

## I. Introduction



Like Goldilocks's three bears, introductions to the Fourth Gospel come in different sizes: small, medium,<sup>1</sup> and large.<sup>2</sup> Typically, they contain standard areas of investigation, such as: author, place of composition, and date; relationship of the Fourth Gospel to the synoptic Gospels; background, whether Israelite and/or Greco-Roman; sociological character of the readers of the Gospel (e.g., a sect in tension with the synagogue); unity of the document; and theories of its development over time and its changing perspectives. Many introductions, moreover, regularly give attention to theology by attending to special vocabulary (light, see, know), distinctive themes ("sacraments" and eschatology), topics (revelation, signs/miracles, knowledge), and Christology ("prophet," "king," "Messiah," "I AM," and "Son of Man"). The commentaries cited in the notes provide an excellent discussion of these topics, and readers are urged to consult them. But here I present a different kind of introduction, one more suited to the specific perspective of this commentary and the series in which it is published. The New Cambridge Bible Commentary series brings to readers a "socio-rhetorical" perspective for interpreting biblical documents,<sup>3</sup> drawing especially on literary/rhetorical and cultural perspectives. Therefore the topics discussed in this introduction are commensurate with the perspective of this commentary and the series to which it belongs: the social location of the author

<sup>1</sup> Robert Kysar, "The Fourth Gospel in Recent Research," *ANRW* 2.25.3 (1984), 2391–2480; and George Beasley-Murray, *John* 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), xxxii–xciii.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. Francis J. Moloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003); and Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1.3–330.

<sup>3</sup> As editor, Ben Witherington III (*Revelation* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003]) described the focus of this series thus: "The NCBC takes advantage of many of the rewards provided by scholarly research over the past four decades. Volumes utilize recent gains in rhetorical criticism, social scientific study of the Scriptures, narrative criticism, and other developing disciplines to exploit the growing edges in biblical studies."

(what he knows); rhetoric, literary patterns, and language; Johannine characters in cultural perspective; and social-scientific models needed to interpret this ancient document.

#### THE SOCIAL LOCATION OF THE AUTHOR

Current scholarship distinguishes between a “writer” of this Gospel and an “author.”<sup>4</sup> A writer may only take dictation, whereas the author imagines the project, organizes the materials, and establishes the editorial point of view. Despite the best labors of Johannine scholarship, we are still uncertain who the author is or where and when the document was written and revised. Nevertheless, we can learn much about the author by asking a new question: What does he know?<sup>5</sup>

*Geography.* The author knows about *Judea*<sup>6</sup> (Bethany, Jerusalem), *Samaria* (Sychar, Jacob’s well, and the custom that Israelites and Samaritans “do not share things in common,” 4:9), and *Galilee* (Bethsaida, Cana, Capernaum, Nazareth, Sea of Galilee/Sea of Tiberias). He is even aware of the negative cachet of Nazareth and Galilee (1:46; 7:31, 41–43). Within Jerusalem, he tells us of two pools, Bethzatha (5:1) and Siloam (9:7), the residence of the high priest Annas (18:13–18), and Pilate’s praetorium (18:28). He knows much about the geography of Jerusalem’s temple: He can identify the “treasury” (8:20), the “portico of Solomon” (10:23), and the place where the incident in 2:13–16 was described. In many of these things, he displays a unique and sharper knowledge than the authors of the synoptic Gospels (see 2:20).

*Temple Feasts and Sabbath.* Whereas the synoptic Gospels know of only one Passover in the career of Jesus, this author knows of three, two celebrated in Jerusalem and one in Galilee. He knows a range of pilgrimage feasts that span the year and the ritual objects characteristic of them: Passover and its specially treated lamb (2:13; 6:4; 12:1; 19:36); Booths (7:1–8:58) and its petitions for sunlight and rains; Dedication (10:22); and an unnamed festival (5:1). He knows of a conflict between “this mountain” in Samaria and its rival in Jerusalem as the legitimate place of worship. Finally, he treats Sabbath observance differently

<sup>4</sup> R. E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (2003), 189–96.

<sup>5</sup> See Vernon K. Robbins, “The Social Location of the Implied Author of Luke-Acts,” in Jerome H. Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 333–60; and Jerome H. Neyrey, “The Social Location of Paul: How Paul Was Educated and What He Could Compose as Indices of His Social Location,” in David B. Gowler, L. Gregory Bloomquist, and Duane F. Watson, eds., *Fabrics of Discourse: Essays in Honor of Vernon K. Robbins* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 126–64.

<sup>6</sup> Ingo Broer, “Knowledge of Palestine in the Fourth Gospel?” in Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher, eds., *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 83–90.

from the other Gospels, for he argues that just as God works on the Sabbath, so does he (5:16–17), and that if Moses' authorization to circumcise on the Sabbath does not break the Law, then surely an act that made a man's body whole does not break it (7:22–23).

*Scripture and Midrashic Interpretation.* The author compares Jesus with two of Israel's great patriarchs ("greater than our father Jacob . . . greater than Abraham"), drawing not only on the Scriptures but also midrashic interpretations of them. As regards the Scriptures, he claims that Moses will change his traditional role of advocate to that of prosecutor of Israel (5:45), and he claims that Isaiah explains why so many did not become Jesus' followers (12:38–40). The author's knowledge of and use of the midrashic interpretations about psalms and patriarchs suggest that he has a school education, such as was found in the *bet ha-midrash*.<sup>7</sup> For example, it has been argued that John 6 is an elaborate midrash on Passover and manna.<sup>8</sup> A text, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat" (6:31), is cited and developed word by word, denying the text to Israel and claiming it for Jesus and his group. In the story of Abraham, the author distinguishes those who descend from Ishmael (the slave and illegitimate son, who did not remain in the house) from those descended from Isaac (the freeborn son and legitimate heir, who remains in the paternal house, 8:33–44), a school interpretation similar to that in Galatians 4:21–30. He utilizes the midrash that Cain is the firstborn of Satan and ancestor of the audience. They are all liars and murderers from the beginning (8:44).<sup>9</sup> And he knows the traditional midrash about Psalm 82:6 apropos of the charge that Jesus is equal to God.<sup>10</sup>

*Literary Acumen.* As far as his rhetorical skills are concerned, the author can write prologues (1:1–18; 13:1–3) and conclusions (12:1–50). From rhetorical handbooks, he knows the Greco-Roman principle of uniqueness<sup>11</sup> used for amplifying praise ("no one has ever but . . .," "he is the unique son . . .," "he is the first and only one to do . . ."); honor ascribed by comparison (Jesus vs. Moses, 1:17); and the use of questions as weapons. He is familiar with certain literary forms found both in Israelite and Greco-Roman literature: the miracle (5:2–9; 9:1–9; 11:1–44) and the farewell address (14:1–17:26). Most interestingly, the author

<sup>7</sup> Although the author insists that Jesus had no formal education (7:15), this does not exclude the author. For materials on midrash and schools of midrash, see Gary G. Porton, "Midrash: Palestinian Jews and the Hebrew Bible in the Greco-Roman Period," *ANRW* 2.19.2 (1979), 103–38; and also R. Alan Culpepper, *The Johannine School* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 261–90.

<sup>8</sup> Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

<sup>9</sup> See Nils A. Dahl, "Der Erstegebene Satans und der Vater des Teufels," in W. Eltester, ed., *Apophoreta* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), 70–84.

<sup>10</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, "'I Said: You are Gods': Psalm 82 and John 10," *JBL* 108 (1989), 647–63.

<sup>11</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, "Uniqueness: 'First,' 'Only,' 'One of a Few,' and 'No One Else': Rhetoric, and the Doxologies in 1 Timothy," *Biblica* 86 (2005), 59–87.

interprets Jesus' death according to the commonplace of a "noble death," celebrated in Greek funeral oratory (10:11–18), and he employs most of the elements of the encomium taught in the second level of Hellenistic education: origins (place and parents), nurture and training, virtues, and death and posthumous honors.

*Israelite and Greco-Roman Theology.*<sup>12</sup> The author has a solid grasp of Israelite God-talk. He utilizes the midrashic tradition that God has two basic powers (creative and eschatological), both of which he bestows on Jesus. The author interprets the name Jesus manifests, "I AM," in two senses (8:24, 28; 8:58). First, "I AM" is the name of the appearing deity of the Scriptures, but since no one has ever seen God (1:18), those receiving appearances must have seen the person who properly bears the divine name, "I AM." Second, in several places, "I AM" is juxtaposed with mortals who came into being and pass out of it (8:56–58). Thus the author appreciates the Hellenistic topos that a true deity is eternal in the past and imperishable in the future.<sup>13</sup> Whereas Jesus himself repeats the key element of Israel's theology, namely monotheism (17:3), the crowds abandon God who is King for King Caesar (19:15).

*Political Scene.* Although the author knows the form of Judean and Roman trials, he especially appreciates the judge's examination of the accused in his portrayal of two such scrutinies of Jesus by Pilate (18:33–38; 19:8–11). Not only does he know that judges should judge justly and not according to appearances (7:24; 8:15) but also that according to the law, a person accused has a right to speak before the court (7:51). Of all the evangelists, the author most appreciates patron–client relationships. He knows that Pilate is Caesar's "friend" (that is, his client), and he records Jesus making his disciple–servants his "friends" (15:13–15).

**Traditions in John and the Synoptics.** Although modern scholarship has been unable to prove Johannine dependency on any one of the synoptics, most admit that the author frequently draws on traditions shared with those Gospels.<sup>14</sup> Although this is not an exhaustive list, the author of the Fourth Gospel knows: (1) John the Baptizer witnessing to Jesus; (2) healings (cure of the paralytic and the blind man; raising of the dead); (3) the multiplication of loaves and the walking on the water; (4) the entrance into Jerusalem; (5) anointing of Jesus' feet at a banquet; (6) the challenge to the Temple; (7) the arrest, trial, and execution of Jesus; (8) the burial and the empty tomb; and (9) resurrection appearances.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, "'My Lord and My God': The Divinity of Jesus in John's Gospel," *SBLSP* (1986), 152–71.

<sup>13</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, "'Without Beginning of Days or End of Life' (Hebrews 7:3): Topos for a True Deity," *CBQ* 53 (1991), 439–55.

<sup>14</sup> For a convenient survey of this, see R. E. Brown, *Introduction to the Gospel of John* (2003), 90–105.

<sup>15</sup> Other items include "the Twelve" (6:67–71); the name of the high priest, Caiaphas (11:49; 18:28); and a miraculous catch of fish (21:5–11). See also Raymond E. Brown, "Incidents that Are Units in the Synoptic Gospels but Dispersed in St. John," *CBQ* 23 (1961), 143–60.

However one evaluates dependence or independence, the author knows a great deal about the Jesus tradition.

What, then, is the social location of the author? Because of all of the things he knows and composes, he would seem to have been educated at least to the second level of education in antiquity, the period during which students learned to compose according to certain genres. And because education was status-specific,<sup>16</sup> this argues that the author was not an illiterate peasant (Acts 4:13). Yet he gives little evidence of an elite formal training such as Luke and Paul had. He is likely the client or retainer of someone with resources sufficient to provide for the writing of such a document. Although his Greek may lack sophistication, the knowledge and craft of the author suggest a person of considerable education and social standing.

#### CHARACTERS

Scholarship on the *dramatis personae* of the Fourth Gospel has been both intense and productive. Readers have always sensed that its characters are symbolic in some sense, but Raymond Collins<sup>17</sup> shaped the discussion by considering them as “representative figures”: They represent in a homiletic context traits either praiseworthy or blameworthy within the Johannine group. Alan Culpepper advanced this: “The characters represent a continuum of response to Jesus. . . . The characters are, therefore, particular sorts of choosers.”<sup>18</sup> His continuum contains these responses: (1) rejection and tepid acceptance of Jesus; (2) scrutiny of reactions to Jesus’ signs and wonders, noting that some people argue that God must be the source of these, whereas others see merely the eating of a surfeit of bread; (3) receptivity to Jesus’ words, which distinguishes insiders or outsiders; (4) misunderstandings that end either in enlightenment of insiders or proof that the interlocutors simply lack the ability to learn; (5) select disciples, who might receive unique information, demonstration of Jesus’ greatest gift (the raising of Lazarus), or simply be known as “beloved” disciples; and (6) defection (6:66) and treason, indicating hate, not love, of Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

Craig Koester added to this discussion insights about how characters were drawn in ancient speeches and drama.<sup>20</sup> He notes that although ancient characters were individuals (Nicodemus is *not* the Samaritan woman), they nevertheless manifest representative, formal ways of speaking and acting. Moreover, Koester cites Aristotle on “character”: “Character is that which reveals choice,

<sup>16</sup> J. H. Neyrey, “The Social Location of Paul,” in *Fabrics of Discourse* (2003), 156–61, and the literature cited therein.

<sup>17</sup> Raymond Collins, “Representative Figures in the Fourth Gospel,” *Downside Review* 94 (1976), 26–46, 118–32.

<sup>18</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 104.

<sup>19</sup> R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (1983), 146–48.

<sup>20</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 36–38.

shows what sort of thing a man chooses or avoids . . . so those speeches convey no character in which there is nothing whatever which the speaker chooses or avoids" (*Poet.* 6.24). Finally, he notes how characters provide positive and negative examples in the pursuit of a suitable manner of life. These studies have shaped the way readers of the Fourth Gospel interpret its dramatis personae. It is now accepted wisdom to examine the Johannine characters as representative of some trait important to the group or along some continuum of response to Jesus or according to the choices made concerning Jesus.

We gain, moreover, considerable benefit from the use of social-science studies of types of personalities, which radically contrasts modern individualists with ancient group-oriented persons.<sup>21</sup> Persons in ancient *bioi*, history, and encomia were praised according to fixed conventional canons, which are ideal places to discover the culturally accepted criteria of status and honor. An author would ask: Where was he born? Who were his parents and ancestors? Who were his teachers? What was his trade? What was his name? To what group did he belong? A noble and honorable person is born in a noble place (Tarsus, Acts 21:39; Jerusalem, Ps 87:5–6). Conversely, nothing noble can come from Nazareth (1:46), nor anyone important from Galilee (7:41–43, 52). People tended to be known in terms of their fathers (e.g., Simon, son of Jonah; James and John, sons of Zebedee).<sup>22</sup> They are presumed to be "chips off the old block" (John 8:38–44), for better or worse. Males are known by their trade (fishermen, carpenters, tax collectors) or role (high priests, priests, scribes, procurator, and Caesar). Except for Nicodemus (3:1), we do not know the names of any other Pharisees or scribes because to know their affiliation or group is to know all about them. Note, for example, what the Pharisees say to the man born blind: "You are his disciples. We are the disciples of Moses" (9:28). Thus, people are known in terms of the teacher<sup>23</sup> they profess to follow.<sup>24</sup> Persons, moreover, were always embedded in someone else; wives in husbands, children in parents, and the like. Plutarch provides an excellent example of this, which minimizes individualism in favor of embeddedness:

The nurse rules the infant, the teacher the boy, the gymnasiarch the youth, his admirer the young man who, when he comes of age, is ruled by law and his commanding general. No one is his own master, no one is unrestricted. (*Dialogue on Love* 754D).

<sup>21</sup> See Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, "First-Century Personality: Dyadic, Not Individualistic," in Jerome H. Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 67–96; and their *Portraits of Paul: An Archeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 153–201.

<sup>22</sup> See Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 63–67.

<sup>23</sup> We call attention to scholars now using "social-identity theory" for studying Paul and John. See Philip F. Esler, *Galatians* (London: Routledge, 1998); and Philip F. Esler and Ronald A. Piper, "Lazarus, Mary and Martha as Group Prototypes: Social Identity, Collective Memory and John 11–12," forthcoming.

<sup>24</sup> On just this point, see R. A. Culpepper, *The Johannine School* (1975), especially 171–96.

John presents Jesus as a group-oriented person. He is and remains totally embedded in his heavenly Father, even resting on his heart (1:18). He speaks and does all, but only what his Father instructs him: His Father gives him his own powers (5:19–28), reveals only to him unique words and mysteries, and guides and directs his career from his descent from heaven to his “lifting up” and his “glorification” by God. Jesus, faithful and loyal to the one who sent him, never acts on his own. He is, moreover, God’s broker; he is the one who is “sent” – that is, agent and intermediary.<sup>25</sup> It should be part of our reading of this gospel to note the group-oriented characteristics of friend and foe. Disciples, for example, hear Jesus’ voice (10:3–5), accept his teachings (12:23–26), are instructed in his secrets (15:15), and imitate his behavior (13:12–17).

#### ROLE AND STATUS

Formal use of the social-science concepts of role and status is extremely helpful in assessing the dramatis personae of the Fourth Gospel. Because the Johannine group is a social organization, we need to know who plays what role and who enjoys what status.<sup>26</sup> “Status” differs from “role” in that status is “a recognized position that a person occupies within society . . . [which] determines where he or she fits in relationship to everyone else.”<sup>27</sup> “Status” suggests verticality, a ranking of people according to some criteria of worth or excellence. “Role” has to do with behavior and is “the socially recognized position of a person which entails rights and duties.”<sup>28</sup> Put simply, status defines who one is socially – male or female, slave or free, Judean or Gentile – whereas role defines what one is expected to do socially on the basis of status. Whereas one *has* status, one *plays* a role.

Roles in the Fourth Gospel are easier to identify than status. We learn of family members, those of Jesus and then of other characters.<sup>29</sup> Jesus’ family consists of Joseph, his father (6:42); God, his Father; his mother (2:1–12; 19:26–27); his aunt (19:25); and his brothers (7:3–5). Apart from Jesus’ blood relatives, other brothers and sisters appear: Andrew and Peter (1:40); Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (11:1); and the sons of Zebedee (21:2). All persons in familial roles have rights and duties, and their roles last as long as the relationship endures. Furthermore, the various roles of Jesus are either acknowledged or denied, such as “prophet” (6:14; 7:52; 9:17), “king” (6:15; 12:13; 18:33–37), “Messiah” (1:41; 4:25–26; 7:31, 41–42),

<sup>25</sup> Peder Borgen, “God’s Agent in the Fourth Gospel,” in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Religions in Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 137–48.

<sup>26</sup> A full exposition of this material is deferred until the commentary on John 20 because only then will readers have observed the characters well enough to make this analysis.

<sup>27</sup> Raymond Scupin and Christopher DeCorse, *Anthropology and Global Perspective* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 280.

<sup>28</sup> A. Paul Hare, “Groups: Role Structure,” *IESS* 6.283.

<sup>29</sup> On the family of Jesus, see Sjef van Tilborg, *Imaginative Love* (Leiden: Brill, 1993); and Jan G. Van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel According to John* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 304–40.



and “teacher” (1:38; 3:2; 20:16). Similarly, we know of other roles: that of a Judean leader (3:2), high priests (11:49–51; 18:13–26), a “royal official” (4:46), a Roman procurator (chs. 18–19), and Caesar, who is owed the loyalty of his “friend” Pilate (19:12). Moreover, we know that some people play the role of ill persons: a man crippled for thirty-eight years (5:5), a man born blind (9:1), and a dying/dead man (11:1–42). Finally, members of the Jesus group are sometimes ascribed a role, such as “the ones sent”; that is, people with duties either to acclaim Jesus or to purify in his name (17:17; 20:21). Finally, Jesus will designate one person the chief shepherd of the group (21:15–19). It is hotly contested whether the Samaritan woman and Mary Magdalene have formal roles.

But “status” seems to be more important in this Gospel than roles because a character can enjoy very high status without playing a role. In the gender-divided world of antiquity, status begins with knowledge that a person is either male or female.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, gender, such as female, is never an abstraction because “Every woman is a sister, daughter, wife, mother or aunt, and it is the role and relationship that usually determines how she will be perceived and treated.”<sup>31</sup> The same can be said of males, who are brothers, sons, husbands, uncles, and so on. Oddly, gender does not immediately suggest status in the Fourth Gospel, for on occasion males do female tasks (e.g., Jesus giving water to the Samaritan woman, 4:10, 15) and females do male tasks (e.g., Mary roaming about seeking to find and carry away a corpse, 20:13, 15). But the critical issue for assessing the status of the characters in John lies in discerning the criteria whereby status is awarded or denied. Although readers can only discover these criteria by working their way through the entire gospel narrative, we anticipate the discussion of this in the commentary on John 20 by listing six criteria for high status in the Johannine group: (1) physical closeness to Jesus (anointing his feet, reclining on his breast, clasping his feet, touching his hand and side); (2) bold public acknowledgment of Jesus; (3) reception of revelations, secrets, and special knowledge; (4) imitation of Jesus (grain of wheat; greater love . . . than to lay down one’s life); (5) enjoying the label “beloved,” and (6) being called by name.<sup>32</sup> The six criteria for high status uniquely apply only to distinctive Johannine characters (Lazarus, Martha, Mary, the man born blind, the Beloved Disciple, and Mary Magdalene). It would appear that although they

<sup>30</sup> In the ancient gender-divided world, males and females were separated according to space, time, task, and tools; see Jerome H. Neyrey, “Jesus, Gender and the Gospel of Matthew,” *Semeia Studies* 45 (2003), 43–52.

<sup>31</sup> The quotation is from Lila Abu-Lughod’s *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), cited in John J. Pilch, *Introducing the Cultural Context of the Old Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 117.

<sup>32</sup> Although not marks of the highest status just listed, certain characters enjoyed status as insiders because they moved from darkness to light and from “not in the know” to “in the know.” The only blessing in the Fourth Gospel is pronounced over those who “have not seen but believed” (20:29). Finally, certain characters, such as Nathanael, struggle through difficulties in accepting Jesus (1:45–49).



enjoy very high status, they do not have formal roles. In contrast, traditional figures, such as Andrew and Peter and the sons of Zebedee, part of “the Twelve,” have much lower status, even though they appear to be the only people with ascribed roles.<sup>33</sup>

#### REVEALING AND CONCEALING: LANGUAGE AND THE STRATEGIES OF SECRECY

Bultmann quipped that in the Fourth Gospel Jesus reveals<sup>34</sup> that he is the Revealer, but not much else. This “information control” emerges as a central phenomenon in John and provides significant clues to the social dynamics of the community for which it was written. Writing on secrecy, Stanton K. Tefft notes that all peoples engage in some form of secrecy or information control,<sup>35</sup> a point also made by Kees Bolle: “Not only is there no religion without secrecy, but there is no human existence without it.”<sup>36</sup> “Information control” is the label for the process whereby secrets, information, and revelations are shared with some but not with others. “Information control,” moreover, not only describes Jesus’ activity but clues the audience in to distinguishing insiders from outsiders in terms of “who knows what and when.”

**The Revealer.** God remains “unknown” by all except Jesus, for “no one has ever seen God” (1:18; 5:37; 6:46). Jesus speaks the words of God, even if many do not grasp their meaning (3:34). Some who receive Jesus’ revelation then disclose it to others (1:35–50). Nevertheless, at all levels, we observe a process of selected disclosure.

**Selective Disclosure.** Given the strategy of information control and concealment, a careful reader will ask who in the narrative knows what and when? The answer to these questions provides data for ranking and classifying insiders. In Samaria, the Samaritan woman is progressively told secrets by Jesus. She begins the story as a character to whom Jesus said, “If only you knew . . . who it is who said to you ‘Give me to drink,’ you would have asked him . . .” (4:10). Entrusted with more secrets, she asks Jesus to “Give me this water” (4:15). Later she receives remarkable information (4:20–24), even a revelation of Jesus as the Messiah (4:26). The man born blind is gradually enlightened, from merely knowing Jesus’ name, to acclaiming him a prophet, and then arguing that he

<sup>33</sup> This phenomenon has long puzzled commentators; see Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 69–91.

<sup>34</sup> See Saeed Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ: A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

<sup>35</sup> Stanton K. Tefft, *Secrecy: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1980), 39.

<sup>36</sup> Kees W. Bolle, *Secrecy in Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 1.

must enjoy God's favor (9:30–33). Jesus himself catechizes the man to believe in the "Son of man" (9:35–38). Martha receives special information from Jesus, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (11:25), which prompts her to acknowledge Jesus as "Messiah, the Son of God." At the last meal, Jesus reveals the identity of his betrayer, but only to the Beloved Disciple (13:23–26). After that meal, select disciples enjoy Jesus' private disclosure of secrets during the Farewell Address: the meaning of the footwashing (13:12–17); information about where he is going (14:1–7); identification of his replacement, who will disclose still more controlled information (14:26); prophecies of future hard times (15:18–19; 16:1–4, 31–33); explanation of some of his statements that seem ambiguous (16:16–22); and a time when "figures," or information control, will no longer be used (16:25–30). The disclosure of secrets continues after Jesus' resurrection. Mary Magdalene receives both a Christophany at the empty tomb and a revelation of a remarkable secret that she is commanded to disclose to Jesus' "brethren": "Go to my brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (20:17). Finally, Peter is given special information about the death he would die in order to glorify God (21:18–19). Information, then, is selectively disclosed, but only to certain persons.

**Asides and Footnotes.** The author selectively discloses to his audience information not even known to the narrative characters. Besides the translation of certain Semitic terms into Greek (1:38, 41, 42; 4:25; 5:2; 9:7; 19:13, 17; 20:16), we are given "footnotes" and "asides."<sup>37</sup> As M. C. Tenny has shown (see n.37), some of these inform the reader of times and places (6:4; 7:2; 9:14; 10:22–23; 11:17), customs (4:9; 19:40), recollections of the disciples (2:22; 12:16), explanations of actions or situations (2:9; 4:2; 7:5, 39; 11:51; 12:6; 19:36–37; 21:19), identification of persons (6:71; 7:50; 11:2; 18:10, 14, 40; 19:38–39), and indications of what Jesus knows (2:24–25; 6:6; 13:1, 3). The narrator, moreover, gives special information about himself to this select audience (1:14b; 19:35; 21:24–25), and on one occasion he corrects a popular rumor (21:22–23). Thus secrets are shared, but only with special people. Information is always controlled.

**Jesus Knows All Secrets.** Even if people try to keep their thoughts secret, Jesus can read hearts, pierce ambiguity and deception, and know all secrets. There is no information that Jesus does not know. Early in the narrative, we are told that he did not trust himself with people: "Because he knew all people . . . he himself knew what was in man" (2:24–25). The author demonstrates repeatedly that Jesus knows the secret thoughts and motivations of those with whom he speaks:

<sup>37</sup> J. J. O'Rourke, "Asides in the Gospel of John," *NovT* 21 (1979), 210–29; M. C. Tenny, "The Footnotes of John's Gospel," *BSac* 117 (1960), 350–64.