The Paraclete as Successor in the Johannine Farewell Discourse: A Comparative Literary Analysis

Ruth Sheridan

Abstract: In recent years scholars have become aware of the ways in which John 13-17 imitates but also subverts the conventions of ancient farewell discourse genres. The purpose of this article will be to analyse selected examples of farewell discourses from the Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions in order to evaluate the Johannine Farewell Discourse in their light. The contribution that this article makes to the topic relates particularly to how the Paraclete functions as a ‘unique’ successor/mediator figure, effectively ‘skewing’ the testament genre. In conclusion, some suggestions are made about the possible social function of this literary invention for the Johannine community.

Key Words: Farewell Discourse, Genre, Greco-Roman, Jesus, Paraclete, Successor, Testament

Traditionally scholars and commentators have referred to chapters 13-17 of the Fourth Gospel as the ‘farewell discourse’ of Jesus.¹ The reason for this generic categorisation lies in the number and kind of formal, thematic and rhetorical motifs shared by John 13-17 and certain literary compositions from antiquity that exemplify the farewell discourse genre. Some Johannine scholars argue that John’s farewell discourse is modelled on the biblical examples of the farewell speech of father-to-sons (cf. Jacob, Gen 49) or on the extra-biblical literature, notably the pseudepigraphical Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.² Other scholars are inclined to argue that John’s literary dependence may have plausibly extended to various examples of farewell speeches in Greco-Roman literature.³

Among other motifs, the farewell discourse genres of antiquity were characterised by the motif of ‘succession’. This stipulates that, upon his or her death, the protagonist of the narrative provide a successor for the group of disciples/kin to act as a replacement. In

² Brown, John 2:597-598; Moloney, John, 370-371.
John 14-16 it is the Paraclete who is given this role of successor to Jesus (cf. 14:16-17; 25-56; 15:26-27; 16:7-11, 13-15). However, the relationship between Jesus (the 'protagonist') and the Paraclete (his 'successor') is no ordinary relationship: the Paraclete does more than replace Jesus—he 'mediates' the ongoing, indwelling presence of Jesus to the disciples.\(^4\) Essentially this overturns the central thematic convention of the farewell discourse genre, i.e. the permanent departure of the protagonist through death; in a way, Jesus 'returns' in and through the Paraclete. But there is subtlety to the Jesus-Paraclete relationship: Jesus does depart, and he is not identified with the Paraclete, keeping the 'farewell' tone of the discourse intact, albeit somewhat precariously. In a recently published article I argued that such generic 'skewing'—which has troubled many an interpreter—is in fact intrinsic to how genres operate and evolve, and I developed this argument with reference to modern literary genre theory.\(^5\) In the current article I wish to focus more specifically upon the evidence for reading the Paraclete as a subversive figure in the farewell discourse genre of antiquity: to this end I will explore what makes the Paraclete a 'unique' successor compared with other ancient successor figures, and, \textit{mutatis mutandis}, what makes Jesus a 'unique' hero figure. In discussing the results of this analysis, I will advance suggestions about the possible social function that this genre-skewing might have had for the Johannine community vis-à-vis their own process of identity construction.

**Preliminary Considerations**

Firstly, let me preface my analysis by stating that I will not perform a comprehensive survey of every 'testament' (\textit{diathēke}) or farewell discourse genre of antiquity in this article. Texts such as \textit{1 Enoch}, \textit{Jubilees} and the \textit{Testament of Job} in the pseudepigraphical corpus will be overlooked; on the basis of the fact that the \textit{Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs} (hereafter T12P) is widely regarded as the most fully developed—if not the only—example of an independent farewell discourse genre of the time, I will concentrate on the characteristic motifs and structural components of that corpus in the first section of this article.\(^6\) I will also consider the testaments upon which the T12P were no doubt based, that is, the biblical farewell addresses of the patriarchs and kings (cf. Gen 49; 1Kg 2:1-9). On the side of the Greco-Roman literature, an independent 'farewell discourse genre' does not appear to have existed; however there are numerous examples of 'last words' and minor farewell speeches spanning a variety of genres such as epic, tragedy and \textit{bioi}. Selected examples will be analysed based on how prominently these texts portray the 'protagonist-successor' motif characteristic of the literature. I want to reinforce that by investigating the commonality (or lack thereof) between John 13-17 and other examples of the farewell discourse genre I do not blindly ascribe to what Sandmel called "parallelomania"—rather, I suggest that these precursor texts, if not known and used by

---


\(^6\) The dating of the T12P is controversial, but most likely to have been composed after 250 BCE by a Hellenized Jew; the Christian interpolations (with decidedly Johannine overtones, see \textit{Testament of Zebulun}) would have been added in the early second century CE; see J. H. Charlesworth, (ed.) \textit{The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Vol. 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments} Garden City, (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 777. Obviously the Christian interpolations of the T12P make for a difficult decision with regard to its 'literary influence' on John; the testaments in their original form could have provided a literary model for John's Gospel.
the Gospel author(s), would have at least formed part of the sociolect or common "stock of generic knowledge" for the Gospel's intended audiences. This article thus aims to show how generic expectations arising out of this stock of knowledge would have been subverted or modified vis-à-vis the Paraclete as successor figure.

THE TESTAMENTARY CORPUS AND THE BIBLICAL FAREWELL DISCOURSES.

The structural elements of any given genre consist of a regulative framework, certain highly conventional thematic motifs and particular rhetorical functions. John Collins considers the narrative 'framework' of the T12P to be constitutive of the testament genre, arguing that while a particular pattern of thematic motifs can be discerned in the corpus the arrangement of these motifs varies considerably. The narrative framework, on the other hand, carries a regulative force because it details (in the third person) the occasion of the testament: there is an introduction describing the situation of the patriarch (the protagonist)—his imminent death, his illness, his gathering of his kin-group—and a conclusion describing the death of the patriarch, his final prayer and his burial. The occasion of imminent death always necessitates the deliverance of the 'farewell' discourse.

The farewell discourse proper takes up the body of the testament and contains certain conventional thematic motifs. Scholars usually recognise three typical motifs of the farewell discourses in the T12P. Firstly, the patriarch may narrate particular events of his life in the past that serve to demonstrate to his gathered kin-group (usually his sons) that he has either been a moral exemplar to them or that he has been culpable of moral failing. This 'biographical' (or 'historical') retrospective thus holds up the patriarch as an embodiment of virtue or vice. Indeed, in each of the testaments, the patriarchs are

---


8 Cf. John Frow, *Genre* (London: Routledge, 2005), 9; my use of the word 'framework' above is roughly equivalent to Frow's concept of the 'frame' of a given genre.


stereotyped according to a specific virtue or vice. The second feature is clearly related to
the first: the patriarch exhorts his kin towards ethically appropriate behaviour, either in
imitation of his virtue or in avoidance of his vice. Other exhortations include the directives
to keep God’s commandments (Deut 30:16) or to love one another. The third motif focuses
on the patriarch’s prophecy of events that will befall his kin-group after his death. This
may take several shapes: the prediction of calamities (cf. T. Sim. 3:1-2; T. Gad 4:1-7), or the
falling away of the kin-group (T. Levi 4:1; T. Nap. 4:1-5, T. Dan 5:7-8; cf. Gen 49:3-4), or the
‘deuteronomic’ pattern of ‘sin-exile-return’. This is related to the paraenetic motif in that
fidelity to the path of virtue is enjoined upon the kin so as to avert future disaster (cf. T.
Sim. 5:1-5; T. Levi 13:5-7).

The rhetorical dimensions of the T12P and the biblical farewell discourses are also
significant: the testaments in the T12P are persuasively crafted so that, in most cases, the
motifs of historiography and prophecy serve the paraenetic motif. From a literary-critical
perspective, the biblical farewells function to provide a place of transition in the overall
narrative of God’s people at which point continuity will be ensured between the traditions
embodied by the dying patriarch or king and the future of the successors and later
generations. The farewell discourse gives a sense of closure to the story together with
the promise of continuation, which has an inherently consolatory function.

In the farewell discourse literature, the successor plays a crucial role in facilitating a
smooth transition from how life was lived under the patriarch or king to how life would be
lived without him. The presence of the successor motif in this literature demonstrates the
utmost concern of the dying protagonist for the future of his kin. Certainly the protagonist
can ‘see’ into the future—upon death he attains a kind of prescience which enables him to
predict the woes that might befall his kin. Despite the usually pessimistic nature of his
predictions—which, in the words of Bruce Malina, stem from the “devolutionary” world
view of the ancient Mediterranean culture—the fact that the protagonist possesses this
foreknowledge functions to ‘neutralise’ the negativity of those predictions. The successor
conserves the traditions and commandments by which the protagonist lived (cf. 2 Kg 2:1-
12), sometimes by expounding his teachings (cf. 1Q22:5), and even at times by keeping a

---

12 For example, T. Reuben (drunkenness and lust); T. Simeon (envy); T. Levi (revenge); T. Issachar (simplicity);
T. Zebulun (mercy and pity); T. Dan (falsehood); T. Gad (hatred); T. Joseph (righteousness).
13 Cf. Collins, “Testaments,” 337; note the ex eventu or ‘ad hoc’ nature of the prophecies.
14 Certain scholars have considered paraenesis to be the leitmotif of the farewell discourse genre, beginning
with H.-J. Michel, Die Abschiedsrede des Paulus an die Kirche Apg. 20.17-38: Motivgeschichte und theologische
Konsolationsliteratur: Wie konnten in Römer John 13,31-17,25 lesen?” in Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums,
ed. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/175; Tübingen:
Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 365-412.
17 Cf. Malina, “Exegetical Eschatology, the Peasant Present and the Final Discourse Genre: The Case of Mark
Coloe, and Rekha M. Chennattu (Rome, Las, 2005), 129; on the notion of ‘devolution’ see Malina, “Exegetical
Eschatology,” 56.
19 ‘The Words of Moses’ in Geza Vermes, The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English (Harmondsworth: Penguin,
1997), 537.
written record of those teachings so as to preserve his memory (cf. *T. Mos.* 10:11). Finally, the successor acts as a ‘guide’ for those left behind, leading them along the ‘way’ (cf. *T. Mos.* 11:9-10).

The relationship between the successor and the dying protagonist in the Jewish farewell discourse texts is obviously one of kinship, and no doubt kinship groups were a focal institution in antiquity. The biblical farewell discourses, for example, are often passed down from father to son/s, with one son usually becoming successor to his father and the recipient of certain commissions: so Joseph succeeds Jacob in Gen 49, and Solomon succeeds David in 1Kg 2:1-9 (cf. 1 Chr 28-29). However, in other examples the protagonist is succeeded by a member who is not of kin, but who is chosen for a given task or who is anointed king: so Joshua succeeds Moses to lead God’s people into Canaan (Deut 31:7-8) and Saul succeeds Samuel as king by anointing (1Sam 10:1; Samuel’s farewell discourse occurs later in 12:1-25). Furthermore, a particular version of the ‘successor’ motif can be found in those biblical texts which portray the relationship between protagonist and successor as one of ‘forerunner’ and ‘perfecter.’20 The successor in this case is to complete the work of the protagonist or to interpret his message. The successor becomes a ‘replacement’ for—almost a ‘copy’ of—the protagonist, but he goes further in bringing to completion the mission of the protagonist. A classic example is Elisha’s succeeding Elijah, where Elisha is dealt a double portion of the Elijah’s ‘spirit’ (2Kg 2:9-15), and where Joshua is obeyed identically to Moses, having received a ‘spirit of wisdom’ by the laying on of Moses’ hands (cf. Deut 34:9).

**EVALUATION OF THE JOHN 13-17 IN LIGHT OF THE T12P AND BIBLICAL FAREWELL DISCOURSES.**

The structural and thematic elements that John 13-17 has in common with the biblical farewells and the testaments are many. To begin with, chapter 13 of the Gospel provides the narrative ‘framework’ for Jesus’ discourse—a final meal with his ‘own’ (13:2b), inflected with poignant moments, such as the demonstration of Jesus’ love for his disciples (13:4-11) and the allusions to his imminent departure (13:1, 3). Like the patriarchs and biblical protagonists, Jesus concludes his discourse with a prayer (17:1-26) and his death and burial are later described (19:16b-42). Jesus also announces his departure (13:33), the grief of his disciples is mentioned (cf. 13:37), and Jesus often consoles them (cf. 14:1-3). Thematic, Jesus’ farewell discourse contains elements of paraenesis: his supreme commandment is that his disciples display mutual love just as Jesus loved them (cf. 13:34; 15:12-13). Often Jesus ‘prophesises’ the calamities his disciples will suffer without him (cf. 16:2-3) as well as predicting the judgment the world will face for its refusal to believe in him (cf. 16:8-11). Finally, Jesus provides his disciples with a successor, the Paraclete (cf. 14:16-17, 25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11, 13-15), their ultimate consolation.

However, John’s divergence from the conventions of the Jewish farewell discourse genre is theologically significant, and this divergence can be noted on three important points, each pertaining to John’s Jesus-Paraclete relationship. Firstly, Jesus is not presented as ill or on his death-bed. Jesus’ life does not come to a ‘natural’ end; his death is

---

the consequence of a protracted confrontation with the dark forces of the ‘world’ (cf. 15:20b–25) and the ‘prince’ of the world (cf. 14:31). In being ‘lifted up’ (cf. 3:14 etc) at the heart of his ‘hour’, Jesus’ death pronounces judgment on the world—something the Paraclete continues in Jesus’ absence (cf. 16:11). His death is presented as an organic part of his mission and as part of his response to his Father’s will. Throughout the Gospel Jesus is depicted as on the way to death (cf. 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). This relates to the second point, namely the presentation of Jesus in the farewell discourse and the Gospel as a whole. Jesus is presented as more than a holy man of God like Moses or Jacob (cf. 1:17–18; 4:12); he is more than simply the embodiment of a given virtue like the twelve patriarchs. Jesus is the sent One of the Father (cf. 3:34); he is one with God (cf. 10:30–33); he is the Word made Flesh (1:14). As such Jesus is able to enter human history, to depart to his Father’s ‘house’ (14:2–3) and to ‘return’ again (cf. 14:18; 28; 16:22). Jesus, then, is presented as a decidedly unique protagonist in John’s Gospel. It follows that Jesus’ relationship to his successor—and indeed Jesus’ very successor—will be likewise ‘unique.’ This is the third point to discuss.

The relationship between protagonist and successor in the farewell discourse literature discussed above is more often than not one of kinship, usually father-to-son. Apart from the T12P, the presupposition in these texts is that the appointed successor will die and in turn appoint another member of kin as successor. The Paraclete, on the other hand, will remain ‘forever’ (14:16), being ‘spirit’ (cf. 14:17). As successor to Jesus, the Paraclete replaces Jesus as leader; ensures that the living memory of Jesus is held dear (cf. 14:26) and the fruit of this is a written testimony (cf. 20:30); he expounds Jesus’ teachings (14:26) and he ‘guides’ the disciples (16:13). This reflects the Jewish testamentary literature examined above. However, the Paraclete does more than this: he mediates Jesus’ ongoing presence, effecting Jesus’ ‘return’ to his own (cf. 14:16–18). Again, while it has been argued that the Jesus-Paraclete relationship is analogous to the ‘forerunner-perfecter’ motif of some biblical farewell discourses and testaments (Elijah and Elisha), the notion of the Paraclete ‘perfecting’ Jesus in any real sense is dubious: Jesus’ words from the cross, tetēlestai (19:30) suggest the completion and perfection of his own work.21 In short, although there are distinct parallels between the employment of the protagonist-successor motif in John 13–17 and the Jewish farewell discourses examined in this chapter, it is clear that the Paraclete is presented as more than an ordinary successor. As successor to Jesus and mediator of his presence, the Paraclete makes the Johannine farewell discourse in some sense generically distinctive, yet also recognisable as a farewell discourse. John’s points of divergence from the farewell discourses analysed above do, however, indicate some telling points of resemblance between John’s farewell discourse and particular examples of farewell-type scenes in Greco-Roman literature. I will now discuss these points in more detail.

FAREWELL DISCOURSES IN GRECO-ROMAN LITERATURE

The well-established Jewish testament and the biblical farewell discourse genres find no parallel in the Greco-Roman literature of antiquity.22 Rather than existing as a generic corpus, Greco-Roman farewell discourses are incorporated within a variety of other

21 See Bornkamm, “Der Paraklet,” for the argument about the Spirit as ‘perfector’ of Jesus.
22 The attestation of literary testaments in Greek literature is poor—Menippus of Gadara (approx. 300 B.C.E) was said to have composed a diathēke but it is not extant (cf. Collins, “Testaments,” 329).
genres ranging from the *bios* to epic through to tragedy. More often than not, the ‘farewell’ speeches delivered by the protagonist in Greco-Roman literature are brief, taking the form of ‘last words’ or memorable ‘sayings’ which “ornament” the narrative.
The Jewish testamentary literature on the other hand gains its generic specificity from its substantial discourses framed by typical narrative contexts. The task of outlining the structural components of the latter is therefore quite straightforward, as shown above. However, the vast array of Greco-Roman genres within which these ‘last words’ are found renders the task of enumerating a universal set of ‘farewell discourse’ motifs quite difficult. I will therefore concentrate on samples of Greco-Roman literature that portray the protagonist of the literature in his or her relationship to death, to a successor and to his or her loved ones. Firstly I will focus attention on Plato’s Socratic dialogues, notably the *Phaedo* and the *Apologia* because of their resemblance to typical farewell discourse motifs examined above and because the Johannine farewell discourse exhibits a certain affinity to them. Secondly, I will attend to selected examples of Greco-Roman tragedy for their depiction of death as a process undergone by the protagonist. Thirdly, I will analyse the theme of grief and consolation in Greco-Roman tragedy and epic and how this theme is approached by a most interesting ‘spin’ on the ‘successor’ motif. Finally, I will evaluate John 13-17 in general and the Jesus-Paraclete relationship in particular, in light of the discussion of these texts.

**Plato’s Socratic Dialogues**

Plato’s *Apologia* concerns itself with the trial of Socrates, Athens’ provocative and itinerant philosopher. Socrates’ sentence is passed and he finds himself at ‘the time just before death’, upon which occasion ‘men most do prophesy.’ Socrates prophesizes the imminent punishment upon those men who have—unjustly it is understood—condemned him to death (cf. *Apol.* 39C, 137). Like the dying protagonists of the Jewish farewell discourse genre, death brings Socrates into a sudden state of prescience and ability to prophesy. But in contrast to the T12P, Socrates prophesies nothing ominous concerning the future of his loved ones and disciples; rather he turns to them and delivers a minor discourse about how they ought not to grieve since death will actually be of benefit to Socrates (cf. 39E, 138-42A, 145). This discourse has the primary function of providing consolation to his group of disciples in the face of his death.

In the *Phaedo* the scene is set for the execution of Socrates, but prior to this event his disciples are gathered with him in prison to hear him speak to them one last time. Exhortations on a variety of themes occur throughout Socrates’ lengthy discourse, including the need for his followers to keep to the philosopher’s theories and way of life (*Phaedo* 115B, 393), and to strive for virtue and wisdom (114C, 391). Like the T12P, there is also a reference to Socrates’ desire for burial (115C 393) and his prayer (117C, 399-401). There are, however, notable differences between the *Phaedo* and the

23 See Kurz, “Luke 22:14-38,” 262-3 for a listing of texts. For examples of the *bioi* see Diogenes Laertius *Epicurus*, and especially Plato’s *Phaedo*; for epic see Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Homer’s *Iliad*, and for tragedy see the plays of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides.

24 Cf. Kurz, “Luke 22:14-38,” 225; an exception is Plato’s Socrates, as will shortly be illustrated.


Socrates’ gathered group is not that of kinship but discipleship, and whereas the protagonist of the Jewish farewell discourse is a ‘man of God’ in the tradition of his ancestors, Socrates includes himself as a ‘chattel of the gods’ (cf. 62B, 217) along with the rest of his friends.

The *Phaedo* also makes extensive reference to the notion of the soul’s immortality. Socrates is presented as philosophising on this concept since his impending death makes it a ‘fitting’ occasion to do so (61E6, 215). As in the *Apologia*, death for Socrates comes as a benefit (cf. 63B, 219) and this is provided as sufficient reason to curb the grief of his disciples (cf. 63C, 219-221). The disciples are profoundly grieved nonetheless (cf. 177D-E, 401) and lament that they will be ‘orphans’ (*orphanous*) without Socrates, their ‘father’ (166A, 395). Despite this, Socrates does not offer them the consolation of appointing for them a successor who will take his place: *they* are to seek out that replacement themselves (cf. 78A, 271-273). The disciples’ immediate consolation in the *Phaedo* rests primarily on the fact that Socrates goes to a ‘better place’ after death (63B, 219). Socrates’ stoic (even cheerful!) acceptance of death (117D, 401) resulting from his conviction of obtaining immortality stands in contrast to the grief and pathos expressed over death in the Greco-Roman tragic genre, which will be briefly discussed below.

**The Death of the Protagonist in Greco-Roman Tragedy**

Tragedy is one of the most influential literary forms that originated in Greece. Two notable motifs of the Athenian tragic plays composed in the fifth century BCE are the utterance of ‘last words’ and the “unstable status” in which the tragic protagonist stands between the threshold of life and death. The ‘last words’ of the tragic protagonist are typically dramatic. No matter the cause of death in the tragic plays, the protagonist’s ‘last words’ are always characterised by three themes: a bidding of farewell to the light of the sun; a reference to being ‘no more’ (*ouketi*); and a reference to the ‘end’ (*telos*). I will examine these motifs as they are present in the text of Euripides’ *Alcestis* since this text will also receive attention in the following sub-section on the motif of ‘succession’.

It is the protagonist’s declaration of being ‘no more’ while in fact still alive that illustrates the ‘unstable’ relationship in which he or she stands between life and death. As the protagonist approaches death he or she speaks of death as an already accomplished reality. Alcestis, the eponymous heroine of Euripides’ play, speaks of her death as both a prospect and a retrospective occurrence (cf. *Alc.* 281-84.17). Alcestis calls out to the light of the sun (cf. *Alc.* 243.16), is then covered by Hades’ darkness (cf. *Alc.* 269-270.16) but then ‘returns’ from the underworld to bid farewell to her children telling them she is ‘no more’ (*Alc.* 270.16). To her husband, Admetus, she speaks as one who has died and is yet to die: ‘I chose that you should look upon this light at the cost of my own life, I am dying…

---

29 Ibid., 8.
30 This text is taken from Euripides, *Medea and Other Plays*, (trans. John Davie; London: Penguin, 2003). See also Sophocles’ *Antigone* as well as Euripides’ *Hippolytus* for the same themes; these and other tragedies are analysed in Parsenios’ article.
(cf. Alc. 281-84; cf. 320-21.18).

Her husband’s speech confirms Alcestis’ ‘death-in-life’ status as he says to her, ‘while you lived no other woman had my heart’ (Alc. 329.18). Again Alcestis repeats that she no longer exists (Alc. 390.19).

The literary effect of Alcestis’ ‘death-in-life’ status (cf. Alc. 141.13) is that she “dies into death.” What is noteworthy about this is that it portrays death and dying as a process rather than an instantaneous happening. In the words of Parsenios, “there is never a time when dying characters are not dying”. This strange manner of living—dying throughout life—is the very form of the tragic character: it is how he or she exists and consequently it gives him or her a “supra-human status as spectres in the land of the living.” This is further accented by the fact that in many of the tragic plays the actual moment of death is rarely emphasised or detailed, underscoring the pathos of the situation of death. The process leading to death and the bereavement and grief that follow death are emphasised instead. The consolation other characters yearn for is to find a replacement or ‘surrogate’ for their lost loved one. I now turn to discuss this topic in more detail.

The Successor Motif in Selected Greco-Roman Texts

The replacement of a recently deceased loved one with another person who would act as a ‘surrogate’ or ‘substitute’ is a motif employed for consolatory purposes in many types of literature in the ancient Greco-Roman world. This motif is somewhat unconventional: the ‘replacement’ of the dying protagonist does not occur by means of the official appointment of a successor at the time of death, but rather the presence and person of the lost loved one is sought by the grieving lover who is left behind. It is presumed that the dead person’s presence can be found again, and—most significantly—found ‘in’ and ‘through’ the person who acts as his or her ‘substitute’. This type of ‘succession’ then, expresses something more than the act of replacing another; it is more appropriately described as the act of ‘mediating’ the lost loved one’s presence.

The motif was employed in many texts, such as those of Plutarch and Virgil. Thus in Virgil’s Aeneid, Dido longs for a ‘little Anneas’ (i.e., a child) after Anneas has departed; such a substitute would leave her feeling not so ‘utterly betrayed and desolate’ as the child’s ‘face’ would ‘remind’ Dido of Anneas’ face (Aen. 4:327-330.78). Furthermore, not only children but also inanimate objects served to bring the departed or deceased person to life by means of representation. According to Bettini, funerary portraits functioned as ‘surrogates’ of lost loved ones in the Greco-Roman world, literally ‘re-presenting’ the

---

31 Lost in translation is the aorist participle katastēsasa (‘having caused’ you to see the light…) which indicates that Alcestis has already died; this stands in contrast with thnēko (‘I am dying’) which indicates that the process of death continues; see Parsenios, “No Longer in the World,” 12.


37 See for example, Plutarch Ad. Ux. 611B, discussed in Holloway, “Left Behind.”

38 This text is taken from Virgil, Aeneid (London: Penguin, 2003).
deceased.39 Statues also performed the same function: in Euripides' *Alcestis*, Admetus tells Alcestis as she dies that he desires 'sculptors...with cunning hands' to fashion a 'statue' of her to lay upon his bed which he may 'clasp and fold in [his] arms', imagining Alcestis with him as he 'calls [her] name' (*Alc*. 348-52.18). The statue of Alcestis serves to console Admetus in his grief via his dreams (*Alc*. 354-56.18). Such statues and portraits worked like 'mediums' through which the deceased could return to their loved ones in "dreams and apparitions."40 While the deceased is clearly not identified with the statue or portrait, his or her presence can still be discerned through those mediums. At the same time the literal 'resemblance' between the medium and the deceased is evident. Holloway thus considers this motif as expressing the 'mediated' return of the dead person's presence through a surrogate.41

### Evaluation of John 13-17 in Light of Greco-Roman Farewell Discourses.

The similarities between the Socratic dialogues discussed in this chapter and the Johannine farewell discourse are evident: chapters 13-17 of the Gospel may have sounded echoes of Socrates' trial and unjust condemnation (*Apol.*), and Socrates' prophecy of imminent punishment upon his persecutors is allusively paralleled in 16:8-11 (cf. 15:24). The exhortation to virtue and wisdom contained in the *Phaedo* also bears resemblance to Jesus' farewell discourse (cf. 15:12-13). The gathering of disciples (rather than kin, cf. the biblical testaments and the T12P) finds a parallel in the 'fictive kinship' represented by Jesus' disciples.42 Furthermore, the motif of Socrates' death being of some benefit is paralleled in John 16:7, although in the *Phaedo* it is Socrates who benefits from death and in John 16:7, the disciples. Finally, Socrates' disciples speak of being left 'orphanned' by their leader's death; Jesus expresses the same concern for his disciples (14:18). However despite this marked literary affinity, Jesus remedies their orphaned state by 'coming' to them (14:18) by means of his successor the Paraclete (14:16-17), whereas Socrates, of course, makes no such provision.

I have already noted in this article that Jesus is depicted in 13-17 as *on the way* to death rather than as ill and dying. This is true of Socrates, and also of the protagonists of Greco-Roman tragedy. The latter 'die into death' much as Jesus does as he moves towards his 'hour' throughout the Gospel. In the farewell discourse, Jesus also declares that he is 'no longer (ουκετί) in the world' (14:18b; 16:10; 17:11), and even speaks of his death—or the triumph it heralds—as an already-accomplished reality (cf. 16:33). While Jesus' 'supra-human' status is not that of a 'spectre in the land of the living', the high Christology of the Fourth Gospel makes it possible to read a parallel at this point as well.43 Nevertheless, the differences between the tragedy genre and the depiction of Jesus in the John 13-17 are clear: Jesus in the end 'dies into' *eternal life*, communicating that life through the Spirit-Paraclete. Unlike the tragic protagonists, Jesus’ death receives significant emphasis, and for important theological reasons.

---

41 Ibid.
Finally, the theme of the mediated return of the lost loved one through statuary and funerary portraits finds a suggestive parallel in John's presentation of the Paraclete. The Paraclete acts as a 'replacement' for Jesus but he also mediates the ongoing presence of Jesus. Turning to Euripides again, it is still the same Alcestis that hopefully 'returns' to Admetus through his statue; yet for the author of the Gospel of John, it is the Paraclete and not the 'post-mortem' Jesus that 'comes' to the disciples after Easter.44 Therefore as fascinating as this parallel is, it is inexact. This is further supported by the fact that in the Greco-Roman texts analysed the deceased reappear as phantom-like figures in 'apparitions and dreams.' Quite obviously the presence of Jesus as mediated through the Paraclete is not referred to in John 14-16 as a fleeting apparition but as a permanent and experiential reality. Likewise, the Paraclete is not depicted as an inanimate 'statue' but an eschatological gift – a living and life-giving presence among the disciples.

**CONCLUSION**

The comparative literary analysis presented in this article has shown that the Johannine farewell discourse exhibits affinities with a diverse range of literary conventions proper to various ancient farewell discourse genres. This article has sought to analyse John 13-17 in the context of selected Jewish and Greco-Roman farewell discourses that exemplify literary conventions familiar to audiences of John's time. Thus, while it is clear that John 13-17 would have been received and understood as a 'farewell discourse', it is also notable that John 13-17 diverges significantly from the expected literary patterns of the contemporaneous Jewish and Greco-Roman farewell discourses. This divergence from generic conventions carries a theological and Christological purpose; the focus of this article has been on how John's presentation of the Paraclete as 'successor-mediator' subverts the central thematic convention of the farewell discourse genre, namely, the permanent departure of the protagonist through death. Yet, in John's Gospel Jesus does depart through death, thus keeping the 'farewell' tone of the discourse in place. John's 'unique' characterisation of the Paraclete as successor-figure certainly served a theological function, but the generic-skewing involved to meet this function also indicates the social contingency of genre as such – John's presentation of the Paraclete was no mere literary inventiveness for the sake of it, but part of the way the Johannine community may have made sense of great social change, or made sense of their "anointed" identity in the post-Easter period.45 

44 Contra Holloway, “Left Behind,” 31, who notes the literary affinity but considers Jesus' return as a "post-mortem visit."

45 Cf. Burge, Anointed Community.
Author: Ruth Sheridan is lecturer in Biblical Studies at the Broken Bay Institute/University of Newcastle. She completed her doctorate on the Gospel of John in 2010 at the Australian Catholic University. Her work is forthcoming as Retelling Scripture: ‘The Jews’ and the Scriptural Citations in John 1:19-12:15 (Leiden/Boston: Brill).

Email: ruth.sheridan@dbb.org.au

© 2011 Ruth Sheridan