



Research article

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**DIALOGUE AS A LITERARY GENRE IN THE BOOK OF SIGNS  
(JOHN 1:19-12:50)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The dialogue of the Gospel of John remains as one of the most significant literary genres yet to be adequately explored by scholars. It is one of the oral or literary genres universally used to promote human interaction and communication. The Book of Signs (1:19-12:50) in the gospel comprises of several dialogue texts. This large block of the gospel appears to be a major dialogue portion in the NT connected to the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. The task of this study will be threefold: to investigate the development of the dialogue within the narrative framework of John; to understand the peculiar approaches and methodologies of the author/narrator for framing the dialogue; and to explore the theological value of the dialogue.

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## 1. Introduction

The dialogue of the Gospel of John remains as one of the most significant literary genres yet to be adequately explored by scholars. It is one of the oral or literary genres universally used to promote human interaction and communication. The Book of Signs (1:19-12:50)<sup>1</sup> in the gospel comprises

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<sup>1</sup> According to classical Johannine scholarship, the Gospel of John is mainly divided into four parts: two small parts (i.e., 1:1-18 as the ‘prologue’ and 21:1-25 as the ‘epilogue’) and two larger parts (i.e., 1:19-12:50 as the ‘Book of Signs’ and 13:1-20:31 as the ‘Book of Glory’; cf. Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina Series. Vol. 4 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998). Brown, similarly, divides the gospel into four parts (the Prologue [1:1-18]; the Book of Signs [1:19-12:50]; the Book of Glory [13:1-20:31]; and the Epilogue [21:1-25]) and he discusses the *Sēmeia-Quelle* or *Sign Source* in detail. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966/1970), 1966: xxviii-xxxix. Van Belle describes in detail the origin and development of the “*Sēmeia Hypothesis*.” See Gilbert Van Belle, *The Signs Source in the Fourth Gospel: Historical Survey and Critical Evaluation of the Semeia Hypothesis*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium CXVI (Leuven: University Press, 1994), 1; cf. Albert Schweitzer, *Das Evangelium Johannes nach seinem innern Werthe und seiner Bedeutung für das Leben Jesu kritisch untersucht* (Leipzig, 1841); Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, tran. Marsh, J (Oxford, 1963/1968); Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ed. Beasley-Murray, G. R (Oxford: B. Blackwell/Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971). For Dodd, the Book of Signs begins with 2:1 and ends with 12:50, with at least seven episodes (2:1-4:42; 4:46-5:47; 6; 7-8; 9:1-10-21 [with appendix, 10:22-39]; 11:1-53; and 12:1-36) and an ‘Epilogue to the Book of Signs’ (12:37-50). See C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953/1960). Barrett broadly structures 1:19-12:50 as a separate section that deals with “Narratives, Conversations, and Discourses.” See C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1978), 11; cf. Johnson Thomaskutty, *Dialogue in the Book of Signs: A Polyvalent Analysis of John 1:19-12:50*, Biblical Interpretation Series 136 (Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2015). Similarly, Brodie divides the book into two, as ‘Book One’ (chaps. 1-12) and ‘Book Two’ (chaps. 13-21).

of several dialogue texts.<sup>2</sup> This large block of the gospel appears to be a major dialogue portion in the NT connected to the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Dodd rightly pointed out that, “Among the various forms in which the church’s witness and saving work of Christ is presented in the gospels, the one most characteristic of the Fourth Gospel is the elaborately wrought dramatic dialogue.”<sup>3</sup> In view of Dodd’s statement, the central question to be addressed here is: ‘How does John use the literary genre called dialogue within the gospel?’ Though Dodd is one of the pioneers in dealing with the dialogue of the gospel, a concentrated study of the subject matter is scarce even in his writings. Along with the central question posed above, a few other questions also have to be dealt with, such as ‘What is the central theme that governs the dialogue of the Book of Signs ahead?’ ‘What type of information is conveyed through the dialogue?’ ‘How does John structure dialogue as a literary genre?’ ‘What are the ways exchanges and episodes function within the narrative framework?’ ‘How do the content, form, and function contribute to the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic levels of the dialogue?’ ‘How are dialogues involved in expressing the aspects of the Johannine community?’ ‘What are the peculiar literary characteristics of his dialogue?’ and ‘What is the theological/rhetorical function of the Johannine dialogue?’ These questions have to be adequately dealt with in the process of

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See T. L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). The above descriptions give a detailed picture of the scholarly views with regard to the Book of Signs. In the present study, we will consider the section 1:1-18 as an appropriate introduction to the entire gospel and the section 1:19-12:50 as the Book of Signs and analyze the dialogues of the latter section.

<sup>2</sup> See Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 11; Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> See C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 41.



exploring the dialogue of the gospel. The task of this study will be threefold: to investigate the development of the dialogue within the narrative framework of John; to understand the peculiar approaches and methodologies of the author/narrator for framing the dialogue; and to explore the theological value of the dialogue.

## 2. The Exchange Development

The nature and function of the dialogue at the *macro*-level can be comprehended through the means of its development at the exchange and episode (i.e., *micro*- and *meso*-) levels. A careful analysis of the Book of Signs confirms that the narrative comments and the utterance units function contributively to one another.<sup>4</sup> Herman rightly states that, “Utterances do not stand alone. They are generally issued and exchanged in specific contexts, and form complex units, within wider units like *speech events*.”<sup>5</sup> What Herman says is proved in the Johannine utterances as they are attached to their contexts. The interactive nature of the utterances with the pure and formula narratives provide the reader important insights concerning the two major dialogue tenets of the Book of Signs, i.e., dialogues between the characters and between the narrator and the reader.<sup>6</sup> The utterance units

of the dialogue are rhetorical as they work efficaciously within the narrative framework.<sup>7</sup> In the process of reading, a paradigmatic reader realizes the interactive nature of the dialogue and the narrative within the exchange structures.<sup>8</sup> This interaction of the utterances/dialogues and the narratives within the exchanges at the micro-level dynamically work for the development of the episodes.<sup>9</sup>

A careful analysis of the Book of Signs helps us to identify some of the major dialogue trends at the micro-level.<sup>10</sup> The narrator uses *question-and-answer* (1:19-28; 6:1-15;<sup>11</sup> 6:22-59, 67-71; 9:1-7, 8-12, 13-17, 18-23; 10:22-39; 11:30-37, 54-57; 12:1-11),<sup>12</sup> *request-rebuke-response* (2:1-11; 4:43-54),<sup>13</sup> *challenge-and-riposte* (2:13-22; 4:16-26; 6:67-71; 7:14-36; 8:12-20; 9:1-7; 10:22-39; 12:1-11),<sup>14</sup> *report-and-defense* (3:22-36), and other forms of dialogues at the *micro*-level in order to present the story of Jesus to the reader. Other formats of

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One Dialogue to Another: Johannine Polyvalence from Origins to Receptions,” *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 93-120.

<sup>7</sup> See H. Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 1998), 2-37; S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 176.

<sup>8</sup> See T. Maranhão, *The Interpretation of Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), 14.

<sup>9</sup> Herman, *Dramatic Discourse*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> G. A. Press, *Plato: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2007), 57.

<sup>11</sup> Here it is in a *question of test-answer of impossibility-action of possibility* sequence.

<sup>12</sup> D. E. Aune, “Dialogue,” *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 126.

<sup>13</sup> A. J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1999), 72-74.

<sup>14</sup> J. H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John*, NCBC (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 71-72, 79, 93, 100.

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<sup>4</sup> R. W. Funk, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Sonoma, California: Polebridge Press, 1988), 2; also see Derek Tovey, *Jesus: Story of God, John’s Story of Jesus* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2007), 42-48.

<sup>5</sup> V. Herman, *Dramatic Discourse: Dialogue as Interaction in Plays* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), 13; cf. M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, tran. McGee, V (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986/1998), 62.

<sup>6</sup> D. F. Tolmie, *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: A Practical Guide* (San Francisco/London: International Scholars Publications, 1999), 13; See T. J. Martin, *Living Words: Studies in Dialogues about Religion* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976/1988), 27; cf. M. J. Buss, “Dialogue in and among Genres,” *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Boer, R (Atlanta: SBL, 2007), 9-18; P. N. Anderson, “From



dialogues such as *double meaning-misunderstanding-clarification* (3:1-10; 4:7-15; 4:31-38; 8:12-20, 21-30; 9:39-41; 11:7-16, 17-27; 12:12-36a),<sup>15</sup> *dialogue leading to monologue* (1:19-34; 3:1-21; 5:10-47; 12:36b-50),<sup>16</sup> *dialogue to action* (2:1-11; 6:5-14; 9:1-7; 11:38-44),<sup>17</sup> and *action to dialogue* (2:13-22; 5:[9]10-13; 6:16-21;<sup>18</sup> 12:1-11) are also used within the exchange structures of the Book of Signs.<sup>19</sup> The dialogues at the exchange level are grouped together to form the dialogues at the episodic level.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. The Episode Development

At the meso-level, the narrator places two glory-focused revelatory dialogues at the beginning (1:19-2:12) and towards the end (11:1-54) of the Book of Signs. If we consider John 1:1-18 as the introduction and 11:55-12:50 as the conclusion,<sup>21</sup> then the *glory-focused revelatory dialogues* (1:19-2:12 and 11:1-54) form a thematic inclusion within the Book of Signs.<sup>22</sup> While the episode in 1:19-2:12 sets a strong foundation for the gospel through the transfer of role

from John the Witness to Jesus the Word and his ministry, the episode in 11:1-54 inaugurates the passion and leads toward the end of his ministry.<sup>23</sup> In both cases, dialogues are used as the important literary phenomenon. Also in both cases the dialogues are leading to/centered on signs performed by Jesus. While in the first case the miracle is performed in a context of a wedding, in the second case it is done in a context of death and bereavement. All other episodes within the Book of Signs are framed within this inclusion, except for the concluding episode in 11:55-12:50 that accelerates toward the climax and is structured as a *conflict-centered* one.

The second episode (2:13-25) maintains a *challenge-and-riposte* format. Though the challenge-and-riposte format is a continuous trend in the Book of Signs (cf. 4:16-26; 6:67-71; 7:14-36; 8:12-20; 9:1-7; 10:22-39; 12:1-11), it is used to develop an independent episode only in 2:13-22.<sup>24</sup> In 2:13-25, through a dialogue-centered action, Jesus reveals his authority at the religio-political headquarter of Judaism, i.e., the temple at Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup> The *pedagogical dialogue* at 3:1-10, as the third episode, reveals Jesus' authority as a teacher from above. While Jesus' role as a teacher is explicit in the other dialogues in the Book of Signs (cf. 4:1-42; 6:1-71; 7:1-8:59), 3:1-21 is significant as he was placed over against a leading teacher of Israel called Nicodemus.<sup>26</sup> At the meso-level, the trend of dialogue

<sup>15</sup> P. F. Ellis, *The Genius of John: A Composition Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1984), 7; also see Neyrey, *The Gospel of John*, 12-3, 78, 90-1, 195-6.

<sup>16</sup> In 12:36b-50, it is in the form of a *soliloquy*.

<sup>17</sup> In 2:1-11 and 6:5-14, the narratives develop in a *dialogue-action-dialogue* sequence.

<sup>18</sup> In 6:16-21, the pericope is in the form of an *action-dialogues-action-dialogue* narrative.

<sup>19</sup> See G. A. Press, *Plato: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2007), 66.

<sup>20</sup> J. A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 27.

<sup>21</sup> C. H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 179-188.

<sup>22</sup> M. De Jonge, and H. M. J. Van Duyne, *Taal en Tekon: Ontmoetingen met Jezus in het Evangelie van Johannes* (Nijkerk: Uitgeverij G. F. Callenbach b. v, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> See C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1960/1953), 292-296.

<sup>24</sup> The *challenge-and-riposte* format is used in several episodes in the Book of Signs.

<sup>25</sup> A. Barus, "John 2:12-25: A Narrative Reading," *New Currents through John: A Global Perspective*, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006), 123-40.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. S. M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: A Herder and Herder Book/The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999/2003), 117-125.





leading to monologue begins here.<sup>27</sup> The framework of the episode as one beginning in the form of a dialogue (vv. 1-10) and ending in the form of a monologue (vv. 11-21) is one of the characteristics in the gospel. The *report-and-defense dialogue* in 3:22-36, as the fourth, is the only episode in which Jesus does not have a direct involvement. But the discussion within the dialogue is close-knit to the role of Jesus within the narrative framework of the gospel.<sup>28</sup>

Episode #	Texts	Episode Title (at the Meso-level)
1	1:19-2:12	A <i>Glory-focused Revelatory Dialogue</i>
2	2:13-22	A <i>Challenge and Riposte Dialogue</i>
3	3:1-21	A <i>Pedagogical Dialogue Leading to a Monologue</i>
4	3:22-36	A <i>Report-and-Defense Dialogue to a Narratorial Commentary</i>
5	4:1-42	An <i>Inter-Religious Dialogue</i>
6	4:43-54	A <i>Request-Rebuke-Response Dialogue</i>
7	5:1-47	A <i>Sign and a Controversy Dialogue Leading to a Monologue</i>
8	6:1-71	From <i>Sign-centered Dialogues to Question-and-Answer Dialogues</i>

<sup>27</sup> The trend of dialogue leading to monologue in two consequent days is introduced in 1:19-34 (and again to a dialogue, 1:35-42). But it was done at the micro-level.

<sup>28</sup> See C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953/1960), 384.

9	7:1-52; 8:12-59	A <i>Religious-Theological Dialogue</i>
10	9:1-10:21	A <i>Dramatic dialogue</i> leading to a monologue and a community dialogue
11	10:22-42	A <i>Forensic dialogue</i>
12	11:1-54	A <i>Glory-focused Revelatory Dialogue</i>
13	11:55-12:50	A <i>Conflict-centered Dialogue</i>

Thirteen episodes of the Book of Signs (i.e., dialogues at the *meso*-level)

The fifth dialogue at 4:1-42 is *inter-religious* in nature.<sup>29</sup> While Jesus confronts the Samaritan woman and directs her to eternal life perspectives, she accepts the new religiosity that is introduced by Jesus.<sup>30</sup> This is different from the *religious-theological dialogue* of 7:1-52/8:12-59 (i.e., the ninth episode), where Jesus confronts the religious leaders of Israel.<sup>31</sup> In both the cases, Jesus introduces his “from above” ideology over against the “from below” ideologies of his interlocutors.<sup>32</sup> In the case of the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, a cordial relationship between the interlocutors is established. While Jesus reveals his

<sup>29</sup> K. Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London/New York: Methuen, 1980), 19, 54, 91, 135-136.

<sup>30</sup> D. R. Sadananda, *The Johannine Exegesis of God: An Exploration into the Johannine Understanding of God* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 254.

<sup>31</sup> As religious complaints against Socrates form the substance of Platonic *Euthyphro*, in John religious complaints against Jesus form the central stuff of the dialogues.

<sup>32</sup> G. H. Van Kooten, *The Creation of Heaven and Earth: Re-Interpretations of Genesis 1 in the Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, Christianity, and Modern Physics* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 149-94.



identity to her progressively (4:10, 13-14, 17b-18, 21-24, 26), she advances in her understanding about Jesus and her faith in him (4:9, 11-12, 15, 19-20, 25).<sup>33</sup> The dialogue between Jesus and the woman results in the conversion of many in the city of Sychar (4:39-42).<sup>34</sup> But the dialogue between Jesus and the Jews in 7:1-8:59 develops in antagonistic terms as the brothers of Jesus did not believe in him (7:1-9) and the Jews attempted to arrest him (7:30, 44) and stone him (8:59).<sup>35</sup> The *request-rebuke-response dialogue* in 4:43-54, as the sixth episode, introduces the theme that Jesus is the giver of life.<sup>36</sup> While the first *request-rebuke-response* dialogue in 2:1-12 appears as the final slot of the first episode (i.e., 1:19-2:12), the dialogue in 4:43-54 is introduced as an independent episode.<sup>37</sup>

In 5:1-47, the seventh episode, the narrator presents a sign and a *controversy dialogue* leading to a monologue.<sup>38</sup> As in the case of the third episode (3:1-21), the narrator here introduces the pattern of a dialogue followed by a monologue. While the pattern is used in 3:1-21 in relation to a pedagogical dialogue, in 5:1-47 the pattern is used in relation to a sign and a controversy dialogue.<sup>39</sup> This pattern is used yet another

time in the tenth episode (9:1-10:21), where a *dramatic dialogue* leads to a monologue and further to a community dialogue.<sup>40</sup> This trend of dialogue leading to monologue (i.e., 3:1-21; 5:1-47; 9:1-10:21) is one of the characteristic features of the Johannine narrative.<sup>41</sup> As in 10:19-21, the community dialogues are also used in other narrative segments such as 7:40-44; 9:8-12; and 11:54-57. While in 7:40-44 and 9:8-12, the community dialogues develop at the intervals of the episodes, in 10:19-21 and 11:54-57, they develop at the close of the episodes. From this detail we understand that the tenth episode has two community dialogues, one at the interval (9:8-12) and one at the end (10:19-21).

The eighth episode in 6:1-71 has a sequence that moves from a *sign-centered dialogue* to *question-and-answer dialogues*. While in vv. 1-21 two signs of Jesus are narrated with the help of both explicit and implicit dialogues, in vv. 22-71 we see an explicit dialogue in *question-and-answer* format. In chap. 6, Jesus' performance of feeding the five thousand (vv. 1-15) and the subsequent bread discourse (vv. 22-71) are presented progressively within the narrative framework.<sup>42</sup> Though *forensic* nature is part of several slots (i.e., 7:45-52; 8:31-59; 9:8-12, 13-17, 18-23, 24-34, 39-41), in 10:22-42, the eleventh episode, the narrator introduces an episode with forensic aspects as the

speeches are decreasing. This method is also seen in John's dialogues.

<sup>40</sup> Schneiders says that, "John 9 is related by the evangelist backward to the story of the healed paralysed man at the pool of Bethzatha in 5:1-18 and forward to the story of the raising of Lazarus in 11:1-57." See S. M. Schneiders, "To See or Not to See: John 9 as a Synthesis of the Theology and Spirituality of Discipleship," *Word, Theology and Community in John* (St. Louise, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2002), 191.

<sup>41</sup> Martyn calls the story of the blind man as a "synagogue-church drama." See J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968/1979), 23-36.

<sup>42</sup> Refer to Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 333-45.

<sup>33</sup> E. Leidig, *Jesu Gespräch mit der Samaritanerin und Weitere Gespräche im Johannesevangelium*, Band XV der Theologischen Dissertationen, herausgegeben von Bo Reicke (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Kommissionsverlag, 1979).

<sup>34</sup> G. R. O'Day, *Irony and the Johannine Theology of Revelation: An Investigation of John 4* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1986), 130.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 1:305-68.

<sup>36</sup> J. P. Louw, "Reading a Text as Discourse," *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1992), 17-30.

<sup>37</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 150-63.

<sup>38</sup> Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, 177.

<sup>39</sup> In Plato's *Euthyphro* and *Crito*, while Socrates' speech is increasing, Euthyphro's and Crito's



leading trend.<sup>43</sup> The feature of the development of action and dramatic climax is obvious in the first half of the Gospel of John. In the Book of Signs, the narrator weaves several dialogic episodes sequentially. This sequence of the Book of Signs informs the reader about the discourse pattern (*sjuzet*) of the story (*fabula*) persuasively.<sup>44</sup>

#### 4. Some Significant Narrative Features

The dialogue of the Fourth Gospel is imitation of the real situation of Jesus' life and ministry. The *mimetic* function of the dialogue is obvious especially in the Book of Signs. As Van der Watt says, "Mimesis, copying Jesus, becomes a central theme in the Johannine literature."<sup>45</sup> Some narrative similarities between the Platonic and the Johannine dialogues are conspicuous to the reader.<sup>46</sup> Plato's literary style transformed the real-life conversations of Socrates with his friends and students into creative 'inventions' which incorporated various dramatic elements for the purpose of progressing toward a philosophical truth.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> P. F. Bartholomä, *The Johannine Discourses and the Teaching of Jesus in the Synoptics: A Comparative Approach to the Authenticity of Jesus' Words in the Fourth Gospel*, A PhD Dissertation (Heverlee: The Evangelical Theological Faculty, 2010), 75-292.

<sup>44</sup> For details about Saussure's structuralism and discourse analysis, refer to D. Howarth, *Discourse, Concepts in Social Sciences* (Buckingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), 16-66.

<sup>45</sup> Jan van der Watt, "Narrative Analysis and Ethics," *Unpublished Document* (Nijmegen: Radboud Universiteit, 2012), 1-13; M. A. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 11.

<sup>46</sup> Van Kooten, *The Creation of Heaven and Earth*, 168.

<sup>47</sup> Van Kooten, *The Creation of Heaven and Earth*, 168-177. Denning-Bolle states that, "In Plato, the dialogue presented the best form in which to encapsulate the lively sort of exchange of which

Similarly, in John, the narrator attempts to imitate the real-life conversations of Jesus with his interlocutors and incorporates the philosophical, theological, and community aspects.<sup>48</sup>

Just as Socratic *elenchus*,<sup>49</sup> in John, Jesus is continually in dialogue with his interlocutors and brings them to the knowledge that they are "not in the know." Their "not in the know" is brought in sharp contrast with Jesus' "in the know" for the progression of the dialogue. As the Platonic protagonist uses the method of *epagoge* (induction),<sup>50</sup> in the Book of Signs, Jesus emphasizes the 'from above' aspects as requirements for his interlocutors. As universalism is one of the significant tenets of Johannine theology, the particulars are viewed with an intention of universal expansion. This aspect of development from the particular to the universal provides an eternal effect for the message of John. As in the case of Socratic *definition*,<sup>51</sup> in the Book of Signs, Jesus is portrayed as the authentic interpreter and the one who can define things. Denning-Bolle states that, "these three 'elements' [i.e., *elenchus*, *epagoge*, and *definition*] are not to be sharply differentiated from one another; they intertwine constantly and do not stand by themselves."<sup>52</sup> Though there are several stylistic similarities between Plato and John, one difference is compelling. While Plato attempts to describe the truth that is remote,

Socrates was a master. The written form of the dialogue was to act simply as an aid to memory but was never meant to take the place of verbal debate." S. Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature: Expression, Instruction, Dialogue* (Leiden: Ex Oriente Lux, 1992), 72, 76.

<sup>48</sup> See *Inst.* 10.2.18 and *Inst.* 10.2.27.

<sup>49</sup> Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 72.

<sup>50</sup> Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 72.

<sup>51</sup> Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 72.

<sup>52</sup> Denning-Bolle says that, "Socrates tried to arrive at a definition of something through the use of *elenchus* but also through induction (particulars to universals)." See Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 72-73.



in John, the truth himself appears in flesh and in constant dialogue with his interlocutors.

John uses a dialectic sort of argumentation<sup>53</sup> to lead the reader toward a certain point.<sup>54</sup> In the Book of Signs, this characteristic tenet is developed from a dualistic point of view.<sup>55</sup> Anderson makes mention about the development of the human-divine dialogue in John's Gospel through the means of dialectical thinking of the evangelist and of the agency schema.<sup>56</sup> The narrative support for the dialogue is continually stated all through the Book of Signs. Guthrie observes that, "Since in discussions of his [i.e., Plato's] work so much is made of dialectic as a technical or semi-technical term, it is worth noticing this general use to stand for any philosophical discussion carried out in a spirit not of competition (as by the Sophists) but of cooperation, not for personal prestige but solely to reach the truth."<sup>57</sup> This principle of the Platonic dialogues can also be noticed in the Johannine dialogues.<sup>58</sup> In John's dialogue, Jesus the protagonist is in constant dialogue with his interlocutors in order to reveal his Messiahship and to lead them toward eternal life perspectives. The

interlocutors come up with intriguing questions and later on turn out to be either in the category of believing or unbelieving. On several occasions, the narrator employs the *question-and-answer*, *request-rebuke-response*, and *challenge-and-riposte* methods in order to maintain the dialectical nature of the dialogues. The dialectical aspects of John develop as the *thesis* and the *antithesis* are united through a higher *synthesis*. The characters like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the blind man, and others engage in a dialectical duel with Jesus and realize the truth claims of the protagonist.<sup>59</sup> In this sense, Jesus' interlocutors are transferred to a different (higher) level.

## 5. Signs and the Dialogue

The signs and dialogues are integrally connected in the Book of Signs and together they help the protagonist to reveal himself.<sup>60</sup> While Platonic dialogues concentrate mostly on arguments,<sup>61</sup> John's dialogues develop in association with actions and movements of the characters.<sup>62</sup> In John, the protagonist appears not simply as one who argues his cause but rather as one who proves his

<sup>53</sup> Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 72.

<sup>54</sup> G. A. Press, *Plato: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2007), 82.

<sup>55</sup> Denning-Bolle mentions that, "The use of the dialogue form is a *literary* device. Plato's famous dialectical method, on the other hand, is a *philosophical* phenomenon. *Dialektikè technè* (dialektikh, te, cnh) is the art of using dialogue; dialectic literally means the 'conversational method' (e.g., *Phaedrus* 276e)." Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 73.

<sup>56</sup> P. N. Anderson, "From One Dialogue to Another: Johannine Polyvalence from Origins to Receptions," *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 109-111.

<sup>57</sup> W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), 1.

<sup>58</sup> For more details about the connection between Plato and John, refer to Van Kooten, *The Creation of Heaven and Earth*, 168-77.

<sup>59</sup> Kennedy says that, "a dialectical dispute is cast as a *question-and-answer* dialogue." G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill/London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 9.

<sup>60</sup> Chatman states that, "It has been argued, since Aristotle, that events in narratives are radically correlative, enchainning, entailing. Their sequence, runs the traditional argument, is not simply linear but causative. The causation may be overt, that is, explicit, or covert, implicit." Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 45.

<sup>61</sup> Press states that, "Certainly one of the most striking features of Plato's dialogues is that they are full of opinions being stated by interlocutors, reasons being given, and then opinions and reasons subjected to criticism and refutation." Press, *Plato*, 75.

<sup>62</sup> J. G. Barry, *Dramatic Structure: The Shaping of Experience* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), 51.





arguments through the means of signs.<sup>63</sup> Keener (cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.2.18, 1357b) states that, “A ‘sign’ signified something beyond itself, and functioned as a proof or attestation; thus the term appears in rhetoric as well as in the context in which we employ it.”<sup>64</sup> This tendency of the connection between the utterances and the actions of the protagonist dynamically works within the narrative framework (2:1-12; 4:46-54; 5:1-18; 6:1-15, 16-21; 9:1-10:21; 11:1-54).<sup>65</sup>

Jesus’ first sign of turning water into wine appears as the last exchange of the first episode (1:19-2:12). Though he does not make a glory proposal anywhere in 1:19-2:12, the revelation of his glory is presented through a sign toward the climax of the episode (2:11). The story of Jesus’ turning of water into wine proleptically works with his discourse in 15:1-11. Jesus, the one who turns water into wine, is revealed as the ‘I AM’ and the ‘True Vine’ (15:1-11). The entire episode in 1:19-2:12 maintains a typical sequence, i.e., a series of dialogue leading to a sign and the glorification of the protagonist. This format is different from that of the seventh sign in 11:1-54, where the protagonist proposes the glory at the beginning (11:4) and fulfills it toward the end (11:43-53). The common factor in both the episodes is the use of dialogue as a rhetorical means to actualize the sign and vice versa. Dodd rightly says that, “Word and action form an indivisible whole, to a degree unique in the Book of Signs.”<sup>66</sup> In

both 1:19-2:12 and 11:1-54, the signs are performed, after a series of dialogues, as a matter of glorification. But in 11:1-54, an antithetical dialogue develops after the performance of the sign (vv. 47-50).<sup>67</sup> In that sense, though both the episodes are thematically well-connected, the narrator employs other literary features to present them distinctively to the reader.

While the first Cana incident in 2:1-12 follows a ‘dialogue-sign-dialogue’ pattern, the second Cana sign in 4:43-54 follows a unique pattern in which ‘the time of dialogue is the time of healing.’<sup>68</sup> The third sign in 5:1-9 also has a pattern of ‘the time of dialogue is the time of healing.’ But differently from the two Cana miracles, the larger framework of chap. 5 maintains a ‘dialogue-sign-dialogue-monologue’ sequence (5:1-47). While the fourth sign story (6:1-15) has a ‘dialogue-action-dialogue’ format, the fifth one (6:16-21) has an ‘action-dialogue-action’ format. The feeding of the five thousand (vv. 1-15), followed by the discourse of the bread of life that is maintained in question and answer format (vv. 22-71), is one of the striking features of the chapter. In the episode, the action of feeding the five thousand is symbolically connected to the revelation of Jesus as the “bread of life.” Thus the entire chapter follows a symbolical action followed by a metaphorical speech.<sup>69</sup> The story of healing the blind man follows a ‘dialogue-sign-dialogue-monologue-community dialogue’ format.<sup>70</sup> Though the format of the

<sup>63</sup> Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> C. S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:251; cf. L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, Revised (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>65</sup> Köstenberger says that, “The first half of John’s narrative sets forth evidence for Jesus’ messiahship by way of seven selected signs (1:19-12:50).” A. J. Köstenberger, *Studies on John and Gender: A Decade of Scholarship*, *Studies in Biblical Literature* 38 (New York/Oxford: Peter Lang, 2001), 8.

<sup>66</sup> Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 363.

<sup>67</sup> R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: Burns and Oates, 1980), 1:112.

<sup>68</sup> Beets attempts to look at the symbolic significance of Johannine events. See M. G. J. Beets, *The Voice of Reason: a Philosopher’s Approach to St. John’s Gospel* (Amsterdam: Hilversum, 1995).

<sup>69</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:251.

<sup>70</sup> Maniparampil says that, “The lengthy discourses that are glued to the signs are Johannine meditations on the identity of the person of Jesus and his unique assignment.” J. Maniparampil, *Reading the Fourth*



sixth sign is similar with the third sign (i.e., 5:1-47), there are noticeable differences between them. While in 5:1-47 the healed man's role as a believer is not clear, in 9:1-41 the healed man's progress in faith is recorded through his exchange with his interlocutors. The above evidences convincingly show how the narrator employs different patterns to incorporate dialogues and signs as interactive elements within the narrative framework.<sup>71</sup>

## 6. 'I AM Sayings' and the Dialogue

Jesus' self-revelatory<sup>72</sup> aspects are potentially reflected through his "I AM" sayings (see 6:35, 48; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11; 11:25; cf. 14:6; 15:1, 5).<sup>73</sup> His saying, "I am the bread of life" (6:35, 48), is stated after giving thanks and distributing the bread, and feeding the five thousand (6:1-15). While he utters that he is the "light of the world" in 8:12, he appears as the fulfiller of the festival of the lights (or the festival of Dedication) described in chapters seven and eight. His second usage of the expression in 9:5 is described in the context of giving sight to a blind person (9:1-41). The utterances "I AM the gate for the sheep" (10:7, 9) and "I AM the good shepherd" (10:11, 14) are expressed immediately after the expulsion of the healed man from the synagogue (9:34). In his response, Jesus implies that while the Jews expel people from their assemblies on account of him, he is right there to accept them as a "gate for the sheep." While the

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*Gospel: A Text Book for Students of Gospel according to John* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2004), 77.

<sup>71</sup> J. C. De Klerk and S. W. Schnell, *A New Look at Jesus: Literary and Sociological-Historical Interpretations of Mark and John* (Pretoria: J. L. van Schaik, 1987), 15.

<sup>72</sup> The dialogues of the BS are revelatory as they reveal several important aspects with regard to the life and ministry of Jesus. See W. Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (New York/London: T & T Clark, 2008), 123-129.

<sup>73</sup> Köstenberger, *Studies on John and Gender*, 8.

Jews are unable to solve the lifelong problems of the man who was closely associated with them in their assemblies, they are reduced to "hired hands." Jesus' significance as the "good shepherd" through his involvement in the life of the person (10:1-18) is brought to the notice of the reader.<sup>74</sup> While the dialogues/discourses are presented in relation to some significant events, Jesus' self-revelatory aspect is the highlight through these "I AM" sayings.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, Jesus' self-revelatory statement that he is the "resurrection and life" (11:25) appears in the context of Lazarus' resurrection from his death.<sup>76</sup> In all these occurrences, his self-revelatory utterances are always supplemented with complimentary actions.<sup>77</sup> The aspect of dialogues centered on signs and revelatory "I AM" sayings is one of the peculiar features of the Book of Signs.<sup>78</sup> This feature is rhetorical as the narrator persuades the reader through the character of Jesus. In John, Jesus' utterances go beyond their literal meanings and actually *do* something.<sup>79</sup> A paradigmatic reader can create a world of her/his own in the process of reading the gospel. In the language of Warren and Wellek (1955: 181), every reading is a

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<sup>74</sup> For details about the discourses of John, refer Maniparampil, *Reading the Fourth Gospel*, 77-78.

<sup>75</sup> Earlier, Aristotle in his *Poetics* referred to the *Sōkratikoī logoi* ("Socratic discourses," or "conversations with Socrates") as an established literary genre.

<sup>76</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 2:331.

<sup>77</sup> For more details about the linguistic character of John, refer Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 1:105-118.

<sup>78</sup> John builds the narratives around the sayings and actions of Jesus. This is also a proven factor in the synoptic evangelists. But the question is how far the evangelists were able to sustain the originality of the sayings of Jesus. This was same with the *Sōkratikoī logoi*.

<sup>79</sup> Press calls such utterances *performatives*. See Press, *Plato*, 60.



performance.<sup>80</sup> John develops his narratives and discourses in his own idiom and persuades the reader with a personal punch. This narrator-and-reader interaction is poignantly presented through the medium of Jesus' "I AM" sayings.<sup>81</sup>

## 7. Content, Form, and Function of the Dialogue

The 'content,' 'form' and 'function' of dialogues<sup>82</sup> help us to understand the characteristic features of that literary genre.<sup>83</sup> The dialogues are the major semantic units within the narrative framework.<sup>84</sup> But the meaning of the utterance units and their function within the exchanges/episodes cannot be deciphered apart from the narratives.<sup>85</sup> In the Book of Signs, the dialogues convey the theological meaning of the text in association with the narratives.<sup>86</sup> The dynamic interlocking between the narratives and the dialogues/discourses is one of the primary features within the first half of the gospel.<sup>87</sup> The meaning of the

dialogue can be understood primarily on the basis of the themes that are held together. The message (or the aspect of the 'what' of the text) is expressed through the utterance units and their function within the dialogues, the actions and movements of the characters, and the narrative asides.<sup>88</sup> Jesus' revelation of his identity, in relation to his Father, his disciples, and the Jews, is highlighted through the dialogue sections. One of the most prevalent themes is Jesus' identity as he is the fulfiller of the Jewish messianic hopes. It is God who fulfills his work of love in the world through the agency of Jesus. This aspect of the fulfillment theme is expressed through several direct quotations from/allusions to the OT passages (1:23, 45; 2:6, 16-17; 3:28; 4:19-26; 6:30-33; 7:19-24; 8:33-58; 11:21-27; 12:13-15). It is mostly through the dialogues that the fulfillment language comes out in its full potential.<sup>89</sup> At the beginning of the gospel, the narrator introduces a transfer of role from John the Baptist, the witness, to Jesus, the Word, through a fulfillment formula (1:23). Jesus' role as the revealer of God's plan and his mission and glory is a running theme throughout the Book of Signs.

The dialogues, coupled with the actions, in the Book of Signs usher in a new order through Jesus' life and ministry, as he is introduced as the bringer of a new temple (2:19), the one who demands new birth (3:3), and the provider of new water and new life (4:13, 14; 4:46-54; 7:37-8).<sup>90</sup> Through dialogues the narrator also introduces the aspect of believing in Jesus and the resultant experience of eternal life (2:11, 22; 4:41, 53;

<sup>80</sup> A. Warren and R. Wellek, *Theory of Literature* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), 181; also see M. Stockhammer, ed., *Plato Dictionary* (London: Vision Press, 1963), 224.

<sup>81</sup> J. G. Van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters*, T & T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 49.

<sup>82</sup> D. Hellholm, "The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John," *Semeia 36: 'Early Christian Apocalypticism, Genre and Social Setting,'* (Decatur, Georgia: SBL/Scholars Press, 1986), 13.

<sup>83</sup> Press, *Plato*, 55.

<sup>84</sup> E. Garver, *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 53.

<sup>85</sup> Literary critics like Warren and Wellek say that the total meaning of a work of art cannot be defined. See Warren and Wellek, *Theory of Literature*, 34.

<sup>86</sup> Just as a typical Platonic dialogue, in John, "the conversation topics themselves are historically contextualised rather than abstract perennial questions." See Press, *Plato*, 57.

<sup>87</sup> For more details about the narrative dynamics, refer to F. Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the*

*Interpretation of Narrative*, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1977-1978 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>88</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), 26.

<sup>89</sup> J. D. Schaeffer, "Dialogue," *Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs, A-J* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 387-395.

<sup>90</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:54.



6:14; 7:31; 8:30; 10:19-21, 42; 11:27, 45). By contrary, unbelief and the resultant judgment are brought together (6:64; 7:1-9, 30-1, 43-4; 8:59; 9:18; 10:19-21, 39; 11:57; 12:36b-41). The themes such as discipleship (1:19-51), missional harvest (4:7-38), and Jesus' universal significance (4:39-42) are leading aspects in the Johannine dialogues. The self-revelatory aspects are climax with the "I AM" sayings of Jesus and their integral connection with the actions (6:35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11; 25 [also 14:6; 15:1, 5]). The dialogues also reveal the dualistic contrast between belief and unbelief, truth and untruth, and the 'from above' and the 'from below.' It is ironic that Jesus risks his life due to his life-giving and eternal life-centered performances (11: 1-12:50).<sup>91</sup> Proleptic themes that take the attention of the reader are the 'hour' of Jesus (2:4; 4:21; 7:6, 30; 12:23, 27) and the 'lifting up of the Son of Man' (3:14; 8:28; 12:32). The union and relationship between Jesus and his Father and the role of Jesus as the emissary of God have important implications all throughout the discourses and dialogues. The theology of the dialogue is centered on the person and work of Jesus.<sup>92</sup>

At the syntactic level, we view 'how' the dialogue texts are structured. The 'what' (or *content*) of the dialogue is structured in specific formats and the plot-structure provides special force to the content.<sup>93</sup> Hence, the 'how' (or *form*) of the text is significant in the process of interpretation.<sup>94</sup> The Book of Signs has its own syntactics that is organized by the help of literary conventions and devices, especially by the help of narratives, dialogues, and

monologues. The dialogues primarily develop at two levels: between the narrator and the reader and between the interlocutors of the story. At the structural level, the dialogues develop from micro-units to meso-units and from meso-units to the macro-unit. This *micro-*, *meso-*, and *macro-*dynamism of the dialogue within the Book of Signs convey the content efficaciously to the reader.<sup>95</sup> As Chatman distinguishes 'story' from 'discourse,' the 'content' and 'form' are distinct entities.<sup>96</sup> But they dynamically merge together in the literary composition. The story of the Book of Signs is presented through appropriate transitions between the episodes, sequence of the events, and dramatic effects. The Book of Signs as a whole is framed with the help of speech units, exchanges (and sub-exchanges), and episodes. This analysis informs the reader how the *macro-*dialogue of the Book of Signs is formed with the help of several layers of *micro-* and *meso-*dialogues.

In the Book of Signs, the narrator's potentiality is proved through the usage of literary figures of speech/thought. The reader of the story experiences new emotions in the process of reading. The message is the vehicle that connects the sender and the receiver. This connectivity is established through the dialogue between the narrator and the reader (Aristotle 1.2.1356a). The development of the 'story' and the 'discourse' has striking similarity with the Greek tragedies. In the Book of Signs, the protagonist undergoes a situation of conflict (*agōn*) with the values, goals, and norms of other characters.<sup>97</sup> This is ideological

<sup>91</sup> J. L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 67-75.

<sup>92</sup> Anderson, "From One Dialogue to Another," 109.

<sup>93</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, tran. McGee, V (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986/1998), 60.

<sup>94</sup> Schaeffer, "Dialogue," 389.

<sup>95</sup> For more details on the rhetorical and literary structural patterns of the fourth gospel, refer G. Østenstad, *Patterns of Redemption in the Fourth Gospel*. Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, Vol. 38 (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998).

<sup>96</sup> See Chatman, *Story and Discourse*.

<sup>97</sup> C. Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3.





dimension as it develops in the form of a conflict between his values (“from above”) and the dominant culture (“from below”) of the day. The conflict of the story is well established with the help of verbal abuse (*flyting*) between the characters.<sup>98</sup> The controversial dialogues in John 5-10 make use of this dramatic element as a significant phenomenon. In the narrative, the crisis or reversal (*peripeteia*) happens when the interlocutors continue in their unbelief and when they reject Jesus’ messiahship (5:18; 7:1-9, 45-52; 8:57-59; 9:35-41; 10:19-42; 11:45-53; 12:36-43).<sup>99</sup> As in the case of the Platonic dialogues, in the Book of Signs, the use of reversal within the storyline provides additional punch for the development of the narrative (cf. Aristotle, *Poet.* 11).<sup>100</sup> The *pathos*<sup>101</sup> of the protagonist begins in the gospel when the antagonists attempt to stone him and even to kill him (5:18; 7:45-52; 8:59; 10:39; 11:45-53; 12:27-36).<sup>102</sup> Jesus recognizes (*anagnōrisis*) that the hour has come and his time of being lifted up (12:23).<sup>103</sup> This opens up the unraveling or resolution (*dénouement* [*luisis*])<sup>104</sup> of the plot in the rest of the gospel story (i.e., the Book

of Glory).<sup>105</sup> In this structure, the Book of Signs comprises of almost all the major plot elements except the *dénouement*.

The larger story of the Book of Signs has unity of action: a beginning (John 1-4), middle (5-10), and end (11-12). As Stibbe observes a tri-tiered development, a paradigmatic reader of the Book of Signs can see a plot of its own.<sup>106</sup> The coming of the Word from the eternal world (i.e., “from above”) to a world that marks the ‘hour’ of Jesus (i.e., “from below”) is narrated in John 1:1-51. His hour of glorification is expected from 2:4 (cf. 4:21; 7:6, 30) and the protagonist realizes that the ‘hour’ of the Son of Man has come in 12:23. This sequence creates an analeptic and proleptic balance in the narrative framework of the Book of Signs. While the first major section (chaps. 1-4) establishes the character and mission of Jesus in the mind of the reader, the second major section (chaps. 5-10) introduces the conflict in which the *theomachus* or ‘enemy of God’ comes to the fore.<sup>107</sup> In the words of Stibbe, John 11-12 is a significant section. He says that, “It is this event [John 11:1-54] which precipitates Jesus’ downfall (11:45-53). It is from this point that the Sanhedrin ‘plotted to take his life’ (11:53).”<sup>108</sup> The plot of the Book of Signs is built by the help of transitions and by cause and effect.<sup>109</sup> This careful construction of the Book of Signs forms a *plot within the plot* of the gospel. The above details enable the reader to understand that the plot-structure of the Book of Signs is correlated through the method of *stichomythia*.<sup>110</sup> From these, a

<sup>98</sup> J. A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 123-139.

<sup>99</sup> See Brant, *Dialogue and Drama*, 43-50. Also see *Poet.* 1450a.34-35; 1452b.8.

<sup>100</sup> Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the NT*, 205.

<sup>101</sup> Baldick says that, “*pathos*, the emotionally moving quality or power of a literary work or of particular passages within it, appealing especially to our feelings of sorrow, pity, and compassionate sympathy.” Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 163.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Poet.* 1425b.13-14.

<sup>103</sup> K. B. Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John*, Vol. 93 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 26.

<sup>104</sup> Baldick says, “*Dénouement*, the clearing up or ‘untying’ of the complications of the plot in a play or story; usually a final scene or chapter in which mysteries, confusions, and doubtful destinies are clarified.” See Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 55.

<sup>105</sup> J. L. Bailey and L. D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 130.

<sup>106</sup> M. W. G. Stibbe, *John’s Gospel*, New Testament Readings (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 35.

<sup>107</sup> Stibbe, *John’s Gospel*, 35.

<sup>108</sup> Stibbe, *John’s Gospel*, 36.

<sup>109</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 97.

<sup>110</sup> Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 211.



paradigmatic reader can understand that the exchanges/episodes of the Book of Signs are rhetorical to form a dramatic plot within the narrative framework of the gospel.

The function of the dialogue is another significant area that contributes to understanding the development of the genre. While semantics deals with the question of the ‘what’ and syntactics with the question of the ‘how’ of the text, pragmatics deals with the question of the ‘why’ of the text.<sup>111</sup> Why is dialogue a significant aspect within the text and how does that rhetorize the message of it in relation to the paradigmatic reader?<sup>112</sup> Moreover, at the secondary level, it looks at ‘how the dialogue invites the attention of the reader.’<sup>113</sup> In the Book of Signs, the dialogue between the narrator and the reader happens by means of the character interactions. The narrator dramatically portrays the story through performative language and especially through the medium of dialogue.<sup>114</sup> Davies says that, “The attribution of direct speech makes a formal distinction between narrator and character, and creates a more immediate and mimetic effect, but characters in the Fourth Gospel do not use their own peculiar vocabulary or style of speech.”<sup>115</sup> Hence, the double-layered dialogue (i.e., between the narrator and the reader and between the characters) functions in an interconnected way. The double-layered dialogue of the Book of Signs develops in a *narrator, dialogue of the*

*characters within the text, and reader sequence.*<sup>116</sup>

The narrator progressively shows how the innocent redeemer is under trial. A dualistic contrast between ‘belief’ and ‘unbelief’ and ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ lies underneath the narratorial framework.<sup>117</sup> The reader develops (and poses) questions one after another on the basis of the movements, acts, and utterances of the characters.<sup>118</sup> The narrator, in return, uses the narrative elements to respond back to the reader. The central theme of the text that the identity of Jesus as the agent of God who comes to introduce himself as the *light-logos-life* (i.e., *licht-liebe-leben*) is convincingly explained to the reader through the medium of dialogue.<sup>119</sup> The dialogue informs the reader that Jesus is the Savior of the world and the light that shines in the darkness. The above analysis helps us to understand the dynamic interaction of the ‘content,’ ‘form,’ and ‘function’ within the dialogue text. The plot structure of the entire Book of Signs informs us that the narrator arranges the story in exchange and episodic fashion in order to sustain dramatic features and to develop suspense and surprise in the reader. The dialogue as a peculiar genre is explored in the story of John by means of the available rhetorical devices of that time.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 11.

<sup>112</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

<sup>113</sup> R. A. Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Interpreting Biblical Texts (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 15.

<sup>114</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 3:173.

<sup>115</sup> M. Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*, JSNT Supplement Series 69 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 25.

<sup>116</sup> Warren and Wellek, *Theory of Literature*, 34; M. L. Coloe, *Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1989/2007), 6.

<sup>117</sup> P. F. Ellis, *The Genius of John: A Composition Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1984), 8.

<sup>118</sup> In the language of Eco (1979: 7), the “text creates the competence of its Model Reader.” U. Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press, 1979), 7.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. G. Voigt, *Licht-Liebe-Leben: Das Evangelicum nach Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991).

<sup>120</sup> Dodd attempts to see the Johannine dialogues in connection with other philosophical and religious dialogues, especially of Plato, Cicero, Plutarch, and



While the form of the genre sets a framework for the content, the form and content together help the genre function in relation to the reader.<sup>121</sup> Here, the semiotic components, i.e., semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics, come together to expose the nature and function of the dialogue to the maximum. Eco rightly says that, “An open text is a paramount instance of a syntactic-semantic-pragmatic device whose foreseen interpretation is a part of its generative process.”<sup>122</sup> What Eco says here is substantiated through the analysis of John’s dialogue at the *micro-*, *meso-*, and *macro-* levels.

## 8. Concluding Remarks

A genre analysis of the Johannine dialogues which into consideration the content, form, and function<sup>123</sup> helps us to understand the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic aspects. Our study informed us that dialogue is a recognizable and established category which is spread throughout the Book of Signs. In the Book of Signs, a reader can recognize several common conventions of dialogue that form it as a specific literary category.<sup>124</sup> Though dialogue is a distinguishable literary category, its interaction with the narratives is strong within the Book of Signs.<sup>125</sup> As dialogue is part and parcel of the narrative framework, it does not make full sense apart from the narrative asides. In most of the

cases, dialogue remains cryptic if not linked to the narrative expositions.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, the narratives themselves are meaningless apart from the dialogue. This mode of interlocking of the narratives and the dialogue is a conspicuous phenomenon within the text. The *micro-*, *meso-*, and *macro-* level analyses of the dialogue help the reader to understand this subject matter. This dynamism of the *micro-*, *meso-*, and *macro-* development of the dialogue enables the reader to be interactive with the text of John.<sup>127</sup> Thus, the exchange, episodic,<sup>128</sup> and the *macro-* structure of the Book of Signs develop in a rhythmical way.

The characterization of the story is expressed primarily through dialogues (cf. Aristotle, *Poet.* 6.24). The dualistic framework of the narrative divides the characters either to the side of light or to the side of darkness.<sup>129</sup> The point of view of the narrator is introduced to the reader through the dynamic interlocking of the dialogue and the narrative.<sup>130</sup> The narrator uses the aspects of ‘showing’ (*mimesis*) and ‘telling’ (*diegesis*) to integrate the two levels of the story (i.e., the story of Jesus and the story of the Johannine community) as a single whole.<sup>131</sup> This narrative pattern communicates directly to the reader through the medium of the verbal exchanges between

Lucian. See Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, 319.

<sup>121</sup> For more details about semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics, refer A. J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979/1982), 272-277, 328-334.

<sup>122</sup> Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 3.

<sup>123</sup> A. G. Van Aarde, “Narrative Criticism,” *Focusing on the Message: New Testament Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Methods* (Pretoria: Protea, 2009), 381.

<sup>124</sup> See more details in the *micro-*, *meso-*, and *macro-* analyses of the Book of Signs.

<sup>125</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, xc-xci.

<sup>126</sup> Baldick says that, “In a dramatic work, a narrator is a performer who recounts directly to the audience a summary of events preceding or during a scene or art.” See Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 146.

<sup>127</sup> Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, 162.

<sup>128</sup> Baldick defines ‘episodic’ as “constructed as a narrative by a succession of loosely connected incidents rather than by an integrated plot.” See Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 72.

<sup>129</sup> For more details about characterisation, refer B. Hochman, *Character in Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

<sup>130</sup> Culpepper sees the relationship that is established within the gospel of John. See Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 34-49.

<sup>131</sup> Also refer to Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.2.1-2.



Jesus and his interlocutors. The plot structure (*mythos*, in Greek)<sup>132</sup> of the dialogue develops as the exchanges/episodes develop in an interconnected way.<sup>133</sup> The Johannine narrator maintains all the important elements of a plot, such as sequence, causality, unity of action, conflict, suspense and surprise, and effective power (Aristotle, *Poet.* 1450b-1451b).<sup>134</sup>

The order of the Book of Signs reveals the master plan of the narrator: a *beginning* (chaps. 1-4), a *middle* (chaps. 5-10), and an *ending* (chaps. 11-12).<sup>135</sup> As in Plato, in John the “dialogues include lively passages of stichomythia (speeches, stitched together), line-for-line dialogue that sharpen the issue, followed by more relaxed and reflective passages.” The plot development of the Book of Signs thus gives strength to the story (cf. Aristotle, *Poet.* 1449b).<sup>136</sup> The thematic development of the story can be understood mostly on the basis of the dialogic progression. The characters’ speech and the interaction ‘for’ and ‘against’ provide insights for the development of the themes. In the Book of Signs, dialogue contributes largely to the development of theology. In recapitulation, the above mentioned episodic and dialogical framework and the characteristic literary features provide a special appeal for the reader.<sup>137</sup> Any reading that neglects the dialogues and discourses, exchange and episodic sequence, and the

dramatic and rhetorical features of the Book of Signs overlooks some of its significant semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic aspects.<sup>138</sup> As a universally accepted genre, John’s dialogue influences people towards divine discourse beyond time- and space-boundaries.

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<sup>132</sup> Resseguie sees ‘unity of action,’ ‘causation,’ ‘conflict,’ and ‘suspense and surprise’ are the important elements of a plot. See Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the NT*, 198-203.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. S. D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1989), 14-15.

<sup>134</sup> In the Book of Signs, the plot develops also through the essential characteristics such as ‘order,’ ‘amplitude,’ and ‘probable and necessary connection.’

<sup>135</sup> Brant, *Dialogue and Drama*, 42-73.

<sup>136</sup> Russian formalists differentiate between *fabula* (story) and *sjuzet* (plot or discourse; cf. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the NT*, 208-9).

<sup>137</sup> Brant, *Dialogue and Drama*, 28.

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<sup>138</sup> F. T. Gench, *Encounters with Jesus: Studies in the Gospel of John* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).