Pleasant places in the gospel according to John: A classical motif as introit to theological awareness

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Abstract
This piece notes that the locus amoenus motif, common in both Graeco-Roman literature and art, may have provided a literary entry point through which non-Judaic readers might have apprehended sections of the gospel according to John. An outline of the trope is followed by an exposition of passages which might be interpreted through this lens. The study reveals that use of the motif would provide an introit, but that many further layers of meaning were present to those who read the text from a Judaic background. This holds good for explorations of place in Samaria, the Temple and Galilee. In one important respect, the gospel shifts the way in which the motif works – by presenting Jesus as the focus and shaper of the desirable place, rather than the place itself simply as a metaphor or symbol of desirable elements.

Keywords
Christology, gospel of John, locus amoenus, symbolism, Temple

Introduction
Scholars are increasingly aware that the identity of the implied audience or readership may have a bearing on how an ancient text was appropriated. Increasingly, phenomena within ancient environments which may assist the task of understanding how they might have understood a text are considered valuable. To avoid the charge of anachronism, it is advisable to look for data which are synchronous with the material which is being examined. John’s gospel and its implied readership both lend themselves for consideration of this type. In the wake of the Religionsgeschichte school and its attempts to find non-Judaic antecedents...
dogmatic and symbolic imagery in the gospel, the pendulum has swung back.\(^1\) The discoveries of Qumran, and the wealth of documentation subsequently published, have made it clear that much of the imagery in the gospel may be located well within the boundaries of Second Temple Judaism. This brings with it a further problem: how might non-Judaic audiences in the locations posited for the gospel, and the community which is associated with it, have begun to apprehend what is in many respects a complex piece of Judaic literature. Whilst much of this is open to the charge of speculation, it is possible to analyse the environment of the gospel and read the gospel in light of that without recourse to over-blown claims.\(^2\)

Such an approach might start with a broad overview of the use of symbolism and imagery at the broadest level. A number of images work across a number of cultures at a very wide and simple level. Thus Craig R. Koester has noted that symbols in the NT period may function across a broad cultural spectrum: core symbols like life, water, bread and light ‘stand on the boundary between various Jewish and Hellenistic modes of speech’.\(^3\) Water, as will be seen in the more detailed discussion which follows, is of particular interest in this regard when the Johannine literature is put under examination. Readers from a number of cultural backgrounds would therefore have approached John’s discussion of ‘water’ with a prior understanding of its symbolism culled from their immediate environment. Robert Royalty’s remarks about symbolism in regard to Revelation would hold good for many contexts of the 1st CE Mediterranean:

> Few of the Christians who heard the Apocalypse would have had the knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures that John had, whereas all would be conversant in the public aspects of Greco-Roman culture that organized social life in the cities of Asia Minor.\(^4\)

These sentiments hold good even if we hold that neither the provenance nor the author of the gospel and Revelation are most likely the same.\(^5\) However, a case may be made for a shared environment, even if not a common authorship.\(^6\)

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Additionally, Andreas Köstenberger notes that similarities with Greco-Roman literature may figure:

the Gospel also displays a considerable amount of surface affinities with Greco-Roman literature, both on the macro- and on the micro-level. However, there are several important differences that suggest that rather than reflect the wholesale adoption of a particular Greco-Roman literary genre, these affinities, which relate to both internal and external features, represent John’s attempts to contextualize the Gospel message for a Greco-Roman audience.7

Absent from his study of textual data, which has a strong focus on historiographical elements, is the literary trope known as the *locus amoenus* (‘pleasant place’ — hereafter *LA*), common in both Greek and Roman literature, but also in visual forms. As other studies have suggested that literary types other than historiography might play a part in the composition of the gospel,8 it may be worth asking if the *LA* provide a lens through which a Graeco-Roman reader or listener recognize the claims made in the gospel, and function as an introit to more detailed understanding of them.

### The *locus amoenus*

The *LA* is first found in Homer: its descriptive features include music, dancing, meadows, shady groves, water and an absence of death and destruction.9 It is found in a broad spectrum of Greek poetry: Homer, Simonides (*Greek Anthology* 7.510), Pindar (*Isthm. 6:74 ff.*), Sophocles (*Oedipus at Colonus 668–693*), Plato (*Phaedrus 229a–242a, 279b*), Theocritus (1:106, 5:31–33; 7:131–57, 11:44–48, 13:39–45, 22:37–43, epigram 4:1–12), and *Daphnis and Chloe*.10

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8 For example, Jo–Ann A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004).
It was recognized as a literary form by Varro and Verrius Flaccus (1st century BCE).\textsuperscript{11}

Pastoral landscapes included real and mythic creatures, for example, nymphs and muses.\textsuperscript{12} These images had a number of symbolic references: emotional interaction between humanity and nature, poetic inspiration, erotic encounters, or a \textit{locus sanctus} (an environment which is appropriate for encounters between the gods and humanity).\textsuperscript{13}

A resurgence in pastoral poetry in the late Roman Republic and the early Empire saw it appear in the writings of Lucretius (99BCE–55BCE), Vergil (70BCE–19BCE), Horace (65BCE–8BCE), who linked it to Epicurean philosophy, and Statius (50CE–95CE), whose pastoral idylls included technological details.\textsuperscript{14} It is a literary trope in which the human condition is explored:

a middle country of the imagination, halfway between a past perfection and a present imperfection, a place of becoming rather than being, where the individual’s potencies for the arts of love and poetry are explored and tested. It points two ways therefore, backward into the past and forward into a possible future.\textsuperscript{15}

In these writings, the pastoral form often has an eschatological or teleological function, sometimes serving as a literary frame for describing outcomes desirable to a philosophical school. Epicureans were key exponents of this practice. First seen in Lucretius, it also appears in Vergil and Horace. Thus Giesecke is able to say of \textit{De Rerum Natura} 2:29–33 and 15:1390–1396:

by including the \textit{locus amoenus} in both of these passages, namely the description of the origin of civilization and the description of the ultimate Epicurean lifestyle, Lucretius is providing his audience/readers with a means, on a metaphysical or spiritual level, of returning to the blessed springtime of human existence and its primal harmony with nature. It is with the guidance of Epicurus and the attending withdrawal from the misconceived modern day, urbane value system that this beatific condition, freedom from distress and anxiety, can be attained.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{12} Pearce, ‘The Function of the \textit{Locus Amoenus}’, 276.
\textsuperscript{15} Peter V. Marinelli, \textit{Pastoral} (London: Methuen, 1971), 37.
Thus the LA becomes a cipher for the goals and aspirations of the philosophical way of life, at least in Epicureanism.

It was a motif also accessible to those who were not literate or had no access to books. Pastoral motifs were significant architecturally. Houses in the late Republic and Early Empire with second-style wall paintings (circa 40–20BCE) included pastoral scenes. These can also be seen at the Villa Farnesina (Rome). Porticus 102 of the Villa San Marco (Naples) incorporates pastoral depictions of mythological figures. Contrapuntal designs at the Villa of the Papyri include Epicurean themes seen in the poetry of the period. The phenomenon was not confined to private houses: public architecture and design might include pastoral themes. They also were found in theatre design: Vitruvius includes it along with the tragic and comic as a setting.

In summary, the LA has four recurring features: a mixture of what is real and unreal, indications of what is truly desirable and worthwhile, an encounter with the mythical and/or divine, and a teleological function. With these in mind, it is worth considering how these points might have been recognized within John’s Gospel by a reader familiar with the LA.

The locus amoenus in John’s gospel

At first glance, the pickings appear slim: John appears to offer little that resembles the LA, nor are there direct descriptions of some perfect environment. Descriptions of anything approaching the Kingdom are few in comparison to those found in the Synoptics, which often include a distinct geographical component, although little descriptive detail. In many ways, Revelation, which is increasingly seen as written by a hand distinct from the gospel, would seem to offer more in this regard. Tellingly, the picture of the heavenly Jerusalem found in Revelation 21 and 22 echoes its nearest pastoral contemporary, Statius, in combining elements of both technology and rural landscapes within the visions.

However, issues of place do figure in John, not least in John 14:2 where the mention of monai pollai indicates a desirable place with generous and

20 Zarmakoupi, *Designing*, 43–44.
unlimited space. This qualification is significant, especially if it bears the sense of ‘all’, rather than just ‘many’, allowing a translation like ‘there are enough for all’. Even if this is not sustained, it suggests there is no agonistic competition for places, nor any ‘economics of scarcity’, understood as ‘the allocation of scarce resources among alternative wants’. This functions beyond the confines of economics, as Rescher observes:

An economy of scarcity is, by definition, one in which justice (in a restricted sense of the term) cannot be done because there is not enough to go around: if everyone is given a share proportional to his claims and desert then someone – or everyone – is pressed beneath the floor of the minimally acceptable level.

Such views had already been challenged in the Old Testament (OT). In this regard, the sentence is important, as it admits that there will be no need to compete against the rest of humanity for a desirable place close to God. Other than that, the verse reveals barely any equivalent of the LA as the descriptive details are minimal. However, it potentially indicates a relationship rather than a specific location, more about the presence of God than the location of the afterlife: this shift in focus, from place to relationship, will permeate the use of geography in the gospel.

Other passages contain more descriptive detail and so may also reveal the trope. One reference occurs early in the gospel: the calling of Nathanael (John 1:43–51). The encounter includes the puzzling reference to seeing Nicodemus hupo tên sukên (John 1:49). It is an obscure phrase which has brought forth a wealth of interpretations. Many of these depend on intertextual references to the OT: these include

potentially Eden, or the Messiah, the study of the Law, or Israel. Expressed in broader terms, these concerns overlap with the significance of the *LA*: ‘peace, prosperity and divine blessing’. Thus at a general, rather than a specific, interpretive level the substance of the scene is accessible. Nathanael, under the fig tree, symbolizes the apparent *telos* of his tradition in terms reminiscent of the *LA*. He is, to put it crudely, in a good place and the phrase indicates a positive recognition of this.

However, this location, and, by implication, the state it represents, are revealed as illusory in the dialogue which follows. All four elements of the *LA* intrude: real and unreal, as well as desirable, elements, an encounter with the mythic or divine and an eschatological function. These serve to introduce an even better and more desirable experience. Instead of the bliss of the fig tree, Nathanael will experience the higher experience of a heavenly vision of the Son of Man, a better condition shaped by symbolism and ideas culled from the OT: Genesis 28:12, an open heaven, and the Son of Man. Person and relationship replaces place alone. Again, access to the place adds an aspect of unreality or fantasy. A ladder used by angels is not exactly normal. It might be objected that such mythological language might be an obstacle to a Graeco-Roman reader, but it must be borne in mind that even a strongly materialist school like the Epicureans could use the language of heavenly ascent to make a teleological point.

A similar dynamic, in which Jesus effectively replaces places and/or rituals which exercise a teleological function, will be seen elsewhere. This new *telos* further finds in expression in fresh places and geographical descriptions: the sites of encounter with both the earthly and risen Jesus. The most intriguing of these is the Description of Jacob’s Well and the subsequent dialogue with a Samaritan woman about living water.

**John 4 and 7: The well at Samaria and living water**

The encounter with the Samaritan woman is set in a clearly defined place, near the well of Jacob (John 4:4), and the dialogue which follows includes talk of water.

48 for Israel; Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1997), 90 as a shared history, symbolic meaning, or rabbinic study.


Again, the locus of such a desirable element is shifted to the person of Jesus rather than a holy site or shrine. The encounter takes place in a significant location, redolent with scriptural symbolism, although Jacob may well not be known to a reader unacquainted with Jewish patriarchal history, and is not explained in the text. However, the mention of water shows the shortcomings of the LA motif in revealing the full symbolic potential of both place and water. Certainly the element is a desirable feature of the pastoral landscape, and therefore might indicate the desirability of Jesus and his message. However, the Johannine usage, particularly when viewed in a Judaic environment has much greater symbolic potential.

The same reality pertains to other details and characters: Jacob and the Samaritan woman. Without knowledge of the patriarchal narratives, the well is more important than Jacob, and would be at best a desirable geographical reference. If the reader does not know the background history of the Jews and Samaritans, it is hard for the woman to function as either allegorical or representative figure. The literary ‘type-scene’ might hold better prospects. Might our putative Graeco-Roman reader catch a glimpse of Odysseus’ encounter with Nausicaa (Odyssey 6) rather than the plethora of such accounts in the OT? The two stories share a broad similarity: a stranger encounters a woman and seeks hospitality. However, a cautionary note is needed. Odysseus may be a significant and positive prototype for some Epicurean reflection, notably on politics and statesmanship, but references to the Phaeacians and Nausicaa were also used pejoratively by critics of Epicureanism who used these passages to describe it as hedonistic.

The ḥudōr zōn (living water – John 4:10–11) promised by Jesus will replace the harsh reality of fetching water. It may be read initially as literal or symbolic. The symbolism of water, present in a variety of OT texts and Second Temple Judaism, indicates the inauguration of eschatological hopes, which Jesus will give. The point is further made in John 7:37–38 where Jesus proclaims himself

39 Zumstein, L’Évangile Selon Saint Jean (1–12), 147.
the source of this living water, potentially replacing the Temple. Whilst this has been disputed, with the implication that water flows from the believer, 7:38 may be translated as follows:

The one believing in me, as Scripture says, ‘streams of living water will flow from his [that is, my] heart’. 

When *autou* is linked to *eme* (me) rather than *ho pisteuōn* (the one believing) Jesus is identified as the source for the believer. This joint reading of John 4:14 and 7:37–38 is supported by another verse which identifies him as the source of water: John 19:34. However, a demand to choose either Jesus as the source, or the believer may be redundant. One thing remains sure: that the ‘living water’ is associated with the status of a believer, not a general anthropological category. Thus, Larry Paul Jones, whilst arguing for the Eastern reading which sees the believer as the source, notes that those who receive from Jesus, the source of living water, are to pass this gift on, just as Jesus did:

Believers are not the sources of the gifts Jesus brings, but when they receive those gifts they do so not merely for personal satisfaction but also to meet the needs of others who can come to faith after and through them.

The verses also exhibit an ambiguity which permeates the ‘I am’ sayings: they not only identify Jesus symbolically, but suggest his divine status. When the Johannine literature is considered as a whole nine points emerge: an invitation for the thirsty to drink (John 7:37; Revelation 22:17); no cost (John 4:10, 14; Revelation 21:6, 22:17); a fountain (*pēgē*) (John 4:14; Revelation 7:17, 21:6); end of thirst (John 4:14; Revelation 21:6); an association with eternity (John 4:14; Revelation 22:5); river(s), signifying an abundance (John 7:38; Revelation 22:1);


44 Brant, *John*, 254, with the reminder that water is not the only symbol operating in that verse; Miller, *At the Intersection*, 140–143, with the addition that John 21:1–11 develops this theme because of the rabbinic connection of the Feast of Booths with Ezek 47.


the water as a present reality (Revelation 22:16); an invitation to take (lambanein) (John 7:39; Revelation 22:17); and a divine source (John 4:10,14; 7:38; Revelation 7:38). Water also symbolizes the Spirit. More controversial is the question of whether the phrase has any sacramental connotation, given that the debate over sacramentalism in John is wide-ranging and runs the full gamut of options.

Would our Graeco-Roman reader grasp any of this in its fullness, or as intended? A study of the phrase reveals that it is common within writings which originate within Judaic contexts, often linked to purification. Purification was a widespread phenomenon in Second Temple Judaism: terms such as miqveh and bet tevilah reveal a variety of ritual bath traditions and practices. Discussion of purification included a debate over which kinds of water were most efficacious: there seems to have been a distinction between ‘running water’ and ‘living water’.

52 Koester, Symbolism, 168.
53 Miller, At the Intersection, 32–44.
The Judaic environment also provides spiritual understandings of the phrases which develop from the general symbolism of water. Water, and this includes flowing water, is associated with the gift of life.\(^5\) This imagery is also found in the OT (Ezek 47) as a gift from God, who is further described as \(\textit{pēgēn hudatos zōēs}\) (the ‘fount of living waters’ – Jer 2:13; also \(\textit{pēgēn zōēs}\) – ‘the fountain of life’ – Jer 17:13).\(^6\) In the period between Jeremiah and the rabbis, the symbolic understanding of water and rain as originating with God, and of rain water as a vehicle of purity were developed.\(^7\) Within the later stages of the Second Temple period water’s identification as life-giving leads to its further being linked to the Torah and its correct interpretation: Ps 1:1-3, 1 Bar 3:12, and the CD 3:13–17; 6:3–8 all take up this theme.\(^8\) In this period, a possible sacramental frame of reference of the gospel usage also emerges:

John himself may be drawing on a tradition of association between water and the Spirit such as that found in the Community Rule of Qumran.\(^9\)

Thus, ‘living water’ in the Judaic tradition may symbolize any or all of purity, the Holy Spirit, and lustral rites, which might include baptism in emerging Christianity. Awareness of these references will depend on the particular exposure readers had to such views and practices in their local contexts.

That said, a general reading of the metaphor is possible even if this symbolic environment is unfamiliar: ‘l’eau symbolise ce qui est le plus necessaire à la vie humaine et lui permet de s’épanouir’.\(^10\) Even if water as a symbol is much rarer in Graeco-Roman usage, it still was used thus. It appears in myths related to Oceanus, where it marks the boundary between this life and the afterlife, and the lake of Mnemosyne in the Orphic traditions: water is thus associated with life.\(^11\) Water, often from streams or springs, was certainly used in a number of purification rituals in the Graeco-Roman world, as shown by a number of archeological sites, including Delphi.\(^12\) Elsewhere, it is associated with divine powers (Muses, prophecy) and

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5 Miller, \textit{At the Intersection}, 124.
6 Miller, \textit{At the Intersection}, 125–130.
7 Miller, \textit{At the Intersection}, 130–137.
8 Miller, \textit{At the Intersection}, 137.
9 Stewart-Sykes, ‘Bathed in Living Waters’, 284 as part of the thesis that the writer of POxy 840 interprets living water sacramentally within a wider Syrian tradition which may well include a baptismal typology derived via the gospel.
10 ‘What symbolizes what is most needed for human life and allows it to flourish’ (translation mine), Zumstein, \textit{L’Évangile Selon Saint Jean (1–12)}, 149.
inspired utterance. The pastoral traditions such as Horace knew the desirability of water, often in ‘living’ forms, springs and rivers. For him, its ready availability in the LA makes it a place where negotium (the daily grind) is replaced by otium (leisurely bliss). Water may be described as sacred (hieron hud – Theocritus 1. 69, 7.136) and is ‘numinous substance whose presence marks man’s entrance into a world beyond his normal ken and normal powers’. The idea of ‘living water’ seems to indicate water of the best kind.

However, hydor zon appears rare as a phrase in the Graeco-Roman literature. The nearest phrase which can be found, hydor zenion, appears in the Greek Magical Papyri, where it means ‘rain water’. It has no spiritual significance in itself. A similar phrase is found in the Aeneid, where Aeneas stresses his need to be purified in a flumine vivo (‘living stream’). However, there is no indication of which, if any, cult or practice might apply directly, and care needs to be taken when appropriating poetic literature as evidence of cultic practice or theory.

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67 Koester, Symbolism, 175.
68 Some scholars muddy the issue. Thus, Hill, “‘The Orthodox Gospel’”, 276 implies the phrase occurs in Hellenistic literature, and cites Schoedel, Ignatius of Antioch, 185 as evidence. However, Schoedel refers not to ὑδόρ ζόν, but το θάλαν πιόντες ὑδόρ – drink[ing] speaking water (Anacreontea 12.7, cf. Ps–Justin Cohort.3 and Apuleius, Met. 6.14).
71 A point which is most apparent in the discussion of Dionysiac ritual and the value of Euripides’ Bacchae as a source: Albert Heinrichs, ‘Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina’, HSCP 82 (1978), 121–160 at 121–123, 150–152; ‘Changing Dionysiac
It becomes clear that the levels at which the symbolism resonate with the Graeco-Roman reader will be influenced by a number of factors. Without some prior knowledge of the Judaic usage, or an interpreter who explicates the significance of the term, it is highly likely to remain little more than a general allusion, or one coloured by prior exposure to what appears to be a rare phrase outside Judaism. Furthermore, both the metaphor (water) and what it symbolizes (the Spirit) are alien, so it cannot be assumed that a Graeco-Roman reader will readily see their significance. If all these details are shorn away, the qualification ‘living’ might do little more than hint at something superior to ordinary water which is desirable and immediately available. Without some prior knowledge, much of the importance of the phrase would pass unnoticed. However, the general symbolism of water as seen in the LA would provide a recognizable point of entry for the reader who wished to delve further into the worldview of the evangelist.

John 4: The Temple

This same episode includes a statement which spells out the ultimate deconstruction of contemporary places of worship: Jesus promises that both the worship of Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim will be replaced in his new dispensation. Again, without some prior knowledge of the history, these remarks will be baffling. At best, they might be taken as construing that the sites mentioned (en tō orei toutō – ‘this [unnamed] mountain’ – John 4:20) near Sychar (John 4:5) and Jerusalem (John 4:20) will be replaced by worship of some higher order: en pneumati kai alêtheia (‘in spirit and truth’ – John 4:23). The argument makes this clear even if the terms are not fully recognizable: this argument clearly proposes that a worship of higher order is presumed. However, its nature may be puzzling unless the reader or hearer holds that these are desirable characteristics. Even then, en pneumati may be opaque, not least because it does not indicate a dualist separation between flesh and spirit.72 A possible reference to Jesus himself rather than a designated place, specifically the Temple, for worship,73 suggests that the phrase is tied to a very specific theological context – the competing claims about true worship and the nature of God within Judaism. John David Audlin’s claim that the phrase represents a rejection of Hellenized conceptions of Jesus, specifically those promulgated by Paul, would make the phrase a direct challenge to the worldviews from which many Graeco-Roman readers might have come. However, he seems to be overly

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bold in describing a supposed conflict between Pauline and Johannine expressions of emerging Christianity: is there, for example, any firm evidence that the ‘author of this gospel…threw Paul out of his synagogue in Ephesus’?\textsuperscript{74} I think not. That begs a number of questions. Ultimately his point may hold some value, given that the claim of superiority is in respect of all other forms of worship. If the text is anchored in context of the narrative, the subtleties of thought might here not be fully apparent to a non-Judaic reader, but the gist of the argument, that worship centred on Jesus is superior to other forms, would be accessible.

The process of deconstruction finds its chief focus in John’s re-evaluation of the Temple. It is possible, by considering the symbolic and ritual design of the temple, to argue that functions as a ritual LA. Margaret Barker’s work lays bare the spatial symbolism of the Temple design, furniture and ornaments which reveal the Temple as a stylized and manufactured variant of God’s creation. Significantly, for any discussion of the LA, a garden motif is included in the form of water, lustral rites and the menorah.\textsuperscript{75} We might re-appropriate Warren’s terminology and describe the Temple as a ‘ritual in stone’.\textsuperscript{76} This allows for the displacement of a religious element, the Temple, and its replacement with one which is primarily Christological, Jesus himself.\textsuperscript{77}

However, a note of caution must be introduced, and the simple question asked, ‘how much would our putative reader known of the Temple design?’, especially if a non-Jew, living outside Palestine in the period after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple?\textsuperscript{78} Detailed comparisons of the Temple design as resonating with knowledge of the LA motif would only be possible for one acquainted with both, and that is by no means certain. So, to avoid the charge of parallelomania, it would appear best to put aside such lines of argument.

**John 6: Changing places**

Sometimes landscape, which can include features of the LA, intrudes, although it will always be the presence of Jesus which will become ultimately significant.


\textsuperscript{76} The original phrase is ‘ritual in ink’, for a definition, see Meredith J.C. Warren, *My Flesh is Meat Indeed: Nonsacramental Reading of John 6:51–58* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 8–10.


\textsuperscript{78} Significant elements in this hold good even if the earlier date of the gospel, around 68 CE is maintained. The gospel, after all, continues to be read well after its composition.
Key events, such as baptism and the meal of John 6, take place in rural, rather than urban, locations or religious centres. Jesus is also portrayed as one who has power to make the environment agreeable. The Feeding of the Five Thousand (John 6:1–15) reveals him as one who has the power to transform an environment, where the feeding of a crowd in a rural setting (not agricultural – John 6:10) seems an impossibility (John 6:7–9). For some, *chortos polus* (‘much grass’) of John 6:10 is sometimes thought to gain additional layers of significance through references to messianic imagery or Psalm 23. To the reader familiar with the *LA* motif, but not the Judaic material, an analogous element of desirability would be recognizable. Similarly, Jesus’ walking on the water transforms a hostile environment (John 6:21). The ensuing dialogue will pursue this further. The food which he provides, whether identified sacramentally or Christologically, will not simply be one which fills stomachs, but one which is qualitatively superior.

**John 20 and 21: Changing places 2**

This pattern continues after the resurrection: features of the *LA* continue to provide a backdrop to the action which might well inform the sensibilities of readers familiar with the trope. The first encounters with the Risen Jesus take place near the tomb (*mnēmeion* – John 19:41, 42; 20:1–4, 6, 8, 11), located in a garden (*kēpos* – John 19:41). The Risen Christ appears as the gardener (*ho kēpouroς* – John 20:15). For some this indicates a motif about paradise, drawing particularly on imagery from Genesis. Whatever view is taken of the nature of Jesus’ resurrection, the encounter between Mary and the (at first) unrecognized gardener fits well with the uncanny or supernatural encounters of the *LA* motif: one does not expect to encounter someone who has died publicly and been well and truly buried. The *LA* motif thus provides a literary hint to the non-cognoscenti of Judaism that something uncanny is afoot.

Later, the disciples will share another simple meal in a rural location, beside the sea of Galilee (John 21:12–14), after Jesus has changed the Sea of Galilee from a barren fishing ground to a sea of plenty: the catch of fish threatens to break the net (John 21:6). A barren, unfriendly environment, indicated by the long failure to catch any fish, has again been transformed through the actions of the Risen Jesus. Just as the landscape of John 6 became a friendly environment because of his presence, so does the Sea of Galilee now become a desirable and pleasant place, transformed by an encounter with a supernatural presence. This marks a major departure from the classical tropes. In those, the *LA* is symbolic of a philosophical

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80 Anderson, *The Christology*, 137–166 for the interpretive debate.
telos, or a utopian hope: it is simply there for the spectator to enjoy. In the gospel, Jesus is consistently depicted as one who reconfigures the landscape in which he finds himself, be it Samaria, Galilee or the Temple. The desirability of place is directly linked to his activity.\footnote{Note that the gospel is much more explicitly Christocentric in its use of the LA than Revelation, which includes far more description of desirable features. Luther’s observation that ‘Christ was “neither sought nor known in it”’ (Arthur W. Wainwright, \textit{Mysterious Apocalypse} (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 109) certainly seems applicable to the use of the LA, as Revelation does not place Jesus’ activity at its centre. This variance in the use of the trope might be a small piece of evidence against common authorship.} This point is emphasized, and potentially the \textit{LA} motif reiterated, if this passage is considered to be the realization of John 1:51.\footnote{Jean Zumstein, ‘La Rédaction Finale De L’Évangile Selon Jean (À L’Exemple du Chapitre 21)’, in Jean-Daniel Kaestli, Jean-Michel Poffet and Jean Zumstein (eds), \textit{Communauté Johannique et son Histoire: La Trajectoire de l’Évangile de Jean aux deux premiers Siècles} (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1990), 209–230 at 220.} This is even true of the heavenly locale; there may be ‘many mansions’ (John 14:1), but even there Jesus goes to prepare the place, obviously desirable and closely identified with his own presence (John 14:2–3).

\section*{Conclusions}

In one significant respect, the \textit{LA} motif, if used in the gospel, would function in a manner which relates more to its pastoral roots: a place of uncanny encounters between humanity and either a deity or supernatural creatures indicating a desirable existence. It would alert readers unfamiliar with Judaic and Scriptural traditions to the significance of the events they describe. Such a motif fits well with those rural locations, already identified above, where Jesus, both earthly and risen, encounters his followers. Given the prominence of the \textit{LA} motif in Roman culture, it is likely to have been known to wide audience, but these claims remain probable, and I am loathe to conclude that they must have been part of the gospel’s design or reception. Johannine studies have seen much ink expended on grand reconstructions of the Johannine community and audience which are increasingly questioned.\footnote{David A. Lamb, \textit{Text, Context, and the Johannine Community}. Library of New Testament Studies Vol. 447 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1–55 provides a critique of the ebb and flow of views about the Johannine community.} Purely and simply, it cannot be proven that the motif was definitely a part of the fourth gospel’s composition or reception. That said, such claims are not impossible, either. If this was a possible lens for reading the gospel, the trope broke free from its Graeco-Roman origins and was re-accentuated to become Christocentric: desirability of place was intimately linked with the activity and teaching of Jesus. In addition, the claims of the gospel were never fully exhausted by the \textit{LA}. These pastoral episodes contained further elements which were less accessible to some readers: claims made that Jesus, rather than the Temple and
its festivals, was the means to knowing and relating positively to God, would be greatly enriched by a more specific understanding of a Judaic context. Furthermore, the focus was not, as in pastoral, on landscape, so much as on relationship and encounter. Friendship and values of encounter featured significantly the pastoral accounts, inasmuch as the LA was a place which was expected to be free from strife, war and tension, but here they took centre stage, and the relationship with Jesus became the dominant feature of the new place.\textsuperscript{85}

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