

Mapping the Scholarship on 1 John: A History of Scholarship and Variations in Methodology

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Introduction

Little scholarly consensus exists on the historical as well as the literary interpretation of the Johannine Epistles.¹ Notably, the First Letter of John has been a controversial document in terms of its genre,² compositional structure,³ autho-

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- 1 Gustav Adolf Deissmann advocated a technical difference between “Epistles” (=literary epistles; non-real letters) and “Letters” (=Greco-Roman letters; real letters). While an “epistle” (Epistel) was a document written for literary and artistic purposes, a “letter” (Brief) was for more private and practical purposes. Given this distinction, he categorized the Pauline Letters as “letters,” and the General Letters (James, 1 and 2 Peter, and Hebrews) as “epistles.” Cf. Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten; das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte der hellenistisch-römischen Welt* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1909); [English] *Light From the Ancient East. The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Greco-Roman World* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927). Contemporary scholarship no longer employs this distinction (Cf. Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986], 17–20).
 - 2 Regarding the genre of 1 John: *universal tract* (Windische, Houlden), *homily* (Marshall, Strecker), *cyclical letter* (Dodd, Kruse), *encheridion* (Graystone), *polemic* (Brown), *polemic and exhortation* (Painter), *Lesehilfe* (Klauck) and so forth. Cf. H. Windische, “Der erste Johannesbrief,” in *Die Katholischen Briefe*, HNT 15, 3rd edition (Tübingen: Mohr, 1951), 136; J. L. Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, HNTC (London: Harper & Row, 1973), 31–32; I. H. Marshall, *The Epistles of*

rial intention, and its social as well as cultural context and background. This paper researches the history of scholarship on 1 John, focusing on the methodological variations and ensuing changes in perspective on the interpretation of the text. I will take up three major lines of methodological approaches — the historical critical approach, the rhetorical critical approach, and the non-polemical reading — which more or less accord with the historical trajectory of broader biblical scholarship. For 1 John, a touchstone of interpretative difference can be found in its polemical texts (1 John 2:18–19; 4:1–6). Considering these disparate methodologies, I will compare the interpretations of these texts to clarify how the methodological variance highlights a particular feature of the letter.

John, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 14; Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*, trans. L. M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996 [German, 1989]), 3; C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, 2nd edition (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947), xxi; Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 28; K. Graystone, *The Johannine Epistles* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1984), 4; Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 30 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 92ff; John Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, Sacra Pagina 18 (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2002), 85–86; Hans-Josef Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief*, EKK 23/1 (Zurich and Braunschweig: Benzinger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlag, 1991), 31.

- Scholars have presented a variety of structural analyses of 1 John — ranging from two to six divisions. Brooke maintained that there is no structure in 1 John (A. E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912], xxxii). Despite the diversity of opinions, there is some consensus that it has the prologue (1 John 1:1–4), three divisions (or cycles, [1] 1:5–2:17, [2] 2:18–3:24, and [3] 4:1–5:12), and the Epilogue (5:13–21). And yet, the exact contours of these three divisions (cycles) differ according to scholars. For the variety of the structural analyses, see the following reference. Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 22ff; see also, L. Scott Kellum, “On the Semantic Structure of 1 John: A Modest Proposal,” *Faith&Mission* 23/1 (2005, 38–82).

1. Historical Criticism

1.1. German, British, and US Scholarship

While the Johannine Epistles have traditionally been categorized as part of the General Epistles (the Catholic Epistles),⁴ modern scholarship usually includes these letters in the *Corpus Johanneum* (the Johannine Corpus, Johannine Literature). Past Johannine scholarship has seldom treated the Johannine Letters independently; the Second and Third Epistles have been rarely investigated on their own account.⁵ In historical criticism, study and research on the Johannine Epistles have filtered through the study of the Johannine Gospel, and thus have been regarded merely as an extension or an adjunct to the Johannine Gospel.

Until the mid-20th century, scholars investigated the relationship between the Gospel of John and 1 John mainly from linguistic, grammatical, and stylistic perspectives, arguing for or against the common authorship. Johannine scholarship in Germany — with its legacy of Wrede, Wellhausen, and Schwartz — promoted *Literarkritik* (source criticism/ “literary criticism” in the older, German sense), assuming that literary strata within the Gospel text indicate specific stages in the development of Johannine Literature.⁶ Scholars generally maintained

4 Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 2.23.24–25; 3.25.2–4, καθολικῶν ἐπιστολῶν; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 4.15., καθολικὴ ἐπιστολή.

5 The classic debate between Bauer and Käsemann redeemed the significance of 3 John in the 19th century scholarship, however. Cf. Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, ed. Georg Strecker, BhTh 10, 2nd edition (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1964); [English] *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. R.A. Kraft and G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Ernst Käsemann, “Ketzerei und Zeuge: Zum johanneischen Verfasserproblem,” *ZTK* 48 (1951, 292–311). One exception in more recent scholarship is Judith M. Lieu’s monograph: *The Second and Third Epistles of John: History and Background* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986).

6 William Wrede, “Charakter und Tendenz des Johannesevangeliums,” in *Vorträge und*

different authorships for the Gospel and 1 John and the sequential priority of the Gospel, as was well attested in the positions of Ernst Haenchen and Rudolf Bultmann.⁷ Integrating this *Literarkritik* to a *religionsgeschichtlich* perspective, Bultmann developed his own “existential interpretation” of the Johannine Gospel.⁸ British Johannine scholarship, however, was rather skeptical of the Bultmannian integration of *Religionsgeschichte* and *Literarkritik*; scholars — like C. H. Dodd, R. H. Lightfoot, W. F. Howard, E. C. Hoskyns, and C. K. Barrett — more or less demonstrated “literarkritisch Abstinenz,”⁹ while the question of authorship remained “a touchstone for British scholarship.”¹⁰ C. H. Dodd, for example, regarded the author of 1 John as a disciple of the Evangelist, concluding the different authorship,¹¹ but he viewed the Gospel “as a single, coherent text that

Studien (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Siebeck, 1907, 178–231); Julius Wellhausen, *Erweiterungen und Änderungen im vierten Evangelium* (Berlin: Georg Reiner, 1907); Eduard Schwartz, “Aporien im vierten Evangelium,” in *Nachrichten von der Königl. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaft zu Göttingen: Philologisch-historische Klasse* (Göttingen, 1907, 342–372), (1908), 115–188, 497–650.

- 7 Ernst Haenchen, “Neuere Literatur zu den Johannesbriefen,” *Theologische Rundschau* 26 (1960, 1–43); Rudolf Bultmann, *Die drei Johannesbriefe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), 9–10.
- 8 Rudolf Bultmann, “Der Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischen und manichäischen Quelle für das Verständnis des johannesevangeliums” (1925), in *Exegetica Aufsätze zur Erforschung des Neuen Testaments*, ed. E. Dinker (Tübingen, 1967, 100–146); idem, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986 [1941]).
- 9 Jörg Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie II. Ihre Probleme im Spiegel der Forschung seit Reimarus*, WUNT 96 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 246.
- 10 R. Alan Culpepper, “The Relationship between the Gospel and 1 John,” in *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles*, ed. R. A. Culpepper and Paul N. Anderson (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014, 95–119), 96. The bracket is mine.
- 11 C. H. Dodd, “The First Epistle of John and the Fourth Gospel,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 21 (1937, 129–156); idem, *The Johannine Epistles*, MNTC (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946). Also, C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Interpretation with Commentary and Notes on the Greek*

pointed forward.”¹²

German *Literarkritik* and Bultmanian integration had a stronger impact on North American scholarship, which focused more on the reconstruction of the Johannine community as reflected in Johannine Literature. The two most influential proponents of redaction criticism, J. Louis Martyn and Raymond E. Brown, shifted the question of the interrelationship of Johannine Literature from the linguistic and stylistic aspects to the text strata and the reconstruction of their editorial stages, advocating an account of the developmental process of the Johannine community behind the Gospel and the letters. They postulated the “developmental theory”¹³ (or “Multiple Redaction Theory”¹⁴) of Johannine Literature,¹⁵ arguing for the historical evolution of the Johannine community along with a multiple-staged process of composition/redaction of the Gospel and letters. Redaction criticism tried to see the referential reality through a *window* of

Text, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978 [1955]); Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, ed. and completed by Francis N. Davey (London: Faber & Faber, 1947).

- 12 Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *John and Philosophy: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 9.
- 13 Tom Thatcher, “Introduction,” in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition*, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher (Louisville, London, Leiden: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 1–9; idem, “Anatomies of the Fourth Gospel: Past, Present, and Future Probe,” in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, ed. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).
- 14 Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, edited and rev. Francis J. Moloney, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 58ff.
- 15 J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 2nd edition (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979 [1st edition 1968]); idem, “Source Criticism and *Religionsgeschichte* in the Fourth Gospel.” in *The Interpretation of John*, ed. John Ashton, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997 [1st edition 1970]), 121–146); Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*. AB 29–29a. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966, 1970); idem, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

the text, assuming that the meaning of the text is *in the world behind the text*.¹⁶ The question of the relationship between the Gospel and 1 John, thus, turned into the discernment of the location of each Johannine document in a linear and monolithic evolutionary trajectory of the Johannine community. First John evidences an internal conflict or schism (cf. 1 John 2:19, ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθαν),¹⁷ thereby scholars assigned a compositional stage to 1 John *different* from that of the Gospel. Redaction criticism emphasized the polemical elements of 1 John (1 John 2:18–19; 4:1–6)¹⁸ because they provide the data and clues to reconstruct the evolutionary history of the community. The polemical reading, thus, became the dominant exegetical perspective for 1 John from the 1960s to the 1980s. Yet, until the early 20th century, the scholarly consensus held that 1 John comprised both paraenetic and polemic elements, and that their interpretations were more balanced on the assumption that the polemical aspects of 1 John should not be overly emphasized.¹⁹ It was Robert Law, as an exceptional figure, who particu-

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- 16 Murray Krieger, *A Window to Criticism: Shakespeare's Sonnet and Modern Poetics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 3–4. Many researchers borrow this metaphor of *window* and *mirror* (or *behind the text* and *in front of the text*) in their explication for the difference between historical criticism and literary criticism. Cf. Norman Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 19; R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (1983); Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, ed. Daniel Harrington, S.J. (Sacra Pagina, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 13–20; idem, *Belief in the World*, ix–xi; Stephen Smalley, *John Evangelist & Interpreter*, 2nd ed. (Cumbria, CA/Exeter, UK: Paternoster Publishing, 2001), 94–95.
- 17 1 John 2:19 “they went out from us.” Thus, those who left the community are called “secessionists.” This designation comes from Brown (*The Epistles of John*, 60, 70, et passim), along with other nomenclatures — “opponents” (x), “adversaries” (415, 574, 618, etc.).
- 18 Also, 2 John 7. Arguably 1 John 1:1–4 can be included in this list.
- 19 Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John: Greek Text with Notes* (London: William Clowes and Sons Limited, 1966/1886), xxxix; A.E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons,

larly underlined the polemical reading of 1 John.²⁰

1.2. Polemical Reading of 1 John

The scholarly consensus on the polemical texts of 1 John singles out 1 John 2:18–19 and 4:1–6. Both passages are of a Christological nature, given that 1 John 2:18–19 is a part of the self-contained section of 2:18–25 (especially, cf. 2:22–23). These texts include the figures called “antichrist(s)” (ἀντίχριστος, 2:18 [x2], 22; 4:3; cf. 2 John 7), “false prophets” (ψευδοπροφήτες, 4:1), and “the spirit of error” (τὸ πνεῦμα πλανῆς, 4:6).²¹ Certainly the author of 1 John has some contentious situation in mind. Yet, in 1 John the polemical texts are not many; there are only two sections (1 John 2:18–19; 4:1–6), for instance, compared with those in the Pastoral Epistles (cf. 1 Tim 1:3–11; 4:1–7; 6:3–5, 20–21; 2 Tim 2:14–4:5; Tit 1:10–16; 3:8–9).

However, once the historical critics set this polemical situation as the interpretative default-setting, “antichrist,” “false prophets,” and “the spirit of error” only reinforce polemical reading, pointing to historical opponent figures of the community — whom scholars refer to as “secessionists.” In addition to these, some texts — isolated as “slogans” of the opponents — are also treated as polemical texts of a moral/ethical nature (1 John 1:6, 8, 19; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20). First John 1:1–4 is sometimes added to this list of the polemical texts.²² Scholars offer widely divergent hypotheses concerning the stage of 1 John’s composition. Yet,

1928/1912), xxvii. Cf. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 47–48.

20 Robert Law, *The Test of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (London: T&T Clark, 1909), 25.

21 Also, “liar” (ψεύστης, 1 John 2:22). The same expression appears in 1:10; 2:4; 4:20; 5:1.

22 Bultmann, Schnackenburg, and Brown (and others) regard 1 John 1:1–4 as a polemical text.

no consensus exists as to “when” — “in which stage of the community development” — the letters were written, which points back to the question of the chronological relationship between the Gospel and the epistles. Scholarly opinions remain divided on this point — still now — in chiefly five different positions.²³

1.2.1. Christological issue: 1 John 2:18–19; 4:1–6

First John 2:22–23 and 4:2 demonstrate the issue evidently relating to Christological confession. It is unanimously agreed that the central issue of these texts points to the proper understanding or confession of Jesus in his relationship to God the Father and in his ministry. In a rhetorical question, 1 John 2:22 refers to the person who denies that Jesus is the Christ (ὅτι "Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστός);²⁴ thereby, the author identifies the liar (ὁ ψεύστης, v. 22) with the antichrist (ὁ ἀντίχριστος, vv. 18, 22). It is an issue about the messiahship of Jesus, yet the text remains ambiguous, allowing multiple interpretations — particularly, the sense in what 1 John understands that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah). Likewise, it is not clear how and why this denial is related to the denial of the Son, which also excludes “to have/possess the Father” (v.23). Some suggest that it is the issue of Jewish messiahship; others, the divinity of the messiahship; still others, the humanity of Jesus Christ, with the last interpretation being the majority opinion, yet with a wider range of interpretations (see below). For this interpretation, 1 John 4:2 is particularly significant to underscore the issue at stake; ἐν τούτῳ

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- 23 The five major positions are as follows: (1) 1 John was written after the Gospel, (2) 1 John was written before the Gospel, (3) 1 John was written during the composition of the Gospel, (4) 1 John is independent of the Gospel, and (5) the sequence cannot be determined. Cf. R. Alan Culpepper, “The Relationship between the Gospel and 1 John,” in *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles*, ed. R. A. Culpepper and Paul N. Anderson (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014, 95–122).
- 24 Jesus is without the definite article whereas Christ is with the definite article, thus the translation is “Jesus is the Christ.” A similar construction is also found in 4:15, “Jesus is the Son of God.”

γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ· πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστὶν — which is usually translated as “By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (NRSV; KJV; NAB), thus featuring that the right confession is the acknowledgement that “Jesus Christ *has come in the flesh*.”

Given this polemical reading, the Johannine scholars explored the identity of the “secessionists” and their Christological view, which — according to this polemical reading — the author of 1 John was trying to repudiate.²⁵ The identification of the secessionists through “mirror reading” became a problematic issue due to the need to speculate this identification based on little internal evidence. Scholars have variously identified the *possible* background of the secessionists as “Gnostic” (or, incipient gnostics),²⁶ “Docetists,”²⁷ Cerinthians,²⁸ and Jewish

25 E.g., John Painter, “The ‘Opponents’ in 1 John,” *NTS* 32 (1986, 48–71).

26 The leading proponents are Dodd (*The Johannine Epistles*, xix), J. Bogart (*Orthodox and Heretical Perfectionism in the Johannine Community* [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977], 115–122), Marshall (*The Epistles of John*, 15), Brown (*The Epistles of John*, 104–106), Smalley (*1, 2, 3 John*, 14–15), and W. Schmithals (*Neues Testament und Gnosis: Erträge der Forschung* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984]).

27 After Gnosticism receded from the front line, scholars switched to the Docetic background of the opponents. Cf. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles: Introduction and Commentary*, trans. R. and I. Fuller (New York: Crossroad, 1992 [German 1984]), 20–21; Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John*, trans. L. M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992 [German 1987]), 169; Strecker, *The Johannine Letters*, 73–74; P. J. Lalleman, “Adversaries Envisaged in the Johannine Epistles,” *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 53 (1999, 17–24); Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 27; et al.

28 Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John*, xxxiv; John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 19, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 111; M. Hengel, *Die Johanneische Frage: Ein Lösungsversuch*, WUNT 67 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 176–177; D. A. Carson, “The Three Witnesses and the Eschatology of 1 John,” in *To Tell the Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology in Honor*

Christians.²⁹ The debate tenaciously continues between the majority “Gnostic-docetic” proponents and the minority “Jewish-messianic” ones, although both sides have a range of variations and nuances.

1.2.2. Moral issue: 1 John 1:6–2:11; 2:28–3:10

First John includes a series of antithetical parallelism (or, antithesis) in 1:6–2:11 and 2:28–3:10. Scholars have explained its distinctive formulaic pattern either by source theory or by rhetorical style. Schnackenburg and Haenchen, for instance, explained these antithetical statements as 1 John’s characteristic style.³⁰ In fact, antithesis is a typical of proverbial and formulaic expressions as often seen in Wisdom literature and other New Testament documents (cf. Sir 27:3; Mark 8:34; Luke 17:6; Jas 1:5, 26; 3:2).

of Robert Gundry, ed. T. E. Schmidt and M. Silva, JSNTSupp 100; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 230; David K. Rensberger, *1 John, 2 John, 3 John*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 23; Charles E. Hill, “Cerinthus: Gnostic or Chiliast? A New Solution to an Old Problem,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000, 135–153); Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3, John: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC 38 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 28–29; Robert W. Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 35–38.

- 29 J. C. O’Neill, *The Puzzle of I John: A New Examination of Origins* (London: S.P.C.K., 1966); Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A contextual Study of John 4:1–32*, WUNT 2nd ser. 31 (Tübingen: J.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1988); Birger Olsson, “First John: Discourse Analysis and Interpretations,” in *Discourse Analysis and the New Testament: Approaches and Results*, ed. E. Porter et al., JSNTSupp 170 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 369–391); Stephen Smalley, *1, 2, 3, John*, revised edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007); Hans-Josef Klauck, *Die Johannesbriefe* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990). Cf. Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, WUNT 166 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).
- 30 “Stylistic device”—Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles*, 7–8; Haenchen “Neuene Literatur zu den Johannesbriefen,” *TRuNS* 26 (1960, 268–291).

In 1907, Ernst von Dobschütz first proposed a source theory behind 1 John 2:29a–3:10b.³¹ Bultmann, taking up Dobschütz’s source theory after twenty years and applying it to all the letters, reconstructed his hypothetical written source (*Vorlage*) of 26 antithetical couplets (or triplets) in 1:6–2:11, 2:29–3:10, and 2 John.³² His commentary on the Johannine Letters (1967) — with a minor rearrangement — posited the same antithetical couplets and triplets. Furthermore, from the *religionsgeschichtlich* perspective, he assigned the source to the revelatory discourse source (*Offenbarungsreden-Quelle* or *Reden-Quelle*) — an oriental (Mandaean) non-Christian gnostic source—which exhibits a cosmological dualism.³³ His reading of 1 John was basically polemical, positing that the author of 1 John employed the antithetical statements vis-à-vis the opponents (“false teachers,” *die Irrlehrer*).³⁴

Johannine scholarship supported Bultmann’s source theory, particularly his *Semeia-Quelle*,³⁵ but his hypothetical revelatory discourse source was criticized

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- 31 Ernst von Dobschütz, “Johanneische Studien. I,” *ZNW* 8 (1907, 1–8.) He identified the thought patterns of Hellenistic Judaism or LXX style with moral dualism. His identification of the hypothetical source was limited to antithetical statements in 2:29a–3:10b, thus rendering his argument — a differentiation between antithetical statements (source) and rhetorical comments (the author of 1 John) — less convincing.
- 32 Rudolf Bultmann, “Analyse des ersten Johannesbriefes,” *Festgabe für Adolf Jülicher* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr /Paul Siebeck, 1927, 138–158).
- 33 Also, introducing “the ecclesiastical redactor” to the redaction process of 1 John, he further asserted the redactor’s additions to 1 John (e.g., future eschatology, 1 John 2:28; 3:2; 4:17; atonement, 1:7b; 2:2; 4:10b; different theological focus, 5:14–21), thereby the redactor rendered the letter closer to the traditional theology (of the Great Church).
- 34 Bultmann, “Analyse des ersten Johannesbriefes,” 139.
- 35 Robert T. Fortna, for example, postulated a Sign-Source hypothesis out of the reflections upon the criticism for Bultmann. Robert T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source underlying the Fourth Gospel*, SNTSMS 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); idem, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to present Gospel*, SNTW; Philadelphia: For-

and rejected. Brown, while rejecting both of Bultmann's source theory and its gnostic-context origin, accepted his identification of the opponents as an "incipient gnostic" tendency, and deemed "the lapidary [antithetical] statements" as *slogans* of the opponents.³⁶ This *slogan*-interpretation was widely accepted by redaction critics, rendering these texts "polemical." Brown summarizes his polemical reading of 1:6–2:11 as follows:³⁷

I have analyzed the disapproved and approved conditional sentences of 1:6–2:11 in their separate protases and apodoses in order to show both the carefully balanced structure given to them by the author and the fact that they make sense when read against the background of a refutation of secessionist theology ...

1.3. Assessment

First, recent interpreters are quite aware of the pitfalls of the "mirror-reading."³⁸ The scholarly focus on the identification of opponents falls into a vicious hermeneutical circle. With these short sentences, the interpreters identify the secessionists from a *Religionsgeschichtliche* perspective. Once they set up the putative opponents (e.g., Gnostics or Docetists), the external information is read back into the text of 1 John, as is often pointed out by scholars.³⁹

truss Press, 1988/Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989); idem, "Source and Redaction in the Fourth Gospel's Portrayal of Jesus' Signs," *JBL* 89 (1970, 151–166); idem, "Christology in the Fourth Gospel: Redaction-Critical perspectives," *NTS* 21 (1974–1975, 489–504).

36 Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 42.

37 Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 241.

38 John M. G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *JSNT* 31 (1987, 73–93).

39 E.g., Judith M. Lieu, *I, II, & III John: A Commentary* (Louisville/London: Westminster

Second, the historical-critical approach overemphasizes “polemical reading,” maximizing the polemical texts to include 1 John 1:6–2:11; 2:28–3:10 (and 1:1–4). PHEME PERKINS was the first scholar who — as early as 1979 — identified and warned of this one-sided reading: “[s]cholars who are not sensitive to the language of oral cultures often misinterpret statements about opponents in ancient writings. . . . I stress this point because we will be talking constantly about the author’s opponents. Remember that ‘opposition’ is the norm for discussion in a rhetorical climate.”⁴⁰ Although she acknowledges the community schism and the presence of the opposing group, she proposes “a less polemicized reading.”⁴¹

Third, recent Johannine scholarship has questioned the redaction-critical model of the Johannine Community⁴² — especially *the developmental theory*. The basic assumption is that the text reflects the historical evolution of the Johannine Community, assuming a linear and monolithic understanding of the community model that produced Johannine Literature. The contextualization of the original setting of the Johannine documents arguably has hermeneutical priority. Yet, the scholarly reconstruction of the Johannine community goes beyond what

John Knox Press, 2008), 11. Also, Klauck. Cf. Hans-Josef Klauck, “Internal Opponents: the Treatment of the Secessionists in the First Epistle of John,” *Concilium* 200 (1988, 55–65). “... [S]cholars have attempted to give the opponents’ theology more definition by using the categories of the history of religion. Concepts like *gnosis* and ‘docetism’ regularly crop up in the relevant literature. It must be admitted that many features in the portrait of the opponents in 1 John tend to point in this direction.” (57).

40 PHEME PERKINS, *The Johannine Epistles*, New Testament Message 21 (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979), xxi–xxii.

41 PERKINS, *The Johannine Epistles*, xxiii.

42 Scholars designate the Christ-believer group of John in a variety of names, such as “the Johannine School” (Strecker, Culpepper, Schnelle) and “the Johannine Circle” (Cullmann). “School” was named after “Pauline School” (Gnilka, Lohse) based on the Greco-Roman philosophical schools. The social-scientific approach underscores the sectarian aspects of the community (Meeks). Recent Johannine scholarship tends to use a more neutral term, “the community” (Keener, Painter, et al.).

the internal evidence could demonstrate. Adele Reinhartz argues against it, questioning the scholarly reconstruction of the Johannine community:⁴³

The Johannine community is entirely a scholarly construct, the product of a circular hermeneutical process: we assume its existence from the very fact that we have a Johannine Gospel. We construct the community's contours by reading between the lines of that Gospel, and then use our construction of the community as a tool for interpreting the Gospel itself.

The demise of the developmental theory coincides with the dismissal of the anachronistic "orthodox" and "heresy" division. On the other hand, there has been a growing consensus that the boundaries between Jews and Christians were fuzzy and porous in the first two centuries of the common era.⁴⁴ These new consensuses inevitably obscure the clear boundaries of the classical divisions

43 Adele Reinhartz, "Building Skyscrapers on Toothpicks: The Literary-Critical Challenge to Historical Criticism," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: the Past, Present, and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, ed. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moor (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 70.

44 "The Nag Hammadi works have challenged scholars to reconfigure the boundaries of orthodoxy and heresy" (King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 152). The term "Gnosticism" is the modern historical reconstruction that has been utilized vis-à-vis "normative" Christianity and her doctrine. "Gnostics" are people who adhere to the thought and practice of these phenomena. For the propositions of reconsidering the definition of "gnostic" and "Gnosticism," see the following: Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Binger A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); PHEME PERKINS, *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993); Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

of Judaism, Christianity, Oriental religion, or Gnosticism. Whether one could reconstruct the Johannine community history or identify the secessionists from the milieu of these obscure boundaries is therefore questionable.⁴⁵ The ‘gnostic’ phenomena, for instance, had developed on Jewish soil. Thus, the current consensus rather postulates that both “Gnosticism” (or “gnostics”) and 1 John are similar religious phenomena within a gradational parameter of the common matrix of Judaism in the late Second Temple Period; they share a common religious matrix — in which the gnostic worldview, Logos/Wisdom tradition, a dualistic way of thinking or “Two-Way Theology,” and the apocalyptic and eschatological worldview intrinsically overlap and intersect.⁴⁶ In addition, recent scholarship is quite skeptical about the interpretation that the Johannine community was in constant polemical struggle with docetism, questioning the nature and type of “docetism” itself.⁴⁷

45 Cf. Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Greco-Roman World* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004); eadem, *Neither Jew Nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity*, second edition (London/ New York: Bloomsbury, 2016); James D. G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways* (London: SCM Press/Trinity Press International, 1991); idem, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways ad 70 to 135*, WUNT 66 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); Tobias Nicholas, *Jews and Christians? Second Century ‘Christian’ Perspectives on the ‘Parting of the Ways’* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); idem, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

46 Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 23–25. Cf. “these values are equally characteristic of other Jewish texts of the period and reflect something of the general Zeitgeist.” (24). Cf. Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Greco-Roman World* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 154ff; Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament*; 39ff.

47 “Docetism” was first introduced as a category in Johannine scholarship by F. C. Baur (*Kritische Untersuchungen über die kanonischen Evangelien, ihr Verhältniss zu einander, ihren Charakter und Ursprung* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1847]), and was strongly promoted by Käsemann (“naïve Docetism,” *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17*

2. Rhetorical Criticism⁴⁸

Scholarship on the Johannine Gospel methodologically shifted towards narrative criticism in 1980s.⁴⁹ Yet, this approach is less applicable to the Johannine Letters. Instead, employing ancient rhetorical theory and practice, some scholars began to apply rhetorical analysis to the Johannine Letters.

[Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966]). Jörg Frey recently pointed out the terminological issues involved in the definition of docetism in scholarship, the major issue, being the anachronistic introduction of dogmatic categories (heresy vs. orthodoxy) into the text. Also, there are diverse types of Docetism(s), such as a “pure” docetic type (Marcion), a modified type (Valentinus), or a “Separation-Christology” type (Basilides). Upon the discovery of the Nag Hammadi documents, scholarship has recognized a multi-faceted phenomenon of “Docetism”; for example, Wichard von Heyden postulated that docetism “neither can be explained from ‘Gnosticism’ nor is it simply the result of the application of ‘Hellenistic’ or Platonic ideas to developing Christianity.” Instead, he posits various types of docetic Christology developed from within Hellenistic Judaism and Jewish Christianity (the Jewish angelological concept). Jörg Frey, “‘Docetic-like’ Christologies and the Polymorphy of Christ: A Plea for Further Consideration of Diversity in the Discussion of ‘Docetism,’” in *Docetism in Early Church: the Quest for an Elusive Phenomenon*, ed. Joseph Verheyden, R. Bieringer, et al (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018, 27–49).

48 “Rhetorical criticism” in Old Testament studies has a different (but related) development from that of New Testament studies. In 1968, James Muilenburg in his presidential address (“Form Criticism and Beyond”) at the SBL meeting marked a major turning point for rhetorical criticism in biblical studies. His primary object was to understand “the nature of Hebrew literary composition, in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole.” Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *JBL* 88 (1969, 1–18).

49 See the now classic work by R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: Analysis of the Narrative Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

Rhetorical criticism, or rhetorical interpretation, focuses on rhetorical devices and their effects in biblical texts; it has been a major interpretative method in biblical studies since the 1970s.⁵⁰ Despite the torrent of diverse and wide-ranging developments that falls under this umbrella term, rhetorical criticism in New Testament studies could be simplified as comprising two different traditions — particularly, in the research of 1 John. One is the classical rhetorical criticism methodologically established by George A. Kennedy, and another is the modern rhetoric — the New Rhetoric — associated with Kenneth Burke, Chaïm Perelman, L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, and Wayne Booth.⁵¹ Wilhelm Wuellner calls the latter tradition as the “Anglo-American theories of argumentation.”⁵²

50 Rhetorical criticism in New Testament studies started with the Pauline Epistles. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Der Still der paulischen Predigt und die kynischstoische Diatribe*, FRLANT 13 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910); Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). Betz deems Galatians as an apologetic (defensive) letter in a judicial rhetoric (14–25); the body of Galatians comprises *exordium* (1:6–11), *narratio* (1:12–2:14), *propositio* (2:15–21), *probatio* (3:1–4:31), and *parænesis* (5:1–6:10). Cf. Betz's earlier work, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition: Ein exegetische Untersuchung zu seiner 'Apologie' 2 Kor 10–13*, BHT 45 (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1972).

51 Margaret M. Mitchell, “Rhetorical and New Literary Criticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 617.

52 Wilhelm Wuellner lines up three directions of modern rhetorical criticism: 1) “Anglo-American theories of argumentation,” represented by the New Rhetoric (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca), 2) “the Continental theories of literary rhetoric,” and 3) “the largely American theories of rhetoric as part of social science hermeneutics.” The epistolary theory in the social scientific approach (e.g., Helmut Koester and Abraham Malherbe) belongs to the last trajectory. Cf. Wilhelm Wuellner, “Rhetorical Criticism and its Theory in Cultural-Critical Perspective: The Narrative Rhetoric of John 11,” in *Text and Interpretation: New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament* (ed. P. J. Hartin and J. H. Petzer; NTTS 15; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 176.

For 1 John, proponents of classical rhetorical criticism are Duane F. Watson,⁵³ François Vouga,⁵⁴ and Hans-Josef Klauck.⁵⁵ Watson has followed Kennedy's lineage (although he refers to Perelman in terms of an epideictic rhetoric), while Klauck essentially endorsed Vouga's rhetorical criticism.

2.1. Classical Rhetorical Criticism

George A. Kennedy provided the solid methodological argument for rhetorical criticism of the New Testament documents.⁵⁶ Kennedy's rhetorical criticism focused on the text as it is (the textual world) to discover the rhetorical devices employed for the persuasive argumentation.⁵⁷ Kennedy posits that the biblical

53 Duane F. Watson, "1 John 2. 12–14 as *Distributio*, *Conduplicatio*, and *Expositio*: A Rhetoric Understanding," *JSNT* 35 (1989, 97–110); idem, "Amplification Techniques in 1 John: The Interaction of Rhetorical Style and Invention," *JSNT* 51 (1993, 99–123).

54 François Vouga, "La réception de la théologie johannique dans les épîtres," in *La communauté johannique et son histoire. La trajectoire de l'évangile de Jean aux deux premiers siècles*, ed. J.D. Kaestli and J. Zumstein (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1990, 283–302); idem, *Die Johannesbriefe*, HNT 15/3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990).

55 Hans-Josef Klauck, "Zur rhetorischen Analyse der Johannesbriefe," *ZNW* 81 (1990, 205–224); idem, *Der erste Johannesbrief*, EKKNT 23/1 (Benziger Verlag: Neukirchener Verlag 1991).

56 George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill/ London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984). Cf. Duane F. Watson and Alan J. Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: A Comprehensive Bibliography with Notes on History and Method* (Leiden/ New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), 109.

57 Kennedy proposes a six-step method: 1) determining the rhetorical unit to be analyzed (one small section, or an entire book), 2) defining the rhetorical situation, 3) defining the rhetorical problem or stasis (main question), 4) analyzing the arrangement, 5) analyzing invention and style, and 6) evaluating the rhetorical effectiveness. George Kennedy, *The New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33–38.

authors employed the internal modes of persuasion — *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (à la Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*) — underscoring rhetorical devices as a strategy arranged and orchestrated in the texts by the author (the implied author).

This approach assumes that the writers of the New Testament epistles were familiar with formal rhetorical education (*progymnasmata*),⁵⁸ or had sufficient interaction with the oral and written Hellenistic culture that permeated rhetorical practice,⁵⁹ and that the New Testament epistles are *speech in epistolary form*, thereby rendering Greco-Roman rhetorical theory applicable with its three dimensions of invention, arrangement, and style.⁶⁰ Although scholarly debate continues regarding the genre of 1 John — whether it is a letter or not —, Vouga, Klauck, and Watson (and Lieu as well) regard 1 John as a letter. Watson asserts that “[t]he use of rhetoric in these letters [Hebrew and the Catholic Epistles] is not perceived as marginalized to style and isolated argumentative strategies. Rather, these letters are viewed as speeches in written form of a highly rhetorical nature meant to be heard by the audiences addressed.”⁶¹

58 George A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). “‘Pro-gymnasmata’ means ‘preliminary exercises,’ preliminary that is to the practice of declamation in the schools of rhetoric, which boys usually began between the age of twelve and fifteen” (x).

59 Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible*, 110.

60 Watson, “Notes on History and Method,” in *Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: A Comprehensive Bibliography with Notes on History and Method* (Leiden/New York: E. J. Brill, 1994, 120–121).

61 Watson, “Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles,” *Currents in Research* 5 (1997, 178). The brackets are mine. Yet, a methodological debate has continued—especially, in Pauline scholarship—regarding the relationship between rhetorical criticism (Greco-Roman rhetorical theory) and epistolary theory, namely concerning the degree to which “rhetorical theory influenced the epistolary genre” (Watson, “Notes on History and Method,” 111). Some scholars posit that the New Testament epistles are primarily “letters” not “speech,” thus rhetoric has a limited and secondary influence on them. Greco-Roman rhetoric did not include epistolary theory. Abraham

2.2. Application of Rhetorical Criticism to 1 John

Kennedy categorizes three types of arguments: *judicial* — to persuade the audience to make a judgment about events occurring in the past; *deliberative* — to persuade the audience to take some action in the future; *epideictic* — to persuade the audience to hold or reaffirm some point of view in the present, as when he celebrates or denounces some person or some quality. The author seeks to persuade the audience in a different circumstance; “these categories refer to the circumstances of classical civic oratory, they are in fact applicable to all discourse.”⁶²

Watson, Vouga and Klauck analyzed 1 John’s *arrangement* (ordering of the components) as follows:

Watson		Vouga		Klauck
epidemic		deliberative		deliberative (not rigidly)
<i>exordium</i>	1:1–4	prescript	1:1–4	
<i>probatio</i>	1:5–5:12	<i>exordium</i>	1:5–2:17	<i>captio benevolentiae</i>
<i>refutatio</i>	1:5–2:2	(<i>captio benevolentiae</i>)		1:5–2:17
<i>refutatio</i>	2:3–22	<i>narratio</i>	2:18–27	<i>narratio</i>
<i>digressio</i>	2:12–14	<i>propositio</i>	2:28–29	<i>propositio</i>
<i>exhortatio</i>	2:15–17	<i>probatio</i>	3:1–24	<i>probatio</i>
invective	2:18–27	<i>exhortatio</i>	4:1–21	<i>exhortatio</i>
& praise		<i>peroratio</i>	5:1–12	<i>peroratio</i>
...		epistolary	5:13	
<i>peroratio</i>	5:13–21	conclusion		Klauck’s analysis
		postscript	5:14–21	does not include
				1:1–4 or 5:13–21

Malherbe points out: “Epistolary theory in antiquity belonged to the domain of the rhetoricians, but it was not originally part of their theoretical systems. It was absent from the earliest extant rhetorical handbooks, and its only gradually made its way into the genre” (Abraham Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, 2).

62 Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, 19.

Watson classified 1 John as an epideictic rhetoric, while Vouga and Klauck considered it deliberative⁶³ — although Klauck rather questions the rigid application of the arrangement for 1 John, unlike 2 and 3 John (thus, I follow here Watson and Vouga).⁶⁴ After his first rhetorical criticism of Jude and 2 Peter,⁶⁵ Watson applied the same method to 1 John in 1989, focusing on the amplification technique in 1 John 2:12–14.⁶⁶ In 1991, he analyzed the argumentation of 1 John 1:1–2:27 (see the chart).⁶⁷

Watson analyzes the characteristically repetitive and emphatic style of 1 John through amplification techniques as an inventional strategy. “Amplification is closely tied to the discussion of invention, arrangement and style ... ; to discussions of how to formulate, arrange and ornament arrangement persuasively.”⁶⁸ He essentially lists up all the different types of amplification techniques employed in 1 John (such as *expolitio*, *regressio*, *conduplicatio*, and *distributio*). His analysis leads to the conclusion that the community schism over Christo-

63 François Vouga, *Die Johannesbriefe*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 15/III, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1990).

64 Klauck remarks on the difficulty of applying rhetorical categories to 1 John. Cf. Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief*, 28–29; idem, “Zur rhetorischen Analyse der Johannesbriefe,” 221–224.

65 Duane Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter*, SBL Dissertation Series 104 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 189. He demonstrated that both authors were “familiar with the rhetorical conventions of their time” (189), and that 2 Peter is “a rare pseudepigraph in letter form which consciously uses Greco-Roman rhetoric to create an obvious pseudepigraph for teaching purposes” (180).

66 Duane F. Watson, “1 John 2.12–14 as *Distributio*, *Conduplicatio*, and *Expolitio*: Rhetorical Understanding,” *JSNT* 35 (1989, 97–110).

67 Duane Watson, “An Epideictic Strategy for Increasing Adherence to Community Values: 1 John 1:1–2:17,” in *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 11 (1991, 144–152).

68 Duane Watson, “Amplification Techniques in 1 John: The Interaction of Rhetorical Style and Invention,” *JSNT* 51 (1993): 99–123 (101).

logical understanding led the author of 1 John to use epideictic rhetoric to increase the adherence of the audience to the traditional truth of the Johannine community. He maintains that 1 John refutes the innovative Christological and ethical understanding of the opponents and appeals to the audience to follow the traditional Johannine teachings. Thus, his interpretation — of 1 John 2:18–19 as inventive and as praise, a typical example of blame and praise in epideictic oratory, or of 1:6–2:11 as *refutatio* 1 and 2 — goes hand in hand with a polemical reading grounded in historical criticism. For Watson, rhetorical criticism remains *an auxiliary aid* to historical critical exegesis.⁶⁹

Vouga, on the other hand, primarily and consistently focuses on the letter's literary aspects, underscoring 1 John's *internal logic* in its exposition of the linguistic and theological argument, which he understood not as a reaction to the opponents but as the expression of 1 John's argumentation. In applying the rhetorical-critical analysis to the entire letter (see the chart), Vouga classifies 1 John as a paraenetic letter and understands the antithetical parallelism as the author's expression of theological logic — not as a *Vorlage*.⁷⁰ The antithetical parallelism constitutes part of 1 John's hermeneutical prepositions, which dichotomize “being-of-God” and “being-of-the-world.” The implied author appeals to the implied reader through the authoritative witnesses and the axiomatic statements (die axiomatischen Aussagen; e.g., ἐν τούτῳ + γινώσκειν; γινώσκειν ὅτι) — which point to the tradition of the Johannine Gospel. The series of axiomatic statements function to promote the unity of the community of faith, appealing

69 “Rhetorical criticism of the New Testament using only Greco-Roman rhetoric is an historical enterprise. It utilizes a systematic and well-conceptualized discipline from the Greco-Roman era to analyze the New Testament. Being in league with traditional historical-critical methodologies like form and source criticism, the situation impinging upon the writers and the reader is one of its concerns Rhetorical criticism in this tradition thus stands between ahistorical literary criticism and historical-criticism.” Cf. Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible*, 110.

70 Vouga, *Die Johannesbriefe*, 5, 9.

to authoritative witnesses with these traditional and confessional formulae. The implied author persuades the implied audience to return to the original unity by remembering “what we have heard from the beginning.” Thus, Vouga interprets the Christological statement in 1 John 4:2 as a summary of a confessional statement, not a polemical nor anti-Docetic one (here he agrees with Lieu, thus see my argument below).⁷¹

While 1 John’s central concern is the community, Vouga expounds its significance from the letter’s theological consciousness, without identifying the opponents nor reconstructing the history of the Johannine community, and yet without ignoring the historical issues either. Instead, he employs a *religions-geschichtliche* approach to compare linguistic and philosophical parallels from Hellenistic Jewish and Gnostic literature. His concepts draw from Perelman’s argumentation theory, which he combines the reader response criticism. Thus, Vouga’s approach safeguards the autonomy of rhetorical criticism in 1 John. Though it has the form of a concise commentary — which is liable to be eclectic methodologically — his consistency pioneered a new perspective.

2.3. Assessment

Apart from the stylistic and compositional aspects of 1 John, Watson’s rhetorical criticism mostly follows the historical-critical method in its interpretation. Watson — Vouga as well — is aware of “the danger of a too rigid application of rhetorical categories to the biblical texts”;⁷² thus, rhetorical criticism contains potential weaknesses. To some degree, rhetorical criticism is helpful in following the flow of argument, pinning down the macro-structure of the arrangement (*des-*

71 Vouga, *Die Johannesbriefe*, 10.

72 Cf. Klauck, “Zur rhetorischen Analyse der Johannesbriefe,” 210; Duane Watson, “Amplification Techniques in 1 John: The Interaction of Rhetorical Style and Invention,” *JSNT* 51 (1993, 100–118).

positio) or the micro-structure of the style (*elocutio*), yet it often fails to integrate the inter-relationship between these macro- and micro-structures. The weakness of rhetorical criticism is its linearity, which slips off of 1 John's notoriously circular argumentation — this is exactly the reason “why” no consensus exists in 1 John's compositional structure.⁷³

In addition, following Kennedy's methodological procedure, Watson applies rhetorical criticism by narrowing down the text into “a rhetorical unit” such as 1 John 2:12–14. However, Aune rightly points out:⁷⁴

The application of rhetorical criticism to early Christian literature has often assumed, incorrectly, that partial texts can be analyzed as if they were independent speeches. This tendency was apparently encouraged by Kennedy ... , who begins with the identification of “the rhetorical unit,” which could be an entire composition or just a section of one. It also leaves open the possibility that the rhetorical situation of another rhetorical unit in a composition can be quite different from the rhetorical situation of another rhetorical unit in the same work While this procedure showcases the creativity of the critic in applying the canons of rhetorical criticism to a given text, more often than not it reads into the text categories and patterns that are not there.

73 *The New Rhetoric (La Nouvelle Rhétorique)*; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca re-envisioned rhetoric as a means of argumentation, thus, correcting this linearity and encompassing more integrated aspects of rhetoric. Cf. Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *La Nouvelle Rhétorique: Traité de l'Argumentation*, 2 Vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958); [English version], *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

74 David E. Aune, “Rhetorical Criticism,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature & Rhetoric* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, 418).

For Watson, the division into “rhetorical units” works methodologically to integrate this approach with historical criticism because of their similar assumptions. In case of Vouga, although his analysis covers the entire letter, it is still questionable whether 1 John 1:5–2:17 could form such a long *exordium* (*capitio benevolentiae*). While his consistent attention to the text is valuable, the application of rhetorical analysis seems arbitrary.

3. Non-Polemical Reading

3.1. Judith M. Lieu: Non-Polemical Reading of 1 John

Judith Lieu’s work on the Johannine Epistles has opened up a new perspective for the study of 1 John.⁷⁵ In her articles and commentary on the Johannine Epistles, Lieu proposed a “non-polemical reading” of 1 John, focusing more on the exhortative and paraenetic tone of the letter buttressed by the various rhetorical formulations employed in the text.⁷⁶ Lieu pays close attention to the Johannine “social dialect” (idiolect), through which the author creates and recreates its distinctive “Johannine” symbolic universe. Yet, while sharing the same idiolect, 1 John has its own “turn” — with no explicit quotation or allusions from the Johannine Gospel. Thus, she takes a unique position that 1 John and the Gospel

75 Judith M. Lieu, “Authority to Become Children of God: A Study of 1 John,” *NovT* 23 (1981, 210–228); “Us or You? Persuasion and Identity in 1 John,” *JBL* 127 (2008, 805–819); eadem, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); eadem, *I, II, & III John: A Commentary*.

76 Lieu, “Us or You? Persuasion and Identity in 1 John,” 805–819; eadem, *I, II, & III John: A Commentary*. T. Griffith first used the term, “non-polemical reading.” Cf. Terry Griffith, “A Non-polemical Reading of 1 John: Sin, Christology and the Limits of Johannine Christianity,” *TynB* 49.2 (1998, 253–276).

of John are mutually independent although they share the common “Johannine tradition.”⁷⁷

Lieu endorses Perkins’s “less polemicized reading” of 1 John,⁷⁸ asserting that “[i]ts purpose is not first of all to engage in polemic with outsiders or with their views Instead its purpose is . . . — the proclamation and assurance of eternal life.”⁷⁹ Lieu’s new reading became a major revision of the traditional historical-critical reading, thus downplaying the polemical reading. Lieu warns that the Christological argument (2:22–23; 4:2–3) should not be confused with

77 Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 17–18. Lieu takes the position that the Johannine Epistles and the Gospel of John are mutually independent although they share “the Johannine tradition.” According to Lieu, “[t]he Johannine tradition does not just refer to a way of speaking or writing but to a way of thinking; the distinctive Johannine vocabulary and formulations reflect a distinctive worldview and understanding of the significance of the coming of Jesus Christ” (Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, 18. Other scholars who propound the independence theory of the Gospel and the Epistles are: Strecker, *The Johannine Letters*, xxxv–xlii; Wendy E. Sproston, “Witnesses to What Was $\alpha\tau'$ ἀρχῆς: 1 John’s Contribution to Our Knowledge of Tradition in the Fourth Gospel,” *JSNT* 15, 48 (1992, 43–65); reprinted (as Wendy E. S. North) in *A Journey Round John: Tradition, Interpretation and Context in the Fourth Gospel* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2015, 57–77); Terry Griffith, *Keep Yourself from Idols: A New Look at 1 John*, *JSNTSup* 233 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 4–6; Hanjörg Schmid, *Gegner im 1. Johannesbrief?: Zu Konstruktion und Selbstreferenz im johanneischen Sinnsystem*, *Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament*, 19/159 (Stuttgart : Kohlhammer. 2002). For the criticism of her independent theory, see Painter. Cf. Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 23.

78 PHEME PERKINS, *The Johannine Epistles* (Wilmington, DW: Michael Glazier, 1979), xviii–xxiii. She also postulated that the schism of the community was “a minor family quarrel that does not destroy the fabric of the Community.” Cf. Lieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13. “P. Perkins . . . emphasises the rhetorical nature of the language and warns against taking it too literally as a reflection of the actual historical situation.” See also Ruth B. Edwards, *The Johannine Epistles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 65.

79 Lieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles*, 22.

the moral dilemma (1:5–2:6; 2:28–3:10) — the latter not being associated with the opponents.⁸⁰ The moral dilemma is more of an issue of the insiders (=the community members) — “the test of life” for themselves — with their orientation of “perfectionism.”⁸¹

Regarding the Christological statement, she observes the grammatical construction of 4:2 as follows:

In iv 2 the grammatical construction “every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ having come in the flesh” (... Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα), in using a participle rather than an accusative and infinitive clause, means that its primary force is not a statement that Jesus Christ came in the flesh as would be expected against docetisim. The emphasis is instead a confession of Jesus who is the Christ and who came in the flesh.⁸²

This reading defocuses “having come in flesh” (ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα), thus devaluating the anti-docetic reading; instead, it emphasizes — along with 2:22 — the confessional statement of Jesus as the Christ. She also suggests the possibility that “having come” and “coming” (ἐρχόμενον, 2 John 7) are epithets for Christ in the Johannine Epistles (cf. 1 John 4:2, “he one who has come,” ἐληλυθότα; 5:6, “the one who came” ὁ ἐλθὼν; 2 John 7, “the one who comes/ the coming one,” ὁ ἐρχόμενος).

Lieu’s text-oriented literary approach primarily focuses on 1 John’s text itself. Lieu demonstrates 1 John’s persuasive argumentation in 1:1–4, 2:18–26,

80 Lieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles*, 14–16.

81 Lieu, “Authority to Become Children of God,” 223. The title of “the test of life” comes from R. Law.

82 Lieu, “Authority to Become Children of God,” 217; eadem, *I, II, & III John*, 166–168.

and 4:1–6. Here, she employs one of the rhetorical techniques — “*enallage of person*” — from the New Rhetoric (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca),⁸³ “[t]he change of person and number as a technique by which an orator creates a sense of identification or communication with an audience has long been recognized ... , but more than this is at play here.”⁸⁴ For the Christological confession texts in 2:18–26, Lieu argues that 1 John employs the rhetorical technique of different *personae* (“we [ἡμεῖς],” “you” [ὁμοῖς], and “they” [=antichrists]); thereby the implied author persuades the implied audience “to stay with *us*” (μενεῖν μεθ’ ἡμῶν, Cf. 1 John 2:19), utilizing “they” (“antichrists”) as “the anti-model” and tactfully plotting for “you” — “constructed by the text with the implied audience” — to be transformed into “we.”⁸⁵ The texts have a polemical tone in the sense that they make use of “they” as virtual opponents;⁸⁶ however, these are chiefly rhetorical devices to persuade the audience to side with “us.” Thus, the focus of 1 John is more on the community members (“insiders”) rather than on the opponents (secessionists or “outsiders”).⁸⁷

Lieu’s text-oriented reading also focuses on 1 John’s “symbolic universe” — a social world created or projected by the text — which the Johannine “so-

83 Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 178. “... *enallage of person*, in which ‘I’ or ‘he’ is replaced by ‘thou,’ making ‘the hearer imagine he sees himself in the midst of danger,’ and which is a figure relating both to presence and to communion. And also by *change in number of persons*, in which ‘I’ or ‘thou’ is replaced by ‘we.’”

84 Lieu, “Us or You? Persuasion and Identity in 1 John,” 817.

85 Lieu, “Us or You? Persuasion and Identity in 1 John,” 811–812.

86 Lieu acknowledges that some kind of schism happened in the community (although she minimizes the scale of schism), and that the members of the 1 John community had some traumatic experience from this schism. Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 9ff, 99, 101; eadem, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles*, 13ff.

87 Lieu, “Authority to Become Children of God: A Study of 1 John,” 241ff; eadem, “Us or You? Persuasion and Identity in 1 John,” 818.

cial dialect (idiolect)” characteristically constructs. Socio-linguistically, any language and linguistic expressions are essentially social phenomena, which presumes the existence of a particular group of people that shares the social dialect (idiolect) and its social context.⁸⁸ The sociolinguistic approach examines the relationship between language and the group identity, on the premise that the language of a particular group of people marks a clear boundary between the insiders and outsiders. Language, thus, plays a crucial role in shaping ideas and identities because it discursively formulates and embodies the distinctive worldview of the group (“the symbolic world”). Language constitutes the realities which they inhabit. Thus, she highlights the “social dynamics” that certain texts create through their idiolect — and this is exactly the place where intertextuality comes into view (for example, intertextuality between 1 John and 1 QS, or 1 John and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and so on). Lieu employs “intertextuality” with a sociological perspective to the relationship between text and (reconstructed) reality — to elucidate the intersection of the symbolic universe (rather than a simple comparison between then-contemporary texts).

Yet, Lieu is primarily — and brilliantly — a close text-reader, flexibly managing various rhetorical techniques to elucidate the consistent but kaleidoscopically changing dynamics of 1 John’s argumentation. Thus, her use of some rhetorical techniques from Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca does not fixate her methodological position in alignment with it.

3.2. The Impact of Lieu’s Non-Polemical Reading

Lieu’s non-polemical reading has impacted on the interpretative perspective on 1 John. The non-polemical reading of 1 John has gained support from Dietmar

88 Peter L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

Neufeld (1994),⁸⁹ Ruth Edwards (1996),⁹⁰ Terry Griffith (1998/2002),⁹¹ Hansjörg Schmid (2002/2004)⁹² and Daniel R. Streett (2011)⁹³ — although each scholar’s methodological as well as hermeneutical principles vary. Vouga is also included on this camp of non-polemical reading side, with his non-polemic reading being influenced by Lieu — while taking the rhetorical-analytic position. These scholars in their reading of the Christological statements follow Lieu’s reading. Yet, it is rather impossible to identify one overarching methodological approach among these scholars, except for their “non-polemical reading” — although these scholars all build on literary criticism.⁹⁴

Neufeld, for instance, analyzed the Christological confessions and ethical

89 Dietmar Neufeld, *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts. An Analysis of 1 John*, Biblical Interpretation Series 7 (Leiden, 1994).

90 Ruth B. Edwards, *The Johannine Epistles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

91 Terry Griffith, “A Non-polemical Reading of 1 John: Sin, Christology and the Limits of Johannine Christianity,” *TynB* 49.2 (1998, 253–276); idem, *Keep Yourself from Idols: A New Look at 1 John*, JSNTSS 233 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

92 Hansjörg Schmid, *Gegner im 1. Johannesbrief? Zu Konstruktion und Selbstreferenz im johanneischen Sinnsystem*, BWANT 8/19 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002); idem, “How to Read the First Epistle of John Non-Polemically,” *Bib* 85 (1) (2004, 24–41).

93 Daniel R. Streett, “*They Went Out From Us*”: *The Identity of the Opponents in First John*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Fur Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011, originally from ProQuest, 2008).

94 In addition to these, other monographs published in the post-Lieu period include: Horst Hahn, *Tradition und Neuinterpretation im erstern Johannesbrief* (Zürich: TVZ, 2009); Matthew D. Janzen, *Affirming the Resurrection of the Incarnate Christ: A Reading of 1 John*, SNTSMS 151 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Jeffrey E. Brickle, *Aural Design and Coherence in the Prologue of First John* (London/New York: T&T Clark/Bloomsbury, 2012); Toan Do, *Rethinking the Death of Jesus: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Hilasmos and Agapē in 1John2:1–2 and 4:7–10*, CBET 73) Leuven: Peeters, 2014); J. L. Merritt, *Devils and Deviants: Religious Schism in 1 and 2 John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017).

exhortations (1 John 1:1–4, 6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20//2:18–24//4:1–6, 16; 5:6) in 1 John by employing speech act theory.⁹⁵ Neufeld, taking the written discourse as a form of action and power, argues that the author of 1 John creates a specific speech act circumstance to change the situation of the implied audience. Griffith, in contrast, tackled the moral/ethical-type polemical texts (*slogans*; 1 John 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20). He demonstrated that these formulas were not used in the polemical contexts in comparable Greek literature and philosophical documents, thus attempting to refute the polemical character of these formulas used in 1 John.

While associating himself with the non-polemical reading, Schmid criticizes the “deficiencies” of the previous analyses (Lieu, Griffith, and Neufeld) for their lack of “hermeneutical and epistemological reflection.”⁹⁶ Starting from a sociological reconstruction of reality, Schmid postulates his thesis that “it is not only virtually impossible to trace the bridges between text and history . . . , but also impossible to prove which of the two texts was written before the other.”⁹⁷ Thus, he employs — on the one hand — the “Johannine System” (*ein johanneischer Sinnsystem*) as his interpretative/hermeneutical basis, grounded in Niklas Luhmann’s system theory, and “intertextuality” on the other.⁹⁸ In a sense, Schmid clarified and solidified the methodological and hermeneutical foundation for his non-polemical reading from a constructivist perspective. Schmid takes up both Christological confessions and moral/ethical texts in terms of apocalyptic contextualization, underlining the eschatological motifs that are their undercurrent.⁹⁹ He showed that 1 John employs the strategy of ethical exhortation through these

95 Neufeld, *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An Analysis of 1 John*, vii.

96 Schmid, “How to Read the First Epistle of John Non-Polemically,” 29.

97 Schmid, “How to Read the First Epistle of John Non-Polemically,” 35.

98 Schmid, *Gegner im 1. Johannesbrief?* 21ff; idem, “How to Read the First Epistle of John Non-Polemically,” 32.

99 Schmid, “How to Read the First Epistle of John Non-Polemically,” 34–36.

motifs, thus espousing a non-polemical reading of 1 John.¹⁰⁰

3.3. Assessment

The transformative effects of this approach with its focus on rhetorical strategies of persuasive argumentation are shown by its ability to show the overall rhetorical power of 1 John. The “non-polemical” readings have thus provided a different framework and perspective for the interpretation of 1 John.

Lieu’s approach has chosen to deal exclusively and faithfully with texts, essentially in a combination of literary theory and sociology of knowledge, although her text-oriented reading is outside of any rigidly defined methodological framework. And yet, no one would disagree that Lieu’s reading on 1 John *has changed* the perspective to this text — which brings us to home to the point that any biblical interpretation should start with the text itself, before establishing “skyscrapers” from the text. While these scholars of the non-polemical reading (particularly, Lieu and Perkins) do not start with grandiose methodological presuppositions, their “intuitive” reading seems more appropriate to 1 John’s argumentation—which raises a question about the nature of 1 John’s textuality — elusive, slipping from any rigid fixation, and yet repetitive in a circular way. Here lies the difficulty of setting up a particular methodological approach and applying it to the entire text of 1 John. Thus, ironically, Schmid’s weakness seems to be on this point — i.e., his over-emphasis on apocalyptic contextualization.¹⁰¹ I question whether the apocalypticism is solid and strong enough to sustain the entire symbolic universe of 1 John — although it certainly has an apocalyptic overtone with some of its language (antichrist, the latter days ...) — particularly since 1 John lacks cosmological dualism (vertical dualism), which is a pillar of

100 Schmid, “How to Read the First Epistle of John Non-Polemically,” 38–40.

101 Schmid, “How to Read the First Epistle of John Non-Polemically,” 34. “... the apocalyptic worldview is the center of the Johannine system.”

the apocalyptic worldview.

Conclusion and Further Implications

The scholarship on 1 John has shifted from historical criticism to literary criticism, in its broader sense, which resonates with the shift of the scholarly approach toward the Johannine Gospel. Yet, interpreters have two different sets of premises about the relationship between text and reality, with the chief fault line being on the different understanding of “reality” in terms of text. Historical critics rather try to see the biblical text as evidence for historical reality, while literary critics, employing a sociological/anthropological perspective, try to see the relationship between text and its *reconstructed* reality in order to decipher the social location of the text’s symbolic world — although some scholars take a position of the post-structuralist high and closed textuality (Neufeld). For literary critics, reconstructed reality is more about the social dynamics of the symbolic universe.

Methodology is a set of procedures that features a particular aspect of the text. By tracing the methodological shift from historical criticism to literary (rhetorical) criticism and to Lieu’s close text-oriented approach, this paper does not intend to present a history of scholarship of 1 John in terms of rivalry between diachronic and synchronic approaches, or historical and ahistorical approaches, as the *default-setting* of scholarship. Although this shift is often described by the *window-mirror* metaphor — now, an old cliché — the new perspective (particularly, Lieu’s text-oriented reading) seems to not only strengthen and consolidate the presently shared values but also maintain and formulate (re-formulate) these values for the future, which might give back to this old metaphor its power of significance. The text becomes once again *a window* — not to reflect its past (the historical context) but to show its future (the formulation and transformation of their identity). This point, however, would be my agenda for future exploration.

As it maps the scholarship of 1 John by emphasizing the methodological variations, this paper thus concludes on a somewhat open-ended note on methodology. Yet, Lieu's text-oriented reading succinctly points to the difficulty of pinning down 1 John's very elusive argumentation with one particular methodological approach — which probably interpreters should take more seriously.