband toward a beloved wife: she is to be held fast (3:18) and embraced (4:8); she is to be loved (4:6) and guarded (4:13), but not to be forsaken (4:6). She is called a “sister” and an “intimate friend” (7:4). The benefits of a relationship with her are honour (4:8; see also 4:9) and life (4:13). Wisdom is depicted as a concrete and human womanly figure.

Throughout this discourse, the language used to describe Wisdom mirrors the description of a good wife (31:10-31).⁸⁸ Like Wisdom, this good wife is sought and

⁸⁵R. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 69ff, is such an example.

⁸⁶N. Habel, “The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9,” *Interpretation* 26 (1972): 131-157; C. Camp, “Wise and Strange: An Interpretation of the Female Imagery in Proverbs in Light of Trickster Mythology,” *Semeia* 42 (1988): 14-36.

⁸⁷Cf. Gen. 18:7; 1 Sam. 28:24.

⁸⁸R. Murphy, “Wisdom and Eros in Proverbs 1-9,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 601, argues that the good wife is a symbol of Wisdom. Cf. T. McCreesh, “Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31,” *RB* 92 (1985): 25-46. A. Wolters, “*Sôpiyyâ* (Proverbs 31:27) as Hymnic Participle and Play on *Sophia*,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 577-87, argues that semantic

found (3:13; 8:17; 31:10). Once found, she is more precious than jewels (2:1-4; 3:14-15; 31:10).⁸⁹ Like Wisdom, the good wife works with her hands (8:27; 31:13). She too speaks wisdom (1:23,30; 31:26), is concerned with the ways of her household (2:12; 31:27) and does not eat the “bread of idleness” (31:27). Like Wisdom, the good wife is praised (31:28). Finally, the benefits of Wisdom and the good wife are described in a similar way; “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD” (18:22) parallels these words spoken by Wisdom: “For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD” (8:35). As a beloved wife, Wisdom becomes more tangible and understandable, something with personality that both appeals and contributes to everyday existence. The effect of applying this human image to a pre-existent cosmic abstraction serves to “bring it home to earth,” as it were. The transcendence of God is bridged by Wisdom even though Wisdom continues to belong to the cosmic realm.

As well as this domestic presentation of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom is depicted as having cosmic significance.

The LORD created (*qnh*) me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth - when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker (*'omman*); and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race (8:22-31).

connections make this allusion clear.

⁸⁹Job 28 uses similar language.

In the quotation above, Wisdom is seen to be more than associated with God in creation. Wisdom is “created” by God, or “begotten” by God depending on the meaning attributed to *qnh*.⁹⁰ In the sense of “created,” Wisdom, like all of creation, is separated from God. In the sense of “begotten,” Wisdom shares divine characteristics but is “younger,” and thus subordinate to God. Either way, Wisdom is not equal to God but continues in a special relationship to God because she was created first. Wisdom also acted with God in creation as a “master worker” (’omman). A textual variant of this passage has Wisdom as “a little child”(’amûn) who “plays” before God during creation.⁹¹ Both texts place Wisdom as pre-existent and closely associated to God. In addition to participation in creation, Wisdom has a role in the relationship between God and humankind: “Whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD” (8:35). Wisdom finds delight in the human race (8:31). Thus, Wisdom mediates for humanity on a cosmic level. Finally, Wisdom has “hewn her seven pillars” (9:1). These seven pillars likely refer to the pillars which maintain the structure of the earth, the underworld and the firmaments. As such, Wisdom’s house, though described with earthly and concrete terms, is presented mythologically as the created world.

Another notable aspect of Wisdom is that she speaks in the first person. She says, “To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live” (8:4). Her call includes various elements: she corrects, saying “Give heed to my reproof” (1:23); teaching, she says: “O

⁹⁰H. Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom* (Lund: H. Olssons, 1947) 100-102, argues for “begat” on the basis of other Semitic languages. W. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) 352-354, argues for “created” which follows the translation in the LXX of ἐκτίσεν.

⁹¹The sense of the artisan is found in the principal ancient versions, Wis. 7:22- 8:1, and rabbinic sources. The sense of the child supports the birth imagery of vv. 24-25. See T. P. McCreech, “Proverbs,” *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (edited by R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, R. Murphy; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989) 457. Cf. W. Oesterley, *The Book of Proverbs* (London: Methuen and Co., 1929) *ad loc.*

simple ones, learn prudence; acquire intelligence, you who lack it. Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right; for my mouth will utter truth” (8:5-7). She provides commandments (2:1). Finally, she judges people by their response to her: for example, she says, “Because I have called you and you refused ... I also will laugh at your calamity.... Then [you] will call upon me, but I will not answer” (1:24-28).⁹² In this way, Wisdom addresses the reader directly.

The description of Wisdom is enhanced by the contrast made between Wisdom and Strange Woman.⁹³ Strange Woman serves as a symbol for the religious, legal and social “other.” Various referred to as “strange,” “foreign,” or “loose” (2:16; 5:3) or as “Lady Folly” (9:13-18), this figure is set up in contrast to Wisdom and thus may be regarded as the antithesis of the positive figure. Instead of life (4:13), love (4:6), creation (3:19), wisdom (1:23), social order (1:33) and truth (8:7), Strange Woman is portrayed as death (2:18-39; 5:6; 9:18), folly (9:13), darkness (2:18), social disruption (2:22; 5:14) and falsehood (2:16). She invites young men to dine on stolen water and secret bread (9:17), but her fruit is bitter as wormwood (5:4). She is “loud and wayward” (2:16; 7:11; 9:13). She seeks aggressively (7:15), and is herself an unfaithful wife (2:17; 7:18-19). She knows no shame (9:13). Following the path of Strange Woman leads to Sheol (9:18).

⁹²These actions have also been ascribed to God: God was sought but not found (Mic. 3:4; Isa. 1:15); people called out to God but they were not heard (Jer. 11:11, 14). Wisdom is like a prophet who cries out in the street. C. Bauer-Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9* (WMANT, 22; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966) 120, highlights prophetic parallels with Proverbs 1:20-33; Scott, *Proverbs*, 39.

⁹³So also Murphy, “Wisdom,” 603. C. A. Newsom, “Women and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9,” *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (edited by Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), develops the relationship of these four figures in terms of patriarchal discourse. Because I will argue that the image of Strange Woman lies behind the Samaritan Woman in John 4, I will discuss this image in more detail in Chapter 4, where I will move beyond description to analysis.

By serving as the antithesis to Wisdom, Strange Woman contributes to the overall picture of Wisdom in this text.

Both Wisdom and Strange Woman are personified in the Book of Proverbs with feminine pronouns and with strong feminine images. At the same time, they are described with cosmic proportions. Wisdom is set up as an ideal figure to be sought, as both divine wisdom and a good wife are to be sought. Strange Woman, as evil wife and cosmic guardian of Sheol, is set up as the antithesis of Wisdom and is to be eschewed. Thus, both Wisdom and the Strange Woman are given personalities with cosmic and earthly proportions. Because of this dual setting, Wisdom functions to intermediate between heaven and earth, for to obtain Wisdom is to “find favor with God”; in contrast, Strange Woman interferes with the relationship between God and humans.

Ben Sira

Ben Sira clearly models his presentation of Wisdom on its forerunner in Proverbs.⁹⁴ Like Proverbs, Ben Sira’s Wisdom has cosmic proportions:

Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, and for all the ages I shall not cease to be. In the holy tent I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion. Thus in the beloved city, he gave me a resting place, and in Jerusalem was my domain. I took root in an honoured people, in the portion of the Lord, his heritage (24:9-12).

⁹⁴P. Skehan and A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A Translation with Notes* (New York: Doubleday, 1979) 40-45, 76. Cf. A. Di Lella, “Sirach,” *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (edited by R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer and R. Murphy; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989) 496-509; B. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic: Ben Sira's Hymn in Praise of the Fathers* (Chicago: University Press, 1985).

Ben Sira, in the passage above, presents Wisdom as pre-existent and eternal. This same Wisdom came to dwell on earth with Israel. And like Proverbs, Ben Sira describes Wisdom in feminine garb: For the one who seeks Wisdom,

She will come to meet him like a mother, and like a young bride she will welcome him. She will feed him with the bread of learning, and give him the water of wisdom to drink (15:2-3).

Wisdom is conceived as a gift of God given to “those who love him” (1:10), that is, to Israel (24:10). However, Ben Sira takes pains to present Wisdom as the law:

All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob. It overflows, like the Pishon with wisdom, and like the Tigris at the time of the first fruits. It runs over, like the Euphrates, with understanding, and like the Jordan at harvest time (24:23-26).

The law represents the concrete and practical tool by which, when one is obedient, one may become wise (19:20-23). An extensive retelling of Israel’s history provides proof-texts for this claim: the famous men named in this retelling are judged by their adherence to the law and hence, by their wisdom (c.44-50). The rewards of obedience are great. Ben Sira claims that the one who seeks Wisdom will have their labour turned to joy:

Search out and seek, and she will become known to you; and when you get hold of her do not let go. For at last you will find the rest she gives, and she will be changed into joy for you (6:27-28).

In summary, Ben Sira develops the motif of personified divine wisdom as a female, pre-existent, and eternal agent of God. However, he identifies divine Wisdom strongly with the law of the covenant, in one way, limiting Wisdom speculation and in another, placing Wisdom within reach.⁹⁵

⁹⁵So also, Scott, *Proverbs*, 55.

Baruch

Baruch contributes little new to the picture which has developed about Wisdom. Divine Wisdom is similarly personified with feminine pronouns. As in Proverbs and Ben Sira, various images cluster around this motif. For example, she is referred to as a fountain (3:12); she is associated with knowledge (3:20) and the right way (3:13, 20, 23).

Like the Book of Proverbs, Baruch constructs a set of polar opposites between one who seeks wisdom, and thus one who has knowledge, prosperity, peace and life (3:13), and one who does not pursue Wisdom and thus has “gone down to Hades” because they have strayed from the right paths (3:19, 21). They have “perished through their folly” (3:28). As Jews of the Diaspora, they have been defiled by association with pagans, “who are all but dead and ready to depart for the netherworld because they do not know and observe the law, the source of life.”⁹⁶

Like the other wisdom texts, Wisdom has her origin in the heavens (3:29) and is given as a gift to Jacob, the beloved of God (3:36). Wisdom dwells with humankind thereafter (3:37). Like Ben Sira, Baruch identifies Wisdom with the law: She is the book of the commandments⁹⁷ of God, the law that endures forever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die. Turn, O Jacob, and take her; walk toward the shining of her light. Do not give your glory to another, or your advantages to an alien people. Happy are we, O Israel, for we know what is pleasing to God (4:1-4).

Thus, the picture of Wisdom in Baruch preserves elements of the earlier texts and supports Ben Sira’s identification of Wisdom with the Law.⁹⁸

⁹⁶A. Fitzgerald, “Baruch,” *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (edited by R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, R. Murphy; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989) 566.

⁹⁷R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (revised edition; New York: Harper, 1948) 421, suggests that *προστάγματα*, “commandments,” represents the Greek translator’s misreading of the Hebrew *tōrat* “law of,” for *tōrôt*, “laws of.”

⁹⁸C. A. Moore, *Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: the Additions: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1977) 295ff.

Wisdom of Solomon

The Wisdom of Solomon is the latest apocryphal presentation of the Wisdom motif and places Wisdom securely in the centre of its discourse. In contrast to Proverbs which presents a very feminine Wisdom, and Ben Sira which presents a very concrete and attainable Wisdom, Wisdom of Solomon presents a Wisdom that is ethereal and intangible.⁹⁹ Even the gender of Wisdom loses its clear definition.¹⁰⁰ Her association with light imagery is particularly strong: she is radiant and unfading (6:12), clear (7:22) and a “pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty” (7:25).

For she is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail (7:29).

She is also described as spirit (πνεῦμα 1:6, 7; 7:7, 22; 9:17), and as the vapour (ἀτμίς) of the power of God (7:25). She is a “reflection” of God (7:26).¹⁰¹

As in the Book of Proverbs and the Wisdom of Ben Sira, Wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon has an active role in creation: she is the maker of all things (7:12,22; 8:6) and “penetrates all things” (7:24). She pervades creation which shapes and transforms itself, either to save Israel (16:24-5; 19:18-21) or to condemn it (1:3-16; 5:17f). This function is evident through the retelling of Israel’s nation-building events of the exodus (9:18-11:1; 14:5; 16:7).

⁹⁹So also, Schroer, “Sophia,” 19. D. Winston, “Wisdom of Solomon,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* VI (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 124, states that this presentation of Wisdom is a perfect bridge between Ben Sira’s exclusivist nationalist tradition and Hellenistic philosophy.

¹⁰⁰See my unpublished, “Sophia: Engendering Wisdom in Proverbs, Ben Sira and Wisdom of Solomon,” presented at the CSBS, Brock University, May, 1996. Cf. Schroer, “Sophia,” 24.

¹⁰¹For a correlation between these attributes and Greek philosophy, see D. Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1979) 178ff.

Wisdom descends from heaven in order to intercede on behalf of humans, for she “passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets” (7:27). Union with Wisdom is akin to the relationship of Wisdom with God - the ultimate goal of humanity.¹⁰²

With you is wisdom, she who knows your works and was present when you made the world; she understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according to your commandments. Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her, that she may labor at my side, and that I may learn what is pleasing to you. For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory (9:9-11).

Knowing all things (8:7), she also instructs (6:17-20); the one who is wise, keeps her laws (6:18). As such, she is the “Archetypal Torah” of which the Mosaic Law is but an image. Wisdom is necessary, therefore, to interpret the law (9:17).¹⁰³ Finally, association with her brings immortality (5:15; 6:19; 8:13,17). Both immanent and transcendent, she bridges the gap between God and humanity.

Most important, because it is in the centre of the chiasmic structure of the discourse on wisdom, is the fact that wisdom is a gift of God:¹⁰⁴

But I perceived that I would not possess wisdom unless God gave her to me - and it was a mark of insight to know whose gift she was - so I appealed to the Lord and implored him, and with my whole heart I said... (8:21; see also 7:7; 9:10).

Like Wisdom, the Word (Λόγος) is also personified. These two concepts, though distinct because one is presented as feminine and the other as masculine (see 18:15),

¹⁰²Winston, *Wisdom*, 41.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰⁴M. Stone, editor, *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 301-313, provides a full discussion on the structure of this book.

function in much the same way in the text.¹⁰⁵ Both the Word and Wisdom are the means of divine punishment (1:6-9; 12:9; 18:19), healing (7:27; 16:12), sustenance (7:27; 16:26) and salvation (18:21-22; 11:1); both are the objects of desire (6:11,13,17). Both are intricately involved in creation (9:1ff). Both originate from the heavenly throne (9:10; 18:15; see also Sir. 24:3). This identification of the Word with Wisdom plays an important role in the Fourth Gospel, as we will see.¹⁰⁶

To summarize, Wisdom is presented as a spirit who comes from God in order to mediate between God and people. She is deeply personal.¹⁰⁷ There is not a strong association of this figure with the law, as in Ben Sira, nor is there a tendency to locate Wisdom in the domestic realm as in the Book of Proverbs; Wisdom is “ever mobile” and resists concrete identification. Finally, divine Wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon is strongly associated with the Λόγος, a male figure who also mediates between God and humans.

Summary

The motifs which cluster around personified divine Wisdom are not consistent throughout these various texts. In fact, the presentation in Ben Sira seems to be at odds, in some respects, with the concept of Wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon. For Ben Sira divine Wisdom is found in the concrete law but for the Wisdom of Solomon, divine Wisdom as spirit penetrates all of creation bringing life. However, four attributes seem

¹⁰⁵Cf. B. Mack, *Logos und Sophia: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie im hellenistischen Judentum* (SUNT 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973) 63-107. Wilson (“Wisdom,” 125) claims that this notion of the word reflects the “Divine Mind”: “Wisdom is identical with the Divine Mind through which the deity acts.”

¹⁰⁶So also, Brown, *John*, 522.

¹⁰⁷Wilson, “Wisdom,” 125.

to emerge repeatedly. First, Wisdom is perceived as present before creation and is thus either the first born of creation or an active participant in the creation of the world.

Secondly, Wisdom originates with God and is, in effect, a gift which God gives to the human race. Third, several texts claim that Wisdom dwells with Israel in order to reveal God in some way. Fourth, Wisdom is presented in predominantly female imagery.

Associated with this picture of personified divine Wisdom are various images which echo throughout the various texts. Some of these are water, spirit, light, life, word, and the way or path. The next chapter will explore the use of Wisdom imagery to describe Jesus in the Gospel of John.

Chapter 3: The Johannine Jesus as Wisdom Personified

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza describes a concept known as “reflective mythology” in which new theologies are reconfigured with familiar images and stories. She says, “Such a theology is not interested in reproducing the myth itself or the mythic materials as they stand, but rather in taking up and adapting the various mythical elements to its own theological goal and theoretical concerns.”¹⁰⁸ In precisely this way, the Fourth Gospel takes up mythical motifs of the Wisdom tradition and applies them to the person of Jesus in an attempt to articulate his significance. Wisdom motifs, as we will see, lend themselves relatively easily to theological reflection on Jesus, but the motifs themselves do not remain unchanged; the Fourth Gospel conflates diverse motifs and rearticulates them as Wisdom incarnate in the male person of Jesus. It is this wisdom christology which will now be considered.

It must first be noted that no forms of the word “wisdom” can be found in the Fourth Gospel. No overt reference connects Jesus with a female Wisdom figure such as we find in the Book of Proverbs. However, the Fourth Gospel identifies Jesus as Wisdom in two ways: first, through the introduction of Jesus in the prologue as the Λόγος, a concept closely related to personified divine Wisdom in early Jewish literature, and secondly, through the gospel’s description of Jesus which incorporates images and vocabulary used to describe Wisdom. In many ways, the prologue rehearses Wisdom themes in the prologue and develops them in the body of the gospel.¹⁰⁹ In this chapter, I

¹⁰⁸“Wisdom Mythology and the Christological Hymns of the New Testament,” *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity* (edited by R. L. Wilken; Notre Dame, 1975) 29.

¹⁰⁹Scott, *Sophia*, 168. Brown (*John*, 19ff) provides a survey of opinions on the

will demonstrate that the Johannine Jesus is strongly identified as Wisdom incarnate. This will lay the foundation of an exegesis of John 4 with emphasis on Wisdom motifs.

Jesus as the Λόγος

Extensive studies have been conducted in order to determine the nature of the Λόγος in the prologue of John's gospel (Jn. 1:1-18).¹¹⁰ Many of these studies explore the background from which this term might have arisen. Within the domain of philosophical studies, the Λόγος has been linked to the Stoic notion of the immanent divine spirit that penetrates and orders the cosmos; the absence of other philosophical terminology in the gospel undermines the argument, however. Similarly, contrasts between "above" and "below" and "heavenly" and "earthly" have led to speculation about Platonic influence, but these notions, too, were seen to function quite differently in the Fourth Gospel.¹¹¹ In the area of the history of religions, the Λόγος has been associated with the Dionysus cult (because of a similar account of changing water into wine), the mystery cults (because of the notions of rebirth and eternal life),¹¹² and the Hermetic writings (because of the use of the Λόγος in their creation myth).¹¹³ However, these links are superficial at best, for though they share some aspects with the Fourth Gospel, they use the term Λόγος in very

relationship of the prologue to the gospel.

¹¹⁰P. Perkins, "The Gospel According to John," *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (edited by R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, R. Murphy; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989) 944; Brown, *John*, 519-520.

¹¹¹Perkins, "Gospel," 944.

¹¹²Euripides, *Bacchae*, 704-707; Pausanias, *Desc. of Greece* 6.26.1-2; see E. Linnemann, *NTS* 20 (1973-1974) 408-18.

¹¹³*Corpus Hermeticum* 1:5-6; see R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven, 1981) 133-137.

different ways.¹¹⁴ On the whole, the arguments for an extra-Semitic background for this term have been unconvincing.

More convincing are the arguments which situate the notion of the *Λόγος* in the Semitic literature. Raymond Brown suggests that the concept of the *Λόγος* in the Fourth Gospel is derived by combining the biblical notions of “the word of the LORD” and the personified divine Wisdom of the wisdom literature.¹¹⁵ With regard to the first, the notion of the *Λόγος* corresponds with the “word of the LORD” in terms of its revelation accompanied by its compelling force; for example, the prophets were compelled to prophesy when they received the “word of the LORD” (Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1) as the Samaritan Woman left her water jar in haste to tell others about Jesus (Jn. 4:28-29). For the Deuteronomist, the word is life-giving (Dt. 32:46-47) as is Jesus: “Very truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (Jn. 5:24). For the Psalmist (Ps. 107:20), the “word of the LORD” is healing, as is Jesus (Jn. 4:46-54; 9:1ff). Like the *Λόγος* in the Johannine prologue, the “word of the LORD” is also associated with creation motifs; God created the world when he *said*, “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). The word in creation is further evoked by the opening words of the prologue which mimic the opening words of Genesis: “In the beginning” (Gen. 1:1; Jn. 1:1).¹¹⁶ Though this “word of the LORD” was not personified, there are traces that suggest that the word carried on a quasi-existence of its own:

¹¹⁴Bultmann (*John*, 22) locates the source for this term in a hymnic Gnostic Redeemer myth.

¹¹⁵Brown, *John*, 519-524; D. Moody Smith, *Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995) 18.

¹¹⁶For other passages which associate the word of the Lord with creation, see Ps. 33:6; Wis. 9:1.

So shall my word be that goes out of my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it (Is.55:11).

This last passage also evokes the ascent-descent motif which is so prominent in the Fourth Gospel. In addition to these biblical connections between the Λόγος in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel and the biblical motif of the “word of the LORD,” Brown’s argument is strengthened by evidence that Jesus was represented as the “word of the LORD” in other early Christian literature. Hebrews 1:1 says: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.”

A second Semitic source for the Johannine term Λόγος is found in the wisdom literature of early Judaism where the Word (Λόγος) is strongly identified with Wisdom (Σοφία).¹¹⁷ Both of these notions together provide the textual background for descriptions of the Λόγος in the Johannine prologue. For a start, the Johannine Λόγος reflects the personification of the Λόγος and Σοφία in the wisdom literature: personified Wisdom is seen in many of the texts, as I have noted, and the Λόγος is specifically personified in Wis.18:15ff where it is seen that the “all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command.” In the wisdom literature, the Λόγος and Σοφία are described in similar ways: they both participate in creation (Pr.3:19; 8:30; Sir.1:1; Wis.9:1ff), originate in heaven (Wis.9:10; 18:15; Sir.24:3), dwell on earth (Wis.9:10; Pr.8:31; Bar.3:37; Sir.24:11ff) and mediate between heaven and earth (Wis.1:6-9; 7:27-28; 12:9; 16:12, 26; 18:15-25; Sir.24:22). Likewise, the Johannine Λόγος originates in heaven (1:1), participates in creation (1:3), comes to dwell on earth

¹¹⁷So also Scott, *Sophia*, 89.

(1:14)¹¹⁸ and mediates between God and people (1:16-18). The Johannine Λόγος is called God's "only son" (μονογενής, 1:18) as Wisdom is called "unique" (μονογενής) in Wis.7:22. The Johannine Λόγος reveals his glory (1:14) as Wisdom is the "pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty" (Wis.7:25). Both the Johannine Λόγος and Wisdom are referred to as light (Jn. 1:4, 9; Wis.7:29) and life (Pr.8:35; Bar.4:1; Wis.8:17). In summary, the wisdom literature, whether referring to the Λόγος or to Σοφία, is able to provide the literary parallels for almost every detail of the description of the Λόγος in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel.¹¹⁹

In conclusion, it can be shown with striking parallels that the Johannine term Λόγος found in the prologue is principally drawn from the Semitic wisdom tradition. In fact, except for the absence of the term Σοφία itself, Jesus as the Λόγος reflects the portrait of Wisdom as presented in the wisdom literature; the Johannine Jesus is Wisdom incarnate.¹²⁰ As Scott says, "At virtually every turn of the Prologue we can find Sophia's

¹¹⁸In John 1:14, Jesus "lived (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us" and in Sir.24:8, Wisdom "set up her tent" (ὁ κτίσας με κατέπαυσεν τὴν σκητὴν μου). Brown, *John*, 523.

¹¹⁹Brown, *John*, 523; Moeller, "Wisdom," 93; Scott, *Sophia*, 58ff; J. Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature and Theology of the Johannine Community* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) 146. Cf. Johnson ("Jesus" 285), who says that the Word tradition was not well developed and that the author of the Fourth Gospel develops this image in a new and unique way. Dodd (*Interpretation*, 274-277) has compiled a list of correlations between the use of Λόγος in the Fourth Gospel, in the wisdom literature, and in Philo. The correlation with the wisdom literature is far more impressive. Brown (*John*, 521-522) suggests that Philo and the author of the Fourth Gospel drew from the same biblical wisdom tradition. Brown also suggests that the author of the Fourth Gospel may have drawn on the notion of the Λόγος as Torah, but given the late rabbinic dating of Law speculation and the evident polarity between Jesus and the law in the gospel (see Jn. 1:17, for example), this seems unlikely. Likewise, his argument that the gospel's quotation from the Targums suggests the Targumic use of *memra* - as "a surrogate for God himself" - is unconvincing. The concept of the λόγος became the focus of its own mythology and attracted its own set of images in the Second Temple period, as the writings of Philo attest.

¹²⁰The Gospel of John is not unique in the presentation of Jesus as Wisdom incarnate.

influence at work on the Johannine Logos.”¹²¹ Though the term Λόγος is not used in this absolute sense again in the Fourth Gospel, the correlation between Jesus and Wisdom persists throughout the gospel’s entirety, as I will demonstrate in the next section.

Jesus as Wisdom

The presentation of Jesus as Wisdom incarnate does not end in the prologue. Many of the Wisdom-type attributes assigned to Jesus the Λόγος in the prologue may be seen to thread their way through the entire gospel, even though the term Λόγος has dropped out and the term Σοφία never appears.¹²² In order to demonstrate the continuity of Wisdom themes through the entire Gospel, this section will consider three main areas in which a Wisdom christology is used: pre-existence, descent to earth and dwelling with Israel, and mediation between God and humans. By no means are these the only themes which corroborate this observation; Scott provides a thorough analysis of the many Wisdom motifs which are applied to the Johannine Jesus.¹²³ These three themes serve as mere examples of a substantial tendency in the Fourth Gospel to articulate a christology drawn from Wisdom motifs, namely, that Jesus is Wisdom incarnate.

One of the most persistent descriptions of Wisdom in the wisdom literature is the aspect of pre-existence. Wisdom claims in Pr.8:22: “The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.” In Ben Sira, Wisdom says,

For extensive treatment of this argument, see Brown, *John*, cxxiv-cxxv; Johnson, “Jesus”, 276-284; Scott, *Sophia*, 84-88.

¹²¹Scott, *Sophia*, 113; Painter, *Quest*, 146.

¹²²So Brown, *John*, 523; Moody Smith, *Theology*, 18.

¹²³Scott, *Sophia*, 82-173. Some of the other themes that Scott discusses are intimacy with God, abiding, the Law, the Spirit, rejection and signs. Cf. J. Ashton, “The Transformation of Wisdom: A Study in the Prologue of John’s Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 161-186.

“Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me” (24:9). As we have seen in the prologue, Jesus as the Λόγος is said to exist with God before creation: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (Jn.1:1-2). He “existed” (εἶμι) before John the Baptist “became” (γίνομαι) (1:30).¹²⁴ Further into the gospel, the Johannine Jesus also claims this for himself: “Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed” (17:5, see also 7:24). Moreover, he says, “Before Abraham was, I am” (8:58), implying that he existed before Abraham. The Wisdom theme of pre-existence therefore continues throughout the entire gospel.

The second Wisdom theme which is found both in the prologue and throughout the core of the Fourth Gospel is the motif which incorporates the descent to earth, the dwelling with Israel and the return to heaven. Wisdom is said to descend from heaven to earth: “Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and my Creator chose the place for my tent. He said, ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance’” (Sir.24:9; see also Pr.8:31, Wis.9:10ff). Baruch 3:37 says, “Afterward she appeared on earth and lived with humankind.” Whether Wisdom returned to heaven because she was rejected or because she did not find what she sought,¹²⁵ we read:

Wisdom found no place where she might dwell; then a dwelling place was assigned her in the heavens. Wisdom went forth to make her dwelling among the children of men, and found no dwelling place; wisdom returned to her seat and took her place among the angels (Enoch 42:1-2).

In like fashion, the Word in the Prologue was “in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (1:10-11). He “lived among us” (1:14). In the core

¹²⁴Scott, *Sophia*, 132.

¹²⁵Ibid., 134-140.

of the gospel, Jesus claims to have “come down from heaven” (6:25-65) sent by the Father (10:36). He first comes from above (3:13, 31; 8:23; 11:27) and then returns when he is lifted up: Jesus says, “I came from the Father and have come into the world; again I am leaving the world and am going to the Father” (8:28; cf. 3:12; 12:32; 16:28).

However, in contrast to Wisdom who returns to heaven because she has “found no place,” Jesus returns to heaven when his work is completed: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work” (4:34; also 5:36; 19:28, 30). Despite this difference, the motif of descent and ascent threads its way throughout the gospel.¹²⁶

The third Wisdom theme that can be traced throughout the gospel is the concept that Wisdom mediates between God and humans. This mediation takes various forms. First, Wisdom reveals the mysteries of God:¹²⁷ these include teaching the things of heaven (Wis.9:16-18), imparting truth (Pr.8:7; Wis. 6:22), and instructing in the ways of God:

With you is Wisdom, she who knows your works and was present when you made the world; she understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according to your commandments (Wis.9:9).

Similarly, in the prologue, Jesus is said to make the Father known because he alone knows the Father (1:18); through him, comes truth (1:17). In the core of the gospel, Jesus reveals himself in a series of narratives which begins with the hesitant proclamation of the Samaritan Woman as the Messiah (4:29) and culminates in the exclamation of Thomas, “My Lord and my God!” (20:28). Through Jesus’ self-disclosure, he reveals the

¹²⁶For a detailed analysis of this theme, see W. Meeks, “The Man From Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 44-72. Cf. Moeller, “Wisdom,” 94ff; Scott, *Sophia*, 134ff.

¹²⁷What exactly these mysteries are remains unclear. See R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (translated by K. Grobel; London: SCM Press, 1955) II 66; Scott, *Sophia*, 145ff.

Father (14:31; 17:6ff). His purpose is to teach the truth: “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice” (18:37). He not only teaches truth, but claims to *be* the truth (14:6). Like Wisdom, Jesus calls out in public places in a loud voice (7:28, 37; 12:44) and delivers long discourses using the first person pronoun and the “I am” formula.¹²⁸ Like Wisdom, he does not wait for people to find him but he seeks them out (5:14; 9:35) and asks them to follow him (1:36-38, 43). This leads to the second aspect of mediation: those who respond positively to the truth are “saved.” In the wisdom tradition, Wisdom grants life: “All who hold her fast will live and those who forsake her will die. Turn, O Jacob, and take her; walk toward the shining of her light” (Bar.4:1-2; see also Pr.4:13, 8:32-35; Wis.8:13; Sir.4:12). The prologue claims that in the Word “was life, and the life was the light of all people” (1:4). In the core of the gospel, those who believe in Jesus have eternal life: Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (8:12).¹²⁹ Thus, Jesus is referred to as saviour of the world (3:17; 4:42; 5:34; 10:9; 12:47). Through revealing the things of heaven, all three - Wisdom, the Λόγος in the prologue, and Jesus - mediate between God and humanity in order to bring life. As Witherington says, “The point in the Wisdom corpus is that all one truly longs for and needs can be found in Wisdom, and the Fourth Evangelist is trying to make the same point about Jesus.”¹³⁰

¹²⁸Johnson, “Jesus,” 284; Scott (*Sophia*, 191) points out that whenever “ἐγώ εἰμι is used apart from the “I am sayings,” its usage is built on some aspect of Jesus Sophia’s relationship to God.”

¹²⁹Cf. 3:16, 36; 4:14, 5:21, 24; 6:27ff; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 14:6; 17:2ff; 20:31.

¹³⁰*Jesus the Sage* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 375. Howard-Brook (*Becoming Children of God: John’s Gospel and Radical Discipleship* [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1994] 53) does not deny the dominant wisdom motifs throughout the gospel, but says that the fourth evangelist subverts them. So also Lieu, “Scripture,” 229.

One question often raised in the discourse on Wisdom christology concerns the absence of the word Σοφία: Why is Jesus not referred to as Wisdom *per se*, if there is so much correspondence with the Wisdom motif? Is it because, as Barrett suggests, that the author may have chosen the term λόγος over Σοφία because it would be a familiar term in the Greek-speaking Hellenistic environment?¹³¹ Most scholars would agree that the reason is fairly simple: namely, that Σοφία is a noun of feminine gender which, when personified, has attracted feminine imagery, and that Jesus is decidedly male.¹³² The identification of Jesus with a feminine designator would provoke cognitive dissonance. Hence, the author of the Fourth Gospel chose to use the masculine noun Λόγος - with its strong association to Wisdom - as the opening appellation for Jesus. After introducing the wisdom tradition through this “clue,”¹³³ the gospel lets the masculine Λόγος disappear while the “feminine” Σοφία becomes known through more subtle means in the themes and images used to describe Jesus. In this way, grammatical gender does not interfere with the identification of Jesus as the male Son of Man, and Jesus may still be conceived as the pre-existent intercessor between heaven and earth. As Scott says,

the Evangelist has introduced Jesus as the Logos because of that word's ability to satisfy both the requirements of the *maleness* of the human Jesus and the *equivalence* to the female Sophia.¹³⁴

Moreover, John Painter claims that it was crucial for the evangelist to use λόγος rather than Σοφία in the Prologue because he set the christology of the Gospel in opposition both to the Wisdom/*Torah* ideology of Judaism (1:17) and to a defective Wisdom christology.

¹³¹Barrett, *Gospel*, 154; also Scott, *Sophia*, 91.

¹³²For a survey, see Scott, *Sophia*, 143-144, 170ff.

¹³³Ibid., 173.

¹³⁴Ibid., 244.

The use of λόγος expressed the theme of revelation dynamically, drawing together a number of themes, thus uniting the creative Word (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 33:6), the prophetic Word and the incarnate Word who himself is the Word of God, speaks the Word of God and is proclaimed in the preaching of the Church.¹³⁵

Therefore, it can be seen that the core of the Fourth Gospel, as well as the prologue, presents Jesus as Wisdom incarnate in the world. This was demonstrated first by outlining the correlation between the Wisdom motif in the wisdom literature with the specific presentation of Jesus as the Λόγος in the prologue; more than any other, the wisdom tradition is the most convincing and consistent source for images and themes in the prologue. Secondly, by tracing three themes which apply to Wisdom both through the prologue and through the gospel as a whole, the correlation is substantiated in the general presentation of Jesus as Wisdom incarnate. Jesus is seen as “Wisdom striding through the gospel.” By establishing the Wisdom tradition as significantly influential to the christology of the Fourth Gospel, I have prepared the way for an interpretation of the narrative of the Samaritan Woman based on this tradition.

This thesis will consider the narrative of the Samaritan Woman in John 4 in the light of this wisdom tradition. In a similar study, Scott has concluded that the Samaritan Woman represents the handmaids or disciples of Wisdom referred to in Proverbs 9:3. However, this account does not take into consideration the emphasis that the text places on the contrast between Jesus and the woman: while the woman is female, Samaritan and unknowing, Jesus is male, Jewish and knowing. This contrast suggests that the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel constructs a polarity between these two figures to reflect the same kind of polarity found in Proverbs between Wisdom and Strange Woman. The

¹³⁵Painter, *Quest*, 152. Brown (*John*, 523) suggests that the word λόγος may also have been chosen because it reflects the *kerygma* of the early Church.

next chapter will investigate the figure of the Strange Woman as found in the book of Proverbs.

Chapter 4: Strange Woman

The strong correlation of the Johannine Jesus and divine personified Wisdom suggests that the Wisdom tradition lies behind the background of this gospel. In the specific narrative of the Samaritan Woman in John 4, the relationship between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman may be interpreted from this different perspective. Martin Scott has undertaken an interpretation of this narrative with the Wisdom tradition in the background and argues that the Samaritan Woman represents the servant-girl of Wisdom:

She [Wisdom] has slaughtered her animals. She has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. She has sent out her *servant-girls*, she calls from the highest places in the town, "You that are simple, turn in here!" To those without sense she says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity and live, and walk in the way of insight" (Pr.9:2-6, emphasis added).

Like the servant-girls, he argues, the Samaritan Woman was sent out to bring others to Jesus/Wisdom. For some unknown reason, Scott implies that Wisdom's disciples "go on to become" Wisdom's servant-girls, as if being a servant is of greater value than being a disciple. In so doing, he applies a New Testament theology that is not present in the Wisdom corpus.¹³⁶ At the same time, he acknowledges that there is an element of sexuality and that allusions to the matrimonial motif may be found in the encounter of Jesus with this "shady lady."¹³⁷ He also identifies the antithesis of Jewish and Samaritan in the text, and he identifies the Samaritan as a woman who "shows little understanding, failing to grasp either who Jesus is, or the nature of the gift he is offering

¹³⁶*Sophia*, 190.

¹³⁷*Sophia*, 186, 192, 238.

to her.”¹³⁸ Later, he states that the woman is “not to be seen as a fool with regard to theological insight.”¹³⁹ Even though he recognizes the various characteristics of the Strange Woman from Proverbs (adulteress, foreign and foolish/ignorant), he does not connect these characteristics with this strong Wisdom motif. By conflating the roles of the various women in the Fourth Gospel, Scott fails to see that the Samaritan Woman represents a distinct Wisdom motif of her own - a motif found in the figure of the Strange Woman of Proverbs.

Proverbs is a wisdom text intended to instruct the community in behavior and attitudes which reflect acceptable social and religious norms. Like any shared values, these norms serve to unify and distinguish the community in which they are observed. In this case, the community may be defined as those who “fear the LORD”:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.
Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil
(Pr.3:5-7).¹⁴⁰

At the same time, Proverbs outlines various opposing factors, factors which threaten the unity and the stability of the community. For example, the difference between friends and enemies is outlined, and good behavior is contrasted with bad. Polarities are constructed in order to make this teaching, with its choices, crystal clear.

Carol Newsom identifies the discourse in the Book of Proverbs as a patriarchal discourse.¹⁴¹ She means by this that the teaching is framed within the relationship of a

¹³⁸Ibid., 187.

¹³⁹Ibid., 188.

¹⁴⁰See also 1:7, 29; 3:7; 8:13; 9:10;10:27; 14:26-27; 15:33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; 24:21.

¹⁴¹Newsom, “Women,” 148. So also, L. A. Snijders, “The Meaning of *zar* in the Old Testament: an Exegetical Study,” *Oudtestamentische Studien* 10 (154): 104.

father to a son. For example, numerous passages begin with the exhortation addressed to “my child” (1:8; 2:1; 3:1, 11; etc.). It says, “When I was a son with my father, tender and my mother’s favorite, he taught me and said to me...” (4:3; cf.4:1). Thus, the father is passing onto his son that which he received from his own father. A great deal of this paternal instruction addresses the son’s choice between the pursuit of wisdom (the accepted way) and the pursuit of folly (the unacceptable alternative). These choices are brought together in two personified figures: “Lady” Wisdom and Strange Woman. Furthermore, this choice is compared to the selection of a spouse, both choices made at the age of maturity. Therefore, the son is faced with selecting between options all of which are depicted as feminine. The son as *subject* embraces or rejects these various female figures as *objects* and so a polarity between male and female is established. However, within this polarity, one set of choices - Wisdom/ good wife - moves to the side of the paternal discourse as the *means* by which the father instructs the son for the words of the sage are life-giving instruction. Proverbs 2:1, for example, says, “My child, if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments within you...” Similarly, personified Wisdom speaks in the first person, saying, “Hear, for I speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right” (8:6). Both the words of the sage and the words of Wisdom bring life (e.g., 4:4,10; 8:35; 19:16). The words of Strange Woman, however, result in death (5:5-6; 7:22-23; 9:18; 22:14). With words, she entices the unknowing onto her path (7:14-23; 9:13-18), and though her words seem “smooth” they are later found to be “bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword” (5:3-4). Therefore, the Strange Woman/evil wife remains in opposition to the father /son: wisdom/ good wife construction. In this way, Strange Woman and her “human” counterpart, the evil wife, are constructed as the formal “other” in this discourse.

In this section, I will explore the paradigm of Strange Woman in Proverbs.¹⁴² As the formal “other” in this discourse, Strange Woman represents all that is opposed to the welfare of the individual, the community and the mythology of post-exilic Israel. Set against the figure of personified divine Wisdom, Strange Woman is the polar opposite of all that is good and productive and all that lends stability and order to a world in chaos. She is the enemy who appeals to basic needs and desire, who entices with sexuality and who ultimately leads to death.

A figure much like the Proverbial Strange Woman is also found in 4Q184, a first century B.C.E. Qumran fragment entitled “The Wiles of the Wicked Woman.”¹⁴³ Similar vocabulary and expressions suggest that 4Q184 is dependent on Proverbs.¹⁴⁴ As in Proverbs, the Wicked Woman is presented as a threat to individual security; as a harlot, she is “ruin to all who possess her” (ln.8), and as a mythological figure, she presides over the gates of Sheol:

Her gates are the gates of death,
in the opening of her house it stalks.
To Sheol *a/l/l* [. . .] will return,
And all who possess her will go down to the Pit (ln.10-11).¹⁴⁵

However, unlike the Proverbial woman who is established as the antithesis of “Lady” Wisdom, the Wicked Woman is established as the antithesis of “all who gird themselves

¹⁴²Strange Woman receives passing mention in Ben Sira 9:3 and 41:20 but is not a well-developed motif.

¹⁴³L. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran* (Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1994) 139ff.

¹⁴⁴For example, ln.1-2 - Pr.2:16; 7:5; ln.3 - Pr.23:27; ln.6 - Pr.7:9; ln.12 - Pr.7:11. Schiffman (*Reclaiming*, 139) claims that the Qumran fragment is an expanded and enriched symbol derived from Proverbs.

¹⁴⁵Quotations are from J. M. Allegro, *Discoveries of the Judean Desert of Jordan V Qumran Cave 4 (4Q158-4Q186)* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 83-84.

with light” (In.8), “those chosen for righteousness”; she is associated with darkness and night and is “the foremost of all the ways of iniquity” (In.8). Within this fragment, there is no allusion to the Woman as foreign or as a teacher of apostasy; emphasis is placed on her seductive eroticism which causes the righteous to sin. Her threat is directed at the community only as it affects the individual within the community. Though this poem supports the presence of the Strange Woman motif in post-biblical Judaism, its direct influence on the Fourth Gospel is debatable. For our purposes, therefore, the Book of Proverbs will serve as the primary source of the Strange Woman motif.

There are three aspects of Strange Woman which I will explore: adulteress, foreigner and foolish woman. To lend some further organization to this discussion, I will draw on the work of Norman C. Habel.¹⁴⁶ Habel traces various symbols found in Proverbs 1-9 (such as the “way”, “two hearts”, and “two companions”) through three overlapping “symbolic zones.” He defines these symbolic zones as

those fields of human experience and thought where a symbol may operate in a meaningful way. Thus a symbol which serves as an integrating force at a personal level may take on new dimensions when it lives in a community context or when it becomes the object of religious attention, whether that be in the fervour of faith or the detachment of reflection.¹⁴⁷

These three zones are thus

the individual and experiential field of ‘old’ international wisdom, the religious and communal field of the Israelite covenant context, and the primordial and cosmic field of theological reflection upon tradition.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶N. C. Habel, “The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9,” *Interpretation* 26 (1972): 131-157.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 133-134.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 134.

I will use these three symbolic zones to highlight the three different aspects of the symbolism of Strange Woman. It is usually the tendency of scholars to favour one symbolic field over another in the interpretation of a text - claiming that one interpretation is more convincing than another.¹⁴⁹ In this study, however, I will provide various interpretations of symbols throughout their various fields, often exposing profound contradictions. Rather than approach these contradictions with an “either/or” mentality, I will let the contradictions ride as ambiguous “both/and” alternatives. In other words, the interpretation of a symbol within a certain field does not exclude an alternative interpretation from within another field.¹⁵⁰

Strange Woman is mentioned specifically in four passages in the Book of Proverbs: 2:16-19, 5:1-14, 7:5-27 and 22:14.¹⁵¹ In three of these passages, Strange Woman and the adulteress are set side by side. For example, 2:16 says, “You will be saved from the Strange Woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words” and 7:4-5 says, “they may keep you from the Strange Woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words.” Two more passages are added to this composite picture when parallel images tie the figures of the adulteress and the Strange Woman together. They both “ensnare” their

¹⁴⁹Okure, *Johannine*, is a good example of a scholar who makes exclusive decisions about how various symbols should be interpreted.

¹⁵⁰Brown (*John*, 179) also argues for preserving several interpretations concurrently. Willett (*Wisdom*, 25) adopts a similar approach: following Celia Deutsch (SBL paper, 1992), he distinguishes between “steno-symbols” which maintain a one-to-one correspondence with their meaning, and “tensive symbols” which support a multiplicity of interpretations. See also Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 180ff.

¹⁵¹C. R. Fontaine claims that “one may also consider 2:16-19; 5:1- 6; 6: 20- 35; 7:6-27; and 9:13-18 as antiwisdom poems since they concern Wisdom’s wicked rival for men’s attentions, the strange, foolish woman, who can also be characterized as adulteress and prostitute,” in “Wisdom in Proverbs,” *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (edited by L. Perdue, B. Scott, W. Wiseman; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1993) 110.

prey (7:23; 5:22) and they both use “smooth” talk to seduce (6:24; 7:21). A further passage aligns Strange Woman with the foolish woman; they both call out to entice the foolish into their house, a house which leads to death (7:27; 9:13-18).¹⁵² I will therefore draw principally on seven passages for a description of Strange Woman: 2:16-19; 5:1-14, 15-23; 6:23-35; 7:5-27; 9:13-18 and 22:14-15. The composite picture that arises from these texts is unified by the common antithetical relationship to Wisdom.¹⁵³ Although the antithesis of Wisdom goes beyond the characteristics attached to this figure, I will use the overt personification of Strange Woman as a starting point for this discussion.

The Hebrew phrase *išša zara*,¹⁵⁴ “Strange Woman,” presents a challenge to translators because of its double meaning. *Zara* comes from the root meaning “to turn aside” especially in the sense of lodging; hence it means “foreigner,” “strange,” or “to be a stranger.” The active participle is translated as “from another (man, place)” or “commit adultery.”¹⁵⁵ In Proverbs 7:5, the Greek Septuagint has ἀπὸ γυναικὸς ἀλλοτριᾶς καὶ πονηρᾶς. The expression γυναικὸς ἀλλοτριᾶς can be translated either “woman of another place” or “woman of another person.” Thus, the Greek also preserves the ambiguity between the terms, “foreign woman” and “adulteress.” Furthermore, this woman is characterized as “evil” (πονηρᾶς). Neither the English translation as “loose woman” or “adventuress” found in the Revised Standard Version nor “wayward wife” in the New International Version preserve this double entendre. Blenkinsopp offers “Outsider Woman,”¹⁵⁶ Whybray, “stranger woman.”¹⁵⁷ The New

¹⁵²Snijders (“Meaning,” 95) says that this description may be similar but it does not necessarily warrant putting foolish woman on the same level as Strange Woman.

¹⁵³So also Murphy, “Wisdom,” 603.

¹⁵⁴This particular phrase is found in 2:16, 5:3; 7:5 and 22:14.

¹⁵⁵J. Strong, “Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982) 34.

¹⁵⁶“The Social Context of the ‘Outsider Woman’ in Proverbs 1-9,” *Biblica*, 72 (1991):

Revised Standard Version offers “strange” as an alternative reading to “loose woman”; even this does not capture the sense of foreignness. My designation “Strange Woman,” therefore, attempts to draw the two elements of foreign and adulteress together in the one term.¹⁵⁸

Strange Woman as Adulteress

The text characterizes Strange Woman as an adulteress in a variety of ways. First of all, as mentioned, it places her in a parallel construction with the word “adulteress.”¹⁵⁹ Second, the text describes a scene in which she plays an adulteress: a young man passes near her corner and, decked out as a prostitute, she invites him in. She says to him, “My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey” (7:19). Thirdly, the text states that Strange Woman “forsakes the partner of her youth” (2:17). Strange Woman is not just a promiscuous woman but the “wife of another” (6:24,26,29); she is worse than a prostitute for “a prostitute wants only a loaf of bread, but an adulteress

457-473. Blenkinsopp emphasizes the foreign aspect of Strange Woman in the light of the polemic against exogamy in the early post-exilic period. In contrast, McKane (*Proverbs*, 285) argues that *nokri* does not *always* mean “foreign” but could apply to any outsider, even an estranged Israelite, who is “beyond the pale... both desperate and uninhibited - desperate because she suffers ostracism and insecurity, and uninhibited because she defies religious and social sanctions and conventions and is a law to herself. As such, she is particularly deadly to young men who become embroiled with her.” So also, Snijders, “Meaning,” 1-154.

¹⁵⁷*Proverbs* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994) 141. Scott (“Proverbs,” 43) calls her “stranger woman” in an attempt to capture the double meaning of both “folly and the seductive way of life associated with pagan religion.”

¹⁵⁸So also, C. Camp, “Wise,” 14-36. The terms “adulteress” and “foreigner” will be discussed in more detail shortly.

¹⁵⁹*Proverbs* 2:16; 5:20 and 7:5. *Nokriyya*, meaning “unknown, unrecognizable, changed, and thus foreign,” is found alone without *zara* at 6:24 and 23:27.

wants a life” (6:26). The association of Strange Woman with an adulteress is well established.

Sensual language addressed to all five senses contributes to this picture of Strange Woman as an adulteress. To the ears, her “lips drip honey” (5:3) and her words are “smooth” (7:5,21). To the eyes, she “captures with her eyelashes” (6:25) and “decks herself out like a prostitute” (7:10). She perfumes her bed with “myrrh, aloes and cinnamon” to entice the nose (7:17). She offers the sweet taste of stolen water¹⁶⁰ and secret bread (9:17). She prepares her bed with the fine touch of Egyptian linens and offers “our fill of love until morning” (7:18). She is the aggressor (7:15). “Loud and wayward” (2:16; 7:11; 9:13), she knows no shame (7:13). She waits on street corners to seize those who pass by (7:13). Strange Woman is characterized as a seductive and sensual woman who purposely leads young men away from right relationships - an action which is condemned in the Torah (Ex.20:14; Lev.20:10).

The text warns the reader to stay away from Strange Woman/ adulteress. Though she appeals to the senses, her sensuality is dangerous. It is intended to ensnare and consume her innocent victims: “as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag toward the trap until an arrow pierces its entrails” (7:22-3). Association with her brings nothing but punishment, death, and dishonour (5:9; 6:26-29). The text encourages the reader to pursue a good wife instead. In contrast to the unfaithful wife, the good wife is described thus

A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life (31:10-12).

¹⁶⁰Whybray (*Proverbs*, 148) suggests that water in this case refers to sexual pleasure, especially when seen in contrast to Wisdom’s offer of wine (9:5).

She is trustworthy and offers only good things. After she is found, the reader is encouraged to remain faithful to her:

Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.
Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?
Let them be for yourself alone, and not for sharing with strangers. Let
your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely
deer, a graceful doe. May her breasts satisfy you at all times; may you be
intoxicated always by her love (5:15-19).

The good wife is aligned with Wisdom,¹⁶¹ Strange Woman's antithesis. Shaped in wifely images, Wisdom prepares her home (9:1) and offers food and hospitality: "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed" (9:5; cf. 1:31; 4:17). Similarly, the response to Wisdom evokes the actions of a husband toward a beloved wife: she is to be held fast (3:18) and embraced (4:8); she is to be loved (4:6) and guarded (4:13), but not to be forsaken (4:6). Like a good wife, Wisdom is sought and found (3:13; 8:17; 31:10, especially 8:35 and 18:22). Once found, she is more precious than jewels (2:1-4; 3:14-15; 31:10) for she brings life (18:22; 31:10; 8:35; 3:13; 8:17; 8:36). Therefore, the text entreats the reader to seek solace in the arms of Wisdom/ good wife rather than flirt with the danger of the Strange Woman / adulteress.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹Murphy ("Wisdom," 601) argues that the good wife is a symbol of Wisdom. See McCreesh, "Wisdom," 25-46. Wolters ("*Sôpiyyâ*," 577-587) argues that semantic connections make this allusion clear. See also C. V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Bible and Literature Series 11; Sheffield: JSOT/ Almond, 1985); J. Crenshaw, "Book of Proverbs," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol.5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 515.

¹⁶²As the text is addressed principally to a male readership, the force of the polemic is directed against the man who responds affirmatively to Strange Woman/ adulteress rather than to the woman who is an unfaithful wife.

Symbolic Level of Personal Experience

The picture of Strange Woman as an adulteress evokes emotions and images common to the experience of wise adulthood. The knowing parent/sage has seen the evidence of families destroyed by adultery and cautions the young person to steer clear of such activity. The following passage suggests personal observation on the part of the teacher: “I have observed among the youths, a young man without sense, passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house in the twilight” (7:7-9). Similarly, the consequences of responding to her are spelled out with vivid imagery:

Can fire be carried in the bosom without burning one’s clothes? Or can one walk on hot coals without scorching the feet? So is he who sleeps with his neighbor’s wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished (6:27-29).

In addition, associating with an adulteress is very costly. Whereas a prostitute’s fee “is only a loaf of bread” the adulteress will take “his life” (6:26). Whybray suggests that this refers to the tendency of the adulteress to demand a life of luxury from her lover, thereby ruining his life.¹⁶³ Her luxurious lifestyle is attested to by the costly imported spices and fine Egyptian linens with which she prepares her bed. The punishment wrought is practical and tangible, involving the loss of income and social standing (6:30-33).¹⁶⁴ The one who responds positively to the adulteress is then subject to her husband’s furious revenge (6:34-35). Based on personal experience alone, the Strange Woman/ adulteress is a dangerous creature.

¹⁶³Whybray, *Proverbs*, 106. McKane, *Proverbs*, 316; cf. 330, prefers “dignity” to “life” in this passage.

¹⁶⁴McKane (*Proverbs*, 316) regards the consequences of a liason with Strange Woman to be primarily on the experiential level. He downplays the possible consequences both to the community and to its mythology.

Symbolic Level of the Covenant Community

The symbolism of Strange Woman/ adulteress is enriched on the level of the Israelite covenant community, or “the response of faith to divinely approved instruction.”¹⁶⁵ The association of adultery with infidelity to the covenant is well attested.¹⁶⁶ For example, Israel is the “unfaithful wife” who has broken the covenant relationship with God by seeking “other lovers” (i.e., the *b^e ‘alim*) in Hosea 1-3. Jeremiah similarly decries Israel for having “played the whore with many lovers” (Jer.3:1) in spite of their previous status as a beloved bride (Jer.2:1).¹⁶⁷ Here again, following lovers refers to worshipping the *b^e ‘alim* (Jer.2:8, 23). The term adultery, therefore, has a special significance for the covenant community; adultery or breaking the covenant of marriage refers to breaking the covenant relationship with God in this symbolic zone. Proverbs directs attention to the symbolic layer of the covenant community in this verse: “You will be saved from the Strange Woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God” (Prov.2: 16-17).¹⁶⁸ Thus, Strange Woman’s words, in comparison to the words of Wisdom, represent the teaching of apostasy (2:16-17), or as Carol Newsom puts it, the “rival

¹⁶⁵Habel, “Symbolism,” 150.

¹⁶⁶Israel is said “to play the harlot after other gods” in Ex.34:15; Lev.17:7, 20:5, 6; Dt.31:16; Jdgs. 2:17; 8:27, 33; 1 Chr.5:25; Jer.3:1, 6, 8; Ez.16:16-17, 26, 28, 34, 23:30 and Hos.3:3, 4:12-14.

¹⁶⁷M. DeRoche, “Israel’s ‘Two Evils’ in Jeremiah II 13,” *Vetus Testamentum* 31 no.3 (1981): 369-371, points out that the use of broken cisterns in Jer.2:13 probably refers to adultery. Pr.5:15-18.

¹⁶⁸Habel (“Symbolism,” 148) notes that Jeremiah 3:4 also refers to God as “the friend of my youth” who is forsaken by Israel. McKane (*Proverbs*, 286) claims that Strange Woman has forsaken the *instruction* of her youth.

discourse.”¹⁶⁹ Strange Woman/ adulteress’ polar opposite, Wisdom/ good wife, on the other hand, represents adherence and faithfulness to the law:

He taught me and said to me, “Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live. Get Wisdom; get insight: do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her and she will keep you; love her and she will guard you.” (4:4-6; cf. 28:4-9; 29:18).

Similarly, the reader is encouraged to:

Bind (*qâshar*) them about your heart (*lêb*) always; tie them around your neck. When you walk they will lead you; when you lie down they will watch over you; and when you awake they will talk with you (6:21-22)... Keep [the] commandments and live... bind (*qâshar*) them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart (*lêb*). Say to Wisdom, ‘You are my sister,’ and call insight your intimate friend, that they may keep you from the Strange Woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words (7:2-5).

Keeping the commandments in the heart, meditating on them day and night, and “binding” them to the fingers evokes similar covenantal language in Deut.6:4-9:

Hear O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart (*lêbâb*), and with all your soul and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart (*lêbâb*). Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind (*qâshar*) them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

In this way, faithfulness to the covenant is symbolized by the faithful “intimate” relationship to Wisdom/ good wife. Faithfulness to the commandments is also conveyed through use of “way” imagery. The sage teaches that the way to life is through obedience to the commandments: “For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a

¹⁶⁹“Women,” 144.

light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life” (6:23). Those who obey these commandments inherit the land:

So you will walk in the way of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will inhabit the land, and men of integrity will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it (2:20-22).

Following the way of Wisdom means obeying the commandments and dwelling in the land, both important elements of the covenant (Deut. 6:1-3). In contrast, *not* following the commandments, and thus approaching the way of Strange Woman, results in the loss of inheritance:

And now, O child, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house; or you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless; and strangers take their fill of your wealth, and your labors go to the house of an alien (Pr. 5:7-10).

The “two ways” imagery associated with the two female figures of Wisdom and Strange Woman augments the symbolism found at the level of the covenantal community and confirms that Strange Woman/ adulteress functions as a seductive symbol of apostasy to the covenantal community of Israel.¹⁷⁰

Some suggest that Strange Woman may also represent the cultic prostitutes of the various nations surrounding Israel. For example, Isaiah 57:3-13 describes the actions of a sorceress, adulteress or whore: she participates in sacrificial rites (Isa. 57:6-7; cf. Pr. 7:14), is located on the high places (Isa. 57:7; cf. Pr. 9:14) and prepares her bed for seduction

¹⁷⁰Habel (“Symbolism,” 135) called Wisdom and Strange Woman “companions of the way.” Wisdom presides over the straight path: “I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice, endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries” (8:20-21). *Strange Woman presides over the tortuous path that leads to Sheol*: “Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the paths to Sheol; she does not keep straight to the path of life; her ways wander and she does not know” (5:5-6; see also 2:18-19).

(Isa.57:8; cf. Pr.7:17). Indeed, Strange Woman is described with similar language. Habel says that “cult prostitution represented a highly respectable profession in numerous ancient cults while the prostitute plays the role of a sympathetic teacher in ancient literature.”¹⁷¹ He mentions the courtesan of the Gilgamesh Epic who trained Enkidu in culture, life and love.¹⁷² Likewise, Boström argues that Strange Woman is not an adulteress: her promiscuity is a cultic act intended to fulfil religious obligations to Ishtar. Adultery, therefore, is not the sin but rather the involvement in fertility rites of a foreign cult.¹⁷³ However, Proverbs is quite clear in identifying Strange Woman as an adulteress and not as a prostitute, even though she is “like a prostitute” (7:10).¹⁷⁴

Proverbs uses the seductive but forbidden figure of Strange Woman/adulteress to good effect. It is not difficult to imagine the possible appeal of different cultic practices,¹⁷⁵ especially when the post-exilic community struggles to make sense of their recent captivity in the light of their “chosen people” theology.¹⁷⁶ When the “companion of their youth” may not appear to satisfy their needs, they turn to other options. Proverbs recognizes the danger in this and seeks to affirm their covenant relationship while at the same time, it acknowledges the appeal of “illegal liaisons.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹Ibid., 143.

¹⁷²Ibid., 143.

¹⁷³G. Boström, *Proverbiastudien. Die Weisheit und das fremde Weib in Spr.1-9* (LUÅ N.F. Avd. I, Bd 30, Nr 3, Lund, 1935) 103. Cf. McKane, *Proverbs*, 334f; Whybray *Proverbs*, 115; Snijders, “Meaning,” 103; Ringgren, *Word*, 133ff.

¹⁷⁴So also McKane, *Proverbs*, 329.

¹⁷⁵Scott, *Proverbs*, 43.

¹⁷⁶For dating and context, see R. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs* (London: SCM, 1965) 30ff; Camp, *Wisdom*; Blenkinsopp, “Social Context,” 472.

¹⁷⁷So also, Crenshaw, “Proverbs,” 515.

Symbolic Level of Mythological Reflection

A third level of symbolism that enriches the interpretation of Strange Woman/adulteress is the symbolic zone which Habel labels “cosmological.” This zone naturally overlaps with the other two zones, those of personal experience and of the covental community, and “extends into the fields of cultic imagery and mythic tradition”¹⁷⁸ through reflection on primordial and cosmic relationships of Wisdom and Strange Woman. Wisdom mythology is highly developed in Proverbs, especially in terms of her presence before and during creation.

The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth - when he had yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race (8:22-31).

Wisdom's polar opposite, Strange Woman, is not presented in the same fashion. Her beginning is not revealed. The cosmic consequences of responding positively to her invitation, however, are described in vivid detail; her way leads to the shades (2:18), to Sheol (5:5; 7:27) and to the “chambers of death” (7:27). Her mouth is a “deep pit” into which “he with whom the LORD is angry” falls (22:14).¹⁷⁹ Her invitation to spend the

¹⁷⁸Habel, “Symbolism,” 150.

¹⁷⁹4Q184 says: “In perversion they seized the fouled [organs] of her passion, they descended the pit of her legs to act wickedly, and behave with the guilt of transgression.”

night may even refer to the activities of a fertility cult.¹⁸⁰ Association with Strange Woman/ adulteress drags one down into the depths of immorality and ultimate death. In stark contrast to the ordered creation of Wisdom, the anomaly of Strange Woman's social status reflects only chaos.

By considering the symbolism of Strange Woman/ adulteress on the three levels of personal experience, covenant community and primordial mythology, layers of meaning are piled on the Strange Woman. As an adulteress, she represents a threat at all three levels of reflection: she threatens the stability of family relations and kinship ties on the experiential level, she threatens the perpetuation of the covenant on the theological level, and she threatens the mythological imagination of all who are seduced by her.

Strange Woman as Foreign Woman

Before discussing the Strange Woman as a foreign woman, some nuancing of terms is necessary. First of all, the term γυναικὸς ἀλλοτριᾶς may mean "a woman of another place," which suggests that Strange Woman comes from another country to dwell among Israel. However, strangers do not necessarily have to come from another country to be "strange"; unusual actions and beliefs, especially those which are perceived as dangerous to the community, separate people from each another in such a way that they are marginalized by the community in which they live. In other words, they could be "estranged" rather than "foreign."¹⁸¹ Estrangement may be a result of non-compliance

¹⁸⁰Habel, "Symbolism," 152.

¹⁸¹Based on the broader use of *zar*, Snijders ("Meaning," 63f, 78, 89) argues that Strange Woman may in fact be an Israelite, who for some reason or another has been estranged from the dominant community. One who associates with her would be similarly estranged. Cf. McKane (*Proverbs*, 334) who concludes that Strange Woman is a *foreign* woman, not just estranged.

to social norms such as in religious practice or in interpersonal relationships. The actual term “stranger” is rather vague in the Book of Proverbs and is generally used in discussions of surety (6:1; 11:15; 20:16; 27:13) or in reference to those who are otherwise unknown in the community (14:10; 27:2). In this thesis, therefore, the use of the term “foreign” combines the notions of “one born in another country” and “one who is estranged from their community of origin.” The sense of the term is “outsider.”

Symbolic Level of Personal Experience

As well as depicting Strange Woman as an adulteress, Proverbs also presents her as a foreign woman though not to the same extent. In a warning against associating with Strange Woman, it says,

And now, O child, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house; or you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless; and strangers take their fill of your wealth, and your labors go to the house of an alien (5:7-11).

Similarly, Proverbs 5:17 states “Let [your springs] be for yourself alone, and not for sharing with strangers.” Though Strange Woman may be seen as a foreign woman or “outsider,” she is a foreign woman who lives in the midst of the community. Her house is near the street within sight of others (7:7-8). Her “feet do not stay at home; now in the street, now in the squares, and at every corner she lies in wait” (7:7-12). She is “the stranger among us.”¹⁸² Though the reference to Strange Woman/ foreign woman is not as strong as Strange Woman/ adulteress, strangers are generally perceived with a certain

¹⁸²Camp (“Wise,” 21-22) suggests that, by acknowledging the presence of foreigners, the sages then attempt to “integrate disorder, the anomalous, into their daily lives.” It is only through knowledge of evil that knowledge of wisdom can be achieved.

element of suspicion in the text.¹⁸³ For example, the reader is warned against becoming indebted to a stranger - one who is so bound, is like a “gazelle to the hunter” (6:1-5). Blenkinsopp suggests that the diatribe against the Strange Woman reflects the social context of the early post-exilic period in which the dominant elite intended to preserve their economic assets and social status.¹⁸⁴ Marrying a foreign woman would mean the loss of land and property as well as expulsion from the religious community, according to Ezra. Some of the returning exiles left their wives in order to marry native land-owning women so that they could reclaim the land which had once been theirs. As well as reclaiming the land, community leaders would marry foreigners in order to gain political power and social status. Blenkinsopp argues, then, that the Book of Proverbs warns the elite against exogamy in order to protect their property and status of social position.¹⁸⁵ Whatever the intention of this text might be, the Strange Woman/ foreign woman is seen to represent a social threat on the experiential level.

Symbolic Level of the Covenant Community

On the level of theological reflection, the way in which the text emphasizes kinship and parental teaching draws a line between the covenant community and foreigners or “outsiders”;¹⁸⁶ parents teach their children all that is necessary for a prosperous and successful life based on “the fear of the LORD.”¹⁸⁷ A foreigner, then, or

¹⁸³6:1-5, 11:15, 20:16; 27:13.

¹⁸⁴“Social Context,” 471-472.

¹⁸⁵Based on Egyptian texts, McKane (*Proverbs*, 284-285, 339) argues that liaisons with women were often the ruin of a man’s career. He sees no need to introduce a cultic theory to explain Strange Woman’s place in this text.

¹⁸⁶The reader is addressed as “my child” (1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; 5:1, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1; 19:27; 23:15, 19, 26; 24:13, 21; 27:11; 31:2).

¹⁸⁷1:7, 29; 2:5, 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26, 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17.

one who is not taught the “fear of the LORD” by their parents, may be a dangerous threat to the self-identity of the community. Foreigners teach intriguing possibilities of alternative ways¹⁸⁸ and function with a different set of values.¹⁸⁹ They threaten national and ethnic identity - even the spoken language.¹⁹⁰ In addition, foreign gods¹⁹¹ introduced into the community through relationships with foreigners threaten Israel’s strict monotheistic faith.¹⁹² The polemic against breach of endogamy laws in other texts suggests that this may have been a widespread problem.¹⁹³ Strange Woman personifies the foreigner, then, who perseveres in their own teaching and in their own cultic practices even while in the midst of another community.¹⁹⁴

Symbolic Level of Mythological Reflection

On the mythological level, Strange Woman/ foreign woman symbolizes the foreign goddess who opposes divine Wisdom.¹⁹⁵ Like Wisdom, she too speaks in the first person to teach and persuade. Like Wisdom, she presides over a path that has eternal consequences, but her path leads foolish people away from the source of life

¹⁸⁸Dt. 13:6-11 condemns to death those who “entice” others to pursue foreign gods. Habel, “Symbolism,” 143.

¹⁸⁹So also, Scott, *Proverbs*, 43; McKane, *Proverbs*, 286.

¹⁹⁰Blenkinsopp, “Social Context,” 459.

¹⁹¹For example, Gen.35:2; Ex.34:11-16; Num.25:1-3, etc.

¹⁹²For example, Ex. 20:3, 23; Dt.5:7; 6:14; 11:16, 28, etc.

¹⁹³For example, Dt. 7:3-4, Josh. 23:12, Ezra 9:11-12 and Neh. 13:23-27. Blenkinsopp, “Social Context,” provides a full discussion of the sanction against marriage with foreign women.

¹⁹⁴Blenkinsopp (“Social Context”, 468) argues that, in this social context, marriage to a foreign wife would constitute not only loss of land inheritance but also being “cut off” from the covenant community (Pr.2:21-22; cf. Isa. 57:13).

¹⁹⁵Habel’s (“Symbolism,” 156) designation of Strange Woman as the “goddess of the underworld” is quite limited in scope. The multiple names used to describe her suggest that there was more than one goddess figure provoking mythological reflection.

(8:35-36). Like a patron of a cult, she constructs a rival temple (“house,” 7:8; 9:27). The word “strange” is often used to describe false gods; the worship of foreign goddesses in the Ancient Near East is well-documented and their growing popularity represents a threat to the confidence of Israel’s mythology.¹⁹⁶ The cultic practices around Asherah, in particular, presented a challenge to the covenant community.¹⁹⁷ Some commentators argue that the figure of Wisdom actually developed in response to the influence of goddess worship on their community, with Strange Woman taking the role of the rival goddess(es).¹⁹⁸

In short, the symbolic interpretation of Strange Woman/ foreign woman expands through consideration on three levels. On the experiential level, she underscores the common mistrust and suspicion that foreigners evoke in a community not their own. On the theological level, she represents both the teacher of heresy who leads the young astray and the practitioner of foreign cults contaminating Israelite monotheism. On the mythical level, she evokes the various goddesses of the ancient world. In all three areas, she threatens the security of the reader.

Strange Woman as Foolish Woman

Symbolic Level of Personal Experience

Finally, Strange Woman is associated with foolish woman, sometimes referred to as Lady Folly. On the experiential level of symbolism, Strange Woman/ foolish woman represents one who rebels against appropriate socialization. “A foolish woman is noisy;

¹⁹⁶See, for example, Jer.2:25, 3:13.

¹⁹⁷Blenkinsopp, “Social Context,” 463-464. See also Whybray, *Proverbs*, 117-118.

¹⁹⁸See G. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM, 1972)153; B. Lang, *Frau Weisheit* (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1975) 170; Blenkinsopp, “Social Context”; Whybray, *Wisdom*, 90-91 and McKane’s extensive survey in *Proverbs*.

she is wanton and knows no shame” (9:13). Inappropriate use of speech is particularly detestable - speech which is slanderous (10:18), lacking in sense (10:21), imprudent (12:16; 12:23; 14:8), ignorant (14:7; 15:2, 7, 14), quick-tempered (14:17), perverse (19:1), and opinionated (18:2). Foolish woman personifies the fool, who, the sage says, causes chaos in the midst of the community. Thus, he warns the reader to reject foolish behaviour.

Symbolic Level of the Covenant Community

At the covenantal community level of symbolism, Strange Woman/ foolish woman represents one who is rebellious in regards to the covenant. Of foolish woman, Proverbs 9:13 says that she “is ignorant and knows nothing.” Fools are identified as those who “despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7; 23:9) and “hate knowledge” (1:22). They do wrong zestfully (10:23; 14:16) without regard for reproof or correction (12:1; 15:5; 17:10; 27:2). In their rebellion, they grieve their parents (15:20; 17:21, 25; 19:13) and receive both disgrace (3:35; 26:1) and ruin (10:8, 14). Adherence to the commandments, therefore, distinguishes the wise from the foolish.¹⁹⁹ Strange Woman/ foolish woman represents the one who has no “fear of the LORD”; she does not know nor follow the commandments, and will not listen to the rebuke and discipline of the wise (i.e., parental figures) of the covenant community.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹The opposition between wise and foolish shape the text, as in 14:16, 33; 15:2.

²⁰⁰Crenshaw (“Proverbs,” 515) argues that the discursive nature of the text calls the reader “to adopt the position of a son subject to an authoritative father” and that “the father adheres to the belief that allegiance precedes knowledge, so that habitual conduct eventually creates its own ethos in which such behavior becomes natural, like breathing.”

Symbolic Level of Mythological Reflection

On the mythological level of symbolism, Strange Woman/ foolish woman sits at the door of her house and calls to those who pass by; those who accept her invitation find only death (9:13-18). She also sits “at the high places of the town” which may refer to the notorious location of forbidden cultic practice (9:14).²⁰¹ Most significant, perhaps, is the notion that Strange Woman/ foolish woman “knows nothing” (9:13). Wisdom, on the other hand, knows all things (Pr.2:6, 10; 3:19, 20; Wis.7:17-22; 9:11), even the creation of the world (8:1-31). As a cosmological symbol, foolish woman is depicted as ignorance personified.

Strange Woman therefore encompasses three main aspects: she is an adulteress, a foreigner living in the community and a foolish woman. Though she is often painted as charming and enticing, the one who responds to her seduction faces deadly consequences. The symbol of Strange Woman carries force through three levels: traditional “wisdom” reflection on personal experience, theological reflection of the covenantal community and mythological reflection of cosmic imagery. Comparison to Wisdom heightens, clarifies and elaborates this symbol of Strange Woman through all of these zones. On one side, Wisdom represents all that is socially acceptable, all that is within the scope of the covenantal community, and all that shapes and pervades creation. Strange Woman, on the other side, represents all that is socially unacceptable, all that undermines the theological community and all that suggests an alternative mythology. In short, Strange Woman serves as a metaphor for the social, religious, and mythical “other”

²⁰¹For high places as sites of cultic worship, see Lev.26:30; Num.33:52; 1 Kgs.3:2,3; 2 Kgs.23:19; 2 Chr.21:11, 28:4; Ps.78:58; Eccl.10:6; Jer.19:5, 32:35 and Ez.6:6. Note that Wisdom also stands “on the heights” (Pr.8:2).

against which the discourse of the text is directed. Even the terms used to describe her - "the woman of another place or person" - connote this sense of "otherness." As a textual construct, this polarity serves to align the reader with Wisdom against Strange Woman in the manner of sectarian literature, reinforcing the ideology of the ethos of the family.²⁰² Joseph Blenkinsopp says it well when he says that Strange Woman is defined "negatively" or "out of a certain normative group or category." He goes on to say, "Her social status is therefore determined with reference to a particular social configuration to which a normative character is assigned."²⁰³

²⁰²So also, Crenshaw, "Proverbs," 515.

²⁰³Blenkinsopp, "Social Context," 463.

Chapter 5: The Samaritan Woman

In this section, as with Strange Woman, I will consider the Samaritan Woman in John 4:1-42 on three layers of symbolic meaning: the experiential level, the communal level and the cosmological level.²⁰⁴ Each symbolic layer contributes to the depth of meaning in this gospel; working in tandem, the various layers expose certain aspects of the text which would otherwise remain beyond the reach of the interpreter. At the same time, I will compare the three aspects of Strange Woman - adulteress, foreign and foolish - with the presentation of the Samaritan Woman across these symbolic zones. In this way, I will show that the Samaritan Woman reflects the paradigm of the Strange Woman.

At this point, I would draw attention to this woman's anonymity. Like other anonymous characters of the Fourth Gospel, such as the beloved disciple, the blind man and the royal official, her anonymity accomplishes three things. First, her character can represent a group or stereotype without limit and throughout various symbolic fields. Her character is not tied to a historical person identified by genealogy, profession, or physical characteristics. We are not told her name, age, appearance, or disposition; she represents much more than any historically named person could. Anonymous, her power to represent collectives - especially the Samaritan collective - is enhanced without the threat of losing her particularity.²⁰⁵ Secondly, her lack of name serves to divert the reader's

²⁰⁴I have not found any work which looks at these three layers of symbolism in this text, though Olsson (*Structure*, 122ff) provides a survey of allegorical and symbolic interpretations of Jn.4.

²⁰⁵S. M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) 189. W. Watty, "The Significance of Anonymity in the Fourth Gospel," *Expository Times* 90 (1979) 211, claims that the woman is unnamed because she existed in the post-apostolic age; only apostles who lived at the

attention from the unnamed characters to the named character, Jesus. It thus serves a theological purpose. Thirdly, according to Beck, it serves to further a reader's identification with a character by creating a gap which the reader is invited to fill with his/her own identity in order to "experience" the narrative as an active participant.²⁰⁶

The reader's participation in her revelatory experience is aided because she is not a particular character whose name sets her apart as distinct from the reader but a woman (as you may be) who is scorned by her community (as we may sometimes be) because of her own life choices (choices we all make).²⁰⁷

These three factors suggest that the Samaritan Woman's anonymity is significant, not only in the literary sense, but also in the theological and rhetorical sense.

A brief survey of the Samaritans will prepare the ground for the following discussion. The Samaritans find their origin in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The ten tribes which belonged to this kingdom were defeated and taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E. (2 Kgs. 17:24ff). The Assyrians relocated five other nations in the cities of Samaria; these immigrants intermarried and mingled with the Israelites who were left behind. The resulting admixture of Israelite and pagan developed a theology and cult of its own particularity focusing on credal beliefs in the Pentateuch and worship on Mt. Gerizim, the location of various shrines and holy sites instituted by the patriarchs. In the meantime, Judea had been taken into exile by the Babylonians. After their return

same time as Jesus are named and other names distract from the person of Jesus. M. Natanson, *Anonymity: A Study in the Philosophy of Alfred Schutz* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 23-25, 163-170; T. Docherty, *Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterization in Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983).

²⁰⁶D. R. Beck, "The Narrative Function of Anonymity in Fourth Gospel Characterization," *Semeia* 63 (1993): 143-158.

²⁰⁷Beck, "Narrative," 151.

around 538 B.C.E., they proceeded to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.²⁰⁸ When the Samaritans offered to help to restore the temple, the Jews refused them (Ez.4:1ff).

Mordecai Cogan claims that the biblical texts reflect two main attitudes towards the Samaritans.²⁰⁹ The first effectively excluded the Samaritans from the community of Israel. The Deuteronomistic text of II Kgs.17: 24-33 places idolatrous action as the issue. The supporting text of Ezra 4:1-5, though not specific in its rebuke, also favors the “Golah community” which struggled to preserve its “holy seed” through marriage and purity laws. Both of these texts possibly express the “growing bitterness” of a later time, a time which Cogan locates in the post-exilic period; the returned exiles resented those who had remained behind. The later Persian text of II Chronicles 30, however, presents the Samaritans in another light. In this account, Hezekiah invites the Samaritans to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem and many respond. Eventually, all those who had remained in Israel were fully integrated into the Jewish community. Thus, the text of Chronicles welcomes all those who returned whole-heartedly to the LORD; the Samaritans were considered full members of Israel. This is in accord with the Samaritans own self-image conveyed in the Samaritan Chronicles, that of the “true Israel.” The tension between Jews and Samaritans is evident in the discourse between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman.

Josephus states that, when it suited their purposes, the Samaritans aligned themselves with the Jews. He also reports that the Samaritans provided sanctuary for Jerusalemites who were accused of breaking the law.²¹⁰ When there was a disadvantage to being associated with the Jews they separated themselves, even to the point of

²⁰⁸E. Barnavi, *Historical Atlas of the Jewish People* (London: Hutchinson, 1992) 30.

²⁰⁹“For we, Like you, Worship your God: Three Biblical Portrayals of Samaritan Origins,” *Vetus Testamentum*, 38 no.3 (1988): 286-292.

²¹⁰*Ant.* 11.8.7

declaring themselves to be enemies of the Jews, engaging in combat and purposefully interfering with Jewish festivals in Jerusalem.²¹¹ Thus, the few texts which describe the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans are not inconsistent.

Samaritan Woman as Adulteress

Symbolic Level of Personal Experience

The Samaritan Woman is introduced as a woman who comes to the well to draw water. Jesus asks her for a drink. After a discussion about water, Jesus says to her, "Go, call your husband and come back" (4:16). The woman responds that she has no husband. Jesus answers:

You are right in saying, "You have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true! (4:18)

On the narrative level of the story, it is unclear why the woman has had five husbands. It may be that she is a widow five times, the victim of tragic circumstances like Tamar whose marriage and levirate marriages failed to produce an heir (Gen. 38:1-30), or Sarah in the Book of Tobit whose husbands were killed by a demon-lover (Tob.3:7-9). It may equally be that the Samaritan Woman was an adulteress who took several men as husbands. They may even have been the husbands of others. Some commentators suggest that the woman was a victim of abuse.²¹² Regardless of the situation, having more than three husbands is a social anomaly.²¹³ Phyllis Bird argues that texts presuppose that harlots are recognized as marginal figures, "tolerated but not

²¹¹*Ant.* 11.8.6; 12.5.5; 20.6.1ff.

²¹²S. Nortjé, "The Role of Women in the Fourth Gospel," *Neotestamentica* 20 (1986): 25.

²¹³Jews allow three marriages only, and it is possible that Samaritans had the same restriction. Bultmann, *John*, 188.

despised.”²¹⁴ Though the Samaritan Woman is not named a harlot *per se*, she carries the stigma of a social outcast because of her anomalous marital status; though she is not designated an adulteress exactly, it strongly implies that she is immoral.²¹⁵

Though the exact nature of her marital relationships is unclear, the text suggests that it is an important point in the discourse. Because Jesus tells the woman “everything she ever did”, she “sees” that he is a prophet. Most commentators focus on the fact of Jesus’ self-revelation here rather than on the content of his prophecy. When attention is paid to her marital status, the tendency is to regard her as a sinner in need of repentance or as symbolically representing the nation of Samaria.²¹⁶ My point here is that Jesus could have prophesied about any number of subjects. That he speaks to her marital status suggests that her marital status - with its accompanying marginalization - is an important element in the narrative and must be taken seriously.

This narrative content is reinforced by literary devices which, on the one hand, emphasize the importance of sexuality, but on the other hand, conceal it. The first indication is the emphasis on gender distinction: the Samaritan is a woman, Jesus is a man.²¹⁷ The second is the use of a literary trope which evokes the betrothal motif. The

²¹⁴“The Harlot as Heroine: Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts,” *Semeia* 46 (1989):119-139.

²¹⁵So also Olsson, *Structure*, 338; Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 468; C. M. Carmichael, “Marriage and the Samaritan Woman,” *New Testament Studies* 26 (1980) 338; Bultmann, *John*, 188; Brown, *John*, 171; Okure, *Johannine*, 110; cf. Schneiders, *Revelatory*, 189; Witherington, *Women*, 60.

²¹⁶For example, Bultmann, *John*, 187; M. Hogan, “The Woman at the Well,” *The Bible Today* (Feb.1976): 663-669; J. R. Michaels, *John* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984) 54-55; Painter, *Quest*, 204; Botha, *Reading*, 142-143; Boers, *Mountain*, 172; Witherington, *Women*, 59.

²¹⁷Cf. De Boer, “John 4:27- Women (and Men) in the Gospel and Community of John,” *Women in the Biblical Tradition* (edited by George J. Brooke; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992) 213, argues that nationality is emphasized over and against gender.

third device is the strong element of sexual innuendo and double entendre. These three literary tools indicate that sexuality is an important element in the discourse between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, while at the same time, they cloak sexuality behind hints and ambiguity.²¹⁸ As Botha says, “overt means make the point, covert means drive it home.”²¹⁹ In order to lay the groundwork for a comparison between the Strange Woman and the Samaritan Woman, I will look at these literary techniques more closely.

The text emphasizes the gender of the woman. She is identified by the specific designation ἡ γυνή, the “woman,” a designation used twelve times in this pericope. She actually draws attention to herself as a woman: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (4:9). Furthermore, Jesus addresses her as “Woman,” in the vocative (4:21). Finally, the disciples are astonished that Jesus is speaking to a woman. Rabbinic texts suggest that conversations between men and women are an anomaly. For example,

Jose b. Johanan of Jerusalem warned: “Talk not much with womankind.”
They say this of a man’s wife; how much more of his fellow’s wife.
Hence the sages have said: “He that talks much with womankind brings
evil upon himself.”²²⁰

Also, “It is forbidden to give a woman any greeting.”²²¹ In the absence of naming, the text goes out of its way to emphasize the gender of the second speaker in this story. Obvious in contrast, is the gender of Jesus, and (most likely) that of the disciples.

²¹⁸Scott (*Sophia*, 238-239) admits to a certain note of sexuality in the relationship between some of the women in this gospel and Jesus. He cites the stories of the Samaritan woman and of Mary when she anoints Jesus’ feet as examples.

²¹⁹Botha, *Reading*, 190.

²²⁰m. Pirke Aboth 1:5.

²²¹b. Kiddushim 70a.

In addition to drawing attention to the mixed gender of the two meeting in isolated conversation, the encounter of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman further evokes the traditional narrative trope of the betrothal scene.²²² Three main stories from the Pentateuch contribute to this narrative pattern: the accounts of the betrothal of Isaac, Jacob and Moses. The following chart indicates the various elements which these stories have in common with the story in John 4. I also include Josephus' account of Moses' betrothal because he adds several interesting details to the biblical account.²²³

From this comparison of narrative elements in the betrothal scenes of Isaac, Jacob and Moses with the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan Woman, several similarities may be observed. Most consistently, these stories describe a man (or, in the case of Isaac, his surrogate) who travels to a foreign country where he meets a woman (or women) at a well. A problem about water arises and is followed by a satisfactory resolution. She introduces him to her kin. He receives a positive response from them. The man and woman marry. The story of the Samaritan Woman in John 4 differs from these other stories in one essential element, however; unlike the patriarchs and Moses, Jesus does not wed the woman he meets at the well, that is, if we can assume as much

²²²J. Neyrey, "Jacob Traditions and the Interpretation of John 4:10-26," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979) 425f; Cahill, "Narrative," 45; Eslinger, "Wooing," 168f. Staley (*Print's*, 99) calls this "a brilliant parody of the patriarchal betrothal scenes" which "subtly instructs [the reader] in how to read intertextually." R. Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981) provides a full discussion on type-scenes. Cf. O'Day, *Revelation*, 132; Botha, *Reading*, 191; M. Pamment, "Is there convincing evidence of Samaritan Influence on the Fourth Gospel?" *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 73 (1982): 222; Lieu, "Scripture," 232. Painter (*Quest*, 201) prefers to see a "quest" motif.

²²³So also J. H. Bernard *St. John* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1928) 136; Olsson, *Structure*, 150. Philo's account (*De Vita Mosis* I, 51-60 [translated by C. D. Yonge; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993]) focuses more on the outrage aroused in Moses by the "lazy" shepherds and less on Moses' marriage to one of the women.

Narrative Element	Jesus and the Samaritan Woman	Isaac and Rebecca	Jacob and Rachel	Moses and Zipporah	Moses and Zipporah
reference	John 4	Genesis 24	Genesis 29	Exodus 2:15-22	Josephus Ant. 2
man/agent travels	to Samaria 4:4	to Nahor 24:10	to Haran 27:43	to Midian 2:15	to Midian 2:257
because of conflict	with Pharisees 4:1-3		with Esau 27:43-44	with Pharoah 2:15	the king of Egypt 2:255
led by God	4:4	24:48	28:15		
outside the city	4:5	24:11	29:2		2:257
time of day	"noon" 4:6	"evening" 24:11	"daylight" 29:7		"noon" 2:257
man is tired	4:6				2:257
man sits by a well	4:6	stands 24:43	29:2	2:15	2:257
woman comes to draw water	4:7	24:13,45	29:6	2:16	2:258
she is described	she has 5 husbands and the man she has now is not her husband 4:18	"very fair, a virgin whom no man had known" 24:16	"graceful and beautiful" 29:17	"the seven daughters of the priest of Midian" 2:16	"the seven sisters that were virgins, the daughters of Raguel a priest" 2:258
he speaks to her first	"Give me a drink" 4:7	"Please let me sip a little water from your jar" 24:17			
dilemna about water	will be thirsty again 4:7-15	drinking jar needed 24:17	flocks must gather 29:8	shepherds interfer 2:17	shepherds interfer 2:260
she gives water to him		24:18-20			
he gives her animals water	offers living water 4:10		29:10	2:17	2:260
her jar is mentioned	4:28	24:20		"trough" 2:16	"trough" 2:259
he is related to her	"our ancestor, Jacob"? 4:12	24:15,27	29:12		
she tells her people about him	4:28	24:28	29:12	2:19	2:261
her people come to meet him or he goes to them	Samaritans come to see Jesus 4:30	Laban ran to meet him 24:29	Laban ran to meet him 29:13	Moses goes to Reuel 2:20	Moses goes to Raguel 2:261
he stays with them	4:40	24:23	29:14	2:22	2:263
they are favorably impressed	4:41	24:31	29:14	2:20	2:262
he gives something to the woman	"living water"? 4:15	gold and clothes 24:22,53		defense against shepherds 2:17	defense against shepherds 2:261
he gives gifts to her kin	"salvation" 4:42	costly ornaments 24:53	14 years of labour 29:20,30		
man and woman are betrothed		24:50	29:19	2:21	2:263
They celebrate a meal	I have food to eat which you do not know" 4:32	24:54		2:20	

from the silence of the text. The woman all but disappears once the Samaritans are introduced. Furthermore, the “wedding supper” is thwarted by Jesus’ refusal to eat the food brought by the disciples from the town - his food is to “do the will of him who sent me” (4:34). In spite of the unexpected ending, a comparison of narrative patterns demonstrates that the encounter of the Samaritan Woman and Jesus is based on this betrothal motif.²²⁴

A review of the first three chapters of the Fourth Gospel demonstrates that the introduction of a betrothal motif is not totally unanticipated. Like Isaac’s surrogate and Jacob who traveled a long distance to seek a wife from their own kin, Jesus “came to his own” (1:10), he “dwelled among them” (1:14) and made his Father known to them (1:18). John the Baptist heralds Jesus as the bridegroom (1:29, 36; 3:29).²²⁵ Jesus provides good wine at a wedding banquet in Cana (2:1-11). The introduction of yet another wedding motif comes as no great surprise. Jesus meets this woman at the most famous well in Samaria, at the well that is dug by the founding ancestor, Jacob, the nation’s namesake. Other clues within the narrative of John 4 itself further direct the reader’s attention to the betrothal motif. Three direct references to Jacob’s well in John 4:5, 6, 12 remind the reader of Jacob’s encounter with Rachel at the well and of his love for her (Gen.29: 9,18).²²⁶ As well, the identification of Jesus as a prophet reminds the

²²⁴Okure (*Johannine*, 88) argues that the absence of a marriage and the multiple husbands of the woman prevent identification of this narrative with the biblical betrothal scenes.

²²⁵Schneiders (*Revelatory*, 187) claims that Jesus, assuming the role of Yahweh the bridegroom of ancient Israel, is betrothed to the New Israel which represents the Christian, and specifically, the Johannine Christian community. Though this “works well,” the identity of the bride is not explicitly stated in the text.

²²⁶Carmichael (“Marriage,” 337) notes that the correlation between John 4 and Gen.29 is particularly strong. Like Rachel, the Samaritan Woman comes to the well at an odd time of day, high noon (Gen.29:7). Jacob and Rachel are close blood relations. Similarly,

reader of Moses, who had a similar encounter at a well (4:19). Most dramatic of all, perhaps, is the sexual innuendo which pervades the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman.

The Fourth Gospel hides sexuality behind double entendre and innuendo. Lyle Eslinger has thoroughly outlined the use of double entendre in John 4 in his article, "The Wooing of the Samaritan Woman at the Well."²²⁷ In this article, he argues that double entendre - defined as a "word that conveys an indelicate meaning under cover of an innocent one"²²⁸ - is a literary strategy used to mislead the reader who will share the experience of misunderstanding with the characters first-hand, and who will thus be more sympathetic. Needless to say, this hidden meaning is ambiguous, and "rests solely with the beholder." Though I will lean heavily on the observations which Eslinger has made, I will use them for another purpose, namely, to highlight the sexual dimension of the exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman.²²⁹

The narrative scene is set when Jesus, weary from his journey and aware of the conflict he has left behind, sits down to rest around the noon hour. Repeated emphasis on the location of the well concretizes the scene, making it more tangible. Stating the time further locates this scene in temporal space. The disciples go to look for food - suggesting a physical hunger as yet unsatisfied - and Jesus is left alone. A Samaritan woman approaches the well to draw water and Jesus asks her for a drink. The literal translation of the Greek in this verse suggests the more passive role of Jesus: "Give me to

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman are close relations, ethically-speaking. There is already an implicit reference to Jacob in Jn. 1:51. So also Dodd, *Interpretation*, 245-246.

²²⁷*Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol.1, No.2 (September 1987): 167-183. See also Lieu, "Scripture," 231.

²²⁸Eslinger, "Wooing," 169.

²²⁹The seductive attitude of the Samaritan Woman is disputed by Schneiders, *Revelatory*, 187.

drink (Δός μοι πείν).”²³⁰ Jesus comes across as hot, exhausted, weak and vulnerable.²³¹

The setting of the scene raises expectations of a sexual encounter.

The Samaritan Woman’s response suggests such sexual possibilities: “‘How is it that you a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’ (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)” (Jn.4:9). This “sharing of things in common” has been the focus of a great deal of discussion. Most commentators will agree with Daube who, on the basis of rabbinic texts, suggests that συγγράομαι means “to share common vessels”.²³² Samaritans and Jews did not share vessels because Samaritan women were considered to be “menstruants from the cradle”²³³ and thus ritually impure. They would transfer this impurity to the vessels they used and hence to another using the same vessel.²³⁴ Daube’s argument depends upon regarding the dative Σαμαρείταις as the object governed by the prepositional prefix συν-, with “vessels” serving as the implied direct object of the verb, even though no other parallels in Greek literature can be found for this reading. Daube renders the verse thus: “Jews do not use (vessels) together with

²³⁰Cf. Olsson, *Structure*, 176.

²³¹So also Okure, *Johannine*, 87.

²³²D. Daube, “Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: The Meaning of συγγράομαι,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1950): 137-147; so also Barrett, *Gospel*, 232; Brown, *John*, 170; Carmichael, “Marriage,” 336. E. Pollard, “Jesus and the Samaritan Woman,” *Expository Times* 92 (1981) 148, arrives at the same conclusion on the basis that Augustine of Hippo understood συγγράομαι to mean “sharing vessels.” Cf. Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 425.

²³³Mishnah Niddah 4:1; Tosephta, Nidd. 5:1. R. G. Maccini, “A Reassessment of the Woman at the Well in John 4 in Light of the Samaritan Context,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 53 (1994): 41, disagrees that Samaritan women were considered to be perpetually impure and cites other Samaritan texts which challenge the notion of menstruant impurity. He argues that this constraint may have been framed by the rabbis to keep Jews from marrying Samaritan women. In fact, the “routine application of rabbinical teachings to the Samaritan woman is inappropriate.” Cf. J. D. Derrett, “The Samaritan Woman’s Purity,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 60 no.4 (1988): 291-298.

²³⁴Mishnah Kelim 1.1ff.

Samaritans.” D. R. Hall, on the other hand, argues that συγχράομαι often takes the direct object in the dative, and cites συνακολουθέω, συνέπομαι, συνευδοκέω as examples of verbs with the συν- prefix which also take the object in the dative.²³⁵ The prepositional prefix συν- does not mean, “[verb] along with other people,” nor does it govern an object of its own but rather, it is strongly associated with the simple verb χράομαι which it intensifies. The simple verb χράομαι, when used with a personal object, means “to treat a person in a certain way” according to Bauer,²³⁶ or specifically, “to treat someone as a friend,” so Liddell and Scott.²³⁷ With the added prefix, συγ- χράομαι may be rendered as an emotionally charged social interaction which Eslinger, given the prevalence of double entendre in this passage, translates as “to be intimate with” or “to have sexual intercourse with.”²³⁸ Therefore, the Samaritan Woman’s response to Jesus that Samaritans and Jews are “not intimate” suggests on one level, the basic impropriety of their conversation, and on another level, that sexual intercourse was perhaps a possibility between them.²³⁹

²³⁵D. R. Hall, “The Meaning of συγχράομαι in John 4:9,” *The Expository Times* 83 (Oct. 1971- Sept. 1972): 56-57; so also Eslinger, “Wooing,” 176.

²³⁶W. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (translated by W. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957/1979) 884.

²³⁷So also Liddell and Scott sv.IV.2

²³⁸Eslinger, “Wooing,” 176, 183. In addition, the biblical use of “vessels” as a euphemism for sexual organs in 1 Sam.21:5 might support Eslinger’s claim.

²³⁹Olsson (*Structure*, 155, 177) is open to the possibility that this is a double entendre referring to both social interaction and purification issues. J. D. M. Derrett, “The Samaritan Woman’s Pitcher,” *The Downside Review* (Oct. 1984): 252-261, claims ambiguously that συγχρῶται means “make use of.” Her five husbands have made use of her, now how can she be of use to Jesus?

Jesus responds to the woman's objection by offering her "living water."

According to Eslinger, water images often serve as euphemisms for sexuality. Take for example, the exhortation to marital faithfulness in Proverbs 5:15-18.

Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water (πηγῆς) from your own well (φρέατων).

Should your springs (ὕδατα ἐκ τῆς σῆς πηγῆς) be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?

Let them be for yourself alone, and not for sharing with strangers.

Let your fountain (ἡ πηγή σου) be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely hind, a graceful doe.

May her breasts satisfy you at all times;

May you be intoxicated always by her love.

Here, the language of water is used to make a sexual point: drinking "from your own cistern" refers to sexual intercourse, the "springs" refer to male semen and the "well" (φρέαρ) and "fountain" (πηγή) refer to the anatomy of a woman.²⁴⁰ Song of Solomon 4:12-15 also refers to a woman as a fountain and a well:

A garden locked is my sister, my bride,
a garden locked, a fountain sealed...
a garden fountain (πηγή κήπων), a well (φρέαρ) of living water,
and flowing streams from Lebanon.

Leviticus 12:7 and 20:18, which refer to a woman's "flow" as πηγή, would also support this interpretation.²⁴¹ In Jeremiah 2:13, God is referred to as the "fountain of living water" of "the faithless wife" Israel (Jer.2:2, 24, 32; 3:1-5, 20). Here again, as in Proverbs 5, sexual infidelity is referred to as having "dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer.2:13). As Eslinger points out, these

²⁴⁰Eslinger, "Wooing," 170; Carmichael, "Marriage," 336. Cf. McKane, *Proverbs*, 318-319.

²⁴¹Ps. 68:26.

euphemisms are only hints to a double meaning, suggesting sexual innuendo. Thus, when Jesus offers the woman “living water,” sexual images may be evoked.

The woman responds, “Sir, you have no bucket and the well (φρέαρ) is deep. Where do you get that living water?” Eslinger says,

The word she uses for “well” (φρέαρ) is another double entendre. She is really talking about her own “well” but disguises her lasciviousness under the guise of an innocent reference to Jacob’s well... Her question is provocative; she has just “exposed” her “well” by mentioning it, now she wants Jesus to reveal the source of his “living water.”²⁴²

She challenges Jesus by asking if he is better than her ancestor Jacob who provided this well. The only biblical story which refers to Jacob and a well is, not surprisingly, the betrothal scene where Jacob meets Rachel (Gen.29-30). Jacob “exposes” the well (φρέαρ, 29:10) by moving the covering stone so that Rachel flocks might be watered. Jacob’s marriage first with Leah and then with Rachel resulted in eleven sons and the accumulation of many animals. Jacob’s well is thus associated with both sexuality and fertility. When the Samaritan woman asks Jesus if he is better than Jacob, then, she wonders whether he is more fertile than her prolific ancestor.

Jesus’ responds to this woman’s challenge by reminding her that the water which Jacob provided for his descendants does not satisfy the thirst: “Everyone who drinks this water will thirst again” (4:13). Jesus’ later revelation - that she has had five husbands and the man with whom she now lives is not her husband - suggests that she wasn’t satisfied either with the “watering” provided by these men (4:18). As the Book of Proverbs says,

²⁴²Eslinger, “Wooing,” 177.

Three things are never satisfied; four never say, “Enough”: Sheol, the barren womb, the earth ever thirsty for water, and the fire that never says, “Enough.” (Pr.30:16)

Jesus, on the other hand, is able to provide “living water” that will quench the thirst once and for all: “Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring of water (πηγή ὕδατος) gushing up to eternal life” (4:14). In other words, the text hints that Jesus’ fertility produces fertility in others; his “living water” is so fecund that it has exponential effects. This is the water that the woman now wants: “Lord (κύριε), give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water” (Jn.4:15). By calling Jesus, “Lord” - which in some cases, can also mean “husband”²⁴³ - she implies that she is ready for a sexual encounter. Moreover, the discourse constantly moves back and forth: first Jesus says something then the woman says something. This pattern in itself, with the additional tension stirred by the sexual innuendo, reflects a kind of verbal intercourse.²⁴⁴

The sexual repartee between Jesus and the woman comes to a halt when the subject of sexuality is brought into the open with, “Go, call your husband and come back” (4:16). Jesus’ directive comes as “a rebuke to her carnal misconceptions”²⁴⁵ right at the point when it seems that she is prepared to commit adultery. She claims, however, that she has no husband and the possibility of sex is still left open,²⁴⁶ but Jesus discloses his knowledge of her multiple partners and the subject changes to one of prophets and

²⁴³Bauer, *Greek-English*, 460; Gen. 18:12 LXX, 1 Peter 3:6; Duke, *Irony*, 102. Cf. 9:38; 13:13; 20:28, etc. where “Lord” does not have this connotation.

²⁴⁴Similarly, the characters in the narrative come and go, back and forth.

²⁴⁵Eslinger, “Wooing,” 178.

²⁴⁶Bligh, “Jesus,” 335-336; Carmichael, “Marriage,” 338-343. Eslinger (“Wooing,” 178) suggests that the woman lied because she had matrimonial designs on Jesus (cf. Okure, *Johannine*, 108). Botha (*Reading*, 142) says that she did not lie for she did not have a husband at that time. Olsson (*Structure*, 185) suggests that she is being evasive. Brown (*John*, 171) just calls her remark “curious.”

worship. As Eslinger points out, this sentence neatly divides the discourse between Jesus and the woman in two; in the first half, the topic is water, in the second, it is worship.²⁴⁷

Eslinger suggests that the ambiguity of Jesus' intentions end with vv.12-13, though the woman's carnal misunderstanding continues.²⁴⁸ The way I have read it, however, suggests that the sexual word-play continues throughout the pericope. Fertility is also an aspect of the harvest parable: the seed is sown and is ready for the harvest so quickly that the reapers and sowers work at the same time! Fruit is the production of intensive labor, in this case, the combined effort of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman.²⁴⁹

I am indebted to Eslinger's study which has laid bare the sexual innuendo in John 4. He has pointed out that Jesus' command to the woman to call her husband arises from the sexual repartee which has occurred throughout the discourse thus far - a remark which, until now, has not been satisfactorily explained by other commentators.²⁵⁰ Though he sees the sexual innuendo as a strategy to elicit the reader's sympathy through sharing the experience of misunderstanding, I wish to use the disclosure of sexuality in this passage to make a different point. I wish to emphasize first, the sexual nature of this discourse and second, the willingness of the woman to commit adultery (not the first time?) in order to demonstrate the affinity which she has with the Strange Woman in Proverbs.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Strange Woman is depicted as an adulteress, a married woman, who entices young men into her bed through wily

²⁴⁷Eslinger ("Wooing," 171) bases his division on the equal number of "he said-she said" expressions on either side of this sentence as well as the abrupt change in topic.

²⁴⁸"Wooing," 178; so also Cahill, "Narrative," 46.

²⁴⁹Chapter 6 will look at this section in detail.

²⁵⁰For example, Lee (*Symbolic*, 69) notes that this sentence is not a "smooth transition" into another phase of the dialogue.

seduction. Though the fully descriptive sensual language of Proverbs is absent here, the sexual innuendo and verbal repartee go just as far in stirring the emotions and stimulating sexual tension. The multiple designation “woman,” especially when used as a form of address by Jesus, emphasizes her femaleness (4:21). The revelation that the woman has had several husbands, yet is still willing to commit adultery, surprises the reader - what may have been the opportunity for marriage with a good wife (introduced with the betrothal motif) has been replaced with the unacceptable option of adultery; nonetheless, Jesus’ hunger was satisfied by the work that he has to do, he has no need for physical satisfaction (4:34).

In addition to the shared depiction of sensuality and the designation as adulteress, the Strange Woman/ adulteress of Proverbs and the Samaritan Woman of the Fourth Gospel are aligned in other ways. For example, the Strange Woman is not found at home: she is “now in the streets, now in the squares, and at every corner she lies in wait” (Pr.7:11-12). The Samaritan Woman, similarly, is not found at home but at the well and in the city. The Strange Woman, like the Samaritan, serves water (Pr. 9:17). Most blatant perhaps is this verse: “For a prostitute is a deep pit; a Strange Woman is a narrow well” (Pr.23:27). These things considered, the Samaritan Woman fits the profile of the Strange Woman of Proverbs.

Symbolic Level of the Covenant Community

Within the symbolic level of the covenant community, the Samaritan Woman also represents an adulteress. In this layer particularly, the individual woman represents the larger collective of Samaritans. She identifies herself as a member of this community both overtly, by naming herself a Samaritan woman (4:9), and covertly, by articulating Samaritan belief using the first person plural, “we” (4:12, 20, 25). Furthermore, Jesus

addresses her in the second person plural (4:21-22). In this way, the Samaritan Woman speaks on behalf of all Samaritans and is addressed as their representative by Jesus.²⁵¹

The biblical text identifies Samaritans as idolatrous: “So they worshipped the LORD but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away” (2 Kgs. 17: 33). These nations introduced the gods from five nations: Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim (2 Kgs. 17:24ff).²⁵² Because the Samaritans began to worship these gods, they were considered to have forsaken the covenant of the God of Israel as an adulteress forsakes the covenantal relationship of her husband. Jeremiah, in particular, associates idolatry with adultery. The LORD is portrayed as the husband whose wife (first Israel, then Judah) has pursued other lovers (other gods): “Have you not seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and played the whore there?” (Jer.3:6). “They are all adulterers,” says Hosea (Hos. 7:1-4). Ezekiel personifies Samaria as a whore and claims that she is a “byword among women” (Ez.23:1-10):

Oholah [Samaria] played the whore while she was mine; she lusted after her lovers the Assyrians... she bestowed her favors upon them... and she defiled herself with all the idols of everyone for whom she lusted (Ez.23:5-7).

It is therefore evident that Samaritans are considered to be adulterous because they have forsaken the covenant and turned to other gods.²⁵³

²⁵¹So also Olsson, *Structure*, 153, 206, 212. Further, Olsson claims that the author is concerned more with the faith of the Samaritans than in the woman alone. Cf.

Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 106; Cahill, “Narrative,” 45.

²⁵²Though seven *gods* are mentioned in 2 Kgs. 17:30-31, Josephus simplifies it to five (*Antiquities*, 9.14.3). Because of this discrepancy, many commentators rule out the possibility that her husbands represent pagan gods. See, for example, Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 433; Bultmann, *John*; Brown, *John*, 171; Witherington, *Women*, 59.

²⁵³Josephus calls Samaritans “apostates of the Jewish nation,” *Ant.* 11.8.6.

In the Fourth Gospel, the Samaritan Woman represents the idolatrous nation of the Samaritans. The dominant betrothal motif introduces the notion of marriage. When Jesus bids the woman to call her husband, she denies that she has a husband. Jesus corrects her by saying that she has had five husbands and the man with whom she now lives is not her husband. The verb “to call” (φωνέω, *qârâ*) is often used when invoking a god.²⁵⁴ Thus Jesus may be saying to her, “Go and invoke your god.”²⁵⁵ The Hebrew word for “husband,” *ba‘al* (“master,” “lord”), is also the name of a pagan deity, so Jesus’ bidding for the woman to “call her husband” may refer to calling both a husband in the flesh and/or her gods. Like Samaria, she has had five husbands (*bē‘alim*); the man with whom she now lives may even represent the anomalous relationship which Samaria has with the God of Israel.²⁵⁶ Therefore, on the covenantal community level of symbolism, the Samaritan Woman represents the idolatrous people of Samaria who have forsaken the covenant by worshipping the gods of the five nations which settled in Samaria.²⁵⁷ The Samaritan Woman, therefore, is portrayed as an adulteress on the symbolic level of the covenant community.

²⁵⁴Ps. 4:1; 18:3; 55:16; Is. 12:4; 55:6; Jer. 33:3; Jon. 1:6, etc.

²⁵⁵Olsson, *Structure*, 184; N. R. Bonneau, “The Woman at the Well: John 4 and Genesis 24,” *The Bible Today* 67 (Oct. 1973): 1258.

²⁵⁶Bultmann, *John*, 188; Brown, *John*, 171. Schnackenburg (*Gospel*, 433) is open to the possibility of this interpretation but not in isolation. Cf. Origen states that the five husbands are the five books of the Pentateuch which the Samaritans consider to be solely canonical, *In Jo.* XIII 8, G.C.S. 10:232; J. Derrett (“Pitcher,” 255) claims that the five husbands are her senses. H. Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel: Interpreted in its Relation to Contemporaneous Religious Currents in Palestine and the Hellenistic-Oriental World* (Amsterdam: Gruner, 1968) 179ff, suggests that the sixth husband refers to the mystical tradition which grew up around the Torah; Howard-Brook (*Becoming*, 107) offers Rome. Haenchen (*John*, 221) does not support any form of allegorical reading.

²⁵⁷Schneiders (*Revelatory*, 191) claims that this narrative has nothing to do with the woman’s moral life but limits its interpretation to “the ‘wooing’ of Samaria to full covenant fidelity in the New Israel by Jesus, the New Bridegroom.” The woman is a symbol of the apostasy of Samaria and is not, as others suggest, simply an adulteress.

Does the Samaritan Woman in the Fourth Gospel continue to have affinity with the Strange Woman? We saw in Proverbs that Strange Woman/ adulteress also represented apostasy at the level of the covenantal community. The waywardness of Strange Woman is stressed even more, especially when seen as the polar opposite of Wisdom, the good wife, who instructs, guides and disciplines in the way of the covenant. Strange Woman who “forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God” (Pr.2:17) provides the prototype for the Samaritan Woman. Samaria, represented by the Samaritan Woman, has turned its back on the covenant in order to “marry” the five *b^e‘alim*.

Symbolic Level of Mythological Reflection

The third level of symbolism which reflects the Samaritan Woman as an adulteress is the level of mythological reflection. It is in this layer that Wisdom Christology comes to the fore. Jesus, spoken of in Wisdom terminology, is cast in cosmological terms: he pre-exists creation with God (Jn.1:1; Pr.8:22), acts in creation (Jn.1:3), descends from heaven to dwell among his own (Jn.1:11; Sir.24:10), comes to save (Jn.3:17; Wis. 11:1), makes God known (Jn.1:18; Wis. 9:9-11) and bestows eternal life (Jn.3:16; Wis. 5:15; 6:19). Like Wisdom, he is presented as the light of the world (Jn.3:19; Wis. 7:29). Like the Strange Woman in Proverbs, the Samaritan Woman is indeed cast as the polar opposite of Jesus: she is a woman, he is a man; she is a Samaritan, a descendant of those who worship on “this mountain” (Jn.4:20), he is a Jew, a descendant of those who worship in Jerusalem. Unlike the Strange Woman, however,

Okure (*Johannine*, 111) claims that this narrative refers, not to the Samaritans’ “love affair” with other gods, but only to the immoral woman herself. Odeberg (*Interpreted*, 186) states that there is no moral judgment in the text: the marriage motif refers to the attraction of the Samaritans to the mystical.

the Samaritan Woman is not presented overtly in cosmological terms, and it is only through the contrast with Jesus as the giver of life that the woman is seen as unable to give life. This is particularly true in light of the discourse about living water. Jesus is able to give water that will satisfy forever, but the woman draws water from a well that does not satisfy. Jesus' living water, on the mundane level, may refer to a cool drink, but on the cosmological level, it takes on new meaning drawn from traditional biblical imagery. This water represents the life-giving principle of the God of Israel: Jeremiah 17:13 says,

O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake thee shall be put to shame;
those who turn away from thee shall be written in the earth, for they have
forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water.

The water from Jacob's well, on the other hand, does not have cosmological effects, for "everyone who drinks from this water will be thirsty again" (Jn.4:13). The Samaritan Woman has access to water which, like the stolen water of the Strange Woman (Pr.9:17-18), is sweet but results in death, a point made only through comparison with the water which Jesus has to offer. That this living water is a cosmological symbol rather than a physical element is recognized by the fact that the woman leaves her jar at the well (4:28) - she has no more use for it.²⁵⁸

Unlike Proverbs, the Fourth Gospel does not warn the reader to beware the Strange Woman/ adulteress. Instead, the reader is confronted with a narrative example of Jesus encountering this woman, being alone with her and vulnerable, aware of the potential sexual nature of their exchange, yet not drawn in. The text does not hint that their relationship is consummated for the woman leaves her water jar behind when the

²⁵⁸Brown, *John*, 173; Marsh, 221; Olsson, *Structure*, 202; Boers, *Mountain*, 182-183. Cf. Derrett, "Purity," 291-298.

disciples return (the significance of v.28 is not clear,²⁵⁹ but it suggests that sexual union is no longer an issue between them), the “betrothal meal” is not eaten (4:31-33), and the Samaritans gather around Jesus. Yet many commentators consider that Jesus replaces the five husbands of the woman and is able to satisfy her with his “living water.”²⁶⁰ The threat of Strange Woman/ Samaritan Woman/ adulteress is neatly parried by Jesus.

Samaritan Woman as Foreign Woman

The next heading under which I want to explore the relationship of the Samaritan Woman to the Strange Woman is foreign woman. Recalling that the title for Strange Woman is ambiguous in that it may mean the woman of another place or another person, the title for the Samaritan Woman is unambiguous: she is a Samaritan. This fact is so dominant that she is not given a name but is identified only through her national or racial designator along with her gender (a point which has been previously discussed), a national designator which is used three times, once by the woman herself and twice by the narrator.²⁶¹ In addition, the woman twice distinguishes herself as a Samaritan in contrast to Jesus as a Jew. In the first instance, she asks Jesus, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (4:9). In the second, she says, “Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you (pl.) say that the place where people must worship is Jerusalem” (4:20).²⁶² Samaritans are set over and against the Jews, as “other than

²⁵⁹It points to her eagerness to return home, so Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 443; Bultmann, *John*, 193; Lee, *Symbolic*, 84. It shows her eagerness to share her news, so Okure, *Johannine*, 135. It indicates her intention to return, so Lindars, *Gospel*, 28; O’Day, *Revelation*, 75. It indicates that she understands living water to be a symbolic element, so Brown, *John*, 173; Marsh, 221; Olsson, *Structure*, 202; Boers, *Mountain*, 182-183.

²⁶⁰For example, Perkins, “Gospel,” 957.

²⁶¹Botha (*Reading*, 192) claims that the repeated use of this word semiotically attests to its great significance in the narrative because it breaks the “economy principle.”

²⁶²That Jesus is a Jew is reinforced by the note that Jesus came to “his own” (1:11) and

Jews.” Finally, the text seems to go out of its way to point out the significance of the location of the narrative with no less than nine separate references.²⁶³ The well, in particular, is the focus of action for the characters in the narrative who come and go from this central location. Strongly associated with Jacob, the Samaritans as inheritors of this well see themselves as true descendants of Jacob.²⁶⁴ From the narrative perspective, at least, the Samaritan Woman is deemed a foreigner - an “outsider” - in relation to the Jews in the Fourth Gospel.

Symbolic Level of Personal Experience

It is difficult to know for certain what the relationship between Samaritans and Jews was in the first century, but it seems evident that there was a great deal of tension between these two people groups. Josephus remarks that it was the custom of the Jews to travel through Samaria on their way from Galilee to Jerusalem for the festivals. This journey usually took three days and was often quite dangerous.²⁶⁵ Some commentators suggest that, because of the danger, Jews usually took an alternative route on the other side of the Jordan River. Thus, Jesus’ journey through Samaria as “necessary” (δεῖ, 4:4) suggests several possibilities: either that it was part of a divine plan or that there was urgency to return to Galilee.²⁶⁶ When asked for a drink of water, the Samaritan Woman

that he refers to the temple as “my Father’s house” (2:16).

²⁶³ “Samaria” (v.4); “a Samaritan city named Sychar”, “near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph” (v.5); “Jacob’s well”, “sitting by the well”(v.6); “the well” (v.12), “on this mountain” (v.21); “the city” (v.30); “that city” (v.39). Olsson, *Structure*, 143.

²⁶⁴Olsson, *Structure*, 140-141.

²⁶⁵*Vitae* 52, *Ant.* 20.6.1.

²⁶⁶Brown (*John*, 176) comments that Jesus passes through Samaria not because of any divine plan; it is merely the shortest route; so also Bultmann, Barrett and Schnackenburg. Olsson (*Structure* 128), on the other hand, argues that δεῖ is often used in conjunction

replies that Samaritans and Jews do not “associate.” This may reflect not only religious and social customs, but also racial tension between these two people groups. The fact that the woman raises the question of where worship should be conducted in the first topic initiated by her suggests that this racial tension was religiously motivated and very much on the surface between these two groups. Furthermore, it may be that the disciples’ astonishment at Jesus speaking with a woman reflects social aloofness between these groups, such as, “We don’t speak to *them!*” It is unclear if there was a problem for the disciples to buy food in Sychar;²⁶⁷ the text, in any case, is not worried about it. Finally, later in the gospel narrative, Samaritans and those who have a demon are combined in an insult aimed at Jesus (8:48). Evidence from the Fourth Gospel suggests some racial tension.

Further evidence of this tension is found in other first century texts. In the Greek Testament, Matthew groups the Samaritans with the Gentiles, as people to whom the disciples were not to “proclaim the good news” - this was reserved only for the “lost sheep of the house of Israel,” the Jews (Mt.10:5-7). Despite two favorable accounts of Samaritans in 10:29-37 and 17:16-18 (which may, indeed, serve a polemical purpose), Luke states that a village in Samaria refused to welcome Jesus. James and John asked Jesus if he thought they should have fire come down from heaven to consume them (Lk.9:52-56). Furthermore, Luke refers to Samaritans as “foreigners” (17:18). It appears that Jews and Samaritans experienced inter-racial conflict.

Therefore, as regards the symbolic field of personal experience, numerous texts attest to antagonism and strife between these two people groups. Worst of all, perhaps,

with Jesus’ saving mission, and thus suggests theological import; so also Okure, *Johannine*, 85. Jn.3:14; 9:4; 10:16; 12:34; 20:9.

²⁶⁷Daube (*Meaning*, 138) argues from rabbinic texts that “certain dry food-stuffs were not regarded as susceptible to uncleanness” and would thus be safe for consumption.

was the *uncertainty* experienced by the Jews traveling through this territory. Would they be refused lodging or be attacked and killed? Would they be welcomed and treated like family? Samaritan Woman as foreigner, therefore, represents anything from an unreliable relative to a hated enemy in the symbolic level of personal experience. Like the Strange Woman/ foreign woman in Proverbs, she represents the threat of “otherness” to a well-ordered, peaceful and prosperous life.

Symbolic Level of the Covenant Community

On the level of theological reflection, the Samaritan woman/ foreign woman also represents a risk. To the covenant community, she symbolizes the people who were once a part of the normative covenantal community, who then came under the influence of foreign cults, became “corrupted,” and later attempted to defile the remnant community which had been “purified” by the exile. These “quasi-Jews,” who were ready to switch allegiance at the drop of a hat, threatened to dilute the extensive influence of the exclusive covenantal community in Palestine. The Samaritans, on the other hand, viewed themselves as the rightful heirs of “Old Israel”: not only did they “possess” the sacred sites of Jacob’s field, his well, Mt. Gerizim and Sychar,²⁶⁸ but they were direct descendants of Jacob, a fact which the rabbinic texts claim was a source of fierce pride for them.²⁶⁹ In spite of their common heritage, Jews considered Samaritans to be

²⁶⁸According to Gen.33:19; 48:22; Jos.24:32 and Acts 7:15, Jacob purchased the land from Shechem, pitched his tent there, and built an altar there called El-Elohe-Israel (“The God of Israel”). He gave this land to his son Joseph and it was here that Jacob’s bones were believed to be buried. Shechem is a centre for cultic activity; see Gen.12:6f; 33:18ff; 35:4; Jos.24:26,32; Dt.11:29; Jg. 9:6.

²⁶⁹Pesiqta 11 (Pes K). J. Bowman, *Samaritan Studies* (Manchester: The John Rylands Library and the Manchester University Press, 1958) 242; Olsson, *Structure*, 141; W. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967) 227.

“outsiders” on the basis of theological issues as well. For example, instead of the Jewish expectation of a Davidic messianic figure, the Samaritans awaited a “prophet like Moses” - a *Taheb* - who would come and proclaim all things to them.²⁷⁰ Jews emphasized adherence to the law where Samaritans emphasized belief based on a theology drawn only from the Pentateuch; the two groups distinguished themselves from each other by differing mores and codes.²⁷¹ Like the Strange Woman in Proverbs, the Samaritan Woman/ foreign woman, representing all Samaritans, resides within the precincts of the covenantal community - Samaritans are “the stranger within.” Nestled in the midst of Palestine, Samaria is a nation of foreigners who must be dealt with on a regular basis, for “it was necessary to pass through Samaria” (4:4).

Symbolic Level of Mythological Reflection

The Samaritan Woman / foreign woman interpreted within the symbolic field of mythology lends yet another colour to the tapestry, drawing closer and closer to the picture presented by Strange Woman in the Book of Proverbs. It is to be recalled that Strange Woman represents an alternative myth introduced by foreign nations. The Samaritan Woman likewise represents a foreign cosmology which stands in opposition to the mythology of the Jews. Again, this alternative cosmology is seen only as the unstated antithesis to the positive cosmology presented by Jesus. He states that he is the source of “living water” which satisfies in perpetuity and results in eternal life; in contrast, the well which she controls by her possession of a bucket, does not satisfy in perpetuity and does not result in eternal life, though she claims that it is special because it has its origin with

²⁷⁰Bowman, *Samaritan*, 300; Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 229ff; Olsson, *Structure*, 191; Pamment, “Samaritan,” 223.

²⁷¹Maccini, “Reassessment,” 39.

her nation's founding ancestor. Like a primordial fountain, her well has been the source of life for her people ("his sons") and the means through which they have become prosperous ("his flocks").²⁷² At this level, the Samaritan Woman represents the influence of foreign gods and goddesses on contemporary mythology.

Another mythological element introduced in their discourse is the nature of true worship. Jesus states that true worship must be "in spirit and in truth"; her worship is centered on a worldly locale with concrete expectations, evidently worship in "the flesh and in falsehood." This locale, like the well, is associated with mythological stories of primordial origins and cultic significance. For example, the mountain on which the Samaritans worship is possibly the sight of Jacob's dream of a ladder to heaven (Gen.28:16-18) and/or the site of Jacob's altar (Gen.33:19-20), traditions which were developed to mystical heights in the later rabbinic material.²⁷³ Like the Strange Woman (Pr.7:8; 9:27), the Samaritan Woman belongs to a nation that has set up a "house of worship," in this case, "on this mountain" - likely Mt. Gerizim - which rivals Jerusalem. Thus, the Samaritan Woman/ foreigner, like the Strange Woman in Proverbs, represents to the Jews a foreign cosmology which ultimately leads to death.

Across these three symbolic fields, the Samaritan Woman fits the paradigm of the Strange Woman/ foreign woman in Proverbs. She represents a threat to the safety and security to individuals personally, to the covenant collective and to the mythological reflection of this group. The Samaritan Woman as Samaritan is constructed as the polar

²⁷²Olsson (*Structure*, 162ff) provides a full study on the well tradition in the first century. Neyrey ("Jacob," 422) claims that the well is seen as a locus of salvation. Odeberg (*Interpreted*, 150ff) reviews rabbinic interpretations and extra-canonical sources for the "gift" and "living water" motifs.

²⁷³Neyrey, "Jacob," 419-437.

opposite of the Jews. As Foreigner personified she represents a formal “other” in the text.

Samaritan Woman as Foolish Woman

Symbolic level of Personal Experience

The final aspect of the Strange Woman which we see mirrored in the Samaritan Woman is the foolish woman. We recall that, on the experiential level of symbolism, Strange Woman represents one who rebels against appropriate socialization as “a foolish woman [who] is noisy; she is wanton and knows no shame” (9:13). Her speech in particular is a cause for concern. Likewise, the Samaritan Woman is an extremely vocal woman; she speaks in 39% of all the verses spoken by a woman in this gospel, more than any other female character.²⁷⁴ Like the Strange Woman, her speech is ignorant,²⁷⁵ Jesus says to her, “If you *knew* the gift of God and who it is speaking to you” (4:10). Like the Strange Woman /fool she is quickly insulted (Pr.12:16) and impudently challenges Jesus to prove that he is greater than her ancestor Jacob (Jn. 4:12).²⁷⁶ She seeks to express her opinion more than she seeks to understand (Jn.4:12; Pr.18:2). Like Strange Woman, her speech lacks sense (Pr.10:21). Many commentators have remarked that the Samaritan Woman carries on a conversation with Jesus on a mundane level while Jesus repeatedly refers to spiritual matters; they are challenged to make sense of her “abrupt change of topic,” usually with little success.²⁷⁷ Finally, the speech of the Samaritan Woman is deceitful: she attempts to mislead Jesus by saying that she has no

²⁷⁴The Samaritan Woman speaks in 9 verses; the mother of Jesus, 2; woman caught in adultery, 1; Martha, 7; Mary of Bethany, 1; Mary Magdalene, 5.

²⁷⁵Pr.14:7; 15:2,7,14.

²⁷⁶So also, Brown, *John*, 177.

²⁷⁷For example, Brown, *John*, 176ff.

husband (4:17). In contrast, Jesus sees through her deception and turns it to his advantage in order to reveal who he is (4:26). Thus, the Samaritan Woman mirrors the Strange Woman/foolish woman on the symbolic level of personal experience.

Symbolic Level of the Covenant Community

At the covenantal community level of symbolism, Strange Woman/ foolish woman represents one who “is ignorant and knows nothing” (Pr.9:13); as a representative for the Samaritan collective, she belongs to the nation which Ben Sira refers to as “the foolish people that live in Shechem” - as “no nation at all” (Sir. 50:25-26). John 4 establishes a dichotomy between those who know and those who do not know; in fact, this pericope is framed by “knowing.”²⁷⁸ Jesus *knows* (ἐγνώ) about the Pharisees (4:1). Jesus says to the Samaritan Woman, “If you *knew* the gift of God and who it is who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (4:10). Both terms, “gift” and “living water,” are used in the covenant community context to refer to the Torah.²⁷⁹ The fact that the woman does not have this water suggests that she is unfamiliar with the precepts of the Torah. He knows his own identity as Messiah and the marital status of the woman (4:17-18). As a Jew, he worships what he knows. He knows, furthermore, of true spiritual worship. In contrast to the disciples, he knows that his food is to do the work of the one who sent him (4:32-34). On the other hand, the woman’s initial response reflects the fool in Proverbs who “despises wisdom and instruction” (Pr.1:7; 23:9) and who “hates knowledge” (Pr.1:22). She

²⁷⁸Lindars, *Gospel*, 186.

²⁷⁹Pr.13:14; 16:22; 18:4. “R. Yohanan said: Three things were given to the world as a gift, and they are these: *Tora*, the *Lights*, and the *Rain*” (*GenR* 67). This divine gift comes directly from God and implies complete and permanent satisfaction, according to *Sifre* 35d 36 a § 42, *Midr. Tann.* 35; also *TY Qidd* 65c *Sanh.* 23 d.

challenges the instruction from Jesus when she asks if he is greater than Jacob (4:12). She still awaits a Messiah who will “proclaim all things,” and even after conversing with Jesus who claims to be this Messiah, she is still uncertain: “Can this be the Messiah?” (4:29). The statement that the Jews worship what they *know* and the Samaritans what they *do not know* is a particularly harsh criticism, for the Samaritans base their religious cult on their theological credal statements rather than their religious practice; knowledge is an important element in Samaritan belief.²⁸⁰ In the final sentence, the Samaritans *know* that Jesus is the savior of the world (καὶ οἶδαμεν ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ἀληθῶς ὁ σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου) (4:42). Thus, in terms of the covenantal community, the Samaritan Woman and those she represents are established as ignorant. They are constructed as polar opposites to Jesus who knows all things.

Symbolic Level of Mythological Reflection

On the mythological level of symbolism, the Samaritan Woman again mirrors the Strange Woman/ foolish woman from Proverbs. Again, most significant, perhaps, is the notion that Strange Woman/ foolish woman “knows nothing” (Pr.9:13). Neither does the Samaritan Woman know that she is face to face with the *Christos Sophia*. She perceives all things on the level of the world where she dwells and fails to realize that Jesus perceives things on another level - that of “spirit and truth” (Jn.4:23). He tells her that these two cosmologies are not compatible because God the spirit requires worship in the spirit. Again, the Samaritan Woman/ Strange Woman is set over and against Jesus/ Wisdom on the mythological level of symbolism.

²⁸⁰Bowman, *Samaritan*, 308ff.

Here again, then, we see that the Samaritan Woman fits the paradigm of the Strange Woman as foolish woman defined by the Book of Proverbs throughout the three symbolic fields of personal experience, covenantal community and cosmological reflection. As Ignorance personified, she is constructed as the polar opposite of Jesus, Wisdom personified. She represents the “other” in the text.

Chapter 6: Strange Woman Transcended as Johannine Samaritan Woman

I do not call you servants (δούλους) any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends (φίλους), because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name (Jn. 15:15-16).

The correlation between the Strange Woman in Proverbs and the Samaritan Woman in John 4 is quite remarkable. Similarities are especially noted between the two as representatives of alterity: as “the formal other,” they both pose some kind of threat to the individual, to the community and to mythological reflection. In the end, however, the Samaritan Woman is seen to transcend these categories of alterity.

A note must be added here in relation to the different genres of the texts; the Wisdom literature is a collection of injunctions, warnings, teachings and maxims which are intended to direct and guide the path of the student/ child under the supervision of a wise teacher, parent, or sage. In this literature, Wisdom and Strange Women do not interact with each other. The sum of their interaction is found only within the mind of the reader/student: Wisdom is to be sought whole-heartedly and Strange Woman is to be evaded at all costs. In the Wisdom literature, the figure of Strange Woman is not seen to change, grow or develop in any way. The Strange Woman does not “become” the ideal disciple but she represents all that a disciple is not. However, the strong presence of the ideal disciple in these texts provides the objective towards which a reader will strive, while the presence of the Strange Woman serves as a strong deterrent from which the disciple will flee. In this way, the *reader* is in constant motion as opposed to the “characters” of Wisdom and Strange Woman who are stagnant. On the other hand, the gospel genre includes narratives: stories with a beginning and an end, plot, characters,

literary devices and various points of view. In the gospel narrative of the Samaritan Woman, Wisdom, played by the character Jesus, meets face-to-face in narrative time, place and plot sequence the Strange Woman, played by the character Samaritan Woman. The two characters interact for an extended length of time, all the while displaying the “characteristics” of Wisdom and Strange Woman to each other and to the reader. Because of this narrative encounter, Strange Woman is offered the possibility of transcendence. The character changes shape as the narrative progresses. She becomes the “ideal disciple” and thereby demonstrates the potential for change of a “three-time loser.” The difference, then, between these two texts is that the “character” of the Strange Woman does not change whereas the character of the Samaritan Woman does.²⁸¹ In this chapter, I will consider the result of the encounter of Jesus/ Wisdom with the Samaritan Woman/Strange Woman in John 4, where another symbolic layer is added to the foundation of the three previously discussed layers: experiential, covenantal community and cosmological. This new layer functions within the symbolic field of early Christianity, to wit, the so-called Johannine community. I use the expression “Johannine community” to describe the collective witness to the gospel narrative (1:14; 21:24). Who these people are exactly and how they define themselves is a matter of some debate.²⁸² Suffice it to say at this point that the Johannine community was responsible for the final form of the text some years after the death of Jesus. As such, they wrote themselves into the text, telling not only the story of the historical Jesus but also the story of their own community.²⁸³ In this symbolic field, the symbolic structure

²⁸¹So also Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 103.

²⁸²Brown, *Community*, looks at this question in detail.

²⁸³J. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (revised edition; Nashville: Abingdon, 1979); *The Gospel of John in Christian History: Essays for Interpreters* (New York: Paulist, 1978) 90ff; Brown, *Community*, 17.

taken over from the Hebrew Testament, i.e., Proverbs, takes on another dimension. It is transformed and reshaped to look quite differently. The Strange Woman aspect of the Samaritan Woman becomes open to the possibilities of total transformation.

In chapter 4, the representation of the Strange Woman was considered in the field of the covenant community - essentially the community who aligned themselves under the covenant established with Abraham. In Chapter 5, the Samaritan Woman was compared to the Strange Woman in this same field even though the characteristics of this field have changed somewhat in the Fourth Gospel. In particular, members of the covenant community are referred to collectively as the Jews. The negative language used to depict the Jews in the Fourth Gospel is well-noted²⁸⁴ and, like the Proverbial Strange Woman in many respects, serves to move the reader from aligning with the Jews towards identification with the Johannine community. In other words, the Jews replace the symbol of the Strange Woman as “other” in the Fourth Gospel. What happens to Strange Woman? As the Gospel moves further away from identification with the Jews towards identification with the disciples of Jesus, so does Strange Woman. In the narrative encounter of the Samaritan Woman and Jesus, the Samaritan Woman enters a new symbolic field - that of the Johannine community.

The turning point in the narrative occurs in the discourse on worship:

The woman said to him, “Sir I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where the people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Woman believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,

²⁸⁴For example, R. Alan Culpepper, “The Gospel of John and The Jews,” *Review and Expositor* 84 (1987): 273-288.

for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (4:19-24).

More specifically, the turning point can be identified with the line, “the hour is coming and is now here.” Within this phrase is captured the reference to two historical moments: the moment in which the historical Jesus is said to speak these words while looking toward the future, and the moment in which the Johannine community recognizes these words as their present reality. Jesus says that worship on this mountain or in Jerusalem will be transcended by worship in “spirit and in truth” and the later community use these words to describe their current form (or ideal) of worship. They acknowledge the transition of worship from one form to another. The dividing line between the future expectation and the present reality is not just the passage of time; it is marked by the death and resurrection of Jesus.²⁸⁵ The post-resurrection Johannine community have experienced a transformation in their form of worship.

The depiction of the Samaritan Woman follows a similar transformation. She is presented as Strange Woman primarily in the first half of the passage - in the “living water” discourse - but undergoes a transition after the worship discourse as we shall see. Her “conversion” is not explicit in any way; however, when the various categories of alterity are re-examined under the lens of the Johannine community, the symbols take on a potentially new shape. The evangelist, therefore, offers the possibility of transformation. As Raymond Brown says,

He has no special interest in the figure of the woman herself. It is enough that through her conversation with Jesus the reader should be shown what the possibilities of the revelation are; how the revelation, by appealing to man’s [*sic*] thirst for life, can make him see himself as he really is in his

²⁸⁵C. H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 114-115.

unrest, can point him to God's miracle and itself, confront him as this miracle, the miracle which calls him to the decision of faith.²⁸⁶

As such, the woman may abandon adultery in favour of becoming Jesus' betrothed. Though still a Samaritan, she may take on the added distinction of becoming "a child of God" (Jn.1:11-12). Though once ignorant of the means for salvation, she might join the Samaritans who know and confess that Jesus is the "saviour of the world." Unlike Wisdom and Strange Woman in the Book of Proverbs who do not meet "face to face," the Samaritan Woman and Jesus do. It is this encounter which challenges alterity within the Johannine community. In other words, otherness is transcended in this symbolic field.

Having outlined the various presentations of Strange Woman and the Samaritan Woman under the three categories of adulteress, foreigner and foolish woman, I will consider how the symbolism of the Johannine community transforms these three categories.

Adultery transcended

Both the Strange Woman and the Samaritan Woman are depicted most extensively as adulteresses. Their very presentation in the text evokes a sensuality capable of arousing and tempting the reader. Proverbs presents her as a dangerous trap into which the unsuspecting might fall; the reader is warned to stay clear of her. The Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, does not convey this same sense of "fatal attraction"²⁸⁷ in spite of the double entendre and sexuality evoked in the text. Instead, the Samaritan Woman is established as the formal "other" to Jesus on the personal level, to the community of the Jews on the social level and to mythological reflection on a third

²⁸⁶Brown, *John*, 193.

²⁸⁷Newsom, "Women," 157-159.

level. But how is this adulteress figure, who represents not only herself but also the Samaritans in general, understood in the light of the Christian community? I will argue that she no longer is perceived as a threat because her characterization as an adulteress is transcended.

Symbolic Level of Personal Experience

As an adulteress, the Samaritan Woman has had five husbands and the man she has now is not her husband. However, when Jesus enters the scene, he plays the role of the bridegroom coming to meet his bride. The Samaritan Woman responds in an unexpected way in some respects: at first, she hesitates to give him water and she challenges his ability to give her what he offers; later, she asks him to give her this living water so that she would no longer have to return to the well to draw again. She leaves her water jar as a sign that she has received this spiritual water. What was once her “vessel” - perhaps a euphemism for her sexual organs²⁸⁸ - is left behind as unnecessary. The implication is that Jesus satisfies her need for sexual pleasure by providing satisfaction with his living water. Some suggest that by calling her “woman” or “wife,” Jesus becomes the husband who does not leave her unsatisfied.²⁸⁹ Like the betrothal scenes in the Hebrew tradition, she runs off to tell the people in the city and they come out to meet him. They invite him to stay, which he does, and the betrothal meal - once the seal of this arrangement - is replaced by a meal of a different kind of food, a spiritual food (4:34) honoring a spiritual covenant (13:33-35; 14:21; 15:9-17). The quasi-betrothal

²⁸⁸1 Sam. 21:5.

²⁸⁹Bonneau, “Woman,” 1258; Duke, *Irony*, 103. Cf. Jesus uses this title for his mother (2:4; 19:26) and Mary of Magdala (20:13,15) also.

of the Samaritan Woman and Jesus is recast as a spiritual, rather than a physical, union.²⁹⁰

In the light of the Johannine community, the phrase, “Jews and Samaritans do not associate” is also transformed. In the sense of its association with intimacy, it now may be understood to refer to the intimate relationship that is established between the believer and God, made possible through the death of Jesus. As Jesus is intimate with the Father, lying close to the bosom of God (Jn. 1:18), and as the Beloved Disciple lies in the bosom of Jesus (Jn. 13:23; 21:20), Jesus and the disciples are now able to “associate” with the Samaritans through sharing the water jar left for their use,²⁹¹ to eat the food purchased in the Samaritan market, to remain in Samaria for two days, in fact, to be a part of the “Samaritan family.” Intimacy is no longer perceived in the language of sexuality but in the language of love between God/Jesus and his “own” (17:23-26; 21:15-19) and in the language of family relationships (1:12; 13:33; 19:27; 20:17; 21:5, 23).²⁹²

The living water that Jesus offers is also recast in the symbolic layer of the Johannine community in a variety of ways. Water is a well-used symbol in this text and suggests various options for interpretation. One such option is the symbol of baptism.²⁹³ Water baptism is used in the Christian community as a sign of repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah (1:19-28). Baptismal water is thus a sign of initiation into the life-giving relationship with Jesus (3:5), when one is born *ἀνωθεν* (3:7) as a child of God (1:12).²⁹⁴ Water is also a symbol of Jesus’ death on the cross; when his body is pierced,

²⁹⁰Staley, *Print 's*, 102. Duke (*Irony*, 103) claims that Jesus takes the Samaritan’s name (8:48).

²⁹¹So Daube, “Meaning,” 137-147.

²⁹²Willett, *Wisdom*, 109ff; Seim, “Roles,” 59.

²⁹³This is emphasized by the various references to baptism in this gospel: Jn. 1:19ff; 3:22ff; 10:40. Cf. Derrett, “Purity,” 293ff.

²⁹⁴The fact that this water is used for drinking and not immersing is not a problem when

water and blood are released (19:34). Through the water and blood of Jesus' death, therefore, life is available (6:52-58; 12:24). Water is also identified with Jesus' revelation as Wisdom (Pr.9:2-5; Sir.15:3; 24:19-22) and as the post-resurrection gift of the spirit (7:37-39).²⁹⁵ Thus, drinking from the springs of living water is a metaphor that is transformed in the context of the Johannine community; the carnal imagery of sexual intercourse is replaced with spiritual imagery of eternal life.²⁹⁶

The result of this spiritually intimate union with Jesus is portrayed in the harvest discourse of John 4:31-38. Raymond Brown suggests that the misunderstanding about food parallels the previous misunderstanding about water, and thus, leads into a teaching discourse.²⁹⁷ Jesus' food, like his water, is "spiritual."²⁹⁸ The reference to food quite naturally leads into a mini-discourse on the nature of the eschatological harvest. In this harvest, the sowers plant and the reapers harvest at the same time.²⁹⁹ Most commentators interpret these verses as evidence of the success of the Samaritan mission.³⁰⁰ The parable, "Another four months and the harvest is here," is reinterpreted in the light of the immediate and positive response of the Samaritans to the woman's testimony; she is the sower who prepared the fields so they would be "white for the

seen in the light of 1 Cor. 12:13 which says, "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and we were all made to drink of the spirit." Brown, *John*, 180.

²⁹⁵Brown (*John*, 178ff) outlines the centuries-old interpretation of living water as revelation and/or the Spirit, both images drawn from the Wisdom tradition (Pr.13;14; 18:4; Sir. 24:21-29). Lee, *Symbolic*, 76ff.

²⁹⁶So also, Staley, *Print's*, 102.

²⁹⁷Brown, *John*, 181.

²⁹⁸Carmichael ("Marriage," 344) says that the focus is on Jesus' work which is the work of creation. He bases this on the use of the term βρωσις, an unusual word found in Gen.1:29.

²⁹⁹Lev.26:5; Amos 9:13.

³⁰⁰For example, Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 448; Boers, *Mountain*, 191.

harvest” before their time (4:35).³⁰¹ Instead of calling only one man, her husband, as Jesus had requested, she brings many men to Jesus. Jesus is the reaper who receives his reward (4:36) - the joy at the gathering of the harvest itself and the completion of his work in his exaltation (4:34; 11:52; 12:32; 17:2; see also Joel 3:13). The “harvest” - the Samaritans - are taken up into eternal life (4:36; cf. 3:16; 5:24; 12:25, etc.; see also Is. 27:12). In vv. 37-38, the working together of reaper and sower is again emphasized but on a larger scale: “Others have labored, and you (plural, ὑμεῖς) have entered into their labor” (4:38).³⁰² This work is seen at the narrative level but also reflects the post-resurrection mandate (20:21) of the disciples sent into the fields.³⁰³

The insertion of this discourse into the narrative flow of the primary story suggests that it is meant as an interpretive key for this passage; in other words, the narrative of the Samaritan Woman must be read in the context of this harvest motif.³⁰⁴ Like the reaper and the harvester who work together, the cooperation between the

³⁰¹Emphatically so, claims Boers, *Mountain*, 191; Witherington, *Women*, 61. Schnackenburg (*Gospel*, 448) argues that God is the sower on the strength that the Father “gives” believers to Jesus and “draws” them to him (cf. 6:37ff, 44, 65; 10:29; 17:6). Bultmann (*John*, 146) argues for the disciples. Why they do not consider the Samaritan Woman is unclear.

³⁰²If the narrative is taken as referring only to the historical event, that is, it does not reflect the voice of the later community, the identity of the “others” presents a problem. Suggestions range from the prophets, to John the Baptist, to Jesus himself. See Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 453. When understood as historical reflection, however, the identity of the “others” may refer to anyone who, like the Samaritan Woman, brought others to Jesus. Brown, *John*, 184; *Community*, 189; Boers, *Mountain*, 193-195.

³⁰³The aorist ἀπέστειλα indicates this. Schnackenburg (*Gospel*, 452) claims that this is Jesus’ “prevision.”

³⁰⁴So Barrett, *Gospel*, 228. Boers (*Mountain*, 158-159) uses syntactical and semiotic analysis in a detailed structuralist approach to John 4. What Jesus tells the disciples is important to interpretation of the story because the disciples don’t really figure in the narrative. Dodd (*Historical*, 325) argues that the dialogue with the disciples has “no intrinsic connection” with the dialogue with the Samaritan Woman and is to be treated as a separate unit.

Samaritan Woman and Jesus produces an abundant harvest.³⁰⁵ Jesus and the Samaritan together sow their “seed” and invite the disciples to help with the “labour” of harvest.³⁰⁶ The large “harvest” of the Samaritans who believe in Jesus is the “gathered fruit for eternal life.”

The Samaritan Woman as adulteress is thus transformed by the union with Jesus by a sense of purpose, that is, to make God known. By interpreting the metaphor of the Samaritan Woman on the spiritual level of the Christian community, the adulteress “makes good.” She produces a bountiful harvest for the good of the community. Her past is of little consequence in the light of the revelation of the Messiah; it does not impede her but rather is the *principle* on which her testimony is based (“He told me everything I have ever done!” 4:29) and the evidence which convinces the Samaritans to believe (4:39) - a tribute highly valued by the text (20:31).

Though the Samaritan Woman fits into the paradigm of the Strange Woman of Proverbs, quite a different result is achieved. In Proverbs, the Strange Woman and Wisdom do not actually *mingle with each other*; they are constructed as polar opposites by the text in order to darken the contrast between the one and the other. In John 4, the Samaritan Woman and Jesus are also constructed as polar opposites, in this symbolic field, as opposite genders: male and female. However, when this opposition is seen in the light of the Johannine community, the distinction is not negated nor eliminated but is (may I say it?) used “productively.” In other words, it is the cooperation of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman - the “quasi-marriage” - which results in a bountiful harvest - the birth of many Samaritans coming to belief in Jesus.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵So also Lindars, *Gospel*, 173.

³⁰⁶So also Brown, *John*, 183.

³⁰⁷So also Carmichael, “Marriage,” 337; Mt.9:37-38.

One further remark may be made with regard to the relationship between male and female in this narrative. In spite of the fact that the woman's husband does not appear on the scene, Jesus continues to talk to the woman about weighty subjects. He takes her questions seriously; he reveals the nature of true worship to her. Like other Johannine women, neither her identity nor her relationship with Jesus are dependent on a husband.³⁰⁸ In this way, the distinction between male and female - even married or unmarried - is made irrelevant in the symbolic level of the Johannine community.³⁰⁹

Symbolic Level of the Covenant Community

When the acetate of the Johannine community's symbolic structure is laid over the picture of the adulterous Samaritan Woman who represents the apostasy of the Samaritans in their covenant with God, again the distinction or polar opposition of faithful Jew versus unfaithful Samaritan dissolves in order to be replaced by belief in Jesus.

The hour is coming when you will worship the Father, neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (4:21-24).

This new worship is centered on Jesus who baptizes with the holy spirit (1:33) and gives the spirit without measure (3:34) through the words that he has spoken (3:34; 6:63) and through his breath (20:22). This spirit abides with the disciples but comes only after Jesus' death (7:39; 14:16; 20:22). The spirit not only allows true worship, but gives new

³⁰⁸Martha and Mary (11:1-53; 12:1-8), Mary Magdalene (19:25; 20:1-2,11-18). Schneiders, "Women," 44; Boers, *Mountain*, 171-172.

³⁰⁹This observation suggests the possibility that the Johannine community honoured celibacy.

life (3:5-8; 6:63) and marks those who will enter the kingdom of heaven (3:5). It therefore follows that only those who have been born of water and spirit are able to worship in spirit, for what is “born of spirit is spirit” (3:6). In this way, those who become children of the Father through the spirit (3:5) may worship the Father, who is spirit, in the spirit (4:23-24).

A true worshiper also worships in truth. Truth is associated with the spirit: hence the title, “the spirit of truth” (14:17; 15:26; 16:13). This “spirit of truth” is said to teach and remind what Jesus has taught (14:26), to testify on behalf of Jesus (15:26) and to guide into all truth (16:13). Similarly the truth is strongly associated with Jesus. Truth comes through Jesus (1:17; 8:32; 17:17-19; 18:37) and is Jesus (5:33; 14:6). Through Jesus, one is sanctified (17:17). Therefore, to worship God in spirit and in truth is to worship God through, and in, Jesus. True worship depends on Jesus as the one through whom one receives the spirit and the truth; it does not depend on the place of worship - either the mountain or Jerusalem. Jesus is the locus, as it were, for true worship;³¹⁰ his body replaces the temple (2:19-21). Again, Jesus is substituted for the traditions of both the Jews and the Samaritans, and transcends the distinction of otherness between the woman and Jesus, that of Samaritan and Jew.

The metaphor which communicates this idea is again the betrothal motif. Like Hosea’s harlot-wife who symbolizes the apostasy of Israel, the Samaritan is wooed back into a relationship with God - she represents Jesus’ “harlot-wife”.

The evangelist feels comfortable in working with the notion of Jesus as a divine being who is involved in a love relationship with a woman because he can interpret precedents in the prophetic tradition of Hosea, Ezekiel and Jeremiah. When God tells Hosea to take a harlot as a wife, it is for the purpose of acting out God’s relationship with Israel. The identity of

³¹⁰Neyrey, “Jacob,” 419ff.

prophet and deity may well have served as the general model for the role of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman.³¹¹

The woman calls Jesus Lord (Κύριε, 4:19) and learns about true worship. Thus, along with the Samaritans whom she represents, the Samaritan Woman is able to transcend her stigma as an idolatrous adulteress. The Strange Woman seduces with an alternative religious way, drawing in those who would believe her away from the covenant and obedience to Torah; the result of following her way is death. The Samaritan Woman in the end similarly points to an alternative way: through Jesus. The difference is, this time, the way she points to does not lead to death, but rather to life! She points to Jesus who is “the way, the truth and the life” (14:6). By bringing others to life, she “reproduces her own kind”: her simultaneous “marriage” and abundant result is reflected in the inserted harvest parable.³¹²

Symbolic Level of Mythological Reflection

The third level of symbolism which is transcended in the Johannine community through the interaction between the Samaritan Woman as adulteress and Jesus is the level of mythological reflection. Jesus offers living water which will gush up to eternal life to whoever will drink of it (4:14). As Cahill points out, the cosmic role of the woman develops: she is identified as a Samaritan woman or woman of Samaria in vv. 7 and 9, but thereafter is referred to as “the woman” or simply, “woman.”

³¹¹Carmichael, “Marriage,” 342. Brown (*John*, 533-538) suggests that Jesus’ use of the ἐγώ εἰμι formula in 4:26 recalls God’s address through his prophet in the Hebrew bible. So also Neyrey, “Jacob,” 426.

³¹²Carmichael, “Marriage,” 344.

The local lore identified as differences between Samaritan and Jew and frequently mentioned by commentators disappears as the formerly described Samaritan woman gradually becomes a prototype of woman.³¹³

Through his spiritual union with the Samaritan woman, the two, laboring together, produce an abundant harvest of many believers who confess Jesus. Jesus extends this work to the whole Christian community when he sends the disciples to enter into this labor (4:38). The mystical union of fecund gods and goddesses is transcended in the Johannine community with an asexual, unnatural spiritual rebirth (1:13; 3:3-8). The Strange Woman as the symbol of death is transcended through this encounter with Jesus and becomes, like Eve “the Living One,” the symbol of all life.³¹⁴

Though the Samaritan Woman is cast in the paradigm of the Strange Woman of Proverbs, she is transfigured by the face to face encounter with Jesus. No longer the seductress who entices young men to adultery, no longer the threat of Samaritan apostasy, and no longer the hungry gatekeeper to Sheol, the Samaritan Woman engages in a productive spiritual union with Jesus through which he provides a new life-giving alternative way. The form of Strange Woman/ adulteress is transcended in the encounter of the Samaritan Woman and Jesus.

Foreignness Transcended

The Samaritan Woman, as we recall, represents otherness in terms of her foreignness as a Samaritan, who, like the Strange Woman in Proverbs, is perceived as a threat on the three symbolic layers of reflection: as a threatening and unreliable enemy to the Jews, as a foreign source of social corruption, or as an alternate though appealing

³¹³Cahill, “Narrative,” 47.

³¹⁴Bonneau, “Woman,” 1257.

foreign mythology. This aspect of the Samaritan Woman is also transcended by an encounter with Jesus.

Symbolic Level of Personal Experience

On the symbolic level of personal experience, the Samaritan Woman/ foreign woman represents the Samaritan who is a threat to the Jews who pass through their territory on the road to and from Jerusalem. When the symbolic field of the Johannine community is superimposed on this picture, we see that it too is transcended by Jesus.³¹⁵ Jesus breaks social conventions and speaks to a foreign woman.³¹⁶ The Samaritans believe in Jesus because of the woman's witness and invite him to stay. They offer him hospitality which he, and presumably his disciples with him, accept with alacrity. There is no account of further enmity between the Jews and Samaritans in the chapters which follow. At one point, as well, Jesus is accused of being a Samaritan and of having a demon (8:48). Though he denies that he has a demon, he is silent in the face of the accusation that he is a Samaritan. Perhaps this illustrates that the antagonism between these two peoples has now been transcended.³¹⁷

³¹⁵So also, Bultmann, *John*, 179; Howard-Brook, *Becoming*, 109.

³¹⁶Howard-Brook, *Becoming*, 102.

³¹⁷So also Botha, *Reading*, 192-193: While the schism between Jew and Samaritan is sharply noted at the beginning, it has dissolved by the end of the story. Schism and difference is "nullified by Jesus' mission"- through use of universal terms, and in practice. C. Scobie, "The Origins and Development of Samaritan Christianity," *NTS* 19 (1973): 404, states that this passage presents Jesus as favorably inclined to Samaritans. Compare Pamment ("Samaritan," 222) who claims that "to be a Samaritan and to have a demon are taken as synonymous. It is pedantic to expect a reply to both." Cf. W. Meeks, "Galilee and Judea in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966): 166.

Symbolic Level of the Covenant Community

On the symbolic level of the covenant community, Samaritans represent a threat to the Jews as “outsiders” or “the stranger within,” those who look and act like them in many ways, but are distinguishable by their religious practices and their emphasis on certain ancestors. John 4, for example, places great emphasis on the role of Jacob as the founder of the well. The Samaritan Woman, like Strange Woman, symbolizes the consequence of a people who were once a part of the normative covenantal community, who then came under the influence of foreign cults, became “corrupted” and later attempted to defile the remnant community which had been “purified” by the exile. Within the precinct of the Johannine community, however, this threat is dismissed by the presentation of a whole new system in which true worshipers worship the Father “in spirit and in truth.” Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim are not the focal points for dispute nor the basis of antagonism. In fact, in order to worship in the spirit, one must be born ἀνωθεν (3:7); in other words, one’s birthplace is “from above” and one’s birthdate is “anew.” There is no distinction between those born in one place and those born in another, for all are born “from above” and become “children of God” (1:12). Familial ties are replaced by Christian kinship. For example, in a central scene from the cross, Jesus calls his mother “Γόναι,” releases her from the care of her other children and hands her over to the care of the beloved disciple (19:26). By calling other women by this title as well, such as the Samaritan Woman (4:21) and Mary of Magdala (20:13), family relationships are reconfigured in the Johannine community.³¹⁸ Seim states that “through

³¹⁸On the association of the mother of Jesus, the Samaritan Woman and Mary of Magdala through the use of this term, see Schüssler Fiorenza, *Memory*, 327.

the exaltation of Jesus, the inclusive family of God is procreated and born of the Spirit,” consisting of mothers and brothers who know one Father only.³¹⁹

It is hardly an accident that a main issue of the conversation is the replacement of the worship on the mountain and in Jerusalem by the worship in spirit and truth. It envisions a new worship where the antagonism between the different groups is eliminated, and where the exclusiveness of the *father's worship* (v.20) has given way to the inclusiveness of *true worshipers* (v.21 where the woman explicitly is included).³²⁰

Thus, rebirth into the family of God, initiated at the time of Jesus' death, eliminates the distinction of nationality.

Heterodoxy between the Jews and the Samaritans is also eliminated in the Johannine community. With regard to the expectation of a messianic figure, for Jews a Davidic king and for the Samaritans a prophet like Moses, Jesus is presented polemically by the Fourth Gospel as greater than all other contenders or expectations:³²¹ his risen body, not Jerusalem or Mt. Gerizim, is the new temple (2:13-22); he is the saviour of the *world*, not just the saviour of the Jews or the Samaritans (4:42).³²² Nationality, and the theological issues which are associated with it, are reconfigured in the Johannine community; not just the Jews, but the Samaritans, find in the revelation of Christ a fulfillment of their longing and their faith. The author of the Fourth Gospel seems to go out of his way to show the Samaritans' openness to the teaching of Jesus. In contrast to the Jews in 2:20, and Nicodemus in 3:1ff, the Samaritan Woman is quick to grasp that Jesus is a prophet (4:25). To her, Jesus reveals that he is the Messiah (4:26). It is in Samaria that the fields are ripe for the harvest (4:35) and where many come to belief in

³¹⁹Seim, "Roles," 65.

³²⁰Ibid., 69.

³²¹Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 312ff; Olsson, *Structure*, 190; Pamment, "Samaritan," 223.

³²²1:29; 3:16ff; 6:33, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 12:47; 16:8.

Jesus (4:39, 41).³²³ In this layer of symbolism, all of Israel is gathered into the one people of God (10:16; 11:52; see also Is. 11:11-13).³²⁴

Symbolic Level of Mythological Reflection

Finally, on the symbolic layer of cosmology, the Strange Woman/ foreign woman paradigm given in the Samaritan Woman is also transcended. At this level, the Samaritan Woman represents the influence of foreign gods and goddesses of contemporary mythology. Again, the mythology that Jesus offers transcends all other possibilities. Jesus, the Λόγος, was “in the beginning” “with God” and “was God.” All of creation came into being through him. He brings life and light into the world (1:1-5). These are strong claims during a time when a pantheon of Greek, Roman and Egyptian gods was claiming credit for these various functions. Again, Jesus is able to provide the water that satisfies forever, whereas the Samaritan Woman, who attends Jacob’s well, is unable to satisfy from her well even though she must come to the well daily to draw water. That she leaves her jar at the well testifies to the fact that she has found relief through Jesus; the mythology that Jesus offers surpasses anything that she may offer. Hence, the threat of foreign god/desses diminishes in the Christian community context. The Samaritan Woman, as Strange Woman, abandons her post at the well, relinquishes her “possession” of its water when she leaves her water jar behind, and takes the water that Jesus offers to the people in the city by telling them about Jesus. She takes them to a new well, a well which is the source of life. Once she delivers them to Jesus, she “decreases” while he “increases” (3:30); in other words, the Samaritans who once

³²³This is especially apparant when compared to the response Jesus received in Judea and Jerusalem. Meeks, “Galilee,” 165; *Prophet-King*, 39-40.

³²⁴For a full exposition of the ingathering theme, see Olsson, *Structure*, 241ff.

believed because of her word, now believe because of Jesus' word (4:41-42). Rather than the goddess of the underworld who sits at the door of Sheol, the Samaritan Woman has been transformed into the psychopomp of the harbinger of eternal life.

One further aspect may be noted here in regards to the geographical and chronological details given in this story. The story of the Samaritan Woman is linked verbally at five points with the death of Jesus recounted in John 19. First, both events occur at noon (4:6; 19:14).³²⁵ Second, Jesus indicates that he is thirsty (4:7; 19:28; see also 18:11).³²⁶ Third, Jesus is described as the source for a flow of water (4:13; 19:34). Fourth, Jesus is engaged in finishing the work of God (4:34; 19:30). Fifth, the event has an eye-witness who testifies about Jesus, thus bringing others to belief (4:39; 19:35), as one who speaks the truth (4:18; 19:35). In addition, Jesus is required (δεῖ) to pass through Samaria towards Galilee (4:4), as he is required to pass through death unto life (3:14; 12:34).³²⁷ Likewise, he remains two days in Samaria and in death before resurrection (4:40; 19:42-20:1).³²⁸ Finally, Jesus "makes the way" (ὁδοποιῶν, 4:6) from Judea to Samaria as he is the "way" (ὁδός, 14:6) from death to life.³²⁹ These parallels are enhanced when seen in the light of the Wisdom tradition where Sophia is presented as the companion on the "way" and where the Strange Woman sits by the way enticing unto death any who listens. On the mythological level of symbolism, then, Jesus

³²⁵Jn. 19:13 says that Pilate, like Jesus in 4:6, "sat down" (ἐκάθισεν). Though Haenchen (*John*, 219) recognizes some temporal connection, he posits no significance to it. Cf. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel*, 122.

³²⁶Dodd (*Historical*, 42) states that Jesus' thirst in 4:7 foreshadows his thirst on the cross.

³²⁷Olsson (*Structure*, 145) argues that the Greek, δεῖ, indicates divine will.

³²⁸Jesus also remains "two days longer in the place where he was" after he hears that Lazarus is ill and before he sets off to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead (11:6).

³²⁹Olsson (*Structure*, 146) claims that emphasis on the journeys of Jesus indicate that they are an important part of his saving work in the world.

as Wisdom is the way, a way won through death. This way winds through the land of death, the land watched over by the Samaritan Woman, a land through which Jesus must pass in order to offer life. It is through his passage through death, symbolically represented as a journey through Samaria and the transformation of the Strange Woman (the gatekeeper of Sheol, Pr. 7:27) that Jesus is able to bring this life. It is no wonder that the next recorded action of Jesus is the rescue of the royal official's son from death (4:47-53)!

Therefore, within each of the three symbolic fields, the Samaritan Woman as foreign woman, in the tradition of the Strange Woman, is transcended in the context of the Johannine community.

Ignorance Transcended

The final designation of Strange Woman/ Samaritan Woman is the foolish woman. We saw in the three symbolic fields that, like the Strange Woman, the Samaritan Woman/ foolish woman is noted for her imprudent speech, her ignorance and rebellion in the ways of the Torah and her failure to recognize Jesus for who he is. Again these elements of the Samaritan Woman as foolish woman are transcended in the symbolic level of the Johannine Community.

Symbolic Level of Personal Experience

In the level of personal experience, we saw that the Samaritan Woman, like Strange Woman, is noted for her loquaciousness. She speaks freely and extensively even in a socially unacceptable situation. In her encounter with Jesus, however, the foolish woman's words progress from unknowing to saving: first, Jesus says she does not know of what she speaks (4:10), then she asks for the living water that Jesus offers in a way

which indicates that she has not fully comprehended (i.e., she has no further need to come to the well for water) (4:15), then she speaks the truth, though unknowingly, according to Jesus (4:18), then she “perceives” (θεωρῶ) that he is a prophet (as opposed to the stronger use of the perfect tense of ὀράω found in 1:34; 3:11, 32; 19:35),³³⁰ followed by the stronger statement that she knows (Οἶδα) that Messiah is coming, then she tells the Samaritans about him with uncertainty,³³¹ but because of her word of testimony (like other esteemed witnesses in this gospel, see 17:20),³³² they believe in Jesus (4:39, 42).³³³ Throughout, she talks less and listens more.³³⁴ The foolish woman’s words are transformed through the conversation with Jesus; what was once a word without value, becomes, in the Johannine community, a word, like Jesus (λόγος) that saves (5:24; 8:51; 12:48).

In addition, the questions of the woman are honoured. Jesus says, “If you knew the gift of God, you would *ask*”; the woman does indeed ask for this gift (4:15) and proceeds to ask him about worship. Her asking is in contrast to the disciples’ silence; they have questions but do not voice them (4:27). The disciples, rather, “were astonished” (ἐθαύμαζον), an attitude which is viewed negatively elsewhere in this gospel (see also 3:7; 7:21 and 9:30). Asking, on the other hand, is viewed positively in the Fourth Gospel (11:22; 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, 26) for it leads to the truth (13:25,

³³⁰Okure, *Johannine*, 113.

³³¹“Elle doit déférer au jugement des personnes compétentes,” M.-J. Lagrange, *Evangile de Jean* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1936) 116.

³³²Okure (*Johannine*, 4) summarizes this concept.

³³³Lee, *Symbolic*, 93; G. O’Day, “Narrative Mode and Theological Claim: A Study in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 105/4 (1986): 657-668 and *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), maintains that the gospel narrative does not just mediate the revelation but is the revelation itself because it allows the reader to experience the revelation of Jesus for him/herself.

³³⁴Okure, *Johannine*, 169.

37; 14:5, 8, 22). Self-satisfied ignorance, once an attribute of the Strange Woman, is replaced in the transforming Samaritan Woman by a diligent search for wisdom, an action viewed positively both in Proverbs (2:4; 8:17) and in the Johannine community (1:38; 20:15).

Finally, the content of the narrative (*narratio*) provides a concrete example (*demonstratio*) for the discourse (*exposito*) of Jesus.³³⁵ Like the discourse on bread following the feeding of the multitude (Jn. 6), and the discourse on light following the healing of the blind man (Jn. 9), a discourse on the nature of God's work (4:31-38) is illustrated by the sequence of events immediately before it in which Jesus/ God is revealed in a personal encounter with the Samaritan Woman. Her testimony to her compatriots concerning this revelation constitutes the work which Jesus was sent to do: make God known (1:18; 15:15; 17:25-26).³³⁶ This is especially seen in the contrast of the response of this woman with that of Nicodemus; Nicodemus also represents a collective (3:12), is noted as a teacher of Israel (3:10), and misunderstands the mundane/ spiritual duality of Jesus' words, but he fades away without another word.³³⁷

The Samaritan Woman, then, as Strange Woman/ foolish woman transformed, is presented as the ideal witness or missionary. First, she follows the typical apostolic pattern, and like the new disciples who leave their nets in the synoptics (Mt.4:20,

³³⁵Ibid., 182ff.

³³⁶Okure (*Johannine*, 112) argues that the woman, because she was immoral, was "hopelessly inadequate" and her "very inadequacy throws into greater relief" her "sign-value."

³³⁷Lee (*Symbolic*, 65-66) points out the strong contrast of Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman: "the male, 'orthodox' Jewish teacher and theologian who has name, status and respectability (3:1), stands over against the female, heterodox Samaritan who has no name or status." He comes at night voluntarily; she meets Jesus as noon involuntarily. He makes no decision for faith and leaves in silence; she comes to an understanding of faith and brings others to Jesus.

Mk.1:18), she leaves her jar in order to carry out her mission.³³⁸ Then, she initiates the movement of the Samaritans coming to Jesus, and, as Schneiders has argued, this coming to Jesus is the first step in coming to belief.³³⁹ The use of the technical term κοπιάω is used to describe the work of mission, and it is here applied to the work of the woman in preparing the harvest (4:38). The Samaritans come to belief because of her word (πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν τῶν Σαμαριτῶν διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς γυναικὸς, 4:39) a notion which Jesus prays about in 17:20 (τῶν πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν). Finally, the results of the woman's testimony are not qualitatively different than the witness of John the Baptist (1:7-8, 32-41; 3:30) and Philip (1:43-49): these witnesses testify about Jesus, people come to Jesus and, as a result, they too confess belief.

Symbolic Level of the Covenant Community

At the covenantal community level of symbolism, Strange Woman/ foolish woman represents one who “is ignorant and knows nothing” (Pr.9:13) even though she functions as the mouthpiece for the Samaritans because she speaks of “our father Jacob.”³⁴⁰ In the context of the Christian community, however, ignorance is transcended. Truth comes through Jesus (1:17; 18:37) and, indeed, is embodied in Jesus (5:33; 14:6). One who continues in Jesus' word will know the truth and the truth brings both freedom (8:32) and sanctification (17:17-19); and this truth comes into the world through the word of Jesus (18:37). The Samaritan Woman, therefore, as a representative of the Samaritans who do not “know” what they worship, not only progressively knows

³³⁸S. Schneiders, “Women in the Fourth Gospel,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 12 (1982): 40.

³³⁹*Ibid.*, 40.

³⁴⁰Olsson (*Structure*, 211) goes as far as saying that this narrative represents the meeting of Samaritan faith and Johannine faith.

who Jesus is throughout this pericope but is able to communicate the truth to her fellow people through “her word” so that they are able to confess Jesus as the saviour of the world (4:42).³⁴¹ The Samaritan Woman asks careful theological questions concerning Jesus’ identity on behalf of the Samaritan collective: once she recognizes him as a prophet who has an affinity with the patriarchs, she asks about true worship and messianic expectations.³⁴² In this way, the Samaritans, acting through the woman, question “every significant tenet of Samaritan theology.”³⁴³ No longer distinguished as those who do not know what they worship, the community of the Samaritans know how to worship “in spirit and in truth” (4:23) because it is part of their post-resurrection reality as the hour which “is now here” (4:23).³⁴⁴

Symbolic Level of Mythological Reflection

On the mythological level of symbolism, the Samaritan Woman is able to transcend the symbol of the Strange Woman/ foolish woman from Proverbs. As the Strange Woman/ foolish woman “knows nothing” (Pr.9:13) and the Samaritan Woman does not know Jesus at the beginning of the story, Jesus reveals himself to her progressively throughout the story. He is not just a thirsty traveler, nor a prophet, but he is the Messiah and the saviour of the world (a title attributed to Wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon) and a title which, it is safe to assume, the Samaritan woman echoed.

To varying degrees, throughout these three symbolic fields the ignorance of the Samaritan woman/ foolish woman has the potential of transcendence in the symbolic level of the Johannine community. Though the Strange Woman of Proverbs remains

³⁴¹Οἶδαμεν is frequently used in confessional statements, 3:2, 11; 9:31; 16:30; 21:24.

³⁴²So also Scott, *Sophia*, 187.

³⁴³Schneiders, *Revelatory*, 190.

³⁴⁴Olsson, *Structure*, 197.

ignorant, the Samaritan Woman has the opportunity of moving into truth through a personal encounter with Jesus.

Transcending Alterity

Throughout this discussion, I have attempted to demonstrate that the Samaritan woman, like the Proverbial Strange Woman, is constructed as the literary polar opposite to Jesus in the areas of gender, nationality and knowledge. Where the woman is female, a Samaritan and one who “does not know,” Jesus is male, a Jew and of those who “do know.” However, in the light of the Johannine community, both the woman and Jesus are seen through new eyes.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored the identity of the Samaritan Woman in John 4. Noting the extensive Wisdom influence in this gospel, I have argued that the author presents Jesus as Wisdom incarnate and the Samaritan Woman as Strange Woman incarnate. As such, the Samaritan Woman is constructed as a literary symbol of alterity: In contrast to Jesus, she is female, foreign and ignorant. This symbol of alterity, however, is rearticulated in the Christian context; the author thus challenges gender, nationality and knowledge as traditional criteria for the exclusion of members from this developing community. The author challenges the Proverbial lines of community definition and claims that Jesus inaugurated a new community which defines itself, not in contrast to gender, nationality and knowledge, but, as it turns out, in contrast to the traditional community - "the Jews."³⁴⁵ In this way, the Fourth Gospel casts the Samaritan Woman in the image of Strange Woman but subverts it in order to redefine the criteria of alterity. It takes a powerful aversive symbol and uses it to make a strong theological point.

The strength of the symbol of the Samaritan Woman as Strange Woman challenges historical speculation: If this narrative functions so well as a literary construction, is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the narrative is based on a historical event? or indeed, that the Samaritan Woman was ever actually flesh and blood?

³⁴⁵The possibility exists that Jews, like the Strange Woman, may similarly transcend these new criteria through belief in Jesus (8:31; 10:24; 11:45; 12:11). The statement of the Johannine Jesus that "salvation is from the Jews" (4:22) is an anomaly in this gospel where the Jews are generally cast as antagonists (5:10, 16, 18; 6:41; 7:1, 13; 8:37; 9:22; 10:31-33; 11:8, 54; 18:12, 36; 19:7, 12, 38; 20:19; cf. 18:20, 33; 19:40).

This thesis challenges Schüssler Fiorenza³⁴⁶ and Bultmann³⁴⁷ who claim that the Samaritan Woman was an unnamed historical person. It calls into question Raymond Brown's claim that the story has a basis in fact.³⁴⁸ Bligh's claim that this "historical" woman was remembered because the event was marked by a solemn pronouncement of Jesus is similarly undermined.³⁴⁹ The strong literary function of the symbolic presentation of the Samaritan Woman as Strange Woman challenges the arguments for a non-fictional historical woman.

In spite of the fact that the existence of a particular historical Samaritan Woman is called into question, the overall interpretation of this text with the emphasis on the transcendence of alterity invites speculation as to the historical community which articulated it. To what extent are the notions of gender, nationality and knowledge significant in the early Johannine community? One might speculate, along with Sandra Schneiders, that this story serves to legitimate the presence of Samaritan Christians in the Johannine community and to affirm their equality with Jewish Christians.³⁵⁰ Or one might argue with Martin Scott that the presence, the testimony and leadership of women in the community needed to be validated.³⁵¹ Was the main thrust of this passage designed to address the relationship between Samaritan and Jew as Bultmann and others have argued?³⁵² Ultimately, one cannot say one way or another whether the theme of transcending alterity reflects upon the role of either Samaritans or women in the

³⁴⁶*Memory*, 138.

³⁴⁷*John*, 175ff.

³⁴⁸*John*, 176.

³⁴⁹"Jesus," 332.

³⁵⁰*Revelatory*, 190-192.

³⁵¹*Sophia*, 192, 246.

³⁵²*John*, 175; Meeks, *Prophet-King*; Brown, *Community*, 34ff; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Memory*, 327; Olsson, *Structure*, 241, 238.

historical community. It most certainly indicates, however, a vision of hope and new possibilities for the Johannine community.

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