

TELLING THE FATHER'S STORY THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AS NARRATIVE THEOLOGY

In the final, climactic words of John's prologue, we find these words: 'No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known' (John 1.18). Though this verse is not without its difficulties, one thing is for sure. The narrator is telling us that Jesus, who was close to the Father's heart, has made the Father known to the world.

The Greek verb for 'making known' is significant here. In his literary commentary on the fourth gospel, F.J. Moloney explains:

The primary meaning of the final word of the Prologue (*exegesato*) comes from a verb widely represented in the literature of the Hellenistic religions that has the basic meaning, "to tell at length", "to relate in full", "to recount a narrative"... The object of the verb (God) must be supplied by the reader: "He has told God's story"¹.

If Moloney is correct, then the implications for our reading of the fourth gospel are great. As much as we would like to make Jesus the exclusive focus of our reading, it is also the Father's story that is being told. To be sure, it is the Son who reveals the Father, and it is the Son who clearly functions as the protagonist in the gospel. At the same time, the narrator states at the end of his prologue that Jesus has come to recount the story *of the Father*. John's theology cannot therefore be swallowed up in his Christology. Put another way, consideration of the Father's characterization cannot be relegated to a sub-section of a discussion of John's portrayal of the Son. A distinctive narrative analysis of the person of the Father must be undertaken as well. The fourth gospel is not just a *bios Iesou*. It is also a *bios theou*, or, better still, a *bios patrou*.

Studying 'the Father' in John

Until very recently, it would have been possible to speak of *the forgotten father* in fourth gospel research generally, and in narrative criticism particularly. Alan Culpepper devoted only two pages to this subject in his seminal book, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (1983). In a chapter on 'characters', he simply stated that 'God is characterized by Jesus'². All that we can learn about God the Father is learnt through the Son. Culpepper lists what Jesus says about God and that is the sum total of his analysis. In the end Culpepper devotes more attention to the characterization of the beloved disciple than to the Father!

In the 1990s, things began to change. Marianne Thompson wrote an article on the Johannine portrayal of God in 1993³. She has recently published a book on the same subject⁴. Paul Meyer made a vital contribution in 1996 with his article on 'The Presentation of God in the Fourth Gospel'⁵. Then, in 1999, a whole edition of *Semeia* was devoted to this subject. Edited by Adele Reinhartz, this volume contained articles by some of the leading narrative critics in fourth gospel research (including Gail O'Day, MM Thompson, and Jeff Staley).

In her article in *Semeia*, Gail O'Day helpfully summarizes the four different ways in which the fatherhood of God is being studied in fourth gospel research⁶. There is first of all the historical-critical approach. This involves exploring the relationship between the use of *pater* on the lips of the Johannine Jesus, and the *Abba* address of the historical Jesus. Secondly, there is the feminist approach. This takes a number of forms, but is mainly concerned with the implications of using paternal terminology in reference to God. Thirdly, there is the doctrinal approach. This consists of examining the development from the Johannine use of *pater* (in language about God) to the more systematic teachings of the church fathers. Fourthly, there is the narrative critical approach. This focuses on the way in which the author has created and developed the character of God the Father in the gospel narrative. The main interest here is how God the Father is portrayed in the final form of the gospel, and what narrative devices are employed by the author to achieve this picture.

In this paper I am going to use a narrative-critical approach to our subject. This is not because I have no interest in the historicity of John's rhetoric of divinity, or feminist issues, or the development of early Christian doctrine. It is simply because I believe that there is more to be said from a narrative critical perspective about John's portrayal of the Father. I am particularly convinced that we need to spend more time looking at how John uses the narrative form to convey his distinctive portrayal of God the Father. As O'Day wrote in her book *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*:

The Fourth Evangelist did not write a textbook, a theological treatise, a collection of paradigms, or a philosophical essay. He wrote a gospel, and we will never approach the Fourth Evangelist's answer to the question "How is God known?" until we take the mode of articulation of the text seriously⁷.

In a recent article Scandinavian scholar Birger Olsson writes, 'The Gospel of John is in form a narrative about Jesus, but its contents are in fact a narrative about what God has done and continues to do through Jesus'⁸. It is to the Johannine portrayal of God the Father that we must now turn. We shall soon see that John is indeed making a theological claim through the narrative form, and specifically about the Father (not just the Son).

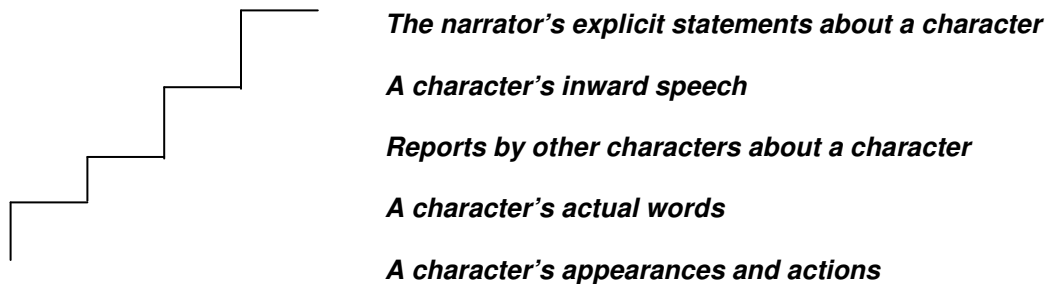
Characterization in John's Gospel

While the overall genre of the fourth gospel has parallels with Hellenistic literature (particularly ancient *bioi*), the actual style of John's storytelling is closest to Hebrew narrative. As I have argued elsewhere, it is the Hebrew Bible that affords us the most appropriate background for studying characters in the fourth gospel⁹. This does not mean that we cannot use any of the techniques associated with characterization in the modern novel. I shall refer to some recent novels later. What it does mean is that we have most to learn from comparing and contrasting the fourth gospel with biblical narrative.

Adele Berlin has emphasized that biblical characters are not drawn in exactly the same way as novelistic characters. 'What is lacking in the Bible is the kind of detailed physical or physiological description of characters that creates a visual image for the reader'. As Berlin continues, 'It is as if the prohibition on graven images has been extended to literary images as well. There is no concrete corporeal representation of humans'. This means that we do not 'see' biblical characters in the same way as we 'see' the characters described in novels. Berlin writes, 'Although the reader may not 'see' a character, he or she perceives this personality in a different sense. There is actually quite a range of information given through description'¹⁰. So how is this 'range of information' conveyed in Hebrew narrative?

Robert Alter provides the answer in his seminal book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. He very helpfully provides a scale for conveying information about narrative characters in the Hebrew Bible. I introduced and applied these categories to John's gospel in my book *John as Storyteller* (1992), though I did not at that time apply them to John's portrayal of the Father¹¹. So my comments here will be necessarily brief.

Alter proposes that the highest end of the scale of reliable information about a character is the narrator's explicit comments¹². At the lowest end are the character's actual appearances in the story and her or his direct actions.



When one looks at a list like this, one is immediately struck by the pros and cons of applying it to John's characterization of the Father. On a positive note, there is great mileage in applying Hebraic rather than novelistic categories to the fourth gospel. That way we avoid the pitfalls of an anachronistic reading, of approaching John's gospel as we would a modern novel. On a negative note, we are immediately impressed by the limitations of a model that is primarily geared towards human rather than divine characterization. How does one apply the lowest category (which refers to physical appearances and direct actions) to the invisible and transcendent Father?

In her 1993 article, Marianne Thompson answers these legitimate concerns. She argues that God is presented as a figure within the story of the gospel and that he therefore merits character analysis in a literary sense. At the same time she warns against reductionism because God cannot be studied as if he were merely human¹³. With this reservation in mind, she then proceeds to use Alter's categories in her study of God in John's gospel. In what follows, I will provide my own analysis of John's characterization of the Father using the same categories.

a) The Narrator's Comments about the Father

As a general rule, there are three ways in which a character can be introduced in a story, whether that story is told by a Hebrew author or a modern novelist. Daiches describes these as follows¹⁴. First, a complete initial portrait can be followed by events which confirm this portrait. Second, an initial portrait can be provided which then changes and develops as the character evolves during the course of the story. Third, a character can be introduced as opaque and indeterminate, but then emerge as a living personality as the narrative unfolds.

When we look at the Johannine characterization of God, it is the third that seems most relevant. In the prologue of the fourth gospel, the omniscient narrator introduces the character 'God' in the opening words.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning'.

What is most significant about these opening remarks is the narrative focus. The word order in the Greek puts the 'Word' rather than 'God' in the foreground. The word 'God' can clearly encompass two figures, yet it is the figure of the Logos who is highlighted more than God.

God (as distinct from, yet one with, the Logos) is introduced here as an indeterminate figure. God is never the subject of any of the verbs in these opening 18 verses. When we arrive at the next reference in v.6, this point is even more striking. Instead of saying, 'God sent a man', the narrator writes that 'There came a man who was sent from God', again putting the emphasis on someone other than God himself.

In v.12, the next reference, we read that the one who came into the world, the Word, gave those who received him the right to become 'children of God', or those 'born of God'. Here again, God is mentioned in the text, but in a background manner. However, this should not cause us to neglect what the narrator is implying. Using the words 'children' and 'born' sets up a picture of God as a parent. This expectation is fulfilled by the paternal imagery used by the narrator in v.14:

'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth'.

The use of paternal language is explicitly introduced at this point. In the process, the God/Logos distinction is redefined as a Father/Son distinction. This means that the word 'God' can refer to at least two figures, a father and a son. By the time we arrive at v.18, this impression is strengthened:

'No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known'.

From this moment on, Father is the divine metaphor that dominates the narrative of the fourth gospel. However, this father language is no longer provided by the narrator from this point on. Most of the 118 references to God as *pater* appear not in the 'telling' but in the 'showing' from 1.18 onwards. In other words, we learn most about the Father not from the narrated material but rather from the discourse or spoken material. This should not obscure the point that it is the narrator who first gives this theological disclosure. He is the first to tell us that Jesus is supremely the one who is 'close to the Father's heart' and who 'tells the Father's story'.

The narrator is also the first to point to something unique about the relationship between the Father and Jesus. In this regard v.12 is crucial, yet easily missed by the reader:

'Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God'.

Notice the phrase, 'children of God'. The narrator deliberately avoids saying 'sons' or 'daughters', preferring instead, 'children'. He also deliberately avoids saying, 'children of the Father', preferring instead, 'children of God'. The only reason for this can be that the narrator is affirming right at the outset that there is something unique about the Father's relationship with the Son, something so unique that words like *huios* and *pater* are avoided with reference to the believer's relationship with God, at least at this stage in the plot.

All this shows how vital it is to begin with the narrator's explicit comments about God the Father in the prologue of the gospel. It is the narrator who insists that Jesus has come to 'tell the Father's story', and it is the narrator who begins the narration of that story. In the prologue, the narrator takes us right back to the beginning of the Father's story, to that primordial moment of divine creativity when the Son fashioned the universe at the bidding of his Father. He then brings us into the 'middle' of the Father's story by telling us that the Jesus Christ has come into the world to bring revelation of the Father. Interestingly, the narrator does not mention the 'end' of the Father's story. The plot of the Father's story is 'open-ended' in John. No wonder Paul Meyer writes, 'What is distinctively Johannine about this presentation of God as Father is that ... eschatology has been replaced by protology'¹⁵. The beginning of the story of the Father's interaction with humanity is all-important to the narrator.

We cannot therefore underestimate the role of the narrator in forming the reader's impression of God the Father. It is as if the narrator has been given the vantage point of heaven and afforded a privileged perspective on the Father's involvement in human history. The narrator's commentary is therefore vital to the Gospel's narrative theology. As the Celtic theologian John Scotus Eriugena once wrote, his voice is 'the voice of that spiritual bird who, on swiftest wings of innermost theology flies beyond all things that are and are not'. This narrator 'ascends beyond all visible and invisible creation'¹⁶. However, this does not mean that the narrator is omniscient. As we are about to see, there are some things about God that he either does not know or does not choose to disclose.

b) The Father's Inward Speech

In general, biblical authors do not provide us with a great deal of 'inward speech' when they draw characters. They prefer to delineate characters in a more indirect way, through descriptions of what they do rather than what they are thinking. This more implicit mode of delineating character is somewhat frustrating to modern readers. As Shimon Bar-Efrat says,

'The technique of building a character through deeds confronts the reader with a problem..... For it is in the nature of this technique to refrain from revealing to us what are the internal motives which give rise to the actions'¹⁷.

It should therefore be no surprise to learn that it is very hard to find any references in John to the Father's thoughts. This is not to say that we never find 'interior monologue' in biblical portrayals of God. Bar-Efrat points to Genesis 8.21 as a somewhat exceptional example, 'And the Lord *said in his heart*, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man....'¹⁸ However, in John's gospel, much is said about the Father's actions, but nothing is overtly said about his thoughts. We might be able to infer some sense of what was in the Father's mind from John 3.16 ('For God so loved the world'), and John 6.40, ('For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him may have eternal life'), but it is far from explicit. We are not actually told by the narrator (or even by Jesus) what exactly the Father was thinking.

However, it is precisely through this lack of disclosure that John manages to preserve a sense of the Father's transcendence. John refrains from giving reports of the Father's thoughts, motives, feelings, and thereby prevents him from appearing too human and over-familiar. A modern writer like Norman Mailer, in *The Gospel According to the Son*, does the exact opposite. Mailer has Jesus as the narrator in his novel and this narrator tries to penetrate God's mental processes and motives all the time. Thus Mailer's Christ, on the Cross, provides his own insight's into his Father's non-intervention:

*My Father was only doing what He could do. Even as I had done what I could do. So He was truly my Father. Like all Fathers he had many sore troubles, and some had little to do with His son. Had his efforts for me been so great that now He was exhausted?*¹⁹

The difference between this kind of narration and John's is pronounced. Whereas John chooses to create the Father's character indirectly through his reported actions, Mailer's narrator ruminates on the workings of the Father's mind and indulges in a more direct form of portrayal. In the process, much of the Father's transcendence is lost. The Father becomes a father like any other father. This of course is the very opposite of John's gospel. Here it is these very 'gaps' that create a sense of the Father's otherness. As the LORD declares to Jeremiah, 'Am I only a God nearby, and not a God far away?' (Jeremiah 23.23).

c) Reports about the Father by other Characters

Outside of the narrator, the only reliable reports concerning the Father's character come from the lips of the Son. After the majestic opening of the gospel, there is a kind of narrative choreography in which the narrator gives way to the protagonist. Since Jesus Christ is the one who is forever close to the Father's heart, he is the one who now tells the Father's story. Indeed, the name 'Father' is constantly on his lips, most often in debate with his fellow Jews, sometimes also in prayer. No other titles for God are used by Jesus in this gospel. Even the noun *theos* is used relatively infrequently, at least in comparison with the Synoptic gospels, and certainly in comparison with the Pauline literature. 'Father', it seems, is supremely the name that Jesus has come to reveal, the God he has come to disclose.

When we think of the word 'Father' we are very prone to bring our own experiences of being fathered (or not, as the case may be) to the discussion. Interestingly, two of the articles in *Semeia* 85 are written overtly from this perspective. Jeff Staley employs 'an autobiographical midrash' in his unusual article, and overtly includes his own experience of being a father²⁰. Michael Newheart's paper employs a 'psychological (yet playful) approach to the Father-Son language in the fourth gospel', and begins by stating, 'this essay is grounded in my experience of fathering and being fathered'²¹. Newheart employs what he calls a 'soul hermeneutic'.

However, Meg Davies, in *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*, warns of the dangers of this kind of approach. She prefers to begin with the prevalent understanding of the father's role in the world of Jesus, both the Graeco-Roman as well as the Hebraic world. Davies emphasizes the connotation of 'authority' in the word 'father' in Jesus' day, and points to the Roman concept of *patria potestas*, the Greek concept of obedience, and the Hebraic commandment to honour one's parents, secondly only to honouring God (according to Josephus). She proposes:

'When the Fourth Gospel uses the father-son metaphor to depict the relationship between God and a human being, it is clear that first-century social conventions are taken for granted. The Son of God is entirely dependent on his Father'²².

How then does Jesus speak about his Father? At this point it would be tempting to extract all the references to God's fatherhood and examine them in isolation. This is really what recent narrative critical studies tend to do²³. However, the down side of this is that we lose a sense of the part played by this divine figure in the plot of the gospel, and we also fail to see how the character of the Father grows from the rather indeterminate person of the prologue into a far more developed portrait. In what follows we will therefore briefly look at the references to God as Father as they appear in the landscape of the unfolding story.


The first time we hear Jesus speaking of his Father is in chapter 2, when he expels the merchants and money-changers from the Temple, shouting ‘How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!’ (v.16). The personal pronoun ‘my’ is significant. It denotes a special, personal relationship between Jesus and the Father. The tone of the statement also implies an all-consuming passion for true worship of the Father (a thought that will be more fully developed in chapter 4).

In chapter 3, Jesus speaks about ‘the kingdom of God’ (v.3; v.5) but not of the Father either directly or indirectly.

In chapter 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at the well and reveals much about his Father in conversation with her. She speaks of ‘the fathers’ of her tradition and history. He speaks of worshipping ‘the Father’. The word ‘worship’ is a relational concept. It connotes immediacy rather than remoteness. Jesus discloses that the Father is actively seeking worshippers. The conversation ends with the woman’s heart captivated by the call to become an intimate lover of the divine Father. The surprise is of course that the Father is seeking intimacy with all people (even Samaritans) not just with the Jewish people.

In chapter 5, Jesus heals a man at the pool of Bethesda. Here he reveals for the first time his complete dependence upon his Father. He only does what he sees his Father doing (v.18). In these words one gets the distinct impression of a divine Father who is personally interested in the sufferings of humanity. He has clearly shown the Son his profound desire to heal the man at the pool of Bethesda, and the Son has duly responded by ministering the life of this living Father to a person in need. Here we see the evidence of Jesus’ assertion in v.19 that his Father loves him and shows him everything he is doing. The Son is therefore the receptor of a continuous flow of revelation from the Father’s heart. The Father is constantly taking the initiative and disclosing to his Son what to do and what to say. Jesus is supremely the conduit of the Father’s love to human kind, a love that is even prepared to transcend Sabbath rules and regulations. As Jesus says, ‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working’ (v.17).

In John 6 Jesus feeds the five thousand then teaches across the lake in the synagogue in Capernaum. He tells his listeners that the Father has placed his seal of approval upon him (v.27). He portrays the Father as the giver of the bread of heaven (v.32). He is also the one who gives people to Jesus as gift (v.37). His desire is to give life to those who believe in Jesus (v.40). At this point Jesus once again becomes embroiled in heated debate with some Jewish critics (v.41). But he maintains that the Father ‘draws people’ to himself (v.44, *elkuein*, suggestive of active involvement within the narrative world itself). The Father takes the initiative in the matter of our salvation. The episode draws to an end with Jesus making a striking contrast between ‘your fathers’ and ‘my Father’. The first died in the desert (v.49). The second is alive (v.57).

‘Your fathers died’  **‘The living Father’**

In John 7-8, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for *Sukkot*. Under further interrogation from Jewish adversaries, Jesus tells his listeners that he stands with the Father who sent him (8.16). He describes his Father as one of his witnesses (8.19), a comment that leads to the question, 'Where is your father?' (8.20). The rest of the chapter leads to further disclosures, including Jesus' telling remark, 'The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him' (8.29). The exchange that follows, with the Jews who had believed him, is vitriolic. The whole argument revolves around the issue of paternity. Jesus' interrogators argue that God is their father (8.41). Jesus tells them that their father is the devil (8.44). The point is made by contrast: their father is a murderer, the Father of Jesus is the giver of life.

In John 9, Jesus heals a man born blind, but since most of the narrative is taken up with this man's interrogation, there is no mention of the Father. Unusually, Jesus is out of narrative focus during the longest part of the plot.

The picture changes in John 10. Jesus teaches that he is the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep, and whose sheep know him. This parallels the relationship that Jesus has with his Father. His Father knows him, and he knows his Father (vv.14-15). Once again, a relational theology is underlined in these comments. The nature of this relationship, at least as far as Jesus is concerned, is spelt out in the rest of the chapter. The Father loves his Son because his Son is prepared to lay down his life (v.17). *At Hannukah*, Jesus reveals that his Father 'is greater than all'²⁴ (v.29), that he and the Father are one (v.30), and that his miracles derive from the Father (v.31). Jesus is the one whom the Father set apart as his very own (v.36) and who is in the Father (v.38).

In John 11, Jesus goes to the tomb of Lazarus and prays to his Father. This is the first of three prayers Jesus utters to his Father in the gospel. The prayer is more a statement of fact than a petition. Jesus merely thanks his Father that he has already heard him and that he always hears (vv.41-42). Once again, the Father is portrayed as always present to his Son, never physically or emotionally absent. He is also portrayed as the source of Jesus' miraculous power to heal the sick and even raise the dead.

In John 12, Jesus enters Jerusalem in the final week of his life. From now on, the name 'Father' is continuously on his lips, particularly in the farewell discourses (chapters 13-17). It is as if the nearer he gets to his homecoming, the more irresistible Jesus finds it speaking of his Father. Of particular note is Jesus' comment in 12.49-50:

'For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his commands lead to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say'.

Here again we find Jesus stressing that he is not 'doing his own thing', as it were, but that the Father's story is being 'fleshed out' in and through him. The Father speaks through Jesus, and the Father acts through Jesus. There is intimate and undivided communion between the Son and his Father.

In John 13 Jesus does not mention his Father. However, the narrator signals that the long-awaited 'hour' for the Son's return has come, and makes clear that this is a homecoming to the Father: 'It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father' (v.1). The narrator adds, 'Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God' (v.4). The reader should note the references to what Jesus knew (*eido*, v.1, v.3). While the narrator is reticent about the Father's thoughts in the gospel, he does make references to the thoughts of the Son.

Although Jesus himself does not mention his Father in John 13, John 14 is full of references. Jesus speaks of going to his 'Father's house' (14.2), of being the way to the Father (14.6) and of going to the Father and of giving glory to the Father (14.12-13). He talks of the Father's desire to send another 'paraclete' (verse 16), so that the disciples will not be left 'fatherless' (v.18). Here again the Father is the one who takes the initiative, this time in giving the Spirit to the believer, in response to the Son's bidding (v.16). This shows that the word 'God' in John cannot be confined to the Father and to the Son, but now needs to include the Spirit. Jesus now promises that the Father will extend his love to those who love his Son (v.21). Indeed, the Father and the Son will make their home in with those who obey Jesus' teaching (v.24). John 14 ends with Jesus' declaration that 'the Father is greater than I' (v.28), highlighting the fact that the Father is prior to the Son in authority (*patria potestas*), and yet one in terms of both being and function.

In John 15 Jesus unusually makes a statement about the Father with a noun rather than a verb. The chapter begins with Jesus saying, 'My Father is the gardener'. This introduces a note of 'discipline' consistent with the idea of fatherhood at the time of Jesus. This Father takes away the branches that do not bear fruit, and he cleanses those that do. People like Judas are removed from the vine, while characters like Peter are cleansed so that they can bear more fruit. All this serves to demonstrate that the Father is someone to be feared as well as loved. For the disciples, the key to an effective life is to remain obedient to the Father. The more obedient believers are, the more fruitful they will be. The more fruitful they are, the more powerfully their prayers will be answered (v.16). Nevertheless, believers will not be left alone to struggle in their own strength. Once again Jesus emphasizes that the Spirit will go out from the Father at the Son's request (v.26), enabling them to witness to the world (v.27), even to those that hate the Father and the Son (vv.23-24).

In John 16, Jesus continues to talk about the believer's mandate to witness to the world. Further teaching is given about the Spirit, who will take what belongs to Jesus and share it with the believer (v.14). This is why it is to the believer's advantage that Jesus is returning to the Father, for unless this homecoming takes place, the Spirit will not be given. When Jesus has returned home to the Father, this will mark a new beginning in the disciples' relationship with the Father who loves them (vv.26-27). This means there must be a conclusion to the cosmic journey of the Son: 'I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father' (v.28).

In John 17, Jesus lifts up his eyes to heaven and prays to his Father. Here the Father's transcendence is emphasized. The Father is the one who glorifies the Son (v.1), who has granted authority to the Son over all people (v.2), who shared his glory with the Son before the foundation of the world (v.5), who has been revealed by the Son (v.6), who gave the disciples to Jesus (v.6), who sent his Son and gave him the words to say (v.8), who shares everything with his Son (v.10), who is a holy Father (v.11, v.25), who will protect the disciples (v.11, v.15), and who will consecrate them in answer to his Son's prayer (v.17). So much of 'the Father's story' is disclosed in this beautiful prayer. So much is indicated about the Father by what is not said. The longing of the Son to return to his Father, at least implied in the tone of the prayer, indicates the extraordinary and indescribable love of the Father (v.23). This love of the Father towards the Son is no longer going to be exclusive but rather inclusive. The Son concludes his prayer by asking that the Father's love for the Son may be shared with those who believe in the Son (v.26).

In the passion narrative, John 18-19, the note changes. Now Jesus is arrested and tried. Jesus speaks of the Father's cup in 18.11 and that is it. For the most part, one is impressed by the hiddenness of the Father.

Yet, in John 20, something very significant happens. After the resurrection, Jesus announces to Mary Magdalene,

'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God' (v.17).'

These words reveal that a monumental change has now occurred. As a result of the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus can now refer to the Father as 'your Father'. The disciples are now Jesus' brothers and God is their Father. The lifting up of the Son of Man has changed the whole way in which the disciples can relate to God. In a gospel where there has been no reference to 'our father' (as in the Lord's prayer, recorded in Matthew and Luke), these words to Mary Magdalene carry momentous significance. From now on everyone who believes in Jesus can call God, 'My Father'. In the absence of any references to the Father in chapter 21, this marks a fitting and moving conclusion to the Father's story, as told in John's gospel.

In summary: the picture of the Father's character gleaned from the words of the Son is a fascinating object of study in its own right. The overwhelming impression gleaned from the Son's reports is that the Father is alive and active, taking the initiative in both creation and salvation, doing both out of a desire for intimate relationship with humanity. Far from being the rather aloof authority-figure implied in Meg Davies' picture cited earlier, this Father is portrayed as taking extreme steps to resolve the orphan state of human beings, and this out of great love rather than some desire for legal satisfaction. In characterizing the Father in this way, one can almost sense the language of worship trying to break through the language of narrative. 'How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!' (1 John 3.1).

d) Words Spoken by the Father

So far we have examined the commentary of the narrator and the reports of the Son in our examination of John's narrative theology. We now come to the words spoken by the Father himself in the fourth gospel. What do these tell us about John's theology?

Bar-Efrat describes speech as an indirect means of characterization in Biblical narrative. 'All speech reflects and exposes the speaker'. It also brings to light qualities of the person being addressed'. Bar-Efrat goes on to add three important warnings. First, characters in Biblical narrative do not have individual speech styles. They speak in a restrained and unembellished tone. Secondly, their speech is more or less identical with the narrator's speech style. This may seem a little boring to modern sensibilities but it does succeed in giving a narrative as a whole a particular unity. Thirdly, the content of speech is related to its function. This can be to 'express emotion, establish an attitude, spur someone to action or provide information'²⁵.

What, then, of the Father's words in John's Gospel? The Father only speaks once directly in the entire story, though there is an instance of reported speech in 1.33. When the Father does speak, his words are unembellished, terse, and very similar to the narrator's speech style. Thus we read in John 12.27-30:

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? `Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "*I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.*" The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine".

Compare and contrast this with the amount of speech given to God as portrayed in modern novels. Jose Saramago's *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* is one of the most recent attempts to novelize the life of Jesus. The difference between the laconic prose of the gospel writer and the detailed prose of the novelist could not be more marked. Whereas God the Father speaks briefly and only once in John, Saramago's God speaks at length and frequently. Look at the following example:

'God turned His eyes towards Jesus, paused awhile, and then, like someone resigning himself to the inevitable, began speaking, Dissatisfaction, My Son, has been put into the heart of men by the God who created them, I am referring to Myself, of course, but this dissatisfaction which like all the other traits which I made in my image and likeness, I Myself pursued in My own heart and rather than diminish with time it has grown stronger, more pressing and insistent. God stopped for a moment to consider the effect of this preamble....'²⁶

What a contrast to John 12.28! Saramago's God is not only talkative, he is verbose, self-indulgent in the expression of his thoughts, using words self-consciously for rhetorical and prideful effect. Not so the Father in John. In John the Father is portrayed as constantly communicating with his Son. But the narrator allows only one episode in which this is overheard by other characters and by the reader. In this case, John 12, some mistake the sound of the voice for thunder, other for the message of an angel. They hear the SOUND but not the WORD. Their ears are not attuned to the phonetics of heaven so they do not understand. This is indeed strange because Jesus says that the Father's words are for the crowd's benefit not his own! This leaves us with a startling paradox. If the bystanders cannot comprehend the meaning of the Father's statement, then in what sense can it possibly have been beneficial for them? There is truly an enigma here.

What do these words reveal about the Father's character? To answer that we need to answer a few other questions. What first of all is the 'name' that God has glorified and will glorify again? The answer must be the name 'Father'. Jesus makes it plain that he has come in his Father's name. This name is a revealed name. When the heavenly voice speaks about a name in John 12.28, it can only denote one thing according to the logic of the narrative thus far: that God is causing his name *pater* to be honoured.

When, secondly, did the Father glorify his name in the story so far? Most commentators refer to specific events in Jesus' ministry. If so, what events within John's story can we point to? The baptism of Jesus? But John does not describe the words from heaven found in the Synoptics. The transfiguration? But this is not recorded in the narrative of the fourth gospel. When then? Perhaps the best solution is to say that the Father is referring to the whole of his Son's ministry prior to John 12.28. Everything Jesus has said and done hitherto has resulted in the Father's name being honoured.

What, thirdly, of the future glorification of this name? When does the Father glorify his name again after John 12.28? Most commentators answer by referring to Jesus' hour. But where precisely does this occur? Is it the Cross? Is it the resurrection? Where and when is the Father's name glorified? Perhaps again we are in the situation we found ourselves with the previous question. In other words, a situation in which the Father seems to be referring to a single act when in reality he is referring to a whole chain of events.

From the narrative of the gospel, we can only conjecture what the Father means in his single utterance in John 12.28. A possible answer can only be found by looking at what immediately precedes and follows this statement. What precedes is the coming of the Greek seekers, an indication that the ministry of Jesus is for the world and not just for Israel (vv.20-22). Jesus, seeing this, declares that the hour for his glorification has come (v.23). What immediately follows is Jesus' statement about being lifted up and drawing *all* people to himself (v.32). The 'all' must include Gentiles (like the Greeks) as well as Jews. A possible paraphrase of 12.28 would therefore have to include this wider mission to the world. How about the following?

‘Throughout your ministry, my Son, I have revealed myself as Father. This is my name, and it has been honoured on your lips and in your deeds. Once again I will cause honour to be brought to this name. When you have been lifted up and you have returned to glory, I will cause this name to be honoured throughout the earth as all people, Gentile as well as Jew, are drawn to you’.

Even this, however, is a guess! Even if it were near the truth, it is interesting to me that I have had to use 74 words in English to get close to interpreting only five words in the Greek. Truly, the Father’s speech – like the Son’s - is elusive. Even in his self-revelation in John 12.28, the Father’s ‘otherness’ is not compromised. There is mystery, even in disclosure. As Marianne Thompson puts it, ‘the one time in the Gospel where there is direct communication by God, there is puzzlement and failure to understand’²⁷.

e) The Father’s Appearances and Actions

Robert Alter’s final means for conveying information about a character involves appearances and actions.

The first of these – appearances - we can deal with comparatively briefly. Just as the Father refrains from speaking directly in the story (except at John 12.28), so he refrains from acting on the stage of the story himself. For this reason we find no theophanies in John’s gospel. In other words, there are no moments in which the Father makes his own appearance, as Father. The Father chooses to speak through his Son, the Logos, and he chooses to reveal himself through his Son as well. Why would the Father need to speak when he is already communicating through Jesus? Similarly, why would the Father want to make his own appearance on the stage when he is already revealing himself in the person of his Son? In real terms, Jesus’ life is an extended theophany.

What then of the Father’s *actions*? Writing about Biblical characterization, Bar-Efrat says,

‘A person’s nature is revealed by deeds; action is the implementation of character, and individuals are disclosed through their deeds no less than through their words’²⁸.

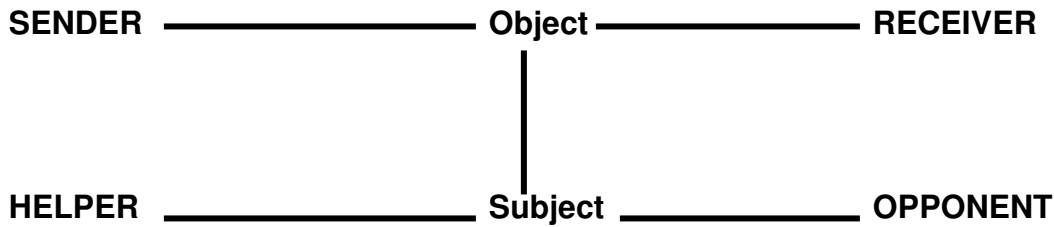
If this is true of human characters, how much more is it true of the Father? The primary medium used by John for conveying information about God the Father is through his actions. Here again, we are told rather than shown the Father’s deeds. In other words, the actions of the Father do not take place directly on the stage, as it were. They are reported by Jesus.

What do we learn about the actions of the Father from the lips of Jesus? The vast majority of these descriptions are very brief and are contained in statements where the Father is the subject of various active verbs, a fact that underlines once again that God the Father is living and active in this story. Paul Meyer has made a useful list of the active verbs used in connection with the word *pater* (when applied to God)²⁹:

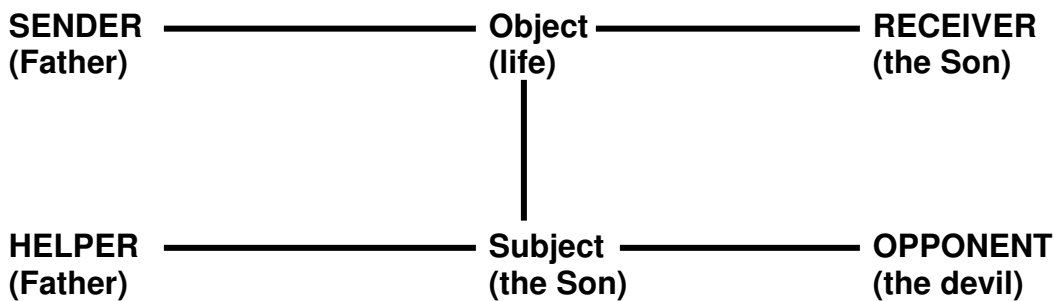
agiazein (consecrate)
ginoskein (know)
deiknuein (make known)
didaskein (teach)
egeirein (raise)
elkuein (draw)
entellesthai (command)
ergazesthai (work)
echein (have)
krinein (judge)
legein (say)
marturein (witness)
menein (abide)
pempein (send)
poein (do)
sozein (save)
terein (guard)
philein (love)

Of these, the most frequent verb associated with the Father is 'send'. It is the Father who sends the Son into the world. Seventeen times we are informed that the Father has 'sent' the Son (*apostellein*): 3.17, 34; 5.36, 38; 6.29, 57; 7.29; 8.42; 10.36; 11.42; 17.3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20.21. On seven occasions we come across perhaps the pre-eminent title for God in the fourth gospel: 'the Father who sent me' (*ho pempas me pater*, 5.23, 37; 6.44; 8.16, 18; 12.49; 14.24), and on a further sixteen occasions we come across the simpler expression 'he who sent me' (*ho pempas me*, 4.34; 5.24, 30; 6.38f (x 2); 7.16, 28, 33; 8.26, 29; 9.4; 12.44 (x 2); 13.20; 15.21; 16.5). From these statistics alone it is very clear that we must focus on the Sender not just on the one sent in John's gospel. It is the Father who sends his Son into the world. It is the Father who takes the initiative of love with respect to salvation.

This thought is further supported when we employ a structuralist approach to John's story. I have demonstrated elsewhere the usefulness of AJ Greimas' actantial approach to storytelling in the study of the plot of the fourth gospel³⁰. Greimas proposed that stories obey a kind of grammar, in much the same way as speech utterances do. He argued that there are three essential axes to a story: an axis of commission, in which a Sender or Originator gives a task to a Receiver; an axis of conflict, in which the mission is obstructed by an opponent but assisted by a helper; and finally, an axis of volition, in which the subject of the mission (the 'I' performing the task) chooses to undertake the object of the mission, or 'quest'.



While Greimas' actantial 'grid' has rightly come in for criticism for claiming more than it actually delivers, it does help us to understand more simply the basic plot structure of the fourth gospel. It also enables us to see far more clearly the critical role played by the Father in John's story:



Although Tolmie and Lincoln have both argued that the receiver is in fact the world rather than the Son³¹, the point still stands: the Father is the originator of the plot of the fourth gospel. He is the one who devises and begins the plan of salvation. The initiative lies in the fatherliness of God not in the activity of the Son. Furthermore, at every turn in the narrative the Father continues to communicate the details of the quest to his Son, revealing both the words he wants Jesus to utter, and the actions he wants him to perform. In brief, there would be no gospel if there had been no Father. While knowledge of Jesus is necessary for knowledge of the Father in John's gospel, there would be no knowledge of Jesus in the first place if the Father had not taken the initiative in sending Jesus. In short, the Father is supremely the Sender and Helper of the hero³².

A Rich Synthesis of Opposites

All this shows how 'the Father' in John is a worthy object of sustained narrative analysis. It is, after all, through the narrative form that John fashions his distinctive theology. The narrative devices he uses include the narrator's explicit comments about the Father, the reports about the Father given by other characters (specifically, Jesus) the direct speech of the Father (one episode only) and the Father's actions (described indirectly). We have looked at each of these in turn in the comments above.

In one sense I have said nothing new about the ‘content’ of John’s theology. I have highlighted the fact that John’s characterization of God is preeminently a father-shaped one. In this respect I am not saying very much more than Leon Morris, who wrote:

‘John’s great advance over everyone else in the New Testament in his teaching about God lies in the emphasis he gives to the truth that God is Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Father of believers. “Father” has become the typical Christian word for God, and it is a priceless gain that we have come to think of God as our Father.... It is a way of looking at God that we owe to Jesus. And in the New Testament writings it is John who gives it emphasis’.³³

At the same time, my paper goes much further than traditional scholarship by looking at exactly how the author creates the theological portrait through narrative means. As Gail O’Day has consistently shown, John’s gospel makes a theological claim using the narrative mode. Johannine scholars have still to take O’Day’s point seriously and look at the *how* of John’s revelation and not just the *what*. The *how* involves narrative devices and it is this fact that makes narrative criticism an indispensable tool.

A narrative critical approach reveals why John’s characterization of the Father is a considerable achievement. The novels I have cited show how easy it is to characterize God in a reductionist, overly human way. They highlight the very real dangers of anthropomorphism in narrative portrayals of divinity. However, John creates an extraordinary fusion of immanence and transcendence by focusing on the intimate, familial name ‘Father’ while, ironically, presenting the same Father as a somewhat elusive figure³⁴. This combination of ideas creates a very rich narrative portrayal in which the Father maintains familiarity and otherness at the same time.

It is one of the benefits of narrative that a storyteller can allow apparently contradictory ideas to be present in the same context. Unlike other forms of discourse, stories allow paradoxes to remain. This is precisely what happens in the story of the fourth gospel. Part of the power of this story lies in the Johannine characterization of the Father, in which opposites attract to create layers of complexity and resonance. While the Father’s character may remain constant, one could not conclude that it is ‘flat’, one-dimensional and banal. Rather, John’s portrayal of the Father involves a potent synthesis of opposites. In this regard, John’s gospel contains a rich narrative theology. The author has indeed succeeded in ‘telling the Father’s story’.

John’s Narrative Theology

It would be wrong to finish without at least some comments about the implications of John’s characterization of the Father for *theology*.

In order to highlight John's contribution in this area, we need to look briefly at the passage in which Jesus first begins to paint a detailed portrait of his Father in conversation with his fellow Jews. In an exchange with some hostile contemporaries, Jesus says these words in John 5.21-23:

“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him”.

Marianne Thompson has described the first sentence as ‘one of the most theologically important statements in the Fourth Gospel’³⁵. Thompson points to the life-giving work of both the Father and the Son, showing how central to the gospel story is the unity of their activity. As Thompson puts it:

“The life-giving work of the Father in the Son does not refer to a single event but to the all-encompassing creative and sustaining work of God, which has past, present and future reference points”³⁶.

With all this I am wholly in agreement. As I have stressed elsewhere, I am convinced that the primary purpose of the ministry of the Son is to give life³⁷. This theme of ‘life’ is emphasized by the narrator in John 3.16. It is stressed by the protagonist in John 10.10. It is written large on just about every page of the gospel story, and is clearly intended to affect the reader's response as well (John 20.30-31). Clearly, the Father is portrayed by John as not only the ‘living Father’ but as the ‘life-giving Father’.

Having said that, we should not emulate Marianne Thompson and miss the significance of what Jesus goes on to say about his Father in John 5.22. ‘The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son’. Here there is a very important transaction. The Father gives the responsibility of judgment to the Son. Jesus relocates the legal, judicial aspect of the Father's character in his own person. He underlines the fact that it is now his task to act as judge, not the Father's. As so many commentators have pointed out, John's gospel in its entirety reads like an extended trial narrative and John 5, in particular, is full of legal overtones as Jesus is questioned. Under this kind of interrogation, we might expect Jesus to refer to God as his judge. This would be a most natural response for a holy man under trial. However, Jesus continues to speak of his Father (fourteen times) not his judge.

Why is this so important for Johannine theology? To answer this we must turn to Andrew Lincoln's illuminating study of the judicial language in John's gospel³⁸. The fourth gospel is narrated as a continuous trial. It has many inter-textual echoes with the trial scenes in Isaiah (particularly chapters 40-55) where God constantly uses the phrase ‘I am’. This leads Lincoln to propose that in John's gospel God is supremely the Judge judged in our place:

'The God uniquely disclosed in Jesus is not simply, then, a sovereign judge who remains aloof but the judge who is judged and undergoes the sentence of death'³⁹.

On the surface of it, this sounds compelling. However, the truth is that Lincoln is looking at Johannine theology not only with a prior commitment to the lawsuit motif, but also through the lens of the theologies of Luther, Barth and Moltmann. While this allows Lincoln to speak about God as 'the judge judged in our place' it does so at the expense of John's portrayal of God as Father. The effect of all this is to fall into the trap of describing John's narrative theology in legal more than relational or filial terms. While some judicial functions are still associated with the Father's character and work in the fourth gospel (see in particular John 8.50 and 17.25), these functions are usually exhibited in the ministry of the Son in plot of the gospel. Of course, as many have seen, this is the source of much of the irony in John's story.

I believe that John has somewhat downplayed the legal aspect of God's character and has given greater emphasis to the truth that he is a living Father who has reached out in love to his fatherless children through the person of his Son. This is the real beauty of John's narrative theology. Rather than focus on God as judge (albeit one judged in our place), he chooses instead to focus on God as Father. He depicts this Father as one who is ever-present to his Son in unbroken intimate communion. He goes on to describe this Father as one who has made provision for us to know this paternal love through the work of the Cross and the work of the Spirit. As Jesus says to his disciples, in a statement with monumental significance, 'the Father himself loves you' (16.27).

The point can be underlined by drawing on the work of the great Scottish theologian John McLeod Campbell (1800-1872). Campbell formed his theology in the context of parish ministry in the town of Rhu (or Row) in Dumbartonshire. He recognized that many of the people that he was called to pastor lacked assurance of their identity and security in God. He realized that the fault lay in the Federal Calvinism so prevalent in his own day, a Calvinism that stressed that God is a lawgiver and that the Cross is an act of penal substitution. Campbell did not want to deny the truth of this insight altogether, but he also saw that an exclusive emphasis on a legal theology would never bring his parishioners into that place of blessed assurance which was their rightful inheritance. He therefore started preaching more and more about the Fatherhood of God and the Son's work of adoption. By the time he had published his classic book *The Nature of the Atonement* in 1856, he had been deposed from the holy ministry for teaching (among other things) 'assurance of faith'.

Although Campbell's theology is not beyond criticism, his core belief is thoroughly consistent with the theology and soteriology of the fourth gospel.

Like John, Campbell gave priority to the filial over the judicial in his presentation.

Like John, Campbell articulated his theology in Trinitarian terms – the Father in love with his world, the Son revealing the Father's love through his selfless death, the Spirit rescuing believers from their orphan state.

Like John, Campbell saw the Father's story as 'the outgoing of a living love, the love of the Father's heart', not 'the mere favourable sentence of a judge and ruler'⁴⁰.

Like John, Campbell locates the scheme of redemption in the fatherliness of God, the very essence of the divine character. To see God only as judge is an incomplete picture, Campbell argued. The highest form of faith is to see God as the 'Father of our spirits going forth after us, His alienated children, lost to Him, dead to Him through sin'⁴¹. As Campbell wrote,

"Our relation to God as our righteous Lord is subordinate to our relation to Him as the Father of our spirits – the original and root-relation, in the light of which alone all God's dealings with us can be understood"⁴².

This, more than anything else, is a theology that releases human beings into a life of 'following God as dear children walking in love'. It is, above all, entirely consonant with the father-shaped theology of the fourth gospel.

ENDNOTES

1. FL Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Michael Glazier: The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota: 1998: 47.
2. RA Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*. Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1983, 113. 'It is difficult to describe the characterization of God in the gospel because God never appears and the only words he speaks are, 'And I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again' (12.28)' (113).
3. MM Thompson, 'God's Voice You Have Never Heard, God's Form You have Never Seen': The Characterization of God in the Gospel of John', *Semeia* 63 (1993): 177-204. See also MM Thompson's chapter on 'The Living Father' in her book, *The Promise of the Father* (Westminster: John Knox Press, Louisville: Kentucky, 2000), 133-154.
4. MM Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan: 2001. Until the publication of this book, T Larsson's comment would have been accurate: 'despite the fact that some have realized that a main theme of the FG is theology and not only Christology, we must conclude that there is no satisfactory treatment of God in the FG in twentieth century NT scholarship' (*God in the Fourth Gospel: A Hermeneutical Study of the History of Interpretations* (Almqvist and Wiksell International, Stockholm, Sweden, 2001, 14). The reader should note that Thompson's book is not a narrative critical study but rather an exegetical and historical approach to the language about 'God' in John's Gospel. This is all the more surprising given her 1993 article (see note 3) and makes the present article all the more necessary.
5. P Meyer, 'The Presentation of God in the Fourth Gospel', in eds RA Culpepper and CC Black, *Exploring the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1996), 255-273
6. G O'Day, "'Show us the Father, and We Will be Satisfied (John 14.8)'", *Semeia* 85, 1999, 11-16. The articles in *Semeia* 85 found their impetus in the annual meeting of SBL in 1998 (in the Johannine Literature Section). Actually, O'Day's list is incomplete. She should really have added a fifth type of research on the fatherhood of God, namely, 'the history of interpretation'. A fine example of this is the Swedish scholar T Larsson's book mentioned in note 4 above. Larsson looks at the way Luther, Calvin, Westcott, Holtzmann, Bultmann and Brown have read the character 'God' in John's Gospel. Of these, Brown is interestingly deemed the most negligent. In the 1300 pages of his two volume commentary, 'God seems to have escaped' (223).

7. G O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1986, 46.
8. B Olsson, 'Deus Semper Maior? On God in the Johannine Writings', in eds J Nilsen and S Pedersen, *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 143.
9. M Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 24-25.
10. A Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, (Sheffield: The Almond Press), 34-35.
11. M Stibbe, *ibid*, 25.
12. R Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York: Basic Books, 1981, 116-117.
13. MM Thompson, 'God's Voice You Have Never Heard', 185. The three challenges are as follows: first, with 'God', it is virtually impossible to respond to this character without preconceptions about who God is or is not; second, many of the things that ordinarily combine to produce character (like physical appearances, thoughts, location, etc) are missing when it comes to God; third, human characters are portrayed as individuals who develop, whereas God tends towards constancy.
14. D Daiches, 'Character', in eds J Calderwood and H Toliver, *Perspectives on Fiction*, London: Oxford University Press, 1968, 351.
15. P. Meyer, *ibid*, 265.
16. John Scotus Eriugena, *The Voice of the Eagle: Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of St John* (trans C Bamford), Lindisfarne Press, Hudson, NY: 1990, 19.
17. S Bar Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Almond Press: Sheffield, 1989): 77.
18. Bar Efrat, *ibid*, 63.
19. N Mailer, *The Gospel According to the Son* (Little Brown & Co: London, 1997), 233.
20. J Staley, 'Disseminations: An Autobiographical Midrash on Fatherhood in John's Gospel', in *Semeia* 85, 127.

21. MW Newheart, 'The Soul of the Father and the Son: A Psychological (yet Playful and Poetic) Approach to the Father-Son Language in the Fourth Gospel', in *Semeia* 85, 155. 'The personal and the professional meet in my experience of the Fourth Gospel. I have been drawn to this book over the years in part because of Jesus' pervasive speech about the father and the son' (156). Newheart's 'soul hermeneutic' is an eclectic mix of analytical and archetypal psychology, African American cultural experience, and reader-response criticism (156).
22. M Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*, JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1992, 131. Adele Reinhartz paints a similarly authoritarian, patriarchal picture in her article, 'And the Word was Begotten', in *Semeia* 85. Her discussion of the background to *pater* emphasizes 'the father's absolute authority over his children', and 'the ubiquity of patriarchy' (84).
23. Gail O'Day points to this tendency in recent narrative critical studies of the Father in John. She says that 'they have in common the tendency to isolate 'Father' from the dynamics of the larger Gospel narrative in which it resides' ('Show us the Father', 11, see also p.16). Paul Meyer also warns that 'one may not abstract from the Gospel some detached doctrine of God' (*ibid*, 256).
24. Though note the variant reading, employed by GNB, 'What my Father has given me is greater than everything'. Leon Morris prefers this reading (*Jesus is the Christ. Studies in the Theology of John*: Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1989, 131).
25. Bar Efrat, *ibid*, 64-68.
26. J Saramago, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, (trans Giovanni Pontiero), Harvill: Harper Collins, London, 1993: 282.
27. MM Thompson, *ibid*, 198. But then Thompson does admit, 'ambiguity is inevitable in portraying God as a human character' (187).
28. Bar Efrat, *ibid*, 77.
29. P Meyer, *ibid*, 264. Meyer argues that *apostellein* is used of *pater* but never of *theos*. This is quite plainly wrong. The verb 'send' is used with *theos* as subject in John 3.17, 34; 17.3. T Larsson warns, 'The FG must not be read as a concordance. It uses different words interchangeably, and this applies also to 'God' and 'the/my Father' (*ibid*, 267).
30. M Stibbe, "'Return to Sender": A Structuralist Approach to John's Gospel', first published in *Biblical Interpretation* Vol 1, no 2, 1993, 189-206.

31. See D Tolmie, *Jesus' Farewell to the Disciples: John 13.1-17.26 in Narratological Perspective* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1995, 141), and AT Lincoln, *ibid*, who follows Tolmie's critique on pp164-169 of *Truth on Trial, The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel*. Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody Massachusetts, 2000. I continue to disagree with Tolmie and Lincoln on this matter. It is a categorical error to put 'the world' as the Receiver in Greimas' grid. This is to make the world the receiver of the commission, or 'the one sent'. Clearly that role belongs to Jesus, the true recipient of the Father's commission.
32. T Larsson, *ibid*, 243, 'God is not a tacitly presupposed figure, hovering somewhere in the distance as a background to a story that deals with more urgent issues. On the contrary, the question of God and the possibility of knowing and meeting God is a main theme; it is a question that preoccupies the text from the very first line'. On p.247, Larsson writes: 'In books on the FG Jesus is often depicted as the one who is sent from heaven, but the emphasis in the text of the FG is not primarily on Jesus as the one sent, but on the Father as the sender'.
33. L Morris, *Jesus is the Christ*, 130.
34. I deal with the elusiveness of the Johannine God in my article 'The Elusive Christ: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel', first published in *JSNT* 44, 1991, 19-38. See section on 6 of this article. Note also the parallels between the Old Testament presentation of God (particularly in Deutero-Isaiah) and John's. In both there is a sense both of God's intimate immanence as well as his transcendent otherness and elusiveness. Isaiah 64.8 also contains a clear reference to God as Father, so there are at least some OT precedents for John's father-shaped theology. For more on this OT background for the Johannine portrayal of God as Father, see my book *From Orphans to Heirs. Celebrating our Spiritual Adoption* (Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship, first imprint 1999), chapter 1.
35. M Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 141.
36. M Thompson, *ibid*, 144.
37. M Stibbe, "Return to Sender", 193.
38. AT Lincoln, *ibid*.
39. AT Lincoln, *ibid*, 192, 426.
40. J McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*: Edinburgh, The Handsel Press Ltd, 1996, 238. This is not dissimilar from Martin Luther's comments in his commentary on John 14.23: 'We should be assured that

there is no longer any anger in heaven or on earth. There is nothing but fatherly love and all goodness. God, together with all the angels, smiles on and keeps watch over us as His dear children' (*Das 14. und 15. Kapitel S. Johannes durch D. M. Luther gepredigt und ausgelegt, 1537.* (WA 45, 1911, 604).

41. *Ibid*, 238.

42. *Ibid*, 238. Campbell defines salvation in Christ as 'the experience of *orphans who have found their long lost Father*' (241, his italics).