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Metalepsis in the Gospel of John – Narration Situation and “Beloved Disciple” in New Perspective

The reproduction of Spanish painter Pèrre Borrell del Caso’s painting “Escaping Criticism” (1874) can be found at the beginning of the present volume on metalepsis. It is an example of Dutch paintings of the late 17th-century in which the figures move outside the painted frame; it represents metalepsis in art. Its effect is bizarre, comic, irritating, illogical, and gives the feeling that the young man is intruding into the world of the observer. This visual example may illustrate in advance the subject of this essay on certain features of the narrative of the Gospel according to John: the “Beloved Disciple” is present in the story as well as in the narration of the Johannine universe and represents one aspect of metaleptical strategy in this gospel.

1. Metalepsis?

In its narratological sense metalepsis¹ was first defined by the French literary theorist Gérard Genette as “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse . . .”² This involves a paradoxical contamination between the level of narration and the level of story. Genette also speaks of a transgression of borders, which he specifies as “a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds.”³

1 For additional theoretical, defining, and functional aspects of metalepsis see the introduction to the present volume by Ute E. Eisen and Peter von Möllendorff as well as the other essays of this volume.

2 Genette (1980) 234f.

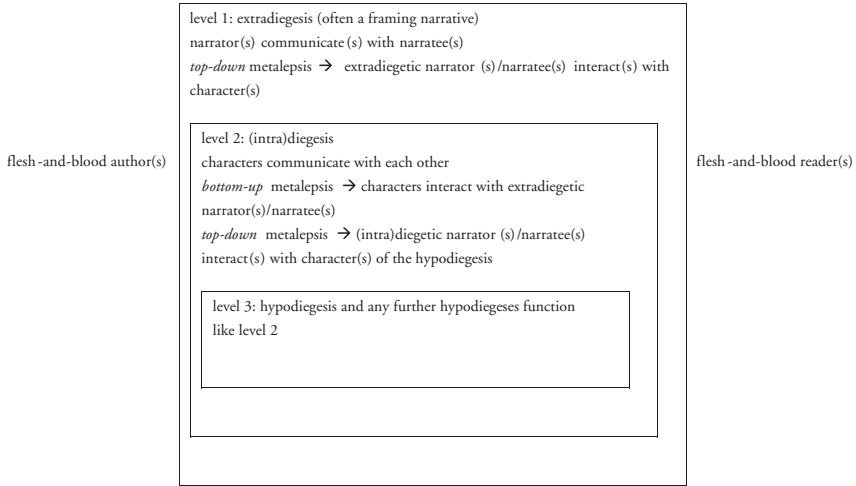
3 Genette (1980) 245.

It is necessary to recognize that narratology draws a fundamental distinction between two worlds, that of the telling (level 1) and that of the told (level 2). Communication takes place in both worlds: on level 1 (according to Genette the extradiegetical level) the narrator(s) communicate(s) with her/his/their narratee(s). The narrator can be characterized as occupying a “speech position from which the current narrative discourse originates and from which references to the entities, actions and events that this discourse is about are being made.”⁴ In other words, the narrator is the guide through the narrated world that the flesh-and-blood reader often does not really recognize. The narrator regularly communicates on the level of narration with a more or less obvious narratee, which is the reader or audience in the sense of innertextual agency. The narratee is an agent that “grasps and approves every aspect of the text.”⁵ This agent can also be called the “ideal narrative audience” (Peter J. Rabinowitz), “model reader” (Umberto Eco), or “implied reader” (Wolfgang Iser). In the following essay I speak simply of the reader or ideal reader. In principle it is important that narrator and narratee or (ideal) reader are textually encoded positions. On level 2 (according to Genette the diegetical or intradiegetical level), or on level 3 and every further embedded level (according to Genette the hypodiegetical level), the action takes place and the characters communicate with each other. The readers watch the characters acting, but are not part of their world and communication. Between these levels of narrative is the so-called “sacred frontier.” Metalepsis can be detected when these levels are transgressed or intermingled or if its hierarchy is subverted, which can happen in both directions, *top-down* or *bottom-up*. When this occurs it produces a shocking, bizarre, or sometimes comic effect for the flesh-and-blood reader. In the following pages I analyze how subtly this happens in the Johannine Gospel and what effects it evokes.

The following schema should illustrate *top-down* and *bottom-up* metalepses on the levels of extradiegesis, intradiegesis, and hypodiegesis:

4 Prince (2012) 1 (1).

5 Prince (2012) 5 (21).



Monika Fludernik and others make a basic distinction between *ontological* and *rhetorical* metalepses. *Ontological* metalepsis occurs when

the narrator is physically present in the story (for example, the heterodiegetic narrator enters the fictional world and marries the heroine), or else a protagonist intrudes on the level of the narrator and performs actions there (for example, the characters visit their ‘maker’ and try to assassinate him). In the case of *rhetorical* metalepsis, the narrator imagines him/herself, or the reader, to be present in the world of the protagonists or, conversely, the narrator imagines the characters existing, as it were, in his/her world, without this having any impact on the plot.⁶

These distinctions can also be applied to embedded narratives (level 3, level 4, etc.). Marie-Laure Ryan has given an illustrative definition of rhetorical metalepsis: it “opens a small window that allows a quick glance across levels, but the window closes after a few sentences, and the operation ends up reasserting the existence of the boundaries.”⁷

There is scarcely any research on metalepsis in ancient narratives. One innovative paper on examples from ancient Greek literature comes from Irene de Jong. She distinguishes several types of metalepsis: (a) apostrophe, understood as an intervention from the *top-down*, whereby the narrating instance addresses characters in the narrated world, what I call *top-down*; (b) apostrophe from the *bottom-up*, i.e., the reverse, an intervention from

6 Cf. for example Fludernik (2009) 156, see also 98 [Fludernik (2008) 175, see also 114].

7 Ryan (2006) 207.

the level of the characters upward to the level of narration, what I call *bottom-up*; and (c) the *blending of narrative voices* from different narrative levels. Irene de Jong's conclusion is that metalepsis in ancient narratives is much more subtle and fluid. And she draws a further distinction: the major difference between metalepsis in modern and ancient literature is its function. In ancient literature metalepsis is "for the most part serious (rather than comic) and . . . aimed at increasing the authority of the narrator and the realism of his narrative (rather than breaking the illusion)."⁸

2. The Early Christian Gospel according to John

The Gospel according to John is one of several early Christian gospels.⁹ It takes its place in the group of four gospels that found their way into the collection of writings known as the New Testament. The four-gospel canon of the New Testament, however, developed slowly in the second century.¹⁰ It was probably within the framework of this collection that the gospels received their "titles": the Gospels according to Mark, Matthew, Luke, John.¹¹ The titles clearly employ *κατὰ* with accusative, which is hardly possessive.¹² Therefore "Gospel of John" is not a correct translation, but it is very commonly used. It should be kept in mind that very probably all four gospels were originally written and transmitted anonymously. Following the ancient conventions, the books were cited by their first words. Their superscriptions or "titles" are, to use Genette's word,¹³ later-applied "paratexts" to distinguish them in collections of gospels.

The Gospel according to John differs from the other three canonical gospels and is in some respects unique.¹⁴ The gospels according to Mark, Matthew, and Luke have a very similar structure and show many agreements, even in word choice; they are therefore called "synoptic." The Johannine Gospel, by contrast, reveals a different structure, contains a good many independent narratives, and is the most theologically elaborated of

8 de Jong (2009) 115.

9 For an introduction to the canonical gospels cf. Ehrmann (2012); Ebner and Schreiber (2008); for introductions to the apocryphal gospels cf. Klauk (2003).

10 The canonization of the New Testament writings was a process that extended over a long period of time. Athanasius's "39th Festal Letter" in the year 367 C.E. is the first attestation for the collection of twenty-seven documents which constitutes the New Testament till today.

11 Cf. Petersen (2006) 250–274.

12 Cf. Blass / Debrunner / Rehkopf § 224⁴.

13 See Genette (1997).

14 For introduction cf. Ehrman (2012) 176–197; Kügler (2008) 208–228; Petersen (2009) 2–11.

the four. This last aspect is especially evident in the fact that it identifies Jesus with the word of God and nearly as God's equal, and that Jesus talks a lot about his own identity, something he scarcely does at all in the Synoptic Gospels.

Conflicting directions in Johannine research are legion; there is scarcely any question on which there are signs of consensus.¹⁵ We know neither where nor when it was written, nor do we know the author.¹⁶ If we take the metanarrative of the gospel at face value we would say that the "Beloved Disciple" wrote the gospel (John 21:24). If the author indicated by the gospel narration, though remaining anonymous within it, is identified with the "John" of the paratext of the gospel (which is a secondary addition), and this identification is again correlated with the narrative text of the gospel, we arrive at John, one of the sons of Zebedee (John 21:2). However, I do not share these interpretations because I regard the reference to the author in the gospel as a narrative strategy that, as I will show in what follows, serves a complex narrative process of authenticating the gospel and bringing its message into the present time and vice versa.

Since the publication of Rudolf Bultmann's Johannine commentary in 1941, twentieth-century research in the Johannine Gospel has been shaped by historical-critical questions, that is, questions of sources, layers, and redactions, as well as the location of the gospel within the history of religions. It was only toward the end of the century that, with the groundbreaking study by Alan Culpepper, *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (1983), a shift began from historical-critical to narrative-critical analysis of the Gospel of John, as part of a trend in gospels research as a whole.¹⁷ The year 1998 saw the simultaneous publication of four commentaries on the Johannine Gospel that showed a preference for a synchronic analysis.¹⁸ This study belongs within the context of that trend, but attempts a consistently synchronical analysis without any speculation about sources or redaction of the Gospel according to John.¹⁹ I am con-

15 An "orienting 'map'" of the controversies in Johannine research can be found in Petersen (2009).

16 Ephesus, Syria, and Egypt are discussed as possible places of origin. Mainstream scholarship posits a time of origin after 70 C.E., with the Gospel according to John as a rule being regarded as the latest of the four canonical gospels. Hence it is often located ca. 100 C.E., but for some time now early datings of the gospel in the 60s of the first century have been proposed.

17 Primary mention here belongs to Rhoads and Michie (1982); for these developments see also Eisen (2006) 16–31.

18 Moloney (1998); Schenke (1998); Schnelle (³2004); cf. for this trend also Thyen (2005).

19 Nevertheless Chapter 21 of the Johannine Gospel is still interpreted as secondary, but the thesis of my contribution is that it is an integral part of the Gospel's metaleptical narrative.

vinced that narratology gives adequate instruments for illustrating that the Johannine Gospel can be read as consistent narrative.

In my contribution I will present the thesis that metalepsis can be detected in the Gospel according to John as a narrative strategy that involves the reader intensely in the story. This intense involvement in turn produces a kind of synchrony of narration, story, and reading, which serves to authenticate the narrative and its illusionistic function by immersing the reader both imaginatively and emotionally.

3. Metalepsis and Metanarration in the Canonical Gospels

The Johannine Gospel and the Lukan double work are the only two canonical gospels with first-person narrator(s) (John 1:14, 16; 21:24–25; Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1; 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16). The presence of these narrators has given rise to a number of different hypotheses, especially concerning the questions of sources, redaction, and authorship. In the following pages I analyze the narrators, consistently with narratological tools, as a strictly textual category.

First of all, we can say that the gospel narratives contain a very much more complex narration than may appear at first glance. The Gospels according to Mark and John as well as the Lukan double work reveal metanarrative elements. Metanarration designates “self-reflective utterances,” that is, “comments referring to the discourse rather than to the story.”²⁰ The term “metanarration” has replaced the narrower but more expressive term “self-conscious narration” devised by Wayne Booth.²¹ The narrators of the Gospels according to Mark, Luke, and John demonstrate that they are not only telling a story but are *written* with a greater or lesser degree of self-consciousness (John 20:30–31; 21:24–25), and their works are to be *read* (Mark 13:14), that is, they are conceived as books (βιβλία, λόγοι) see explicitly Acts 1:1; John 20:30).

One of the strongest self-referential aspect in the Gospel according to Mark is the metanarrative imperative “let the reader understand” (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοεῖτω), which appears quite surprisingly within Jesus’ apocalyptic discourse (Mark 13:14).²² This is on the one hand a clear case of metalepsis, since here the Jesus-figure in the narrative, contrary to rule,

20 Neumann and Nünning, (2012); Nünning (2001) 13–48. Fludernik (2003) 1–39, summarizes Nünning’s piece, complements his categories and focus on the character of metanarration.

21 Neumann and Nünning (2012) 2.

22 Cf. du Toit in this volume.

crosses out of the story-level and addresses the readers directly (metalepsis *bottom-up*). On the other hand it is a reception-oriented metanarrative discourse by the narrator, who lets her/his reader come to know his/her expectations: s/he has to understand, to recognize (νοεῖτω). It foregrounds the narrative act and creates “the illusion of being addressed by a personalized voice or a ‘teller,’”²³ and in this case, moreover, by Jesus himself. As de Jong would say, in Mark 13:14 a “blending of narrative voices” (Jesus and the third-person narrator) takes place. Jesus seems to be not only the main character but also the narrator talking directly to the reader. Hearing his personal voice and words advances the illusion. The story world and the act of reading are converging.

In the Lukan double work an omniscient and omnipresent authorial narrator tells the story. In addition, in his distinctive metanarrative prologue he announces himself as a self-aware narrating “I” who, while remaining anonymous, reflects on his own diegesis.²⁴ Luke 1:1–4 is telling:

Ἐπειδήπερ πολλοὶ ἐπεχείρησαν ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων, ² καθὼς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου, ³ ἔδοξε κάμοι παρηκολουθηκότι ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι, κράτιστε Θεόφιλε, ⁴ ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηγήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν.

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.²⁵

The explicit reference to the “many” who have previously undertaken to write a diegesis of the events, with which the prologue opens, is to be regarded as what Monika Fludernik calls an “allo-metanarration” (Luke 1:1). This means it reflects on the style and composition of other authors and texts.²⁶ The narrator explains that these others have written their diegeses by referring to things “handed on to us” by “eyewitnesses and servants of the word” (Luke 1:2). And from the positive description of his own concept of diegesis we can infer his critique of these already existing narratives by way of the *via negationis*, since the narrator develops his own

23 Neumann and Nünning (2012) 19.

24 For this and what follows see also Eisen (2006) 85–87 *passim*.

25 In the English translations of Greek New Testament texts I quote with a few exceptions the New Revised Standard Version.

26 Neumann and Nünning (2012) 18.

concept of diegesis in the form of a “proprio-metanarration,” which means “auto-referential comments on the narrator’s own act of narrating.”²⁷ In contrast to the many others, he proposes, “after investigating everything carefully from the very first,” to write an “orderly” account for his narratee, whom he addresses in the second person and even by name (Luke 1:3). From his subsequent reception-oriented metanarration it becomes clear that he is doing this in order to demonstrate the reliability (ἰσφάλεια) of the teaching in which the narratee was presented as being schooled (Luke 1:4). Narrator and narratee belong to the world in which the things of which the diegesis speaks have happened, but neither is eyewitness to the story; both are located extradiegetically and heterodiegetically. Like his predecessors, the narrator depends on eyewitness accounts, but proposes to write them down more carefully and in better order. At the beginning of his second book, the Acts of the Apostles, he presents a brief summary of his “first book” (πρῶτον λόγον): “all that Jesus did and taught.” He again reopens the channel of communication to his narratee, once more addressing him by name (Acts 1:1). Metalepsis²⁸ occurs in the second book when the extradiegetical-heterodiegetical narrator becomes an immediate part of the diegesis by attributing the so-called “we passages” to a companion of Paul—metalepsis *top-down*.²⁹ He thus abruptly becomes an eye- and ear witness to the great deeds of Paul: e.g., the baptism of Lydia and her house (Acts 16:10–17) and the raising of a dead person (Acts 20:5–15). He also suddenly participates in spectacular events such as the shipwreck (Acts 27:13–28:1) and also, in that context, observes how Paul survives the bite of a viper (Acts 28:3–6). But it is also important that he accompanies Paul to the two principal cities in the narrative, Jerusalem (Acts 21:1–18) and, finally, Rome (Acts 27:1–28:16). Those experiences remain incidental because they are interrupted by the main third-person-narration. The window closes after a few sentences or chapters, having allowed the reader only “a quick glance across levels.”³⁰ But the effect on the reader is tremendous. There are still interpreters who read Luke-Acts as written by an eyewitness.³¹

Things are more complex in the Gospel according to John. It begins, as does Luke’s gospel, with a prologue (John 1:1–18), but this contains

27 Neumann and Nünning (2012) 18.

28 First described by Cornils (2005) 95–107.

29 Compare Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16.

30 Ryan (2006) 207.

31 For more information to the narration situation of Luke-Acts, see: Eisen (2006) 63–99, 76–99.

only content-oriented metanarrative reflection, if indeed it should be called metanarration:

(...) ¹⁴ Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.¹⁶ ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος·

(...) ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.¹⁵ (. . .) ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

Here we find an otherwise-undefined “we” who speaks of the event of the “*logos* [who] became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14; cf. Luke 1:1), and by means of verbal conjugation a first person plural appears: “we have seen his glory” (John 1:14) and “of his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:16). The narrators present themselves as part of a collective that shares in the indwelling of the Word made flesh and thus belongs to the world in which the story happened. Surprisingly, the collective “we” disappears after the end of the prologue (John 1:1–18) and only reappears in the second-to-last sentence of the gospel narrative (John 21:24). Between these there is always an omniscient third-person narrator telling and commenting on the story.³² S/he, or better “he,” as we will see, can be described as an omniscient observer who has a penetrating insight into the minds of Jesus, the disciples, and other characters in the story.³³

In the Epilogue, which begins with the second-to-last verse of the gospel, the “we” speaks again for the third and last time (John 21:24). Now the comment is indisputably metanarrative:

Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ μαθητὴς ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ τούτων καὶ ὁ γράψας ταῦτα, καὶ οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἀληθὴς αὐτοῦ ἡ μαρτυρία ἐστίν.

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.

The comment refers to the last scene of the gospel (John 21:1–23) and the person who has been reflected in the closing sequence of Jesus’ last dialogue with his disciples, the “Beloved Disciple” (John 21:20–23). In the first part of the comment the we-narrator suddenly reappears, revealing the identity of the person who “is testifying to these things and has written

32 Culpepper (1987) 17–18 offers a compilation of the numerous commentaries by the narrator (as well as further literature on the subject).

33 See the passages quoted and cited in Culpepper (1987) 21–26.

them.” In the second half of the verse, then, the collective “we” attest to the “truth” of his witness and writing. This verse represents, in Fludernik’s coinage, “proprio-metanarration,” that is, “auto-referential comments on the narrator’s own act of narrating,” with the specification that the narrators of the frame reveal the “true” narrator. In this epilogue it becomes clear that the diegesis of Jesus’ “signs” was transmitted by another narrator, the third-person narrator who appears in John 1:19–21:23, now identified with the “Beloved Disciple.” On the basis of his omniscience and his commentary he is certainly an overt narrator, but he acts throughout both extradiegetically and heterodiegetically (that is, outside the diegesis and having no part in it). Now it is suddenly, even shockingly and most surprisingly clear that this narrator was also “in reality” a figure in the diegesis and a participant in it (intradiegetically and homodiegetically), without being known to the first reader.

So only at the end of a first reading of the gospel is it obvious that there is a metalepsis in the Gospel according to John, a very subtle merging and intermingling of the narrative levels: the extradiegetical narrator is synchronically also an “undercover” character in the story. This affects a second reading of the gospel, because then at the latest the ideal reader recognizes that the events are not being told only by a nonparticipant omniscient third-person narrator, but instead that the narrator is at the same time a character in the narrated world, an eyewitness to what happens, and a participant in the events he narrates. This recognition brings those events into a new light and has an uncommon “reality effect” on the reader. The narrator addresses the reader on two levels simultaneously: on the level of narration the third-person narrator informs the reader about the events, omnisciently and omnipresently, by, for example, commenting and offering prolepses that permit the reader to know in advance what will happen. But after the first reading the ideal reader knows that this narrator also, at the same time, is acting on the story-level and experiencing the events directly as an eye- and ear witness. Thus he not only speaks but also sees and experiences the events and hears the words that are spoken. This narrator thus has every possible opportunity for access to the events, and with him the readers. The level of action and the level of narration and reading merge. The world of the story and the world of narration are permeable.

Against this background the metanarrative commentary in the epilogue, “we know that his testimony is true,” is no longer surprising and must convince every reader. After the first reading, the reader is surprised and shaken by this unexpected news, a typical effect of metalepsis. He or she will easily agree: indeed, in that case everything in the story can only be “true.”

On a renewed reading of the story the reader is thus already aware of this omnipresence of the narrator (*top-down* and *bottom-up*) and can see the diegesis with new eyes and hear it with new ears, and s/he knows that this narrator is the “Beloved Disciple,” who has written all he saw and participated in (John 21:24).

This narrator himself refers in a metanarrative commentary to his narrative as a “book” (John 20:30–31):

Πολλὰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλα σημεῖα ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ, ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ.³¹ ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

He lets his readers know that he experienced that “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples.” The ideal reader can only answer “yes.” The narrator also offers a reception-oriented metanarrative comment about why he has written everything down: “that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

Previously, as the ideal reader knows, the third-person-narrator, the “Beloved Disciple,” had presented a metanarrative commentary (John 19:35):

Καὶ ὁ ἑωρακὼς μεμαρτύρηκεν, καὶ ἀληθινὴ ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ ἡ μαρτυρία, καὶ ἐκεῖνος οἶδεν ὅτι ἀληθὴ λέγει, ἵνα ὑμεῖς πιστεύ[σ]ητε.

He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.

This metanarration, at first seemingly modest and only developing its full significance in a second reading, proceeds in three directions. (1) It gives information about the author (author-centered metanarration): the one who testifies is also an eyewitness, and by reading this information in connection with John 21:24 the reader knows that he is an eyewitness not only to this scene but to the entire event, and in addition is the author of the gospel. (2) This leads, in turn, to the evaluation that “his testimony is true,” which is asserted both in the third-person-narration (John 19:35) and again in the metanarration of the framing (John 21:24). (3) This metanarrative commentary, however, is also reception-oriented: the eyewitness

and narrator of the whole desires that his readers, twice addressed directly in the second person plural, “also may believe” (John 19:35b) and, more concretely, “that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). This metanarration connected with metalepsis drags the reader into the scene. S/he sees simultaneously with the eyes of the narrator and of the characters. The worlds of action and reading merge.

But to return to the framing narrative: the gospel does not end with the speaking “we” who “outs” the “author” of the gospel and confirms his testimony as “true.” Instead, an “I” (οἶμαι) appears in the last verse as part of a further metanarrative reflection (John 21:25):

Ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἃ ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἅτινα ἐὰν γράφηται καθ’ ἓν, οὐδ’ αὐτὸν οἶμαι τὸν κόσμον χωρῆσαι τὰ γραφόμενα βιβλία.

But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

This time, as in the Lukan double work, we are dealing with an allo-metanarration, though in the Johannine context it refers only to potential books. The “I” speaks of other books that could have been written about deeds of Jesus not told in the present book. Focusing on reception, the verse explains why the work of this book—although lacking “many other things that Jesus did”—is the only true one and “the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”

This concluding reception-oriented metanarrative commentary by an “I” who has not previously appeared in the narrative determines:

- (1) Concerning the content: that it tells of Jesus’ deeds, but that is far from everything.
- (2) Concerning the form: that the gospel according to John is a book.
- (3) Concerning its reception: that the world, here specifically the reader, is asked to assent to or make room for (τὸν κόσμον χωρῆσαι) what has been narrated in this book and may believe that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God who gives life (cf. John 19:35; 20:30).

But why the reference to an “I” who has not appeared in the preceding narrative? One may speculate about whether this is a person from the “we” group (John 1:14, 16; 21:24), or whether at this point another voice is reflecting on the narration. Thus, for example, in some historical-critical research it is posited that the person who published the gospel is speaking here. In my opinion this “new I” should be taken seriously as an additional narrative voice in the framing. It points to a further function of this concluding commentary that is constitutive for this narrative: it is an

additional kind of certification of the true witness of the book. Particularly in the Johannine Gospel and in the Lukan double work it is clear that only what is attested by eyewitnesses and witnesses to those witnesses can claim to be true (especially in the Gospel according to John) and reliable (especially in the Gospel according to Luke). Thus the narrative of the Johannine Gospel is built on its interweavings and intercalations of the testimonies of witnesses (I, we) to the eyewitness (the “Beloved Disciple”) of the witness *par excellence* (Jesus), thus:

- Jesus is the direct witness to God; he is in the bosom of the Father and has made God known (ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο) (John 1:18).
- The “Beloved Disciple” is a direct witness to Jesus; he was leaning on Jesus’ bosom (John 13:23.25; 21:20), has experienced everything and testifies to it (John 19:35), and has written it down (John 20:30, self-testimony in the third person; 21:24 in the report by another).
- The “we” of the frame testify that they, too, have experienced what has happened and know that Jesus is in the father’s bosom and has made him known (John 1:18), and that all this is true (John 21:34).
- The “I” in the framing narrative affirms and certifies that a great deal more could have been related and attested, thus demonstrating in content-oriented fashion that the deeds related here are only the tip of the iceberg. But, in conclusion, the reception-orientation of the narration recalls once more that what matters is to grasp what has happened here in such a miraculous and unfathomable way.

Thus I interpret the concluding verse as primarily content- and reception-oriented metanarration, that is, with the functions that classically belong to a publisher. But I do not resolve this historically by supposing a “real” publisher; I advocate the position that this is part of the conception of this narrative, the primary task of which is to demonstrate the miraculous truth and to make it present to the reader with a reception-oriented goal. Jesus is quoted: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29). This apostrophe has double relevance. It is addressed to the readers as well as to the listeners of Jesus in his world.

Before drawing further conclusions about the effects of the narration and its metalepses I want to shed more light on the “Beloved Disciple,” the virtual author of the Gospel according to John.

4. The “Beloved Disciple” and Metalepsis in the Johannine Gospel

Thus at the end of the narrative of the Gospel according to John, in the metanarrative frame of the gospel, the readers have come to know that the “Beloved Disciple” is the narrator and writer of the gospel. Who is this character? What is he doing on the level of story and what on the level of narration, and how does he transgress these two levels?

First of all, it should be mentioned that the so-called “Beloved Disciple” is not mentioned in any other early Christian gospel tradition. He is at home only in the universe of the Johannine Gospel. On the story level he appears explicitly in four prominent scenes of the narrative: he is introduced at the Last Supper (John 13:23–25), he stands under the cross of Jesus (John 19:26–27), he plays a role in the discovery of the empty tomb (John 20:2–10), and he is present in the last scene of the gospel narrative, where the risen Christ appears to his disciples for the last time (John 21:1–23). On the level of narration he is identified by the narrating “we” as true witness and writer of the gospel (John 21:24), which means that, while also acting within the narrative, he is at the same time the omniscient and omnipresent third-person narrator of the story (John 1:19–21:23). Let us briefly consider these four scenes.

Scene 1: The “Beloved Disciple” during the Last Supper (John 13:23–25)

²³ Ἦν δὲ ἀνακείμενος εἰς τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ²⁴ νεύει οὖν τούτῳ Σίμων Πέτρος πυθέσθαι τίς ἂν εἴη περὶ οὗ λέγει. ²⁵ Ἐπιπεσὼν δὲ ἐκεῖνος οὕτως ἐπὶ τὸ στήθος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, λέγει αὐτῷ, Κύριε, τίς ἐστίν;

²³ One of his disciples – the one whom Jesus loved – was leaning on Jesus’ bosom³⁴; ²⁴ Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So while lying on Jesus’ breast³⁵, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?”

In the scene of the Last Supper before the feast of the Passover (John 13:1–18:1) — the point in the gospel when Jesus gives his farewell discourse to his disciples—the longest scene in the gospel and told in the least-hurried manner, the “Beloved Disciple” (ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς) is introduced. Jesus is sitting at table with his disciples, proclaiming that one

34 I alter the translation of the New Revised Standard Version from “was reclining next to him” into “was leaning on Jesus’ bosom” because it much better translates ἀνακείμενος . . . ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

35 I alter the New Revised Standard Version “reclining next to Jesus” into “lying on Jesus’ breast”.

of them will hand him over (παραδώσει) (John 13:21). In this sequence the third-person narrator characterizes one of the disciples as “leaning on Jesus’ bosom” (ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) (John 13:23a). He subsequently calls this disciple the “one whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23b). The scene moves on, with Peter gesturing to this disciple to ask Jesus of whom he is speaking (John 13:24). The narrator repeats that “the one who was lying on Jesus’ breast” asks Jesus in direct speech: “*Kyrie*, who is it?” (John 13:25). Jesus answers him that it is the one to whom he gives the morsel he has dipped. After this short but intense moment the scene proceeds without any further mention of the “beloved one” or Peter. So it is also not said whether he conveys the information to Peter. The rest of the description indicates that this was not the case.

How should this strange sequence be understood in terms of the narrative? Why is it that Peter apparently does not want to know Jesus’ answer, after having explicitly asked the “Beloved Disciple” to make the request? Why do none of those reclining at the table understand what Jesus says to Judas?

If we want to understand better it makes sense to look back at what the readers and the characters in the narrative have learned previously about Jesus’ being handed over by Judas. On the level of the narration it was announced to the readers quite early, proleptically and in a number of ways: the narrator shows the readers, through inside views of Jesus, that he knew who would betray him (John 6:64). But even on the story level Jesus indicates enigmatically, in a direct speech, that one of the Twelve is “a devil” (John 6:70), which the narrator interprets for the readers by giving his name, “Judas Iscariot” (John 6:71). Shortly before Jesus is handed over, the narrator tells the readers more specifically that Judas Iscariot is precisely the one who “was about to betray” Jesus (John 12:4), thus placing the whole matter within the picture. This certainty that Judas will hand Jesus over is again confirmed for the reader at the very beginning of the Last Supper scene by means of an inside view of Judas, that is, the assertion that the devil was already active in Judas to “betray him” (John 13:2). For the ideal reader it is completely clear that Judas Iscariot will hand Jesus over, and that Jesus also knows it.

This is less clear on the level of the story. Jesus does announce the event a number of times in direct speech, but these announcements remain enigmatic (John 6:70; 13:10, 11; 13:18). It is only in the scene just mentioned, with the “Beloved Disciple,” that Jesus no longer speaks guardedly of his betrayal but says “one of you will betray me” (John 13:21). That leads to an understandable uncertainty on the part of the disciples (John 13:22). Against this background Peter’s action in asking Jesus by way of the “Beloved Disciple” about whom he is speaking is all too understand-

able (John 13:24). What is surprising—and not a logical consequence in the narrative—is that, while the “Beloved Disciple” receives an answer, it seems that he keeps it to himself, and Peter no longer wants to know the answer. Thus this short sequence is utterly inconsequential to the plot.

What function does this sequence have with regard to the narrated world? It characterizes the “Beloved Disciple” for the readers without any consequences for the plot. This disciple is a character who “leans on Jesus’ bosom” just as Jesus “is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18). The immediate repetition of this statement, and its reappearance at the very end of the gospel, gives it a special accent (John 13:23, 25; 21:20). And the intratextual parallels in John 1:18 show the “Beloved Disciple” in relationship to Jesus like the relationship of Jesus to God. Jesus’ special esteem for this disciple is again expressed in his designation as the “Beloved Disciple,” which in the ongoing narration becomes something like a proper name for him.³⁶ Beyond this, it is striking that Peter clearly stands at a greater distance from Jesus and also addresses the “Beloved Disciple” as an authority.

In the act of reading (a second time!), the third-person narrator and the “Beloved Disciple” meld into a single person. Jesus’ answer to him is thus addressed also to an ideal reader. Thus the reader, together with the “Beloved Disciple,” receives from Jesus the knowledge that remains hidden from the other disciples. Both stand in contrast to the disciples, who lack understanding.

Scene 2: The “Beloved Disciple” under the cross (John 19:26–27, 35)

²⁶ Ἰησοῦς οὖν ἰδὼν τὴν μητέρα, καὶ τὸν μαθητὴν παρεστῶτα ὃν ἠγάπα, λέγει τῇ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ, Γύναι, ἰδοὺ ὁ υἱός σου. ²⁷ Ἐἶτα λέγει τῷ μαθητῇ, Ἴδου ἡ μήτηρ σου. Καὶ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης τῆς ὥρας ἔλαβεν ὁ μαθητὴς αὐτὴν εἰς τὰ ἴδια. (. . .) ³⁵ Καὶ ὁ ἑωρακὸς μεμαρτύρηκεν, καὶ ἀληθινὴ ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ ἡ μαρτυρία, κάκεινος οἶδεν ὅτι ἀληθῆ λέγει, ἵνα ὑμεῖς πιστεύσητε.

²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Under the cross the readers see the “Beloved Disciple” standing with the mother of Jesus and other women, the sister of Jesus’ mother, Mary, the

36 The fact that he is called “beloved” is less significant, since Jesus’ love for his own (John 13:1, 34; 15:9, and elsewhere) and for individuals (John 11:3, 5, 36) is stated a number of times in the gospel. But unique to the Gospel according to John is his designation as the “Beloved Disciple.”

wife of Klopas, and Mary of Magdala (John 19:25). When the Crucified becomes aware of his mother and the “Beloved Disciple” standing close to her, he says in direct speech: “Woman, here is your son,” then goes on speaking to the disciple: “Here is your mother” (John 19:27). This sequence closes with the narrator’s hint that the disciple took her into his own [home] (εἰς τὰ ἴδια) (John 19:27). There is a similar formulation in the prologue: “He came to what was his own (εἰς τὰ ἴδια), and his own people did not accept him” (John 1:11). Here again, similarly to “leaning on one’s bosom,” a motif is adopted that parallels the “Beloved Disciple” with Jesus (John 1:18; 13:23).

This sequence, like the one analyzed previously, serves the primary purpose of characterizing the “Beloved Disciple.” He is the only male disciple standing under the cross with the female disciples. He is the only male disciple who witnesses the crucifixion of Jesus and all its details. He observes that the soldiers did not break Jesus’ legs and that instead a soldier thrusts his lance into Jesus’ side so that blood and water flowed out of the wound, evidence of Jesus’ real death on the cross in the Johannine gospel (John 19:31–37, esp. 34). This is followed immediately by the metanarrative narrator’s commentary discussed above (19:35), which reflects the kind and quality of the narrative in an auto-referential commentary and also portrays for the readers the desired reception.

Scene and commentary show that the characterization of the “Beloved Disciple” indicates that he was one addressee of Jesus’ last words on the cross, and he received the special instruction of the Crucified to care for his mother. In doing so he was integrated into the earthly family of Jesus and became Jesus’ brother in the flesh. Moreover, he has taken Jesus’ position as son. In a metanarration the ideal reader is directly addressed by the third-person narrator, knowing that this is the “Beloved one,” and, with reference to the eyewitnesses, the truth-content of the message is doubly manifested; finally, the readers are challenged to believe.

Scene 3: The race to the empty tomb (John 20:1–10)

Τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ἔρχεται πρώτῃ, σκοτίας ἔτι οὔσης, εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον, καὶ βλέπει τὸν λίθον ἡρμένον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου.² Τρέχει οὖν καὶ ἔρχεται πρὸς Σίμωνα Πέτρον καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἄλλον μαθητὴν ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Ἦραν τὸν κύριον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου, καὶ οὐκ οἶδαμεν ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν.³ Ἐξῆλθεν οὖν ὁ Πέτρος καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητὴς, καὶ ἦρχοντο εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον.⁴ Ἐτρέχον δὲ οἱ δύο ὁμοῦ· καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητὴς προέδραμεν τάχιον τοῦ Πέτρου, καὶ ἦλθεν πρῶτος εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον,⁵ καὶ παρακύψας βλέπει κείμενα τὰ ὀθόνια, οὐ μέντοι εἰσῆλθεν.⁶ Ἐρχεται οὖν Σίμων Πέτρος ἀκολουθῶν αὐτῷ, καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον, καὶ θεωρεῖ τὰ ὀθόνια κείμενα,⁷ καὶ τὸ σουδάριον ὃ ἦν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ, οὐ μετὰ

τῶν ὀθονίων κείμενον, ἀλλὰ χωρὶς ἐντετυλιγμένον εἰς ἓνα τόπον. ⁸ Τότε οὖν εἰσήλθεν καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητῆς ὁ ἐλθὼν πρῶτος εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον, καὶ εἶδεν, καὶ ἐπίστευσεν. ⁹ οὐδέπω γὰρ ἤδεισαν τὴν γραφήν, ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῆναι. ¹⁰ Ἀπῆλθον οὖν πάλιν πρὸς ἑαυτοῦς οἱ μαθηταί.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

The narrative of the race of the “Beloved Disciple” and Peter to the empty tomb is as unique in the gospel tradition as are all the other scenes concerning him. The narrator tells the reader that after Mary of Magdala sees the empty tomb she “runs” to Peter and the “Beloved Disciple” to tell them that someone “has taken away” Jesus’ body from the tomb (John 20:2). Upon hearing this the two start running to the tomb to see what has happened. The reader comes to know that the “Beloved Disciple” is faster than Peter and arrives at the tomb first. He looks into the tomb and sees the linen wrappings, but does not enter. Eventually Peter arrives and goes into the tomb, also recognizing the linen wrappings lying there. The difference now is that Peter sees more, not only the linen wrappings but also “the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself” (John 20:7). After that the “Beloved Disciple” enters the tomb as well, “and he saw and believed” (εἶδεν, καὶ ἐπίστευσεν) (John 20:8). Here we have one of the very few inside views of an individual disciple in the Johannine gospel narrative.³⁷ The “Beloved Disciple” does exactly what he asked of his readers some sentences before: believe (John 19:35). The narrator’s comment follows: “for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead” (John 20:9). Then the narrator lets the two men simply “return to their homes” (John 20:10).

³⁷ Culpepper (1987) 23.

This is a significant scene as regards the “Beloved Disciple”: he is again characterized physically—here as someone who can run fast. Again he is placed alongside important disciples, Peter (cf. scene 1) and Mary of Magdala (cf. scene 2). With Peter he is in an obvious competition. He is the faster runner and he not only “sees” as Peter does (John 20:6) but also “believes” (John 20:8), exactly what the readers are expected to do (John 19:35). The “Beloved Disciple” again gets to witness an important event: the tomb is empty and the face-cloth has been rolled up in a place by itself, which indicates activity on the part of the Crucified. This scene serves as evidence for the reader that Jesus has not been “taken (. . .) out of the tomb,” as Mary of Magdala’s statement suggests (John 20:2), but resurrected. The “Beloved Disciple” is the one who saw and first “believed” that Jesus had risen. Again, while Peter and the other disciples have not yet understood, the “Beloved Disciple” does, and with him the readers. They see and believe with him. The story world is made present/envisioned.

Scene 4: The risen Christ appears at the sea of Tiberias for the last time (John 21:1–23)

Μετὰ ταῦτα ἐφανερώσεν ἑαυτὸν πάλιν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης τῆς Τιβεριάδος· ἐφανερώσεν δὲ οὕτως. ² Ἦσαν ὁμοῦ Σίμων Πέτρος, καὶ Θωμᾶς ὁ λεγόμενος Δίδυμος, καὶ Ναθαναὴλ ὁ ἀπὸ Κανᾶ τῆς Γαλιλαίας, καὶ οἱ τοῦ Ζεβεδαίου, καὶ ἄλλοι ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ δύο. (. . .) ⁴ Πρωΐας δὲ ἤδη γενομένης ἔστη ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὸν αἰγιαλόν· οὐ μέντοι ἤδεισαν οἱ μαθηταὶ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν. ⁵ Λέγει οὖν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Παιδιά, μὴ τι προσφάγιον ἔχετε; Απεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ, Οὐ. ⁶ Ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Βάλετε εἰς τὰ δεξιὰ μέρη τοῦ πλοίου τὸ δίκτυον, καὶ εὐρήσετε. Ἔβαλον οὖν, καὶ οὐκέτι αὐτὸ ἐλκύσαι ἴσχυσαν ἀπὸ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν ἰχθύων. ⁷ Λέγει οὖν ὁ μαθητῆς ἐκεῖνος ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ Πέτρῳ, Ὁ κύριός ἐστιν. (. . .) ²⁰ Ἐπιστραφεὶς δὲ ὁ Πέτρος βλέπει τὸν μαθητὴν ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀκολουθοῦντα, ὃς καὶ ἀνέπεσεν ἐν τῷ δεῖπνῳ ἐπὶ τὸ στήθος αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶπεν, Κύριε, τίς ἐστίν ὁ παραδιδούς σε; ²¹ Τοῦτον ἰδὼν ὁ Πέτρος λέγει τῷ Ἰησοῦ, κύριε, οὗτος δὲ τί; ²² Λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἐὰν αὐτὸν θέλω μένειν ἕως ἔρχομαι, τί πρὸς σε; Σὺ ἀκολουθεῖ μοι. ²³ Ἐξῆλθεν οὖν ὁ λόγος οὗτος εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφούς, ὅτι ὁ μαθητῆς ἐκεῖνος οὐκ ἀποθνήσκει· καὶ οὐκ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ὅτι οὐκ ἀποθνήσκει· ἀλλ’, Ἐὰν αὐτὸν θέλω μένειν ἕως ἔρχομαι, τί πρὸς σε;

² Gathered there (Sea of Tiberias) together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. (. . .) ⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶ He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” (. . .) ²⁰ Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined

next to Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?”²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about him?”²² Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!”²³ So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”

This last scene of the gospel plays out on the Sea of Tiberias; the characters involved are three named disciples (Peter, Thomas, Nathanael), two called by their father’s name (the sons of Zebedee), and two who remain anonymous (John 21:2). The narrator says the disciples went out fishing without any success (John 21:3). Then only the reader comes to know, thanks to the omniscient narrator, that in the morning “Jesus” is standing on the beach. In contrast, the characters in the scene at first do not realize that it is Jesus (John 21:4). He encourages them to “cast the net to the right side of the boat” to “find some [fish]” (John 21:6). They follow the unknown man’s advice and catch so many fish they are not able to haul them into the boat. It is only at this moment that the “Beloved Disciple,” and he alone, identifies the unknown as the *κῦριος* in direct speech to Peter (John 21:7). Again he is the one who first understands.

After the disciples have taken breakfast with the risen Christ a longer conversation follows between the Risen One and Peter. Christ asks Peter three times whether he loves him more than the others. Peter confirms it three times. After that, Jesus asks him to “tend my sheep” (John 21:17), part of a miraculous prolepsis of Peter’s future death. Then Jesus says to Peter: “Follow me” (John 21:19). After this passage Peter turns around and sees the “Beloved Disciple” doing exactly what Jesus expects of him: “following.” Again that disciple is characterized as the one who understands correctly and knows what to do. The narrator briefly reminds the reader—for the third time in the narrative—that this is the one “who leaned on Jesus’ breast at the supper” and had asked about the traitor (John 21:20). Peter asks Jesus: “*Kyrie*, what about him?” (John 21:21). Jesus answers him obscurely: “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!” (John 21:22). Jesus’ statement is followed by a long narrator’s commentary: “So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?’” (John 21:23).

In this last scene of the gospel the “Beloved Disciple” gets the most important part: the identification of the *κῦριος*. Again he is the witness *par excellence* because he identifies the Risen One first. But he is not only the one who understands best; he is also the one who knows what to do: he “follows.” This is a major issue in the last dialogue of Jesus with his

disciples. The “Beloved Disciple” attracts Peter’s interest while doing what Jesus has just demanded of Peter, to “follow” him. Beyond that, the “Beloved Disciple” gets a special position: Jesus’ very last words are about him. Jesus’ suggestion that he wants him to remain until he comes indicates his special selection and role as well as his importance. The readers have come to know that the “Beloved Disciple” seems to be more important and reliable than Peter. He follows Jesus—before Peter (John 1); he, not Peter, leans on Jesus’ bosom; he learns the identity of the betrayer before Peter does (John 13); he, not Peter, is made the son of Jesus’ mother (John 19); he, not Peter, is witness to the crucifixion; he arrives at the empty tomb before Peter; he believes before Peter (John 20); he identifies the risen Christ before Peter (John 21); Jesus wants him, not Peter, to stay until he comes (John 21). Last but not least: as the omniscient narrator he speaks directly to the readers (John 21:24).

This final scene of the narrative reveals another significant truth: that the “Beloved Disciple” was one of the anonymous disciples mentioned in the opening of this scene. This detail has far-reaching consequences for the act of reading, as demonstrated also by the history of reception of the Gospel according to John, for the “Beloved Disciple” can now be inserted in nearly every position in the narrative in which a disciple is mentioned anonymously. Such allusions can be interpreted as empty spaces. The most prominent of these is to be found at the very beginning of the story (John 1:35–40), in the narrative of Jesus’ calling his first two disciples. These two had been disciples of John the Baptizer, who pointed Jesus out to them. After that they follow Jesus and become his disciples (John 1:37, 40). The identity of only one is revealed: this is Andrew, the brother of Peter (John 1:40). Andrew then calls Peter’s attention to Jesus, so that he assumes the third position among those called to belong to the Twelve (John 1:41–42). If the “empty space” of the anonymous disciple is filled by the “Beloved Disciple” there are consequences for the overall reading of the gospel. In that case, according to the logic of the story, he even became Jesus’ disciple before Peter. This would underscore that he followed Jesus from the beginning and really has experienced everything as an eyewitness. On the story level he is then also the disciple who is the first and last among the disciples to be mentioned. Another prominent empty space is the mention of “another disciple” (that is also how the “Beloved Disciple” is designated in the last scene of the gospel, described above, John 21:23), who followed Jesus, after his arrest, into the high priest’s palace. It is he who makes it possible for Peter to gain entry to the palace (John 18:15–16). In this scene in the high priest’s house Peter denies Jesus three times (John 18:17–27). This would mean that the “Beloved Disciple” was also witness to Peter’s triple denial of Jesus, to which

the last dialogue between Jesus and Peter with his threefold question about his love builds a mirror scene.³⁸

Besides these other places in the story the “Beloved Disciple” might, purely theoretically, have occupied, in the subsequent metanarrative commentary the “we”-narrator makes it clear that the “Beloved Disciple” not only experienced everything from the closest possible vantage point but also testified to it and wrote everything down (John 21:24). He is thus, insofar as one is willing to place him in John 1:37, one of the first disciples of Jesus, explicitly the “Beloved Disciple” who, as an eye- and ear witness, saw and heard all the events from the closest proximity. He shows himself to be the disciple *par excellence*, “leaning on Jesus’ bosom” at the last supper (John 13:23), who “sees” the crucifixion (John 19:26) and “believes” (John 20:8), and also recognizes the risen κύριος even before Peter does (John 21:7), and whom Jesus wants to “remain” (John 21:22, 23). At this point the readers probably are no longer asking whether his testimony is really true. The proof has been given by the story and the narration. This metalepsis serves a double function: first, it makes the events present for the readers and involves them in the narrated world very intensely—past and present are merged—and second, it authenticates the narrative.

5. Further Metaleptical Strategies in the Gospel according to John

The fact that the “Beloved Disciple” is explicitly introduced only in chapter 13 has often raised the question: why so late? This could be connected with the overall composition of the gospel. Chapters 1–12 summarily describe a period of two to three years of Jesus’ public activity. In contrast, in Chapters 13–21 the story time is drastically restricted to only a few days. Five chapters treat only the events, conversations, and speeches that took place in a single day, the first farewell of Jesus and his disciples (John 13:1–18:1). The last four chapters narrate Jesus’ passion and the farewell of the Risen One and his disciples (John 18:2–21:23). Chapters 13–21 are marked by the transgression of Jesus from this world to the world of God. The narrator’s transgressions are analogous in structure.

The last third of the gospel is concentrated on the relationship of Jesus and his disciples. As already shown the “Beloved Disciple” is a very special

38 Two further correspondences between the scene in the high priest’s palace and the last scene in the gospel may be discerned: in both there is mention of a charcoal fire (άνθρακιά) (John 18:18; 21:9), and in both scenes there are three exchanges with Peter: in the former he denies Jesus and in the latter he affirms his love for him (John 18:17–27; 21:15–17). The “Beloved Disciple” is thus witness to both conversations, as an ear witness.

disciple, present only in the Johannine Gospel. The emphasis placed on him amplifies the channel of communication with the reader. The foot-washing scene, at which only disciples are mentioned, and the dialogue, during which only disciples ask questions, show that we are to suppose that they alone are present. This is favored also by the reference to a disciple's question about why Jesus "desires to reveal himself" only to them and not to "the world" (John 14:11). Jesus wants to prepare his disciples (and the readers) for the time when he "has left this world and gone to the Father" (John 13:1). This marks a time that is particularly relevant for the readers.

Embedded in Jesus' farewell discourses (John 13–17) are questions from the disciples, who repeatedly show their lack of understanding, a motif that runs throughout the whole gospel. These dialogues and speeches conclude with a long prayer by Jesus in which he speaks with God (John 17:1–26) but also talks of those who are not his disciples, specifically "all" who "believe" in him through their "word" (John 17:20), which should be interpreted as an apostrophe to the readers.³⁹

But above all, the feigned orality of these speeches is intensified still more by the metaleptic double function of the narrator, who as a character in some sense reveals camera shots of the event and Jesus' discourses. Against this background Jesus' saying "blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29)—unlike Thomas, who in the scene depicted in John 20:24–29 only believes after having seen and touched Jesus' wounds—can also be interpreted as speech with double relevance to the characters of the story world as well as to the readers.⁴⁰

In general Jesus talks a great deal in the Johannine narrative, especially in comparison with the Synoptic Gospels. This indicates a distinctive degree of feigned orality; in the New Testament only Acts, where a third of the narrative is made up of speeches, has a similar intensity of "oral" content. From narratology we know that direct speech represents a dramatic mood, which lessens the distance of the reader from what is related.⁴¹ Metalepsis has a very similar effect. The Johannine Gospel, by a combination of metalepsis and the immediacy of direct speech, creates an intensive presence of what it reports.

In view of the basic metaleptic structure of story and narration that is apparent at the latest in John 21:24, we may suppose that Jesus' speeches are frequently conceived in such a way as to apostrophize the readers

39 It would certainly be a fruitful exercise to examine the metaleptical strategy in the Farewell Discourses more closely, but that would exceed the limits of this essay.

40 Cf. Irene de Jong's essay in this volume.

41 Cf., for example Genette (1980) 161–211, and Genette (1988) 41–63.

directly. This is perceptible even in the grammar, as the scenes frequently and surprisingly switch to the present tense. Culpepper had already observed this strategy and its effect: “to move the reader into the scene so that even though it is told in the course of narrating the past, readers feel that they are in the scene.”⁴² One example of this pattern is the scene of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1–10). It is introduced by two aorist verbs describing the scene and one imperfect used to move the action along. But the “dialogue is consistently introduced by λέγει (John 2:3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 (φωνεῖ) ‘he calls,’ 10).”⁴³ This pattern is not so consistently maintained in all scenes. In Jesus’ dialogue with the woman of Samaria we find λέγει (John 4:7, 9, 11, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 25, 26) and εἶπεν (John 4:10, 13, 17). The pattern of changing verbal aspects is not limited to *verba dicendi*. It also can be observed, for example, in *verba movendi* (John 4:4, 5).

Given that the arbitrary shifting between tenses reveals no persuasive system, this phenomenon can be interpreted, in light of the overall analysis thus far presented, as a signal of a permanent transgression between the level of action and the level of reading. In the Johannine Jesus’ speeches the call for attention, “Amen, amen, I say to you” (ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν), is very frequent. It occurs with λέγω ὑμῖν 20 times (John 1:51; 5:19, 24, 25; 6:26, 32, 47, 53; 8:34, 51, 58; 10:1, 7; 12:24; 13:16, 20, 21; 14:12; 16:20, 23) and with λέγω σοι five times (John 3:3, 5, 11; Nicodemus; 13:38; 21:18: Peter). In light of the metaleptical structure of the narrative it can be simultaneously interpreted as a speech with double relevance, an apostrophe to the characters of the story world as well as to the readers.

A clear example of “merging of voices” is the “four eyes” dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, introduced by οὗτος (Nicodemus) ἦλθεν πρὸς αὐτὸν νυκτὸς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ (Jesus) (John 3:2–21). In the following dialogue the narration twice shifts from first person singular to first person plural narration. The first shift is in the opening of the speech of Nicodemus. He says: “We know that you have come from God as a teacher” (John 3:2). In verse 1 Nicodemus is characterized as one of the Pharisees. Does he speak for all of them? For the readers, this seems to be the case. The second shift is more complex. The I-speech of Jesus shifts suddenly, mid-course, to first person plural, which is metaleptically suspect (John 3:11–12):

¹¹ ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι ὅτι ὁ οἶδαμεν λαλοῦμεν καὶ ὁ ἐωράκαμεν μαρτυροῦμεν, καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἡμῶν οὐ λαμβάνετε. ¹² εἰ τὰ ἐπίγεια εἶπον ὑμῖν καὶ οὐ πιστεύετε, πῶς ἂν εἶπω ὑμῖν τὰ ἐπουράνια πιστεύσετε;

42 Culpepper (1987) 31.

43 See Culpepper (1987) 31 for more detail.

Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, and you [plural] do not accept our testimony.¹² If I told you [plural] earthly things and you [plural] do not believe, how will you [plural] believe if I tell you heavenly things?

This fleeting apostrophe to the readers by the we-narrator then flows back into an apostrophe to the readers by Jesus himself, who shifts in the middle of his speech to the second person plural. In this sequence we have two metalepses: first, the we-narrator apostrophizes the reader (John 3:11b) in the Jesus-speech; second, Jesus apostrophizes the reader directly (John 3:12). Verse 11b is the only exception: here the we-narrator from the prologue and the epilogue speaks in the midst of the third-person narration (of the “Beloved Disciple”). But the we-narrator’s voice is camouflaged in Jesus’ speech; then follows an equally fluid shift back to third-person narration (John 3:13–21). The metaleptic structure of the Johannine narrative is especially easy to grasp here.

6. Conclusion

It could be shown that metalepses can also be detected in the canonical gospels according to Mark und John and in the Lukan double work. We find *top-down* and *bottom-up* apostrophes as well as merging/blending of narrative voices. The strategy in the Gospel according to John, where the third-person narrator is simultaneously a character in the story, is a special form of very subtle metalepsis. All these metalepses are rhetorical because they have no consequences for the plot. In the case of the Johannine narrative the question of the narrator’s location is answered by the character Jesus in the story: “What is that to you?” (John 21,22). Thus the narrator cannot be questioned by his readers either, and he is exempt from any kind of criticism—which brings us back to Père Borell del Caso’s painting, “Escaping Criticism,” at the beginning of this essay.

But the metalepses in the canonical gospels and Acts serve a double function: the frontier of the story and the world of narration is made permeable. The two worlds are able to fuse into one presence. Especially in the metalepsis of the Johannine narrative, the double agency of the narrator and the “Beloved Disciple” enables him both to lean on Jesus’ bosom and to communicate fluidly and subtly with the reader. In this way readers are drawn into the narrated world and the illusion is enhanced: they become themselves almost eye- and ear witnesses to the events. The narrated Jesus speaks to them directly. By means of this difficult and subtle narrative process, past events are brought within the grasp of readers. Josef

Blank has very accurately described Johannine theology as a “theology of making-present” (“Vergegenwärtigungstheologie”).⁴⁴ Furthermore, it is powerfully illusionistic: metalepsis of the Johannine Gospel demonstrates and proves its authenticity; it is “ἀληθής”. To that extent it is no accident that even today the most intense speculation about the author of the Gospel according to John continues. And even today the Johannine Gospel claims, through its metalepsis and metanarration, to have been told by an eyewitness, a special authority that is narratively demonstrated in the most complex way through interwoven witnesses.

Historically also, this marked self- and truth-assurance in the Gospel according to John is plausible since, as the narrative says, those who joined in believing in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God were threatened with expulsion from the synagogue (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). Such a thing happened historically at the earliest after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. and probably occurred only as a local measure.⁴⁵ It certainly did not threaten the generation surrounding Jesus, but perhaps affected Jewish people who adopted faith in Jesus as Messiah much later. A possible problem of exclusion from the synagogue is projected back into the diegesis as if it had happened in Jesus’ world around 30 C.E. Exclusion from the synagogue after 70 C.E. or later could have implied, for those affected by it, a religious and social uprooting, and a socio-political threat as well, since those people could no longer live in their Jewish communities and under the protection of the Jewish religion, which was a *religio licita* in the Roman empire. Against this background the many-layered theology of attestation and making-present in the Gospel according to John is also historically understandable, because there was strong opposition and it was identity that was at stake.

The case of the Lukan double work seems to be somewhat different. There metalepsis also underscores the authenticity of the narrative, but these books apparently had to assert themselves primarily against competing gospel narratives. The metanarration is less a defense of the gospel’s own claim to truth (ἀλήθεια) in contrast to other such claims, a situation that is so prominent in the Johannine Gospel. The Lukan double work, rather, aimed at defending the reliability (ἀσφάλεια) of its gospel’s own diegesis in competition with the “many” others (Luke 1:1). The Gospel according to Mark, probably the oldest gospel, does not yet contain comparable self-referential passages. But readers are also directly addressed by subtle metaleptic strategies, whereby the readers are more

44 Blank (1986) 24.

45 Cf. Culpepper (1986) 273–288, at 283; Wengst (1983); Martyn (2003); van der Horst (1994) 363–368.

powerfully drawn into the events and the message of Jesus so that they become involved. Here the function of making present can be observed, but authenticating is not of primary concern.

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