



Changing things around: Dramatic aspect in the *Pericope Adulterae* (Jn 7:53–8:11)

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In this article the transactional model of narrative as expounded by Louise Rosenblatt, supported by an analysis in terms of dramatic aspect, is employed to show how the interpolated scene in John 7:53–8:11 (known as the *Pericope Adulterae* and hereafter referred to as PA) functions as a pivot of power in the gospel. The content of the scene, as well as its placement within the gospel, serves to promote an aesthetic reading that focusses attention on the experience during the reading event. Awareness of sensations, images, feelings and ideas from past experiences, as well as the sounds and rhythms of the words become important. The reader responds to the aesthetic transaction, the various elements of total experience, rather than simply to the text, during and after the reading event.

Introduction

Texts

The one constant in the work of the Bible interpreter is the text. It is the focal point of our scholarly endeavour and expectations. It is truly remarkable how these biblical texts have been preserved over hundreds of years. Clearly, people have gone to extraordinary lengths to preserve the texts as closely as possible to their original form. Copying the texts by hand was a mammoth undertaking before the advent of Gutenberg and the printing press.

Bible interpretation should therefore always start with the text, and should adhere to certain guidelines. The following are important:

- The text is the primary source of information, which makes it the point of departure in the process of interpretation. Research about the text must enhance and enrich the meaning, whilst at the same time narrowing it down. Wellek and Warren (1963:57) point out that one of the first steps in scholarship is the assembly of materials. Under the heading, 'The ordering and establishing of evidence', they distinguish two levels of operations: firstly, assemble and prepare a text. Texts have a history. It is the task of the discipline of textual criticism to determine the integrity of the text. That includes the identification and comparison of sources, interpolations, and the like, and to what extent the text has undergone changes. Secondly, establish the dating, authenticity, authorship, revision, setting, and purpose; in short, any relevant background relating to the text that could aid in its interpretation. However, they warn, one must beware of the fallacy of origins (genetic fallacy), suggesting that a literary work can only be understood in terms of its origins. This includes the biographical information about the author (Wellek & Warren 1963:73–80).
- The complete text is a communicative whole that presides over its parts. The interpreter must beware of not seeing the wood for the trees. Put simply: the text should not be fragmented in the interpretive process to such an extent that its central message and totality impact are lost.
- Because it has a history, the text has strata. Matters such as form and redaction criticism come into play in the interpretation of the text.
- The text has layers of meaning. Depending on the context, the text in its totality or in its parts may play on figurative meanings, which requires a reading between the lines. It also contains what may be called tenuous aesthetic threads that link it to other texts; for example, reference to persons, direct quotes or mere allusions that may only be noticed by someone who has read the text alluded to.
- Texts are of a kind, otherwise known as genre. To interpret a text that belongs in one genre according to the rules of interpretation of another, will almost certainly produce inappropriate results and conclusions.
- The text can be analysed on various levels, that is, grammatical, syntactical, compositional, figurative and so forth.

The list is certainly not exhaustive. The point is that the texts should be respected and that respect should be evident in the way we handle them. Biblical texts already have meaning. They have

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shared that meaning with hearers and readers over hundreds of years. They have changed people's lives, given hope, alleviated suffering. Our interpretation of the texts can only add to this reservoir of meaning.

Integrating social-scientific models in the interpretation process

The use of social-scientific models in Bible interpretation has been ongoing now for almost four decades. In South Africa, like elsewhere, I imagine, there was some initial resistance to the new direction in research. I can remember remarks at the time expressing doubt that the social sciences could contribute anything of value to theology. Since that time many theological faculties have become acquainted with this approach. Appreciation has grown for the tremendous contribution it made to the understanding of the cultural background of the books of the Bible, and more directly to the interpretation of the texts.

Carney (1975:7) points to the fact that models are not easy to define, because the term model 'both identifies and obfuscates a very complex reality'. He defines a model as 'an outline framework ... of the characteristics of a class of things or phenomena', and emphasises that a model is not a replica of a thing or process, but a conceptual instrument used with the aim of analysing a complex configuration by means of pattern matching (Carney 1975:8). In terms of what it sets out to do a model *selects* certain data and *simplifies* it by a process of generalisation and abstraction. Models are therefore not a replica of reality, but a lens which affords an alternate view of reality in order to aid our understanding of that reality (Carney 1975:9). For this reason, models have to be chosen with care in order to ensure a 'good fit' when the model is applied to the reality being modelled. Carney (1975:13-34) discusses five main types of conceptual model that are useful for selecting, simplifying and analysing complex data, namely ideal, cross-cultural, comparative, postulational and multivariate (matrix) models.

The use of models is not without problems. Two possible areas of concern have been mentioned above: care must be taken that the chosen model fits the data, and the model is not and does not produce a replica of the thing or process it is applied to. Carney (1975:34-38) mentions the following methodological weaknesses of models:

- Firstly, there is what he calls the *cost of consciousness*, due to an 'iron law of perspective' (Carney 1975:34). By that he means that a model blinkers the interpreter, not allowing for other possibilities in interpretation. I consider this an important point. I have heard and read too many arguments where dyadic personality or honour-shame culture has become the all-explaining fallback position, sort of a *deus ex machina* solution for difficult exegetical problems.
- A second problem is *strategic mischoice* in selecting or building a model due to the subjective bias of the interpreter (Carney 1975:35-36). If this happens the

results produced by the application of the model are necessarily skewed, and so also in all probability the conclusions drawn from those results. This fallacy can be countered by working with more than one model simultaneously.

- Thirdly, there may be a problem *validating the findings* (Carney 1975:36). What can they be measured against in order to determine whether they can be taken seriously? Prior knowledge and open discussion can be validating mechanisms, as well as different hypotheses and other data sets.
- A fourth danger of the use of models is *fixation*. Carney (1975:37) calls it the 'theology of models', which is what happens if an interpreter should fall in love with a model, using it all the time, everywhere.

It is important to keep in mind the dangers and fallacies inherent in the use of models. It keeps us on the straight and narrow, so to speak. All considered, though, to eschew models is not an option. Carney's (1975) opening paragraph of his book says it clearly:

It is no longer possible to delude ourselves that we see 'reality' with a sort of immaculate perception – that the picture inside our heads is a one-to-one representation of the thing we are looking at. (p. 1)

My choice of an interpretive model is indicative of my view about the primacy of the text. Narrative texts in general and the scene in John 7:53-8:11 in particular, can be described as performance literature. Vanhaesebrouk (2004) gives the following description:

[...] recent developments in postclassical narratology such as cognitive narratology and in theatre studies such as Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theatre reveal a new and dynamic use of narratological theories, a use which is activated both on the levels of dramaturgical analysis and visual semiotics. (p. 2)

Because of this natural and organic link between narrative text and theatre, I employ a dramaturgical model to interpret the text.

Summary

The study will consist of the following:

- A concise discussion of the concept of narrative transaction.
- A brief exploration of 'aspects of a narratology of drama' and the functioning of visual semiotics.
- The construction of a dramaturgical model for analysing the chosen text in terms of role and status.
- Analysis of the scene in John 7:53-8:11.
- Findings and conclusions.

Theoretical issues

In the opening paragraph of a 1993 essay with the title, *The transactional theory: Against dualism*, written in response to a request to give her impressions on the developments in writing theory and critical theory during the 1980s, Louise

Rosenblatt (1993) expresses her frustration at the amount of time it took for these two subjects to come together:

I received dozens of invitations to speak or write, usually about literature, sometimes about composition – but I had to wait forty-five years to be invited to discuss their “connections”! (p. 377)

She refers to the institutionalised separation between composition and literature in the universities and the long struggle of teachers of composition against traditional formulaic methods and mechanical theories of writing at university level, and how this impacted upon the way these subjects were taught at school level¹:

The story of composition in the schools is more complex, ranging from widespread neglect of composition to the use of workbooks that fragmented the language into mechanically testable units. Writing, when taught, served mainly the purpose of demonstrating command of conventional forms and ‘correct’ mechanics. Reading was taught as a set of disparate skills to be demonstrated largely through answering multiple-choice questions. Stories, and even poems, were often used for that purpose. Literature at the high school level was taught with the assumption that there is a single ‘correct’ interpretation [...] (Rosenblatt 1993:378)

This state of affairs was due in part to the dominant influence of Ferdinand de Saussure’s dyadic formulation of the relation of word and object, which he called the ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’. Combined with his emphasis on the arbitrary nature of the sign, that gave rise to a view of language as a self-contained system (Rosenblatt 1993:381).²

Rosenblatt (1993:381) chooses for a different approach, set out in the triadic formulation by Charles Sanders Peirce: ‘The sign is related to its object only in consequence of a mental association, and depends on habit.’ The implicit link between word, object and interpretant strengthened her transactional view of language:

While I understood that language is socially generated, I saw that it is always individually internalized in transactions with the environment at particular times under particular circumstances. Each individual, whether speaker, listener, writer, or reader, brings to the transaction a personal linguistic-experiential reservoir, the residue of past transactions in life and language. (Rosenblatt 1993:381)

Denying the notion of the autonomous text embodying a single determinate message, Rosenblatt also rejects as extreme the opposite conclusion drawn by some critics – based on the polysemous character of literature – that the possibility of determining textual meaning spirals into complete relativism. She finds a solution for the dualism

of absolute truth versus complete relativism in a pragmatic approach:

We must indeed forego the wish for a single ‘correct’ or absolute meaning for each text. If we agree on criteria for validity of interpretation, however, we can decide on the most defensible interpretation or interpretations. Of course, that leaves open the possibility of equally valid alternative interpretations as well as of alternative criteria for validity of interpretation. Such an approach enables us to present a sophisticated understanding of the openness and the constraints of language to our students without abnegating the possibility of responsible reading of texts. (Rosenblatt 1993:382)

The transactional theory

The question of the polysemous character of texts is well-known and has been debated extensively.³ The idea that texts ‘have’ meaning(s) has been abandoned since in favour of a considerably more nuanced view of the process by which meanings relating to texts are generated.

Thinkers from the late 1800s like Georg Simmel, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim began to ask questions about the reciprocal relationship between society and individuals. The interest was directed to the way in which society shapes individuals, and how individuals create, maintain, and change society (Van Staden 1991:129).⁴

The American philosopher, George Herbert Mead, is regarded as the father of modern interactionism. He borrowed key concepts from others such as William James (philosopher and psychologist), John Dewey (philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer) and Charles Horton Cooley (sociologist) and combined them with his own insights to pioneer the field of modern interactionism. Using the concept of *self* in his interactionist theorising Mead focussed on the capacity of individuals to assume the perspective of those with whom they must cooperate for survival on the basis of the interpretation of conventional gestures. This capacity he called *taking the role of the other*.

Based on the insights of Mead a further theoretical perspective evolved, namely *symbolic interactionism*. This perspective studies the way in which the symbolic processes of role-taking, imaginative rehearsal and self-evaluation by individuals adjusting to one another, form the basis for social organisation. This in turn led to role theory, which ‘focuses primary analytical attention on the structure of status networks and attendant expectations’ (Turner 1982:320) involved in the internal symbolic processes of individuals and the eventual enactment of roles. The concept of role denotes the point of articulation between the individual and society. Ralph Linton distinguished the aspects of role, status and individuals from one another. In this view, status

1. Rosenblatt’s contribution in the field of teaching literature was lauded as follows: ‘Even though the current teaching of literature reflects the wide scope of all the literary and pedagogical movements of the twentieth century, and in spite of all the technological advances and disparate theories of literature, one practitioner’s theory of literature education seems to be more widely cited and referred to than any other’s since it was first published in 1938’ (Church 1997:71).

2. ‘Language, according to Saussure, is simply the functioning of linguistic oppositions; these oppositions yield a pattern of relationships – a *Gestalt* – the study of which constitutes linguistics’ (Waterman 1963:64).

3. See, for instance, Hirsch (1967), Gurwitsch (1971), Eco (1976, 1979), Ricoeur (1976), Wittig (1977), Wolff (1977), and Combrink (1984). For an attempt to rescue biblical hermeneutics from the secular views of deconstructionists and literary critics resulting in indeterminate meaning, see Vanhoozer (1998).

4. Paulson (2002–2003) adds Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of pure reason* to the general epistemological roots of transaction theory.

is a collection of rights and duties, and a role represents the dynamic aspect of status – to put rights and duties into effect is to perform a role (see Van Staden 1991:135). This leads to a view of social structure as having three distinct elements (Turner 1982:319):

- a network of positions
- a corresponding system of expectations
- patterns of behaviour which are enacted with regard to the expectations of particular networks of interrelated positions.

Rosenblatt's (1988) transactional theory of literature is at home in this ambit of thought; she formulates as follows:

Instead of separate, already defined entities acting on one another (an 'interaction'), Dewey and Bentley (1949, p. 69) suggested that the term 'transaction' be used to designate relationships in which each element conditions and is conditioned by the other in a mutually-constituted situation. This requires a break with entrenched habits of thinking. The old stimulus-response, subject-object, individual social dualisms give way to recognition that such relationships take place in a context that that also enters into the event. Human activities and relationships are seen as transactions in which the individual, and the social, cultural and natural elements interfuse. (p. 2)

The relationship between the reader and the text is conceived of as a continuing, complex, nonlinear, self-correcting transaction between reader and text. The process involves 'the arousal and fulfilment (or frustration) of expectations, the construction of a growing, often revised, "meaning"' (Rosenblatt 1988:4).

The transactional theory postulates a specific kind of relationship between the reader and the text. According to Rosenblatt (1988), the reader's adoption of a certain *stance*, conscious or unconscious, towards the text, is essential to the reading process. This involves adopting a selective attitude that brings certain aspects to the centre of attention whilst pushing others to the periphery (Rosenblatt 1988:5). The selection possibilities form a range along a continuum between what she calls an 'efferent'⁵ stance and an 'aesthetic'⁶ stance.

Stance

Efferent stance: An efferent stance refers to an attitude that expects to take some information from the text that can be pragmatically useful:

In efferent reading, then, we focus attention mainly on the public 'tip of the iceberg' of sense: The meaning results from an abstracting-out and analytic structuring of the ideas, information, directions, conclusions to be retained, used, or acted on after the reading event. (Rosenblatt 1988:5)

Aesthetic stance: An *aesthetic* reading focusses attention on the experience during the reading event. Awareness of sensations, images, feelings and ideas from past experiences,

5.From the Latin *effere*: to carry away.

6.From the Greek *aisthethai*: to perceive, thus perceptual.

as well as the sounds and rhythms of the words become important. The reader responds to the aesthetic transaction, the various elements of total experience, rather than simply to the text, during and after the reading event. The same text may be read with either stance, because it is not only the reader and the text that are involved in the meaning-making act, but also the situation. The process is triadic, not dual. This implies that the meaning may differ from reader to reader and from situation to situation, even if the text stays the same.

Against the accusation that this approach allows the reader to derive any meaning from whatever point of view from the text, Rosenblatt (1988) refers to John Dewey's precept of 'warranted assertibility' in scientific investigation:

Such a position makes possible agreement concerning the most defensible interpretation according to the shared criteria of evidence, but leaves open the possibility that alternative interpretations for the same facts may be found, or that different criteria or paradigms may be developed. (n.p.)

The shared criteria of validity of interpretation in a particular social context makes it possible to allow for different interpretations of the same text, but also recognises that some readings may be more in accordance with the criteria than others (Rosenblatt 1988:7). Also, there are certain cues in the text that may direct the reader's stance. The arrangement on the page, for instance, may alert the reader to adopt a stance for an aesthetic reading rather than an efferent one.

There is much more detail and subtlety to the transactional theory of literature than set out here.⁷ However, it will suffice for our purpose to have been made aware that our engagement with the text is not one of duality, of I-question-you-to-see-what-you-mean. It is rather a transaction involving reader, text and circumstance, within which the creation of meaning is a dynamic process.

Aspects of drama in texts

The affinity between prose and drama is widely recognised and acknowledged. According to Manfred Jahn (2003):

[...] there is a strong family resemblance between drama and prose fiction. Both genres are *narrative* text types, and it is for this reason that the theory of drama and the theory of narrative texts cover a good deal of common ground.⁸ (D1.1.)

However, the resemblance does not approach identity. Jahn (2003:1.2) points out that most theorists view the true nature of a play as its orientation toward a public performance, with its text seen as a guide to performance. He defines a play as 'a multimedial *narrative* form because it presents a story (a sequence of action units)'.⁹

7.See Tiedeman (2011:57–75) for an in-depth discussion of Rosenblatt's contribution and the problems and shortcomings of transactional theory.

8.Jahn (2003) refers to Richardson (1987, 1988, 1991) as his source in this instance. See Worthen (1998) for some caveats.

9.The definition is an extension of the following definition by Pfister (1988), quoted by Jahn: 'A play is a multimedial form designed to be staged in a public performance. A play is "multimedial" in the sense that it uses both auditory and visual media: a play's audience has to use their eyes as well as their ears (a novel, in contrast, is a "monomedial" form).'

Drama theory and interpretation

According to Jahn (2003:D1.5), the following three 'schools' are distinguished in drama theory and interpretation:

- **Poetic Drama:** this approach emphasises the reading of the dramatic text as a unique experience, in some cases to be valued above the dramatic performance in a theatre.
- **Theatre Studies:** the theatre performance is valued above the text to the extent that the text has no existence outside of being performed in the play.
- **Reading Drama:** this approach holds that the two previous types are 'unnecessarily biased'. Jahn (2003:D1.5.3) subscribes to this approach as a synthesis between the previous two. It 'encourages the cross-disciplinary exchange between the theory of drama and the theory of narrative prose (narratology)'. He explains his choice as follows (Jahn 2003):

The text is accepted both as a piece of literature and as a guide to performance; the movement from 'page to stage' is considered equally important as that from 'stage to page' (Berger 1989). Like a director, the reader of a play's text must be one 'who is able to bring the numerous explicit and implicit signs and signals inherent in the literary text to life in his imagination'. (Pfister 1988:13; D1.5.3)

The latter approach follows an interpretive strategy consisting of a textual analysis orientated to performance. In Berger's terms (1989:28) it is a 'stage-centered reading', 'imaginary audition and visualization'; an examination of the playscript's 'actability' and 'realizability'. It might be described as a 'virtual performance' (Jahn 2003:D1.5.3).

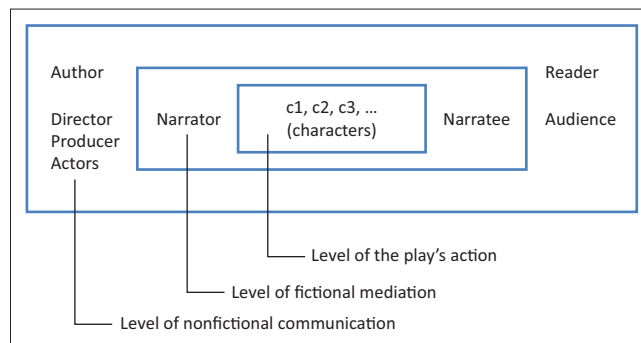
Berger's (1989) definition of 'imaginary audition' is pertinent:

We practice imaginary audition when, in a dialogue between A and B, we imagine the effect of A's speech on B; listening to A with B's ears, we inscribe the results of this audit in the accounts we render of B's language. But we can also [...] listen to B's language with B's ears. [...] As readers we join B [...] in monitoring his speech acts. This perspective converts B's speech to continuous self-interpretation or -interrogation [...] (p. 46)

Plays and narratives have certain commonalities. Their narrative world is in principle the same. Like narratives, plays have a story and a plot. They share the "'double chronology" of all narrative presentations (the duration of the action and the duration of the reception)' (Jahn 2003:1.5.4).

A model of dramatic communication: Figure 1 serves to indicate the levels of dramatic communication in both narrative and play.

Each level of communication comes with its own set of addressers and addressees (i.e. senders and receivers, story-tellers [narrators] and audiences) (Jahn 2003:2.1). The model indicates the categorical equivalence of drama (play) and dramatic narrative, and the legitimacy of applying analytical concepts from stage performance to a dramatic narrative text.



Source: Jahn, M., 2003, *A guide to the theory of drama. Part II of poems, plays, and prose: A guide to the theory of literary genres*, viewed 11 August 2014, from <http://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppd.htm> (used with permission from the author)

FIGURE 1: Jahn's model of dramatic communication.

Analysing performative texts

A playscript or performance is divided into acts and scenes. An act is a major unit of a dramatic text. A scene is an action unit within an act:

[T]ransition from one scene to another involves a new stage situation and a fresh episode, marked either by a change in time and/or location, or by an empty stage, or by characters entering or going off stage. (Jahn 2003:D3.1)

A new combination of characters may also indicate a change of scene.

The playscript is subdivided into two types of text: primary and secondary text. The primary text is made up of direct dialogue between the characters. The secondary text consists of all textual elements that do not belong to the primary text; specifically, the play's title, subtitle, historical notes, dramatis personae, stage directions and speech prefixes.

Primary text: Jahn (2003) lists the following elements of primary text:

- **Speech:** An utterance of a single speaker, either within a dialogue, a monologue, or an aside.
- **Dialogue:** A sequence of conversational 'turns' exchanged between two or more speakers or 'interlocutors'. The more specific term *duologue* is used occasionally to refer to a dialogue between exactly two speakers.
- **Monologue:** A long speech in which a character talks to himself or herself. Often, only one character is on stage during a monologue, in which case one also speaks of a *soliloquy* (from Latin *solus*, 'alone'). Monologues and soliloquies serve a number of dramatic functions: they foreground the monologist or soliloquist; they provide a transition (or bridge) between scenes; they open a source of information and exposition; and they let the audience know something of the private thoughts, motives, and plans of characters. Typically, they are also 'great speeches' that constitute a play's dramatic high points, especially in Shakespeare. For this reason, they are sometimes compared to operatic arias.
- **Aside:** A remark that is not heard by the other characters on stage. There are three types of asides: monological, dialogical, and *ad spectatores*. A *monological aside* is a remark that occurs in a dialogue, but is not meant to

be heard by any of the speaker's interlocutors (it is monological because it is a self-communication).

- Implied stage direction: An indication, in a character's speech, of some property or behaviour that should be perceptible to the audience. (D3.4)

Secondary text: The main elements of secondary text are:

- *Dramatis personae*: The list (or cast) of characters. This is a peritextual element usually accompanied by a brief explicit characterisation indicating role and social status.
- *Speech prefix, speech heading*: The name of the speaker, introducing a speech. This is the dramatic equivalent of 'attributive discourse' or 'speech tags' in narrative theory.
- *Stage direction*: A descriptive or narrative passage of secondary text ... either *describing* set, scenery, props, costumes and characters, or *recounting* events and the behavior of the characters (such as their movements). In performance, a stage direction can normally be translated into a property or a physical action, which is directly perceptible to the audience (Jahn 2003:D3.5).

Eloquent silence: In speech act theory, silence is recognised as a legitimate, meaningful response in certain situations. It is therefore part of communication in general. According to Agyekum (2002:32–33), 'silence is communicative and functional. It carries illocutionary force and perlocutionary force and has pragmatic uses, meanings and impact'.

Silence is a deliberate response by one of the actors in the dramatic text of PA. I will therefore briefly discuss some theoretical aspects of communication.

Saville-Troike ([1982] 2003:23, referring to Hymes 1972) names three units of analysis relating to communicative activities, namely situation, event and act:

- *Communicative situation* is the context within which the communication takes place, for example, a classroom, church service or court trial.
- A *communicative event* is the single bounded event within which communication takes place, as defined by a set of determinants such as the same purpose, topic, participants, language, rules for interaction and setting. Where does an event end? An event terminates whenever there is a change in the major participants, their role-relationships, or the focus of attention. If there is no change in major participants and setting, the boundary between events is often marked by a period of silence and perhaps a change in body position.
- A *communicative act* usually consists of a single interactional statement which may be verbal or nonverbal, such as a request, order, exclamation, facial expression or intentional action:

In the context of a communicative event even silence may be an intentional and conventional communicative act, and used to question, promise, deny, warn, insult, request, or command. (Saville-Troike [1982] 2003:24)

Clair (1998:1) notes that silence is socially constructed.

Recognition of John 7:53–8:11 (PA) as dramatic narrative

The present study proceeds from the assumption that PA presents itself as a dramatic text. Against the background of the theory set out above, the text will be analysed by employing dramaturgical categories. The main categories to be employed in the analysis are the following:

- *The set*: The objects and the backdrop making up stage scenery (i.e. the temple and the Mount of Olives) (see Jahn 2003:D3.2). Word scenery or verbal decor is scenery created in words (Jahn 2003:D4.4).
- *The characters*: The various character roles and the actors in the scene, for example, the protagonist, antagonist, audience, et cetera.
- *Primary and secondary speech*: Dialogue, narrator's commentary, silence as speech act, and symbolic act as a form of dramatic communication.
- *Stage directions*: Centre stage as focal point, focalisation, nuance and inflection.

The scene in John 7:53–8:11

The text

There are two key questions about this pericope (see Table 1):

- What does it say?
- What does it do?

History of interpretation

It is generally accepted that John 7:53–8:11 was interpolated into the gospel at a late stage.¹⁰ The main supporting argument is the fact that this pericope does not appear in the earliest manuscripts. It is not quoted by the Church Fathers. There are some vague references to a case of a woman with many sins who was brought to Jesus that Papias mentioned, which suggests that a version of the story was known relatively early, but a date of around 250 CE for the interpolation seems to be one which many scholars would endorse.

In addition, the style and grammar differs from that of the fourth gospel and seems closer to the style of the synoptic gospels, especially Luke. All this has been extensively researched, and there are excellent studies that cover about everything one can find out about the origins of this piece of literature.¹¹ I am not going to repeat any of that here.

The volume of publications on this pericope is staggering. One of the reasons is that it is the largest interpolation in the New Testament, and as such has drawn attention. The other is the powerful message carried by the pericope, and the intriguing symbolic action of Jesus writing on the ground, without saying what it is that he wrote. This has invited

10. Bultmann (1968:236, n. 2); Schultz (1975:124); Kümmel (1975:195). As late as the 3rd century, see Schnackenburg (1980:235). He concludes as follows: 'Aber für das Joh-Ev stellt er einen Fremdkörper dar, der auch den Zusammenhang von Kap. 7 und 8 störend unterbricht'.

11. Solid work has been done by Klindienst (1992), Bart Ehrman (1988), Chris Keith (2008, 2009, 2013), Jennifer Knust (2005, 2006), Knust and Wasserman (2010), John David Punch (2010) and Wieland Willker (2014), to name but a few. They all provide extensive bibliographies for interested readers.

TABLE 1: Text and translation.

Greek text (Nestle Aland)	Revised standard version
[[53 Καὶ ἐπορεύθησαν ἕκαστος εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ,	7:53 They went each to his own house,
8:1 Ἰησοῦς δὲ ἐπορεύθη εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν Ἐλαιῶν.	8:1 but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.
2 Ὁρθρὸν δὲ πάλιν παρεγένετο εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν καὶ πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἤρχετο πρὸς αὐτόν, καὶ καθίσας ἐδίδασκεν αὐτούς.	2 Early in the morning he came again to the temple; all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them.
3 ἄγουσιν δὲ οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι γυναῖκα ἐπὶ μοιχείᾳ κατελιγμένην καὶ στήσαντες αὐτὴν ἐν μέσῳ	3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst
4 λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Διδάσκαλε, αὕτη ἡ γυνὴ κατελιγται ἐπ' αὐτοφώρῳ μοιχευομένη·	4 they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.
5 ἐν δὲ τῷ νόμῳ ἡμῖν Μωϋσῆς ἐνετείλατο τὰς τοιαύτας λιθάζειν. σὺ οὖν τί λέγεις;	5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?'
6 τοῦτο δὲ ἔλεγον περιάζοντες αὐτόν, ἵνα ἔχωσιν κατηγορεῖν αὐτοῦ. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς κάτω κύψας τῷ δακτύλῳ κατέγραφεν εἰς τὴν γῆν.	6 This they said to test him that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.
7 ὡς δὲ ἐπέμενον ἐρωτῶντες αὐτόν, ἀνέκυψεν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Ὁ ἀναμάρτητος ὑμῶν πρῶτος ἐπ' αὐτὴν βαλέτω λίθον.	7 And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.'
8 καὶ πάλιν κατακύψας ἔγραφεν εἰς τὴν γῆν.	8 And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.
9 οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες ἐξήρχοντο εἰς καθ' ἑἰς ἀρξάμενοι ἀπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ κατελείφθη μόνος καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἐν μέσῳ οὖσα.	9 But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.
10 ἀνακύψας δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῇ, Γύναι, ποῦ εἰσιν; οὐδεὶς σε κατέκρινεν;	10 Jesus looked up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?'
11 ἡ δὲ εἶπεν, Κύριε, κύριε. εἶπεν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Οὐδὲ ἐγὼ σε κατακρίνω· πορεύου, [καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μηκέτι ἀμάρτανε.]]	11 She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.'

all and sundry to fill in the gap with all sorts of proposals, some informed and based on solid research, but many others simply according to whim and flights of fancy.

Dramatic aspects

Table 2 provides an analysis of the pericope in terms of dramatic characters, locality, roles and actions.

Status and roles

Neyrey (2007) gives the following explanation of roles¹²:

The concept of 'role,' borrowed from the stage, involves behavior and the socially recognized position of a person, entailing rights and duties. A role implies a set of expectations for interaction between a person who holds one position in a group and another person who holds a reciprocal position.⁸ In other words, there can be no role of 'leader' without a 'follower' role, no mother without child.⁹ as several anthropologists define it, 'role' is [...] a set of expected behavior patterns, obligations, and norms attached to a particular status. The distinction between status and role is a simple one: you 'occupy' a certain status, but you 'play' a role [...] as a student you occupy a certain status that differs from that of your teacher, administrators, or other staff. As you occupy that status you perform by attending lectures, taking notes, participating in class, and studying for examinations. This concept of role is derived from the theater and refers to the parts played by actors on the stage. If you are a husband, mother, son, daughter, teacher, lawyer, judge, male or female, you are expected to behave in certain ways because of the norms associated with that particular status.

Thus the role of 'mother' refers to her status and duties to her children; in politics: kings vis-à-vis subjects; in economics: bankers to borrowers; and in education, teachers to students. As Malina states, 'roles are indicative of institutional location, hence of the status of that person within that institution'. (p. 7)

Status is something different:

Status. Whereas persons play certain roles, they occupy or have status. 'Status' differs from 'role' in that status is 'a recognized

12. See also Van Staden (1991:135–137).

TABLE 2: An analysis of the pericope.

Dramatic characters	Dramatic locality	Dramatic roles	Dramatic actions
Jesus	Mount of Olives Temple	Protagonist – Jesus: • teacher • judge	Teaching the crowd by: • symbolic action • illocution • transference of guilt • rescinds judgement • frees from sin • grants new life
Scribes and Pharisees	Temple	Antagonist – scribes and Pharisees: • judge • prosecutor • executioner	Overt: • applying the law • accusing the woman • judging Covert: • testing Jesus • judging Jesus
Adulteress	Temple Centre stage	Accused: • guilty as charged Catalyst: • causes things to change	-
Crowd or nation	Temple	Legitimizing community: • jury	-

position that a person occupies within society [...] [which] determines where he or she fits in relationship to everyone else.' In addition, one scholar defines status as a quality entailing deference and precedence in interaction, a quality of professional or public honor [...] Status systems are generated by bases or dimensions of honor – power, wealth, knowledge. 'Status' suggests verticality, a ranking of people according to cultural criteria of worth or excellence. It indicates the honor, respect, or worth a person enjoys. Thus statuses are thought of as 'polar or reciprocal: any particular status always implies at least one other to which it is related.' For example, some statuses may be first or last, highest or lowest, most or least or best or worst. (Neyrey 2007:3)

Neyrey (2007) comes to the conclusion that status is much more important than role in the fourth gospel, and status is defined by knowledge.

TABLE 3: The dramatic flow of the story.

Sequence of events or episodes	Text	Description (King James version)
1. Clearing the stage	John 7:53–8:1	<i>And every man went unto his own house. Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.</i>
2. Setting the stage The curtain opens	John 8:2	<i>And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came unto Him; and He sat down and taught them.</i> • Scene setting – temple surroundings – lots of people – teaching
3. Action – Scribes and Pharisees enter stage	John 8:3a	<i>And the scribes and Pharisees brought (dragged) unto Him a woman taken in adultery;</i> • Emotive register – judgemental/angry/glowing/frenzied
4. Stage directions and ranking	John 8:3(b)	<i>And when they had set her in the midst:</i> • Surrounded by the audience; vulnerable position • Having set = participle = stage direction – centre stage
5. Indicator of character dialogue	4(a)	<i>they said unto Him,</i>
6. Direct dialogue – question by scribes and Pharisees in emotive mode	John 8:4b – 5	<i>‘Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?’</i> • Emotional register – taunting/ contemptuous/groveling • οὐ οὖν τί λέγεις; = But you, what do you say? (contemptuous/obsequiously) • ‘This woman’ – she is not a person, she is a case of law
7. Narrative aside by omniscient narrator	John 8:6a	<i>This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him.</i> • Information to the reader, setting/confirming/explaining the emotive tone in the previous demand/request • The action they bring is not against the woman, it is a covert action against Jesus
8. Expected turn-taking in conversation – met by silence	John 8:6b	<i>Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.</i> • Stooping = participle = stage direction • Deliberate eloquent silence • Speech replaced by symbolic action with illocutionary force
9. Stage direction	John 8:7a	<i>And as they continued to ask him,</i> • Asking = participle = stage direction • Emotive tone demand or request
10. Deliberate action	John 8:7bi	<i>he stood up and said to them,</i> • Deliberate action – angry or confrontational
11. Indicator of character dialogue	John 8:7bii	<i>and said unto them,</i> • Emotional register? – he told them – directional force
12. Direct dialogue = Illocutionary force indicator	John 8:7c	<i>‘Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.’</i> • Emotive register – challenging/accusatory/confrontational • Illocutionary force ≠ permission to execute the sentence of stoning, but a challenge here within this temple of God, in his presence so to speak, to declare yourself blameless and worthy to throw the first stone
13. Deliberate action	John 8:8	<i>And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.</i> • Stooping down = participle = stage direction • Repeat of the symbolic action – was writing on the ground • Deliberate eloquent silence after directing the illocutionary force of the action by his words – demanding soul – searching
14. Perlocutionary effect	John 8:9a	<i>But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest,</i>
15. Result	John 8:9b	<i>and Jesus was left alone with the woman (standing before him) there in the middle.</i>
16. Stage direction	John 8:10a	<i>Jesus looked (stood)up and said to her,</i> • Change of dialogue partner
17. Dialogue	John 8:10b	<i>‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’</i>
18. Dialogue indicator	John 8:11ai	<i>She said,</i> • Stage direction – character change
19. Dialogue	John 8:11aai	<i>‘No one, Lord.’</i> • Confirmation of the perlocutionary effect of Jesus’ symbolic acts and words.
20. Dialogue indicator	John 8:11bi	<i>And Jesus said,</i> • Stage direction – character change
21. Dialogue	John 8:11bii	<i>Neither do I condemn you;</i> • Setting the woman free – from condemnation. Restructuring the basis on which sin and weakness is dealt with. <i>go, and do not sin again.</i> • Illocutionary force: get your priorities right, grasp the new life.

Scene sequence:

In Table 3 the pericope is analysed by plotting the dramatic flow of the story as if performed on stage.¹³

Character dialogue

Three of the *dramatis personae* are involved in direct dialogue, namely the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus, and the woman caught in adultery:

- the scribes and Pharisees address Jesus
- Jesus addresses the scribes and Pharisees

13. Participles are taken as an indication of stage directions, whilst verbs in the imperfect form with its durative aspect, are deemed to describe the action as it happens.

- Jesus speaks to the woman
- the woman speaks to Jesus.

The emotive register of the dialogue between Jesus and the religious authorities is damnatory and hostile. The emotive register of the dialogue between Jesus and the woman is wonderment on her part, and non-judgemental and concerned on his part. The audience is peripherally involved in the dialogue as adjudicators.

Symbolic action

Symbolic action is a means to transmit information, but more than that, it actually constructs social reality, or people’s

understanding of the world.¹⁴ It can be evaluated in terms of three perspectives:

- Effects: Referring to the identifiable influence an act may have on the audience.
- Aesthetics: Referring to the artistic techniques used in a rhetorical act.
- Ethics: Referring to the morality of the techniques used and the ends sought by the symbolic action.

In this case there are two symbolic actions to consider. The first is the symbolic action of the pericope itself as rhetorical act. The second is the symbolic action performed by Jesus when he writes on the ground. We will first consider Jesus' double action of writing in terms of its functionality in the story, and then the pericope itself as symbolic act. This corresponds to the two initial questions about the pericope formulated above: what does it say and what does it do?

Findings and conclusions

Description of the scene

The preceding scene (Jn 7:45–52) establishes and demonstrates the unbelief of the leading priests and the Pharisees. Their speaking tone is derogatory, both about Jesus being a prophet and about the naivety of those who believe him because they do not know the law. They deny him prophetic status because 'no prophet is to rise from Galilee' (Jn 7:52). The stage is cleared in the first verse of the interpolation (Jn 7:53) which serves as an ending to the previous scene. Everybody goes home, but Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives where he frequently went to pray and receive strength for his prophetic task.

Opening

In John 7:14 Jesus goes to the temple to teach during the feast of Tabernacles.¹⁵ The element of teaching is strengthened in John 7:28.¹⁶ The curtain rises (Jn 8:1) early on a new morning ('Ὁρθρου – temporal genitive). The new scene is set up to maximise its dramatic impact. The teaching motif is taken up again – Jesus goes to the temple, the whole nation flocks to him, and like a typical rabbi and philosopher he sits down and starts teaching. It is a peaceful picture. Within the scene, there is a vibe in the audience. Expectations have been growing over the last few days because of the signs Jesus performed (Jn 7:31 – 'When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?'), and because of the manner in which he spoke (Jn 7:46 – The officers answered, 'No man ever spoke like this man!'). Most translations have 'All the people came to Him'. The Greek has 'the whole nation came to Him',¹⁷ which I consider to be significant, as it is a *hapax legomenon* (once only) in the gospel of John. *The whole nation* is hyperbolic, of course, and meant to indicate that the situation

14. In rhetorical criticism the rhetorical act in itself is considered to be a symbolic action.

15. John 7:14 – Ἦδη δὲ τῆς ἑορτῆς μεσοῦσης ἀνέβη Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν καὶ ἐδίδασκεν (UBS).

16. John 7:28 – ἔκραξεν οὖν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ διδάσκων ὁ Ἰησοῦς... (UBS).

17. John 8:2 – ... καὶ πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἤρχετο πρὸς αὐτόν... (UBS).

is getting out of control for the religious leaders. The nation came to be taught, and they will be. At the same time they are one of the *dramatis personae* in the confrontation that is to follow, because they form the interpretive community, the adjudicating body that will witness the drama and decide the merits of the case.

The altercation

The religious authorities, previously identified as the leading priests and Pharisees¹⁸, are getting in a state of panic, and this sets the tone (emotive register) for what follows. Here identified as the scribes (*hapax legomenon*) and the Pharisees¹⁹, they burst onto the stage, *dragging* a woman caught in adultery, and *making her stand* in the middle. The context would make the middle the centre of the crowd. In terms of dramatical aspect, it is also the middle of the stage. But centre stage is not the centre of the issue. That will soon be evident as proceedings unfold.

The entrance of the scribes and Pharisees with the adulteress has been carefully choreographed. It is abrupt and interruptive, upsetting the almost pastoral harmony of the teacher and his audience in the opening scene. This in itself carries a symbolic message. It is a take-over, a power play aimed at rearranging participant positions through the social mechanism of public humiliation. It is an effort to undo the popularity Jesus has built up around his person, to discredit him, and, if possible, to remove him from society. This will emerge during the unfolding of the altercation.

After storming onto the stage and arranging the scene to their maximum benefit by placing the adulteress centre-stage, the scribes and Pharisees address Jesus in direct dialogue: 'Teacher', they say, 'this woman has been caught in the act of adultery'.

No doubt the announcement would have created an effect. It was intended to. We may surmise that shocked gasps were heard, and whispering all around. Such a serious charge; definitely guilty, being caught in the act; and here the woman was standing in the temple grounds! They quote the law: 'Moses commanded us to stone such'. 'Such behaviour tears at the fabric of society!' is what they say. 'It threatens what we know and believe to be right!' is what they say. 'It contravenes God's laws!' is what they say. 'The penalty is prescribed!' they say. Ultimately by none less than God himself, they imply. The whole matter and its outcome is as clear as day. But what is the woman doing here, then? Why is she not outside being stoned right now?

As luck will have it, we have an omniscient narrator who knows why. And he informs us, the readers. Not the crowd of onlookers, though. Not Jesus and the guilty woman. No, just us, the readers. In a narrative aside we are introduced to some secret information: the scribes and Pharisees are

18. John 7:45 – ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ Φαρισαῖοις (UBS).

19. John 8:3 – οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι – this combination is a status enhancement device (UBS).

plotting to test Jesus, and this is not a test he will survive. The deck is stacked against him. He is trapped. 'But you', they ask him, 'what do you say?'

This is a dramatic moment in the sequence of the story. They know him. They know how he thinks. If he stays true to his beliefs and true to form as a worthy opponent in an agonistic society, he is finished.

But our narrator lets Jesus perform an act of dramatic irony – he keeps silent. And silence, the experts say, is not simply the absence of speech (Saville-Troike [1982] 2003:117). Silence can by itself constitute a communicative act.

In practically all cultures there are rules for verbal interaction. Saville-Troike ([1982] 2003) indicates that these rules may vary across cultures, and that may lead to misunderstandings:

One example of rules for interaction is turn-taking rules in conversation: in English, if one speaker utters a compliment, request, or invitation, politeness usually requires the addressee to make an appropriate response on the next turn [...] (p. 123)

Eloquent silence is to be differentiated from unmarked silence (stillness, pauses), which carries no meaning: 'Eloquent silence alone (not stillness, pauses or silencing) is an active means chosen by the speaker to communicate his or her message' (Ephrat 2008:1913).

An important point is made by Saville-Troike ([1982] 2003): Silent communicative acts conveying propositional content may include gestures, but may also consist of silence unaccompanied by any visual cues (p. 117).

Not only did Jesus react with eloquent silence, but he performed a visual act that can only be construed as a symbolic act. He bent down and wrote on the ground. The silence and the symbolic act should transmit the same message.

According to Ephrat (2008), silence signifies the emotive function:

All scholars of eloquent silence – linguists, psychologists, discourse researchers, etc. – seem to agree about the emotive force of silence. Within the emotive function, where the speaker (not the outside world or the Other) is at the center, this speaker through his or her words or silences expresses his or her emotions, internal experiences. (p. 1916)

Silence in such cases is the socially built-in means whereby one expresses one's empathy as in cases of loss and sorrow. (p. 1917)

What did this symbolic act of writing on the ground signify? The scribes and Pharisees did not understand the silence or the symbolic act. They were intent on catching Jesus in their trap. Therefore, they kept nagging him to answer. Then Jesus stood upright and said: 'Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone'. Again, he bent down and wrote on the ground.

The atmosphere is highly charged. The audience as interpretive community know the law. The transgression is proven. The woman is guilty. In terms of the law the outcome is already decided. They also know Jesus. They have come to hear his teaching. Will he declare the woman innocent, and thereby himself guilty?

The words Jesus uttered do not constitute a direct answer to the harsh question of the scribes and Pharisees. He does not meet their challenge to a juridical duel verbally. He meets it in dramatic fashion by an action, which is a decisive answer. Initially they ignore it, demanding that he speak. When he does, it is again not in answer to their question, but an elucidation of his action. It is not a plea, and it is not an appeal to their emotions.

It is a surgical strike to the essence of their relationship with God. It is a head-on confrontation with their over-inflated and arrogant sense of justification, from which they derive the power to apply the Law of Moses with no compassion and with condemnatory harshness. And when Jesus bends down in humbleness and writes on the ground again, it is He who strikes home. He shames them into silence. Every last one of the accusers slinks away. They abscond. 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' he asks the woman when he stands up again. She is still standing in the middle, held there by her guilt and waiting for his judgement.

Did no one carry out your sentence? Did no one throw a stone? Was no one amongst them without sin? 'No one', she said. Nor do I condemn you, said Jesus. You are free to go, and free to sin no more.

It is clear that the aspect of drama around the woman in the narrative scene was the catalyst that tipped the scales of power. The accusers thought they had an unassailable position. Their case against the woman was watertight, and so was the way they set up the trap for Jesus. He was theirs for the taking. But that is not how it ended. A simple dramatic action, accompanied by a few words, shamed them into silence and disappearance.

What, then, was the symbolic meaning of writing on the ground? Did he write down their sins, as Hieronymus thought? Did he write down his own verdict, as the Roman judges did, and what was it? Surely not innocent, for the woman was clearly guilty!

The illocutionary force of an utterance is the speaker's intention in producing that utterance; for example, promising, advising, warning, which can be verbal or nonverbal. It is not simply words spoken or a deed done, but by speaking and doing a power is unleashed commensurate to what is intended. The combined illocutionary force of Jesus' writing on the ground and his utterance, 'Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone', was not the granting of permission to carry out

the sentence, but the holding up of a mirror that reflects light to the darkest and innermost recesses of the hearts and minds of everyone present. The one who is perfect and blameless, who has never thought or said or done anything wrong, who stands pure before God, let him or her throw the first stone and be the executioner.

An illocutionary force has what is known as a perlocutionary effect, such as persuading, frightening, amusing or causing to act. The perlocutionary effect of Jesus' symbolic act and the words he spoke to the accusers was one of shaming. They all looked into the mirror, and not one picked up a stone. They all went away.

Concluding remarks

Reader stance

We as readers have taken an aesthetic stance (see earlier discussion) towards the text in this reading event. The text presents itself as literary, with dramatic aspect. Having analysed it in terms of its dramatic aspect, and having experienced the power inherent in the story, we can arrive at a decision about what the text has to say. We do not know everything. There is still a mystery about what exactly Jesus wrote. Some say he wrote Jeremiah 17:13:

LORD, you are the hope of Israel; all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn aside from you will be written in the dust, because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water.

Others remember the writing on the wall in Daniel²⁰, and God writing the Ten Commandments on the stone tables with his finger²¹. From Plutarch there is a well-known story about Demetrius who saved his friend Mithridata by writing on the ground what he could not say in words: 'Go away, Mithridata!, thereby setting him free'.²²

Function of the interpolated dramaturgical scene (PA)

The pertinent question we have to answer is: what does this pericope do? Why was it interpolated at such a late stage?

Firstly, I would like to point out that the interpolation is evidence of theology in action. Even then, there were theologians at work using narrative – in this case a powerful dramaturgical text – to keep the hopes alive for true justice and peace, against what may have seemed to be insurmountable odds. Secondly, the characters, roles and statuses in this text cannot be taken for themselves. The time of inclusion is at least two centuries after the event that forms the contents of the story. The details within the story

must reference something outside the text in the real world at the time of inclusion. The pericope was interpolated to bring a new perspective into that reality. Chris Keith proposed that the interpolation had an apologetic function, countering accusations that the founder of this new religion was an uneducated, illiterate peasant not to be taken seriously. That might be part of the reason for inclusion. However, the carefully choreographed construction of the pericope for maximum dramatic effect, suggests something more profound. Its placement at precisely this juncture of John's gospel, together with the powerful dramaturgical scene with its illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect, suggests that the interpolation referenced an internal power struggle in the church, towards the resolution of which this specific scene would lend a pivotal impetus. What could that be about? Accepting a date for the interpolation of around 250 CE, and based on the theme of the pericope, I would venture that the church was becoming aware of its growing influence and power. Historically speaking the conversion of Constantine was not far away. Factions may have been jostling for position and control, based on issues such as orthodoxy and heresy and the establishment of the canons of Scripture itself. The dramatic victory of Jesus over the accusers in *Pericope Adulterae* (PA) sets an exemplary tone for justice and mercy rather than condemnatory harshness in resolving power issues within the church. In this sense the placement of PA in the gospel of John is perfect, setting the tone for the interpretation of the whole gospel. The popularity of the PA today attests to its function as pivot of power in a time of uncertainty and flux. Thomas O'Loughlin (2000:84; eds. Kreitzer & Rooke 2000) voices surprise at the current popularity of PA, measured against a lack of interest in earlier times, specifically that of the Latin Fathers.²³ He grants that the frequency of reference to and treatment of the pericope are not necessarily precise indicators, but still feels that the relative silence is significant. He suggests the following as key to its lack of prominence:

The pericope challenges some very deep-seated fears by men about the behaviour of their wives, the fear of sexuality without control among women whose sexuality was considered accounted for, and the notion that religion must support the structures of the society [...] – 'bad women' were 'bad women' no matter what Jesus said or did. (O'Loughlin 2000:103)

Willker (2014) mentions the possibility that the inclusion came about because of laxness towards sin in general and sexual licentiousness in particular:

[O]ne can get the idea that at this time, when the idea came up to forgive mortal sins, the PA was added to the Gospel of John, probably from an extracanonical source. (p. 14)

However, the results obtained from the application of the interpretive model as set out in the study above indicate something different. It is not sexual morality that is at issue,

20.LXX Daniel 5:5 – ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἐξῆλθον δάκτυλοι χειρὸς ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἔγραψαν κατέναντι τῆς λαμπάδος ἐπὶ τὸ κονίαμα τοῦ τοίχου ... (In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote in front of the lamp on the plaster of the wall).

21.LXX Deuteronomy 9:10 – καὶ ἔδωκέ μοι Κύριος τὰς δύο πλάκας τὰς λίθινὰς γεγραμμένας ἐν τῷ δακτύλῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ ...

22.The Greek of Plutarch is very close to what is told here: he wrote on the earth – κατέγραψε ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ὁρῶντος αὐτοῦ· “φεύγε Μιθριδάτα (Parallel Lives 057, Demetrius).

23.Willker (2014:13) also notes the silence: 'None of the early Greek fathers commented on the passage, e.g. Origen and Chrysostom wrote commentaries about the Gospel of John, but did not discuss the PA.'

but the morality of power.²⁴ The early church fathers had to organise the fast-growing church structurally and theologically during and after the initial persecutions. It was only when the unity of the church became threatened by internal strife and heresy, and power mongering resulted in harsh and unforgiving action against transgressors, that the need arose for a decisive example alluding to the highest authority, namely Jesus himself. At this time PA was introduced into the gospel text with the purpose of providing direction to the church. The answer of PA is that the church has no power to condemn. Its power lies in the dramatic and forceful example set by Jesus in the scene of PA, to set the sinner free to become good. In this way PA functions as hermeneutical key in the understanding of the gospel at that time.

Today we have moved forward more than 1750 years since the estimated date of inclusion of PA in the gospel of John. The world is a very troubled place with wars everywhere, some of them religious. Within the church there is strife and apostasy. Everything is tainted by corruption and power struggles. Authorities take a hard line towards opposition. The church itself has become a condemnatory place. How can and should this challenge be met?

The chances of finding similar floating debris like PA from ancient times are slim, and we would not be able any more to interpolate it into the text. But we do not need new texts. We have the old, if we can only release their power again. For this purpose we construct models, change our perspectives, play our roles and discover anew the power in the texts that can change things around.

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²⁴See also U. Becker in Willker (2014:17): 'U. Becker suggests that the pericope has been included into the canon in the 3rd CE in either Alexandria or Antiochia, as the two main centers of conflict between orthodoxy and heresy. Becker tends to Antioch.'

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