Introduction

> *Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'*
>
> *John 20:15*

The Passion/Resurrection Narrative of the Fourth Gospel (Jn 18-20) includes the use of the word ὁ κηπουρός ('the gardener') (Jn 20:15). The employment of the word does not interrupt the flow of the narrative in any way and in that sense it is not startling or unusual. What is striking is that it is a *hapax legomenon* (a word that occurs only once) not only in John's writings, but in the whole of the New Testament. The purpose of this study is to attempt to discover why this particular image might have been chosen by John. Is it simply a point of historical detail to give weight to the description of the encounter between Mary Magdalene and the Risen Lord on the first Easter Day, or is there another level of meaning in the reference?

Most commentaries note that the Fourth Gospel is peppered with examples of the ancient rhetorical devices of lexical and conceptual *amphibologia* (double-meaning and double-reference).[1] The most commonly cited example is the play on ναός ('temple') in Jn 2:19-22 and the ambiguity of the term, or rather its double-reference to the structure of the Jerusalem

1. From Greek *amphi*, 'on both sides', *bolos*, 'a throw', and *logos*, 'word'. The terms, definitions and a comprehensive treatment of the literary devices of lexical and conceptual *amphibologia* can be found in Saeed Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ: a Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2, Reihe 120 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 46-60. (For the purposes of referencing in the text, footnotes and bibliography of this study, the names of scholars will be presented in the form in which they appear in their respective publications.)

Temple and the 'temple' of Jesus' body. Similar is the ambiguous use of τυφλός ('blind') in Jn 9: here the word may indicate both physical and spiritual blindness. In this study it is assumed that the devices are not only present but intentionally employed by the author as a means of communicating both literal and deeper meanings to the reader.

A deeper level of meaning might be that John, in his Passion/Resurrection Narrative, using the images of the 'garden' and the 'gardener', is encouraging the reader to make connections with the mythological narrative of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2-3. Does John wish his audience to understand the resurrection of Jesus in some sense as the restoration of Paradise, the reconciliation between God and humanity? The Risen Lord, at the literal and narrative level 'supposed' by Mary Magdalene to be 'the gardener' working near the tomb (Jn 20:15), is also to be recognised, at a theological level, as the Gardener, the Creator-God Himself.

Such connections were certainly made by Church Fathers. In modern scholarship, E.C. Hoskyns and R.H. Lightfoot see similar links, and conclude that the Risen Lord who encountered Mary Magdalene in the garden is, in fact, 'the Keeper of the garden',[1] thus furthering the possibility for discerning a theological allusion to the creation myth and the activity in the Garden of Paradise. In an article published in 1990, Nicolas Wyatt revisited the question and also argued for the positive acknowledgement of Jesus as 'the gardener', stating emphatically that John 'fully intends that the cross be in Paradise'.[2]

While the connection between the garden of the Resurrection and the garden of Paradise has been a popular theme in Easter sermons of the Church, Raymond Brown threw doubt on the scholarship arguments for intentional symbolism on the part of the author. If John had intended his readers to discern the allusion, Brown argued, he would have created stronger vocabulary connections.[3]

1. R.H. Lightfoot, *St John's Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 322.
2. Nicholas Wyatt, ' "Supposing him to the Gardener" (John 20:15): A Study of the Paradise Motif in John', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 25 (1990), 21-38, 38.
3. Brown's objections will be discussed more fully in Chapter 1, and a response offered in Chapter 2.

This debate needs to be opened up once more. Is it enough to reject the theological connection between the Passion/Resurrection Narrative of the Fourth Gospel and the creation myth of Genesis on the basis of 'vocabulary dissimilarity' at one point,1 when the allusion appears to be so significant? The question of the possible intentional rhetorical ambiguity in John's use of ὁ κηπουρός ('the gardener') needs to be addressed again. The semantically-related κῆπος ('garden') is used almost exclusively in the Fourth Gospel, with three appearances in the Passion/Resurrection Narrative, the only other instance in the New Testament occurring in Luke 13:19 for the garden in Jesus' parable of the mustard seed. Is it possible that in the final chapters of the Fourth Gospel, using *amphibologia* as a key rhetorical device, John directs a discerning reader (or readership) to a secondary, non-literal (i.e. not of the plain sense) level of meaning running through the work as a whole, namely the theme of creation? Might the 'garden' and the 'gardener' be signifiers of the *Ursatz*, the fundamental structure of the Gospel which, like the book of Genesis, opens with the phrase ἐν ἀρχῇ ('in the beginning')?

Before addressing these questions, and by means of further introduction, it is necessary to explore the setting of the Fourth Gospel and offer a brief discussion on the identity of the intended readers of the Gospel. The current debate on the questions of authorship and composition of the text will first be summarised in a short critical survey.

Authorship

For the purpose of this study, the author(s)/redactor(s) of the Fourth Gospel will be named simply 'John'. Traditionally, the 'Beloved Disciple' is understood to be the author and internal evidence within the Gospel supports this view. But who the 'Beloved Disciple' is (if indeed a single author could ever be identified) remains a mystery. Possibilities have included John the Son of Zebedee, John the elder, Thomas the Apostle, John the Apostle and even Mary Magdalene. Alan R. Kerr suggests that the author had priestly and therefore Temple connections 'that [strengthen] the case for finding a Temple theme in the

1. Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), Vol. 2, 1270.

Gospel'.[1] Ruth Edwards offers the helpful conclusion that, while the search for the author(s) might lead to disappointment, the 'Beloved Disciple' is the anonymous person 'whom the author (or at least whoever wrote John 21) wants readers to see as a reliable authority lying behind the Gospel'. Edwards stresses that 'a book's value does not depend on knowing who wrote it, but on its intrinsic worth'.[2] Perhaps the Evangelist deliberately chooses not to identify the Beloved Disciple; he would, surely, have provided far clearer clues if later readers were intended to discover who he was?[3] What is important is that the anonymity of the author serves to point to Jesus as the authoritative source of the traditions held by the community of John's audience.[4]

> Just as the implied author's views about Jesus have been attributed to Jesus in his earthly ministry, so the implied author's insights, especially about the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection, have been attributed to the Beloved Disciple as the ideal witness. Any known identity of this originating witness has been effaced in favour of the tradition that he authenticates.[5]

While accepting the difficulty of identifying the author of the Fourth Gospel, and acknowledging the fruitlessness of the search, this study rests on the assumption that the author was a cosmopolitan figure, perhaps a Jewish Christian himself, and certainly someone with a good knowledge of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the city of Jerusalem, and the rites, festivals and customs of the Jewish people. He has an awareness, too, of Hellenistic (and possibly Roman) practice and thought (for example, in the parallel to the Dionysus legend in Jn 2:1-11).

1. Alan R. Kerr, 'The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 220 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 8.
2. Ruth Edwards, *Discovering John* (London: SPCK, 2003), 26.
3. Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St John* (London: Continuum, 2005), 22.
4. The term 'community' is loaded in the context of Johannine scholarship. 'The scholarly construct of John writing from, and for, a small and isolated community with narrow sectarian views should [. . .] be rejected. The Gospel would have been produced in the context of a believing community, but there is no need to suppose that it was written exclusively for this group.' Edwards, *Discovering John*, 44.
5. Lincoln, *ibid.,* 25-6.

Composition of the Fourth Gospel

This study will be concerned with the text of the Fourth Gospel as it has been received in its final canonical form. The analysis of the narrative assumes the text to be a literary unit and the proposal of this study rests upon the supposition that at least part of John's audience would have known and understood it in this form (see below: *John's readers*).

> In relation to the composition of the Gospel, interpreting the traditions about Jesus for present circumstances, through knowledge of the Synoptics and in the light of the Scriptures, has been seen to be the work of at least two and possibly three people – the Beloved Disciple and the evangelist, who may or may not have been the same person, and the final editor.[1]

The differences of style and language within the gospel, most notably the Prologue, the so-called 'appendix' of Jn 21, and the theologically rich discourses in Jn 14-16, suggest that the gospel was composed in redacted stages. Problems in narrative continuity (for example, Jn 4:43-45) may also betray the hand of an editor although, it might be suggested, the canonical form of the text was never completed as the author/redactor intended. Certainly, though, the literary unit with which this study is concerned is a composition which has brought together oral traditions about Jesus, as well as written sources from the Synoptic tradition and some knowledge of the Pauline version of the Christian message.[2] Rudolf Bultmann suggested that 'to these traditions, a *miracle-source* could have belonged'.[3] It is true that John handles the eight signs (several without Synoptic parallel) distinctively, but, as Edwards highlights in her own discussion, John's written sources, if he had any, 'cannot be identified with confidence' and that 'the search for sources has proved inconclusive'.

> The Fourth Gospel does not anywhere draw attention to its use of sources other than the Old Testament and personal testimony. Therefore one can probably assume that source

1. Lincoln, *ibid.,* 55.
2. Lincoln, *ibid.,* 54.
3. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 6-7.

> criticism is not essential for understanding the Fourth Gospel. Second, source and composition theorists have not been able to agree on any rearrangement of the canonical form of the Fourth Gospel that would improve upon the current state of the text without creating further problems. Third, the composition critics have not produced any compelling evidence for the work of a later redactor or redactors.[1]

Any attempt to reconstruct the process of the composition of the Fourth Gospel raises more questions than answers. This study presupposes that the narrative, even with its apparent disjunctions and textual seams, represents the thought of one mind which drew upon oral tradition about Jesus, and probably written sources too, to create, over a period of time and with one or more revisions, the literary unit that we have today. This narrative whole is bound together by the *Ursatz* of the theme of creation, which runs from the opening verses of the Prologue through to the 'second' ending of Jn 21:25.

Sitz im Leben and purpose of the Fourth Gospel

'In contemporary literary criticism attempts to identify an author's purpose are viewed with suspicion. [. . .] But nobody would attempt a work with such sustained narrative and theological content as John without having an aim'.[2] Edwards goes on to explore the purpose of the Fourth Gospel, asking whether it was written for Hellenism, for Jews or for Christians. In her discussion she draws attention to the ambiguity of purpose and suggests that the Evangelist's aim might be either to induce faith in Jesus as the life-giving messiah or to deepen the faith of committed Christians. She also suggests an alternative: that John was seeking to address both constituencies simultaneously.[3]

The historical backdrop to John's purpose is summarised succinctly by Lincoln: 'the Fourth Gospel sits squarely within the religious thought-world of the Judaism of the late first century

1. Paul M. Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfilment of the Temple in the Gospel of John* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2006), 6-7.
2. Edwards, *ibid.*, 37.
3. *ibid.*

CE'.[1] Demonstrating features in common with the Qumran writings and an obvious 'heir' of early Christian (and especially Synoptic) tradition and teaching, John was writing in the shadow of the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., in the cloud of conflict within the Jewish community and in the wake of the expulsion from the synagogue of those who shared the Evangelist's views about Jesus. Given the consensus that the gospel was produced c.85 C.E., with Lincoln it may be said that 'enough time must have passed for Jewish Christians to have become a separate community with an identity differentiated from that of the synagogue and, as is suggested by the Gospel's universal perspective on salvation, for Gentiles to have joined them'.[2]

Taken together, the views of Edwards and Lincoln serve well as summaries of the on-going debate. An underlying assumption of this study, aligning with the consensus, is that the aims of the Fourth Gospel are multiple. John wrote for a wide audience: for a virgin readership of those whom he seeks to persuade with the life-giving message about Jesus (Jn 20:31) and, at the same time, a community of believers whose faith he wishes to nurture and deepen. It is the reception and interpretation of the Fourth Gospel by this latter group with which this study is primarily concerned.

John's readers

> 'Issues raised in the FG [. . .] allow for a broad viewpoint regarding the audience to whom John is speaking. Evidence allows for a diverse audience of Jewish and non-Jewish Christians, as well as Jewish and Gentile non-believers. It speaks to those both familiar and unfamiliar with the issues of Judaism in later first century C.E. It is relevant to those who were faced with the relationship with the synagogue, relationship with the Jewish Scriptures, and confronted with questions and challenges regarding the person of Jesus Christ.'[3]

1. Lincoln, *ibid.*, 82. Wm Randolph Bynum's more recent study does not depart from that view: 'It is safe to locate the FG within the final years of the first century C.E.' 'The Fourth Gospel and the Scriptures: Illuminating the Form and Meaning of Scriptural Citation in John 19:37', *Novum Testamentum Supplement* 144 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 7.
2. Lincoln, *ibid.,* 86.
3. Bynum, *ibid.,* 15.

Ruth Edwards suggests that John's wide audience might also have included Samaritans.[1] This book will suggest that the theme of creation will have been discernible to a readership which was not encountering the gospel for the first time but which had become familiar with the whole text of a later redaction. This more settled text was the one which had become the subject of study, discussion, meditation and reflection.

The plain or literal sense of the narrative would have been the vehicle by which John sought to bring his readers to faith; such intention is clearly stated in Jn 20:31. The theological sense, which may appear to contradict the literal sense, simultaneously offers a deeper level of understanding to an audience steeped in the Johannine gospel, who had enjoyed a period of time to discern and explore the allusions that John (and/or the final redactor if they are not the same person) has planted.

To take the pivotal text of Jn 20:15 as an example, the plain sense of the narrative is that Mary Magdalene is mistaken in supposing the risen Jesus to be the gardener. The theological sense is, this study suggests, to the contrary: Mary is in fact correct to discern the Lord as the keeper of the garden.

The Evangelist uses δοκέω ('to think, seem') as a device of rhetoric, to highlight the Christological significance of the noun ὁ κηπουρός. John uses δοκέω eight times in his gospel (Jn 5:39, 45; 11:13, 31, 56; 13:29; 16:2; 20:15) and the various occurrences are listed below.

Jn 5:39 – 'You search the scriptures because you think (δοκεῖτε) that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf.' Here, Jesus rebukes 'the Jews' for refusing to come to him for life. The plain sense is clear, they are mistaken, but the implication exists *for the reader* that in the scripture that they themselves are reading, i.e. the Fourth Gospel, eternal life is to be found: the gospel is written 'that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah' (20:31) and 'whoever believes has eternal life' (Jn 6:47). The use of δοκέω is ambiguous, open to interpretation and working at two different levels simultaneously.

Jn 5:45 – 'Do not think (μὴ δοκεῖτε) that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope.' The meaning of δοκέω here is clear. 'The Jews' are mistaken.

1. Edwards, *ibid.*, 44.

Jn 11:13 – 'Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought (ἔδοξαν) that he was referring merely to sleep.' Here, John uses δοκέω as a rhetorical device. The characters of the narrative are mistaken in their thinking but the reader, with the privilege of prior knowledge ('This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it' [Jn 11:4]) is drawn to see beyond the plain sense of the narrative: the reader shares the viewpoint of the Evangelist, not making the error of the disciples but becoming a witness to the true meaning of the narrated event.

Jn 11:31 – 'The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought (δόξαντες) that she was going to the tomb to weep there.' Again, in the literal sense, Mary's companions are mistaken in their assumption. The reader, however, aware of the earlier 'privately' (λάθρᾳ, or 'secretly') imparted information from Martha that 'the Teacher is here and is calling for [Mary]' has the privilege of foreknowledge, thus rendering δοκέω an instrument of rhetorical ambiguity.

Jn 11:56 – 'They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? (Τί δοκεῖ ὑμῖν;) Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?" ' This event of δοκέω represents a classic example of John's use of rhetoric. The plain sense of the narrative is, of course, that the 'many' who had come 'up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover' (Jn 11:55) were wondering what Jesus' course of action might be. But the reader (and particularly the reader with which this study is concerned, i.e. one who is already familiar with the text) will be alert to the significance of this question, the answer to which is that Jesus will *certainly* 'come to the festival' and with great symbolic ceremony (Jn 12:12 ff.).

Jn 13:29 – 'Some thought (ἐδόκουν) that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or that he should give something to the poor.' Again, the Evangelist uses δοκέω as a signal to his reader, at least one who is familiar with the text as a whole, that the 'some' among the disciples who believed that Judas was running an errand were mistaken. The implication is that the informed and discerning reader is not among that group, but will see the darker significance behind Jesus' instruction.

Indeed, those who would understand the theological rather than literal sense of 'And it was night' in the next verse (i.e. that the night represented a 'spiritual darkness') would be making such connections.

Jn 16:2 – 'They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think (δόξῃ) that by doing so they are offering worship to God.' This refers to the historical backdrop of the Fourth Gospel itself, that is, the expulsion of Jewish Christians from the synagogue, suggesting that this passage at least might be directed at a Jewish-Christian readership which had already experienced the indignity of expulsion and 'profound religious and social dislocation'.[1] John uses δοκέω here in its literal sense; that in believing that they will be favoured in the sight of God for their action, 'the Jews' will be mistaken, in the view of the Evangelist and those who share his belief.

Jn 20:15 – 'Supposing (δοκοῦσα) him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."' The literal sense of δοκέω is clear: Mary Magdalene is mistaken in thinking that the person standing before her is a gardener; he is the Risen Lord. The other seven occurrences of δοκέω in the Fourth Gospel have been explored above and it is possible to conclude that here John is also using the verb as a rhetorical device, a further example of his employment of lexical and conceptual *amphibologia* (see above). The character of the narrative (Mary) might be mistaken in her supposition, but the discerning reader, who detects the connection between the reference to 'the gardener' within the 'garden' (κῆπος) setting of the crucifixion and resurrection, and who is alert to John's creation *Ursatz* will recognise the Christological significance of Mary's (mis)identification, that Jesus is indeed the Gardener, the Creator-God.[2]

This exploration of the use of δοκέω in the Fourth Gospel serves to demonstrate how John's readers might have interpreted the narrative. A reader new to the faith and to John's writing would be carried through the account by the literal and plain sense of the text; but a readership which was familiar with the gospel as a

1. Lincoln, *ibid*., 85.
2. The use of the definite article (ὁ κηπουρός ['the gardener'] rather than simply 'a gardener') may go some way to support the argument.

whole, and which had had opportunity to absorb itself in John's text and become attuned to the Evangelist's leitmotifs, would recognise and appreciate the deeper levels of meaning and the complexity of rhetoric, allusion and theological purpose.

The Greek-speaking/reading audience of the Fourth Gospel who came from a Jewish background (and who would have been familiar with the LXX (Septuagint) and possibly other Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures) would be the group most likely to detect the allusions with which this study is concerned. The 'creation indicators' (see Chapter 3) will, it is suggested, have been recognised by those who knew the LXX of Gen. 1:1-2:4a. The allusions by which the Evangelist communicates his creation theme would not have been recognised by readers who did not have that knowledge or background. The representation of the Genesis account of the ordering of creation within the Fourth Gospel and the narrative description of Jesus as the Creator is a message from the Evangelist to Greek-speaking/reading Jewish Christians who might be concerned with the question of monotheism and Jesus' identity. This, after all, was an important aspect of the historical backdrop to the Fourth Gospel:

> The evangelist does indeed hold that Jesus was Son of God, equal with God, and God, but is at pains to make clear that Jesus does not arrogate this status to himself; it is granted him by God so that this is who he really was. [. . .] The evangelist would have claimed that this was not a breach of monotheism but instead a variation within it which already had a precedent within Jewish Wisdom traditions.[1]

In the text, it is not Jesus who claims to act in the world as the Creator; so much is implied in the 'supposition' of Mary Magdalene.

Outline of the study

This book, which assumes the unity of the text of the Fourth Gospel in its present canonical form, will be concerned to show that it is the theme of creation that serves as a structural *Ursatz*. It will demonstrate that the theme runs through the narrative as a whole.

After a review of literature, Chapter 2 will offer a case study

1. Lincoln, *ibid.,* 84-5.

in intertextuality and allusion in John's use of the words κῆπος ('garden') and κηπουρός ('gardener'). Occurrences of the words in Classical and Patristic writings will also be examined to aid understanding of John's choice and placing of this vocabulary in the narrative.

Chapter 3 will provide a study of the occurrence and, more especially, the literary context of certain 'creation indicators': verbs and other words which serve as leitmotifs throughout the narrative and which remind the reader, albeit sometimes very subtly, of the creation *Ursatz* which sounds throughout the gospel.

In an original contribution to scholarship, Chapter 4 will demonstrate that the creation theme is particularly significant in the Book of Signs, the High Priestly Prayer and Jn 21. The theme is not left undeveloped between its heralding in the Prologue and its climax in the Passion/Resurrection Narrative; rather, the intervening text is rich in creation imagery and allusion. Creation, and especially the re-presentation of Gen. 1:1-2:4a, is a fundamental theme in the Fourth Gospel.

A summary and a conclusion (including a suggested re-reading of the Fourth Gospel in the light of the creation theme) will be offered in Chapter 5, together with some points for further study or theological reflection.