Rifts in (a reading of) the fourth gospel, or: Does Johannine irony still collapse in a reading that draws attention to itself?*

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ABSTRACT

Johannine irony depends on the audience being able to maintain a hierarchical separation of two levels: heavenly/earthly, spiritual/material, figural/literal, etc. A deconstructive reading suggests that this two-storey structure collapses with the Johannine compression of exaltation and crucifixion motifs, resulting in a failure of irony. Deconstruction, which gives scrupulous attention to subtle divisions within the text, offers a timely corrective to recent compositional and narrative approaches. But are divisions or other data actually "in" the text, or products of certain ways of "framing" it? The earlier reading is reenacted, but in a way designed to draw critical attention to the workings of the frame itself.

The critique reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, or universal, in order to show that...the starting point is not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself.... (Johnson 1981:xv)

We must be constantly checking what assumptions are sleepily embedded in the practice of writing about and reading texts.... (Blank 1986:66)

1 STORIES OF READING

1.1 Caveat Emptor: Herein one shall not find the tactics and sensibilities of a hyper-rigorous deconstruction, but a demonstration instead of deconstruction's exegetical aptitude or ineptitude - a demonstration which some will see, and not without justification, as a crude appropriation of Jacques Derrida's dispute with philosophy, "its reduction to a few sturdy devices for the critic's use" (Gasché 1979:180).

*Paper presented at the New England regional meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in March 1988 under the title "(Un)making the reader(s): literal and living water in John."
1.2 Taking hold of my few sturdy devices I will venture a reading of some scenes in John - recklessly no doubt, for I am not a licensed Johannine scholar, much less a licensed deconstructor. Certain comments by W H Kel­ber on John 4, 7, and 19 in an essay soon to be published (Kelber [1989]; cf Kelber 1987), appropriated here with his gracious consent, are the spring­board for my own reading. I shall be attempting to extend Professor Kelber's insights as much as space and competence allow by amplifying the (general) deconstructionist subtext on which part of his essay relies. I should mention that Kelber's reading of the pertinent episodes is rather less detailed than mine (it spans only two pages of an average-sized essay), is rather differently nuanced, and is closely bound up with orality/literacy concerns that do not form part of this paper. (In Kelber's recent work, Ong and Derrida meet on the site of the fourth gospel.)

1.3 Offered below is a story of reading (cf Culler 1982:64-83). To read is to operate with the hypothesis of the reader that a given text is assumed to demand - supremely so if one happens to belong to a guild of professional readers. The Biblical critic is typically engaged in (re)enacting a hypothetical role of reading. In gospel studies, once the idea took hold that the evangelists were authors as well as collectors, the critic's task became more than ever one of reenacting the roles scripted for original audiences, being attuned to even subtle nuances of the authors' intentions. The redaction critic's adopted role of reading, moreover, is one which implies minute familiarity with the entire text in advance. Of late an acutely self-conscious variant of the redaction critic has appeared: the reader-response critic, who tends to approach the evangelist's story as though it were his/her very first time (who assumes the role of a virgin reader) and who reads it in strict sequence, all the while supplying a live commentary on the reading experience as it unfolds (acute examples include Resseguie 1984; Edwards 1985; Keegan 1985; Bassler 1986). The typical result is a tale of anticipations and reversals, of puzzles and enigmas and the struggles to solve them, of beliefs and presuppositions challenged and overthrown. The "reader" is the hero(ine) of this story of reading and functions as a fictional character within it. Her fresh, virginal responses to the text distinguish her from the jaded or voyeuristic critic who records them. Every obscurity in the gospel story with which an exegete has ever had to wrestle, every enigma or lacuna, may become a plot-­engendering complication in a story of reading. (A story of reading, like any other story, needs complications to fuel and propel it.) The exegete's workaday attempts to make sense of a difficult text become the subject matter for a script in which a hypothetical reader, fresh to the text and capable of being surprised by it (unlike the jaded critic), is let loose in an adventure of reading. The exegete's workaday frustrations are narrativized and allegorized in this script in the form of suspenseful setbacks and befuddlements encountered by the reader on his/her journey. And the exegete's arrival at a satisfactory solution to the
set of problems is allegorized as the happy ending to the story in which the reader finds eventual enlightenment. Redaction criticism has no sustained, fleshed-out story of reading of this sort. There is no unfolding, suspenseful, moment-by-moment side to the redaction critic's reading. His/her assumed role vis-à-vis the text is one of intimate familiarity - that of the lifelong spouse rather than the virginal bride.

1.4 One thing these fringe, fleshed-out stories of reading inadvertently do, is to illuminate some of what goes on, undercover, in "normal" exegesis. They make us keenly sensitive to the moves and countermoves that make up our exegetical practice. In the final section of this paper I hope to bring this sensitivity to the threshold of a veritable neurosis. But first I shall provide the promised reading of/story of reading John 4, 7, and 19. Where it differs from the story of reading a reader-response critic typically will tell is that it meanders into theoretical terrain where the ability of a narrative to achieve its ostensive aim of leading an audience through complications and deferrals to a climactic, completed understanding - the ability that reader- oriented exegesis celebrates - is precisely what is thrown into question. The Johannine narrative is one which, when submitted to a certain kind of grilling, will tell a peculiar story of reading indeed. More precisely, my interpretation is an interrogation of more traditional ones, and I am tempted to say (very recklessly, I fear) that its aim is "to outdo the closeness of reading that has been held up to [it] and to show, by reading [previous] close readings more closely, that they were not nearly close enough" (de Man 1979b:498; cf Culler 1982:242-243).

2 (DE)CONSTRUCTING JOHANNINE IRONY

2.1 In John 4, Jesus dialogues with a Samaritan woman around the theme of water. Jesus breaks with the literal sense, that of water drawn from the well, to introduce the superseding "living water" that he himself dispenses and that prevents those who drink it from ever thirsting again, becoming a spring in them that wells up to eternal life (4:10,13-14). But the woman, incapable of distinguishing the literal and material from the figural and spiritual, says "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw" (4:15; cf 4:11). A two-storey ironic structure is erected. "Below" is the apparent meaning, that which the woman as unwitting victim reads. "Above" is a higher level of meaning of which the woman is unaware, in sharp contrast to the reader or listening audience (cf Culpepper 1983:165ff; Duke 1985:13-18).

2.2 As it transpires, however, the complete meaning of the figure has also been withheld from the wider audience, deferred, it seems, to a later time. For on the last day of the feast of Tabernacles, the great day, Jesus again speaks of thirst, drinking, and the supramundane living water (7:37-38), and
in an "aside" by the Johannine narrator this figure is now interpreted as being "about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive...." Again the reader/hearer is positioned on a perceptual level superior to that of Jesus' audience within the narrative. But now there is a second deferral. The figure of imbibing living water is interpreted as the receiving of the Spirit, but its narrative representation is postponed until later: "...as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (7:39) (cf Kelber [1989]). And subsequently Jesus' glorification is itself interpreted in turn as the "hour" of his exaltation on the cross, an exaltation in which his resurrection is prefigured (12:23-24,28; 13:31-32; 17:1,5; cf 3:14; 12:32).

2.3 At the scene of crucifixion the themes of thirsting and drinking recur once again in a way that strangely echo their first occurrence in chapter 4. There are suggestions of completion and closure: "Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the scripture), 'I thirst'" (19:28). But by this utterance, far from seeming to satisfy the desire for living water (and should we not expect some such satisfaction on the basis of 7:37-39?), Jesus is depicted as thirsting himself for the literal, earthly water, just as he was first depicted at the Samaritan well ("Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'"). Expectations having being steadily raised and redirected from 4:10ff from the mundane to the supramundane, Jesus, source of the figural "water", is now thrust into the very condition of the literal meaning which his discourse has led the audience to transcend (cf Kelber [1989]). And the satiation of Jesus' physical thirst, an event peculiarly linked to the fulfillment of Scripture (19:28), elicits the climactic announcement from Jesus himself that "It is finished" (19:30), at which point he yields up - what? His spirit? The Spirit? (Greek simply has τὸ πνεῦμα.) Brown's (1970:931) double reading is attractive:

In vii 39 John affirmed that those who believed in Jesus were to receive the Spirit once Jesus had been glorified, and so it would not be inappropriate that at this climactic moment in the hour of glorification there would be a symbolic reference to the giving of the Spirit.... His symbolic reference is evocative and proleptic, reminding the reader of the ultimate purpose for which Jesus has been lifted up on the cross. In Johannine thought the actual giving of the Spirit does not come now but in xx 22 after the resurrection. (Brown's emphasis.)

Now, the satiation of Jesus' physical thirst in 19:30 is an arresting strange precondition for the symbolic yielding up of that designed to satiate the supraphysical thirst of the believer. (The source of living water cries out in thirst; some read this as an instance of irony, as Brown [1970:930] notes.) But the sequence is a good deal stranger still when one begins to rethink it deconstructively. The literal, material, earthly level, hierarchically superseded in John 4:7-14 and shifted into the background, is reinstated in John 19:28-30 as the very condition (physical thirst, physical death) that enables the Spirit
itself, emblem and token of the supramundane order (cf 14:17), to **effectively come into being.** The hierarchy established in chapter 4 is curiously **inverted** (the superior, pleromatic term is shown to depend for its effective existence on the inferior, insufficient term), an inversion prefigured in 7:39: "...the Spirit had not been given [lit there was as yet no Spirit], because Jesus was not yet glorified" (cf 12:24). (No distinction is made between ontology and soteriology in 7:39b, as is often noted; thus the Spirit is presented as though it had no [effective] existence prior to Jesus' glorification.) The inversion of the hierarchy by the death scene, an inversion which the larger context in fact disallows (see 1:13; 3:5-6,31; 4:13-14,24,33-34; 6:26-27,31-33,49-50,58,63; 8:23; 12:25; 17:2), is followed by the reappearance of water - the flow from Jesus' side (19:34b) -this time as an **equivocal** term that inhabits both levels simultaneously, suspending the hierarchy altogether.

2.4 Let me unpack the latter part of the preceding sentence, and add that I am as interested in what may be out of the control of the Johannine writer/s at this point as in anything that might conventionally be said to be within his/their control. Jesus expires and yields up his spirit (19:30). This symbolic pre-donation of the Spirit (see above), which is to say, the living water, is followed by the reappearance of **material** water as Jesus' side is pierced and blood and water issue forth (19:34). The detail of the issue of water is unusual enough to demand supraliteral interpretation (cf Schnackenburg 1982:289-290). Many would posit a connection between 7:37-39 and the flow of water in 19:34, though 19:34 itself has been read in a great variety of ways (sacramentally, anti-docetically, in light of 1 John 5:6, Zechariah 13:1 and 14:8, etc) that we need not go into here. But let us say that, given the previous associations of earthly water with living water and Spirit, the flow of water is (at minimum) another symbolic token of the promised "living water", which has now become available in the form of the Spirit with Jesus' glorification. That leaves us with a symbol (the flow of water) of a metaphor ("living water") for the Spirit. But does this figural skid come to a halt with the Spirit? What if the Spirit were itself a further substitution? Brown (1970:1141), with uncanny echoes of Derrida, defines the Johannine Paraclete as "another Jesus...the presence of Jesus when Jesus is absent" with the Father. Not surprisingly, the convoluted route of the water imagery in John empties out on the very absence (that of Jesus) which occasioned the weave of substitutions in the first place. But is this substitutive, figural weave self-consistent in its pattern? Retracing the design yet again, we see that the initial, earthly water at the Samaritan well was declared superseded by figural "living water" (4:13-14), which was interpreted as the Spirit (7:39) which has now been made available (19:30), and the making available of which is symbolized by water (19:34) that is neither simply literal nor yet fully figural (a "literal figure", so to speak). May we keep the literal cleanly separate from the figural in the end? I think not. And if not, has the narrative not forced a "sublime
simplicity" (de Man 1979a:9) upon us that it led us earlier to transcend - that of the woman of Samaria who desired the living water so that she might no longer have to come to the well to draw (4:15), or of Nicodemus perplexed that he should have to reenter the womb in order to be born anew (3:4), or of the crowd who would fill their bellies with the imperishable bread (6:26-27, 34)? In each case two levels of meaning are collapsed that should have been kept apart. The ironic structure that positioned us on a level above these characters depended on our being able to keep the literal and figural levels clearly separate. But the events of the death scene have elided the levels, disallowing their separation. (Note the overturning and suspending of the hierarchy, delineated above.) The result is a kind of cognitive paralysis, a profound symptom of which turns up in the first resurrection appearance (20:11-18). Meeks (1987:159), sounding remarkably deconstructive himself but actually coming from the direction of cultural anthropology, perceptively interprets Jesus' difficult injunction to Mary Magdalen, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to the father...." (20:17), as an effect of the "compression of exaltation and crucifixion motifs into one" that leaves the traditional resurrection appearances "in a kind of limbo". This "strange statement imparts to that limbo a sacred liminality" (neither one thing nor the other, neither here nor there). "Jesus is no longer in the world, but not yet ascended; he belongs to the intermediate zone that violates these categories and renders him untouchable". But the compression of exaltation and crucifixion motifs into one has already consigned the hierarchical structure of Johannine irony to a liminal zone, annulling it. Irony - which depended on the clean separation of flesh and glory, earthly and heavenly, material and spiritual, literal and figural, water and "water" - collapses in paradox (cf Kelber [1989]).

3 WHAT PRICE UNITY?

3.1 Before we come to the second part of our reading (our reading of the preceding reading), let us pause to theorize and speculate a little. Ultimately the paradox just spoken of (the one that unravels Johannine irony) is the result of an oscillatory pull and tug in John between an epiphanic and an incarnational christology - a christological opposition toward which a deconstructive reading will be irresistibly drawn, given the powerful resistance to synthesis that it might exhibit. Here I find Brown's very different reading illustrative. For Brown (1966:cxv-cxvi), as indeed for many others, "the Johannine view of salvation is both vertical and horizontal". The vertical dimension pertains to Johannine dualism (heavenly/earthly, above/below, descent/ascent, with the Father/in the world, Spirit/flesh, glory/flesh (?), truth/falsehood, light/darkness, "water"/water, "bread"/bread, etc) whereas the horizontal dimension pertains to the incarnation of the Word in human flesh and in salvation history. "The blending of the vertical and the horizontal..."
may be said (perhaps too facilely) to represent a blending of the Hellenistic and the Hebrew approaches to salvation, but such a blending occurred long before the Fourth Gospel was written." From a deconstructionist angle, it is not the identification of the vertical and the horizontal with Hellenism and Hebraism that is facile so much as the easy assumption that the two planes "blend" in the fourth gospel. It may be instead that the (impossible?) attempt to syncretize the planes has backlashed in a severe disruption of the gospel's internal logic, as our own reading suggested. Kysar (1975:195-199), surveying the range of positions on the relationship of flesh to glory in John, similarly fails to raise the possibility that the relationship might be one defiant of rational expression, but later drops a bare, tantalizing hint (218) that the coming together of flesh and glory in the gospel might entail a certain pain.

3.2 Deconstructive criticism may offer a means to diagnose the extent of that pain - a variable strategy of rigorous close-reading that entails "scrupulous attention to what seems ancillary or resistant to understanding," and is suspicious, in dealing with traditional readings, of any attempts to convert the strange into the familiar that seem to elide, conceal, or circumvent anything that stands in the way of coherence. "What would happen if, for once, one were to reverse the ethos of explication [explication at any cost, that is] and try to be really precise", to scrupulously examine every resistance to meaning (de Man 1978:ix-x; cf Culler 1982:242-243)? Interestingly, to adopt a reading strategy of this sort would be to place oneself broadly in the tradition of source-centered gospel scholarship, which could be said to have prefigured deconstruction in its often scrupulous attention to minute tears in the ostensibly smooth fabric of the text. (Though I speak in the past tense, this form of gospel scholarship may very well bury its undertakers. It does seem to be willing, however, in the more "holistic" climate of current Biblical studies.) To give a single illustration of the older approach, Haenchen (1984:193-194) commenting on John 19:28-29 notes that

the clause "to fulfill the scripture" does not go with the preceding remark of Jesus, "When Jesus knew that all was now finished" - if everything is finished, there is nothing left to follow. Holding a sponge filled with vinegar up to Jesus' mouth [moreover] does not conform to the Johannine picture of the death of Jesus, to which elements of affliction and agony are alien and in which there remain only the victorious overcoming and consummation.

The detail of the vinegar seems conflicting precisely because of the Johannine compression of the exaltation and crucifixion motifs. However - and this is typical of the approach - Haenchen draws attention to these resistences to coherence only to label them as insertions by the so-called "ecclesiastical redactor". (The difficult 19:34b, similarly, is often suspected to be an editorial addition.) In source-criticism's more ambitious manifestations (Bultmann, Fortna et al), close reading is a device to enable one (so one hopes) to sepa-
rate out the redactional layers in the gospel and to provide a chronological account of its composition. Not surprisingly, these layers have proved most elusive, and the extent to which redactional faultlines are responsible for the logical rift opened up by the Johannine crucifixion scene eludes specification in turn (the stark paradox of the crucified Word repels attempts to soften it).

3.3 Interestingly, a close reading strategy that would accord special attention to whatever is resistant to sense may have a valuable function other than an historical one. It may be expected in the years ahead, particularly in North America, that so-called composition criticism and narrative criticism will continue to mount a strong challenge to the older, source-centered gospel criticism (I have source-centered redaction criticism especially in mind) and that the scrupulous, verse-by-verse style of close reading will continue to decline in favor of more holistic and more paraphrastic approaches that attempt to center on larger sense units within the received text. (I am speaking in gross generalizations, of course; source criticism does not hold a monopoly on close reading.) But a reading style sensitive to breaks and inconsistencies can also function in an approach disgruntled with the quest for sources that elects to center its energies on the received text instead. Take our example from (the undisgruntled) Haenchen above. What I find most interesting is that which Haenchen implies but omits to spell out, namely that the redactor (if there was a redactor) all but sabotaged the evangelist's careful preparation of his audience to hear or read the crucifixion episode as the resurrection-prefiguring elevation of Jesus. The case is similar with our own earlier reading: if the thirst motif at the crucifixion is a redactional addition, and the issue of blood and water also, then it was the redactor who was responsible for further subverting the foundations of the two-storey ironic structure that the evangelist had carefully erected - a structure rendered dangerously unstable in any case once the crucifixion and exaltation motifs were compressed. But what if diachronic accounts of the building up and pulling down in John were to take a synchronic turn, encouraged by the changed climate in Biblical studies of recent years? What if we were to attend more closely still to features resistant to coherence in the gospel narrative, not (or at least, not only) to ascribe our conclusions to this or that intentionality in the gospel's compositional history, but to tease out "the warring forces of signification within the text" (Johnson 1980:5) instead, in as rigorous a manner as possible? The pendulum has swung heavily in recent years against reading strategies that treat the gospels as parted garments. The tendency more recently is to find them, if not without seams, at least without serious rents, woven from top to bottom; composition critics are now saying to narrative critics, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be" (John 19:24). Both composition criticism and narrative criticism, the one preoccupied with the theological unity of the gospels and Acts, the other with their narrative unity, are unsteadily founded (or so it seems to me) on the
suppression of the older paradigm of the fragmentary, source-spliced text, and depend heavily for their success on an effective blocking out of the more disruptive data that the supplanted paradigm would disclose (cf Moore 1987a; 1987b:52-53). Deconstructive criticism in contrast invites a detailed tracing of the weave of figure and trope within the fabric of the gospel text - a tracing attentive to tears in the fabric or to inconsistencies in its pattern.

3.4 My own reading of the water/"water" opposition, expanding on certain of Kelber's insights, is offered merely as a dim illustration of what a more skilled and subtle reading of Johannine figurality (one that would feel for fault-lines through a wider range of oppositions) might reveal. But in offering tribute to deconstructive techne, do we flirt with grave illusion, as though the secrets of the text's hidden divisions are to be extracted from it by the skill of an interrogator - secrets that the text managed to conceal through long generations but may no longer withhold now that certain strategies have been brought to bear on it? Are we really in the inquisitional business of extracting shameful secrets from the text - secrets of inner division and deep conflict? I have argued in detail elsewhere (Moore 1986) that we are victim in Biblical studies to a stubbornly lingering essentialism. We have interiorized a realist model of the Biblical text: one possessed of innate properties that exist prior to and independent of the interpreter's activity. Most major strains of contemporary philosophy, both Anglo-American and continental, render such a model of the text extremely anachronistic. Do our Biblical texts have innate properties and meanings that may be extracted if only the right methods are applied? Or is what we see purely a function of the ways in which we frame the text - frames that are less individual creations than the products of a certain comprehensive situatedness (disciplinary, socioeconomic, ideological, cultural, historical, etc)? Traditionally as exegesis, we detract attention from the frame, efface it, bury it within the text so that what the frame yields up in terms of data appears self-evidently there in the text. And the more potent and effective the frame, the less attention it draws to itself (cf Derrida 1978; Phillips 1986). My reading above held fast to this traditional way of working. But what would be the result if we reenacted the reading once again, this time with an altered script, one specifically designed to draw attention to the workings of the frame, as opposed to the data framed?

4 "READING"

4.1 The interpretation narrated earlier culminates in the conclusion that Johannine irony, instigated in the instance examined by the supersession of literal water by living, must eventually collapse in paradox. It raises the question of whether irony must always work on behalf of the story's recipients at the expense of the story participants, enabling the recipients to comprehend what the participants may not. Are we, the story recipients, never the victims...
of its irony (cf Kelber [1989])? The reading I enacted implied that the recipient(s) of the fourth gospel may indeed be the ultimate victim(s) of its irony. But the question to be raised in addition is this: Who precisely is perceived as the victim of the irony in such an instance, and who is doing the perceiving? "Irony is a matter of perception and it must, to become manifest, be seen by an observer or it does not exist" (Amante 1981:81; cf Muecke 1982:69). In the scene at the Samaritan well, for example, it was "the reader" who perceived the irony in the interchange between Jesus and the woman. Later at the crucifixion scene the tables are turned, uncannily, on the canny "reader", who is extended the same sublime incapacity as the woman (and that of Nicodemus, and the crowd in John 6) to cleanly and confidently separate the literal from the figural, a separation on which the irony at the well depended. But who perceives the "reader's" ironic dilemma at the crucifixion scene?

4.2 The reason I press this question so insistently is because it touches something vital with regard to stories of reading. We noted in 1.4 above how the "virginal" reader of most reader-response gospel criticism, exposed to the text for the first time, is to be distinguished from the much more "experienced" reader with whom the redaction critic identifies. This is a useful distinction, certainly, but we must add that any story of reading, even one that utilizes the construct of a first-time reader, will be limited in its claims by the conventionality and "secondariness" of the reading experience. For the experience of reading can never be a simple, immediate, given one; instead it will be mediated and will have its contours and boundaries determined by the premises and practices that govern reading in the social formation(s) of which the reader is a part. Our experience as we interpret the Johannine text (our experience of its irony, say) may never be a simple, natural given. It will be a cultural construct instead, and more likely than not will be blind to its own conventionality and artificiality.

4.3 This prompts us to rephrase and to reframe our reading of Johannine irony. In the scene at the Samaritan well, "the reader" who perceives the irony in the interchange between Jesus and the woman is not really the present author (myself), nor even the "ideal reader" (given the usually masterful connotations of that term), so much as the one scripted to play the scapegoat in the exegetical drama to follow, and on whom the irony will eventually rebound - though my reader will not yet know that. The scapegoat, stand-in for anyone who has ever read Johannine irony naively, is further set up (framed) in the Tabernacles scene, being the (seeming) beneficiary of the narrator's explanatory aside (7:39). Later at the scene of the crucifixion, as the ironic levels teeter and start to crumble, a startling denouement occurs. It transpires that this persona is not the true "reader" after all. His/her role, it is now revealed, has simply been that of precursor to a second "reader", able
now to smile superciliously at the dupe as the latter once smiled at the Samaritan woman, and able to comprehend the instability of the literal/figural dichotomy while the scapegoat reels helplessly in the throes of the reversal. It transpires, furthermore, that this second "reader" is in fact the "ideal" reader, in relation to whom the first is merely a "reader". This ideal "reader" must have stood, a dim wraith, in the wings in the scenes with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and the crowd in chapter 6, identifying not with the less-than-ideal "reader" but with these story participants instead - participants whose "sublime simplicity" has now been thoroughly vindicated.

4.4 Of course, this second, usurper "reader" is no more the present author (myself, or should that be "myself"?) than the first one. Rather, as I read (interpret) her role she becomes a "reader" in her turn in relation to the role-playing "reader"-critic that I have become, while the original (?) "reader" (the scapegoat) becomes a "reader" in his turn, and so on. I am aware that the preceding re-reading may prompt my readers ("readers") to take my earlier interpretation of Johannine irony even less seriously than they might otherwise have been disposed to do, but certain risks are worth the taking. In re-reading the earlier reading in the way that I did, I hope to have suggested some of the involutions that may lurk beneath a calm exegetical surface. And, finally, there should hardly be any need to own up, in the wake of my comments in 3.4, that the results obtained in both cases were the products of conventional strategies of reading, strategies necessarily blind in turn to their own enabling assumptions. Interestingly, the upshot in each instance (the weave of Johannine figuration, as I read it, and my subsequent reading of that reading), was a text that seemed more strange and more treacherous the more I peered down into it - more like Kermode's opaque and secretive text than Fish's insubstantial and empty one (Kermode 1979; Fish 1980). Which, while it does not compel me to think that texts have prior, independent features proper to them, does make me want to agree, tentatively, with Freund (1987:154) that the pendulum swing of literary theory - and she has in mind the impact of deconstruction in particular - may lead one back "to a new respect for the text's integrity and impenetrability".

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