

RUBEN ZIMMERMANN

# Breaking New Ground in John

Edited by  
DIETER T. ROTH

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament  
531*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

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Ruben Zimmermann

# Breaking New Ground in John

Imagery, Parables, Characters, Christology,  
and Ethics in the Fourth Gospel

Edited by  
Dieter T. Roth

Mohr Siebeck

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## Foreword

It is my distinct honor and privilege to have edited this volume of essays by Ruben Zimmermann. I first met Ruben when I came to the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz in the summer of 2010 as a post-doctoral fellow in his Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft-funded project “Gleichnisse in der Logienquelle.”<sup>1</sup> Over the past decade and a half, I am fortunate not only to have benefited tremendously from our academic conversations and his scholarship but also to have come to know him as a friend.

Even though my own work in the Gospels has most often tended to focus on the Synoptic Gospels, Zimmermann, for many years of his academic career, has engaged widely and deeply with the Gospel of John. As expressed through numerous publications, countless public lectures and conference papers, and various private conversations, Zimmermann’s studies of this text, from monographs to articles to essays, has emphasized a narratological and literary approach to the Fourth Gospel. Such an approach, of course, stands in continuity with the seminal work by Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*,<sup>2</sup> that, in its own way, broke new ground in the study of the Gospel of John and indeed, as already noted by an early reviewer, served as a “catalyst, because it irrefutably demonstrates the interpretive potential in applying literary critical methodology to John.”<sup>3</sup> Drawing on several decades

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<sup>1</sup> Initially funded for three years, the project, in an expanded and extended form, received a further three years of funding so that the grant ultimately ran from 2010–2016. Publications arising out of scholarship funded by the grant include a volume resulting from an international conference on Q held in Mainz from Aug. 30 – Sept. 1, 2012 (Dieter T. Roth, Ruben Zimmermann, and Michael Labahn, eds., *Metaphor, Narrative, and Parables in Q*, WUNT 315 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014]), the published version of Arne Bork’s doctoral dissertation (*Die Raumsemantik und Figurensemantik der Logienquelle*, WUNT 2.404 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015]), and the published version of my *Habilitationsschrift* (Dieter T. Roth, *The Parables in Q*, LNTS 582 [London: T&T Clark, 2018]).

<sup>2</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Gail R. O’Day, Review of Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, *JBL* 104 (1985): 547. The “catalytic” function of the work is particularly evident in a volume published 25 years after Culpepper’s work that reflected upon Culpepper’s impact and influence upon Johannine studies, namely, Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth*

of exploring that interpretive potential, the following volume includes 29 revised, translated, or previously unpublished essays by Zimmermann in which he takes up, builds upon, and expands various questions in Johannine scholarship. This collection of essays is thus designed to bring together new versions of many of his own pioneering studies as Zimmermann himself, ever since the publication of his own *Habilitationsschrift* on “Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium” and the first international conference he organized during his work on this monograph,<sup>4</sup> has continued to break new ground in scholarship on the Gospel of John. The methodological and thematic paths taken therein are also followed in the present contributions and expanded in various directions.

The volume’s opening section is entitled “Imagery” and contains four revised essays and one previously unpublished contribution entitled “‘You are from below, I am from above.’ (John 8:23): Space Metaphors and Space Semantics.” The opening chapter sets the stage for considering images in John by surveying the history of research on the topic and then considering the manner in which images, metaphors, parables, figurative narratives and symbols along with their constellation contribute to theological reflections on Christology, the image of God, anthropology, and ecclesiology. The remaining chapters advance new reflections on the garden symbolism, mission imagery and metaphorical networks, and spatial and temporal metaphors. Right from the outset Zimmermann dives deeply into the manner in which figurative language contributes to theology.

The second section on “Parables” offers two revised essays, one new translation of an originally German essay, and two previously unpublished contributions entitled “The Power of Parables: The Parable of the Grain and the Greeks in John 12:20–36” and “Parables in John and Q: ‘Rehistoricization’ of the Fourth Gospel?” Given the widespread conviction since the massively influential work on parables by Adolf Jülicher that there are no parables in John, it is not surprising that Zimmermann begins this section with a study “Are There Parables in John? It is Time to Revisit the Question.” In this section Zimmermann combines his profound contributions to parables scholarship

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*Gospel as Literature*, SBL Resources for Biblical Study 55 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> See Ruben Zimmermann, *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium: Die Christopoetik des vierten Evangeliums unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Joh 10*, WUNT 171 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004) and the published volume of the conference proceedings Jörg Frey, Jan G. van der Watt, and Ruben Zimmermann, eds., *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language*, WUNT 200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

with his study of the Gospel of John,<sup>5</sup> opening new avenues for groundbreaking studies on the parables in the Fourth Gospel.

Section three is devoted to “Character Studies” and contains four revised essays, one new translation of an originally German essay, and one previously unpublished contribution entitled “The Beloved Disciple as Eyewitness: Historical Memory of Literary Fiction?” Characters clearly figure prominently in narratological approaches to the Gospels and Zimmermann considers both prominent characters, such as “the Jews” or the “beloved disciple,” and other important, but less conspicuous figures in the Fourth Gospel, including John (the Baptist) as a disappearing witness. This section not only breaks new ground in narratological studies of Johannine characters but also offers new insights into historical and theological questions surrounding the figures found in the Gospel of John. The chapters here are closely linked to the co-edited volume *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel*,<sup>6</sup> which, it is gratifying to note, has already had a certain level of impact on American scholarship.

The fourth section offers reflections on “Christology as Christ-Poetics” and is comprised of three revised essays and three translations of originally German essays. In these chapters, Zimmermann breaks new ground in christological studies focusing on the Fourth Gospel as he discusses the manner in which images and metaphors contribute to the presentation of the Christ in John. From the image of the shepherd and its metaphorical background in the Old Testament to the metaphorical Christology of the Lamb of God to the christological implications of the bridegroom, Zimmermann analyzes the narrational and symbolic construction of Christology in the Fourth Gospel. He concludes this section with an image of his own as Zimmermann uses the “Pas de Deux” from the world of ballet in order to reflect upon Christology as theology.

The final section is devoted to question of “Ethics,” which is another area of NT scholarship that has often seen John excluded from the discussion. The five revised essays and two translations of originally German essays are therefore introduced by Zimmermann’s challenge of an outdated consensus that “ethics” is not found in the Gospel of John. If the title of this book applies to one area in particular, it is to the issue of ethics of the Fourth Gospel. The work initiated by Zimmermann (together with Jan G. van der Watt) has led to a rapid

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<sup>5</sup> Zimmermann has been a prolific contributor to both English- and German-language parables scholarship over the past two decades. For an introduction to many of his most salient views, see, e.g., Ruben Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables of Jesus: Methods and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015) and the recent revision in a German edition, *Parabeln in der Bibel: Die Sinnwelten der Gleichnisse Jesu entdecken* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, Penguin Random House, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> See Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (eds.), *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, WUNT 314 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013; paperback edition, Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing, 2016).



and significant reappraisal in this area of NT scholarship.<sup>7</sup> Once again, Zimmermann, co-founder of the Mainz Center for “Ethics in Antiquity and Christianity,”<sup>8</sup> brings together his extensive research on ethics (including fields of applied ethics such as biomedical ethics and climate ethics) with that of the Gospel of John. Having argued that the proper framework for understanding NT ethics is Zimmermann’s “implicit ethics,”<sup>9</sup> he offers a series of chapters dealing with narrative ethics and relevant ethical concepts in the Fourth Gospel, and brings the entire volume to a conclusion with a particularly relevant discussion in the midst of the world’s present climate crisis: “Little Time Left: The μικρὸν χρόνον Motif in the Gospel of John in Eco-Ethical Perspective.”

Even though each essay in this volume seeks to make its own, individual contribution to the study of the Fourth Gospel, there is also a sense in which the collection of essays as a whole reflects several of Zimmermann’s foundational commitments in his scholarship on the Gospel of John.

First, even as Zimmermann has sought to take Johannine scholarship in new scholarly directions, he has also been keen to highlight and develop the manner in which literary and narrational approaches can contribute to traditional and classic themes of Johannine studies, including, e.g., time and eschatology, Christology, and reflections upon Johannine figures such as the “beloved disciple.”

Second, this volume reflects the manner in which Zimmermann has sought intentionally to connect theoretical and methodological reflection with the exegesis of individual passages and pericopae. As such, one consistently finds Zimmermann illustrating the theoretical with the practical as he demonstrates to his readers the significance of his methodological approaches for textual interpretation and the understanding of the text in our contemporary context. In this way, interdisciplinary scholarly approaches, relevance of the biblical texts in current debates, and interpretations informed by the Christian faith are brought together within the hermeneutical approach explored by Zimmermann (who is himself ordained minister).

Third, and finally, Zimmermann remains committed to embracing the international context of modern biblical studies, in particular seeking to build

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<sup>7</sup> See Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann, eds., *Rethinking the Ethics of John: The implicit Ethics in the Johannine Writings*, Contexts and Norms of New Testament Ethics, vol. 3, WUNT 291 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012). Cornelis Bennema, in an appendix to his article “A Model of Johannine Ethics,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 35 [2022]: 433–56 offered a summary of “Publications on Johannine Ethics (2012–2022),” which included “12 monographs, 3 edited volumes comprising 37 essays, and 37 articles and book chapters” (p. 453).

<sup>8</sup> See <https://eac-en.uni-mainz.de/> (accessed May 8, 2024).

<sup>9</sup> The theory and method of this approach is explicated in the first part of Ruben Zimmermann, *Logic of Love: Discovering Paul’s “Implicit Ethics” through 1 Corinthians*, trans. Dieter T. Roth (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018).

bridges between German- and English-language scholarship and scholars. Clear indications of Zimmermann's commitment to cooperative work and dialogue can be found in co-edited volumes in cooperation with South-African and American scholars as well as in Zimmermann's participation in the scholarly exchange in the international "Colloquium Ioanneum." In addition, Zimmermann's interest in collaborative work is reflected in several essays in this volume that are co-authored, either with Zimmermann's wife, Prof. Dr. Mirjam Zimmermann, or with Dr. Olivia L. Rahmsdorf or Dr. Zacharias Shoukry, former doctoral students of Zimmermann. The publications with former doctoral students, in particular, are indicative of the scholarly dialogue that Zimmermann cultivates while mentoring his graduate students as he has supervised nine doctoral dissertations and one *Habilitation* on the Gospel of John alone.<sup>10</sup> The reciprocal interaction arising from these projects can be seen in many of the chapters in this volume.

In sum, it is the hope of both the author and the editor that the following essays, as they dig into the fertile soil of the Fourth Gospel, may not only break new ground through their own contributions to Johannine scholarship but also that these chapters may plough rows of new furrows for the next generation of scholars to plant the seeds of their own scholarship.

Dieter T. Roth  
Boston College

Chestnut Hill, MA  
September 2024

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<sup>10</sup> The published doctoral dissertations are Karl Weyer-Menkhoff, *Die Ethik des Johannevangeliums im sprachlichen Feld des Handelns*, WUNT 2.359 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); Fredrik Wagener, *Figuren als Handlungsmodelle: Simon Petrus, die samaritanische Frau, Judas und Thomas als Zugänge zu einer narrativen Ethik des Johannevangeliums*, WUNT 2.408 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015); Alexander Drews, *Semantik und Ethik des Wortfeldes Ergon im Johannevangelium*, WUNT 2.431 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); Olivia L. Rahmsdorf, *Zeit und Ethik im Johannevangelium: Theoretische, Methodische, und Exegetische Zugänge zur "Gunst der Stunde,"* WUNT 2.488 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2019); Benjamin Lange, *Der Richter und seine Ankläger: Eine narratologische Untersuchung der Rechtsstreit- und Prozessmotivik im Johannevangelium*, WUNT 2.501 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019); Aaron Graser, *Das Fremdzeugnis für Jesus: Untersuchung der narrativen Darstellung des Zeugnisgebens für Jesus im Johannevangelium*, TANZ 71 (Tübingen: Narr Francke, 2024); Alois A. Hund Carrasco, *Das Johannevangelium und der Magische Realismus: Eine Studie zu den magisch-realistischen Zügen des vierten Evangeliums im Vergleich mit Cien años de soledad von Gabriel Garcia Márquez* (Mainz: Open Science, 2024); Zacharias Shoukry, *Schöpfung im Johannevangelium: Traditionen und Theologie des Schöpferwirkens im vierten Evangelium*, BZNW 268 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2024); Mirjam Jekel, *Schöpfungspoetik im Johannevangelium: Sprachanalytische Untersuchungen zum Lebensmotiv*, WUNT 2.621 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024). The published Habilitationsschrift is Susanne Luther, *Die Authentifizierung der Vergangenheit: Literarische Geschichtsdarstellung im Johannevangelium*, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming).



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## I. Imagery





## Chapter 1

# Imagery in John

## Opening up Paths into the Tangled Thicket of John's Figurative World\*

The imagery in the Gospel of John is as important and powerful as it is ambivalent and puzzling. On the one hand, there is hardly a book of the NT whose images have exerted a larger influence in theological, ecclesiastical, or art history than those of John. Good examples are the christological images of the "Son," the "Good Shepherd," or the "Lamb." On the other hand, these images are difficult to understand and analyze. No single theory has managed to explain the origin, the literary form and treatment, or the theological significance and function of these images in a manner that all can agree upon. Every traditional derivation comes up short, every formal classification has its limits, and every comprehensive attempt at description is doomed to failure because of the nature of the text itself. On the narrative level, with its motif of the "elusive Christ,"<sup>1</sup> the images seem to escape one's grasp exactly at that moment when one believes one can take hold of them. The images of John are unwieldy, resistant, and intricate. To use a metaphor from Adolf Jülicher: They are jumbled and confused,<sup>2</sup> like a hedge or a thicket.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the imagery in John has long been disregarded in Johannine scholarship. However, since the "linguistic turn" in scholarship on the Gospel of John, increasing attention has been given to the imagery of the Fourth Gospel. The task and the significance of this volume is to bring together various recent approaches to the subject and to stimulate the debate on John's figurative world. It would be futile to search for a common method and universal understanding, or even for generally accepted terms to describe Johannine imagery. For this reason, this introductory article can do no more

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\* The paper upon which this chapter is based was first read as the introductory paper at the Eisenach conference "Imagery in the Gospel of John" (held July, 30<sup>th</sup> to August, 1<sup>st</sup> 2005). In this revised version more recent literature has been included.

<sup>1</sup> See John 2:23–25; 6:15; 7:1–13, 30, 44; 8:20, 59; 9:12; 10:39; 12:36. For further discussion, see Mark W. G. Stibbe, "The Elusive Christ: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel," *JSNT* 44 (1991): 20–39.

<sup>2</sup> Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1910; repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), 1:115.

than attempt to make some initial proposals and to open up perspectives and topics of conversation. Stated with an image, this chapter seeks to begin opening up paths into the tangled thicket which is the imagery of the Gospel of John.

## 1. A Research Path: The Search for Images<sup>3</sup>

### 1.1. First Phase: The Jülicher Classification and the Disregard for the Johannine Imagery in the First Half of the 20th Century

In his *Magnum Opus*, *Adolf Jülicher* subdivided the parabolic speech of Jesus into allegory, parable, and the so-called “Beispielerszählung” (“example story”), thereby introducing the basic system of classification for the analysis of NT imagery for the 20th century.<sup>4</sup> However, Jülicher’s categories could hardly be put into use with the imagery of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>5</sup> The result of this was that he devoted a whole 29 lines (not even one page) to the imagery of the Gospel of John, making obvious his disparagement for the figurative speeches of John. He considered Johannine images to be “insufficient allegories” which are “aesthetically unsatisfactory” and able to be interpreted only in a “jumbled and confused”<sup>6</sup> way. A few years later, in 1913, *Johannes Kreyenbühl* makes the contempt for Johannine imagery even clearer:

Die Bilderwelt des vierten Evangeliums ist höchst beschränkt, einförmig und darum auch in ihrer Bedeutung leicht zu erfassen. Die Lebendigkeit und Mannigfaltigkeit der synoptischen Parabeln ist in den Allegorien des vierten Evangeliums erloschen, der Gedanke scheint überall in dem Maße durch, daß sich ein selbständiges, anschauliches, farbenreiches Bilderleben nicht zu entwickeln vermag. Das Bild von der Rebe und den Rebschoßen (Kap. 15) ist kaum berührt, so wird es sofort von dem eigentlichen Gedanken (v 7ff.) überwuchert. Kap. 10 ist das Hirtengleichnis nicht besonders geschickt durchgeführt, was freilich seine guten Gründe hat.<sup>7</sup>

The opinions of Jülicher and Kreyenbühl demonstrate the disregard of Johannine imagery that continued within NT scholarship until well into the 20th century. This is partially due to the massive impact of Jülicher’s “Gleichnisbuch” since NT imagery was identified with synoptic parables. Jülicher’s attack

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<sup>3</sup> For a systematic overview of this field of research, see Ruben Zimmermann, *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium: Die Christopoetik des vierten Evangeliums unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Joh 10*, WUNT 171 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 77–87.

<sup>4</sup> Jülicher, *Gleichnisreden*, 1:25–118.

<sup>5</sup> See *ibid.*, 1:117: “Die *παροιμίαι* des Joh sind den synoptischen *παραβολαί* am wenigsten verwandt.”

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:115, see also 1:201–2, 264.

<sup>7</sup> Johannes Kreyenbühl, “Kritische Randglossen zu Wellhausens Evangelium Johannis,” *SThZ* 30 (1913): 129–263, here 203.

against the allegorical interpretation that dominated exegesis before his time also made the category of “allegory” taboo. It did not seem possible to gain access to the NT imagery of John or Revelation outside of Jülicher’s categories.

The pejorative opinion towards the imagery of the Fourth Gospel also arose out of certain studies of John’s Gospel itself: The works of *Julius Wellhausen* and *Rudolf Bultmann* led to an era of Johannine exegesis (at least in Germany) that was dominated by certain form-critical, tradition-critical and existentialist ways of formulating the central questions. However, no real consideration was given to the existing literary form of the Gospel.

Only a few exegetes of John can be named as exceptions. For example, in an article published in 1948, *Oscar Cullmann*<sup>8</sup> acknowledged the ambiguity of the Johannine language as “key to the understanding of the Gospel.” In his work, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, *C. H. Dodd*<sup>9</sup> was the first to identify the Gospel’s “central ideas” and to separate, in form and function, the “so-called allegories of the Fourth Gospel” from the synoptic parables and to connect them back to the OT and Hellenistic-Jewish symbolic tradition. Against the background of Platonic thought, Dodd argued that the discourses, the images with the recurring ἀληθινός (like the true bread and the true vine), the narratives, and the Johannine σημεῖα are to be understood symbolically. According to Dodd the whole Gospel is bound together by an “intricate network of symbolism” and represents “a world in which phenomena – things and events – are a living and moving image of the eternal, and not a veil of illusion to hide it, a world in which the Word is made flesh.”<sup>10</sup> I would also like to mention the work of *Franz Mußner*, who described the Johannine representation of Jesus as the expression of a specific theological perspective – as a “way of seeing” (*Sehweise*) – and in this way, in a wider sense, as “symbolic language.”<sup>11</sup> The figurative quality and ambiguity of Johannine language fulfil, according to *Wayne A. Meeks*<sup>12</sup> or *Herbert Leroy*,<sup>13</sup> a function for the Johannine community. Each in his own way considers the language of mystery to be the esoteric jargon of the Johannine community, allowing its theological value to be seen only by means of “translation.” Apart from these works, only the

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<sup>8</sup> Oscar Cullmann, “Der johanneische Gebrauch doppeldeutiger Ausdrücke als Schlüssel zum Verständnis des 4. Evangeliums,” *TZ* 4 (1948): 360–72.

<sup>9</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>11</sup> Exemplary of this view is Franz Mußner’s highly regarded work *Die johanneische Sehweise und die Frage nach dem historischen Jesus*, QD 28 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1965).

<sup>12</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, “Galilee and Judea in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 85 (1966): 159–69 and *idem*, “The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72.

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Leroy, *Rätsel und Missverständnis: Ein Beitrag zur Formgeschichte des Johannesevangeliums*, BBB 30 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1968).

tradition-historically oriented research on the “I am-Sayings,” such as that of *Eduard Schweizer*,<sup>14</sup> needs to be mentioned.

*1.2. Second Phase: The Linguistic Turn in Johannine Exegesis and the Rediscovery of the Johannine Language of Imagery (Since 1970)*

Not until the literary interpretation of the Gospel of John, which began in the seventies, did the linguistic form move into the center of attention, which led to the works of *David Wead*, *Birger Olsson*, or *R. Alan Culpepper* gaining initial importance.<sup>15</sup> Within the framework of linguistic research on the Gospel of John, increasing attention was given to the imagery in Johannine language. Therefore, I would like to speak of the second phase in this overview of the history of research as the “rediscovery” of Johannine imagery. In this phase, the Johannine images were considered in varied contexts and evaluated in the service of overarching theological or literary interpretations. One could mention here the works of *René Kieffer*,<sup>16</sup> *Xavier Léon-Dufour*,<sup>17</sup> *C. K. Barrett*,<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Eduard Schweizer, *Ego Eimi: Die religionsgeschichtliche Herkunft und theologische Bedeutung der johanneischen Bildreden, zugleich ein Beitrag zur Quellenfrage des vierten Evangeliums*, FRLANT 38 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939). See also Ethelbert Stauffer, “Εγώ,” *TWNT* 2:341–60; Johannes Richter, “Ani hu und Ego eimi: Die Offenbarungsformel ‘Ich bin es’ im Alten und Neuen Testament” (PhD diss., Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1956); Heinrich Zimmermann, “Das absolute ‘Ich bin’ als biblische Offenbarungsformel” (PhD diss., Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 1953); and idem, “Das absolute ‘Ich bin’ als neutestamentliche Offenbarungsformel,” *BZ* 4 (1960): 54–69, 266–76.

<sup>15</sup> David Wead, *The Literary Devices in John’s Gospel* (Basel: Reinhardt, 1970); idem, “The Johannine Double Meaning,” *ResQ* 13 (1970): 106–20; Birger Olsson, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel: A Text-Linguistic Analysis of John 2:1–11 and 4:1–42*, ConBNT 6 (Lund: Gleerup, 1974); and R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). See also the collected papers in *Semeia* 53 (1991), an issue which bore the title “The Fourth Gospel from a Literary Perspective”; Mark W. G. Stibbe, ed., *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, NTS 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1993); Fernando F. Segovia, ed., *Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, vol. 1 of *What is John?*, SBLSymS 3 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), and idem, ed., *Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, vol. 2 of *What is John?*, SBLSymS 7 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> René Kieffer, “Different Aspects in Johannine Imagery,” in *Aspects on the Johannine Literature: Papers Presented at a Conference of Scandinavian New Testament Exegetes at Uppsala, June 16–19, 1986*, ed. Lars Hartman and Birger Olsson, ConBNT 18 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987), 74–84 and idem, *Le monde symbolique de Saint Jean*, LD 137 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Xavier Léon-Dufour, “Towards a Symbolic Reading of the Fourth Gospel,” *NTS* 27 (1980–1981): 439–56 and idem, “Spécificité symbolique du langage de Jean,” in *La communauté johannique et son histoire: La trajectoire de l’évangile de Jean aux deux premiers siècles*, ed. Jean-Daniel Kaestli et al., MdB (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1990), 121–34.

<sup>18</sup> C. K. Barrett, “Symbolism,” in idem, *Essays on John* (London: SPCK, 1982), 65–79.

or Günter Stemberger,<sup>19</sup> all of whom interpreted the Johannine motifs in the context of their symbolic depth and tradition, as did Juan Leal a few years before.<sup>20</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders went one step further, in that for her the Johannine images represented sacramental symbols which involve “a person subjectively in a transforming experience of the mystery of the Transcendent.”<sup>21</sup> The works of Robert Kysar<sup>22</sup> and John Painter<sup>23</sup> point in a different direction. In several papers they were the first to successfully employ linguistic metaphor research in the analysis of the images of John.

Finally, it was R. Alan Culpepper who, in his influential study *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, recognized the pictorial aspect of the language within the narrative design of the Gospel. Not only the representation of space and time, but also individual characters and the scenarios of their encounters are, according to Culpepper, depicted according to literary, narrational principles. In this way, they have a semantic depth that one could call “figurative” within the fictional composition of the Gospel. In his sixth chapter, Culpepper describes literary devices such as misunderstandings, examples of irony, and so on, which function as an “implicit commentary” to tell the reader how to discover the real meaning of the Gospel. Here also “symbolism” becomes a central theme. Symbols are “bridges by which the reader may cross in some elusive sense into the reality and mystery, the life, which they represent.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Günter Stemberger, *La symbolique du bien et du mal selon saint Jean* (Paris: du Seuil, 1970).

<sup>20</sup> Juan Leal, “El simbolismo histórico del iv evangelio,” *EstBib* 19 (1960): 329–48. Leal described 1) allegorical symbolism; 2) nominal symbolism; 3) biblical symbolism; 4) symbolism in action; and 5) historical symbolism.

<sup>21</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, “Symbolism and Sacramental Principle in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Segni e Sacramenti nel Vangelo di Giovanni*, ed. Pius-Ramon Tragan, SA 66 (Rome: Ed. Anselmiana, 1977), 221–35, here p. 223. See also eadem, “History and Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel,” in *L’Evangile de Jean: Sources, Rédaction, Théologie*, ed. M. de Jonge, BETL 44 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1987), 371–76; eadem, “The Foot Washing (John 13.1–20): An Experiment in Hermeneutics,” *ExAud* 1 (1985): 135–46; and eadem, *Written that You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Robert Kysar, “Johannine Metaphor – Meaning and Function: A Literary Case Study of John 10:1–18,” *Semeia* 53 (1991): 81–111 and idem, “The Making of Metaphor: Another Reading of John 3:1–15,” in Segovia, *Readers and Readings*, 21–42.

<sup>23</sup> John Painter, “Johannine Symbols: A Case Study in Epistemology,” *JTSA* 27 (1979): 26–41; idem, “John 9 and the Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel,” *JSNT* 28 (1986): 31–61; idem, “Tradition and Interpretation in John 6,” *NTS* 35 (1989): 421–50; and idem, “Tradition, History and Interpretation in John 10,” in *The Shepherd Discourse of John 10 and its Context*, ed. Johannes Beutler, S.J. and Robert T. Fortna, SNTSMS 67 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 53–74.

<sup>24</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 149–202, here 201.

### 1.3. Third Phase: The Research of the Imagery of John from 1995 on

I would like to describe the past twenty-five years as the “third phase” of the research on the imagery of John, because since about 1995 we find independent works that have, with various methods, moved the imagery of John into central focus. Two monographs from 1995 present two different ways of approaching the figurative world of John.

First, *Otto Schwankl*<sup>25</sup> understands the images of John as metaphors and examines the central imagery of the Gospel of John through the motifs of light and darkness. Fresh ground can be broken by “placing together” semantic domains that do not actually belong together. According to Schwankl, with reference to Ricœur’s theory of metaphors,<sup>26</sup> the “living metaphor” opens a “semantic field of experimentation” and produces a “surplus of meaning” or “consciousness” or even “a growth in being.”<sup>27</sup>

Second, *Craig R. Koester*, in his instructive work *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* which was published 1995,<sup>28</sup> set forth “symbolism” as the principal term for Johannine imagery. Koester defines a symbol as “an image, an action, or a person that is understood to have transcendent significance.”<sup>29</sup> In this way he can deal equally with “symbolic and representative figures” (ch. 2) and “symbolic actions” (ch. 3). Koester considers light-darkness (ch. 4), water (ch. 5) and cross/crucifixion (ch. 6) to be the central symbols of the Gospel and he examines them in detail. Finally, Koester closely examines the influence of symbols on the Johannine community (ch. 7: “Symbol and Community”), which uses symbols to describe its identity “within this tension between the community’s distinction from and engagement with the world.”<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, later works focus their attention on either metaphor or symbolism and examine these by way of individual motifs in the Gospel of John. The work of *Dorothy Lee*<sup>31</sup> should be mentioned here as she understands the Johannine narratives as “symbolic narratives” which, in view of the reader, fulfil a

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<sup>25</sup> Otto Schwankl, *Licht und Finsternis: Ein metaphorisches Paradigma in den johanneischen Schriften*, HBS 5 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Die lebendige Metapher*, Übergänge 12 (Munich: Fink, 1986; 3d. ed. 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Schwankl, *Licht*, 32: “Durch den Ausgriff auf einen anderen semantischen Bezirk eröffnet die Metapher ein ‘semantisches Experimentierfeld’ und produziert einen ‘Mehrwert an Artikuliertheit’, einen ‘Überschuß von Bedeutung’ oder semantische Energie; sie erbringt so in der Tat, mit P. Ricœur zu sprechen, einen Bewusstseins-, ja einen ‘Seinszuwachs.’”

<sup>28</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995; 2nd ed. 2003).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>31</sup> See Dorothy A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning*, JSNTSup 95 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) and eadem, *Flesh and Glory: Symbol, Gender, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002).

pragmatic function.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, individual images such as “water” in *Larry Paul Jones*, *Wai-yee Ng*, and *Rhonda G. Crutcher*<sup>33</sup> or the “Temple” in *Johanna Rahner*, *Mary L. Coloe*, and *Alan R. Kerr*<sup>34</sup> are dealt with in separate monographs, each with its own approach.

Other studies follow an approach that is based, to a greater extent, upon theories of metaphor. *Jan G. van der Watt*<sup>35</sup> attempts to derive inductively a “Johannine theory of metaphor” from the text itself. In doing, so he recognizes the dynamic interaction of semantic fields on the verse level as a specific Johannine image technique. One particular benefit of this work is the attention paid to the combining of images into larger networks. In his work *Family of the King*, van der Watt describes how images on the level of macro-text “flow together” into “metaphorical networks,” which can be seen as the principles of formation and coherence of the entire Gospel.<sup>36</sup> Van der Watt sees the most important of these principal image systems in the metaphor of family,<sup>37</sup> in which diverse complexes of metaphors such as birth, life, eating, love, and knowing each other, as well as solicitude and protection etc., are connected to each other. For *Ulrich Busse* the “temple metaphor” is another image complex that becomes an overall organizing principle. Furthermore, Busse integrates Johannine metaphors into the horizon of ancient rhetoric.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Lee, *Symbolic Narratives*, 24, see also 231.

<sup>33</sup> Larry Paul Jones, *The Symbol of Water in the Gospel of John*, JSNTSup 145 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997); Wai-Yee Ng, *Water Symbolism in John: An Eschatological Interpretation*, StBibLit 15 (New York: Lang, 2001). Rhonda G. Crutcher, *That He Might Be Revealed: Water Imagery and the Identity of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Johanna Rahner, “*Er aber sprach vom Tempel seines Leibes*”: *Jesus von Nazareth als Ort der Offenbarung Gottes im vierten Evangelium*, BBB 117 (Bodenheim: Philo, 1998). Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001); Alan R. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus’ Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John*, JSNTSup 220 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> Jan G. van der Watt, “Interpreting Imagery in John’s Gospel: John 10 and 15 as Case Studies,” in *Hypomnema: Feesbundel opgedra aan Prof J P Louw*, ed. J. H. Barkhuizen, H. Stander, and G. Swart (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1992), 272–82; idem, “‘Metaphorik’ in Joh 15,1–8,” *BZ* 38 (1994): 67–80; idem, “The Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel of John,” *SNTSU A* 23 (1998): 29–78; idem, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John*, BibInt 47 (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Van der Watt, *Family*, 123–24, 137.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 161–62, 397: “The Family imagery is the constitutive and most essential imagery in this Gospel.”

<sup>38</sup> Ulrich Busse, “Die Tempelmetaphorik als ein Beispiel von implizitem Rekurs auf die biblische Tradition im Johannesevangelium,” in *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, ed. Christopher M. Tuckett, BETL 131 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 395–428; idem, *Das Johannesevangelium: Bildlichkeit, Diskurs und Ritual: Mit einer Bibliographie über den Zeitraum 1986–1998*, BETL 162 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002); idem, “Metaphorik und Rhetorik im Johannesevangelium: Das Bildfeld vom König,” in *Imagery in the Gospel of John*, ed. Jörg Frey, Jan G. Van der Watt, and Ruben Zimmermann, WUNT 200



In addition to this focus on the *literary dimension* of Johannine images, it is possible to recognize, in a very simplified way, certain categories that are definitive in more recent works. In some works, questions concerning the *tradition-historical and history-of-religions background* of Johannine images are in the forefront. In studies of the shepherd metaphor, for instance, one can search for connections to the OT/Hebrew or to the Hellenistic/Greek background.<sup>39</sup> Another common theme for this type of investigation is creation imagery, where the Johannine images and motifs are read against the background of Old Testament and Jewish traditions.<sup>40</sup> Even most works on the “I am-Sayings” have continued to concentrate on this approach, following in the tradition of form criticism.<sup>41</sup>

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(Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006, 279–317; see also Joseph Verheyden, Gilbert van Belle, and Jan G. Van der Watt, eds., *Miracles and Imagery in Luke and John: Festschrift für Ulrich Busse*, BETL 218 (Leuven: Peeters, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> For the Jewish background, see, for example, Adrianus J. Simonis, *Die Hirtenrede im Johannes-Evangelium: Versuch einer Analyse von Johannes 10,1–18 nach Entstehung, Hintergrund und Inhalt*, AnBib 29 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967); J. Duncan M. Derrett, “The Good Shepherd: St. John’s Use of Jewish Halakah and Haggadah,” *ST* 27 (1973): 25–50; Pius-Ramon Tragan, *La parabole du “Pasteur” et ses explications: Jean 10,1–18: La genèse, les milieux littéraires*, SA 67 (Rome: Ed. Anselmiana, 1980); John P. Heil, “Ezekiel 34 and the Narrative Strategy of the Shepherd and Sheep Metaphor in Matthew,” *CBQ* 55 (1993): 698–708; and Ruben Zimmermann, “Jesus im Bild Gottes: Anspielungen auf das Alte Testament im Johannesevangelium am Beispiel der Hirtenbildfelder in Joh 10,” in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums: Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditionsgeschichtlicher Perspektive*, ed. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle, WUNT 175 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 81–116. The Hellenistic context is highlighted by, for example, John Whittaker, “A Hellenistic Context for John 10,29,” *VC* 24 (1970): 241–44; Adele Reinhartz, *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel*, SBLMS 45 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 50–70; and Jerome H. Neyrey, S.J., “The ‘Noble Shepherd’ in John 10: Cultural and Rhetorical Background,” *JBL* 120 (2001): 267–91.

<sup>40</sup> See Anthony M. Moore, *Signs of Salvation: The Theme of Creation in John’s Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) and Carlos Raúl Sosa Siliezar, *Creation imagery in the gospel of John*, LNTS 546 (London: T&T Clark, 2015).

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, David M. Ball, “*I am*” in *John’s Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications*, JSNTSup 124 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996) and Catrin H. Williams, *I am He: The Interpretation of ‘anī hū’ in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, WUNT 2.113 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); Christian Cebulj, *Ich bin es: Studien zur Identitätsbildung im Johannesevangelium*, SBB 44 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000); and Silke Petersen, *Brot, Licht und Weinstock: Intertextuelle Analysen johanneischer Ich-bin-Worte*, NovTSup 127 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008). Attempts to connect traditional, sociological, and metaphorical questions to this topic can be found in the works of Hartwig Thyen, “Ich bin das Licht der Welt: Das Ich- und Ich-Bin-Sagen Jesu im Johannesevangelium,” *JAC* 35 (1992): 19–46 and idem, “Ich-bin-Worte,” *RAC* 17:147–213; more recently Veronika Burz-Tropper, “Jesaja als Hintergrund der metaphorischen Ich-bin-Worte im Johannesevangelium,” *Protokolle zur Bibel* 30 (2021): 115–32.

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