

Applying Modern Literary Methods to Ancient Texts such as the Gospel of John: In the Case of Famous Johannine Irony¹

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1. Introduction

At a previous meeting of the Japan Society of New Testament Studies, I presented my research on “Literary analysis on Johannine irony,”² and this is a related study. In particular, this article will focus on a discussion of the methodology of biblical interpretation to be used in the analysis of irony, with particular emphasis on its validity and plausibility. The reason for this is that there are scholars who argue against the use of methods based on modern theories in order to avoid anachronism when reading ancient biblical texts, and who insist that it is necessary to use the methods used in the same ancient times. According to them, since the literary and

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- 1 This is basically the English translation of my article, which first appeared in H. Ito, “Jidaisakugo ka Yuko ka: Gendai no Bungakuteki Hoho no Yohane Fukin-sho Kaisaku heno Tekiyo wo Megutte [Anachronistic or Plausible?: On the Application of Modern Literary Methods to an Interpretation of the Gospel of John],” *Shinyakugaku Kenkyu* 49 (2021, 7–28). Some adjustments were made according to the instructions of AJBI.
 - 2 This presentation was later published as H. Ito, “Bungakuteki Hoho niyoru Yohane Fukin-sho no Aironi no Bunseki [Literary Analysis on Johannine Irony],” *Shinyakugaku Kenkyu* 37 (2009, 43–62).

linguistic methods developed in modern times were originally intended to analyze modern works of fiction and complex phenomena of human communication, their application to ancient texts is anachronistic. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to show that analytical methods based on modern literary and linguistic theories can also produce valid research results in the analysis of ancient ironies.³ As a practical example of this, this article will revisit the major irony of John's Gospel. Through this process, rather than asking whether a particular methodology is anachronistic or not, the most important matter is to verify the point as to whether research results would be valid and plausible regardless of which method is used.

2. Identification of the problems

2.1. An overview of the research history of irony in John's Gospel

Based on my own view that "Irony as a literary expression is a more profound concept that cannot be captured in mere words such as sarcasm or satire,"⁴ my previous studies presented a systematic way to analyze irony.⁵ As a full-scale application of this method, the entire chapter of John 9, including ironies, had also been analyzed, and it was published as "*The Story of Jesus and the Blind Man: A Speech Act Reading of John 9*."⁶ In these previous studies, the history of previous

3 It is not the purpose of this paper to compare some methodological merits between the ancient methods and modern methods, or to explore some differences in the results of their applications.

4 Ito, "Bungakuteki Hoho niyoru," 55.

5 H. Ito, "Johannine Irony Demonstrated in John 9: Part 1," *Neotestamentica* 34 (2) (2000, 361–371); "Johannine Irony Demonstrated in John 9: Part 2," *Neotestamentica* 34 (2) (2000, 373–387); "Bungakuteki Hoho niyoru".

6 H. Ito, *The Story of Jesus and the Blind Man: A Speech Act Reading of John 9* (Bloemfontein: University of the Free State, 2015) [Acta Theologica Supplementum 21]. In particular, the irony of John 9 is discussed in its summary on pp. 464–467 and 494, and in the relevant biblical passages in Unit 4 of that book.

irony research on John's Gospel has already been reviewed⁷ and it will not be repeated in detail here.⁸ However, this article would like to mention the studies

7 See also the following studies. The order of reference information is based on the published year. B. W. Bell, *The Midwife of Truth: The Nature of Irony and a Rationale for its Prevalence in the Gospel of John*. Ph.D. thesis. (Victoria University of Wellington, 2014), 14–17. Cited 28 May 2020. Online: <https://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10063/3743/thesis.pdf?sequence=2>; K. W. Sarlow, *A Rhetorical Critical Analysis of the Stability of Irony in the Fourth Gospel Passion Narrative*. Ph.D. Thesis. (South Australia: Flinders University, 2017), 41–62. Cited 28 May 2020. Online: <https://flex.flinders.edu.au/file/e9acf061-7a98-4145-9028-2f2d36ce143f1/SARLOW.%20IRONIC%20AUTHORITY%20final.pdf>; T. Y. Lee, “Dramatic Irony” in *John's Gospel?: Re-examining the Irony Using Ancient Dramatic Theory*. Ph.D. Thesis. (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen, 2019), 15–29. Cited 28 May 2020. Online: <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.774045>. These scholars also introduce previous irony studies in line with their research objectives.

8 For example: G. W. MacRae, “Theology and Irony in the Fourth Gospel,” in *The Word in the World: Essays in Honor of Frederick Moriarty*, ed. R. J. Clifford and G. W. MacRae (Cambridge, MA: Weston College Press, 1973); D. W. Wead, “Johannine Irony as a Key to the Author-Audience Relationship in John's Gospel,” in *AAR Biblical Literature*, ed. F. O. Francis. (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), 33–50; R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); E. Richard, “Expressions of Double Meaning and their Function in the Gospel of John,” *NTS* 31 (1) (1985, 96–112); G. R. O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); S. D. Moore, “Rifts in (a reading of) the Fourth Gospel, or: Does Johannine Irony still Collapse in a Reading that Draws Attention to Itself?,” *Neotestamentica* 23 (1) (1989, 5–17); J. E. Botha, “The Case of Johannine Irony Reopened 1: The Problematic Current Situation,” *Neotestamentica* 25 (2) (1991, 209–220), and “The Case of Johannine Irony Reopened 2: Suggestions, Alternative Approaches,” *Neotestamentica* 25 (2) (1991), 221–232; J. P. Heil, “Jesus as the Unique High Priest in the Gospel of John,” *CBQ* 57 (4) (1995, 729–745); R. A. Culpepper, “Reading Johannine Irony,” in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, ed. R. A. Culpepper and C. C. Black. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, 193–207); T. Takasago, *Irony in the Passion Narrative of the Fourth Gospel*. Th.M. Thesis. (Holland, MI: Western Theological Semi-

that were omitted in that review and the new studies that have been published since then, along with the recent active research trends.

Recently, irony studies have come to be analyzed in terms of linguistic, literary, and rhetorical expressions, and are discussed in more diverse ways than before. In addition to this, irony itself is complex in nature to begin with, which makes it nearly impossible to identify and fully explain all aspects of irony. Therefore, the current state of research on irony tends to assume that each irony researcher must first establish his or her own methodology (or analytical model) and faithfully apply it to the text under analysis in order to logically explain the criteria for finding irony, how to classify it, and its intended meaning and function. Consequently, even if the same biblical text is used as the object of analysis, there would be differences in the way irony is captured, and as the results of analysis, there may be cases in which there is more than one correct answer. In order to properly evaluate the results of such research, it will be necessary to objectively evaluate the validity of each research method. Looking specifically at such recent research trends, there has been a considerable increase in the number of studies that comprehensively analyze irony or discuss one aspect of the ironies that appear in the text of John's Gospel, for example, Barr, Blank, Bell, England, Brown, Leslie, Karakolis, Sarlow, Larsen, Lee, Smith and Wright.⁹ In addition, Steyn, Blanke,

nary, 1997); T. Thatcher, "The Sabbath Trick: Unstable Irony in the Fourth Gospel," *JSNT* 76 (1999, 53–77); S. Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ: A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel* (Hemsbach, Germany: Druck Partner Rubelmann, 2000).

9 D. R. Barr, "John's Ironic Empire," *Interpretation* 63 (1) (2009, 20–30); J. A. Blanke, "Compound Irony and 'True Passover' in John 18:28–19:16," *Teologia-Diakonia* 46 (2012, 23–42); Bell, *Midwife of Truth*; F. England, "Credo ut Intelligam: Irony in John 9," *Neotestamentica* 48 (2) (2014, 365–385); S. Brown, "What is Truth? Jesus, Pilate, and the Staging of the Dialogue of the Cross in John 18:28–19:16a," *CBQ* 77 (1) (2015, 69–86); B. Leslie, *One Thing I Know: How the Blind Man of John 9 Leads an Audience toward Belief* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers (2015); C. Karakolis, "The

Maekawa, England, Leslie, Lee, and others,¹⁰ have dialogues and references to my previous research.¹¹ At the same time, there have been recent studies that analyze John's irony using new methodologies. They are the aforementioned studies by Bell, Sarlow, Larsen, Lee, Smith and Wright.¹²

Logos-Concept and Dramatic Irony in the Johannine Prologue and Narrative,” in *The Prologue of the Gospel of John: Its Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Context*, ed. J. G. Van der Watt et al (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016, 139–156) [WUNT 359]; Sarlow, Rhetorical Critical Analysis; B. Larsen, *Archetypes and the Fourth Gospel: Literature and Theology in Conversation* (London: T&T Clark, 2018); Lee, “Dramatic Irony”; T. Smith, “Drama: Discrepant Awareness and Dramatic Irony,” in *The Fourth Gospel and the Manufacture of Minds in Ancient Historiography, Biography, Romance, and Drama*, ed. T. Smith. (Leiden: Brill, 2019, 166–207); A. M. Wright, *The Governor and the King: Irony, Hidden Transcripts, and Negotiating Empire in the Fourth Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019).

- 10 G. J. Steyn, “Misunderstanding, Irony and Mistaken Identity in references to Jesus as κύριος in John's Gospel,” in *Miracles and Imagery in Luke and John*, ed. J. Verheyden et al (Leuven: Bibiotheca, 2008, 141–160); Blanke, “Compound Irony”; Y. Maekawa, “Yohane Fukin-sho de Katarareru Kyusai Shiso [The Salvation Narrated in John 9],” *Shinyakugaku Kenkyu* 41 (2013, 27–45); England, “Credo ut Intelligam”; Leslie, *One Thing*; Lee, “Dramatic Irony.”
- 11 Also Endo, Goethe and Ishikawa discuss one of my studies (Ito, *Jesus and the Blind Man*) as the subject of book reviews: M. Endo, “Review: Hisayasu Ito, The Story of Jesus and the Blind Man: A Speech Act Reading of John 9,” *Shinyakugaku Kenkyu* 45 (2017, 65–69); H. Goethe, “Book review: Speech Act Theory as an Approach to Interpret Gospel Narratives,” *In die skriflig* 51 (1) (2017, 1–2); R. Ishikawa, “Hisayasu Ito, The Story of Jesus and the Blind Man: A Speech Act Reading of John 9,” *Nihon no Shingaku* 57 (2018, 149–154). There seem to be others who mention my works, but I have not been able to fully identify them as I do not have those research books and papers at hand.
- 12 Bell, *Midwife of Truth*; Sarlow, Rhetorical Critical Analysis; Larsen, *Archetypes*; Lee, “Dramatic Irony”; Smith, “Discrepant Awareness”; Wright, *Governor*. The study by Smith, which appears to deal with the irony of John, was not available at the time when my original article was prepared.

Of these, Bell and Lee's dissertations are particularly relevant to the topic of this article, so they will briefly be introduced. Lee's doctoral dissertation "re-examines the interpretation of dramatic irony in John's gospel with the objective of discovering an ideal reader response to the phenomenon."¹³ He proposes "a new method of studying dramatic irony, namely by using the dramatic theory found in Aristotle's *Poetics*."¹⁴ Lee, like Bell, uses an ancient methodology while calling it "new", but strictly speaking, this is an analysis that has not yet been used to study Johannine irony (see the discussion in the next section on Bell's dissertation).

From the above studies, it can be seen that the current trend in irony studies has an increasing number of ambitious Johannine studies that each prepares their own research methodologies and analyzes irony as an important (literary, rhetorical, or dramatic) device accordingly.¹⁵

2.2. Criticism of anachronism

As mentioned above, the growing methodological diversity in irony studies and the increase in the number of studies, have led to lively debates and scholarly criticism. For example, Lee writes "Johannine scholars mostly identify the ironies in the gospel and interpret them using methods supplied by modern ironologists, without considering the literary environment of ancient writer and reader. No Johannine scholar has attempted to discover the reader's response to the dramatic irony in the gospel without using anachronistic methods of interpretation,"¹⁶ so he states a justification for his doctoral dissertation. In his dissertation, he mentions: "Two scholars have attempted to refine the work of Culpepper, Duke and O'Day by introducing the speech-act theory. They are Botha and Ito. These

13 Lee, "Dramatic Irony," vi.

14 Lee, "Dramatic Irony," vi.

15 This is also the way I have been doing it for some time.

16 Lee, "Dramatic Irony," vi. However, Bell's study, *Midwife of Truth*, uses the same ancient method as Lee, "Dramatic Irony", so his comment is not strictly accurate.

scholars borrowed the methodology of the ironic speech-act from Amante. Their work focuses on clarifying the analysis of irony, and there is no discussion on the reception by ancient audiences.”¹⁷

Similarly, Bell also states:¹⁸

The historically changeable nature of irony is important to reckon with when we come to biblical exegesis. The real author of the Fourth Gospel would have had access to both Semitic and Greek usage within his immediate cultural and literary context of Hellenistic Judaism. However, modern approaches to irony are increasingly used to impute ironic meanings of which the real author would never have conceived. Authorial intent is marginalised or rejected outright, either deliberately or unconsciously. Accordingly, it is essential to grasp irony’s historical development in order to identify irony in ways consistent with its classical use and differentiate it from its contemporary expressions.

In other words, Lee and Bell are expressing their pet theories while criticizing methods like Botha’s and mine as anachronistic.¹⁹

Then, what are their methodologies for not being anachronistic? As Bell points out: “It is often observed that the Fourth Gospel shares many similarities

17 This Lee’s comment, “Dramatic Irony,” 29, that “there is no discussion on the reception by ancient audiences” is also incorrect, since Ito, *Story of Jesus*, makes the similar type of discussion.

18 Bell, *Midwife of Truth*, 41–42.

19 To be precise, Bell, *Midwife of Truth*, 16, does not specifically mention two of my articles, “Johannine Irony: Part 1” and “Johannine Irony: Part 2”, as he seems to limit his reference to previous studies of irony before 2000. Phillips, *Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading* (T&T Clark, 2006), 51, makes a general argument that since irony “is a twentieth-century literary fascination”, one should be careful not to read too much into it.

with Greek drama, especially Greek tragedies,”²⁰ their methods seem to identify how irony functioned and was understood through comparisons of similarities and differences with John’s Gospel, which was produced in that same cultural and historical milieu.²¹ In short, Bell uses Socrates’ irony model and Lee uses Aristotle’s drama theory for their analyses.

3. Arguments against their criticism

This section intends to respond to Lee and Bell’s criticism that my method of analysis based on contemporary speech act theory is anachronistic, mainly on the following four points.

- i) Differences in the way we perceive the scope of historical context
- ii) Critics’ methods - also anachronistic
- iii) Modern scholars’ position
- iv) History of biblical interpretation

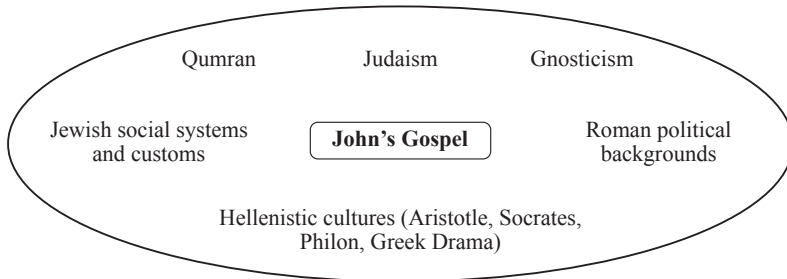
First, the historical contexts of John’s Gospel which Lee and Bell propose may be the geographically and culturally narrow historical contexts that limit the depicted Gospel story only to Israel. However, the contexts of John’s Gospel should include the ancient contexts which are more expansive in scope than this. In other words, their view of the range of meaning of the historical context differs from my view, and in that sense their criticism is missing the mark. In fact, my speech act method focuses on specific speech situations in order to clarify the author’s

20 Bell, *Midwife of Truth*, 82. Similarly Brant, *Dialogue and Drama*, Takasago, *Passion Narrative*, 64, and Lee, “Dramatic Irony,” vi.

21 Behind this is the view that “The proper historical context for the authorial intent of Johannine irony will be that of the Greek tragedians, Socratic irony, the Old Testament and possibly the early Roman rhetoricians” (Bell, *Midwife of Truth*, 61).

intention in John’s Gospel.²² As my previous studies state: “speech act analysis... emphasizes the importance of contexts such as historical, social, religious, cultural, and linguistic situations to elucidate the use and meaning of utterances in a communication process,”²³ I also pay attention to the *most immediate* historical context in which the author and readers were placed at the time. In this respect, it is not anachronistic. In fact, my book discusses such contexts in several “specific mutual contextual beliefs”, mainly in “Contextual Survey of John 9” in Chapter 3 and the actual analysis of John 9 in Chapter 4.²⁴

Second, there is a question of how adequate their methodological models are. The environments that are believed to have influenced the circumstances surrounding John’s Gospel, although the details are disputed, could include at least the following:



If the situation was roughly like this diagram at the time, a necessary and sufficient hermeneutics would not really be sufficient unless it is a methodology that takes into account all influences on the text. Even if one accepts the possibility that the author of John’s Gospel was influenced by Aristotle or Socrates, he was not

22 This is a response to Bell, *Midwife of Truth*, 41–42, who states above that “the author’s intent ... is marginalized”.

23 Ito, *Jesus and the Blind Man*, 46, 60, and “Chapter 7: Speech Act,” 209.

24 Ito, *Jesus and the Blind Man*.

influenced by them alone. If there were also multiple cultural, social, and literary influences, it could be said to be only a methodology of modern researcher if s/he makes his/her analysis by using only one or two methodologies, (even if it is now a normal academic practice). This is a one-sided methodological choice in the researcher's academic circumstance, which is also anachronistic in another sense of the criticism which directed at my method.

In addition, Lee states that one of his goals is to discover "an ideal reader response,"²⁵ but this concept of "ideal reader" is an idea of Iser who led modern reader response criticism.²⁶ Similarly, Bell uses narrative criticism as one of his methodological frameworks.²⁷ Thus, they too use modern literary theories, which is also anachronistic, to use Lee and Bell's terminology.

Third, as is true of biblical interpretation in general, any method of interpretation is always subject to the assumptions of the person interpreting it. The interpreter is one of the readers, and as Tsuji mentions: "The reader reads the text not objectively and neutrally but with his own social context," and "There is no neutrality in rational judgment, which is influenced by the historical and social context in which the interpreter is placed."²⁸ No one can escape the time frame of the present day. For example, is Aristotle's drama theory anachronistic in its analysis of John's irony? It may be so, because, while the theory itself may be ancient, the method proposed based on that theory to be applied is the one rearranged by a modern scholar. From among Aristotle's concepts, those that can be applied

25 Lee, "Dramatic Irony," vi, 3, 29.

26 W. Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

27 Bell, *Midwife of Truth*, 41–42.

28 M. Tsuji, *Rekishiteki Hihanteki Kenkyu no Senkyotekina Tenkai* [The Mission Development of Historical Critical Studies], in *Kyodo Kenkyu: Shinyaku Seisho to Gendai no Senkyo* [Joint Studies: New Testament Studies and Contemporary Missions], M. Nakano et al (The Board of Publications, The United Church of Christ in Japan, 2015, 30–43), 41, 43.

by a modern scholar are extracted as appropriate and arranged as a methodology. The scholars who use those methods are still living in this modern age, and the methods are used through their lenses (viewpoints). No one can escape this fact unless they travel back in time to the ancient world and live and work in that era. However, that is impossible. Interpretations are made based on the assumptions they bring to bear, whether modern scholars realize it or not. How anachronistic is each methodology? It is considered to be *only* a matter of degree.

Fourth, from the perspective of the history of biblical interpretation, the criticism that certain interpretive methods being anachronistic is actually not new: when narrative criticism began to bloom in biblical studies in the 1980s, the term historical critics used when criticizing narrative critics was this term “anachronistic”.²⁹ However, narrative criticism is now widely recognized as an important method in biblical studies.

As can be derived from the above four points, the basis for the criticism that my method is anachronistic is weak and not that significant. What is most important is the validity and plausibility of research results, regardless of which method is used. Whichever method is adopted, however, it is impossible to remove all speculative factors and to produce 100% accurate understanding. Our task, therefore, is to understand ancient biblical texts in a way that seems appropriate and yields valid (appropriate) research results and findings. Looking at the respective studies from this perspective, the current trends in irony research are interesting: Lee

29 H. Ito, *Eigoken ni okeru Bungaku Hihyo no Doukou: Yohane Fuku-insho wo Chushin to shite* [Trends in Literary Criticism in the English-Speaking World: With a central focus on the Gospel of John]. *Fuku-in to Sekai* [Good News and the World] 67 (7) (Shinkyo Shuppansha, 2012, 31–37), 34, summarizes the view of those historical critics: The Gospels are not the complex narratives that narrative critics analyze. They are much simpler and do not warrant complex narrative criticism. In other words, the point is that they cannot be considered to have been written with the sophisticated literary techniques that modern critics find.

uses the Aristotelian model and Bell does the Socratic model of antiquity. On the other hand, I employ the speech act model, Larsen uses Northrop Frye's model, Sarlow uses Kennedy's rhetorical model, and Wright uses Scott's Hidden Script model, each of which contributes to the advancement of research in their own way.

Now, starting from the next section, this study would like to show specifically, as a particularly positive response, that analytical methods based on modern literary and linguistic theories, such as the speech act model, can also produce valid and interesting research results in the analysis of ancient ironies. As an example for this purpose, I will revisit one of the main ironies of John's Gospel (1:11).

4. Active response with an example of actual interpretation³⁰

4.1. Reasons for re-analyzing the irony of John 1:11

In my opinion, the master plot of John's Gospel is that the only Son of God sent by the Father to save the world is not only rejected when he comes to his world, but is also resurrected on the third day to return to his heavenly Father in glory, despite the fact that he is crucified while innocent and undoubtedly experiences death. The Prologue of this Gospel plays a significant role in this master plot, and John 1:11 in particular has been considered as a very important verse in understanding this Gospel. For, as Culpepper states that "the Jews rejected the Messiah they eagerly expected," this is considered the fundamental irony of this Gospel.³¹ Accordingly, the traditional interpretation of this verse has been that *the Jews were the victims of this fundamental irony*.³² However, questions now

30 In section 4, when the terms "the author" and "the reader" are used, they will refer to "the implied author" and "the implied reader" respectively.

31 Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 169. Also P. D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 111 and note 51.

32 See also, e.g., Keener, *Gospel of John*, 399; Lee, "Dramatic Irony," 111; Wright, *Governor*, 39.

arise. Is this all true? Perhaps is it necessary to re-examine this common view of this irony? The reason is, in my own view, that there is a possibility that the victims of the irony in 1:11 are not only the Jews *but also Jesus*.³³ Therefore, this study attempts to verify this hypothesis, using the *Analytical outline for ironical speech acts* (hereafter referred to as “Analytical Outline”³⁴) that I developed as a linguistic analysis method of irony. In addition, I will also refer to John 1:10 as its secondary evidence in section 4.3.

4.2. Analysis of John 1:11

1:11 εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον.

He came to his own people, but his own people did not accept him.³⁵

The Prologue (1:1–18)³⁶ where this verse is located is considered the preface to

33 The term “victim” is one of the essential elements in analyzing the irony phenomenon, because irony is employed to target someone. It is usually important to identify the three parties, the ironist (the one who creates an irony), the target (or victim) and the observer, and to understand their relationship.

34 It attempts to systematically analyze the irony woven into the text based on speech act theory, and has three major steps - Preliminary, Verifying, and Final Steps. For more details, see Ito, “Johannine Irony: Part 1”; *Story of Jesus*, 26–34; “Bungakuteki Hoho niyoru”; “Chapter 7: Speech Act,” 222.

35 My own translation

36 There has been a traditional argument that John brought specific materials that were already in circulation at the time, such as the “Logos Hymn”, to the beginning of the Gospel. For this, see, e.g., R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John, vol 1: Introduction and Commentary on Chapters 1–4. Reprint* (Tunbridge wells, UK: Burns & Oates, 1984), 224; R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, ed. R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971); T. Onuki, *Yohane niyoru Fuku-insho: Yo no Hikari Iesu* [The Gospel according to John: Jesus, the Light of the World] (The Board of Publications, The United

the entire Gospel. Its function is to link this Gospel narrative closely to the rich cultural and religious background rooted in Judaism, to deepen its contents, and to contribute to the reader's understanding of this Gospel. This Prologue is also the starting point for the author's communication with the reader through the narrator to begin this Gospel, and forms a section that introduces the main themes of the Gospel.³⁷ Therefore, the narrator narrates this section assuming that the reader also has some background knowledge of what is presented in the Prologue, including key words such as "word, God, life, light, John the Baptist, and law".

Regarding verse 11, the stylistic structure of 1:10 and 1:11 is similar. However, in terms of content, while verse 10 simply says "the world did not know him", verse 11 records "his own did not accept him". The latter expression "did not accept" is more intensified than the former.³⁸ Based on Culpepper's statement about verse 11 mentioned previously, the existence of irony can be inferred. Therefore, I intend to analyze it later using my *Analytical Outline*. However, before that, for the sake of comparison and contrast with verse 11, Culpepper's statement will be examined first. It is because the way of expression Culpepper uses is very important to our arguments.

Church of Christ in Japan, 1996), 64. On the other hand, some recent views have regarded it as originally created as the introduction to this Gospel, because there is a lack of external evidence of materials that existed separately, and as internal evidence, the literary structure of the entire Gospel favors it. For this, see, e.g., C.S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 337; J. A. Brant, *John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 23; C. Van Deventer, "Performing John: The Participatory Nature of the Fourth Gospel," *Neotestamentica* 53 (3) (2019, 517–534), 520 n. 11. This is gaining support. As for the relationship between the Prologue and the creation accounts of early Judaism, see M. Endo, *Creation and Christology: A Study on the Johannine Prologue in the Light of Early Jewish Creation Accounts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002). And for the three categories of analysis about the structure of the Prologue, see, e.g., Bell, *Midwife of Truth*, 100–102.

37 See also Onuki, *Yo no Hikari*, 66–67; Karakolis, "Logos-Concept," 152.

38 Keener, *Gospel of John*, 395, considers this expression as "deliberate rejection".

4.2.1. The statement expressed by Culpepper

“The foundational irony of the gospel is that the Jews rejected the Messiah they eagerly expected.”³⁹

It is important to keep in mind that Culpepper’s statement itself shown above is *not* an expression that produces irony in the story. Correctly, this is his view of the irony in the narrative. Thus, there is no ironist, no victim, nor observer in his statement.

In light of the above, the subject of *the irony he describes* in his subordinate clause is “the Jews”. In this irony he regards “they eagerly expected the Messiah” and “they rejected the Messiah” as a content opposition. (It is a conflict of counterfactual propositions.) He interprets that this conflict as occurring in the same people is the very phenomenon of irony, and that *the victims of this irony were “the Jews”*. The type of this irony is *situational irony* induced by some disparity or incongruity in an event. Moreover, we can conclude that it falls into two types in its subcategories: *Irony of self-betrayal* resulting from the victim’s utterance or action which unconsciously shows his own ignorance, weakness, errors, or follies, and *Irony of dilemma* occurring in a dilemma or some other impossible situations. As for this irony pointed out by Culpepper, the ironist is the author of this Gospel through the narrator, and the observer is the reader of this Gospel.

4.2.2. Analysis of John 1:11 according to Analytical Outline for Ironical Speech Acts

When this irony of 1:11 is analyzed according to Verifying Steps,⁴⁰ the ironist is

39 Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 169.

40 Since the existence of irony in 1:11 has already been acknowledged as above, the Preliminary Steps of the process to identify whether it exists or not are omitted here.

the author (John) who lets the narrator speak. Note in particular that the subject of this verse is “He”, and this indicates *the victim of irony* is “He”, namely *Jesus*, who resides at the character level.⁴¹ Its observer is the reader who reads the narrator’s utterance. As for the type of this irony, it is *situational irony* in general, and in particular *irony of events* derived from the outcome of an event which is neither expected nor desired. This can be observed by the reader on the textual level. In contrast, on the character level, it might be a bit tricky if we think of Jesus’ situation. “He came to his own people,” and *Jesus thought* he would be accepted, but he was not. Then, this *irony of events* can exist. However, if he could have expected not to be accepted, this irony of events would not be identified. It may be possible from the Jesus image in this Gospel that the Father and the Son had a very close relationship, and that the Son was informed of all of the Father’s plans, as shown in 5:20: “For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does” and 10:30: “I and My Father are one” (NKJV).

The same holds true of *dramatic irony* which is recognized by the observer about what the victim does not yet know. This dramatic irony would not occur if Jesus knew of the Father’s plan. However, even if Jesus could have predicted it, at least this is the *irony of dilemma*. This situation implies the suffering of Jesus. Thus, the nature of opposition is a conflict of counterfactual propositions.

The speech act (the act in saying something) of this verse is for the narrator to tell or reveal the information about the relationships between “He” and “his own people”, which is an informative speech act. At the same time, it is also an assertive speech act because the act emphasizes the content as to “his own people did not accept him”. The author’s intended meaning is to tell the reader about it, namely, the Jews did not accept Jesus.

Finally, as for Final Step, the perlocutionary act (the effect on the reader)

41 The narrative level (= character level), together with the textual level (= implied author/reader level), form the communication model of the story.

of this verse is as follows: The reader has already taken to heart the astonishing information “The world was made through him, and the world did not know him” presented in verse 10. The reader is further shocked by the unbelievable negative content in verse 11, that is, Jesus the Savior, who was the Light and the Word, came to the Jews but they rejected this Savior. This content is very important throughout John’s Gospel. The reader is expected to consider it very carefully. It is also hoped that the reader will be warned not to act in the same way as the Jews did in the story. Then, verse 11 directs the reader’s interest to the development of the next verses. However, although the fundamental irony of this Gospel is found in verse 11, for the first-time reader who has not read the entire Gospel yet, the specific details of the content of that rejection are not known to him/her yet at this point. There is a lot more left for the reader to observe.⁴²

4.2.3. Comparison of Two Utterances

The following points will emerge when comparing the two utterances above.

	The irony Culpepper describes	The irony of verse 11
Ironist	(The author of the Gospel)	The author of the Gospel
Victim of irony	<i>The Jews</i>	<i>Jesus</i>
Observer	(The reader)	The reader
The types of irony	Irony of self-betrayal Irony of dilemma	Irony of dilemma Irony of events (Dramatic irony)

42 This point is particularly important in terms of the concept of *narrative temporality*. It is because the differences between the author and the reader in terms of their knowledge about the content of the story have significant implications for the analysis of irony (For this, see H. Ito, “Chapter 6: Narrative Criticism,” in *Shinyaku Seisho Kaishaku no Tebiki* [A Guide to New Testament Interpretation], A. Asano et al (The Board of Publications, The United Church of Christ in Japan, 2016, 173–206), 176–177. See also H. Ito, “Narrative Temporality and Johannine Symbolism,” *Acta Theologica* 23 (2) (2003, 117–135).

As this comparison shows, a new and interesting aspect of the irony of verse 11 can be detected in the history of interpretation. It is the following feature: The victims of irony in this Gospel are usually some characters other than the protagonist, Jesus. Specifically, there are many ironies that target the Jews (the Jewish authorities) as victims, which is a typical pattern that prevails throughout this Gospel.⁴³ This is also corroborated by my previous studies.⁴⁴ In particular, it has been traditionally considered that the victims of irony in verse 11 were the Jews who rejected the Messiah. Again, this has been called the foundational irony of this Gospel. If one looks at the Gospel as a whole, certainly it is not a mistake. However, according to my analysis by *Analytical Outline*, the victim of irony of verse 11 is primarily *Jesus*. This is a surprising finding from a literary perspective, since (as far as my knowledge is concerned) no scholar has ever pointed this out explicitly, that is, *Jesus* is the victim of irony in the very fundamental irony of John's Gospel. Even Duke, a leading irony scholar on this Gospel, states that "Jesus is the only character in the Fourth Gospel who utters irony without being the victim of it."⁴⁵

Why do such differences in interpretation arise? The main reason is that, from a linguistic perspective, even though the deep structures (the content/core of the message) are the same, the surface structures (the way the message is expressed) are subtly different between the two utterances. Especially, concerning the utterance of irony described by Culpepper, the author of this utterance is Culpepper, and its readers are his readers who read it. If we compare the subjects of the two utterances, that of verse 11 is "Jesus" and that of Culpepper's statement is "the Jews". In fact, this point is the major reason which leads to the differences.

43 See, e.g., Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 178, and Duke, *Irony*, 149–150.

44 See Ito, *Bungakuteki Hoho niyoru*, 43–62. Also when I analyze irony in the entire John 9, *Story of Jesus*, and even there the main victims of Johannine irony are the Jewish authorities (Ito, *Story of Jesus*, 464–466). *Seemingly*, Jesus is never a victim of any irony.

45 Duke, *Irony*, 45.

4.3. The meaning of Jesus as a victim

Next, this section attempts to make a brief discussion of how the interpretation of Jesus as a victim in John 1:11 relates to the immediate context, and to this Gospel as a whole. First, in the most immediate context, John 1:10 says: “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him” (NRSV). Here we can also identify *the irony of dilemma with Jesus as a victim* as one of its ironies,⁴⁶ because, from Jesus’ angle, he created the world, but the world (he created!) did not know him. In this way, the reader is struck by the description of Jesus as a victim in verse 10, in addition to verse 11.

Immediately after that, in verse 12, John strongly highlights the contrastive content with the previous verses by using a contradictory conjunction of *but*: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (NRSV). John makes us aware that there are negative and positive responses to the light that shines on all people, and he implicitly encourages the reader to think deeply about how to respond. Also, he implicitly inspires the reader to become one of God’s children. In addition, when we look at the whole Gospel, the interesting argument that Jesus is a victim is not only confined to John 1:10–11. In the irony found throughout the Passion narrative of Christ (18:1–20:31), it is also evident.⁴⁷

Second, the Johannine Jesus is portrayed as a person with his initiative found

46 The primary irony of this verse is dramatic irony which indicates the world is the victim.

47 Sarlow, *Rhetorical Critical Analysis*, analyzes the irony found throughout the Passion narrative of Christ and makes a similar observation that Jesus is the victim of irony as John’s unstable irony. He comes to that conclusion using his own rhetorical method of analysis, as opposed to my linguistic method, but it is an interesting scholarly concordance. Sarlow, *Rhetorical Critical Analysis*, 255, states that “Jesus as protagonist is, for a period of time, a victim.”

in 1:12; 5:21; 9:1;⁴⁸ 9:35,⁴⁹ etc., and a person with passivity found in 5:19; 5:27, 30, and so on.⁵⁰ Even if Jesus can be interpreted as the victim in John 1:10–11, that does not make *Jesus' initiative* (or passivity) lost. It is because even if he becomes a victim temporarily, this does not change the nature of Jesus. This can be seen from the fact that even human beings do not necessarily lose their power (nature) to get out of severe conflicts and difficulties.

Third, what is the function of irony in relation to the view that Jesus is the victim? In my opinion, the following can be mentioned: (a) A *psychological communication strategy* that leads people (characters and readers) to the author's thoughts (or value standard) and his way of thinking. It shocks the readers, dropping their level of understanding (power) once and then lifting it up again. This gap creates a paradoxical effect. (b) A *literary technique* that is unique and skillful enough to make the readers desire to read the story again and again. (c) An *educational (evangelistic) device* that encourages the readers to re-examine their faith. It is an evangelistic tool that encourages the readers to prepare for the dilemmas they may encounter in their lives. In this way, John's Gospel describes various subtleties of life through the use of irony, making the readers think deeply and at the same time being fascinated by it.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to show whether or not analytical methods based on modern literary and linguistic theories can produce valid and interesting research results in the analysis of ancient ironies. As a practical example, it was found that

48 See J. W. Holleran, "Seeing the light: A narrative reading of John 9. II: Narrative exposition," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 69 (4) (1993, 354–382), 354.

49 Ito, *Story of Jesus*, 385.

50 In John 3:16, there seems to be more emphasis on the initiative of God the Father than on that of Jesus.

there is an intriguing aspect on the interpretation of John 1:11. Traditionally, the Jews have been considered to be the victims of irony in verse 11. However, when this verse is analyzed using *Analytical Outline*, it has become clear that the victims of this irony are not only the Jews but also *Jesus*.

In relation to this, regarding the criticism that many of the modern literary methods used in biblical interpretation, especially the method of irony analysis based on speech act theory so far, may be anachronistic, we can conclude that any modern methods inevitably come with an anachronistic element, so it is only a matter of degree, as discussed in the four points in section 3: (i) Differences in the way we perceive the scope of historical context, (ii) Critics' methods - also anachronistic, (iii) Modern scholars' position, and (iv) History of biblical interpretation. Therefore, rather than asking whether a particular methodology is anachronistic or not, it is the contention of this article that the most important question is whether the research results are valid regardless of which method is used. I believe that the current trend of lively irony research now illustrates this point.