

# ○ JESUS AND THE LADIES

## CONSTRUCTING AND DECONSTRUCTING JOHANNINE MACHO-CHRISTOLOGY

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Taking as a starting point the way in which Jesus' relationship with his mother is depicted in the Gospel of John, this paper explores the construction of a 'macho-christology' in this gospel, which, is deconstructed at the cross: Jesus the true (hu)man is there shown to be the true man as the crucified, which invites re-reading John's macho-christology as a whole from this point of view.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Recently Colleen Conway (2003) has argued convincingly that it is theologically, as well as ideology-critically worthwhile to pay attention to the question of the construction of Jesus' gender<sup>1</sup> in John, especially as this gospel's terminology has been so influential in formulating later Christologies.

In this paper, the question that Conway has raised will be taken up and explored further. This will be done not so much in the direction of John's history of reception in early Christological proposals, but rather by deepening some of Conway's insights into the structure of Jesus' masculinity in John. Jesus' Johannine masculinity will be related to the discourses of contemporary (that is, ancient) gender and family ideologies through an analysis of Jesus' relationship to his own (unnamed) mother in John and of his behaviour towards other women. This enables the construction of a Johannine 'macho-christology'. After this it will be argued that in John Jesus' paradoxical glorification on the cross radically questions precisely this macho-christology and opens up doors towards alternatives. Central to this historically informed synchronic approach is the reading of John as a literary whole, allowing the various elements of his story-world to interact with one another and (re)interpret each other continually – in other words, to continually construct new meanings by deconstructing the previous ones. Nothing is as it seems in John.

### 2. CONSTRUCTING JOHN'S MACHO-CHRISTOLOGY

#### 2.1 JOHANNINE CHRISTOLOGY AND MASCULINITY

As already mentioned, Conway has drawn attention to some aspects of Jesus' masculinity in the fourth gospel. She mentions the following particularities. In the first place the strong emphasis on Jesus' divine parentage is striking, articulated as it is in terms of masculinity (Father and Son).<sup>2</sup> Being divine in this very masculine sense of the word, Jesus' position is at the top of the hierarchy of humanity / masculinity (Conway 2003: 170–171). Secondly, Conway suggests that the absence of references to Jesus' body in John shows striking parallels with the reticence to describe bodies of free males elsewhere, in contrast to those of slaves (cf. Jn. 19:32–33 for a contrast). This includes, according to Conway, even the wound Jesus' dead body receives, as it is active in the sense that it points towards the salvation brought by this Son of the Father rather than to Jesus'

vulnerability (Conway 2003: 171–172). A third example is Jesus’ control of his (sexual) passions as might be hinted at by the scene in Jn. 4:1-42,<sup>3</sup> where a male-female encounter leads to matters spiritual, rather than sexual, as well as by the scene in Jn. 20:1-2.11-18, where Mary of Magdala, possibly depicted as the Song of Song’s searching lover, has a similar kind of encounter with Jesus: though the setting of the scene suggests intimacy, Jesus’ reaction to Mary (i.e.: *noli me tangere*, Jn. 20:17) expresses the opposite (Conway 2003: 172–173). Furthermore, even though Jesus does lose his temper in 2:13-17 as well as in 11:33-38, these scenes still fit, according to Conway, well into ancient thought about the control of passions and justified anger. The note in Jn. 12:27 that Jesus’ soul is troubled is a far cry from the kind of exasperation one might have expected here, certainly in combination with the determinacy to pursue the road taken, expressed in the very same verse (Conway 2003: 173). A fourth example is that of Jesus’ absolute control over the events around his arrest (cf. Jn. 18:1-11), questioning (cf. Jn. 19:11) and execution (giving the Spirit, Jn. 19:26-30; Conway 2003: 173–175). In this respect, the Johannine Jesus shows a considerable degree of similarity with Philo’s depiction of Moses in terms of heroism and hence masculinity (Conway 2003: 168–170).

In other words, even if some elements of Conway’s proposal may seem to be more convincing than others – especially to her interpretation of the depiction of the crucifixion to which I will return below – it may be clear that Johannine Christology is related to the discourse of masculinity in antiquity, especially by emphasising Jesus’ ideal masculinity (and hence his super humanity). This will be returned to after analysing the textual clusters, which deal in John with Jesus’ attitude towards his mother and his attitude towards women in general as these provide a useful way of deepening insights in John’s construction of Jesus’ masculinity.

## 2.2. JESUS, HIS MOTHER AND THE LADIES

The way a man relates to women reveals much about his masculinity, even within a monosexual discourse.<sup>4</sup> For this reason the analysis of those texts in which Jesus interacts with women in John is a good starting point for a sketch of the conception of Jesus’ masculinity in that gospel. This will be done by looking at Jesus’s attitude towards his mother in Jn. 2:4, comparing this with his attitude towards other women in the fourth gospel, before returning to Jesus’ attitude towards his mother in Jn. 19:26. Both sets of behaviour will be placed into the context of ‘normal’ or expected behaviour of sons over against their mothers in the ancient world and vice versa, as well as placing it into the context of the first century gender discourse.

### 2.2.1 JN. 2:4: THE MOTHER OF JESUS I: AND OTHER WOMEN

Jn. 2:4, as well as the narrative it is part of, Jn. 2:1-11 (the story of the wedding in Cana) remains a puzzling text.<sup>5</sup> The main issues in the verse are the following: first, the meaning of the clause *oupō hēkei hē ōra mou*; and second, Jesus’ tone when addressing his mother here: *ti emoi kai soi* is as problematic as the use of *gynai*, not in the least because of the (apparent) rudeness of both parts of Jesus’ way of addressing his mother.<sup>6</sup> In the following, the emphasis will be on the interpretation of the second of these problems: Jesus’ way of addressing his mother.

Much exegetical ink has been spilled over the question as to what extent Jesus’ uncommon way of addressing his mother is an expression of distance between him and his mother, respectively a rudeness or impoliteness on his part, or not, and, if one of these options is chosen, what is to

be made of Jesus' mother's reaction in Jn. 2:5, as she seems to behave as having received a positive response from her son, rather than a negative one. Naturally, if Jesus distances himself here from his mother, this might cause difficulties for one's Christology or Mariology. This notwithstanding, it will be argued here that Jesus is indeed distancing himself from his mother, after which it is asked, what rationale might be behind this depiction of Jesus.

The best starting point is the philological.<sup>7</sup> In view of the use of the expression *ti emoi kai soi*, most of those writing on the subject agree that this expression (structure: interrogative particle + dative + dative) is not uncommon in the New Testament, the Septuagint or even a broader ranger of Hellenistic literature, be it with changing subjects and pronouns. A few examples conveniently illustrate this.

In the New Testament, the construction expression is among others found in Mk. 5:7 / Mt. 8:29 / Lk. 8:28. In Mark *ti emoi kai soi, jēsou huie tou theou tou hypsitou* is changed into *ti hēmin kai soi, huie tou theou* by Matthew while remaining the same in Luke. Another synoptic parallel, Mk. 1:24 / Lk. 4:34 reads *ti hēmin kai soi*, (cf. also GosThom 5:45); *hēmin* is again the self-reference of an unclean spirit. From these verses, it is already clear that the expression wants to emphasise a certain distance: 'what am I of your business' might be a contemporary rendering of the expression. This is confirmed by the findings in the Septuagint, where it occurs essentially in the context of conflicting spheres of authority, respectively when someone, or a group, tries to invade (with force) into someone else's domain (cf. Jos. 22:24, Jgs. 11:12, 2 Sam. 16:10, 19:22, 1 Kgs. 17:18, 2 Kgs. 3:13, 9:18 and 2 Chr. 35:21). As indicated above, it is often a translation of *ti emoi kai soi* or a similar formulation. Some representative findings in Hellenistic literature confirm this picture: the first comes from the work of Epictetus in *Dissertationes ab Arriona digestae* 2:19:19.1. There he quotes a speaker using exactly the same expression as in Jn. 2:4, be it with *anthrōpe* instead of *gynai* (cf. further Epictetus II.19.16 and I.1.16, 22:15, 27:13). A second example may be Martial, *Epigr.* 1.76:11, where he writes '*Quid tibi cum Cirrha? quid cum Permesside nuda?*' – even if the construction with *cum* is slightly different from the Greek construction with the double dative. On the basis of these samples, the meaning of the expression as established above is confirmed. Williams' interpretation, suggested in the context of her social-science interpretation of Jn. 2:1-11 as 'what is that (the lack of wine) of mine and your business', is, on the basis of 2 Kgs. 3:13 and Hos. 14:9, possible as well, where the expression seems to stay close to its most literal meaning 'what has that to do with me and you' though not the most likely interpretation as will be argued below (Williams 1997).<sup>8</sup>

This all establishes the phrase *ti emoi kai soi, gynai* as an expression, which establishes distance between the two partners involved in the dialogue. That this applies to Jesus' use of *gynai* can also readily be shown.

As in the case of *ti emoi kai soi*, practically all exegetes observe that Jesus is addressing his mother in a unique way here. There is, to my knowledge, no extant parallel in ancient literature of a son addressing his mother this way, and, even if there is, it is certainly not the most common way to do so. More often, the address would have been *kyria*, as is at least shown by a second century letter written by an Egyptian recruit in Italy, who uses *kyria* in the heading of his letter (cf. further *Sel. Pap.* 1:318-319, P. Oxy. 112:1.3.7, 528:2 [sister or wife]; see White 1986; Balla 2003). Jesus does therefore not seem to treat his mother as mother here. Rather, he seems to address her as any other woman, or as a husband would address his wife, both in the situation

of a conflict, as well as in a more pleasant situation. In other words: a polite, but distancing way of addressing some one,<sup>9</sup> even if various shades of tenderness were possible when using it.<sup>10</sup>

Two fine examples of the usage of this address are the following. The first is taken from Plutarch, *Marcus Cato* 8.4.1-8.5.5, who presents a series of anecdotes about the politician.

Discoursing of the power of women: ‘Men’, said he, ‘usually command women; but we command all men, and the women command us’. But this, indeed, is borrowed from the sayings of Themistocles, who, when his son was making many demands of him by means of the mother, said, ‘O woman (*gynai*), the Athenians govern the Greeks; I govern the Athenians, but you govern me, and your son governs you; so let him use his power sparingly, since, simple as he is, he can do more than all the Greeks together’.<sup>11</sup>

The second and not dissimilar to the first one is Ezekiel the Tragedian’s way of describing the conversation between the Egyptian who has just picked up the (yet unnamed) Moses from the water and his mother, who is called upon to feed him:

The sovereign’s daughter then said: ‘Woman (*gynai*), nurse this child and I will render you a wage’ (Ezekiel the Tragedian 1985).

*Gynai* therefore seems to be a (male) superior’s way of addressing a woman. The pun on Plutarch’s anecdote is probably exactly that: the anecdote is funny, because a man seems to be dominated by his son, which is already quite ridiculous; but it is even more hilarious as this takes place through his own wife, whom, he supposedly should have under his control, rather than admitting the opposite to be true.

This picture may be refined by looking at Jesus’ way of addressing women in John, as here the aspect of authority comes out slightly more nuanced: *gynai* seems to be the common way of addressing an unknown woman in a respectful way. In the gospel of John,<sup>12</sup> to return to the references there,<sup>13</sup> Jesus addresses, apart from his mother in Jn. 2:4, a number of women with *gynai*, and it is not unreasonable to assume that his mother belongs, at least semantically, in the same category as they do. This company of women consists of the following persons. In Jn. 4:21 Jesus addresses the Samaritan woman in the following way: *pisteue moi, gynai*, which is certainly not offensive, but rather a common, possibly even respectful, way of addressing a more or less<sup>14</sup> unknown woman – by the very act of which Jesus was already crossing two boundaries: that between Samaria and Judea (cf. 4:9) and that between women and men, who are, to top it off, strangers to one another. The woman’s polite and respectful way of addressing Jesus with *kyrie* in 4:11.14.19 is entirely in line with this, in spite of its theological *double entendre*. More or less the same communicative situation is found in Jn. 8:10-11<sup>15</sup> where Jesus addresses the unfaithful woman with *gynai, pou eisin, oudeis se katekrinein?* (8:10) and she replies with *oudeis, kyrie* (8:11). Again, this is, as far as the exchange of addresses are concerned, a perfectly normal situation in which two strangers are addressing one another in a civilised way. Before turning to Jn. 19:26, the next instance of the use of *gynai*, it is useful to look at Jn. 20:11-18, in which the dialogue between Mary of Magdala and Jesus takes place. Here, first of all, the two angels who are sitting at the head and the foot of the place where Jesus laid (Jn. 20:12) address Mary in the following way: *gynai, ti klaeis?* (Jn. 20:13). Then, in the same verse, Mary answers using the

word *kyrion*, which here certainly means ‘master’ or ‘lord’, rather than ‘sir’ as it did before. It could even (cf. Jn. 20:16) suggest a certain amount of intimacy (*ton kyrion mou*).<sup>16</sup> The dialogue in that verse resembles the dialogues in chapters 4 and 8, in that it is a dialogue between a man and a woman who are supposedly strangers to one another. This changes radically in Jn. 20:16, where Jesus switches from using *gynai* to using her first name, *Mariam*, and Mary from using *kyrie* to using the much more intimate *rabbouni*. This dialogue is for the present study of the utmost importance, as it shows that John was very well able to depict Jesus as engaging in a more or less intimate dialogue with a woman, thereby making the question why Jesus is addressing his own mother in Jn. 2:4 and 19:26 in such an impersonal and formal way even more pressing.

That both Jn. 2:4 and Jn. 19:26 must sound formal and carry the suggestion of distance can therefore not only be deduced from a philological analysis of the words Jesus uses in both verses, but also from the dialogues in John between Jesus and the unknown woman, and even more clearly from the change in the conversation between him and Mary of Magdala in Jn. 20:14-18.

#### 2.2.2 JN. 19:26: THE MOTHER OF JESUS II: THE REPLACEMENT OF THE SON

The preceding considerations have paved the way for an interpretation of Jn. 19:26, a verse which is connected in a double way with Jn. 2:4. First of all there is the verbal agreement between the uses of the word *gynai*; second, there is the agreement between Jn. 2:4b, where Jesus’ hour is mentioned, and the situation in Jn. 19:26, with Jesus being exalted at the cross: his hour has come indeed. Apart from this, the references to Jesus’ mother in 19:26, in exactly the same terms, remind one of Jn. 2:1 where she is nameless and just ‘mother’ as well. Jesus’ testamentary dispositions in 19:26 have more than once been described in moving terms as the faithful son’s caring for his – most likely widowed – mother.<sup>17</sup> This might be true, though one wonders why Jesus is addressing her in the same impersonal way as in Jn. 2:4 then, and what has happened to Jesus’ brothers (cf. Jn. 2:12, 7:3.5.10)? In the view taken here, the case is slightly different. It is true: Jesus is caring for his mother (at least making sure that the beloved disciple does so, cf. Jn. 19:27), but in a rather peculiar way: he is replacing himself by his beloved disciple, who is identified as Jesus’ mother’s son (Jn. 19:26).<sup>18</sup> In fact, Jesus himself increases the distance between himself and his mother even more: not only does he address her in a very impersonal way as in Jn. 2:4, but he also dissociates himself from her as completely as possible: one the one hand by dying, on the other by replacing himself. Vanhoye (1974: 166) was already right in seeing this along the same lines. Both mother and son change their roles fundamentally: Jesus stops being his mother’s son, and his mother stops being her son’s mother. This can well be seen as a consequence of the overwhelming importance Jesus’ heavenly Father has in the fourth gospel, even if he hardly plays an explicit role in Jn. 2:1-11 and Jn. 19. In the fourth gospel, Jesus is not his mother’s child, but his Father’s Son.

### 2.3 JESUS, HIS MOTHER AND THE WOMEN IN JOHN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FAMILY IDEOLOGY

Returning with these results to Jn. 2:4, it is possible to shed light on both problems indicated earlier. It can be said now that an interpretation along the lines of the creation of distance is plausible. This is shown not only by the history of interpretation of the text, but also by the fact that in John, Jesus can relate in a number of ways to women: more or less intimately in a number of instances, but in Jn. 2:4 as well as in Jn. 19:26 he clearly opts for a more distancing kind of address. When this is viewed against the foil of relationships between mothers and their sons in

Greco-Roman society in general, ones that were often characterised by intimacy, the impression of an unusual distance is merely strengthened (see Balla 2003<sup>19</sup>; Williams 1997: 681–682<sup>20</sup>). On the basis of Jewish, Christian and other texts Balla shows that one may assume a broad consensus on the kind of responsibilities and the kind of attitude children were supposed to show over against their parents in antiquity. Apart from the issue of paying honour in general (Balla 2003: 63–64, 86–92, 117–130), it should be emphasised that the issue of ‘respectful speech’ could and was treated separately. Philo provides eloquent evidence for this in his exegesis of Ex. 21:15.<sup>21</sup> The effect of Jesus’ address will therefore have been the same if one assumes non-Jewish readers, as the example of Origen has already shown, especially as this theologian was relatively well-informed about Judaism. This is both due to the question *ti emoi kai soi?* implying nothing but distance as well as due to the way Jesus addresses her: *gynai*. Throughout John’s gospel, this is the way in which Jesus addresses unknown women only. By contrast, another woman, Mary of Magdala, he can even address by her first name (in Jn. 11 names or titles are missing in Jesus’ answers to Mary and Martha). Thus, there is no way of softening Jesus’ words here. For these reasons, it seems that that one can describe what happens in Jn. 2:4 best as the beginning of a process of distancing, which is completed in 19:26 at the cross.<sup>22</sup>

Mary therefore begins to stop being Jesus’ mother in Jn. 2:4. The process is completed in Jn. 19:26, where, speaking down from the cross, Jesus rearranges the family ties of his mother, as he replaces himself with the beloved disciple.<sup>23</sup> Even if the narrator of John’s gospel keeps calling her Jesus’ mother, she is no longer so. She acts at the level of other, strange, women, who are addressed politely, but nothing more. As Witherington puts it: ‘it is as “woman” that Mary must work out the tensions between the physical and spiritual family, for later (Jn 19.26) the Evangelist indicates that it is as “woman,” not as Jesus’ mother, that she enters the community of faith’ (Witherington 1984: 85). Jesus breaks in a clear, not to say brusque, way with this mother, thereby violating the behaviour which was expected from sons over against their mothers. An explanation for this will be offered after discussing the same problem from the perspective of ancient gender ideology.

#### **2.4 JESUS, HIS MOTHER AND THE WOMEN IN JOHN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GENDER IDEOLOGY: A HIERARCHY OF PENETRATION**

The table of contents of a recent work on Roman culture provides an interesting starting point for the discussion of Roman and Hellenistic gender ideologies, as it discusses the social organisation of the city of Rome.<sup>24</sup> The order of the subjects is: imperial court,<sup>25</sup> senators, equites, plebs, women, slaves (Goodman 1997: ix).<sup>26</sup> This is not only a good illustration of a highly stratified society, but at the same time an eloquent illustration of the concept of a hierarchy of masculinity, in which one will have to place women as well, i.e. a hierarchy not so much of gender as of degrees of humanity. It seems this was indeed a dominant way of thinking about the structure of gender identity in antiquity, even with a more ‘liberal’ tendency during the Empire. A useful concept in this context is the hierarchy of penetration as a measuring rod for the degree of one’s masculinity.<sup>27</sup> This hierarchy can be seen as shorthand for the idea that one would be more masculine the more one could penetrate, and vice versa. It should be clear that sexual penetration is of primary importance, but that this concept can easily be transposed into other contexts well:<sup>28</sup> independence or autarky and control of the passions as masculine ideals illustrate this eloquently.<sup>29</sup>

For this reason, with slaves and women at the bottom of the hierarchy of ‘masculinity’ and thereby of ‘humanity’, one is not surprised that subjects like ‘the clever slave’ or ‘the dominant woman’ do appear on a regular basis in comedy,<sup>30</sup> thereby ridiculing the vulnerable humanity or unmanly masculinity of husbands or masters (see Rei 1998; McCarthy 1998). Or, for that matter, in times of what was felt to be an ideological crisis, the dominant themes would be the loyal slave<sup>31</sup> and the loyal wife (Parker 1998).<sup>32</sup>

From this point of view, Jesus may, in Jn. 2:4, as well as in, for instance, Jn. 20:17, be concerned about his masculinity / humanity. Not so much in terms of ‘sexuality’, but rather in terms of intrusions into his sphere of authority or autarky, i.e. in terms of penetration. Jesus’ reply to his mother in Jn. 2:4 makes, when reading the text with an eye to the gender ideology just outlined, it abundantly clear that Jesus is not going to be dominated by persons who are less (hu)man than he is, certainly not by a woman. Throughout John the only exception remains the Father. This also seems to explain why the Johannine Jesus violates the expected pattern of behaviour of a good son over against his mother as brutally as he does in Jn. 2:4, 19:26: Jesus is simply too masculine for this.

### 3. CONSTRUCTING JOHN’S MACHO-CHRISTOLOGY

All that has been said above can be drawn together in terms of Johannine Christology. It is clear that Johannine Christology is closely related to the discourse of masculinity in antiquity, especially by emphasising Jesus’ ideal masculinity. This alone would already have made it worth the trouble of attempting to approach the question of Jesus’ relationship to his unnamed mother precisely from this perspective.

A pattern emerges in view of the ideologies outlined earlier: as soon as the succession of ungrateful sons to the imperial throne was secured – a succession brokered by the very same mother – she was put out of the way (Kleiner 2000). As with all analogies, the difference between *analogans* and *analogatum* is larger than their similarity: it is not necessary to assume that Mary literally brokered Jesus into his role of a prophet. In any case this does not play a role in John’s gospel.<sup>33</sup> What, however, is very clearly the case here is that from the beginning of the first sign, which reveals Jesus’ glory (cf. Jn. 2:11), Jesus’ mother – the very person who should have been thought to exercise most influence upon Jesus, certainly according to the general pattern of this kind of relationships in antiquity – is denied her own glory. It appears that the glory of the Son of the Father is in Johannine theology (implicitly) related to the discourse of masculinity in antiquity, especially since autonomy and self-control were hallmarks of a ‘real man’ (Conway 2003: 172–175). Pursuing this background further, the language the Johannine Jesus uses here gains some further significance: even though ‘Mary’ remains ‘mother of Jesus’ throughout the fourth gospel, Jesus continually addresses her as ‘woman’, thereby twice explicitly denying the special status she might have been expected to have in the ears of the first generations of readers (and now as well): Jesus the Man is not relating to his mother in a very intimate way as soon as spheres of influence and power come into play. The glory and the power are his, derived from his Father: these masculine characteristics are certainly not to be meddled with by someone less masculine, i.e. a woman.

In spite of the fact that dramatic development of characters, especially that of Jesus, is not necessarily the most outstanding characteristic of John’s gospel,<sup>34</sup> the fact that Jesus replaces

himself with the Beloved Disciple at the foot of the cross in Jn. 19:26,<sup>35</sup> is certainly one step beyond Jn. 2:4. It is significant when read against the background of the Hellenistic discourse on masculinity as well. Even though it is common sense that no male would exist without a mother, Jesus is at the moment of his exaltation and glorification more than ever identified as the super-masculine Son of His Father – not as the son of his mother. The source of all authority – the Father – is here, as in the prologue, both source and goal of all (masculine) humanity. The term ‘macho-christology’ may well be used to describe this.

#### **4. DECONSTRUCTING JOHANNINE MACHO-CHRISTOLOGY. THE PENETRATED PENETRATOR: JESUS ON THE CROSS**

However, when applying the terms of the discourse on humanity / masculinity to the scenes of Jn. 19, John’s hypermasculine Jesus is penetrated in probably the most vivid way possible: by crucifixion. What is Important is not so much the actual nailing to the cross, nor the piercing by the spear, but the sheer endless humiliations that Jesus has to endure, reducing him, literally, to less than a human being. Practically all elements from Jesus’ passion can be read as a conscious mocking of Jesus in terms of his authority, this quite in spite of the deeply ironic nature of the narrative and Jesus’ earlier heroic acceptance of his fate (Jn. 18:11). In Jn. 19:1-3, Jesus is mocked as a quasi-person at the top of the pyramid of masculinity: a king, dressed in royal purple.<sup>36</sup> Pilate’s ‘ecce homo’ (Jn. 19:5), while pointing at Jesus also points at quite the opposite. The paradox between the supreme humiliation of crucifixion and Jesus’ (divine and) royal aspirations (cf. Ps. 110:1) is made clear in Jn. 19:6-7. That Jesus has indeed lost all power is obvious in Jn. 19:10-11 and Pilate is clearly torn between two supreme sources of authority (and hence masculinity): the emperor and the one who has given him authority over Jesus (Jn. 19:12), all of which is brought to a dramatic climax in the formal mock trial in Jn. 19:13-16. The latter text is only to be followed by the quasi-enthronement at the cross, with a robber at each side of Jesus, and the superscription ‘Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews’. Jesus the king is made to hold court, but in quite a humiliating fashion. In addition, Jesus’ (partial) nakedness is hinted at as the soldiers at the foot of the cross divide up his garments (Jn. 19:23-24). A final scene, which is quite literally related to the hierarchy of penetration, is, after sparing Jesus’ legs from being broken, the piercing of Jesus’ side with the sword (Jn. 19:34). Even if Conway claims that Jesus is still ‘active’ during this piercing since his redeeming and cleansing blood pours out of the wound, it should be observed that this is a Pauline, rather than a Johannine *theologoumenon* and does not apply to Jn. 19:34.

This supremely humiliating penetration / crucifixion of Jesus, the Man, binds together a number of threads, which run through John as a whole. First, the theme of the hour<sup>37</sup> of Jesus’ glorification<sup>38</sup> is of central importance in John. Jesus looks forward to it, yet, as is generally recognised, this hour of glorification is highly paradoxical. Jesus is indeed enthroned but as a mocking in mock-glory, that is to say: on a cross and with robbers, rather than members of the royal family at his left and right, quite the opposite of what the language of glory in John would lead one to expect. This paradox can well be expressed in terms of gender ideology as well: Jesus, who is established as a very masculine figure throughout John is at the cross robbed of all those attributes which made him stand out as a (hu)man. Only seemingly, of course: the supreme ‘feminisation’ of Jesus at the cross is in a hidden way his true exaltation and the moment of his true victory. Glorification takes place in the shape of absolute humiliation, Jesus the Man reaches



the peak of his glory, when he is completely and utterly robbed of his masculinity in the ancient sense of the word. Both are there at the crucifixion: Jesus the Man, supermasculine Son of his just as masculine Father, gaining glory, and distancing himself from his mother (Jn. 19:25-27!), and, at the same time, 'Jesus the Sissy', forsaken, stripped bare of all his masculinity, ridiculed as mock-king, and soon to die. Neither of these two can be denied. Yet Jesus is still the hero of the story. Put differently: hanging at the cross, Jesus is probably the most authoritative and hence human / masculine of all the scenes in the fourth gospel, but at the same time further removed from the ideal male of any ancient ideology of masculinity than ever. It would be well worth the suggestion that with the radical redefinition of glorification that takes place in Jn. 19, the seeds of a rethinking of anthropology and masculinity are sown – against the grain of much Johannine narrative – oriented towards a new kind of *doxa*, the prime example of which is a crucified Lord.

It may be well worth the suggestion that one may read the Johannine passion narrative in terms of a redefinition of the concept of masculinity / humanity, in which *doxa*, the main hallmark of masculinity, is reconceptualised as doing the will of the Father and returning to him. This is, in the end, what Jesus does at the cross. The hypermasculine Jesus, constructed in the course of John is de(con)structed at the cross.

Therefore, nothing is as it as it seems in John: Jesus the Man reaches the climax of his divine sonship at the very moment of his very feminisation – or, for that matter, 'sissification'. However, this fundamental deconstruction of the ideal of masculinity at the cross does not immediately solve the inherent problems of Jn. 2:4 or 19:26. However, the narrative redeems them: the fate of the most real man of the gospel redefines ideal humanity / masculinity at a fundamental level, thereby radically questioning the gender and family ideologies, which are inscribed in Jn. 2:4, 19:26, as well as in the whole language in which the NT is written – that of 1<sup>st</sup> century society. Put semiotically, the paradoxical glorification of Jesus becomes the sign which destabilises – also in terms of gender – the very fabric of the language in which the Johannine narrative is cast, much to the benefit of those who are looking for new and creative ways of (re)defining human gender and sexuality. Narratively, this works only because the narrative of the fourth gospel first built up the image of Jesus the Man by means of Jn. 2:4, 19:26, among other texts, which brings the supermasculine sonship to its deconstruction and redefinition at the cross. This is why the Johannine passion narrative cannot solve the problems that cleave to Jn. 2:4, 19:26, but can only redeem them narratively, i.e., by forcing the reader to think masculinity / humanity and cross together and to correct the former in the light of the latter: the glory of God's man is that he gives his life for the benefit of others (cf. Jn. 15:13).

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Questions about gender in this paper are asked from the – in this respect – unfortunate hermeneutical starting point of an ordained, single, Caucasian male, currently working in a catholic tradition at a traditional (male-dominated) theological faculty of a Western-European university.
- <sup>2</sup> See especially Reinhartz (1999). John draws, in his depiction of Jesus’ provenance, possibly on an ancient theory of procreation, in which the woman was merely the ‘receptacle’ for the man’s ‘seed’. See Harlow (1998), and on the Corpus Hippocraticum, Stein (1994), especially when referring to Hippocrates, *Aphor.* 5:62. Also striking in this respect is Jesus’ explicit patrilineal identification in Jn. 6:42.
- <sup>3</sup> Taking into account the imagery of a betrothal scene here, see Gen. 24:10-61, 29:1-20, Ex. 2:15b-21.
- <sup>4</sup> See below, par. 2.4.1.
- <sup>5</sup> See the overviews of research in Lütgehetmann (1992), especially pp. 185–186 and Olsson (1974: 18–20). An extensive work on the story’s early and modern history of reception is found in Smitmans (1966). No significantly new positions have been added to the interpretative spectre since the publication of these works.
- <sup>6</sup> See the overview of the discussion and interpretative options by Keener (2003: 501–509).
- <sup>7</sup> See in general the parallels listed in Schnelle et al. (2001: 96–101).
- <sup>8</sup> Witherington (1984: 83) does not want to acknowledge these parallels, arguing that the subjects of the parallels (demons etc. and not Jesus) are not the same. However, I do not see how this can be a decisive criterion.
- <sup>9</sup> This may be illustrated by practically any of the examples of the use of the address in the New Testament: see for example Jn. 4:21, 20:13.15, see 8:10, Mt. 15:28, Lk. 13:12, 22:57, 1 Cor. 7:16), in the LXX (e.g. Jdt. 11:1, see 4 Macc. 15:17, 16:14); or in Greco-Roman literature: see for example Homer, *Il.* 3:204, *Od.* 4:266, 8:242, 19:221.555, 23:350, Sophokles, *Oedip.* 665, Achilles Tatius, *Leuk.* 6:6, Dio Cassius, *Hist.Rom.* 12 :5, Josephus, *Ant.* 1.16:3.
- <sup>10</sup> See Williams (1997: 680–682), for a review. Exceptions prove nothing more than themselves and the rule.
- <sup>11</sup> Translation by John Dryden in the *Loeb Classical Library*.
- <sup>12</sup> Jesus’ attitude towards women in general is a question of an ongoing debate and cannot be addressed here. See more recently Melzer-Keller (1997), especially pp. 399–449 (conclusions), who holds a moderate view: Jesus is neither the first feminist nor a conservative patriarch, even if he is crossing some boundaries. See also Ilan (2000), Freyne (2000), and Ubieta (2000).
- <sup>13</sup> The noun *gynē* occurs in Jn. 2:4, 4:7.9.11.15.17.19.21.25.27-28.39.42, 8:3-4.9-10, 16:21, 19:26, 20:13.15. Of these occurrences Jn. 2:4, 4:21, 8:10, 19:26, 20:13.15, half of these occurrences concern Jesus’ mother.
- <sup>14</sup> See however the scene in Jn. 4:17-18, which establishes a contrast with the disciples’, probably socially oriented, surprise in Jn. 4:27.
- <sup>15</sup> In spite of the text’s secondary character.
- <sup>16</sup> Even if the rendering in Jn. 20:16 is *didaskale* not *kyrie*, which is the way Mary addresses the unrecognisable Jesus in 20:15.
- <sup>17</sup> See Stauffer (1975: 136, 229) and Witherington (1984: 96, n103 with examples). From a more ideology-critical point of view, see Becker (2001: 209–214), emphasising that it is not so much Mary who takes care of the Beloved Disciple, but rather the other way around. Becker’s argument does

support my thesis that Jesus is replacing himself by the Beloved Disciple. Thus, on p. 212 Becker writes: 'Vielmehr dient hier die Mutter Jesu in einer literarischen Funktion dazu, den Lieblingsjünger mit seiner Bedeutung als Testamentvollstrecker Jesu zu definieren'. The opposite is argued in Roman Catholic exegesis, e.g. (Brown 1979: 197), or Grassi (1986: 73), who writes: 'This invites us to think of the beloved disciple as a favorite son or protégé of Jesus, a son who then continues on as "adopted" by Mary'.

18 See Witherington (1984: 95) Mary indeed becomes a mother of a different sort.

19 Balla's thesis is supported by many others, see Cox (1998: 99–103), though noting that conflicts between mothers and their sons arose when the mother was thought to prevent the son from getting the full share of his paternal estate (p. 101), see Aeschines, *Or.* 1.98–99, though admittedly discussing an earlier era. In a study which concerns the date of origin of the Gospel of John, Kleiner (2000: 43–60) surveys the development of the ties between imperial mothers and their sons in an illuminating way: often a mother, who helped her son to acquire the emperorship was afterwards involved in a power struggle, no longer with her husband, but with her son and protégé. For the mother as guardian or in a guardian-like role on lower levels of society, see van Bremen (1996: 254–255). See for a mother promoting her sons also Matt. 20:20–28! A good overview, which focuses on Jesus and the beginnings of the Jesus movement, is found in Moxnes (1997a: 13–41), emphasising the close, emotional bond between mothers and sons. It is interesting to note, however, that even if it is true that Mt. and Lk. establish a 'royal' and therefore 'honourable' parentage for Jesus by means of their genealogies, John does this in the same by means of his prologue, establishing Jesus' divine parentage quite firmly. The view that the relationship between sons and their mothers was an affectionate one is confirmed by Kraus (2003: 77–78.138–141).

20 Williams (1997: 679) is perfectly right in pointing out that a semantic analysis should take into consideration the socio-cultural context as well, but she seems to forget about the literary context of the Gospel of John sometimes.

21 In *Spec.* 2.248 widening the striking of Ex. 21:15 to the abusive language as well. See in agreement: Sir. 3:8, Sib.Or. 2:275–276 (Balla 2003: 92). For the Jewish context in general, see Balla (2003: 86–97). For the non-Jewish context, see Balla (2003: 41–79).

22 Other intertextual possibilities are explored by Kitzberger (2000: 102–111).

23 In line with Lieu (1998: 61–77), whose interpretation I share 'She is no longer the mother of Jesus but the mother of the disciple whom he loved' (p. 69).

24 For 'a heirarchy of penetration' see in general Winkler (1990) and Montserrat (1996). See for the history of masculinity also the essays in Erhart and Herrmann (1997). For an instructive collection of source texts, see McClure (2002). Noticeably none of these works provides much information about the relationship between mothers and sons. On the no doubt influential depiction of the ideal woman by Xenophon see Tirelli (2001), Williams (1999) and Moxnes (1997b).

25 See on this Fischer (1998: 169), where she refers to the depiction of Augustus as the outstanding male authority figure, ie. as militarily dominant, but also benevolent. See in the same volume Roy (1998), emphasising his benevolent and father-like character.

26 However, Goodman's treatment of women remains meagre. His main suggestion is that the possibility of achieving a higher degree of economic independence (and thereby social influence) during the Empire – at least for upper class women – thereby inflated the ruling ideology, which thought of women as subject to their father, specifically in terms of a *tutor* in the case of the father's death or a husband (Goodman 1997: 175–176). The concept *kyrios* is therefore also full of this kind of gender ideology, applied as it was to the Emperor in the first place.

27 Therefore a statement like 'Greek culture was bisexual' (Garrison 2000: 108) is potentially misleading; Greek sexual culture was not so much bisexual as it was oriented towards penetrating and being

penetrated, without asking the question whether the (passive) partner was male or female. See Davidson (2001) and Økland (2003). What Thornton (1997: 106–110) calls ‘the heterosexual paradigm’ is much more to the point; see along similar lines, van Wees (1998) and, on Roman sexuality, Walters (1997). Also telling is the masculinisation of lesbians; see Gordon (1997) as well as Hallett (1997). In general, see further Sommerstein (1998), Walters (1998). Of interest are also the traditions around the mother of the seven Maccabean martyrs, who is said to have ‘Abraham’s soul’ (4 Macc. 14:20); see Young (1991). She is clearly depicted as a manly woman.

28 Such as that of rhetoric; Larson (2004), especially pp. 87–91 on 2 Cor. 10:10. Also of interest in this respect is Plutarch’s depiction of Alcibiades as an effeminate but dominant character (Maslov 2003; Plutarch 75). On effeminacy see also Corbeill (1997) and Skinner (1997) on Alcibiades’ gender bending.

29 See Conway (2003: 166–170) on self-mastery as a characteristic of manliness.

30 Thereby reflecting a social dynamic; Wagner-Hasel (2000). See also the telling excursus on the Amazons (Fantham et al 1994: 128–135), whose less than favourable portrayal will have had to do with exactly that: control.

31 See on slaves, masters and the element of control, strongly related to the ideal of autarky, as well as obedience and loyalty, fear and ‘control’, Bradley (1984: 21–45, 113–137, 139–143).

32 On the issue of social control and the dangerous and destabilising fear of slaves by slave-owners, see further Bradley (1984: 113–137). Thornton (1997) rightly refers to the chaste wife as ‘the most important possession’ (166).

33 In fact Jesus’ strained relationship with his family would speak against it.

34 Kind suggestion of Dr. Moises Mayordomo, University of Berne.

35 So also Zumstein (1997: 139): ‘Der Lieblingsjünger wird somit zum Stellvertreter des Sohnes in seiner Abwesenheit’.

36 It should of course be noted that the colour purple was the imperial colour as well. This notwithstanding, John’s Passion narrative revolves around Jesus’ *kingship* in contrast to the power of Pilate, and, finally, also of the emperor.

37 See Jn. 2:4, 4:21.23.53, 5:25.28, 7:30, 8:20, 12:23(!).27, 13:1, 16:4.25.32, 17:1.

38 See on kingship and crucifixion the use of the verb *doxazō* (Jn. 7:39, 8:54, 11:4, 12:16.23. 28, 13:31-32, 14:13, 15:8, 16:14, 17:1.4-5.10, 21:19) and the noun *doxa* (Jn. 1:14, 2:11, 5:41.44, 7:18, 8:50.54, 9:24, 11:4.40, 12:41.43, 17:5.22.24).

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