

Introduction

Aim

The aim of the present study is to argue that Jesus' divinity is made explicit in John 6:51c-58¹ and thereby to present this scene as christological rather than eucharistic. I propose that this pericope makes claims about Jesus' divinity because of the ways in which the Gospel of John participates in the literary world of the ancient Mediterranean: the author's use of genres and his characteristic manipulation of common tropes makes finding affinities between John and other Hellenistic literature useful for understanding the multivalency of John's Gospel. In particular, I show how John's Gospel makes use of the established trope of the relationship between an extraordinary mortal and an antagonistic deity, which is most readily seen in the Homeric epics but is also preserved in the Greek

1. Unless otherwise indicated, Greek text from the New Testament comes from the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland, 27th ed.; English is from the Revised Standard Version.

romance novels² from around John's era—that is, from the first to the fourth centuries CE.³

This project emerges from previous debates about the nature of John 6:51c-58 and its relationship to the rest of the Gospel. As I discuss in chapter one, scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann have isolated the pericope as a late addition that attempts to interject sacramentalism into what is frequently considered an anti-sacramental text; that is, Bultmann and others who agree with him see the scene as promoting the institution of the Eucharist within a text that otherwise carefully omits any reference to such a rite. As such, Bultmann does not consider this section original to John. On the other hand, a christological interpretation of the section has recently been advanced. This view interprets John 6:51c-58 in light of the tension throughout the Gospel between the divinity and humanity of Jesus, an approach that I embrace. As I argue in chapter one, John 6 participates in John's use elsewhere of physical, bodily signs to point to Jesus' divinity. In alluding to Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, John 6:51c-58 continues the Gospel's preoccupation with Jesus' divinity and does not address issues of community practice or sacrament. While an inclusion of the institution of the Eucharist would indeed seem strange in the context of the greater Gospel,

2. The four romances I will be examining in this project are Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, Xenophon of Ephesus's *An Ephesian Tale*, Achilles Tatius's *Leucippe and Clitophon*, and Heliodorus's *An Ethiopian Story*. Editions used will be as follows, unless otherwise indicated: Chariton, *Callirhoe*, trans. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1932); Xenophon of Ephesus, *Anthia and Habrocomes*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); *Achilles Tatius*, trans. S. Gaselee, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921); Heliodorus, *Les Éthiopiennes (Théagène et Chariclée)*, ed. and trans. R. M. Rattenbury et al. (Paris: Société d'édition Les Belles Lettres, 1935) for Greek text; and Heliodorus, *An Ethiopian Story*, in *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, trans. J. R. Morgan, ed. Bryan P. Reardon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 349–588 for the English, as there is currently no Loeb edition of Heliodorus's tale.
3. For convenience, I will refer to the author of the Fourth Gospel by the name John, as is customary. On John's authorship, please see, among others, Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1990), 244–72.

interpreting this scene christologically fits John's larger narrative concerns. In short, it is important not to succumb to a synoptic point of view. The use of bread, flesh, and blood in John might seem to be used in the way that Mark, Matthew, and Luke use that combination, that is, with reference to the Eucharist or Last Supper, but in the context of John's Gospel, the combination has a different significance. I suggest that, given (1) John's overarching concern with Jesus' divine identity and his use of Jesus' physical body as a sign to that end, and (2) the consistency in grammar, vocabulary, and style that this section shares with the rest of John, a christological interpretation of this scene resolves both its meaning and the question of Johannine unity. Where I diverge from previous christological interpretations of John 6 is in my use of Hellenistic literature to elucidate John's meaning. This literature—and in particular the novels, whose preoccupation with right identity is parallel with John's concerns in this area—preserves notions of divinity, sacrifice, and consumption as they occur in the Greco-Roman cultural milieu. As such, reading these novels alongside John provides the context within which Jesus' statement in John 6:51c-58 can be understood to have christological significance.

In the classical literature, the relationship between hero and deity is clearly antagonistic, with the deity responsible for the hero's hardships and, ultimately, for his death. However, as Gregory Nagy has shown, what is recorded as an antagonistic relationship in the narrative translates into a relationship of association in the cult practice.⁴ In other words, the death of the hero, recounted as the will of a god, is the cause for the establishment or *aition* of a cult that identifies that hero with the god in question.⁵ The romance novels of

4. Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

5. Following Nagy, I use *aition* to mean the narrative event that spurs the establishment of a cult. It is important to acknowledge that this definition includes the understanding that myth and cult

the Hellenistic era, while of a different genre from the epics, preserve this relationship between god, hero, and cult, but do so exclusively within the narrative.

I argue that in the romance novels of the early common era, both the identification of the hero or heroine with the divinity and the associative cultic action occur at the literary level: the romances recount the antagonism between the heroines and the divine and at the same time mark the heroines as divine. That the heroines face death is the will of the gods, and their *agôn* is manifested as a cultic event so that the cult *aition* is conflated with the cult rites. The heroines experience many hardships and blame the gods for them; in three of the novels, these hardships reach their apex in the apparent or near sacrifice of the protagonists. I demonstrate that the choice of language in the texts creates a level of anticipation in the audience that effectively realizes the sacrifices even when, at the last moment, they are avoided. Further, these linguistic choices imply the possibility of the cultic meal of the heroine that is an important aspect of the heroic cult that establishes the divine identification. In other words, the near consumption and sacrifice of the heroine in the novels corresponds to the culmination of the antagonism between heroine and deity and, at the same time, establishes her identification with that deity.

These romance novels preserve a Greco-Roman understanding of the ways in which extraordinary human beings become or are divine. In other words, the novels participate in the cultural expectations about heroes and their relationship to the divine. This understanding is one that I contend John's Gospel develops to its own advantage. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus' divinity is demonstrated both explicitly in direct statements and implicitly through Jesus' signs.

do not have a linear relationship, with myth creating cult. Rather, tradition and ritual evolve together; one is not derivative of the other (Nagy, *Best of the Achaeans*, 279 n. 2).

John has a clear preoccupation with Jesus' divine identity. Jesus' arrival on the earth, which is necessarily tinged with mortality, is the will of God; thus Jesus' salvific death is God's ultimate aim, a death to which all his acts point.⁶ Jesus is a character who occupies dual ontological categories simultaneously; he is at once mortal and divine. This conflation of identities is emphasized in John 6, where Jesus both gives bread and is that bread. Jesus' statement that his followers must "eat the flesh of the Son of Man," which is the bread that he gives (δίδωμι ὑπέρ) them, must be understood as a statement of identity. Like the heroines of the romances, Jesus is ultimately a sacrifice who does not die, but whose flesh is nevertheless consumed. In the moment of that consumption, occurring at the level of narrative, John fully articulates Jesus' divinity in his identification with God.

Method

I expand the study of John 6:51c-58 by bringing it into dialogue with its immediate historical context, namely, the Greco-Roman world and the Johannine literary tradition. On the one hand, I read John 6:51c-58 as a component of a unified Gospel of John; on the other hand, I read it as a participant in the wider historical world. First, I approach John 6:51c-58 as part of a literary whole. I understand this scene to be an integral part of John's Gospel rather than an addition by a later hand attempting to insert sacramental rites. As I argue in chapter one, this section of John shares linguistic and theological affinities with the rest of the Gospel despite attempts to demonstrate otherwise. I reject claims that this section is theologically incompatible with John's supposed anti-sacramental approach, and I agree with scholars who observe this pericope's linguistic continuity

6. It is perhaps significant that in the end, like the heroines of the novels, Jesus also survives his sacrifice.

with the sections that surround it.⁷ Further, I accept that John has been read and understood as it currently stands without much difficulty for as long as we have a manuscript tradition for it; in other words, the text-critical trajectory of John 6:51c-58 gives us no reason to doubt its authenticity. Thus I follow C. K. Barrett's argument for Johannine unity: "*someone* published it substantially as it is now stands; and I continue to make the assumption that he knew his business, and that it is the first duty of a commentator to bring out this person's meaning."⁸ In fact, my present argument regarding John 6:51c-58 renders explanations involving Johannine interpolations moot.

Second, by approaching John 6:51c-58 in this way, I am necessarily engaging with it as a text that exists in history and in culture. John is therefore also part of a larger whole that constitutes the diverse corpus of Hellenistic literature. Other scholars have already established that John presents many of the literary tropes used by Hellenistic authors. Jo-Ann Brant and Jennifer Berenson Maclean, for instance, have both written about John's characterization of Jesus as a heroic figure.⁹ Lawrence Wills has outlined the ways in which the Gospel of John and the *Life of Aesop* share similar literary patterns.¹⁰ Most recently, Kasper Bro Larsen has argued that John

7. More recently the tide has turned and an increasing number of contributions to the debate conclude that this section of John should not be viewed as an addition; e.g., Tom Thatcher, *The Riddles of Jesus in John: A Study in Tradition and Folklore*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 53 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 284 n. 40; Maarten J. J. Menken, "John 6,51c-58: Eucharist or Christology?" in *Critical Readings of John 6*, Biblical Interpretation Series 22, ed. R. Alan Culpepper (Leiden: Brill, 1997), esp. 191-202. See chapter one for a full discussion of this debate.

8. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1978), 22.

9. Jennifer Berenson Maclean, "Jesus as Cult Hero in the Fourth Gospel," in *Philostratus's Heroikos: Religion and Cultural Identity in the Third Century C.E.*, eds. Ellen Bradshaw Aitken and Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 195-218; Jo-Ann A. Brant, "Divine Birth and Apparent Parents: The Plot of the Fourth Gospel," in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, ed. Ronald Hock et al. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 199-218.

makes use of a type scene common in classical literature, *anagnorisis*, or the recognition scene.¹¹ Harold Attridge's 2002 article demonstrated how John manipulates common tropes of Hellenistic literature in order to point to his own particular theological aims.¹² As such, my argument about John 6:51c-58 both emerges from and innovates on current approaches in Johannine scholarship. In developing this holistic approach to this section of John, and using previous Johannine scholarship alongside innovative methods for integrating Greco-Roman literary culture to its study, I offer a new solution for this troubling passage, a solution that reflects both the integrity of the gospel and its necessary participation in the ancient Mediterranean world in which it was created.

As a text produced in the Greco-Roman world, John necessarily shares certain literary tropes and devices with other texts produced in that world. Genres are complex to define, since any genre "is never fully identical with itself, nor are texts fully identical with their genres."¹³ John is comparable to the genre of the novel in certain specific ways. First, chronologically, John and the novels together preserve cultural expectations of the first few centuries of the common era. John dates from around 90 to 100 CE. The earliest of the novels, Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, dates from the early first century CE.¹⁴ *An Ephesian Tale* is likely from the second century CE. The earliest novels also preserve the expectations of a certain geographical range—that of the Hellenistic world. Chariton's name

10. Lawrence M. Wills, *The Quest of the Historical Gospel: Mark, John, and the Origins of the Gospel Genre* (New York: Routledge, 1997), esp. 23–50.

11. Kasper Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes and the Gospel of John* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

12. Harold Attridge, "Genre Bending in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121, no. 1 (2002): 3–21, esp. 14.

13. Thomas O. Beebee, *The Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 19.

14. B. P. Reardon, "General Introduction," in *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. B. P. Reardon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 17.

carries the epithet “of Aphrodisias,” locating him in present-day Turkey in a city named for Aphrodite, located about one hundred kilometers from the coast. John, whether composed in Syria,¹⁵ in Ephesus,¹⁶ or elsewhere, is a text that was produced in the Greco-Roman world, probably in a metropolitan center, coming into contact with the variety of narratives available to those inhabiting the historical ancient Mediterranean. That is, while the specific provenance of John’s Gospel is not relevant to this project, the fact that it was written in a milieu that was also producing the ancient romances allows for a natural comparison of these texts with the Gospel.

As most of the novels were likely composed after the Gospel of John, it should be clear that I am not arguing for a direct (or even indirect) literary dependence. Rather, I am making the suggestion that the romances preserve a way of thinking about how divinity is conferred on extraordinary humans, a way of thinking that seems, from its prevalence dating back to the Homeric texts and continuing in popularity in the novels, to have survived and thrived through the time period in which John was writing. We can use the novels as a window through which to view the *Weltanschauung* that to some extent shaped John’s approach to identifying divinity in Jesus.

Main Themes

Rituals in Ink

In arguing that John 6:51c-58 does *not* preserve a Johannine Eucharist, I remove Jesus’ statement about eating and drinking his flesh and blood from the world of historical Christian ritual activity

15. E.g., Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament: History and Literature of Early Christianity*, vol. 2 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000).

16. E.g., Raymond Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979).

and locate it firmly in the narrative world. Just as with the Greek romances, whose cannibalistic sacrifices do not reflect any historical ritual ever really practiced, John 6:51c-58 represents a ritual that only exists in text. As I demonstrate in chapter three, tropes of human sacrifice and cannibalism are used to paint a description of a barbaric Other and do not reflect actual ritual practice of any known group, past or present. Thus, in the novels, as in other texts that describe such rites, the meaning that is produced by a “ritual in ink”¹⁷ exists not because the ritual parallels a familiar one that took place in the “real” historical world, but because the ritual in ink creates meaning by interacting with existing notions of what it means to sacrifice and to consume.

It is to this category that John 6:51c-58 belongs; John describes a rite that takes place only in the literary realm, but that nonetheless transmits meaning. The narrativity of the ritual is twofold in John, since it is twice removed from the historical world: once because it is embedded in a narrative of Jesus’ life and teaching, and twice because within that narrative it is embedded in the speech of the character of Jesus. Thus two narrative levels exist in this passage: a sub-narrative describing Jesus on the shore, discussing the bread of life, and a meta-narrative, which consists of Jesus’ statements about the bread of life. Jesus’ words effect a ritual even when that ritual does not ever actually take place either (a) in the sub-narrative (i.e., Jesus’ flesh is never narratively consumed) or (b) in historical reality (i.e., this eating of Jesus’ flesh, metaphorical or otherwise, is not a reference to any actual ritual).

17. Jörg Rüpke, introduction to *Rituals in Ink: A Conference on Religion and Literary Production in Ancient Rome Held at Stanford University in February 2002*, eds. Alessandro Barchiesi, Jörg Rüpke, Susan A Stephens (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2004), vii–viii.

The narrative world produces significant and real meaning even when its events or rituals are not matched by those that take place in the real world.

If performed rituals matter in society, literary rituals must matter in texts. Rituals in ink matter. Ancient texts do not constitute a hermetically sealed realm. Texts participate in the wider society in which they were created. In that space texts have a performative dimension regardless of the mimetic or fictitious character of their embedded rituals.¹⁸

The narrative realm creates its own realities: the actions depicted in texts interrupt the “real” world, the historical world, and collide with the symbols and truths of that world, producing new meanings in it. This force exists without historical correlation, as in the case with the sacrificial *Scheintod*¹⁹ the heroines of the novels undergo. This phenomenon, the trope of rituals that exist only in the narrative realm, is also reflected in John 6:51c-58; the flesh and blood do not point to a practice of ritually eating Jesus’ flesh, even in symbolic terms, but to Jesus’ identification with God, something that is only solidified through this consumption of his sacrificed flesh.

Contemporaneity

Contemporaneity, or *die Gleichzeitigkeit*, as Bultmann terms it in the original German version of his *Gospel of John*, describes the peculiar quality of Johannine time. John has no future: everything that occurs takes place in the present moment. Bultmann describes how eschatology in John’s Gospel “is taking place even now in the life and destiny of Jesus.”²⁰ That is, Jesus’ coming to the earth, his

18. *Ibid.*, vii–viii.

19. *Scheintod* or “apparent death” is a widely used element of suspense in the Greek romances whereby the heroine is shown to die or appear to die in order to confuse the identity of the female protagonist and, in so doing, develop the plot.

20. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 128.

death, his returning to the Father—all these events take place in the same moment; everything is imminent. Regarding John 6:51c-58, this concept allows us to talk about the collision of several aspects of Jesus' characterization. His identity as the Word made flesh occurs at this moment; Jesus' death on the cross occurs at this moment. "*Past and future are bound to each other.* That the hour of death is the hour of glorifying God rests on the fact that the entire work of Jesus serves the revelation."²¹ Every moment in the Johannine narrative can be said to occur at the same time—that is, contemporaneously. The moment when Jesus exhorts his audience to consume his flesh and drink his blood therefore collides with the overall Johannine narrative, pointing at the same time to Jesus' divinity and his mortality in the moment of his sacrificial death. These moments, colliding in John 6:51c-58, illuminate the significance of Jesus' anthropophagic words. In instigating this narrative rite of consuming his sacrificed flesh, Jesus points to all the moments of his a-temporal existence and death. That is, the meaning of John 6:51c-58 refracts into multiple concurrent moments of Johannine theology; this pericope, then, is the culmination of John's statements about Jesus' divinity and death. It is in this light that we can see Jesus' statements about consuming his sacrificed body as the signifier of his divine identity.

Simultaneity

Whereas contemporaneity is a chronological term designating the intersection of two or more elements in a temporal landscape, I propose simultaneity as an ontological term that points to the intersection of multiple identities within the same being. In the Greek romance novels the protagonists are characterized by their

21. *Ibid.*, 429. Italics in original.

divinity. Like those who view Jesus' signs in John, the spectators in the novels recognize the heroines as goddesses by certain external indicators. In the novels, this divinity is manifested using certain accepted tropes of epiphany, taken from the literature of the classical world and especially Homer. The nature of the relationship between mortals and divine beings in the ancient world gives way to an understanding of the heroines where, like Jesus, they are simultaneously human beings and divinities. In the ancient world, the perception of a human being as divine—the belief that the individual is a manifestation of a divinity—is enough to make that person phenomenologically divine. Thus, when the narrative devices used in the novels describe the heroines as having radiant beauty, as being larger-than-life, and as worthy of worship by those who come across them on their travels, this suggests that the narrative is making claims about the divinity of those protagonists.

This phenomenon is clearly at play in the discussions of Jesus' divine and mortal ontology in John's Gospel; the debate surrounding the precedence of the flesh over the glory or the glory over the flesh, which I outline in chapter one, reflects Jesus' characterization as simultaneously divine and human. John's insistence that Jesus is *both* fleshly (John 1:14) and divine (1:1) indicates the author's concern with Jesus' identity as *both simultaneously*. Jesus' fleshly signs, his healing with spit (9:5-7a) for example, all point toward his identity as "equal to God" (5:18); all his physical signs point to his divine identity, revealed finally in that most physical of signs, his own crucified body (8:28). Thus, Jesus' physicality does not imply the pre-eminence of flesh over glory, but the simultaneity of the two in his being. Viewing Jesus' simultaneously divine and mortal ontology in light of the romance novels allows us to examine the significance of this simultaneity. This sliding scale of mortality creates space for the coexisting of divinity and humanity in a single character. It also

suggests a further comparison that is significant for understanding the intersection of tropes of divinity and consumption in John: the category of the hero.

Cannibalism and Anthropophagy

The terms *cannibalism* and *anthropophagy* are often used interchangeably to refer to the consumption of human flesh by other humans. Both cannibalism and anthropophagy as culturally-sanctioned behaviors are fictional;²² while incidents of desperation have from time to time in the history of humanity produced situations in which the eating of human meat was necessary (under siege conditions, for example), William Arens²³ has convinced many anthropologists that the absence of *any* evidence for *any* population practicing cannibalism or anthropophagy means that we must seriously question its historical reality. Rather, Arens suggests, and I agree, that cannibalism instead serves as a demarcator of social boundaries between right/insider and wrong/outsider. That is, accusations of cannibalism abound, but rather than reflect real-world practices, they indicate boundary-making anxieties and identify the group accused of the practice as Other, a group outside of right society.

As such, the human sacrifices described in the romance novels do not preserve actual rituals practiced by actual groups; rather, they reflect the social expectations about right and wrong ritual behavior, the latter exemplified by the characters of bandits and barbarians. As I propose in chapter three, the terminology used to depict the human sacrifices in the romances leaves open the thrilling possibility of a

22. For a more meaty discussion of what is at stake with these two terms, see chapter three, especially note 152.

23. William Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

cannibalistic banquet as part of the rite, given the structure of Greek sacrifice and banqueting practices. The entirely narrative existence of cannibalism coincides with the strictly narrative location of the sacrifices that take place in the course of the novels, and likewise with the wholly narrative quality of Jesus' exhortation to theophagy/anthropophagy in the Gospel of John. That is, we can understand Jesus' theophagic statement in the context of these narrative tropes: how cannibalism functions as a cultural narrative; how divine and mortal identities can exist simultaneously in literary narrative; and how John's narrative condenses time into a single, contemporaneous moment that takes place at all times and at no time.

Outline

The first chapter of this study, "The Word Was Made Flesh," engages John's preoccupation with Jesus' divine identity by examining the christological elements both throughout the Gospel and particularly in John 6. This chapter also challenges the theological assumptions that have often led to the interpretation of John 6:51c-58 as a eucharistic scene and as such, discusses the issue of sacramentality in this Gospel. The chapter concludes with an overview of the character of Jesus in John as a hero of the Hellenistic type and introduces Greco-Roman concepts of divinity and mortality.

In the second chapter, "Second Only to Artemis," I introduce the four main Hellenistic romance novels relevant to this project, including a history of scholarship of the novels as literature and as a genre. Key to my discussion of John 6:51c-58 as christological is this chapter's discussion of how the romantic heroines are described as goddesses and likewise, their association with the classical heroes of the epics. These sections explain the translation of the association between hero and divinity noted by Nagy into a purely narrative context; whereas in Nagy's Homeric examination, such association

occurs only at the historical level, leaving the antagonism to the literature, in the romances the association with the divine is written into the fabric of the plot.

“Her Viscera Leapt Out,” chapter three, details the second half of the association formula: the antagonistic relationship between the heroines of the romances and their gods, a relationship that ultimately leads to the apparent-death (*Scheintod*) of the protagonist. I first give an overview of Nagy’s conclusions about this phenomenon and then outline Greek sacrificial procedure and terminology and the function of human sacrifice and cannibalism in the Greek cultural imagination. These latter sections describe human sacrifice and cannibalism in the cultural imagination, and not in history, since, following William Arens²⁴ and others, I put forward that these tropes exist only in the literary realm and were never practiced in history. Having established cannibalism’s cultural function, I then turn to how this trope works in the Greek novels and argue that the act of sacrifice and implied anthropophagy represents the ultimate conferral of divinity on the heroines, whose deaths are simultaneously implied and avoided.

The last chapter, “My Flesh is Meat Indeed,” applies the conclusions made in the previous chapters to John 6:51c-58. After a summary of these conclusions, this chapter outlines how John participates in the antagonism trope, making use of Lawrence Wills’s comparisons between this Gospel and the *Life of Aesop* as well as internal evidence from the Gospel itself. Next, the relationship between Jesus’ death and God’s glory is developed using Bultmann’s concept of contemporaneity;²⁵ here I make the argument that the temporal convergence of Jesus’ death and his anthropophagic statements point clearly to his divine identity, an argument that

24. Ibid.

25. Bultmann, *John*, 198.

reaches its completion after an analysis of how cannibalism has been used both against and by Christians as an identity marker. This discussion also illustrates another way in which John plays with what Attridge calls “genre-bending,”²⁶ the altering of traditional modes of expression in order to express new ideas. Finally, I conclude the chapter with an analysis of how the sacrificial meals of hero cults ultimately articulate Jesus’ divinity through his shocking call to consume his flesh, making special reference to the verbs used in John 6:51c-58 as pointing to sacrificial language and away from a eucharistic context. As Dennis Smith shows in his discussion of the cult banquet,²⁷ the meal is often inseparable from the act of sacrifice, a cultural trope than John manipulates, I argue, in order to identify Jesus with God.

A concluding chapter follows that relates my findings to the work of two scholars: first, Kasper Bro Larsen’s 2008 work on recognition scenes, and, second, Wayne Meeks’s 1967 monograph, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and Johannine Christology*. The latter supports my conclusions, albeit from a different vantage point: John 6 utilizes key references to the Exodus traditions, references that Meeks argues construct Jesus’ Christology in John. Given that John 6:51c-58 utilizes motifs from Exodus, Meeks’s conclusions bolster my proposal that this pericope contributes to the Gospel’s identification of Jesus as divine. Larsen’s study uses the Homeric trope of the recognition scene to describe what he calls the “hybrid” identity of Jesus as both God and mortal.²⁸ Using similar methods to the present study, Larsen’s work views John as participating in the literary world of the ancient Mediterranean. Our parallel approaches lead us to similar conclusions about Jesus’ divine nature: that, contrary to the previous

26. Attridge, “Genre Bending,” 14.

27. Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 67–86.

28. Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger*, 219.

century's debates, Jesus' divinity cannot be fully described by either of the terms *σάρξ* or *δόξα*.²⁹

This project therefore furthers the study of John's Gospel through its multiple points of contact with current trajectories of Johannine scholarship. First, the methods used in this study represent a new way of approaching John. The Synoptic Gospels have long been compared with Hellenistic literature of the age while John has only recently begun to be approached from this perspective. The novels in particular have seldom been looked to as a source for understanding the Johannine worldview, and even less frequently as lenses with which to view John's Christology. As such, this study broadens contemporary examinations of John's Jesus in light of the Greco-Roman hero by establishing literary parallels to Jesus as a character in the pattern of the hero.

Second, the conclusions I present provide new insight into the function of eating and consumption in John in general and in John 6:51c-58 in particular. It has been difficult to create distance between this scene's references to flesh and blood and the references to flesh and blood in the Synoptic Gospels in the context of the institution of the Eucharist. By removing this pericope from a synoptic reading and locating it as participating in a narrative trope common in the ancient novels, this study shifts the conversation around this scene away from concerns of sacramental theology and toward a subject more in tune with the Gospel's clearly stated christological concerns.

Finally, in locating the type of eating presented in John 6:51c-58 in the context of the cult *aition*, I not only articulate the need for a category of narrativized rituals that do not reflect historically practiced rites (e.g., cannibalistic sacrifices) but also argue for a particular function of this narrative ritualized eating in John. That is,

29. Cf. chapter one.

in making the connection between Nagy's work on antagonism and symbiosis in the epics, the evolution of that pattern in the romances, and the internalization of that trope in John, I propose that the significance of Jesus' statement in John 6:51c-58 is not a demonstration of historical community ritual practice but is instead the causal mechanism by which Jesus' divine identity is realized. These conclusions offer new ways of understanding the function of rituals in an entirely narrative setting, and in particular ritualized eating in narrative.