

# Performing John: the participatory nature of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

Cornelia van Deventer<sup>2</sup>

*Scholars often refer to the term implied audience to describe the ideal audience an author intends to fashion through a specific story or narrative. While the Fourth Gospel explicitly paints the picture of the implied audience as those who will believe and have life in Jesus' name (19:25; 20:31), the Gospel's engagement with the audience exceeds these purpose statements. The picture of the ideal audience is on the table from the beginning of the Gospel and strengthened by the rhetorical<sup>3</sup> mastery of creating attractive identities with which the audience is implicitly exhorted to identify. The audience, therefore, becomes more than spectators of the Fourth Gospel, but essentially participators and finally performers as John opens up its performative axis to them.*

## Introduction

The author of the Fourth Gospel articulates the purpose and implied rhetorical effect of the gospel on its audience in no uncertain terms near the end of the narrative (19:35; 20:30-31). However, to an audience paying attention to the cues within the Gospel, this rhetorical effect is at work from the prologue, as the evangelist invites participation from the audience by creating various identities who perform the purpose of the Gospel well. These include the ideal group referred to as 'we' (1:14; 21:24) and various characters, including the beloved disciple, who fulfill the aims of the Gospel by believing in Jesus. The purpose statement(s) expressed after the climax therefore exhort the audience to become a "participating audience" (Loubser, 2013:169) by performing what they have seen and to experience the life that accompanies such belief. The Gospel therefore contains a dimension of experiencing, participating and ultimately *performing*.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the material within this paper is taken from van Deventer (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Dr Cornelia van Deventer is a lecturer at the South African Theological Seminary (SATS). She holds an MTh and PhD in New Testament from Stellenbosch University.

<sup>3</sup> Rhetoric is the art of using (mostly) speech or language to persuade others (Blackburn, 2008:317). The rhetorical effect, therefore, refers to the persuasive effect of the text on its audience.

## Performance and participation

Various scholars have argued for the dramatic<sup>4</sup> and performative nature of the Fourth Gospel. One of the strongest voices in this discussion has been that of Jo-Ann Brant, who argues in her book *Dialogue and Drama. Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (2004) that the Johannine author intentionally resembled notions of the ancient Greek tragedy to strengthen the rhetoric effect of the Gospel on a first-century Ephesian audience, who would have been familiar with the Greek drama. Others like F.R.M. Hitchcock (1923), C.R. Bowen (1930), Milo Connick (1948), Stephen Smalley (1978:192-203), William Domeris (1983; 2018), S.A. Cummins (2008), Harold Attridge (2015), and Cathleen Conway (2015) have also ventured in a similar direction, discussing the possible resemblance between the Johannine Gospel and the ancient drama and the possible rhetorical effect(s) that this could have on an audience.

In my doctoral dissertation, I attempted to take these lines of thought further by reading the Johannine prologue and crucifixion scenes through a drama lens and exploring the possible experience of a hypothetical audience throughout (Van Deventer, 2018). While the performative nature of the Fourth Gospel came through strongly, I was surprised by the performative axis on which I found myself as the reader of the text. This performative axis is recognised by performance critics like Richard Horsley and David Rhoads. Horsley (2011:147) refers to the power of performance not only to evoke meaning but essentially to "work on or among the group of hearers in the context". Rhoads (2006:128) argues along the same line when asserting that a performance "does not work until the audience works it out", as performers seek to transform their audiences and to "impel them to action" (2006:130). The idea is that the audience becomes part of what they see and that what they see, in turn, challenges and shapes their own context and circumstances (Powell, 2010:241).

As biblical scholars, we recognise that biblical material was written to have a rhetorical effect on its receivers and to move them from point A to point B. The outcome is thus a certain type of audience who would be convinced by the text to

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<sup>4</sup> The word "dramatic" is used here to refer to something which resembles drama rather than something which is exaggerated or tense. See Keuris (1996:2) for a discussion of the different uses of the word.

embody the ethos it proclaims. As the modern interpreter has little access to information about the historical audience of biblical texts, biblical scholars, and specifically those who make use of narrative criticism, often refer to this type of audience as the *implied audience*. The implied audience is the ideal audience who would respond to the narrative in the way that the implied author wills and who would thus actualise the rhetorical effect of the text (Powell, 2010:241-242; see Rhoads, 2011:109).<sup>5</sup> The implied author would use a variety of techniques to lead the audience into embodying the ideal ethos as portrayed in the text.

The Fourth Gospel is unique in the sense that the evangelist not only uses various rhetorical techniques to identify the implied audience but spells out the characteristics of this audience in a direct address to the receivers by identifying the purpose of the Gospel (20:30-31; cf. 19:35). While it might seem like the evangelist only involves the audience at a very late stage in the narrative, this could not be further from the truth. The evangelist's weaving of a self-conscious implied audience can be traced all the way back to the Gospel's beginning, or *prologue*.

## Participation and the Prologue

Whether it was added at a later stage or not,<sup>6</sup> the Johannine prologue serves a very particular function in the Fourth Gospel. It is unique in the sense that it casts an interpretive lens on the whole story of the Gospel and essentially creates a privileged audience. Similar to the ancient drama (see Worthen, 2000:19) the audience is oriented through the use of a prologue. This prologue contains dramatic speech, a way of speaking which precedes action (Brant, 2004:42), to give the audience a privileged understanding of what they are about to see and hear.<sup>7</sup> They are

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<sup>5</sup> The implied author is the perspective from which the narrative seems to be written and presented (Powell, 2010:241). Each narrative presents its audience with an author which they could discern from the story. The convictions, values, and perspectives presented in the story will be that of the implied author. This paper will refer to the implied author of the FG as the evangelist.

<sup>6</sup> Scholars like Anderson (2008:97), Barr (2002:388), Bultmann (1923:18), Moloney (1993:23), Miller (1989:3), Ridderbos (1997:18), and Voorwinde (2011:22) hold that the prologue was a later addition. Moreover, Bultmann (1923:18-20), Lamarche (1964:36), Miller (1989:5), and Schnelle (1992:213-225) argue for internal redaction of the prologue. However, due to the lack of any FG manuscripts without the prologue, as well as references to the prologue in second century commentaries, the possibility of redaction should also not be uncritically accepted (Brant, 2011:23; Köstenberger, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> The use of past tense verbs in the prologue, therefore, does not imply that the events narrated have necessarily already happened in the story world (Ridderbos, 1997:38), but is a dramatic tool used by the evangelist to form the point of view of the audience. Powell (1990:37) refers to such a narration, which precedes the actual event(s) narrated, as a prolepsis.

introduced to ὁ λόγος, the divine protagonist and hero, and are provided with all the information that they need to make a reasonable value judgement on him (and the other characters).

The prologue informs the audience that ὁ λόγος was from the beginning, that he is turned towards God,<sup>8</sup> and that he himself is God (1:1). He created everything (1:3), contains life (1:4), and illuminates the human race (1:4, 9). Moreover, the evangelist complements the protagonist by introducing an antagonist referred to as ἡ σκοτία (the darkness – 1:5). The audience is therefore immediately thrust into a world with two realities: that of light and that of darkness. Moreover, they are given a glimpse of the coming interaction between the light and darkness with the promise that the light will not be mastered<sup>9</sup> by the darkness.

While the prologue's focus is on the divine protagonist, the evangelist draws the audience's attention to another party, which is simply identified as "we" in 1:14. This unnamed group is identified as co-seers with the evangelist of the glory of ὁ λόγος with the first-person plural ἐθεασάμεθα (from θεάομαι, which means "to observe something [unusual] with continuity and attention" – Louw & Nida, 1996). This first-person plural most probably refers to the evangelist and the fellow eyewitnesses to the life and resurrection of Jesus (Carson, 1991:128; cf. the first-person plural used by Luke in the Book of Acts to describe the movements of the apostles). It is curious, however, that the evangelist refers to this group at the dawn of the Johannine story. While he uses the third-person singular to refer to the one from whom the eyewitness account comes (αὐτοῦ in 21:24) and the first-person singular to refer to himself (οἶμαι in 21:25), he deems it necessary to move beyond these categories and create an authoritative *group* who is present with him in the recital of the prologue.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> While ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν can simply be translated as "the word was with God", the preposition πρὸς has an element of "towards" to it. Moreover, if the chiasmic structure of the prologue is taken into consideration, the πρὸς τὸν θεόν in v.1 and the εἰς τὸν κόλπον in v.18 strengthen the same idea of nearness and intimacy with the Father.

<sup>9</sup> The passive κατέλαβεν (from καταλαμβάνω) can imply both being overcome or being understood. To encapsulate both possibilities, I translate it with being mastered.

<sup>10</sup> Köstenberger (2009:116) refers to these first-person plural uses (1:14; 21:24) as the "authoritative 'we's", used by the evangelist to strengthen the authority of the witness presented in the FG..

While this use of the first-person plural adds weight to the testimony that will be presented to the audience, its possible rhetorical effects exceed this as the evangelist can also be said to create a(n) (ideal) group identity – and a porous one as this paper will argue – with this reference. While the first-person plural cannot be said to be aimed explicitly at the audience, their privileged position of knowledge through the prologue can highlight a potentially inclusive dimension to the “we”. It is also telling that the evangelist uses ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν (“we all received”) in v.16 to refer to the gift upon gift/grace upon grace. This “we all” certainly has a more inclusive ring to it, which seems to include the audience.

As the receivers of the prologue, the audience is therefore given the privilege to function as insiders (Skinner, 2016:124). Unlike the characters in the Gospel, they have divine and eternal insight regarding ὁ λόγος. Important to note is that the beholding of Jesus’ glory does not simply function as a historical statement (i.e., we have seen the life and ministry of Jesus), but also manifests itself as a deeply theological assertion (we have seen the life and ministry of Jesus and have found divine glory in it). The evangelist therefore introduces a theological interpretation in the opening scene of the Gospel (Keener, 2009:17), which is freely shared with the audience. The audience is initiated into the Johannine story with a revelation of his divine glory – the perspective that the “we” brings to the table.<sup>11</sup> The first-person plural can, therefore, be regarded as a rhetorical tool which creates an inclusive feel among the Johannine audience, implicitly trying to convince them that they too stand witness to the glory of ὁ λόγος (1:14) and the truthfulness of the account they will receive (21:24).

Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere (Van Deventer, 2018:23), the use of θεάομαι (and not ὁράω or βλέπω) could be significant in a late Ephesian context where the audience was familiar with τὸ θέατρον: the word used to describe the space where dramas were performed (Brant, 2011:34-35; see Carver, 2009:3; Louw & Nida, 1996; Worthen, 2000:3). While this resemblance in no way implies that the Fourth Gospel was written to be performed as a drama, it creates an audience who is invited to

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<sup>11</sup> A similar porousness of group identity can be seen in the First Letter of John, which begins with clear distinctions between “us” and “you” (plural). However, in chapter three, those distinctions become undone as the author begins using an inclusive “we” to refer to himself and the receivers of the letter. Cf. e.g., the emphasis on the divide between senders and receivers in phrases like ὁ ἐωράκαμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν, ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ’ ἡμῶν (1:3), to the inclusive ring to a later phrase like, ἀγαπητοί, νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν (3:2).

behold together with the evangelist as they are given the perspective from above. This way of speaking not only includes the audience in the story but nudges them in the direction of becoming a participating implied audience.

Not only does the evangelist create the group known as “we”, but another group is identified in broad and general terms: the objects of the ministry of ὁ λόγος. The life residing in him is described as the light of *humanity* (τῶν ἀνθρώπων – v.4), the subjects of belief through John’s testimony are described as *all/everyone* (πάντες – v.6), and the potential receivers of the light are affirmed as *all humanity* (πάντα ἄνθρωπον – v.9). Moreover, the use of present verbs to describe the continuous illumination by the protagonist (φαίνει in v.5, and φωτίζει in v.9), essentially indicates that the giving of light continues into the present.<sup>12</sup> The benevolence of ὁ λόγος is therefore identified in universal language, which, like the “we”, does not close itself off to the audience of the Fourth Gospel, and his revelation is identified as a present *shining*, available to the audience.

However, unlike the “we”, who are identified by their mutual *beholding*, the objects of ὁ λόγος’ ministry are divided into two groups on the basis of a mutual *doing*. Building on the dichotomy of light and darkness, protagonist and antagonist, the evangelist paints the picture of two distinct realities, as there will be those who do not accept or receive (παραλαμβάνω, lit. “to accept the presence of a person with friendliness” – Louw & Nida, 1996) ὁ λόγος and those who do (vv. 11-12).

The ones who embrace the protagonist are given the authority or right to become children of God (1:12). While it is not yet clear what will happen to those who align themselves with the antagonist, the promise of a status of kinship with the divine is more than enticing, especially among a first-century Mediterranean audience, who saw kinship as one of the central identity markers and indicators of honour (Barr,

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<sup>12</sup> While the FG makes ample use of the historical/dramatic present (a present verb which refers to a past event and is therefore translated as an imperfect), these are usually found in narrative sections. The use of a present in a more poetic or hymnly section like the prologue is curious as this section does not serve as a telling of events in the same way that a narrative does. Moreover, in the FG the narrator usually interrupts with background information using the imperfect, where the action-packed scenes make use of the aorist and (historical) present (Reimer, 1985:30). It is therefore more likely that the present should be taken as an actual present, and not a historical present. Brant (2004:41) goes further in her reference to the narrative section by arguing that, while the present tense is translated as an historic or dramatic action in these sections, it can very easily be translated in the present to create the idea of immediate action in front of an audience. In this sense, the reader or receiver of the Fourth Gospel becomes an eyewitness together with the Fourth Evangelist. Such language “enacts as it reports”.

2002:31). This promise of kinship and the diversion into two possible destinies for a universal group of receivers is a profound rhetorical technique to make the audience aware of a choice to be made. Moreover, the ones who receive ὁ λόγος are designated as τοῖς πιστεύουσιν (v.12), “those (continuously) believing” [in his name]. In a similar fashion to the illuminating action from the protagonist, this use of the present (participle) extracts the decision of belief from the story world and transposes it into the audience’s present situation. The evangelist, therefore, seems to implicitly hint at a “decisive action in the immediate future” (Loubser, 2013:176) that awaits all humanity (πάντα ἄνθρωπον).

## Participation and Characterisation

While the dichotomy between receivers and rejectors is birthed in the prologue, it takes flesh throughout the story, constantly reminding the audience of two distinct realities with two distinct performances and, ultimately, two distinct destinies. The dualistic language employed by the Johannine author is reinforced by playing various motifs off against one another. The author opposes life and death (5:24; 10:10, 28; 11:25),<sup>13</sup> light and darkness (1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 11:9-10; 12:35, 46), above and below (3:31; 8:23), heaven and earth (3:12, 31), the truth and lies (8:44), to mention but a few. However, arguably one of the most powerful dichotomies emerge between characters who believe in the protagonist and those who do not, as these opposing ethe begin taking flesh in specific objects of Jesus’ ministry. These characters express views and model behavior which identifies them either as part of those who accept Jesus and become children of the divine (1:12), or as those who reject him (1:10-11). Skinner (2016:124) emphasises that the evangelist employs this dichotomous language to illustrate that for the characters in the story, and for the audience, there is no middle ground.<sup>14</sup> The prologue’s orientation of the audience influences the way in which they evaluate, not only the character of Jesus, but every other character in the Johannine Gospel (Skinner, 2016:124), and, eventually, themselves.

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<sup>13</sup> Life is not always explicitly contrasted to death in the FG, but often to concepts which are semantically connected to it. In 3:36, life is contrasted to having the wrath of God (ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ) remain on you, while 5:29 contrasts the resurrection to life with the resurrection to judgement (κρίσις).

<sup>14</sup> Campbell (2017:71) argues along the same line in his discussion of the first Johannine letter. He asserts: “The dichotomies of love/hate and light/darkness present life through stark contrasts. [...] John’s point is to remind his readers that there are ultimately only two allegiances.”

What is significant about Johannine characterisation is that characters who embody ideal responses to Jesus can be found throughout. Where the Synoptics depict a growth in the revelation of Jesus in the eyes of the disciples, the Fourth Gospel depicts ideal responses from the very first chapter (Carson, 1991:22).<sup>15</sup> Once again, the privilege of the Johannine audience is telling, as they are exposed to *ideal* performances of faith from the beginning.

Another observation is that many of the characters who respond in an ideal way to Jesus, remain unnamed. While it could be supposed that characters with little literary value would be left anonymous in a narrative (Skinner, 2016:127), the Johannine author does this with characters who feature prominently in the story, like the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple. The unnamed characters are often those who embody a response of faith, like the Samaritan woman (4:1-42), the royal official (4:46-54) or the formerly blind man (9:1-41). On the other hand, the Fourth evangelist often explicitly names characters who do not necessarily fulfill a crucial role when the plot is considered.<sup>16</sup> Since it would be hard to imagine that the evangelist did not know the name of Jesus' mother (not to mention the name of the beloved disciple), it makes sense to assume that the anonymity of these characters is deliberate.

While there could be merit to argue that the beloved disciple (who identifies himself as the eye witness and author in 21:24, and perhaps 19:35) wished to portray himself in a more modest fashion, there still remains no explanation for the fact that the names of other significant characters, who are named in the Synoptics, are left out. It could be that the receivers of the Gospel were so familiar with the names that the evangelist did not see the need to mention them, but this audience would also have been familiar with other names which are mentioned in the Gospel (e.g., John and Nicodemus). Skinner (2016:125-127) argues that this Johannine anonymity is an intentional literary device used by the evangelist to create archetypes – little pockets of implied audiences, if you will – for the audience to associate with and mimic.

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<sup>15</sup> E.g., Nathanael's divine declaration in 1:49.

<sup>16</sup> Skinner (2016:127) refers to the example of Malchus, the servant whose ear was cut off by one of the disciples (19:10). While he does not function as an important character when the plot is considered, his name is explicitly given.

The Samaritan woman, who becomes a powerful evangelist to her home town of Sychar, becomes a type for any marginalised, shamed and unqualified individual to meet Jesus, seek the truth of who he is, and become an active disciple. The royal official functions as a type for anyone prominent in the systems of the world to humble themselves and believe in Jesus and allow that faith to manifest in their household. To anyone who finds themselves disqualified and ostracised from the religious discourse of the day, the blind man functions as a type of what it means to meet Jesus outside of this discourse and to seek a revelation of who he is.

While the Fourth Gospel portrays various characters who react to Jesus in a praiseworthy manner, one stands apart from the rest. The unnamed, yet crucial, character of the beloved disciple, in a sense, embodies the perfect response to Jesus (Skinner, 2016:124). He exemplifies intimacy with Jesus as their relationship is defined by his identification as ὁ μαθητῆς ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς (the disciple whom Jesus loved) and his last identification in the Fourth Gospel (21:20) emphasises his intimate position as the one who was reclining against Jesus' chest (ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) before his crucifixion (13:23). Moreover, he is the one who directly asks Jesus about his betrayer (13:25). He is represented as one who follows and seeks to know Jesus (10:4, 27) and therefore becomes an archetype (and performer) of one who has eternal life (see 17:3). He also exemplifies loyalty, as he is the one disciple who is present during Jesus' trial (18:15-18; cf. Peter's characterisation as one who chooses to warm himself by the fire and denies Jesus three times) and crucifixion (19:26-27). Moreover, he features as one who remains in Jesus as he commanded his disciples in 15:4 and Jesus' words abide in this beloved disciple (see 15:7) as he compiles the testimony of what Jesus said and did in order to facilitate faith in the hearers and seers of the story (21:24). Above all, the beloved disciple embodies that for which the Fourth Gospel was written – belief in Jesus as the Christ and son of God (20:31). He is described as the one who believes after entering the empty tomb of Jesus (20:9) and the one who recognises the risen Jesus (21:7) without even having understood the scriptures (21:9; cf. the characterisation of Thomas as the one who believes because he has seen [and touched] in 20:27-29).

Not only is the beloved disciple left unnamed, but he is also not given any identity markers, which adds a porous dimension to his personality. Nothing is said of his genealogy (cf. e.g., Andrew, identified as Simon Peter's brother in 1:40) and his

cultural, religious, and political status remains a mystery to the audience. The only identity marker attributed to this disciple is his relationship with Jesus. In this sense, the beloved disciple becomes a blank slate, onto which any audience member can write their name and his life becomes a script, which any willing audience member can perform.

The beloved disciple also functions as far more than a mere character, but identifies as the narrator of the story (21:24). The audience, therefore, does not only look at the ethos of the beloved disciple, but the narrative allows them to identify even closer with him. As they read his retelling of the events and his theological interpretation of them, they become co-tellers of the story. They now know what the ideal character knows as they see the life of Jesus from his point of view. With this, they are given the opportunity to assume the beloved disciple's (porous) role and become the ideal and beloved performers of the story as they read or hear it (Brant, 2004:25).

## Participation and Purpose

Of the four gospel accounts, the Fourth Gospel is unique in the sense that it clearly communicates its purpose and implied effect on the audience (19:35; 20:30-31). The evangelist also comments on the validity of the Gospel by reintroducing the “we” in the epilogue (21:24-25).<sup>17</sup> While not the only gospel to contain a purpose statement, the Fourth Gospel's purpose statement is unique when compared to that of Luke, who addresses a narratee named Theophilus and holds that the purpose of the orderly writing is that Theophilus might have assurance (know securely) concerning the words that he has been taught (1:4 – ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν). While Theophilus might be a generic name for a believer (Θεόφιλε lit. meaning, “friend of God”), the use of the vocative (a noun used to address someone specifically) and singular verbs (ἐπιγνῶς; κατηχήθης) fit the context of an address to one specific person.

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<sup>17</sup> While this ‘double ending’ has led to much speculation regarding the later addition of the epilogue, Brant (2004:64) argues that the two sections, when pieced together, contain all the necessary components to the ending of a Greek tragedy. It is usually after such closing lines where the playwright informs the audience what the drama has achieved and the audience is given the opportunity to express whether they were satisfied or not with the drama and its plot. Euripides was known for communicating the selective nature of his work as the Johannine narrator does in 20:30 and 21:24-25. Cf. *Alc.* 1159-1163; *Bacch.* 1387-1394; *Med.* 1415-1419; *Hel.* 1689-1690; *Andr.* 1284-1288.

Where Luke expresses his intention that Theophilus (and probably those under his discipleship) come to a place of assurance, the Fourth evangelist widens the scope of the Gospel's receivers by using a generic second-person plural in the purpose statement in 20:30-31. The first mention of this resolution is found in 19:35, where the eyewitness of the events connected to the crucifixion asserts his accuracy and indicates his goal: ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς πιστεύ[ε]τε (that you also may believe). Not only is the emphatic unnecessary pronoun (you) included in the phrase, but the evangelist adds a καί (also/too), making the audience aware that there are those who have come to believe before them and that they are exhorted to participate in this ethos and become part of the "we". As mentioned before, one of these who have already come to believe is the beloved disciple. The audience is explicitly invited to model this belief, which has been expounded over the past 19 chapters.

In 20:31, the author again points the finger to the audience asserting that the Gospel was written so that they (lit. "you" [plural]) may believe (πιστεύ[ε]τε) that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God (ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ), and that this act of believing will produce life in his name. Here, the evangelist goes further and, unlike Luke, explicitly spells out the content of this belief and the effect(s) thereof on the lives of the audience.<sup>18</sup> The content of their belief is identified as a revelation of the identity of the protagonist, which will empower them to participate in the life which the Gospel has been testifying of since the prologue (1:4; 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14; 5:21, 24, 29, 40; 6:27, 33, 40, 47, 53-54, 63, 68; 8:12; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2, 3). Moreover, while the prologue referred to a non-specific group of believers (1:7, 12), the evangelist now specifically aims this category at the audience – the goal of this entire exercise of telling and remembering is that they will become the group referred to in the prologue. Besides the implied ethos of this audience, the evangelist once again provides no further context – no names, locations, ethnicities, or genders

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<sup>18</sup> The specificity of the author poses a challenge to those who argue that the audience of the FG was limited to a sectarian group referred to as the Johannine community. Where the Lukan introduction proposes a high-context receiver (a receiver with a high level of understanding of the context and content – Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:16) with its references to "that which you [singular] have been taught" (ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων), the purpose statement of the FG is too explicit to suppose the same degree of inside information and relationship. Even if the addressees of the Gospel did comprise of a tight-knit group who shared the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Fourth evangelist seems aware of a wider audience and looks outwardly in his writing style by taking care to explain theological realities that a low-context audience (an audience with a lower level of understanding of the context and content – Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:17) would not understand (e.g., 2:21; 11:13).

are ascribed to the “you”: it is simply presented as a porous group with which anyone who hears or sees the Gospel can identify.

Since πιστεύ[ζ]ητε can be regarded as either an aorist subjunctive (πιστεύζητε) or present subjunctive (πιστεύητε), some argue that it can be interpreted in a twofold manner.<sup>19</sup> The interpretation of the verb as an aorist can imply a once-off action (punctiliar), creating the idea that the Gospel set out to achieve an evangelistic goal in leading its audience to believe in Jesus as the Christ (see Johnson, 1999:527-528; Köstenberger, 2009:85).<sup>20</sup> Many of the characters encountering Jesus model such a *first belief* (e.g., Nathanael – 1:44-51; the Samaritan woman – 4:1:42; the blind man – 9:1-41; the crowd – 10:41-42). At other times, the Gospel seems to presuppose an audience which already believes (e.g., Jn. 13-17; Köstenberger, 2009:85), aligning with an interpretation of the verb as present tense, which points to a more continuous action (“that you may continue to believe”). The above illustrate that the verb should not be interpreted in an exclusive sense, but that Gospel of John had the potential to reach unbelievers in an evangelical sense, but also to edify existing believers in a pastoral way.

The implications of the verb πιστεύω (“I believe”) are no mystery as this ethos has been expounded and enacted through the Johannine story. This belief is not a cognitive process but speaks of “complete trust and reliance” on Jesus (Louw-Nida, 1996; Köstenberger, 2009:86; Souter, 1917:203), as performed by the characters who accept him. Jesus also often connects ὁ πιστεύων (the one who believes) and τὰ ἔργα (the works), indicating that belief and ethos go hand in hand (e.g., 3:16-21; 14:12). Moreover, belief and relationship with Jesus are also tightly connected (e.g., 1:12; 4:42; 9:38). The audience is invited to participate in something which exceeds knowing; they are invited to participate in an “existential and holistic involvement” with Jesus, “inspired through the live performance” of the story (Loubser, 2013:169).

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<sup>19</sup> Where Codex Alexandrinus uses the aorist subjunctive, Papyrus 66, Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Vaticanus use the present subjunctive (Köstenberger, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> However, Mounce (2009:195, 198, 201) emphasises that the use of the aorist usually points to an *undefined* action and not necessarily to a punctiliar action (an action occurring at one specific point in time). This means that the aorist is used to tell the reader that something happened, but that it does not tell the reader much about the aspect of the action. Moreover, the present tense can also be used to refer to a punctiliar action (e.g., Mk 2:5 where ἀφίενται is simply translated as “are forgiven” and not “are [continuously] being forgiven”; see Mounce, 2009:138). Therefore, leaning too decisively on one of these two proposed options (either pastoral or evangelical) on the basis of a verbal aspect will be naïve (see Köstenberger, 2013). As the Gospel contains both instances of individuals coming to belief (e.g., 9:38) and language about being preserved in belief (e.g., 17:11), this article argues for both.

The reality is, however, that the Johannine audience has not simply been empowered to evaluate the ethos of the various characters in the story, but, according to the purpose of the author, they have the mandate to now evaluate their own. Their privileged knowledge has allowed them to participate as privileged audience: they too have seen the glory of God (1:14) and know that this testimony is true (21:24). The appropriate response is a life-giving ethos of performing like the children of God (1:12), the unnamed Samaritan woman, royal official, formerly blind man, and beloved disciple.

The Fourth Gospel, therefore, supposes an audience of individuals who were intended to become “participators and propagators” of Jesus’ life and words (Loubser, 2013:169). This purpose statement is placed at a strategic place in the Gospel. Unlike Luke’s purpose statement, it is not part of the prologue, but is placed after the climax of the narrative, crowning both the triumphant and tragic events of the entire Gospel and communicating to an audience that belief and life are still on the table – even after the shameful event of the cross. Communicating this purpose in the shadow of the tragic cross challenges the audience to become meaning-making participants, as they are called to integrate their experience with the Johannine Gospel – the glory, signs, opposition, crucifixion, and resurrection – into an ethos of belief and an embodiment of life. They find themselves in the company of disciples who do not yet fully understand (e.g., Peter, Thomas), but also still in the company of the beloved disciple, who extends the challenge of life in His name (20:31).

While the language of the Fourth Gospel is compelling, performing John is (and was) no easy task. As the failure to recognise Jesus for who he really is, is one of the main elements driving along the plotline of the Fourth Gospel (Brant, 2004:50; Culpepper, 1983:84; Jn. 1:11), one should not glance over the possible wrestle of the Johannine audience to become the implied audience. As Jesus often had great difficulty convincing characters of who he is, it would not be unrealistic to suppose that receivers of John would experience a struggle with the Gospel – especially when one considers the counter-cultural message of the cross and the vulnerable situation in which many first-century individuals found themselves after making the decision to believe in Jesus (see Ashton, 1991:172; O’Day, 2012:518; Rensberger, 2009:339).

The participatory nature of the Fourth Gospel is therefore a double-edged sword: it is both encouraging and challenging. The privileged audience is invited to write themselves into the drama by becoming the “we”, participating in the porous identities of those who believe, and becoming the realisation of the evangelist’s intentions. They may well also walk away and dissociate from the implied audience, but they cannot walk away from the Gospel’s performance. Those who reject the protagonist are still participators: they have become performers of unbelief, supporting characters of the darkness, and those who miss out on the life of God. By pointing its finger to the audience, the Fourth Gospel makes it clear that it has not fashioned an audience of uninformed bystanders, but an enlightened audience of performers: what they now perform is entirely up to them.

## Conclusion

While the Fourth Gospel has often been affirmed as a literary piece with a dramatic axis to it, the dramatic involvement of the audience has often been underplayed. This paper argues that the Fourth Gospel creates a self-conscious audience from the prologue and that this audience is invited to become performers of a certain ethos through the creation of an ideal and porous group of receivers of ὁ λόγος and his revelation. Moreover, the Gospel creates various porous identities of ideal characters who perform belief, among whom the beloved disciple is chief. Finally, the Gospel affirms the ideal response by pointing its finger to the audience in its purpose statement and indicating its intent that they now believe and have life as they perform John.

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