

# Narratological perspectives on John 13:1-38

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## Abstract

### Narratological perspectives on John 13:1-38

The text of John 13 as a literary phenomenon is taken as narrative communication. Emphasis is laid on the pragmatic dimension, in which the relation between the sign and the recipient is highlighted. This article describes John 13 as a structured narrative in which a specific ideological perspective is reflected. Retrospectively viewed, John 13 provides an interpretative framework for meaningful discipleship. The modern reader is challenged to seek for deeper significance in the narration of the footwashing.

The intention with this presentation is not to offer a detailed exegesis of John 13, for which thorough expositions in commentaries and monographs can be consulted (cf Bultmann 1966; Richter 1967; Brown 1970; Schnackenburg 1975; Du Rand 1979), but to share some hermeneutical, narratological and rhetorical perspectives on the chapter mentioned.

## 1. JOHN 13:1-38 AS TEXT

### 1.1 Hermeneutical point of departure

As hermeneutical presupposition, the text of John 13:1-38 should be taken as a *work* rather than an *object* (Ricoeur 1976:87; cf Schneiders 1981:76-81). 'The text of John 13 is viewed not primarily as something to be analyzed but as a human expression which functions as a mediation of meaning' (Schneiders 1981:76). The implication

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of such a viewpoint is that the text mediates meaning which is not behind it, concealed in its past but stretches it out to the future (Ricoeur 1976:87).

On the other hand, the historical distance between the present reader and the text need not to be an obstacle but can be an advantage for understanding 'in that the tradition which is operative in the interpreter helps him or her to draw from the text richer meaning than was available to the original audience' (Schneiders 1981: 78). Ricoeur (1973:129) calls this 'productive distanciation'.

Another point of departure is that John 13 as a literary text is symbolic (cf Ricoeur 1976), which means that as a linguistic entity it has a primary signification but also a deeper, secondary signification which can be reached only in and through the primary signification (cf Schneiders 1981:79). And this means that the text is the symbolic surface of the message that Jesus is the true revelation of God.

Although we do not find the so-called σημεῖον (Johannine sign) technically spoken, in chapters 13-20 (cf Brown 1966:524-532), the foot-washing is narrated as a symbolic act to reveal the identity of Jesus - not a sign in the 'technical' Johannine sense, but naratologically interpreted in the rest of chapter 13 as a symbolic sign of revelation. Therefore, the foot-washing can be regarded as a Johannine symbol.

## 1.2 As narrative

Some perspectives constitute a framework of methodological approach:

- The present text of John 13 is taken as a literary phenomenon with a communicative function. Emphasis is laid on the pragmatic dimension in which the relation between the sign and the recipient is to be analysed. John 13 must be listened to as an authoritative witnessing narrative. A message is told and it is handed over as a narrative (cf Du Rand 1986:153). John 13:1-38 actually comprises a series of shorter narratives which are arranged according to a narrative point of view concerning the protagonist Jesus.
- John 13:1-38 should be read in the real sense of the word. S Brown (1988) distinguishes three different ways of reading the Gospel narrative when the meaning is actually generated by the reading rather than residing in the intention of the author: *historical* readings are reconstructive; *doctrinal* readings lead to a projection onto the text and *literary* readings concentrate on an 'altruistic' interest in the text; not to use it to reconstruct something outside the text; not to manipulate it in accordance with one or other conviction (Brown 1988:233; cf O'Day 1986:657-662; Reinhartz 1989:61-76; Kermodé 1987:440-446; Tolbert 1982:1-8; Bal 1985:79-82).

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- In Frye's (1982:57) terminology, a methodological approach; it is a 'centripetal' approach in which the reader deepens his or her own view of himself or herself and the world. The reader is actually penetrated by the text and wants to be read by the text (S Brown 1988:234). And that is true of John 13, the more the reader places himself or herself at the disposal of the text, the more he or she discovers about discipleship.
  - From a narratological point of view it is clear that chapter 13 should be read as part of the farewell discourses (chapters 13-17) - as an integrated part of the whole succession of narrative. The reader has come to a more relaxed part of the Johannine narrative because the main issue is no longer the fierce antagonism of the Jewish leaders (according to the narrative) towards Jesus' identity, but the important preparation of the disciples to give them the necessary knowledge concerning Jesus' identity and imminent death and glory.
  - A very important perspective, from which a narrative text like John 13:1-38 should be read, is that the text is a form of arrangement of human existence according to defined principles (cf Lotman, in Danow 1987:355f; Van Aarde 1988:238).
  - The act of foot-washing, dialogue and discourse in John 13:1-38 are combined in a series to develop a plot (cf Culpepper 1983:86f; Du Rand 1986:159f), which can be called the story and which is expressed by narrative discourse. It should be remembered that the plot of a story is only secondarily the property of the narrative and primarily the property of the reader (cf Egan 1978:455). Plot is causal completion (Booth 1961:126) to determine the sense of unity; to produce a synthetic whole - the soul of the work (Egan 1978:455). It is the dynamic, sequential element in narratives (Scholes & Kellogg 1966:207).
  - The story is embedded in the narrative discourse and should skilfully be extracted. The resonance of echo effect (Tannehill 1984:238) in the narrative discourse should be identified to distract the ideological perspective. This means that the direction of the development of the relationships of the characters and events is to be abstracted. It could be done by an analysis of the reciprocal relationships of the characters which manifest on five levels, according to Uspenski (1973), namely the temporal, spatial, psychological, phraseological and ideological levels (cf Petersen 1978). These phraseological, psychological, spatial and topographical levels are presented on the surface level in the narrative text and lead to the ideological perspective, which contains the system of ideas in the deeper structure.
  - Besides the story in the narrative discourse, we also perceive the narrator's situation (Genette 1980:26f; cf Rimmon-Kenan 1983).

- \* The interaction between the situation of the narrator and the narrative discourse can be described as the 'point of view' (evaluation of the narrated world) (Uspenski 1973:86) or 'focalisation' (viewpoint from which the story is told) (Genette 1980:186; cf Van Aarde 1988:239; Bal 1985:108f; Rimmon-Kenan 1983:74f).
- \* The use of the expression 'point of view' in this presentation focuses on the evaluative relationship between observers and observed objects (cf Van Aarde 1988:239). This brings us to the conclusion that the story in John 13:1-38 functions in a literary framework of narrative discourse, social context and ideological perspective.
- \* From the viewpoint of the intended readers of John, taking into consideration their possible social context, discipleship could have become the crucial issue in the community. Together with conflict with the Jewish and Hellenistic worlds (cf Katz 1984:55; Brown 1979:34-41; Painter 1981:527-534), the readers had to accommodate believers from both paganism and Judaism. In this process the readers' acceptance of one binding factor, namely Jesus' identity and role, is very important to maintain true discipleship as Christians.
- \* The ideological perspective concerning Jesus' departure and the implication for the disciples who will remain behind are told by way of transparency, that is the view of Jesus through the eyes of the Johannine community, from a post-resurrection perspective (cf Painter 1981:525; Martyn [1977] 1979:149-154).
- \* To apply the above-mentioned theoretical point of view to the text of John 13:1-38, we should concentrate on the narratological dismantling of the available narrative discourse. Although I agree that the evangelist may have used one or more sources in the process of composition of John 13 to resolve the definite tensions in the text (cf Brown 1970:549), I take the text as a narrative unit to attempt to discover the resonance (the narrative's communicative direction) and perspectives (Uspenski) of the narrator.

For a thorough discussion of the specific historical questions concerning John 13 the work of Brown (1970), Barrett (1978), Schnackenburg (1971), Sabbe (1982) and Kleinknecht (1983) can be consulted.

### 1.3 Unity: Coherence and progression

Chapter 13 is in a sense an introduction to chapters 14 to 17. Although there are pauses and transitions in the sequence of thought of the present order of the 38 verses, the same narratological story-line spirals through the chapter as a whole, and the present order is taken as a working basis (cf the opposite view of Hultgren

1982:540).

The logical *coherence* and narrative *progression* in the composition of John 13:1-38 flow from the agenda in verse 1: 'Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father'. Generally speaking, verse 1 is taken as a possible introduction to chapters 13-20 in their entirety, and verses 2-3 as an introduction to the foot-washing as such (Brown 1970:563-565; cf Schneiders 1981:80; Staley 1986:241-263). Jesus' *departure*, as the announced theme, brings an acuteness in the Johannine story. It is manifested in the narrative discourse by various dialogues and discourses in 13:2-38.

Chapter 13 should narratologically be treated as a unit. The introductory words in 13:1, 'It was just before the Passover Feast', signal a shift in scene as well as a logical break from the previous verses, 12:42-50. The following four narrative units emphasise the same theme of Jesus' going away, each one from a different angle (4-17, 18-30, 31-35 and 36-38). From a narratological point of view the dialogues and discourses continue in chapter 14 in a recapitulative way. Chapter 13, however, can be seen as a demarcated unit for the sake of narratological analysis. Chapter 14 starts with the same theme, namely Jesus' departure.

The content of John 13 is to be structured syntactically as follows (cf Du Rand 1979:16-18):

VERSE 1	Introductory menu: Jesus' departure and his love for his own
VERSES 2-17	The foot-washing and interpretations
Verses 2-5	The deed at table
Verses 6-11	First interpretation: signalling Jesus' death
Verses 12-17	Second interpretation: Jesus as an example of service
VERSES 18-30	Announcement and identification of the betrayer

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VERSES 31-38	Announcement of Jesus' departure and Peter's reaction
Verses 31-35	Jesus announces his departure and gives a 'new command'
Verses 36-38	Peter's reaction and Jesus' prediction of the denial.

From such a cursory mapping of the content it is clear that the progression in chapter 13 is manifested through temporal and especially logical development. Jesus' disclosure of his identity and destination as the ideological theme is narrated through the scenes with a growing urgency. The mentioning of the role of Judas Iscariot in verse 2, for example, is rounded off in verse 30 when Judas leaves the room. Through progression the narrator has constructed the opening to accentuate the glorification of Jesus and his Father in 13:31-33.

If we take into consideration the function of cohesion in chapter 13, verses 31-38 form a structural peak in the thematic development. The narrative sequence in 13:1-30, however, forces us to take verses 31-38 as a serious part of chapter 13. In these verses the purpose and acuteness of Jesus' departure are summarised, as well as the consequences of discipleship.

Verses 31-38 can, according to content, thematically be structured as follows (cf Du Rand 1981:160-169; Woll 1980:225-239; Becker 1970:215-246; Brown 1970:581-604):

Departure (ὑπάγω)	Verses 31-32	: Purpose of departure:	glorification
	Verse 33	: Acuteness of departure:	'be with you a little longer'
Discipleship (ἀκολουθέω)	Verses 34-35	: Positive discipleship:	'to love one another'
	Verses 36-38	: Negative discipleship:	Peter's denial.

Verses 33 and 34-35 could be linked thematically because Jesus' departure will be 'compensated' for through the visual 'new command'. Everybody will 'find' Jesus in the disciples' loving one another - the visual distinctive mark of discipleship after Jesus' departure.

The syntactical marker in verses 31-32 is δοξάζω in a chiasmic pattern *abba*, in which 'a' indicates the Son's glorification and 'b' the Father's. Through this pattern the mutual glorification of Father and Son is emphasised. And in verse 33 the departure of Jesus is enwrapped with acuteness by ἔτι μικρόν (only a little longer) and ἄρτι (now).

The structural marker in verses 34-35 is without doubt ἀγαπᾶν ἀλλήλους (to love one another). The theme (new command) and content of the theme (to love one another) are stated in verse 34a, and the grounding (καθώς - as) and appeal (ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς - so you must...) in verse 34b with the visual identification of discipleship (all men will know that...) in verse 35.

The dialogue between Jesus and Peter is structured around the questions by Peter: 'where' (ποῦ) in verse 36 and 'why' (διὰ τί) in verses 37-38 within the framework of Jesus' departure and Peter's discipleship (Du Rand 1981:167).

## 2. READING JOHN 13:1-38

### 2.1 As a structured, narrated story

Once again, useful perspectives are to be gained from the narratological theories of Greimas (1971), Bremond (1977) and Genette (1980) (cf Rimmon-Kenan 1983).

According to narratological differentiation between story, narrative text and act of narration, the story level could be seen as the so-called deeper structure of a narrative text - which can be reconstructed from the surface by the narrative propositions in their chronological sequence. Such an analysis operates mainly on the syntactical manifestation level, the narrative level which flows from the morphological syntagmatical analysis of the phenomena that imparts the meaning, and the thematic, intentional (Louv 1985:101f) or ideological level which reflects the so-called deeper meaning (cf Du Rand 1986; Vorster 1982:139f).

After such a reconstruction, the actors in their relationships to the events are also to be sketched briefly, to trace their functions or roles on the story level (cf Rimmon-Kenan 1983:20f).

According to the narrative propositions (cf Greimas 1971) in the story of John 13:1-38, the episodes are the following, bearing in mind that we have a beginning, a middle and an end:

SITUATION (1-3)	Jesus knows that he has to leave this world to go to the Father Jesus knows that the Father has put all things under his power The devil has prompted Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus
PART A (4-17)	The serving of the evening meal Jesus' preparation to wash the disciples' feet The washing of their feet The dialogue between Jesus and Peter Jesus puts his clothes on again Jesus explains his conduct
PART B (18-30)	Jesus announces his betrayal The disciples try to find out who the betrayer could be Jesus discloses the betrayer Satan enters into Judas Judas goes out into the night
PART C (31-35)	Jesus explains Judas' conduct Jesus announces his departure Jesus discloses the distinctive characteristic of discipleship
PART D (36-38)	Peter's question concerning Jesus departure Jesus explains his going away Jesus predicts his denial by Peter.

From the narrative discourse, the story has fallen into four main parts, with the central narrative resonance announced in verse 1, namely that the time has come for Jesus to leave this world to go to the Father, ushering in a series of disclosures (verse 2-38) to the intimate circle of disciples.

In summary, it reads as follows:



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Verse 1	The time has come:	
2-17	Disclosure of Jesus through his symbolic action	SERVICE UNTO DEATH
18-30	Disclosure of Jesus through the betrayal by Judas	BETRAYAL
31-35	Disclosure of Jesus through the distinctive mark of discipleship	LOVE
36-38	Disclosure of Jesus through the denial by Peter	DENIAL.

Each of the four parts of the story consists of a beginning or setting, middle episode and an ending. Every disclosure is triggered by a meaningful pause (cf Genette 1980:99) in the form of a question:

- A - Peter's question as to whether Jesus is going to wash his (Peter's) feet, and
- Jesus' own question as to whether the disciples understand what he has done to them
- B - The beloved disciple's question as to who the betrayer could be
- C - The pretended question of the disciples like the Jews asked
- D - Peter's question as to where Jesus is going and why.

It seems that the story is narrated in almost the same chronological order as that in the narrative discourse itself. The only difference is that verse 2 refers to something that happened some time ago, namely the prompting of Judas by the devil. The narrative discourse closes as it has begun, with the emphasis on Jesus' going away (vv 1 and 36).

The defusing of each part lies in repeating the holistic theme, stated in verse 1 (going away) and making it acute by the questions asked or supposed.

When Greimas' actantial model is roughly applied to John 13 some gripping narratological observations are made. The uniformity in the four narrative units (2-

17, 18-30, 31-35, 36-38) is remarkable:

Objective : Understanding Jesus' revelation

Donor	Object	Beneficiary
Helper	Subject	Opponent
Donor	Object	Beneficiary
Father	Understanding Jesus' forthcoming destination	Disciples
Helper	Subject	Opponent
No	Jesus	Judas (18-30) Peter (36-38).

It is significant that in two of the narrative units (verses 2-17 and 31-35) we do not identify explicit opponents. The opposition of Judas (18-30) and Peter (36-38) functions narratologically to put the identity and mission of the protagonist into relief. The provisional conclusion from the analysis according to Greimas' model is that the disciples, although the beneficiaries, have not yet come to a full understanding of Jesus' disclosure. This could be why chapter 14 starts like chapter 13, with the same theme of Jesus' going away but with the syntactically foregrounded emphasis on: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me'.

From another narratological angle, Bremond's model also provides a useful analysis. His argumentation fits into the following framework:

Potentiality (objective defined)	Process of actualisation (the steps taken)	Success (objective reached) Failure (objective missed)
	Non-actualisation (no steps taken)	

<p>Potential of understanding Jesus' forthcoming destination</p>	<p>Potentiality actualised:</p> <p>Washing of disciples' feet and dialogues (2-17)</p> <p>Jesus predicts his betrayal (18-30)</p> <p>Jesus gives a new command (31-35)</p> <p>Jesus predicts Peter's denial (36-38).</p>	<p>Disciples do not understand</p>
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It is clear that the impression is created by the narrative that the disciples should understand (vv 12, 17, 27, 30 and 38) but the reality is that they do not (vv 9, 28 and 36). The understanding of Jesus' forthcoming destination is kept openended. The narrator's idea is to suggest that they will only understand after Jesus' resurrection. There is no doubt that the greatest success would be the disciples' understanding of Jesus' full identity and his forthcoming destination. The function of the dialogues (vv 6-10, 21-26 and 36-38) and discourses (vv 12-17, 18-20 and 31-35) is to bring the readers progressively to an acknowledgement of Jesus' real identity and destination. The destination lies in verse 31: the glorification of the Father and Son. The disciples will acknowledge Jesus' identity as the Son of God, and the path of glorification, only after the resurrection.

In passing, the narratological relationship of text and time should not be overlooked. We have two examples of analepsis in John 13. An analepsis could be defined as a narration of a story-event at a point in the text after subsequent events have been told (cf Rimmon-Kenan 1983:46). In 13:2 it is mentioned that the devil had already prompted Judas to betray Jesus. It is only told at this point in the narration, although it happened some time ago. And in 13:3 we read that Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his (Jesus') power and that he had

come from God and was returning to God. Analepsis is a reflection from the past.

The only example of a prolepsis, the narration of a story-event that takes a leap into the future of the story (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:47), is found in 13:1. It concerns Jesus' leaving this world to go to the Father. In the broader context the foot-washing could also be seen as a symbolic prolepsis, taking the coming dialogue with Peter into consideration (vv 6-11), signalling Jesus' death.

We find a few very important *pauses*, which have the function of serving the reader with important information. The reader receives the agenda in verse 1 as a directive for the rest of the chapter. And in verse 2 the reader shares with the narrator the information on Judas which will be useful to follow in the remainder of the narrative. Verse 3, another pause, provides the key to understanding the whole chapter when it states that Jesus has the knowledge that the Father has put all things under his power and that his destination is with the Father. The only other pauses are in verses 11, 23 and 28. Jesus' knowledge of his betrayer is linked up with the foot-washing and dialogue with Peter in verse 11. And in verse 23 it is just mentioned that the person who is reclining next to Jesus is the beloved disciple. In verse 28 it is emphasised that the disciples do not understand Jesus' words to Judas.

Once again, the pauses provide the reader with the background information to make sense of the story. They express the narrator's purpose in narrating. If the reader ignores aside the information on Jesus' foreknowledge (13:1,3), the roles of Judas (13:2, 11) and the beloved disciple (13:23), his understanding of the flow of the rest of the story will be incomplete, to say the least.

## 2.2 From an ideological point of view

In reading texts we come to certain perceptions which are influenced by the specific foregrounding of ideological themes and ideas. Van Aarde (1988:237) says: 'If the speech act takes the form of a narration, the ideological perspective (the evaluating point of view) is communicated by means of a narrative act'. And this means that a literary communication implies the projection of a circuit of themes and ideas (an ideology) in a specific social context. The ideological point of view (Uspenski) can also be called the perceptual dimension in the communication act. In John 13 this perceptual dimension is carried by or projected in the form of a narrative to influence and manipulate the reader to agree or disagree from the ideological perspective.

According to Cronin's discussion (1987:12) the term ideology can refer either to the Marxist or to the idealistic, non-materialistic point of view (cf Van Aarde 1988:236). The non-materialistic tradition takes approaches of idealism into consideration, as do the sociological theories of Mannheim and even Husserl. Van

Tilborg (1986) declares that every 'ideology' represents an imagined 'distortion of reality'. Texts as 'imagined' accounts of realities therefore belong to the sphere of 'ideology' (Van Tilborg 1986:9; Van Aarde 1988:236). This is why the 'ideology' is used in the literary framework of narratology (cf Uspenski 1973; Du Rand 1986; Van Aarde 1986).

The term 'ideology' in the literary framework refers to the circuit of themes and ideas which is found in a narrative as an 'imagined' portrayal of a definite reality.

The theory of the ideological narratological reading of a text should be traced back to the work of Uspenski (1973) which was further developed by Lotman (1975). According to their view, a text is not only a structure of linguistic symbols but a reflection of a 'culture' from which it has grown (cf Danow 1987:352). This means the text can only be understood if it is compared with the socio-historical context, that is the behaviour of the contemporary readers - those during the latter period of the first century as well as the recent real readers.

The narrator's point of view according to chapter 13 is that of *zerofocalisation* which means that the narrator is not one of the characters or part of the events. It becomes clear when the reader notices that the narrator has insight into the thoughts and feelings of the characters (cf verses 1-3, 21, 28-29).

It is also clear that the narration is done from a *retrospective* point of view. The story is told after the events have been concluded, which means that the narrator has insight into perspectives which the real characters, except Jesus, did not have. One has the conviction that the hermeneutical perspective through which John 13 could be understood is the post-resurrection perspective.

The ideological issue at stake in John 13 is to understand Jesus' identity in the framework of his departure and the disciples' remaining behind.

The narrator has insight into and shares the protagonist Jesus' ideological point of view. It is Jesus' knowledge and the disciples' ignorance that dominate the flow of the narratives in chapter 13.

The perspectives from which Jesus, the Father, Judas, Peter and the disciples are narrated are important markers in the process of understanding the ideological perspective.

*Jesus* is sketched as *knowing*: that the time had come to leave this world (v 1); that the Father had put all things under his power (v 3); that someone was to betray him (vv 11, 18-19); the identity of his betrayer (vv 11, 18); that the disciples did not understand the foot-washing (v 12); that the glorification of the Father and the Son had come (v 31); that he was going away (vv 1, 33) and that Peter would deny him three times (v 38).

The readers are convinced that Jesus has all the knowledge about his own destination and that he tries to persuade the disciples to understand that as well. Jesus ὑπόδειγμα (example) is symbolically portraying the significance of his imminent death. What is decisive is the acceptance in faith of Jesus' origin and destiny as the Son of God (Du Rand 1986:159).

The *Father* is narrated as the *donor* and ruler: He is the destination of the Son (vv 1, 3); He has put all things under Jesus power (v 3); It is He who has sent the Son (v 20); the Father will glorify the Son (v 32). The readers have the impression that the Father is altogether in control.

The *disciples* are narrated as the *beneficiaries* who *do not understand* the conduct of the protagonist Jesus. Jesus washes their feet (vv 2-5); explains the meaning of his action to them (vv 12-17) and gives perspectives to them in his discourses (vv 18-20, 31-35). The disciples also take part in the action of the identification of the betrayer (vv 21-28). They will understand later what Jesus has done (v 7). They are to follow Jesus' example (vv 12-17) and will be known as disciples if they love one another (vv 34-35). Their daily dependence on Jesus will be broken with Jesus' departure to his Father. Although they are 'clean' (v 10), they still need their feet washed! Jesus still has to pay the highest toll! We should distinguish between the idea of disciples and the narrator's characterisation of them. Their questions (vv 36; 14; 5, 8, 22) reveal that they do not understand Jesus' forthcoming glorification (v 31).

A very strong narratologically emphasised motif in the so-called farewell speeches is the idea of unity and solidarity between Jesus and his disciples. Retrospectively viewed, the community is to understand the death and resurrection of Jesus only through the farewell discourses. In John 13 the narrator wishes to create an interpretative framework of reassuring trust, in order to make as meaningful as possible the disciples' remaining behind, in spite of Judas' and Peter's roles. Unity will be maintained, not by following Judas or Peter's ὑπόδειγμα, but by demonstrating visually the 'new command' to love one another (v 34).

*Judas Iscariot* is depicted as an illustration of unreliability because of his destined role. The information about Judas given to the reader persuades the reader not to associate with Judas: Judas has been prompted by the devil to betray Jesus (v 2); he is also known to Jesus as the betrayer (v 11) and he is not 'clean' (v 11); he is given the piece of bread as token of identification (v 26); the acuteness of his forthcoming deed is emphasised (v 27); he accepts the token of identification and disappears into the night (v 30). It is not without Johannine symbolism that Judas *went out* and *that it was night* (v 30). It does not move the readers to sympathy because they know that Judas is on his way to accomplish his evil

commission. The readers have antipathy towards Judas, the defector, and servant of the devil (cf Jn 8:44).

*Peter* is portrayed as the *representative* but also as the *exception* among the disciples. He is mentioned at two crucial stages in the narrative in 13:1-38. In verses 6-10, as well as in verses 36-38, the reader has the impression that Peter does not understand the need to be cleaned and, later on, he cannot come to grips with the possibility that Jesus is going away. Peter is actually depicted as the complex character. The narration implies that Peter does not understand the foot-washing, thus emphasising that Peter will understand later, after the resurrection. Peter boasts of following Jesus and says that he will lay down his life for his Lord (v 37). What a meaningful, ironic statement, because Peter will follow Jesus in martyrdom later on. The narrator uses the characterisation of Peter to get existentially deeper into the heart of the reader (cf vv 6-11 and 36-38). The reader can associate as well as dissociate himself with Peter, thus identifying with Jesus, the protagonist.

Peter does not ask Jesus directly who the betrayer is, but motions for the beloved disciple to do so. The beloved disciple is narrated as the ideal follower, and Peter does not have the privilege of knowing the identity of the betrayer directly (cf vv 23-26).

The reader is really moved by sympathy or antipathy towards the narrated characters. The account of Judas awakens antipathy but that of Peter introspection. The two represent in these narratives the extremities of discipleship. The narrator is definitely not impartial; he discourages his readers from associating themselves with Judas or with the uncertain Peter; it is better to identify with disciples who have knowledge, although the disciples are not narrated as understanding Jesus' destination.

It is vitally important for the reader to get to the 'from above' wavelength, in order to recognise Jesus as the one coming from the Father, and going back to the Father, with all things in his power (v 3).

### 2.3 In a socio-historical context

In narrative exegesis it is very important not to reject the possible *socio-historical* situation within which a text communicates. That text functions in a specific extratextual world. The text of John 13:1-38 tries to convey meaning in a definite context. The perspective from which the meaning is handed over can be called the ideology of the text (cf Uspenski 1973; Lanser 1981; Van Aarde 1988).

It is therefore important that extratextual factors such as the socio-historical context of the first historical readers of John 13 should be taken into consideration, in so far as they are manifested in the text. I read John 13 within the Judaic-

Hellenistic context of a possible selected group of readers. With this in mind one cannot escape the ideological framework of the principle of transparency. This means that the whole story of John is to be read from the retrospective point of view of the resurrection of the protagonist Jesus. The hermeneutical framework from which the ideological reading of John's story communicates is the retrospective meaning of the resurrection.

According to Schmithals (1985:357f; 1987:370f; cf Van Aarde 1988:245), many Jewish and non-Jewish groups sheltered under the roof of the synagogue to enjoy the legal protection and state privileges of Rome. Hellenistic Jewish Johannine Christians could have been part of such a heterogeneous group within Judaism. Through the Pharisaic reorganisation of society after AD 70 the Torah was instituted as the pivot of religious life. The farewell discourses, especially John 13, seem to take up position against such a Tora-centered Christianity by focusing on a Jesus-centred discipleship, with emphasis on the 'new command' (Jn 13:34), not for the sake of the command itself but as being distinctive of true discipleship. Backsliding into the arms of the legal protection and privileges of the synagogue is therefore symbolised by Judas and Peter's narrated roles. On the other hand, devoted Johannine discipleship can only be build upon a real understanding of the identity of Jesus.

The narrated role of Peter as a leader who did not understand (cf vv 6-11; 36-38) can be symbolically understood with reference to the community leaders. As leader of the disciples Peter should have known better, as did the disciples, the real identity and forthcoming destination of Jesus. In the process of reading, the reader is convinced to associate with Jesus because Jesus has knowledge and has all things under his power.

#### 2.4 By using rhetorical criticism

Viewed from another angle, John 13 could be interpreted by using rhetorical criticism. According to Kennedy (1984:19; cf Wuellner 1987:458f) we find three types of rhetoric: judicial, deliberative and epideictic, which are applicable to all discourse. He says the rhetoric 'is judicial when the author is seeking to persuade the audience to make a judgment about events occurring in the past'. It is deliberative 'when he seeks to persuade them to take some action in the future'. Lastly, it is epideictic when he wants to persuade his readers to affirm some point of view in the present, 'as when he denounces some person or some quality' (Krnrfy 1984:19). The Sermon on the Mount is an example of deliberative rhetoric; some speeches in Acts and 2 Corinthians are judicial. The Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55) and the farewell speeches (Jn 13-17) are epideictic.



The question is, how is John 13 to be perceived as an epideictic rhetorical narrative? First of all, the audience is restricted to the disciples, a cohesive group with a common interest and narratologically bound together by the meal and the washing of the feet. Another binding factor is the departure of Judas Iscariot. It serves as a purifying narratological device.

Jesus is rhetorically narrated with a problem: the distress of his disciples and their ignorance of his mission and imminent destiny. And the challenge to the narrator is to present this problem with all its pathos and glory (cf Kennedy 1984:78).

The first verse of chapter 13 can be described as a narratological eye-catcher. It awakens the reader with an agenda of the rhetorical topics (cf Kennedy 1984:79) to follow:

- (a) Jesus knew
- (b) that the time had come for him
- (c) to leave this world and go to the Father.
- (d) Having loved his own
- (e) he loved them to the last.

In summary, we have: (a) Jesus and his *relation to the Father*; (b) his *departure*; (c) the relation to the *world*; (d) his *love* and in (e), his relation to the *disciples*. The narrator uses (a) as the point of departure to build the rest on, especially to normalise (e). In verse 3, where the reality of Jesus' knowledge is mentioned, after the disturbing pause in which Judas' role is described, as well as his impending departure, (a) and (b) are combined. In spite of Judas' commission (v 2), mentioned at this point in the narrative to build up tension, the narrator brings the reader back to reality by stressing Jesus' knowledge and his departure (v 3). And, in the very next section (vv 4-17), the narrator elaborates on Jesus' relationship with his disciples.

The prominent rhetorical repetition of the idea of 'now, but later' serves as a narratological sign to emphasise the fulfilment of Jesus' knowledge. In verse 7 he says: 'You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand'. And in verse 19 the same idea is repeated to keep the readers' anxious expectations alive: 'I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He'. Even in verses 33 and 38 the same idea is insinuated. The obvious speech acts are meaningful (cf Patte 1988:92f; Buss 1988:125ff). These signs (Aristotle) call for confirmation to prove the original claims and uphold the credibility of the protagonist Jesus.

In verses 14-15 we have a significant example of deductive proof in rhetoric, called enthymeme. This means that a premise is enunciated, acceptable to an audience, from which a deductive conclusion is drawn. Jesus' example (ὑπόδειγμα) of washing the disciples' feet is to be followed figuratively. And through the maxim in verse 16, '...no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him', the rhetoric enthymeme is drawn from the literal washing of feet to the spiritual sphere of understanding.

It is remarkable that we find in verses 31-35 a repetition of the topics mentioned in the agenda in 13:1:

- (a) Jesus' relationship with the Father - mutual glorification of the Father and Son (vv 31-32)
- (b) Jesus' departure (v 33)
- (c) from the world (Jews) (v 33).
- (d) his love - a new command (v 34)
- (e) his relationship with the disciples - to love one another will visually prove the relationship (v 35).

This repetition, proved by rhetorical and narratological analysis, emphasises the seam at verse 30 in the narrative and the introduction of verses 31-35 to the farewell speeches.

Although it is not the purpose of this presentation to discuss chapter 14 in detail it is obvious that even further in the first farewell speech the above-mentioned topics are repeated in the narration of Peter's question in verse 36: 'Lord, where are you going?' (Jesus' departure); Thomas' statement in 14:5: 'Lord, we don't know where you are going?' (Jesus' departure); Philip's request in 14:8: 'Lord, show us the Father...' (Jesus' relationship with the Father) and the other Judas' question in 14:22: 'Lord, when do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?' (Jesus' relationship with the disciples and the world).

We can proceed to trace this line right through to chapter 17 in which the relationship between Jesus and the Father dominates. His relationship with the world and with his disciples, as well as his love for them, are prominent. It is striking that chapter 17 ends with the introductory topic of 13:1, when Jesus is reported as saying: 'I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known...' (17:26).

### 3. COMMUNICATIVE MEANING OF JOHN 13:1-38

In the second part of the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is revealed in a full awareness of his own identity, destination and mission, his glory to the disciples. In the broader context of chapter 13-21, the washing of the feet should not only be seen as an example of humility, but also as a visual, symbolic, prophetic deed of revelation, used by the narrator to emphasise Jesus' own knowledge of his destination and mission to convince his disciples of his love.

In the washing of the feet Jesus is portrayed as a servant, symbolically characterising his impending suffering and death as a work of service (Schneiders 1981:82).

Many different interesting interpretations of the washing of the feet have seen the light so far. They are summarised by Richter (1967:17-38) and Segovia (1982:31-51). Dunn, for example, sees the washing as an act of persuasion: 'Jesus in washing his disciples' feet is acting out what his death will accomplish for his disciples' (1970:250).

Weiss (1979:320) links the washing with martyrdom and says: '...that the Johannine community performed the act as preparation for martyrdom' (cf Culpepper 1983:118).

According to Kysar (1986:215) the narrative portrait of the washing of the feet and the prediction of betrayal underscores the tragic irony of divine love against evil will. This paradox of divine love (v 34) and human denial (vv 36-38) is again emphasised in the dialogue with Peter (vv 36-38).

Another interesting question concerns the narratological function of Peter's rejection of the reality symbolised. Why does he reject Jesus' washing so vehemently (vv 6-8)? Jesus is reflected as performing a duty not because of some or other right on Peter's behalf, neither as a deed of mercy (cf verse 7) but as a symbol of a gift of himself (cf 10:17-18). This symbolic deed or even *σπμείον* is stripped of any conventional liability. Jesus' declaration in verse 16 is ironical, emphasising the difference in the new order. Jesus overcomes the inequality between himself and his chosen friends (cf 15:13). Peter's resistance is narrated in such a way that the deeper rejection of Jesus' death is at hand. When Jesus convinces Peter to share in the washing, Peter accepts it with overwhelming enthusiasm. In this small scene the whole issue of Jesus' knowledge, the disciples' ignorance, and the deeper meaning of acceptance of God's salvific intention are staged. The natural superiorities and inferiorities are transcended by this totally new 'friendship' (cf 15:13).

The reader is challenged to look for deeper significance in the symbolic action narrated in the narrative text (cf Via 1967:105ff; Tolbert 1979:89f). The description of the washing of the feet is a symbolic expression of the salvific work of Jesus.

From an 'objective' reading of this text in its socio-historical context, the meaning could be extracted that Jesus performed an act of service, symbolising his coming humiliation (cf Schneiders 1981:90). Further, the disciples should do the same by humbling themselves towards each other. At a deeper level, Peter did not reject Jesus because Jesus' deed was self-abasing, but because he could not deal with the reversal of the ordinary social order, with the superior serving the inferior. The reversal of the accepted order was therefore narrated as the locus of the meaning of the text (cf Schneiders 1981:90). In that sense, although not even slaves could be required to wash one's feet (cf Brown 1970:564), the contrast lies in Jesus and Peter's understanding of the symbol. Jesus demonstrates service as an expression of love (v 1) and Peter's framework takes service as an expression of domination. According to Peter's conception, Jesus' deed was inappropriate to a scandalous degree but in the context of the new 'friendship' (15:13) it was an act of love. This applies to all structures of human relationships, regardless of time and place. All of us are part of certain accepted structures. Therefore, our task is not so much to demonstrate humility but to participate in Jesus' work of transforming structures of domination.

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