

# Imagery in the Gospel of John

Edited by  
JÖRG FREY, JAN G. VAN DER WATT,  
and RUBEN ZIMMERMANN

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
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Mohr Siebeck

**Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
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200





# **Imagery in the Gospel of John**

Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of  
Johannine Figurative Language

Edited by

Jörg Frey, Jan G. van der Watt,  
and Ruben Zimmermann

In Collaboration with Gabi Kern

**Mohr Siebeck**

JÖRG FREY, Dr. theol. habil., is Professor of New Testament at the Protestant Theological Faculty of the University of Munich, Germany.

JAN G. VAN DER WATT, D.Th., D.Litt., is Professor and Head of the Department of New Testament Studies at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

RUBEN ZIMMERMANN, Dr. theol. habil., is Professor of Biblical Theology at the Faculty of History, Philosophy and Theology of the University of Bielefeld, Germany.

GABI KERN is wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin at the Chair of Biblical Theology at the Faculty of History, Philosophy and Theology of the University of Bielefeld, Germany.

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## Preface

The Gospel of John is well-known for its wealth and depth of figurative language, metaphors and symbols. During the last two decades, the exploration of these elements of the Johannine language has become a major issue in scholarship, providing important clues for the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. A variety of theoretical and methodological approaches have been applied to classify the different types of figurative language and understand their impact on the readers and their relevance for the meaning of the text. Various images can be explained by their use in earlier Biblical traditions or in the world around the New Testament. The growing awareness for the peculiarities of Johannine figurative language contributes to a deeper understanding of the narrative web and to a more comprehensive or even holistic view of the Fourth Gospel.

During the preparation of his Habilitationsschrift on the Christology of Images within the Gospel of John at the University of Munich, Ruben Zimmermann felt the need to bring together some of the leading scholars in Johannine exegesis, particularly in a debate on Johannine imagery, to discuss different theoretical approaches and their interrelation and to explore their benefit for Johannine exegesis. From initial ideas, we jointly developed the plan of an international conference entitled “Imagery in the Gospel of John / Die Bildersprache des Johannesevangeliums”, held from July, 30<sup>th</sup> – August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005, in Eisenach, Thuringia, a beautiful place beneath the Wartburg where Luther once translated the New Testament.

The present volume provides the revised and enlarged papers of the Eisenach conference and, in addition, papers from other participants of the conference either asked or inspired to take up the threads of the debate and develop their own views on aspects of the topic. The editors are grateful to all the speakers and authors for their contributions at the conference, for a very open and dense discussion, and for the articles in which numerous aspects from the discussions could be included.

The success of the project is due a number of persons and institutions. First, we would like to express our thanks to the Stiftungsfonds Hellmuth Ley for funding, not only the conference, but also the preparation of the publication. Special thanks to Ulrike Johanning-de Abrew in the office of the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft for her tremendous support for the project. The organization of the conference would have been impossible without the continuous support of the Munich secretarial team,

Christina Rink and Stephanie Gripenrog. We are also grateful to Juliane Schlegel and Tanja Schultheiß (Munich) and to Gabi Kern, Dominik Mahr, and Natascha Nemetschek (Bielefeld) for their support. The editorial work was done by the team from Bielefeld: Gabi Kern did a great job editing and formatting the articles; Sarah Beumler, Dominik Mahr, and Dr. Georg Gäbel supported her in various ways, read proofs and compiled the indexes. The whole editorial process was supervised by the staff from Mohr Siebeck publishers. To all we express our sincere gratitude.

The Fourth Gospel closes with an image which is not discussed in this volume. In John 21:25 it is said that the whole world could not contain the books that should be written about the works of Christ. This hyperbolic closure might also be true for the number of publications that continue to be written on the most enigmatic and – at the same time – theologically deepest of our canonical Gospels. The editors hope this volume stands out by not only continuing the debate, but also deepening our understanding of the Fourth Gospel in its figurative world.

Bielefeld, Munich, and Pretoria,  
in September, 2006

Jörg Frey  
Jan van der Watt  
Ruben Zimmermann

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## Abbreviations

The abbreviations used in this volume follow

for the German articles the “Abkürzungsverzeichnis der Theologischen Realenzyklopädie, zusammengestellt von S. Schwertner (IATG), 2nd ed., Berlin – New York 1994;”

for the English articles “The SBL handbook of Style: for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies, ed. by Patrick H. Alexander, Peabody, MS 1999.”

For the abbreviation of Ancient Greek and Latin Literature confer further “H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones, A Greek-English Lexicon, 9th ed. with revised supplement, Oxford 1996, xvi–xxxviii.”

The following abbreviations are not given in these reference works:

ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte, Leipzig.
AncBD	Anchor Bible Dictionary, New York, N.Y., et al.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids, Mich.
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series, Leiden.
DNP	Der Neue Pauly, eds. H. Cancik and H. Schneider, Stuttgart/Weimar.
FAS	Frankfurter althistorische Studien, Kallmünz, Oberpfalz.
HBS	Herders Biblische Studien, Freiburg, Br. et al.
Hist.E	Historia: Einzelschriften, Stuttgart.
LHJS	Library of Historical Jesus Studies, New York.
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies, London et al.
MJSt	Münsteraner Judaistische Studien: Wissenschaftliche Beiträge zur christlich-jüdischen Begegnung, ed. Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum, Münster.
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, Leiden et al.
SAPERE	Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris ad Ethicam Religionemque pertinentia, ‘Schriften der späteren Antike zu ethischen und religiösen Fragen’, Tübingen.
SNTInt	Studies in New Testament Interpretation, Edinburgh.
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and its World, Edinburgh/London et al.
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum, Tübingen.
ThKNT	Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, Stuttgart et al.
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Leicester.



# Imagery in John: Opening up paths into the tangled thicket of John's figurative world\*

*Ruben Zimmermann*

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 New Testament 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 way 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 facts of the text. 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 catch 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 thicket.

Therefore, it is not astonishing that the imagery in John has long been disregarded in Johannine scholarship, as we’ll see below. However, since the ‘linguistic turn’ in research on the Gospel of John, increasing attention has been drawn 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 illusory to search for a common method and understanding or even for generally accepted terms to describe Johannine imagery. Accordingly, this introductory article can do no more than attempt to make some initial pro-

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\* I am grateful to Janelle Ramaley and Craig Koester for proofreading this article.

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

<sup>2</sup> A. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (2 vols.; 2nd ed.; Freiburg, Br. et al. 1910; repr., Darmstadt 1963), I, 115.

posals, to open up perspectives and topics of conversation or – to say it in images – to begin opening up paths into the tangled thicket which is the imagery of the Gospel of John. The goal is that some of the paths within the collected papers can be expanded into roads of discussion and markers of orientation through continued research on Johannine imagery.

## 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 “Beispielerzählung” (examples), thereby introducing the basic system of classification for the analysis of New Testament 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 considers 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 Hirtegleichnis nicht besonders geschickt durchgeführt, was freilich seine guten Gründe hat.”<sup>7</sup>

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

<sup>4</sup> Jülicher, *Gleichnisreden* (n. 2), I,25–118.

<sup>5</sup> See Jülicher, op. cit., 117: “Die παροιμίαι des Joh sind den synoptischen παραβολαῖ am wenigsten verwandt.”

<sup>6</sup> Jülicher, op. cit., 115, see also 201 f.; 264.

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

The opinions of Jülicher and Kreyenbühl demonstrate the disregard of Johannine imagery that continued within New Testament exegesis until well into the 20th century.

This is partially due to the impact of Jülicher's "Gleichnisbuch" since New Testament imagery was identified with synoptic parables. Jülicher's attack 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 New Testament imagery of John or Revelation outside of Jülicher's categories.

The pejorative opinion towards the imagery of the Fourth Gospel also originated in certain studies of John's Gospel itself: The works of *Julius Wellhausen* and *Rudolf Bultmann* led to the Johannine exegesis (at least that in Germany) long being dominated by certain form critical, traditions 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 a paper from 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" (1st ed. 1953), *Charles Harold Dodd*<sup>9</sup> was the first to identify the "leading 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 Old Testament and Hellenistic-Jewish symbolic tradition. Against the background of Platonic thought, 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 ful-

<sup>8</sup> O. Cullmann, "Der johanneische Gebrauch doppeldeutiger Ausdrücke als Schlüssel zum Verständnis des 4. Evangeliums," *ThZ* 4 (1948): 360–372.

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

<sup>10</sup> Dodd, op. cit., 143.

<sup>11</sup> Exemplary of this is the highly regarded work of F. Mußner, *Die johanneische Sehweise und die Frage nach dem historischen Jesus* (QD 28; Freiburg, Br. et al. 1965).

fil, according to *Wayne 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.’ Beyond this, only the traditio-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 Whead* (1970), *Birger Olsson* (1974), or *R. Alan Culpepper* (1983) 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 here in the second phase of this outline of research about the “rediscovery” of Johannine imagery. Now the Johannine images were considered in varied contexts and evaluated for complete theological or literary interpretations. One could mention here the works of *René Kieffer*<sup>16</sup>, *Xavier Léon-*

<sup>12</sup> W. Meeks, “Galilee and Judea in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 85 (1966): 159–169; Idem, “The man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72.

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

<sup>14</sup> E. Schweizer, *Ego Eimi: Die religionsgeschichtliche Herkunft und theologische Bedeutung der johanneischen Bildreden, zugleich ein Beitrag zur Quellenfrage des vierten Evangeliums* (FRLANT 38; Göttingen 1939); see also E. Stauffer, “Ἐγώ,” *ThWNT* II:341–360; J. Richter, *Ani hu und Ego eimi* (diss.; Erlangen 1956); H. Zimmermann, *Das absolute ‘Ich bin’ als biblische Offenbarungsformel* (diss.; Bonn 1951); Idem, “Das absolute ‘Ich bin’ als neutestamentliche Offenbarungsformel,” *BZ NF* 4 (1960): 54–69; 266–276.

<sup>15</sup> D. Whead, *The Literary Devices in John’s Gospel* (Basel 1970); Idem, “The Johannine Double Meaning,” *ResQ* 13 (1970): 106–120; B. Olsson, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel: A text-linguistic analysis of John 2:1–11 and 4:1–42* (ConBNT 6; Uppsala 1974); R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia 1983). See also the Collected Papers of R. A. Culpepper, ed., *The Fourth Gospel from Literary Perspective* (Semeia 53; Atlanta 1991); M. W. G. Stibbe, ed., *The Gospel of John as Literature: An anthology of twentieth-century perspectives* (NTTS 17; Leiden et al. 1993); F. F. Segovia, ed., *What is John? Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (SBLSymS 3; Atlanta 1996), and Idem, ed., *What is John? Vol. II: Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (SBLSymS 7; Atlanta 1998).

<sup>16</sup> R. Kieffer, “Different aspects in Johannine Imagery,” in *Aspects on the Johannine Literature: Papers presented at a conference of Scandinavian New Testament exegesis at Uppsala, June 16–19, 1986* (eds. L. Hartman and B. Olsson; ConBNT 18; Uppsala 1987), 74–84; Idem, *Le monde symbolique de Saint Jean* (LD 137; Paris 1989).

*Dufour*<sup>17</sup>, *Charles K. Barrett*<sup>18</sup>, or *Günter Stemberger*<sup>19</sup> who 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, as 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,”<sup>24</sup> 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 narrative 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

<sup>17</sup> X. Léon-Dufour, “Towards a symbolic reading of the Fourth Gospel,” *NTS* 27 (1980–1981): 439–456; 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. J.-D. Kaestli; Le monde de la Bible; Genf 1990), 121–134.

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

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

<sup>20</sup> J. Leal, “El simbolismo histórico del iv evangelio,” *EstBib* 19 (1960): 329–348. Leal described 1) allegorical symbolism; 2) nominal symbolism; 3) biblical symbolism; 4) symbolism in action, and 5) historical symbolism.

<sup>21</sup> S. M. Schneiders, “History and Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel,” in *L’Evangile de Jean: Sources, Rédaction, Théologie* (ed. M. de Jonge; BETL 44; Leuven 1977), 371–376; Eadem, “Symbolism and Sacramental Principle in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Segnie Sacramenti nel Vangelo di Giovanni* (ed. P.-R. Tragan; SA 66; Rome 1977), 221–235; Eadem, “The Foot Washing (John 13.1–20): An Experiment in Hermeneutics,” *ExAud* 1 (1985): 135–146; more recently Eadem, *Written that You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York 1999).

<sup>22</sup> R. Kysar, “Johannine Metaphor – Meaning and Function: A Literary Case Study of John 10:1–18,” *Semeia* 53 (1991): 81–111; Idem, “The Making of Metaphor: Another Reading of John 3:1–15,” in Segovia, ed., *What is John?* (n. 15), 21–42.

<sup>23</sup> J. 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): 421–450; Idem, “Tradition, history and interpretation in John 10,” in *The Shepherd Discourse of John 10 and its Context* (eds. J. Beutler and R. T. Fortna; SNTSMS 67; Cambridge et al. 1991), 53–74.

<sup>24</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy* (n. 15).

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>25</sup>

### *1.3. Third Phase: The Research of the Imagery of John in the past decade (from 1995 on)*

I would like to describe the past ten 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 demonstrated two different ways of gaining access to the figurative world of John:

Otto Schwankl<sup>26</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. The lively metaphor opens – according to the author with reference to Ricoeur’s metaphor theory<sup>27</sup> – a “semantic field of experimentation” and produces a “surplus of meaning” or “consciousness” or even “a growth in being.”<sup>28</sup>

Secondly, Craig Koester, in his instructive work *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, which first appeared in 1995,<sup>29</sup> took “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>30</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>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Culpepper, op. cit., 149–202, here 201.

<sup>26</sup> O. Schwankl, *Licht und Finsternis: Ein metaphorisches Paradigma in den johannineischen Schriften* (HBS 5; Freiburg, Br. et al. 1995).

<sup>27</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Die lebendige Metapher* (Übergänge 12; München 1986; 3rd ed. 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Schwankl, *Licht* (n. 26), 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. Ricoeur zu sprechen, einen Bewusstseins-, ja einen ‘Seinszuwachs’.”

<sup>29</sup> C. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis 1995; 2nd ed. 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Koester, *Symbolism* (n. 29), 4.

<sup>31</sup> Koester, op. cit., 253.

Similarly, later works center attention on either metaphor or symbolism and examine these by way of individual motifs of the Gospel of John. The work of *Dorothee Lee*<sup>32</sup> should be mentioned here as she understands the Johannine narratives as “symbolic narratives” which, in view of the reader, fulfil a pragmatic function.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, individual images such as “water” in *Larry Paul Jones* (1997) and *Wai-yee Ng* (2001)<sup>34</sup> or the “Temple” in *Johanna Rahner* (1998), *Mary L. Coloe* (2001), and *Alan R. Kerr* (2002)<sup>35</sup> are dealt with in separate monographs, each with its own critical development. In contrast, the research studies of *Jan G. van der Watt*<sup>36</sup> or *Ulrich Busse*<sup>37</sup> follow an approach based more on metaphor theory. Jan van der Watt’s attempt to derive inductively a ‘Johannine theory of metaphor’ from the text itself is particularly remarkable. In doing this he recognizes the dynamic interaction of semantic areas on the verse level as a specific Johannine image technique. Ulrich Busse would like to integrate Johannine metaphor into the horizon of ancient rhetoric. One particular benefit of these works is the attention paid to the combining of images into larger networks. In his work “Family of the King,” Jan van der Watt describes how images on the level of macro-text “flow together” into “metaphoric networks,”<sup>38</sup> which can be seen as the principles of formation and coherence of the entire Gospel. Van der Watt sees, in the metaphor of

<sup>32</sup> D. A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (JSNTSup 95; Sheffield 1995); recently Eadem, *Flesh and Glory: Symbol, Gender, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Lee, *Symbolic Narratives* (n. 32), 24, see also 231.

<sup>34</sup> L. P. Jones, *The Symbol of Water in the Gospel of John* (JSNTSup 145; Sheffield 1997); W.-y. Ng, *Water symbolism in John: an eschatological interpretation* (New York et al. 2001).

<sup>35</sup> J. Rahner, “Er aber sprach vom Tempel seines Leibes.” *Jesus von Nazareth als Ort der Offenbarung Gottes im vierten Evangelium* (BBB 117; Bodenheim 1998). M. L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville 2001); A. R. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus’ Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John* (JSNTSup 220; London 2002).

<sup>36</sup> J. G. van der Watt, “Interpreting imagery in John’s Gospel: John 10 and 15 as case studies,” in *Hypomnema* (eds. J. H. Barkhuizen et al.; Pretoria 1992), 272–282; 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* (BIS 47; Leiden 2000).

<sup>37</sup> U. Busse, “Die Tempelmetaphorik als ein Beispiel von implizitem Rekurs auf die biblische Tradition im Johannesevangelium,” in *The Scriptures in the Gospels* (ed. Chr. M. Tuckett; BETL 131; Leuven 1997), 395–428; Idem, *Das Johannesevangelium: Bildlichkeit, Diskurs und Ritual. Mit einer Bibliographie über den Zeitraum 1986–1998* (BETL 162; Leuven 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Van der Watt, *Family* (n. 36), 123 f.137.

family, the most important of these principal image systems,<sup>39</sup> in which diverse complexes of metaphors such as birth, life, eating, love, 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.

In addition to this focus on the *language-linguistic dimension* of Johannine images, it is possible to recognize, in a very simplified way, certain master categories that are definitive in more recent works:

In some works, questions concerning the *traditio- and religious-historical background* of Johannine images are in the forefront, whether one searches for connections to the Old Testament-Hebrew environment or to the Hellenistic-Greek environment, as in studies of the shepherd metaphor.<sup>40</sup> Even most works on the “I am-Sayings” have continued to concentrate on this question, following in the tradition of form criticism.<sup>41</sup>

Other works give the *hermeneutic dimension* of imagery a central position. For Saeed Hamid-Khani<sup>42</sup>, for example, irony, symbolism, metaphor, poetry, dramatic style etc. can be summed up as the “enigmatic quality of the language of the Fourth Gospel,” which develops a hermeneutic func-

<sup>39</sup> Van der Watt, op. cit., 161 f.397: “The Family imagery is the constitutive and most essential imagery in this Gospel.”

<sup>40</sup> See (including earlier work) for the Jewish background A. J. Simonis, *Die Hirtenrede im Johannes-Evangelium: Versuch einer Analyse von Johannes 10,1–18 nach Entstehung, Hintergrund und Inhalt* (AnBib 29; Rome 1967); J. D. M. Derrett, “The Good Shepherd: St. John’s Use of Jewish Halakah and Haggadah,” *ST* 27 (1973): 25–50; P.-R. Tragan, *La parabole du “Pasteur” et ses explications: Jean 10,1–18. La genèse, les milieux littéraires* (SA 67; Rome 1980); J. P. Heil, “Ezekiel 34 and the Narrative Strategy of the Shepherd and Sheep Metaphor in Matthew,” *CBQ* 55 (1993): 698–708; R. 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* (eds. J. Frey and U. Schnelle; WUNT 175; Tübingen 2004), 81–116; the Hellenistic context is pointed out by J. Whittaker, “A Hellenistic Context for John 10,29,” *VC* 24 (1970): 241–244; A. Reinhartz, *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel* (SBLMS 45; Atlanta 1992), 50–70, or J. Neyrey, S. J., “The ‘Noble Shepherd’ in John 10: Cultural and Rhetorical Background,” *JBL* 120 (2001): 267–291.

<sup>41</sup> R. M. Ball, “*I am*” in *John’s Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications* (JSNTSup 124; Sheffield 1996); C. H. Williams, *I am He: The interpretation of ‘aní hū’ in Jewish and early Christian Literature* (WUNT 2/113; Tübingen 2000); C. Cebulj, *Ich bin es: Studien zur Identitätsbildung im Johannesevangelium* (SBB 44; Stuttgart 2000), attempts to connect traditional and sociological questions; carrying on with this topic are the works of H. Thyne, “Ich bin das Licht der Welt: Das Ich- und Ich-Bin-Sagen Jesu im Johannesevangelium,” *JAC* 35 (1992): 19–46; Idem, “Ich-bin-Worte,” *RAC* 17:147–213.

<sup>42</sup> S. Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and concealment of Christ: a theological inquiry into the elusive language of the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT 2/120; Tübingen 2000).

tion exactly because of its mysteriousness. In the end, the ambiguity of language assists Christological and pneumatological perception.

The *theological function* of Johannine images is referred to again and again, but in some works this dimension receives special emphasis. For *Mary Coloe*, the imagery has an ecclesiastical function: “The imagery of the Temple is transferred from Jesus to the Christian community, indicating its identity and role.”<sup>43</sup> For me, John especially uses imagery in expressing his Christological message. It is in and through figurative language that Christological reflection takes place.<sup>44</sup>

## 2. A Terminological Path: The Johannine figurative term “Paroimia”

One characteristic feature of Johannine imagery is that the fourth evangelist indicates a self-consciousness about his own figurative form of speech. This is made clear in the use of figurative terms. John does not use the term *παραβολή*, as is common in the synoptic tradition, to characterize the figurative speech of Jesus. Also not to be found in the Gospel of John are the terms of ancient rhetoric such as *μεταφορά* (metaphor), *ἀλληγορία* (allegory), *σύμβολον* (symbol), which are prominent in later theoretical discussion. However, other terms are used, which make clear how the Fourth Gospel conceives of imagery. Among the most important are the terms *παροιμία* and *σημεῖον*, which can be co-ordinated with further terms such as *ἀληθινός κτλ.*<sup>45</sup>

A few aspects of the rarely studied term *παροιμία* will be discussed below.<sup>46</sup> What is the meaning of this term? Does it perhaps contain a key to understanding the imagery of John?

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<sup>43</sup> Coloe, *God* (n. 35), 3.220.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Zimmermann, *Christologie* (n. 3).

<sup>45</sup> See the contribution of R. Hirsch-Luipold, “Klartext in Bildern: *ἀληθινός κτλ., παροιμία – παρρησία, σημεῖον* als Signalwörter für eine bildhafte Darstellungsform im Johannesevangelium,” 61–102 (in this volume).

<sup>46</sup> For more detail see S. Kaipuram, *Paroimiai in the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Parables of Jesus’ Self-Revelation* (Rome 1993); chap. II; P. Chatelion Counet, “Paroimiai (John 16:25): A Post-Hermeneutical Model,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis* (eds. P. Pokorný and J. Roskovec; WUNT 153; Tübingen 2002), 252–269; Zimmermann, *Christologie* (n. 3), 30–45, as well as the contributions of U. Poplutz, “Paroimia und Parabolē: Gleichniskonzepte bei Johannes und Markus,” 103–120, and Hirsch-Luipold, “Klartext” (n. 45) in this volume.

### 2.1. Etymology and Function of ‘paroimia’ in ancient times

First some general observations about the etymology and use of παροιμία in ancient writings:

In ancient Greek literature since Aeschylus<sup>47</sup>, παροιμία is found almost exclusively to have the meaning “proverb” and to denote a statement of folk wisdom that distinguishes itself stylistically through brevity, assonance, parallelism and rhyme.<sup>48</sup> We often find introductory phrases such as “according to the proverb” (κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν<sup>49</sup>), or “as also the proverb (says)” (ὅθεν καὶ ἡ παροιμία<sup>50</sup>), which lead up to the quotation or paraphrasing of a specific proverb. The meaning of παροιμία as proverb continued also in *Hellenistic-Jewish literature* (LXX, Philo) and in the NT. The LXX translates the Hebrew בָּשָׂר (Prov 1:1; 26:7; Sir 6:35; 47:17<sup>51</sup>) as παροιμία and uses the term as a heading for the proverbs of Solomon (Prov 1:1).

Correspondingly, Philo uses this lexeme as a summarizing title for the Book of Proverbs. In addition, there are several further instances in Philo in which παροιμία is used, without exception, with the meaning “proverb.”<sup>52</sup> In 2 Pet 2:22, the only example in the New Testament outside of the Gospel of John, Prov 26:11 as well as another proverb is mentioned.

Of course there are also instances in which the term παροιμία is used independently of a concrete example. In Sir 6:35 and 8:8, παροιμία is parallel to “wisdom sayings” (διήγημα σοφῶν) and the term is also synonymous with παραβολή (Sir 39:3; 47:17). It could be assumed here that παροιμία cannot be limited to a generic term but, as is suggested by its etymology, was also understood as a manner of speech, a *modus dicendi*.

<sup>47</sup> This noun is mentioned first in Aeschyl. Ag. 264 (see the quotation in Poplutz, “Paroimia” [n. 46], 106) frequently also by Herodot. In epic poems, in elegy and in melic poetry this word does not appear – a fact that according to Bieler might be explained by metrical reasons. See L. Bieler, “Die Namen des Sprichworts in den klassischen Sprachen,” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 85 (1936): 240–253, here 240.

<sup>48</sup> An example of this use of the term can be taken from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, Arist. Rhet. I, 1371b, as here four proverbs are cited under the term παροιμία. For further findings cf. Arist. Rhet. I, 1363a; 1372b; 1373a; 1376a; 1383b; II, 1384a; 1395a; III, 1413a. Platon makes use of παροιμία in the meaning “proverb,” see for example Plat. Symp. 174b; 222b; Cra. 384afin; Resp. I 329a; IV 424a; VI 492e; see G. Damschen, “Paroimia,” *DNP* 9.351; for the formal use cf. esp. K. Rupprecht, “Παροιμία,” PW 18,4:1707–1735, here 1713 ff.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. for example Plat. Symp. 222b; Resp. IV 424a; VI 492e; Arist. Rhet. I, 1372b; Philo Abr. 235; Mos. I 22.156; Legat. 126; QG II frg. 54c.

<sup>50</sup> Arist. Rhet. I, 1371b; 1383b; II 1384a et al.

<sup>51</sup> For Sir 18:29 and 39:3 a hebrew copy is missing, in Sir 8:8 חִידָה (riddle) is in the Hebrew text, on these references see below.

<sup>52</sup> Philo Abr. 235; Mos. I 22.156; II 29; Praem. 150; Legat. 126; QG II frg. 54c.

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