Chapter 1

The Rise, Demise, and Afterlives of the Johannine Community

Christopher W. Skinner

Few scholarly constructs have proven as influential or as durable as the Johannine community. A product of the era in New Testament studies dominated by redaction criticism,[1] the Johannine community construct as articulated first by J. Louis Martyn[2] and later by Raymond E. Brown[3] emerged with an explanatory power that proved persuasive to many scholars deliberating on the provenance and emergence of the Johannine literature for the next fifty years. However, recent years have seen this once dominant paradigm questioned by many of those working with the Gospel and Letters of John.[4] An examination of the current state of the question shows that there is little consensus among scholars. Some reject outright the notion of a Johannine community. Others continue to employ the construct while jettisoning some of the particular details associated with its articulation by Martyn, Brown, and others. The idea of a Johannine community—either as something upon which to build or as something to which scholars respond and abandon altogether—does not appear to be going anywhere anytime soon. In short: the Johannine community remains an essential topic of conversation for those engaged in Johannine studies.[5]

The conception and production of this book has been motivated by the desire to explore the current state of the question while shining a light on new and constructive proposals for understanding the emergence of the Johannine literature. Some of the chapters that follow proceed under the assumption that a Johannine community ostensibly existed in some form, even if not in a one-to-one correspondence with the reconstructions that dominated Johannine studies for the latter part of the twentieth century. Other chapters take as their starting point a complete rejection of the idea that the Johannine writings

arose from within a community context. In this way, our book represents a robust portrait of the current state of the question among scholars working in various parts of the English-speaking world, including Australia (Porter, Seglenieks), Canada (Reinhartz), the United Kingdom (Byers, Corsar, Lamb), and the United States (Anderson, Hunt, Méndez, Myers).

Against that backdrop, this chapter will briefly survey (1) the rise of the Johannine community hypothesis and its reception within scholarship, (2) its demise among some scholars, and (3) the various positions some Johannine scholars presently take on the question, most notably those authors represented in the remainder of this book. The brief sketch that follows is representative rather than comprehensive as the goal of this chapter is to prepare the reader to interact meaningfully with the essays that follow. This means that, for pragmatic purposes, my treatment of the rise and demise of the Johannine community may appear tidier than we know such complex discussions to be. Below I attempt to plot major developments rather than trace the history of the discussion comprehensively. Numerous treatments of the reception of the Johannine community among scholars have appeared in recent years. For those readers interested in a more complete treatment of the question, I recommend accessing one of those.[6]

THE RISE OF THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY MODEL

In order to recount the emergence of the community model in Johannine studies, it will prove helpful to look back briefly at the emergence of that model in gospel studies as a whole. As far back as the early twentieth century, gospel scholarship had operated under the nearly unquestioned assumption that the gospels were written by/for individual communities, churches, or social networks of churches. This assumption—which emerged during the eras dominated by form criticism and redaction criticism—reigned as one of the assured results of modern gospel scholarship until the late twentieth century. One foundational assumption for both form and redaction critics was that the gospels reflected a fractured portrait in which the reader could see both the original historical context of Jesus in the late twenties CE, as well as elements of the historical situation(s) of those responsible for producing the gospels in the seventies to nineties CE. These two settings were known as the *Sitz im Leben Jesu* and the *Sitz im Leben der Kirche*, respectively. In other words, the gospels were vehicles for the life of Jesus set in the context of some major concerns of early Christian communities. For these critics, the gospels were, at least partially, windows into the communities that produced them. It follows, then, that at least some of the dialogue in the gospels consisted of material intentionally put into the mouth of Jesus and his interlocuters and framed

to reflect concerns of the communities to which those gospels were written. The end product was a text that interpreters could read at two levels. All of this methodological framework ultimately provided J. Louis Martyn with the raw materials for his brilliant "two-story reading" of the Fourth Gospel. His was a reconstruction of a first-century CE Jewish community in crisis over internecine debates about Jesus which led one group of Jews to expel another group of Jesus-believing-Jews from the local synagogue.

Another major assumption was foundational for Martyn's proposal. He questioned the at-the-time dominant paradigm that the Fourth Gospel should be understood primarily against Hellenistic and/or Gnostic backgrounds.[7] Instead, Martyn set his proposal against a Jewish background with emphasis upon a proposed intra-Jewish conflict. He further regarded the literary tension between Jesus and "the Jews" (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι)[8] throughout the Fourth Gospel as one of the key elements to unlocking the *Sitz im Leben* of the author(s).

With these assumptions in place, Martyn's argument proceeded along the following lines: The emergence of the Fourth Gospel can be accounted for by tracing the backstory of the conflict between "the Jews" (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) and Jesus across the gospel. Since this conflict is likely not rooted in the experience of the historical Jesus, but rather the "community" to which John is writing, we must search for the origins of this conflict in the author's *Sitz im Leben*. A key to this interpretive agenda is found in the gospel's three uses of the term ἀποσυνάγωγος ("out of the synagogue"; 9:22; 12:42; 16:2)—a term otherwise unattested in Hellenistic Greek prior to its appearance in the Fourth Gospel. John envisions a scenario in which some "Jews" (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) are expelling other Jesus-believing Jews (viz., "Christians") from the synagogue. There is no evidence for exclusion on a wide scale taking place during the lifetime of Jesus.[9] Here, Martyn introduces a point critical to his overall thesis (and one which will later be a site of controversy)—the so-called *Birkat Ha-Minim*, or "curse against the heretics."

The 1898 publication of "Genizah Specimens" by Solomon Schechter contained a version of the "Eighteen Benedictions," a daily programmatic prayer ritual for pious Jews.[10] The Genizah text of the Twelfth Benediction, the *Birkat Ha-Minim*, contained a curse upon the heretical "Nazarenes," which scholars of early Christianity took to be a euphemism for Christians. Martyn overlooked that fact that this extant version of the curse dated to a period between the ninth and tenth centuries CE and argued that late-first-century rabbis introduced this liturgical curse against Christians into their prayer cycle. This, he argues, provides the background for passages in the Fourth Gospel about Christians being excluded from and/or cursed within synagogues. These Jesus-believing Jews are thus the ἀποσυνάγωγοι, those who have been cast out (or to use Martyn's phrase, "smoked out") from

synagogue fellowship. For Martyn, the three Johannine ἀποσυνάγωγος passages (9:22; 12:42; 16:2) reflect the Fourth Evangelist's historical setting near the end of the first century CE. This was a period after the first Jewish revolt (66–74 CE) when the proto-rabbis at Jamnia declared that Jewish followers of Jesus were not to be considered part of Israel's religious community. Thus, the conflict with "the Jews" (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) resulting in synagogue expulsion that is pictured in the Fourth Gospel was taking place *during the author's time* and *not during the historical ministry of Jesus* in the late twenties CE.

Against the backdrop of the methodological assumptions of his time, Martyn's thesis was a revelation for Johannine scholars. In the early days after its publication, the monograph was received enthusiastically. In his review of the first edition, Raymond E. Brown writes that "Martyn makes the most thoroughgoing synthesis of these ideas yet achieved," and further that he (Brown) stands "in substantial agreement with the essential points of this ably-argued presentation."[11] In his 1968 *JBL* review, T. A. Burkill refers to the monograph as "an unusually important work which will surely affect the course of scholarly research."[12] In a review of the second edition, which appeared in 1979, R. Alan Culpepper refers to the book as the "the most important monograph of the 1960s for Johannine studies as measured by its influence on Johannine scholarship in the 1970s."[13] These reviews communicate succinctly what fifty years of subsequent research would demonstrate, namely that Martyn's thesis represented a sea change in Johannine scholarship and it was nearly impossible to pursue a course of study on the Fourth Gospel without at least referencing his foundational work.

Other important developments on the way to cementing the Johannine community as a scholarly dogma include Wayne Meeks's 1972 article, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism."[14] Meeks also questioned the dominant Bultmannian position that the Fourth Gospel arose from within a Gnostic milieu and, like Martyn, situated the Johannine literature in the context of Jewish wisdom. Motivated by the desire to understand John's Christology in light of the gospel's dualisms, particularly the ascent/descent motif, Meeks explores the conflicts narrated in the gospel and epistles and concludes: "Thus we have in the Johannine literature a thoroughly dualistic picture: a small group of believers isolated over against 'the world' that belongs intrinsically to 'the things below,' i.e., to darkness and the devil."[15] In other words, the gospel conflict is not simply between one group of Jewish Christians and another group of Jews, but rather the forces of good "from above" and evil "from below." If Martyn's work laid the foundation for our understanding of a community in crisis, Meeks's article furthered this by emphasizing the parochial, sectarian nature of the Johannine community.

In 1979, Raymond E. Brown—a longtime colleague of Martyn at Union Theological Seminary in New York—published *The Community of the*

Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times.[16] Brown had already articulated portions of his understanding of the Johannine situation in other publications, most notably his two-volume commentary in the Anchor Bible series.[17] In *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, Brown provides considerably more substance to his previous theories by tracing a community situation that unfolds in four phases.

Following Martyn, Brown accepts as a foundation, the idea that the community situation begins with a controversy between Jesus-believing Jews and other Jewish members of the local synagogue. However, Brown differed a bit from Martyn in the details of his proposal. The original group of Christ-confessing Jews also consisted of followers of John the Baptist, and these were later joined by a second group, consisting of some Samaritans. For Brown, the introduction of this second group can help explain Jesus's brief Samaritan ministry in John 4. Further, in the early chapters of the gospel we witness a distinct attempt to establish the superiority of Jesus vis-à-vis both John the Baptist (cf. 1:6–8; 19–28; 29, 34, 36; 3:30–35) and Moses (cf. 1:17–18). Brown argues that the Jesus–Baptist tension can be traced to the original group while the Jesus–Moses tension is traceable to the second, in which Samaritans were present. Understanding Jesus in terms of traditional Davidic messiahship would have been essentially correct but insufficient. Jesus was more than just a Davidic messiah, a recognition which led to the introduction of a higher Christology embraced by the Christ-confessing Jews in the synagogue. This high Christology would have led some synagogue Jews to feel that their traditional monotheistic understanding was being threatened, and it was this perceived threat that led to the synagogue expulsions. Brown's tightly structured hypothetical scenario represented his understanding of phase one in the Johannine community's development and evolution, which took place between the fifties and eighties CE.

Phase two of the community situation (ca. 90 CE) is the period during which the Fourth Gospel was composed and presupposes the community situation envisaged in phase one of Brown's reconstruction. Brown argues that the Beloved Disciple was an actual historical figure with a place of prominence in the community. His role spans the period between the historical ministry of Jesus and the second phase of the community. Phase three (ca. 100 CE) is the period during which the three Johannine Epistles were composed, and this phase includes another controversy between Johannine Christians and a group Brown labels, "the secessionists" (cf. e.g., 1 John 2:15–29). The epistles are all written by the same individual, but that person is not the Beloved Disciple. The fourth and most speculative phase is fraught with questions of ecclesiastical authority. While those in the Johannine community could appeal to things they believed to carry real authority, such as

the role of the Spirit/Paraclete in their midst and their knowledge of the new confession (e.g., 1 John 2:8–11), there was not an authority structure in place to sustain their community. Eventually, Brown speculates, the secessionists outnumber the "orthodox" members of the community (cf. 1 John 4:5) and commandeer the gospel for their own theological ends, while the "orthodox" move toward (or are absorbed by) later heterodox movements such as Gnosticism, Docetism, and Montanism.

Brown's proposal, with its four hypothetical phases, was both more speculative and arguably more tendentious than the theory originally offered by Martyn, something Brown appears to acknowledge.[18] Nevertheless, Brown's multi-phase model proved to be paradigmatic for future scholars working on the emergence of the Johannine literature.[19] Throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, one can detect a distinct emphasis on stages of gospel development and phases of community evolution in scholarship on the Johannine literature.

Given more space, we could detail further the reception of the Johannine community theory in major scholarly works throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.[20] There is little doubt that the contributions of Martyn, Meeks, Brown, and eventually others cemented the scholarly orthodoxy of a Johannine community. This was a sectarian group consisting of Jewish-Christians at odds with other "Jews" (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) over a loyalty to Jesus which served as the impetus for their isolation and expulsion from the synagogue. The community also evolved in various stages over time as a result of internal conflict and theological debates. This basic understanding of the Johannine community was a *default assumption* for those working with the Gospel and Letters of John in the last three decades of the twentieth century. With few detractors, the Johannine community construct held firmly among scholars until the 1990s.

THE DEMISE OF THE COMMUNITY MODEL

At least three scholarly trends that were taking place in the 1990s ultimately contributed to the dissolution of the consensus view that there was a Johannine community. Two of these trends operated at the broader level of gospel scholarship, while the third was more directly focused on the Johannine Literature.

First, the literary turn in New Testament studies that began in the early 1980s with the emergence of narrative criticism, had become a full-blown enterprise among gospel scholars in the 1990s.[21] An overarching emphasis on the coherence and autonomy of each gospel text led scholars to produce works that more carefully considered how a text moved from start to finish and what its overarching message(s) might be. One consequence of employing literary

methods was that scholars were not as concerned with speculating about the genesis of the gospels, but were rather more focused on tracing their internal narrative rhetoric. This methodological shift did not have the net effect of casting doubt on the idea of gospel communities as much as it often failed simply to take such a construct into consideration.

For a period in the 1980s and into the 1990s, narrative criticism and its concomitant assumptions struggled to arrive at an uneasy truce with historical criticism. In his 1992 article, "Narrative Criticism, Historical Criticism, and the Gospel of John," Martinus deBoer describes the narrative critic's assumption that a given work possesses internal unity, then wonders, "Can any avowedly *critical* method, however, really presuppose coherence, whether thematic or literary, as an unquestionable principle?"[22] While numerous scholars have ably demonstrated that it is possible to deal responsibly with historical and literary questions at the same time, some historical critics continue to express concerns over the use of literary methods in gospel research.[23] For many narrative critics, historical and literary concerns simply go hand in hand.[24] It cannot be denied, however, that some streams of narrative criticism throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s chose to jettison concerns about the origins of the New Testament narratives in favor of a sole emphasis on the "world of the text."[25] At the very least, the literary turn in New Testament studies caused some to turn away from highly speculative proposals about the contexts in which our early Christian literature emerged.

A second important trend was inaugurated in 1998 with the publication of Richard Bauckham's influential book, *Gospels for All Christians.* This work represented the first substantial challenge to the "gospel communities" hypothesis.[26] As discussed above, a key observation arising from this strain of scholarship is that those who engaged in reconstructing gospel communities tended to be skeptical about the historical quality of the material narrated in the gospels while being more optimistic about arguments regarding the community settings in which the gospels emerged. Thus, a consequence of this approach was to reject the historicity of much of the content of the gospels, while creating and defending—often with conviction—a historical reconstruction of the community's evolution, religious convictions, and inner conflicts. A further byproduct of this approach was the habit of reading the gospels not as narratives about Jesus, but rather as narratives about reconstructed hypothetical communities standing behind the texts themselves.

Critiquing this approach, Bauckham began with the assertion that all four gospels were intended for Christian audiences, as opposed to being written for the purpose of evangelizing non-Christian audiences. He goes on to argue that: (1) unlike the letters of Paul which are clearly addressed to individual communities, the gospels are examples of Greco-Roman biographies, and so presumed a much wider readership, (2) the early Christian movement is not

just a group of isolated and independent churches but a cohesive network of churches that kept in fairly close contact with one another, (3) the earliest churches saw themselves as part of a worldwide movement, and (4) even if they existed, the gospel communities ultimately have no real hermeneutical bearing on our interpretation of the gospels. For many, Bauckham's criticism of this trend was valid and demonstrated a need for a nuanced corrective. Responses to Bauckham's thesis were mixed but equally effusive in both directions, and the ripple effects of his argument are still felt today.[27] It is safe to say that, at least for some scholars, Bauckham's thesis led to a lack of confidence in the ability to reconstruct hypothetical communities behind the gospel texts.[28] Thus, serious questions arose among some scholars regarding the validity of the community construct across gospel research.[29]

A third trend that led to the demise of the Johannine community consensus was directly related to an analysis of flaws in the theories set forth by Martyn and Brown. In particular, some scholars questioned whether the *Birkat Ha-Minim* represented a first century development. Since the Genizah text of the Eighteen Benedictions that served as the basis for Martyn's proposal dated to a period between the ninth and tenth centuries CE, scholars began to express considerable doubt as to whether or not the curse could reasonably be traced back to a first century CE tradition.[30] Questions were also raised concerning the Hebrew term נוצרים/נצרים ("Nazarenes") and whether or not it should be understood as a reference to Christians.[31] To cast doubt on these two critical portions of Martyn's original thesis is to do serious damage to the rest of his argument.[32]

Others took aim at the legitimacy of the two-level reading of the Fourth Gospel, especially its emphasis on the ἀποσυνάγωγος passages,[33] a strategy that was in some cases influenced by the work of Bauckham on the larger gospel tradition. One clear example of applying Bauckham's skepticism to the Fourth Gospel in light of other questions about the theses of Martyn/Brown is Edward Klink's monograph, *The Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of* John (2007).[34] Klink, a student of Bauckham, takes a thoroughgoing approach to the question and concludes that the Fourth Gospel was intended for a general audience. Klink is one among an ever-growing number of exegetes to reject the legitimacy of the Johannine community construct.[35]

All three developments traced above did considerable damage to the prior consensus of a Johannine community and helped usher in new ways of thinking about the genesis of the Johannine literature. As it currently stands, scholars are divided over the question and a new consensus among scholars appears unlikely in the near future. In many cases, decisions about whether the Johannine community existed are drawn clearly along methodological lines. In other cases, it seems clear that the prior theological commitments

of a given scholar determine, to a large degree, the trajectories of their conclusions. As with our discussion above, much more could be written about the rise of skepticism over the legitimacy of the community construct as a whole, and the demise of the Johannine community consensus in particular. However, this brief outline of major works and assumptions is sufficient to bring us to the present day and the contributions of the present volume.

THE AFTERLIVES OF THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY (OR THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY IN CONTEMPORARY DEBATE)

The foregoing summary and analysis is meant to serve as a foundation for engaging with the various chapters in this volume. The remainder of this book is divided into two unequal sections. The first section consists of seven constructive chapters that provide various approaches to the question of the Johannine community. The first five of these seven chapters all proceed under the assumption that the idea of a Johannine community should be retained or that a Johannine community can be recovered in some form, albeit with different foci than have traditionally been offered in various reconstructions of the community situation.

The first in this grouping of five is Chris Seglenieks's chapter, "Reading the Johannine Community in the Letters: A Method." He argues that, while there are good reasons to see the Fourth Gospel as having a wide intended audience, such a position does not preclude knowledge of the setting in which the Gospel was written. Rather, this view excludes the social and economic realities of ancient writing. Against that backdrop, he begins by establishing the methodological validity of reconstructing various features of a supposed community context based primarily upon the Johannine Letters. Genre conventions dictate that those letters are forms of communication aimed at *particular locations and contexts*. This observation is the basis for his exploration of various features of the Johannine context which are evident in the letters, particularly the contested nature of the community, along with the role of Christology and ethics as boundary markers. He concludes with an exploration of how reading the Gospel within such a context might shape our interpretation.

The next three chapters in this grouping of five introduce various theoretical models, including social, sociological, cognitive, and linguistic factors to articulate an understanding of the Johannine community.

First, building upon his previous work on using sociolinguistics to investigate the Johannine community,[36] David Lamb's chapter, "The Language of John: Idiolect, Sociolect, Antilanguage, and Textual Community," (1) offers

a clarification of his model of "register" and its relation to "context of situation"; (2) provides a defense of the application of contemporary linguistic theory, particularly register theory; (3) reaffirms his stance that "antilanguage" is an inappropriate description for the language of the Gospel; and (4) considers the relevance of Brian Stock's concept of "textual community" for the community debate.[37] He concludes that we must read the Johannine writings primarily as documents intended to communicate an interpersonal message and not treat them simply as sites for historical excavation. Additionally, an analysis of the language of the Gospel and Letters suggests one, distinctive voice behind the Gospel, but an "embryonic community" behind the Epistles, whose associates wish to promote the Gospel's status as "scripture," while aware that the true Gospel is more than a written text.

Second, and also building upon his previous work,[38] Christopher A. Porter's chapter, "Disentangling 'Mom's Spaghetti': A Socio-Cognitive Approach to the Complexity of the Johannine Community," shines a light on some of the sociological assumptions underlying previous work on the question of the Johannine community. He pursues this avenue of inquiry as a way of arriving at some clarity about the possibility of retaining the community model going forward. Porter notes that the notional Johannine community has been informed and constructed by a plethora of implicit and explicit sociological models along with the exercise of a given exegete's sociological imagination. He seeks to disentangle some of the foundations, both named and unnamed, upon which the Johannine community edifice is built, examining them through the lens of Social Identity Theory to gain some methodological objectivity. Ultimately, he concludes that while the Fourth Gospel pushes toward a possible future social identity for the audience—along with an implicit post-hoc community formation—the more likely location for a putative Johannine community is to be found with the Johannine Epistles.

The third theoretically oriented chapter is Laura Hunt's "Triangulating a Johannine Community from John 18:28–19:22." Hunt seeks to alleviate the problem of inferring a community almost entirely from a text. She suggests setting boundaries on interpretation by using three theoretical tools, thereby triangulating a proposed audience: Semiotics, Probability, and Social Identity Theory. After some preliminary introductions to these theories, she applies them to John 18:28–19:22 by first hypothesizing a distinct setting for the gospel (Ephesus at the turn of the second century CE) and then conducting a semiotic analysis of νόμος within Roman and Jewish encyclopedias. Finally, a Social Identity Theory analysis of the passage concludes that it presents Jesus as an exemplar for both identities. However, she argues, triangulation also reveals shortcomings in drawing further unwarranted conclusions. The probability analysis using Bayes' Theorem requires further comparisons with other analyses starting from different hypothesized settings. She notes further

that Umberto Eco's *Semiotics* helped reveal a missing element in Social Identity Theory studies of biblical texts: they uncovered a rhetorical movement, but not the starting point of the auditors. The Social Identity Theory study, in turn, takes a determined direction because of the specific key words chosen. Hunt closes by suggesting that the insights arising from her study represent one contribution that needs to remain in conversation with other scholarly triangulations.

The last chapter in this grouping of five is Andrew Byers's "The Johannine Community and the Johannine Community Vision: Historical Reflection, Rhetorical Construction, and Narrative Ecclesiology." Here Byers explores the imaginative work of "Johannine world-building," a term he applies both to the scholarly exercise of reconstructing John's context as well as to John's rhetorical work of shaping his audience with a future-oriented vision of community. Byers identifies two key challenges to historical reconstruction (John's fusions of temporal horizons and his integration of theology with history), then discusses three points of access to John's historical context using the language of "windows," "mirrors," and "vistas." A "window to the past" arises from the recollection of Jesus's historical ministry, while "mirrors of the present" provide a reflection of the evangelist's present. Byers uses "narrative ecclesiology" to commend more urgent attention to "vistas to the future" in which John casts a vision as an act of prescription or construction that relates to the historical context, yet in a less direct way because of its aspirational nature.

The final two chapters in this section start from the assumption that the Johannine community construct should be abandoned. In his chapter, "Renewing Johannine Historical Criticism: A Proposal," Hugo Méndez insists that any attempt to reinvigorate the historical criticism of John must begin by thinking outside three "undertheorized" and "unproductive" models: (1) the Johannine community hypothesis; (2) the idea of social links between the supposed Johannine community and Gnostic communities; and (3) the concept of a Johannine "sociolect." Against that backdrop, he proposes an alternative way of understanding the same data these models are meant to explore, suggesting that the Gospel and Epistles of John likely represent a lineage of falsely authored works, written by authors in different social matrices, whose works influenced readers across the spectrum of second-century Christianity.[39]

In that same vein, Elizabeth Corsar's chapter, "The Legacy of the Beloved Disciple: The Johannine Letters as Epistolary Fiction," follows a recently growing trend to consider our biblical materials in the context of ancient literary practice, and offers an alternative proposal regarding the production of the Johannine Letters that does not rely on a Johannine community hypothesis. To

this end, she suggests that 1–3 John are epistolary fictions—pseudo-historical letters that are composed in the name of the Beloved Disciple as a means of continuing the legacy of this legendary figure. Her argument challenges the hypothesis of the Johannine community by reading the Johannine Gospel and Epistles in light of ancient literary practice.[40] After outlining the theory of imitation—the practice of borrowing and reworking predecessor texts and composing a new text—she presents examples from 1–3 John where the author/s have consciously imitated the Fourth Gospel and composed new pieces of writing. She concludes by providing illustrative examples of ancient texts where authors imitate narrative material and compose their new piece of writing in the epistolary genre.

The final section of the book consists of detailed responses from three important senior scholars—Paul Anderson,[41] Alicia Myers,[42] and Adele Reinhartz[43]—each of whom has articulated their own take on the Johannine community in the context of related historical, theological, and ethical discussions of the Johannine literature. All three authors respond to the seven previous chapters in this volume from their own perspective on the Johannine community. Since Anderson, Myers, and Reinhartz all have differing methodological approaches to the question of a Johannine community, readers are treated to a substantive discussion which offers a wealth of insights to help advance the conversation. It is our hope that this book will enter into the current space in which the Johannine community remains an important discussion, and inspire ongoing constructive work on the provenance and emergence of the Johannine literature.

NOTES

1. Redaction criticism was more immediately concerned with the Synoptic tradition. Some in Johannine studies working with the same assumptions as redaction criticism have referred to their methodological approach as "composition criticism."

2. Cf. J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1968). The second edition of this work appeared in 1979 and the third in 2004.

3. Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist, 1979).

4. For our purposes in this book, we define the Johannine writings as the Gospel and Letters traditionally attributed to John. Though there has been a move among some scholars in recent years to consider Revelation as part of the Johannine literature (cf. e.g., Rodney Reeves, *Spirituality According to John: Abiding in Christ in the Johannine Writings* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021]), we will not include it here.

5. An ATLA Serials search conducted on January 9, 2024, using the terms "Johannine" and "community" immediately returned 273 results consisting of monographs, peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and book reviews, spanning the period from 1973 to 2023. More and potentially more variegated results are likely to have appeared with the introduction of more and/or different search terms.

6. See especially Wally V. Cirafesi, "The 'Johannine Community' in (More) Current Research: A Critical Appraisal of Recent Methods and Models," *Neot* 48.2 (2014): 341–64; idem. "The Johannine Community Hypothesis (1968–Present): Past and Present Approaches and a New Way Forward," *CBR* 12.2 (2014): 173–93. Other helpful treatments can be found in Edward W. Klink III, "The Gospel Community Debate: State of the Question," *CBR* 3.1 (2004): 60–85; Robert Kysar, "The Whence and Whither of the Johannine Community," in *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown, S.S.*, ed. John R. Donahue, S.J. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2005), 65–81; and Martinus C. de Boer, "The Story of the Johannine Community and Its Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, ed. Judith M. Lieu and Martinus C. de Boer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 63–82.

7. Two major figures in Johannine studies working in the period before the appearance of Martyn's monograph were Rudolf Bultmann and C. H. Dodd. Bultmann's epoch-making commentary on John situated the Fourth Gospel against a Gnostic background (see Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. by George R. Beasley Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971], original German, 1941), while C. H. Dodd's two important volumes situated the Fourth Gospel within a Hellenistic milieu (see C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953], idem. *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963]). An early outlier in this period is Peder Borgen's important monograph, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, NovTSup 10 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965). Borgen represents a mediating position between an overly simplistic separation of the "Hellenistic" on one side and the "Jewish" on the other by situating the Gospel in the context of Hellenistic Judaism. By this period, scholars had slowly come to realize that Hellenism and Judaism were inextricably intertwined in the first century CE.

8. The question of how to define the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the Fourth Gospel is fraught with difficulty. For recent, helpful treatments of this question, see Adele Reinhartz, "The Jews of the Fourth Gospel," in *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, ed. Judith M. Lieu and Martinus C. DeBoer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 121–37; idem. "'Jews' and Jews in the Fourth Gospel," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel: Papers of the Leuven Colloquium, 2000*, Jewish and Christian Heritage Series 1, ed. Reimund Bieringer, Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, and Didier Pollefeyt (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 341–56; Steve Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512; Wally V. Cirafesi, *John within Judaism: Religion, Ethnicity, and the Shaping of Jesus-Oriented Jewishness in the Fourth Gos*pel, AJEC 112 (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

9. Jonathan Bernier (*Aposynagōgos and the Historical Jesus in John: Rethinking the Historicity of the Johannine Expulsion Passages*, BInS 122 [Leiden: Brill, 2013]) is unique among Johannine exegetes in arguing that the ἀποσυνάγωγος passages plausibly reflect a situation facing the followers of Jesus during his lifetime.

10. Solomon Schechter, "Genizah Specimens," *JQR* 10 (1898): 197–206.

11. Raymond E. Brown, review of J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* in *USQR* 23 (1968): 392–94.

12. T. Alec Burkill, review of J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* in *JBL* 87.4 (1968): 439–42.

13. R. Alan Culpepper, review of J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* in *RevExp* 76.4 (1979): 573–75.

14. Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72.

15. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," 68.

16. For the full bibliographic reference, see n. 3, above.

17. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII,* AB 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966); idem. *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, AB 29a (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

18. In the preface, Brown writes, "I must warn the reader that my reconstruction claims at most probability; and if sixty percent of my detective work is accepted, I shall be happy indeed" (Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 7).

19. The most thoroughgoing example of this approach in English is Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 3 vols., ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). Von Wahlde's three volumes (published in 2010 but written over the three previous decades) trace a community situation with multiple phases and three distinct versions of the gospel reflecting those phases. For von Wahlde's further reflections on the Johannine situation, see idem. *The Earliest Version of John's Gospel: Recovering the Gospel of Signs*, Good News Studies (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1989); idem. *The Johannine Commandments: 1 John and the Struggle for the Johannine Tradition*, Theological Inquiries (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1990); idem. *Gnosticism, Docetism, and the Judaisms of the First Century: The Search for the Wider Context of the Johannine Literature and Why It Matters*, LNTS 517 (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2015).

20. Among other works, see, in chronological order, Birger Olsson, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel: A Text Linguistic Analysis of John 2:1–11 and 4:1–42*, ConBNT 6 (Stockholm: Almqvist, 1974); R. Alan Culpepper, *The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine School Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press); Severino Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity according to John*, NovTSup 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1975); Oscar Cullmann, *The Johannine Circle: Its Place in Judaism, among the Disciples of Jesus and in Early Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1976); David Woll, *Johannine Christianity in Conflict: Authority, Rank, and Succession in the First Farewell Discourse*, SBLDS 60 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981); Peter F. Ellis, *The Genius of John: A Composition-Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*

(Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1984); Jerome Neyrey, *An Ideology of Revolt: John's Christology in Social-Science Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988). The most recent monograph employing this earlier approach is Kari Syreeni, *Becoming John: The Making of a Passion Gospel*, LNTS 590 (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2020).

21. Narrative criticism was introduced into New Testament studies via two important works that appeared in consecutive years in the early 1980s. First, David Rhoads, a New Testament scholar, and his colleague, Donald Michie, a scholar of English literature, published *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1982). This was the first work to apply principles of the so-called New Criticism within English literary studies in a systematic way to a New Testament text. The following year, R. Alan Culpepper published *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983). These two works inaugurated the broader enterprise of applying narrative and literary-oriented methods to the New Testament narratives. By the 1990s, narrative criticism was no longer in its nascent stages and was proving to be a formidable methodological competitor for historical criticism.

22. Martinus C. deBoer, "Narrative Criticism, Historical Criticism, and the Gospel of John," *JSNT* 47 (1992): 35–48 (here, 43), emphasis in original. On this tension, see the insights in Adele Reinhartz, "Building Skyscrapers on Toothpicks: The Literary-Critical Challenge to Historical Criticism," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, RBS 55, ed. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 55–76.

23. On this, see Urban C. von Wahlde, "Narrative Criticism of the Religious Authorities as a Group Character in the Gospel of John: Some Problems," *NTS* 63 (2017): 222–45. See also my response to von Wahlde: "Narrative Readings of the Religious Authorities in John: A Response to Urban C. von Wahlde," *CBQ* 82 (2020): 424–36.

24. See especially Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading John 1–4* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); idem. *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5–12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); idem. *Glory Not Dishonor: Reading John 13–21* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); and Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St. John*, BNTC (London: Continuum, 2006), among others.

25. Mark Allan Powell traces three iterations of narrative criticism that operated in New Testament scholarship over its first three decades: (1) author-oriented narrative criticism, (2) reader-oriented narrative criticism, and (3) text-oriented narrative criticism. Cf. Powell, "Narrative Criticism: The Emergence of a Prominent Reading Strategy," in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner, RBS 65 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 19–43.

26. Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). This book is an edited collection, but Bauckham's opening chapter, "For Whom Were the Gospels Written?" proved to be the most influential for contributing to the demise of the community model.

27. For critical engagement with Bauckham's thesis, see David C. Sim, "The Gospels for All Christians? A Response to Richard Bauckham," *JSNT* 24.2 (2001): 3–27; Philip F. Esler, "Community and Gospel in Early Christianity: A Response to Richard Bauckham's *Gospels for All Christians*," *SJT* 51 (1998): 235–48; and Margaret M. Mitchell, "Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that 'The Gospels Were Written for All Christians,'" *NTS* 51 (2005): 36–79. Edward W. Klink's edited volume, *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity*, LNTS 353 (London: T&T Clark, 2010) also contains several helpful responses to Bauckham's thesis.

28. Some of the community reconstructions of the mid-to-late twentieth century were too speculative, but there is little doubt that those responsible for writing the gospels were members of social networks. Those networks shaped and informed their understanding of Jesus, his ministry, and its significance for their immediate circumstances. Bauckham is correct that the gospels were widely disseminated early after their composition, but it does not naturally follow that therefore they were intended for "all Christians." It is possible for the gospels to have been written for and within a specific social network *and* for them to have been widely distributed to Christian communities. For an approach that takes these complementary claims as its starting point, see Craig Blomberg, "The Gospels for Specific Communities and All Christians," in Klink, ed., *The Audience of the Gospels*, 111–33.

29. Portions of this section were adapted from several paragraphs in chapter 1 of my forthcoming book, *The Gospel of Mark*, New Word Biblical Themes (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2025).

30. Cf. e.g., Uri Ehrlich and Ruth Langer, "The Earliest Texts of the *Birkat Haminim*," *HUCA* 76 (2005): 63–112; Edward W. Klink III, "Expulsion from the Synagogue? Rethinking a Johannine Anachronism," *TynBul* 59.1 (2008): 99–118.

31. On the use of the נצרים/נוצרים as a reference to Christians, see Reuven Kimelman, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, Vol. 2. Aspects of Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period, ed. E. P. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 232–44; and Martinus C. de Boer, "The Nazoreans: Living at the Boundary of Judaism and Christianity," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998) 239–62.

32. Other challenges to Martyn's theory include Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); and Stephen Motyer, "The Fourth Gospel and the Salvation of Israel: An Appeal for a New Start," in Bieringer, Pollefeyt, and Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, 84–87.

33. Cf. Tobias Hägerland, "John's Gospel: A Two-Level Drama?," *JSNT* 25 (2003): 309–22. Adele Reinhartz has devoted a great deal of time discussing the various elements of this supposed two-level drama. See Adele Reinhartz, *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel*, SBLMS 45 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1992); idem. "The Johannine Community and its Jewish

Neighbors: A Reappraisal," in *"What is John?" Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, SymS 7 (Atlanta: Scholars Press): 111–38; idem. "Forging a New Identity: Johannine Rhetoric and the Audience of the Fourth Gospel," in *Paul, John, and Apocalyptic Eschatology*: *Festschrift Martinus de Boer,* ed. Jan Krans, L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, Peter-Ben Smit and Arie W. Zwiep, NovTSup 149 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 123–34.

34. Edward W. Klink III, *The Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of John*, SNTMS 141 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

35. See, for instance, Bennema's curious claim that such a reading "defiles the Gospel's genre" (Cornelis Bennema, "The Historical Reliability of the Gospel of John," *Foundations* 67 [2014]: 4–25 [here, 5]).

36. David A. Lamb, *Text, Context and the Johannine Community: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Johannine Writings*, LNTS 477 (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014).

37. Cf. e.g., Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); idem. *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

38. Christopher A. Porter, *Johannine Social Identity Formation after the Fall of the Jerusalem Temple: Negotiating Identity in Crisis*, BInS 194 (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

39. This chapter assumes as its starting point doubt over the existence of the Johannine Community as it has been classically articulated. For more on Méndez's approach to this question, see Hugo Méndez, "Did the Johannine Community Exist?," *JSNT* 42 (2020): 350–74.

40. On this trend and its potential implications for the wider field of New Testament studies, see Robyn Faith Walsh, *The Origins of Early Christian Literature: Contextualizing the New Testament within Greco-Roman Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

41. Cf. e.g., Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, third ed. (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010), 195–265; idem. "The Sitz im Leben of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and its Evolving Context," in *Critical Readings of John 6*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper, BInS 22 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 1–59; idem. "The Having-Sent-Me Father—Aspects of Agency, Encounter, and Irony in the Johannine Father-Son Relationship," *Semeia* 85, ed. Adele Reinhartz (1999): 33–57; idem. "'You Have the Words of Eternal Life!' Is Peter Presented as Returning the Keys of the Kingdom to Jesus in John 6:68?" *Neot* 41:1 (2007): 6–41. idem. "Bakhtin's Dialogism and the Corrective Rhetoric of the Johannine Misunderstanding Dialogue: Exposing Seven Crises in the Johannine Situation," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*; Semeia Studies 63, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 133–59.

42. Cf. e.g., Alicia D. Myers, "Just Opponents?: Ambiguity, Empathy, and the Jews in the Gospel of John," in *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John,* ed. Sherri Brown and Christopher W. Skinner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 159–76; idem. *Reading John and 1, 2, 3 John: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the New Testament: Second Series (Macon, GA: Smyth

& Helwys, 2019); idem. "Us and Them: Lessons from 1 John's Antichrist Polemic," *WW* 41.1 (2021): 42–50; idem. "Jesus's Ongoing Ministry in 1 John: Priestly Purification and Intercession in 1 John 1:5–2:2," *PRSt* 48 (2021): 243–55;

43. In addition to the bibliography in n. 33 above, cf. e.g., Adele Reinhartz, "Judaism in the Gospel of John," *Int* 63 (2009): 382–93; idem. "'Common Judaism,' 'The Parting of the Ways,' and 'The Johannine Community,'" in *Orthodoxy, Liberalism, and Adaptation: Essays on Ways of Worldmaking in Times of Change from Biblical, Historical and Systematic Perspectives*, Studies in Religion and Theology 15, ed. Bob E. J. H. Becking (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 69–87; idem. "Incarnation and Covenant: The Fourth Gospel through the Lens of Trauma Theory," *Int* 69 (2015): 35–48; idem. "Story and History: John, Jesus, and the Historical Imagination," in *John and Judaism: A Contested Relationship in Context*, ed. Tom Thatcher and Paul N. Anderson (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017) 113–26; idem. *Cast Out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Academic, 2018).