

A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF JN 20:19-29

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1 INTRODUCTION

Waetjen states that the gospel according to John is a story creatively and artistically narrated by a powerful storyteller¹. According to Brown, every story has a real author and he tells the story to a particular person or a group of people (intended real reader). The real author develops a story as a means to communicate a particular message to his audience. For Brown, the fourth gospel is one such writing².

A good story has a beginning, a body, and an end. Agreeing with Aristotle (*Poet. 7.3-7*), Moloney states that “a successful story has a good beginning, to catch the initial attention of the reader, a good central section, to maintain that interest and a good conclusion, to render satisfying the reading experience of the whole utterance”³. We can

¹ Cf. Herman C. WAETJEN. *The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple: A Work in Two Editions*. New York. T & T Clark. 2005. p. xiii.

² Cf. Raymond Edward BROWN. Francis J. MOLONEY. *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*. New York. Doubleday, (The Anchor Bible Reference Library), 2003, 32-33.

³ Francis J. MOLONEY. “Writing a Narrative Commentary on the Gospel of Mark”, in Kelly R. IVERSON and Christopher W. SKINNER (eds.), *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*. Atlanta. Society of Biblical Literature, (Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study 65) 2011, 96.

discover the genius dramatic sensitivity of John and his literary touch in the fourth gospel. He ends the book with a good conclusion, with the appearance of Jesus to the disciples and the confession of faith by Thomas. How does the episode constitute a suitable conclusion of the book of glory? What is the plot of chapter 20 of the fourth gospel?

When Jesus appeared to the disciples (Jn 20:19), Thomas was not with them (Jn 20:24). When the other disciples told Thomas that they had seen the Lord (Jn 20:25), he told them that he will not believe unless he sees the mark of the nails and touches it. He refused to believe without evidence (Jn 20:25). Here, the author has used the Greek construction *οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω* to show the refusal of Thomas and it is the strongest form of negation in Greek. The absence of Thomas and his attitude of refusing to believe the disciples' testimony arouses the curiosity of the reader. Why was Thomas absent? What is the peculiarity and specialty of the episode of Thomas in the fourth gospel?

After eight days, Jesus took the initiative and appeared again to the disciples when Thomas was with them. Here, Jesus and Thomas are the main characters. Thomas' confession of Jesus' divinity is surprising because he calls Jesus: "My Lord and my God (Jn 20:28)". This is for the first time, after the resurrection of Jesus, an apostle definitively declares that Jesus is God. At the beginning, in the prologue of the fourth gospel John introduces the word as God (Jn 1:1). Before the epilogue, in chapter 20, Thomas proclaims Jesus as God. Is the proclamation of Thomas the climax of Johannine Christology?

Jesus' answer is also surprising: "Do you believe because you see me? Blessed is those who believe without seeing me" (Jn 20:29). What is the importance of Jesus' response in this pericope? What is the literary function of this particularly intriguing narrative (the beatitude)? What impact does this narrative create on its readers?

The narrative critical method helps us to find out the literary function of this pericope in the fourth gospel and to focus on the point of view of the narrator, the text, the plot, and the characterization.

2 THE NARRATIVE CRITICAL APPROACH

Powell states that the narrative critical approach “focuses on stories in biblical literature and attempts to read these stories with insights drawn from the secular field of modern literary criticism. The goal is to determine the effects that the stories are expected to have on their audience”⁴.

The traditional methods for the study of the gospels were form criticism, source criticism, historical criticism, tradition history, redaction criticism, and textual criticism. But it has been changed in 1980's by the narrative criticism which responds to the question, ‘what artistry is there in the New Testament stories?’ The narrative criticism gives importance to the final form of the New Testament stories and focuses on the narrative dynamics of the text which had not been seen in the traditional methods⁵.

According to Resseguie, “a narrative critical approach to the fourth gospel complements traditional methods of interpretation, for instance the historical critical method by asking a new set of questions concerning the way a text communicates its meaning as a self-contained unit, a literary artefact, an undivided whole”⁶. For Zumstein, narratological reading

⁴ Mark ALLAN POWELL. “Narrative Criticism”, in Joel B. GREEN (ed.), *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. 1995, 239.

⁵ Cf.. Mark W. G. STIBBE. *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, (Monograph Series / Society for New Testament Studies, 73), 1992, 5-6.

⁶James L. RESSEGUIE. “A Narrative-Critical Approach to the Fourth Gospel”, in Christopher W. SKINNER (ed.), *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*.

focuses primarily on the investigation of the world in/of the text⁷. Resseguei states that the narrative criticism helps “to study the words on a page, the formal features of the Gospel in its finished form such as narrative structure, rhetorical devices, settings, narrator’s role in shaping the narrative, point of view, master-plot or universal story that underlies the narrative and shape it’s conflicts”⁸.

In this analysis, we will analyze in detail the rhetorical devices, settings, point of view, the plot, and the theme in Jn 20:19-29.

3 LITERARY RHETORICAL DEVICES IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

The fourth gospel uses symbolism, irony, ring composition (inclusion), *double entendres*⁹ and misunderstandings as rhetorical devices¹⁰. For Stibbe, John uses the rhetorical devices ‘to direct the reader to the faith in Jesus of Nazareth’¹¹. The rhetorical devices, ring composition and misunderstanding are seen in Jn 20:19-29.

3.1. INCLUSION (RING COMPOSITION)

Inclusion is the repetition of words or themes at the beginning and

London, Bloomsbury, coll. « Library of New Testament Studies » 461. 2013, p. 17.

⁷Cf.. Jean ZUMSTEIN. *La Memoire Revisitee: Etudes Johanniques*. op. cit.. p. 404.

⁸James L. RESSEGUEI, « A Narrative-Critical Approach to the Fourth Gospel ». in Christopher W. SKINNER (ed.). *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*. op. cit.. p. 3.

⁹ They are words that have twofold meanings and both meanings are intended. Cf.. James L. RESSEGUEI, *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John*. Leiden, Brill, coll. « Biblical Interpretation Series »56, 2001, p. 51.

¹⁰ Cf.. James L. RESSEGUEI, « A Narrative-Critical Approach to the Fourth Gospel ». in Christopher W. SKINNER (ed.). *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*. op. cit.. p. 5.

¹¹ Mark W. G. STIBBE, *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel*, op. cit. p. 22.

the end of the book. “John will often mention a detail or allude at the end of a passage to recall something recorded at the beginning of the passage”¹². If we take the confession of Thomas as inclusion, it is parallel to the narrators’ saying in prologue that ‘the word was God’¹³. At the beginning itself the reader knows that ‘the word was God’, but it is fully revealed to the disciples after his resurrection and this fact is proclaimed by Thomas when the risen Lord appeared to him. The whole gospel is tied together by this inclusion.

Sylva states that “Thomas’ final acclamation of Jesus as ‘my God’, is an inclusion”¹⁴. According to Michaels, “the identifications of Jesus as God (Jn 1:1 and 20:28) form an admirable pair of bookends framing the whole gospel and contributing to the commonly held notion that the gospel at some stage ended with chapter 20”¹⁵. For Stibbe, “John 20 is the original conclusion because it forms such an obvious inclusion with John 1 (the introduction of the Gospel)”¹⁶. Girard states that there is a correspondence between the first weeks: Jn 1:1- 51 and the last weeks 20:1-31. Both Nathanael (Jn 1:45-49) and Thomas (Jn 20:24-28) were sceptics at first, then by the action of Jesus they came to believe and confess their faith explicitly. In both cases there are analogous formulations like “because I saw you...you believe” (Jn 1:50) and “because you saw me.. .you believe” (Jn 20:29). The exclusive topic in both narratives is the remission of sin (Jn 1:29 and 20:23)¹⁷.

¹² Mark W. G. STIBBE, *John as Storyteller* , 19.

¹³Cf.. Jean ZUMSTEIN, *L’Evangile Selon Saint Jean (13-21)*. op. cit. p. 291.

¹⁴Dennis D. SYLVA. *Thomas: Love as Strong as Death, Faith and Commitment in the Fourth Gospel*, op. cit.. p. 106.

¹⁵J. Ramsey MICHAELS. *The Gospel of John*. op. cit.. p. 1018.

¹⁶Mark W. G. STIBBE. *John*, op. cit.. p. 198.

¹⁷Cf.. Marc GIRARD. *Evangile Selon Jean: Structures et Symboles*, Jean 10-21. op. cit.. p. 246.

John uses the literary device of inclusion in the climax of the gospel (chapter 20) by introducing Thomas' demand for proof and the confession of faith in order to recall what he said in the prologue and in the episode of Nathanael (chapter 1).

3.2. Misunderstanding

The elements of misunderstanding are seen in the episode of Thomas. In Jn 20:25, the dialogue partners with Thomas are other disciples, who say that they have seen the Lord. Thomas makes a protest by demanding greater things in order to understand and believe the words of disciples. He wants to see the mark of nails and put his finger in the mark of the nails and his hand in his side. In the first appearance of the risen Lord, the disciples come to paschal faith by seeing the wounds of Jesus. It is stated that they "rejoiced" when Jesus showed his hands and his side. After eight days Jesus takes initiative to bring Thomas to the paschal faith. The misunderstanding of Thomas or his demand for proof leads him to the proclamation of faith.

According to Brown, "Thomas doubt is an acted-out misunderstanding, even as Magdalene's failure to recognize Jesus was an acted-out misunderstanding"¹⁸. Beirne Supplements that Thomas and Magdalene are examples of Johannine misunderstanding¹⁹. In the case of Mary Magdalene, this acted-out misunderstanding is evident. In the first appearance of the risen Lord in the garden, Mary could not recognise the risen Lord and she considered him as a gardener (κηπουρός). "In the New

¹⁸ Raymond BROWN. *The Gospel according to John (XIII-XXI)*. op. cit.. p. 1032.

¹⁹ Cf.. Margaret M. BEIRNE. *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel: A Genuine Discipleship of Equals*. London. Sheffield Academic Press, (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series , 242) 2003, 202.

Testament, ὁ κηπουρός the Greek word for gardener appears only here”²⁰. Later when Jesus calls her by her name, she recognizes him and calls him as teacher (v. 16). It is the words of Jesus (telling) that enable her to recognize Jesus. In the case of Thomas, this acted-out misunderstanding becomes clear when we compare this episode with the Lucan episode of Jesus’ appearance to his disciples (Lk 24:36-49). In the Lucan episode, we find that all disciples are equally doubting when the risen Lord appears for the first time. But in the Johannine narrative only the disciple Thomas is doubting. Thomas becomes a personification of an attitude²¹. His doubt can be seen as an acted-out misunderstanding to convey the message of paschal faith to the future generation. This acted-out doubt leads Thomas to proclaim his faith and it results in the final beatitude.

According to William Bonney, in the case of Mary Magdalene, “in her moment of recognition, Jesus reveals himself as both her faith’s object and the one who enables it. With this faith-giving action, the force of Jesus’ will (which had been absent since the scene of the burial) returns to the fore of the narrative”²². If we think in the line of Bonney’s argument, the episode of Thomas is not different from that of Mary Magdalene. Through Thomas’ encounter, Jesus reveals himself as both his faith’s object and the one who enables it. With this faith giving action of Jesus, Thomas proclaims the faith, “My God and my Lord” (Jn 20:28). It means that Thomas is having a misunderstanding about the resurrection. But by the appearance of the risen Lord, Thomas is not only coming to the paschal faith, but he proclaims courageously his faith in front of the twelve.

²¹¹ Barclay M. NEWMAN. Eugene Albert NIDA. *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of John*. op. cit.. p. 610.

²¹Cf.. Raymond BROWN. *The Gospel according to John (XIII-XXI)*. op. cit.. p. 1031.

²² William BONNEY. *Caused to Believe: The Doubting Thomas Story at the Climax of John’s Christological Narrative*. Leiden. Brill, (Biblical Interpretation Series), 2002, 153.

4 THE NARRATOR'S POINT OF VIEW

‘It is both the mode or angle of vision from which the character, dialogue, actions, settings, and events are observed from the narrator’s attitude towards the development of the characters and the events’²³. ‘The narrator stands outside the action and has a privileged view and understanding of the words and works of Jesus’²⁴. He is the one omniscient and who knows everything in the scene. He is the one who speaks and acts to convey his message.

4.1. POINT OF VIEW THROUGH SETTING

According to Resseguie, “point of view is expressed in the type of setting and the arrangement or configuration of characters and objects in a setting. Types of settings include architecture, topography props (cross, spear, inscriptions, clothing, etc.), temporal notations (day, night, sabbath, feasts, etc.), and even characters: walks-ons”²⁵. Now we will analyse the point of view by settings in Jn 20:19-29.

In the appearance of the risen Lord to the disciples in Jn 20:19-29: the settings are the same. “The doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked” (v.19, v.26). For Murray, ‘the feature of closed doors’ signifies the ability of Jesus to present himself in any place and it also signifies the free will of the Lord to reveal himself anywhere at any time, ‘in a mode beyond comprehension’²⁶. Girard says that ‘the settings of the

²³ James L. RESSEGUIE. *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

²⁴ Cf.. Mark W. G. STIBBE. *John as Storyteller*, 20.

²⁵ James L. RESSEGUIE, *The Strange Gospel*, 61.

²⁶ George Raymond BEASLEY-MURRAY. *John. op. cit.*, p. 378.

room locked' connotes the seclusion of the disciples through fear²⁷.

The first appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene happens in a garden (Jn 20:10-18) which signifies an outside open space. But in the case of the disciples, it is a locked room. The disciples are inside the room (Jn 20:19-29). The narrator uses the inside/outside settings with great creativity²⁸. Here 'inside space' suggests security while outside space is perceived as threatening. Why was Thomas outside when all other disciples were inside? From the other disciples' perspective 'inside' is a safe space, but from Thomas' point of view inside space may be confining, preventing him from doing his work. It signifies his courage to go outside even though other disciples are staying inside 'for fear of the Jews'. Similar courage is seen in 11:16, when he tells his fellow disciples "Let us also go, that we may die with him". According to Murray, Thomas is seen "as a pessimistic follower of Jesus, ready to die with him"²⁹. Thomas is willing to sacrifice his life for those who are inside.

When Jesus comes, "he is sending them as the Father has sent him". This sending them out (from this secure but confining space) just as the Father had sent him into the world (Jn 20:21) can be considered as Jesus setting them free to continue the mission³⁰. Therefore, it is the initiative of the risen Lord to help them to continue their mission from inside space to the outside world, to the future believers.

In the first appearance it is evident that the doors were closed because of the fear of the Jews (v. 19). But why did John use the same settings of the locked doors for the second appearance of Jesus too? For

²⁷Cf.. Marc GIRARD, *Evangile Selon Jean: Structures et Symboles*, Jean 10-21. op. cit.. p. 212.

²⁸ Cf.. Mark W. G. STIBBE, *John*, 200.

²⁹ George Raymond BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John*, 384.

³¹¹ Cf.. James L. RESSEGUIE. *The Strange Gospel*, 63-64.

Newman and Nida, it intends to highlight “the miraculous aspect of Jesus’ sudden appearance among his disciples even though the doors are closed”³¹. For Leon-Dufour, it suggests the non-material nature of the body of the risen Lord³². For Bonney, the risen Lord’ appearance passing through doors demonstrates that “Jesus’ revelatory actions transpire according to his own will and transcend human limitations”³³. Their perspectives are also applicable to the first appearance of Jesus. The same settings in the second appearance indicates that the disciples gathered together once again with Thomas and Jesus appearing in their midst as same as in the first appearance. Here Thomas is having the same visual experience that the other disciples had in the first appearance of the risen Lord. The second appearance of Jesus in the presence of Thomas can be a rearrangement of the first appearance by the author.

4.2. POINT OF VIEW THROUGH THE NARRATIVE TIME

According to Culpepper, “the narrative time is determined by the order, duration, and the frequency of events in the narrative. It may correspond more or less closely to the story time, but the two are never equal”³⁴. For Zumstein, the order of the narrative deserves special attention because through the play of prolepses and analepses, the events narrated are linked together and put into perspective and the meaning arises precisely from this connection³⁵. For Frey, “the temporal notes, which are numerous in John, sometimes have a theological-symbolic

³¹ Barclay M. NEWMAN. Eugene Albert NIDA. *A Translator 's Handbook on the Gospel of John*. op. cit.. p. 618.

³² Cf.. Xavier LEON-DUFOUR. *Lecture de l' Evangile Selon Jean IV, L' Heure de la Glorification: chapitres 18-21*. op. cit.. p. 247.

³³ William BONNEY. *Caused to Believe: The Doubting Thomas Story at the Climax of John 's Christological Narrative*, op. cit.. p. 156.

³⁴ R. Alan CULPEPPER. *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A study in Literary Design*. Philadelphia. Fortress Press. 1983. p. 54.

³⁵ JeanZUMSTEIN. *La Memoire Revisitee: Etudes Johanniques*. op. cit. p. 397.

meaning and sometimes merely a narrative or dramaturgical function”³⁶. Therefore, it is important to analyze the narrative time and the organization of the time in the Easter cycle of chapter 20. How does the Easter cycle fit into the whole story by the organization of the time?

Within the sphere of eight days there happens two appearances of Jesus to the disciples. The Easter story begins in Jn 20:1 which states that it was “early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark”. Then v.19 states that “it was evening on that day, the first day of the week” and v.26 starts with “eight days later”. “Scholars have suggested that this rhythmic reference to “the first day of the week” (v. 1), “the evening of that same day” (v. 19), and “eight days later” (v.26) deliberately situates all these events on the day of the Lord”³⁷.

Before the appearance of Jesus to the disciples, the author has narrated the story of the visit of Peter and the other disciple to the tomb in the early morning and the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene in the garden. All these incidents happen in the early morning. Appearance of the risen Lord to the disciples happens at the evening of that same day. The time span between the appearance to Mary Magdalene and first appearance to the disciples is from early morning to evening. It gives a continuity to the narrated events. Till the v.23, the reader thinks that Jesus appeared to all the disciples and he gets no idea about the absence of Thomas in the first appearance.

The author introduces the absence of Thomas in v.24. It creates a break in the story time, and it creates a curiosity in the reader. He could have mentioned it at the beginning of the first appearance. If the author

³⁶ Jörg FREY. *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John*, Texas. Baylor University Press, coll. « Baylor-Mohr Siebeck: Studies in Early Christianity ». 2018. transl. of Wayne COPPINS. CHRISTOPH HEILIG, p. 87.

³⁷ Francis J. MOLONEY. *The Gospel of John*, 537.

has not introduced the absence of Thomas and the following incidents (v.24-29) the reader might have peacefully continued the reading.

The second appearance of Jesus in the presence of Thomas occurs ‘after eight days’ (v.26). This narrated time signifies something decisive in this episode. When Mary Magdalene announced in the morning that ‘she had seen the Lord’ (v. 17), we don’t know how the disciples responded to it. Then the same day in the evening Jesus appeared to them. The two incidents happen on the same day, the first day of the week. In the case of Thomas, he had to wait for eight days to experience the risen Lord. For Sylva, the temporal index of ‘eight days’ shows a sense of urgency that is missing in Thomas episode³⁸. Thomas has already put forward some demands or tangible proof to believe and to come to the paschal faith. During this ‘eight days’ the other disciples might have continuously told (ελεγον) Thomas that they had seen the Lord. This eight days’ time might have been a difficult time for Thomas but for the other disciples it was a time of joy since they have seen the risen Lord. Eight days’ time may signify the free will and the initiative of the risen Lord to come wherever and whenever he wants. It is the Lord who brings back an unbeliever to the paschal faith. This time also signifies the duration or a process for an unbeliever to come to belief.

“A week later, literally “after eight days” John means us to understand this as the second Sunday”³⁹. It indicates that the disciples gathered together once again on the Sunday with Thomas and Jesus appearing in their midst as same as in the first appearance. Here Thomas is having the same personal experience that the other disciples had in the first appearance of the risen Lord. Apart from these eight days’ gap and

³⁸ Cf.. Dennis D. SYLVA. *Thomas: Love as Strong as Death, Faith and Commitment in the Fourth Gospel*, 103.

³⁹ Raymond BROWN, *The Gospel according to John (XIII-XXI)*, 1025.

the disciples' fear of the Jews (v.19) all other settings seem to be the same. So, it can be a rearrangement of the first appearance of the risen Lord.

5 THE POSITION OF THE PERICOPE IN THE STORY

Before entering into the study of the plot of the pericope (Jn 20:19-29) in detail, we will situate the pericope in the fourth gospel, and we will analyse the context of the story.

According to the structures of Bultmann, Brown, Murray, Lincoln, Zumstein and Scrima we can locate the pericope Jn 20:19-29 as the conclusion or the last story of the book of glory. Chapter 20 deals with the resurrection of Jesus. It begins with Mary Magdalene's visit to the tomb and she finds that the stone of the tomb was removed. She runs to Peter and to the other disciple. They visit the empty tomb. The beloved disciple sees the empty tomb and believes. Then comes the risen Lord's appearance to Mary Magdalene in the garden. It is the first appearance of the risen Lord to an individual. It is the preceding context of Jn 20:19-29. The subsequent context is Jn 20:30-31 in which the author writes the purpose of this book: "these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name".

As the scholars like Brown, Zumstein and Bruner divide Jn 20:19-29 into 2 scenes, the appearance of the risen Lord to the disciples in the absence of Thomas (Jn 20:19-23) and appearance of the risen Lord to the disciples in the presence of Thomas (Jn 20:24-29). From this, it is clear that the context of Chapter 20 is the resurrection appearance of Jesus to the disciples and the pericope Jn 20:19-29 is the conclusion story of the book of glory.

6 THE PLOT OF THE PERICOPE (JN 20:19-29)

Jn 20:19-29 is a narrative. In order to find out the plot of the pericope we analyze the pericope using the quinarian schema. The quinarian schema is a narrative schema where the story is structured by five successive moments: the initial situation, the complication, the transformative action, the denouement, and the final situation⁴⁰. This schema will help us to understand better the plot of the story and what message it conveys to the reader or to the listener.

6.1. THE INITIAL SITUATION: SEEING AND BELIEVING OF THE DISCIPLES (V. 19-23)

The initial situation provides the reader with necessary information regarding the setting, the place and the characters are introduced. The initial situation of this episode presents the main characters, Jesus and the disciples. In this initial scene, the disciples are locked in a room for the fear of the Jews. It shows the absence of Jesus with them. It presents the importance of Jesus' coming into the scene. In this initial scene 'the risen Lord appears in their middle' for the first time (v.19). Then happens the greeting of peace (v.19) and the showing of his hands and his side to his disciples (v.20). For Schneiders, this showing of hands doesn't have any apologetical significance, but it has "a revelatory identification of himself as the one who was glorified on the cross and whose glorification is the source of the peace he has just imparted and the Spirit which he is about to bestow"⁴¹. It also reveals that the one who is crucified is risen. Then the disciples are seeing and believing (v.20). They are rejoicing in the presence of the Lord. It is a recognition scene. Subsequently, Jesus sends the disciples for mission as the Father has sent him. Jesus breathed on

⁴¹ Cf.. Daniel MARGUERAT. Yvan BOURQUIN. *Pour Lire les Recits Bibliques: Initiation à l'Analyse Narrative*. Paris. Cerf. 2004. p. 57.

⁴¹ Sandra Marie SCHNEIDERS. "The Raising of the New Temple: John 20: 19-23 and Johannine Ecclesiology", *New Testament Studies* 52/ 3 (2006), 347.

them and gave them the power to forgive sins (v.21-23). The event of resurrection is communicated in the initial situation. It is the risen Lord who is the principal actor in this scene. The disciples are the ones who benefit from it. The coming of the risen Lord transforms the fearful situation of the disciples into joy, and His words give courage to them.

6.2. THE COMPLICATION: NARRATOR'S NOTE ON THE ABSENCE OF THOMAS (V.24-25)

Marguerat notes that the complication constitutes the triggering of the action where the dramatic tension usually begins. It can be a statement of difficulty, a conflict, an incident, etc⁴². Here the complication starts by the narrator's note about the absence of Thomas, one of the twelve who was absent in the initial scene (v.24). It creates a curiosity in the reader and it generates different questions: why was Thomas absent when all others were locked in the room? Why does he go out alone when all other disciples are locked in the room due to fear of the Jews? The other disciples' testimony to Thomas regarding the appearance of the risen Lord complicates the scene (v.25). For Zumstein, by introducing the absence of Thomas, the author of the fourth gospel introduces a new problem in the story: it is no longer about the birth of the paschal faith, but about the questioning of the paschal kerygma by an absent disciple, who represents the later generations of believers⁴³.

Thomas might have thought about the reasons for Jesus' appearance to the disciples in his absence. It results in Thomas' unwillingness to believe the testimony of the other disciples and his demands for the proof to believe (v.25). According to Sylva, the attitude of Thomas is courageous, because he was willing to stand alone against a group's

⁴² Cf.. Daniel MARGUERAT. Yvan BOURQUIN. *Pour Lire les Recits Bibliques: Initiation à l'Analyse Narrative*, 57.

⁴³ JeanZUMSTEIN, *LaAlemoire Revisitee: Etudes Johanniques*, 397.

testimony of an experience of the risen Lord⁴⁴. For Thomas, it is difficult to accept that the crucified one appeared to the disciples in his absence. He might have assumed that the disciples had seen something else, and they believed it as the appearance of the Lord. It complicates the scene. From the perspective of Thomas, the reader starts to think about the inevitability of the doubt in Thomas.

6.3. THE TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION: APPEARANCE OF JESUS IN THE PRESENCE OF THOMAS (V. 26- 27)

Transformative action is the turning point of the story which aims at the solution to the difficulty or the problem⁴⁵. The second appearance of Jesus to the disciples in the presence of Thomas is the transformative action, because it transforms the attitude of Thomas (v.26). Thomas also got an opportunity to see the risen Lord and to confirm that He is the one who was crucified and who is now risen. It happens a week later and it shows the free will of Jesus to reveal himself even to one of the twelve who demands the proof. It is rare that Jesus satisfies one's demand for signs⁴⁶. But, in the case of Thomas, the risen Lord fulfils his demand for signs and proofs. Jesus' action and his words transform the sceptic, Thomas. He sees and comes to the paschal faith. For Zumstein, the seeing is granted to Thomas, the doubter (in fact, he sees nothing more than the other disciples and he does not touch the risen Lord), it is the call to faith formulated by Christ (v.27) and it leads him to the confession of faith⁴⁷. Moreover, the fourth gospel doesn't say that Thomas touched and believed. Otherwise, Jesus could have told Thomas: "Do you believe because you have touched me? Blessed are those who believe without

⁴⁴ Cf.. Dennis D. SYLVA, *Thomas: Love as Strong as Death, Faith and Commitment in the Fourth Gospel*, 83.

⁴⁵ Cf.. Daniel MARGUERAT. Yvan BOURQUIN. *Pour Lire les Recits Bibliques*, 58.

⁴⁶ Cf.. Jerome H. NEYREY. *The Gospel of John*, 330.

⁴⁷ JeanZUMSTEIN. *LaAlemoire Revisitee: Etudes Johanniques*, 397.

touching me". So, we can't distinguish the experience of Thomas from that of the other disciples (v.20)⁴⁸.

6.4. THE DENOUEMENT: SEEING AND BELIEVING OF THOMAS (28)

Denouement is the resolution of the announced problem which describes the effects of the transformative action on the people involved or how the situation returns to its previous state⁴⁹. Here the denouement is Thomas' proclamation that Jesus is his Lord and his God. It is for the first time that after the resurrection, a disciple is proclaiming that the risen One is his Lord and God. It is the climax of the confessions of faith in the fourth gospel. For Moloney, this confession of Thomas is the final affirmation of the Christology of the fourth gospel rather than the rejection of emperor worship⁵⁰. For Riley, "this is the climax of the Christology of the fourth Gospel and recalls the opening verse, 'the Word was God'"⁵¹. The encounter of the risen Lord transforms Thomas' attitude. He comes to the paschal faith. The risen Lord's appearance and his words give confidence to Thomas to proclaim that Jesus is his Lord and his God.

6.5. THE FINAL SITUATION: THE BEATITUDE (29)

The final situation portrays the recognition of a new state, but it responds to the initial state⁵². Here, after the confession of Thomas, Jesus says, "Do you believe because you see me? Blessed are those who believe without seeing me". It is an invitation to go beyond the initial situation where the disciples are seeing and believing. In the final situation the risen

⁴⁸ Cf.. Xavier LEON-DUFOUR. *Lecture de l'Evangile Selon Jean IV, L'Heure de la Glorification: chapitres 18-21.* op. cit., p. 248.

⁴⁹ Cf.. Daniel MARGUERAT. Yvan BOURQUIN. *Pour Lire les Recits Bibliques*, 58.

⁵⁰ Cf.. Francis J. MOLONEY. *The Gospel of John*, 540.

⁵¹ Gregory J. RILEY. *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy*, 123.

⁵² Cf.. Daniel MARGUERAT. Yvan BOURQUIN. *Pour Lire les Recits Bibliques*, 58.

Lord demands a faith without seeing. For Riley, “Thomas’ faith is such that he must see to believe, and Jesus blesses those who do not see but believe”⁵³. For Zumstein, the privilege is found in ‘non-seeing’, not in ‘seeing’. To believe without seeing is the privilege of the post-Easter period⁵⁴. Sylva states that “Jn 20:29 is not an exaltation of faith based on the word over sign faith, but rather an exhortation for a faith that is based on learning from the Gospel’s testimony to signs rather than requiring an appearance of the resurrected Lord”⁵⁵. According to Bonney, “John ends his account of Thomas’ encounter with the risen Lord by shifting the focus of his narrative from faith of Thomas to the faith of the reader”⁵⁶. Therefore, this episode is no more a criticism of Thomas’ faith, but it opens up the beatitude for the future believers. For Riley, the beatitude is “the conclusion of the gospel as a whole and John uses Thomas here to speak to all later Christians, since later generations had no such opportunity: the time of appearance was past, and they had to rely upon the testimony spoken by others”⁵⁷. In short, this beatitude opens up two modes of access to paschal faith: that of Thomas (seeing and believing) and that of the disciples to come (non-seeing and believing).

6.6. FINAL REMARKS ON QUINARIAN SCHEMA OF THE PERICOPE

The problematic of this pericope reflects the concern of the Johannine communities and more broadly of the potential readers of the Gospel. Johannine Christians knew neither the historical Jesus nor the

⁵³ Gregory J. RILEY. *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy*, 105.

⁵⁴ JeanZUMSTEIN, *LaAlemoire Revisitee: Etudes Johanniques*, 397.

⁵⁵ Dennis D. SYLVA, *Thomas: Love as Strong as Death, Faith and Commitment in the Fourth Gospel*, 100.

⁵⁶ William BONNEY. *Caused to Believe: The Doubting Thomas Story at the Climax of John 's Christological Narrative*, 169.

⁵⁷ Gregory J. RILEY. *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy*, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

apparitions of the risen Lord belonging to the past⁵⁸. According to the beatitude in the episode of Thomas, Christians of later generations must rely on the paschal kerygma proclaimed in the gospel to have faith in the risen Lord and to have life in his name (20:31).

In the complication scene, Thomas refuses to believe the testimony of the disciples that they have seen the Lord (v.25): “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands... I will not believe” (v.25). His “non-seeing” leads to a doubt. But this doubt was transformed by the appearance of the Lord and his call to faith: “Do not doubt but believe” (v.27). It leads Thomas to the confession of faith “My Lord and my God” (v.28) and to the beatitude that regulates the relationship between seeing and believing: “Do you believe because you see me? Blessed are those who believe without seeing me” (v.29).

Thomas expresses his faith without having put his hand in the wounds of Jesus. Atkins is of the opinion that “when offered physical proof of the resurrection, and thereby of Jesus’s humanity, Thomas is not said to touch Jesus or to confirm his resurrection. Instead, he confesses Jesus’s deity (My Lord and my God)”⁵⁹. The words of the risen Lord in v.27 stigmatize his unbelief and open the way of faith to him. Thomas does not empirically verify the identity of the risen Lord but he is questioned and moved by the word of the risen Lord, and thus he pronounces the most accomplished confession of faith in the Gospel.

Therefore, we can conclude that the plot of chapter 20:19-29 is thematic. The theological question is the relationship between ‘seeing’ and ‘believing’. This relationship, problematized and constructed by the

⁵⁸ Cf.. Xavier LEON-DUFOUR. *Lecture de l’Evangile Selon Jean IV, L’Heure de la Glorification: chapitres 18-21.* op. cit.. p. 252.

⁵⁹ J. D. ATKINS. *The doubt of the Apostles and the resurrection faith of the early Church: The post-resurrection appearance stories of the Gospels in ancient reception and modern debate,* op. cit., p. 308.

narrative, is the characteristic of the paschal faith⁶⁰. In this sense, the account of Jn 20:19-29, aims at the birth of the paschal faith.

7 THEME

John has themes or concepts which unite the different parts of the narrative⁶¹. According to Culpepper, “the fourth gospel contains a complex theology of belief levels of faith”⁶². The key word in the fourth gospel is the verb πιστεύω (believe) which appears 98 times⁶³ but the noun form of the word πίστις (faith) does not occur at all. The main theme in chapter 20 is ‘seeing and believing’⁶⁴.

According to Raymond Brown,

“The beloved disciple comes to faith after having seen the burial wrappings but without having seen Jesus himself. Magdalene sees Jesus but does not recognize him until he calls her by name. The disciples see him and believe. Thomas also sees him and believes, but only after having been over insistent on the marvellous aspect of the appearance. All four are examples of those who saw and believed; the evangelist will close the Gospel in 29b by turning his attention to those who have believed without seeing”⁶⁵.

According to William Stibbe,

“In 20:1, Mary goes to the tomb and sees that the stone

⁶¹¹ Cf.. Jean ZUMSTEIN, *L 'Evangile Selon Saint Jean (13-21)*, 268.

⁶¹ Cf.. Mark W. G. STIBBE. *John as Storyteller*, 18.

⁶² R. Alan CULPEPPER. *Anatomy of the fourth gospel: A study in literary design*. Philadelphia. 1983, 21.

⁶³ Cf.. William BONNEY. *Caused to Believe*, 166.

⁶⁴ Mark W. G. STIBBE. *John*, 202.

⁶⁵ Raymond BROWN. *The Gospel according to John (XIII-XXI)*, 1046.

has been rolled away. In 20:5, the beloved disciple bends over the entrance of the tomb and sees the strips of linen. In 20:6, Peter sees the same items. In 20:8, the beloved disciple sees and believes. In 20:11 a similar process is repeated as Mary bends over to look into the tomb. She sees two angels. They address her and she turns to see Jesus. In v.20, Jesus shows the disciples his hands and side. The disciples are described as ‘overjoyed’ when they see the Lord. In v.25, the disciples tell Thomas, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ In the same verse Thomas says to them that he will not believe unless he sees for himself. In v.27, Jesus appears to Thomas and tells him to see his hands and side. In v.29, Jesus explores the relationship between ‘seeing’ and ‘believing’ in what amounts to the climactic summary statement of this theme”⁶⁶.

If we agree with Brown and Stibbe, it is clear that the running theme in chapter 20 is ‘seeing and believing’. Mary Magdalene, the beloved disciple, the disciples and Thomas are seeing and believing. What do they see? Are they seeing the same reality? Is there any difference in their perception?

In the case of Mary Magdalene, the disciples, and Thomas, it is clear that they come to paschal faith by direct encounter with the risen Lord. But in the case of the beloved disciple, ‘by seeing the burial wrappings’ he comes to paschal faith. He believed in the resurrection before having a direct encounter with the risen Lord. It is stated in v.8: καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐπίστευσεν (“He saw and he believed”). Therefore, in the fourth gospel, the beloved disciple becomes the representative of future believers who are coming to paschal faith even without seeing the risen Lord directly as

⁶⁶ Mark W. G. STIBBE. *John*, 202.

it is later mentioned in Jn 20:29: μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ιδόντες καὶ πιστεύσαντες (the beatitude). In v.8 and in v.29 the author used the same verbs ὄράω and πιστεύω) for seeing and believing.

8 THE IMPLIED AUTHOR

Powell states that “the basic goal of narrative criticism is to discern how the implied reader of a narrative would be expected to respond to the text”⁶⁷. According to Jean Zumstein, “The fourth gospel showed that the narrative is the result of a whole series of literary and theological choices. These different writing choices that are objectified in the text constitute the implied author. In the Gospel of John, the implied author is identical to the narrator who tells the story of the Johannine Jesus”⁶⁸.

We do trace the implied author ‘from the data of the text’⁶⁹. The implied author who manifests himself in Jn 20:19-29 is omnipresent and he knows everything. He tells the intimate feelings of the characters: he knows that Thomas was absent in the first appearance of Jesus, he is aware about the disciples’ fear of the Jews and their situation in the closed room. He knows that the disciples are coming to paschal faith by seeing the risen Lord. He is conscious about the intimate thoughts of the actors in the story and the deeper meaning of the events⁷⁰.

The purpose of the fourth gospel in Jn 20:30-31 helps us to identify that the author has done a choice and selection in narrating the story of

⁶⁷ Mark Allan POWELL. “Narrative Criticism: The Emergence of a Prominent Reading Strategy” in Kelly R. IVERSON and Christopher W. SKINNER (eds.), *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, Atlanta, (Society of Biblical Literature, 65), 2011, 23.

⁶⁸ Jean ZUMSTEIN. *La Memoire Revisitee: Etudes Johanniques*, 402.

⁶⁹ Patrick CHATELION COUNET. *John, a Postmodern Gospel: Introduction to Deconstructive Exegesis Applied to the Fourth Gospel*, Leiden. Brill, (Biblical Interpretation Series 44), 2000, 31.

⁷⁰ Jean ZUMSTEIN. *La Memoire Revisitee*, 402.

Jesus. He has written the story of Jesus at the service of faith. He wants to arouse faith in the person of Jesus Christ. The implied author identifies with the point of view of the Johannine Jesus, which he fully defends⁷¹.

Considering the legitimacy and the trustworthiness of the implied author's view, the reader meets him in the epilogue. There we find that the voice of the narrator has a face, that of the beloved disciple (Jn 21:24)⁷². According to Culpepper, "in Jn 21:24, the editor characterizes the implied author (the superior self of the evangelist reflected in John 1-20, that is, "he who has written these things") as the beloved disciple (the gospel's idealized portrayal of the evangelist's mentor)"⁷³. He is one reclining next to Jesus at the last supper (Jn 13:23-25). At the last supper, he comes explicitly for the first time in the Gospel⁷⁴. Then he appears as a witness at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:26-27). He appears in chapter 20:4-8 as one who reached first at the empty tomb and one who saw and believed. It is in him that the purpose of the gospel (Jn 20:30-31) is fulfilled by his faith response to his entering into the empty tomb, and by believing he demonstrates that he was a child of God (Jn 1:12). In the case of Peter, his belief is not mentioned. Thus, the beloved disciple becomes the first believer (who comes to the paschal faith), paradigmatic for all other believers⁷⁵. He becomes a model disciple. This determines his status as a witness. This makes him the interpreter par excellence of the story of Jesus and in particular of his resurrection⁷⁶. Moreover, the content of the

⁷¹ Jean ZUMSTEIN. *La Memoire Revisitee*, 402.

⁷² Cf. Patrick CHATELION COUNET. *John, a Postmodern Gospel: Introduction to Deconstructive Exegesis Applied to the Fourth Gospel*, 317.

⁷³ R. Alan CULPEPPER. *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A study in Literary Design*, 47-48.

⁷⁴ Cf.. Stephen VOORWINDE. *Jesus ' Emotions in the Fourth Gospel: Human or Divine?* London. T&T Clark, (Library of New Testament Studies 284), 2005, 258.

⁷⁵ Cf.. Jörg FREY. *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John. op. cit. p. 223.*

⁷⁶ Jean ZUMSTEIN. *La Memoire Revisitee*, 403.

faith of the beloved disciple “is not simply ‘that Jesus is risen from the dead’ but, more precisely, his divine authority and dignity”⁷⁷.

9 THE IMPLIED READER

Powell states that “the concept of implied reader parallels that of the implied author. The implied reader is one who actualizes the potential for meaning in a text, who responds to it in ways consistent with the expectations that we may ascribe to its implied author”⁷⁸. According to Jean Zumstein, “the implicit author conceives his story as an act of communication. He is therefore addressing a reader and, in doing so, he inscribed in the text itself the image he has of his reader, the contract he is offering him. This image of the reader, which is part of the text itself, is what should be called the implied reader”⁷⁹.

The implied reader is the one who is the first beneficiary of the work. He must be a person who knows Greek and who knows the characters of the story especially Jesus and the disciples⁸⁰. He might know why disciples are afraid of the Jews, why they meet together on the first day of the week, why Thomas was absent in the first appearance of Jesus, why Thomas alone proclaims the paschal faith explicitly and what is the significance of the beatitude⁸¹.

The purpose of the fourth gospel helps us to find out the intention of the author because he has written so that “one may come to believe that Jesus is Messiah, the Son of God” (Jn 20:31). By reading the gospel one is invited to faith. For Zumstein, regarding the attainment of faith, “it is

⁷⁷ Jörg FREY. *The Glory of the Crucified One*, 223.

⁷⁸ Mark ALLAN POWELL. “Narrative Criticism”, in Joel B. GREEN (ed.), *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, 241.

⁸⁰ Jean ZUMSTEIN. *La Memoire Revisitee: Etudes Johanniques*. op. cit. p. 403.

⁸¹ Cf. R. Alan CULPEPPER. *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 216-218.

⁸¹ Cf.. JeanZUMSTEIN. *La Memoire Revisitee*, 403.

not a question of moving from unbelief to faith in the sense that the implied reader would be a pagan to be converted. It is a question of moving from unbelief to faith in the sense of Thomas. His doubt does not concern the phenomenon of the appearance as such (the disciples do not doubt the reality of the appearance when Christ manifests himself to them), but the credibility of the kerygma”⁸².

This is the typical situation and the problem of the believers of the second generation who have no direct access to the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus. The reader is therefore invited to the advantage of non-seeing and believing. He can measure this advantage in terms of its significance and theological legitimacy insofar as he agrees to follow the paths of the beloved disciple who believes in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus by the mere sight of the empty tomb. Chapter 20 thus proposes the disciple to pass from an ordinary conception of Christ’s resurrection to his profound intelligence and, thereby, to attain the type of faith that characterizes the post-Easter period⁸³.

Therefore, we can say that the beloved disciple is the representative of future believers who are coming to faith without seeing the risen Lord. The fourth gospel is written after the synoptics, and it suggests a later date of its origin. At that time, it is no longer possible to see the risen Lord directly, it is necessary to speak about the future generation and their coming to paschal faith. Here the implied author uses the beloved disciple and Thomas as the two different characters of paschal faith. Thomas coming to faith by direct vision of the Lord, but the beloved disciple as model *par excellence* coming to faith without the direct encounter with the risen Lord. By this comparison, the implied author invites the implied

⁸² JeanZUMSTEIN. *La Memoire Revisitee*, 403.

⁸³ JeanZUMSTEIN. *La Memoire Revisitee*, 403

reader to come to the paschal faith like the beloved disciple by believing in the Lord without seeing.

10 CONCLUSION

Narrative criticism of the text helped us to see Jn 20:19-29 as a whole and to conclude that this pericope is an invitation for the reader to the paschal faith. The appearance of Jesus to the disciples is written in a context where it is no more possible to see the risen Lord physically. Therefore, the author has narrated Thomas' story who doubts the possibility of resurrection and demands tangible proof for it. The evangelist has beautifully used the similar settings and similar entry of Jesus to convince the reader that it is the risen Lord who initiates one to the paschal faith. By the actions of Jesus: the showing of wounded hands and side leads us to believe that the crucified one is the risen Lord. Moreover, by breathing on them, he gives the gift of the Holy Spirit. By the threefold greetings of peace, he fulfills the promise of his farewell discourse. Jesus then invites them to continue His mission in the world, as he fulfilled the mission that the Father had entrusted him. Finally, by the beatitude he invites all the readers to a paschal faith without seeing Him physically.
