The Opening of John's Narrative (John 1:19–2:22)

Edited by
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Historical, Literary, and Theological Readings from the Colloquium Ioanneum 2015 in Ephesus

Edited by

R. Alan Culpepper and Jörg Frey

Mohr Siebeck

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In Memory of John Ashton
(13 June 1931–3 February 2016)

Since much that at the first, in deed and word,
Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,
Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match,
Fed through such years, familiar with such light,
Guarded and guided still to see and speak)
Of new significance and fresh result;
What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars,
And named them in the Gospel I have writ.

Robert Browning, "A Death in the Desert"

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Foreword

The Colloquium Ioanneum held its second biennial meeting at Ephesus, September 5–7, 2015, following a three-day tour of archaeological sites in western Turkey. Continuing the work of the Colloquium, which held its founding meeting in 2013 (published in the volume *The Prologue of the Gospel of John,* WUNT 359), the papers at this meeting examined aspects of John 1:19–2:22, the narrative introduction to the Gospel, the witness of the Baptist, the calling of the first disciples, the wedding at Cana, and the (so-called) cleansing of the temple.

This section of the Gospel presents interpreters with a host of tantalizing issues, many of which are addressed in this volume. As different as John is from Mark, if one leaves aside the Prologue and begins reading at John 1:19, the Gospel begins much like the Gospel of Mark does. The narrator introduces the witness of the Baptist, but George Parsenios notices that the elusive Johannine narrator then leaves the scene. Christos Karakolis finds that there are four categories of characters in John, most of whom are introduced in John 1:19–2:11. As in the prologue, John is a witness, and as in Mark Isa 40:3 is used to describe his role, but in John the quotation comes from the Baptist rather than the narrator. Catrin Williams examines the role of the Isaianic quotation in shaping not only the characterization of the Baptist but the witness to Jesus in the immediate context and the rest of the Gospel. John's baptism and his promise of one coming who would baptize with water and spirit opens for Marianne Meye Thompson the issue of the role of purification in John. Ruben Zimmermann offers a new perspective on the Baptist's much debated testimony to Jesus as "the lamb of God." Udo Schnelle argues that the unnamed disciple in John 1:40 is the Beloved Disciple, so his introduction at this point traces the authority of his testimony to the calling of the first disciples. William Loader and Jan G. van der Watt both assess the echo of Gen 28:12 in John 1:51 and its intratextual functions. Loader finds that Jesus is pointing the disciples to the "greater things" they will see when they behold the exalted Son of Man in his glory. Van der Watt contends, on the other hand, that the ascending and descending angels mark the presence and locus of the divine in the earthly Jesus. Jörg Frey takes note of the plurality of semantic horizons evoked by the Cana episode in John 2:1–11 and shows how the historical level of the story progressively yields to its symbolic

dimensions. Craig Koester asks how readers in an urban center like Ephesus would have read the story of the wedding at Cana. Adele Reinhartz offers a new interpretation of Jesus' response to his mother in John 2:4, and challenges the approach of those who find the Johannine Jesus to be a model for ethics by analyzing the Gospel's "implicit ethics." On the basis of an analysis of the dramatic character of the Gospel (especially in its construction of space and time), Michael Theobald characterizes the cleansing of the temple in John 2:13–22 as setting the stage for Jesus as the new temple. Jean Zumstein, analyzing the same scene, shows how the evangelist intertwined history and theology by reinterpreting traditional elements of the story and adding new elements to it. Finally, Alan Culpepper, continuing the approach taken by some of the earlier papers, asks how the story of Jesus' prophetic demonstration in the temple would have been understood by those who lived in the shadow of the temple of Artemis. A more detailed survey of the arguments of these essays reveals both points of disagreement as well as themes and approaches that characterize current Johannine scholarship.

George Parsenios begins with the observation that in three passages in John (1:19–22; 3:31–36; 14:30–31), the narrator begins by introducing the scene and the dialogue and then slips gradually away, leaving the reader to hear the exchanges between the characters. That this is an intentional literary move is demonstrated by parallels in other ancient texts. Parsenios finds similar examples in Thucydides's *History,* in the report of the Ambraciot herald (Book 3) and the Melian dialogue (Book 5). Narration *(diēgēsis)* and drama *(mimēsis),* or the mixture of the two, were distinguished by the presence or absence of a narrator's voice, and Thucydides illustrates the turn toward drama that was inherent in ancient historiography. The evidence of Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Symposium* shows how the suppression of the narrator's voice creates the illusion of dramatic immediacy. John is grounded in the Incarnation rather than in the dialectic between the perfect world of ideas and the illusory world in which we live, but the effect of their use of this narrative strategy is similar: it makes the discourses more accessible for the reader.

Christos Karakolis observes that most of the recurring characters in the Gospel are introduced in John 1:19–2:11. Based on the introductory character of this section, he surmises that the evangelist intended "to introduce these characters from the very beginning of the narrative in order to unfold their development as the narrative progresses." The Johannine characters, Karakolis proposes, may be grouped in the following categories according to their attitude toward Jesus: the knowing, the opposing, the believing, and the fluctuating. Jesus' Mother and John the Baptist belong in the first category. Jesus' Mother has a unique knowledge of Jesus, and John the Baptist is the only character other than Jesus who is identified as one sent by God. Because of their unique status, neither can be considered as a model for faith. At the other extreme, the chief priests are the only (group) character that is constant-

ly opposed to Jesus. Among "the believing," Karakolis places Andrew and Philip, Nathanael, Simon Peter, and the unnamed disciple, whom he identifies as the Beloved Disciple and who becomes "the ideal model of faith." Among "the fluctuating" one finds the Pharisees and the Jewish people also known as "the Jews." Because the Pharisees are not present at the conviction and execution of Jesus, "there is no reference whatsoever to the final outcome of their narrative development." Similarly, the final outcome of the Jewish people "remains open to be answered outside of the narrative world."

Turning her attention to the quotation of Isa 40:3 at the beginning of this section of the Gospel, *Catrin Williams* finds that it not only defines the Baptist's self-deprecatory role in the Gospel but fulfills "a more wide-reaching and integral function within the series of scenes outlining the content and initial impact of John's testimony to Jesus." Examination of the modifications to the scriptural quotation in John can alert the interpreter to its role in the Johannine context. By means of the quotation, the Baptist "not only *embeds* himself in Israel's sacred story, but he now *embodies* the voice in the wilderness ('I am the voice') and, through his testimony, he *enacts* Isaiah's prophetic words." The quotation also suggests the significance of the words assigned to that voice. Williams calls attention to the message of the messenger in the second part: "it is these words in the quotation, not those preceding them, that present Jesus as the content and focus of John's testimony." In this way, the Isaianic quotation "provides a *scriptural frame* for [the] various references to Jesus as ὁ ἐρχόμενος" in the verses that follow, and establishes John as a bridge between the testimonies to Jesus from Israel's ancient past and those the Gospel will introduce.

Marianne Meye Thompson takes up another element of the Gospel that is introduced by the Baptist: purification. John is strikingly different from the Synoptic Gospels in its treatment of issues related to clean/unclean. As Thompson observes, "there are no expulsions of demons or 'unclean' spirits, cleansing of persons from skin diseases, discussions of what constitutes true purity, stories in which Jesus actually touches a corpse, or parables or aphorisms about cleansing or defilement." Thompson presses on beyond the differences between John and the Synoptics, however, to ask "what is John's understanding of the means and necessity of purification, and what might have shaped his viewpoint?" She argues that John presents both John's baptizing with water and Jesus' baptizing with the Spirit as acts of purification. Baptism with water anticipates "the cleansing that Jesus will offer through the Spirit, his word, and his death." Jesus baptizes with water and with Spirit, he washes the disciples' feet and at his death water and blood flow from his side. Appropriately, in view of the fact that this paper was presented to the Colloquium meeting at Ephesus, Thompson then comments on ablutions and cleansing in Greco-Roman cultic practice. She concludes that Greco-Roman readers "familiar with cleansing as preparatory for encounters with the divine

might well understand John's or Jesus' baptizing practices as preparation for encounter with the 'one God' of whom Jesus himself speaks." For the evangelist, "Jesus' cleansing is the *sine qua non* of encounter with God."

Consideration of the function of the title, "lamb of God," leads *Ruben Zimmermann* to a new understanding of how the Fourth Gospel evokes and creates its Christology. "Lamb of God" is a metaphor that links two unrelated semantic fields. The semantic donor *("Bildspender")* is a lamb that takes away sin. While the removal of sin associates the lamb with the cult, it is not a sacrificial bull or a goat. Interpreters have often linked John 1:29, 36 and the lamb in Isa 53:7 (LXX), but in Isaiah the link established by the metaphor is not the removal of sin but the lamb's silence before the slaughterer. Interpreters have contended that the lamb evokes a connection with the daily Tamid sacrifice, the Passover Lamb, or the lamb of the Aqedah (Gen 22). After evaluating all of these proposals, Zimmermann concludes: "In my view the textual indications do not only impede a definite interpretation of the lamb, but may even be read as deliberately forestalling it." Rather than seeking to establish a definite connection, "the evangelist deliberately chooses the indefiniteness of metaphorical language in order to enable new possibilities of expression." No one of the four suggested references exhausts the potential of the metaphor. The result is that "the often-lamented resistance of the Jesus-lamb metaphor to be allocated to one precise tradition-historical derivation, turns into an essential element of creative theology formation based on metaphor theory." Metaphors suggest a connection between unrelated entities in order to tease the mind into seeing something new. They propel the hearer from tradition to innovation. John's use of the metaphor in this way signals that John's Christology calls for personal engagement in an ongoing, interactive process of Christological reflection. Zimmermann concludes, therefore, that "lamb of God," as religious language, is "a metaphorical and holistic – I would even add – 'holy' language."

In his essay on the unknown disciple in John 1:40, *Udo Schnelle* focuses on the enigmatic anonymity of the second of the two first-called disciples. While the first one is identified as Andrew, the silence about the name of the second one is a literary element that calls for explanation. The evangelist provides a clarification with the figure of the "Beloved Disciple" who is in view in 1:40 as also in 18:15 and in 21:2. In a second step, Schnelle interprets the call of Philip in the second calling scene. For the Johannine community, both scenes, read together, provide an account of the origins of its own history. The Beloved Disciple as an ideal figure stands for the validity of the Johannine tradition. In Schnelle's view, it is a theological eyewitness testimony that was triggered by the struggles of the evangelist's time, whereas John 21 modifies the relationship between the Beloved Disciple and Peter in favor of Peter who is now the disciple who loves Jesus.

William Loader examines the intertextual connections of Jesus' response to Nathanael in John 1:51 with Jacob's vision in Gen 28 and offers an alternative rendering. Some interpreters see Jesus as the ladder, others draw a connection between Jesus and Jacob, or the location, Bethel, but most see the ascending and descending angels as an image of revelation. Loader finds none of these proposals satisfactory, calling instead for a fresh reading of the text. What will they see? Not a ladder, not a stone, but angels ascending, then descending. Are they ascending and descending on Jesus? That is circular and makes little sense. Instead, Loader contends, the verse promises "a vision of Jesus in an exalted state in heaven, glorified by angels." The proleptic reference to the lifting up of the Son of Man in John 3:14–15 presents the same contrast: "There is more to be seen than Jesus as revealer on earth; they will see him as glorified Son of Man in heaven." In the farewell discourse, Jesus again promises the disciples that they will see "greater things" (14:12). Jesus' death and resurrection are "the basis for the fruit-bearing in mission, through which God will be glorified." John 1:51, Loader concludes, belongs to the series of sayings in the Gospel where "the earthly Jesus points forward to the greater event to come through which he will, to the eyes of unbelief, meet an inglorious end on the cross, but, to the eyes of faith, be exalted and glorified, ascending and returning to the Father." His own will see him, Jesus assures them, as the Son of Man in his glory.

Jan van der Watt also focuses on John 1:51, asking in particular what the angels are doing. This question leads to an initial review of the concept of angels and their functions in antiquity, and the intertextual connections that have been proposed between John 1:51 and Gen 28:12. The role of the angels cannot be determined from outside the text, however. Van der Watt gives particular attention to the ways the angels in John 1:51 have been connected with revelation in the history of interpretation before turning to a close reading of the verse. This examination leads him to the observation that "John creates its own unique saying in 1:51, combining the concepts of the open heaven, the angels, and the Son of Man here, which are not elsewhere related in this way, it must be taken seriously that from Gen 28 John only wants to specifically highlight the movement of the angels." The angels mark the locus of the divine presence by descending *on* Jesus. What the disciples will see is the Son of Man as the presence and locus of the divine on earth.

In a study previewing his scheduled commentary in the Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar (EKK), *Jörg Frey* provides an interpretation of the Cana episode in John 2:1–11 with special consideration of certain aspects from the history of interpretation. After some considerations regarding the growth of the narrative and its fictional design from an earlier narrative kernel, probably still located in Galilee, the short episode is read as the "prototypical" sign that establishes the general pattern according to which the Johannine *sēmeia* narratives are to be read. From the very beginning, the narrative

points to a plurality of semantic horizons against which the narrative can be read, such as wedding motifs, a creation "screen," and repeated hints to the time of Jesus' death and resurrection. It is the latter dimension in particular in which the narrative wants to be read, as numerous narrative elements are best understood in view of the whole of John's narrative. The evangelist does not merely intend to present an event from the past time of the earthly Jesus in its "historical" dimension, but presents a two-level narrative in which the level of the narrated events is never abandoned but steadily overshadowed from various symbolic dimensions. Thus, the real "sign" is not the miraculous change of water into wine but the well-designed text of the narrative, and the "faith" of the disciples mentioned in 2:11 is far more than simply acknowledging Jesus as a miracle worker but rather the fully developed Johannine faith in the risen Jesus which can only be arrived at in post-Easter time.

Beginning with the recognition that reading involves both reception and creation of meaning, *Craig R. Koester* asks how John's account of the wedding at Cana would have been read in the social context of an urban center like Ephesus in the first century. Given the assumptions of their context, which was very different from the small, unwalled Jewish village in Galilee, how would an Ephesian reader have imagined the wedding? The awkwardness of Jesus' response to his mother would have been sensed by both Jewish and Greek readers. Jesus does not fit anyone's social conventions but transforms human relationships and redefines people's roles. The culturally loaded reference to the ἀρχιτρίκλινος gives the scene a Greco-Roman feel. Koester explains: "In the strict sense the word indicates a person who oversees a τρίκλινον or banquet at which participants recline on three couches arranged in the shape of a U, which was done among the wealthier members of Greco-Roman society." Even if a home in Cana had a τρίκλινον, the reference would have seemed incongruous to an Ephesian reader: "the scene would have been comparable to the banquets that were held in the homes of the wealthy in their urban context." The center of the story is the transformation of water to wine. Wedding practices had much in common across ancient contexts, and wine connoted the abundance and happiness that many associated with beneficent rulers and divine presence. Koester turns around the question that has often been asked, whether traditions about Dionysus have influenced our text, and asks instead how readers familiar with those traditions would have understood John. He suggests that "the way the Dionysus traditions linked wine to kingship and divine disclosure could have underscored those dimensions for ancient readers. Such traditions add resonance to the idea that where the abundant wine flows, there God is present and active."

Jesus' response to his mother in John 2:4, "woman, what concern is that to you and me?" (NRSV), has long troubled interpreters. *Adele Reinhartz,* focusing solely on the depiction of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, argues that "whether Jesus treated others, including his mother, nicely, was of no concern

to the Fourth Evangelist." Challenging the assumptions of recent work on "implicit ethics" in the Gospel of John, Reinhartz contends that "John's high Christology precluded his Jesus from being a model for ethical behaviour on the human plane." Both patristic and modern commentaries demonstrate the discomfort caused by Jesus' response to his mother, and the commentators often advance reasons, theological or cultural, as to why Jesus' words should not be taken as inappropriate, discourteous, or expressing a rift between Jesus and his mother. Unlike the other occurrences of "woman," in the Gospel, where Jesus addresses the Samaritan woman (4:21) and Mary Magdalene (20:15), the address in John 2 creates distance rather than bringing him closer to the person he is addressing, although when his "hour" comes Jesus provides for his mother, again using the address "woman" (19:26). Nevertheless, Reinhartz contends, "this final act does not excuse his behaviour in 2:4." In the first-century Palestinian context, as well as in Greek and Roman ethical writings, a high value was placed on the obedience of children to their parents: "disrespectful behaviour to a parent was seen as impiety." Proposing a new approach to this thorny verse, Reinhartz begins with the Gospel's emphasis on Jesus' relationship to his divine father, a relationship that she proposes is grounded in Aristotle's theory of epigenesis, which diminishes the importance of the mother's role. Jesus' response signals that he does not owe her the courtesy or obedience that could be expected of a son. On the other hand, as becomes evident in John 5:17, "as the Son of God, Jesus is not subject to the same rules that apply to ordinary human beings." For this reason, the Johannine Jesus cannot be regarded as a model for social ethics.

In his article on the construction of space and time in John, focused on the function of the Johannine account of the cleansing of the temple (John 2:13–22), *Michael Theobald* initially discusses some developments regarding the Greek tragedy in the Hellenistic period, including the work of the Jewish tragic poet Ezekiel. He describes aspects of the dramatic design in the Fourth Gospel (unity of time and space, visuality, background information), before interpreting the Johannine temple narrative as a complete "exorcism" of the temple in order to set the stage for Jesus as the "new" temple. In Theobald's view, this design aims at the final separation from a type of Jewish Christianity still oriented towards Jerusalem and the construction of a new, independent identity.

Jean Zumstein interprets the same episode as a characteristic example of Johannine historiography. From the perspective of post-Easter memory, the evangelist forms a unity of history and fiction, by adopting and redesigning elements from the tradition in a novel and unique manner. He changes the plot of the traditional Jesus story and adds extensive interpreting elements, a citation from the Scriptures and a narrative commentary about the meaning of the temple saying. In his final section, Zumstein summarizes the theological interpretation in John's text: the temple motif is linked with the death of

Jesus, and Jesus, or rather his crucified and risen body, is interpreted as the place of God's presence.

Finally, continuing the theme of how John might have been understood in Ephesus, *Alan Culpepper* sets the story of Jesus' demonstration in the Jerusalem temple (John 2:13–22) against the background of the famed temple of Artemis in Ephesus. Following a review of the history of the temples of Artemis, descriptions of the Hellenistic temple, descriptions of the administration of the temple, modern scholarship on the cult of Artemis, and its provision of asylum and role as a banking center, Culpepper asks how John's account would have been understood in Ephesus. Some aspects of the story, the scandal of temple violation, commercial and banking activity in the temple, and the deep connection between the city and its temple would have been readily understood. Jesus' act in the temple would have been understood as a scandalous violation of the temple. On the other hand, Johannine believers would also have been aware of profound differences between the worship of the goddess and the worship of the risen Lord. Those who followed Jesus could not also participate in sacrifices to Artemis. They too were part of a "temple" community, but they belonged not to Artemis or the emperor but to the risen Lord. Their "mystery" concerned not the birth of Jesus but his incarnation and exaltation.

As independent explorations of various aspects of the first two chapters of the Gospel of John, these essays provide significant insights into both the Gospel and current Johannine scholarship. Interpreters have repeatedly observed that John is unique both in its theological formulations and in its literary expression of the gospel traditions. The Gospel is deeply embedded in both its Jewish and its Greco-Roman contexts. It also demands much of its readers, using metaphors, irony, symbolism, deliberate ambiguity, and subtle interactions with the Scriptures and its cultural, philosophical, and religious context. As this collection of papers illustrates, while the Gospel creatively develops and recasts the traditions it incorporates, it also calls for its readers to actively engage in dialogue with the text. Only by accepting this challenge can readers grasp the interpretation of the person and words of Jesus that the Gospel communicates and evokes.

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R. Alan Culpepper
Jörg Frey

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*. Part 2: *Principat*. Edited by H. Temporini and W. Haase. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972–
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AThR	*Anglican Theological Review*
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible
AYBRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BDAG	Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.* 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BET	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BFCT	Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie
BG	Biblische Gestalten
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BiHe	*Bibel heute*
Bijdr	*Bijdragen*
BL	*Bibel und Liturgie*
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*

BSR	Biblioteca di scienze religiosa
BT	*The Bible Translator*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BTS	Biblical Tools and Studies
BTZ	*Berliner theologische Zeitschrift*
BU	Biblische Untersuchungen
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CIL	Corpus inscriptionum latinarum
CNT	Commentaire du Nouveau Testament
ConBNT	Coniectanea Neotestamentica/Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series
CRB	Cahiers de la Revue biblique
CSCO.Ae	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium: Scriptores Aethiopici
CSHJ	Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
EBR	*Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception.* Edited by H.-J. Klauck et al. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–
EHS	Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 23: Theologie
EKK	Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar
EtB	Etudes bibliques
ETL	*Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses*
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
EvT	*Evangelische Theologie*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FB	Forschung zur Bibel
FF	Foundations and Facets
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
fzb	Forschung zur Bibel
HBS	Herders biblische Studien
HCS	Hellenistic Culture and Society
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HTCNT	Herder's Theological Commentary on the New Testament
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae. Editio Minor.* Berlin: De Gruyter, 1924–
IGS	Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien
ITS	Innsbrucker theologische Studien
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JbTh	*Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie*
JECH	*Journal of Early Christian History*
JES	*Journal of Ecumenical Studies*
JMS	Johannine Monograph Series

JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSHJ	*Journal for the Study of Hellenistic Judaism*
JSHRZ	*Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*. Edited by W. G. Kümmel and H. Lichtenberger. 5 vols. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1973–95
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
JTSA	*Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*
KBANT	Kommentare und Beiträge zum Alten und Neuen Testament
KD	*Kerygma und Dogma*
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LIMC	*Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae.* Edited by H. C. Ackerman and J.-R. Gisler. 8 vols. Zurich: Artemis, 1981–97
LSJ	H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon.* 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996
MThSt	Marburger theologische Studien
MTSR	*Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*
NAWG.PH	*Nachrichten (von) der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philologisch-Historische Klasse*
NBL	*Neues Bibel-Lexikon*. Edited by M. Görg and B. Lang. 3 vols. Zurich: Benziger, 1991–2001
NCB	New Century Bible
NEchtB	Neue Echter-Bibel
NedTT	*Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift*
Neot	*Neotestamentica*
NewDocs	*New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity.* Edited by G. H. R. Horsley and S. Llewelyn. North Ryde, N.S.W.: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1981–
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NPNF^{1}	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Series 1
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTG	New Testament Guides
NTL	New Testament Library
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
ÖBS	Österreichische biblische Studien
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology

OCD	*Oxford Classical Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Edited by N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard. Oxford: Clarendon, 1970
ÖTK	Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar
PaThSt	Paderborner theologische Studien
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PG	*Patrologiae cursus completes: Series graeca*. Edited by J.-P. Migne, 162 vols. Paris: Migne, 1857–1886
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completes: Series latina*. Edited by J.-P. Migne, 217 vols. Paris: Migne, 1844–1864
PTMS	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
QD	Quaestiones disputatae
RB	*Revue biblique*
RelSRev	*Religious Studies Review*
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
RevScRel	*Revue des sciences religieuses*
RGRW	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World
RivB	*Rivista biblica*
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
RPT	Religion in Philosophy and Theology
RST	Regensburger Studien zur Theologie
RThom	*Revue thomiste*
RVV	Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLEJL	SBL Early Judaism and Its Literature
SBLMS	SBL Monograph Series
SBLRBS	SBL Resources for Biblical Study
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
ScEs	*Science et esprit*
SEÅ	*Svensk exegetisk årsbok*
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
SIG	*Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*. Edited by W. Dittenberger. 4 vols. 3rd ed. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1915–24
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
StBibLit	Studies in Biblical Literature (Peter Lang)
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StPB	Studia post-biblica
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter
TBT	*The Bible Today*
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
TLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*

TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum/Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
TTZ	*Trierer theologische Zeitschrift*
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
TWNT	*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament.* Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. 10 vols. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933–1979
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
UB	Urban Taschenbücher
UTB	Uni-Taschenbücher
VC	*Vigiliae Christianae*
WA	*Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe.* Weimar: Böhlau, 1.1883–
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAC	*Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum/Journal of Early Christianity*
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
ZNT	*Zeitschrift für Neues Testament*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZTK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

The Testimony of John's Narrative and the Silence of the Johannine Narrator

George L. Parsenios

Alan Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* proved many years ago the value of narrative critical interpretation of the Gospel of John, and Culpepper opens his groundbreaking work on John's narra*tive* by focusing on John's narra*tor*. Following a brief introduction that explains the book's methodology, *Anatomy's* first interpretive chapter is entitled "Narrator and Point of View." We learn a great deal in this chapter about the Fourth Gospel's narrator, and there is no need to rehearse the full contents of the discussion here. I want only to draw attention to the mention made by Culpepper of the infamous and oft-treated problems in John 3:13–21 and 3:31–36, where the narrator fails to make it clear who is speaking. Are we reading the words of John the Baptist, of Jesus or even of the narrator? Culpepper helpfully brings the narratological insights of Chatman to bear on the problem presented by these verses in order to explore the "unification" of the voice of Jesus and the narrator, not only here in John 3, but elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel as well.[1] The present paper will also pursue the elusive voice of the narrator in the Gospel of John. But I will complement Culpepper's modern approach to the problem by looking to ancient material for insight, and especially the dialogues of Plato. I have addressed aspects of this problem on two other occasions, and, after further inquiry into the problem, will extend those previous discussions here.[2] I will connect in what follows the presence or absence of the narrator in John with the use of a narrator's voice in the dialogues of Plato.

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[1] R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (FF; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 40–41, citing S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1978), 206–7.

[2] See G. L. Parsenios, "The Silent Spaces between Narrative and Drama," in *The Gospel of John as Genre Mosaic* (ed. K. B. Larsen; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); idem, "Anamnesis and the Silent Narrator in Plato and John" (under peer review).

1. The Silence of the Johannine Narrator

The evidence in John that demands explanation is found especially in three different places. The first comes in the opening scene of the Gospel, in the interrogation of John the Baptist in 1:19–22, which reads as follows:

19 a This is the testimony given by John
b when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem
c to ask him,
d *"Who are you?"*
20 a He confessed and did not deny it,
b but confessed,
c *"I am not the Messiah."*
21 a And they asked him,
b *"What then?*
c *Are you Elijah?"*
22 a He said,
b *"I am not."*
c *"Are you the prophet?"*[3]

Notice the architecture of the lines, and especially what the careful construction of these verses indicates about the gradual departure of the narrator from the scene. The opening comment of the narrator in v. 19a–c is lengthy and full: "This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him." That lengthy comment is followed by a slightly shorter narrator's comment in v. 20a–b, "He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed." The next comment in v. 21a is even briefer: "And they asked him." The following narrator's comment is even more brief in v. 22a: "He said." The narrator's presence in the conversation has been slowly and gradually diminished. By the end, the narrator completely disappears. As soon as John answers in v. 22b, "I am not," the next question of his interrogators has no narrator's introduction at all. With rapid fire speed, they simply ask the next question. John says, "I am not," and immediately we read, "Are you the prophet?" The narrator has disappeared. The gradual tapering of the

[3] I have followed here the presentation of the passage and the emphasis on the architecture of the lines in M. Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Kapitel 1–12* (RNT 4a; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2009), 146–52. The effect is as pronounced in Greek, as follows:

Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἰωάννου ὅτε ἀπέστειλαν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐξ Ἱεροσολύμων ἱερεῖς καὶ Λευίτας ἵνα ἐρωτήσωσιν αὐτόν· *Σὺ τίς εἶ;*

καὶ ὡμολόγησεν καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσατο, καὶ ὡμολόγησεν ὅτι *Ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ὁ χριστός.*

καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτόν· *Τί οὖν; σὺ Ἠλίας εἶ;*

καὶ λέγει· *Οὐκ εἰμί.*

Ὁ προφήτης εἶ σύ;

narrator's presence concludes in a total retreat of the narrator from the discussion. The careful construction of the interrogation demonstrates that the utter disappearance of the narrator's voice with the question "Are you the prophet?" is not some irrelevant or chance fact. It is the culmination of the structure of the passage. It appears to be an intentional narrative move.

Further proof that this is an intentional literary move comes from ancient literary parallels. In two key places in Thucydides's *History,* the narrator's voice recedes into silence in the very same way that we see in John 1, and the silence is noted by both ancient and modern commentators.[4] The two relevant passages are the Melian dialogue in Book 5 and the report of the Ambraciot herald in Book 3. The famous Melian dialogue (5.85–113) contains a series of dueling arguments delivered back and forth between the Athenians and the people of the island of Melos. The opening speeches of both sides are introduced by a narrator's comment, such as "They said." Thereafter follows a purely mimetic, dramatic presentation. The first speeches of both parties – the Athenians in 5.86 and the Melians at 5.87 – are introduced with narrator's comments, but the next speech of the Athenians at 5.88 and that of the Melians at 5.89 are spoken with no narrator's introduction. The narrator is silent until the end of the dialogue many sections later.

The Melian dialogue, of course, is massive in scale and extends over several pages of text. In this sense, it is very different from John 1. But this is not the first time that Thucydides writes like this. It is the most famous example, but there is another example which is more similar to what we find in John in terms of scale. This other episode appears in Book 3. After the Athenian general Demosthenes defeats a force consisting of both Spartans and Ambraciots in 426 B.C.E. near the city of Olpae, the Ambraciots send a herald to request that they might recover their dead. The herald sees many times more dead Ambraciots than he expects, because he does not know that a relief force had been sent to his comrades from their home, and then had been utterly annihilated. Not only does Ambracia lose the soldiers killed in the first battle, but, unknown to the herald, they also lose an entire army of soldiers sent in relief. Thucydides tells us that, owing to this disaster, no other

[4] When speaking about the Ambraciot herald in Book 3, Simon Hornblower says, "This ch. [chapter], exceptionally, contains some rapid dialogue (the Melian dialogue is the only other example of this in Th. [Thucydides]). This is a tragic feature […]." See S. Hornblower, *Commentary on Thucydides* (vol. 1; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 533. His comments are anticipated by and follow those of Dio Chrysostom, who writes on the Melian Dialogue, "Thucydides begins by stating in his own person what each side said, but after maintaining this form of reported speech *(diēgēmatikon)* for only one exchange of argument, he dramatizes *(dramatizei)* the rest of the dialogue and makes the characters speak for themselves" (*On the Character of Thucydides* 37 [Usher, LCL]). Dio later adds, "After this, [Thucydides] changes the style of the dialogue from narrative *(diēgēmatos)* to dramatic *(dramatikon)* … (*On the Character of Thucydides* 38 [Usher, LCL]).

city in the entire war suffers so great a loss in proportion to its size in so short a time (3.113). The reported number of dead seems too large even to be believed. The ensuing conversation takes the form of the Melian Dialogue. The first several lines of the conversation are introduced with narrator's comments, but then suddenly and briefly, the text shifts to direct conversation.[5] I have covered this material at length in a previous essay, so there is no need for further discussion here. It is enough to say that John has done something that Thucydides did in beginning a conversation that was refereed by a narrator, but quickly became an unmediated conversation between two people.

This feature of the text makes it more like a drama – at least for a brief moment. This is certainly how the matter would have been understood in antiquity. To understand how this is so, we can turn to the *Republic,* where Plato discusses different types of literary production. He writes,

> And narration may be either simple narration (ἁπλῇ διήγησει) or imitation (μιμήσεως), or a union of the two (δι' ἀμφοτέρων)? […] You have conceived my meaning perfectly; and if I mistake not, what you failed to apprehend before is now made clear to you, that poetry and mythology are, in some cases, wholly imitative – instances of this are supplied by tragedy and comedy; there is likewise the opposite style, in which the poet is the only speaker – of this the dithyramb affords the best example; and the combination of both is found in epic, and in several other styles of poetry. (*Republic* 392d, 394b–c)[6]

There are three modes: simple narration *(diēgēsis),* drama *(mimēsis),* and the mixture of the two. The distinguishing characteristic of the different forms is the presence or absence of a narrator's voice. A text with no narrator, in which the characters speak to one another with no mediation, is a mimetic text, like a drama. A text in which a narrator describes the interaction of characters but in which the characters never speak directly to one another is a diegetic text, a simple narrative. John is clearly writing a "mixed" form, in which the narrator sometimes describes the interaction of characters, but the characters also speak directly to one another. And yet, John lapses occasionally into a more mimetic mode, as in chapter 1, which makes John seem more like a drama. The evidence from Thucydides and ancient historiographers and literary critics, furthermore, supports the belief that the moves that John makes could have been understood in antiquity as directing the text in a more mimetic direction, a more "dramatic" direction.

John makes this same move – silencing the narrator – in two other places. The first instance is in John 14. The voice of the Evangelist drops out of view in the midst of the Farewell Discourses. The situation is somewhat different,

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[5] Hornblower suggests that this briefer passage might have been a trial effort for the Melian dialogue, *Commentary on Thucydides,* 3:219 (n. 4).

[6] Translation of Plato from B. Jowett, trans., *The Republic and Other Works* (New York: Anchor, 1973).

but the same silence appears. As chapter 14 draws to its conclusion, Jesus says (14:30–31),

> I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way.

The important phrase is the last one: "Rise, let us be on our way." The passage is important because Jesus is describing his own movements. No narrator describes his stage directions, and he actually goes nowhere. Only later, in John 18:1 do we hear, "After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out …" This is a place where a narrator would generally say, "He got up and left." But not only does Jesus give his own stage directions. These directions also have no accompanying narrator's comment.

The second instance of the absent narrator appears in the passage from John 3 mentioned at the start of this essay. The reader struggles to understand who speaks in John 3:31–36. The last mentioned speaker is John the Baptist, who is identified at 3:27, and his words clearly extend to 3:30, where he says, "He must increase, while I must decrease." Some interpreters believe, therefore, that the Baptist continues speaking in verses 3:31–36. If these are the words of the Baptist, then he is setting up a distinction between himself and Jesus, in order to explain why Jesus must increase, while the Baptist decreases.[7] The gravest difficulty with such a reading is that the sentiments expressed in 3:31–36 sound exactly like the words of Jesus, not the Baptist.[8] In this way of reading, Jesus resumes speaking, as he had been prior to the words of John, but the narrator gives no notice of the change. If Jesus is here speaking, then the reason for the confusion among interpreters is the fact that the Evangelist gives no notice of a shift back to Jesus. The narrator is silent – again. The precise dramatic purpose of the narrator's silence is in this case not so clear as it was in the others. But, like the episodes in John 1 and John 14 already discussed, this passage in John 3 has analogies in other texts where the narrator lapses into silence unexpectedly. In a few key places, for instance, Homer fails to supply a narrator's voice to indicate the identity of a particular speaker. Ancient scholiasts on Homer understand this as a shift from a narrative *(diegetic)* to a more dramatic *(mimetic)* mode of writing. This is precisely what we have in John 3.[9]

The first way of explaining this feature of the text, and the one most natural after the discussion of Thucydides above, is to connect this device to

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[7] C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1956), 187.

[8] R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John,* Vol. 1 (AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966), 159.

[9] R. Nunlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 106.

historiography. Such a turn toward drama can be seen as inherent to the writing of history.[10] And the purpose of writing in a more dramatic and mimetic mode is to make both author and reader appear to be eyewitnesses of the events described in the text. David Aune makes an important point relevant to the current study when he compares what he calls "history proper" to four other styles of related writing: (1) Genealogy/Mythography, (2) Travel Descriptions, (3) Local History, and (4) Chronography. He says in regard to "history proper" the following:

> History proper is a unique historiographical genre since it is mimetic, i.e., it attempts to dramatize and interpret the memorable actions of people in time. The other four types described above collected and reported data without interpretation or dramatization. The historian, on the other hand, created the illusion that he was an observer of the events he depicts.[11]

Scholars like Richard Bauckham have connected John in various ways to ancient historiography, and the occasional silencing of the narrator in John could be part of that effort.[12] Thus, by suppressing occasionally the voice of the narrator, the Evangelist is able to underscore that he was an eyewitness of the events described. The concern for eyewitness status is obvious at the cross, when the testimony of the blood and water flowing from Jesus' side is followed by the notice, "He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth" (19:35). The suppression of the narrator's voice contributes to this concern because it suggests that the events depicted are presented in such a way that one loses the features of narrated account and witnesses the events directly, as in a drama.[13] The author is describing events as in a newsreel, as an eyewitness. But the author is not alone in being drawn into this new mode. The reader is also refashioned into an eyewitness of the events depicted. The events de-

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[10] Rhetoric and historiography are joined in various ways in various works. For a quick description of the relevant issues, see C. Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 169–75. See also C. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the Rhetoric of History: An Investigation of Early Christian Historiography* (WUNT 2/175; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), esp. chapters 3 and 4; F. W. Walbank, "History and Tragedy," *Historia* 9 (1960): 216–34; J. Price, "Drama and History in Josephus' *BJ*" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL Josephus Seminar, Boston, Mass., 1999); L. Feldman, "The Influence of the Greek Tragedians on Josephus," in *Hellenic and Jewish Arts: Interaction, Tradition and Renewal* (ed. A. Ovadiah; Tel Aviv: Ramot Publ. House, Tel Aviv University, 1998), 51–80.

[11] D. E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 86.

[12] Richard Bauckham, "Historiographical Characteristics of the Gospel of John," *NTS* 53 (2007): 17–36.

[13] For more on John and eyewitness testimony, see R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 358–471.

scribed are shown to the reader as though in a drama, without the interference of a narrator's voice.

2. The Evidence of Plato

This is not merely a feature of history writing. The same device operates in the dialogues of Plato.[14] Plato's *Theaetetus* is a particularly rich place to focus our discussion of the relevant issues, since it opens with a conversation where Euclid is explaining to Terpsion how he came to record the conversation between Socrates and Theaetetus, even though he had not been present.[15] Euclid had the conversation described to him by Socrates, wrote it down, and then corrected his text later by further conversation with Socrates. The interesting fact is that he does not merely transcribe what Socrates tells him. Rather, he says (143c),

> Now this is the way I wrote the conversation: I did not represent Socrates relating it to me as he did, but conversing with those with whom he told me he conversed. And he told me they were the geometrician Theodoras and Theaetetus. Now in order that the explanatory words between the speeches might not be annoying in the written account, such as "and I said" or "and I remarked," whenever Socrates spoke, or "he agreed" or "he did not agree," in the case of the interlocutor, I omitted all that sort of thing and represented Socrates himself as talking with them. (Trans. H. N. Fowler, LCL)

Commenting on this reality, Diskin Clay writes, "In the *Theaetetus,* the editorial suppression of narrative links creates the illusion of dramatic immediacy."[16] Plato erases the narrator's voice in order to allow later generations to hear the

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[14] The literary character of Plato's dialogues, and especially the relationship between philosophical content and literary form, is increasingly a concern for scholars. The *Symposium* has received particular attention for its literary artistry. On the need to attend to the literary shape of the *Symposium,* and not merely its ideas abstracted from any context, Penwill writes, "[Plato] clearly intends the reader to respond to this work not as a philosophical treatise on the subject of Eros but as a work of literature which portrays a group of thinking human beings engaged in appraisal of an issue which is of fundamental importance in their lives"; J. L. Penwill, "Men in Love: Aspects of Plato's *Symposium,*" *Ramus* 7 (1978): 143. For additional efforts to relate the philosophy of Plato's dialogues to the form in which they are presented, see D. Clay, *Platonic Questions: Dialogues with the Silent Philosopher* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); C. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); K. Dorter, "The Significance of the Speeches in Plato's *Symposium,*" *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 4 (1969): 215–34; H. G. Wolz, "Philosophy as Drama: An Approach to Plato's *Symposium,*" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 30 (1970): 323–53.

[15] For more on the relevance of the *Theaetetus* for the present discussion, see Parsenios, "Anamnesis and the Silent Narrator" (n. 2).

[16] Clay, *Platonic Questions,* 26 (n. 14).