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978-0-521-09022-3 - The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God: Marriage in the Fourth Gospel

Jocelyn McWhirter

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 1

ALLUSIONS TO BIBLICAL TEXTS  
ABOUT MARRIAGE

“You see that everywhere the mysteries are in agreement,” writes Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–ca. 253). “You see the patterns of the New and Old Testament to be harmonious.”<sup>1</sup> Origen’s belief in the theological unity of the Bible leads him to recognize all kinds of parallels between passages in the New Testament and portions of Israel’s Scriptures. Among these are similarities between two of John’s stories and certain biblical texts that involve marriage. In his *Commentary on John*, for example, he compares the Samaritan woman of John 4:4–42 with Rebekah in Gen. 24:1–67. Just as Rebekah meets Abraham’s servant at a well, so the Samaritan woman meets Jesus at a well. Origen notes one important difference: whereas Rebekah gives Abraham’s servant a drink from her water jar and does not leave it behind (Gen. 24:18), the Samaritan woman accepts the water of eternal life from Jesus and forsakes her own jar – that is, her former opinions (John 4:28).<sup>2</sup> In his *Genesis Homily*, Origen goes on to extend the connection to two other biblical scenes: the stories of Jacob and Rachel in Gen. 29:1–20 and of Moses and Zipporah in Exod. 2:15–22. He then propounds the unified theological message of the Old and New Testament accounts: “There, one comes to the wells and the waters that brides may be found; and the church is united to Christ in the bath of water.”<sup>3</sup>

Origen also perceives a connection between John’s story of the anointing at Bethany and the Song of Songs. He interprets Song 1:12, “While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance,” in light of John 12:3, “Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure

<sup>1</sup> Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 10.5, in *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (trans. Ronald E. Heine; FC 71; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 167.

<sup>2</sup> Origen, *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* 13.175–78, in *Commentary on the Gospel According to John: Books 13–32* (trans. Ronald E. Heine; FC 89; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 105–6.

<sup>3</sup> Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 10.5.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09022-3 - The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God: Marriage in the Fourth Gospel

Jocelyn McWhirter

Excerpt

[More information](#)2 *The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God*

nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."<sup>4</sup> Origen contends that the spiritual meaning of the bride's nard giving forth its odor is found in John's anointing story. As Mary (the soul) anoints Jesus, the nard absorbs Jesus' fragrance (his teaching and the Holy Spirit). That fragrance is then transferred back to Mary (the soul) by means of her hair, and eventually fills the house (the soul, the church, or the world).<sup>5</sup>

Origen is not the only ancient interpreter to observe similarities between stories in John's Gospel and biblical texts about marriage. His contemporary Hippolytus (who was Bishop of Rome from 222 to 235) notices parallels between Song 3:1–4 and John's tomb scene. Song of Songs 3:1–4 describes the nocturnal search of a woman for her beloved. Hippolytus specifically quotes John 20:16–17 to support his interpretation of Song 3:1–4 as a prophecy about the women in the four Gospels who go to the tomb on Easter morning.<sup>6</sup> John 20:16–17 shows how the women look for Jesus by night, how they encounter watchmen (the angels), and how they finally find Jesus and hold him – just like the woman in the Song of Songs.<sup>7</sup>

Most twenty-first-century exegetes would find several aspects of these third-century interpretations untenable. Allegorical readings of the New Testament have been widely discredited since the rise of rationalism in the eighteenth century. Origen would be hard-pressed today to persuade most historical and literary critics that John's anointing story is really about the soul receiving Jesus' teaching and then transmitting it to the world. He would find it even more difficult to persuade most feminist interpreters that the Samaritan woman and Mary of Bethany are symbolic brides who represent believers in relationship to Jesus. Eighteenth-century rationalism has also called into question

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations in English are taken from the NRSV.

<sup>5</sup> Origen, *Comm. Cant.* 2.9, in *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies* (trans. R. P. Lawson; ACW 26; Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1957), 160–61. See also his *Hom. Cant.* 2.2 (in ACW 26, 285–86). Nobody knows whether Origen recognized any other connections between the Song of Songs and the Fourth Gospel, since the greater part of his commentaries on both books has been lost.

<sup>6</sup> Since Hippolytus harmonizes the four Gospel accounts, he ignores the discrepancy between John and the Synoptics about the actual number of women who came to the tomb. He does not consider that in John Mary Magdalene comes alone whereas according to the Synoptics she has company.

<sup>7</sup> Hippolytus, Εἰς τὸ ᾄσμα, Frag. 15, in *Exegetische und Homiletische Schriften* (ed. and trans. G. Nathanael Bonwetsch and Hans Achelis; GCS, Hippolytus I, Part I; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897), 350–52. This commentary on the Song of Songs, attributed to Hippolytus, has been preserved in Slavonic, Syriac, and Armenian fragments. The text appears to be ancient, if not authentic (see Bonwetsch and Achelis, *Exegetische Schriften*, xx–xxi).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09022-3 - The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God: Marriage in the Fourth Gospel

Jocelyn McWhirter

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the notion that the Old and New Testaments present one unified theological message. Not many contemporary scholars would agree that biblical stories about a man and a woman meeting at a well have anything to do with baptism, or that Song 1:12 should be interpreted in light of John 12:3. Indeed, only a few would understand the Song of Songs as anything but erotic poetry that found its way into the canon because it was attributed to Solomon, interpreted allegorically, and championed by R. Akibah.<sup>8</sup>

Recent developments, however, have opened the way for a renewed appreciation of ancient interpretations. Within the last few decades, some exegetes have challenged many of the presuppositions of eighteenth-century rationalism, as well as of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical criticism. Chief among these is the assumption that the Bible is subject to objective interpretation through analysis of historical and literary evidence, along with the related assumption that only modern critics who perform such analyses deserve a hearing. It has been persuasively argued that objective interpretation is impossible.<sup>9</sup> In light of this realization, the academy now welcomes contributions from reader-response critics, post-modern exegetes, and many whose political agendas render their readings overtly subjective. As A. K. M. Adam observes, “If . . . there are not transcendent criteria for interpretation, but only local customs and guild rules, the reluctance modern New Testament theologians express about admitting the possible legitimacy of other appropriations of the New Testament is an expression of cultural imperialism and intellectual xenophobia.”<sup>10</sup>

This suggests that the readings of so-called pre-critical interpreters should not be dismissed out of hand. In this monograph, I will argue that Origen and Hippolytus were on the right track in several respects. For one, they were not hearing things when they detected echoes of well betrothal stories and the Song of Songs in the Fourth Gospel. I will make the case that John indeed alludes to four biblical texts about marriage. One involves similarities between Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4:4–42 and the story about Jacob and Rachel in Gen. 29:1–20. Two others evoke the Song of Songs. Mary of Bethany perfumes the reclining Jesus in a scene reminiscent of Song 1:12, and

<sup>8</sup> Marvin Pope briefly discusses the Song’s canonical status in *Song of Songs* (AB 7C; Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 18–19.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Mary Ann Tolbert, “Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics,” *Semeia* 28 (1983): 113–26.

<sup>10</sup> A. K. M. Adam, *Making Sense of New Testament Theology: “Modern” Problems and Prospects* (StABH 11; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995), 179.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09022-3 - The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God: Marriage in the Fourth Gospel

Jocelyn McWhirter

Excerpt

[More information](#)4 *The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God*

Mary Magdalene seeks and finds her missing man as does the woman in Song 3:1–4. A fourth allusion is the first to occur in the Gospel narrative. In John 3:29, John the Baptist declares, “He who has the bride is the bridegroom.<sup>11</sup> The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice (τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ νυμφίου).”<sup>12</sup> This saying recalls Jer. 33:10–11: “In . . . the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem . . . there shall once more be heard the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom (φωνὴ νυμφίου) and the voice of the bride.”<sup>13</sup>

Origen was also right to attribute some figurative meaning to John’s well and anointing stories. In my interpretation of the four allusions, I will show how they develop a marriage metaphor, introduced in the Cana wedding scene (John 2:1–11), that describes Jesus as the Messiah and depicts his relationship with the believing community. I will stress that all Christians should be able to accept and appreciate this metaphor since John does not use it to reinforce oppressive gender roles.

Finally, Origen’s and Hippolytus’ belief in the theological unity of the Scriptures is relevant because it closely resembles that of the Fourth Evangelist. I will argue that the Gospel’s implied author considered Jer. 33:10–11, Gen. 29:1–20, and the Song of Songs appropriate for illustrating the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus because of their messianic significance. According to the conventions of first-century exegesis – conventions based on a belief in the theological unity of Scripture – they can be interpreted as messianic prophecies in light of Ps. 45, which celebrates the wedding of God’s anointed king.

**A tumult of reverberations**

I am certainly not the first post-Enlightenment critic to hear echoes of biblical texts about marriage in the Fourth Gospel. In fact, early traditions of interpreting John 4:4–42 and 20:1–18 in light of well betrothal narratives and the Song of Songs have been perpetuated through the Enlightenment and into the present. Both The Venerable Bede (673–735) and St. John of the Cross (1542–91) link John’s tomb

<sup>11</sup> The appellation “John the Baptist” never appears in the Fourth Gospel. I use it here to distinguish John the Baptist from John the Evangelist.

<sup>12</sup> The Greek text of the Fourth Gospel is taken from NA<sup>27</sup>. I discuss significant variants in the footnotes.

<sup>13</sup> The passage reckoned as Jer. 33:1–13 in Hebrew and English Bibles appears at Jer. 40:1–13 in the LXX.

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

story with Song 3:1–4.<sup>14</sup> This exegetical tradition has found its way into the Roman Catholic lectionary: Song 3:1–5 is read on the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene (July 22). A similar tradition has been preserved in the work of at least one nineteenth-century Protestant scholar. In his magnum opus, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, David Friedrich Strauss explores the connection between John 4 and the Genesis well stories.<sup>15</sup>

In the wake of these traditions, several twentieth-century exegetes have proposed allusions to Gen. 29:1–20, Song 1:12; 3:1–4, and Jer. 33:10–11. They have also detected references to a whole host of other texts, most of which have something to do with marriage. For example, Michel Cambe hears several echoes in John 3:29. He affirms that John the Baptist's bridegroom saying may allude to Jer. 33:10–11.<sup>16</sup> He also agrees with John H. Bernard and Walter Bauer, who note the similarity between John's phrase "the bridegroom's voice (τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ νυμφίου)" and "the voice of the bridegroom (φωνὴ νυμφίου)" mentioned in Jer. 7:32–34, 16:9, and 25:10.<sup>17</sup> These prophecies describe how "the voice of the bridegroom," along with "the voice of the bride" and the sound of mirth and gladness, will eventually cease in Jerusalem. In addition, Cambe notes that others have detected echoes of the Song of Songs in John 3:29. André Feuillet makes the case for allusions to Song 2:8–14 and 5:2–6, passages that describe the bride's eager response to her beloved's voice.<sup>18</sup> Even more convincing for

<sup>14</sup> The Venerable Bede, *In Cantica Cantorum Allegorica Expositio*, in PL 91:1120; St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul* 2.13.6, in *Dark Night of the Soul* (trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers; 3 vols; 3rd rev. edn.; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 140–42.

<sup>15</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (ed. Peter C. Hodgson; trans. George Eliot; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 308.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Cambe, "L'influence du Cantique des Cantiques sur le Nouveau Testament," *RThom* 62 (1962): 14. See also Jacques Winandy, "Le Cantique des Cantiques et le Nouveau Testament," *RB* 71 (1964): 168–69; François-Marie Braun, *Jean le théologien 2: Les grandes traditions d'Israël et l'accord des écritures selon le quatrième évangile (Ebib)* (Paris: Gabalda, 1964), 197 and *Jean le théologien 3.1: Sa théologie: Le mystère de Jésus-Christ (Ebib)* (Paris: Gabalda, 1966), 101; Martin Hengel, "The Interpretation of the Wine Miracle at Cana: John 2:1–11," trans. Gerhard Schmidt, in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament* (ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright; Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 101–2; Mirjam Zimmermann and Ruben Zimmermann, "Der Freund des Bräutigams (Joh 3,29): Deflorations- oder Christuszeuge?" *ZNW* 90 (1999): 126–27.

<sup>17</sup> John H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (ed. A. H. McNeile; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), I:131; Walter Bauer, *Das Johannes-Evangelium* (3rd edn.; HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1933), 63.

<sup>18</sup> André Feuillet, "Le symbolisme de la colombe dans les récits évangéliques du Baptême," *RSR* 46 (1958): 540; "Le Cantique des cantiques et l'Apocalypse," *RSR* 49 (1961): 334, n. 8; "La recherche du Christ dans la nouvelle alliance d'après la christophanie de Jo 20,11–18: Comparaison avec Cant. 3,1–4 et l'épisode des pèlerins

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09022-3 - The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God: Marriage in the Fourth Gospel

Jocelyn McWhirter

Excerpt

[More information](#)6 *The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God*

Cambe is P. Joüon's belief that John 3:29 alludes to Song 8:13: "O you who dwell in the gardens, my companions are listening for your voice; let me hear it."<sup>19</sup>

Allusions to marriage texts are also discerned in the well scene of John 4:4–42. Jerome H. Neyrey and Calum M. Carmichael contend with me that this scene alludes to the Jacob and Rachel story in Gen. 29:1–20.<sup>20</sup> Others hear different echoes. Scholars such as François-Marie Braun and Marie-Émile Boismard point out several verbal similarities between John 4:4–42 and the scene with Abraham's servant and Rebekah in Gen. 24:1–67, while E. C. Hoskyns and Gerhard Friedrich recognize an allusion to the encounter between Moses and Zipporah (Exod. 2:15–22) as told by Josephus (*Ant.* 2.257).<sup>21</sup> Aileen Guilding suggests that John refers to Exod. 2:15–22 along with one of the Genesis stories; for Annie Jaubert, the relevant passages are Exod. 2:15–22 and Gen. 29:1–20.<sup>22</sup>

d'Emmaüs," in *L'homme devant Dieu* (Théologie 56–58; Paris: Aubier, 1963), I:106; *Le Mystère de l'amour divin dans la théologie johannique* (Ebib; Paris: Gabalda, 1972), 231; and *Jesus and His Mother: The Role of the Virgin Mary in Salvation History and the Place of Woman in the Church* (trans. L. Maluf; Still River, Mass.: St. Bede's, 1974), 12; Cambe, "Influence du Cantique," 13.

<sup>19</sup> P. Joüon, *Le Cantique des cantiques* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1909), 331–32; Cambe, "Influence du Cantique," 15. See also Braun, *Jean le théologien* 2, 198 and *Jean le théologien* 3.1, 93, 101–2; Feuillet, "Symbolisme de la colombe," 540; "Cantique et l'Apocalypse," 334 n. 8; "Recherche du Christ," 106; *Mystère de l'amour divin*, 231; and *Jesus and His Mother*, 12. For a critique of this position, see Winandy, "Cantique et le NT," 167, 172.

<sup>20</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, "Jacob Traditions and the Interpretation of John 4:10–26," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 425–26; Calum M. Carmichael, "Marriage and the Samaritan Woman," *NTS* 26 (1980): 332–37.

<sup>21</sup> Braun, *Jean le théologien* 3.1, 93–95; Marie-Émile Boismard, "Aenon près de Salem: Jean III.23," *RB* 80 (1973): 225; Marie-Émile Boismard and Arnaud Lamouille, *L'Évangile de Jean* (Synopse des quatre évangiles en français III; Paris: Cerf, 1979), 136; E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (ed. Francis Noel Davey; London: Faber & Faber, 1940), 263; Gerhard Friedrich, *Wer ist Jesus? Die Verkündigung des vierten Evangelisten, dargestellt an Joh 4,4–42* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1967), 25. In agreement with Braun and Boismard are Philippe Dagonet (*Selon Saint Jean: Une femme de Samarie* [Paris: Cerf, 1979], 47–53) and Marc Girard ("Jésus en Samarie [Jean 4, 1–42]: Analyse des structures stylistiques et du procès de symbolisation," *EgT* 17 [1986]: 302–3).

<sup>22</sup> Aileen Guilding, *The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship: A Study of the Relation of St. John's Gospel to the Ancient Jewish Lectionary System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 231; Annie Jaubert, "La symbolique du puits de Jacob: Jean 4,12," in *L'homme devant Dieu*, I:63–73; *Approches de l'Évangile de Jean* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), 58–63; and "La symbolique des femmes dans les traditions religieuses: Une reconsidération de l'Évangile de Jean," *RUO* 50 (1980): 118–19. Normand R. Bonneau builds on Guilding's work ("The Woman at the Well, John 4 and Genesis 24," *TBT* 67 [1973]: 1252–59), as does Eugene D. Stockton ("The Fourth Gospel and the Woman," in *Essays in Faith and Culture* [ed. Neil Brown; Faith and Culture 3; Catholic Institute of Sydney, 1979], 142). Birger Olsson develops Jaubert's thesis (*Structure and Meaning in the Fourth*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09022-3 - The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God: Marriage in the Fourth Gospel

Jocelyn McWhirter

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Allusions to biblical texts about marriage*

7

These critics were joined by many more following the publication of Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative* in 1981. One of the many contributions to literary criticism of the Bible put forward by Alter in that volume is his hypothesis concerning conventional type-scenes. To illustrate their function, he presents a detailed analysis of the so-called "betrothal type-scene" in which a man on a journey meets a maiden at a well, water is drawn and shared, and a marriage is arranged.<sup>23</sup>

As a professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature, Alter never extends his observations to include the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. New Testament scholars, however, have not hesitated to avail themselves of his insights in interpreting this passage. After all, John 4:4–42 follows the standard format of a "betrothal type-scene": Jesus journeys to Samaria, meets a woman at a well, and engages her in a conversation about water. Among the many who read John 4:4–42 as a "betrothal type-scene" are P. Joseph Cahill, R. Alan Culpepper, Paul D. Duke, and Jeffrey Lloyd Staley.<sup>24</sup>

*Gospel: A Text-Linguistic Analysis of John 2:1–11 and 4:1–42* [trans. Jean Gray; CB 6; Lund: Gleerup, 1974], 169–73, 256–57). For more general references to echoes of biblical well betrothal narratives in John 4, see Joseph Colson, "Les noces du Christ (Nouveau Testament)," in *Un roi fit des noces à son fils* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1961), 134–35; John Bligh, "Jesus in Samaria," *HeyJ* 3 (1962): 332; J. N. Sanders, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (ed. B. A. Mastin; BNCT; London: Black, 1968), 140–41, 144; James D. Purvis, "The Fourth Gospel and the Samaritans," *NovT* 17 (1975): 194; J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The Samaritan Woman's Pitcher," *DRev* 102 (1984): 252–61.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 51–58. Alter follows the lead of Robert C. Culley, who concludes that the similarities between the Genesis and Exodus well betrothal narratives suggest the possibility that "a traditional episode . . . has been employed in and adapted to different contexts" (*Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976], 41–43).

<sup>24</sup> P. Joseph Cahill, "Narrative Art in John IV," *Religious Studies Bulletin* 2 (1982): 41–48; R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 136; Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 101–3; Jeffrey Lloyd Staley, *The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel* (SBLDS 82; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 98–102. For additional references to John 4:4–42 as a "betrothal type-scene," see Walter Rebell, *Gemeinde als Gegenwart: Zur soziologischen und didaktischen Funktion des Johannesevangelium* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1987), 189; Lyle Eslinger, "The Wooing of the Woman at the Well: Jesus, the Reader, and Reader-Response Criticism," *Literature and Theology* 1/1 (1987): 167–83; repr. in *The Gospel of John as Literature* (ed. Mark W. G. Stibbe; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 165–82; Paul Trudinger, "Of Women, Wells, Waterpots and Wine! Reflections on Johannine Themes (John 2:1–11 and 4:1–42)," *St. Mark's Review* 151 (1992): 10–16; Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 68–69; Adele Reinhartz, "The Gospel of John," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, et al.; New York: Crossroad, 1994), II:572–73; C. Clifton Black, "Rhetorical Criticism and the New Testament," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. Joel B. Green; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 270–71; Joan E. Cook, "Wells, Women, and Faith," in *Proceedings, Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 17 (1997): 11–18; Larry Paul Jones, *The Symbol of Water in*

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978-0-521-09022-3 - The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God: Marriage in the Fourth Gospel

Jocelyn McWhirter

Excerpt

[More information](#)8 *The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God*

A few scholars also detect allusions in both the anointing scene of John 12:1–8 and the resurrection appearance of John 20:1–18. Cambe points out several parallels between the anointing scenes in John 12:3 and Song 1:12.<sup>25</sup> Anthony Tyrrell Hanson proposes instead that John 12:3 alludes to Hag. 2:6–9, in which the Lord promises to fill the temple with splendor.<sup>26</sup> Feuillet, Sandra M. Schneiders, and Hanson join Cambe in suggesting that Mary Magdalene's search in John 20:1–18 bears a strong resemblance to Song 3:1–4.<sup>27</sup> In addition, some of these scholars propose various other evoked texts, including a similar nocturnal search in Song 5:5–6, the description of the Shulammitte maiden who turns and turns in Song 6:13 (7:1), and the scene in Song 8:13 where companions listen for the voice of one who dwells in the gardens.<sup>28</sup>

*the Gospel of John* (JSNTSup 145; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 91–96; Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization* (SBLDS 167; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Cambe, "Influence du Cantique," 15–17. See also Bauer, *Johannes-Evangelium*, 159; Jacques Winandy, *Le Cantique des Cantiques: Poème d'amour mué en écrit de sagesse* (BVC 16; Tournai, Belgium: Castermann, 1960), 60 and "Cantique et le NT," 166–67; Mary Rose D'Angelo, "(Re)Presentations of Women in the Gospels: John and Mark," in *Women and Christian Origins* (ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 136; Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 108.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *The New Testament Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SPCK, 1980), 118–21.

<sup>27</sup> Cambe, "Influence du Cantique," 17–19, 25; Feuillet, "Recherche du Christ, 103–7 and *Mystère de l'amour divin*, 231; Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Johannine Resurrection Narrative: An Exegetical and Theological Study of John 20 as a Synthesis of Johannine Spirituality" (D.S.T. diss., Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1975), I:394, 407–8, 413–16, 429; "John 20:11–18: The Encounter of the Easter Jesus with Mary Magdalene: A Transformative Feminist Reading," in "What is John?" *Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia; SBLSymS 3; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), I:161; and *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 195; Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *The Prophetic Gospel: A Study of John and the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 228–30. See also Jaubert, "Symbolique des femmes," 117; Godfrey C. Nicholson, *Death As Departure: The Johannine Descent-Ascent Schema* (SBLDS 63; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), 73; Carolyn M. Grassi and Joseph A. Grassi, *Mary Magdalene and the Women in Jesus' Life* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed & Ward, 1986), 109–10; Teresa Okure, "The Significance Today of Jesus' Commission of Mary Magdalene," *International Review of Mission* 81 (1992): 181; J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Miriam and the Resurrection (John 20:16)," *DRev* 111 (1993), 178, 181; Stibbe, *John*, 205; Jack R. Lundbom, "Mary Magdalene and Song of Songs 3:1–4," *Int* 49 (1995): 172–75; Frédéric Manns, *L'évangile de Jean à la lumière du judaïsme* (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum 33; Jerusalem: Franciscan, 1999), 415–17; D'Angelo, "(Re)Presentations of Women," 136; Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple*, 108.

<sup>28</sup> Cambe, "Influence du Cantique," 17–19, 25; Feuillet, "Recherche du Christ, 103–7 and *Mystère de l'amour divin*, 231; Schneiders, "Resurrection Narrative," I:394, 407–8, 413–16, 429; "Easter Jesus," 161; and *Written That You May Believe*, 195; Hanson, *Prophetic Gospel*, 227–30. The notation "6:13 (7:1)" reflects the fact that this verse is



Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

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The most sustained treatment to date of John's allusions to marriage texts is the work of Ann Roberts Winsor. She devotes her book, *A King Is Bound in the Tresses*, to the numerous echoes of the Song of Songs she detects in John 12:1–3 and 20:1, 11–18. Winsor contends that John's "allusions to the Song follow the intertextual practice characteristic of biblical narrative."<sup>29</sup> She finds this practice described by Michel Riffaterre and Ziva Ben-Porat, so she uses their theories to develop a method for identifying and interpreting allusions in John's anointing and garden scenes.<sup>30</sup> First, Winsor notes the presence in John's narrative of what Riffaterre terms "ungrammaticalities"; that is, details that seem out of place.<sup>31</sup> Such details signal an allusion to another text where they are more at home.<sup>32</sup> Next, Winsor determines the evoked text by examining its verbal and thematic similarities with the originating text.<sup>33</sup> Once the evoked text is recognized, it changes the context of the originating text such that all elements of both texts begin to interact.<sup>34</sup>

Using this method, Winsor finds that thirteen words or ideas in John 12:1–3; 20:1, 11–18 correspond with about sixty verbal and thematic parallels in the Song of Songs. In John 12:1–2, for example, Jesus at table is reminiscent of the reclining king of Song 1:12.<sup>35</sup> The term *πιστικῆς* in John 12:3 may be a corruption of *τῆς στακτῆς*, mentioned in Song 1:13: "My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh (*τῆς στακτῆς*) that lies between my breasts."<sup>36</sup> Mary of Bethany's wiping Jesus' feet with her hair in John 12:3 calls to mind the king of Song 7:5 (6) who is held captive in his lover's tresses, along with the bathed feet of the aroused woman in Song 5:3 and the graceful feet of the queenly maiden

reckoned as 6:13 in English translations but as 7:1 by the MT and LXX. Similar notation elsewhere indicates similar variations of verse and chapter numbers in Song 6–7.

<sup>29</sup> Ann Roberts Winsor, *A King Is Bound in the Tresses: Allusions to the Song of Songs in the Fourth Gospel* (Studies in Biblical Literature 6; New York: Lang, 1999), 1.

<sup>30</sup> See Michel Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Advances in Semiotics; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978; Ziva Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976): 105–28.

<sup>31</sup> Winsor, *A King Is Bound*, 8; Riffaterre, *Semiotics*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Winsor, *A King Is Bound*, 8–9; Riffaterre, *Semiotics*, 164–65.

<sup>33</sup> Winsor, *A King Is Bound*, 10; Ben-Porat, "Poetics," 107–8.

<sup>34</sup> Winsor, *A King Is Bound*, 11; Ben-Porat, "Poetics," 116.

<sup>35</sup> Winsor, *A King Is Bound*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. The idea of a possible corruption originated with Paul-Louis Couchoud ("Notes de critique verbale sur St. Marc et St. Matthieu," *JTS* 34 [1933]: 128). See also Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* (AB 29; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 220–21.

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Jocelyn McWhirter

Excerpt

[More information](#)10 *The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God*

in Song 7:1 (2).<sup>37</sup> The fragrant perfume of John 12:3 alludes to the bag of myrrh in Song 1:13 and the scent of Song 1:3, 4, and 12 – along with twenty-eight other references to scent in the Song of Songs.<sup>38</sup>

Similar parallels link the Song to John 20:1, 11–18. For instance, the tomb (μνημεῖον) in John 20:1, 11 is reminiscent of the chamber (ταμίειον) in Song 1:4; 3:4; and 8:2, while the garden (John 19:41) evokes the Song’s setting (4:12, 16; 5:1; 8:13).<sup>39</sup> Mary Magdalene’s nocturnal search (John 20:1, 15) echoes Song 3:1–4.<sup>40</sup> Her two enigmatic turns in John 20:14, 16 are ungrammaticalities that signal an allusion to the turning Shulammitte maiden of Song 6:13 (7:1).<sup>41</sup> Jesus’ address in John 20:16 alludes to the beloved’s voice in Song 5:2, 6, while Mary’s testimony in John 20:18 resembles the voice from the garden in Song 8:13.<sup>42</sup> Finally, Jesus’ prohibition “Do not hold me” (John 20:17) marks a reference to Song 3:4.<sup>43</sup>

Winsor concludes that the Fourth Gospel alludes to the entire Song. “Understanding the Johannine anointing and resurrection appearance narratives requires a grasp of the [Song of Songs] as well,” she writes, “for the Song is alluded to not just once or incidentally, but comprehensively.”<sup>44</sup> She supports this argument by pointing out that the Fourth Gospel and the Song of Songs share similar tendencies and may have emerged from similar social settings. The Song stands “as a singular affirmation of women’s experience and authority,” and the Fourth Gospel shares the Song’s understanding of gender roles.<sup>45</sup> Winsor theorizes that “those who composed, preserved, and handed down the songs that became the Song” were women.<sup>46</sup> She then suggests that John’s allusions to the Song may have originated in an early stratum of the Johannine community. She postulates a group influenced largely by women who valued the Song’s emphasis on human relationships and physical sensation.<sup>47</sup>

**Making sense of the echoes**

The echoes heard by Origen and Hippolytus have certainly not died away. Scholars still detect them, along with a whole tumult of reverberations that those two venerable theologians would never have imagined.

<sup>37</sup> Winsor, *A King Is Bound*, 20–22, 23–25.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–23, 25–27. See also Derrett, “Miriam and the Resurrection,” 178.

<sup>39</sup> Winsor, *A King Is Bound*, 41–42.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 41–43.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–39.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 43–44.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–41.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 61–62.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 89–90.