

The Mother of Jesus:

A Woman Possessed

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Characterization and Theology

Since the rise of New Criticism, to speak of characterization in narrative fiction invites vigorous debate as ‘character’ is dissolved into a cipher to be understood solely within the text itself with little relationship to external considerations such as the historical circumstances of the text, or biographical information about the author, or the possible author’s intention for writing the text.¹ To raise the issue of characterization in a Gospel is particularly problematic due to the ideological goal of the evangelist, which is made explicit in the Gospel of John. “These things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (20:31).

There is also concern whether modern theories of narrative criticism and characterization are applicable when considering ancient texts. In the words of Mark Allen Powell, “[N]arrative critics may be charged with anachronistically applying modern concepts to ancient literature or with treating the Gospels as though they were novels or works of fiction.”² Merenlahti and Hakola ask, “whether narrative-critical readings to justice to the

¹ A helpful introduction to various approaches in narrative criticism can be found in Elizabeth Struthers Malbon’s analysis of the Markan Characters. See, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark’s Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John-Knox, 2000) chapter 1. See also the brief overview of the origins and development of narrative criticism in Petri Merenlahti and Raimo Hakola, “Reconceiving Narrative Criticism,” in *Characterization in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism*, ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni (London: T & T Clark, 1999), 17-23.

² Mark Allan Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995) 254. A similar concern is raised by Cornelis Bennema in his study when he asks, “whether it is legitimate to apply modern methods used in fiction to ancient narratives and whether we can compare Hebrew and Greek literature regarding character;” Cornelis Bennema, “A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature,” *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009) 380. Bennema concludes that it is appropriate to apply modern methods of analysis to ancient narratives providing necessary precautions are taken such as being aware that by using modern methods “we fuse the

nature of the Gospel narratives,” since a narrative approach emphasizes the poetic/artistic nature of the work, measured in terms of “aesthetic standards” but the Gospels are “not only literary artefacts” but also “ideological discourse that originated in a particular real-life context.”³ They continue: “The primary goal of the Gospels was not beauty but truth.”⁴

The recent study by Cornelis Bennema on characterization in John makes a start in developing not simply a method or language for analyzing characters, but a comprehensive theory of character. His study draws upon the work of Yosef Ewen who proposes that characters be evaluated along three continua or axes which he names as complexity, development, and penetration into the inner life. To these axes he adds a continuum of “degree of characterization.” Here he plots each character as (i) agent, actant, or walk on; (ii) a type, stock or flat character; (iii) a character with personality; or (iv) an individual person.⁵ In addition to the explicit characterization in Gospel texts, because of the nature of the Gospel as non-fiction and therefore to some degree relating to the real world, Merenlahti and Hakola draw attention to the way readers try to “fill the gaps”⁶ by drawing on what is known about the events and circumstances. “What readers of a non-fictional narrative think of a character depends not only on what the narrator reveals but also on what else the readers may know about the person who is portrayed as a character in the narrative.”⁷

A further aspect of contemporary narrative criticism, which is particularly pertinent in Gospel studies, is called “the point of view,” for as Bennema notes “a narrative is not neutral since it has an inbuilt perspective.”⁸ In the case of the Fourth Gospel, this perspective is made explicit (20:31) but it can also operate implicitly within the deeper structural levels. The ideological point of view includes “the beliefs, norms, evaluations and value system of the

modern and ancient horizon, and use modern terminology to understand characters in ancient literature” (*idem*. 396).

³ Merenlahti and Hakola, “Reconceiving Narrative Criticism,” 14-17.

⁴ Merenlahti and Hakola, “Reconceiving Narrative Criticism,” 32. For further on the truth claims of the Gospel that are extrinsic to the text itself see 33-34. Since the Gospels make truth claims that refer to the historical reality beyond the text, these claims are quite different to the claims of fictional works, and this makes a difference in the reading experience.

⁵ Bennema, “A Theory of Character,” 407.

⁶ Meir Sternberg seems to have been the first to speak of “filling the gaps” in examining the story of David. See Meir Sternberg, “The King through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Reading Process,” *Poetics Today* 7 (1986): 275-322. This was originally published in Hebrew in *Ha-Sifrut* 1.2 (1968): 263-92.

⁷ Merenlahti and Hakola, “Reconceiving Narrative Criticism,” 40.

⁸ Bennema, “A Theory of Character,” 394.

text.”⁹ Resseguie asks how a narrator uses “setting, rhetoric, character and plot to persuade the reader to adopt his evaluative point of view?”¹⁰

In this essay, I will take up some of these approaches in my analysis of the characterization of the Mother of Jesus, in particular I will make use of the insight of Resseguie and those other narrative critics who consider not only the quality of the characterization as such, but also raise the deeper question of how this characterization serves the ideological purpose or ‘point of view’ of the writer since it is the characters “who transmit the significance and values of the narrative to the reader.”¹¹ In other words, my interest is how the character ‘works’ to contribute to the theological perspective of the Gospel.

The questions I bring to the text are: why is the Mother of Jesus never given her personal name? Does it make a difference that she is present at Cana and the Cross? Could her place in these scenes be substituted by any other character, male or female? Given that she speaks less than ten words, is she essential to the Johannine plot?

The Wedding at Cana.

The first character introduced in this scene is the Mother of Jesus, signaling her importance.¹² Her initial words, “They have no wine” (2:3), and Jesus’ first response, “What [is this] to me and you, Woman” appear to be simply statements of fact. As guests at the wedding the supply of wine is not a matter for their concern.¹³ As the narrative will later reveal, it is the bridegroom’s responsibility to provide wine. Jesus’ further words, “my hour

⁹ James Resseguie has undertaken an analysis of the Fourth Gospel examining ways in which the narrator communicates his point of view to the reader. In this study he considers the spatial, phraseological, temporal, psychological, and ideological point of view. See James L. Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John*, Biblical Interpretation Series 56 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 4-5.

¹⁰ Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 2.

¹¹ Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, JSOTSup 70 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 47. Merenlahti also emphasizes the importance of considering characterization in relation to the ideological or theological perspective of the Gospel. “Rather than static elements of design picked by a master author to fill a distinct literary or rhetorical purpose, they [characters] are constantly being reshaped by distinct ideological dynamics. This ideologically attuned nature of character presents a challenge for any theory or model of characterization for the Gospel narrative... analysis of ideology should be an integral part of the analysis of the formal features of narrative.” See Petri Merenlahti, “Characters in the Making: Individuality and Ideology in the Gospels,” in *Characterisation in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism*, ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni (London: T & T Clark, 1999), 50.

¹² Lieu notes that “John generally uses the formula ‘there was ...’ to introduce an individual who plays a significant role in the ensuing scene.” See, Judith Lieu, “The Mother of the Son in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 117 (1998): 50.

¹³ Similarly, Ritva H. Williams, “The Mother of Jesus at Cana: A Social-Science Interpretation of John 2:1-12,” *CBQ* 59 (1997): 688.

has not yet come” (2:4), indicate that he has heard more than a simple statement of facts. He has heard a request to do something about this issue. This is an example of the need for the reader to “fill the gaps.” “Being given only sparse and ambiguous information, the reader simply has to infer, make guesses and interpretations.”¹⁴ At this point, the work of the sociolinguist Deborah Tannen on gender related modes of communication can add to our understanding of the interplay between the mother and son. Tannen describes her work as “discourse analysis” which “focuses on connected language ‘beyond the sentence’.”¹⁵

The Mother’s apparently neutral comment, “they have no wine,” can be understood as a linguistic strategy of indirectness where without making an explicit request, she presumes, because of her relationship with her son, that he will hear the implied request. Jesus’ response indicates that her presumption is correct. He hears the implicit request. Tannen comments that “those who feel entitled to make demands may prefer not to, seeking the payoff in rapport.”¹⁶ She also notes that cultures vary in their use of indirect communication as an appropriate communication strategy.

One of the deeply puzzling aspects of the Cana episode is the sharp response Jesus makes to his mother when she indicates that the wine has run out; it reads literally, “What to me and to you?” (2:4).¹⁷ In all its uses in the LXX¹⁸ this statement has a corrective, if not harsh, tone in a situation “in which two parties have nothing in common, or no relationship to each other.”¹⁹ The reply to his mother is strange, but then the puzzle deepens when Jesus acts in accordance with her wishes. There is more to this dialogue than meets the eye. Tanner cautions about the tendency for scholars to see only one aspect of a conversation between men and women when in fact there is ambiguity and the polysemy of both power and solidarity.²⁰ The contradiction between Jesus’ words and his later actions suggest that his

¹⁴ Merenlahti, “Characters in the Making,” 53.

¹⁵ Deborah Tannen, *Gender and Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 1996), 5. I wish to acknowledge the unpublished work of one of my Master’s students, Sandra Jebb, who introduced me to Tannen’s work and how it can contribute to understanding the implied nuances of language when gendered relationships are taken into account.

¹⁶ Tannen, *Gender and Discourse*, 32.

¹⁷ The use of the vocative, “Woman” when addressing his mother will be discussed in the next section in examining the scene at the foot of the cross.

¹⁸ Judges 11:12; 2 Sam 16:10; 19:22; 1 Kgs 17:18; 2 Kgs 3:13; 2 Chron 35:21. Similarly in the New Testament it has the negative sense “leave me alone” (Matt 8:29; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 4:34; 8:28).

¹⁹ Arthur H. Maynard, “TI EMOI KAI SOL,” *NTS* 31 (1985) 584. For a discussion of its use in the LXX and the possible Semitism lying behind the expression, see Jean-Paul Michaud, “Le signe de Cana dans son contexte johannique,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 18 (1962) 247-53. Williams cautions that context is important to interpret the meaning of this exchange and not presume that words and phrases remain constant over time or remain constant regardless of context; see Williams, “The Mother of Jesus at Cana,” 687.

²⁰ Tannen, *Gender and Discourse*, 46.

response is not simply a rebuff of his mother's request. Tannen notes that many cultures see "arguing as a pleasurable sign of intimacy" and in this context she notes that among men and women of Jewish backgrounds "a friendly argument is a means of being sociable" and that when a Jewish couple appear to be arguing, "they are staging a kind of public sparring match, where both fighters are on the same team."²¹

In spite of the seemingly harsh response of Jesus, there must be a deeper level of intimacy, as Tanner suggests, within this exchange, for with no further rejoinder, the Mother turns to the servants and says, "Do whatever he tells you" (2:5). Clearly, she presumes that Jesus will act. Whatever the apparent harshness at the surface level of the dialogue with her son, at a deeper level she has understood his compliance with her implied request. When commenting on indirectness as a strategy used between men and women, Tanner states, "The interpretation of a given utterance, and the likely response to it, depends on the setting, on individuals' status and their relationship with each other, and also on the linguistic conventions that are ritualized in the cultural context."²² As a twenty-first century Western woman, trying to make sense of this exchange when I only have a text I need to be aware of possible cultural conventions operating here that I may never fully grasp. Jane Kopas' comments express the demands placed on the modern interpreter when seeking to make sense of this exchange.

... the level of understanding that exists between them transcends the words exchanged. In one sense, they seem to be talking past each other, and one gets the impression of a lack of real contact. On the other hand, Mary's reaction suggests that she understands all as she tells the servants to do whatever he tells them. As we ponder the kind of communication that was going on, we realize that there was an exchange of invitation and response, initiated and answered from each side. The words themselves are not the most important vehicle of meaning; the relationship is. The degree to which the relationship yields its meaning depends upon the willingness and ability of the participants to hear more than what was spoken, and to let the communication unfold in its own way.²³

The very strangeness of the exchange draws the reader's attention to the relationship between Jesus and his mother and to the indication that this relationship will be particularly

²¹ Tannen, *Gender and Discourse*, 44.

²² Tannen, *Gender and Discourse*, 34.

²³ Jane Kopas, "Jesus and Women: John's Gospel," *Theology Today* 41 (1985): 202.

significant in the future, when ‘the hour’ arrives.²⁴ Considering Jesus’ subsequent actions in changing the water into wine, his words to his mother must be understood primarily as a narrative strategy directing the reader’s attention to the future ‘hour’.²⁵ It is then that the relationship between Jesus and his mother will be critical. The importance of her relationship as mother of Jesus, in this Gospel, will only be revealed in ‘the hour’. The Cana miracle happens, but Jesus’ apparent reprimand, creates a puzzle that will not be resolved until the Passion.

As the Cana episode develops, the words of the Steward to the Bridegroom indicate that it was the role of the bridegroom to provide the wine for the wedding (2:10). This exchange implicitly identifies Jesus as the real bridegroom in this scene, which John the Baptizer will later confirm (3:28-30).²⁶ Since Jesus is the bridegroom, then his Mother becomes the “mother of the bridegroom.” The Mother’s role at Cana concludes with the narrator’s comment, “After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and sisters and his disciples; and they dwelt there for a few days” (2:12) A household is being formed around Jesus and his mother. This narrative comment proleptically introduces a theme that will be further developed at the Cross.²⁷

To summarize: In this episode, the mother of Jesus is an active agent. She is introduced first indicating her significance, she then notices the lack of wine, initiates the miracle by speaking to her son, she implicitly makes a request, and then gives explicit directives to the servants. The strangeness of Jesus’ response points ahead to a future time. There is no report on the Mother’s response to this miracle, as there is the disciples’ (2:11) but the episode concludes with Jesus, his mother, his family and disciples together at Capernaum. Her role at this time is finished. What she has done and said is sufficient – for now!

The hour.

²⁴ The theme of Jesus’ ‘hour’ will develop across the narrative and take on a meaning related to the Passion, as the ‘hour’ of Jesus’ death, exaltation and glorification (7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). The presence of the woman/mother at Cana and at the cross link these two scenes and require that the ‘hour’ named here be understood in terms of the Passion.

²⁵ So also Lieu: “we are led to look for a deeper meaning that has yet to be revealed. There is unfinished business.” Lieu, “The Mother of the Son,” 66.

²⁶ See in this same volume, Mary L. Coloe, “The Servants and Steward at Cana,” pages???

²⁷ I have developed in greater detail the significance of the nuptial theme in John 1 and 2 in an earlier study. See Mary L. Coloe, *Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), chapters 2 and 3.

The Mother of Jesus returns to the narrative at the foot of the Cross. Here she says nothing. But, this scene marks the climax of the Gospel for immediately after the narrator states: “After this, knowing that everything had been finished (τετέλεσται) so that the scriptures might be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I thirst.’ After taking the vinegar Jesus then spoke aloud, “‘It is finished (τετέλεσται),’ and bowing his head he delivered over the spirit” (19:30)

These words of completion, following the scene with his mother, emphasize the importance of this scene where Jesus changes the relationship between his mother and the beloved disciple: “Woman, behold your Son” (19:26), “Behold your mother” (19:27). Jesus’ words are frequently interpreted as simply a dying son showing filial care for his mother in seeing that she is given into the care of another.²⁸ Such an interpretation does little justice to the significance of the scene and Jesus’ ensuing judgment “τετέλεσται.”²⁹

When Jesus turns to his mother, and says, “Women behold your son,” and then turns to the beloved disciple and says, “Behold your mother,” he effectively alters their relationship. The double use of the term ‘behold: ἰδε’ (vv. 26, 27) informs the reader that Jesus’ words are a prophetic revelation, while the form of words is very similar to the formula of adoption.³⁰ The woman is now mother to the beloved disciple, and the disciple is now son. But with this change, the disciple’s relationship with Jesus also changes. If they now have the same ‘mother’ then the disciple is now brother to Jesus and therefore participates in Jesus’ relationship with God.³¹ This is the moment of divine filiation when disciples become brothers/sisters to Jesus and children of God.³²

In fact the prologue had already hinted that this was the ultimate goal of the narrative when it stated, “He came to his own (εἰς τὰ ἴδια) but his own did not receive him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God”

²⁸ See for example C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 552.

²⁹ Brown, comments, “we doubt that Jesus’ filial solicitude is the main import of the Johannine scene. Such a non-theological interpretation would make this episode a misfit amid the highly symbolic episodes that surround it in the crucifixion episode;” Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., Anchor Bible 29-29a (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966 & 1970), 2:923.

³⁰ de Goedt proposes that ἰδε introduces a revelatory formula. See Michel de Goedt, “Un Scheme de Revelation dans la Quatrieme Evangile,” *New Testament Studies* 8 (1961-62) 142-50. Barrett (*The Gospel According to St John*, 552) states that the words are both revelatory and adoptive.

³¹ “... le disciple bien-aimé est adopté par Jésus comme frère,” (De Goedt, *Un scheme de revelation*, 145).

³² Following the gift of *the Spirit* (19:30), the Father of Jesus is called the Father of the disciples, “go to my brothers and sisters (τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου) and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (20:17). I read τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου as an inclusive expression since Mary Magdalene is surely included in ‘your Father’.

(1:11-12). The phrase, “εἰς τὰ ἴδια” (1:11) is repeated at the cross, “and from that hour the disciple took her “εἰς τὰ ἴδια” (19:27). The *inclusio* formed by this phrase indicates that what was promised in the prologue is brought to completion at the Cross. The beloved disciple, representative of all disciples, is born anew as a child of God.

This scene of Jesus’ death and the bestowal of the Spirit is also a scene depicting the disciple being born anew of the Spirit (3:3, 5), born into the household of God.³³ The flow of blood and water from the pierced side of Jesus (19:34) is evocative of birth when the mother’s waters break at the onset of labor and the flow of blood in which the new child is born.³⁴ Lee comments, “The connection between the flow of blood and water and childbirth is not one that is generally made by commentators... Yet with an understanding of the flexible nature of Jesus’ flesh as it is symbolically presented in the Fourth Gospel, and its capacity to take on cosmic significance, the imagery makes perfect sense – of the elements themselves ... and the significance of the crucifixion as life-giving.”³⁵ Jesus, as the one whose flesh makes God known, depicts the birthing moment when children are born of God. In his ‘labor’ of death, Jesus’ work is now finished (τετέλεσται 19:28, 30).

The verb τελέω reiterates God’s judgment at the completion of his six days creative work – “thus the heavens and the earth were finished (συνετελέσθησαν)... And on the seventh day God finished (συντέλεσεν) the work” (Gen 2:1-2).³⁶ God’s work, which was begun in creation, is brought to its completion at the cross as Jesus dies and breathes down the Spirit to the couple standing beneath the Cross. In the next verse we are told that it was

³³ This has been a theme of my work, see in particular Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), chapter 9.

³⁴ On the birth imagery in this scene see Dorothy A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 152-59. Brown identifies Jesus’ mother as the New Eve and Lady Zion “giving birth to a new people in the messianic age” (926). While I agree that the titles “woman” and “mother” are part of a constellation of images that evoke the Genesis creation narrative, I see the Johannine imagery pointing more towards God as the one “giving birth” in the hour. Here, we need to allow Johannine imagery to have greater subtlety and even obscurity than allegorization, rather than looking for exact one-to-one equivalence. As Culpepper explains, “Symbols ... often span the gap between knowledge, or sensible reality, and mystery. They call for explanation and simultaneously resist it;” see, Alan R. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 183. The flesh of ὁ Λόγος makes visible in history, the presence of ὁ Θεός (1:1, 14). The blood and water flowing from the flesh of Jesus symbolizes the rebirth of disciples, as children, born of God (1:14).

³⁵ Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John*, 80. One ancient commentator who perceived birth symbolism in the flow of blood and water was Jacob of Sarug, (450-520) who wrote, “Christ came and opened up baptism by his cross, so that it should be a mother of life for the world in place of Eve, water and blood for the fashioning of spiritual infants flowed forth from it, and baptism became the mother of life” (Homily on Three Baptisms), cited in Joel C. Elowsky, ed. *John 11-21 Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IVb: (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007) 328.*

³⁶ Martin Hengel, “The Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel,” in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, JSNTSup 104 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 393-94.

the day of Preparation before the Passover and the eve of Sabbath, and the narrator notes “that Sabbath was a great Sabbath” (19:31). In the Hour, Jesus brings the work he was sent to accomplish to its conclusion. Throughout the Gospel Jesus had claimed that God in fact was still working (5:17), that the creative work of God had not yet been completed, and that he has been sent to complete (τελέω) this work (4:34; 5:36; 17:4). It is only with the death of Jesus that Creation can hear the word “τετέλεστοι,” and this word ushers in the great Sabbath, marking the completion of God’s creative work that has been in process since the dawn of time “in the beginning” (Gen 1:1).

Woman and Mother.

Both at Cana and the Cross only two titles are given to this woman, known in the Synoptics as “Mary.” In the Fourth Gospel in both scenes she is described by the narrator using the title, ‘Mother’ (2:1, 19:25) and spoken to by Jesus, with the title, “Woman” (2:4; 19:26). These two titles, were names given to the first woman: “She shall be called Woman” (Gen 2:23). “The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living” (Gen 3:20). These two titles, when considered with other unique features of the Johannine Passion, suggest a deliberate evocation of the primordial Garden of Eden, and a theology of creation.³⁷

Only in this Gospel is Jesus arrested and buried in a garden (18:1; 19:41). As Frédéric Manns notes, “The symbol of the garden frames this section.”³⁸ John emphasizes that the cross is in the centre, “So they took Jesus ... to the place called the place of a skull ... There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus in the middle (19:17-18).³⁹ The Johannine addition, “in the middle (μέσον)” echoes the phrase in Genesis where God plants “the tree of life in the middle of the garden” (LXX Gen 2:9: ἐν μέσῳ τῶ

³⁷ The theme of “creation” and “recreation” then continues in John 20 where Jesus is misunderstood to be the “gardener” by Mary Magdalene, the naming of the day as the first day of the week, and “eight days” later, and when Jesus breathed (ἐνεφύσησεν) the Spirit upon his disciples with the same expression used in Genesis when God breathed (ἐνεφύσησεν) life into the face of the earth creature, and Adam becomes a living being (Gen 2:7). For more on the use of Creation symbolism in John 20 see Mary L. Coloe, “Theological Reflections on Creation in the Gospel of John,” *Pacifica* 24 (2011): 1-12; and Jeannine K. Brown, “Creation’s Renewal in the Gospel of John,” *CBQ* 72 (2010): 275-90.

³⁸ The theme of creation is very richly developed in Frédéric Manns, *L’Evangile de Jean à la Lumière du Judaïsme*, SBFA 33 (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1991), 401-29, quotation p. 409. He draws attention to many Genesis motifs within the Johannine Passion: the Kedron torrent (18:1), the tree of life in the middle of the garden (cf. 19:18), the rabbinic location of Eden beside the Jerusalem Temple. See also Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991), 57-95; Coloe, “Theological Reflections on Creation,” 1-12; Brown, “Creation’s Renewal,” 275-90.

³⁹ The Synoptic Gospels mention the two criminals crucified with Jesus “one on the right and one on the left” (Mk 15:27; Matt 27:38; Lk 23:33), but only John adds, “and Jesus in the middle.”

παράδεισῳ).⁴⁰ The evangelist depicts the crucifixion with the iconography of Genesis 2: there is a garden, and in the middle of the garden is the cross, the tree of life, and at the foot of the cross stand a man, the beloved disciple and a woman, who is never named but called only ‘woman’ (John 2:4; 19:26) and ‘mother,’ (2:1; 19:25), echoing the names given to the first woman (Gen 2:23; 3:20).

The Mother of Jesus: Her Characterization

The characterization of this woman from the ideological point of view of the Gospel lies in her two titles: mother and woman. The title “the mother of Jesus” by which she is first introduced immediately emphasizes her relationship with Jesus. At Cana, because of this relationship, she presumes to speak to him about the wine shortage which, ordinarily, should be no concern either to her or to Jesus. Jesus’ strange ‘distancing’ response sets up a dilemma for the reader, for while appearing to rebuff her, he then acts in accordance with her implicit request. The strangeness of his response also highlights his words, that his hour has *not yet* come, suggesting that there will be a time in the future when the relationship between mother and son will be important. Similarly, the use of the term “Woman” when Jesus speaks to his mother is strange. While it is not necessarily impolite, since it is the way Jesus later speaks to the Samaritan Woman (4:21), Mary Magdalene (20:15),⁴¹ it is unusual and again seems to suggest a distance between son and mother. Paradoxically the apparent “distancing” only emphasizes the relationship between Jesus and his Mother.

At Cana the two titles therefore arouse some discomfort in the reader due to Jesus’ form of response.⁴² This discomfort is not resolved until the Cross where, in conjunction with other aspects of the Johannine crucifixion recalling the garden and tree of life (Genesis 2) the titles Mother and Woman are part of a narrative strategy where the Johannine crucifixion is portrayed as an act of re-creation. And here, in this scene, the mother’s presence is crucial. Given that the Gospel is a narrative, the change in the status of the believer from disciple to

⁴⁰ The phrase, “in the middle of the garden” is repeated in Gen 3:3. Marie-Émile Boismard and Arnaud Lamouille, *L’Evangile de Jean*, Synopse des Quatre Évangiles en Français III (Paris: Cerf, 1977), 452; Manns, *L’Evangile de Jean à la Lumière du Judaïsme*, 426-7.

⁴¹ See also the woman caught in adultery (8:10).

⁴² Resseguie identifies a narrative strategy he calls, “phraseological point of view” where there is ambiguity or strangeness in how the narrator or a character speaks. Names and titles are one aspect of this strategy. See Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 10-15.

brother of Jesus and child of God, could only be depicted in such a scene which has similarities to the formal process of adoption.⁴³

The explicit plot of the Gospel as stated in the Prologue is that believers, become children of God (1:12). The characterization of the Mother of Jesus plays an essential role in this plot. In fact, the Mother's relationship to her Son initiates his public ministry at Cana, and then enables it to be brought to fulfillment at the Cross.

In discussing characterization, Merenlahti places an emphasis on characters "in the process of becoming,"⁴⁴ rather than static "types" such as the heroes of Greek epics.⁴⁵ He makes use of the characterization of Judas across the four Gospels as a way of illustrating this claim. He states: "Both Luke and John report the exact moment when Judas the man, a greedy thief who stole from the common purse of the disciples (Jn 12:6), turns into Judas the betrayer occupied by Satan (Lk 22:3; Jn 13:27) – an intriguing case of a character *becoming possessed by his narrative role*" (italics mine).⁴⁶ This final phase aptly describes the significance of the Mother of Jesus. On one level, her explicit characterization declines. At Cana she is active, she speaks, she directs. At the Cross she is passive, she stands, says nothing, and receives directives. But when considering her characterization in relation to the ideological point of view of the Gospel, her role at the cross is where *she is possessed by her narrative role*. At the cross there is no need for her to do or say anything. Her presence, her being "woman and mother" is sufficient for the theological goal of the narrative to be completed as disciples become children. Apart from Jesus, no other character is as important to the ideological point of view of this Gospel's narrative, than the Mother of Jesus.

⁴³ According to Raymond Brown, (*The Gospel According to John*, 2:907), the words of adoption are usually couched in the second person, "you are my son," but as Barrett notes "here the words are not spoken by the adoptive parent;" see Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 552.

⁴⁴ Merenlahti, "Characters in the Making," 54.

⁴⁵ "Thus in the Gospels, characters are only in the process of becoming what they are;" Merenlahti, "Characters in the Making," 50.

⁴⁶ Merenlahti, "Characters in the Making," 61.

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