PhD thesis

**Bringing characters alive: sensory development in the Fourth Gospel's characterisation**

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**Bringing Characters Alive:**
**Sensory Development in the Fourth Gospel's Characterisation**

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OCMS, Ph.D

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## ABSTRACT

The present thesis is an interdisciplinary investigation of the work of biblical character construction drawing from biblical studies, cultural anthropology and semiotics. It surveys how the author of the Fourth Gospel alludes to the human senses to build his characters to impact his readers. The research proposes the methodological joint approach to survey the sensory development of the characterisation of Nicodemus (3:1-21; 7:45-51; 19:38-42), the Samaritan woman of Sychar (4:1-42), and the man born blind (9:1-38). Specifically, it attempts to address the question, *how might the author of the Fourth Gospel have employed sensory experiences to establish a model of sensory perception to highlight somatic outcomes to develop his characters*? To date, there has been no thorough investigation of the sensory development of Johannine portrayals. The analysis through such an exegetical method reveals facets that assist contemporary readers of this Gospel in understanding how its author elaborates on characters by creating unique sensory generative trajectories of meaning for each portrayal while also revealing the impact of sensory perceptions on somatic actions. The survey proposes a biblical sensory model of sensory hermeneutics to provide an alternative perspective of the Johannine characters' interaction with Jesus that purposefully impacts the readers' perception of this Gospel's goal (20:30-31).

# Bringing Characters Alive:
# Sensory Development in the Fourth Gospel's Characterisation

by

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## DECLARATION

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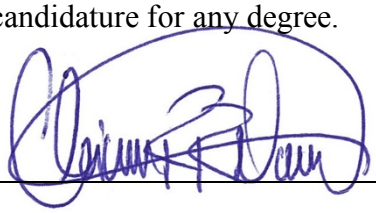
Signed  (Candidate)

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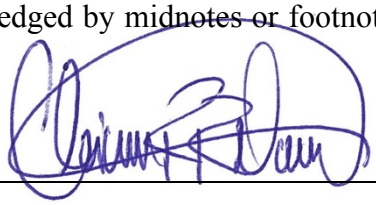
Signed  (Candidate)

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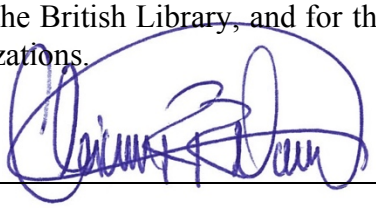
Signed  (Candidate)

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## DEDICATION

To God, the good Father, the One who created everything and mercifully called me to share His Word with all people He would lead me to meet. To His Son Jesus, who is the Christ, who died but was raised to life again to offer me access to His Father, and called me to become His disciple to announce His Good Message. And to God's Spirit, my Comforter and Counsellor who interceded for me during difficult times while writing this thesis.

To the two beautiful women of my life. Renata, my wife, always so present, confident, lovely and full of hope and joy. She always believed in me. She was my first discipler in the faith of our Saviour and is my eternal love. And to the fruit of our union, Victoria, our amazing clever daughter who has patiently taught me how to become a father while writing a PhD thesis. She is at the age of this work, as she was born in the same year I began this wonderful journey.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ANE | *Ancient Near East* |
| ANF | *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* |
| AUSS | *Andrews University Seminary Studies* |
| AYBC | *Anchor Yale Bible Commentary* |
| AYBD | *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* |
| AYBRL | *Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library* |
| BDAG | *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT and Other Early Christian Literature* |
| BTB | *Biblical Theology Bulletin* |
| BBR | *Bulletin for Biblical Research* |
| CBAA | *Catholic Biblical Association of America* |
| CBQ | *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* |
| CEUP | *Central European University Press* |
| CUAP | *Catholic University of America Press* |
| ColUP | *Columbia University Press* |
| CUP | *Cambridge University Press* |
| DSS | *Dead Sea Scrolls* |
| FG | *Fourth Gospel* |
| HUP | *Harvard University Press* |
| GTM | *General Trajectory of Meaning* |
| JBL | *Journal of Biblical Literature* |
| JC&C | *James Clark & Company Limited* |
| JECH | *Journal of Early Christian History* |
| JPS | *The New Jewish Publication Society Translation* |
| JSNT | *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* |
| JSOT | *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* |
| JTS | *The Journal of Theological Studies* |
| KJV | *King James Version* |
| LHBOTS | *Library of Hebrew Bible Old Testament Studies* |
| LNTS | *Library of New Testament Studies* |
| LXX | *The Septuagint Text* |
| MT | *The Masoretic Text* |
| NABS | *Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies* |
| NIB | *New Interpreter's Bible* |

| | |
|---|---|
| NICNT | *New International Commentary of the New Testament* |
| NIV | *New International Version* |
| NRSVUE | *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition* |
| NT | *New Testament* |
| NTTSD | *New Testament Tools, Studies and Documents* |
| NYUP | *New York University Press* |
| OHCHR | *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights* |
| OT | *Old Testament* |
| OUP | *Oxford University Press* |
| PSUP | *Pennsylvania State University Press* |
| SBL | *Society of Biblical Literature* |
| SCM | *Student Christian Movement Press* |
| SNT | *Supplements to Novum Testamentum* |
| SUP | *Stanford University Press* |
| UCP | *University of California Press* |
| UChP | *University of Chicago Press* |
| UTP | *University of Toronto Press* |
| YUP | *Yale University Press* |
| WJK | *Westminster John Know* |
| WLC | *Westminster Leningrad Codex* |
| WUNT | *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* |

# Chapter 1 | **INTRODUCTION**

## 1.1. The Research Background

This study examines the significance of sensory experiences in the characterisation process within the biblical narratives, with a particular focus on the Fourth Gospel. It posits that the Gospel's author may have strategically utilised his conceptualization of human senses to shape the development of his characters, thereby facilitating the readers' comprehension of and engagement with his theological motif articulated in 20:30-31. Consequently, the research demonstrates that sensory experiences catalyse sensory perceptions, which, in turn, produce tangible somatic outcomes. By delineating a structured pathway within the domain of sensory perception, this study explores how the sensory experiences of Johannine characters inform their subsequent actions. Ultimately, it seeks to answer the central research question: In what ways did the author of the Fourth Gospel employ sensory experiences to construct a model of sensory perception that underscores somatic outcomes, thus advancing the development of his characters?

Research on characterisation in the Fourth Gospel is vast. Relevant contributions to Johannine scholarship regarding character studies have been made for at least forty years. As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, such surveys have consistently presented unique understandings following previous findings on the character-building process in the Bible, particularly the Gospels' narratives. In addition, thorough research on the human senses in general has been carried out in different academic fields, appearing with increasing frequency in the last thirty years. Although investigations regarding the relevance of sensory perceptions in biblical texts, precisely in the Fourth Gospel, are not yet expressive, some relevant examples are discussed in the third chapter of this thesis. However, the impact of sensory perception in the work of characterisation in the Gospels' narratives is still incipient, and the discussion about a distinct contribution of sensory experiences in character building in the Fourth Gospel has not yet received proper consideration by current biblical scholarship. This investigation aims to contribute to this subject.

At this point, we should consider the background in which this investigation was idealized and conceived. A relevant initial question refers to the interest in surveying the reference to human senses in biblical texts: Why study sensory development in the portrayal of the characters in the Fourth Gospel? Why the human senses? The answer to this question has personal, missiological and theological connotations. Such concerns

began to be considered before there was a specific interest in surveying the presence of human senses in biblical texts, ultimately arriving at the point where this research is now.

Many years of responsibility as a theologian and pastor have brought thought-provoking considerations to this research. Among recurring daily concerns, one has often stood out: How to provide today's followers of Jesus with a lens through which they can read the Scriptures in search of references consistent with the Gospel's message to qualify and solidify their presence as God's servants in their own family and Christian community and also in the world (John 20:21).

To understand how God's redemption through Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection can truly be understood and experienced as God's dominion over the entire created universe, it is necessary to see that God is not only saving but also restoring the human race as a whole, with the new creature becoming Christ's descendant, the new human being. Although the Gospels certainly announce salvation as personal, they also manifest that spiritual pilgrimage is communal. God's church is the unity of the redeemed people transformed from glory to glory, by the Holy Spirit, until all together reach the stature of a perfect woman and man. Therefore, the invitation to a personal relationship with God is only a part of our mission as Jesus' disciples. It is important to understand that the Bible teaches Christ as the Lord over everything, everyone, all dimensions of human existence, as it has often been said: 'the whole gospel to the whole man'.

The reflection above has become one of the main initial reasons for this research. God values both the physical and spiritual dimensions of human life. Divine redemption manifests itself in the restoration of the whole creation, and as concerns humanity, God wants to rescue the human soul as well as to provide the restoration of the human body. The commitment of every woman and man identified with Jesus' teaching and work must be guided by a missiological and pastoral action that affects the human person in all its dimensions, where the entire person in its context is transformed in all its circumstances.

Therefore, this research arises from the need to perceive that the Gospel's stories of women and men in interaction with Jesus teach that relationship with God goes beyond evangelism and social assistance, but must also consider the relevance of such tasks. Reading the evangelical narratives filled with dialogues and interactions with Jesus should highlight that the presence of the disciple in the world consists of much more than building or multiplying local churches so that people can withdraw from the world to perform functions that make the institution viable, deeming religion as an end in itself. The interaction of women and men with Jesus in the pages of the Bible reveals a call to surrender to his lordship, forgiveness of sins and receipt of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Disciples become part of a body, the body of Christ, the perfect environment to collectively experience of the benefits of the cross. This body is used by God to overflow his blessings to the world, as a prophetic announcement of the new heaven and the new earth. Thus, the missiological and pastoral path of each disciple of Jesus is affective and relational, much more important than the methodological and operational.

The Fourth Gospel's accounts of Jesus' encounters with people from countless life situations, different cultural contexts, age, intellectuality, social position, gender, and spiritual and religious convictions show that his church was built to be a therapeutic community where God's grace shapes it into an agency of integral redemption. Women and men of God form the historical sign of the Kingdom of God, orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, knowing and unconditionally serving Jesus as Lord.

Where do the human senses fit into this discussion? As analysed in the third chapter on sensory studies, cultural anthropologists have begun to realise that the human senses are an ever-shifting social and historical construct. Research has shown that cultural and political sensory perceptions are not cognitive processes or neurological mechanisms only, but also mediators between self and society, mind and body, idea and object.[1]

This view has led some scholars to understand more clearly how the mind relates to the body in the realisation of the world. That is, how human thought and consciousness cooperate with bodily sensory perceptions to learn about and adapt to the environment around us.[2] Scholars are beginning to see that the human senses should not be simply taken as passive receptors. Their interaction both with the world and other senses is a mental and physiological phenomenon, but also cultural and political. Therefore, the limits of one's language are not the limits of one's world since the senses come before language and extend beyond it.[3] Such discernment has led sensory anthropologists to see the body as an existential ground of perception and being: 'a profusion of sensory experience, absorbed in the movement of the world and mingling with it through all its senses'.[4] For Casey O'Callaghan, although we generally think that human senses work the same for different persons or a given person over a lifetime, such a view mistakenly leads us to understand our senses as sources of value and meaning for all of us in all stages of life. But people do not like the same foods, music and art, as our sensory perceptions differ in sensory capacities due to our background, experience, skills, training and life

[1] Bull et al., 'Introducing Sensory Studies', 5.

[2] Gibbs, *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*, 10.

[3] Howes, *Senses and Sensation*.

[4] Le Breton, *Sensing the World*, 1.

stage. Each of these differences in sensory capacities is also affected by the diversity of senses, providing us with evaluative and normative outcomes.[5] Yael Avrahami, as we will see in detail later, understands that biblical authors employ the senses as categories for experiencing the world through the body. For her, such bodily sensory experiences identify symbolic use of the senses, when seeing and hearing, for instance, should also be taken as learning and knowledge.[6]

But another question must be asked: Why study sensory perception in the Fourth Gospel? What makes this Gospel relevant as background for this research? Perhaps we should answer this question by saying, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (1:1).[7] Such solemn and ceremonious words have been written to be read and heard, mentally taking readers and listeners far back, before the creation of the world to grandiose realities practically impossible to imagine.

At first glance, incongruity seems to increase when we continue reading the Gospel until the end. Jesus appears to be portrayed differently in comparison to the Synoptics. In the Fourth Gospel, he practically does not tell parables, and says things that people do not seem to understand so that he can say something even more decisive and important. He gives long speeches, and often the disciples and other listeners are left without understanding his teaching. When performing signs, he does not encourage people to understand the extraordinary phenomenon but asks them to find the deeper meaning of what happened.

Moreover, sometimes there is a strange feeling that the Fourth Gospel portrays Jesus as being distant from us, little concerned with daily issues that bother and challenge us. Before Pilate, he says: 'My kingdom is not of this world' (18:36). One could wonder, then, what would Jesus have to say to us today? Furthermore, he seems to need no one to feed five thousand people (6:11), and even asserts that 'I and the Father are one" (10:30). However, the more one reads the Fourth Gospel, the more one realises that it is a kind of mysterious treasure that does not want to give up its secrets too easily, as in when it asserts: 'Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (20:30-31).

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[5] O'Callaghan, *A Multisensory Philosophy of Perception*, 191-2.

[6] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 127-30.

[7] All biblical quotations in this thesis are taken from the NIV, unless otherwise indicated.

According to one tradition from the first centuries of the Church, the four canonical Gospels are identified with four living creatures (ζῷα) coming from the prophetic visions of Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4:7. Standing in the presence of the throne of God, they seem like an ox, a lion, a man, and an eagle.[8] Interestingly, the comparison of the Fourth Gospel with a flying eagle seems to have been based on the understanding that this Gospel accentuated the grandeur of Jesus' relationship with the Heavenly Father. In other words, this Gospel would pay little attention to more immediate issues relating to common life on earth. To top it off, Eusebius of Caesarea wrote in 313 that Clement of Alexandria would have identified the author of the Fourth Gospel as having composed a 'spiritual gospel'.[9]

Such interpretations might have led readers throughout the centuries to mistakenly believe that the Fourth Gospel neglected a crucial theological dimension: Jesus' message was holistically concerned with the human being. Such an inaccuracy would have prompted people to think that their down-to-earth issues of life and dramas would be of lesser importance because the spiritual dimension is the Gospel's primary goal. That is indeed a wrong interpretation of Jesus' comment that his kingdom was not of this world.

This research seeks to demonstrate that the Fourth Gospel can be read holistically, and the investigation of the human senses in its characterisation work contributes to this goal. All the canonical Gospels are 'spiritual' in that they present a supernatural message from God. However, the Bible does not seem to state that 'spiritual' should be understood as opposed to 'material'. Likewise, nowhere does the Fourth Gospel call on its readers to escape the world, the conflicts and dramas that affect the majority of women and men subjected to so many forms of domination and violence. At no point does the Fourth Gospel seem to affirm that the relationship with God consists of readers closing in on themselves and their intimacies. After all, Jesus does not ask the Father to take his disciples out of the world but to keep them from the evil and corruption present in the world (17:15).

In this way, the Fourth Gospel is crucial to this research's attempt to study sensory perception in the construction and development of its characters. Its narratives deeply deal with the situations that afflict us. They reveal the roots of many conflicts that oppose

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[8] Robert Thomas says that the Church Fathers differed on the issue. For Irenaeus (d. 202), in *Adversus Haereses* 3.11.8–9, the human face of the third beast represented Matthew, the eagle of the fourth the gospel of Mark, the ox of the second Luke, and the lion of the first being John. But for Victorinus (d. 303), *In Apocalypsin* 4:7, the man pictured Matthew, the lion Mark, the ox Luke, and the eagle John. Augustine (d. 430), in *De Consensu Evangelistarum* 1.6.9, identified the lion with Matthew, the man with Mark, the ox with Luke, and the eagle with John. For Thomas, it looks like almost every combination has been suggested. In *Revelation* 1-7, 355.

[9] Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.14.5-7. See also Carlson, 'Clement of Alexandria on the "Order" of the Gospels'.

God's justice and mercy. They do not spare words in denouncing numerous mechanisms of domination that not infrequently produce exclusion and death. They employ harsh words to question the ways of those who possess power and use it exclusively for the sake of their own interests, security and prestige. The Fourth Gospel, therefore, is crucial to this research as 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth' (1:14). Dorothy Lee appropriately reminds us that the Fourth Gospel tenaciously introduces images relating to the human senses in order to establish Jesus' incarnation as its central theological motif. For her, because our senses are intrinsic to what makes us human, their identification in the Johannine narratives arguably enables us to see their capacity for metaphorical or spiritual signification, which is vital to realise the Gospel's narrative for the life of faith.[10]

One last question can now be asked at this point in the research background: What are the criteria for choosing the narratives portraying Nicodemus (3:1-15; 7:50-53; 19:38-42), the Samaritan woman of Sychar (4:1-42), and the man born blind (9:1-41) as textual examples for investigating sensory development in Johannine characterisation?

Certainly, many other Johannine characters could have been chosen for the analysis of sensory perception in this research. Personal identification with the stories of the encounters between Jesus and each of these three characters is certainly relevant, but other reasons should be identified. Nicodemus has been depicted through the Fourth Gospel as coming to Jesus, engaging in conversations, attending the Sanhedrin, apparently standing up for Jesus and questioning his colleagues, and finally showing up to Jesus' burial. He is indeed an active man, but his sensory experiences with *speech* reveal him speaking less in each depiction. Then, his unique experiences with the sense of *movement*, and also with *smell* at Jesus' burial, are also telling. He became capable of 'sensing' that something was wrong. As a changing character, Nicodemus is both an appreciator of Jesus' teaching and deeds while also ignorant of his resurrection promise. He is portrayed as going through emphatic sensory perceptions that would require from him a decision, but was he able to realise that Jesus could change his life by increasing the relevance of his sensory attitude?

The narrative of the Samaritan woman of Sychar is impressive. Johannine scholarship has traditionally compared the narrative about her with the previous one on Nicodemus, for seemingly evident reasons.[11] But she certainly stands out. Although we

[10] Lee, 'The Gospel of John and the Five Senses', 125.

[11] See, for instance, Pazdan, 'Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman: Contrasting Models of Discipleship'.

cannot affirm she has accompanied Jesus until the cross, she identified herself as one of Jesus' followers in Samaria. She is portrayed as increasing in *taste* (of Jesus' living water and food) up to the point of being able to tastefully experiment with Jesus' proclamation that liberates her from prejudice towards the Jews and their theological understanding of worship. Her sensory trajectory of meaning from tastelessness to tastefulness constitutes the restoration of the witnessing experience she has been through, sharing the *taste* of freedom for drinking the living water and working in the harvest.

The narrative of the man born blind seems to be tricky at first glance. Significantly, the author does not portray him returning to his healer. One might expect to see the former blind man believing in Jesus any time after the healing, but his action is delayed. As a man blind from birth and a roadside beggar for much of his life, one would think he would fear religious authorities at least the way his own parents did, but he boldly and ironically offers theological reasoning to those who should be responsible for teaching the people about God. What kind of character is this man? To answer this question, one should note that, although the author asserts the physical healing as the precursor event to the broad topic of *sight* in the narrative, we are led to realise that God's glory in Jesus—initially portrayed through the miraculous sign—actually continues in the complement of the unfolding process of development of the man's spiritual *sight* and *speech* in his commitment to Jesus' work while it is still 'day' since no work can be done at 'night'.

Considering these three distinct but intriguingly related characters in analysing the sensory development of the Fourth Gospel's work on character building is a challenging but also rewarding endeavour. It demonstrates that while Western modern readers of this Gospel might reasonably have a different cultural view of human senses, which would consequently implicate in particular results from the analyses of these characters, we can still acknowledge that the Gospel's author benefitted from his view of the human senses to develop his characters and create a deeper and better connection with his readers. Among many relevant literary features employed by authors to build their characters, we can certainly benefit from characterisations that reveal sensory experiences similar to their very actions, words, emotions and responses in real life.

### 1.2. The Research's Gaps

In this thesis, the review of the literature on the work of biblical character construction receives exclusive consideration in the next chapter. Likewise, an introduction to the cultural studies of the senses and its contribution to the work of biblical characterisation

as well as a brief analysis of recent sensory scholarship is offered separately in the third chapter. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the exegetical method to be employed in this research to analyse the biblical narratives of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman and the man born blind. Cornelis Bennema's theory of character and Yael Avrahami's work on the biblical sensorium will be adopted as the main methodological lenses, along with the assistance of Greimas' semiotic theory of the generative trajectory of textual meaning.

These three chapters will demonstrate both the viability of the attempt to investigate sensory experiences in the Bible and, more evidently, the awakening of greater interest on the part of academia and biblical interpreters, Johannine scholars in particular. Such increasing interest contributes to a methodological framework that might stimulate and propagate a sound academic conversation between traditional methods of biblical interpretation and recent sensory approaches in the analyses of sensory perceptions that might have been purposefully designed and introduced by biblical authors to compose their narratives and emphasize theological elements vital to their message.

Therefore, all the surveys to be introduced later contribute considerably to this research for some relevant reasons, even if indirectly. They accomplish meaningful results by meticulously presenting, debating, and arguing for the need to provide a proper and extensive analysis of the presence of sensory experiences in biblical texts. They also contribute to current research on biblical studies by helping us to consider and validate the comprehension that biblical authors might have enabled the biblical message to be perceived not only in a cognitive way but also through fundamental embodiment elements, thus assisting their readers to grasp the main ideas of biblical stories by both cognitive (mind) and sensory (body) awareness.

Based on such a procedure, this research aims to investigate how sensory perception could have been employed by the author of the Fourth Gospel to build and develop his characters along their narratives. Its main attempt in combining these three distinct yet complementary methodological approaches intends to identify the current need to fill two main gaps in the study of biblical characters, mainly in the Gospel narratives.

Firstly, there is a contextual gap in the study of biblical characters. Unarguably, one finds already a decent body of existing research on this particular topic, with each effort offering an appropriate and relevant contribution to understanding character construction in biblical narratives.[12] However, there is also a noticeable absence of research in the specific context of sensory development in the Johannine characterisation. Such a solid

[12] See the discussion about these works in the chapter 2, the literature review on biblical characterisation.

foundation of already existing literature within narrative criticism and literary analysis in the investigation of the development of characters in the narratives of the Fourth Gospel can be undeniably enriched with the potentiality of the cultural study of the senses.

Consequently, the second research gap is methodological. The contextual gap seen above acknowledges the call for research with a particular exegetical approach. Such an approach should emerge as a methodological pursuit that aims to contribute to the design of existing verified studies, but ones that have not yet been employed together in order to produce an analysis of the sensory development of literary characters in the Fourth Gospel. This survey attempts to demonstrate plausible reasons why we should expect promising distinctive findings in an analysis of Johannine characters under the scrutiny of a combined approach between narrative criticism and sensory studies.

Though the scholarly works introduced and discussed in the next chapters are relevant as they combine to fill both contextual and methodological gaps, and even though some of them have already been initially predisposed to study the presence of sensory experiences in some biblical texts, the investigation of the contribution of sensory perception in the construction and development of Johannine characters have not yet been elucidated and investigated. Further research on this topic is required. As will be demonstrated in the following methodology outline and, in more detail, in the specific chapter on method, it is necessary to address how such presumable use of sensory experiences in Johannine characterisation might have helped its readers to perceive the Gospel's characters by identifying themselves with similar sensory experiences described in the stories they were reading.

### 1.3. The Relevance of the Research

Given the gaps presented in the previous section, this study sets out to assess the presence and relevance of sensory experiences for the Fourth Gospel's narratives in its construction and development of characters. To accomplish such a goal, this survey consists of the following objectives. First, it shows the main findings of current relevant research on the characterisation of Nicodemus (3:1-15; 7:50-53; 19:38-42), the Samaritan woman of Sychar (4:1-42), and the man born blind (9:1-41). Secondly, it identifies the most fundamental logical articulation in opposition to the surveyed biblical narratives. Here, the research will benefit from Greimas' *semiotic square* to reveal each character's sensory generative trajectory of meaning within the story. Thirdly, it indicates how sensory experiences are found in the characters' portrayal. The same task is also performed with

other characters' portrayal within the story whenever necessary as a way of comparison between their characterisations. The fourth objective consists of understanding how these identified sensory experiences might have been employed by the author to build and develop these characters. Finally, the study considers the results from the survey of sensory experiences in each character's portrayal, thus demonstrating the pertinency of sensory studies in the analysis of the construction of these characters in terms of the theological framework of the biblical account.

As the above delineated objectives aim to explore the relevance of each of the three given characters' experiences with the senses, the following are the key questions this study will seek to answer:

- Is there any mention of sensory experiences in the characterisation of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman of Sychar and the man born blind? If so, which senses are employed in these narratives?
- Are these senses employed in isolation or interaction with other senses?
- How do the numerous sensory experiences relate to the sensory generative trajectory of the meaning of each character?
- How might the author have employed sensory experiences in the development of his characters to achieve his Gospel's theological goal (20:30-31)?

### 1.4. The Methodology Outline

The third chapter of this research presents a detailed explanation of the interpretational method that will be applied to analyse the sensory development of some Johannine characters. However, this outline is helpful as it considers the main aspects of this survey's exegetical method within the background of this introduction.

This research benefits from three methodological lenses: Cornelis Bennema's theory of character; Yael Avrahami's biblical sensorium; and Algirdas Greimas' semiotic square. As previously stated, this research will investigate the portrayal of three Johannine characters (Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman of Sychar and the man born blind). Each character will be considered in a separate exegetical chapter. The first section of each chapter introduces, discusses and charts the results obtained through Bennema's theory of character, while also proposing a readjusted *table of character analysis* to include the characters' interactions with sensory experiences.

The second section investigates how the Gospel's author would have referred to the human senses when portraying his characters. First, Greimas' *semiotic square* will be

applied in order to identify the character's sensory generative trajectory of meaning, thus disclosing the fundamental logical articulation of the terms in opposition in the story. Then, the investigation benefits from Avrahami's exploration and definition of specific sensory perceptions employed in each character's portrayal to bring forth the stages of the sensory development in that character's depiction. Here, two concepts introduced by Avrahami are fundamental and will be adapted to the methodology: the septasensory model of the Bible (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell, movement, and speech) and synaesthesia (the merging of generally unrelated senses but depicted as connected to each other through associative links).

The third section of each exegetical chapter surveys the merging of senses in every character's portrayal to understand how two or more senses may appear intrinsically linked in the narrative with the character's sensory development. The relevance of this task rests in the fact that synaesthesia contributes to the characterisation work by conveying meaningful cultural information about the character through word-pairs. This way we can survey how the author might have linked one main sensory experience of a specific character to other senses in the same portrayal, attempting to build the narrative pattern upon a combined unique sensory perception, thus highlighting the relevance of the main sense in the character's portrayal.

A final section in each exegetical chapter charts the results obtained along the study, comparing the initial results from Bennema's analysis to the findings discovered after the investigation of sensory experiences in each character's portrayal, and how such sensory perception impacted this character's development.

### 1.5. The Structure of the Research

This first introductory chapter aims to establish the context of this research, the motivation for undertaking this survey and its relevance for the scholarly effort in biblical studies, more particularly on the studies of characterisation in the Fourth Gospel. The remaining chapters of the thesis are structured as follows.

The second chapter contains the literature review on characterisation in NT studies. It demonstrates how the present survey of sensory development in the Fourth Gospel's characterisation might fit with what has been written on this topic thus far, qualifying the path of this investigation and its unique contribution. The chapter begins by critically analysing the background of recent research on biblical characters through the lenses of narrative criticism, while also affirming the relevance of this interpretative approach to

survey biblical narratives through literary analysis. This section looks into numerous aspects and features of narrative criticism to understand how it investigates stories as literature, including characterisation, which is the main topic addressed in this survey. The literature review will demonstrate that although narrative criticism belongs to the broad field of literary criticism, and therefore benefits primarily from secular narrative theories, it is still seen by many biblical scholars as an autonomous interpretative approach with its own particularities.

Then, the chapter presents a scholarly discussion on character definition in order to understand the complexity behind the term 'character'. Of course, many references to the definition of character can be discussed, but the review limits its consideration to the author's characterisation process. Next, the chapter surveys numerous researches on the classification scheme for literary characters in contemporary literary theory and biblical scholarship. Two features in the classification of characters are germane to this research. The first and most debated feature refers to the characters' complexity, usually determined by a collection of personality traits (or lack thereof) demonstrated by or attributed to them. The other feature of the classification of characters refers to their development in the narrative. After that, the literature review discusses the scholarly work on the relationship between characters and other relevant textual elements. It shows that although the discussion on character construction in the gospels' narratives has increased more recently, it has received some consideration already in ancient writings, and considers how such consideration might have influenced the biblical authors' work in constructing their characters.

Lastly, the chapter introduces and briefly discusses Cornelis Bennema's work on characterisation, highlighting his approach's relevance for this research. It will be suggested that among the recent surveys on characters in the Gospels, particularly in the Fourth Gospel, Bennema's work has deserved some attention and fomented a fair amount of debate. In his concern for reversing the view that Johannine characters are merely *types,* thus having little complexity or no development, he argues that the differences in characterisation in the Hebrew Bible, ancient Greek literature, and even modern fiction are actually about the emphasis given to characters instead of simply the kind of characters portrayed in such literature. In other words, he points out that both ancient and modern literature, including biblical or classical Graeco-Roman narratives, portray the differences between characters in a *degree of development*, rather than in an inflexible dichotomous division between 'flat' and 'round' characters.

Chapter three provides a concise yet clarifying discussion on sensory anthropology and its contribution to the present survey on the sensory development of characters in the Fourth Gospel. Because the interest in sensory studies is perceived to be growing among biblical scholars, although still relatively new, we believe it to be a good idea to write this chapter right after the literature review on character studies, but before the presentation of the exegetical method.

First, the chapter discusses the relevance of the cultural study of the senses to highlight the plausibility of surveying biblical narratives through the sensorium. Next, it provides a short analysis of the historical development of the interest in the human senses since the philosophical discourse of the Greco-Roman culture. And, by contrast, it shows that the growing interest of biblical scholarship in surveying sensory experiences within biblical narratives has been a relatively recent phenomenon when relevant questions related to the senses in the Bible began to appear in academic research. Thirdly, the chapter considers particular aspects of sensory anthropology and how this discipline can work with other academic fields to survey biblical texts. The fourth section introduces essential features of current research on sensory scholarship, which helps us better examine the recent relationship between sensory studies and other academic disciplines. Finally, this chapter dedicates a substantial section to introducing and discussing Yael Avrahami's theory of sensory perception in the Bible.

The fourth chapter introduces the exegetical method of this research in detail. It presents a dialogue between the three methodological lenses selected for this thesis to devise a unique interpretational reading of biblical characters. It unveils the interaction between Cornelis Bennema's survey on NT characters and Yael Avrahami's biblical sensorium. With the assistance of Greimas' work on the generative trajectory of meaning, all three lenses bring forth a distinct approach to investigating how the sensory development of the Fourth Gospel's characters may be understood.

Starting with the fifth chapter, the exegetical method is applied to the first Johannine character under analysis, Nicodemus (3:1-15; 7:45-53; 19:38-42), investigating how the writer of the Fourth Gospel might have presumably employed his cultural view of human senses to build the Pharisee's portrayal. The first section displays the results of Bennema's analysis of Nicodemus' characterisation according to his theory of character. Then, the second section initially benefits from Greimas' semiotic square in order to find out Nicodemus' sensory general trajectory of meaning. In addition, it demonstrates how Avrahami's biblical sensorium contributes to analysing Nicodemus' sensory experience with *speech* as a relevant somatic outcome in the development of his

characterisation. The third section concerns understanding how the merging of senses, particularly in Nicodemus' last appearance, contributes to the evangelist's character-building work, showing how Nicodemus' evident lack of *speech* may be taken as a clue to reinforce the sensory parallelism formed by the presence of other senses, with special attention to *smell*. The fourth and final section illustrates the sensory development of Nicodemus' portrayal through a trajectory of meaning densely shaped by textual sensory perceptions (*sight*, *hearing*, *smell* and *speech*), thus revealing how the author employed sensory perception to expose a critical purposeful change in one of his characters.

Chapter six investigates the sensory development in the depiction of the Samaritan woman of Sychar (4:1-42) throughout four different sections. Firstly, it introduces Bennema's findings on the characterisation of the Samaritan woman. Then, the second section encompasses the analysis of the sensory generative trajectory of meaning in her portrayal, demonstrating her characterisation development over four distinct stages, each of them connected to a unique condition of the sense of *taste*: *awkwardness* (tasteless); *inquiry* (non-tasteless); *declaration* (non-tasteful); and *invitation* (tasteful). This section also shows that each of these four stages is distinctly connected to specific narrative themes along the story: *awkwardness* (tasteless) is connected to gender and ethnicity; *inquiry* (non-tasteless) is linked to the betrothal type-scene and the living water; *declaration* (non-tasteful) is related to her marital history and true worship; and *invitation* (tasteful) is associated with her missional action. The third section, then, concerns finding out how two cases of synaesthesia in the story contribute to the fourth evangelist's character-building work: the merging of *taste* with *hearing*, and a second merging of *taste* with *hearing* and *movement*. The fourth and final section aims to demonstrate how the sensory development of the Samaritan woman's characterisation should be understood through her increased sensory experience of taste.

Chapter seven is the final exegetical chapter. It employs this research method to investigate the sensory development of the man born blind's characterisation (9:1-41). Similar to the two previous analyses, this chapter starts with Bennema's findings on this character, while the second section benefits from Greimas' theory to investigate how the Gospel's author skilfully reveals the gradual sensory development of the sense of *sight* in the man born blind's characterisation. The third section discusses the healing scene (9:1-7) that anticipates the process of sensory development introduced only in the fourth section: The Self-Affirmed Man: the Night Stage (9:8-13); The Man's Opinion: the Non-Night Stage (9:14-23); The Man who Witnesses: The Non-Day Stage (9:24-34); and, The Man Who Believes and Worships: The Day Stage (9:35-38). After a brief discussion

about the judgement scene (9:39-41) in the fifth section, the sixth section concerns understanding how *synaesthesia* in the man's portrayal, in interaction with other characters in the narrative, reveals the sense of *movement* working as the catalyst sense to help the gradual development of his spiritual *sight*. It will investigate how the sensorial parallelism *sight-movement* assists in the former blind man's depiction as a character who identifies Jesus as the light in the world. In the seventh and last section, the attention moves to perceiving how the sensory development of the man's characterisation might lead us to realise that such a character's portrayal teaches that believing is not instantaneous and static but gradually grows until it moves believers to confess and adore Jesus as the Son of Man sent by God.

The eighth chapter presents some final considerations about the research. It takes a broader perspective to report the main research outcomes and how such results address the understanding of how the presence and relevance of sensory experiences in the Fourth Gospel's narratives may assist us to realise the construction and development of its characters. For such an endeavour, the conclusion will present a summary of the key findings of the study in its attempt to answer the research questions and address its aims. Also, it provides information about the research's main contributions, discussing its limitations while also presenting relevant recommendations for future investigations.

### 1.6. Scope and Limitations of the Study

Any research that sets out to investigate a topic as peculiar as understanding how the author of a canonical Gospel employed sensory perceptions to develop his characters will certainly be affected by some limitations. Furthermore, the simple fact that this research employs three methodological lenses from different areas and academic disciplines (narrative criticism, sensory anthropology and semiotics) may result in some unanswered questions for the sake of the space that must be allocated for the presentation, explanation and application of the exegetical methodology in the given narratives to demonstrate its experimental validity.

Considering this reality, three limitations must here be outlined. First, some pertinent issues that commonly raise a fair amount of discussion in many surveys involving these three Johannine characters unfortunately will not be discussed here. Themes that impact the analysis of sensory development of Johannine characterisation will receive more consideration, others will be mentioned but not dealt with in full, and

those themes that, although relevant for the narrative, do not directly influence the main purpose of this research will be only mentioned *en passant*.

Along with the investigation of sensory development of Nicodemus' portrayals (3:1-15; 7:45-53; 19:38-42), some issues will be addressed although not fully discussed, such as his portrayal as a symbolic representation of Jewish leadership, his name's meaning and his presumable identification with Naqdimon ben Gorion, Nicodemus' and Jesus' use of the first-person plural, and the distinctiveness of the meaning of 'Kingdom of God' for both characters. The same happens with themes such as John's strong verbal connections to 'new birth' associated with God's kingdom, the work of the Spirit as part of the context of the biblical promises of salvation and renewal of the people of Israel, and John's 'earthly' and 'heavenly' realities in Jesus' teaching about his origins and eventual return to the Father. The relevance of other themes will be fairly considered, such as the Fourth Gospel's 'realized eschatology'[13] and its author's view of 'life' and 'eternal life' with respect to different coordinates (creation; Christology; the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit; and the God's gift through the Spirit to believers in Jesus).[14] Jesus' development of birth imagery considering σάρξ and πνεῦμα is relevant for the present analysis of sensory perception, but it will not deeply refer to Jesus' relevant statement in 3:6 that appears to pit flesh against spirit. Here will be investigated the ways 'being born from the spirit' appears in correlation with *seeing* the reality of the kingdom of God.

With regards to the narrative portraying the Samaritan woman (4:1-42), relevant topics will not be exhaustively addressed. For instance, her presumable understanding of the Samaritan Messiah (*taheb*) could offer some insight by contrast into the reaction of the Jewish crowd in John 6:15, since the people's recognition of Jesus as 'the prophet who is to come into the world' seems to impel them to try to force him to become an earthly king.[15] Also, the relevance of the geographical location of the village or town of Sychar will be discussed though not significantly as it impacts the analysis of the sensory development of the woman's characterisation, since the narrative themes involving Jacob and his gift of the field to Joseph may lead to the understanding of the betrothal type-scene.[16] The most debated relevant themes in her characterisation are contemplated as they are intrinsically correlated to each stage of the development of her sensory generative

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[13] Beasley-Murray, *John*; and Culpepper, 'Realized Eschatology in the Experience of the Johannine Community'.

[14] Thompson, *John*, 82-89.

[15] Matthews, 'Conversation and Identity: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman', 224.

[16] Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 137.

trajectory of meaning. For example, the stage of 'awkwardness' is related to the themes of gender and ethnicity. The second stage, 'inquiry', interacts with the themes of betrothal type-scene and living water. The stage of 'declaration' is discussed in connection to the themes of marital history and true worship. The fourth and final stage of 'invitation' relates to her witness to her fellow villagers.

When investigating the man born blind's characterisation (9:1-41), we will not be able to develop a thorough discussion on some themes, such as all aspects involving Jesus' healing technique of mixing his saliva with dust to make mud in order to apply it to the man's eyes and his connotation of new creation (9:6). Also, this survey does not investigate the possible primitive references to Christian baptism in Jesus' command to the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. Other relevant themes in the narrative will receive attention related to the character's sensory development in the discussion, such as considerations of the 'I Am' saying (9:9) and the Son of Man (9:35).

The second main limitation of this study refers to the thought-provoking theological reflection that could definitely be carried out from the results obtained through the narrative analysis of the sensorial development in the portrayal of these three Johannine characters. Among many theological conversations from the narrative of Nicodemus that regrettably will not be addressed here, we should list, as an example, Jesus' allusions to heavenly realities, such as the Son of Man's identity as paradoxically godly and fleshly, the one from above even while on earth. Or still, the Son's heavenliness in connection to his being lifted up typologically tied to Moses' lifting of the serpent in the wilderness (3:14-18). Another relevant discussion that can be carried out in future investigation relates to the theological role played by Patristic interpretation or other relevant traditions in the characterisation of Nicodemus.

With regards to the narrative of the Samaritan woman, we will unfortunately avoid the theological discussion on the relevance of the doctrine of regeneration in the portrayal of her characterisation. Such investigation certainly helps us to understand how God's new creation could be identified in the personal act of rescue wrought by God in us to fulfil his plan of salvation effected by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the narrative of the man born blind, two significant theological themes are addressed, albeit perhaps not with the depth evident in studies specifically dedicated to such theological discussions: Jesus' self-identification as the light of the world (9:5) in connection with all the other Johannine allusions of the same theme (1:4, 9; 8:12) and the OT allusions of 'light of life' (Job 33:30; Psalms 27:1; 118:27; Isaiah 53:11; 56:13; Micah 7:8). Here, too, a discussion on the Church Fathers' view about this theme would be

helpful, considering their understanding of Jesus as the light in the sense of true enlightenment, bringing illumination during the believer's journey to a virtuous life with spiritual understanding and deliverance of sin (Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria).

One final limitation of this study will probably sound more similar to a note rather than a restrictive condition faced by the research itself. Agreeing with Jeannine Hanger, we understand that it might be challenging for modern academic readers to engage the biblical text seeking 'to cross the imaginative gulf into the ancient sensory context'.[17] Our knowledge about our own senses is achieved by experiencing them, which is fairly distinct from trying to explain how the human senses work by describing multiple sensory experiences within a narrative in a rational way. Nonetheless, as academic research, this study still concentrates its effort on the epistemological application of a specific exegetical method to understand how the author of the Fourth Gospel might have employed his view of the human senses in his work of character constructions.

Therefore, although this research undoubtedly provides room for cognitive and rational analysis of categories of academic discourse, it also invites its readers to consider the many aspects involved in sensory experiences and perceptions in the Johannine text. It is not possible to describe, precisely, the *smell* of seventy-five pounds of a mixture of myrrh and aloes the same way Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus probably experienced in the presence of Jesus' dead body. We would not know how to explain the symbolic *taste* of the living water experienced by the Samaritan woman on the edge of a well in arid ancient Palestine even though we can probably describe the *taste* of our own spiritual experience with God's Holy Spirit today. We cannot witness the gradual development of our spiritual enlightenment about God's grace and mercy the same way the former blind man did right in front of a group of religious authorities self-identified as sighted people but who theologically were not able to understand God's work amidst them, although we can certainly be spiritually touched by God in order to acknowledge our own biases and prejudices against others who think differently.

Although we can object to the presumption that the author of the Fourth Gospel knew about the human senses and employed them in the construction of his characters, we should also realise that every time we come to the text, we put our sensory perceptions into action. As we read the biblical narratives aware of such a reality, we may be able to also understand that, actually, we do not need to put our awareness about sensory

[17] Hanger, *Sensing Salvation in the Gospel of John*, 48.

experiences aside. We sense our senses today and the Johannine characters are depicted as sensing theirs centuries ago. And even if we will never be able to clearly understand or describe how ancient readers might have interacted with *sight*, *hearing*, *smell*, *taste*, *touch*, *movement* and *speech*, we can still employ our own experience with these senses to recognise the way the Johannine narratives benefitted from sensory perceptions in their ancient context to help us see their characters more intimately.

# Chapter 2 | **LITERATURE REVIEW**

New findings on biblical characterisation are becoming more common in a fair number of articles and books. Such investigations consistently present unique understandings based on previous surveys' findings on the character-building process in the Bible, particularly the Gospels' narratives. This literature review aims to indicate how this present survey of Johannine characters may fit with current scholarship, thus qualifying its investigation and contribution. This chapter critically analyses the background of recent scholarly research on Johannine's characterisation by briefly discussing the essential primary sources that develop the context of this work. The next chapter will introduce a scholarly discussion specifically on sensory studies.

This literature review is structured as follows. First, it briefly explains the broad issues related to narrative criticism, the leading literary approach employed in this study. Relevant scholarly work will be surveyed to introduce the main aspects of such a method of investigation of biblical characters, without forgetting to bring to light some of its potential caveats.

The second section of this literature review concerns the definition of character itself. Such a task is complex, and the attempt to bring forth a specific definition of the term could generate pitfalls or misunderstandings. On the other hand, it would be unwise to proceed with an investigation of Johannine's characterisation without indicating what this research recognises as a literary character. Indeed, among both complementary and different aspects of character definition that could be addressed here, this work will focus on the explanation of how characters must be understood as part of a story. That is, considered here will be both the presumed author's effort in building the characters and the readers' contribution in their reconstruction of the same characters.

Thirdly, the chapter provides a scholarly discussion about a classification scheme for literary characters in contemporary literary theory and biblical scholarship. With this brief investigation, this literature review aims to demonstrate the currently developed arguments for and against the many different concepts and terms employed by literary and narrative critics with regard to characters' categories and types. The first discussion in this regard refers to the characters' complexity, usually determined by a collection of personality traits (or lack thereof) demonstrated by or attributed to them. Then, it will continue with a discussion about the characters' eventual development along the story, another relevant feature of character classification.

The fourth section of this chapter brings forth a discussion about the relationship between characters and three other textual elements: plot, narrator and readers. The survey of these textual exchanges reveals that the deconstruction of a narrative might effectively identify specific characterisation aspects employed by authors to attract their readers, as scholars have differed over how such aspects may have been chosen over others in constructing the text. Because surveys on character reconstruction differ when studying the relationship between characters and other literary elements, understanding such contrasts might prove helpful in perceiving unique aspects of distinctive processes of characterisation in the Bible.

The fifth and final section introduces Cornelis Bennema's work on characterisation. Although his approach's techniques are assessed throughout the length of this thesis, with a particularly careful appreciation in the methodological chapter, a succinct analysis of the reception of his method among biblical scholars will be provided in this section.

## 2.1. Understanding Narrative Criticism

The study of characters in the NT was introduced to an entirely different perspective with the advent of narrative criticism.[1] While the main focus of this research is not concerned with an exhaustive explanation or discussion of literary criticism and other methods of biblical interpretation, it is appropriate to consider some fundamental aspects of the work done by narrative critics. Thus, the initial section of this chapter summarises the main points of narrative criticism. Characterisation is discussed in the following sections.

Narrative criticism is an interpretative approach within biblical studies[2] that surveys Bible narratives[3] through literary analysis. It looks into numerous aspects and features to understand such stories as literature, including their aspect (fiction or non-fiction), genre (history, legend, myth), structure (plot, theme, irony, foreshadowing), characterisation, and perspective.[4] Although it belongs to the broad field of literary criticism[5] and therefore

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[1] See an interesting discussion in Myers, *Characterizing Jesus*, 1-20.

[2] The term is usually not recognized by literary theory outside biblical scholarship, as it 'developed within the field of biblical studies without an exact counterpart in the secular world', in Powel, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 19.

[3] Narrative criticism is used primarily with the narratives of the Gospels and the book of Acts, although some literary approaches have been applied to the study of poetry and epistles. Cf. Michael, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 75-6; and Longenecker, 'The Narrative Approach to Paul', 88-111.

[4] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 19; Merenlahti and Hakola, 'Reconceiving Narrative Criticism', 14; Brown, 'Narrative Criticism', 619.

[5] See, for instance, Elizabeth Malbon's interesting discussion on the influences of new criticism and structuralism on narrative criticism, in 'Narrative Criticism', 24-7.

benefits primarily from secular narrative theories, it is still seen by many biblical scholars as an autonomous interpretative approach with its own particularities.[6]

The analytical tools provided by narrative criticism are helpful to this research. After assisting in determining how the narrative elements of the stories are structured within the discourse of the Fourth Gospel, such tools will provide insight into the author's expectation of how his audience might respond to the stories of the interaction between Jesus and the other Gospel's characters. In other words, narrative criticism, and more specifically its analysis of characterisation, constitutes the first step in understanding how the character's involvement with the plot, events, settings, and other characters within the Fourth Gospel shape the development of the Johannine characters in response to Jesus.

The following are considered essential aspects of this approach. First, narrative criticism focuses on how biblical literature works as literature. It investigates the poetic function of narratives in attending to their literary and storied qualities.[7] For this reason, narrative critics approach the Gospels as unified stories that require a holistic reading and analysis, attending to their literary qualities and storied shape.[8]

Second, narrative criticism focuses on the final form of the text.[9] It looks for the narratives' features in their present form rather than paying attention to the numerous aspects relating to the production of the text, which are representative of historical approaches such as source and redaction criticisms.[10] Focusing on the final form gives narrative critics an overall understanding of the story by analysing its essential elements.[11]

Third, narrative criticism emphasises a holistic reading of stories. By highlighting the narrative as a whole instead of cleaving it into smaller parts, narrative critics aim to define the story shape as a remarkable 'whole cloth'. The many features (narrator, plot, characters, point of view, stylistic) are unified to satisfy the overall rhetorical effect.[12] Gospel stories, for instance, essentially proclaim the message of the NT as a whole (the central proclamation of the saving significance of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection).[13] This wholeness of the text reaches its peak when the audience realises that the outstanding

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[6] Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 19.

[7] Merenlahti and Hakola, 'Reconceiving Narrative Criticism', 13-47; Merenlahti, *Poetics for the Gospels*, 7, 11, 24.

[8] Brown, 'Narrative Criticism', 619.

[9] Merenlahti, *Poetics for the Gospels*, 2.

[10] Brown, *The Gospels as Stories*, 11-6.

[11] Brown, 'Narrative Criticism', 619–24.

[12] Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 3.

[13] Donaldson, 'The Vindicated Son', 104.

interrelatedness of many parts of the story makes complete sense at the end precisely because of its unity. Thus, more important than figuring out the origin of a text, critics should consider how its author succeeded in creating an undivided and consolidated story.

The fourth aspect of narrative criticism to be considered is its interest in the two narrative levels. One of the relevant works on characterisation that has proved helpful among surveys of the Gospels comes not from the arms of biblical research but rather from a theoretical model in contemporary literary theory.[14] The American film and literary critic Seymour Chatman developed his approach based on the structuralist theory that narratives are formed by two different levels (or planes): the 'story' level (or the plane of context) aims to explain *what the narrative is about* through the analysis of its events, characters, and settings, and their interaction with the plot; and, the 'discourse' level (the plane of expression) addresses *how the narrative is developed* to reveal its primary purposes.[15] In other words, if 'story' comprehends both the 'content' (actions and happenings) and the 'existents' of the narrative (characters, plot, settings), then 'discourse' is how the author communicates the content. For Chatman, 'the story is the *what* in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the *how*'.[16] Although not a work of biblical survey, Chatman's contribution to narrative criticism has been under the scrutiny of many biblical scholars, particularly his 'story-as-discourse' structure.[17]

One final aspect of narrative criticism that should be demonstrated here regards its normative reading process: a text must be read following a logical order so that all its parts can be understood as a whole.[18] For the narrative to achieve the author's effect, the readers must have prior knowledge of some information about the story and its relevant aspects. In like manner, since narrative criticism does not seek to determine how historical matters and events might have inspired the narrative, readers might be assumed to accept the dynamics brought forward by the author. This highlights narrative criticism's aim to see the text from the readers' standpoint, even considering their possible resistance. Still,

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[14] That is, secular academy of literary studies outside biblical scholarship. Of course, the term 'contemporary' may have different meanings, and here it refers to the many assumptions upon which literary criticism is based and the analysis of linguistic and cultural contexts within which literature is produced. See Muhlestein, 'Teaching Contemporary Literary Theory at a Church-Sponsored University'.

[15] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 147-51.

[16] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 19. Instead of using the term 'discourse', Rhoads and Michie prefer 'rhetoric' level, in *Mark as Story*, 4-5.

[17] The following investigations are today considered classic literary-critical works in the gospels influenced by Chatman: Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*; Edwards, *Matthew's Story of Jesus*; Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*; Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*; and, Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*.

[18] Powel, 'Narrative Criticism', 242-4.

narrative critics understand that the readers acquire the value and moral system that moves the narrative, such as the belief that God's point of view defines truth since the Bible reveals his perspective. Therefore, such a normative reading process underlines a relevant distinction between narrative and historical criticisms. While the latter surveys the text by temporarily keeping faith commitments from reaching an objective analysis so that pure historical aspects can be considered, the former is expected to temporarily consider faith engagement to determine how texts are expected to affect readers.[19]

In his introductory book, Powell presents narrative criticism as a helpful tool for literary criticism. After describing the primary differences between literary and historical criticisms when discussing several literary approaches (e.g., structuralism, rhetorical criticism, and reader-response criticism), Powell highlights what he identifies as 'the benefits of narrative criticism': (1) it focuses on the text of Scripture itself; (2) it provides some insight into biblical texts for which the historical background is uncertain; (3) it provides for checks and balances on traditional methods; (4) it tends to bring scholars and nonprofessional Bible readers closer together; (5) it stands in close relationship to the believing community; (6) it offers potential for bringing believing communities together; (7) it offers fresh interpretations of biblical material; and (8) it unleashes the power of biblical stories for personal and social transformation.[20]

Of course, although narrative criticism's proposal of literary inquiry into the Bible has been welcomed in many precincts of biblical scholarship, it has not escaped scathing critique on some of its crucial aspects. Such assessment has provided a myriad of debates about the usefulness, even reasonableness, of carrying out an analysis of Old and New Testament stories via narrative criticism.

Three common critiques will be mentioned here, but they suffice to show the impact of this approach within biblical scholarship. One of the foremost common debates refers to the issue of historicity, particularly the conversation with earlier historical approaches. A pivotal charge asserts that narrative criticism tends to simply ignore historical issues to prove the autonomy of the biblical text. The search for textual wholeness blinds narrative critics to problems of textual historicity.[21]

Consequently, a second critique questions narrative critics' focus on the text's final form and their emphasis on a holistic reading. Since narrative critics insist on seeing the

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[19] Powel, 'Narrative Criticism', 244.

[20] Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 85-91. Powell also presents five different objections of narrative criticism (91-98). Some of these will be covered in the discussion below.

[21] Brown, 'Narrative Criticism', 621.

Gospels' stories as a whole instead of cleaving them into smaller parts, the features of a story that form the 'whole cloth' (e.g., narrator, plot, characters, point of view, stylistic) are perhaps being forcibly unified to satisfy the overall rhetorical effect.[22] Thus, narrative criticism could be making a severe error in ignoring relevant inconsistencies in biblical narratives concerning the text's many different traditions and redactions.[23] Elizabeth Malbon's helpfully exposes such controversy's complexity:

> Narrative criticism compensates for the fragmentation of the text into smaller and smaller units by form and redaction criticism. Even redaction criticism with its potential to be concerned for the Gospel as a whole – frequently bogs down in ever more meticulous divisions between 'tradition' and 'redaction' (...) Nevertheless, perhaps narrative criticism – in its holistic passion – overcompensates.[24]

Another critique charges that narrative criticism benefits from modern categories derived from literary theory (usually applied to modern fiction) to interpret ancient texts that claim to portray historical events. As the Gospels are ideological narratives wanting to 'induce the readers to believe in the values shared by the Christian community from which they emerged',[25] how could analytical methods designed to interpret modern fictional texts be used as hermeneutical tools for analysing ancient historical texts such as the Gospels? Narrative critics, however, claim that because there should be no such dichotomy between 'history' and 'fiction' in literature, 'the form of the Gospels (as narratives) rather than their genre (as gospels) makes it possible to study them by employing narrative criticism'.[26] In other words, narrative critics approach the Gospels as narratives, stories that tell a story, instead of religious accounts of a particular belief or religion. Brown emphasises that the stance of the author and even of the audience towards the narrative is more important than a distinction between historical and fictional as readers of historical narratives will 'fill in the inevitable gaps in the story with historical information rather than with fictional material'.[27]

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[22] Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 3.

[23] Merenlahti and Hakola, 'Reconceiving Narrative Criticism', 24.

[24] Malbon, 'Narrative Criticism', 35.

[25] Merenlahti and Hakola, 'Reconceiving Narrative Criticism', 33.

[26] Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 94.

[27] Brown, *The Gospels as Stories*, 18.

## 2.2. What is a character?

In the attempt to answer this question, one must be aware of the complexity behind the term 'character'. At this point, it is imperative to make a significant observation. While this section addresses various facets of character definition, the focus of this thesis is specifically on the author's process of characterisation. The primary objective of this research is to examine how the author employs sensory perceptions to construct characters. Consequently, discussions concerning the implied author, implied readers, and different reader-response hermeneutics are not addressed in this survey. Although the following paragraphs briefly acknowledge the significance of readers in defining characters, it is important to note that the exegetical chapters do not provide a comprehensive analysis of the readers' role in the author's use of sensory perception for character construction. This gap represents an intriguing area for further research, which merits investigation in studies beyond the scope of this thesis.

We should, therefore, understand the many-sided definition of character itself. Depending on the theoretical approach adopted, one finds variations on the rationale behind the term 'character'. A more general and encompassing explanation would determine a literary character as an individual (or group of individuals), whether human or any other figurative species with human-like features, who belongs to an original literary work or comes from cultural folk tales. If such a definition is agreed upon, we must affirm that characters exist as entities portrayed 'within storyworlds, and play a role, no matter how minor, in one or more of the states of affairs or events told about in the narrative'.[28] That is, every character must be understood as part of a story.

Although no single definition of character could satisfy everyone's taste, we can still try to clarify how the writers' work in building their characters, that is, their characterisation, is understood by narrative critics. For Joel Williams, characterisation is the process of characters' construction that is achieved by the writer's revelation of the characters' main traits and points of view in the narrative. At first glance, we could think that William's elementary definition may camouflage the complexity of such a task. That is because we have agreed that there are different ways to portray characters within a narrative, and writers commonly provide details on their characters' personalities to lead their readers to an understanding of how such characters relate to the other elements of the text. But Williams goes beyond by affirming that the primary function of

[28] Margolin, 'Character', 66.

characterisation is to bring to the surface the information in the story 'which state[s] or present[s] the traits of a particular character'.[29]

Brian Small's definition is also simple, but is helpful as it brings forth a new facet: 'Character is a construct of the totality of traits and attributes belonging to a particular human or non-human figure in a given story'.[30] His words outline a crucial investigation: what does it mean to affirm that character is a construct? Small supports the literary critics who see characters as artificial entities engraved in the narrative to resemble human beings drawn from real people's images in the real world. In other words, by affirming that characters are constructs to fulfil a particular role in the story, these critics affirm that even though characters have no real psyche, personality, ideology, or competence to act as human beings in the real world, any reader may find in their favourite characters some particular features that reveal some psychological and ideological descriptions.[31]

As previously indicated, the primary objective of this research is to examine how the inclusion of sensory experiences in Johannine narratives may contribute to the Fourth Gospel's characterisation, and not the participation of the reader in this process. However, in the broader discourse on character definition, it is pertinent to recognize that the concept of readerly construction of characters encompasses significant developments and is accompanied by numerous complexities and diverse viewpoints.[32] Fred Burnett emphasises that such a discussion on characters as a result of readers' construct is, in fact, more profound than it initially seems. For him, if we prefer to understand characters as readers' apprehension of the narrative, we must also agree that they are constructed from textual indicators presented in the narrative along a *continuum*.[33] Specifically, there are two ways: characters can either be reduced to the words of the text—and therefore dissolved to a meaning limited to the text itself—or, at the opposite extreme, they can protrude from the words of the text to assume aspects of individuality and personality attributed by the reader. Burnett then emphasises that the path taken by characters within

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[29] Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 60.

[30] Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews*, 36.

[31] Price, *Forms of Life*, 37-64; Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 51; Leitch, *What Stories Are?*, 141-9; Bal, *Narratology*, 104-24; Springer, *A Rhetoric of Literary Character*, 14-6.

[32] See, for instance, the following surveys in the Fourth Gospel: Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*; Blaine, *Peter in the Gospel of John*; Farelly, *The Disciples in the Fourth Gospel*; Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*; Martin, *Judas and the Rhetoric of Comparison in the Fourth Gospel*; Skinner, *John and Thomas*, and *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*; Yak-hwee, *Re-Presenting the Johannine Community*; Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*; Wead, *The Literary Devices in John's Gospel*.

[33] That is, a sequence in which adjacent actions and words might not be perceptibly different from each other, although the extremes might become quite distinct in the end of the character's participation in the story.

a narrative depends on the exact text's ability to convince its readers to make such characters either transcend or remain in the text.[34]

Such an understanding has raised a complex discussion. Some critics, like Marianne Meye Thompson, affirm that literary characters are not to be thought of as historical, actual human persons but 'strictly literary phenomena because they are constructed as the reader reads the text'.[35] In their opinion, although the reader's role in constructing the character does not entirely remove writers from their responsibility in portraying characters, the readers' expected inability to perceive all the complete details of the characters' inner lives is compensated for given their freedom to re-construct characters according to their own understanding of the story. True, readers know characters according to what writers decide to reveal about them. Also true is that when allowed by the author, readers can grasp the characters' private self and life secrets since 'a narrator controls the amount of information available to the reader concerning a character',[36] or, as William Harvey asserts, 'fiction allows both intrinsic and contextual knowledge of others'.[37] However, for these critics, although literary characters may undoubtedly impact the readers with their actions, thoughts, emotions and choices, there is no interaction between actual, historical readers and literary, fictional characters. Their encounter is uniquely one-sided. John Darr, for instance, resolutely says that there is no confrontation between characters and actual people, or any kind of engagement, affective differences, emotional consequences, or even access to the character's life on the reader's part, making such interaction strictly textual.[38]

Such a straightforward opinion raises questions and concerns in other scholars, as they see the matter as much more complex, particularly regarding the characters' actuality or historicity. Many different questions could be posed to discuss this topic: Should we understand characters, including the biblical ones, as representations of actual historical people within narratives? If we assume that characters in a given biblical narrative should not be seen as historical persons, are we saying that they are not sufficiently or properly characterised to provide the readers with a description more adequate or closer to their historical lives? How far can we, as readers of a narrative, reconstruct characters performing within the text as historical people? Are there any boundaries to indicate the

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[34] Burnett, 'Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels', 6.

[35] Thompson, 'God's Voice You Have Never Heard, God's Form You Have Never Seen', 180.

[36] Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 55.

[37] Harvey, *Character and the Novel*, 32.

[38] Darr, *On Character Building*, 47-9.

extent to which readers are free to imagine and create their own characters based on the information they glean from the text?

We must be careful here for two main reasons: first, readers are alive when reading stories, and their lives are the context that provides them with resources to build the characters they are encountering. Kermode highlights that 'we perform our character-building exercises, supplementing them by inferring from the repertoire of indices characteristics not immediately signalled in the text, but familiar from other texts and from life'.[39] On the other hand, even accepting that characters are assimilated and understood by readers during the reading process, readers obviously construct their view of the characters based on the writers' textual indicators. It is difficult to ignore the legitimacy of the impact of the writer's work on the reader. This assertion certainly applies to the numerous sensory experiences in the Johannine narratives.

Textual indicators evidently provide the readers with numerous routes for character definition according to the information strategically sequenced inside the narrative. Merenlahti, for instance, clarifies that because readers constantly interact with characters while discovering the story's meaning, characters usually surprise the readers by taking a different shape at the end of the narrative compared to their first appearance.[40] The writer provokes such strategic literary bewilderment. Therefore, it is about how capable writers are in using their texts to make an impression on their readers during the reading activity: 'The life-likeness of biblical characters does not necessarily have to do with how long they appear in the narrative; it also has to do with how they are characterised and what kind of an impact they have on the reader'.[41]

One could still add another ingredient to this recipe. Chatman's concern with characterisation makes him ask whether literary characters are *open* or *closed* constructs. For him, readers are always able to rebuild and make suppositions about the characters they find in the story: 'We read between their lines, so to speak; we form hypotheses based on what we know and see; we try to figure them out, predict their actions, and so on'.[42] His classic invitation toward an 'open theory of character' reveals his understanding that although characters are not living people, both literary characters and historical persons can be constructed in the same way 'by the audience from evidence announced or implicit in an original construction and communicated by the discourse,

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[39] Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, 78.

[40] Merenlahti, 'Characters in the Making', 54.

[41] Lehtipuu, 'Characterization and Persuasion', 77.

[42] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 118.

through whatever medium'.[43] If Chatman is correct in affirming that authors build characters, but readers rebuild them when interacting with the textual indicators that authors leave in the story, then one concludes that distinct readers arrive at distinct considerations about the same character. Does Chatman's understanding, therefore, affirm that all characters are mere literary constructions? When we come to biblical narratives, mainly the Gospels' stories, are we not supposed to expect biblical characterisation to be established on the writers' source material, either physical material or memory, based on historical events and people?

These are challenging questions, particularly when referring to characters within biblical narratives. Although we could appreciate Chatman's approach in his 'open theory of character,' where characters border on independent beings in terms of their function in the plot, we must be careful not to turn them into sovereign, uncontrolled entities. We agree with Chatman that in the course of reading a narrative, readers have some degree of freedom to reconstruct characters by sorting or categorizing them consonantly to their textual qualities, but we also anticipate that Chatman's approach risks jeopardizing any conceivable relation between biblical characters and their historical reliability. This survey tends to see Alter's view of biblical narratives—including their characters—as more careful and solid, at least when analysing characters within Gospel narratives. By identifying biblical stories as 'historicized prose fiction', Alter wants to affirm that such narratives provide their readers with an instructive key instance of intertwining history and fiction.[44] If we follow Alter, seeing that the Gospels' narratives are based on historical facts would not necessarily be a problem. We are still not able (and perhaps will never be) to guarantee that the biblical writers were fully confident that their various gathered traditions should be considered actual historical facts, but that must not lead us to regard biblical stories as fiction, or in Alter's words, as 'inventions' of their authors.[45]

> If we fail to see that the creators of biblical narrative were writers who, like writers elsewhere, took pleasure in exploring the formal and imaginative their fictional medium, perhaps sometimes unexpectedly capturing the fullness of their subject in the very play of exploration, we shall miss much that the biblical stories are meant to convey.[46]

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[43] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 119. I will not be able to offer a lengthy discussion on the treatment of historical personages as characters. See Darr, *On Character Building*, 45-7; Reicher, 'The Ontology of Fictional Characters', 11–33; and Eldridge, 'The Question of Truth in Literature', 119–38. Specifically, in the Fourth Gospel, see Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 105.

[44] Alter, 'Sacred History and the Beginnings of Prose Fiction', 152.

[45] Alter, 'Sacred History and the Beginnings of Prose Fiction', 157.

[46] Alter, 'Sacred History and the Beginnings of Prose Fiction', 161.

The discussion above encourages us, then, to debate another interesting aspect of Chatman's definition of character, where he discusses the character's totality of traits and attributes. For such a task, Chatman developed what he calls the 'paradigm of traits'.[47] According to this paradigm, readers collect information from within the text about characters—behaviours, motions, words, judgements, deliberations, information issued by the narrator and other characters—to enable themselves to conceive a collection of traits in order to understand the characters within the narrative. Consequently, readers turn this very paradigm into their particular understanding of those characters. In other words, as numerous elements about the characters are simultaneously included in the readers' minds, they can eventually develop unique characters who might be capable of becoming independent of the original narrative formulated in the author's mind. That is, Chatman practically believes in a 'second characterisation' proposed by the readers themselves. He further understands that while reading and getting introduced to the characters in the story, the readers experience the most critical aspects of these characters in a way that makes even the narrative's events irrelevant, as long as the readers can remind themselves of their own formulation about those specific characters.[48]

Again, Chatman's theory is interesting, but it also requires us to proceed with care. We agree that traits help readers clarify the difference between one character and another, particularly when a combination of traits portrays a character's uniqueness. He thinks that the combined and blended image of a given character comes from many different traits of this character (i.e., the *totality* of traits). This combination of traits helps the reader discern the character's individuality in interaction with other characters' actions and words.[49] We also agree that the characters' paradigm of traits might help identify how characters assist in the plot development, making sure they are not exclusively plot devices. Also, we see no difficulty in accepting that characters comprehend a 'vertical assemblage of traits', since their qualities are inferred from all kinds of textual data.[50]

We do not follow Chatman's approach concerning the indiscriminate power given to the reader to reconstruct characters based on the paradigm of traits. Contra Back, who

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[47] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 126-31. He benefits from Guilford's definition of trait: 'any distinguishable, relatively enduring way in which on individual differs from another'. In *Story and Discourse*, 121. For Resseguie, many different types present the characters' traits: they may be told by the narrator, they can be inferred from characters' actions and words, proper names and nicknames, or even anonymity can provide reader with relevant information about a specific character. See Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 128-30.

[48] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 117-21.

[49] Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews*, 46-7.

[50] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 127.

believes that Chatman's view is crucial for providing an alternative prospect to the limits of the theory of characterisation formulated by Forster (round and flat characters only),[51] we prefer to see that such a benefit, even if opportune, come at a high price. Regarding biblical characters, it is debatable to follow his approach strictly. There is the actual risk of considering that the reader engages with a character who eventually becomes different from the one the writer might have wanted to create in his own mind. Chatman's idea of two intermediate constructs, 'one in the text, which invents it upon each reading (the author), and one outside the text, which construes it upon each reading (the reader)',[52] challenges the relevance, for instance, of the Fourth Gospel's portrayal of the entire narrative arc for characters such as Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman and the man born blind. True, readers cannot engage in direct dialogue with the writer to clarify the significance of a specific character's action or words, but it is a long and unnecessary stretch to affirm that the very idea of an author prevents readers from thinking that the text is able to give them access to the literary goal presented by the author.

We are not alone in our critique of Chatman's paradigm of traits. Thomas Leitch, for example, understands that reducing characters to the sum of their traits is inadequate. Biblical characters, particularly, lead readers to think of more than a simple aggregation of traits. Readers wrap their minds around the characters' personalities because of various aspects. Characters are given the ability to go beyond the number of traits impressed in the story to give readers a vivid picture of their portrayal in the story.[53]

Two other critiques of Chatman's approach are also relevant. Laura Donaldson highlights that Chatman's perception of character as an open-ended paradigm of traits helpfully prevents a kenotic tendency to portray characters as entities without any trace of sensuous detail (emptiness). However, she asserts that although Chatman's theory is a step forward, it seems insufficient. He still 'perpetuates the traditional Aristotelian view of character as inert and descriptive'. Moreover, Donaldson asserts that Chatman does not eliminate stereotypical definitions by not questioning underlying assumptions of mimeticism and formalism.[54] More recently, Kari Syreeni follows Donaldson as she

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[51] Bach, 'Signs of the Flesh', 70.

[52] Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, 76.

[53] Leitch, *What Stories Are*, 156-7.

[54] Donaldson, 'Cyborgs, Ciphers, and Sexuality', 83-4, 93. 'Mimesis' is not a literary device or technique, rather a way of thinking about a narrative as 'imitation' or 'mimicry' to portray and interpret the world. *Mimeticism* plays an important role in literature since it may enable readers to suspend their disbelief in order to identify with characters. Donaldson sees such process as problematic, however, because it usually carries with it the interpretation of character as the production of positions within traditionally suppressive discourses and worldviews, such as masculinism and colonialism. *Formalism*, on the other hand, analyses a narrative without considering any influence that might occur

asserts that Chatman's 'paradigm of traits' indeed suggests some freedom to the reader's perception of the story and the consequent reconstruction of the characters' personality in the real world, but it fails for inevitably presupposing an intermediary instance where both text-world and real-life entities are interpreted. The problem, then, according to Syreeni, is that Chatman's characterisation does not contemplate the reality that readers are not necessarily always prepared to recognize the ideological intervention of the narrative transaction initially hinted at by the author.[55]

According to the discussion thus far, scholars are divided into two distinct groups: those who understand that literary characters must be reduced to textuality, and those who see characters should be analysed and explored as living representations in the actual historical world. Except for our due disagreements pointed out above, we understand that Chatman's 'open theory of character' is an interesting approach to this survey on the Johannine characters, as it allows an exploration of many relevant aspects that are not necessarily explicit in the words of the narrator but are undoubtedly implicit in the actions and words of the characters in their response to Jesus' interaction. However, we should also benefit from Rimmon-Kenan's and Burnett's two-fold view of characters. The former thinks the opposite views of characters—as persons modelled by the reader's construction and as textual entities—can be reconciled depending on the narrative aspect. For her, just as characters are extracted from the world of the text (and therefore textual entities), they are also objects of the readers' construction. Readers bring characters to real-life based on the people they (the readers) have encountered and interacted with in life.[56] Burnett adds that such a dual view of character is possible and necessary. While it is difficult to deny that characters are a construct developed in the reading process and therefore reduced to textuality (what he calls the 'effect of reading'), the same effect caused by the reading process helps the characters move beyond the text itself.[57] Joel Weinsheimer's words on comparing textual characters to literary critics are helpful:

> The significative relationship between the character's textuality and his personhood is reversible, for the words are not wholly constitutive of nor do they signify the character's personhood, nor vice versa. Simply, a character is no more subservient to words than a critic, and conversely a critic is no more a person, an autonomous self, than a character. What then distinguishes a critic from a character? [58]

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outside the text. By ignoring notions of cultural or social influence, authorship, and content, a formalist characterisation is concerned with the discourses (forms) presented by the text itself.

[55] Syreeni, 'Peter as Character and Symbol in the Gospel of Matthew', 115-6.

[56] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 33-6.

[57] Burnett, 'Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels', 5-6.

[58] Weinsheimer, 'Theory of Character: Emma', 210.

The conversation on characters' typology and portrayal is still in vogue today, which only shows the relevance of understanding the process of character building. To better understand the relevance of sensory perceptions for the work of the Fourth Gospel in building its characters, particularly the three specific ones under survey in this research, we briefly highlight in the following section some critical aspects of characterisation: the classification of characters, the relationships of the characters with other characters and textual features, and the techniques of characterisation.[59]

### 2.3. Classification of Characters

A classification scheme for literary characters is a current discussion in contemporary literary theory and biblical scholarship. There are debates on generic categories like 'round' versus 'flat' and 'protagonist' versus 'antagonist' characters, but also much more developed argumentation concerning many different terms employed by literary and narrative critics due to the relevance of characters to textual investigations. To classify characters means to categorize their types. They are usually distinguished through archetypes (the different types of characters portrayed in storytelling), their role in the narrative, or their quality in changing or remaining the same along with the story.[60]

Two features in the classification of characters are germane to this research. The first and most debated feature refers to the characters' complexity, usually determined by a collection of personality traits (or lack thereof) demonstrated by or attributed to them. Since the publication of Edward Morgan Forster's classic work on novel writing in 1927, many surveys on characterisation in the Gospels have adopted his distinction between 'flat' and 'round' characters. Flat characters are portrayed around a single idea or quality, consistent with almost no change, easily recognized, to whom few or no words are attributed. On the other hand, round characters have complex and multiple traits, holding qualities that generate endless possibilities for development within the story which are capable of surprising the reader convincingly. For Forster, round characters 'are fit to

[59] This research will not address the interesting discussion on whether modern literary theories on characterisation are adequate to investigate ancient text such as the Fourth Gospel. A fairly good debate is found in Merenlahti and Hakola, 'Reconceiving Narrative Criticism', 13–47; and Bennema, 'A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature', 239–50.

[60] Johnson and Arp, *Perrine's Story and Structure*; Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*; and *Theory and History of Folklore*; Fischer, 'The Sociopsychological Analysis of Folktales'.

perform tragically for any length of time and can move us to any feelings except humour and appropriateness'.[61]

Recent scholarship on Gospel characterisation has benefited from Forster's classic distinction of characters in many ways. A good example is the investigation of whether ancient writers have evidenced their characters as simple types functioning to support the plot (see below the discussion on the Aristotelian approach) or have disclosed slight hints of character development to the point of portraying them with complex traits and roles. Such theoretical conversation has brought forth pertinent debate and development on characterisation, and many scholars have introduced different character types. Rimmon-Kennan, for instance, affirms that although Forster's distinction is of 'pioneering importance', it must be revised due to its simplicity and inadequacy. She understands it is inappropriate to simply and carelessly classify characters as 'flat' since many of those characters considered as 'flat' are not necessarily two-dimensional; they present aspects of depth, even individuality. Also, Forster's dichotomy does not comprehend the various nuances found in many characters. Rimmon-Kennan asserts that Forster confuses two criteria that do not always overlap, thus missing that 'there are fictional characters which are complex but undeveloping (...) and others which are simple but developing'.[62]

Forster's work, nonetheless, has sparked the creativity of many scholars. Chatman introduces the type 'walk-on' to show that some characters should not necessarily be outlined and individualized fully. Because they serve as part of the background for the narrative, they belong more to the setting than being characters in their own right (e.g., the crowds in the Gospels' narratives).[63] Abrams and Harpham present the idea of 'stock' characters, often portrayed as identifying themselves as supporters for reaching the story outcome (e.g., the antichrist with several appearances in the book of Revelation).[64] Resseguie still uses the type 'foil' to refer to characters contrasted with other characters to reveal some of their distinctive characteristics, positively or negatively (e.g., a Gentile who has faith in Jesus).[65]

The other feature of character classification refers to their development in the narrative. The Israeli OT scholar Shimon Bar-Efrat introduced an interesting debate

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[61] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 73. Elizabeth Malbon points out that Forster's distinction between 'flat' and 'round' should not be confused with the difference between 'minor' and 'major' or 'negative' and 'positive' portrayal of characters. In 'Narrative Criticism', 29.

[62] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 43.

[63] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 138-40.

[64] Abrams and Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 378.

[65] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 124.

distinguishing between 'dynamic' and 'static' characters. While the dynamic characters are usually understood as developed, evidently experiencing transformation by the time they reach the end of their participation in the story, static characters are undeveloped, portrayed at the end of the story the same as they were at the beginning. Bar-Efrat affirms both concepts overlap with Forster's distinction between 'round' and 'flat' characters, although they are by no means identical. For him, 'a changing character cannot be simple and have just one feature, but a complex character need not develop at all in the narrative'.[66] He also asserts that because most biblical narratives are relatively short stories, 'there is virtually no technical possibility of gradual development. We often feel, nevertheless, that those characters who appear in many episodes change profoundly in the course of their lives'.[67]

Forster's and Bar-Efrat's work are relevant to understanding the biblical writers' characterisation. However, some have taken different directions. For example, Phillip Esler and Ronald Piper try to answer them by suggesting caution in characterising ancient Mediterranean texts (the Gospels included). For them, scholars should not expect significant changes in the biblical characters because the manifested group-oriented ancient world people would not reveal their inner selves. The Gospels portray their characters as people who followed group values and behaviour, not concerned about bringing out the same degree of psychological introspection familiar to modern literature. They conclude that biblical characters should be seen in a somewhat stereotypical form.[68]

Esler and Piper may have gone too far on the other end of the scale. The analysis of all the components of manner relevant to the portrayal of a given character, such as speed, imagination, precision, determination, and speech,[69] provides us with a presumable inference about the character with respect to his or her participation in the narrative. Such an assumption relates to a certain degree of psychological activity—affection, reflection, consideration, memory, and deliberation. Thus, the survey on characters' emotions does not necessarily depend exclusively on whether a narrative is ancient or modern. Not all ancient characterisations are as robust in their psychological features as most complex modern narratives, but some provide us with considerable knowledge of characters' mental acts or states, some narratives more than others. By all means, it is essential to say that, contra Bernard Paris, we perhaps should not go far enough to consider psychological

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[66] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 90.

[67] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 92.

[68] Esler and Piper, *Lazarus, Mary and Martha*, 19-20.

[69] Margolin, 'The Doer and the Deed', 212.

analyses of biblical characters as more important in their portrayal.[70] Such an approach would be primarily interested in characters' words, behaviours and actions without earnestly considering narrative theory. But this work examines the Fourth Gospel's characters, paying close attention to their inner states and mental properties whenever the author allows such traits or features to be excerpted from the story.

Dorothy Lee challenges the thought that biblical characterisation should be seen as 'flat', with only modern characters receiving a 'rounded' portrayal. For her, the Gospels' characters are aware of their symbolic role in the narratives, because 'their illustrative role is a significant part of their presentation, particularly in the Fourth Gospel, and is dependent on theological meaning'. In other words, Lee understands that 'Gospel characters (...) have distinct, personality traits so that they prove to be much more than ideological ciphers'.[71] She understands that characters change in the biblical narrative since the 'few, sketchy details are often strategic and pithy enough to create a real sense of movement and development'.[72]

Other scholars follow Lee's view of character development in the Gospels' stories. Merenlahti affirms that studies on biblical characterisation should primarily concern what he calls the 'representation of individuality'. For him, the Gospels portray so many personality traits out of such little character portrayal, 'figures who are sketched with only a few harsh strokes manage to give an impression of individuality and personhood'.[73] Bennema further asserts that instead of a dichotomised notion between flat and round characters, it is adequate to think in a continuum of degree of characterisation. In his work on characterisation in the Fourth Gospel, he investigates the characters' appearance in text and context, their classification according to criteria of complexity, development or change, insights into their inner lives, and their individual responses to Jesus.[74]

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[70] Paris, *Imagined Human Beings*, 119-260.

[71] Lee, 'Martha And Mary', 198.

[72] Lee, 'Martha And Mary', 197.

[73] Merenlahti, 'Characters in the Making', 49.

[74] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 1-41. More on Bennema's approach in the last section of this chapter.

## 2.4. Characters and Plot

The relationship between the characters and the plot is the first aspect we should consider. Although the discussion on characterisation in the Gospels' narratives has increased more recently, it earlier received some consideration in ancient writings. Aristotle has been identified with the 'purist' approach to characterisation, as he understood that the characters' most relevant participation in the story refers to their function within it. For him, characters are revealed by their actions, and therefore they are of lesser importance than the action as such. Characters must not be analysed or thought about out of the text. They should not be considered historical and/or actual persons:

> The most important element is the construction of the plot. Tragedy is a representation not of persons but of action and life, and happiness and unhappiness consist in action. The point is action, not character: it is their moral status that gives people the character they have, but it is their actions that make them happy or unhappy. So, it is not in order to portray moral character that the actors perform; rather, they include character for the sake of action. The events, the story, are the point of tragedy, and that is the most important thing of all.[75]

Aristotle's approach has resonated in modern thought. Analysing specifically Russian folktales, Vladimir Propp affirms that more important than the study of characters is the investigation of the story according to the functions performed by the characters, since 'functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale'.[76] Robert Funk follows Propp by identifying biblical characters as participants in the stories according to the function they fulfil in the text.[77]

Because Aristotle's approach does not allow characters' freedom with their performed action, some understand his view as inappropriate to studying the specific elements of characterisation, since 'characterization serves to make the plot in a narrative come to life'.[78] Chatman, for example, disagrees with Aristotle affirming there is no evident reason to assert the primacy of action over the characters' traits. He further suggests that we should not put a great emphasis on the distinction between characters and agents.[79] Identifying himself with the 'realist' approach (characters as representations of reality), Chatman argues that characters are autonomous beings within the story. They

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[75] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450a.15.

[76] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 21.

[77] Funk, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 62-6. Similarly, Sternberg highlights the relevance of characters' epithets to the fulfilment of the plot, in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 332.

[78] Rand, 'The Characterization of Jesus as Depicted in the Narrative of the Fourth Gospel', 19.

[79] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 110.

can be analysed in terms of the narrative world and be drawn out of it and, through their traits, be reconstructed as ideational people in conjectural realities in the world of the reader.[80] Prior to Chatman, Maren Elwood viewed the plot as secondary to the character-building task, since without characters the other text elements have no power to attraction over readers. When readers are in touch with the characters, the text comes to life.[81] Rimmon-Kenan, in turn, highlights that Aristotle's approach should be seen as the first step of a journey that would lead modern literary critics to declare the 'death of character',[82] culminating in the evident neglect of the critical study of characterisation until the rise of literary studies of the gospels in the early 1980s. Particularly inside biblical scholarship, this would lead to surveys on characterisation promoting the understanding that because the Gospels' stories are so similar to classic literature, there should be no need to consider the relevance of the Hebrew style of characterisation.[83]

It is risky, however, to claim that either view is right or wrong. Some scholars try to find an alternative to contemplate both, if not equally, at least respecting what seems unfeasible to counteract. For example, Malbon points out that although characters are a prominent narrative feature, they are also intertwined with the narrative analysis of the plot. Characters are known not only by their relationship with other characters through words and actions or by some qualities attributed to them by the narrator (names, epithets, descriptions), but also by comparative or contrasting juxtapositions with the unfolding of the plot. Characters are always interpreted in terms of their roles in the plot.[84]

Culpepper follows Malbon by asserting that Chatman's realist approach must be considered as long as critics can realise its limitations to biblical texts, particularly the Fourth Gospel, where 'most of the characters in it appear so briefly that it is difficult to form an impression of them as autonomous beings'. Culpepper explains that because the writer of the Gospel is not a novelist interested primarily in the profound and intense unfolding and portraying of characters, they are helpful textual elements for the primary representation of Jesus' purposes in the story. 'As a result', asserts Culpepper, 'one is almost forced to consider the characters in terms of their commissions, plot functions, and representational value'.[85] Here, Christopher Skinner reminds us that Culpepper's view is

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[80] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 107-16.

[81] Elwood, *Characters Make Your Story*, 129-30.

[82] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 31-3.

[83] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 100; Burnett, 'Characterization', 6; Hock, 'The Greek Novel', 127-46.

[84] Malbon, 'Narrative Criticism', 28-33.

[85] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 102.

evidently based on the idea that the great majority of characters in the Fourth Gospel are almost entirely reduced to functionaries to the plot.[86]

Before Culpepper, Tannehill caught the attention of biblical scholars due to the relationship between characters and the unity of the plot's narrative in the gospel of Mark. His concern might be perfectly applied to the Fourth Gospel in this regard since the unity of the whole Johannine narrative reveals a specific structure where a mission is accepted by a character which consequently results in either the character's success or failure in achieving the purpose presented by the implied author through the plot. That is why we see the Gospel's story as a narrative that 'becomes a meaningful plot filled with internal tension, the tension of suspense as we wait to see whether the commissions will be fulfilled and the tension of conflict among characters'.[87]

Adele Berlin is another scholar who emphasizes the relevance of the plot for characterisation, making clear the difficulty of simply choosing between the 'purist' or 'realist' approach. For her, the same degree of characterisation[88] is pliable enough to portray characters in distinct ways depending on the events in the story. For this reason, Berlin maintains that characters may stand out as mere *agents* necessary for the completion of the plot, or *types* with limited traits in order to represent groups of people, or even as *characters* who then acquire a more comprehensive collection of traits causing them to stand out above the plot.[89]

The discussion above encourages us to ask if such views must also be applied to biblical characters. However, such a question does not have a definite answer. Biblical characters are usually employed as functionaries of the plot, which is not necessarily the case with many characters developed in newer narratives. Of course, this does not lead us to axiomatically adopt Propp's view and his particular analysis of Russian tales. But, considering the above discussion on the definition of characters in which readers contribute to the construction of characters from the different textual indicators in the pages of biblical narratives, the answer probably lies in a deeper discussion.

One manifest aspect of this relationship between character and plot that could probably receive more attention is Outi Lehtipuu's study on the two overall categories of characterisation generally applied to Gospels stories: (1) plot-centred (*a-psychological*),

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[86] Skinner, 'Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John', xxiv.

[87] Tannehill, 'Tension in Synoptic Sayings and Stories', 148-50.

[88] Merenlahti defines 'degree of characterization' as 'the extent to which characters stand out as mere functional agents as opposed to individual personalities', in 'Characters in the Making', 55.

[89] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 31-2.

and (2) character-centred (*psychological*). Analysing the Gospels' stories, one quickly understands they belong to the first category. Not only because the idea of developing and attributing psychological features to characters is as recent as the eighteenth-century appearance of the novel, but also because the message of the Gospels is evidently dependent on progressive development. However, Lehtipuu clarifies that such categorisation seems insufficient because critics should not look for psychological measures but instead for the degree of focus and characterisation employed to depict each character to highlight their differences. For her, even though not all Gospels characters are presented with equal relevance, there is undoubtedly a differentiation in their *symbolic* levels. In other words, she understands that the characterisation of Jesus, for example, is not rendered with greater complexity or psychological depth than other biblical figures. But we should not deny that the symbolic significance of Jesus' character far exceeds that of the minor characters. [90]

### 2.5. Characters and Narrator

The other relevant aspect to this research refers to the association of characters with the narrator. Jeannine Brown affirms that 'the most important relationship for understanding characterisation is a character's relationship to the narrator—the one who shapes the story and paints the character within the narrative framework'.[91] As briefly discussed in the previous section, the narrator is the literary device employed by the author to guide readers through the story and prompt them to respond appropriately. The readers are assumed to believe in what Wayne Booth calls the 'direct and authoritative rhetoric' of the narrator.[92] This belief allows them to achieve a reasonable and comprehensive standpoint of the author following the characters presented by the narrator in words, actions, and responses to the numerous events through the story: 'the narrator point of view is so central that we, as readers, are encouraged to take on that perspective and evaluate the characters in the story just as the narrator does'.[93] Therefore, either positively or negatively, the narrator's point of view shapes the reader's perspective on the many aspects of the story.

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[90] Lehtipuu, 'Characterization and Persuasion', 78-81. Following Merenlahti, Lehtippu also states that some specific minor characters vary in depth, being more memorable than others. Merenlahti, 'Characters in the Making', 49-72.

[91] Brown, *Gospels as Stories*, 73.

[92] Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 6.

[93] Brown, *Gospels as Stories*, 74.

The character's relationship with the narrator also influences our understanding of a character's relationship with other characters. By informing the readers what other characters say and do to a specific character, the narrator 'structures time, sketches space, brings characters on and takes them off again, misleads the reader at times, and enforces his point of view through thick and thin'.[94] The narrator highlights all the aspects necessary to portray characters as they should be realised within the narrative.

In this way, the narrator's point of view directly affects our understanding of the characters. Although one or many characters may issue an opinion about a specific character, for example, the narrator's perspective approves or contradicts such an opinion, giving out the valid information that comes from the author, determining 'whether we hear any particular character's voice at any specific moment as reliable'.[95] Characters also speak for themselves about themselves and other characters, thus helping to build their own and others' characterisation. Such a contribution happens mainly through the following aspects: (1) the characters' words reveal the context and the contrast to other characters; (2) the characters' reliability influences their characterisation; and (3) the effect of contrary points of view between narrator and character (what characters say against what they do).[96]

### 2.6. A Comprehensive Theory of Character: Bennema's Contribution

In the last section of the discussion on characterisation in the Fourth Gospel, we should look at Bennema's contribution to my research. Among the recent surveys on characters in the Gospels, particularly in the Fourth Gospel, the work of Cornelis Bennema deserves some attention and has fomented a fair amount of debate.[97] His main concern is to reverse the view that Johannine characters are merely *types* having little complexity or no development. He argues that the differences in characterisation in the Hebrew Bible, ancient Greek literature, and even modern fiction are actually about the emphasis given to characters instead of simply the kind of characters portrayed in such literature. In other

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[94] Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 55.

[95] Brown, *Gospels as Stories*, 76.

[96] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 63-75.

[97] Bennema, 'A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature'; 'A Comprehensive Approach to Understanding Character in the Gospel of John'; *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative*; *Encountering Jesus*; 'Mimesis in John 13'; 'Character Reconstruction in the New Testament (1): The Theory'; 'Character Reconstruction in the New Testament (2): The Practice'; 'A Shared (Graeco-Roman) Model of Mimesis in John and Paul?'; 'Imitation in Johannine Christianity'.

words, he points out that both ancient and modern literature, including biblical or classical Graeco-Roman narratives, portray the differences between characters in a *degree of development*, rather than in an inflexible dichotomous division between 'flat' and 'round' characters.[98]

For this reason, he proposes what he calls a 'comprehensive theory of character' encompassing three main aspects. First of all, the study of character must contemplate both text and context.[99] Critics must benefit from the information that comes from the text and other sources regarding the historical context of the first-century world, including the author's evaluative portrayal. In other words, the analysis of characters needs to be conditioned by the type of narrative under investigation. Given that the Fourth Gospel is rooted in historical events, Bennema clarifies that readers should be aware of both the social and cultural environment of the New Testament in the effort of 'understanding the personality, motive, and behaviour of ancient characters'.[100]

Secondly, Bennema benefits from Joseph Ewen's three dimensions (complexity, development, inner life),[101] to plot the resulting character on a continuum of degree of characterisation in four stages: an agent (also actant or walk-on); a type (also stock or flat character); a character with personality; and, an individual (or person). Practically speaking, Bennema proposes to chart characters according to the different ways they are eventually portrayed in the narrative. Thus, he investigates the number of traits a character exhibits (complexity), the progressive adaptation or change of their identities (development), and the information about their internal thoughts, emotions, and motivations (inner life).[102] A priori, such an approach seems helpful to analyse a character who is portrayed along with the whole Gospel narrative (e.g. Peter or even Nicodemus), but not as suitable to characters who have a shorter portrayal (e.g. the Samaritan woman of Sychar and the man born blind). On the other hand, it might prove helpful when these characters are portrayed with other characters.

Finally, Bennema suggests evaluating characters according to the author's point of view and the narrative plot. In the specific case of the Fourth Gospel, he invites critics to pay attention to the implied author's purpose and dualist worldview since such features

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[98] Bennema follows Burnett when arguing for degrees of characterisation along a continuum. See Burnett, 'Characterization and Reader Construction', 3–28.

[99] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 62. Also, 'Character Reconstruction in the New Testament (1)', 367-9.

[100] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 62.

[101] Ewen, 'The theory of character in narrative fiction', 7; *Character in Narrative*, 33-44. Ewen's works are only available in Hebrew, but his theory is summarized in Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 43–4.

[102] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 72-82; 'Character Reconstruction in the New Testament (1)', 369-70.

assist in recognizing the characters in relation to their responses to Jesus as the main character of the Johannine narrative.[103] In other words, Bennema is concerned with both the description and the evaluation of characters. Applying his theory to the Fourth Gospel, he finds that only eight out of twenty-three characters are *types*. For him, such a purposeful character development—even within delimited periscopes—achieves the Gospel's target of shaping the lives of his readers/hearers in a way that they will identify with the progressive maturing of the characters as they come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that they can achieve life in his name (John 20:31). For Bennema, as the Fourth Gospel's theological agenda enables each character to be evaluated positively or negatively according to their response to Jesus, characterisation assists today's readers to be impacted by the message and purpose of John's theological arguments.

Bennema's approach is helpful to this research on Johannine characters, and it will be assessed along with the development of this thesis. It certainly contributes to understanding characterisation in the Fourth Gospel as it will be demonstrated in the summary of his method in the fourth chapter.

[103] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 90-103; 'Character Reconstruction in the New Testament (1)', 370-2.

# Chapter 3 | **SENSORY STUDIES**

The previous chapter discussed the contribution of narrative criticism to this research, specifically the studies on characterisation in the Fourth Gospel, bringing up the scholarly survey on character's definition and classification as well as the relationship between characters and plot, narrator and readers. The last section of that chapter introduced a succinct analysis of Cornelis Bennema's work on characterisation, the approach that significantly correlates with this study and it will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The following chapter introduces the methodological approach to the investigation of the presumable sensory development in Johannine characterisation. There, different approaches will be considered to devise the interpretational reading of such characters: the aforementioned Bennema's survey on NT characters, Yael Avrahami's work on the biblical sensorium, and Algirdas Greimas' semiotic square to understand the fundamental generative trajectory of textual meaning of each characterisation in analysis.

What about the present chapter? Why does it show up here, between the literature review and the research method chapters? The main goal of this specific chapter on sensory studies is to provide a concise yet clarifying explanation of how sensory anthropology can interact with this survey on sensory development in the Fourth Gospel's characters' portrayal. Although the interest in sensory studies is perceptually growing among biblical scholars, the methodological conversation between sensory anthropology and biblical characterisation is still relatively new. Over the last fifteen years or so, interpreters have benefited from the investigatory work of sensory scholars—or scholars from other disciplines who have opened the door to sensory studies in their analyses—and such a journey has enabled biblical scholarship to incorporate some particular tools from this approach to cooperate with their own investigation of different aspects in the NT, not necessarily on characterisation.

This chapter serves as an introduction to sensory studies and as an extension of the literature review presented in the previous chapter. It aims to demonstrate how biblical scholars can benefit from sensory anthropology in understanding character development within Gospel narratives. To achieve this, the chapter presents a range of scholarly work, highlighting researchers who have begun to apply sensory studies to biblical narratives. However, it should be noted that many have not yet employed this approach specifically in examining the sensory development of biblical characters.

The chapter pays particular attention to the work of Yael Avrahami on the biblical sensorium, which is discussed in the final section. Overall, the chapter provides a brief

review of current research in this field and defines key terms related to sensory scholarship. These definitions, while not directly connected to the discussion on character construction presented in the previous chapter, are essential for understanding the broader context of studying characters in biblical texts.

The chapter, then, is structured as follows. First, it briefly discusses the relevance of the cultural study of the senses to show how biblical scholarship could benefit from it. Such insight might help in the awareness of the experience of the biblical cultural ambience concerning human sensory perception, including how senses appear arranged in the text of the Fourth Gospel.

Next, it provides a short but suitable analysis of the historical development of the interest in studying and investigating the human senses among contemporary biblical scholarship but primarily within the philosophical discourse of the Greco-Roman culture. It has been helpful to understand that although the interest in the study of the human senses in biblical texts is not yet fully developed, nor has it been used for a long period, the interest in such a topic has been around since ancient philosophy, religion and science, particularly the early Greek thinkers (sixth and fifth centuries BCE), who 'among a flurry of rationalistic thought experiments, broad theories about the workings of the cosmos soon turned their gaze to the interaction between humans and their environment'.[1]

The third section introduces the discipline of sensory anthropology. It discusses essential features of developing current research of sensory scholarship in interaction with other academic fields. The main goal is to define sensory perception through multiple cognitive and contextually specific meanings related to sensory experiences. The 'sensory turn' inquiry—to follow Neumann & Thomas' definition—has been responsible for new findings on human interaction in fields such as psychology, neuroscience, evolutionary biology, and even medical imaging technology.[2] In the attempt to explain how it investigates social, moral, and epistemological values associated with one or more human senses in a given culture, the section introduces the leading proponents of the sensory perception approach.

The fourth section demonstrates some instances of how biblical scholarship has gradually benefited from sensory studies to survey biblical texts, particularly narratives. Though we should not yet state that sensory investigation of the Bible has already reached a prominent position, a recent growth in the interest of biblical scholarship has become

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[1] Baltussen, 'Early Theories of Sense Perception', 35.

[2] Neumann and Thomason, *The Routledge Handbook of the Senses in the Ancient Near East*, 2.

evident, making it possible to realise some profitable contribution of sensory studies to the analysis of biblical writings.

Finally, the chapter dedicates a substantial section to introducing and discussing Yael Avrahami's theory of sensory perception in the Bible and its contribution to this research. Her theoretical and methodological grounding for studying cultural notions in ancient texts, particularly the Hebrew Bible, helps us realise many principles of cultural anthropology's call for sensitivity to cultural differences in textual phenomena. It shows how she proposes to investigate the embodied worldview of a given culture through the survey of semantic fields and mental frames reflected in the language of such a culture. Avrahami believes biblical scholars are in the position to find relevant hints of sensory perception within biblical narratives since biblical sensory modalities bring up a theological understanding of epistemology. The chapter also indicates how Avrahami's development on the Bible's septasensory model, synaesthesia and sensory development can contribute to the present investigation of Johannine characters.

### 3.1. Cultural study of the senses

This research understands the study of characters in the Fourth Gospel can certainly be enriched by analysing how human senses might have been employed by the Gospel's author in the construction of his characters. However, to perceive such a contribution, we need first to ask, what are the human senses? An abrupt and disinterested answer would simply say that we have five basic senses: *touch*, *sight*, *hearing*, *smell* and *taste*. We could further improve this explanation by saying that they work together with the sensing organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin) to send relevant information to the brain to help us understand the world around us. In addition, it could be said that we benefit from our senses in almost every aspect of cognition, behaviour and thought.

Although the description above is correct, it is far from complete. The human senses should not be seen only as a manifestation of our interaction with the world. Such a flat perception would ignore the work of the senses operating simultaneously and in cooperation with each other to provide our individual experience of the reality around us. So, where did such an understanding of the five senses come from? We should not accept the traditional idea of the five senses as truth without further investigation, since 'the number and order of the senses are fixed by custom and tradition, not by nature'.[3]

[3] Vinge, *The Five Senses*, 107.

Although the commonly accepted idea about the pentasensory model might be understood as habitual, it is an experience that primarily relies on social construction:

> It is claimed that the distinction between the senses and the mind and the strict hierarchy of the senses in Western philosophy are so widely accepted, that they seem like a natural, universal epistemology. Cultural anthropology attempts to avoid ethnocentrism and distance itself from its own cultural perceptions in order to appreciate and understand other cultures.[4]

The statement above is an invitation to consider yet another question: What is the cultural study of the senses? As part of the field of cultural anthropology, any cultural study that investigates the human senses is intended to understand them in a given culture to answer how, and in what ways, the senses are closely involved and associated with that culture's values. The academic work on the human senses has increased among cultural studies scholars since the last decades of the twentieth century. Commonly acknowledged as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that communicates with the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts, cultural studies are interested in the conversation between the human transformation of movements and the forming of future human interactions. That is why the historical foundation of popular culture, for instance, is relevant as scholars look for cultural practices of power and social phenomena. Cultural studies of the senses think 'across these disciplinary spaces about historical and contemporary culture',[5] investigating how senses work in different cultures. By surveying the relationship between sensory experience and reasoning, cultural approaches see the human senses as reliable sources of knowledge in understanding different cultures, including ancient human societies.[6]

David Howes, professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Concordia University, Montreal, is one of the leading scholars in researching the cultural life of the senses. He states that sensation is not just a 'matter of physiological response and personal experience. It is the most fundamental domain of cultural expression, the medium through which all the values and practices of society are enacted'.[7] In other words, Howes clarifies that it does not matter the type or intensity of a sensory experience. It will always be a field of cultural elaboration that structures social roles and interactions. Sensory relations are also social relations.[8]

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[4] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 5.

[5] Oswell, *Culture and Society*, 9.

[6] Howes and Classen, 'Sounding Sensory Profiles', 3–42.

[7] Howes, *Sensual Relations*, xi.

[8] Howes, *Sensual Relations*, xi.

Any sensory research should then provide a dialogue between the study of the senses and culture. Initially, such an approach was seen only as an alternative to avoid the total absorption of the study of the senses by psychology and neuroscience which saw the senses specifically as cognitive or neurological processes without cultural or political perception. There is an evident invitation for history, anthropology, and other disciplines to be part of this conversation. As Constance Classen alerts, the study of the senses matters because the meanings and values of the senses

> form the sensory model espoused by a society, according to which the members of that society 'make sense' of the world, or translate sensory perceptions and concepts into a particular 'worldview.' There will likely be challenges to this model from within the society, persons and groups who differ on certain sensory values, yet this model will provide the basic perceptual paradigm to be followed or resisted.[9]

Also known as the *sensorium*, the cultural study of the senses evidences that anthropology has been consistently concerned with senses and sense perception issues.[10] Specifically, the interest in this field of study has become more evident as it has brought forth a skilled variety of studies in a broader cultural context, rather than being only a concern of philosophical or biological debates.[11]

Some cultural anthropologists understand the sensorium as an ever-shifting social and historical construct. It implies that cultural and political sensory perceptions should be considered not as simple cognitive processes or neurological mechanisms located in the person but as mediators between self and society, mind and body, idea and object. The analysis of the sensorium helps to get closer to the experience of cultural reality.[12]

To better understand the scholarly research around sensory studies, Howes has created eight propositions for sensory studies. According to him, such propositions are helpful because they 'bring out the sociality of sensations, and highlight a series of topics for further research in the expanding field of sensory studies'.[13] They are as follows:

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[9] Classen, 'Foundations for an Anthropology of the Senses', 402.

[10] Howes, 'Sensing Cultures', 173.

[11] Interesting resources are Bendix and Brenneis, *Senses*; Brahinsky, 'Pentecostal Body Logics'; Le Breton, *Sensing the World*; Cox, Irving, Wright, *Beyond Text?*; Geurts, *Culture and the Senses*; Kurek-Chomycz, 'The Fragrance of Her Perfume'; McInroy, *Balthasar on the 'Spiritual Senses'*; Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation*; Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*; Ram and Houston, *Phenomenology in Anthropology*; Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship*; *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*; Trnka, Dureau, Park, *Senses and Citizenships*; Vannini, Waskul, Gottschalk, *The Senses in Self, Society, and Culture*.

[12] Bull et al., 'Introducing Sensory Studies', 5.

[13] Howes, *Senses and Sensation*. In building his eight propositions, Howes was inspired by Sandywell, 'Seven Theses on Visual Culture', 648–73.

1. The senses are not simply passive receptors. They are interactive, both with the world and each other.
2. Perception is not solely a mental or physiological phenomenon. It is also cultural and political.
3. The limits of one's language are not the limits of one's world, for the senses come before language and extend beyond it.
4. The senses collaborate, but they may also conflict. Therefore, the unity of the senses should not be presupposed.
5. The senses are commonly hierarchized, with higher-ranked groups associated with the "higher" senses and what are considered refined (or neutral) sensations.
6. No account of the senses in society can be complete without mention being made of sensory differentiation, such as gender, class, and ethnicity.
7. The senses are everywhere. They mediate the relationship between idea and object, mind and body, self and society, culture and environment.
8. Each culture elaborates its ways of understanding and using the senses. Therefore, no one sensory model will fit all.

### 3.2. A Brief Analysis of the Historical Development of Sensory Studies

Some interesting aspects of the search for the understanding of the human sensorium can be traced in philosophical discourses since the Greco-Roman culture, or even earlier particularly with regard to the Hebrew scriptures, as it will be demonstrated below. But the growing scholarship interest in studying the senses within biblical narratives has been a relatively recent phenomenon when relevant questions related to the senses in the Bible began to appear in academic research. At its annual meeting of 2009, the *Society of Biblical Literature* launched a programme unit named 'Senses, Cultures, and the Biblical World.' The unit, chaired by Yael Avrahami, investigates 'all aspects of sensory perception in the Bible and early Judaism and Christianity, including how various cultures thought about, used, and ascribed meaning to the senses.'[14] Following a similar pattern, the *American Society of Overseas Research* surveys the history and cultures of the Near East and the wider Mediterranean world. A specific session called 'Senses and Sensibility

[14] 'Senses, Cultures, and Biblical worlds', available at https://www.sbl-site.org. Accessed 2 March 2023.

in the Near East' is responsible for analysing theoretical and methodological approaches in their exploration of senses and sense-making related to objects, spaces, and practices in the Near East. Their main goal is to discover 'culturally meaningful sensory experience and modes of representation, reception, perception, and interaction, as well as social and political dynamics of past worlds and human encounters'.[15]

According to Jerry Toner, ancient writings are filled with indications concerning the relevance of the senses. For him, the most appropriate explanation for their vast number is that the senses were responsible for bringing to the surface the differences between a massive variety of cultural meanings. Not only religious rituals benefited from expressions of body sensations in achieving spiritual significance. A rich web of sensory perception was relevant to all aspects of ancient life: 'In a steeply hierarchical world, with vast differences between the landed wealthy, the poor, and the slaves, the senses also played a key role in establishing and maintaining boundaries between social groups.'[16]

Ancient science and philosophy were arenas in which the battles for understanding the meaning of life and the function of society were strongly influenced by the quest to understand the relevance of the human senses. The Greek philosophical tradition took a stand by delineating logical discrimination between the senses and reason, with the former being cast to a lower place restricted to the animal aspect of humanity.[17] That is not to say that the search for understanding sensory perception was regarded as sufficiently dangerous to be eliminated from life experiences, but they were undoubtedly supposed to be understood and employed only following specific philosophical principles of truth.[18] For instance, in his allegory of the cave, Plato affirms that humans have the faculty of reason since they can see and understand what is real. The senses are the only device left for those who are fettered in the cave. They need to trust what they see and hear from the shadows on the wall. However, their sensory perceptions only provide them with a distorted view of the truth about fine, just, and good things:

> Education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around, and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it. It isn't the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately.[19]

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[15] 'Senses and Sensibility in the Near East', available at https://www.asor.org. Accessed 2 March 2023.

[16] Toner, *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, 2.

[17] Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 1, 5.

[18] Clements, 'The Senses in Philosophy and Science: Five Conceptions from Heraclitus to Plato', 115-6.

[19] Plato, *Republic* VII, 1136.

Plato's insinuated lower view of the human senses, nonetheless, does not indicate he was not interested in the issue. Although he is clear that we should not allow ourselves to be governed by the senses' feelings and passion, he still wanted to elucidate how we should view and deal with our senses. In the development of his philosophical work, he ended up identifying *sight* as one of the essential principles of his thinking, since this sense leads to God and Truth: 'Our sight has indeed proved to be a source of supreme benefit to us, in that none of our present statements about the universe could ever have been made if we had never seen any stars, sun or heaven'.[20]

Aristotle was also interested in the studies of human senses. Although he considered *touch* as one of the most important forms of sense since it belongs to all animals,[21] he gave particular attention to *sight*, as pre-eminent, since it is through *sight* that human beings can attain and develop knowledge. Of particular interest to this research is Aristotle's effort to rank the senses, which contributed to establishing what would become the Western cultural standard pentasensory model for the classification of the human senses. In his 'History of Animals', which is considered a pioneering work on zoology, Aristotle affirms that 'the total number of the senses (for we have no experience of any special sense not here included), is five: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch'.[22]

As happened with classic philosophy, sensory perceptions became a crucial part of the worldview of ancient religions, not only Christianity: 'bodily practices, sensory engagement, and the cultivation of sensory awareness were common features across the different religions of the Roman Empire'.[23] However, it is also true that the advent of the Christian era revealed another interesting aspect of the senses. With the development of Christian doctrines and theologies, especially concerning the aspect of God's incarnation in Jesus, the senses became an even more recurring subject in the work of many Christian writers. For Anthony Synnott, early Christian consideration of the senses was often presented in conflicting ways: either as fleshy features and gifts created by God to bless people or as instruments of fall and deviation from God's will.[24]

As demonstrated in the later chapters of this thesis, Jesus is undoubtedly portrayed by the gospels as a man with a positive attitude towards the senses concerning the dignity

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[20] Plato, *Timaeus*, 1249.

[21] Aristotle, *On the Soul* II, 413b4, 902.

[22] Aristotle, *On the Soul* II, 1205. Robert Jutte understands that Democritus (460-370 BC), contemporary of Socrates, should be considered the creator of the penta-sensory model. Aristotle would only have developed the concept. See *A History of the Senses*, 33.

[23] Harvey, 'The Senses in Religion', 113.

[24] Synnott, 'Puzzling over the Senses', 64.

of life. Moreover, his evident teachings and attitudes on behalf of the hungry and the sick, as well as his miracles of transforming water into wine and multiplying fish and bread, show that he recognized that 'sensory gratification could be good, so long as it was directed toward the glory of God'.[25] However, how did the Christian understanding of the human senses develop throughout the growth and establishment of church doctrines and traditions?

Two examples from the Church Fathers help us understand the rationale concerning human senses in the first centuries after the establishment of Jesus' movement. First, John Chrysostom (347-407) wrote consistently about the senses, particularly concerning the body's desires that would bring him closer to death and away from God. However, he also saw the senses as instruments to appreciate God's beauty and wonder, with particular attention to the eye that allows us to see what God has done. In his surviving twelve catechetical lectures on baptismal instructions, Chrysostom presents interesting metaphors linking sensory perception to architectural imagery in a way that situates the catechumen's body in space.[26]

By appealing to the relation between biblical spaces and symbols, such as the Garden of Eden, Chrysostom teaches that Adam remained close enough to the garden's entrance to gaze at the forbidden paradise so that he might see each hour the joys of which he had deprived himself. He adds: 'When we enjoy blessings without perceiving the manner of the benefaction as we should, and they are deprived of them, we get a fuller perception of these blessings'.[27] *Sight*, for Chrysostom, is the sense that brings both the intense pain of sadness upon the realisation of separation from God and the learning about what we lose when we do not follow God's commandments.

Augustine (354-430) is even more emphatic in describing his dilemma concerning the senses as a gift from God. Constructing his words in a careful and artisanal way, as if it were a work of art, he uses poetry to bring to mind some excerpts from the Songs of Solomon's words in order to identify the bodily senses spiritually:

> You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.[28]

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[25] Synnott, 'Puzzling over the Senses', 67.

[26] Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions.*

[27] Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, 45.

[28] Augustine, *The Confessions*, 201.

Augustine's theological view places spiritual sensory experience above the corporeal in these and many other references to the senses, but he is also careful to show that the bodily senses should not be seen as insignificant. Gracefully, his focus on resurrection indicates that our interaction with the new creation through both body and spirit will manifest a sensory perception of the whole and unlimited, with direct and instant involvement with God, giving rise to a complete sense of excitement. Therefore, Augustine's understanding of spiritual sensory experience 'seeks to preserve God's immateriality, while at the same time guaranteeing that the perceptual life remains an essential aspect of human existence both in this life and the next'.[29]

From the development of Christian theology in the medieval period, nonetheless, it is possible to identify the beginning of concern with human senses related to the danger of living in search of physical rather than intellectual or spiritual satisfaction. For instance, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) presented a systematic analysis of the senses following the previous Christian theological tradition of privileging *sight* over the other senses as 'the most spiritual, the most perfect, and the most universal of all the senses'.[30] However, his main concern was to emphasize that both human happiness and the meaning of life do not consist of bodily pleasures. Aquinas understood that we should not allow our senses to plunge ourselves into worldly pleasures. Otherwise, we would risk losing our 'spiritual senses' (the intellect) in the attempt to enjoy the 'bodily senses':

> Man is kept away from a close approach to God, for this approach is effected through contemplation, and the aforementioned pleasures are the chief impediment to contemplation, since they plunge man very deep into sensible things, consequently distracting him from intelligible objects.[31]

With the advent of modernity, the interest in understanding the human senses witnessed a significant shift. A range of different approaches, sometimes complementary and sometimes contrary to each other, was developed over three centuries. If, on the one hand, ancient and medieval Christian theologians were concerned with understanding how the senses—admittedly God's gifts to enjoy life—could be used to glorify the Creator instead of becoming a road to damnation, modern thinkers were looking for the epistemological and scientific aspect of the human sensory perception.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) affirms the relevance of the senses for politics and social life. For him, human thoughts are a representation of reality produced by a diversity

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[29] Lootens, 'Augustine', in *The Spiritual Senses*, 70.

[30] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Volume 1*, 393.

[31] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book 3: Providence Part I*, 113.

of appearances of which the senses are to be considered the original of them all, 'for there is no conception in a man's mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense. The rest are derived from that original'.[32]

René Descartes (1506-1650) adopted a seemingly contradictory view of the senses. Regarding the advancement of his scientific discoveries, he saw the senses as responsible for the entire conduct of our lives. For him, scientists should work hard to develop technologies that help us better explore our senses, especially *sight*. However, Descartes also stated that, philosophically, the senses must not be trusted because they can generate a reality illusion. They can be distorted according to the environment. It is paramount that we adopt a dissociation between body and soul, or *sensing* and *thinking*. More important than feeling the physical reality around us is protecting ourselves against any 'sense deception': 'I shall consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things'.[33] Therefore, for him, *thinking* is more critical than *sensing* to understand one's existence, that is why his famous proposition: 'I am thinking therefore I exist, which makes me sure that I am telling the truth, except that I can see very clearly, that in order to think, one has to exist'.[34]

Almost two centuries later, the senses remained a topic of great discussion. For Friedrich Hegel's idealism (1770-1831), the senses should be seen as representations of the self and instruments for survival and acquiring information about the world. Hegel is recognized for developing an interesting philosophy about the senses, with distinctions between human and animal senses, as well as a hierarchy of the senses with upper and lower ones.[35] On the other hand, Karl Marx (1818-1883) asserted that the satisfaction of human biological needs comes through the senses. Since the objectivation of the senses was connected to their alienation, private property and capitalism ended up creating the 'sense of having'.[36] Marx concludes that the senses actually do not have ontological qualities because they are subjected to historical changes. They are a 'labour of the entire history of the world down to present'.[37]

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[32] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 9.

[33] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 19.

[34] Descartes, *A Discourse on the Method*, 29.

[35] Synnott, 'Puzzling over the Senses: From Plato to Marx', 73.

[36] Jutte, 'The Senses in Philosophy and Science', 117.

[37] Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 108.

### 3.3. An Introduction to Sensory Anthropology

Following the above quick survey on recent sensory scholarship we are ready to ask about the main goals of this relatively new discipline named sensory anthropology. In cultural studies of the senses, sensory anthropology is *the approach to cultural anthropology that investigates social, moral, and epistemological values associated with one or more human senses in a given culture*.[38] Although it certainly comprehends physiological sensory perception, sensory anthropology also sees the human senses reasoned in a cultural orientation that allows for individual variation. In other words, sensory perceptions 'are shaped through education and brought into play according to the personal history of each individual'.[39] Any culture can be defined by knowing its exploration of the sensorium revealing the body's entire sensory apparatus.

As we have seen, because the organization of the senses in a society is highly influential in shaping modes of cultural expression,[40] one of the main proposals of sensory anthropologists—seemingly a daring one—is to challenge the Western philosophical tradition that holds the view that the human senses are only bodily tools to interpret the world. For them, researchers should rather look at different uses of the senses in the lifeworld (emotions, communication, expressions of social and cultural relationships). By studying the ways members of different cultures experience the world via human senses, sensory anthropology today recognizes that many views of sensory perception propagated by the modern Western understanding of the senses helped to create and establish distinct anthropological biases, such as the centrality of sight and the textual lens through which cultural topics are examined, [41] or as David Howes and Constance Classen state:

> Every culture strikes its own balance among the senses. While some cultures tend toward an equality of the senses, most cultures manifest some bias or other, either privileging a particular sense, or some cluster of senses. In order successfully to fathom the sensory biases of another culture, it is essential for the researcher to overcome, to the extent possible, his or her own sensory biases.[42]

The mind-body dichotomy, for instance, is one of the most evident philosophical assumptions debated by sensory anthropologists to the extent that it inadequately promotes the objectification of the body through a high view of cognitive processes

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[38] Based on Howes, 'The Expanding Field of Sensory Studies'.

[39] Le Breton, *Sensing the World*, 3.

[40] Howes, 'To Summon All the Senses', 18.

[41] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 5.

[42] Howes and Classen, 'Sounding Sensory Profiles', 260.

derived from the Western philosophical tradition that can be found already in ancient Greece. Raymond Gibbs, interestingly, affirms the reality of a 'corporeal disappearance' that understands the human body as 'a material object, whereas the self and the mind are ethereal entities that somehow mysteriously invade or permeate the body'.[43] For that reason, anthropologists involved with the cultural studies of the senses aim to read the sensory map of a given culture to investigate the ways members of different cultures experience the world via sensory experiences.[44]

Another epistemological challenge proposed by sensory anthropologists refers to a revision of the fivefold sensory-perception model, going against the socially constructed nature of Aristotle's traditional model adopted by Western cultures prizing *sight* as the pre-eminent sense, as previously discussed. They look at different uses of the senses in the lifeworld (expressions of social and cultural relationships) 'to expose the Western fivefold understanding of the senses as itself a *folk model*, not biologically given, but rather socially constructed'.[45]

For many adherents of this approach, sensory anthropology was initially developed to elaborate an anthropology of the body as an existential ground of perception and being, since the body is 'a profusion of sensory experience. It is absorbed in the movement of the world and mingles with it through all its senses'.[46] Consequently, this concern brought up the interest in the subject's life as the embodied individual who is continuously seeking meaning within the in-depth need and duty of social and cultural interaction.

In recent decades, scholars like David Howes,[47] Constance Classen,[48] and Paul Stoller[49] have influenced biblical studies through the lenses of sensory anthropology. Based on the premise that 'the ways we use our senses, and the ways we create and understand the sensory world, are shaped by culture',[50] they attempt to demonstrate the connection between senses and culture by breaking with the sensually limited approaches of traditional anthropology to focus on the interplay of all the senses.[51] In all cultures, the

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[43] Gibbs, *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*, 14.

[44] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 5.

[45] Lawrence, 'Exploring the Sense-Scape of the Gospel of Mark', 388. Her emphasis.

[46] Le Breton, *Sensing the World*, 1.

[47] Howes, *Sensual Relations*; 'Sensation'; 'The Cultural Life of the Senses'; *Ways of Sensing*; and 'Sensing Cultures'.

[48] Classen, *Worlds of Sense*; 'Foundations for an Anthropology of the Senses'; *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Empire*; *The Book of Touch*; Classen and Howes, *The Museum of the Senses*.

[49] Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship*; *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*.

[50] Howes, *Ways of Sensing*, 212.

[51] Howes, 'To Summon All the Senses', 5.

senses must be understood as hierarchically organized. Any sensory research must determine the sensory profile of the culture being studied.[52]

This is, for example, the epistemological endeavour of the Concordia Sensoria Research Team (CONSERT), based in the department of Sociology and Anthropology at Concordia University, Montreal, that has been researching the cultural life of the senses with the following assumptions: (1) The hierarchy of the senses depends on the cultural tradition, which varies from culture to culture; (2) The senses encode ethical values that are learned as part of the socialization process, in real practices during childhood; (3) Sensory preferences are expressed in language, in expressions, in symbols, and proverbs; and (4) Different sensory hierarchies can exist in different parts of the same culture, based on religious, political, or gender factors.[53]

Given what has been seen regarding sensory anthropology, is it possible to apply this approach to survey biblical narratives? Compellingly, Louise Lawrence initiates her conversation on the sensory study in Mark's gospel, stating that there is a certain lack of interest in the senses in NT studies. She sees NT scholarship as a 'sense-less' industry as it commonly follows the Western cultural dominant trend of logocentrism (focused only on words and texts), they tend to neglect material and sensory features by considering them purely animalistic forms of interface with the world. For her, 'this is a serious lacuna, for even a cursory look at NT texts reveal "corporeally" inclined cultures, where understanding is formed by sense experience just as much as words'.[54]

It is appropriate to end this brief introductory section on sensory anthropology mentioning what David Howes and Constance Classen call *general considerations* about sensory research. The following principles are to be borne in mind when studying the sensorium: (1) Other cultures do not necessarily divide the sensorium as we do; (2) The senses interact with each other first before they give us access to the world. That is why it is necessary to find out the sorts of relations between the senses the studied culture considers proper; (3) Senses which are essential for practical purposes may not be important culturally or symbolically; (4) Sensory orders are not static: they develop and change over time, just as cultures do; and (5) There may be different sensory orders for

[52] Howes and Classen, 'Sounding Sensory Profiles', 257.

[53] These assumtpions are summarised by Avrahami in *The Senses of Scripture*, 15. The CONSERT's webpage can be accessed at http://www.david-howes.com/senses/.

[54] Lawrence, 'Exploring the Sense-Scape of the Gospel of Mark': 387

different groups within a society (women and men, children and adults, leaders and workers).[55]

The above brief introduction to the discipline of sensory anthropology assists us in better examining the recent relationship between sensory studies and other academic disciplines. For the present analysis of recent sensory scholarship, this thesis benefits from the extensive work edited by David Howes that includes leading scholars from the humanities and social sciences, including arts and communication studies. Howes' contribution to the study of the senses is considered one of the pioneering pillars of the 'sensory turn' which has as one of its main objectives to challenge the monopoly that psychology held until recently over the investigation of the senses and sensation.[56]

Other relevant sensory studies are found in the works of Steven Feld,[57] Charles Goodwin,[58] and Cristina Grasseni,[59] among others. Their work reveals the emergence of the study of cultural experiences that had not been sufficiently carried out systematically, such as non-visual or aurality modes of cultural expression. For that reason, they are interested, for instance, in opposing the 'visualism'[60] of Western thought and culture prevailing in anthropological works, so that they could emphasize the importance of connecting with the cultural experience of non-Western subjects.

One very relevant discussion regards the methodological approach employed by sensory anthropologists in their investigations. Anthropologists in general have always relied on written research and data from interviews and academic communication vehicles, such as monographs or journal articles, to circulate and publicize their discoveries. However, the early 1980s witnessed a significant prominence of 'text' in anthropological work.[61] The focus on 'interpreting' and 'writing culture' as initially proposed by leading anthropologists began to be gradually identified as a type of research moving too far away from sensing cultures. This fact brought them to conclude that texts have traditionally been associated with reason, while the body is associated with emotions. However, it should not mean that 'the text is intrinsically rational in nature or

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[55] Howes and Classen, 'Sounding Sensory Profiles', 257–9.

[56] Howes, *Senses and Sensation*.

[57] Feld, *Sound and Sentiment*.

[58] Goodwin, 'Professional Vision'.

[59] Grasseni, *Skilled Visions*.

[60] A strong emphasis on 'sight' as the primary senses of human experiences in all cultures.

[61] Tyler, 'Post-Modern Ethnography', 132-4.

the body intrinsically irrational'.[62] In other words, there seems to be general agreement among scholars that 'sensory models' or 'sensual scholarship' are more accurate paradigms within anthropological research. One of the main reasons for reaching this understanding is that such paradigms empower researchers to accept that their own bodies and senses can become means of ethnographic analysis and experience to write about the given cultures.

The same realisations have been perceived in other disciplines. Regarding history, for instance, scholars such as Johan Huizinga,[63] Lucien Febvre,[64] Alain Corbin,[65] Constance Classen,[66] Sidney Mintz,[67] George Roeder,[68] and Mark Smith,[69] are pivotal. They see historical sensation within historical experiences, helping historians obtain a more profound perception of the manifestation of the senses in these experiences. By examining the role of the human senses in the development of distinct historical periods and events, their research points to critical progress in academic surveys on the senses. Indeed, one of the most fruitful findings relates to their understanding of historical events' entire social and cultural contexts by 'sensing' between the lines of written sources.

As it has been commonly called, sensory history has challenged history scholarship by providing new approaches other than focusing on 'mentalities' (developed by the Annales School) or 'discourse' (established by the poststructuralists, notably Michel Foucault). In daring to create such a perspective, scholars are working with a greater focus on analysing how sensory perception has contributed to shaping historical periods.

Many types of research could be identified as good examples of this approach. In his work *Sweetness and Power*, Sidney Mintz analyses the social, political, and economic impacts of developing a taste for sugar. This product was transformed from a rare luxury to a commonplace necessity of modern life, thus implying significant changes in American and European capitalism and industry history.[70] Another interesting example of sensory history is Mark Smith's *How Race is Made*. He calls attention to the sensory

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[62] Howes, *Sensual Relations*, 43.

[63] Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages.*

[64] Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century*.

[65] Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant*; and, 'Charting the Cultural History of the Senses'.

[66] Classen, *Worlds of Sense*; 'Foundations for an Anthropology of the Senses'; *The Book of Touch*; and, *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Empire,* volume 5.

[67] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*.

[68] Roeder, 'Coming to Our Senses'.

[69] Smith, 'Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History'.

[70] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 29-41.

dimension of history by exploring social processes within sensory dynamics of 'racializing' proceedings in the Southern United States. For instance, he concludes that racial issues have always involved the scope of emotionally charged sensory stereotypes. For Smith, the historian is responsible for discovering such stereotypes through analysis and deconstruction of historical events.[71]

Many other disciplines receive input from sensory studies, what David Howes has called 'sensory stirrings in cognate disciplines'.[72] Sociologists are drawing attention to how the senses and sense experience impact social attitudes and interaction,[73] while geographers are gradually becoming concerned with the mediation provided by the analysis of the senses concerning the spatiality of the senses through the affective relation of people to their habitat (intersensoriality).[74] Howes highlights that other academic fields have been immersed in research on the senses, acquiring increasing definitions in recent years, such as the archaeology of the senses, senses and sensation in literature, philosophy of the senses, and religion and the senses.[75]

### 3.4. Recent Sensory Biblical Scholarship

Biblical studies have gradually benefited from sensory studies and sensory anthropology to survey biblical texts, particularly narratives. Although it is not yet possible to state that the investigation of biblical texts has already reached a prominent position in the field of biblical research, the last fifteen years have undeniably seen an interesting growth in terms of the interest of scholars in trying to understand the impact that sensory experiences may have had on the work of biblical authors.

In 2010, Dorothy Lee's article on the senses in the Fourth Gospel opened the door for the analysis of sensory perception in Gospels narratives.[76] She affirms that the cohesive presence of images relating to the five senses in John is grounded in the Gospel's central theological motif, the incarnation. Because the senses are intrinsic to what makes us human, their capacity for metaphorical or spiritual signification is important to understand the narrative for the life of faith in the Fourth Gospel. Although she adopts

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[71] Smith, *How Race Is Made*, 2-7.

[72] Howes, 'The Expanding Field of Sensory Studies'.

[73] Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*; Synnott, *The Body Social*; Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

[74] Porteous, *Landscapes of the Mind*; Tuan, *Topophilia*; Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies*.

[75] Howes, 'The Expanding Field of Sensory Studies'.

[76] Lee, 'The Gospel of John and the Five Senses'.

the traditional view of the five senses,[77] her work is relevant for identifying many occurrences and usage of the senses in John to find their implications for the implied reader's imaginative entry into the 'symbolic universe' of the Fourth Gospel. For her, this is the only way to comprehend the idea of faith in John.[78]

In the same year, Dominika Kurek-Chomycz published a significant paper on the significance of sense imagery in the Fourth Gospel's narrative of the anointing of Jesus in Bethany (12:1-11). She highlights that although all the Gospels portray the story of Jesus' anointing by a woman, only the Fourth Gospel introduces an 'explicit remark on the aroma of the anointing oil filling the house'.[79] For her, such a reference to a distinct sensory experience may be connected to the fact that the author wanted to employ the symbolic meaning of the fragrance to highlight the association between social order and smell with the specific purpose of portraying Mary of Bethany positively. Such particular awareness of sensory perception revealed by the author in this narrative should be seen by interpreters as a boundary marker that points out the transition to the last stage of Jesus' earthly life (death and resurrection). For her, therefore, the sensory elements so evident in the story should be understood as a pivotal indication of Johannine's redaction.

Two years after Lee's and Kurek-Chomycz's articles, Yael Avrahami introduced a biblical epistemology that reveals how ancient Israelites thought about and used their senses.[80] She boldly asserts that biblical scholars need to liberate themselves from the Western bias that holds a pentasensory paradigm to adopt a septasensory model, including the five traditional senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell) plus *speech* and *kinaesthesia*.[81] Her survey points out that the Bible shows each one of the seven senses closely linked to a particular organ and functioning through it, 'when the sensory organ was open, the sense functioned. When it was closed, it was disabled.'[82] She then concludes that sensory perception in biblical texts is related to various types of experience, including cognitive, emotional, and social experiences, as the biblical writers used the human senses as symbols for autonomy, subjectivity, and sovereignty.

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[77] In contrast to the traditional Western view of the five human senses, see below Avrahami's view of a septasensory (seven senses) model of the Bible.

[78] Lee, 'The Gospel of John and the Five Senses', 116.

[79] Kurek-Chomycz, 'The Fragrance of Her Perfume', 353.

[80] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*.

[81] See my discussion of Avrahami's septasensory approach, in which I propose a re-categorisation of the senses of *speech* and *movement* as 'somatic outcomes' derived from sensory perceptions attributed to the Johannine characters, p. 102.

[82] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 206.

Avrahami's work on the biblical sensorium led her to develop what she identifies as a 'theology of the senses' since the symbols in the biblical writings identified with the senses were all based both on the derived experiences attributed to the senses as well as on the perception that God had created the senses.[83] For her, the writers of biblical texts understood the human senses as a divinely created physical experience which symbolises the human ability to act in a sovereign manner in the world, consequently resulting in the understanding that people with sensory disabilities suffered not only from physical difficulties but also from semantic liminality. Based on this assumption, she then proposes a methodological grounding for the study of cultural notions as they are reflected in the Bible by using principles of cultural anthropology to survey the cultural differences of textual phenomena. To reach her goal, her book is written descriptively, including many biblical citations to clarify the biblical sensory vocabulary and its context.[84]

In 2013, Louise J. Lawrence contributed with her anthropological approach to biblical texts related to the cultural and contextual implications of reading scripture.[85] Her work *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels* takes a multidisciplinary approach to analyse what she calls sensory-disabled characters in the gospels. She proposes a survey of the gospel narratives combining intertextual and exegetical approaches with ethnographic and contemporary readings of disabilities. For this reason, she reads these narratives through reconfigured frameworks to examine the stigma attached to sensory-disabled conditions in the Gospels.

She emphatically states that sensory deprivation functions within the gospels as a negatively charged metaphor for sin or social deviance to correlate a physical condition with social and cultural stigma. For her, this shows how the 'sensory-disabled' characters should be understood as a challenge and prefiguration of dominant conceptions of the 'normal' in both biblical traditions and scholarly analyses at a more fundamental level.[86] This leads her to argue in favour of a 'disability theology,' the view of a God with limits who is not a blind god who cannot see, but rather one that shares limits of the human condition to proclaim a memorable solidarity between the being of God and the being of disabled people.[87]

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[83] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 55-64 and 189.

[84] See also her notes on method, 'The Study of Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible'.

[85] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels and* 'Exploring the Sense-Scape of the Gospel of Mark'.

[86] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels*, 125.

[87] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels*, 131.

Based on Lawrence's understanding above, while it must be agreed that the senses may be sometimes employed in the NT writings as instruments of knowledge and power, thus constituting important mediators of cultural knowledge and experience, one might question her conclusion about reading the Bible through a reconfigured interpretive framework that distinctly challenges ableist binaries and able-bodied perspectives in the Bible. Although a seemingly affirmative and conducive proposition, we should be careful with such pursuit as this seems never to have been the intention of the NT writers, which could make such an assessment somewhat far-fetched. Although the author of the Fourth Gospel may have employed blindness as a metaphor for lack of spiritual insight, for instance, there seems to be no evidence to affirm that John's use of the senses as a contextual literary device perpetuates harmful and inaccurate ableist associations. Despite such caveat, however, her concept of sensory disability and the cultural construction of senses is certainly an essential contribution to any research on sensory analysis of biblical studies, as it focuses on the embodied human experience in the Gospels reinterpreting their narratives featuring Jesus's interaction with sensory-disabled characters.

Additionally, Lawrence is accurate in stating that the following three principal contributions made by sensory anthropology are relevant to biblical interpretation: (1) the understanding that sensory perception is dynamic and diverse; thus, the specifics of each cultural context need to be 'made sense of' carefully; (2) the acceptance that 'sensoria' (relative rankings of senses) are often linked to broader cultural values and notions of identity; and (3) the awareness that senses are not 'mere passive receptors, but rather integral components of social experience which offer powerful insights into the diverse values, identities and moral ethics of the culture under review'.[88]

First published in 2014 and reprinted in 2019, Jerry Toner's book on the survey of human senses in antiquity is not a work on biblical scholarship, but it significantly contributes to the sensory analyses of biblical narratives. He discusses the relevance of the human senses in understanding the beliefs of ancient societies, how they operated in practice, and how they developed to the point of influencing contemporary cultures. According to him, new religions such as Christianity developed their way of using the senses, acquiring unique forms of sensory-related symbolism in processes which were slow and often contested, such as the 'increasing use of sense as part of their rituals and

[88] Lawrence, 'Exploring the Sense-Scape of the Gospel of Mark', 388-9.

processions, the dramatic use of lights in churches, or the imagined fragrance of the afterlife.[89]

In 2015, Josaphat C. Tam introduced a relevant study on some aspects of Jesus' and other characters' portrayals in the Fourth Gospel, taking into account some aspects of sensory scholarship. By investigating what he identifies as the 'apprehension of Jesus concept', he surveys how the Gospel's author might have employed seeing, hearing, knowing, remembering, witnessing, and believing to frame four different stages of interaction with Jesus (initial stage, chapters 1-4; subsequent stage, chapters 5-12; deepening stage, chapters 13-17; and climatic stage, chapters 18-21). Tam affirms that such literary strategy was employed by the author to reach both believers and non-believers emphasising that Jesus should be understood as a living omniscient and divine being. For such an endeavour, the author would have employed mainly the senses of *seeing* and *hearing* in his characterisations to connect his readers with his testimony about Jesus' work and teaching. That interaction would lead the reader to a final decision about whether to follow Jesus' movement.

Sunny Kuan-Hui Wang interestingly connects the Gospel of John's presumable use of sensory experiences to witnessing, by affirming that the author might have wanted to appeal to his readers' emotions to assist them to develop their commitment as testimonies of Jesus. In her book published in 2017, she describes the relevance of the senses as literal and physical phenomena in merging both themes of sensory perception and testimony 'to call attention to a theological conjunction of motifs that relates the revelation of God to the realities of embodied sense perception'.[90] For that reason, Wang thinks that the author employs the senses as an appeal to rhetorically improve the allure of his stories to elicit his readers into believing in Jesus by accepting the faith experience of his disciples and witnesses. She compares such Johannine literary strategy to how ἐνάργεια is applied in Greek and Roman rhetoric to draw readers and hearers into a narrative. Therefore, she understands that a more in-depth investigation into sensory perception in the Fourth Gospel must be carried out, since, generally, Johannine scholars reference the senses to discuss three main aspects: faith, Christology, and the author's emphasis on sight and hearing.[91]

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[89] Toner, *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, 18.

[90] Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony in the Gospel According to John*, 1.

[91] Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony in the Gospel According to John*, 2.

Additional research on the presence of sensory perceptions in the Fourth Gospel has emerged in more recent years. In 2020, Deborah Forger argued that the Johannine account of Jesus as the divine λόγος made flesh introduces him as the materialized God of Israel. For her, the survey of sensory perception in the Johannine prologue reveals that 'because the physical act of speaking creates sound, and sound becomes perceptible to persons through the auditory sense, Jesus' words render the God of Israel accessible in the somatic realm'.[92] In other words, she asserts that Jesus' speeches along the Gospel render God's voice audible, thus making the Father accessible to the readers to experience, understand, and ultimately believe in the truth of the relationship between Jesus and God: 'The connection between the bodily senses and Jesus' own embodiment is therefore of utmost importance in John's gospel',[93] because the bodily senses of *speech* and *hearing* operate in the Fourth Gospel to present Jesus as the unique embodiment, materialization of the God of Israel.

In 2021, Louise A. Gosbell wrote a chapter to argue that the narratives of the Fourth Gospel are teeming with the most varied sensory experiences. However, even though such experiences are pivotal to understanding how we should live as embodied creatures in God's creation, they are 'often overlooked in our expression of faith and our engagement with the Scriptures'.[94] Although acknowledging that modern readers approach the Gospel with a considerably distinct sensory framework from that of the original readers, she affirms that it is almost impossible to deny that Jesus' encounters and interactions with other characters are described in sensory terms. She notes, however, that this rich use of the language of the senses is not always straightforward, as the dichotomy between 'literal versus metaphorical sensory language used throughout the Gospel adds to the complexity of the presentation of the senses in the fourth Gospel'.[95] Very significant for Gosbell, the rich sense-scape in the Johannine story of Jesus allows readers to be called to have both a cognitive response and an effective engagement with God through their speech and action concerning what they have heard and seen from Jesus.

The most recent survey on the sensory perception in the Fourth Gospel has been presented by Jeannine Marie Hanger, in 2023.[96] Her research aims to investigate how the numerous sensory aspects of the Johannine texts contribute to the responses of what she

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[92] Forger, 'Jesus as God's Word(s)', 277.

[93] Forger, 'Jesus as God's Word(s)', 275.

[94] Gosbell, 'Sensory Experience and the Gospel of John', 152.

[95] Gosbell, 'Sensory Experience and the Gospel of John', 159.

[96] Hanger, *Sensing Salvation in the Gospel of John.*

identifies as 'believers' participatory relationship with Jesus'.[97] Focusing on the embodied and sensory aspects of the Gospel's stories, she develops a sensory-oriented survey of the seven predicated *I am* sayings in the Gospel: the bread of life (6:1-71), the light of the world (8:12–9:41), the gate (10:1-42), the good shepherd (11:1–12:11), the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth, and the life (13:1–14:31), and the true vine (15:1-17). For her, while such sayings are correctly understood as crucial elements to the theological development of Christology and soteriology, they should also be seen as providing imaginative access into Johannine's stories world as they also reveal sensory experiences that help to realise the participation of Jesus with believers. In her words, the analysis of sensory perception in these sayings is 'embodied portrayals of different qualities of salvific life with Jesus. Through each saying, Jesus tangibly meets needs that only he can meet, providing life to the full'.[98]

Hanger highlights that such understanding is possible only because the author of the Fourth Gospel employs sensory experiences with the ultimate goal of providing his readers with a proper understanding of the dynamic relationship with Jesus, thus contributing to tangible value to the participatory theology of his Gospel. She affirms that all instances of sensory perception throughout the Gospel should be seen as a 'robust representation, not only of what it looks like to be joined with Jesus but also what it feels like in embodied existence'.[99] She thinks that by engaging imaginatively with these dynamic sensory images proposed by Jesus' sayings, readers of the Fourth Gospel can realise these sensory participatory qualities 'under the skin' which would lead them to a fuller, more embodied quality of knowledge. Such knowledge can be realised only in sensory terms since it goes 'beyond mere mental awareness to impact the body, mind, and heart in important, life-giving ways'.[100]

### 3.5. Sensory Perception in the Bible: Yael Avrahami's Contribution

A relevant input of sensory anthropology to this research comes from Yael Avrahami. She introduces a biblical epistemology that reveals how ancient Israelites thought about

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[97] Hanger, *Sensing Salvation in the Gospel of John*, 32.

[98] Hanger, *Sensing Salvation in the Gospel of John*, 190.

[99] Hanger, *Sensing Salvation in the Gospel of John*, 191.

[100] Hanger, *Sensing Salvation in the Gospel of John*, 193.

and used their senses.[101] This subsection highlights some critical aspects of her method for this investigation of sensory development in the Fourth Gospel's characterisation.

Avrahami develops a study on sensory perception in the Hebrew Bible. She presents her theoretical and methodological grounding for the study of cultural notions reflected in ancient texts,[102] in her case specifically applied to the study of the senses in the Hebrew Bible, employing principles of cultural anthropology to call for sensitivity to cultural differences of textual phenomena. She intends to achieve her goal through semantic analysis 'to trace the embodied worldview of a given culture by examining the semantic fields and mental frames reflected in its language'.[103] In other words, she wants to address the increasing interest in studying emotions, the senses, and the body in the Bible. For her, there is an apparent confusion and lack of agreement among the few biblical scholarly works regarding the relevance of the studies on human senses in biblical texts.

Avrahami categorically states that most biblical scholars understand the human senses as physiologically determined for all cultures in history. In other words, the human senses are mentioned in the biblical text only in a concrete and performative way without any figurative or theological meanings.[104] The way sensory experience has been surveyed in biblical texts is an evident example. For her, limited lexical discussions, reading of verses in isolation, and simple considerations of the role of the senses in nonverbal communication and thought patterns are considered the only suitable means by which the knowledge of the experiences with the human senses could aid in understanding several worldviews of the biblical culture. For those biblical scholars, the senses were only human experiences with the specific purpose of serving 'biblical culture in an interpersonal communication capacity, as well as for legal and public order purposes'.[105] Unfortunately, Avrahami does not present a specific list identifying such scholars. Perhaps because she is referring to a general, large number of biblical surveys, she has decided not to list them by name. However, we must agree that biblical scholarship's work with the sensorium is still developing within academia. Therefore, her note is not likely a criticism but rather a

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[101] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*.

[102] Avrahami's complete methodology can be found in the following works: *The Senses of Scripture*; and 'The Study of Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible: Notes on Method'.

[103] Avrahami, 'Notes on Method', 3.

[104] Her observation is based on different scholars, such as Dhorme, *L'emploi métaphorique des noms de parties du corps en hébreu et en akkadien*; Malul, 'Studies in Mesopotamian Legal Symbolism'; Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East*; Bark, 'Listen Your Way in with Your Mouth'; Brockington, 'Audition in the Old Testament'.

[105] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 18.

warning of a current reality that might change over the next few years as the research on the biblical sensorium becomes more evident.[106]

Avrahami asserts that the most common aspect in any research on the human senses in the Bible was a sporadic generalisation about the primacy of *hearing* in the oral Israelite culture, as opposed to the primacy of *sight* in the literate Greek culture.[107] However, even such surveys were usually grounded in analyses that disregard the careful reading of biblical texts immersed in their cultural contexts. For this reason, she aimed to develop a study on the relevance and impact of sensory perception in the Hebrew Bible. She understands that many of her theoretical and methodological remarks presented below are relevant to any scholar interested in recovering information on a culture's worldview from ancient texts, particularly biblical texts.

From the outset a crucial question might arise regarding the validity and relevance of Avrahami's method concerning the relationship between texts and culture: how does one go about the practice of sensory anthropology when dealing with ancient texts? This question promptly arises when one finds that ethnography is the standard method of anthropological research, which entails a *thick description* of a culture based on observing and interviewing its members. She reminds us that the method of ethnographic studies first introduced by philosopher Gilbert Ryle and then developed by anthropologist Clifford Geerts, in 1973, consists of describing human social action taking into consideration their behaviour within their cultural context, adding a record of subjective explanations and meanings provided by the behaviour of the people under analysis.[108] Stoller, for instance, argues that ethnography is the original product of anthropology: 'Despite its taken-for-granted status, ethnography, rather than cultural materialism, structuralism, or any other 'ism,' has been and will continue to be our core contribution'.[109] However, one might assert that because philology rather than ethnography is the primary method of studying ancient texts, applying an anthropological methodology to study biblical narratives is considered inappropriate.

Avrahami, in turn, argues that because the biblical text is a human, culturally-specific product that opens a window into ancient worldviews and mindsets, the study of biblical sensory perception might help us identify underlying thought patterns. It might reveal part of the *common sense* of the biblical culture through the meaning of both its

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[106] There is only one reference to a biblical scholar in Avrahami's book: Silberman, 'Listening to the Text'.

[107] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 14-27; and 'Notes on Method', 3-4.

[108] Avrahami, 'Notes on Method', 11 and 21.

[109] Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*, 130.

style and literary persuasion. Such a survey would try to understand how these modalities worked together to establish a socio-cultural system identified from the standard practice recorded in the text. It would 'turn from the study of the text for the sake of the text itself to the study of the text as a way to recover a worldview'.[110]

Her approach consequently intends to elucidate the biblical culture that produced the text. She rests on the premise that it is possible to find explicit information about the senses within the biblical narratives since they clearly state that God Himself gives the human senses. Therefore, sensory modalities bring up the theological understanding of epistemology.[111]

For Avrahami, because explicit reference to the senses may be limited in biblical texts, scholars must also rely on implicit information. Her argument relies on the understanding that literary semantic fields reveal conscious as well as unconscious cultural assumptions. Even if a narrative might reflect a writer's fantasy, sense of irony, or utopian vision, 'the semantic links within a language are not subject to individual manipulation and, therefore, more reliable witnesses to a culture's mental frames'.[112]

For this reason, Avrahami's method of analysis of the sensory perception in biblical texts encompasses both what she calls *communicative competence in the biblical text*[113] and *semantic analysis of cultural notions*.[114] First and foremost, it is necessary to acquire a high level of communicative competence in the biblical narratives to recover essential aspects of cultural perception and social notions from the text. According to her, there is no other way to recuperate the shared cultural pre-learning that empowers any behaviour within the biblical societies if we do not first recognise the abundant web of connections and cooperative links of people who lived in biblical times. Such connections and links authoritatively lay down terms and expressions that disclose the countless combinations of mental frames and, consequently, rules, assumptions, attitudes, and core beliefs about ourselves, others and the world (cognitive blueprints). Suffice it to say that scholars can rarely achieve ultimate native communicative proficiency in biblical Hebrew and Greek. However, these cognitive blueprints are approachable through biblical stories and provide access to the biblical culture's worldview.

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[110] Avrahami, 'Notes on Method', 11.

[111] See, for instance, Proverbs 20:12 and Psalm 135:15-17.

[112] Avrahami, 'Notes on Method', 12.

[113] Avrahami, 'Notes on Method', 11-4.

[114] Avrahami, 'Notes on Method', 14-6.

Benefiting from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Avrahami argues that although evident that speaking a language and understanding a given culture appropriately demand prior cultural knowledge—mainly an ancient one—, such knowledge is often unconscious. That is, she understands that interpreters do not need to be able to list cultural categories to use them, much as we do not need to know how our muscles work to walk.[115] She argues that there are sensory cultural preferences in the Bible even though current biblical scholarship has not spent time and effort to reflect on them. For her, the demonstration of vocabulary, metaphors, and associative patterns are sufficient to form a semantic network that expresses feelings, experiences, thoughts, and events, allowing the scholar to 'access the culturally distinctive patterns of thought implicit in the structure of a language'.[116]

Secondly, Avrahami emphasises the relevance of semantic analysis and cultural notions. By stating that 'words evoke other words, images, emotions, and memories',[117] she affirms that while some associations are universal, others are idiosyncratically cultural. When scholars examine a particular word's semantic field and its figurative uses, they investigate associative patterns within a culturally specific mental frame. Based on previous research on the phenomenon of fixed word-pairs in biblical literature, Avrahami highlights that word-pairs in biblical literature are not only poetic or literary tradition but also 'windows into ancient cultures'.[118]

Following such an understanding, Avrahami highlights two main types of semantic links: *paradigmatic associations* and *syntagmatic associations*. While the former connects words that can be substituted for each other in a given context (synonyms, antonyms, or metonyms[119]), the latter reflects the construction of idiomatic phrases.[120] Both semantic links define cognitive blueprints that comprehend biblical cultural notions. That is why she thinks an appropriate survey of semantic links and figurative language is fundamental for understanding how the senses were employed in biblical narratives.

As a short example, both paradigmatic and syntagmatic links appear in the Bible as word-pairs creating a semantic field forming a conceptual frame. The common word-pair 'eyes' and 'heart' appears about forty times in the Hebrew Bible and creates the semantic

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[115] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 66-68.

[116] Avrahami, 'Notes on Method': 14.

[117] Avrahami, 'Notes on Method': 14.

[118] Avrahami, 'Notes on Method': 14.

[119] A word, name, or expression employed as a substitute for something else with which it is closely associated.

[120] The terms "paradigmatic" and "syntagmatic" were originally introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics*. However, Avrahami here benefits from Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 64-79.

link ‘mind’ that generates the expression ‘thinking is seeing’, today understood as a metaphor. However, the implication of identifying this paradigmatic link for any biblical survey is that because both the eyes and the heart are physical organs, the link between them is not necessarily metaphoric. In other words, the ancient people of biblical times may have perceived the eyes and the heart as taking part in the physiological thinking process, similar to how we today perceive and relate to the brain.

### 3.5.1. The biblical sensorium

Avrahami’s work introduced above helps investigate the sensory development of characters in the Fourth Gospel, combining characterisation studies with the analysis of sensory perceptions in biblical narratives. However, it is important to note that such aspects are not employed in this research in isolation, as they belong to the broader approach of Avrahami’s analysis of the biblical sensorium. Such an approach encompasses the semantic aspects used to survey the Johannine characters’ sensory experiences. But three additional tools are crucial to my work: *the number of senses*, *synaesthesia*, and *sensory disability*.[121]

*The Septasensory Model of the Bible*. One of the ruling ideas of sensory anthropology is that it is impossible to separate thought from feeling and action since they are inextricably connected. Avrahami approaches the components of the sensory category in the Bible by removing modern stereotypes based on the pentasensory model. For her, the biblical narratives reveal seven senses correlated semantically and associatively in several ways: sight, hearing, *kinaesthesia*, *speech*, taste, smell, and touch.[122]

Two critical points must be discussed here. First, although there is a complexity of meanings embedded in sensory vocabulary, the Bible uses the senses to both affirm or deny human abilities. For Avrahami, these seven senses are acquired by learning and controlling the world and involve the relationship between human autonomy and the lack of it. Second, she highlights that the term ‘sense’ in the biblical text should not be seen simply as ‘feeling’ and ‘sensation,’ based on a Western epistemology that defines the senses as instruments that allow us to receive information from the world. Although this is important, the biblical idea of ‘sense’ represents the means through which the world is

[121] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 109-114-54; 109-11; 206-14, respectively.

[122] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 109.

experienced physically, closely correlated to various limbs and organs, and humanity as a whole. In the Bible, 'senses' designate and represent functions like thought and action, obedience and disobedience, and enjoyment and suffering.

*Synaesthesia*. Synaesthesia is the second tool from Avrahami's work to be employed in this survey of Johannine characters. It refers to the merging of generally unrelated senses but depicted as connected through associative links. These links generate one sensory experience through images from different sensory fields. Within biblical narratives, this connection may be perceived by analysing all the metaphors implied in human behaviour that provide the readers with a sensory perception particular to each character.

In the previous discussion on paradigmatic and syntagmatic links, we saw the relevance of word-pairs in the Bible for conveying meaningful cultural information. As a brief example of synaesthesia, 'eye' and 'ear' might function as a word-pair in the Bible, appearing both synonymous and antonymous in parallelism. There is a contrast between them as sensory organs connected to the heart and mind through the instrumentality of the tongue, which generates passive and active interaction with the world.

In this case, for example, if we consider Avrahami's view of what she identifies as the biblical sense of *speech*, this sense can be characterised as internal (through heart and mind to generate 'thought') and external (a vocal speech). Such synaesthetic dynamic may be found in many texts of the OT, such as Proverbs 16:1, but a clearer example is Isaiah's prophecy in 32:1-4. The author of the Fourth Gospel may have even benefited from this passage as a scriptural echo for the construction of its synaesthetic parallelism in the narrative of the man born blind (9:1-41):

.הֵן לְצֶדֶק, יִמְלָךְ-מֶלֶךְ; וּלְשָׂרִים, לְמִשְׁפָּט יָשֹׂרוּ
.וְהָיָה-אִישׁ כְּמַחֲבֵא-רוּחַ, וְסֵתֶר זָרֶם, כְּפַלְגֵי-מַיִם בְּצִיּוֹן, כְּצֵל סֶלַע-כָּבֵד בְּאֶרֶץ עֲיֵפָה
.וְלֹא תִשְׁעֶינָה, עֵינֵי רֹאִים; וְאָזְנֵי שֹׁמְעִים, תְּקְשַׁבְנָה
.וּלְבַב נְמְהָרִים, יָבִין לָדָעַת; וּלְשׁוֹן עִלְּגִים, תְּמַהֵר לְדַבֵּר צָחוֹת

ἰδοὺ γὰρ βασιλεὺς δίκαιος βασιλεύσει, καὶ ἄρχοντες μετὰ κρίσεως ἄρξουσιν.

καὶ ἔσται ὁ ἄνθρωπος κρύπτων τοὺς λόγους αὐτοῦ, καὶ κρυβήσεται ὡς ἀφ᾽ ὕδατος φερομένου· ⊤ καὶ φανήσεται ἐν Σειὼν ὡς ποταμὸς φερόμενος ἔνδοξος ἐν γῇ διψώσῃ.

καὶ οὐκέτι ἔσονται πεποιθότες ἐπ᾽ ἀνθρώποις, ἀλλὰ τὰ ὦτα ἀκούειν δώσουσιν·

καὶ ἡ καρδία τῶν ἀσθενούντων προσήξει τοῦ ἀκούειν, καὶ αἱ γλῶσσαι αἱ ψελλίζουσαι ταχὺ μαθήσονται λαλεῖν εἰρήνην·[123]

[123] Swete, *The Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint*. Isaiah 32:1-4.

*Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and as for princes, they shall rule in justice.*

*And a man shall be as in a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as by the watercourses in a dry place, as in the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.*

*And the eyes of them that see shall not be closed, and the ears of them that hear shall attend.*

*The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly.*

While a more comprehensive critical analysis about Avrahami's consideration of *speech* as a sense is provided in the next chapters, it is possible at this juncture to briefly examine Avrahami's approach to synaesthesia as an illustrative example. The same parallelism *eye-ear-tongue* observed in Isaiah's prophecy introduced in the previous paragraph— with *hearing* being the semantic link between *sight* and *speech*—, might be present in John 9. That is, following Avrahami, one might see that *hearing* brings to the surface the real meaning of both *sight* and *speech* in the narrative. At first glance, *sight* (i.e., the lack of it) is understood as a problem pertaining only to the blind man. However, the author seems to be leading his readers to understand that such meaning is superficial. *Sight* is, indeed, the Pharisees' main problem. By the same token, *speech* initially seems to belong only to the Pharisees since they are Israel's religious teachers. However, the development of the former blind man's characterisation shows that his *speech* is much more pertinent than the religious leaders since he believes in and worships Jesus, while the Pharisees cannot reach the same perception of the truth.

Therefore, for Avrahami, *sight* and *speech* represent the passive use of sense, and *hearing* is the active use.[124] The evidence is astonishing because there are 36 references to *sight* (or lack thereof) and 40 references to *speech* (including questions and answers). But as if the apparent balance between the two senses was not enough, the linking-sense *hearing* is mentioned only seven times, nonetheless appearing in the most crucial parts of the narrative: five times during the former blind man's speech to the Pharisees and the other two times in Jesus' final declaration of judgment against those who are guilty of sin for not having listened to his words.

In sum, with the assistance of Avrahami's approach, we could see that what is most striking in John's synaesthetic image involving *sight*, *hearing*, and *speech* is that although an uncompromising reading leads to thinking initially that *sight* is the most crucial aspect

[124] It is important to explain that there is no disqualification of a sense for being passive or active. In the case of biblical sensorium analysis, an active sense does not necessarily have a positive value, just as a passive sense does not necessarily have a negative value.

of the transformation performed by Jesus to restore the blind man's dignity, the outcome is his capacity to witness and testify Jesus as a prophet of God, linked to his willingness to worship him as Lord. *Hearing* is the sense that enables and provides the connection between *seeing* and *speaking*: those who are not willing to hear the message cannot see the message and, consequently, cannot speak and proclaim the message.

*Sensory Disability*. Avrahami's third tool of her biblical sensorium investigates the interaction between the reality of power and the absence of the senses in a particular character's portrayal. Sensory disability in biblical literature refers to the direct relation between the power of the senses and the vitality and autonomy of the characters when performing their actions, in contrast to their inability to experience the world and provide adequate answers to their challenges.

Avrahami introduces the concept of 'theology of the senses' to affirm that every time a biblical text evidences the absence of one or more senses (sensory disability), it highlights the absence of power and ability to experience life as intended.[125] However, to demonstrate development in their characters, biblical authors frequently indicate that this is not the end of the story. They employ depictions of sensory disabilities portraying characters facing concrete challenges concerning their faith, thus offering them an opportunity to grow or to decay since their development can be positive or negative. Such challenges faced by the biblical characters lead the reader to find the story's goal through the transformation process from 'sensory disability' (loss of a sense) to 'sensory ability' (recovery of the same or a substitute sense) after interacting with Jesus.

One observation is imperative here. In this research, 'sensory development' will be preferred rather than the expression 'sensory disability'. Such a choice is grounded on two main reasons. The first reason is methodological, as this research argues that the Fourth Gospel's author perceivably composed his characters benefiting from different features of everyday human life including sensory experiences. Such experiences are depicted in his characters as developing from an initial to a final stage, leading his readers to see these characters growing in their characterisation to a lesser or greater extent, from the initial 'undeveloped' stage of misunderstanding or lack of knowledge about Jesus' identity and work (i.e., sensory undeveloped) to the final stage of enlightenment and recognition of Jesus' divinity and work (i.e. sensory developed).

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[125] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 189-222.

Therefore, the sensory development of these Johannine characters is identified through one or more senses in their characterisation, and it should not be taken that the initial undeveloped stage of misunderstanding Jesus' identity and work is necessarily connected to bodily physical limitations. In fact, the initial sensory undeveloped stage refers to these characters' spiritual, cultural, ethnical, or political previous conditions that might be preventing them to realise Jesus' divinity. Their sensory development helps readers realise their initial spiritual challenges in identifying themselves with Jesus' movement. That is why, in this research, the notion of sensory development seems to be more appropriate than sensory disability.

The second reason this research employs 'sensory development' instead of 'sensory disability' refers to the relevance of inclusive language. Unarguably, words and metaphors matter, and this research does not adopt the term 'disability' in the attempt to avoid bringing forward negative, discriminatory and inequitable connotations in the analysis of the Johannine characterisation. Any analysis of sensory perception in the construction of literary characters must be careful not to denote, even unconsciously, that the absence of one or more human senses naturally indicates that such characters are portrayed as incapable of living their lives with dignity. Ableism is a misguided and biased understanding of disability that 'considers persons with disabilities as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, and of less inherent value than others'.[126]

Avrahami's methodological tools discussed so far constitute a pivotal contribution to this research on the characters' sensory perception in the Fourth Gospel. Her method points out that the Bible shows the human senses closely linked to a particular organ and functioning through it: 'When the sensory organ was open, the sense functioned. When it was closed, it was disabled'.[127] Skilfully, she demonstrates that sensory perception in biblical texts is related to various types of experience, including cognitive, emotional, and social interactions, as the biblical writers used the human senses as symbols for autonomy, subjectivity, and sovereignty.

Avrahami's notion of synaesthesia is pertinent as it helps to understand that the symbols in the biblical writings identified with the merging of senses were all based both on the derived experience attributed to the senses as well as on the perception that God

[126] OHCHR, *Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines*, 8.

[127] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 206.

had created the senses.[128] For her, the writers of the Bible understood human senses as a divinely created physical experience, symbolising the human ability to interact with the world, resulting in the understanding that the biblical characters' sensory development is grounded on the Bible's cultural frameworks.

### 3.5.2. A Brief Evaluation of Avrahami's Work

The final aspect that warrants discussion is the conspicuous lack of scholarly critique of Avrahami's theory. Although her work was published over a decade ago (2012) and has been mentioned in a few studies,[129] it has yet to receive substantial scholarly evaluation or critical assessment by other experts in the field, particularly biblical scholars. This paucity of engagement is evident, with only a few references available. For instance, Howes has commended Avrahami's work for emphasizing narration over biology or nature. However, he also contends that such an emphasis may weaken her work by diverting attention from the performance of sensation and placing excessive importance on linguistic aspects.[130] Similarly, Gosbell acknowledges the erudition of Avrahami's survey of the senses in Hebrew Scriptures but criticizes its lack of focus on sensory deprivation. This oversight, according to Gosbell, renders her analysis less nuanced. She argues that Avrahami's work inevitably leads to the conclusion that, because the ancient Israelite community held the senses in high esteem, individuals with non-functioning senses would be relegated to a life of stigmatization and marginalization, effectively becoming 'non-persons' devoid of agency or power.[131]

In light of the findings to be presented in the exegetical chapters, it is beneficial to offer a critical review of Avrahami's theory to further the academic discussion in this field. To date, Avrahami's work remains unparalleled as she provides a significant survey of the cultural sensorium in the Hebrew Bible. She underscores that although Hebrew lacks a specific term for 'senses,' sensory experiences are vividly portrayed through numerous biblical references to body organs (the eye, the ear, the nose, the mouth, the

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[128] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 55-64, and 189-222.

[129] See, for instance, Wilson, 'Hearing the Word and Seeing the Light'; Howes, 'In Defense of Materiality'; Forger, 'Jesus as God's Word(s)'; Marks and Taussig, *Meals in Early Judaism*; Johnson, *Knowledge by Ritual*; Peckruhn, *Meaning in Our Bodies*; Lee and Oropeza, *Practicing Intertextuality*; McGrath, *Re-Imagining Nature*; Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels*; Wilson, *The Embodied God*; Gosbell, *The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, and the Lame*; Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh.*

[130] Howes, 'Resounding Sensory Profiles', 52.

[131] Gosbell, *The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, and the Lame*, 137.

hand, and the foot). Thus, a crucial aspect of her work is the exploration of the concept of sensory perception in the Hebrew Bible, presenting a novel perspective on biblical epistemology.

It is pertinent to highlight the significant contributions of Avrahami's research to the field of sensory perception in biblical texts, as well as its potential implications for future studies. Firstly, her theoretical framework is notably relevant. By challenging the conventional modern Western pentasensory paradigm and advocating for a septasensory model, Avrahami's work provides a deeper cultural insight. This framework enables a more comprehensive understanding of how ancient Israelites might have perceived and interacted with their environment through a broader spectrum of senses.

Secondly, her work meticulously examines various biblical texts to elucidate how different senses were valued and employed in biblical culture. Her approach integrates associative and contextual patterns to reconstruct sensory experiences, which, combined with her epistemological insights, shed light on the cognitive processes of ancient Israelites. This challenges contemporary biblical scholars to reconsider their assumptions regarding sensory priorities.

While Avrahami's work is undoubtedly innovative and significantly contributes to the outcomes of this analysis, it may also encounter critical questions. Firstly, she proposes a scope of sensory analysis that still requires further development: Does the septasensory model comprehensively capture the sensory experiences of ancient Israelites, or are there other senses or sensory experiences that remain overlooked? Also, how can we conceptualise *speech* and *movement* as senses rather than sensory or somatic outcomes? Although this research acknowledges Avrahami's septasensory model with a minor yet significant conceptual revision, it remains open to the possibility that future studies may yield more refined results.

Secondly, while her research encompasses a broad range of biblical texts, some critics might argue that it could demonstrate a deeper focus on specific books or sections of the Hebrew Bible that would provide more precise data. An essential question pertains to her textual limitations: how does Avrahami address potential biases or limitations within the biblical texts themselves regarding sensory perception?

Furthermore, Avrahami's work lacks an initial comparative analysis that would certainly enhance or challenge her findings. Although, understandably, such an analysis might not be feasible due to the complexity of the task and the scope of her book, such an analysis would allow scholars for an examination of how the sensory model in the Hebrew Bible compares to those in other ancient Near Eastern texts. Given that her

insights have practical implications for biblical interpretation and pedagogy, incorporating sensory dimensions from the various cultures neighbouring the biblical culture would provide scholars with a more comprehensive understanding of biblical texts concerning ancient sensory perceptions.

In conclusion, Avrahami's research on the senses in Scripture must be recognized as a significant contribution to biblical studies, offering a unique perspective on sensory perception in the Hebrew Bible. Her challenge to the conventional sensory hierarchy prompts a re-evaluation of ancient Israelite epistemology and enriches the understanding of biblical texts. Despite potential limitations in scope and theoretical complexity, her work serves as a valuable resource for scholars and students interested in the intersections of sensory studies and biblical literature.

In this chapter, a conversation is initiated to investigate the methodological lenses adopted in this survey. The following pages explore the interaction between Cornelis Bennema's theory of character and Yael Avrahami's biblical sensorium[1], creating a distinct approach which investigates how the Fourth Gospel might have employed sensory development to create influential and meaningful characters. Additionally, this method benefits from Algirdas Greimas' *generative trajectory of meaning*, particularly the semiotic square, providing us with the fundamental logical articulation in opposition to the story, revealing the initial and final stages of the sensory development of each character's portrayal.

### 4.1. Biblical Context and Sensory Perception

Among the recent surveys on biblical characters discussed in the second chapter,[2] the work of Cornelis Bennema on characterisation has risen to prominence in debates relating to character studies in the NT, particularly in the Fourth Gospel.[3] Benemma sees a gap in NT scholarship in terms of engaging characterisation analysis with contextual knowledge of the world of first-century Palestine. For him, since the 1980s, 'numerous studies on character have appeared, but many do not use, mention, or show awareness of a theory for doing character analysis'.[4]

Bennema asserts that critics must benefit from all relevant information available in the biblical text as well as other sources to derive the historical context of the first-century world, including its author's evaluative portrayal.[5] In his *In Text and Context* analysis, character study is conditioned by the kind of narrative under investigation. In other words, given that the Gospels are rooted in historical events, in addition to surveying the material from within the text, readers should know both the social and cultural biblical settings to perceive 'the personality, motive, and behaviour of ancient characters'.[6]

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[1] See pages 71-8 for explanation and references on Avrahami's research on the biblical sensorium.

[2] See pages 19-43.

[3] Bennema's theory of character and the outcomes of his method is found throughout his published works: 'A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel'; 'A Comprehensive Approach to Understanding Character in the Gospel of John'; *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative*; *Encountering Jesus*; 'Mimesis in John 13'; 'Early Christian Identity Formation Amidst Conflict'; 'Character Reconstruction: The Theory'; 'Character Reconstruction: The Practice'; 'A Shared (Graeco-Roman) Model of Mimesis in John and Paul?; 'Imitation in Johannine Christianity'.

[4] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 3.

[5] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 62; 'Character Reconstruction: The Theory', 367.

[6] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 62; and 'Character Reconstruction: The Theory', 367-9.

Bennema's plan is relevant to this research, as it offers a methodological approach to the investigation of NT characters based on a fertile discussion with other biblical scholars, such as Rhoads, Powell, Brown and Darr.[7] Kelly Iverson, for instance, surveys a specific cross-section of the Gentiles in Mark's Gospel, noting that although the text of the Gospel is his primary focus of study, he does not consider the Second Gospel as 'an autonomous story world that can be known in isolation from its socio-cultural context'.[8]

One of Bennema's main points refers to his view that characters should not be seen as having 'lives' beyond the text which would require the interpreter to reconstruct them from the information in the text.[9] But regarding the Fourth Gospel in particular, he accurately recognises that because this Gospel claims to be a nonfictional narrative, 'the *dramatis personae* are composites of historical people and must be viewed within the socio-historical context of the first-century Judaism and not just on the basis of the text itself'.[10] Bennema rightfully recognizes an expected reasonable caveat in his approach when affirming that such a method of going *beyond the text* can be problematic since 'character reconstruction through *filling the gaps* has the inherent tendency to be speculative, fanciful, and ignore cultural differences'.[11] But Bennema's argument is legitimate as it seems to be impossible to envisage a proper study of the NT without investigating its contextual world, no matter how limited we still are regarding accurate data about first-century Palestinian society. For him, an investigation into particular historical details is the *sine qua non* for augmenting the information about biblical characters.

Bennema describes such an interpretative process as analogous to a 'plausible historically informed reader', meaning 'a modern reader who has an adequate knowledge of the general first-century world and who can give a plausible explanation for the ancient sources she or he presumes'[12] He refers to Burridge's work on Graeco-Roman biographies as an attempt to defend his position. He agrees that a proper work on biblical characters would unveil 'very similar results from these generic features to those already

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[7] The idea of character reconstruction by 'filling the gaps' is also present in the characterisation studies in the Hebrew narratives, such as Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 143-62; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 47-92; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 33-42; and Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 186-229.

[8] Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark*, 4.

[9] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 63. His emphasis.

[10] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 63. His emphasis.

[11] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 62. His emphasis.

[12] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 25.

discovered in the synoptic gospels and Graeco-Roman βίοι'.[13] Perhaps one of the most useful aspects of Burridge's work refers to his view that ancient characters are not all 'flat' or 'types'; instead, many of them, including biblical characters, are complex, developing or round.[14]

With regard specifically to the Fourth Gospel, Bennema backs up his argument by calling on investigations such as those by Keener, Bauckham, and Myers,[15] to say that even if John may have benefited from a 'legitimate degree of freedom to portray' his characters, they must still be seen as historical figures.[16] He recognises we must bear in mind the author's post-Easter perspective, assuring his readers about the theological significance of Jesus' divinity. One forewarning, perhaps, would be that affirming NT characters as historical figures—people who were indeed born, lived, met Jesus, and died in first-century Palestine—might not necessarily indicate that scholars can rest utterly assured they will find relevant historical data about their surveyed characters in extra-biblical sources. For Bennema, however, the converse is true, as scholars are not required to assume that characters must be investigated without considering their historical context presented in the narrative.

Admittedly, there is no need to fear that confining characters to the narrative world alone would dangerously narrow the reader's perception of the text. After all, as we have seen previously, one of the main prerogatives of narrative criticism is the significant distinctiveness of this method. Nevertheless, we should still be cautious given the fact that historical extra-biblical data on biblical characters may not be sufficiently available. It seems straightforward that interpreters must consider historical events in the common knowledge of the story's world. But such a task suits some biblical characters but not most. For example, one can refer to Philo and Josephus to investigate historical evidence on Pontius Pilate (John 18-19), who was the representative of the Roman Empire in Judea for probably ten years, including the time of Jesus' crucifixion, therefore, a public figure.[17] It is more complex to find contextual extra-biblical information on simple non-

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[13] Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 217-8.

[14] Bennema himself presents a good argumentation on this issue, in *A Theory of Character*, 31-60.

[15] Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John*; Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 384-411, also in 'Historiographical Characteristics of the Gospel of John'; Myers, *Characterizing Jesus*, 26-36.

[16] Bennema, 'Character Reconstruction: The Theory', 368.

[17] Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*; Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus.* In his analysis of Pilate, Bennema follows Bauckham in that the writer of the Fourth Gospel knew the characterisation of Pilate from the Gospel of Mark. For Bennema, that does not imply reading Johannine characters through Mark's account, rather through a Johannine's narrative which contains a prior understanding of its characters from a Markan perspective. See Bauckham, *The Gospels for All Christians*, 147–71.

elite people, so commonplace in the Gospels' stories.[18] Even in this case, however, Bennema seems to be correct in determining that the narrative material of the NT is nonfictional in nature and refers to actual events and people in history. Following Merenlahti and Hakola, he accepts that 'we can fill the gaps in the narrative from our knowledge of the socio-historical context of the first-century Mediterranean world (rather than our imagination)'.[19]

This survey entails a literary analysis rather than just an investigation of historical sources leading to character building, but it certainly benefits from historical knowledge about the relevance of institutions such as the Sanhedrin and the synagogue or even the confrontational political-cultural context involved in Jesus' encounter with characters. We agree with Bennema's use of Kermode's assertion that character study is widened 'by inferring from the repertoire of indices characteristics not immediately signalled in the text, but familiar from other texts and from life'.[20] Such an assertion consequently leads us to relevant questions: Should we benefit from biblical intertextual relationships to study the Fourth Gospel's work on characterisation? If so, what characters portrayed in the Synoptics, for instance, could assist our analysis of the Johannine characters? In what ways could we benefit from echoes of Scripture portraying OT characters who would work as a representation or literary *silhouette* for our surveyed characters?

The biblical sensorium proposed by Avrahami contributes to the discussion on Bennema's theory of character. She asserts that the 'understanding of the senses in a given culture is bound up with that culture's values. Thus, studying how sensory experience is represented in a culture is one way of studying its worldview.[21] Following this view, her findings on the sensory perceptions in the Bible provide relevant knowledge on the life of ordinary people in the biblical culture without necessarily having to look for inaccessible presumed historical sources.

Combined with Bennema's concern for historical and contextual investigation of biblical settings, this research benefits from Avrahami's findings in two main ways. First, because in the biblical worldview, the senses are experienced as either affirmation or denial of human abilities, sensorial knowledge is acquired by learning the world in

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[18] Bennema's analyses of Nicodemus is an example. Apart from briefly mentioning Flavius Josephus' description of the Pharisees, there are no references on extra-biblical or historical sources to assist the reconstruction of this character. See *Encountering Jesus*, 147–60.

[19] Bennema, 'Character Reconstruction', 367. Cf. Merenlahti and Hakola, 'Reconceiving Narrative Criticism', 40–3.

[20] Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, 78.

[21] Avrahami, 'Notes on Method', 4. An interesting discussion on sensory biblical metaphors is Tilford, *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom*, 173-98.

deliberation with the critical exchange between human autonomy and the lack of it. It will be here demonstrated that sensory development in the characters' portrayal is as crucial as the identification of sensory experiences. Equally relevant are the final results of this assessment about how such development is portrayed in the narrative.

Second, Avrahami proposes challenging modern Western epistemology's view of human senses that generally defines them only as a means of catching information from the world (*feelings* or *sensations*). Sensory anthropologists are increasingly recognizing that this particular perception of the senses is 'infused with distinct anthropological biases, such as the mind-body dichotomy, the centrality of sight, and the textual lens through which cultural topics are examined'.[22] The biblical idea of *sense* is distinctly more abstract, as senses represent the abilities through which the world is experienced physically but remaining closely correlated to limbs or organs, and, in consequence, to humanity as a whole.[23] For Carasik, 'biblical culture emphasized memory more than originality, and authoritative (divine) knowledge more than original (human) knowledge'.[24] For this reason, we aim to survey how Johannine characters are portrayed as using their senses to perform not only feelings or sensations, but also functional activities such as thought and action, obedience and disobedience, awkwardness, comfort, inquiry, and witness.

The particular approach proposed here undoubtedly brings forth questions, some of them listed as follows: How do the Fourth Gospel's narratives indicate the presence of human senses when portraying its characters? How evident is such a portrayal of the senses? In what ways is such a portrayal of the characters' sensory development along the story different from the modern perception of the sensorial mindset? How can such a perception affect our understanding of biblical stories?

### 4.2. Sensory Development and the Dimensions of Characterisation

Understanding pivotal aspects of the socio-historical context of the Bible in order to find how such a unique worldview might have experienced the reality of the human senses is essential to surveying elements of sensory development in the Fourth Gospel's characterisation, but it is not enough. This section discusses the second aspect of

[22] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 5.

[23] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 185.

[24] Carasik, *Theologies of the Mind in Biblical Israel*, 12.

Bennema's theory of character, namely, the classification of the Johannine characters along three dimensions (complexity, development, inner life). As in the previous section, Bennema's approach will be analysed in conversation with Avrahami's method.

As the first dimension, Bennema works on characters' *complexity* to demonstrate how they evolve from a single to multiple and multifaceted traits. Some biblical characters initially present a single trait but are eventually and gradually portrayed as developed characters at the end of the narrative. Bennema wants to know why and how their number of traits makes explicit any possible degree of variation in their identity along the narratives.

From the outset, Bennema's definition of a character's *trait* would supposedly be the first aspect to be discussed. For Bennema, it would be legitimate 'to apply insights from modern fiction to ancient literature' because 'it would be natural that the trait-names we assign are derived from what we know of real people in the real world. This means we would use contemporary language to describe a character'.[25] He follows Chatman to affirm that traits are 'socially invented signs. Trait-names are not themselves traits'.[26] For Richard Rohrbaugh, however, Bennema fails to affirm the difference between ancient and modern readers as well as their perception of human character, personality, motive and behaviour, as he seems to impose an 'ethnocentric projection of modern selves back onto the ancient text' without considering the 'profound differences between ancient Mediterranean culture and the modern West'.[27] However, Bennema's definition and consequential use of traits to analyse ancient and biblical characters seem adequate. He presents a scathing argument to defend that 'it is not only legitimate but also necessary to draw on modern labels to infer a character's traits'.[28] His work fills an unsatisfactory gap between only 'flat' or 'round' characters. Failing to recognise the evident complexity in the Gospels' characters—even some minor characters—damages any survey on character reconstruction.

Another aspect of Bennema's view of the characters' complexity deserves attention. For him, the Gospels' writers build and evaluate their characters based on the binary categories of belief and unbelief, or in his words, *adequate* and *inadequate*.[29] He thinks that because the Fourth Gospel's author, for instance, intends his audience to approach

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[25] Bennema, 'A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel', 397.

[26] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 124.

[27] Rohrbaugh, Review of Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 110–1.

[28] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 32.

[29] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 19. His emphasis.

Jesus' message and continue to believe that he is the Messiah so that they can enjoy true life in God, it 'deliberately puts on the stage various characters that interact with Jesus, producing an array of belief-responses in order to challenge his readers to evaluate their own stance regarding Jesus'.[30] Bennema's view might raise debates as some prefer to read the Gospel's purpose in 20:30-31 as the invitation to a more complex understanding of God's activity in the world. For Koester, faith in Jesus refers not only to accepting or rejecting his words but also to the progressive realisation that he is the Son of the God who is deliberately and positively *acting* in the world. He has created the world and is now redeeming it through His Son: 'character portrayal deals not only with the way that people respond to each other but also with the way that God interacts with human beings'.[31]

Susan Hylen adds that Johannine characters are complex to the point of being portrayed with considerable ambiguity.[32] For her, they are not always *types* or *flat*, some of them 'display misunderstandings alongside remarkable statements of faith',[33] and thus we cannot always classify them only as believers or unbelievers, simply because the author does not always provide his readers with precise information on the characters' faith commitment. In other words, she understands that Johannine characters do more than respond positively or negatively to Jesus, they reveal God's interaction with each person's unique situation. Thus, the author of the Fourth Gospel indicates such a complex character development by furnishing the readers with a slightly more profound level of responsibility in determining a character's faith, as they search 'for knowledge and must evaluate complex speech and actions in light of the Gospel's standards for faith'.[34]

Bennema evaluates Hylen's work and disagrees with her.[35] Initially endorsing her attempt to avoid treating Johannine characters in a reductionist way, he points out what he considers three problems in her approach: (1) Her view of characters' varying degrees of ambiguity causes unnecessary resistance to the Fourth Gospel's binary categories of *belief* and *unbelief*; (2) Hylen's concept of *ambiguity* is weak for identifying it with *imperfection*, as Bennema sees *imperfect faith* as nothing else than an inadequate response to Jesus; and (3) her approach on the ambiguity of the Johannine characters might be

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[30] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 1.

[31] Koester, 'Theological Complexity and the Characterization of Nicodemus in John's Gospel', 165.

[32] Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*, 15.

[33] Hylen, 'Three Ambiguities', 97.

[34] Hylen, 'Three Ambiguities', 98.

[35] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 83.

dangerous, risking moving beyond the author's original intention. For Bennema, Hylen confuses diversity in modern interpretations with the author's supposedly wished opacity, forcing us to see the entire Bible as intentionally ambiguous. Therefore, he claims that 'ambiguity, as evident from the variety of interpretations, may be more the result of modern hermeneutical enterprise than the author's intentional design'.[36]

Bennema's work on characters' *complexity* is applied to this research to analyse the gradual attribution of traits to characters' portrayal while also considering other literary elements in the Fourth Gospel's narratives. The Johannine characters' misunderstandings of Jesus' teaching, for instance, help the readers to grasp how Jesus' words and actions align with what God has in store for those who follow him. All characters' responses regarding *belief* or *unbelief* will be surveyed, although not necessarily as absolute denials or affirmations of faith. There are, indeed, ambiguities in some characters in the Fourth Gospel, and, perhaps, that is precisely the way its author wanted us to read them.

The second dimension of Bennema's work refers to the *characters' development*. For him, characters develop in the narratives when they 'surprise' the readers with any distinctive trait that the writer might employ to show new aspects, behaviour, or even words that would evidence a consistent change in them. By 'surprising' the reader, Bennema attempts to identify the character's aptitudes that reveal a newly found trait in replacement of another, showing that the previous trait did not fit neatly into the existing set of traits, implying that the character has changed. [37]

He asserts that readers should look for traits that progressively adapt or modify the characters' identity, uncovering significant developments that would function as eye-openers in the direction in which characters seem to be heading. Such new aspects, behaviour and words may not be marked or glaring, but their significance might lie in the fact that sometimes these changes contradict the standard set of characters' traits demonstrated since the beginning of the narrative. Complex characters are more prone to show development.

One might question Bennema's idea on character *development* by asking how should we evaluate characters portrayed *en passant* or in only one or short narratives. It seems reasonable to investigate the development of characters portrayed many times in the Gospels. Peter, for example, figures only once in the earlier section of the Gospel

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[36] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 83.

[37] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus,* 27. Merenlahti clarifies that because readers interact with characters along a process of discovery, they usually surprise the readers by taking a different shape at the end of the narrative compared to their first appearance, in 'Characters in the Making', 54.

(6:68) but appears many times in its final accounts (13:1-11, 21-30,36-38; 18:10-11, 15-18, 25-27; 20:1-8). However, would it not be pushing it too far to affirm that minor biblical characters generally show evident development along their narratives?

Bennema responds by affirming that interpreters must look for *traces* of characters' development, not only new traits here and there introduced by the narrator. Character development does not necessarily depend on the narrative's length, the number of the character's appearances, or the characters' belief in Jesus' teaching and works. Instead, it is recognised in the aforementioned character's ability to surprise the reader. Similarly, Skinner affirms that although Nicodemus, for instance, is first introduced as a person who could not understand Jesus' teaching, let alone his role as the Messiah, he gradually becomes, at least, a sympathiser with the crucified Jesus. For Skinner, then, 'belief' is not simply a new feature added to him to move from *flat* to *rounded*. It also indicates that a 'lack of understanding' of God's will must be addressed by faith in His Son, thus generating a thoroughly Johannine transformation of the character.[38]

Judith Redman diverges from Bennema. For her, Bennema does not provide correct decoding on the criteria for assessing whether or not a response is positive.[39] She thinks that Bennema's *saving-belief adequate response to Jesus* contradicts his view of the character's involvement, continuing discipleship and relationship with him.[40] For her, 'not all the types of adequate response that he (Bennema) lists could be said to do this, especially hearing Jesus' voice; being intimate with Jesus; seeking; and sympathy'.[41] In other words, Redman understands that Bennema seems to explain this apparent gap by trying to objectify an outcome—indiscriminately for all characters—even when the narrative does not always require a strictly precise and unambiguous response.[42]

Redmam's analysis raises an important point. One might think it unnecessary to seek a definitive answer from some characters to evaluate them primarily in terms of their response to Jesus. Taking Nicodemus as the example again, numerous nuances surround him in the critical period between his identification with the Sanhedrin and his respect for Jesus' teaching. He is not portrayed as evidently committed and identified with Jesus' movement, but it would be shallow to affirm that he has not responded positively to Jesus at the end of the story. One could say that although we cannot affirm whether Nicodemus'

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[38] Skinner, 'Introduction: Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John', xxiv-xxv.

[39] Redman, 'Eyewitness Testimony and the Characters in the Fourth Gospel', 61.

[40] Bennema, 'Character Reconstruction: The Theory', 371.

[41] Redman, 'Eyewitness Testimony and the Characters in the Fourth Gospel', 64.

[42] Redman, 'Eyewitness Testimony and the Characters in the Fourth Gospel', 64.

belief-response is adequate or not—or somewhere in between—we can still investigate how his reaction fits within the gospel's primary purpose, encouraging its readers to believe in Jesus and achieve life in his name.[43]

Still, we should not too quickly declare that Bennema's view requires an absolutist tight right-and-wrong response from every character in the Gospel. It seems that, instead, he refers to responses or attitudes that lead the readers to acknowledge the character's disposition to positive or negative responses according to the author's intended goal for the narrative. Even so, some characters might still 'surprise' the readers in the end. Indeed, the Fourth Gospel elicits its readers to search for a character response. But perhaps, we should look for a deeper and more nuanced process involving characters' interaction with Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, or as Coloe says: 'faith response to Jesus is one aspect of the role of the Johannine characters. However, characters also serve to clarify, articulate, and develop the theology of the narrative'.[44]

The third and final dimension of Bennema's approach refers to the character's *inner life*. For him, the NT stories do portray the inner life of characters to some extent and reveal their consciousness to the reader with essential information about their internal thoughts, emotions, and motivations.[45] Both the narrator and the characters reveal aspects of *inner life* about other characters or themselves. Jesus can also be seen as revealing people's inner thoughts and motivations. Naturally, such information makes the reader expect a more elaborate interaction and response to Jesus.

One might think Bennema's work on characters' *inner lives* should be addressed with caution. Although a worthwhile device to survey characters' features not explicitly conveyed by the narrator or other characters, providing the reader with an awareness of their thoughts, emotions, inspirations and impulses,[46] would cause some to think that if the investigation of the interiority of ancient characters' portrayals is valid, such as those in the Fourth Gospel, to what extent can a reader possess the ability to extract features of personality and inward manners from the account offered by the narrator?

Following Alter and Sternberg, Bennema argues that in order to be transformed or changed, biblical characters reveal intimate aspects of their personalities (e.g. ambiguity, unpredictability, complexity, surprise).[47] Sternberg refers to biblical characters by saying

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[43] Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 137-45.

[44] Coloe, Review of Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 373-4.

[45] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 77-82.

[46] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 78.

[47] See Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 114-26; Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 323-9.

'it is amazing how distinct and memorable its figures remain, without the benefit of formal portrayal. And this is largely due to the surplus of inner life expressed in act and speech'.[48]

For Bennema, traces of characters' *inner life* in the Fourth Gospel work as crucial devices to move them towards roundness.[49] Such a view leads him to disagree with Scholes and Kellogg who affirm that the 'inward life is assumed but not presented in primitive literature, whether Hebraic or Hellenic',[50] or Tolmie, who sees no inner life at all in the characters of the Fourth Gospel.[51] Bennema prefers to see that the apparent barrier in perceiving the demonstration of inner thoughts, emotions or motivations in the Johannine characters is mainly because Jesus' inner life is abundantly portrayed in the Fourth Gospel. Interestingly, he points out that Jesus' teaching and deeds in the Fourth Gospel are inarguably portrayed as levers that bring out reactions and curiosities in the characters with whom he interacts, both before large groups and in private encounters. Also, Jesus indeed elicits—either on purpose or not—characters' inner reasoning (e.g. 5:39–47; 6:26, 36, 61, 64, 70; 8:31–55; 13:21, 37–38; 14:1; 16:6).

Concerning characters' inner life, one might imply that Bennema's analytical plan could contemplate a survey beyond the single inside view into the characters' lives. One aspect suggested by David Gowler in his survey of the Pharisees' portrayals in Luke and Acts may be relevant here. He affirms that although biblical stories do not give quite open access to characters' inner lives compared to modern stories, they do provide relevant information via *indirect* presentation.[52] In other words, Bennema's approach is relevant, but we should perhaps suggest that inside views are as important as the *absence* of inside views. Not portraying an expected particular reaction or response in a character's depiction does not necessarily mean that the narrator prevents readers from accessing this character's *inner life*. On the contrary, such an absence might be precisely the narrator's main point in the story, even more so if we agree that biblical narrative, in general, reveals considerably less than most modern literature.

Bennema's three dimensions of characterisation discussed above are pivotal to this research as they provide the appropriate literary analysis to investigate how Johannine

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[48] Sternberg, *The Poetics*, 329. In turn, he bases his analysis on Bar-Efrat's instances of biblical characters' inner life, in *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 53-64.

[49] Bennema, 'A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel', 405-6.

[50] Scholes and Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 166.

[51] Tolmie, *Jesus' Farewell to the Disciples*, 166.

[52] Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy, and Friend*, 62.

characters are depicted in their development along the narratives. Combined with Bennema's work, Avrahami's analysis of sensory perception in the Bible contributes to increasing our insights into the Fourth Gospel's strategies to build its characters. Starting with some readjustments on her findings on the biblical *septasensory model*, this research benefits from two meaningful implications on the contextual survey of Johannine characterisation. First, it will be demonstrated how biblical narratives employ the senses to *affirm* or *deny* human abilities so that their characters can learn from and control the storyworld. Second, this survey investigates how the Gospel presumably portrays its characters' sensory development by evincing sensory experiences to perform functional activities.

Additionally, Avrahami's findings on *synaesthesia*, the merging of senses that are generally not connected but related to each other through associative links, help to identify biblical characters' sensory experiences through images from different sensory fields. It will be analysed how attributing different senses to the same character in the same narrative creates new sensory metaphors for human behaviour and response to Jesus' teaching. Such metaphors are textual pedagogical elements related to the senses, created through synaesthetic experiences in the characters' common sensory activities, to reaffirm existing traits or bring new ones. Sensory metaphors pave the way in showing how characters understand or misunderstand Jesus' words in contrast both to their abstract experiences and Jesus' own metaphors about himself.

In this way, the survey of synaesthesia improves the analysis of characters as it does not refer to textual traits, but to plausible merged sensory experiences singular to each character as their interaction with Jesus unfolds throughout the text. For such examination, the following questions will be asked: Does the surveyed biblical narrative reveal characters experiencing the merging of two or more different senses? If so, is there any additional or modified literary trait in portraying a specific character after having gone through such a merged sensorial experience? In the case of evidence of new or altered traits, how does the narrative assimilate such traits to lead the reader to new metaphors and the character's development? What new metaphors does this merging of senses create, and where do they point the character to? In what ways does such a character seem to surprise the reader with unprecedented traits after merging senses that would not have been expected given the path the narrative seemed to be initially taking the reader? If any character development is confirmed through merging the senses, is it possible to affirm that the character has a new identity from then on?

Finally, the survey on synaesthesia is directly related to the third element from Avrahami's biblical sensorium: *sensory development*.[53] It will study the trajectory between the characters' initial relation with a specific sense (or lack of it) and the condition of that same sense at the end of their characterisation. Such analysis of characters' sensory experiences will reveal how characters might be depicted as having changed their autonomy in performing their actions, which consequently highlights their eventual sensory development which enables them to experience the world differently after their encounter with Jesus.

The main interest of this particular survey on sensory development is to verify how different sensory experiences attributed to the surveyed characters might increase their complexity in order to impact the readers by the end of the narrative. Some plausible questions for such an endeavour are: Is there in the narrative any hint pointing to sensory development? If so, in what way is this development evident enough to demonstrate what aspects might have prompted the character to perform a task or take a determined action? How does the author portray the character's sensory development in order to assist his readers in perceiving the character's transformation by the end of the story?

### 4.3. The Sensory Generative Trajectory of Meaning

Avrahami suitably proposes to overcome the disputed usage of anthropological methods to interpret ancient texts.[54] Notably, she wants to find the roots of the encapsulated worldview of the biblical culture. She puts forward a combination of methods, including traditional philology (the investigation of both the structure and content of texts) and the analysis of the semantic fields and mental frames[55] associated with biblical Hebrew and Greek. Based on Boyarin,[56] and Dancygier & Sweeter,[57] Avrahami argues that biblical

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[53] See pages 75-6 for the explanation on choosing the term 'development' over 'disability'.

[54] See Avrahami's discussion on 'thick description' in 'Notes on Method', 11-12. Also in *The Senses of Scripture*, 37-42.

[55] *Mental frames* (*frames of mind*) correspond to the expression of a person's or group's cultural sensibilities through the production of texts. It may involve mental or emotional states that relates to the numerous procedures a group adopts in order to respond to determined social events. In some cases, it is applied to a broader context as well, such as regional or national mind frames (e.g., Second Temple Judaism or Johannine literature). For an interesting discussion on the production of texts with a literary intention, see Fokkema, 'On the Reliability of Literary Studies'.

[56] Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 14.

[57] Dancygier and Sweetser, *Figurative Language*, 9.

narratives reveal part of the common sense of a particular group through cultural poetics,[58] and we should turn to 'the study of the text as a way to recover a worldview'.[59]

A philological analysis is important to researching sensory perception in biblical texts, and this research may occasionally benefit from Avrahami's investigation of semantic fields through *paradigmatic associations* (words can be replaced by other words in a given context), *syntagmatic associations* (the construction of idiomatic phrases), and *figurative language* (in order to identify cultural notions and mental frames). Nonetheless, this survey proposes instead a more straightforward technique to assist in the analysis of sensory development in the Johannine characters' portrayal.

The semiotic technique based on Greimas' generative trajectory of meaning, particularly his work on the *semiotic square*, is helpful as it assists this research in combination with the results from the survey of characters through Bennema's theory of character and Avrahami's biblical sensorium. Although such semiotic analysis does not represent the primary approach of this research, it identifies the fundamental logical articulation in opposition to the biblical narratives. Greimas' *semiotic square* helps understand the characters' responses to Jesus after identifying the author's characterisations and the sensory signals along the narratives.

Before getting into the presentation of Greimas' *semiotic square,* his theory is here introduced succinctly. Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917-1992) was a French-born-Lithuanian literary scholar who conceived the text as an instrument through which it is possible to see the relations established throughout the textual discourses. He understands it is possible to identify any text's main elements without appealing to the reader's imaginative deviation. Greimas first intends to describe and explain what *the text says* and then shows how *the text says what it says*. To this end, he wants to find the significance of a text by examining its generative trajectory of meaning.[60]

What is the generative trajectory of meaning of a text? Slightly distinct from the analysis of textual semantic fields adopted by Avrahami, Greimas affirms that every text has a trajectory that begins with simple semantic information and is successively enriched

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[58] *Cultural Poetics* ('new historicism' in the United States or 'Cultural Materialism' in the United Kingdom) investigates literary movements through works, writers, and styles in order to identify or categorize specific cultural contexts. It is form of literary analysis since it finds out original mindsets embedded in historical facts about writer and their texts. See DiEdwardo, *Cultural Poetics and Social Movements Initiated by Literature*; Dougherty and Kurke, *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece*; and Brannigan, 'Cultural Poetics: After the New Historicism?'.

[59] Avrahami, 'Notes on Method', 11.

[60] Greimas' most relevant works for this research are *Structural Semantics*; *On Meaning*; *Maupassant: The Semiotics of Text*; *Narrative Semiotics and Cognitive Discourses*; *The Semiotics of Passions.* Also, Greimas and Rastier, 'The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints'; and Greimas and Courtés, *Semiotics and Language.*

with increasingly complex textual elements. His overall scheme looks at the text through three independent levels appropriately connected, forming a trajectory: *Fundamental* (the superficial and abstract textual level), *Narrative* (the intermediate textual level), and *Discursive* (the more complex and concrete textual level). General readers follow the text in the opposite direction, as they begin their journey by first interacting with the discourse delivered by the text and then acquiring access to the more critical levels after getting acquainted with the overall aim of the writer.[61]

Since all three levels of Greimas' approach are independent tools that complement the generative trajectory of meaning, they can be employed separately to work with other tools' supplementary data. As previously experienced by this researcher, the use of the entire Greimas' generative trajectory of meaning is suitable for a broader and complete analysis of all the textual elements of a narrative (narrator, plot, characters, narrative time and space, figures and themes, argumentation, manipulation, competence, performance and sanction). However, as the target of this research is primarily the study of sensory development in characters in the Fourth Gospel, Greimas' analysis of the *discursive* and *narrative* levels will not be contemplated in this work. Instead, the results that could be drawn from these two first levels of the generative trajectory of meaning will be brought to this research by the lenses previously discussed, namely, Bennema's work on *characterisation* and Avrahami's work on *sensory perception*. The discursive level investigates the textual characters through elements such as proper names, doubts, fears, and physical or mental aspects, always presented according to the categories of time and space. It looks for the choices the writer makes to persuade his readers to understand and accept his discourse as truth. The narrative level asks how the text is organised from the characters' point of view. It surveys the power games between characters when they relate to each other in conjunction (acting for a common purpose) or disjunction (acting in opposite directions). Therefore, Greimas' *fundamental level* of textual analysis employed here is explained as follows.

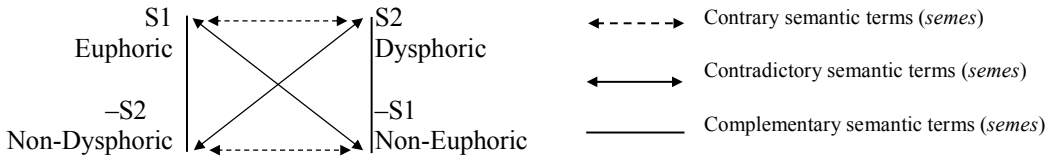
The fundamental level contains two semantic terms in opposition (*semes*), which are the basis of the text, where the most primary (hence *fundamental*) aspect of the discourse may be found (e.g., life x death, light x darkness, freedom x oppression, knowledge x ignorance). One of these terms is always *euphoric* (positive), and the other is *dysphoric* (negative). However, the reader does not determine which term is *euphoric* or *dysphoric*. Such values are dependent on the writer's goal. 'Death', for instance, might

[61] Daniel Patte, 'Greimas's Model for the Generative Trajectory of Meaning in Discourses', 59-78.

not necessarily be considered a *dysphoric* term if the writer wishes to communicate the relevance of death to achieve a greater good.

### 4.3.1. The Semiotic Square

Greimas and Rastier developed what has been commonly identified as the logical model of the *semiotic square*.[62] Despite its apparent complexity, the *semiotic square* is actually not difficult to understand. As a graphic tool, it illustrates the *semes* (semantic terms) in opposition or the 'logical articulation of a given opposition'.[63] As a visual representation of the articulation of a semantic category, the *semiotic square* deconstructs the hidden meaning of the dualism inherent in any discourse, as demonstrated in the graphic below.




As shown above, in a square, S1 and S2 are semantic terms (*semes*) in oppositional relationships (contrariety). Generally speaking, S1 and S2 are in opposition every time the negation of one implies the affirmation of the other, and vice versa. Thus, –S2 implies S1, while –S1 implies S2. Consequently, this double operation establishes a relation of complementarity between S1 and –S2 on the one hand, and S2 and –S1, on the other. Therefore, the *semiotic square* prescribes a determined route: from S2 to S1 via –S2, and from S1 to S2 via –S1.[64] The singular contribution of Greimas' *semiotic square* to this research regards the semiotic act, or *the trajectory of discourse*, which is inferred from the analysis of *contrary*, *contradictory*, and *complementary* terms:

S1 → –S1 → S2 → –S2 → S1

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[62] Greimas and Rastier, 'The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints', 87. The semiotic square is an independent device of literary analysis. It is sometimes employed with Greimas' *actantial model* (cf. *Structural Semantics*, 196-221). Jean-Marie Floch indeed affirms that Greimas' *semiotic square* has become so popular that it could now be considered a 'gadget' in literary analytical works: 'Voilá bien, avec le carré, le type même du concept en danger de gadgetisation'. However, he also asserts that 'le carré sémiotique représente d'abord un heritage scientifique, et une exigence pour ceux qui l'assument'. In *Petites Mythologies de L'Oeil Et de L'Esprit*, 197.

[63] Hébert and Tabler, *An Introduction to Applied Semiotics*, 40.

[64] This graphic is found in Greimas, *Structural Semantics*, 161-196. Scholars throughout the years have referenced and discussed Greimas' model of semiotic square adopting slightly different terms, but without major changes. See for instance, Eco, Magli, and Otis, 'Greimassian Semantics and the Encyclopedia'; Hendricks, 'Circling the Square: On Greimas's Semiotics'; Corso, 'What Does Greimas's Semiotic Square Really Do?'; Schleifer, *Greimas and the Nature of Meaning*; Pelkey, 'Greimas Embodied; Signori and Flint, 'Revealing the Unique Blend of Meanings in Corporate Identity'.

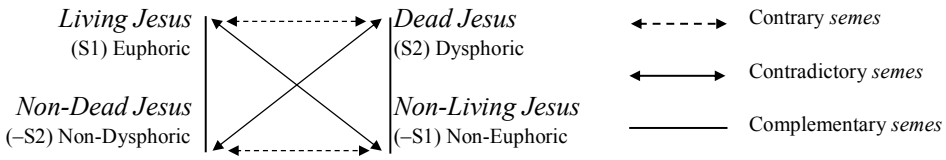
The following brief analysis is an example from the Gospel of Mark 16:1-8.[65]

The euphoric semantic term (S1): *Living Jesus*
'Jesus the Nazarene... He is going ahead of you into Galilee' (Mark 16:6,7)

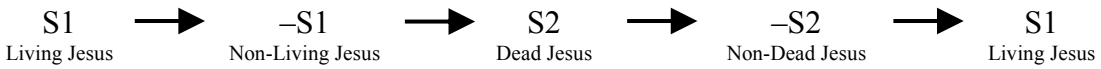
The Dysphoric semantic term (S2): *Dead Jesus*
'See the place where they laid him' (Mark 16:6)

The Non-Dysphoric semantic term (–S2): *Non-Dead Jesus*
'He is not here' (Mark 16:6)

The Non-Euphoric semantic term (–S1): *Non-Living Jesus*
'who was crucified' (Mark 16:6)




Initially, Jesus is alive, located in Nazareth. When crucified, his condition moves by *negation* to –S1, before joining by *assertion* the term S2 which designates the space of death (the 'tomb'). A second time, *death* (S2) is denied, giving rise to its *contradictory* –S2 in the statement 'He is not here!' Finally, Jesus moves from –S2 (*Non-Dead Jesus*) because of the words 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee'. Following the arrows in the square above, we see that Jesus' resurrection takes the form of the number eight along the trajectory of the discourse in the narrative. It represents a journey where the point of arrival ('into Galilee') coincides with the point of departure ('Nazareth', in Galilee).




Significantly, in the analysis of the sensory development of characters in the Fourth Gospel, Greimas' *semiotic square* will be employed to investigate each character's sensory generative trajectory of meaning. Each narrative provides a specific fundamental logical articulation in opposition, following the particular sensory experiences revealed in the sensory development of each particular portrayal. Therefore, the *semiotic square* functions as an analytical tool to interpret the results from character reconstruction through sensory perception.

[65] Such an example was given by Joseph Courtés, in *Analyse sémiotique du discours*, 151-4.

### 4.4. The method: Understanding Biblical Characters' Through Sensory Perception

To date, many methods of interpretation have been developed to study biblical characters. As presented above, this research benefits from the three aspects of Bennema's theory of character: (1) analysis of the textual and historical context, (2) classification of characters along three dimensions (complexity, development, inner life), and (3) plot the resulting character on a continuum of degree of characterization. After evaluating his method's benefits, introduced were some aspects of Avrahami's work on the biblical sensorium to compose a new approach that investigates how biblical narratives might have employed the human senses to cooperate in building characters that not only support narratives' plots but also establish themselves as textual elements to influence their readers. Also, Greimas' *semiotic square* has been introduced as an auxiliary methodological lens to identify the characters' sensory generative trajectory of meaning, thus revealing the fundamental logical articulation in opposition within the story.

Such a set of methodological lenses forms the foundation of this research's approach to investigating the fourth evangelist's construction and development of his characters after their transforming encounter with Jesus. At certain times, each theoretical approach will be employed separately to facilitate the understanding of specific aspects and features in the narrative's characterisation. At other times, two or more approaches will work together to bring to light other aspects and features that would likely not be identified through only one methodological lens. Such a merge of approaches will happen eventually throughout the present analysis.

The following pages, therefore, present a summary of the research approach. The first section of each exegetical chapter introduces, discusses and charts the investigation results of Bennema's theory of character. Bennema's *table of character analysis* has been readjusted to include possible indications of sensory experiences. With the information collected from the Gospel's narratives according to Bennema's study, the likely instances of sensory development in the character's portrayal will be verified in order to understand where such sensory experiences may become essential for analysing each character's *continuum of degree of characterisations* (agent, type, personality, and individuality).[66]

[66] Benemma's use of categories usually understood in the modern sense of individual autonomy (such as 'personality' and 'individual') is not addressed here. He follows Malina's concept of 'collectivist identity' or 'group-oriented personality' to affirm that the individual identity is embedded in a larger group or community. See Malina, *The New Testament World*, 60–7. Cf. Bennema, 'Character Reconstruction: The Theory', 370.

| Character Name: | | |
|---|---|---|
| Character in Text and Context | Origin | Birth, Gender, Ethnicity, Nation/City Family (Ancestors, Relatives) |
| | Upbringing | Nurture, Education |
| | External Goods | Epithets, Reputation Age, Marital Status Socio-Economic Status, Wealth, Place of Residence/Operation Occupation, Positions Held Group Affiliation, Friends |
| | Speech and Actions | In Interaction with the Protagonist<br>In Interaction with Other Characters |
| | Death | Manner of Death, Events after Death |
| Character Analysis and Classification | Three Continua upon which a character may be situated | Complexity<br>Development<br>Inner Life |
| | Degree of Characterization | Agent<br>Type<br>Personality<br>Individuality |
| Character Evaluation | Response to Jesus<br>Role in the Plot | |
| Character Significance | Representative Value | |

The table above will be employed to display where the characters are positioned on each continuum to understand their degree of characterisation. But more than that, it will illustrate how characters are distinct from each other in their unique contribution to Jesus' story through their sensory experiences. The identification of the specific senses as well as their development in the character's portrayal in the narratives will come to the surface in the second step of this investigation, demonstrated below.

Two particular cautions are necessary, however. First, it is impractical to expect an absolute and objective definition of such terms as "little", "some", and "much." Bennema seeks to solve this caveat by positioning the surveyed characters in relation to other characters on each continuum. In other words, he analyses characters not merely by comparing their own development inside the narrative but also in comparison to other characters. He understands it to be more appropriate since such a relative portrayal of biblical characters leads the readers to an 'intuitive' approach. We agree that such an approach fits better in comparing biblical characters than searching for objective criteria, as such objectivity can be very hard to achieve. However, because the table becomes more complex due to the addition of sensory experiences, it will be used as a panel to display how sensory perception in each character contributes to evincing their development.

Another caution refers to Bennema's published work on studying characters in the Fourth Gospel.[67] He has already provided an assessment of most Johannine characters, including the three characters investigated in this research. Interestingly, however, different conclusions about the same characters under analysis might be demonstrated here, even when employing some of his own method features. Such differences will be explained in the exegetical chapters when analysing each particular character.

The second section of each exegetical chapter looks for traces of sensory perception in the Fourth Gospel's characterisations. In other words, it will survey how the author would have referred to human senses when portraying his characters. This is a meaningful methodological task as it requires two separate analyses. First, it investigates Greimas' *semiotic square* in order to identify the character's sensory generative trajectory of meaning, thus disclosing the fundamental logical articulation of the terms in opposition in the story. Then, it benefits from Avrahami's analysis of the specific sensory perception employed in each character's portrayal in order to provide the stages of sensory development in each character's depiction.

The third section of each exegetical chapter surveys the merging of senses in every character's portrayal. At this point, the main task consists of understanding how two or more senses may appear in the narrative intrinsically linked with the character's sensory development. It will be demonstrated that synaesthesia contributes to the characterisation work by conveying meaningful cultural information about the character through word-pairs. In other words, it will be investigated how the author might have linked one main sensory experience of a specific character to other senses, aiming to build the narrative pattern upon a unique sensory perception to highlight the relevance of the main sense in the character's portrayal.

To sum up, this research aims to inquire how the author of the Fourth Gospel might have built his characters' evident development by employing sensory perceptions with the intent of turning them into literary devices to remarkably impact his readers' lives and direct them towards his main goal (20:30-31). For such an endeavour, it investigates how the Fourth Gospel elaborates on influential characters by valuing the human senses with the intent of identifying each character's sensory generative trajectory of meaning. As we intend to demonstrate, the analysis of the complexity of this Gospel's characterisations may be assisted by the understanding of its characters' sensory development, revealing a new perspective on their relationship with God that becomes evident through their

[67] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*.

interaction with Jesus. With that in mind, the following three chapters present the application of this method in the narratives of Nicodemus (3:1-15; 7:45-53; 19:38-42), the Samaritan woman of Sychar (4:1-42), and the man born blind (9:1-41).

### 4.5. Discussion and Examination of Methodological Elements

This concluding section aims to discuss and elucidate certain critical aspects that must be meticulously observed to prevent the formation of erroneous methodological expectations, which could subsequently undermine the exegetical work to be undertaken in the forthcoming three chapters. The ensuing discussion seeks to reinforce and validate the primary objectives of this research, ensuring clarity and methodological rigor.

Firstly, we clarify the roles of the author and the reader in the characterisation process of the Johannine characters. Although this topic holds significant importance in a textual approach conducted through Narrative Criticism, and despite its brief mention, consideration, and discussion in the literature review and this methodological chapter, it is crucial to reiterate that this research does not aim to explore reader-response criticism or the impact of readers in interpreting and reconstructing Johannine characters. Specifically, this research does not consider the readers' influence as a factor directly affecting the presentation of sensory perception in the creation of meaning. An in-depth discussion on the readers' relevance is excluded from the application of the proposed exegetical methodology, which focuses on analysing the presence and influence of sensory experiences in the characterisation of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and the man born blind as they interact with Jesus in the Fourth Gospel narratives. This exclusion does not imply that such a discussion is irrelevant; rather, it indicates that, for the specific aim of this research—investigating the presence of sensory experiences and perceptions in Johannine characterisation—the readers' participation is not taken into account.

Second, this research posits that the Fourth Gospel was originally composed in Koine Greek, yet exhibits a distinctive style indicative of Hebrew influences and mindset. Although a comprehensive discussion of this topic exceeds the scope of this study, the Greek origin of the Gospel is substantiated by numerous scholarly investigations. These studies present linguistic evidence, including a plethora of Greek literary features, stylistic elements, and the use of Greek idioms, vocabulary, and syntactic structures, all corroborated by manuscript evidence and the historical context of the Greek language.[68]

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[68] Cf. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*; Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*; and Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*.

Furthermore, Avrahami's exploration of the biblical sensorium, which pertains to the Hebrew Scriptures, renders it pertinent to this research to recognize that the Fourth Gospel, despite being written in Koine Greek, extensively employs Hebrew literary techniques. These techniques include parallelism, chiastic structures, and symmetrical patterns, as exemplified in passages such as the prologue (1:1-18), the wedding at Cana (2:1-11), the narrative of the Samaritan woman (John 4), and the foot washing (13:1-17). The narrative style of the Gospel mirrors Midrashic tradition, characterized by extensive dialogues and discourses that explore scriptural themes and concepts, feasts and traditions, and scriptural echoes (e.g., imagery such as the Lamb of God, Bread of Life, Good Shepherd, the 'I Am' sayings; and vocabulary such as 'Rabbi' and 'Messiah'). This evidence demonstrates that the Fourth Gospel is deeply rooted in Jewish thought and tradition, thereby reflecting the author's background, which bridges Jewish heritage with the emerging Christian tradition.[69]

The third aspect warranting explanation pertains to the differentiation of terms when applied to character development within biblical narratives. Specifically, what constitutes sensory *experiences*, and what are sensory *perceptions*? Although these terms are often used interchangeably in casual conversation, they bear significant distinctions in this research.

Sensory *experiences* refer to the information and impressions gathered through the human senses whenever the narrative reveals the presence of one or more senses in the description of the characters—be it physical, metaphorical, or a blend of both realities. Avrahami examines the significance of such experiences across various contexts, including religious practices, daily life, and literature. In essence, how does sensory data influence cognition, emotion, and memory? Sensory experiences are thus not merely passive receptions but also active processes, shaping characters' interpretations of their reality within the narrative.

Conversely, sensory *perception* refers to the interpretation and meaningful organization of sensory *experiences* by the character, or how the character makes sense of the sensory data (experiences) attributed to them within the narrative. For this reason, we should say that sensory *perception* involves the transition from physical sensation to metaphorical meaning. For instance, why is drinking water from a well incomparably less significant than drinking living water?

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[69] Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple*; Cirafesi, *John within Judaism*; Hakola, *Identity Matters*; Guilding, *The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship*; Kierspel, *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel*; Neyrey, 'Jacob Traditions and the Interpretation of John 4'.

According to Avrahami, sensory *perceptions* are essential for understanding how individuals interpret and interact with the world around them. This distinction is therefore crucial for comprehending how characters in the Fourth Gospel perceive, interact, and respond to the manner in which Jesus guides them towards specific sensory *perceptions*. However, as this study categorises *speech* and *movement* as 'somatic outcomes'—and thus does not entirely align with Avrahami's classification of *speech* and *movement* as sensory *experiences*—it advances the analysis of a Johannine sensory model. For this reason, whenever the terms 'speech' and 'movement' appear in this research—whether in isolation, in a synaesthetic relationship with one another and other senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch)—they should be understood not as direct sensory experiences, but as somatic responses that emerge from the characters' sensory perceptions within the narratives.

In the model introduced in this research, sensory *experiences* give rise to sensory *perceptions*, which subsequently result in *somatic outcomes* that help shape and develop the characters. Through this re-categorisation of *speech* and *movement* into sensory outcomes, sensory *perceptions* can still be understood as processes of interpretation and the attribution of meaning to various sensory *experiences* within the Johannine narrative (sensory data and inputs). This approach enables the exploration of a more nuanced framework for analysing how biblical characters navigate and interpret their environments, thereby enriching our understanding of biblical narratives.

One final discussion pertains to the application of Greimas' semiotic square in this research. It is crucial to understand that employing this tool to analyse sensory experiences does not reduce sensory perception to binary categories. On the contrary, as demonstrated above, Greimas' semiotic square elucidates the intricate relationships between the gradual functions of the senses. It is particularly beneficial for character analysis as it clarifies oppositions and nuanced contradictions, revealing gradual sensory development in characters to avoid a simplistic transition, for example, from speechfulness to speechlessness or tastelessness to tastefulness. Instead, the semiotic square maps the dynamics of the characters, highlighting their evolution, tension points, potential, and internal conflicts.

This research understands that Johannine characters are not flat or one-dimensional but rather round and complex. For this reason, the semiotic square facilitates the exploration of complex and ambiguous functions through opposing elements, illustrating the gradual progression from one sensory function to another until the character's complete sensory development is achieved.

# Chapter 5 | **NICODEMUS**

Starting with this chapter, the method previously presented will be applied to investigate how the author of the Fourth Gospel presumably employed his cultural view of human senses in his characterisation work to achieve his purpose (20:30-31). Nicodemus is the first character under survey, with intention being given to his three appearances in the Gospel (3:1-21; 7:45-53; 19:38-42). The first section of this chapter displays the results of Bennema's analysis of Nicodemus' characterisation according to his theory of character. Such results contribute to the development of the investigation of Nicodemus' sensory development.

The second section benefits from Greimas' semiotic square to find out the sensory generative trajectory of meaning in the story. The results from such an analysis will be employed in the third section in conjunction with Avrahami's biblical sensorium to analyse Nicodemus' sensory experiences with *speech*. Here, it is proposed that his *speech* decreases as a positive outcome of his portrayal. Nicodemus is depicted as a talkative man who goes through several stages up to being categorically depicted as a 'no words person'.

The fourth section concerns understanding how *synaesthesia* (the merging of senses) particularly in Nicodemus' third appearance contributes to the evangelist's character-building work. For such an endeavour, it will be demonstrated how Nicodemus' evident lack of *speech* might be taken as a clue to reinforce the sensory parallelism formed by the presence of other senses, with special attention to *movement* and *smell*.

The fifth and final section illustrates how the sensory development of Nicodemus' characterisation might have happened differently than the readers of the Fourth Gospel (both ancient and modern) would likely expect. He changes as a character through a trajectory of meaning densely shaped by textual sensory perceptions (*sight*, *hearing*, *smell*, *movement* and *speech*), demonstrating how the Fourth Gospel's writer may have employed the human senses to expose a critical purposeful change in this character.

### 5.1. 'In the Twilight Zone': Bennema's Analysis of Nicodemus

The tenth chapter of Bennema's work on character studies in the Fourth Gospel deals with Nicodemus.[1] For Bennema, this character is intriguing and mysterious as there seems to be no scholarly consensus about Nicodemus' features, given the effusion of different—and even contrasting—ideas about his characterisation.[2] Bennema's first task concerns identifying how the Fourth Gospel established Nicodemus' identity throughout his portrayals, with three aspects being considered: Nicodemus' connection with the Pharisees; his presumable participation in the Sanhedrin; and his responsibility as a teacher in Israel.

Regarding the first aspect, Bennema relies on Flavius Josephus to highlight that the Pharisees were an important, influential sect who enjoyed a certain prestige among the population since 'the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side'.[3] Following Anthony Saldarini, Bennema affirms that more recent scholarship has agreed that the Pharisees should be understood as more influential than a control group, which would put them among the religious authorities without necessarily acting as the primary leadership.[4] In this regard, Bennema disagrees with McLaren, who does not highly regard the Pharisees' political interest and strength, and believes only a few individuals within the sect should be considered influential laity, although he includes Nicodemus in this list.[5] Elsewhere, Bennema affirms that such a view is mistaken, particularly considering Johannine's view of the Pharisees as part of the influential laity and religious authorities, some of them even belonging to the Sanhedrin.[6] He further affirms that the Fourth Gospel acknowledges the Pharisees as part of the οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, as some elements in the Gospel appear to issue such a correlation between both groups (1:19-24; 8:13-22; 9:13-41).[7]

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[1] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 147-60.

[2] See *Encountering Jesus*, 147 for a list of surveyed works used by Bennema.

[3] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities 13.298*.

[4] Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*.

[5] McLaren, *Power and Politics in Palestine*, 208-9.

[6] Bennema, 'The Identity and Composition of Οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the Gospel of John', 247.

[7] Older and more recent studies on οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι is found in Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 86-7; Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 128-32 and 'The Identity and Function of the Ἰουδαῖοι in the Fourth Gospel'; Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 45-50; Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John, Volume 1*, 331-8; Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)*, 307-10; Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 65-98 and 'The Gospel of John'; Culpepper, 'Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel as a Theological Problem for Christian Interpreters', 82-7; Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 176-82; Staples, *The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism*, 11-21. Byers, 'Put your sword back into its sheath' and *John and the Others*; Cirafesi, *John within Judaism*, 71-6; Blumhofer, *The Gospel of John and the Future of Israel*, 38-47.

For Bennema, another aspect in the Fourth Gospel that shapes Nicodemus' identity is his presumable participation in the Sanhedrin, as ἄρχων τῶν Ἰουδαίων suggests he was a member of the supreme court in Jerusalem. Although Bennema accepts that συνέδριον could refer simply to a local city council, he asserts that the episodes in 7:45-53 and 11:45-53 should be understood as a meeting of the chief priests and Pharisees with the high priest taking part in 11:49: '(P)rominent (and probably wealthy) Pharisees could belong to the Sanhedrin, and Nicodemus fits the profile'[8].

Finally, Bennema sees that Nicodemus' portrayal is shaped by Jesus' overture on the Pharisee's responsibility as a teacher in Israel. Bennema upholds that the Greek term διδάσκαλος equates to the Hebrew term רַבִּי (ῥαββί). Because Jesus explicitly addresses Nicodemus using σύ ('you', 3:10) this should be interpreted as Jesus' emphatic way of identifying Nicodemus as a 'top theologian' or 'chief rabbi'.[9]

Bennema then analyses Nicodemus' characterisation in his distinct portrayals in the Gospel: his meeting with Jesus (3:1-21), his conversation with his colleagues (7:45-53), and his participation in Jesus' burial (19:38-42). Bennema applies his methodological approach to Nicodemus' characterisation and, from the outset, does not recognise a timid and scared Nicodemus. Contra Painter, Koester, Ridderbos and Moloney,[10] who agree that the Pharisee was an anonymous disciple who came to Jesus at night, secretly and by himself, Bennema prefers to see Nicodemus as a leader of a group of disciples who came 'at night' due to the traditional evening time discussions between rabbis and followers. Bennema acknowledges that 'at night' might refer to Jesus' disclosure of Nicodemus' spiritual darkness, a man who initially came to know more about Jesus but ended up having his own identity revealed by the young Galilean rabbi.[11]

For this reason, Bennema aims to unearth some aspects that mark Nicodemus' depiction. First of all, Bennema sees him as an ambiguous[12] and complex character. While the reader may sympathise with Nicodemus as a believer, his belief is deficient. He might agree with Jesus' teaching but could not understand it. Where the reader may appreciate Nicodemus' questioning against an unfair judgement of Jesus, he seems afraid to be

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[8] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 148-9. Also, 'The Identity and Composition', 248.

[9] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 149. Bennema's analysis of the Pharisees lacks more recent discussion such as the worked edited by Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine, *The Pharisees*, published in 2021.

[10] Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 510; Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah*, 197; Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 45; and Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 123.

[11] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 151.

[12] Bennema acknowledges the relevance of Hylen's work on Nicodemus' ambiguity, but he understands she mistakenly only defends that ambiguity is part of Christian experience, without highlighting the Fourth Gospel's insistence that its readers must clarify their commitment to Jesus' movement. See *Imperfect Believers*, 35-8.

openly associated with Jesus. While the reader may be encouraged to realise Nicodemus' assistance to Joseph with Jesus' burial and the unexpected amount of spices, his silence does not provide clarity about his stance toward Jesus.

Considering these aspects, Bennema understands that the author 'gives a negative evaluation of Nicodemus' ambiguity—to stay in the twilight zone is not acceptable'.[13] The Pharisee does not show enough cognitive progress, remains ambiguous and secretive regarding his faith in Jesus, and does not assume a clear commitment to Jesus' cause, as, for instance, is clearly demonstrated by the man born blind (9:113-14). Therefore, Bennema concludes that because the reader cannot verify whether or not Nicodemus experienced the 'new birth' reality taught by Jesus, the author's unspoken teaching asserts that 'anonymous discipleship or secret Christianity will not suffice'.[14] It seems that Bennema understands Nicodemus had all the resources at his disposal to believe in Jesus, but he preferred to move toward shadows instead of accepting the invitation of the Light.

Therefore, Bennema's consideration of the Gospel's characterisation of Nicodemus leads him to the following reading of this character: Nicodemus is a male Judean, probably coming from the aristocratic Gurion family in Jerusalem[15], trained as a Pharisaic scholar and leading rabbi in Israel. He was presumably advanced in age and married, wealthy, respected and highly educated in socioeconomic status, and affiliated with the Pharisees, Sanhedrin and Joseph of Arimathea. In his interaction with Jesus, Bennema sees Nicodemus showing initiative but lacking understanding, and, although sympathetic with Jesus and his ministry, he remains an ambiguous character for not being open in his commitment.[16]

Finally, Bennema reveals the results of his investigation of Nicodemus' complexity, development, classification and evaluation. For him, Nicodemus is a complex character with multiple traits (ambiguous, indecisive, showing initiative, sympathetic to Jesus, fearful, secretive, courageous, intellectual, risk-taking, having boldness combined with fear). Such complexity makes Bennema see Nicodemus with some development within the Fourth Gospel because he shows initiative, courage, and a willingness to be associated with Jesus. However, Bennema understands that Nicodemus' development is incomplete because his traits seem curbed by fear, secrecy, an inability to sustain an argument, and

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[13] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 157.

[14] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 158.

[15] Bennema follows Bauckham's investigation of the rabbinic traditions about a wealthy Jerusalem aristocrat called Naqdimon b. Gurion, in 'Nicodemus and the Gurion Family', 1–37. He also highlights other three works on the subject: Taylor, *The Immerser*, 187-8; Barrett, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 204; and, Carson, *John*, 186.

[16] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 159-60.

silent disappearance from the scene. All this, coupled with the fact that there is not enough telling about Nicodemus' inner thoughts, leads Bennema to classify Nicodemus as a character with 'personality' instead of complete 'individuality'. Evaluating Nicodemus' response to Jesus, Bennema suggests he offers an inadequate response, being sympathetic but ambiguous, being attracted to Jesus but without an open commitment. Therefore, the reader should understand Nicodemus' role in the plot as a character who is portrayed in the Gospel in order to allow Jesus' portrayal to explain what it means to enter into the kingdom of God and the need for Jesus to die on the cross to give life.[17]

Is Bennema correct in his assessment of Nicodemus' characterisation? Considering his methodological plan and the main aspects of his approach, there could be some room for disagreements, but his work generally fulfils the promises outlined in the construction of his methodological project. This research benefits from Bennema's analysis, but it aims to move forward by investigating how the human senses may have probably influenced the task of characterisation in the Fourth Gospel. For that, it now surveys the presumable development of sensory experiences in Nicodemus' portrayal.

### 5.2. The Generative Trajectory of Meaning in Nicodemus' Characterisation

Following the interpretative method proposed in this research, the first task to be carried out to analyse Nicodemus' sensory development is to find out the generative trajectory of meaning potentially assigned by John in Nicodemus' three appearances in the Gospel. As explained earlier,[18] the basic level of Greimas' semiotic analysis contains two *semes* (semantic terms) in opposition. Obviously, the author of the Fourth Gospel wrote his narratives within his specific historical period, and therefore he was not aware of such terms. Nevertheless, Greimas' theory affirms that every author, independently of their historical and cultural location, would think of fundamental aspects of meaning, basically with one *seme* to represent the *euphoric* (positive) aspect of the text, and one *seme* to represent the *dysphoric* (negative) aspect of the text.[19] Importantly enough, Greimas affirms that it is up to the author to determine which *seme* is *euphoric* and which *seme* is *dysphoric*.

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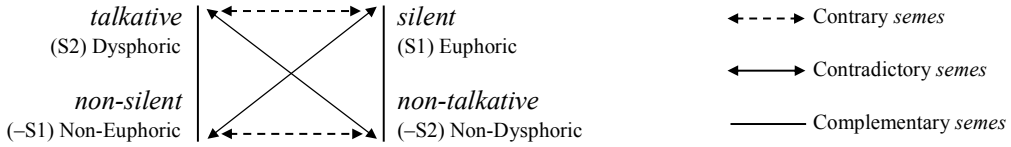
[17] See Bennema's table of character description in the last section of this chapter, pages 128-129.

[18] See pages 93-94.

[19] Greimas, *On Meaning*, 61.

Such a determination is evident in John's portrayal of Nicodemus. Considering the three narratives in which Nicodemus is involved, the *semiotic square* illustrates the *semes* in the logical articulation of a given opposition. In other words, it deconstructs the hidden meaning of the duality inherent in all three narratives. In the specific case of Nicodemus, such hidden meaning surfaces in surprising ways:




First Stage: The Dysphoric seme (S2): *talkative*
Νικόδημος... ἦλθεν... καὶ εἶπεν (3:1-2)
Λέγει πρὸς αὐτὸν [ὁ] Νικόδημος... (3:4)
Ἀπεκρίθη Νικόδημος... (3:9)

Second Stage: The Non-Dysphoric seme (–S2): *non-talkative*
σὺ εἶ ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ταῦτα οὐ γινώσκεις; (3:10)
μὴ καὶ σὺ ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας εἶ; (7:52)

Third Stage: The Non-Euphoric seme (–S1): *non-silent*
μὴ ὁ νόμος ἡμῶν κρίνει τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐὰν μὴ ἀκούσῃ πρῶτον παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ γνῷ τί ποιεῖ; (7:50)

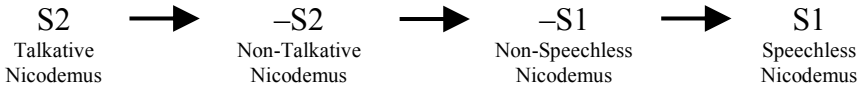
Fourth Stage: The euphoric seme (S1): *silent*
ἦλθεν δὲ καὶ Νικόδημος ... φέρων μίγμα σμύρνης καὶ ἀλόης ὡς λίτρας ἑκατόν. (19:39)

The graphic above shows that Nicodemus is introduced as a talkative character. The Fourth Gospel would probably aim for its readers to perceive *speech* as one of Nicodemus' essential somatic outcomes, if not the most powerful. Furthermore, his *status quo* as a speaker should be recognised even before his encounter and conversation with Jesus. That is made clear when the narrator first identifies Nicodemus as ἄρχων τῶν Ἰουδαίων, and then by Jesus himself as ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ. Such leadership and teaching positions would require an acute ability to communicate and a public endorsement for such an enterprise.

Interestingly, the evident initial portrayal of Nicodemus as possessing *speech* before religious authorities is gradually worked out by the writer in a not-so-normal fashion. First, Nicodemus comes to Jesus as a *talkative* character who initially feels comfortable searching for answers to the countless questions he carries with him about Jesus' teaching (S2). However, contrary to what the reader might initially conclude, Nicodemus' sensory experience with *speech* is not represented as the *euphoric* (positive) aspect of the textual meaning but rather as the *dysphoric* (negative) aspect.

Nicodemus is the man who initially talks much. Then, he is portrayed as a character who still talks, but not too much anymore. Thirdly, he is someone who almost does not

speak at all. Finally, he is portrayed as totally silent. Employing Greimas' terms, in the course of his conversation with Jesus, and later with his fellow Pharisees, Nicodemus' condition moves from a *talkative* to a *non-talkative* character (S2 to –S2). Intriguingly, his portrayal then moves from *non-talkative* to *non-silent* (–S2 to –S1), as he no longer feels comfortable freely voicing his opinion. He still speaks but addresses the Pharisees with words that seem to be calculatedly measured. The author depicts Nicodemus uttering one last word if not wholly defending Jesus' cause, at least to question the religious authorities' procedure. Nicodemus finally moves from a *non-silent* to *silent* character (–S1 to S1), which amazes the readers since now his sensory experience with *speech* reveals him no longer a man of words.




The generative trajectory of meaning in Nicodemus' narratives is revealing. His portrayals show a literary strategy that, at first glance, we might think was inverted: Nicodemus' gradual sensory development (loss of speech) is portrayed as a positive outcome (*euphoric*). Such sensory development of *speech* should be delineated precisely as an affirmative condition in his characterisation. It seems that for the Fourth Gospel's author, portraying Nicodemus speaking *less* throughout his depictions—to the point that not a single word is attributed to him in his last appearance—is not a problem for this character's development. Nicodemus is not here persecuted and bullied by the author who violently silences him at his pleasure. This is a literary strategy to tell the readers the relevance of silence even when a prominent somatic outcome like *speech* would be paramount for any character. Here, the author might be letting his readers know that Nicodemus' experience with the lack of *speech* precisely prompts him to perform one other aspect of action which up to that point is not yet attributed to him: involvement. As the fourth section of this chapter demonstrates, his action at the burial is completely embedded with synaesthesia (merging of senses). That is the way in which Nicodemus reveals a conflicted, almost wavering development of his association with Jesus.

### 5.2.1. The Somatic Outcome of Speech in John 3:1-21

In her thorough historical investigation of the relevance of the human senses across different cultures, Constance Classen suggests that the thought of *speech* as a sense seems

odd to modern Western civilisation. For her, the main reason for such an oddity relates to the fact that we understand our senses as 'passive recipients of data, whereas speech is an active externalization of data' and, in addition, 'we think of the senses as natural faculties and speech as a learned acquirement'. She then reveals that ancient cultures had different ideas about the sense of speech since they were apt to think of the senses as media of communication and not so much as passive recipients of data.[20] Howes follows Classen to remind us that because the sense of *speech* is a means of communication, other senses such as *sight* and *hearing* benefit from *speech* due to its strong association with the intellect: 'For many centuries the ability to hear and to speak was taken to be the prime indicator of an ability to reason'.[21]

Brittany Wilson affirms that we should not too quickly state that Greek culture (and, for her, subsequent Christianity) should be understood as 'visual' while Jewish culture as 'verbal', but also reminds us of David Chidester's interesting affirmation that discourse in the West often claims that the Greeks revered 'the eye' whereas the Jews revered 'the word' or specifically God's word.[22] In this aspect, Michael Squire has found in his study about sensory perception in ancient cultures that the act of speaking in Greek culture is almost always synaesthetic, related to *sight* and *hearing*. As an example of this sensory cross-over, he reveals that the Greek schoolboy handbooks of rhetoric (*Progymnasmata*, between the first and fifth centuries CE) contained this sensory merging process duly explained and associated with the phenomenon of ἔκφρασίς (literally, a 'speaking out'): ἔκφρασίς ἐστι λόγος περιηγηματικὸς ἐναργῶς ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον ('speaking out a descriptive speech which vividly brings about seeing through hearing').[23]

When it comes to biblical texts, the proclamation of words in both the OT and NT as a means of expressing thoughts and feelings, either as a formal or informal address, and to an audience or oneself, is so crucial to the teaching of God's precepts that, in the Scriptures, the distinction between *thought* and *speech* is not even obvious, or at least, it is not necessarily made to appear as such. According to Michael Carasik, *speech* is a crucial aspect of the 'biblical view of the mind,' that is, the mode of perception by which people acquire knowledge, warnings, orientation and counselling from God.

God's verbal information happens by *speech* to the ear, providing the realisation of the commandment. In Deuteronomy, both auditory and rhetorical experiences compare

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[20] Classen, *Worlds of Sense*, 2.

[21] Howes, *Ways of Sensing*, 2.

[22] Wilson, 'Hearing the Word and Seeing the Light', 456. Cf Chidester, *Word and Light*, 52-5.

[23] Squire, *Sight and the Ancient Senses*, 18. His translation. Cf Theon, *Progymnasmata* 118.7.

to the visual experience, as when the people at Mount Horeb 'saw' God's voice 'there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness' (Deuteronomy 5:22) or when they heard the voice 'out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire' (Deuteronomy 5:23). God's commandments were first uttered by God's voice and later became Moses' *speech*, thus connecting God's manifestation (theophany) with the visual experience of God's actions for the people heading to the promised land.[24]

One interesting aspect is brought up by Mark Stibbe in his analysis of the Fourth Gospel. Following Shimon Bar-Efrat and Sternberg, he asserts that modern readers face one particular struggle when going through biblical narratives: their characters rarely indulge in inward speech, since their narrators usually introduce few direct statements about their characters' personalities.[25] In other words, narrators in biblical stories seem to trust the readers' imagination by requiring them to infer mental processes by themselves, making these stories a system of gaps that must be filled in. Stibbe, therefore, affirms that because the Fourth Gospel is 'a story told in the Hebrew style of storytelling'[26] its readers must infer Jesus' and other characters' portrayal from their actions and direct speech because this Gospel bases its work on the characterisation of the Hebrew narrative art.

Perhaps an alternative way to benefit from the analysis of *speech* as somatic outcome in Johannine narratives comes from Avrahami's work on the biblical sensorium. She says that although *speech* should be taken as a thought process developed inside the characters' minds and then revealed to the outside, *speech* is also the actual process of thought itself.[27] Words and actions are complementary elements as they undergird each other. For her, the biblical writers use such movement between them to bring up the characters' roles in the plot. According to her investigation, this thought process is evident in some narratives, for example, when Esau speaks with his heart (mind) while planning to kill his brother: 'Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and *Esau said in his heart* (וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו בְּלִבּוֹ), "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (Genesis 27:41).

Another clear instance refers to David's through processes: '*And David said in his heart* (וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד֙ אֶל־לִבּ֔וֹ), 'I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than to escape to the land of the Philistines; then Saul will despair of seeking

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[24] Carasik, *Theologies of the Mind in Biblical Israel*, 225-7.

[25] Stibbe, *John's Gospel*, 10-11. Cf. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 89; Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 186-91.

[26] Stibbe, *John's Gospel*, 11.

[27] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 84.

me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand'" (1 Samuel 27:1).

More interestingly still is Avrahami's finding that although the two aforementioned describe the action of 'thought' and 'planning' through the phrase 'to speak to/in mind' the biblical authors usually employ the senses of speech as a metaphor for thought to correlate speech with knowledge, identifying this sense with the content of the information expressed in the narrative. She offers two examples: '*The tongue* (לְשׁוֹן) of the wise produces much *knowledge* (דֵּעַת), *but the mouth* (וּפִי) of dullards pours out *folly* (אִוֶּלֶת)' (Proverbs 15:2, JPS). And also, 'You are plotting (תַּחְשֹׁב) destruction. Your tongue (לְשׁוֹנֶךָ) is like a sharp razor, you worker of treachery' (Psalms 52:4).

Following the brief discussion thus far, this research assumes that Nicodemus' *speeches* derived from his sensory perceptions contribute to his three portrayals by serving as an available means of persuasion to invite readers to accept or reject determined points of view. But also, very importantly, the presence or absence of *speech* in the story implicitly reveals Nicodemus' role in response to Jesus. In other words, this survey considers that Nicodemus' *speeches* enable readers to infer and make assumptions about these very characters. As Meeks properly suggests, although the reader recognises the characters' fictionality, he is asked by the writer to intuitively relate to the characters as real people, since he has

> an experience rather like that of the dialogue partners of Jesus: either he will find the whole business so convoluted, obscure, and maddeningly arrogant that he will reject it in anger, or he will find it so fascinating that he will stick with it until the progressive reiteration of themes brings, on some level of consciousness at least, a degree of clarity.[28]

Hayes' classic observation is valid today when he says that throughout the Fourth Gospel, there is an 'alternation of word and deed. There is a constantly (*sic*) changing from action to speech and from the brighter to the darker aspects of the history. There is a continuous variety which never allows the interest to lag'.[29] In the Fourth Gospel, the words attributed to Nicodemus should not be considered *speeches* with the same deliberative rhetorical level as the words attributed, for instance, to Peter (Acts 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 10:34-43) and Paul (Acts 13:16-41; 17:22-31; 20:18-35; 22:1-21; 24:10-21; 26:2-23; 28:25-28). In Nicodemus' portrayals, we do not expect to find the type of *speech* that aims to invite a whole group of spectators and hearers to consider his oratory, agree

[28] Meeks, 'The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism', 68-9.

[29] Hayes, *John and His Writings*, 94.

with his convictions and set of beliefs and get involved in his proposal. That is greatly beyond what this research expects to find.

This survey refers to *speech* in the Fourth Gospel as a somatic outcome that corresponds to the characters' thought process while also revealing their planning and thinking about the knowledge and understanding they have acquired—or missed—through interaction with Jesus and other characters, by hearing and speaking. Therefore, we will analyse the words attributed to Nicodemus by considering them not only spontaneous expressions of personal feelings let alone statements handcrafted by the Gospel's author only to support Jesus' message, but also recognising them as important for the Gospel's plot. Instead, Nicodemus' *speeches* must be understood also as depictions of thought processes brought to the surface because of the impact of Jesus' teaching. His *speech* gradually resonates throughout the sensory development of his characterisation through his unfolding portrayal after encountering with Jesus. Bennema's approach to the analysis of the character on *a continuum of degree of characterisation* is thereupon a helpful tool to dialogue with Avrahami's *biblical sensorium*.

In this case, every facet of Nicodemus' *speeches* must here be considered. Not only the evident words attributed to him, but also the possibility of indirect *speech* as well, when readers are informed about a particular utterance by the characters but no words are attributed to them. Or, even more importantly, when Nicodemus is revealed to be speechless due to his reaction to Jesus' teaching but also because of his very sensory development proposed by the author.

We will now survey the sensory development of Nicodemus' portrayals. He starts as a man searching for the Way, during which *speech* is an evident somatic outcome (3:1-15). Then, he transitions to a man who questions a way (7:50-53) where he is shown to have much less *speech*. Finally, he is portrayed as a man finding his place (19:39-42), a short narrative that suffices to show that Nicodemus' development achieves its climax not with sensory words but with sensory action.

### 5.3. The Sensory Development of Nicodemus' Characterisation

The previous section introduced the benefits of Greimas' semiotic square to find out the generative trajectory of meaning in Nicodemus' characterisation. The results from such an analysis will now be employed in this third section in conjunction with Avrahami's biblical sensorium to analyse Nicodemus' somatic outcomes with *speech*. Such an

investigation will be carried out through three different subsections that aim to demonstrate that Nicodemus' *speech* decreases as a positive aspect of his portrayal. He is first depicted as a talkative man who goes through several stages. ultimately being categorically depicted as a 'no words person'.

### 5.3.1. Some Speech: A Man in Search of the Way (3:1-21)

Nicodemus' initial portrayal is crucial to the Fourth Gospel's story[30]. It belongs to a larger textual unit between the second and fourth chapters, the beginning of Jesus' ministry (2:1–4:45).[31] These narratives contribute to a better understanding of his characterisation development. In the second chapter of the Gospel, Jesus begins his ministry in Cana by performing his first sign at a wedding celebration, turning water into wine (2:1-12), leading the readers to reflect on the relationship between good wine and God's revelation in human history (2:1-12). The admiration of the master of the feast (2:10) highlights such an analogy. Jesus, the Logos and the Light of the world, would have finally arrived after a long preparatory process, during which God's people were enjoying only the old covenant wine. The sign symbolically pointed to the passage from the old to the new order brought by the Son of God.[32]

After the wedding narrative, Jesus is depicted in Jerusalem attending the Passover festivals. He executes the Temple cleansing (2:13-25)—which the Synoptics portray only at the end of his ministry.[33] In his altercation with the Jews, Jesus alludes to his upcoming death and resurrection, which was not understood promptly even by his disciples.

After the narrative of Nicodemus' first appearance, the end of the third chapter brings back John the Baptist to testify again about Jesus. Although there is an evident separation between both characters' story, together they form an interesting textual unit by revealing equivalent terms, particularly ἄνωθεν (from above), πνεῦμα (Spirit) and πιστεύων (believing). However, the most obvious evidence shared by these two narratives

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[30] Older and more recent studies on this regard are, for example, de Jonge, 'Nicodemus and Jesus'; Pazdan, 'Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman', 145–48; Bassler, 'Mixed Signals: Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel', 635–46; Sevrin, 'The Nicodemus Enigma', 357–69; Clark-Soles, 'Characters Who Count: The Case of Nicodemus', 126–45; Shin, 'Reading the Story of Nicodemus Ethically', 54–79; Ford, 'Meeting Nicodemus, 1-17; Marshall, 'Becoming "Another"', 33-40.

[31] Vrede, 'A Contrast between Nicodemus and John the Baptist in the Gospel of John', 715-26; Koester, 'Theological Complexity and the Characterization of Nicodemus in John's Gospel', 172-5.

[32] Collins, *These Things Have Been Written*, 180-2; Collins, 'The Question of Doxa', 106-8; Clendenen, 'Jesus's Blood at the Wedding in Cana?', 495-501; Bulembat, 'Head-Waiter and Bridegroom of the Wedding at Cana', 55-73.

[33] Evans, 'Jesus' Action in the Temple', 237–70; Dvorak, 'The Relationship between John and the Synoptic Gospels', 201-13; Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel*, 2, 10-1.

culminates in their fundamental exposition of the Gospel's goal, the message that whoever believes in the Son of God has eternal life while whoever does not believe in him remains under God's wrath (3:21, 36).

Following the encounter with John the Baptist, the fourth chapter depicts Jesus heading to Jacob's Well in Sychar, Samaria. There, Jesus meets a woman and initiates a conversation with her. The narrator then makes a point of describing the woman's surprise at being interpolated by Jesus, οὐ γὰρ συγχρῶνται Ἰουδαῖοι Σαμαρίταις ('for the Jews have no association with the Samaritans'). Interestingly, as in the dialogue with Nicodemus, the woman struggles to grasp Jesus' arguments. Still, the story reveals that the woman has managed to move beyond Nicodemus' stance to bear witness about Jesus (4:28-29).

Once we acquire a broader view of the context in which Nicodemus' narrative is inserted, we realise that the scene built by the Fourth Gospel to describe Nicodemus' characterisation begins before the third chapter. The author reveals that Jesus, while in Jerusalem, performed signs and many believed in his name (2:23), but despite this positive outcome, Jesus does not trust people, knowing how fickle human beings are. Nicodemus' narrative then appears within this scenario. A member of the Pharisees, he is further described as ἄρχων τῶν Ἰουδαίων who comes to Jesus at night to talk about his teachings. Such an encounter with Nicodemus is specific to the Fourth Gospel.

During their conversation, Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born from above,[34] by water and the Spirit, as a *sine qua non* condition for him to see and enter God's Kingdom. Nicodemus has difficulty understanding Jesus' teaching but seems to recognise him as a teacher sent from God. Although Jesus' explanation does not seem to answer the Pharisee's questions directly, it seems like the narrative's main target is to portray a perplexed Nicodemus, asking Jesus how it would be possible for him to be born again. In a touch of irony,[35] the author renders Jesus as 'provoking' the Pharisee by stating that even though being a teacher in Israel, he cannot understand his teaching. Yet Jesus provides him with a robust explanation of the nature and purpose of the Gospel message (3:16). After that, Jesus is ready to describe the critical nature of the advent of the Son of God. Any judgment, condemnation or salvation depends on the person's response to the Son of God's revelation and saving work (3:17-21).

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[34] Beasley-Murray, 'John 3:3, 5: Baptism, Spirit and the Kingdom', 167-70; 'Seung-In Song, 'A Study on the Meaning of "Unless One Is Born of Water and the Spirit" in John 3:5', 79-114; Oliver, 'The Water in John 3:5', 1-10; Weissenrieder, 'Spirit and Rebirth in the Gospel of John', 58-85; Grese, 'Unless One Is Born Again', 677-93.

[35] Thatcher, 'The Sabbath Trick', 53-77; Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, 45-6; Filtvedt, 'Revisiting Nicodemus's Question in John 3:9', 110-40; Johnson, 'Nicodemus-An Encounter', 11-12.

The encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus marks a point of return to the beginning of the scene in 2:13, when Jesus entered Jerusalem and vigorously expelled the Temple merchants. Jesus convivially received a representative of the Jewish elite, a group that Jesus had previously rudely rejected, generating a contrast and preparing the way for numerous features that initiate Nicodemus' characterisation development.

Although Jesus is portrayed as showing a certain contempt for the fact that many Jews had been excited by his signs, he rebukes Nicodemus but does not seem to have rejected him. His visit at night makes the scene an anticipatory illustration of the Gospel message itself: Jesus is the light that dispels darkness (3:19-21). And despite his eminence as a religious leader and teacher, Nicodemus fails to get the message. The author portrays him as revealing a superficial human condition before God that is of pivotal relevance to the Gospel, in which believing in Jesus is a requirement to understand things from above.

One last characteristic is relevant. Nicodemus seeks out and approaches Jesus with a desire to learn more about his teachings, not as a doubter or critic of his work. Such a sincere attitude does not make Jesus minimise the importance of his statement about the condition of the new birth being necessary to reach an understanding of God's will. But the fact that Nicodemus did not veto Jesus, later argued against an inadequate accusation of Jesus according to Jewish law (7:50-53) and finally assisted in Jesus' anointing and burial (19:38-42) may indicate a possible later enlistment of Nicodemus in Jesus' movement, information that unfortunately is not in the text to confirm its accuracy.[36]

Three times Nicodemus is portrayed as having difficulty understanding Jesus (3:2, 4, 10). In all of them, Jesus solemnly prefaces his answer with ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι. The last answer turns into a monologue (3:11-21), and Nicodemus no longer appears in the narrative. His silence is remarkable as it leaves the reader wondering about potential alternatives that the Gospel will offer to show the development of Nicodemus' characterisation in the other appearances.

After briefly going through some relevant aspects of the first narrative depicting Nicodemus, we should now investigate how a presumable sensory experience throughout his dialogue with Jesus can assist in his characterisation. *Speech* is a pivotal somatic outcome in Nicodemus' portrayal, and this research recognises that it refers to the basic human activity of interpersonal communication, crucial to communal engagement. Here, *speech* is not taken as a technical form of social performance, let alone forms of rhetoric governed by formal and informal rules of engagement common to the rhetorical devices

[36] Bassler, 'Mixed Signals', 637-8, 643; Hakola, 'The Burden of Ambiguity', 442,449); Moloney, 'An Adventure with Nicodemus', 97-110.

of Greek and Roman cultures. This survey understands the Fourth Gospel may have portrayed *speech* in Nicodemus' characterisation as a somatic outcome derived from his sensory synaesthetic perceptions that relates to interpersonal communication considering his motivations, expectations, and interpretations. Investigating Nicodemus' *speech* in light of his synaesthetic experiences help us understand the forms of communication that become important for the development of his characterisation in the Gospel. His *speeches* are inherently rational since no matter what is communicated they are depicted by the author as capable of expressing and communicating thoughts and feelings.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee who was a member of the Jewish ruling council, probably from the upper class in Jerusalem,[37] was presumably aware of the relevance of his speech. He would see himself as one of the leaders and teachers called to exercise authority to serve and protect the Israel flock. He was aware that his influence should proclaim God's desire to maintain a relationship with his people. He came to Jesus to share and learn ways to keep gathering God's people together through his words. He questioned Jesus to understand the ways a performer of such wonderful signs could contribute to ensuring the salvation and protection of Israel.

For this reason, it seems plausible to understand that the author might have wanted to emphasise that Nicodemus had no excuse for avoiding asking Jesus his questions. Such questions were certainly the result of his vocation or life-long training, but they were also a reflection of his world. The Fourth Gospel validates Nicodemus' rabbinic tradition, not necessarily portraying him as a bad or a kind character, nor condemning or justifying his words. No doubt, the writer wants to inform the reader about Nicodemus' representation of the particular group of the Pharisees,[38] one of the leaders of the nation and a teacher in Israel. However, considering the relevance of Nicodemus' words primarily as a conversational expression of his *speech*—a natural faculty that has been exercised virtually every single day of his life since his early age—we might be able to understand why he is portrayed taking the initiative in leading the conversation by mentioning his concept of a rabbi, his attestation of Jesus as a teacher from God (ἀπὸ θεοῦ), and the relevance of Jesus' signs (τὰ σημεῖα).[39]

Nicodemus wants to engage in conversation with Jesus. He is sincerely curious about Jesus' teachings and how the relationship with the Father is to be completed, but

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[37] Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judea in the First Century after Christ*, 17.

[38] Collins, *These Things Have Been Written*, 57.

[39] Cotterell, 'The Nicodemus Conversation: A Fresh Appraisal', 239.

he also sees Jesus as a man who has the same mindset. Nicodemus knows the reality of Jesus as a teacher who comes from God. He knows Jesus is a wonderful performer of signs that could only be done in an intimate relationship with God. He comes to Jesus thinking they both are able to *speech* the same conversation. However, each answer given by Jesus makes Nicodemus sensibly realise that Jesus' *speech* seems different. In just the first episode, Nicodemus is portrayed speaking less and less, because both Jesus' teaching and Nicodemus' apparent lack of ability to understand such teaching show they did not possess the same worldview.[40]

As Avrahami demonstrates, *speech* in ancient societies functioned as an evident physical connection between the information that should be passed on and the person responsible for transmitting it. That is, not only communication between the informant and recipient but also the interaction between the message and the messenger.[41] Nicodemus seemingly felt his communication with Jesus was not having the effect he had envisioned. That is why his *speech* decreases as Jesus' *speech* increases. As Resseguie timely observes, Nicodemus' first speech has twenty-four words (3:2). Then, eighteen words (3:4). Finally, only four words (3:9).[42] Nicodemus' gradual sensory development begins as early as the third chapter. Such a decrease in *speech* becomes evident as his character develops along the Fourth Gospel, both in his brief interpellation with his fellow Pharisees and, evidently, in his last appearance at Jesus' burial, when no word is uttered.

Therefore, Nicodemus' inaugural portrayal reveals him as a character with some *speech* in search of the Way. Contra Whitenton, this survey does not see the Gospel portraying Nicodemus as a dissembling character belonging to the larger Jewish religious establishment, sent by the Pharisees to disavow Jesus' teaching and deeds. Whitenton's argumentation is scathingly done, but considering Nicodemus as an example of a character who refuses to believe and receive Jesus' message—who embodies the Pharisaic resistance against Jesus—seems to fail by leaving essential elements out of the conversation.[43] Here, Nicodemus should be seen through his consequent gradual *speech*

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[40] For Schnelle, 'there are clear points of contact between the Nicodemus conversation and the hearing before Pilate: the first dialogue with a Jew has its counterpart in the last dialogue with a Gentile, with Jesus's dialogue partner in each case failing to recognize Jesus's essential identity and remaining stuck at the superficial earthly level', in *Theology of the New Testament*, 697-8.

[41] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 83.

[42] Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 12-3.

[43] Whitenton, 'The Dissembler of John 3, 141-58. Culpepper goes in the same direction to affirm that it is difficult to decide whether Nicodemus 'sought Jesus out of his own accord or was sent by the Pharisees to question him further about what he was doing, and his signs', in 'Nicodemus: The Travail of New Birth', 254.

deprivation as a character built with sincere nuances that alternate in exchanging words and places with Jesus.

A cursory reading might show that Nicodemus was curious about Jesus' teachings, perhaps in one way or another considering the young Galilean's theological novelty as fresh air to Israel's rabbinical theology, but not necessarily a doctrinaire threat. After all, Jesus had shown his power in the signs he was performing. However, going deeper into the analysis of Nicodemus' words makes us ask: Was Nicodemus just curious about the next step God would take concerning Israel's future? Maybe. But considering the relevance of *speech* as a somatic outcome and natural faculty, some other possibilities can be suggested. Or, paraphrasing Cantwell, had Nicodemus actually just found a revealer while he was sincerely looking for an instructor?[44]

### 5.3.2. Less Speech: A Man Questioning a Way (7:45-53)

Some primary observations must be raised in the second literary unit on Nicodemus. Firstly, the account occurs in a particular context within the story where some Pharisees and priests, presumably endowed with some official authority, sent part of the temple guard to arrest Jesus. The guards return, showing they cannot follow the religious authorities' orders. They are portrayed as profoundly impacted by Jesus' teaching, claiming οὐδέποτε ἐλάλησεν οὕτως ἄνθρωπος ('No one ever spoke the way this man does', 7:46). The Pharisees harshly censure the guards, but Nicodemus, even belonging to the religious rulers' guild, prefers to point out his assumption that Jesus should not be acquitted or condemned until they hear his part of the story. As a quick reaction to his words, the rest of the Council rudely dismisses Nicodemus' suggestion, being depicted by the narrator as having already made up their minds about the fate of Jesus.

In addition, Nicodemus appears in this second account wrapped in an engaging literary structure that increasingly leads the readers to notice his portrayal development. We should not conclude here that the author wants to lead his readers to understand the story as a 'friendly fire' account (internal conflict between the Pharisees), as he seems to point out a clear distinction between three noticeable groups in this small literary unit. The first group claims that Jesus' teaching is sufficient proof of his prophetic (or even Messianic) identity (7:40-41a). The second group still find themselves in doubt about Jesus, mainly because of his origin (7:41b). The third group refers to the religious

[44] Cantwell, 'The Quest for the Historical Nicodemus', 484.

leaders—of which Nicodemus is part—identified as the cluster of people who resist believing in Jesus (7:47-48). In addition, apparent traces of Johannine irony contribute to this complex interweave of perceptions on Jesus' identity, particularly Nicodemus' question to his fellows about how they, the religious leaders, should treat Jesus' stir in the proper fulfilment of the Law.

We should recognize, however, that irony is not the only device employed by the author. The distinct emphasis of the dialogue between Nicodemus and his colleagues belongs not necessarily (or at least not entirely) to the ironic 'positive' reaction of Nicodemus towards Jesus' ministry, but to the severe resistance of the majority of the group. Here is where the narrative's subtlety lies. This research disagrees, for instance, with Ashton's point that the Pharisees' seemingly terse response to one of their members should be regarded as 'the first signs of the rift between the Johannine community and the authorities'.[45] I believe such a view is somewhat outside the author's primary purpose as it fails to address some equally important issues. The narrative is primarily concerned with demonstrating that although someone among the Pharisees would like to grant Jesus a fairer and more equitable treatment according to the very Law they follow, the blindness and deafness of the religious leaders prevent them from seeing and hearing the argument of one of their own inside companions.

We should now investigate Nicodemus' sensory development apparently indicated in his second appearance, when he speaks only the following seventeen words μὴ ὁ νόμος ἡμῶν κρίνει τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐὰν μὴ ἀκούσῃ πρῶτον παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ γνῷ τί ποιεῖ ('Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing', 7:51)? As mentioned earlier, we should consider that the distinct emphasis of the dialogue between Nicodemus and his fellow Pharisees belongs not necessarily (or at least not entirely) to the ironic 'positive' reaction of Nicodemus towards Jesus' ministry. Although this notion is relevant, the emphasis seems to lie subtly in the severe resistance of the majority of the group. More important than suggesting a 'rift between the Johannine community and the authorities',[46] we could read the narrative as primarily concerned with demonstrating that one of the Pharisees would like to grant Jesus a fairer and more equitable treatment according to the very Law they follow. In other words, the Fourth Gospel is likely concerned with letting its readers understand that the 'blindness' and 'deafness' of the religious leaders prevent them from metaphorically *seeing* and *hearing*

[45] Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 203.

[46] Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 203.

the argument of one of their own inside companions, although the verb ἀκούω appears in verse 51 as a physical reference.

Why is the depiction of the Pharisees' sensory experience relevant to Nicodemus' characterisation? The author of the Fourth Gospel possibly employs this blatant anti-Jesus stance of the Pharisees as literary leverage to highlight the next stage of Nicodemus' own sensory development. Metaphorical sensory perceptions are all over the place in this second account. First, the readers should not see Nicodemus as the only character being portrayed as having to deal with the bewildering reality of lacking one or more senses. Although the term 'hearing' is not literally mentioned in this passage, the author seemingly portrays the chief priests and Pharisees as characters who have become metaphorically *deaf* due to the enormous impact that Jesus' teaching has had on the crowd in Jerusalem. The division among the townspeople over Jesus' identity, inducing the possibility that the humble rabbi from Galilee would begin to be hailed as the Messiah, caused the religious leaders to be depicted not only with anger and zeal for having their convictions and religious traditions questioned but also with fear of losing control of the mob who knows nothing about the law because there is a curse on them (7:49).

Here is a skilful characterisation engineered by the author, which, through exquisite distinction, shows that the chief priests and Pharisees are metaphorically deprived of the ability to *see* and *hear* the reality of Jesus' authority which is right before them. Following Whitenton, Nicodemus is portrayed as seemingly changing his stance regarding the Pharisees' understanding of Jesus, although we should perhaps consider it a bit of a stretch to affirm that this second account makes things more apparent to the point of seeing Nicodemus stepping into the light to challenge his colleagues' rejection of the Logos of God.[47] But the author is indeed telling his readers that something deeper is occurring.

As opposed to what happens to the Pharisees, however, the author attributes a unique sensitivity to the ὑπηρέτας concerning the troubled context provoked by Jesus' presence and words (7:45-47). If the religious leaders are portrayed as metaphorically *blind* and *deaf*, the temple guards appear to possess senses adequate enough to directly understand the reality of the unrivalled authority of Jesus' teaching. By being figuratively portrayed as *blind* and *deaf*, the religious leaders are identified as alien to the manifestation of God through Jesus and, consequently, unable to perceive the impact and the probable transformation that Jesus' words and signs are causing in many people. On the other hand, the theological humility of the temple guards indicates that the

[47] Whitenton, 'Towards a Blending-Based Approach to Early Christian Characters', 519.

fundamental senses of *sight* and *hearing* are necessary to perceive God's reality. The temple guards occupy a prominent lower position in the social order than the religious leaders, but they do not lack a sensory experience. Again, figuratively, they *see* Jesus, they *hear* the mob. They understand that something unique has happened. They refuse to comply with the chief priests and Pharisees' order to seize Jesus to the point of accepting their irritation and cursing.

How, then, does Nicodemus' portrayal fit within this sensorial clash? Along with Malina and Rohrbaugh, we should not see a problem understanding Nicodemus' silence as his agreement with his colleagues' counterclaim. Yet, we should also note that the author may have employed Nicodemus' lack of response to the Pharisees' reproach to Jesus in order to indicate that he might already have been beginning to understand the difference between the uncompromising theological stance of the Pharisees and Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God.[48] In the same vein is Doberenz's affirmation that the Pharisees' searing response to Nicodemus' question might prove that the group thought he had already begun demonstrating loyalty to Jesus and his teachings.[49] Still, we should press on since such perceptions, although relevant, are not enough. No doubt the writer of the Fourth Gospel intends to contrast the religious leaders' self-assured strict and excessive conformity with their religious code with the plain respect shown by the temple guards to Jesus' teaching and person. Amidst such a crisis, however, the author seems to highlight Nicodemus' stance right in the middle position, from where he faces his progressive and gradual sensory development with fewer words.

In this second account, Nicodemus is still a man in a position of authority and influence but whose *speech* no longer holds sway when compared to his status in his first appearance. He is still connected to the circle of power. No observation makes us think that Nicodemus had declared himself a staunch opponent to his guild. He exercises his leadership and influence in his official capacity as a member of the Sanhedrin. Precisely for this reason, he is portrayed as feeling authorised to try to find, together with the other members of the Sanhedrin, an adequate solution to the issue of 'Jesus'. However, should we simply follow de Jonge's idea that because Nicodemus takes part only in an internal private discussion with his fellow Pharisees, he is not actually interested in defending Jesus' words and signs but is more concerned with the way his colleagues are carrying

[48] Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary of the Gospel of John*, 154-6.

[49] Doberenz, 'Ambiguity Among the Pharisees in John, 75.

out the fulfilments of the Law before the entire people and other religious authorities?[50] Again, there seems to be more in this fascinating account, particularly the author's appeal to his readers' sensory perception of the story. Nicodemus cannot be portrayed as blind or deaf. He *sees* the context and reality of the scene. He *hears* Jesus' words and the crowd's reasonings. So, what is going on with him?

Nicodemus' ambiguous portrayal straightforwardly asserts his ongoing unique sensory development: he is a religious leader who is losing his *speech*. His crucial somatic outcome depicted in his first appearance now boils down to just a few words. Nicodemus' interjection does not even attempt to question the metaphorical blindness and deafness of his colleagues. It only raises a topic in the agenda so that further discussion can be carried forward. That is why the narrative does not portray Nicodemus as blind or deaf. He is moving out of *speech*, which is, in his specific case, infinitely more compromising. He begins to *see* what is wrong. He approaches the truth by *hearing* Jesus' teaching. But he is less and less able to voice his opinions openly. He fears what he might be about to discover regarding Jesus' teaching on God's Kingdom. His sensory development (in this case, his decrease in *speech*) is caused much more by external facts than by any physical or emotional breakdown, although such things may also contribute to the loss of his *speech*. Nicodemus' *speech* is increasingly impeded by the nagging question that torments his mind: How can I openly affirm that the teachings and deeds of a strange man from Galilee might hold wonderful truths for Israel's religious elite?

Nicodemus' portrayal is indeed purposefully ambiguous. But the second account shows that he has now become a man questioning a way. Is he just cautious that he and his group are going in the wrong direction regarding applying God's Law? Is he sceptical that the Pharisees, including himself, are unable to solve the problem caused by Jesus and the likely riot that might come from his followers? Or is he starting to get suspicious that Jesus' auto-identification with the Father might emerge as the truth after all? One thing is sure: Nicodemus is starting to lose his *speech*, the basic human activity of interpersonal communication crucial to communal engagement. Why does the author of the Fourth Gospel seem to be so flagrant about it?

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[50] Jonge, *Jesus, Stranger from Heaven and Son of God*, 34-7.

### 5.3.3. Speechless: A Man Finding His Way (19:38-42)

There are interesting ways to read Nicodemus' third appearance in the Gospel. For instance, Clark-Soles sees his portrayal indirectly highlighted by Joseph's depiction. The author's savvy literary strategy would demonstrate that, at Jesus' burial, Nicodemus lacks what is abundant in his companion. Readers are introduced to Joseph, they are told he is from Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus, and although being afraid of the Jews, he is the one who boldly asks Pilate for Jesus' body, and Pilate surprisingly consents. Not so with Nicodemus. Although the readers would expect him to act like Joseph did, even because he has already been introduced to them, his two previous appearances would not be enough to convince them about a positive portrayal of the Pharisee. Readers still do not know where Nicodemus is from, whether or not he can be seen as one of Jesus' disciples, what happened to his relationship with his fellow Jews after his second appearance, and are now informed of the apparent negation of his leadership to go to Judea's governor with the belief he might be able to liberate Jesus' body. Nicodemus is definitely not Joseph. He comes by night, and although he keeps coming (emphasis by the repeated use of ἔρχομαι), he has not so far managed to please the Gospel's readers by showing himself openly on Jesus' side.[51]

Adopting a dynamic approach to complex characterisation based on Schneider's cognitive theory of literary characters, Whitenton argues that we should see Nicodemus' last appearance more specifically as the final step in his development 'from dissembler to disciple'. For Whitenton, the first readers/hearers of the Fourth Gospel likely perceived Nicodemus as a dissembler. He is described in connection with darkness. His problem, then, is not only misunderstanding Jesus' words. In his second depiction, Nicodemus' attitude suggests a step forward in his categorisation and personalisation. Although still a dissembler, his clever question to the other Pharisees reveals that he is now beginning to be seen as Jesus' ally, which brings him to his third appearance and characterisation, finally, as a follower of Jesus. His public support for and service to Jesus testifies to such understanding.[52] Elsewhere, Whitenton adds that for many original readers of this Gospel, Nicodemus's behaviour would activate the Johannine Disciple character type given his

[51] Clark-Soles, 'Characters Who Count: The Case of Nicodemus', 139-40.

[52] Whitenton, *Configuring Nicodemus*, 107-18. For more information on Ralf Schneider's cognitive theory of literary characters, see 'Toward a Cognitive Theory of Literary Character', 607–39.

'courage to follow Jesus to his actual cross to retrieve his body and lovingly bury it with such costly and high honour, risking his life and reputation in the process'.[53]

Apart from small divergences, Keener, Carson, and Witherington[54] similarly assume that although the tradition of the Fourth Gospel emphasises Joseph's participation in Jesus' burial, there is no denying that a unique emphasis (directly and indirectly) is attributed to Nicodemus' third characterisation portrayal. Witherington disagrees with Carson on his assumption that the Fourth Gospel's main point in this pericope is to definitively depict Nicodemus 'stepping out of the darkness and emerging into the light'.[55] But they all concur that this account reminds the Gospel's readers about the first chapter's conversation scene primarily to emphasize the curious contrast between Nicodemus' coming at night and his subsequent questioning stance before the Pharisees, in an apparent astute defence of Jesus. For this reason, although this third narrative portrays Nicodemus as a paradigm for the secret believers among the Jews, particularly the religious leaders, his service to Jesus to the point of taking a personal risk could be seen as 'a sign of spiritual progress toward being a full-fledged disciple'.[56]

The brief scholarship discussion above refers to just three examples of recent studies on Nicodemus' characterisation in his third depiction in the Fourth Gospel.[57] One important aspect though relates to the significance of the extraordinary quantity of spices brought by Nicodemus to Jesus' burial. It is relevant to notice that although the discussion in the last few pages brings essential aspects necessary to better understand Nicodemus' participation, what catches the eye is the lack of discussion on Nicodemus' silence. This aspect has not come to light easily among Johannine scholarship. Culpepper, for example, only affirms that because 'Nicodemus does not speak in this scene', any further inferences about him have to be based on associations and actions. Although he is correct, this is not enough.[58] We discuss these important aspects below.

In his third and final appearance in the Gospel, Nicodemus is portrayed as a man without *speech* but who nevertheless reveals a surprising particularity. For this research, his lack of words is crucial, as it can now be understood how the author might have

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[53] Whitenton, 'Towards a Blending-Based Approach to Early Christian Characters', 526.

[54] Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1157-64; Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 629; Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 303-20.

[55] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 629.

[56] Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 312.

[57] Of course, there are many other researches on this topic, but these suffice to demonstrate the lack of discussion on Nicodemus' absence of *speech* in his third appearance.

[58] Culpepper, 'Nicodemus: The Travail of New Birth', 258.

completed the sensory generative trajectory of meaning in Nicodemus' characterisation. The *talkative* (S2) leader of the Pharisees has gone through his *non-talkative* (–S2) and *non-silent* (–S1) stages to eventually arrive at his *silent* (S1) radical point. Importantly, as we have seen before, the Fourth Gospel portrays Nicodemus' continuous sensory development (loss of *speech*) not as a negative outcome (dysphoric) but instead as a positive one (*euphoric*). For the author, portraying Nicodemus as a man who is losing his sense of *speech* is of utmost relevance. If one agrees with Nicodemus' eventual allegiance to Jesus' movement, such a commitment is realised through a unique attitude, not words. He no longer speaks. He now openly brings spices to Jesus' burial. The relevance of his attitude is increased with more nuances of sensory perception. However, this investigation argues that instead of only portraying Nicodemus' ongoing sensory development as losing his *speech*, the author introduces new senses to contribute to his characterisation.

Consequently, Nicodemus' sensory development to the point of lacking *speech* must not be seen as a conundrum or puzzlement but rather as a necessary spiritual path to achieve the main goal of the Gospel: to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing one may have life in his name (20:31). The Fourth Gospel does not employ words to affirm Nicodemus' development from a curious religious leader to a follower of Jesus. Perhaps because, in the case of this character, words are not necessary.

### 5.4. Synaesthesia in Nicodemus' Characterisation

Synaesthesia is the merging of senses that are generally not connected but are related to each other through associative links. Such associative links generate one sensory experience through images from different sensory fields. The biblical metaphors implied in human behaviour specify unique sensory perceptions of characters. Such an understanding is crucial to this research since the Fourth Gospel typically conveys meaningful cultural information through word-pairs. As demonstrated in the previous section, *speech* is an essential somatic outcome attributed to Nicodemus' characterisation. Concerning the senses of *sight* (eye) and *hearing* (ear), *speech* is an outcome categorised as both internal (through heart and mind to generate 'thought') and external (vocal speech).

In the following pages, it will be argued that the author of the Fourth Gospel might have employed a synaesthetic dynamic in Nicodemus' last appearance to develop his characterisation by providing the readers with a rich sensory perception. The evident lack

of his *speech* in the third story actually functions as a sign to reinforce the sensory parallelism formed by the abundance of other senses, particularly the senses of movement and smell.

### 5.4.1. A Sensory Dialogue (3:1-21)

Nicodemus' first appearance is full of sensory perceptions. However, the way in which the author of the Fourth Gospel presents the unfolding of these perceptions in the scene of Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus initially draws the readers' attention to a divergent insight. Instead of leading the narrative straightforwardly to the obvious *eye-tongue-ear* sensory relationship, the author first emphasises the importance of another somatic outcome highly valued in biblical culture, *kinaesthesia*, that is, the actuality of *movement* in the interrelationship between Jesus and the Pharisee. Such manifestation happens in a very evident way: Nicodemus *came* to Him by night (ἦλθεν, v.2); Nicodemus states that Jesus *has come* from God (ἐλήλυθας, v.3); then, he says that a person cannot *enter* a second time into the womb of the mother (εἰσελθεῖν, v. 4). Jesus answers Nicodemus also in terms of *movement*: 'The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going' (ἔρχεται and ὑπάγει, v. 8); 'No one *has ever gone* into heaven except the one *who came* from heaven—the Son of Man' (ἀναβέβηκεν and καταβάς, v. 13); and, 'Just as Moses *lifted up* the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must *be lifted up*' (ὕψωσεν and ὑψωθῆναι, v. 14).

*Movement* is necessary for Nicodemus' characterisation development. Although it should not be understood as the primary sensory experience, it works in this first episode as a catalyst *somatic outcome* with crystal-clear tasks: it first envelops and then propels *sight* and *hearing* out to assume *speech*'s spotlight. John evidently invites light and darkness into the conversation to tell his readers about the relevance of not only knowing but also *seeing* the truth of the Kingdom of God presented by Jesus. The truth brings people to light and, therefore, makes them see God's reality right in front of them. The light makes people *hear* what followers of Jesus can already see and accept their testimony (v.11).

5.4.2. A Sensory Controversy (7:45-53)

Nicodemus' second appearance closely follows his previous one concerning sensory perception in the Johannine narrative. The same sensorial structure that happened in the first account is part of this second episode. But here, his *speech* deprivation becomes stronger.

Jesus leaves his role as Nicodemus' conversation partner to give room to the group of Pharisees. Other than that, the direct and indirect interactions between all the characters (the crowds, the temple guards, the members of the Sanhedrin and Nicodemus) introduce a step forward in this character's unfolding development. At this time, Jesus does not draw the readers' attention to Nicodemus' lack of s*peech*. Jesus does not rebuke Nicodemus in the second story. The Pharisees are responsible for this role. The sensory relationship *eye-tongue-ear* persists and brings to the surface the same sensorial conflict between characters, now Nicodemus versus the Pharisees. But, as an unprecedented element, if the first story valued *movement* in the interrelationship between Jesus and Nicodemus as the undergirding *somatic outcome* between *senses*, the second narrative still employs *movement* but through a different and more interesting perspective, from a local reality to a broader scope.

There are clear indications of *movement* in this second story, too. The temple guards are *sent* to where Jesus teaches (ἀπέστειλαν, v. 32) and surprisingly *return* with empty hands (Ἦλθον, v. 45). Before that, there are brief references to the crowd's exclamation regarding the Messiah's *coming* (ἔρχηται and ἔλθῃ, vv. 27 and 31 respectively) as well as Jesus' teaching about his *departure* to the Father (ἐλθεῖν, v. 34). Such indications reveal the relevance of the kinaesthesia also in this second story. However, the most remarkable reference to *movement* concerns the contradiction between two ideologically strategic places in the Fourth Gospel: Jerusalem and Galilee.

The Pharisees' harsh and ironic response to Nicodemus' suggestion to conduct a fairer assessment of Jesus following the very Law which they should protect most zealously (3:52),[59] reveals a counter-irony by the author of the Gospel, who claims that the teacher of the Law cannot distinguish the erratic *movement* of faith. Nicodemus, at this point, must have remembered that 'the wind blows wherever it pleases' (3:8). The

[59] μὴ καὶ σὺ ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας εἶ; ἐραύνησον καὶ ἴδε ὅτι ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας προφήτης οὐκ ἐγείρεται One of the oldest well-preserved manuscript containing parts of the Fourth Gospel, 𝔓[66] or the *Bodmer Papyri*, brings ὁ before προφήτης, thus suggesting that the Pharisees were actually referring to a specific prophet, probably a mention to the Messiah as the awaited prophet. See further discussion in Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 385-6; and Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 219.

*movement* implied in the conversation changing from Jerusalem to Galilee represents the outcome of sensory sensitivity to faith. By accusing Nicodemus of being a Galilean, even if ironically, the Pharisees are showing him how dangerous it is to be identified with the label of a follower of Jesus.[60] For them, believing in Jesus is a step backwards. The Gospel's irony, in turn, reveals that in challenging the Pharisees for their unjust and hasty condemnation of Jesus, one of them (3:1; 7:50) himself seems to question the misuse and application of their very own Law.[61]

Again, as in the first story, *movement* is still necessary for portraying Nicodemus' characterisation development. However, it keeps its role as the catalytic somatic outcome with the same previous task, i.e., it envelops and propels *sight* and *hearing* to assume the spotlight once belonging to *speech*. Differently now, *sight* comes to place, veiled rather than plainly manifested. 'Light' and 'darkness' are no longer directly mentioned, but one could read the Pharisees' resistance to Jesus as the *movement* of the cluster of knowers of God's Law who are increasingly becoming unaware of the Law's God. But Nicodemus, although slow and shy, seems to begin to perceive a thread of light that allows him to get nearer to the readers' hearts to, at least apparently, consider reaching the light.

On the other hand, the allusion to *hearing* is also veiled but skilfully worked and more evident than *sight*. Subtly and ingeniously, the Gospel's author places the Pharisees in a unique position. They *hear* Jesus' teaching. They *hear* the crowd's reaction to Jesus' teaching. And they *hear* Nicodemus' reaction to their reaction to the crowd's reaction. The manifestation of *hearing* surrounds them. They cannot deny they are openly *hearing* if they plan to offer excuses for not *seeing*. In addition, they are depicted as being in a difficult position because *hearing* (ἀκούω) in the Fourth Gospel commonly appears closely connected with 'to know' or 'to understand'.[62] Therefore, *hearing* Jesus as Nicodemus proposes to them in this specific narrative (μὴ ὁ νόμος ἡμῶν κρίνει τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐὰν μὴ ἀκούσῃ πρῶτον παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ γνῷ τί ποιεῖ;) might be understood as knowing God's very Law in and through Jesus' teachings and signs.[63] By refusing to *hear*

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[60] Carson thinks that the Pharisees are not actually upset with Nicodemus, but with their own frustration due to their inability to stop Jesus' teaching. For him, the evidence lies in their mistake to remember that the prophets Jonah and Nahum sprang from Galilee. *The Gospel According to John*, 333. In addition, Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 255.

[61] Bassler, 'The Galileans', 243–57 and 'Mixed Signals', 640. See, also, Brant, 'A Sure Thing', 64.

[62] Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 258.

[63] For Pancaro, the Fourth Gospels employes ἀκούω to keeping a promise or a commandment, in 'The Metamorphosis of a Legal Principle in the Fourth Gospel', 350. He makes a similar point in *The Law in the Fourth Gospel,* 140. Renz disagrees that the Gospel portrays both positive and negative views of Nicodemus to persuade its readers, as it would be difficult for the readers to assume that Nicodemus would have employed ἀκούω with such a meaning in mind. For her, we can assume such interpretation as a task laid out for the reader of the Gospel, but not for one of his characters. See 'Nicodemus: An Ambiguous Disciple? A Narrative Sensitive Investigation', 268-9.

the truth around them, the Pharisees become sensory-deprived people. Contrary to what happens to Nicodemus throughout his appearances in the Gospel, the more the Pharisees elaborate their sense of *speech*, the less they absorb God's truth through *sight* and *hearing*. Here, the Fourth Gospel applies its sensorium structure to inform the reader that the Pharisees should instead exert their sense of *hearing* to convince themselves that Jesus should not be seen as a lawbreaker but rather as the one who came to fulfil it.

Finally, and interestingly enough, the Fourth Gospel does not provide its readers with any opinion on Nicodemus' expected reaction after his fellows' rebuke. The readers 'hear' nothing from Nicodemus. No clue functions as a source or raw material, so the readers can deduce a straightforward moral lesson from the Pharisees' ironic words to him. There is no evaluation at all issued by the narrator. The author's intention to reveal Nicodemus' hesitant personality might be among the explanations for such a lack of clarification.[64] Others prefer to understand that Nicodemus never intended to defend Jesus directly but wanted to question his colleagues' stance before the Law they observed so carefully, an outcome that could undoubtedly benefit Jesus regardless.[65]

This research prefers to see Nicodemus' silence as a result of his development throughout the Gospel in conjunction with the author's brushstrokes in his painting, picturing an even more complex synaesthetic relationship between the senses. Nicodemus recognises that Jesus comes from God (ἀπὸ θεοῦ), but it is still too early to affirm that he has already decided that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. Nicodemus' silence, however, is not explicitly portrayed. He prefers to quiet down after witnessing his fellows' elitist rebuke. He has *heard* Jesus' teachings. He has probably *seen* (or *heard* of) Jesus' signs but prefers to keep quiet.

Why is that? Our analysis indicates that according to the author's goal, Nicodemus must be characterised as a religious leader who is portrayed as decreasing his *speech* to increase his senses of *sight* and *hearing*. The author might have wanted to indicate that Nicodemus has to silence himself before God in order to have his heart and mind (eyes and ears) open to the manifestation of God's Son. If, initially, Nicodemus issues forty-six words in his dialogue with Jesus (3:2, 4, 9), in this second episode, he speaks only seventeen (7:51). Also, no words are *heard* from his mouth after his friends' criticism. The readers are now more prepared to receive Nicodemus' novel attitudes overloaded with sensory nuances in his third and last depiction.

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[64] See Clark-Scoles discussion on Nicodemus' 'becoming a person', in 'Characters Who Count', 138-40.

[65] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 332.

### 5.4.3. A Sensory Burial (19:38-42)

Admittedly, the sense of *smell* is not explicit in the third narrative, but its inference is strong, as the Fourth Gospel reveals an intriguing note on his assistance in Jesus' funeral. After reminding his readers about the initial steps of Nicodemus's portrayal ('the one who first came to him at night'), the author then highlights that the Pharisee accompanies Joseph of Arimathea 'bearing a mixture of myrrh and aloes[66] *about a hundred litras* (ὡς λίτρας ἑκατόν, 19:39). That is a considerable amount of spices to anoint Jesus' body, both in quantity and monetary value. It would be equivalent today to approximately 75 pounds (34 kilograms) if referred to as a dry measure.[67] Or, if taken as a liquid mixture of myrrh and aloes, it would be equivalent to 20 litres (or four and a half imperial gallons).[68] In his account of Crassus' invasion of Judea and his plundering of the Temple, Josephus provides us with a slightly lower weight for the pound compared to today's value, which would make Nicodemus' gift about 60 pounds (27 kilograms).[69] Even so, it would far exceed the minimum required for someone's burial.

As expected, for many years, Johannine scholarship has discussed this curious note. Many considerations have been offered and different conclusions have been given. A pertinent inquiry that may impact this research on Nicodemus' portrayal is similar to the one posed by Brown: What should we make of Nicodemus' action at Jesus' burial? Is it positive or negative? That is, does the Gospel see Nicodemus' initiative as a pure lack of understanding of Jesus' teachings and failure to believe in him as the Messiah? Or does it candidly depict him finally achieving his ultimate development stage and being now able to reveal himself as a committed disciple of Jesus?[70]

It is necessary to understand how such a note on Nicodemus' gift of spices should be developed through sensory analysis, thereby contributing to recognising his characterisation according to the biblical sensorium. To begin with, a summary of the scholarly debate is needed. Basically, two diverging groups refer to Nicodemus' actions in his third appearance in the Fourth Gospel. The first group comprehends his massive offering as an indication that he had explicitly become one of Jesus' committed disciples,

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[66] Interestingly, 'aloes' is found in three different instances in the OT (Psalm 45:8; Proverbs 7:17 and Song of songs 4:14), but only in John 19:39 in the NT.

[67] Sylva, 'Nicodemus and His Spices (John 19.39)', 149.

[68] De Kruijf, '"More Than Half a Hundredweight" of Spices', 238.

[69] Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.7.1; #106.

[70] Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1266.

or, at least, demonstrated his belief in and agreement with Jesus' deeds and teachings, particularly regarding the coming Kingdom of God.

One of the central claims of this group indicates that Nicodemus would have planned to honour Jesus by providing a royal burial. But he had to undergo considerable transformation to achieve such an endeavour, proving he was irrevocably willing to step forth when all the other disciples had deserted Jesus in fear. Nicodemus, then, would have turned into a brave devotee at the foot of the cross, standing as a courageous convert who had overcome the stifling traditions of Judaism.[71] Jesus's willingness and courage to die would have convinced the Pharisee of his coming Kingdom, or as Moloney affirms, the author presents a clear progression of Jesus' kingship stamped in the characters involved in his condemnation and death, leading Nicodemus to acknowledge his divine essence:

> Jesus, proclaimed and crowned as a king before Pilate (18:28–19:16a), further proclaimed as a king by the sign on the cross (19:19–22), and who acted as a king in founding a new people of God from the cross (vv. 25–27), is anointed with an exaggeratedly large quantity of spices, bound in burial cloths, and placed in a new tomb. He is buried as a king (vv. 40–42).[72]

Following the same thought, Brown, Schnackenburg, Senior, Morris, Munro, and Chan[73] understand that the author's clarification in 'as it is the custom among the Jews to prepare for burial' (19:40), in no way says that Joseph and Nicodemus' attention to Jesus' body should be seen as only a provisory first burial up until the definitive one to be provided by the women on Sunday (20:1; also Mark 16:1-3; Matthew 28:1, and Luke 24:1). Although it was regular practice to put spices in with the dead person's clothes in almost any funeral procedure—and therefore Nicodemus would only be performing an expected and common reverence or kindness—the noteworthy portion of spices was sufficient to indicate that given the attitude of the two 'secret' disciples something else was going on. Even if the hefty load of myrrh and aloes suggests only their intention to cover the whole body of Jesus, some testimonies could see an open allegiance to Jesus and his Kingdom-proclamation message, given the resemblance to the amount of spices identified in King Asa's burials (2 Chronicles 16:11-14), Jeremiah's prophecy about king

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[71] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 729-30. Also, Wilson, 'The Message of Nicodemus', 57-70.

[72] Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 149.

[73] Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1265-8; *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI)*, 940-1; 956-60; Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to Saint John,* vol. 3, 295-8; Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, 129-34; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 825-6; Munro, 'The Pharisee and the Samaritan in John', 716-7; Chan, 'John 19:38-20:31, 72-6.

Zedekiah's death (Jeremiah 34:1-5)[74], and also Josephus' account of the burial of Herod the Great.[75]

Alternatively, the second group encompasses those who resist seeing Nicodemus' massive offering as a token of allegiance to Jesus, at least considering him an openly committed follower of the young Galilean's movement. Perhaps one of the strongest opposing opinions comes from Meeks, affirming that his 'ludicrous "one hundred pounds" of embalming spices indicate clearly enough that he has not understood the "lifting up" of the Son of Man'.[76] Dennis Sylva follows Meeks, pointing to two features in Jesus' burial story to support the same view. First, the Gospel's author's choice of the verb δέω (to bind) in ἔλαβον οὖν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ ἔδησαν αὐτὸ ὀθονίοις should indicate their intention to constrain (almost shackling) Jesus' body. The writer could have chosen ἐνειλέω (as in Mark 15:46) or ἐντυλίσσω (as in Matthew 27:59 and Luke 23:53), both verbs meaning 'to wrap in', definitely keeping Jesus' body in a more loosened state. For Sylva, that proves that Nicodemus and Joseph would have brought the spices thinking that Jesus was already 'held by the power of death; they have not understood Jesus' life beyond death'.[77]

Second, Sylva follows a similar approach to affirm that the use of ὀθόνιον ('clothes' or 'bandage') in John 20:5-7 exposes that Joseph and Nicodemus have, first, placed the spices inside the ὀθόνια and, next, bound Jesus in them. When Jesus discards such garments after rising from the dead, he actually disassociates himself from Nicodemus and Joseph's intent, thus showing their perspective as futile. In other words, for Sylva, if in 19:40 the Gospel's author has Nicodemus bringing spices to hand Jesus over to the power of death, the next chapter undoes such an attitude by revealing Jesus discarding the ὀθόνια in which he was wrapped: 'These features support the interpretation of the abundant spices as manifesting a lack of understanding of Jesus' life beyond death'.[78]

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[74] In the Evel Rabbati (אבל רבתי), a minor tractate of the Babylonian Talmud, chapter 8, verse 6 reads: "We may burn articles at the funeral of kings but not at the funeral of princes. When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the proselyte Onḳelos burnt after him more than eighty Tyrian *minas*. They asked him, 'What was your purpose in doing this?' He replied, 'It is written, *Thou shalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were before thee, so shall they make a burning for thee*. And is not Rabban Gamaliel worth more than a hundred useless kings?'" In Cohen, *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud*.

[75] Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.8.3; #196. Matthew Y. Emerson interestingly suggests that the intertextual and narrative matrix of John 19:38-42 (burial, king, and temple) would indicate Jesus' burial as a land claim, in 'Land, Burial, and Temple', 180-98.

[76] Meeks, 'The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism', 55. Meeks reveals in a footnote that such an opinion was suggested by one of his teachers, P. Meyer, in private conversation.

[77] Sylva, 'Nicodemus and His Spices', 148.

[78] Sylva, 'Nicodemus and His Spices', 149.

Other scholars share an analogous opinion. For Charles Cosgrove, Nicodemus' belief in Jesus is covert and careless, as the Pharisee's portrayal in the Gospel displays little understanding of Jesus' mission. Nicodemus' massive amount of spices is the writer's ironic comment on his failure to recognise Jesus' divinity; 'an attempt to serve Jesus in his death, but in so doing he succeeds only in revealing his unbelief. Nicodemus is preparing Jesus for a very long tenure in the grave'.[79] Bassler adds that although the Gospel's writer portrays Nicodemus as a character 'in transition', he must be understood as one who has never made a point of identifying himself as an 'insider'. He walks throughout the story with one foot in each world, thus becoming one of the symbols of an ambiguity reasonably rejected by the author of the Gospel: 'The real difference, then, between Nicodemus and the true disciples arises not from their superior confessions or fearless faith but from the fact that there is no ambiguous tension between their point of origin and their present state'.[80]

The brief survey above is just a modest demonstration of the lack of consensus among Johannine scholars regarding Nicodemus' loyalty, or lack thereof, to Jesus' cause. It only shows that one can arrive at opposing considerations depending on the type of analysis applied to Nicodemus' characterisation. Considering the countless arguments presented in the most varied literary approaches, this research sides with those who understand that the Fourth Gospel wants to inform its readers about Nicodemus' evident progression towards loyalty to Jesus and his movement, but as a character who needs more than one story to show such development. Despite the numerous challenges and perils of openly identifying with Jesus, Nicodemus chooses to try to be 'born again' in order to come out of the darkness to live in the Light. However, such an opinion is based not only on the surveys so far developed but also on the study of Nicodemus' third story from the point of view of sensory perception, as attested below.

If Nicodemus' first and second portrayals in the Fourth Gospel closely follow each other through a similar structural pattern regarding sensory perception among their characters, his third and final appearance is strikingly distinctive and magnified. The two previous conversational partners leave the scene and are substituted for new characters interacting with Nicodemus differently. Jesus' corpse is portrayed, but the Pharisees are nowhere mentioned. Although Pilate and Joseph of Arimathea are relevant to the story,

[79] Cosgrove, 'The Place Where Jesus Is', 537-8.

[80] Bassler, 'Mixed Signals' 646.

there is no portrayal of direct dialogue between them, only the indication of it. And Nicodemus has arrived at his prime point of participation without even saying a word.

Why is this third portrayal so important? Coupled with the fact that it is the last and conclusive representation of Nicodemus in the Gospel, and therefore the final and crucial occasion provided by the author for the reader to understand this character's development, there is the particular detail introduced by a unique marked sensorial experience: *smell*.[81]

In the first two stories, the author worked on the same synaesthetic structure of *sight-speech-hearing* to reveal Nicodemus' development as a character who interacts with others in an inordinately particular way as he decreases his *speech*. Nicodemus is depicted speaking fewer words at each appearance. Now he is portrayed in only one verse, with no *speech* at all. However, the heavy weight on the other side of the scale indicates Nicodemus has become inclined to adopt an unanticipated attitude, at least concerning the reader's expectation upon learning that Nicodemus was a member of the Pharisees' group. Nicodemus says nothing, but his presence and attitude at the foot of the cross are portrayed as a pivotal literary manoeuvre to reveal how much he had developed as a character alongside Jesus and the other believers.

A brief perusal of the sense of *smell* in biblical texts is valid. Avrahami found this sense in the Hebrew Scriptures solely in a few verses, including not only the word *smell* per se but also scents and other terms connected to olfaction.[82] Deuteronomy 4:28 and Psalms 115:4-7 employ *smell* in semantic parallelism with other senses (*sight*, *hearing and touch*). Although it would appear to be self-evident, the latter text is the only place in the entire OT where *smell* is straightforwardly correlated with the organ *nose*: 'They have ears, but are not hearing; noses (אַף) but are not smelling (יָרִיחוּן)' (v. 6).[83] Nonetheless, even if just a few, the OT references are helpful as they enlighten our perception on the implication of *smell* in Nicodemus' third appearance in the Fourth Gospel. For example, Avrahami avers that the story of Jacob's stolen blessing in Genesis 27 curiously evidences the centrality of *sight* in the Hebrew Scriptures, even when it is absent. Isaac was old. His now weak eyes did not allow him to see well. There is no manifestation of *sight* in the whole story. Interestingly, though, as soon as Jacob gets

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[81] At least two other narratives in the Fourth Gospel have unequivocal sensory experiences relating to the sense of *smell*: the death and resurrection of Lazarus (11:1-43) and Jesus anointing at Bethany (12:1-11). However, the uniqueness to which I refer concerns to *smell* within the narratives that form Nicodemus' characterisation.

[82] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*. Her survey on the sense of *smell* can be found in two different subsections: 'Olfactory', 103-6; and, 'The Nose', 124-5.

[83] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 103-4. She points out to two other synaesthetic correlations between *smell* and other senses. When Pharaoh increased the workload on the Hebrews (Exodus 5:21), and in the story of Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 16:21). In both cases, *smell* is directly related to 'bad odour' due to incorrect attitudes and behaviours.

closer to his father, tricking him with his brother's clothes, Isaac *smells* the smell of Jacob's clothing, and taking him for Esau, he sighs,

> רְאֵה֙ רֵ֣יחַ בְּנִ֔י כְּרֵ֖יחַ שָׂדֶ֑ה אֲשֶׁ֥ר בֵּרַכ֖וֹ יְהוָֽה׃ [84]
>
> Ἰδοὺ ὀσμὴ τοῦ υἱοῦ μου ὡς ὀσμὴ ἀγροῦ πλήρους ὃν ηὐλόγησεν Κύριος.
>
> *See*! The smell of my son is like the smell of a field which Yahweh has blessed!

It is thought-provoking to realise that, in this verse, *smell* not only appears in semantic parallelism with *sight*. It also complements it due to the evident relevance of the latter over the former. In other words, *smell* brings *sight* back to its prominent 'rightful' place within the cultural mindset of Hebrew biblical literature. Such a perception can raise an essential point in analysing Nicodemus' characterisation.

When we get to the NT references to *smell*, we are immediately presented with a slightly richer stock of references to the olfactory activity and its derivatives compared to the OT references to the same human sense. There is one reference in 1 Corinthians 12:27 to what could be more forthrightly understood as 'smelling' or 'the sense of smell', ὄσφρησις. Two references to 'sweet smelling', ἡδύοσμον.[85] Three instances of 'fragrance', εὐωδία,[86] and six occurrences of the noun 'smell' or 'odour', ὀσμὴ.[87] With regards to this last verb, ὀσμὴ, its presence in John 12:3 as the narrator declares that ἡ δὲ οἰκία ἐπληρώθη ἐκ τῆς ὀσμῆς τοῦ μύρου ('and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume') should not be taken as *prima facie*. Bultmann's classic argument that the author wanted to emphasise the spreading of the perfume's fragrance as a quasi-prophecy that the Gospel would soon fill the entire world is a stretch.[88] Such a reading with an evangelist connotation is more induced by other references to the same story (Mark 14:9 and Matthew 26:13) than by an internal evaluation of the Gospel's intention. It is probably better to follow Dominika Kurek-Chomycz's view that the missiological comment concerning the woman's act is missing in the narrative. For her, ὀσμὴ refers to the Johannine redaction, as 'it may bespeak the author's particular sensitivity and awareness of the symbolic meanings of fragrance, including the association between social order and smell, possibly implying also an intertextual allusion to the Song of Songs'.[89]

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[84] Genesis 27:27, WCL.

[85] Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42.

[86] 2 Corinthians 2:15; Ephesians 5:2; Philippians 4:18.

[87] John 12:3, 2 Corinthians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 2:16 (twice); Ephesians 5:2; Philippians 4:18.

[88] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 415.

[89] Kurek-Chomycz, 'The Fragrance of Her Perfume', 357.

The most significant allusion to the sense of *smell* for this research is ὄζω ('to emit a smell'), which is thoroughly encased in another burial story, that of Lazarus, in John 11:39. The presence of ὄζω in the Fourth Gospel functions as a confirmation to Jesus' followers regarding his power to bring Lazarus from death, and consequently his own resurrection of the flesh after going through his condemnation on the cross. Lazarus' body condition and smell after four days of decomposition were essential to defend his resurrection in order to oppose early claims for mere resuscitation.[90]

Moreover, ὄζω finds its significance also in the development of the Fourth Gospel's plot. In the story of Lazarus' death, Martha approaches Jesus in an attempt to stop him from removing the stone that sealed the tomb where her brother had been lying dead for days (John 11:38-39). Following the testimony given by the Gospel's author, supported by the unintentional prophecy issued by Caiaphas (John 11:50-51), it is commonly accepted among biblical scholars that Lazarus' death—and Jesus' subsequent action in bringing his friend back to life—must be seen as one of the primary triggers that led the Jewish authorities to devise the bluntest plan to condemn and kill Jesus (John 11:52-53).

With that in mind, Jesus' death would be linked to Lazarus' death. Then, Jesus' burial would bring forth resonances from Lazarus' burial. The sensorium in Lazarus' narratives indicates the play of senses in Jesus' funeral preparation story. The writer seems to emphasise that ὄζω, so distinctly uttered from Martha's lips, does not need to be employed in the narrative of Jesus' burial. Interestingly, Jesus' death, although undoubtedly rugged, heartbroken and brutal, is not related to 'smell emission' in the same fashion as the previous narratives. Such symbolism is not directly brought to the readers' minds. But *smell* is there, as the author assigned Nicodemus a particular mission.

In this third and final appearance, there is no mention of the four terms related to olfactory activity presented above (ὄσφρησις, ἡδύοσμον, εὐωδία and ὀσμὴ). But the exuberant amount of spices brought by Nicodemus informed the readers that *smell* keeps his *speech* active in a distinctive manner. He does not utter a single word in this third story because he does not need to. His participation in developing the Gospel's plot is even more substantial and impactful than in the first two stories. Nicodemus 'shouts' through seventy-five pounds of spices. His portrayal develops as a Pharisee, teacher and member of the Jewish ruling council who has exchanged his words for an unsurpassed attitude, becoming one of the influential characters in the Fourth Gospel.

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[90] See Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 430-5; and Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 840-2. More recently, Strawbridge has argued that the narrative of Lazarus' death and resurrection assisted on Paul's development of his theology of resurrection of the flesh, in 1 Cor 15.50, in 'How the Body of Lazarus Helps to Solve a Pauline Problem', 588–603.

### 5.5. Sensing Nicodemus' Characterisation Development

We are now ready to update the *table of character analysis* proposed by Bennema, adapting it to indicate Nicodemus' sensory experiences and somatic outcomes. With the information collected so far, we can verify where Nicodemus' sensory development becomes essential for his characterisation's consequential significance to the role of the Fourth Gospel.

| | NICODEMUS | John 3:1-21; 7:45-53; 19:38-42 |
|---|---|---|
| DESCRIPTORS | AGGREGATE INFORMATION | RESULTS |
| Nicodemus in Text and Context | Birth, Gender, Ethnicity, Nation/City | male, Judean, probably from Jerusalem |
| | Family (Ancestors, Relatives) | possibly part of the aristocratic Gurion family in Jerusalem |
| | Nurture, Education | trained as a Pharisaic scholar |
| | Epithets, Reputation | a leading rabbi in Israel |
| | Age, Marital Status | advanced in age, presumably married |
| | Socio-Economic Status, Wealth | wealthy, respected, highly educated |
| | Place of Residence/Operation | Jerusalem |
| | Occupation, Positions Held | Pharisaic scholar, member of the Sanhedrin |
| | Group Affiliation, Friends | Pharisees, Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea |
| | In Interaction with the Protagonist | initiative but lacks understanding; sympathetic but no open commitment; ambiguous |
| | In Interaction with Other Characters | ambiguous, secretive, boldness combined with fear |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nicodemus' Classification | Complexity | complex; multiple traits: ambiguous, indecisive, showing initiative, sympathetic to Jesus, fearful, secretive, courageous, intellectual, risk-taking |
| | Development | some development: shows initiative, courage, and willingness to be associated with Jesus, but these traits seem curbed by fear, secrecy, an inability to sustain an argument, and silent disappearance from the scene |
| | Inner Life | little |
| | Degree of Characterisation | personality |
| Nicodemus' Evaluation | Response to the Protagonist | inadequate: sympathetic but ambiguous; attracted to Jesus but no open commitment |
| Nicodemus' Significance | Role in the Plot | he allows Jesus' portrayal to explain the entrance into the Kingdom of God and the need for Jesus to die on the cross to give life |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Biblical Sensorium | Sensory Generative Trajectory of Meaning | *talkative* to *non-talkative* to *non-speechless* to *speechless* |
| | Synaesthetic Experience and Somatic Outcome | sight, hearing, smell and speech |
| | Sensory Development | Nicodemus is portrayed as decreasing his *speech* that used to give him access to the primary human activity of interpersonal communication. Still, he moves forward until his role is affirmed through his sensory development. |

We initially considered the findings provided by Bennema's survey. Then, included were the results of the present investigation on Nicodemus' sensory experiences. The updated table shows Nicodemus' portrayal development differently than readers (both ancient and modern) would likely expect. As demonstrated in this chapter, Nicodemus decreases his *speech* without demeaning his significance for the Gospel's purposes. On the contrary, the author seemingly portrays the Pharisee as a man who, in his interaction with Jesus, was able to envisage himself dealing with the challenges faced by any man or woman who decided to get involved with Jesus' movement.

Although it is not possible to conclude that Nicodemus had assumed himself to be one of Jesus' disciples, this analysis goes a step further in understanding his depiction. From the outset and going along the three stories, the readers of the Gospel are told that Nicodemus experiences a decrease in *speech*, the very sense that refers to the primary human activity of interpersonal communication, vital to communal engagement. In other words, the Fourth Gospel emphasises that after meeting Jesus, Nicodemus becomes deprived of much more than just a skill, no matter how important. Intrinsically, Nicodemus' sensory experiences lead to a sensory perception that highlights his lack of speech as the key somatic outcome in the development of his character.

Nicodemus is not depicted as suffering complete sensory deprivation, as though all his senses are lacking. His decrease in *speech*—starting as early as in his talk with Jesus—provides him, on the other hand, with the increase of multiple sensory experiences up to his last portrayal. The somatic outcome of *kinaesthesia* (movement and action), together with the senses of *sight*, *hearing*, and *smell*, are employed by the author to underscore his intention: to convey that Nicodemus' characterisation development unfolds through the conflict between Jesus' growing use of *speech* and Nicodemus' diminishing ability to speak. As Jesus' *speech* intensifies, it prompts Nicodemus to open his eyes to *see* the light and unblocks his ears to *hear* the truth. In parallel, the more Jesus speaks, the more evident becomes the Pharisee' loss of speech. At least directly, there is no indication in this story that the narrator implies that Nicodemus is entirely blind and deaf, although Jesus' harsh rebuke (3:10) may lead us to infer that such senses may be part of Nicodemus' sensory deprivation in this first story.

In addition, one of the most critical aspects of the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus employed to investigate how the author benefits from the human senses to build Nicodemus' characterisation lies in the fact that *movement* first presents, and then propagates, the senses of *seeing* and *hearing* throughout the story. That propitiates Jesus'

*speech* to reassume its proper place in the dialogue, while Nicodemus' *speech* begins to wane.

The sensory development of Nicodemus' characterisation shows that, as a man searching for the Way (3:1-21), he had not yet met Jesus; therefore, his *speech* was still functioning. Then, after meeting Jesus, he becomes the man who questions a way (7:45-53), showing fewer expressions of *speech*, and becoming suspicious that something might not be correct. Finally, he is portrayed as a man finding his way (19:38-42), a short narrative that suffices to demonstrate that Nicodemus' characterisation development achieves its climax not with sensory words but with a unique sensory attitude.

Interestingly, Nicodemus has been depicted through the Fourth Gospel as an active man (he comes to Jesus, engages in conversation, attends the Sanhedrin, stands up for Jesus and questions his colleagues, and comes to the tomb). However, his unique attitude at Jesus' burial happened once he became capable of 'sensing' that something was wrong. Death is wrong. The *darkness*, *muteness* and, especially, the *odour* of death are undesirable. Such realities do not match Jesus' teachings and signs of God's Kingdom.

Is Nicodemus' attitude at Jesus' burial positive or negative? Does the Fourth Gospel see his initiative as a lack of understanding of Jesus' teachings and failure to believe in him as the Messiah? Or does it show that the Pharisee's characterisation had finally achieved its ultimate development stage to reveal himself as a committed disciple? What if we take a middle ground? As a changing character, Nicodemus is an appreciator of Jesus' teachings and deeds while being ignorant of his resurrection promise.

If the sum of his three depictions in the Gospel does not stamp him absolutely as an enthusiastic disciple wholly committed to the cause of Christ, it is also true that the sensory investigation of Nicodemus' characterisation development shows him walking towards involvement with Jesus. Although not yet an unconditional commitment, John tells his readers that even through the life of a man like Nicodemus, a publicly recognised leader of the restricted sect of the Pharisees, the hope of Jesus' message is powerful enough to break into the muteness and sadness of darkness.

These findings lead us to better realise the role played by the study of sensory perceptions to the biblical understanding of the human person. The integration of sensory perceptions within biblical anthropology underscores the indivisible unity of the human person as portrayed in Scripture, challenging dualistic conceptions of soul and body. Investigating the development of Nicodemus' characterisation through the lenses of sensory anthropology helps us perceive a biblical holistic view that affirms that sensory engagement is not merely an aspect of corporeal existence but constitutes its foundational

framework. The transformative encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus exemplifies this principle as it illustrates how an enriched sensory disposition can reorient one's approach to life and faith. Nicodemus' portrayal of his 'lack of speech' as an affirmative condition signifies a profound generative shift, enabling him to communicate through a multidimensional sensory lens aligned with Jesus' proposal and presentation of the Kingdom of God. This paradigm not only reshaped his sensory generative trajectory of meaning but also advanced a broader theological vision in which sensory experience becomes a way for divine encounter and mission.

In doing so, the Fourth Gospel calls readers to embrace a renewed perspective, recognising sensory perceptions as integral to serving God and participating in the redemptive narrative of light and transformation. As articulated in its theological motif in 20:31, the Fourth Gospel asserts that belief in Jesus is not abstract but deeply sensory and experiential, engaging the whole person in the transformative reality of his work. The sensory development of Nicodemus' characterisation thus exemplifies a spiritual journey shaped by faith in Jesus, pointing to the fullness of life and revealing that the Gospel's call to believe transcends intellectual assent as it invites participation in a lived, sensory embodied faith that draws from and contributes to the Kingdom's transformative vision.

## Chapter 6 | **THE SAMARITAN WOMAN OF SYCHAR**

This chapter employs the interpretive method introduced in this research to survey the second selected example of character-building work within the Fourth Gospel: the Samaritan Woman of Sychar (4:1-42). The chapter is comprised of four different sections. The first section introduces Bennema's findings on her characterisation. His extensive work is helpful as it brings forth many essential features in text and context, analysing and classifying her portrayal along the dimensions of complexity, development, and inner life, and also plotting his findings on a continuum of degree of characterization.

The second section encompasses two fundamental tasks. First, it benefits from Greimas' semiotic square to investigate the sensory generative trajectory of meaning in the Samaritan woman's portrayal along the narrative. It is possible to understand the sensory development of this character over four distinct stages, each of them connected to a unique condition of the sense of *taste*: *awkwardness* (tasteless); *inquiry* (non-tasteless); *declaration* (non-tasteful); and *invitation* (tasteful). This second section also offers an alternative interpretation connecting each of the four stages of her trajectory of meaning to distinguish themes presented by the Gospel's author: the first stage of *awkwardness* (tasteless) is connected to the themes of gender and ethnicity, while the second stage of *inquiry* (non-tasteless) is linked to the themes of betrothal type-scene and the living water. The stage of *declaration* (non-tasteful) will be investigated in relation to the themes of marital history and true worship, and the final stage *invitation* (tasteful) will be examined in association with her missional action.[1]

The third section concerns understanding how two seemingly merging senses (*synaesthesia*) in the story contribute to the fourth evangelist's character-building work. The results of the analysis of the sense of *taste* throughout the narrative intend to show how a presumably first merging of *taste* with *hearing*, and a second merging of *taste* with *hearing* leading to the somatic outcome *movement*, may have been employed by the author to provide his readers with the sensorial parallelism *movement-taste-hearing*, with *taste* being the semantic link between *movement* and *hearing*.

The fourth and final section aims to demonstrate how the characterisation of the Samaritan woman developed to a point where readers can perceive that her unexpected encounter with a Jewish man in a perhaps isolated place in fact ended up transcending their cultural and religious mindsets. She came to understand that such mindsets were not

[1] The use of the sense of 'taste,' along with terms related to the woman's sensory generative trajectory of meaning (e.g., tasteless and tasteful), is explored in the following pages.

enough to hinder God's proposal through his Messiah that no one is prohibited from *tasting* the living water because of gender, ethnicity or social status.

### 6.1. 'An Unexpected Bride': Bennema's Analysis of the Samaritan Woman

The eleventh chapter of Bennema's work on character studies in the Fourth Gospel deals with the characterisation of the Samaritan woman.[2] He understands that because the writer presents the same concern about belief-responses and adopts themes common with the Fourth Gospel's previous chapter, her characterisation should be investigated in comparison with Nicodemus'. Both are individual characters but represent larger groups.[3]

Bennema highlights that some aspects of the Samaritan woman's characterisation are, nonetheless, new when compared to the Pharisee's portrayal. The details introduced in 4:5-7 might evoke an OT betrothal type-scene (Genesis 24 and 29; Exodus 2:15-22). Such betrothal imagery certainly shapes the narrative, preparing the woman to provide the reader with two distinct interactions with Jesus followed by a final response. If, in the first interaction, the dialogue starts with a simple request from Jesus that leads to her misunderstanding of his teaching on the living water, the second reveals Jesus changing tactics by focusing on his identity, which then moves her to show some progress almost to the point of confessing his divinity but creating in the reader a suspense due to the arrival of the disciples in the scene. Following Beck, O'Day, Beirne, and Day,[4] Bennema sees that the woman's response comes finally in 4:27-42 through the following indicators: she leaves the water jar behind to express her thirst has been quenched (4:28); she invites her people to meet Jesus while tentatively suggesting that he is the Messiah (4:29-30);[5] and she probably confesses Jesus together with her community as the Saviour of the World (4:42). Importantly, Bennema also points out that the intrusion of the disciples in 4:31-38 should be seen as a positive strategic literary tool in the narrative. It delays the climax of the story by creating a suspenseful environment and heightens the reader's expectation as it 'starts at a material level and moves to a spiritual or symbolic level'.[6]

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[2] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 161-73.

[3] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 161.

[4] Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 74-5; O'Day, *John*, 569; Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel*, 91; Day, *The Woman at the Well*, 173.

[5] Bennema diverges from Colleen Conway for whom the Samaritan woman's question μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός ('Could this be the Messiah?') must be seen as having a negative connotation. For Bennema, because μήτι can be used in both negative and hesitant question, the context of John 4 indicates that the woman's successful mission reveals a positive expectation about Jesus, in *Encountering Jesus*, 167. See Conway, 'Speaking Through Ambiguity', 335.

[6] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 168.

Bennema evaluates her characterisation as a positive portrayal. For him, although she struggles to understand Jesus' revelation, she confesses his divinity, but not without revealing emotional traits expected from any human being, such as hesitation and curiosity. Even her opening misunderstanding and presumably mockery contribute to her forward-looking, positive development as she challenges Jesus to raise her interest in his teaching. Bennema further affirms that her belief and expression of discipleship are 'two integrated aspects of salvation—her discipleship *is* her belief-response'.[7]

Following Neyrey, Schneiders, Stibbe and Day,[8] Bennema believes the Samaritan woman represents an 'outsider' transformed by Jesus into an 'insider', and therefore, she is carefully portrayed as a model disciple for testifying about Jesus and bringing people to his movement. This chapter later points out some minor disagreements in terms of how Bennema understands the Samaritan woman's portrayal, but he summarises her depiction as follows: She is a marginalised female Samaritan, possibly with a tainted reputation, unmarried and living with a man, with the Samaritans as her group affiliation or friends. However, in her interaction with Jesus, her initial resistance and light sarcasm turn into an example of participation that results in understanding and belief. She testifies to her community by challenging them to verify her findings.[9]

For Bennema, her characterisation is complex and has multiple traits (cooperative, open-minded, perceptive, initiating, responsive, and witness). Therefore, she presents some development as a character in the narrative. The minor emphasis on the aspects of her inner life should not prevent the readers from understanding that the author brought her to the spotlight as a character with personality since her response to Jesus is adequate.[10]

### 6.1.1. A brief evaluation of Bennema's analysis of the Samaritan Woman's portrayal

Bennema helpfully initiates his analysis by demonstrating the relevance of the narrative about the Samaritan woman within the Fourth Gospel's structure, emphasising that the pericope tells the story about the people from Sychar coming to faith in Jesus, culminating in the Christological assertion: 'We know that this man really is the Saviour of the world'

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[7] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 169. His emphasis.

[8] Neyrey, *The Gospel of John*, 95; Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe*, 143-4; Stibbe, *John's Gospel*, 67-8; Day, *The Woman at the Well*, 174.

[9] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 172.

[10] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 172-3. See the *table of character analysis* proposed by Bennema in page 159.

(4:42).[11] We should probably here add to Bennema's view on the narrative's intertextuality that this story resides within the Book of Signs,[12] where different themes (e.g., witnessing, light against darkness, new covenant, living water, eternal life) bring together a unified literary section. In the next immediate narrative—the healing of the official's son (4:43-54)—, the author identifies the 'second sign' of Jesus, connecting it with the account of Jesus' turning water into wine (the 'first sign', in 2:1-11). Therefore, the reader can understand that the narratives that start in 2:1 and go up to 4:54 form the first major textual unit in the Fourth Gospel.[13]

Constructively, Bennema understands that the Samaritan woman receives a positive portrayal as she interacts with Jesus in an extended dialogue to reveal yet another aspect of the protagonist's divinity to the reader. Köstenberger seems to agree with Bennema as he understands that the characterisation of the Samaritan woman assists the Gospel's readers in acknowledging a theological description of Jesus' messianic mission.[14] Another work that aligns with Bennema's argument is Asnath Natar's view that the representation of the Samaritan woman summarizes the Fourth Gospel's 'missional-incarnational ethos' as the interaction between her and Jesus connects straightforwardly with the Gospel's missiological purpose.[15]

Bennema considers the Samaritan woman an individual character without disregarding the notion that she can also be representative of a larger group.[16] He highlights that some prefer to see her not necessarily as a historical figure since her nameless portrayal perhaps points to her representation of the Samaritan community.[17] However, for Bennema, her namelessness should not be understood as abnormal in the Fourth Gospel's story. Other Johannine characters are also unnamed; some are identified

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[11] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 167.

[12] The *Book of Signs* is the title given to the first main section of the Fourth Gospel (1:19–12:50), preceded by the *Prologue* (1:1-18) and followed by the *Book of Glory* (13:1-20:31) and the *Epilogue* (21:1-25). The reason for its name comes from the narrative of seven signs: the turning of water into wine (2:1–11), the healing of the royal official's son (4:46–54), the healing of the paralytic man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1–15), the deeding the of the crowd (6:1–15), Jesus' walking on the water (6:16-24), the healing the man born blind (9:1-41), and the raising of Lazarus (11:1-44). Carson follows Fortna in his defence that Jesus' resurrection should also receive a 'sign value'. Köstenberger takes a careful look at what he calls 'the six undisputed signs' (he excludes Jesus' walking on the water) in order to identify common characteristics of these signs. That way he proposes to develop a profile of a Johannine 'sign' that could then be used to evaluate any other possible signs in John (such as the walking on the water). Carson, 'The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel', 639–51; Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs*; and Köstenberger, 'The Seventh Johannine Sign, 87–103.

[13] Weinandy, 'The Samaritan Woman and the Healing of the Official's Son', 171-6; Wyckoff, *John 4*, 9-11; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 584; Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, 176-85.

[14] Köstenberger, *Encountering John*, 73, and *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 202.

[15] Natar, 'Prostitute or First Apostle?', 105.

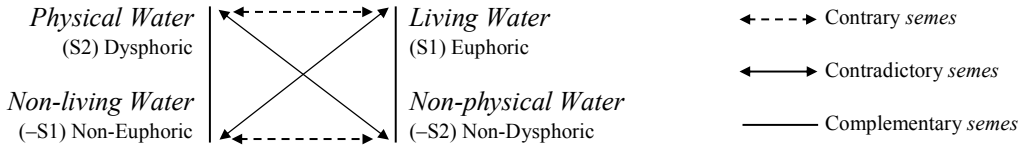
[16] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 161.

[17] Attridge, 'The Samaritan Woman: A Woman Transformed', 268.

only when expressing their own function. Jesus' mother, for example, appears in the role of a 'mother' without her name being acknowledged. In this Gospel, characters' names and places should not be considered random. They perform essential functions that contribute to the objective proposed by the author.[18] Margaret Beirne, for instance, says she remains unconvinced by the many scholarly attempts to understand Johannine characters based on whether they are named, since the way in which they 'serve the Gospel's purpose depends not at all on whether they are given names'.[19] Staley follows the same line by affirming that 'the mother of Jesus, the Samaritan woman, the blind man, and the Beloved Disciple are characters with more of a "life of their own" than named characters like Judas, Nathanael, Caiaphas, or a Philip'.[20]

### 6.2. The Generative Trajectory of Meaning in the Samaritan Woman's Portrayal

Firstly, we should determine the potential sensory generative trajectory of textual meaning assigned to the Samaritan woman. Considering the narrative in which she is involved, the *semiotic square* illustrates the *semes* in the logical articulation of the most fundamental opposition presented by the narrative, thus deconstructing the hidden meaning of the duality inherent in her depiction in four distinct stages. In the story of the Samaritan Woman in John 4, it is possible to structure the following key opposition:




The graphic above demonstrates the contrast between two different kinds of water that could be taken as the most fundamental opposition in the narrative: While the *Physical Water* represents the mundane or the everyday need for survival, the *Living Water* offered by Jesus symbolizes eternal life and spiritual satisfaction that comes from believing in him. A sensory analysis of the story of the woman in interaction and dialogue with Jesus reveals that the sense of *taste* plays a pivotal role in the narrative. Such a sensory experience is integral to the progression of the story and significantly contributes to the development of her characterisation.

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[18] Martin, 'Assessing the Johannine Epithet "the Mother of Jesus"', 73; and Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1015.

[19] Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel*, 172.

[20] Staley, 'Stumbling in the Dark, Reaching for the Light', 71.

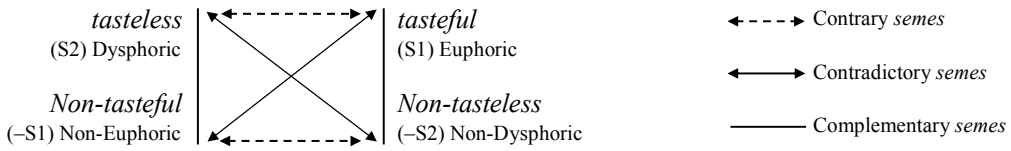
One might observe that the term *taste* does not explicitly appear in this narrative, as is the case with the Greek term γεύομαι, the most prominent word used to signify both literal and metaphorical tasting, frequently emphasising experiential dimensions such as faith, suffering, or divine grace. In the Fourth Gospel, for instance, γεύομαι is employed both as a physical sense, as seen in ἐγεύσατο ὁ ἀρχιτρίκλινος τὸ ὕδωρ ('the master of the banquet *tasted* the water,' 2:9), and as a metaphorical sense, as illustrated in καὶ σὺ λέγεις· ἐάν τις τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσῃ, οὐ μὴ γεύσηται θανάτου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ('yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never *taste* death,' 8:52).

Nevertheless, the narrative of John 4, and by extension the characterisation of the Samaritan woman through sensory experiences—particularly the sense of *taste*—appears to underscore the Gospel writer's intention to emphasize the metaphorical and symbolic significance of water. This dual representation of water as a source of both physical sustenance and spiritual nourishment highlights the transformative potential of the woman's encounter with Jesus. He speaks of 'living water' that quenches a deeper, spiritual thirst (4:10, 14). *Taste*, as a sensory experience, is directly associated with satisfaction and fulfilment. Also, spiritual thirst parallels the woman's craving for meaning, fulfilment, and eternal life, while Jesus' offer of 'living water' can be understood as satisfying the soul's *taste* for what is good and eternal (cf. Psalm 34:8).

Therefore, although the portrayal of the Samaritan woman does not explicitly reference the sense of *taste*, it is plausible to interpret such a sensory experience as a metaphorical framework through which her character development is conveyed. This progression is evident in her increasing comprehension of Jesus' teachings. In other words, the stark contrast between *physical* nourishment (πᾶς ὁ πίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος τούτου διψήσει πάλιν·, 4:13) and spiritual fulfilment (ὃς δ' ἂν πίῃ ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος οὗ ἐγὼ δώσω αὐτῷ, οὐ μὴ διψήσει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὕδωρ ὃ δώσω αὐτῷ γενήσεται ἐν αὐτῷ πηγὴ ὕδατος ἁλλομένου εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον., 4:14) underscores that the woman's initial perception of water as merely a means to quench physical thirst is rooted in the superficial gratification of physical *taste*. As Jesus elevates the discourse by introducing the concept of 'living water', he alludes to a source of eternal satisfaction that addresses her deeper, existential 'thirst' for true and lasting life.

Because the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus not only satisfies her profound spiritual longings but also compels her to share this newfound *taste* of life with others in her village (4:28-30), the development of her characterisation happens through experiencing the living water that leads to both personal transformation and outward action, akin to how savouring a flavorful meal inspires one to relish and share it with

others. Thus, to more effectively illustrate the sensory dimension of her sensory development, we should explore Greimas' semiotic square again now applying two figurative terms in opposition to emphasise an evident metaphorical duality in the narrative: *taste-lessness* and *taste-fulness*.




First Stage: The Dysphoric seme (S2): *tasteless*

πῶς σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ὢν παρ' ἐμοῦ πεῖν αἰτεῖς γυναικὸς Σαμαρίτιδος οὔσης; (4:9)

Second Stage: The Non-Dysphoric seme (–S2): *Non-tasteless*

κύριε, οὔτε ἄντλημα ἔχεις καὶ τὸ φρέαρ ἐστὶν βαθύ· πόθεν οὖν ἔχεις τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ζῶν; (4:11)

μὴ σὺ μείζων εἶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἰακώβ, ὃς ἔδωκεν ἡμῖν τὸ φρέαρ
καὶ αὐτὸς ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἔπιεν καὶ οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ θρέμματα αὐτοῦ; (4:12)

κύριε, δός μοι τοῦτο τὸ ὕδωρ, ἵνα μὴ διψῶ μηδὲ διέρχωμαι ἐνθάδε ἀντλεῖν. (4:15)

Third Stage: The Non-Euphoric seme (–S1): *Non-tasteful*

οὐκ ἔχω ἄνδρα. (4:17)

κύριε, θεωρῶ ὅτι προφήτης εἶ σύ. (4:19)

οἶδα ὅτι Μεσσίας ἔρχεται ὁ λεγόμενος χριστός· ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος, ἀναγγελεῖ ἡμῖν ἅπαντα. (4:25)

Fourth Stage: The euphoric seme (S1): *tasteful*

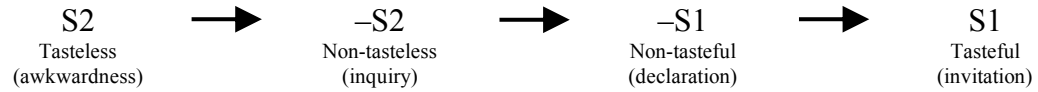
δεῦτε ἴδετε ἄνθρωπον ὃς εἶπέν μοι πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησα, μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός; (4:29)

It is pertinent to explain these two terms—*tastelessness* and *tastefulness*—at this point. These metaphors are employed here as a way to understand the transformative impact of encountering Jesus in the Samaritan woman's life. The notion of a 'taste-less' life, in the context of the narrative, does not refer, for instance, to the absence of aesthetic or culinary refinement but rather to a deeper existential emptiness—a lack of meaning, purpose, and spiritual fulfilment. The writer seems to be highlighting that such a 'thirsty' life, devoid of true knowledge about God's Messiah, may be marked by striving for satisfaction in temporal or material things, yet these pursuits often fail to provide lasting contentment. In contrast, the metaphorical 'tastefulness' that characterises life in a relationship with Jesus signifies a profound enrichment of existence. The author wants us to see that such a shift is not rooted in external circumstances or worldly measures of success but in the internal transformation brought about by God's grace and relationship with his Son. A life quenched by Jesus' living water is abundant life (10:10).

Employing these terms, such progression in the Samaritan woman's characterisation may be understood as follows. The Gospel's readers are introduced to the woman who appears to be in a situation of 'awkwardness'. Jesus' initiative in interacting with her adds to the story's certain inappropriateness, where a lonely Jewish man tries to communicate with a Samaritan woman coming to the well by herself. That 'awkwardness' is linked to the dysphoric seme 'tasteless' (S2), bringing to the story an initially uncomfortable atmosphere related to her gender and ethnicity. Following the narrative, the Samaritan woman reveals herself as eager to speak and asks Jesus some questions, thus creating an atmosphere of 'inquiry'.

This moving from 'awkwardness' to 'inquiry' discloses a progression from 'taste-less' to 'non-tasteless' (S2 to –S2), related to the themes of betrothal type-scene and living water. Next, her portrayal moves from 'inquiry' to 'declaration' as Jesus expands the dialogue, making her sufficiently comfortable to openly make a request, reveal one aspect of her privacy, recognise Jesus as a prophet, and even assert her theological knowledge. This is when she moves from 'non-taste-less' to 'non-tasteful' (–S2 to –S1). Her characterisation has shown some crucial development, but it is not yet complete, as she still has room to grow within the narrative.

This third context of 'declaration' is linked to her marital history and the discussion of true worship. Finally, as the story reaches the 'tasteful' stage (the euphoric seme S1), the Samaritan woman reaches the context of 'invitation', amazing the readers by becoming a messenger to her people. At this stage, the reader is ready to assume the relevance of her invitation encouraging her people to come to the well to meet Jesus.




### 6.2.1. The Sense of Taste in John 4

The French anthropologist and ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss understood *taste* as the human sense controlled by cultural and social norms. For him, the act of cooking itself was so peculiar to humanity that it should be considered one of the most obvious differences between us and the other animals. As a result, he suggested that *tasting* food helps us understand that we eat not only because 'bonnes à manger mais parce que bonnes à penser'.[21]

[21] 'It is good to eat but because it is good to think about', Lévi-Strauss, *Le totémisme aujourd'hui*, 132.

In her investigation of the sense of taste in the Hebrew Bible, Avrahami found a small number of parallels or word-pairs between this and the other senses. According to her, almost all the cases involving *taste* are actually synaesthetic experiences, connecting it with *sight*, *movement*, *smell*, and *speech*. For this reason, the use of taste in the Scriptures offers supplementary images through adjectives from the world of eating and taste to portray different sensory actions.

Most relevant for this research is Avrahami's finding that eating/taste is commonly employed in the Bible as the satisfaction of the hungry soul: 'The righteous has enough to satisfy their appetite (לְשֹׂבַע נַפְשׁוֹ), but the belly of the wicked is empty' (Proverbs 13:25). She notes that although נפש in this verse might mean 'throat', which would lead to the understanding that eating and being full is filling the stomach up to the throat, it may also be translated as 'spirit', which would connotate spiritual hunger. She suggests that both the physical and the spiritual (emotional or symbolic) meanings are meant in this image, as they can be also found in another verse: 'Just as when a hungry person dreams of eating and wakes up *still hungry* (וְרֵיקָה נַפְשׁוֹ), or a thirsty person dreams of drinking and wakes up faint, *still thirsty* (וְנַפְשׁוֹ שׁוֹקֵקָה), so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against Mt. Zion' (Isaiah 29:8). She reminds the reader that although being difficult to translate נפש precisely, the KJV translated it as 'soul' while recent translations have chosen to treat it as 'oneself'.

Also importantly, Avrahami highlights the contrasting metaphor of satisfaction and hunger in synaesthetic examples when the satisfied eye (the tasting eye) is turned into a description of complete experience and understanding: 'Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy (לְשָׂבְעָה)? Listen carefully (שִׁמְעוּ שָׁמוֹעַ) to me, and eat what is good (וְאִכְלוּ־טוֹב), and delight yourselves (נַפְשְׁכֶם) in rich food' (Isaiah 55:2). Here, hunger and satisfaction are correlated to the seeming emphasis on the prophet's connection between prosperity (food) to faith and obedience (hearing), creating an allegory between eating and drinking and following God. Another example helps understand the relevance of this synaesthetic combination of *taste* with other senses to illustrate inquiry and investigation, or even satisfaction through faith: 'O taste and see (טַעֲמוּ וּרְאוּ) that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him' (Psalm 34:9).

As Avrahami has appropriately investigated, the sense of *taste* in the Scriptures is usually employed metaphorically. For Pierre Van Hecke, taste conceptualises direct and personal experiences in biblical texts. When characters are portrayed tasting something (literally or symbolically) they are also depicted acquiring an immediate, unmediated

experience of the object of tasting. In other words, pleasing tastes such as sweet and salt are identified with positive experiences while bitter tastes are attributed to negative perceptions.[22]

Meredith Warren's survey contributes to Avrahami's and Van Hecke's views about the relevance of the sense of taste to biblical narratives. In her interesting analysis of hierophagy in the Bible, more precisely the ingestion of the scroll in Revelation 10:8-10, she asserts that John is portrayed as acquiring knowledge about God's plans because by eating and tasting the book, John is invited to participate 'in a culturally understood way of interacting with the divine realm, one which grants the eater both direct transmission of divine knowledge and also the means of transmitting the knowledge to a community'.[23] In other words, the apostle has to taste the scroll first and only then is he able to understand its message, as he 'shares his intimate access to the divine when he transforms his taste experience into the visions that make up Revelation'.[24]

Jeannine Hanger also contributes to this discussion with her research on Jesus's bread of life claim (6:25-59). Although not related to our investigation of the sensory development of the Samaritan woman's characterisation, Hanger affirms that Jesus connects belief in his word with the satisfaction of hunger and thirst. She borrows from Klink[25] to explain that although 'thirst' could be considered unexpected in this story since only bread is mentioned, the author might have probably wanted to connect this episode with the Samaritan woman's narrative (4:14), personifying the bread of life as the promise of full nourishment.[26] More importantly, Hanger reminds us that Keener interestingly suggests that 'thirst' here alludes to her invitation as Wisdom herself inviting hearers to 'come to me' to satiate hunger and thirst (Proverbs 9:5).[27]

Jo Ann Brant, on the other hand, prefers to connect the sense of *taste* with another Johannine episode as a wordplay in the Gospel. For her, when Jesus is portrayed talking about the role of death in eternal life, he says, 'Whoever keeps my word will never see death' (8:51), but his adversaries respond, 'you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death' (8:52). She suggests they could not understand the actual meaning of Jesus' teaching, because believers in him will certainly *taste* death, as tasting death is a

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[22] Van Hecke, 'Tasting Metaphor in Ancient Israel', 115.

[23] Warren, 'Tasting the Little Scroll', 115.

[24] Warren, 'Tasting the Little Scroll', 116.

[25] Klink (III), *John*, 331.

[26] Klink (III), *John*, 331.

[27] Hanger, *Sensing Salvation in the Gospel of John*, 65. Cf. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 683.

condition of life in his discourse on the bread of life, 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you' (6:53).[28]

As previously discussed, although the term 'taste' does not explicitly appear in the biblical text of John 4, the brief survey provided offers a valuable contribution to examining the four stages of sensory development in the characterisation of the Samaritan woman (*tasteless*, *non-tasteless*, *non-tasteful*, *tasteful*). We will proceed considering the Gospel's use of symbolic *taste* as an indication of the many circumstances that led the Samaritan woman to acquire spiritual understanding about Jesus' identity as the Messiah and Saviour of the world. Such an insight subsequently led her to leave a context of *awkwardness*, passing through *inquiry* and *declaration*, to arrive at the completely developed ambience of *invitation*, in which she understood herself prompted to leave her water jar to go and invite her fellow villagers to have the same experience with this particular *taste* of life.

## 6.3. The Sensory Development of the Samaritan Woman's Characterisation

### 6.3.1. The Awkwardness at the Well: The 'tasteless' stage

In the previous subsection, Greimas' semiotic square helped identify the generative trajectory of meaning within the Samaritan woman's story to understand the development of her sense of *taste*. This sub-section wants to demonstrate that *taste* seems to function as a figurative representation of a hinging sense on which the Samaritan woman's characterisation can be compellingly developed.

Even before her dialogue with Jesus, two aspects appear to be directly implicated in her tastelessness: her gender and ethnicity.[29] First of all, she is a *woman*. The Fourth Gospel introduces her as γυνὴ ἐκ τῆς Σαμαρείας. Some see her as a representative of all Samaria as she remains nameless throughout the story.[30] Others have highlighted aspects that would clarify the context of 'awkwardness' stirred by Jesus' inappropriateness when trying to communicate with a lonely Samaritan woman. Neyrey, for instance, thinks that her anonymity and the disciples' surprise at catching Jesus talking with a *woman* (4:27) denote their sociocultural mindset as gender divided, males in the 'public' and females in

[28] Brant, 'A Sure Thing', 62.

[29] Although the mention of Jacob's well in 4:6 might pull the discussion of the betrothal type-scene already here, we understand it is more appropriate to consider such a theme in the next subsection. See below pages 151-5.

[30] Brodie, *The Gospel According to John*, 216; Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 152; Coloe, 'The Woman of Samaria', 188.

the 'private' world. He follows Philo to highlight the gender-specific aspects of public and private space, such as the marketplace as the male space and the house and water well as the female space.[31]

John Collins has pointed out that an ancient woman's 'lower-level' positional status is derived from particular OT teachings that would have had different perceptions towards female and male genders.[32] Jennifer Garcia Bashaw notably refers to another Johannine narrative to emphasise the law that condemns an adulterous woman to be stoned (7:53-8:11), where the laws of such society 'made scapegoating a woman, especially sexually, easy'.[33] Terence Fretheim offers a helpful discussion on the OT's ambiguous reputation for violence acceptance, particularly against women.[34] Solomon Ademiluka provides a thorough assessment of the correlation between ancient Israel patriarchy and violence against women.[35] For Roche Coleman, the OT teachings depict women as a dangerous source of temptation and sin—a woman gave the forbidden fruit to a man, causing them to be expelled from Eden.[36] For others, such as Tarja Philip, Charlotte Fonrobert, and Elizabeth Goldstein, passages such as Leviticus 12:1-5; 15:19-30; 18:19; 20:18 encourage men to approach women with great caution since every rule of sexual purity saw women as impure during menstruation and postpartum periods. People and objects could become contaminated and unclean by impure women.[37]

Interestingly, however, other scholars point to a presumptive inconclusiveness of opinion concerning the characterisation of women in the Fourth Gospel. Fiorenza, Schneiders and Kysar understand that female characters play essential roles in Johannine narratives to the point of being portrayed as coequals of men.[38] Although Fehribach asserts that women should be seen solely as supporters of the Johannine Jesus as the messianic bridegroom, thus reaffirming the patriarchal and androcentric structures of

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[31] Neyrey, What's Wrong with This Picture?', 102-5. His argument has been recently refuted by others. Victor Matthews sees that Neyrey neglects the fact that some spaces in the antiquity should be considered common to both genders, in 'Conversation and Identity: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman', 218-9.

[32] Collins, 'The Zeal of Phinehas', 20-1.

[33] Bashaw, 'The Woman Saved from Stoning', 4.

[34] Fretheim, 'The God Who Acts', *17-8*, 'Some Reflections on Brueggemann's God', 26-7, and 'God and Violence in the Old Testament', 129–39.

[35] Ademiluka, 'Patriarchy and Women Abuse', 339–62.

[36] Coleman, 'Was Eve the First Femme Fatale?', 77–96.

[37] Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible*; Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*; and Goldstein, *Impurity and Gender in the Hebrew Bible*.

[38] See Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*; Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe*; and Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel*.

ancient Palestine Judaism,[39] Hylen prefers to see the Fourth Gospel's characterisation of women as ambiguous,[40] while Conway alerts to the fact that women in this Gospel should not be read in isolation but always close at hand with men.[41] And for Lozada, the work of female character-building in the Fourth Gospel should be analysed from a literary-ideological perspective. That is, he understands that although some portrayals of women in this Gospel can indeed convey a negative depiction, we should adopt a positive characterisation of the Samaritan woman as she contributes significant elements to the development of the Gospel's plot.[42]

This research suggests, however, that we should investigate the Samaritan woman's context of uncomfortable 'awkwardness' for being alone with a Jewish man not only through her gender but also her ethnicity. Susan Miller adequately argues that the Fourth Gospel's writer certainly builds the narrative of the Samaritan woman having in mind the issue of gender within the early church, but he also draws attention at the beginning of the story to the differences between the Samaritan woman and Jesus in terms of race.[43]

At the beginning of the story, the narrator presents the readers with two notes. The first one seems a correction of a previous affirmation of Jesus' ministry of baptism (3:22), now saying that Jesus was not actually the one who baptises, but his disciples (4:2). The second note, however, is curious as it affirms that Jesus had to go through Samaria (Ἔδει δὲ αὐτὸν διέρχεσθαι διὰ τῆς Σαμαρείας, 4:4). Although Botha suggests that the lack of explanation about Jesus' need to pass through Samaria simply causes the readers to keep following the story,[44] Beck and Morris affirm that 'the necessity is divine.'[45] Brown and Barret go further to affirm that ἔδει emphasises a theological aspect—rather than only geographical[46]—of the necessity to pass through Samaria, as Jesus had to meet the woman for a purposeful reason. In a missiological approach, Jo Ann Davidson sees that Jesus must travel through Samaria due to the nature of his mission, as ἔδει is also attributed to

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[39] Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom*.

[40] Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*.

[41] Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel*, 48.

[42] Lozada, *John*, 61.

[43] Miller, *Women in John's Gospel*, 58.

[44] Botha, 'Reader entrapment', 40.

[45] Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 72; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 225.

[46] Josephus reveals that it was 'the custom of the Galileans, when they came to the holy city at the festivals, to take their journeys through the country of the Samaritans', thus Jesus' decision to pass through Samaria would probably be more common than some consider, in *Antiquities* 20.118. However, elsewhere, he seems also to imply that there were two possible paths between Galilee and Judea. If the first and most likely route was actually through Samaria (shorter and safer), there was also a second possible way through Transjordan, in *The Jewish War*, 2.232.

Jesus' teaching about his mission (3:14; 9:10,16; 16:12,14; 29:9). For her, by the time the narrative of the Samaritan woman concludes with the unexpected harvest in Samaria, ἔδει refer to the divine will.[47] Similarly, Teresa Okure says that being rejected in Judea, 'Jesus left for Galilee through Samaria, in obedience to the divine imperative of his mission'.[48] Nonetheless, regardless of whether we follow the notion of divine providence in making Jesus pass through Samaria, her ethnicity certainly contributes to the depiction of the first stage of her sensory development of *taste* (the dysphoric seme *tasteless*).

This is because considering both aspects, her gender and ethnicity, one could conclude that the cultural background of the NT would have provided a reason for the portrayal of the Samaritan woman's uncomfortable situation when finding herself alone with a Jewish man at the beginning of her characterisation. However, the matter is more complex. As recent scholarship has uncovered, some assumptions might not fit into the sociocultural reality of the first-century Roman world.

Susan Hylen's research has identified that women actually had a greater degree of legal independence, even social influence, during the biblical period of the NT. For her, although NT texts reflect the social hierarchy of its period, when men had greater status than women, modern readers should avoid seeing biblical instructions as more limiting for women than they may have been in practice: 'Early readers of New Testament texts recognised a variety of everyday expectations for women's behaviour and were likely to have read these passages in ways that did not eliminate women's active leadership'[49]. Hylen concludes that its cultural background indeed reflected social norms viewing 'women as inferior and insisted upon their silence', but that does not exclude the fact that the NT also 'mirrored the social practices that made room for and even encouraged women's speech'.[50]

Considering Hylen's survey, we should investigate how the 'awkwardness' at the initial portion of the Samaritan woman's characterisation could be linked to a plausible figurative representation of the lack of a sense of *taste*. As her inquiry and declaration seem to demonstrate, the Samaritan woman is indeed portrayed as initially uncomfortable with being alone in the presence of a strange Jewish man. But soon she is also portrayed as someone eager to find answers regarding her spiritual journey to quench her thirst with the water that could ultimately provide her with the true *taste* of full life.

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[47] Davidson, 'John 4: Another Look at the Samaritan Woman', 162,

[48] Okure, 'Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (Jn 4:1–42) in Africa', 402.

[49] Hylen, *Women in the New Testament World*, 63.

[50] Hylen, *Women in the New Testament World*, 159.

For this reason, two main affirmations could be made regarding the initial stage of her depiction. First, she comes to the well still *tasteless* and feels awkward when Jesus asks her for water. Second, her answer to Jesus demonstrates that she is not forbidden to speak as a result of cultural androcentric norms. Although she finds herself in an awkward situation before Jesus, the social norms and rules of the NT cultural background do not inhibit her from pursuing a *tasteful* life. Reasonably, she might find herself in an uncomfortable awkward situation due to her androcentric and ethnic-divided culture, but nowhere does the story indicate the awkwardness of her initial *tasteless* stage was due to moral failure or sinful activity. She speaks back to Jesus. She wants to find a *tasteful* life.

### 6.3.2. The Inquiry of the Heart: the 'non-tasteless' stage

This subsection works with the second stage in the Samaritan woman's portrayal: the *seme* 'non-tasteless' (–S2), as she progresses from 'awkwardness' to 'inquiry'. At this stage, she asks Jesus two questions: 'Where can you get this living water?' (4:11); and, 'Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?' (4:12). Later, she makes a request: 'Sir, give me this water so that I might not thirst nor come here to draw' (4:15). This sub-section proposes a connection of the *seme* 'non-tasteless' with two themes: the *betrothal type-scene* and *living water*.

Firstly, the betrothal type-scene might represent the initial stage of the development of the figurative sense of *taste* within the narrative. By depicting Jesus and the woman at a well and following it with his request for water, the author might have been referring to the OT betrothal type-scenes.[51] According to Robert Alter, these scenes are roughly plotted as follows: the bridegroom-to-be (or perhaps his representative) sojourns from a distant territory to meet a woman at a water well drawing water. The request for a drink sparks the conversation between them, and the woman returns home to inform her household about the stranger. An invitation to hospitality is issued to the man, almost always accompanied by a meal and a celebration followed by a betrothal.[52]

Alter's work on the betrothal type-scene has led Johannine scholars to see Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman as a representation of the OT pattern. Cahill asserts

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[51] Abraham's servant encountering Rebekah while seeking out a potential spouse for Isaac, at the well of Nahor (Genesis 24:15-67); Jacob's encounter with Rachel at the well of Haran (Genesis 29:1-13), and Moses' encounter with Zipporah, where he is also depicted as sitting down by the well (Exodus 2:15-22).

[52] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 51-62.

that the Johannine narrative evokes the 'well' to suggest the motif of a betrothal,[53] while Culpepper sees that Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman is a conventional biblical type-scene, although she 'is no marriageable maiden; she has had five husbands. Still, Jesus goes to her village, and she receives him as her Lord'.[54] For Duke, Jesus' travel into foreign territory to meet a woman should 'immediately assume some context or overtone of courtship and impending marriage',[55] and Eslinger understands that the Fourth Gospel's writer models the betrothal type-scene to lead his readers to believe that his story will have the same result of the OT stories, when the meetings 'always result in the betrothal of the two characters'.[56] Botha, for instance, sees that 'all the basic components of the betrothal type-scene are present in the text of John 4:1-42'.[57] Staley thinks we should see the Johannine account as a parody of the OT betrothal type-scenes,[58] and Stibbe reminds us that although a literal betrothal is not shown between Jesus and the woman, marital imagery should be considered.[59] Mullins sees that such matchmaking encounters must be understood against the background of the continuation of the line of descendants who inherit the divine promise to Abraham, as they are the agents of the divine plan of continuing salvation.[60] Lincoln affirms that the writer of the Fourth Gospel 'builds upon but subverts the betrothal type-scene'.[61]

These surveys are relevant, but two other approaches may better assist with further consideration of the Samaritan woman's development from the *tasteless* to the *tasteful* stage. First, Brodie's understanding of an 'unbetrothal' type-scene might illustrate more appropriately the liberating of a woman who had been over-betrothed physically, which would lead the reader to perceive that her fundamental need is now the announcement of another type of engagement, a spiritual betrothal or, better still, a *betrothal of belief*. In this case, the woman would have perceived such a proposal coming from Jesus and is, already in this second stage (non-tasteless), free to trust in him. She no longer sees him as a Ἰουδαῖος but as κύριε. Therefore, although the narrative may not explicitly aim to

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[53] Cahill, 'Narrative Art in John IV', 41–48.

[54] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 136.

[55] Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, 101.

[56] Eslinger, 'The Wooing of the Woman at the Well', 168.

[57] Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman*, 111.

[58] Staley, *The Print's First Kiss*, 101.

[59] Stibbe, *John*, 68.

[60] Mullins, *The Gospel of John*, 150.

[61] Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 170.

reveal Jesus' involvement in an actual betrothal, it ends with him abiding with the Samaritan people: 'It is in this idea, of abiding with the believers, of staying with them, that the reality of betrothal finds new expression'.[62]

Combined with Brodie's perception, Andrew Arterbury's re-evaluation of the betrothal type-scene in John 4 is helpful. For him, although Alter's idea of a betrothal type-scene has influenced many surveys on the encounter between Jesus and the woman, it might actually suggest unhelpful conclusions for exaggerating the relationship between wells and betrothals as it relies too heavily on modern notions of courtship.[63] As an interesting alternative, Arterbury suggests reading the narrative as a manifestation of the ancient custom of hospitality, as it heightens the Johannine emphasis on the identity of Jesus, the 'Saviour of the world' (4:42) in close connection with YHWH who 'does not come either to punish or reward the Samaritans for their hospitality; rather he comes to bring eternal life (4:14) and true worship (4:23-24)'.[64]

Without disregarding the work of Johannine scholars who have based their survey on Alter's argument, Brodie's notion of an 'unbetrothal' type-scene combined with Arterbury's idea of a narrative depiction of hospitality seems to benefit the identification of a transition of the Samaritan woman's portrayal from 'tasteless' to 'non-tasteless'. As she progresses from an atmosphere of 'awkwardness' to a situation of 'inquiry', she feels gradually more comfortable considering pursuing a 'betrothal of belief' in a cordial environment that welcomes her to present to Jesus the inquiries of her heart.

Soon after that, the author introduces Jesus' offer of living water (4:10). Now, ὕδωρ ζῶν (also in 4:11) might first convey a gift of physical water that flows from a spring, although even such reference to a material substance flowing from somewhere could be seen as a figurative language.[65] Jesus' later explanation (4:13-14) suggests that ὕδωρ ζῶν should be understood as a symbol of God's gift of His Spirit.[66]

More important for this research is the notion of a place with a generous quantity of water. The theme of the well holds the narrative together as a literary unit and indicates

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[62] Brodie, *The Gospel According to John*, 67.

[63] Arterbury, 'Breaking the Betrothal Bonds', 83.

[64] Arterbury, 'Breaking the Betrothal Bonds', 82. Larsen presents an interesting comparison between the Johannine's betrothal type-scene and Homer's hospitality scenes, such as 'the maiden at the well' from the *Odyssey*. In *Recognizing the Stranger*, 124-34

[65] See the term ζάω in W. F. Arndt and W. Bauer, eds., *BDAG*, 426.

[66] Some affirm that ὕδωρ ζῶν should be considered a representation of a quintessential use of ambiguous language, perhaps one of the clearest examples of contrast between material and spiritual meanings. See, for instance, Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 604-5; and Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 117.

fidelity to God's Law.[67] God presents himself as the source of living water just as Jesus does in this narrative (4:10).[68] The same theme reappears in the Gospel to indicate that the living water is the Holy Spirit that will be given when Jesus is glorified (7:37- 39).[69] Therefore, the offering of living water to the Samaritan woman is, in reality, the offering of the Spirit by the Father and the Son. In this context, the following progression of the Fourth Gospel can be perceived: (1) The Father sends the Son,[70] (2) The Father and the Son send the Spirit,[71] and (3) the Father, the Son, and the Spirit send the disciples.[72]

With this in mind, the living water theme could work here as the revealing aspect of the woman's transitioning out of her 'tasteless' stage, although her portrayal will be further developed until she reaches the 'tasteful' stage, which occurs by the end of the narrative. Nevertheless, it is already possible to realise at this moment that her sensory development comes from a combination of her misunderstanding of Jesus' words (4:11) and her ironic question about Jesus' capability to provide her with living water (4:12). The narrative informs the readers that she takes Jesus' offer as a literal physical, material type of water, as indicated by her references to a utensil to draw water from the well. Her main concern at this moment relates to the well's depth. Some argue that the woman's misunderstanding of Jesus' living water as a material water relates to the Samaritans' belief in the Torah only as a sacred book, disregarding the other OT writings. Thus, the Samaritan woman would have misunderstood Jesus' words because all occurrences of 'living water' within the Torah actually had literal meanings, either pointing to wells

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[67] Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel*, 67. In Jeremiah, God denounces the idolatrous worship of Israel saying, 'My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water' (2:13). In yet another oracle, Jeremiah states, 'A glorious throne, exalted from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary. Lord, you are the hope of Israel; all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water' (Jeremiah 17:12-13).

[68] In her analysis of the conceptual similarity between the Fourth Gospel and the DSS, Hannah An understands that Jesus' self-revelation as the provider of living water early in the narrative unit is not incidental but essential to the discourse and heightens the Gospel's witness to Jesus as the prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy 18. In, 'The Prophet Like Moses (Deut. 18:15–18) and the Woman at the Well (John 4:7–30) in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls', 475.

[69] Other accounts from the Fourth Gospel and the Book of Revelation highlight the relationship between the image of the 'living water' and the Holy Spirit, although such a connection is already found in Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezekiel 36:25-26). The same image of the 'living water' appears again in Ezekiel when the prophet describes the gushing of water from the future Temple's right side (Ezekiel 47), thus relating to the pierced side of Jesus on the cross from which blood and water flow (John 19:31-37).

[70] John 1:17; 2:34; 4:34; 5:37; 6:38-39,44,57; 7:16,18,29,33; 8:16,18,26,29,42; 9:4; 12:44,45,49; 13:16,20; 14:24; 16:5,28; 17:3,8,18.

[71] John 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:7; 17:18.

[72] John 20:21.

which produced fresh water or running water for ritual purification.[73] Alternatively, Susan Hylen thinks that the Samaritan woman would have likely understood 'living water' as a conventional metaphor since Samaritans were familiar with the stories of God's provision of water to the Israelites in the desert (e.g. Exodus 15:22-27; 17:1-7).[74]

Very important, however, is that her misunderstanding (4:11) leads to her ironic, almost mocking question or comment (4:12) which reveals the infinite distance between Jacob's gift of physical water in the past and Jesus' gift of living water at the moment she speaks. The significant unveiling of such disparity between types of waters began to reveal itself effectively at the very moment she benefits from her liberty to interact with a man whom she apparently had neglected seconds ago but is now curious about. Her sense of *taste* is slowly developing as she reaches the ambience of 'inquiry'.

### 6.3.3. Declaring the Truth: The 'non-tasteful' stage

The initial stages of the development of the Samaritan woman's portrayal were surveyed in the previous sub-sections: first, the *awkwardness* at the Well (the tasteless stage) and then the *inquiry* of the heart (the non-tasteless stage). This subsection addresses the third stage in her characterisation: the *seme* 'non-tasteful' (–S1), as she progresses from the stages of *awkwardness* to *inquiry* to *declaration*.

In the previous stages, the Samaritan woman asks Jesus some questions. Now, the author characterises her development in direct response to Jesus' developing of his proclamation through his answers. As the dialogue grows in length and depth, the Samaritan woman becomes more comfortable to openly request. She reveals one crucial aspect of her privacy and recognises Jesus as a prophet, making assertions based on her theological knowledge.

The narrative demonstrates that she is not yet ready to experience the full taste of Jesus' message as she cannot at this point recognise Jesus as the Messiah. But this third step is pivotal for achieving her complete development within the Gospel plot, which happens in the final stage when she reaches the tasteful stage. This subsection, therefore, deals with her stage of *declaration* in relation to two themes, namely, her *marital history* and the ensuing discussion on *true worship*.

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[73] Pummer, *The Samaritans*, 195; Anderson and Giles, *The Keepers*, 105-6; Wyckoff, 'Narrative Art and Theological Meaning', 147.

[74] Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*, 44.

From the outset, this research has taken a different route on the hypothetical insight regarding the supposed dubious morality of the Samaritan woman. The narrative does not portray Jesus revealing her immoral life or evil deeds, let alone telling the reader that she is lascivious or brazen, even making sexual advances to Jesus.[75] Also, Jesus does not question her about her husband to insinuate her irregular marital career or immoral life. The narrative keeps moving forward without any trace of Jesus' warning against sinful life or repentance. O'Day suggests a reasonable explanation:

> The text does not say, as most interpreters automatically assume, that the woman has been divorced five times but that she has had five husbands. There are many possible reasons for the woman's marital history, and one should be leery of the dominant explanation of moral laxity. Perhaps the woman, like Tamar in Genesis 38, is trapped in the custom of levirate marriage and the last male in the family line has refused to marry her. [76]

Likewise, this research adopts the literal reading of this passage as a factual statement about the men with whom the Samaritan woman had lived, instead of the figurative reading that sees her as a representation of the religious infidelity of the Samaritan people. According to such a reading, the five husbands would symbolise the five foreign gods brought into the Samaritan territory after the Assyrian conquest in 722 BCE, based on 2 Kings 17:13–34.[77] Leon Morris argues that such an interpretation is wrong for various reasons. Firstly, there are seven gods listed in 2 Kings 17:30ss, instead of only five. Secondly, those false gods were worshipped simultaneously, and not one after another as the husbands followed one another. Thirdly, Jesus (or the Gospel's author) would hardly think of the false gods as the legitimate husbands of the Samaritans and held that YHWH, the one true God, was no 'husband' at all, but a paramour. Finally, The Gospel's readers would not be expected to detect such a subtle allusion.[78]

Jesus' affirmation 'you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband' (4:18) does not function as disapproval of her moral status but as a demonstration of his evident power of omniscience, which prompts the Samaritan woman to realise that he must be at least a prophet, if not someone even more powerful. That is

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[75] Among scholars with such a view, see Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 242; Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 171; Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 433; Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 313; Olsson, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel*, 120; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 61; Eslinger, 'The Wooing of the Woman at the Well', 171-8; and Staley, *The Print's First Kiss*, 101.

[76] O'Day, 'Gospel of John', 521.

[77] For such a view, see Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 242; Olsson, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel*, 186; Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 171; Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 235; Cahill, 'Narrative Art in John IV', 44; and Neyrey, 'Jacob Traditions and the Interpretation of John 4:10-26', 426.

[78] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 265-6. Curiously, Augustine understood the five husbands as the five human senses, in *Tractates on the Gospel of John 11–27*, 91.

why at this moment the Samaritan woman's portrayal reaches what is probably the most complex literary locus in the entire pericope. The author develops the narrative through numerous possible facets in her characterisation. The dialogue flows with the scene as though different identities of the woman begin to surface due to Jesus' confrontational responses to her theological convictions. Consequentially, it reveals disputing layers of representation such as her ethnicity against Jesus' ethnicity, her theological convictions as a Samaritan against the Jewish theological story, and her expectation of the end of time against Jesus' assurance of the Samaritans' lack of theological knowledge.

The Samaritans' basic beliefs in the words of the deceiver who promised to show where Moses had buried the sacred vessels on Mount Gerizim[79] prompted Jesus' logical affirmation that 'you worship what you do not know, we worship what we know, for salvation comes from the Jews' (4:22). The most striking proof that Jesus' words impacted her convictions is her use of Μεσσίας, the Aramaic form of 'Anointed One', which requires the narrator to immediately use an aside to inform that this word in Greek is χριστός (also in 1:41).

In this regard, Pummer explains that the Samaritans would seldom use Μεσσίας, mainly due to their belief and expectation that at the end of time, a figure would come and bring back the Tabernacle. This figure is later called 'Taheb', from Aramaic תוב, meaning 'to return'. However, in addressing non-Samaritans, the Samaritans often called the Taheb 'Messiah' as did the Samaritan woman in 4:25, even though the Samaritan concept of the eschatological prophet is different from the Jewish and Christian ideas of the Messiah.[80] For Victor Matthews, the 'Taheb' seems to be more of a teacher or prophet than a king, which is the kind of Messiah that Jesus proclaims himself to be. He understands that such a view provides a contrast to the reaction of the Jewish crowd in 6:14-15 who recognize Jesus as the prophet who is to come into the world, impelling them to force him to become their earthly king.[81]

Amid this complex momentum in her characterisation, a crucial thematic change emerges in the conversation, providing her with the opportunity to take a step forward in moving to the stage of *declaration*. Although the narrative reveals Jesus confronting some of her convictions and then offering a counter-argument, at no point does he prevent her from presenting her arguments. Now, at the imminence of a new topic, this time on true

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[79] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.85-89.

[80] Pummer, 'The Samaritan Tabernacle', 31.

[81] Matthews, 'Conversation and Identity', 224. Also, see Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 178.

worship, she is depicted feeling even more comfortable expressing her anguish about a theological dilemma that was keeping close people apart (Judaeans and Samaritans).

But to express her hope in the One who will explain everything, she must improve her *tasting* experience. The new dialogue marks the beginning of a perception of the person of Jesus that, until then, the woman had not yet *tasted*. Her surprise at learning that Jesus was aware of such an intimate particularity of her life made her realise that in front of her stood someone different, perhaps a teacher or prophet who could finally answer a distressing question about the place of true worship, the second theme that reveals her transition from the stage of *inquiry* (non-tasteless) to the stage of *declaration* (*non-tasteful*).

The description of Jesus suddenly referring to the Samaritan woman's marital life while she also skilfully jumps to the subject of her people's worship practice should not be considered a disconnected textual move. Contra Brodie, we should not think she changes the subject of the conversation after being asked by Jesus about her husband.[82] Instead, she feels ready to declare the truth about her situation and move to a new subject once she identifies Jesus as a prophet. Jesus' disclosure of his ability to know her private life leads her to speak freely, showing she appreciates the *taste* of the conversation. She might not yet realise the connection between true worship and the living water offered by Jesus moments ago, but by attributing to her one more stage in sensory development, the author reminds the reader that God's epiphany results in human beings *declaring* many aspects inherent to their own lives.[83]

The Samaritan woman is not depicted as uncomfortable for being before a man who has already revealed the privacy of her marital history and the minor details of her past and present. On the contrary, she appears now more confident and eager to finally get an explanation of why there are two different 'truths' about worshipping God. Following Okure, sociocultural prejudices against the Samaritan woman notwithstanding, she knows who she is and about the land where she lives (the place where Jacob gave the well where she and Jesus now sit). She is convinced that 'despite inherited and competing claims for Gerizim and Jerusalem as the fitting place of worship, the Messiah will put them right'.[84]

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[82] Brodie, *The Gospel According to John*, 222.

[83] I paraphrase Bultmann when commenting on this narrative. He says that 'the revelation [of the divine] is for man the disclosure of his own life', in *The Gospel of John*, 188. However, as demonstrated in note 89, I disagree with his thought that the Samaritan woman' unrest is identified in her disturbed past and her unsatisfied married life, 'who reels from desire to pleasure' portraying the aberrations of the desire for life. There is indeed an evident unrest in her characterisation, but it is not related to her marital life. As this research tries to demonstrate, it is indeed related to her desire to answer her question.

[84] Okure, 'Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (Jn 4:1–42) in Africa', 408.

The final step left to complete her sensory development from *tasteless* to *tasteful* is then taken by Jesus who says, ἐγώ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι ('I am [he], the one speaking with you', 4:26).[85] Now she remembers Jesus' response to her question about how he, as a Ἰουδαῖος, asked her, a γυνὴ ἐκ τῆς Σαμαρείας, for water. Remembering, she realises that a *tasteful* life has nothing to do with being a man or a woman, a Jew or a Samaritan, but rather with what Jesus is and promises, and reveals how willing she is to *taste* the living water. Jesus is the Messiah and the gift of God and gives living water from God. Therefore, she was right because he was indeed greater than her father, Jacob. And he is also right because the water he gives wells up to eternal life.

### 6.3.4. The Invitation to the Village: The 'tasteful' stage

This last subsection analyses how the theme of witness is tied to the characterisation of the Samaritan woman in the final stage of her sensory development: the transition from the seme *non-tasteful* (–S1) to the seme *tasteful* (S1), as she progresses from the stage of *declaration* to be depicted in the stage of *invitation*.

Among many surveys on her portrayal, the Samaritan woman has been understood through different perspectives, including a missionary dimension,[86] an example of a faithful disciple,[87] a wise communicator who shares the living water and eternal life,[88] a brave woman fighting against a heavy 'negative background' to bring her people closer to God,[89] and someone not afraid of either Jews or Samaritans.[90] She has answered Jesus' invitation not 'with verbal confession, but with an active witness to others',[91] to become established in the apostolic witness tradition of the Gospel's disciples.[92] Manifestly, negative evaluations of her characterisation have also been issued.[93]

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[85] Or, as Matthews affirms, 'The question of his identity is at last resolved and nothing further needs to be said. And yet, this is the ultimate example of frame busting in the narrative. Throughout her dialogue with Jesus, the woman has defended and championed the rights and prerogatives of the Samaritans. Now she discovers that the man she has sarcastically asked whether he is "as great as Jacob," has proven to be the great hope, the Messiah, and he is a Jew', in 'Conversation and Identity', 224.

[86] Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission*, 60-65.

[87] Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*, 41-58.

[88] Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman*, 164-5.

[89] Brodie, *The Gospel According to John*, 214. His emphasis.

[90] Natar, 'Prostitute or First Apostle?, 121.

[91] Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 76.

[92] Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel*, 92.

[93] For example, Kim says that 'once the Samaritan woman has fulfilled her role both as a symbol of Samaria and as a disguised betrothed of Jesus, her significance fades away. The woman simply drops out of the story never to be seen or

From these and other surveys, it can be assumed that scholars have generally agreed that, in the story of John 4, witnessing implies both missional and announcement activity. Following a similar literary pattern introduced in the Prologue (1:1-18), where the Fourth Gospel explains Jesus' mission by the revelation of the Father in his presence, Jesus tells his disciples that his life consists in doing 'the will of the [one] who sent me to finish his work'(4:34).

Meanwhile, in connection to Jesus' teaching to his disciples, the Samaritan woman leaves her water jar and returns to her village to announce her discovery (4:28-29). Her announcement elicits her fellow villagers to meet Jesus and consider his offer of living water, while Jesus accepts their offer of hospitality. As the reader is presumably able to notice, the notion of 'leaving' and 'meeting' is intense in these few verses (4:28-29; 39-42). It reveals her development from an uncomfortable *awkwardness* to the concluding setting of *invitation*, as her portrayal evidently progresses through listening to Jesus' words, considering her own theological understanding, and, again, being confronted and encouraged by Jesus' explanation.

At this moment, her sense of *taste* appears ultimately developed through a complex process, and the readers can presumably realise she has indeed *tasted* Jesus' living water as well as his food—which is to do the will of God and to finish his work (4:34). She has *tasted* them. Her water jar is left behind as a changing life turning point. She now enjoys her *tastefulness* by realising Jesus' identity —from 'Jew' to 'sir' passing through 'prophet' until reaching 'Messiah'. She arrives at the *invitation* stage proclaiming her finding without any 'ethnocentric perspective that divides Jew and Samaritan'.[94]

Some have raised questions concerning her authority or legitimacy to testify in the ancient Jewish Palestine cultural context. Harvey affirms that 'a woman's testimony would not have been accepted in a court of law',[95] as it was not the custom for a Rabbi to engage in conversation with women, notably doctrinaire or theological talk.[96] Such a view

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heard from again after her townspeople had rejected her witness as the cause of their belief in Jesus. By interweaving the betrothal type-scene and the Samaritan woman whose marital history alludes to Samaritan history, John intends to reestablish the relationship between Jesus' group and Samaritans for the sake of a coalition of the two groups in a (de)colonizing context. In this regard, the Samaritan woman is thus no more than an object of exchange between groups of men', in *Woman and Nation*, 115.

[94] Matthews, 'Conversation and Identity', 224.

[95] Harvey, *Jesus on Trial*, 45. See also Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 170; Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 240; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 274, and Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission*, 133-4.

[96] Referring to the ethical teachings and maxims of Rabbinic Jewish tradition, see *Pirjei Avot* 1,5: 'Engage not in too much conversation with women. They said this with regard to one's own wife, how much more [does the rule apply] with regard to another man's wife. From here the Sages said: as long as a man engages in too much conversation with women, he causes evil to himself, he neglects the study of the Torah, and in the end he will inherit gehinnom'.

has led Bultmann, for instance, to affirm that the Samaritan woman's testimony typifies only 'mediatory proclamation', as the townspeople's belief is carried on as 'second-hand' faith only until they encounter Jesus themselves, at which time their faith then surpasses the level of her faith. For Bultmann, more important than witnessing Jesus is seeing people coming to faith in him.[97] Such discussion is complex, but this survey follows Collins in seeing Bultmann's view as overinfluenced by his existentialist perspective of the Fourth Gospel, thus belittling the power of the verb πιστεύειν in πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν τῶν Σαμαριτῶν διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς γυναικὸς μαρτυρούσης ('many of the Samaritans believed in him because of the word of the woman testifying', 4:39).[98]

Indeed, the Samaritans confessed Jesus as the Saviour of the world not just because of what the woman said but because they heard Jesus for themselves (4:42), but in no way does this denigrate her invitation to her people. Margaret Beirne properly reminds us about a likely parallel between the testimony of the Samaritan woman and John the Baptist. John recognizes that he has been sent ahead of Jesus but needs to decrease so Jesus increases (3:28-30). The Samaritan woman is perhaps portrayed here as revealing the same attitude of witness in humility before the Messiah.[99] Also, as Peter Phillips highlights, she is the one who offers hope to her neighbours after embracing her new representative role as an apostle to her people. While her people function in the narrative as the 'chorus', which affirms the message proclaimed by her and is then transformed by Jesus' message, 'they receive the message passively. It is the woman who still holds the active role—she tells them the message about Jesus'.[100] For Susan Miller, the Samaritan woman shows a greater understanding of Jesus's mission than his disciples who are depicted only as being surprised to find Jesus talking to a woman.[101]

She has finally *tasted* the living water offered by Jesus. She has become able to sense the worth of her work in the harvest, even if that means shocking many with the fact that 'the recipient of Jesus' universal invitation to inclusion is a woman, a universal representative of the despised and excluded "other"'.[102] The development of her *taste* for Jesus' eternal life allows her to be part of the interesting group of women to whom the

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[97] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 200-5.

[98] Collins, 'The Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel, 39.

[99] Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel*, 92.

[100] Phillips, 'The Samaritans of Sychar: A Responsive Chorus', 298-7.

[101] Miller, *Women in John's Gospel*, 58.

[102] Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe*, 147.

Gospel's writer openly attributed the distinguished role of witness.[103] As indicated in the following section, her *tastefulness* condition appears connected with other sensory experiences, providing her characterisation with a richer perception of *moving* and *hearing* God's transformative action in the world.

### 6.4. Synaesthesia in the Samaritan Woman's Characterisation

The previous section demonstrated the four stages of the sensory generative trajectory of meaning in the Samaritan woman's characterisation connected to a unique condition of the sense of *taste*, starting from *awkwardness* (tasteless), passing through *inquiry* (non-tasteless), moving to *declaration* (non-tasteful) and finally arriving to *invitation* (tasteful). As an alternative interpretation, each of these four stages was connected to one or more distinguishing themes within the Johannine narrative.

This third section concerns understanding how two likely synaesthetic experiences in the story might have contributed to the evangelist's character-building work. The narrative of the Samaritan woman introduces an interesting sensory parallelism that compares her characterisation with that of Jesus' disciples. The results of such a comparison between their sensory experiences would assist the readers to better understand the development of her characterisation along the narrative.

#### 6.4.1. Synaesthesia between *taste* and *hearing*

The OT writings usually show a relationship between the verb אכל ('to eat') and the verbs for 'sight', 'hearing', and 'smell'.[104] Importantly, no sharp semantic distinction is found between the common verb אכל ('to eat') and the rare verb טעם ('to taste'). It can be said that there is almost no evident distinction between 'tasting' and 'eating'.[105] Based on that, Avrahami interestingly affirms that it is possible to derive a parallel between the senses of *taste* and *hearing*, as both senses refer to the entrances of the body. She affirms that

[103] Jesus' mother at the wedding in Cana (2:1-12) and her presence at the cross (19:25-27), Mary and Martha (11:17-37); Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet (12:1-3), and Mary Magdalene at the tomb morning (20:11-18).

[104] See, for instance, 'There you will serve other gods made by human hands, objects of wood and stone that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell' (Deuteronomy 4:28).

[105] As in 'For the ear tastes words as the palate tastes food' (Job 34:3), or 'Does not the ear try words as the tongue tastes food?' (Job 12:11).

none of them suggests passive absorption. For one to 'eat' or 'hear' something, it is necessary to act, which implies processing it by literally placing it in the body.[106]

In the OT, Ezekiel's call to be a prophet is a clear example of such sensory parallelism, where the verb 'to hear' implies obedience to God and understanding of his message. In order to *hear* (obey and understand), the prophet has to *eat* the scroll. By *eating* the scroll, he is actually *tasting* it (or processing information) by placing the scroll inside his body:

> But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and *eat* what I give you (...) Son of man, *eat* what is before you, *eat* this scroll; then go and *speak* to the people of Israel. Son of man, *eat* this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.[107]

In the characterisations of the Samaritan woman and Jesus' disciples, the author presents the reader with two symbiotic approaches in the synaesthetic relationship between *tasting* and *hearing*. Whereas the dialogue with the Samaritan woman portrays Jesus culling her sense of *taste* through the development of four stages in her portrayal from 'tasteless' to 'tasteful' (awkwardness, inquiry, declaration, invitation), the disciples face the implication of *taste* in the micronarrative about Jesus' food (4:31-38) and the revelation that God's will must be done to finish the harvest. Although both the Samaritan woman's and the disciples' experience with *taste* might be taken as connected to *hearing* (obeying and understanding), they appear in the narrative through different elements: water and food.

These distinct elements are semantically connected to the sense of *taste* but each is employed here to reveal the contrasting situation of the disciples' work and the Samaritan woman's endeavour. The theological significance of Jesus' dialogue with his disciples interpolated in the Samaritan woman's narrative is clear: Jesus speaks about his mission and its completion, but the theological imagery about Jesus' food should make the disciples realise the path they still have to take. They must agree to *taste* God's will as the food that must precede their bodily needs. Jesus' labour will be *tasted* by all who accept his meal offered on the cross.[108] The relevance of their work with the harvest lies in the fact that they have *tasted* only the food which was brought from the village. Jesus wants them to *taste* the food he brings from God. Once the disciples *taste* and *hear* (obey and understand) Jesus' message, they become ready to walk the Way.

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[106] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 93-103.

[107] Ezekiel 2:8; 3:1,3.

[108] For sake of space, I am not able to develop here the theological significance of an interesting correlation with Jesus' thirst on the cross (19:28) linking Jesus' thirst by the well.

Importantly, at this point, the author still seems to be working on the portrayal of the Samaritan woman in his readers' minds, even when the story depicts the talk between Jesus and his disciples only. By saying 'I sent you to reap what you have not toiled for; others have toiled, and you have entered into their labour' (4:38), Jesus reveals that the Samaritan woman has already *tasted* and *heard* (obeyed and heard) the message.

The analysis of two crucial terms here might unveil the author's use of sensory perception. Although Köstenberger thinks that ἄλλοι refers to Jesus and the OT prophets up to the ministry of John the Baptist,[109] it seems more appropriate to consider Jesus' use of ἄλλοι as pointing to his and the woman's missional work. The evidence might lie in the fact that ἄλλοι and κεκοπιάκασιν are purposefully connected: ἄλλοι ('others') brings together the mention of Jesus' tiredness at the start of the story (κεκοπιακὼς, 'being wearied', 4:6) linking it with κεκοπιάκασιν ('have toiled for', 4:38). The structural form of verse 4:38 likely indicates the association of ἐγὼ, referring to Jesus, with ἄλλοι, now referring both to Jesus and his companion in the harvest work. The plural ἄλλοι would here show that Jesus includes the Samaritan woman in the harvest's labour, as she has gone into the city to invite her people: 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did' (4:29). If that is the case, Jesus is affirming that the Samaritans are the crop for eternal life (καρπὸν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, 4:36), the fruit of the Samaritan woman's labour that the disciples will then reap.

For Jesus, the day is approaching when the disciples *taste* the fruit of the work in the harvest while others *taste* the food they are harvesting. But the disciples' own *taste* is still developing and will eventually progress until the end of the Gospel story. At that specific moment, however, Jesus reveals that they went to town to buy food that has a different *taste*. As it is, the *taste* of their food has not helped them to *hear* Jesus' teaching. In other words, their food had no impact on the townspeople's lives because it was the type of food that had not yet influenced their *taste*. The Samaritan woman, on the other hand, has *tasted* the living water, *heard* the message, moved back into the village, and is on her way to bring her people to *taste* eternal life.

### 6.4.2. Synaesthesia between *taste*, *hearing* and *movement*

Up to this point, this research has investigated the synaesthetic relationship between *taste* and *hearing* in the imageries of Jesus' living water and unknown food. Now it is possible to survey another synaesthetic perception as the narrative appears to lead its readers to

[109] Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel*, 184.

realise the *movement* from the well to the world (4:39-42). For this reason, we should understand how both *taste* and *hearing* interact with the somatic outcome *movement*.

When the narrative reveals Jesus accepting the Samaritans' welcome, thus leaving the well that had initially been the place of lack of *taste*, the Samaritans believed in Jesus and confessed him as ὁ σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου (4:42). Koester helpfully points that the Samaritans' depiction addresses the issue of Israel's freedom in the late first-century Roman empire by presenting an alternative to both collaboration and violent resistance. For him, the expression 'the saviour of the world' goes against Caesar's claims to affirm the sovereignty of God as well as against the zealots who preferred the path of violence. Therefore, the Samaritans are here portrayed as

> moving beyond a form of worship tainted by charges of idolatry to true worship of God, and beyond a national identity defined by colonial powers to become true people of God. The title 'Saviour of the world' was used by Caesar, but the Samaritans recognized that it truly belonged to Jesus, whom they received in a manner appropriate for a king.[110]

Thought-provokingly, however, the author seems to employ a variety of senses in the last part of the narrative, likely accentuating the evident *movement* between the stages that form the narrative. If, at first, the story portrays Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman, soon afterwards, readers are informed that once Jesus reveals himself as Messiah (ἐγώ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι, 4:26) she *moves* out from the front-stage to be replaced by the disciples who, initially at the backstage, now *move* to the front (4:31-38). Then, the disciples *move* again backstage to make room for the villagers who *move* to the front stage.[111] Compellingly, all this *movement* happens with each scene ending with the response of a character, while the quality of their responses progressively advances until the narrative comes to a climax of faith. According to Dorothy Lee, 'through the narrative stages, the woman and her people *move* from a literal and material level of understanding to a metaphorical and symbolic one'.[112]

Such an intense *movement* of characters might have been intended to introduce the readers to many kinaesthetic experiences, ultimately connecting the notion of coming and

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[110] Koester, 'The Savior of the World', 680.

[111] Hans Windisch, in his article that originally appeared in 1923, affirms that the Fourth Gospel has some particular characteristics as a literary document, such as a broad elaborated and dramatically presented narratives in a sequence of individual scenes that belong together. In the specific case of the narrative of the Samaritan woman, Windsich divides the story in seven different scenes (Jesus comes to the well with his disciples; a Samaritan woman comes to draw water; the disciples return; the woman goes to her village; the disciples offer foo to Jesus; the Samaritans come to the well; and, the Samaritans and the woman are gathered around Jesus in the village). In 'John's Narrative Style', 30-31. See, also, Martyn's consideration on the story of the man born blind (9:1-41) as a dramatic form of a miracle story in different stages, in *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 35-45.

[112] Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel*, 93. My emphasis.

going with the characters' sensory experiences of *taste* and *hearing*, as they assimilate Jesus' teachings. Interestingly, contrasting such richness of other characters' *movement*, Jesus 'remains' at the well only to be portrayed later as also 'remaining' with the Samaritans (καὶ ἔμεινεν ἐκεῖ δύο ἡμέρας, 4:40).[113]

The word 'come' clearly hints at *movement,* but the word 'see', which elsewhere could be connected to *sight*, might in this narrative be particularly indicating *taste*, as the villagers are invited by the woman to see (*taste*) the same experience with Jesus. The *taste* of the living water can quench any thirst for abundant life. But before *tasting* it, the Samaritans first *heard* the woman. Then, later, they *heard* Jesus. But the whole process commences as the Samaritan woman *tastes* the living water and *hears* Jesus' message. As a way of comparison, the disciples of Jesus are still in the process of *moving* (following him), gradually learning to *hear* him and *taste* the truth. As part of Jesus' promise of His kingdom, the disciples will one day have their *taste* restored in fullness (Act 1:8), but for now, they need to learn the lesson of the day. If such analysis is correct, the author might be eagerly wanting to inform his readers that the best lesson they can learn is that neither the woman's gender nor her ethnicity is an issue for Jesus in his plan of proclamation of the kingdom. What matters is to *taste* what God has to offer.

### 6.5. Sensing the Samaritan Woman's Characterisation Development

This chapter has investigated the sense of *taste* in the sensory development in the Fourth Gospel's portrayal of the Samaritan woman. Bellow we revisit Bennema's *table of character analysis* to include her sensory experiences and development.[114]

[113] Cahill, 'Narrative Art in John IV', 43.

[114] Bennema's original findings are shown in the shading cells.

| | The Samaritan woman | John 4:1-42 |
|---|---|---|
| DESCRIPTORS | AGGREGATE INFORMATION | RESULTS |
| The Samaritan woman in Text and Context | Birth, Gender, Ethnicity, Nation/City | female, Samaritan |
| | Family (Ancestors, Relatives) | |
| | Nurture, Education | |
| | Epithets, Reputation | possibly a tainted reputation [115] |
| | Age, Marital Status | unmarried, living with a man |
| | Socio-Economic Status, Wealth | marginalised [116] |
| | Place of Residence/Operation | Sychar in Samaria |
| | Occupation, Positions Held | |
| | Group Affiliation, Friends | Samaritans |
| | In Interaction with the Protagonist | initial resistance and mocking then keen participation resulting in understanding and belief |
| | In Interaction with Other Characters | testifying to her community and challenging them to verify her findings for themselves [117] |
| The Samaritan Woman's Classification | Complexity | complex; multiple traits: cooperative, open-minded, perceptive, initiating, responsive, being a witness |
| | Development | some |
| | Inner Life | little |
| | Degree of Characterisation | personality |
| The Samaritan Woman's Evaluation | Response to the Protagonist | adequate belief-response: she believes and testifies |
| The Samaritan Woman's Significance | Role in the Plot | through her interaction with him, Jesus reveals aspects of his identity (he is the source of life) and mission; she, in turn, testifies about Jesus and brings people to him |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Biblical Sensorium | Sensory Generative Trajectory of Meaning | from *tasteless* to *non-tasteless* to *non-tasteful* to *tasteful* |
| | Synaesthetic Experience and Somatic Outcome | taste, hearing and movement |
| | Sensory Development | The Samaritan woman is portrayed as sensory developing her taste of taste feels free to voice her questions and affirmations as her conversation with Jesus improves |

The table above displays the results of the sensory investigation of the Samaritan woman's characterisation in the Fourth Gospel. After presenting the results of Bennema's

[115] This survey does not agree with Bennema at this point. Please see discussion on the Samaritan woman' reputation in pages 148-9.

[116] Again, we understand the emphasis should not be in the fact that the woman might have been marginalized, although some scholars have worked with such an assumption. See discussion on pages 151-4.

[117] We understand that the Samaritan woman' words to her fellow villagers should be seen more as an invitation than a challenge. But Bennema's point seems fair.

investigation, it also includes this research's findings. The updated table shows that the Samaritan woman develops as a character differently than readers (ancient and modern) would likely expect. She increases her sense of *taste,* highlighting her significance for the Gospel's purposes, in clear contrast with the disciples' *tastelessness* who, shocked in seeing their master speaking with a woman, are portrayed as having a long way to go until they achieve a *tasteful* perception of Jesus' ministry and teaching.

The survey on the sensory perceptions in the narrative of the Samaritan woman suggests, perhaps clearer than in Nicodemus' portrayal for instance, that readers can assume she had identified herself as one of Jesus' followers in Samaria, although it is more difficult to affirm that she has followed him up to the cross. Her depiction reveals that her increase in *taste* (of both Jesus' living water and food) emphasises that after meeting the Messiah she is blessed for receiving an instrument of freedom. Being able to *tastefully* experience Jesus' proclamation liberates her from her prejudice towards the Jews and their theological understanding of worship, or from a marginalised and low-level social position as a woman and Samaritan (which interpretation might seem more viable is at the interpreter's discretion). It is crucial to understand that her trajectory of meaning from *tastelessness* to *tastefulness* constitutes the restoration of the witnessing experience she has been through, sharing the *taste* of freedom for drinking the living water and working in the harvest.

As in the conclusion of the previous chapter on the sensory characterisation of Nicodemus, we can again affirm that the study of sensory perceptions within biblical narratives profoundly enhances the understanding of the human person as an integrated whole, rejecting any dichotomy between soul and body. That is because sensory perception, far from being a mere facet of bodily experience, emerges as the foundation of embodied existence, shaping the ways individuals encounter the divine and interpret their place within the world. This is exemplified through the characterisation of the Samaritan woman in the Fourth Gospel, whose transformative encounter with Jesus reoriented her sensory framework and worldview. Her experience of tasting the 'living water' offered by Jesus signified not only the fulfilment of her being but also the renewal of her identity and purpose, enabling her to transcend cultural and religious boundaries. In embodying the Kingdom's perspective introduced by Jesus, she bridged divides between Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles, leading the reader to realise Jesus' desire for advancing God's reconciling mission. This holistic approach underscores the biblical vision of humanity, where sensory engagement serves as the medium through which individuals partake in divine purpose, embodying their call to service and participation in

God's harvest. Such an integrative understanding situates sensory perception as a theological and anthropological cornerstone, pivotal to the biblical depiction of human wholeness.

This understanding resonates profoundly with the purpose articulated in John 20:31. The Samaritan woman's transformative journey exemplifies a life offered through faith, as her encounter with Jesus enabled her to embody and proclaim the message of the Messiah. Her renewed sensory perception allowed her to participate in and extend the life-giving reality of Jesus' mission, aligning her personal transformation with the Gospel's broader purpose. Thus, her narrative serves to testify to the Gospel's readers how belief in Jesus, grounded in sensory and experiential engagement, fulfils the theological vision of life through the Messiah.

Therefore, it is reasonable to understand the Samaritan woman as more than a character with personality; she acquires 'individuality' throughout her narrative. She is one of the most essential characters in the Gospel for providing Jesus with an opportunity to reveal himself as the Messiah and his message about eternal life in God. She confirms Jesus' message and messiahship through her inspiring attitude of sharing and inviting her people to meet Jesus. We should conclude that the Fourth Gospel portrays her positively. It is also conceivable that its author might have introduced numerous theological themes having considered her figurative sensory development of *taste* as the path to a gradual understanding of Jesus' teaching. If that is correct, the Samaritan woman appears in the Fourth Gospel as a character who managed to positively abandon some of her own *tastes* of life to bring a message of redemption to her people,[118] advancing from a *tasteless* place of awkwardness to a *tasteful* environment of invitation and proclamation.

[118] Attridge, 'The Samaritan Woman: A Woman Transformed', 281.

# Chapter 7 | **THE MAN BORN BLIND**

This final exegetical chapter employs the interpretive method introduced in this research to analyse the sensory development of the characterisation of the man born blind in the Fourth Gospel (9:1-41). It aims to understand how its author presumably employed his view of the human senses to build characters who would achieve his purpose (20:30-31). After introducing in the first section Bennema's findings on his investigation of this character, the chapter's second section benefits from Greimas' theory to investigate how the author of the Gospel skilfully reveals the gradual sensory development of the sense of *sight* in the characterisation of the man born blind. The third section discusses the healing scene (9:1-7) that anticipates the process of sensory development introduced in the fourth section. It is structured as follows: Self-Affirmation: The Metaphorical Blindness Stage (9:8-13); The Man's Opinion: The Metaphorical Non-Blindness Stage (9:14-23); Witness: The Metaphorical Non-Sight Stage (9:24-34); and, Belief and Worship: The Metaphorical Sight Stage (9:35-38).

After a brief discussion about the judgement scene (9:39-41) in the fifth section, the sixth section has to do with understanding how *synaesthesia* (the merging of senses) in the man's portrayal contributes to the author's character-building work. The interactions of the character with his neighbours and the Pharisees will reveal how the somatic outcomes of *movement* and *speech* catalyse the gradual development of his *sight* along the narrative. How the sensorial parallelism *sight-movement* assists in the blind man's depiction as a character who improves his spiritual sight to identify Jesus as the light in the world will be investigated.

In the seventh and last section, the attention moves to perceiving how the sensory development of the man born blind's characterisation might have led the readers of the Fourth Gospel to realise that such a character's portrayal teaches that believing is not always instantaneous and static but gradually grows until it moves believers to confess and adore Jesus as the Son of Man sent by God.

## 7.1. 'Once I Was Blind but Now I See': Bennema's Analysis of the Man Born Blind

The seventeenth chapter of Bennema's work on character studies in the Fourth Gospel deals with the characterisation of the man born blind (9:1-41).[1] From the outset, Bennema

[1] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus,* 245–58.

affirms that he is not a flat character but a complex, round one, changing throughout the chapter. The numerous traits attributed to him allow this character to surprise the readers at the end of the narrative. Bennema also wants to remind his readers that he prefers not to follow Martyn's distinguished view of the Johannine narrative as a two-level drama that relates to a Johannine community in conflict with post-70 CE synagogue Judaism. Bennema sees the narrative of the Fourth Gospel 'is primarily the story of Jesus, and that the encounter in John is 9 authentic and historically reliable'.[2]

Bennema highlights particular features of the man born blind. No name is given to him and his identity is indirectly provided by the author. His blindness from birth leads him to become a beggar in the vicinity of the temple in Jerusalem (8:59-9:1; 9:8). With Beasley-Murray and Brown, Bennema understands that the phrase 'he is of age' (9:21) indicates that the man has reached the age of legal responsibility.[3] He follows Lee and Schnackenburg concerning Jesus' rejection of the disciples' claim of an alleged connection between blindness and sinful life, promptly correcting them by showing that the man's condition is an opportunity for God's redemptive work to be revealed (9:3).[4]

According to Bennema, the story of the man born blind is connected with Jesus' sense of urgency to participate in the work that God is already doing in the world. In 9:5, Jesus reiterates that he is the light of the world, and soon clarifies how he accomplishes this. The stage is set, and Jesus turns his attention to the man born blind. Bennema points out that the narrative of the miracle is brief, with the emphasis on Jesus' command: 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (9:7).[5] In his succinct analysis of the healing scene, Bennema does not reserve space for discussing some aspects that would draw the Gospel's readers' attention, such as the presence of creation motifs,[6] a probable perplexity caused by Jesus' spit,[7] and the relevance of the mud in bringing realism to the narrative.[8]

Because Bennema understands the author's emphasis is not merely on God's miraculous action but also on the development of the character, he follows Carson's and Resseguie's view to affirm that after informing his readers of the miracle, the author

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[2] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 245. Cf. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 46-66.

[3] Beasley-Murray, *John*, 157; Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, 374.

[4] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 245-6. See Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 2:240-1; and Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel*, 170.

[5] Here, Bennema disagrees with Brown and Collins, saying the healing is not related to baptism. Respectively in *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, 380-2 and 'The Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel', 21.

[6] Frayer-Griggs, 'Spittle, Clay, and Creation in John 9:6 and Some Dead Sea Scrolls', 659–70.

[7] Brodie, *The Gospel According to John*, 347.

[8] Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 546.

indicates that 'although the blind man gains sight when he washes in the pool of Siloam, he actually receives it through the power of the Sent One'.[9] And based on Farmer, Bennema underlines that Jesus' healing is not done instantly, maybe to test the faith of the man born blind,[10] because although he 'has experienced Jesus as the sight-giving Light, he must still experience him as the life-giving Light'.[11] The man's recognition of Jesus as Lord leads him to sincere worship, demonstrating his development through unique characteristics as a restored individual due to his personal encounter with Jesus.

Bennema points out that the author reveals relevant traits of the man's portrayal in his conversation with the Pharisees and Jesus. The first trait, *courage*, is clearly shown when despite the Pharisees' aggressive approach in challenging the man born blind, he is not intimidated into agreeing with them. Rather he bravely answers them with irony: 'Why do you wish to hear again? Do you want to become his disciples too?' (9:27). Moreover, even after he is insulted by the Pharisees: 'This [man] we do not know from where he is' (9:29), he is not intimidated, but instead shows himself confident enough to enlighten his interrogators on their lack of knowledge about God's action through Jesus: 'If this [man] were not from God He could do nothing' (9:33).

For Bennema, the author portrays the man born blind as having *open-mindedness*. He quickly realised Jesus' prophetic ministry. Perhaps as a way of showing a connection with the Samaritan woman (4:1-42) and contrasting with the man healed in the pool of Bethesda (5:1-15), the author tells about the necessity of having an open mind to realise God's establishment of His Kingdom properly. Here, the man born blind fulfils the requirement of giving glory to God not by confessing his sins before God (as it is referred to in Joshua 7:19) but by explaining to the Pharisees what is evident: 'Whether he is a sinner I do not know, one [thing] I do know: that being blind now I see' (9:25).

Another trait attributed to the man born blind is *witness*. His confidence in speaking about Jesus is so profound that his witness seems to cause a division even in the Pharisees (9:16). His determination in testifying about Jesus not only contrasts his parents' lack of courage and witness (9:21) but also shows his willingness to risk witnessing to someone whom he does not even know and who is not around to defend and protect him against his assertive interrogators: 'And they said to him: Where is He? He says: I do not know' (9:12).

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[9] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 247. Cf. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 365; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 149.

[10] Farmer, 'John 9', 61.

[11] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 248.

Bennema sees that the man born blind is also portrayed as a *loyal* character. After being expelled by the Pharisees, Jesus seeks out the man born blind to give him spiritual sight, no longer limiting him to just hearing his voice. By asking the man 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' (9:35), Jesus explains the result of believing in him as the Messiah and Lord: an opportunity to encounter the divine reality. Contra Painter, Bennema disagrees that John tries to correct an inadequate Christology of the secret believers who understood Jesus as the Christ in terms of traditional Davidic messiahship by depicting a faith in the heavenly Son of Man.

For Bennema, the confession of Jesus as the Christ seems adequate since it is the kind of belief-response that John seeks to inspire (20:31): 'It is the failure to make such a confession publicly out of fear of the religious authorities that John finds wanting'.[12] Only at this point of the narrative is the man born blind able to know and understand who Jesus really is. Here, the Gospel elucidates that the man born blind's loyalty makes him anxious to meet his healer: 'And who is he, Lord, so that I may believe in him? (9:36), and he finally confesses his belief and worships Jesus by saying Πιστεύω, κύριε ('I believe, Lord', 9:38).

Importantly, Bennema understands that ancient characters are built in a range from showing no development at all to being fully developed without necessarily implying that their development process is always explicitly informed by the writer through additional traits. He thinks that while the readers' perception of the character's progress is certainly essential, the main aspect involving character development refers actually to the character's ability to surprise the reader when a 'newly found trait replaces another or does not fit neatly into the existing set of traits, implying that the character has changed.'[13]

When reading John 9, then, Bennema sees that the character develops from a blind man to someone who can see to show not only the healing event's process and outcome but also that, despite his disadvantaged start in life and marginalised reality, he surprises the reader with his cognitive abilities. That is, Bennema thinks that such abilities help him to arrive at what the Gospel shows as an authentic understanding of Jesus' prophetic and messianic ministry. Elsewhere, Bennema makes a point that seems indeed relevant to his method: we should be careful not to confuse a character's progression in his or her

[12] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 253. Cf. Painter, 'John 9 and the Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel', 31–41.

[13] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 27.

understanding of Jesus with character development. Only when a character's progression surprises the reader can we speak of character development.[14]

Such a development presented by the Fourth Gospel reveals the other characters' backward development within the same narrative. The man born blind starts as a person who cannot see but is given physical sight, enabling him to acquire spiritual sight. On the other hand, the Pharisees, initially portrayed as claiming to have spiritual sight, turn out to be blind. Later, the man born blind testifies boldly before the religious authorities in the face of persecution, while, on the other hand, his parents withhold their testimony out of fear. Finally, the man born blind grows in his understanding of Jesus facing the authorities and eventually reaches a saving faith, contrary to the invalid in the fifth chapter who faltered and betrayed Jesus.[15]

Lastly, Bennema points out three crucial aspects regarding the man's *inner life*: He knows his condition: 'one [thing] I do know: that being blind now I see' (9:25); He knows God's procedures: 'We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will' (9:31); and, again, believes that Jesus is Lord: Πιστεύω, κύριε ('I believe, Lord!', 9:38).

Because of his survey on this character, Bennema understands the man born blind is portrayed by the author as a character with personality.[16] He is depicted as someone whose identity is embedded in a group or community but still possesses the ability to make decisions different from those taken by the group, even in some cases being in opposition to the group to which he belongs.

His characterisation, therefore, provides Jesus with an opportunity to act on his earlier claim to be the Light of the world (8:12). In addition, Bennema follows Koester concerning Jesus' warning to his disciples about the hostility that awaits them after his departure (15:18-16:4),[17] as the man born blind understands Jesus' identity not in a reflective encounter with him 'but in a confrontation with the hostile religious authorities'.[18]

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[14] Bennema, 'A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature', 377.

[15] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 254.

[16] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 258.

[17] Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

[18] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 256. Bennema elaborates on Beirne's suggestion that that the man born blind's faith 'grows in inverse proportion to the hardening into blindness of his antagonists', in *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel*, 124. Curiously, this could be understood as an approximation to Martyn's thesis that Bennema earlier noted in opposition.

### 7.2. The Generative Trajectory of Meaning in the Man Born Blind's Portrayal

As presented in the previous characters' analyses, the purpose in surveying the man born blind's development is to understand the potential sensory generative trajectory of meaning in his portrayal, based on Greimas' semiotic square. However, one important note specifically related to analysing this character's building process through sensory perception is crucial here. The opposition *sight* versus *blindness* is reasonably associated with sensory perception, as demonstrated in the graphic below. But its logical articulation encompasses a subtle nuance between the metaphorical and physical healings. It seems that the author employs a complex literary strategy contemplating *sight* and *blindness* in two distinct moments: before and after the physical healing. Greimas' semiotic square helps us to detect the nuances of such opposition.

This complexity progresses through two interesting moments. First, both *sight* and *blindness* appear in the initial narrative of physical healing (9:1-7) and are already expected to be understood physically and metaphorically. Jesus and his disciples saw a man blind from birth. Jesus performed a miraculous sign 'that the works of God might be displayed in him' (9:3).[19] Jesus commands the man to wash in the Pool of Siloam. The man went and washed, and came home seeing. Healing a man blind from birth is indisputably a wonderful sign, and the author still adds an emphasis on the work that Jesus has received from God: 'As long as it is day, we (ἡμᾶς) must do the works of him who sent me (πέμψαντός με). Night is coming, when no one can work' (9:4).[20]

The second moment in this complex use of the opposition *sight* versus *blindness*, however, reveals that both terms subtly received increased purposes along the narrative. They work as tools of opposition but also of emphasis, depending on how they are employed in the story. In the first scene (9:1-7), *sight* is portrayed euphorically while *blindness* is dysphoric, otherwise, Jesus would not have been depicted healing the man born blind to provide him with *sight* so that the works of God might be displayed in him (9:3). But interestingly, the end of the narrative portrays Jesus interacting with some Pharisees (9:39-41), first teaching them, 'For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind' (9:39), and, later, answering

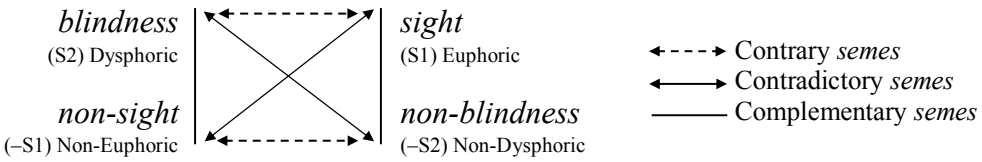
[19] See below a brief discussion on the controversial punctuation of 9:3-4, pages 183.

[20] The variant readings of John 9:4 have been a subject of considerable scholarly discussion. This verse presents different readings in various ancient manuscripts. Some manuscripts read 'we must work the works of him who sent me (or 'us'),' while others state 'I must work the works of him who sent me (or 'us').' The difference between singular and plural persons has significant theological implications and can affect the interpretation of who is responsible for the works of God – Jesus alone or his followers as well. Cf Comfort, 'The Greek Text of the Gospel of John According to the Early Papyri'. Unfortunately, for space's sake, this thesis will not be able to introduce a discussion on this interesting subject.

them, ‘If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains’ (9:41). At this final micronarrative, *blindness* is still the negative aspect, but it is now employed by the author not only to oppose *sight*, but also to emphasise that *sight*, the positive aspect, appears to be the outcome that, in this very specific case, does not necessarily help the Pharisees eliminate their guilt. Of course, *sight* should not be seen here as negative, but because the Pharisees insinuate they are not blind, they miss the chance to have an excuse for themselves, and their very *sight*, although a positive aspect along the narrative of John 9, highlights their misunderstanding about the connection between seeing and believing.

Thus, the analysis of the most fundamental logical articulation in opposition in this narrative, *sight* versus *blindness*, should take into consideration this complexity possibly planned by the author. Missing this subtle element within the story’s logical articulation could lead us to a narrower interpretation of its elemental meaning. For this reason, the next section demonstrates that in the investigation of the former blind man’s sensory development, physical *sight* is certainly a pivotal sensory experience in the narrative, but the character’s development of metaphorical *sight* receives unique emphasis after his initial physical healing.

Reading the story carefully, we may realise that the author seems to want his readers to understand that the man’s blindness, admittedly a conspicuous element in the man’s life story, should not prevent readers from seeing that this character’s progressive improvement of *sight* is as important as the physical healing. The physical healing is portrayed as a marvellous sign ‘so that the works of God might be displayed in him’ (9:3), but during the whole process of his sensory development in many different scenes (9:8-38), the character’s ability to see goes through the development of his awareness of Jesus’ identity. The physical *sight* miraculously attributed to him in the first scene gave place to the metaphorical *sight* that gradually developed during all the stages of his sensory development. The healing scene sets the theological foundation of the narrative. If the story ended in 9:7 we would not have enough information to analyse the development of the characterisation of the man born blind, but still, we would have kept the theological rationale that affirms Jesus as the light of the world. Enlightened by such light, his disciples must do the work of the one who sent Jesus into the world: helping people to see God’s glory and believe in His Son.




First Stage (9:8-13): *blindness* (S2)

> ἐγώ εἰμι
> I am him (9:9)
>
> ἄνθρωπος ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰησοῦς
> the man they call Jesus (9:11)
>
> οὐκ οἶδα
> I do not know (9:12)

Second Stage (9:14-23): *non-blindness* (–S2)

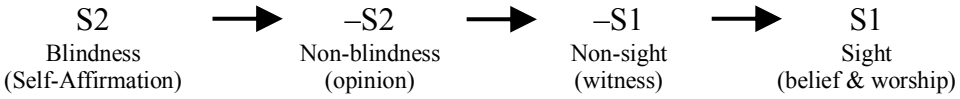
> πηλὸν ἐπέθηκέν μου ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ ἐνιψάμην καὶ βλέπω.
> He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see (9:15)
>
> προφήτης ἐστίν
> He is a prophet (9:17)

Third Stage (9:24-34): *non-sight* (–S1)

> εἰ ἁμαρτωλός ἐστιν οὐκ οἶδα
> Whether he is a sinner or not, I do not know (9:25a)
>
> ἓν οἶδα ὅτι τυφλὸς ὢν ἄρτι βλέπω
> One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see. (9:25b)

Fourth stage (9:35-38): *sight* (S1)

> καὶ τίς ἐστιν, κύριε, ἵνα πιστεύσω εἰς αὐτόν;
> Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him. (9:36)
>
> πιστεύω, κύριε·
> Lord, I believe! (9:38)




7.2.1. The Sense of Sight in John 9

In their investigation of the cultural, historical and political dimensions of the world of senses, sensory anthropologists David Howes and Constance Classen affirm that *sight* has been revered as an honourable sense for its common association with both spiritual and intellectual enlightenment, a traditional link between vision and knowledge.[21]

[21] Howes and Classen, *Ways of Sensing*, 3.

However, should we maintain the same understanding when considering the use of this sense in biblical narratives?

Before we proceed with this analysis of each stage in the sensory development of the characterisation of the man born blind, we should benefit from Avrahami's investigation of the biblical sensorium concerning the sense of *sight* in biblical epistemology. For her, the centrality of *sight* is 'linguistically prominent and highly elaborated in Biblical Hebrew, and thus must have been highly developed in biblical culture'.[22] Although she has found no evidence of a structural hierarchy of the senses, she did find a 'prominence given to sight within the associative and contextual patterns, as well as elaborate use of sight vocabulary to express the derived meanings related to the sensory category'.[23]

Surveying the central role that *sight* plays in the biblical narratives, Avrahami observed that it is understood as the root metaphor for two specific contexts of primary relevance for our research. First of all, she highlights the biblical perception of *sight* as *knowledge*, as the correlation between the roots ראה ('to see') and ידע ('to know') reoccurs in several contexts. She notes that both *knowledge* and *rule of God* are described as *sight*. A couple of examples are: 'God looked upon (וַיַּרְא) the Israelites, and God took notice (וַיֵּדַע) of them' (Exodus 2:25); 'High though the Lord is, he sees (יִרְאֶה) the lowly; lofty, he perceives (יֵיֵדָע) from afar' (Psalm 138:6, JPS). Conversely, the lack of understanding is described as a problem of *sight*, where the associative pattern *sight*–knowledge is usually absorbed in the eye–heart word-pair. One clear instance is: 'They do not know (יָדְעוּ), nor do they comprehend (יָבִינוּ); for their eyes are shut, so that they cannot see (טָח מֵרְאוֹת עֵינֵיהֶם), and their minds as well, so that they cannot understand' (Isaiah 44:18). Equally relevant to the present analysis, *sight* is related to the process of learning and acquiring knowledge based on personal experience, as in 'and when I saw it (וָאֶחֱזֶה) I took it to heart; I looked on it (רָאִיתִי) and learned a lesson' (Proverbs 24:32).[24]

Secondly, Avrahami notes that biblical perception of *sight* correlates to *belief*, for numerous portrayals of miraculous events are accompanied by an audience who witnessed the event or the later results of it.[25] In other words, the Bible relates *sight* to *believing* since watching the miracle or its results 'proves the authenticity of wonders',[26]

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[22] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 223.

[23] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 224.

[24] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 248-50.

[25] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 243.

[26] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 243.

as in the very first time Moses stands as God's messenger for his people: 'Aaron repeated all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and he [Moses] performed the signs in the sight of the people (לְעֵינֵי הָעָם), and the people were convinced (וַיַּאֲמֵן הָעָם)' (Exodus 4:30-31a, JPS). Importantly, she argues that all these expressions from the field of *sight* related to the events and miracles experienced by a specific audience function as 'a collective memory that could not be denied–a kind of non-verbal recording of events. The public nature of miracles resembles the public nature of the juridical system'.[27] In the case of the biblical story, the legality of the covenant between God and his people consists of the fact that the entire people see and witness God's miraculous work.

Considering the relevance of Avrahami's investigation of the correlation of *sight* with knowledge and belief, we can now explore the way this sense should be investigated in the sensory development of the man born blind's characterisation. Brown highlights that the author of the Fourth Gospel ties in *sight* and *knowledge* by masterfully contrasting the decrease of blindness with the increase of knowledge: 'Three times the former blind man, who is truly gaining knowledge, humbly confesses his ignorance. Three times the Pharisees, who are plunging deeper into abysmal ignorance of Jesus, make confident statements about what they know of him'.[28] For Barret, the author portrays Jesus clearly disclosing his identity to the former blind man to show him he has received not only physical sight but also spiritual sight, that is, his knowledge should not be taken as primarily intellectual, but as the direct bestowal of life and salvation.[29] Collins suggests that the author wanted his readers to understand the man's healing symbolically, as the episode is 'treated by John as a symbol of spiritual illumination which a man receives when he believes'.[30] Drawing on the theological aspect, Moody Smith warns that more important than focusing on the literal healing of the blind man is to take the episode to be a symbol for the man's understanding of the 'total, saving work of Jesus, as he says that he has come into the world "that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind (verse 39)"'.[31]

Koester interestingly connects *sight* with the presence of God's light in the world when knowledge becomes a necessity to see God's work and deeds through Jesus. He says that although the healing initially provides the blind man with the ability to see on a

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[27] Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 239.

[28] Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, 377.

[29] Barrett, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 354.

[30] Collins, 'The Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel', 42.

[31] Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, 165.

physical level, it develops to show the man's gradual acknowledgement of Jesus through the eyes of faith. Conversely, the Pharisees are depicted with physical *sight* throughout the story, but have no true knowledge about Jesus: 'At the level of life experience, readers would know that there is a connection between light and vision, and since Jesus enabled someone to see, he could legitimately claim to be a source of light'.[32] Gosbell comments that blindness usually appears in the Hebrew Bible and later Judaism as a metaphor to describe spiritual ignorance (e.g. Isaiah 42:16, 18; 43:8, Book of Wisdom 2:21), but the healed man's declaration of faith in John 9 happens because Jesus turns the conversation into a discussion about spiritual blindness: 'John reveals that while Jesus was healing those who were physically blind, his ultimate role as the "light of the world" (8:12) is to bring sight to those who are spiritually blind (9:39)'.[33]

Koosed and Schumm interestingly affirm that John 9 plays with two meanings of blindness: literal (absence of light) and metaphorical (inability to understand or perceive). For them, the narrative teaches acceptance or denial of Jesus' foreshadowing resurrection by concomitantly binding *sight* to understanding and physical blindness with the metaphorical sense of ignorance and unfaithfulness.[34] Also intriguing, Yuckman points out that although *knowledge* might be a freighted term in the Fourth Gospel due to the term's connection with Gnosticism,[35] the story of John 9 uses *knowledge* with profound connotations of *sight*: 'though for many knowledge depends on right seeing (cf. Pharisees or Thomas), discipleship is a matter of knowledge leading to sight'.[36] With Yuckman we could conclude that the entire narrative seems to be framed by Jesus *seeing* the man (9:1) and the man's *sight* of Jesus (9:37).

Other considerations are also helpful. Engberg-Pedersen understands that the author employs *sight* and blindness to contrast the man born blind and the Pharisees according to their knowledge and understanding of Jesus, later emphasised by Jesus' own claims about his identity.[37] Clark-Soles adds that the man's physical blindness is replaced by not only a physical *sight* but also a spiritual *sight* that gave him the wholistic ability to access knowledge and theological perspective,[38] and Boone argues that *sight* in the NT is a

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[32] Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 161.

[33] Gosbell, *The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, and the Lame*, 315-6.

[34] Koosed and Schumm, 'Out of the Darkness', 79.

[35] Bruce Metzger, for example, understands that accusations about the Gospel presumed associations with later Gnosticism could have delayed its eventual inclusion within the NT canon, in *The Canon of the New Testament*, 90.

[36] Yuckman, 'That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest', 125.

[37] Engberg-Pedersen, *John and Philosophy*, 204.

[38] Clark-Soles, 'John, First-Third John, and Revelation', 350.

metonym for first-hand knowledge.[39] For Jan Du Rand, the author portrays Jesus as the literary connection between the former blind man, who is portrayed as moving from physical blindness to spiritual knowledge, and the Pharisees, who think they know but are actually spiritually blind.[40]

For the following investigation of the four stages of the sensory development of the man born blind's characterisation (*Blindness*, *Non-blindness*, *Non-sight*, *Sight*), this research considers the Fourth Gospel's use of spiritual *sight* as an indication of circumstances of *knowledge*, *awareness*, *insight* and *understanding*, which subsequently leads this character to believe in and worship Jesus. Conversely, it will be concluded that the author refers to the Pharisees' regression of spiritual *sight* as an indication of their lack of willingness to accept Jesus' deeds and teaching as coming from God.

This research does not investigate some aspects related to the physical *sight* of the man born blind, such as Michaels' suggestion that the making of a ball of mud would lend realism to the narrative, and the restoration of the man's eyes would perhaps identify the reason why his neighbours would not be able to recognise him right away.[41] McDonough highlights that more scholars have been working recently with the idea of Jesus assuming the role of creator,[42] while Barrett prefers to assert the improbability of such a reading.[43]

Therefore, although it would be pragmatic to survey the consequences of a 'double' healing in the story (physical and metaphorical), this research concentrates on Avrahami's and the other scholars' views briefly introduced in the previous paragraphs acknowledging *sight* in correlation with *knowledge* and *belief*. The following sections focus on the sensory development of the characterisation of the man born blind, highlighting his metaphorical (or spiritual) ability to realise Jesus' identity as a prophet (9:17), man from God (9:33), and Lord (9:38).

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[39] Boone, 'Blessed Are Those Who Have Not Seen and Yet Have Known By Faith', 145.

[40] Rand, 'A Syntactical and Narratological Reading of John 10 in Coherence with Chapter 9', 98.

[41] Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 546.

[42] McDonough, *Christ as Creator*, 35. Some examples of scholars with a similar view are Brodie, *The Gospel according to John*, 347-8; Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 545-6; and Frayer-Griggs, *Spittle, Clay, and Creation in John 9:6 and Some Dead Sea Scrolls*, 660-3.

[43] Barrett, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 358.

### 7.3. The Healing Scene (9:1-7)

This section analyses the relevant aspects of the introductory scene in the narrative of the man born blind as the immediate episode before the stages of sensory development of his characterisation.[44] The scene opens by informing that Jesus saw a man blind from birth when he was passing by (9:1). Scholars highlight different aspects of this scene. For Carson, although little precise information about the healing's time and place can be deduced, the chapter's connection with chapters 8 and 10 shows Jesus is still in Jerusalem, between the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Dedication.[45] Staley suggests Jesus knew the man's blindness condition because of his divine omniscience.[46] Painter notes that because giving sight to one blind from birth was so incredible, development is to be seen in the language 'blind from birth', which is Hellenistic, rather than the Semitic.[47]

Secondly, even if initially the readers may get the impression that the story happens because the disciples ask Jesus, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' (9:2), thus wanting to know about the origin of the man's blindness, the narrative soon reveals that Jesus 'views the man's blindness from birth not as tragedy but as opportunity. This is commonly understood to mean that the man's blindness affords Jesus an opportunity to work a miracle'.[48] For Resseguie, 'postponing the answer to the disciples' question creates a dramatic tension for the readers. Ironically, it will be the religious authorities who will illustrate the cause of blindness, not the blind man'.[49] In fact, Jesus prefers not to answer the question but promptly disassociates the man born blind's condition to any reference to sinfulness saying, 'neither this man sinned nor his parents' (9:3a). Beck notes that Jesus' refutation of the man's sinfulness seems to reverse his own earlier statement to the man at the pool of Bethzatha (5:14), although Beck also reminds that Jesus' affirmation in 9:2 actually shows that his statement in chapter 5 does not refer to the infirm man's physical healing, as it is 'a declaration that worse things than infirmity or blindness can befall a person, such as failing to respond appropriately to Jesus'.[50]

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[44] The healing of the man born blind appears in the Fourth Gospel within the 'Book of Signs', this being the penultimate sign, preceding only the raising of Lazarus (11:1-41).

[45] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 361.

[46] Staley, 'Stumbling in the Dark, Reaching for the Light', 60.

[47] Painter, 'John 9 and the Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel', 34.

[48] Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 540.

[49] Resseguie, 'John 9', 116.

[50] Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 91-2.

The author portrays Jesus explaining the reason for the man's blindness by stating that 'the works of God should be displayed in him' (9:3b). Carol Webster suggests that by saying that the man born blind's life is a witness to God's miraculous works, Jesus informs his disciples that the man is the prototype for discipleship.[51] John Poirier, on the other hand, thinks that because Jesus did not say that the man was born blind so that God's healing power might be displayed in him, but instead that he must work this healing while it is day so that others may see it, the man's healing is not a prototype, neither for discipleship nor for anything else, because his story is 'a straightforward account of one of Jesus' healings, heightened by its dramatic designs against the Sabbath halakhot of the Pharisees'.[52] Poirier's point in connecting the healing with the central theme of God's revelation in Jesus is engaging, even considering the facts that text indeed says that φανερωθῇ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ (9:3) and the author's use of his characters as representative figures for relevant themes in the narratives, such as Nicodemus' γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν (3:3, 7) and the Samaritan woman's ὕδωρ ζῶν (4:10, 11, 13, 14).

Interestingly, Kruse articulates his disagreement with the translation of verses 3 and 4 in the NIV and other modern English versions, specifically regarding punctuation. He asserts that they present an unappealing theodicy by suggesting that 'God allowed the man to be born blind so that many years later God's power could be shown in the provision of his sight.'[53] Kruse emphasizes that early Greek NT manuscripts were not punctuated, allowing for alternative punctuation of the verses, such as: 'Jesus replied, "Neither this man sinned nor his parents. But so that the works of God may be revealed in him it is necessary for us to work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one is able to work.'" According to Kruse, this translation does not imply that the man was born blind so that the works of God might be revealed in him, but that 'Jesus had to carry out the work of God while it was day so that God's work might be revealed in the life of the man born blind'.[54]

Thirdly, Jesus' theological affirmation associates his disciples with his ministry: ἡμᾶς δεῖ ἐργάζεσθαι τὰ ἔργα τοῦ πέμψαντός με ('*we* must *work* the works of the one who sent *me'*, 9:4).[55] It emphasises the urgency of doing God's work ἕως ἡμέρα ἐστίν ('while it is day', 9:4b), that is, while Jesus is still with them. In this respect, Martyn proposes

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[51] Webster, 'Paradox in the Development of the Non-Disabled Church', 30.

[52] Poirier, 'Another Look at the "Man Born Blind" in John 9', 64.

[53] Kruse, *John*, 305.

[54] Kruse, *John*, 306.

[55] See footnote 20 regarding the variant readings of John 9:4.

that the combination of the plural pronoun ἡμᾶς with the singular pronoun με evinces the author's post-resurrection perspective, since Jesus is here preparing the disciples for the continuation of his ministry (see also 14:12).

For Martyn, John 9 tells the story of the Johannine community excommunicated from synagogues for their faith in Jesus, leading the readers to see the narrative as a two-level drama where both the historical settings of Jesus' proclamation and the Johannine community are considered.[56] However, we should realise that the sign must shed light in the world because 'night is coming when no one is able to work' (9:4c). That is, by repeating a similar statement from the previous chapter of the Gospel,[57] Jesus seems to affirm that the disciples should benefit from his presence in the world as the light that illuminates their understanding about God's work and his mission: 'While I shall be in the world I am the light of the world' (9:5). For Carson, Jesus' declaration does not attest that he will cease being the light of the world by ascending to the Father, but that 'the light shines brightly while he lives out his human life up to the moment of his glorification'.[58] By acknowledging and understanding Jesus' identity, the disciples will keep doing their work in the name of God.

Finally, the last two verses of the first scene portray the sign itself (9:6-7), showing Jesus' technique of mixing his saliva with dust to make mud to apply it to the man born blind's eyes (9:6). There is a vast discussion in Johannine scholarship about Jesus' process to heal the man born blind. Analogous procedures are found in Mark 7.31-36 and 8.22-26, but without reference to the mud pack. Many extrabiblical examples are listed in the Gospel's commentaries, such as the healing of Valerius Aper, a blind soldier who was probably healed by Asclepius through a kind of an eye-salve made of the mixture of honey and a white cock's blood.[59] Based on Rabbi Akiba, it is generally considered that rabbis usually condemned the use of saliva since, in pagan culture, the use of spittle was often associated with magical practices.[60] Some church fathers, more prominently

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[56] Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 35-66. Martyn's view on the existence of a particular Johannine community has received criticism, e.g. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*; Reinhartz, 'The Johannine Community and Its Jewish Neighbors'; Kysar, 'The Whence and Whither of the Johannine Community'; and Klink III, *The Sheep of the Fold*. More recently, Méndez, 'Did the Johannine Community Exist?'.

[57] ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου· ὁ ἀκολουθῶν ἐμοὶ οὐ μὴ περιπατήσῃ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, ἀλλ' ἕξει τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς. ('I am the light of the world; the one following me shall not walk in the darkness but will have the light of life', 8:12).

[58] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 362.

[59] Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 132.

[60] Tosephta, *Sanhedrin* 12:10

Irenaeus, suggested that Jesus' formula with clay and saliva is connected to God's use of dust in the creation of the first human being (Genesis 2:7).[61]

At the end of the scene, Jesus commands the man: 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (9:7).[62] Because he is not portrayed replying to Jesus, although he obeys and comes home seeing, Menken sees the man as completely passive, 'almost exclusively the object of what others say and do'.[63] However, Jesus' approach to the man born blind has raised different scholarly opinions. Webster, for example, thinks that Jesus acted without being solicited and his healing transformed the man born blind 'to the valued sameness of his surrounding community',[64] while Barrett prefers to see him as 'the object of divine mercy and a place of revelation'.[65] Interestingly, although the imagery introduced in the healing scene might remind the readers about the light-and-darkness contrast in the prologue (1:1-8) and other places (3:1-21; 5:35; 6:16-21; 8:1-12), this same imagery seems to also link this episode with a potential parallel between Jesus' work during the day to stop darkness' advance and the man born blind's work in promptly obeying Jesus' words while the Light of the world is still present.

Meaningfully, although the man might have heard about Jesus, and almost certainly heard Jesus' conversation with his disciples about him, he is portrayed as obeying Jesus without having a complete understanding of Jesus' identity as Lord or a clear sign that would lead him to believe in his divinity.[66] This opening scene correlates the man's blindness with his initial unfamiliarity about Jesus, not to depict him negatively, as if the author wanted to associate blindness with the lack of mental or cognitive ability to purposefully build a deplorable depiction to the detriment of the character's human dignity. Jesus' affirmation that the man's blindness was not related to sinfulness disallows such understanding (9:3). Actually, the author tells his readers that because the disciples uncritically link blindness to sinfulness, they are the ones portrayed negatively here.[67] As Colleen Grant states, the man born blind is rendered already in his initial depiction as an

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[61] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* XV.2, 541. Cf. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 363-4; Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 372; Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 358; Brodie, *The Gospel according to John*, 347; Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 545-6.

[62] Some have tried to identified a primitive reference to Christian baptism in Jesus' command to the man born blind. See, for instance, Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 257-8, and Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 380-2. Beasley-Murray thinks the author does not provide enough hint for such a view, in *John*, 162.

[63] Menken, 'The Open Mind of the Man Born Blind (John 9)', 184.

[64] Webster, 'Paradox in the Development of the Non-Disabled Church', 27.

[65] Barret, *The Gospel according to Saint John*, 358.

[66] Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 95.

[67] Howard-Brook, *Becoming Children of God*, 215.

individual fully embodied in himself, not as a symbolic representation of humanity.[68] For her, Jesus's teaching redirects the disciples' question: 'Whereas the disciples are interested in the past cause for the man's blindness, Jesus speaks of its future purpose'.[69]

For this reason, in addition to the more relevant and crucial theological statement about God's glorification through the healing of a man born blind, it is also valid to realise that, as Koester and Mills indicate, the Fourth Gospel plainly emphasises belief and testimony rather than signs and miracles.[70] If that is the case, the author may be initiating the narrative by echoing Jesus' words to Thomas right before the revelation of the Gospel's purpose: 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed' (20:29).

### 7.4. The Sensory Development of the Former Blind Man's Portrayal

#### 7.4.1. Self-Affirmation: The Metaphorical Stage of Blindness (9:8-13)

In the first stage of the former blind man's sensory development, he is depicted as a person who can already see physically. But he also experiences the metaphorical stage of 'blindness', as Jesus temporarily withdraws from the story to later restore himself 'to the position of protagonist' fulfilling the dramatic construction of the narrative (9:35).[71] For this reason, the man's spiritual *sight* is not yet clear. He does not know too much, yet. He can tell his neighbours about the healing episode but refers to Jesus only as 'the man they call Jesus' (9:11). Also, when inquired about Jesus' location, he honestly affirms 'I do not know' (9:12). His only assurance at this point, which is indeed very significant to his characterisation, refers to his astonishing self-affirmation as the man who was healed by Jesus: ἐγώ εἰμι ('I am him', 9:9).

If the previous healing scene introduces Jesus and his disciples at the front to highlight Jesus' creative and redemptive work (9:1-7), it leaves the man born blind in the background. Now, the first stage of his development (9:8-13) reports the verification of

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[68] Koosed and Schumm point that 'Church fathers such as Tertullian and Augustine understood the intricately connected symbolism of the Gospel of John to indicate that the man born blind is indeed a reference to humanity being born in sin', in 'Out of the Darkness', 80. Howard-Brook follows a similar view as he translates the first verse as 'And as he was going along, he saw humanity blind from birth', in *Becoming Children of God*, 215.

[69] Grant, 'Reinterpreting the Healing Narratives', 80.

[70] Koester, 'Hearing, Seeing, and Believing in the Gospel of John', 341; Mills, *The Gospel of John*, 250-55.

[71] Brant, 'The Fourth Gospel as Narrative and Drama', 195.

the miracle,[72] and his neighbours are surprised about his new reality (9:8). But the author seems to stress here that one of the possible literary strategic reasons for Jesus' being largely absent might lie in the former blind man's revelatory ἐγώ εἰμι (9:9). In this regard, Colin Yuckman's work on vision and vocation in John 9 is relevant here.[73]

Yuckman asserts that traditional historical-critical readings of this narrative have usually overlooked its potential for missional readings, and proposes a vocational rendition of the story rather than solely a socio-historical investigation about an implied Johannine community. For him, the original readers of the Gospel would be able to grasp a sophisticated 'doubling' of Jesus and the man born blind, when the former's absence enables the latter's presence to witness on Jesus' behalf while taking up his role as the 'sent' one. For Yuckman, the story is built to equip and empower disciples to testify to Jesus' lordship in his absence.[74]

As the first aspect of his argument, Yuckman comments that little attention has been drawn to Jesus' *anointing* of the blind man's eyes (ἐπέχρισεν, 9:6). While Brown prefers to investigate possible text-critical issues,[75] Barrett adopts the Vaticanus's alternative reading ἐπέθηκεν, following the blind man's own account in 9:15.[76] Yuckman argues that although ἐπέχρισεν might describe Jesus' physical movement ('to spread on; to apply to') it might also function as Jesus' appointment of the blind man as a 'little Christ',[77] thought-provokingly saying that the 'deputizing of a nameless man "born entirely in sin" (v. 34) establishes the man's *bona fides* to speak on Jesus' behalf and in his absence'.[78] For Yuckman, the Gospel's author would have established messianic connections to furnish the man with sufficient authority to witness before the Jewish leaders.

Another aspect in Yuckman's analysis refers to the translation of Siloam as 'Sent'. He agrees with Brown and Koester that the narrator's concern in offering a translation combined with Jesus' title as the 'sent one' should not be accepted as coincidental: 'the continuity of the mission of a disciple with that of Jesus himself is here linguistically and narratively sustained'.[79] In other words, he thinks that the former blind man is 'anointed'

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[72] Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John*, 282.

[73] Yuckman, 'That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest'.

[74] Yuckman, 'That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest', 110.

[75] Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, 372.

[76] Barrett, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 296.

[77] Yuckman employs Martin Luther's view of Christians as versions of Christ, in *The Freedom of a Christian*, 84.

[78] Yuckman, 'That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest', 117.

[79] Yuckman, 'That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest', 117.

and 'sent' by Jesus to wash in the pool of the 'sent (one)' to connect the readers to another saying: as the Father 'sent' the Son, the Son now sends his disciples (20:21).

Yuckman arrives, then, to his assertion that the potential for a missional reading of the narrative is related to the former blind man's words ἐγώ εἰμι (9:9).[80] The phrase occurs 24 times in the Gospel and almost always conveys divine identity.[81] The former blind man, therefore, would be presenting himself as a witness by claiming the authority of the absolute 'I Am'. Yuckmann notes that the author does not portray a popular refusal of the man's self-proclamation (as happens to Jesus in 8:59)[82] which would indicate the man is not deeply aware of such an expression's meaning. But Yuckman thinks the readers realise the strongly implicit significance of such words attributed to him.

Of course, it is inaccurate to attest any author's intention in attributing ἐγώ εἰμι to the former blind man as an attempt to deify him (or better yet, 'Christify'), as 'beyond the issue of identity here, the expression probably should not be pressed theologically'.[83] Crucial for this research is the role that the process of sensory restoration plays in building his characterisation rather than any presumable process of character divinisation. But his consequent acquisition of knowledge of Jesus' divine identity as the Light of the World indeed at least assigns him to the role of an announcer of God's Kingdom message. If not a type of Χριστός, he seems to gradually become an ἀπόστολος.[84]

Following that thought, we should note that the author depicts the former blind man as still not knowing the reason for his healing,[85] but in this first stage of his sensory

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[80] Classic considerations on the 'I Am' sayings are Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 533-38; and Harner, *The 'I Am' of the Fourth Gospel*. Two recent helpful references are Ball, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*; and Williams, *I Am He: The Interpretation of Ânî Hû in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*. See also, Kim, *Truth, Testimony, and Transformation*; and Macaskill, 'Name Christology, Divine Aseity, and the I Am Sayings in the Fourth Gospel'.

[81] Yuckmann follows Harvey McArthur's research to say that ἐγώ εἰμι occurs 14 times with predicates (6:35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12, 18; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5) and 10 without (4:26, 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 9:9; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8). Based on Johannes Coetzee, Yuckman concludes that 'all ten instances of the predicate-less (absolute) ἐγώ εἰμι appear on the lips of Jesus, except for 9:9, and of those nine a good case could be made that they all either signify divine identity or at the very least ambiguously suggest it', That the Works of God Should Be Made Manifest', 118. Cf. McArthur, 'Christological Perspectives in the Predicates of the Johannine Egō Eimi Sayings', and Coetzee, 'Jesus' Revelation in the EGO EIMI Sayings in John 8 and 9'.

[82] Beck interestingly points that 'the theologically weighty phrase ἐγώ εἰμι is echoed by the formerly blind man in verse 9 as his identity becomes a disputed issue, just as Jesus' identity is disputed', in *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 91.

[83] Borchert, *John 1–11*, 316.

[84] Resseguie has a similar view of the result of the man born blind's healing, but focusing more on his identity than his proclamation: 'Although he does not take on the identity of the divine, he finds his voice and his identity in an encounter with the divine', in 'A Narrative-Critical Approach to the Fourth Gospel', 13.

[85] This research does not follow the view that the former blind man's answer creates a schism around himself to represent Jesus' later rift with religious authorities, culminating in his crucifixion. We understand that he is here depicted as a character who came to know and confess Jesus due to the gradual enlightenment provided by the miraculous healing, thus becoming an example for readers to follow. Cf. Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 96. More in Stibbe, *John*, 111; Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community*, 42-5; and Moloney, *Signs and Shadows*, 123.

development he has already started to be enlightened because 'sight becomes insight into the identity of Jesus, a willingness to believe, and finally faith'.[86] Of course, only at the final stage is he portrayed inquiring of Jesus concerning the Son of Man's identity, which seems to be an evident contrast between him and the infirm man healed at the pool of Bethzatha (5:1-14), who would not have been able to say who healed him if it were not for Jesus looking for him again in the Temple.[87] Here, the former blind man has initiated his journey on the path towards the second stage.

### 7.4.2. The Man's Opinion: The Metaphorical Stage of Non-Blindness (9:14-23)

In the second stage of the former blind man's sensory development, he is portrayed as entering the dawn period of his sensory development. His spiritual *sight* gets better with minimal light around him, as he is led to reconsider the healing episode while answering the Pharisees' first inquiry: 'He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see' (9:15). Interestingly, at this second stage of 'non-blindness', he no longer refers to his healer as the man 'they called Jesus', but rather he affirms προφήτης ἐστίν ('he is a prophet', 9:17).

Peculiarly, the former blind man reaches an advanced and rhetorically elaborated witnessing in the next stage, but here his spiritual *sight* improves as he probably begins 'to conceive the gift of illumination'[88] offered by Jesus. However, such 'gift' seems to come also from both the Pharisees' questions and the idiosyncratic identification of the man in this scene. First, the way the author employs spiritual *sight* when characterising both the man and his interlocutors allows the readers to notice a contrasting difference between the man's *sight* and the other characters' *sight*. In other words, by juxtaposing two types of opposing *sights*, the author provides his readers with a comparison between these divergent *sights* to show the appropriateness of each character's portrayal.

Second, Lieu appropriately reminds us that the former blind man is distinctively identified in this second stage as the one who 'had received sight' (ἀνέβλεψεν, 9:15,18), while any other reference to him in the narrative 'is defined in terms of his previous state' (9:8,13,17,24).[89] Also, it might here be plausible to agree with Vincent Muderhwa who, based on Martyn's suggestion of the historical and theological significance of this

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[86] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 191. For Barret, the 'illumination is not presented as primarily intellectual (as in some of the Hermetic tractates) but as the direct bestowal of life or salvation (and thus it is comparable with the gift of living water and the bread of life', in *The Gospel According to St. John*, 354.

[87] For a comparison between these two characters, see Köstenberger, *Signs of the Messiah*, 108-10.

[88] Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel*, 173.

[89] Lieu, 'Blindness in the Johannine Tradition', 89.

particular scene, understands that the former blind man 'boldly confesses not to doctrine about Jesus, but to what Jesus has done for him, and is contrasted with his parents who frame a cautious answer for the Jews'.[90]

Both observations above are relevant. The former blind man might have realised the confusion established amid the Pharisees. Their need to question him about his own opinion (since it was his eyes Jesus opened, 9:17) might have suggested to him that he would have something to say. He perceived that, as his spiritual *sight* developed, he was not only of age to speak and willing to do so, but also a man who had an opinion about Jesus and his healing. Indeed, at this second stage of *non-blindness,* he is portrayed only professing that Jesus must be some kind of prophet, still a poignant statement coming from a former blind beggar in the presence of religious leaders. Moreover, as Myers suggests, calling Jesus a prophet before the Pharisees capitalizes on other connections to the prophets in the pericope, 'such as Jesus' instruction for the man to go to the pool of Siloam, which itself has roots in narratives concerning Isaiah, and similarities between Jesus' healing of the man and Elisha's healing of Naaman in 2 Kings 5'.[91]

What is at stake in this second stage seems to be a matter of sensory development versus sensory regression concerning pertinence and purpose. One type of spiritual *sight* faces the other type of *sight,* revealing two sensory perceptions in opposition. On the one hand, the readers come across the confident, straightened-out evolving *sight* of the former blind man who follows coherent and lucid parameters. On the other hand, they encounter the fearful and uncommitted *sight* of the man's parents, and also the perplexing, confusing and disharmonised *sight* of the Pharisees. While the man's spiritual *sight* is still moving forward, the Pharisees cannot decide whether they should believe in Jesus. While some of them affirm that Jesus 'is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath' (9:16a), others ask: 'How can a sinner perform such signs?' (9:16b). Such a split indicates that not even a blatantly, never heard of miraculous sign can restore their spiritual *sight*.

### 7.4.3. Witness: The Metaphorical Stage of Non-Sight (9:24-34)

In the third stage of the former blind man's sensory development, with little left now before he can experience spiritual full daylight, the former blind man enters the sunrise period. At this stage, he is portrayed as being excluded from one group to be included in

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[90] Muderhwa, 'The Blind Man of John 9 as a Paradigmatic Figure of the Disciple in the Fourth Gospel', 3. Cf. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.

[91] Myers, *Characterizing Jesus*, 150-1.

a different group in the following stage. He is still portrayed with minor limitations in his metaphorical *sight*, as he does not know yet about Jesus' identity when he says, 'whether he is a sinner or not, I do not know' (9:25a). However, he can overtly testify about what happened to him: 'One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see' (9:25b).

The almost complete development of his metaphorical *sight* at this first stage allows him to visualise the deficiency of the Pharisees' spiritual *sight*, prompting him to ironically ask them: 'I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?' (9:27).

In addition, this third stage of the former blind man's sensory development reveals that his metaphorical *sight* has increased for two main reasons. First, his theological insight appears developed as he points out the Pharisees' limited knowledge of God's action: 'Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind' (9:30-32). The second reason refers to the clear progression in his identification of Jesus as a man from God: 'If this man were not from God, he could do nothing' (9:33).

At this third stage, the former blind man is subjected to a final interview, followed by his ironic response that may have sounded to the Pharisees as a quasi-defence of Jesus, which generates the reply: 'You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you to lecture us!' (9:34), and 'ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἔξω ('threw him out', 9:34c). Unfortunately, it will not be possible to present here a proper discussion on the man's expulsion by the Pharisees. Carson suggests that the context of the Fourth Gospel's final expression 'and they threw him out' indicates the man's actual excommunication, thus reflecting his parents' fears (9:22), and not merely physical expulsion from the place where the discussion took place.[92] However, an interesting detail relates to the former blind man's witness development at this moment: this time he speaks without being requested to.

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[92] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 367-72. For relevant scholarly debate see Carroll, 'The Fourth Gospel and the Exclusion of Christians from the Synagogues'; Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 46-66; Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, 374; Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 361; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 488; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 154; Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, 410; Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, 155–6; Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 247–53; Bauckham, *The Gospels for All Christians*, 9-48; Klink III, *The Sheep of the Fold*, 136-47; Hakola, 'The Johannine Community as a Constructed, Imagined Community'. Susan Helen provides a helpful discussion on how the Fourth Gospel's characters make sense within a historical context in which persecution of Christians was known but not systemic, where even expelled Christians could still consider themselves Jewish. With respect to the man born blind's narrative, she believes that 'instead of a clear division between Christians and Jews, the narrative after this point expresses competition over who is the rightful leader or shepherd of God's flock (10:1–18)'. She points out that the variety in the character of the Jews might make sense to readers in a context in which there was not one monolithic Jewish perspective, or a single Jewish response to Christianity, in 'Three Ambiguities', 102-3.

He seems to be portrayed as witnessing because he wants to. His witness does not appear to be an answer but a deliberation. It starts with the nominative adjective θαυμαστόν (admirable, remarkable, extraordinary, 9:30) prompting him to reveal the Pharisees' deficient spiritual *sight* regarding God's works in 'broad daylight'. But it also reaffirms his own sensory development of spiritual *sight*. Or, as Menken suggests, the man presents his own theological reasoning because the Pharisees' reasoning leaves no room for Jesus, while the former blind man's argument starts with his own healing experience. Therefore, his speech becomes the 'longest speech in the entire chapter'.[93]

What seems to propel him to initiate this long speech is not necessarily his fascination with the miracle per se (albeit nowhere is he portrayed refuting Jesus' healing), but his opposition to the Pharisees' argument that simply because they do not know the origin of the man who gave him *sight*, they authorise themselves to discredit his healing as God's work in his life. In other words, the former blind man is portrayed as seeing almost fully and clearly, in contradiction to the absurdity of the Pharisees' logic when they suppose that their own lack of spiritual *sight* (knowledge about Jesus) authorises them to rubber-stamp the validity of Jesus' sign.

The author portrays the former blind man with an increase in his spiritual *sight,* providing him with a theological ability to point out the Pharisees' confusion about Jesus' sign and, consequently, their neglect of Jesus' immanent relationship with God. Skilfully, if earlier the man honestly answers οὐκ οἶδα ('I don't know', 9:12) when asked about Jesus' location, now the author employs the same verb οἶδα ('to know, perceive') negatively to the Pharisees (ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἴδατε πόθεν ἐστίν, '*You don't know* where he comes from', 9:30) and positively to the former blind man (οἴδαμεν ὅτι ἁμαρτωλῶν ὁ θεὸς οὐκ ἀκούει, '*We know* that God does not listen to sinners', 9:31).

The sensory development in the former blind man's characterisation begins here to surprise the readers even if the narrative's end does not reveal the character's fate. But the readers are told that the man transitions to a new position within the story: witness. His testimony evaluates the religious authorities' contrarian attitude towards Jesus. His witness is long and coherent, almost erudite. It reviews and mirrors all previous interrogations to unmask the declining spiritual *sight* of his inquisitors. By concluding indisputably that, 'If this [man] were not from God, he could do nothing' (9:33), he sparks a harsh reaction from those who now are losing the appropriateness of their spiritual *sight*.

[93] Menken 'The Open mind of the Man Born Blind', 187.

The author has made himself clear. The religious authorities assume the initial stage of the man born blind's characterisation. They have become deprived of spiritual *sight* as they lose the coherent thread of their judgement and resort to violence: 'And they threw him out' (9:34). Readers are led to realise that the 'literate' people, holders of the authority to teach, are constrained by the 'illiterate' man, who now is given spiritual *sight* to move towards his confession and worship of the one he will recognise as his healer.

### 7.4.4. Belief and Worship: The Metaphorical Stage of Sight (9:35-38)

In the fourth stage of the former blind man's sensory development, he is finally portrayed as having his sense of *sight* fully developed. His second meeting with Jesus brings him to the full daylight of his characterisation. Jesus ἤκουσεν ('heard', 9:35) that the Pharisees expelled the healed man from the synagogue, returns to the narrative after a long period of absence and, presumably intentionally, meets the man again to lead him to accomplish the healing process. In the presence of his healer, he is able, first, to eradicate any doubt about Jesus' identity by asking him, 'Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him.' (9:36), and then, believing in Jesus, confessing him as Lord, and worshipping him by prostrating himself at his feet: πιστεύω, κύριε ('Lord, I believe', 9:38). He can now see completely clear as the full daylight reaches his life.

One particular aspect at this fourth stage, however, might surprise the readers, provoking a sudden climatic anticipation that the development of the man's portrayal should not be taken as happening as smoothly as the narrative appeared to demonstrate thus far. Jesus' question 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' (9:35)[94] may sound like a pushback, leading readers to think that Jesus' demands regarding trust and faithfulness are not being met by the former blind man, even after the story reveals that he has been witnessing before religious authorities all along without even knowing Jesus deeply.

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[94] We are unable to develop a discussion on the words τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (9:35). The use of 'Son of Man' within the Fourth Gospel has been discussed exhaustively among Johannine scholars. Here, it is often suggested that the theme of 'judgment' should be taken into consideration, due to Jesus' affirmation εἰς κρίμα ἐγὼ εἰς τὸν κόσμον τοῦτον ἦλθον ('For judgment I have come into this world', 9:39). According to Jewish tradition, the book of Daniel indicates the image of the 'son of man' as an eschatological judge (Daniel 7:13). However, in ten mentions of this title in the Fourth Gospel, only once does Jesus identify himself in the role of judge (cf. 5:27), while the others demonstrate several essential aspects of his redemptive ministry, namely, his incessant relationship with heaven (1:51), his ascent and descent to heaven (3:13), his ascension to heaven (6:62), his passage through the cross (3:14 and 12:34), his glorification (13:31), and that his image as the food of the world (6:27,53). Some instances of scholarly debate are Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 240-80; Casey, *The Solution to the 'Son of Man' Problem*; Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*; Freed, 'The Son of Man in the Fourth Gospel'; Moloney, '"Constructing Jesus" and the Son of Man'; Müller, '"Have You Faith in the Son of Man?"'; Pamment, 'The Son of Man in the Fourth Gospel'; Pazdan, *The Son of Man*; Reynolds, *The Apocalyptic Son of Man in the Gospel of John* and *The Son of Man Problem*; Romanowsky, '"When the Son of Man Is Lifted Up"'; Walker, 'John 1.43-51 and "the Son of Man" in the Fourth Gospel'.

In this regard, Lindars suggests the narrative teaches that because spiritual *sight* must lead to confession of faith in Jesus, spiritual blindness obviously leads to refusal to believe.[95] However, as this research has previously stated, it seems more accurate to read this story as a gradual improvement of the character's different levels of *sight*, instead of a simple dualism *sight-blindness*, at the risk of ending up confusing physical sight-blindness with spiritual sight-blindness. Each dimension seems to belong on a different shelf. Malina and Rohrbauch propose a likely more adequate explanation when saying that Jesus' is actually asking the healed man 'if he believes "into" the Son of Man. The idea of believing "into" Jesus, in John's antilanguage, implies loyalty of a high order. In effect, Jesus is asking if the man is prepared to be a part of his antisociety'.[96]

The idea of loyalty of a high order or commitment to Jesus' movement seems to fit into the particular path upon which the author appears to be leading the character. Considering that Jesus' question is immediately followed by the former blind man's question, 'Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him' (9:36), his understanding of Jesus begins to be appropriately enlightened when Jesus inducts him through his self-revelation. In other words, both characters appear to be wanting to reach specific goals. Jesus wants him to believe and trust in him so that the man can receive the full spiritual *sight*. The man wants to know who Jesus is so that he can complete the development of his spiritual *sight*.

At this point, the former blind man's fully developed spiritual *sight* functions as a symbol of his faith in wanting to know more about his healer. He is presumably aware of the *enlightenment* process he has been through to recognize Jesus' identity. He learned more about Jesus at each stage of his sensory development. He faced numerous deliberations along the way to learn from Jesus himself that the one speaking with him is both authorised and empowered to introduce the following 'statement about judgment and renews the reader's awareness of Jesus' human vulnerability'.[97] Particularly, he now shines before the Light of the World as he answers Jesus' question with another question, not signalling disrespect or arrogance, but inquisitiveness.

The man who has progressed from identifying his healer as 'the man they call Jesus'(9:11), next, as a prophet (9:13), and then, as a man from God (9:33), now confesses him as Lord (9:38).[98] Admittedly, the noun Κύριε is a vocative masculine singular in both

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[95] Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, 340.

[96] Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 173.

[97] Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*, 193.

[98] Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 94.

9:36 and 9:38. However, although the narrative flow suggests that the former blind man employs it as courtesy in 9:36, the second time functions as a deep theological statement revealing his acknowledgement of Jesus as worthy of worship.[99] The increase in his confession level is directly linked to the enhancement in his spiritual *sight*.

The author portrays the former blind man's theological actualisation as Jesus answers him, 'You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you' (9:37). Here, a careful survey of Jesus' words in the context of their dialogue reveals relevant features. First of all, in the attempt to answer the man's previous question (9:36), Jesus makes himself known through the conjunction καὶ which, in its precise place in the text, would be better rendered as 'both', thus suggesting the following response from Jesus: 'He is *both* the one you have seen and the one speaking with you'.

Secondly, instead of employing verbs such as βλέπω ('to look at') or ἀναβλέπω ('to look up' or 'to recover sight'), the author here employs ἑώρακας (the perfect indicative active second person singular of ὁράω, 'to see, perceive, attend to'), probably to denote an experience that extends from the past but has predominantly present meaning (cf. 14:7,9 and 20:29).[100] The author presumably wanted his readers to avoid the simpler assumption that Jesus refers exclusively to the physical action of 'opening of the eyes' that happened in the sign (9:6-7). Physical healing is, of course, crucial for the man's characterisation, but Jesus moves on to affirm that although he currently sees physically (cf. 9:7, 11, 15, 18, 19, 21 and 25), he has been now also provided with spiritual *sight*.

Because Jesus' self-revelation prompts the former blind man to see clearly, his *sight* is now fully developed for a purpose. Here, Jesus does not reveal himself by unveiling a theological concept or a description of his prophetic figure, but by his very presence before the man. Jesus' healing and revelation are the gifts to the man par excellence. His physical healing at the beginning of the story is important to reveal God's work through Jesus' ministry, but the man realises that Jesus is the divine light working in the world only after having accomplished his full sensory development of spiritual *sight*. That is why he προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ ('worshipped him', 9:38).[101]

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[99] See Clark, 'Provocative Vocatives in the Gospels', 426; and Reimer, 'The Man Born Blind', 436.

[100] Cf Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 440; Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 349.

[101] Brodie's analysis of προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ is interesting. He translates the expression as 'he bowed in worship before him', and correlates it with the first time it is employed in the NT: the baby Jesus before whom the Magi bowed down (cf. Matthew 2:2, 8, 11). For Brodie, the author wants to affirm that the former blind man presents his humble worship as the final insight of development. In *The Gospel According to John*, 353.

### 7.5. The Judgement Scene (9:39-41)

Once the sensory development of the former blind man's characterisation is achieved, the author closes the story with a last brief conversation between Jesus and some Pharisees who are listening to him. The healed man is no longer mentioned, although the talk revolves around *sight* and *blindness*. The narrative does not specify to whom Jesus addresses this final teaching, but he makes a general statement about divine judgment: 'For judgement, I have come into this world, that those not seeing may see and those seeing may become blind' (9:39).

Importantly though, Jesus uses κρίμα[102] instead of κρίσις, employed in 3:19; 5:22, 24, 27, 29, 30; 7:24; 8:16; 12:31; 18:8,1 (cf. Matthews 23:13; Luke 24:25). While the latter indicates condemnation through the very action of judging, the former denotes a division between two groups: those in favour and against Jesus' self-revelation as God's Son. For this reason, Jesus' use of κρίμα could be translated as 'discernment', referring to the divine sovereignty that comes into the world to clarify the difference between light and darkness, probably evoking Isaiah (6:9-10)[103] to show that the religious leaders are pursuing self-glorification.

Of course, Jesus' words may be taken as a general declaration applied to anyone who ignores his message. But, in this story, it should be understood that the Pharisees are the ones portrayed as 'those who see will become blind' (9:39c) because, in their bragging about their knowledge of God's law, they are openly characterised as eliciting an environment of contradiction with Jesus and his proclamation of God's will.

Earlier in the narrative, the Pharisees are portrayed as self-assured in the light propagated by the law (9:28-29) without realising that such light alone is insufficient. By not accepting Jesus as the true light that has come into the world for judgement, Jesus seems to be telling the Pharisees that they have become blind (τυφλοὶ). Their short question to Jesus, 'We are not blind, too?' (9:40) reveals more fear and obliviousness rather than confidence. Jesus' reply 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin;

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[102] This is the only place κρίμα occurs in the Fourth Gospel. See discussion on Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, 327-30 and Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 365.

[103] וַיֹּאמֶר לֵךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ֣ לָעָ֣ם הַזֶּ֗ה שִׁמְע֤וּ שָׁמוֹעַ֙ וְאַל־תָּבִ֔ינוּ וּרְא֥וּ רָא֖וֹ וְאַל־תֵּדָֽעוּ׃ (And He said: 'Go, and tell 'Go, and tell this people: hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.) הַשְׁמֵ֞ן לֵ֣ב־הָעָ֣ם הַזֶּ֗ה וְאָזְנָיו֙ הַכְבֵּ֔ד וְעֵינָ֖יו הָשַׁ֑ע פֶּן־יִרְאֶ֤ה בְעֵינָיו֙ וּבְאָזְנָ֣יו יִשְׁמָ֔ע וּלְבָב֖וֹ יָבִ֑ין וְשָׁ֥ב וְרָפָ֖א לֽוֹ׃ (Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they, seeing with their eyes, and hearing with their ears, and understanding with their heart, return, and be healed').

but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains' (9:41) shows that the Pharisees are not able to understand the irony of their own words.[104]

The Pharisees' metaphorical *sight* is not only short, it is misguided. In opposition to the former blind man, who is now portrayed as having the full *sight* that enables him to believe in and worship Jesus, the Pharisees arrive at the end of the narrative only to demonstrate their lack of understanding of Jesus' identity.[105] Although no character in this narrative is depicted directly identifying Jesus with the terms 'Messiah' or 'Christ', bringing sight to blind people might be understood as a clear sign of Messiahship. Therefore, it would be correct to correlate Jesus' marvellous bringing of *sight* to a man blind from birth with messianic expectations, such as Isaiah 35:5 (see also Matthews 11:1-6 and Luke 4:18; 7:18-23).[106] The Pharisees, therefore, have not improved their sense of spiritual *sight*. Their final words reveal that they misunderstand God's work through Jesus who is working at full daylight, refusing *to see* Jesus as the Son of Man. The Pharisees' final feature, therefore, functions as the confirmation of the final stage of the sensory development of the former blind man's characterisation, whose *sight* has been completely developed, both physically and spiritually, as he professes Jesus as his Lord.

### 7.6. Synaesthesia in the Former Blind Man's Characterisation

The previous section demonstrated the four stages of metaphorical *sight* in the sensory development of the former blind man's characterisation. We now investigate how synaesthesia (the merging of senses) might have contributed to building his portrayal since the survey of senses implied in human behaviour provides a perception particular to each character. Such an investigation is crucial as we assume the Fourth Gospel conveys meaningful cultural information through sensory functions, one of the most common in the man born blind's portrayal being the synaesthetic function of *sight* with the somatic outcomes of *movement* and *speech*.

As demonstrated so far, readers of this narrative likely consider *sight* as the more evident and immediate sensory experience in virtue of Jesus' mighty healing work. Although we must indeed hold Jesus' powerful act in view, the man evolves as a character

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[104] Gosbell, *'The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, and the Lame'*, 316.

[105] Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, 720.

[106] Although the OT does not provide evidence about prophets healing the blind, there are still other prophecies probably indicating the Messiah restoring the sight of blind people, such as Isaiah 29:18; 42:7,18, and Psalm 146:8. See an interesting discussion in Van der Loos, *Miracles of Jesus*, 415–434.

not only for improving his sense of physical *sight*. Actually, the text indirectly warns that such a prospect would be a shallow reading of its intended message.

The author does so by demonstrating that although *sight* is undeniably an essential sense in the story, the narrative pattern is also built upon another sensory perception that highlights the relevance of *sight* in the man's characterisation. The blind man's account develops through the sensory functionality of *sight-movement-speech*. Indeed, *movement* and *speech* are not the primary sensory perceptions in the man's depiction, but they work as catalyst for somatic outcomes propelling the gradual development of the man's *sight*.

Interestingly, if the author leads his readers to realise that *sight* functions as a double-entendre (the man first gains physical *sight* and, along the story, has his spiritual *sight* improved to acquire insight into Jesus' identity), here the author applies a similar function to the somatic outcomes of *movement* and *speech*, since they are intricately represented both physically and metaphorically. First, *movement* is employed to describe how Jesus' miraculous physical healing provides the man born blind with physical *sight*, and then, *speech* is employed to reveal his gradual insight about Jesus as expresses his self-assurance, his opinion about Jesus, his witness, and his belief and worship of the 'incarnate revelation of God who gave his life for the world'.[107] In the opposition between blindness versus sight, *movement* enables Jesus' sign and revelation of himself to gradually enlighten the man's *speech* until his sensory development is achieved to realise Jesus as κύριε (9:38).

The *movement* from *blindness* to *sight* is precise throughout the narrative. However, *movement* starts even before the beginning of his development, in the healing scene: *Passing by* (παράγων), Jesus sees a man blind from birth (9:1). After a brief discussion with his disciples on the man's purposes, Jesus says that they must do 'the works of the one who *sent me*' (πέμψαντός με) because night is *coming* (ἔρχεται, 9:4). Still in this first scene, he continues 'the creative work of the divine logos by creating eyes'[108] for the man born blind, commanding him *to go* (ὕπαγε) and wash in the pool of the '*Sent*' (Σιλωάμ, 9:7a), Here, the very name of the pool might indicate *movement* as its symbolic significance leads the readers to identify the power of Jesus to bring *sight* to a man born blind while he stands as the one sent by God. God is *moving* and acting within His creation. The man born blind *went* (ἀπῆλθεν), washed and *came* (ἦλθεν) seeing (9:7b).

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[107] Borchert, *John 1–11*, 324.

[108] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 34.

From then on, after initiating his sensory development of metaphorical *sight*, *movement* occurs in all four stages (blindness, non-blindness, non-sight, sight). First, when the former blind man tries to explain the healing to his neighbours: 'He told me *to go* (ὕπαγε) to Siloam and wash. So, *having gone* (ἀπελθὼν) and washed, I received sight' (9:11). It also happens when his neighbours *bring him* (Ἄγουσιν αὐτὸν) to the Pharisees (9:13), and, later, when the Pharisees ask him again about how *he received his* sight (ἀνέβλεψεν, 9:15). The Pharisees decreed that Jesus is not *from* (παρὰ) God (9:16) and the man's parents were afraid to be *expelled* (ἀποσυνάγωγος) from the synagogue (9:22). This stage closes as the former blind man answers the Pharisees: 'That is an amazing thing, that you do not know *from where he is* (πόθεν ἐστίν), and yet *he opened* (ἤνοιξέν) my eyes (9:30). Later, he concludes, 'if this man were not *from God* (παρὰ θεοῦ), he could do nothing' (9:33). Finally, the author employs *movement* to indicate that the Pharisees *throw him out* (ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἔξω, 9:34).

This last mention of *movement* is crucial, as the action happens precisely when the former blind man's spiritual *sight* and the somatic outcome *speech*—though not yet fully developed—no longer fits within the Pharisees' *sight* and *speech*, and thus, need to be eliminated. That is when *movement* and *speech* bridge two contrasting realities in the story. The man *moves out* from one group (the synagogue), bluntly contrasting with Jesus' *move* in the opposite direction. As Jesus hears that *they had thrown him out* (ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἔξω, 9:35), he *moves* towards the man, finds him, and *moves* him back towards inclusion in the group with the same sight and speech (the believers).[109]

Therefore, the function of metaphorical *movement* is also present. The narrative begins with Jesus *moving* the man born blind to physical *sight* so that 'the works of God should be displayed in him' (9:3), and it ends portraying Jesus *moving* the former blind man to spiritual *sight* so that 'those not seeing may see' (9:39). The author skilfully depicts the former blind man's journey as he is blessed with *sight* twice, precisely through metaphorical *movement*: Jesus *moves* him toward *sight*, then the religious leaders try to *move* him back to blindness, and, finally, Jesus comes again to *move* him back towards the even more powerful *sight*, this time one that is impossible to extinguish.

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[109] Koester raises an interesting discussion regarding the process of the man born blind's belief in Jesus. According to him, the narrative does not clarify at what point the man born blind came to faith in Jesus: 'Is it at the beginning, when he silently goes to the pool as directed by Jesus (9:7)? Or when he acknowledges that "the man called Jesus" put mud on his eyes and told him to wash (9:11)? In the middle of the story he calls Jesus "a prophet" (9:17) and someone "from God" (9:33), but he does not call Jesus the Messiah and in the final scene has to ask who the Son of Man is (9:36). So are readers to think he is a believer only at the end, when he says, "I believe" (9:38), or has faith emerged along the way?', in 'Theological Complexity and the Characterization of Nicodemus in John's Gospel', 168.

After fixing and remodelling the Pharisees' work, kinaesthesia is still relevant in the narrative as Jesus deals with them by stating that, 'for judgement, *I came* (ἦλθον) into this world, that those not seeing *may see* (βλέπωσιν) and those seeing *may become blind* (τυφλοὶ γένωνται, 9:39). Their blindness condemns them, since 'blindness can be cured; sightless seeing remains incurable'.[110]

Through mentions of the sense of *sight*, and the somatic outcomes of *movement* and *speech*, the author tells his readers about the relevance of being able to *see* the truth, *coming* to the person who is the truth, and upon knowing the truth, *confessing* the truth. Whereas the Pharisees are depicted as self-deceived religious leaders who cannot *see* spiritually and, therefore, are unable to *move* towards Jesus to avail themselves of his merciful benefits and consequently *proclaim* Jesus' messiahship, the former blind man is portrayed as *moving* in a direction opposite from guilt. He gains physical *sight* through Jesus' merciful healing, then receives spiritual *sight* through Jesus' divine revelation. The man's relevant physical *sight* is completed through the unique spiritual *sight* (enlightenment, understanding) provided by Jesus. That way, readers are invited to emulate the former blind man's attitude to improve their spiritual *sight* by coming to the Son of Man (*moving*) and confessing his name (*speech*).

### 7.7. Sensing the Man Born Blind's Characterisation Development

This chapter has investigated the sense of *sight* in the sensory development of the man born blind's characterisation in the Fourth Gospel. We must now update Bennema's *table of character analysis* with the character's sensory experiences and development.

| | The man born blind | John 9:1-41 |
|---|---|---|
| DESCRIPTORS | AGGREGATE INFORMATION | RESULTS |
| The Man Born Blind in Text and Context | Birth, Gender, Ethnicity, Nation/City | blind from birth, male, Judean |
| | Family (Ancestors, Relatives) | his parents |
| | Nurture, Education | |
| | Epithets, Reputation | a sinner |
| | Age, Marital Status | probably a young adult |
| | Socioeconomic Status, Wealth | socioeconomic outcast |
| | Place of Residence/Operation | near the temple in Jerusalem |
| | Occupation, Positions Held | beggar |
| | Group Affiliation, Friends | neighbours |

[110] Resseguie, 'A Narrative-Critical Approach to the Fourth Gospel', 7.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | In Interaction with the Protagonist | he responds well |
| | In Interaction with Other Characters | he testifies boldly about Jesus to his neighbours and the authorities amid persecution |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Man Born Blind's Classification | Complexity | complex; multiple traits: obedient, courageous, intelligent, open-minded, willing to testify, risk-taking, loyal |
| | Development | some |
| | Inner Life | some |
| | Degree of Characterisation | personality |
| The Man Born Blind's Evaluation | Response to the Protagonist | adequate, saving belief-response |
| The Man Born Blind's Significance | Role in the Plot | the man's condition provides Jesus with an opportunity to act on his earlier claim to be the light of the world (8:12); the man's experience of being expelled paves the way for Jesus to inform the disciples that a similar hostility awaits them after his departure (cf. 15:18-16:4a) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Biblical Sensorium | Sensory Generative Trajectory of Meaning | *blindness* to *non-blindness* to *non-sight* to *sight* |
| | Synaesthetic Experience and Somatic Outcome | Sight, with Movement and Speech |
| | Sensory Development | the man is given physical *sight* at the beginning of the story but is also portrayed as synaesthetically being *moved* to other stages, where he develops his speech and receives spiritual *sight* (understanding), leading him to believe and worship his healer as the Son of Man |

This research considered initially Bennema's findings about the characters and then includes the results obtained by the investigation realised in this chapter. With the updated table above, we can understand the sensory development of the man born blind's characterisation. The healing scene portrays him without physical sight (9:1-7). Then, after having received physical *sight*, his sensory development of spiritual sight initiates.

In the first stage (9:8-13), he metaphorically experiences 'night', as Jesus leaves the story temporarily. However, although his spiritual *sight* is not yet clear since at night 'no one can work', he is able to affirm himself: ἐγώ εἰμι ('I am him', 9:9). In the second stage 'non-blindness' (9:14-23), he experiences the dawn of his sensory development. His spiritual *sight* gets better with some little light around him, and is now portrayed as having an opinion about Jesus: προφήτης ἐστίν ('he is a prophet', 9:17). The third stage of his sensory development, 'non-sight' (9:24-34), shows him entering the sunrise period, almost ready to experience broad daylight. At this stage, he still has some minor limitations in his spiritual *sight*, but he overtly witnesses what happened to him: 'One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see' (9:25b). Finally, in the fourth stage, the metaphorical sight, (9:35-38), the former blind man is portrayed as having his sense of

*sight* fully developed. He meets Jesus again, the light of the world, to eradicate any doubt about Jesus' identity. Then, believing and confessing, he prostrates himself and worships Jesus: πιστεύω, κύριε ('Lord, I believe', 9:38).

Significantly, the author does not portray the man returning to his healer. Jesus takes the initiative to meet him again. The readers might expect to see the former blind man believing in and worshipping Jesus any time after the healing, but his response is delayed. The author might have intended to demonstrate that the former blind man's sensory development leads him to become a character who reaches the degree of 'individuality'.

We are here able to realise a similar finding about the biblical understanding of the human person, as reflected in the study of sensory perceptions of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, which underscores the integral unity of the human person, challenging any notion of dualistic separation. In the biblical tradition, humanity is created in the image and likeness of God, affirming a holistic view in which bodily and spiritual experiences are inseparable. This perspective finds compelling expression in the account of the man born blind, where Jesus' act of physical healing signifies more than the restoration of sight. It becomes a profound symbol of spiritual, social, and existential renewal. The narrative reveals how sensory perception serves not only as the foundation of human experience but also as a means through which the fullness of God's glory is displayed. In this respect, the man's journey—from recognising Jesus, to believing in him as Lord, to adoring him as Creator—represents the restoration of his entire being, transforming him into a witness to the Kingdom's message. Thus, the Fourth Gospel employs sensory perception as a dynamic locus of divine interaction, affirming the wholeness of the human person and the inseparability of physical and spiritual restoration within God's redemptive work.

Such a holistic understanding of the human person aligns with the purpose articulated in John 20:31. The restoration of the man born blind exemplifies the Gospel's ultimate purpose of leading its readers to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that by believing, they may have life in his name, since the man's sensory and spiritual transformation leads to a profound confession of faith in Jesus as Lord. His journey embodies the life promised in the Gospel's theological motif, where belief in Christ brings about not only salvation but the fullness of existence in communion with God.

Still, before Jesus, he shows himself willing to receive and accept his self-revelation as the Son of Man.[111] Resseguie affirms that the structure of the man's narrative clearly differs from other healing stories in the Gospel as it does not conform to their basic form. For him, the man born blind speaks, uses irony and sarcasm, and takes the initiative to teach the Pharisees some basic theological insights: "Unlike any other healing story of the Gospel of John, the blind man in chapter 9 does not fade into the background. He remains not only in the foreground but as the centre of attention for the entire chapter'.[112] This unfolding development is similar to what Dorothy Lee calls the 'basic stages of symbolic narrative,' when she affirms that all aspects of a symbolic narrative are present in the story of the man born blind, 'beginning with the miracle and ending on a note of joyful confession, on the one hand, and rejection, on the other.'[113] As pivotal as seeing this development as a literary aspect is to realise the author's strategy in highlighting that after the physical healing and the spiritual perception of the light of God's glory, the former blind man recognises his place and role in God's restoration story for His creation.

[111] Holleran, 'Seeing the Light', 20.

[112] Resseguie, 'John 9', 117.

[113] Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel*, 62.

# Chapter 8 | **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

## 8.1. Sensing Initial Findings

This study began by inquiring about how the author of the Fourth Gospel might have employed the human senses to build his characters. Following the results of this investigation, it is understood that the author would have benefited from his cultural mindset concerning the senses to produce his narratives. Although we will probably never be able to surely affirm the ways through which the first-century Church developed its unique use of the senses in order to acquire a particular set of sensory-related symbolism, biblical and extra-biblical textual sources teach us that, in the early Christian church, 'the senses came to sit at the heart of how Christians define themselves and the structure of their communities'.[1]

We modern readers have our own sensory experiences in our specific historical time and socio-cultural context. We may have a different understanding of the human body sensorium today in comparison with the first-century readers of the Gospels, but we can say that the ancient people of Palestine also lived their daily lives through sensory experiences. Reading the Fourth Gospel, one cannot deny the presence of sensory perception in its narratives. Jesus' interactions with other characters are always portrayed with sensory aspects, some clearly distinctive while others are almost imperceptible. In an attempt to invite his readers to more closely interact with his stories, the Gospel's author employed his mindset of sensory symbolism to furnish his literary characters with multiple sensory perceptions, either emphasising one peculiar relevant sense or merging multiple senses to bring up a colourful depiction of a particular characterisation.

The first chapter of this thesis provided the background for this research, showing how the study of the human senses in the development of the Fourth Gospel's characters could contribute to a more holistic and integral understanding of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God. In that chapter, we established the context of the surveyed topic, the motivation for undertaking this work and its relevance to the scholarly effort in biblical studies, particularly on the studies of characterisation, and even more specifically the character-construction work in the Fourth Gospel.

In this research, we decided to designate a separate chapter for the literature review on scholarly surveys of biblical characters. The second chapter introduced how the

[1] Toner, *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, 18.

present survey of sensory development in Johannine's characterisation might fit with what has been written on this topic thus far, qualifying the path of this investigation and its unique contribution. The chapter began by critically analysing the background of recent research on biblical characters through the lenses of narrative criticism and affirmed the relevance of this interpretative approach to survey biblical narratives through literary analysis. The review of literature looked into numerous aspects and features of narrative criticism to understand how it investigates stories as literature, including characterisation as the main topic addressed in this survey. Then, it demonstrated that although the approach belongs to the broad field of literary criticism, and therefore benefits primarily from secular narrative theories, it is adopted by many biblical scholars as an interpretative model with its own particularities. After that, the chapter provided a scholarly discussion on character definition, the classification scheme for literary characters in the contemporary theory of narratives in biblical scholarship, and the relationship between characters, plot and narrator. The chapter was completed with a brief analysis of Cornelis Bennema's work on characterisation.

Once we discussed the scholarly contribution of biblical studies to the literary analysis of character construction, we were ready to introduce the second methodological lens of this research that, combined with narrative criticism, has allowed us to introduce a specific exegetical method of analysis of biblical characters. For this reason, it was decided to write a specific chapter to offer a concise yet clarifying discussion on the discipline of sensory anthropology and its contribution to the present survey on the sensory development of characters in the Fourth Gospel.

The third chapter, therefore, discussed the relevance of the cultural study of the senses to highlight the plausibility of surveying biblical narratives through the sensorium. We provided a short analysis of the historical development of the interest in the human senses since the philosophical discourse of the Greco-Roman culture to show that, curiously, the interest of biblical scholarship in surveying sensory experiences has been a relatively recent phenomenon. This unique chapter also considered particular aspects of sensory anthropology and how this discipline works with other academic fields to survey biblical texts. After that, we introduced essential features of current research on sensory scholarship, which has helped us better examine the recent relationship between sensory studies and other academic disciplines. Finally, that chapter dedicated a substantial section to introducing and discussing Yael Avrahami's theory of sensory perception in the Bible.

The fourth chapter, then, was responsible for introducing the exegetical method of this research in detail. It presented an interaction between the three methodological lenses selected for this thesis to devise a unique interpretational reading of biblical characters. It unveiled the interaction between Cornelis Bennema's survey on NT characters and Yael Avrahami's biblical sensorium. With the assistance of Algirdas Greimas' work on the generative trajectory of meaning, all three lenses bring forth a distinct approach to surveying how the sensory development of Johannine characters may be understood.

Chapters five to seven were dedicated exclusively to the work of investigating the sensory development of Johannine's characterisation. In those chapters, we applied the exegetical method developed in this research to arrive at the results presented below. The fifth chapter studied the three portrayals of Nicodemus along the Gospel (3:1-15; 7:45-53; 19:38-42), investigating how the writer developed the depiction of this character through sensory experiences. What are the primary aspects of this research that assist us in understanding how the sensory development of the characterisation of Nicodemus' role contributes to the overall goal of the Fourth Gospel (20:30-31)? What are some significant contributions of this research to the study of the development of this biblical character?

First, we observed that Avrahami proposes two distinct senses in the septasensory model of the Bible, in contrast to the Western pentasensory mindset, both of which are richly manifested in Nicodemus's characterisation. Although we have chosen to identify *speech* and *movement* as somatic outcomes rather than sensory experiences, we can still affirm they are crucial to understanding the development of his portrayal along the three narratives. With the assistance of the analysis of the sensory generative trajectory of meaning attributed to Nicodemus, we are told that Nicodemus experienced a decrease in his *speech*, which happens through the evident gradual increase in his *movement* throughout the stories.

After meeting Jesus, Nicodemus is portrayed as experiencing a development in his characterisation that might initially seem to be going backwards: He first appears as 'a man searching for the Way' (3:1-21) as he had not yet met Jesus, and his *speech* was still functioning. Nicodemus approaches Jesus and engages in an open theological dialogue, seeking to comprehend the young rabbi's doctrinal stance. His inquisitiveness and eagerness to learn are evident in his *speech*, despite his difficulty in understanding Jesus' teachings. Then, after meeting Jesus, he *moves* to 'the man who questions a way' (7:45-53), where he is shown to have fewer expressions of *speech*, becoming suspicious that something might not be quite right concerning his fellow Pharisees' assessment of Jesus. Nicodemus *transitions* from mere curiosity to cautious advocacy, marked by fewer words

but increased risk-taking actions. Finally, he *moves* again to be portrayed as 'a man finding his way' (19:38-42), a short narrative that shows that his development as a character achieves its climax not with sensory words but with a unique sensory outcome. He acts openly without the concealment of night and without words. This transformation from a vocal inquirer in his initial appearance to a silent, active supporter by the end demonstrates the evident sensory development in his characterisation. His final actions reflect a deep respect for Jesus and imply a considerable personal cost, signalling his consideration of Jesus' movement.

The second finding on Nicodemus' sensory development refers to the synaesthetic relationship between *speech* and *smell*. Even while portrayed as gradually deprived of his *speech*, Nicodemus' role does not demean its significance for the Gospel's purposes. On the contrary, the author depicts Nicodemus as a man who, after interacting with Jesus, was able to envisage himself dealing with the challenges faced by any man or woman who decided to get involved with Jesus' movement. Although the author tells his readers that Nicodemus is an active man (he comes to Jesus, engages in conversation, attends the Sanhedrin, stands up for Jesus and questions his colleagues, and comes to the tomb), his unique attitude at Jesus' burial took place because he became capable of 'sensing' that something was wrong. Although silencing before God might become a wise posture sometimes (Psalm 37:7) and living as the pleasing aroma of Christ might be requested of Jesus' followers (2 Corinthians 2:15), it seems that the Gospel's writer wanted to portray Nicodemus' realization at Jesus' burial that the *muteness* and *odour* of death are undesirable. Such realities do not match Jesus' teachings and signs of God's Kingdom.

Chapter six applies the exegetical method to survey the sensory development in the depiction of the Samaritan woman of Sychar (4:1-42). In contrast with what happened with Nicodemus' characterisation, the sensory development in the woman's portrayal moves forward, not backwards. But here we should also ask: What are the primary aspects of this research that assist us in understanding how the sensory development of the characterisation of the Samaritan woman's role contributes to the overall goal of the Fourth Gospel (20:30-31)? What are some significant contributions of this research to the study of the development of this biblical character?

Our first finding indicates the increase in her sense of *taste* (both for Jesus' living water and for Jesus' food). Her new *taste* of abundant life was acquired because she met the Messiah and was blessed with freedom. As we have seen, her capacity to *tastefully* experience Jesus' proclamation led her to an evident liberation from her prejudice towards the Jews and their theological understanding of worship.

The second finding in her characterisation refers to her sensory generative trajectory of meaning, revealing a transition over four distinct stages, each of them connected to a unique condition of the sense of *taste*: *awkwardness* (tasteless); *inquiry* (non-tasteless); *declaration* (non-tasteful); and *invitation* (tasteful). Interestingly, we also found that each of these four stages distinctly correlates to one or more specific narrative themes along the story: *awkwardness* (tasteless) is connected to gender and ethnicity; *inquiry* (non-tasteless) is linked to the betrothal type-scene and the living water; *declaration* (non-tasteful) is related to her marital history and true worship; and *invitation* (tasteful) is associated with her missional action.

One more important finding about the sensory development of the Samaritan woman's characterisation relates to the contribution of two instances of synaesthesia to her characterisation. By merging the senses of *taste* and *hearing*, and then through a second merging of *taste* with *hearing* and the somatic outcome of *movement*, the author capably portrays her spiritual *movement* from an uncomfortable stage to a missional stage. Jesus changed her *taste* for life. She became able to sense the world through the Kingdom's lenses, no longer just Samaria's. Moreover, she served in the harvest of God even before Jesus' disciples, which consequently allowed them to reap the benefits of her work carried out in company with Jesus. We found that she is, indeed, more than a character with personality; she acquires 'individuality' throughout her narrative. She is positively portrayed in the Fourth Gospel as a character who managed to abandon some of her own previous *tastes* in life to bring the redemption message to her people, advancing from a *tasteless* awkward place to a *tasteful* environment of invitation and proclamation.

Finally, the seventh chapter of this study investigated the sensory development of the man born blind's portrayal (9:1-41). What are the primary aspects of this investigation that help us to understand how the sensory development of the characterisation of the man born blind's role contributes to the overall goal of the Fourth Gospel (20:30-31)? What are some significant contributions of this research to the study of the development of this biblical character? Similar to the two previous analyses, the seventh chapter surveyed the man's sensory generative trajectory of meaning. However, at this time, we found that although one might think that the opposing *sight* and *blindness*, reasonably associated with sensory perception, should be identified as the most fundamental logical articulation in this story, our investigation has shown that the author seems to build up his literary strategy contemplating these terms in opposition in a very complex manner.

In other words, both *sight* and *blindness* are employed in the first scene, the physical healing (9:1-7), as physical senses, not as symbolic (metaphorically) sensory experiences. Because of that, *sight* and *blindness* purposely alternate functions along the narrative. If the healing scene (9:1-7) identifies *sight* positively, the last scene (9:39-41) reveals to the readers that, in his altercation with some Pharisees who overheard him, Jesus answers them that 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains' (9:41). Here, *sight* does not necessarily justify the Pharisees' attitude towards Jesus.

Another important contribution of this research concerning the man born blind's characterisation refers to how *synaesthesia* is presented in interaction with the other characters. The somatic outcomes of *movement* and *speech* play a prominent role in his characterisation. Through mentions of *sight*, *movement* and *speech*, the author tells his readers about the relevance of being able to *see* the truth, *coming* (movement) to the person who is the truth, and upon knowing the truth, *confessing* (speech) the truth. Whereas the Pharisees are depicted as self-deceived religious leaders who cannot *see* spiritually and, therefore, are unable to *move* towards Jesus to avail themselves of his merciful benefits and consequently *proclaim* Jesus' messiahship, the former blind man is portrayed as *moving* in the opposite direction to guilt. He gains physical *sight* through Jesus' merciful healing, then receives spiritual *sight* through Jesus' divine revelation. The man's relevant physical *sight* is completed through the unique spiritual *sight* (enlightenment, understanding) that Jesus provides. That way, readers are invited to emulate the former blind man's attitude to improve their spiritual *sight* by coming to the Son of Man (*moving*) and confessing his name (*speech*). The more the man *sees*, the more he *speaks* and *moves* towards confessing Jesus as Lord.

### 8.2. Worthwhile Future Investigations

The numerous findings demonstrated above are exclusively related to the investigation of sensory experiences in the narratives involving three Johannine characters. We saw in the previous paragraphs that the investigation carried out in the exegetical analyses identified how different sensory experiences and perceptions employed by the writer of the Fourth Gospel contributed to the development of his character-building work of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman of Sychar and the man born blind, in order to achieve his goal with his Gospel story (20:30-31).

As we can see, this research has proposed a narrow focus to demonstrate the validity of perusing the narratives of the Fourth Gospel through the lenses of sensory studies. Indeed, as explained in this survey, the analysis of sensory perception in the writings of the Bible is still a growing field, although it has become more frequent in the last decade. In her proposal to discuss what she calls the 'disabilities' of the biblical studies discipline, Louise Lawrence affirms that, for being a 'bookish' industry, biblical studies focus primarily on texts and literature, instead of also fleshing out and 'embodying' 'understandings of biblical traditions through the adoption of various socio-cultural perspectives drawn from anthropology'.[2] It seems that her wish has increasingly become true, although we cannot affirm yet that sensory studies have achieved prominence within the academia of biblical scholarship.

The following three brief subsections are relevant for offering examples of valuable investigations of topics that could be carried out by applying a exegetical method of biblical interpretation similar to that introduced here. Such surveys could be accomplished by upgrading and including more tools that can contribute to the investigation of biblical texts through sensory studies having this work as a starting point.

### 8.2.1. Sensory Development in Other Johannine Characters

The initial proposal for this research consisted of studying the encounters between Jesus and many characters in the Fourth Gospel, mainly the following ones: Nathanael (1:47-51), Nicodemus (3:1-21), Samaritan woman (4:1-426), the man born blind (9:1-41), Martha (11:20-27), Pilate (18:33-19:12), Mary Magdalene (20:14-17), and Peter (21:15-22). It would be counterproductive, however, to try to carry out research applying this exegetical method to investigate the sensory development of each character listed above.

Nonetheless, we believe such a survey can still be carried out in the future, either by applying the method introduced here or by another approach that contemplates the study of sensory perception in other Johannine characters. Some potential preliminary findings could be explored here now. Nathanael is portrayed as having physical *sight*, but he lacks spiritual *sight*. His initial prejudice against Jesus and his closeness to what God is capable of doing prevents him from realising and understanding God's actions. Jesus, in turn, is depicted affirming that he '*saw*' Nathanael under the fig tree, and the revelation of his omniscient power contributes to the sensory development of Nathanael's

[2] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels*, 16.

characterisation. After such sensory experience, he is now able to realise Jesus' messiahship through the indication of the manifestation of God's power upon his Son, when he will *see* heaven open and God's angels will ascend and descend on the Son of Man (1:47-51).

Martha is portrayed in the Fourth Gospel as a woman who listens to the news that Jesus is coming to her town and place, but it seems that the author wants his readers to understand that she still lacks adequate *hearing*. Her legitimate concern for her brother's death impacts the sensory development of her characterisation, causing her to interpret Jesus' words of hope as relating only to the already institutionalised religious doctrine. Jesus' question of whether she believed in him triggers Martha's sensory development and then she recovers the ability to *hear* and understand the precise meaning of Jesus' promising consolation (11:20–27).

Pilate, although an important political leader, lacks metaphorical kinaesthesia, the somatic outcome of *movement*. He is never able to follow Jesus' explanation about his Kingdom and mission. Pilate is portrayed as unsafely static when having to utter a final verdict, unable to walk decisively either toward Jesus' freedom or toward Jesus' condemnation by the religious authorities of Jerusalem. According to the author's work on the sensory development in Pilate's characterisation, the only evident move attributed to him was the act of washing his hands (18:33–19:12).

The portrayal of Mary Magdalene also deserves an analysis of sensory perception. She is initially depicted as not having her senses of *smell*, *sight* and *touch* fully developed. First, it seems that she is not able to identify the absence of stench that would certainly come from a corpse dead already for a few days. In a synaesthetic experience, she moves from inside to the outside of the tomb, but only to stand outside crying. When she decides to move, she mistakes Jesus for the gardener, a clear sampling of her inability to see that Jesus' death was not a mission failure, but a precursor to success. She touches and holds on to Jesus to the point of neglecting important aspects such as Jesus' need to fulfil his mission of going to the Father as well as the disciples' need to share Jesus' message.[3] The sensory development of her characterisation is triggered simply by Jesus pronouncing her name, where she can, then, see Jesus and move to announce his resurrection to the other disciples (20:14–18).

Finally, Peter's characterisation could be investigated, although he is the most complex case of all characters, due to his relevance in the Gospel's role and his high

[3] See an interesting discussion on the proper meaning of μή μου ἅπτου in Fowler, 'The Meaning of "Touch Me Not" in John 20:17' and Brown, *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI)*, 1966-70.

number of appearances throughout the Johannine story. But taking only his last depiction as an example of analysis, the author portrays him as the leader of the group of disciples, but he is not exempt from having to go through sensory development. In his final dialogue with Jesus in the Gospel, Peter is clearly depicted as having to expand his sensory perception of taste, smell, and the somatic outcome kinaesthesia. (21:15–22).

Undoubtedly, many other examples of Johannine characterisation would deserve an investigation of sensory perception, such as the invalid at the Pool of Bethesda (5:1-15), the almost stoned woman (7:53-8:11), Lazarus (11:1-45), Mary of Bethany (12:1-11) and Thomas (20:24-29). Also, the numerous images employed by Jesus to identify himself before his disciples are richly related to the human senses, and could be adequately studied through sensory symbolism, such as the 'bread of life' (6:25-59) and 'the Good Shepherd' (10:1-21).

### 8.2.2. Sensory Development in the Synoptics

The other three canonical Gospels offer abundant opportunities to work with an analysis of the sensory development of many characters' portrayals. Currently, specific research on the characterisation work in these writings has not yet been frequent. However, the study of sensory perception has contributed to new avenues in the Synoptics, as some relevant surveys have already been published. In the Gospel of Mark, Louise Lawrence conducts a sensory survey based on her work with the cultural anthropology of the senses. She has found that the Gospel of Mark is revealed as an audio-centric text given the sense of *hearing* is the pre-eminent sense, while deafness seems to be portrayed by its author as the gravest sensory impairment. Interestingly, she also found that the notable ambivalence of the Second Gospel to the sense of *sight* is viewed as a resistance to the pre-eminence of the visual within imperial propaganda.[4]

Sensory studies in the Gospel of Matthew have also been accomplished. Walter Wilson has investigated the episodes of healing of blindness (9:27–31; 11:5; 12:22–24; 15:30–31; 20:29–34; 21:14) that carry deep symbolic meaning in demonstrating Jesus' messianic status and providing models of discipleship. However, Wilson also highlights that such stories may have negative connotations for how the blind themselves are perceived. A comparison of Matthew 9:27-31 with Tobit 11:7-15, or even Matthew 11:2–5 with Luke 7:18–23, shows how the blind are depicted both following and disobeying

[4] Lawrence, 'Exploring the Sense-Scape of the Gospel of Mark'.

Jesus. He sees that a proper analysis of sensory disability in these healing episodes would benefit readers of this Gospel to realise the many implications for the representation of disability, particularly the role of sensory experiences in creating disciples.[5]

Brittany Wilson has surveyed both writings attributed to Luke to explore how divine discourse in the Gospel and Acts intersects with the sense of *sight*. For her, Luke clearly teaches that divine discourse is never simply *heard*, for *speech* crosses sensory lines and blurs any clear demarcation between the verbal and the visual. Wilson investigates these numerous sensory experiences (she calls them 'sensory intersections') in the Third Gospel's birth narrative and discusses its divine-human encounters, tracing how the patterns concerning *sight* and its overlaps with divine speech are amplified later in Luke's writings. For her, the author planned for his readers to understand the relevance of 'seeing' divine speech.[6]

### 8.2.3. Sensory Development in the New Testament Writings

Understandably, it would be more difficult to investigate the sensory development of characters in non-narrative biblical writings, such as the Pauline epistles and other NT letters. Still, one might likely develop successful research in the analysis of sensory perception in some people mentioned by Paul in his writings, for example in an analysis of Timothy and Titus, considered as recipients of some of the apostle's letters, or even in the investigation of sensory perception in entire communities that may represent a group of people, such as the church in Corinth. The book of Revelation, however, is full of symbolic language that, although requiring prior knowledge of apocalyptic literature, might provide researchers with an interesting avenue to study the sensory development in some characters, among them the Lamb (5:8-13), the Seven Churches (2:1-3:22), the two witnesses (11:3-6), and the Four Horsemen (6:1-8)

Susan Ashbrook Harvey has surveyed the relevance of sensory perception in early Christianity. She focuses on the importance of the sense of *smell* in ancient Mediterranean culture, particularly the biblical and ancient Christian writings. She found that the Early Church learned to cultivate a dramatically flourishing devotional piety employing the human senses as crucial instruments of interaction with God. One interesting aspect of her survey refers to her discovery that olfactory analogies seemed to work efficiently as

[5] Wilson, 'Perception, Discipleship, and Revelation in the Gospel of Matthew'.

[6] Wilson, 'Seeing Divine Speech'.

theological tools, as in the case of Pauline's rich metaphor of the 'pleasing aroma of Christ' (2 Corinthians 2:14-16). For her, early Christians used the olfactory experience for purposes of a distinctive religious epistemology in order to formulate knowledge of the divine to yield a particular human identity.[7]

With regards to sensory perception in the last canonical biblical writing, Meredith Warren investigates the ingestion of the scroll in Revelation 10:8-10 as a key element to find out how the writer affirms having experienced God's revelation to transmit the message to others. She provides an analysis of sensory perceptions to suggest that the scroll's ingestion represents a shared understanding of the consumption of otherworldly food that grants access to the divine realm and thereby transmits divine knowledge. In other words, she suggests that the sense of *taste* in this narrative appears in opposition to *sight* or *hearing* to lead its readers to perceive that participants in this kind of eating experience God most intimately. The narrator consumes the small scroll to demonstrate that he had been granted privileged access to God's knowledge and now is inviting the Church to participate in this same intimacy.[8]

### 8.3. Sensing Theological and Missiological Development

This study has focused on the survey of the sensory development of characters' depictions in the Fourth Gospel. Such an undertaking is primarily aimed at realising literary elements within the Gospel's narratives. That being said, this research would also suggest that a theological examination could be carried out in the future at least as an applicative frame comprising a necessary theological outcome of the survey of the sensory development of characters in Johannine writings. Jürgen Moltmann's thought on the human senses could serve as an initial helpful conversation on such theological endeavour.

With his immense contribution to contemporary systematic theology, particularly regarding Christology and the Kingdom of God, Moltmann offers relevant insights with his *spirituality of the senses*.[9] Moltmann reminds us that the Holy Spirit acts in a way that is not hostile to the body, let alone alien to the senses. God's Spirit is the Spirit of the resurrection of Christ, He sanctifies the earth and makes life come alive, also awakening all the senses. Therefore, it is important to open the narrow limits of a theology of God-

[7] Harvey, Scenting Salvation.

[8] Warren, 'Tasting the Little Scroll'.

[9] Moltmann, *The Living God and the Fullness of Life*, 157-75.

and-the-soul pattern for patterns of God-and-the-body, more particularly of God and the senses. Any spirituality for the world is a spirituality of the everyday Spirit that preserves and renews the world.

Moltmann then proposes to understand the life-giving Spirit not only as the Spirit of the world beyond but also of this one. In other words, God's Spirit is not only the spirit of the soul; it is also the Spirit of the whole of life. From the powers of this divine Spirit, we should expect the rousing and awakening of our senses through four vital powers: love (the awakening of all senses for life), hope (opens the senses for the future), rest (purifies the senses), and faith (entices the senses). His view of a spirituality of the senses could fit adequately in a theological analysis of the results of this research, which would certainly orient us to realise in depth the theological implications of the sensory development in Johannine characterisation. It is indeed a promising topic for future investigation efforts.

Combined with this feasibly rewarding dialogue between theology and the literary analysis of sensory perception in biblical characterisation, another prospective discussion seems to be relevant. As we demonstrated in this research, the Fourth Gospel adopted sensory experiences as metaphorical correlations between the functions performed by the senses to build its characters, connecting these functions to the gradual understanding of Jesus' teachings about His mission as Messiah and Son of God. Consequently, the results of this research can provide modern readers of the Gospels with a more holistic awareness of their commitment to God's mission in the world today.

The study of the sensory development in the characterisation of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman and the man born blind, as well as many other Johannine characters listed in the previous section, is a valuable approach with a germane role: to provide readers of the Gospels' narratives with the awareness and acknowledgement of the cultural account of sensory perception in which our senses are pivotal instruments to discern the world around us.

Through such an approach we realise that the Fourth Gospel understands the human senses more than physical feelings, sensations or even character traits. Indeed, the senses in biblical literature, in general, should be seen to function as metaphorical 'characters' in dialogue with other characters, thus assisting the portrayed literary characters to acquire cultural, historical, and theological knowledge which, as we have demonstrated in this survey, are important aspects of John's announcement of Jesus as the son of God. In light of this, a future relevant investigation would inquire about the many ways the use of human senses in biblical characters would help us to understand their commitment to

witnessing God's message and, consequently, our own missional responsibility before God and his created world.

### 8.4. Sensory Development in Johannine Characterisation: A Contribution

After investigating how Johannine characters may have been constructed through the author's use of sensory experiences, two initial contributions must be identified here. In methodological terms, although there is already a huge range of research related to characterisation work in the Gospel narratives, prospective studies contemplating the analysis of sensory perception in biblical texts will affirmatively demonstrate the relevance of a tool that evaluates the meaning of the vast imagery employed by the Gospels' authors to construct their stories and characters. As we could realise through this research, such images usually appear intrinsically related to the human senses, generally through synaesthetic experiences. They are 'sensory portrayed' in characters or themes as a way to provide the readers with a connection to the narrative through their sensory perception. In this way, the methodological approach presented here helps in understanding how the author decided to appeal both to the imagination of the readers (when one or more sensory experiences are depicted symbolically) and to the literal and material reality of their lives (when sensory experiences are portrayed physically).

Obviously, the investigation of sensory experiences in biblical narratives is not need necessarily the main aspect of a literary analysis of biblical characters. But it undoubtedly adds to all the excellent work on biblical character construction that has already been developed by countless biblical scholars who have adopted narrative criticism as the main methodological lens in their surveys. This combination of approaches, as in the case of this research between narrative criticism and sensory anthropology, should not be seen as either inconsistent or definitive. As we hope to have demonstrated in these pages, the presence of sensory experiences, physical and metaphorical, is evident in the characters' development in the narratives of the Fourth Gospel.

The second contribution of this research to biblical studies is broader as it refers to the role played by the study of sensory perceptions to the biblical understanding of the human person. The investigation of sensory perceptions in biblical narratives seems to provide yet additional evidence that the idea of a split between soul and body is foreign to biblical tradition. In the Bible, human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and are therefore considered in their integrity. The body should not be seen as a mere

outer covering of the spiritual principle or a prison of the soul. Sensory perceptions are not one aspect of bodily experience, they are the basis for bodily experience.[10]

Given that the event of the incarnation is the fulcrum of the Christian faith, the investigation of the way in which human senses are used by biblical writers to construct their characters contributes to addressing a theological and philosophical gap generated from an inversion of perspective regarding the body and the reality of sensory experiences. In the specific case of the scope of this research, the Fourth Gospel's contemplation of sensory experiences reveals its consideration of Jesus' incarnation as the central idea that, in the reality of the created human body, God evidences 'the hope of flesh revived in a palpability that death itself cannot annihilate'.[11] Perceiving how the senses are employed by the author of the Gospel enables us to realise what Lee calls 'the incarnational shape of salvation through imagination'.[12]

For that reason, studying the senses in biblical narratives leads us to understand the biblical and theological urgency of considering the human body in its proper place, the physical reality created by the Father, restored by the Son and inhabited by the Spirit. Paraphrasing Saint John of the Cross, this investigation attempts to take one small step towards a necessary disavowal of a 'dark night of the senses' that teaches that the search for inner redemption always implies the fight against sensory reality. As the Bible seems to teach that God is not alien to the body's potential, our sensory experiences help us understand that the mystique involved in the relationship with God is nothing other than the integral experience of life itself.

The study here proposed to investigate the sensorial development of some characters in the Fourth Gospel contributes to an extremely important perception of the reality of Jesus' disciples today. As previously stated, the Fourth Gospel invites readers to adopt a renewed perspective, recognising sensory perceptions as integral to serving God and engaging in the redemptive narrative of light and transformation. This is accomplished through the evident link between sensory perceptions in the characters' development and the theological motif articulated in 20:31. The characterisation of Nicodemus exemplifies a spiritual journey shaped by faith in Jesus, highlighting the fullness of life and demonstrating that the Gospel's call to believe transcends mere intellectual assent. Instead, it invites participation in a lived, sensory, and embodied faith

[10] Classen, 'Foundations for an Anthropology of the Senses', 402.

[11] Lee, 'The Gospel of John and the Five Senses', 127.

[12] Lee, 'The Gospel of John and the Five Senses', 126.

that both draws from and contributes to the transformative vision of the Kingdom. The portrayal of the Samaritan woman exemplifies a life transformed through faith, as her encounter with Jesus empowered her to 'sense' and proclaim the message of the Messiah. Her renewed sensory perception enabled her to participate in and extend the life-giving reality of Jesus' mission, testifying to the Gospel's readers that belief in Jesus, rooted in sensory and experiential engagement, fulfils the theological vision of life through the Messiah. Finally, the restoration of the man born blind exemplifies the Gospel's ultimate purpose: to lead its readers to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and, through this belief, to attain life in his name. The man's sensory and spiritual transformation culminates in a profound confession of faith in Jesus as Lord. His journey embodies the life promised in the Gospel's theological motif, demonstrating that belief in Christ brings not only salvation but also the fullness of existence in communion with God.

If we risk losing such a creative measure of our senses, the channels of communication with the divine truth will become channels of excessive drives and instruments of heavy slavery. Reading the Johannine stories that portray characters developing their sensory experiences as the result of their encounters with Jesus teaches us that, as human beings, we were created by God for life with him. God is the giver of our senses, and through our sensory experiences, we can believe even, and particularly, in the face of unbelief, for our faith comes from hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). By tasting the living water (John 3:13-14) as we see the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5), we can also taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). This is the Lord that makes us proclaim, confess and worship His majesty, and also allows us to become the tasteful salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13) and the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved (2 Corinthians 2:15). As we walk in love amidst our adversities, we remember that Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:2). By taking the bread, blessing it, breaking it and giving it to the disciples, he taught about his body. By taking the cup, giving thanks and giving it to his disciples, he taught us about his blood of the covenant poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:26-29). Our sensory experiences help us strengthen our faith in the One which was from the beginning, which our sisters and brothers once heard, saw with their eyes, looked upon and touched with their hands, concerning the word of life (1 John 1:1). By bringing characters alive through metaphorical and physical sensory perceptions, the author of the Fourth Gospel teaches us to 'make sense' of our daily interaction with the whole creation of God on its journey towards redemption.

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