The Purpose of σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα in the Gospel of John: A Socio-Rhetorical Reading of John 4:46–54

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Abstract

This article contributes to the critical issue of "signs" in the Gospel of John. It discusses the purpose of the synonym σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα in John 4:46–54 as a factor for soliciting faith from the audience and recipients of the gospel, and presents Jesus being above miracle-workers of his day. Although some scholars have discussed σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα in John 4:46–54, the works were mainly focused on intertextual analysis in the Pentateuch, the prophets, and parallels in Hellenistic religions of the ancient Mediterranean world. This study adapts the inner texture of the socio-rhetorical reading propounded by Vernon K. Robbins to re-interpret John 4:46–54. The narrator engaged σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα to stimulate faith from the audience and recipients of the Gospel of John, and to present Jesus to be above emperor miracle-workers. In this way, the gospel employs deliberative rhetoric to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus in the miracle enterprise.

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1. Introduction: σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα

The phrase σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα is typically used in reference to the acts of God through Moses that led to the exit of biblical Israelites from Egypt. Rengstorf stated that,

> [W]hen the OT speaks of God's signs and wonders its style takes on what is almost a hymnal character. This is connected with the fact that when the phrase is used the reference is almost always to the leading of the people out of Egypt by Moses and to the special circumstances under which the people stood

Conspectus

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> up to the passage of the Red Sea and in all of which God proved Himself to be the Almighty and showed Israel to be His chosen people. (Rengstorf 1982, 253)

The phrase σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα (LXX) encompasses the decision and acts of Adonai to send Moses back to Egypt, the acts of Adonai in Egypt, and the eventual departure of ancient biblical Israelites to the "Promised Land" as captured mainly in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. This is a primary use of the phrase. It was later used in the prophets to demonstrate the supremacy of God over other gods, and subsequently to connote the might of God based on the faith of Daniel and his colleagues during the exile (Mundle 1976). The context in which σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα was used suggests that it is exclusive to miracles on nature because many of the miracles performed by Moses, Elijah, and Elisha were on nature. Later in the Apocryphal writings, the phrase was used to denote the remembrance of the mighty acts of God for the emancipation of Israel from Egypt (Rengstorf 1982). This usage attempted to limit the miraculous acts of God to ancient biblical Israelites during the time of Moses. The concept was present among some first-century biblical Jews. Mundle (1976) explains the relationship between σημεῖα and τέρατα to mean that τέρας is the miracle/terror/wonder component of σημεῖα.

2. Some Interpretations of John 4:46–54

Scholars of John's Gospel have variedly interpreted John 4:46–54. According to F. F. Bruce (2002, 116–120), the miracle of converting water into wine serves as the foundation for the miracle of healing the royal official's servant. The first miracle was to respond to a critical need while the second miracle is to deliver from death to life, in order to continuously manifest the glory of Jesus. He explains that the royal official might be attached to Herold Antipas; consequently, he could be referred to as a "noble person" or a "petty king." Bruce is of the opinion that the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt 8:5–13; Luke 7:2–10) is similar due to the miracle being effected at a distance, but John did not indicate whether the royal official was a Gentile or not. Bruce notes that the author of the gospel uses "signs" independently but in John 4:46–54, "signs and wonders" is jointly used, which demands critical study. He concludes that the royal official was not interested in only the "signs and wonders" of Jesus but whatever would motivate Jesus to heal his child. The royal official expressed faith in Jesus, and the child was healed from a distance.

Craig S. Keener (2010, 630–633) identifies parallel events of miracles performed at a distance in the synoptic tradition, biblical Jewish, and Hellenistic religions. He explains that miracles performed at a distance are a result of an answer to prayer, so glory is given to God; but in the event of the healing of the royal official's servant, glory was given to Jesus. He adds that central to the narrative of the healing of the royal official's son is faith, which he calls "signs faith." It is the faith required to receive a miracle. Keener identifies three kinds of faiths expressed in the narrative: (i) the initial faith that propelled the royal official to invite Jesus; (ii) the faith to believe Jesus's command to go; and (iii) the faith of the household that expresses belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

Ismo Dunderberg (2014, 279–300) traces parallels of healing at a distance in the Synoptic Gospels and Hellenistic contexts. The royal official expressed miraculous faith leading to the healing of the child. The portrayal of Jesus as a miracle-worker is anti-imperial agenda because emperors were depicted as miracle-workers to demonstrate their affiliation to a deity or divine being. This is not to discredit the miracles of Jesus but to demonstrate the propagandist agenda in imperial cults.

Similar to Bruce, Udo Schnelle (2016, 231–244) argues that, although there is no literary relationship between John 4:46–54 and Matthew 8:5–13/Luke 7:2–10, no doubt the narratives portray the idea of healing from a distance. However, he adds that John 4:46–54 is closely parallel to *Berakhot* 34b where Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was reported to have healed the servant of Gamaliel II from a distance through prayer. The idea is also present in the works of Apollonius of Tyana as captured by Philostratus. In a nutshell, Schnelle argues that there are parallels of healing at a distance in the socio-religious context of the ancient Mediterranean society.

Christopher Seglenieks (2019, 23–40) asserts that the rebuke of Jesus, 'Ἐὰν μὴ σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἴδητε, οὐ μὴ πιστεύσητε', to the royal official seems to be out of place because he believed that Jesus could heal the child; that is why he came to invite him. Hence, it should be understood as the demand for genuine faith, not faith to receive miracles. Seglenieks argues in intertextual parlance that the use of σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα is unique to John 4:46–54 and reflects miracles in the Old Testament.

Bruce, Keener, and Seglenieks identifies the uniqueness of σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα in John 4:46–54. However, the synonym σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα was not critically considered in the interpretive framework of John 4:46–54. It was mainly considered in an intertextual relationship with the acts of God through Moses in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Keener, Dunderberg, and Schnelle discusses the parallels of healing at a distance in Greco-Roman and Hellenistic religions that reflect John 4:46–54 with some variations in literary context. The competitive issue of presenting a religious leader as having had the power to perform miracles has been noted, including the faith to receive miracles. However, the discussion of σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα, πιστεύω, and Jesus as a miracle-worker above his peers in the context of John 4:46–54 requires analysis.

There are cases where the author of the gospel condemned the request for a "sign" (6:30; 19:35); and some had seen "signs," but they did not believe (12:37). The narrative under interpretation belongs to "signs" that lead to faith. It is a narrative that supposedly can also be found in "Q" where Matthew and Luke have their variants (Matt 8:5–13; Luke 7:110). The uniqueness of John's version is that it combines σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα as a factor to motivate faith and project the miracle power of Jesus. A peculiar Johannine synonym dualism, which is not in opposition such as "light and darkness," "heaven and earth," and so on, but is a complementary synonym to "signs." These, in addition to the mode of healing by Jesus, are often left out by many interpreters of the narrative. The over-emphasis on the theological use of "signs" by the author to draw faith has over-shadowed the medium Jesus used—healing from a distance, and the synonym of "signs and wonders" to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus above other miracle-workers. Fortna (1970, 151–166) was very scanty on the narrative when he said that "signs and wonders" was to indicate "signs" that are wonders or miracles. He did not see it in the context of John's synonym and the efficacy of the power of Jesus to heal the sick from a distance (without geographical limitation), but in the context that some of the signs might not necessarily be miracles. This has limited the use of "signs" in John to redactional studies and its effect on the audiences/recipients (Labahn 1999; Koester 1989; John and Miller 1994; Robinson 1971). The desire to closely associate "signs" to redactional discussions in the entire Gospel of John in lieu of exegetical studies of a narrative that uses "signs" before linking it to the overall objective of "signs" in the Gospel of John is still being perpetuated.

This article engages the inner texture of socio-rhetorical reading to re-interpret John 4:46–54 considering σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα and the mode of the healing of the child as critical factors for understanding the narrative and how it induces faith and promotes Jesus above others. The study uses "signs"

as miraculous acts by Jesus. My procedure is to discuss socio-rhetorical criticism and its appropriateness for the study, undertake inner texture analysis of John 4:46–54, synthesize the findings, and draw a conclusion.

3. Socio-Rhetorical Criticism/Interpretation

Socio-rhetorical interpretation has since the early 1970s begun to receive critical attention in biblical interpretation. The methodology is characteristically adaptable and multi-disciplinary. Multiple methods are brought together to interpret a text in its socio-linguistic background to deduce its existential meaning (Aryeh 2020). Vernon K. Robbins (1996a, 2–4; 1996b, 24; see also van Eck 2001, 593–611; Gowler 2010, 191–206) posits that socio-rhetorical interpretation is composed of five textures: (i) inner texture, (ii) intertexture, (iii) social and cultural texture, (iv) ideological texture, and (v) sacred texture. This study employs inner texture, which consists of (i) repetition, (ii) progression, (iii) narrational, (iv) open-middle-ending (plot), (v) argumentation, and (vi) sensory-aesthetic sub-textures. The rationale for choosing inner texture is that Robbins has cogently argued that it is not feasible for all the textures to be used to explore a narrative in a single study (Robbins 2004, 2). That notwithstanding, the sensory-aesthetic element of the inner texture will not be discussed in this study because the miracle narrative of John 4:46–54 was performed at a distance. Hence, the use of hands to touch the sick child and other sensory-aesthetic elements were not present. This will not mar the re-interpretation of the narrative but give a distinct feature that previous interpreters have not observed. Since socio-rhetorical interpretation is adaptive, in the narrational texture I engage the approach of N. Clayton Croy (2011, 62). This approach is preferred for its detail and procedural nature. Croy's (2011) proposition of narrative emphasizes the urgency and narrative *point of view*, which allows readers to have ideas concerning the predispositions of the author of the narrative.

The justification for the rhetorical interpretation of John 4:46–54 is due to the purpose of rhetoric to persuade the audience and the theological adaptations by the author of the Gospel of John from the SG in order to deduce faith from the readers of the gospel. In other words, religion and rhetoric seem to have a similar purpose: to influence their readers/audiences to accept their proposition (Henderson 1989, 20–39). In classical Greek thought, the term πειθω (persuade) is regarded as a goddess in charge of persuasion, and persons who were considered to do well in persuading others were regarded as having magical powers (Pernot 2006, 235–254). Lucian's and Polemo's audience were usually glued to their speeches and could not leave until they were persuaded by the speakers (Pernot 2006). Stamps (2000, 953–959) clearly observes that the form of Christian rhetoric is based on the authority of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

4. Inner Texture Analysis of John 4:46–54

4.1 Repetition texture

Before embarking on the analysis of repetitive texture of John 4:46–54, it is imperative to make some comments regarding similar narratives in the other canonical gospels that may sound repetitive. A similar narrative concerning Jesus's distance healing of a slave/servant of a Centurion who was at the point of death can be found in Matthew 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10. The main points of convergence between John's version of the narrative and that of Matthew's and Luke's is the healing from a distance; the beneficiary was a slave/servant; and the issue of faith as the precursor of the healing event. The main points of divergence include that John describes the man as a royal official while Matthew and Luke call him a Centurion. John did

not indicate the analogy of the authority of the royal official to command slave/servants. Matthew and Luke did not include the response of the household of the royal official concerning their faith in Jesus after the healing event. Historically, John reported that the event took place at Cana while Matthew and Luke reported that Capernaum was the venue for the event. Milne (1993, 90–91) observes that, although there is some degree of similarities between John 4:46–54 and Matthew 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10, it is superficial and that "the differences are marked and clearly relate to a different occasion and miracle." Marshall (1978, 277) explains that the parallel version of the narrative in Matthew and Luke is a mixture of differences and similarities difficult to fathom. Subsequently, in the context of synoptic argumentations it can be posited that the narrative is a *Quelle* (Q) material that was adapted by Matthew and Luke for theological emphasis. Although there may be some similarities in words, concepts, and phrases, the differences cannot be ignored. John 4:46–54 is a unique narrative that also emphasizes the concept of σημεῖα that runs through the gospel.

Repetition of key terms, concepts, and phrases seeks to indicate the main emphasis or building blocks of the narrative. Repetition texture exists in John 4:46–54, which may be regarded as an affirmation of a particular idea and concept in the context of the SG and that of John. The noun Γαλιλαία (Galilee) occurred three times in verses 46, 47, and 54 of the narrative. The opening phrase in verse 46 suggests that it is the second occasion that Jesus visited Cana in Galilee. The first occasion was at the wedding when Jesus converted water into wine (John 2:1). Cana in Galilee is the setting that facilitated the encounter between Jesus and the royal official. Rhetorically, the repetition of Cana in Galilee in the narrative reaffirms the fact that it is the venue that hosted the event (Goodwin 1992). However, all the references to Cana in Galilee in the narrative might have been interpolations by the narrator of the Gospel of John. It is not likely to be part of the SG source. Nonetheless, that does not mean that the incident did not take place at Cana in Galilee.

The question whether the encounter took place on the second visit of Jesus to Cana in Galilee has been keenly disputed by some scholars arguing that the event might have taken place during the first visit when Jesus converted water into wine at the wedding ceremony (John 2:1–11). According to James M. Robinson (1971, 341),

> In the text as it now stands in Chap. 4 the trip to Galilee is a repetition of an earlier movement (cf. 4:3: 'again into Galilee'). Yet one can sense that this repetition is motivated in part by the Evangelist's desire to return to an interrupted narration and is not unambiguously thought of as a distinct second trip.

Robinson (1971) believes that the miracle of converting water into wine at the wedding (John 2:1–11) and the miracle of the healing of the official's child took place on one visit of Jesus to Cana in Galilee because of the author's claim that the healing of the official's child is the second sign. He added that it could not be the second miracle at the second visit to Cana in Galilee, but the second miracle at the first visit or the first miracle at the second visit is a better rendition. He further argues that the removal of John 2:13–4:46 offers a smooth connection between John 2:12 and John 4:47. However, Robinson explains that the redactional policy of the narrator made him to interpolate John 2:13–4:46 from another source to separate the two miracle events. And when the narrator returned to the initial event, then emerged the need to engage in repetition. In other words, Robinson's explanation for the repetition is not to affirm that Jesus visited Cana in Galilee a second time but a redactional policy that allows the narrator to

interpolate and resume the initial source by repetition. Robinson's assertion supports the view of Fuller (1963, 88–92) that the materials between the first miracle and the second miracle were interpolated by the narrator and that both miracles were most likely to have occurred in succession during the first visit to Cana by Jesus. Clearly, Robinson engages the literary tool of interpolation and chronology of miracles in John to make his argument. This is to build a cogent argument for the SG containing only the miracles of Jesus. This was emphasized by Fuller that the "Book of Signs," as he calls it, contained only selected miracles of Jesus (Fuller 1963, 88).

In determining the narrative cohesiveness, Joost Smit Sibinga (2003, 224–225) argues that John 4:43–45 should be considered as an introduction to the healing of the royal official's servant (John 4:46–54) because it describes the second coming of Jesus to Cana of Galilee. By this assertion, Sibinga argues that the miracle of the healing of the official's son took place when Jesus entered Cana in Galilee the second time.

Arguing from a rhetorical point of occurrence of words as a determinant of the emphasis of the narrator, I argue that the repetition of Cana in Galilee indicates that the event took place in that setting. However, considering the argument by Sibinga that John 4:43–45 better serves as *an exordium* to the narrative of the healing of the royal official's servant, it is most likely that the event took place when Jesus entered Cana in Galilee the second time when his family was not present with him as was the case in the miracle of converting water into wine (John 2:1–12). The narratives between John 2:13 and 4:45 can hardly be considered as a direct interpolation by the narrator of John. There is a rhetorical concept of "signs" and "belief" that link them. For example, in the narrative of the cleansing of the temple (John 2:13–25), the narrator commented that the Jews believed in him because of the "signs" they saw (2:23). In the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3:1–21), Nicodemus was said to have confirmed the "signs" that Jesus performed as being evidence that he hails from God (3:2); hence, Jesus must be believed/accepted (3:22–36). The narrative of the Samaritan woman and Jesus indicates that the Samaritans believed in Jesus due to the miraculous revelation to the woman by Jesus of her past life history (4:39–42). Although the events between the miracle of converting water into wine and the encounter between Jesus and the royal official are not miracle narratives in their strictest character, I argue that there is a rhetorical flow through the repetition of key terms, concepts, and ideas from the first miracle of changing water into wine and the second miracle of the healing of the royal official's servant. Hence, the latter occurred when Jesus visited Cana in Galilee the second time. The theme of "signs" that should lead to "faith," which is a critical issue in the first part of the gospel to which John 4:46–54 belongs, can be smoothly deduced from John 2–4:43–54 (Dunderberg 2014).

The servant of the royal official who directly benefited from the miracle of Jesus was referred to as υἱός (son) by the narrator. The appellation occurs five times in the narrative, indicating a non-biological relationship (Verbrusse 2000) between the royal official and the victim of the sickness (fever), who is a male. The narrator later uses παῖς (children) twice in place of υἱός to indicate the widening of the blessing of healing not limited to males or persons related to high officials. The redactional and theological intent of the author was likely at play when he replaced υἱός with παῖς, which may imply that they are addressing the audiences/readers of the gospel through deductive argumentation. If the royal official's servant benefited from the miracle power of Jesus, then the Galileans could also do the same (Fortna 1970). It is a polyptoton repetition intended to secure the attention of the audiences/readers on the initial term/concept and its privileges.

The term πιστεύω (believe) occurs in two sentences in the narrative. In the first instance, it is used by Jesus to the royal official: "you will never

believe" (John 4:48b) if you do not see signs and wonders. The second occurrence is the comment by the narrator that the royal official believed together with his household after they witnessed the recovery of the sick servant (John 4:53c). It is significant to mention that some audiences demanded signs, but they were not given or condemned (John 6:30; 19:35), while others saw signs but did not believe (John 12:37). In the case of the healing of the royal official's servant, the author claims that Jesus diagnosed the condition of the man to show that without "signs and wonders" he would not believe. However, the royal official's acceptance of the instruction of Jesus to depart is an act of faith/belief (John 4:50b). Although the term πιστεύω was not specifically mentioned, the concept of πιστεύω underpins the action of the royal official in departing without hearing of the healing of the servant but with the anticipation that the servant would be healed. It agrees with the condemnation of the demand for a sign before belief (John 6:30). "…not seeing and yet believing, by far the most important for John…, belief on the basis of concrete evidence is satisfactory, but belief without seeing is commendable" (Fortna 1970, 162). Hence, in the use of πιστεύω, explicitly and implicitly, the concepts of *not seeing and yet believing* and seeing and believing were engaged. There is no direct condemnation for either "not seeing and yet believing" and "seeing and believing."

The term σημεῖα (signs) occurs twice in the narrative—once in the plural and once in the singular. In the first instance, σημεῖα is accompanied by τέρατα (wonders). It is an unprovoked opening statement of Jesus to the royal official. Since no incident necessitated it, Fortna (1970) argued that it was directed to the church (audiences/recipients) rather than the royal official. This is the only miracle narrative in John where σημεῖα was accompanied by τέρατα. The phrase σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα (signs and wonders) implies that there could be signs that are not necessarily miraculous but an indication to identify a person or thing (Aryeh 2020). The occurrence of σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα implies "signs" that are miraculous. Hence, there is no primary distinctive mark between the terms σημεῖα and τέρατα in the context of John 4:46–54 (Verbrusse 2000).

The occurrence of σημεῖα and τέρατα can be considered as dualism that is not opposite but affirmative. The Gospel of John "contains strong contrasts between light and darkness, heaven and earth, the Father and the world, as well as bold propositions about insiders and outsiders, truth and falsehood, life and death" (Estes 2020, 1–29). That notwithstanding, the topics or key terms and concepts that underpin the interpretation of John 4:46–54 are the setting, the beneficiary of the miracles, belief/faith, and signs and wonders.

According to Gail R. O'Day (2012, 175–188), σημεῖα and ἔργα works are key miracle terms in the Gospel of John. This is obvious in many miracle narratives in the gospel. However, the miracle narrative of John 4:46–54 is unique in combining a popular miracle term, σημεῖα, with an unpopular miracle term, τέρατα, in a complementary dualism. It indicates that in John's dualism concerning miracles, terms and concepts used are not opposite in general dualistic phenomenon; τέρατα seeks to emphasize and consolidate σημεῖα in the context of John 4:46–54. It alludes to not limiting cross-referencing and self-referentiality of miracle terms in the Gospel of John to σημεῖα and ἔργα (2012) but also to σημεῖα and τέρατα. σημεῖα and τέρατα serve a one-way positive role in John 4:46–54 (John and Miller 1994).

4.2 Progression texture

The repetitive terms proceeded progressively. Cana in Galilee was portrayed as a place where Jesus performed the "second" miracle ("signs and wonders"), marking a progression from first to second. There is progression in the appellation used for the servant (υἱός, then παιδίον—the latter being

wider and more inclusive). It is the redactional strategy of the narrator not to limit the event to selected individuals but give indications of including others. It is "as a matter of rhetorical spatiality or conceptual framework where people may go and reason for possible clues to understand a phenomenon" (Aryeh 2020, 120).

The use of πιστεύω (belief) involves positive and affirmative progression. It was used by Jesus to show that the reason why he would heal the servant is that he wanted the royal official to believe in him. After witnessing the healing of the servant, the royal official believed together with his household. Hence, not only did the royal official believe but his household. Another progression can be seen here: first, one person believed and then many followed. Another progression in the narrative is βασιλικός that progressed from a political position and relationship to a more intimate relationship between a father and a servant. The progression in the narrative largely reflects the pattern of miracle narratives in Jewish and Greco-Roman literature: "(1) a description of the disease or situation to be remedied; (2) a statement of the cure or solution achieved by Jesus; [and] (3) a statement of the results of the miracle—either the effect on the person healed or the reaction of the onlookers" (Travis 1977, 153–166).

The illness was not described at the beginning of the narrative. However, it was later described as "fever" (v. 52). Since it was stated at the beginning of the narrative that the child was at the point of death, it was likely to be one of the ancient fatal fevers that paralyze the victim. This kind of fever is usually referred to as πυρετός μέγας (high/great fever) where πυρετός primarily connotes a high temperature (Aryeh 2020). The narrator of John decided to mention the possible outcome of the fever if not attended to. This is aimed at presenting the exigency of the situation first. In the component of the description of the disease, often, an appeal is made to the miracle-worker—healer (Aryeh 2020). In John 4:46–54, an appeal was made to Jesus after the exigency was mentioned and the disease was later described. There was not a direct statement for cure/healing that rebukes the illness or addresses the situation directly. The royal official would have to leave with hope in the words of Jesus that the child would live.

That notwithstanding, the progression and pattern/structure of John 4:46–54 closely reflects a general miracle pattern in the ancient Mediterranean religiosity, which Werner Kahl (2018, 47–76) calls narrative schema and description of healing miracle stories. He argues for four schema progression of miracle narratives: (i) need; (ii) preparedness; (iii) performance; (iv) sanction. The "need" is where a person or situation is subjected to unwanted/undesirable circumstances. "Preparedness" is where the victim of an unwanted/undesired situation is willing and accepts conditions for remedy. "Performance" succeeds "preparedness," and it is active by the power of the miracle-worker and the subject. "Sanction" is the recognition of the desired result or failure and the instructions that follow (Kahl 2018). In John 4:46–54, there was a need expressed on behalf of the subject of disease—the royal official informed Jesus concerning the near-death condition of his servant (vv. 46–47). The victim was not prepared directly, but the heart of the royal official was prepared to believe that the child would recover (v. 50). The performance took place (vv. 51–52). The sanction was the belief of the royal official because Jesus said he would believe if he saw "signs and wonders," and he did believe after the servant was healed (v. 53). It is significant to note that the narrator did not indicate that the servant had any contact or interaction with Jesus. Hence, in a narrative schema of progression of miracle narratives, actions can be performed on behalf of the victim and miracles performed from a distance.

Considering the progression pattern propounded by Travis and Kahl, it is obvious that John 4:46–54 largely aligns with their propositions. However, the narrative shows a unique progression of the miracle pattern.

Thus: (i) the royal official invited Jesus to heal a dying servant; (ii) Jesus identified the challenge of the royal official; (iii) the royal official believed; (iv) the illness mentioned and the dying servant was healed at a distance; (v) the witnesses believed in Jesus. The variation in pattern and structure suggests that the primary attention of the narrator was focused on the faith of the royal official, thereby making the description of the illness a secondary issue. It is related to the concept of "preparedness" prior to the performance of miracles argued by Kahl (2018). The concept also reflects the proposition by Vernon K. Robbins (2012, 17–84) that in some miracle narratives in the gospels, the faith of the victim of disease or his/her representative is needed before attempting to pronounce healing. However, the demand for miracle-faith or "preparedness" came by rebuke, a section of the narrative which Fuller (1973) argues was an addition by the narrator. He queries what wrong the royal official had done to deserve such a comment, claiming that the rebuke was probably meant for the readers, not the royal official, because it did not have any negative effect on him due to his unflinching desire for help.

That notwithstanding, it can be argued that the progression texture in John 4:46–54 is generally logical/syllogistic progression where the narrator outlines premises that include pieces of evidence that put forward or create inspired ideas for the implied readers/audiences to conclude (Leroux 1995). Nonetheless, it is significant to add that the rebuke of the royal official by Jesus is a qualitative progression which is an unanticipated development in the line of argument by an author/narrator, which compels readers/audiences to consider discovering rationales for the advancement of a new idea or concept (Leroux 1995). The logical/syllogistic progression of the narrative is spatial where the form of progression is the movement from one step/principle to the other; while the qualitative progression is temporal where the form of progression does not follow a sequence (Croy 2011). The qualitative progression component of the narrative can be deleted, and still, the syllogistic progression will not be affected in any way.

4.3 Narrational texture

The nature of narrative texture can either be "narrative" elaboration or "*chreia*" elaboration (Robbins 1996, 376). Narrative elaboration is a fully developed story with a clearly identifiable beginning, middle, and ending. John 4:46–54 is a fully developed narrative elaboration that began, developed, and concluded. Robbins (1996, 376) distinguishes between two narratives: (i) "πρατκὸν πρᾶγμα (event narrative), which is an account of an occurrence that has political and historical significance," and (ii) "μυθικὸν πρᾶγμα (*muthikos pragma*) (mythical narrative), which is a story that includes gods, heroes, and other mythical figures." John 4:46–54 is a μυθικὸν πρᾶγμα (*muthkon pragma*) (mythical narrative), which is about the power of Jesus to heal from a distance.

The opening statement of the narrative, Ἦλθεν οὖν πάλιν εἰς τὴν Κανὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας … (He then came again to Cana in Galilee …) suggests that the narrator is familiar with an earlier work of Jesus in Cana of Galilee. Hence, the narrator was drawing the attention of his readers/audiences to an earlier activity of Jesus; or the readers/audiences are aware of the earlier work by Jesus of which the narrative under interpretation might be an extension/continuation. It is a reflection that Jesus assumed a very important position in the social and religious life of the people in Cana after the first miracle. It gives an interpretative clue to any critical reader of the narrative to consider in the interpretative process. Simply put, the interpretation of John 4:46–54 ought to be partly understood by using the immediate previous miracle event "as a rhetorical conceptual location for ideas for possible reasoning" (Aryeh 2020). The narrator attempts to show

a close relationship between John 4:46–54 and an earlier miracle narrative of John 2:1–11.

The narrative is very active and occupied with movements from one location to the other. Jesus moved from Judea to Galilee where he once visited; the royal official went to invite Jesus to come; the royal official was instructed to go; the servants of the royal official met him on the way. These movements suggest various inputs in constructing the narrative. However, the use of Judea, Galilee, Capernaum, and Cana at the beginning and end of the narrative show that the narrator was using a biblical Jewish "point of view" to compose the narrative. These locations are predominantly populated by Jews and their culture during the period of Jesus's ministry and the writing of the gospel (Lawrence 2006). Rhetorically, the narrator is pointing the readers/audiences to the conceptual reasoning of Jewish towns and cities where Jesus had been to and what took place, particularly, the narrative world—Cana.

Although the narrator intended to be as detailed as possible, they left out some details that they thought were known by the readers/audiences; or where it would be easier for the readers/audiences to search for such details. For example, the name of the royal official and the sick child were not mentioned, an indication that the narrator is not interested in the names of the persons in the narrative but their character. It confirms the referential nature of the New Testament narrative where the goal is to influence the readers/audiences to act in a particular manner (Croy 2011).

The passage of John 4:46–54 is a rhetorical unit that follows order, duration, and frequency in four to six parts rhetorical composition (Philips 2008; Witherington III 1995):

Rhetorical Unit	Corresponding reference in John 4:46–54
Exordium Introduction to the composition	Verses 46–47
Narratio It explains the nature of the narrative/discourse	Verses 48–51
Propositio The thesis of the narrative with supportive arguments	Verses 52–53
Peroratio The recapitulation of the main thoughts in the narrative in the conclusion	Verse 54

The narrative texture may express any one or more of the branches of rhetoric—epideictic, judicial/forensic, and deliberative (Robbins 1996, 368–385). The rhetorical unit indicates that John 4:46–54 is a deliberative rhetorical composition with an intended effect on the readers/audiences. In other words, it is a religious (faith) composition to convince readers/audiences to accept the view of the narrator concerning Jesus and his power to perform miracles at a distance. It is meant primarily to exert an intellectual effect that may have cultural adaptation demands on the audiences/readers.

This leads to the identification of characters in John 4:46–54. Jesus is a character that is critical in the *narratio*. He has portrayed a character that possesses divine power, who is asked to remedy a situation at a distance—fever. Jesus is a character that gravitates towards the wealthy/elite and their socially marginalized/poor servants (royal official and the servant)

to remedy the illness of his servant and restore him to work. The character of Jesus depicts a person that is a Bearer of Numinous Power (BNP), a religious intermediary who possesses divine power to be dispensed at will (Kahl 2018).

The character of Jesus and the royal official are both flat characters; Jesus distinguishes himself as possessing divine power to heal, and the royal official distinguishes himself as a person having faith in Jesus to heal his dying servant from fever. It is a character that portrays a single and consistent trait (Croy 2011). The other character in the narrative is the servant of the royal official. This is a round character (Croy 2011) that keeps changing due to the changing condition of the sick servant.

4.4 Open-middle-ending (plot)

John 4:46–54 has an opening—verses 46–47; a middle—verses 48–51; and an ending—verses 52–54. It demonstrates the narrative skills of the narrator to compose an elaborative narrative for impressive effect on the readers/audiences (Robbins 1996). It shows that John 4:46–54 is not simply a listing of actions or vocabularies but a coherent and consistent composition that flows from beginning to the end to form a literary unit. The narrator embarks upon a plot of disclosure, an epistemic plot to show that the power of Jesus to heal from a distance is beyond emperors who also performed miracles. The challenge of the readers/audiences is to understand why a royal official who might have a working relationship with an emperor may not find any miracle-worker as a result of his position or availability of miracle-performing emperors, but came instead to Jesus to heal the dying servant.

The kernels of the plot are: (i) Jesus returned to Cana in Galilee; (ii) the royal official came to invite Jesus to heal the dying servant; (iii) Jesus instructed the royal official to go and the servant will be healed; (iv) the servant was healed from a distance. The satellites that filled or embellished the kernels to form a complete plot are: (i) the query and faith of the royal official; (ii) and the belief in Jesus by the household of the royal official. The kernels are the skeletal frame around which the satellites were formed to have a coherent literary plot (Matera 1989).

4.5 Argumentative texture

The narrator presents the narrative in deductive argumentation reasoning by attempting to show that Jesus had performed a miracle earlier and that he performed a second one. The premise here is similar to the earlier miracle of John 2:1–11. The premise is that the royal official believes the command of Jesus to go and that the servant will live (v. 50). The evidence in the premise may lie in the background of the royal official who understands how to obey instruction from a superior, and the fact that the narrative indicates that the royal official might have information concerning the first miracle in which the servants obeyed the command of Jesus to fill the jars with water (John 2:7). Labahn succinctly states:

> The Fourth Gospel is in some ways a masterpiece in its use of internal references that lead the reader to the meaning of its narrated world. The Fourth Evangelist also makes great play with semantic fields and semantic lines. By the term 'semantic lines' I mean intratextual references that function as hermeneutical links. Semantic lines work by taking up slightly revised wordings or by taking up pictures and situations already mentioned by the use of analogous words or word families. The use of this technique in binding together different parts of the gospel is an indication that the Fourth Gospel is not only composed so that some parts of

> it were read in the Christian worship, but also so that it could be read as a written document, like a book. (Labahn 1999, 187)

It engages the *logos* of the readers/audiences in rhetoric. However, it is not obvious in the narrative that the servants of the royal official and the sick servant were aware of the miracle credentials of Jesus. Therefore, to the servants and the sick servant, the narrative would present a *pathos* reasoning that mainly appeals to their emotions without having a point of reference.

7. Synthesis

Due to the numerous occurrences of σημεῖα and ἔργα in the Gospel of John (Fortna 1963), many studies of miracle vocabulary in John have been largely concentrated on these two to the neglect of τέρατα. It has been firmly established that the purpose of σημεῖα in miracle narratives in John is to attract belief (faith) in Jesus as the Messiah and to witness (evangelize) to others to come to the faith (John and Miller 1971)—even in situations where σημεῖα was used in a miracle context. The question that arises is that what does the combined use of the synonym σημεῖα and τέρατα mean in a miracle performed at a distance?

The combined use of σημεῖα and τέρατα in John 4:46–54 is aimed at presenting Jesus as being superior to other miracle-workers of his day. Labahn (1999) has argued that the main concern of miracle narratives in John is to portray Jesus as the mediator and giver of true life. My thesis in this study is that John 4:46–54 was narrated within the context of deliberative rhetoric to show that Jesus is above his contemporary miracle-workers in giving true life. In that regard, he is a Bearer of Numinous Power (BNP) not a Mediator of Numinous Power (MNP). Individuals (Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel) through whom the acts of God were considered as σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα were MNP; hence, the glory goes to God Almighty. But in the case of the σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα in John 4:46–54, the glory was given to Jesus. In addition, the miracle of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa concerning the healing of the son of Gamaliel II (Schnelle 2016), performed at a distance, was the result of an answer to prayer. In John 4:46–54, Jesus did not pray.

The royal official (βασιλικός) depicts someone related to an emperor either through work or biological relationship (Dunderberg 2014). The term βασιλικός occurred twice and was later substituted by πατὴρ (father), probably to indicate that the relationship between him and the sick servant is close to a biological one. However, it could be argued that the narrator of John seeks to move the attention of his audiences/readers from a narrow view of the event to a wider perspective for them to consider being a character in the miracle event. The βασιλικός (royal official) is related to an emperor who also was believed to have had the power to perform miracles. One of the best known was Vespasian (ruling 69–79 CE). The βασιλικός should easily have had access to miracle-workers to heal the dying child through any of the emperors rather than Jesus. Although Glachau Gerhard Delling (1981, 591) has argued that the use of βασιλικός in John 4:46–54 is highly debatable, he explains that the term denotes unhindered access to resources and personnel, and having proximity to a βασιλεύς (King) and thereby making him a mini-King. Subsequently, in an inductive argumentation, it can be inferred that the βασιλικός might have exhausted all avenues at his disposal to contact a miracle-worker and to heal the dying servant but could not get the expected result.

In the ancient Mediterranean world, miracle-workers and cults competed among themselves for patronage by attempting to perform

miracles that would be deemed superior. This is evident in the challenge between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:20–40). Consequently, Bultmann (1963) argued that the disciples and close relatives of Hellenistic and Jewish miracle-workers concocted miracles for their masters in order to make them look superior. Usually, it was the most powerful and superior miracle-workers that were invited to homes to heal sick relatives. For example, when two disciples of Rabbi Gamaliel II were sick to the point of death, he sent for Hanina ben Dosa, a Jewish miracle-worker, who came and prayed for the two disciples, and they were healed instantly of a fever (Guttmann 1947). Hence, the invitation by the royal official is not strange. The healing of the sick servant from a distance and the complementary dualistic use of σημεῖα and τέρατα is the attempt by the narrator to show the superiority of Jesus over other miracle-workers of his day. This is deliberative rhetoric by the narrator in *logos* deductive reasoning by indicating that this miracle is the second in Cana in Galilee. In other words, the first miracle serves as the premise and evidence for the second miracle. It depicts the flat character of Jesus as a BNP.

8. Conclusion

This study contributes to the discussion on the purpose of σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα in John 4:46–54. It sought to highlight a neglected purpose of the miracles as deliberative rhetoric to show that Jesus is superior to his contemporary miracle-workers by the conjoined use of the synonym σημεῖα and τέρατα and to move the analysis of σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα beyond intertextual discussions in Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Kings. The deliberative rhetoric is also obvious in the use of βασιλικός who was supposed to have had access to miracle-workers in his kingdom to heal the dying servant; yet, he had to come and invite Jesus. It is an indication of a failed attempt to either acquire a miracle-worker to heal the sick servant or a failed attempt by the miracle-workers to heal the sick servant. Hence, the purpose of miracles in John cannot be limited to proving the Messiahship of Jesus, attracting faith, and witnessing to others; but it also includes proving Jesus as being superior to the miracle-workers of his day.

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