Tracing how John draws his narrative to closure is fraught with challenges, due to the unresolved debate concerning where his story ended. For many scholars and commentators, the words of the narrator to the audience in 20:30–31 mark the end of the original Johannine Gospel.¹ Increasingly, however, interpreters regard 21:1–25 as part of the original gospel. Most contemporary literary critics insist on the importance of interpreting a narrative in the form that it has come down to us over almost two thousand years. They regard the final chapter as an integral part of the story that must be taken into account in assessing Johannine theology and christology and also in tracing “how John works.”² There are ongoing themes

¹. It is widely claimed that there is no evidence of a manuscript tradition without 21:1–25, but Michael Lattke (“Joh. 20:30f als Buchschluß,” ZNW 78 [1987]: 288–92) has suggested that Tertullian knew a Fourth Gospel that ended with 20:30–31. Philip W. Comfort (The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], 157–66) argues that the scribes of P⁵ and P⁷⁵ would have had to add two extra pages to contain 21:1–25. J. K. Elliott, in his review of Comfort’s book (NovT 36 [1994]: 284–87), rightly remarks: “As both of these manuscripts are fragmentary it seems risky to argue that there is textual evidence for a chapter 20 edition of the Fourth Gospel on these grounds” (286). Such fragmentary evidence cannot be claimed as sure grounds for the way an original might have ended. Too much of Comfort’s argument historicizes why and when the gospel was written (see Quest for the Original Text, 164–66). There is increasing interest in Coptic manuscripts that may close with John 20. See, for example, Gesa Schenke, “Das Erscheinen Jesu vor den Jüngern und der ungläubige Thomas: Johannes 20,19–31,” in Coptica—Gnostica—Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk, ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier, BCNHSE 7 (Québec: University of Laval Press; Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 893–904.

². For a survey of recent scholarship, see R. Alan Culpepper, “Designs for the
across John 1–20 and John 21, and unresolved problems from 1:1–20:31 are dealt with in 21:1–25.4

Five significant characters who have appeared earlier in the narrative are the key players in 20:1–31: Peter (1:40–44; 6:8, 68–69; 13:6–10, 24, 36–38; 18:10–11, 15–18, 25–27), the Disciple whom Jesus loved (1:35 [?]; 13:23–25; 18:15–16 [?]; 19:25–27), Mary Magdalene (19:25), the disciples (passim), and Thomas (11:16; 14:5). Other characters appear in John 21 (Thomas, Nathanael, and the sons of Zebedee [vv. 2–3, 5–14]), but they are marginal. Peter and the Beloved Disciple continue to play major roles (Peter in vv. 2–3, 7, 11, 15–21; the Beloved Disciple in vv. 7, 20–24) returning from the obscurity of their respective homes (see 20:10: apēlthon oun palin autous hoi mathētai); one is appointed shepherd (Peter, 21:15–18) and the other, witness (the Beloved Disciple, 21:24).5 Another element in John 20–21 is the “voice” of the narrator. In 20:1–31, by means of direct communications between the implied author and the implied reader in verse 9, and in the final statement of the purpose of this writing in verses 30–31, the narrator plays a role that subordinates the characters in the story to the narrative rhetoric of John 20:1–31, aimed at the reader/


Literary Considerations

Literary theory surrounding “endings” has not been extensively applied to biblical narratives, despite the epoch-making study of Barbara Herrnstein Smith on closure in poetry, the more recent study of narrative closure in antiquity by Massimo Fusillo, and others. The variety and sometimes puzzling nature of the “endings” of New Testament narratives makes it difficult to formulate a theory about them in their contemporary rhetorical, literary, and theological contexts. Morna Hooker has elegantly shown that all the gospel “endings” serve as “invitations to discipleship,” but the authors of Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, and Acts do this in very different ways.


There are several “closures” in the Fourth Gospel. John 1:18 looks back across 1:1–17 as the Prologue closes. Jesus’s first days close with Jesus’s request that the disciples look beyond their expectations to the promised revelation of the heavenly in the Son of Man (1:49–51). The second Cana miracle (4:46–54) rounds off and looks back across the responses to Jesus that have marked 2:1–4:45. Jesus’s celebration of the Jewish feasts closes with the reason for his claim to be true bread, true light, living water, the light of the world, and the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his friends: he and his Father are one (10:30; see v. 38); it closes further with a glance back the place where John was baptizing as the story began (10:40–42; see 1:28). The turn toward the cross closes with a summary of Jesus’s ministry (12:44–50). Jesus’s last night with his disciples climaxes in his prayer that all may be where he will be—united in love with the Father (17:24–26). Yet the reader/listener finds that the account of Jesus’s death and resurrection has two endings: 20:30–31 and 21:25.

A further literary feature of the Fourth Gospel calls for attention: John’s tendency to frame episodes. Widely recognized examples are the oneness between God and the Logos in 1:1 and the oneness between Father and the Son in 1:18; the Mosaic law used by “the Jews” to put Jesus on trial in 5:16–18 and Jesus’s counterclaim that Moses accuses them in 5:45–47; the Cana miracles of 2:1–2 and 4:46–54 frame the beginnings of Jesus’s ministry; a garden scene opens and closes the passion narrative (18:1–11; 19:38–42). The same feature appears at a macrolevel across the gospel. The best known is the oft-identified parallel between 1:1–18 and 20:30–31. The public ministry is framed by references to the location and activity of John the Baptist (1:28 and 10:40–42). A number of commentators who argue in support of the originality of 21:1–25 point to an


“inclusion” between 1:19–51 and 21:1–25. Following Howard Jackson, Richard Bauckham argues that “circling back” to the first appearance of the Beloved Disciple (1:35) as the story closes (21:7, 20–24) is a sign of eyewitness testimony.

The Cana-to-Cana section of the gospel (2:1–4:54) opens the account of Jesus’s public ministry. Across this literary unit, the reader/listener encounters a series of responses to the word of Jesus: the Mother of Jesus, “the Jews,” Nicodemus, John the Baptist, the Samaritan woman, the Samaritan villagers, and the royal official. A description of “journeys of faith” began the story (2:1–4:54), and parallel “journeys of faith” close the story (20:1–29). But there is a difference. While in 2:1–4:54 eight different characters respond to Jesus in a variety of ways, four foundational characters move from no faith to belief in 20:1–31: the Disciple whom Jesus loved (20:2–10; 21:7, 20–24), Mary Magdalene (20:1–2, 11–18), the disciples (20:19–23; 21:12–14), and Thomas (20:24–29). In 21:1–25, the disciples, Peter, and the Beloved Disciple reappear, but there is no hint of any “journey of faith.”

Following hard on the heels of Jesus’s blessing of “those who have not seen and yet believe,” this intervention from the narrator, explaining the purpose of the “writing,” looks back to the disciple who believed without seeing Jesus (see v. 8), but who did not yet know “the Writing” (v. 9: τὴν γραφὴν). There is no such focus upon the faith experience of Peter and the Beloved Disciple in 21:1–25 nor upon the significance of “the Writing.” Although the issue of faith is not totally absent (see vv. 7 [the


12. The English translation “yet” in v. 29 is part of the meaning of the adversative kai, set between the two aorist participles mé idontes and pisteusantes: not seeing, yet believing.
Beloved Disciples and Peter], 18–19 [Peter]), John is more interested in their respective roles in the community (vv. 15–18, 20–24). The final reference to the writing of books (21:25), which is modeled upon 20:30–31 (especially v. 30) and directed to subsequent readers and listeners, does not instruct them that this book has been written to lead them deeper into faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

What follows pursues a literary approach to John 20–21, focusing upon the importance of the use of the final appearances of major characters from the narrative as a whole in an attempt to uncover how John brought his story to closure. It will also devote attention to the “voice” of the narrator, especially in 20:9, 30–31, and 21:25.

13. It has been suggested that John 20 affirms the importance of “faith” (esp. vv. 30–31), while John 21 stresses the importance of “love” (esp. vv. 15–17). See R. Alan Culpepper, “Peter as Exemplary Disciple in John 21:15–19,” PRSt 37 (2010): 165–78, for Peter’s response as loving self-gift. But the love theme in 21:15–19 serves the vindication of Simon Peter rather than being the dominant theme of the chapter. On this, see the fine essay of Michael Labahn, “Peter’s Rehabilitation (John 21:15–19) and the Adoption of Sinners: Remembering Jesus and Relecturing John,” in Anderson, Just, and Thatcher, John, Jesus, and History 2, 335–48.


The use of time should be taken into account in an assessment of the rhetorical use of the characters in 20:1–31.\(^\text{16}\)

(1) The report of the experience of Peter and the Disciple whom Jesus loved (20:3–10) is recorded as something that happened in the past. They are dismissed from the story-world in verse 10. However, immediately prior to that dismissal, the use of the pluperfect tense (ēideisan) points to a past time, after which much has happened. The narrator reports that at that time “they did not yet know the Scripture.” The expression contains the hint of a promise that one day they will come to that knowledge.\(^\text{17}\) That experience is not recorded within 20:1–31.

(2) Mary Magdalene, the disciples, and Thomas experience a journey from lack of faith to a confession of Jesus recorded within the time frame of the narrative:

(2a) Mary Magdalene moves from a conviction that the body has been stolen (vv. 1–2, 11–16), to “her” being recognized by Jesus who prevents her from clinging to him (vv. 16–17), to her acceptance of a mission from the Risen Jesus (verse 18).

(2b) Although not as intense as the requests of Mary Magdalene and Thomas, the disciples experience the physical presence of Jesus: “He showed them his hands and his side” (v. 20).

(2c) Thomas is initially absent when the risen Jesus appears (v. 24), and he will not accept that Jesus has risen “unless” certain physical conditions are fulfilled (v. 25). Challenged by the appearance of Jesus (vv. 26–27), he confesses that Jesus is his Lord and God (v. 28).

With the exception of Peter and the Beloved Disciple, the experiences of faith in the risen Jesus resolved within the narrative itself are the result of seeing Jesus, and they are shot through with the physical. As the narrative closes, Jesus contrasts Thomas’s arrival at faith on the basis of “sight” with those “who have not seen and yet believe” (vv. 24–29).\(^\text{18}\) The aorist parti-


\(^{17}\) This is conveyed by the English translation “yet,” rendering the temporal aspect of the Greek oudepō. See BDAG, s.v. oudepō.

\(^{18}\) For a very different reading of 20:24–29, see Popp, “Thomas,” 513–23. Popp presents Thomas in an entirely positive light, suggesting that all he asks in his request to touch Jesus is the Easter experience had by Mary Magdalene and the other dis-
ciples describing “those who have not seen [hoi mē idontes] and yet believe [kai pisteusantes]” and the general context of these culminating words of Jesus indicate that they are directed to believers who live in the time after the return of Jesus to his Father (see 17:5; 20:17).19 Those who are blessed belong to a later generation living in the period of the absence of Jesus. In other words, Jesus’s blessing within the narrative is directed forward into a time and a situation that lies beyond the limitations of the narrative, to a time when the sight of Jesus, and the possibility of physical proximity, are no longer available.

Peter, the Disciple whom Jesus loved, Mary Magdalene, Thomas, and the rest of the disciples are characters in the story. As such, Peter and the Disciple whom Jesus loved cannot yet know the Scripture (tēn graphēn), as they are part of it. Within John 20, only the Disciple whom Jesus loved comes to faith without seeing Jesus (vv. 11–18). But this story was written (gegraptai, v. 31) for the readers and hearers of this gospel who believe without seeing.20 Located in a time outside the narrative, they have it in hand; they are hearing it recited or watching its performance.21 Only they are blessed (makarioi, v. 29). Peter and the Disciple whom Jesus loved disappear from the narrative as they return to their respective homes (v. 10), never to be heard of again within John 20.22 Is it possible that John is giving a unique status to his “writing” that the characters in the story cannot yet know (v. 9), while the recipients of the story are instructed that

19. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of biblical texts are my own.
20. The temporal aspect of the perfect tense of the verb “has been written” also plays into the author’s use of time. This book has been written in the past, but the perfect tense of the verb gegraptaı indicates that it is still available, providing access to faith in Jesus and the life that comes from faith in his name.
22. Labahn, “Simon Peter,” 162–63, rightly points to Peter’s need for an encounter with the risen Lord. But he claims that it “is provided in a subsequent scene: 20:19–29, which leads him to post-Easter understanding.” But Peter and the Beloved Disciple are decisively dismissed in v. 10. There is no indication in the narrative that Peter is present for vv. 19–29, whatever one makes of John 21.
they are hearing the Scripture (tēn graphēn), written (gegraptaī) that they may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in his name (vv. 30–31)?23 Which “Scripture” is referred to in verse 9?24

Perhaps the readers of the Gospel of John accept that “the word” they hold in their hands is “the Scripture.” This is something that the Disciple whom Jesus loved and Peter, key players in the drama of the narrative, “as yet” were not able to understand (20:9).25 Such understanding will be provided for the readers of the story “later” (v. 29).26 That will be made clear in verses 29–31. A candidate for the “Scripture” that Peter and the Disciple whom Jesus loved did not yet know (v. 9) is the Johannine story. It was


25. For more detail, see Moloney, “A Study in Narrative Time,” 104–7. For a response to this essay, see Brendan Byrne, “A Step Too Far: A Critique of Francis Moloney’s Understanding of ‘the Scripture’ in John 20:9,” ITQ 80 (2015): 149–56. Byrne’s response reflects a lack of care over the shift of focus in the use of “had been written” in 1:19–12:16, in support of christological claims, and the “fulfilment” of Scripture from 12:38–19:37 (reaching its high point in 19:30), a tendency to read John as if he was Paul, and a lack of appreciation of the uniqueness of the Fourth Gospel’s claim to be the word about “the Word.” Byrne’s work on John is always informative (see, for example, his Life Abounding: A Reading of John’s Gospel [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015]), but often lacks a depth of appreciation of Johannine nuance and uniqueness.

impossible for them to know this Scripture because they are characters in the story and thus not yet (oudepō) readers or hearers of the story. As such, the “Scripture” of the Gospel of John is not available to the Disciple whom Jesus loved. But he has been presented as the first disciple to come to belief in the risen Jesus, even though he does not see Jesus.

The response of the other individual foundational disciples—one a woman (20:1–2, 10–18) and the other a man (20:24–29)—is strikingly different from that of the Disciple whom Jesus loved. They seek to establish a “fleshly” contact with the Jesus they can see and touch (see especially 20:16–17, 25, 27). The same must be said for the disciples. Informed that Jesus is now the risen Lord (v. 18), they also “see” Jesus and are shown the physical evidence of his hands and his side (vv. 19–20). They are to be his sent ones, the bearers of his word (see 18:21), and whoever receives them will receive Jesus and the one who sent him (13:20). It is to that “later” world, however, touched by the witness and the critical presence of the disciples (vv. 19–23), that Jesus directs his final blessing (v. 29).¹⁷

The Voice of the Narrator in John 20:30–31

Turning away from Thomas, Jesus’s final words in John 20 are directed to later generations of readers and hearers, those who have not seen Jesus but still believe (v. 29). The narrator then tells them why he wrote this book (vv. 30–31). Looking back across the faith journeys recorded in the episodes of the Disciple whom Jesus loved, Mary Magdalene, the disciples gathered behind closed doors, and Thomas, there is an important link between Jesus’s final blessing of those who do not see and yet believe (v. 29) and the experience of the Disciple whom Jesus loved: he also did not see, yet he believed (v. 8). This is what it means to be a disciple whom Jesus loves.²⁸ The author, in fact, suggests that later generations, those who do

---

¹⁷. Against Popp, “Thomas,” 515–23, who includes Thomas in the beatitude of v. 29. Although she does not devote detailed attention to the disciples in 20:19–23, Hylen reacts to the widespread notion that they are examples of true faith. She shows that as “characters” in the Johannine narrative, the disciples remain “ambiguous.” They “are people who always seek to gain understanding” (“Disciples,” 226).

²⁸. See Brendan Byrne, “The Faith of the Beloved Disciple and the Community in John 20,” JSNT 23 (1985): 83–97. See also Barnabas Lindars, The Gospel of John, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1972), 602: “He (the author) is concerned that the reader should believe, and sets the Disciple whom Jesus loved before him as the first example for him to follow.”
not see and yet believe (v. 29), have an advantage. They have been provided with “the Writing” that Peter and the Disciple whom Jesus loved did not yet know (v. 9).

Jesus did many signs, but they have not been written (gegrammena) in this book (v. 30). There is a purpose behind the selection of the signs that has been written (gegraptai) “so that you [later generations of disciples who have not seen, but have this story], may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (v. 31). This “Writing,” not yet available for the Disciple whom Jesus loved (v. 9), is available to those who are reading John’s story of Jesus and in the ears and hearts of those who are hearing it or seeing it performed. Their blessing (v. 29) is part of John’s rhetoric of persuasion.29 Living in the time of the absence of the physical Jesus, they are in a more advantageous position than those who had access to his bodily presence: Mary Magdalene, the disciples, and Thomas. They also have an advantage over Peter and the Disciple whom Jesus loved, who returned to their homes, not yet knowing “the Scripture” (tēn graphēn) that Jesus must rise from the dead (vv. 9–10). They have “the Writing” (tēn graphēn, v. 9), written for them (gegraptai, vv. 30–31).

**The Characters in John 21**

John has dismissed Peter and the Beloved Disciple (20:10), but they return to play key roles in 21:1–25.30

(1) Peter has lost interest in what has gone before: “I am going fishing” (21:3). When he is informed by the Beloved Disciple that the personal calling to the fishermen from the shore “is the Lord,” he leaps into the water (v. 7), and he hauls the net ashore when Jesus asks for some of the fish (v. 11). The reader/listener recognizes such actions as typical of his enthusiasm (see 6:66–69; 13:6–10, 36–38) but knows that he has failed (18:15–18, 25–27). On the basis of a threefold profession that he loves Jesus “more than these,” Peter reverses his abandoning of the Jesus-story (vv. 1–3).31

29. See the essay “Persuasion” by Ruth Sheridan in this volume.
30. For a more detailed analysis of the role of Peter and the Beloved Disciple in John 21, see Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John*, 176–89.
He is appointed the shepherd of Jesus’s flock, symbolized by the catch of many fish and the fact that the net is not torn apart (see 19:23–25a). The narrator's comment in verse 19a, catching up themes and words that spoke of the future death of Jesus (see 12:33; 18:32), informs the reader/listener that Peter will lose his life in a fashion that matches the death of Jesus (vv. 15–18).

(2) The Beloved Disciple's actions are minimal and entirely positive, as his role is never ambiguous. He is not mentioned in the original group of disinterested fishermen in verses 1–2, and he thus appears on the scene surprisingly in verse 7 where he informs those disciples: “It is the Lord.” Peter responds (vv. 7–18), but as he “follows” Jesus (v. 19), he turns and asks a question that bothered those who were reading and hearing this story. Seeing the Beloved Disciple also “following,” he asks “What about this man?” (vv. 20–21). This is a pivotal question on the final page of a story where Peter has always been a leader (1:41–42; 6:67–69; 20:2–10), albeit a somewhat ambiguous one (13:6–11; 18:15–18, 25–27). Whenever Peter and the Beloved Disciple appear together, the former is always upstaged by the latter (13:22–25; 18:15–18; 20:2–10). The Johannine community is asking the question placed on the lips of Peter: “What about this man?” (21:21). Addressing the world outside the text, in a period after the death of Peter (vv. 18–19) and after the death of the Beloved Disciple (vv. 22–23), the narrator answers the question of verse 21: what about this man? The Beloved Disciple is their witness; the one who has written these things, through whom they have received their authoritative Jesus-story (v. 24).

John 21 has provided a response to the unresolved question of the respective roles of Peter and the Beloved Disciple. Another “resolution,” however, that is seldom noticed is the bleak situation of the two foundational disciples who “as yet did not know the Scripture” (20:9). The story

---

32. For a comprehensive study in support of this claim, see Culpeper, “Designs for the Church,” 369–402.


of the subsequent Johannine church must be based on more solid author-
ity than these disciples who disappeared from the story as they returned
home after their experiences at an empty tomb (20:9–10). The situation is
resolved in 21:15–24: Peter will profess unconditional love and eventually
experience a death that will glorify God (vv. 15–18). The Disciple whom
Jesus loved, who has also died, is the one who has “written these things”
(vv. 19–24). One is the authoritative shepherd and the other is the witness.35

**Conclusion**

John is not *primarily* interested in the “character” or the “characterization”
of the Beloved Disciple, Peter, Mary Magdalene, Thomas, or the disciples
in John 20–21. His gospel is directed to its audience, those who have not
seen, yet believed (20:29).36 It is at this point that John 21 falters in its role
as “closure” for the Johannine story. There are many indications across 1:1–
20:31 that this gospel has been written for those who do not see yet believe,
*readers and listeners who receive the text but who experience the absence of
Jesus*. This is especially clear in the Johannine use of sacramental material
25–26; 15:26–27; 16:7–11, 12–15),38 the need for Jesus to depart (14:1–4,
27–31; 16:4–7, 16, 19–21, 28), and in such editorial interventions as 1:1–18
and 19:35.39

In 21:1–25, Mary Magdalene, Thomas and the disciples do not play a
role. The issue of believing without seeing has disappeared from the Johan-
nine rhetorical agenda, and thus the faith experience of these foundational


36. As R. Alan Culpepper, “The Weave of the Tapestry: Character and Theme in
John,” in Skinner, *Characters and Characterization*, correctly observes: “In a sense,
each of the characters is a ‘plot functionary,’ and it is important to take note of the ways
characterization, theme development and the rhetorical design of the gospel narrative
are intertwined” (35).


Gospel of John: Text and Context*, ed. Francis J. Moloney, BibInt 72 (Leiden: Brill,

39. On 19:35, see Moloney, *Gospel of John*, 505–6, 509. It is important to recognize
that 1:1–18 is a massive authorial intervention directed to readers and listeners.
figures is unimportant. But Jesus must return to the story to bring Peter and the Beloved Disciple out of their homes (see 20:10), to establish them respectively as shepherd (Peter) and witness (Beloved Disciple). In 20:17–18, the risen Jesus spoke of his imminent return to his Father but that has been postponed in 21:1–23. John must address readers and listeners about a matter of concern: the nature of the community (vv. 3–18) and the respective roles of Peter (vv. 15–18) and the Beloved Disciple (v. 20–24).

John’s story of Jesus ended in 20:30–31, but that was not the end of the story of the Johannine disciples. The implied author whose narrative, christological, and theological strategies direct the rhetoric of 1:1–20:31 wanted to convince readers that the Scriptures had been fulfilled in the glorification of Jesus through his death and resurrection (19:23–37, esp. vv. 28–30), and he had left the graphē of his story of Jesus as a witness to that fulfillment (20:9, 30–31). What had been selected from the tradition had been “written” that all who did not see might believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in his name (20:30–31).40 But, as we know from subsequent Johannine literature (1, 2 and 3 John), the Johannine disciples were troubled by the unanswered questions concerning the nature and mission of the community as well as questions of leadership and authority.41 The story of Jesus had come to an end, but another story had begun. The implied author of John 21 called upon other Johannine traditions concerning the risen Jesus to generate that story.42

The addition of the epilogue was pastorally effective, as the ongoing presence of John 21 within Christian literature indicates. But it has altered


an important element in the rhetoric of the earlier narrative. A post-Easter Christian reader has been led from 1:1 to 20:31 to see the blessedness of the one who believes in Jesus as the Christ the Son of God and has life in his name because of what has been “written” (20:30–31), despite the absence of Jesus. In an ideal world, there is no need for the return of the ascended Jesus to guide the church with Peter, the Beloved Disciple, and the other disciples. Jesus has ascended to the Father to establish a new situation where his disciples are his brethren, children of God (see 1:12; 20:17). Another Paraclete is with the followers of Jesus and will be with them (see 14:16–17, 25–26; 16:7–11, 12–14) until Jesus returns to take them to his Father’s dwelling place (see 14:2–3, 18–24).

But Johannine disciples do not live in an ideal world. Despite the importance of “departure” and “absence” for the Christology of John 1:1–20:31, they need instructions from the risen Lord, still present, to guide them as they live the in-between-time. Thus the Fourth Gospel appeared in its present form: John 1:1–21:25. Behind John 1–21 lie two implied authors communicating slightly different points of view through the voice of a single narrator. John 21:25 hints that the early Christian community which listened to and read John 1:1–20:31, despite its conviction that “the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (21:25), experienced the need to add more to the story it already had as a treasured part of its story-telling tradition.

43. I have come to regard 21:1–25 as a “necessary epilogue,” but I suggest that John 1:1–20:31 has an internal rhetoric of its own (i.e., without 21:1–25), in leaving the questions of community and leadership (Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple) unanswered. This rhetoric matches the closure of the Gospel of Mark in 16:8, inviting post-Easter disciples to “fill the gaps” in their response to the presence of the risen Jesus. On this, see Francis J. Moloney, The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 339–54.


45. Aptly caught by Hooker, Endings, 80: “There is something odd about John’s ending; whereas in Mark the risen Christ never made an appearance, in John he never departs.”

46. On this notion of two implied authors writing for a single readership, see Zumstein, “Endredaktion des Johannesevangeliums,” 288–90.