

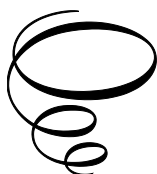
An Analysis of the
Performative Nature
of Literary Devices
in the Fourth Gospel

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By

Risimati S. Hobyane

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This monograph is dedicated to my beloved family – my wife, Rendani, and our children: Vunene, Muhluleri, and Dzunisani.

I am deeply grateful for your love, support, and prayers throughout my career and the writing of this book. Your unwavering encouragement sustained me during this journey, and your presence has been a constant source of strength and inspiration. I appreciate you more than words can express.

This monograph is a revised and restructured version of my unpublished thesis, completed in October 2023 at North-West University (South Africa). It comprises eight chapters, including the introduction and conclusion, with at least 50% of the original material reworked and rearranged. One chapter from the thesis – on focalisation – was omitted entirely from the monograph. These revisions were undertaken to meet the standards required by both the publisher and the Department of Higher Education and Training.

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PREFACE

In this book, I share my observations, surprises, and experiences from my reading journey of the Fourth Gospel. From its prologue to the epilogue, I came to realise that this Gospel is uniquely crafted, unlike the other three in the New Testament canonical writings. This book, *An Analysis of the Performative Nature of Literary Devices in the Fourth Gospel*, is not just an academic endeavour but a more personal engagement with the author of the Gospel – the Holy Spirit Himself – through its narrative. When reading the Fourth Gospel, its narrative style and everything that defines it left me with no choice but to commit to sharing my experiences with the reader of this book.

The Fourth Gospel is one of the most explicitly and intentionally formulated texts in terms of its purpose and what it aims to achieve compared to the other three Gospels; it is written so that the reader may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, they may have life in his name (20:31). It is clear that the implied author of the Gospel did not want his readers to guess his intentions but to clearly understand what is at stake: the reader must be persuaded to make ethical choices and decisions to come to faith in Jesus Christ. The compelling question that must be asked here is: Can we identify some literary elements that the author utilises to ensure that the Gospel achieves its purpose? The answer is: Yes!

From a narratological-pragmatic interpretive angle, this book presents an analysis of the literary devices that the author employed to reinforce the performativity of the Gospel's main purpose. In this sense, I approach the text of the Fourth Gospel as a narrative. Viewing and studying it as a narrative does not in any way suggest that it is less of an authentic Word of God. The impetus behind this analysis is the desire to share with the reader the performativity and/or the performative nature of the literary devices in this Gospel. I observe that the author of the Fourth Gospel intelligently employs literary devices to invite the implied reader's participation as they engage with the text. The book approaches the text of the Fourth Gospel using some aspects of speech act theory as an analytical tool or

methodology. It concedes that it does not intend to comprehensively apply all aspects of speech act theory in analysing the text, but focuses on certain aspects of it, particularly the effects of utterances, as will be discussed in Chapter 1.

The study's point of departure is from an already established finding that the Fourth Gospel's purpose is stated in performative terms¹; it is crafted and presented in such a way that the reader is constantly invited to participate in it. As stated above, it is convincingly clear from the purpose of the Gospel that the implied author intends to achieve something in the life of the reader through the text. Following the stated purpose of the Gospel, the central question, as hinted above, is: *How does the implied author of the Fourth Gospel ensure that the purpose of the Gospel is achievable?*

This book proposes that the implied author of the Fourth Gospel employs literary devices such as misunderstanding, irony, forensic dialogues, asides, and repetition to enhance the Gospel's communicative purpose. These devices are not merely stylistic but performative – they invite the reader's active engagement with the text and participate in shaping its theological message. The central aim of this study is to demonstrate how these devices function performatively, drawing the reader into the narrative and prompting reflection and response.

The book is organised into eight chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study and sets out its theoretical and methodological framework. Chapter 2 explores the performative nature of misunderstanding in the Gospel, while Chapter 3 examines irony as a rhetorical strategy that deepens reader engagement. Chapters 4 and 5 investigate the use of forensic dialogue and its dialogical, truth-revealing function. Chapter 6 considers the role of asides in shaping reader perception and guiding interpretation. Chapter 7 focuses on repetition and how it serves to reinforce key themes and elicit reader

¹ J.G. Van der Watt. "Ethics Through the Power of Language: Some Exploration in the Gospel According to John". In *Moral Language in the New Testament*, eds. R. Zimmerman, and S. Luther (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), pp. 421-448.

participation. Finally, Chapter 8 summarises the findings and reflects on the contribution this study makes to Johannine scholarship.

While this work does not claim to be groundbreaking, it emerges from sustained engagement with a wide range of scholarly perspectives on the Fourth Gospel. It offers a fresh and focused lens through which to explore the Gospel's rhetorical strategies, contributing a thoughtful voice to the ongoing conversation within Johannine studies.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Orientation and Background

The book posits that the Fourth Gospel² is a brilliant piece of literary artistry when viewed through a narratological lens. This view does not, in any way, attempt to subvert its canonical authenticity as the Word of God, reducing it to just an ordinary narrative work. This study acknowledges that the book is skilfully crafted by the implied author with a specific purpose in mind. According to John 20:30-31, the Fourth Gospel is written to bring the reader³ to faith in Jesus Christ so that they may have eternal life by believing

² In this book, the term “Fourth Gospel” will be used to refer to the Gospel of John in the New Testament canon. The study posits that the book was written by John the Son of Zebedee, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. It acknowledges that there are varying viewpoints regarding the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. However, this book supports the view and clarification provided by F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 1 (cf. R.A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983], pp. 36-39), who states that, “The title ‘According to John’ is a label attached to it when the four Gospels were gathered together and began to circulate as one collection, in order to distinguish it from its three companions.” Bruce further points out that “As early as the ascription of this Gospel to ‘John’ can be traced back, it regularly assumed that the John in question was John the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve. There is indeed positive evidence for another ‘disciple of the Lord’ called John, living (probably) in the Roman province of Asia to which John the son of Zebedee, according to tradition, migrated from Palestine in the later part of the first century, but no one in antiquity, as far as we can tell, ascribed the fourth Gospel to this other John rather than to the son of Zebedee.” Among other views on the authorship of the Fourth Gospel are suggestions that attribute it to figures such as John the Elder, the Beloved Disciple, John Mark, Lazarus, and even Paul.

³ Whenever the reference “reader” is utilised in this book, it will be intended to refer to what I call an “implied reader.” J.G. Van der Watt. “Repetition and Functionality in the Gospel of John: Some Initial Exploration”. In *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel: Style, Text, Interpretation*, ed. G. Van Belle, M. Labahn, and P.

in him. Accordingly, this book aims to study the text of the Fourth Gospel from a narratological-pragmatic perspective – that is, it will be read and analysed as a narrative or story. Without compromising its nature as the authoritative Word of God, this study also recognises that it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge the literary features that mark the text as narrative. Therefore, this study aligns with the field of narrative analysis, focusing on the structure, content, and function of stories in both written and oral communication.⁴ It aims to identify and examine the narrative elements embedded in the text, analysing how these features contribute to its overall meaning and effect. To this end, a narratological perspective is adopted to explore the literary characteristics of the Fourth Gospel. Commenting on this approach to biblical narratives,⁵ Tolmie observes that the text is read as a 'story' and analysed using a theoretical framework developed for the study of narrative texts. He further notes that this approach brings us into the domain of another discipline – namely, Literature Theory – and more specifically, the field of Narratology. He adds

Maritz (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), pp. 87-108, defines the “implied reader” as follows: “The *implied reader* is the inner-textual (personified) construction that systematically discovers what the implied author presents. The implied reader as inner-textual construct knows nothing at the beginning of the narrative but is indeed constructed as the narrative develops. As the narrative unfolds, the implied reader is informed by everything the narrative has to offer, and the knowledge of the implied reader increases proportionally. Within the framework of the growing knowledge, the implied reader will have to make sense of every piece of new evidence and integrate it into the existing body of knowledge this reader already has. New information will constantly be considered and interpreted in the light of existing information up to that point in the narrative. Stylistic issues like creating or easing tensions, redefining, and expanding existing definitions of concepts, interrelating information, et cetera will in this way be developed and enriched within the construct of the implied reader.” As stated above, whenever this study talks about the term “reader,” it will be referring to the “implied reader,” unless specified that it refers to the real reader (the original intended reader). Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 208, calls this reader an “ideal narrative audience,” as opposed to “actual audience who is the ‘real’ flesh and blood reader – may be either the historical (first century) readers or contemporary readers.”

⁴ M. Bamberg. “Narrative Analysis”. In *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology. Vol. 2. Research Designs: Qualitative, Neuropsychological, and Biological*, ed. H. Cooper, P.M. Camic, D.L. Long, A.T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, and K.J. Sher (Washington: American Psychological Association Press, 2012), pp. 85-102.

⁵ D.F. Tolmie, “The Function of Character Focalisation in John 13-17,” *Neotestamentica*, No. 2(1991): pp. 273-287.

that “In Theory of Literature a variety of different approaches to narrative texts exists, such as deconstructive readings of a text, feminist readings, psychological readings and Marxist readings.”⁶

This study takes note that the Fourth Gospel has enticed countless research contributions from numerous scholars within the New Testament field or Johannine literary research. Many insightful contributions came forward in the form of commentaries (e.g., Barrett,⁷ Bruce,⁸ Lindars,⁹ Brown,¹⁰ etc.), books (Culpepper,¹¹ Duke,¹² Van der Watt,¹³ Köstenberger,¹⁴ etc.), and many scholarly articles. Many of these materials will be utilised in this study. They offer comprehensive analyses of passages, key terms, and major motifs inherent in the Fourth Gospel.¹⁵ While categorising and referencing all the scholarly works on the Fourth Gospel lies beyond the scope of this book, a selection of studies closely aligned with its aim will be discussed.

⁶ According to D.J. Jeong, “*Thematic Dynamics of Characters’ Outward Appearance in the David Narrative*”. PhD diss. (Toronto: University of St. Michael College, 2018), p. 14, scholars who analyse biblical narratives typically borrow Seymour Chatman’s model. Chatman gives a detailed account of a narrative text as follows: Each narrative has two parts: (i) a story (*histoire*), which encompasses the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), and the existents (characters and settings); and (ii) a discourse (*discours*), which refers to the expression, the means by which the content is communicated. Put simply, the story represents the “what” in a narrative – what is depicted – while the discourse represents the “how.” Cf. S. Chatman’s (*Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* [Ithaca: Cornell, 1978], p. 19) elucidation of the narrative structure he proposes, and D.F. Tolmie’s (*Narratology and Biblical Narratives: A Practical Guide* [San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1999], p. 4) contribution to the debate.

⁷ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to ST John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Texts* (London: SPCK, 1978).

⁸ Bruce, *The Gospel*.

⁹ B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphant, 1972).

¹⁰ R. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

¹¹ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*.

¹² P.D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985).

¹³ J.G. Van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters* (New York: T & T Clark, 2007).

¹⁴ A.J. Kostenberger, *The Cradle, the Cross and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2009).

¹⁵ J.H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John: The New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2007), p. 1.

These will serve to highlight the existing research gap and to clarify the specific contribution this book intends to make.

Furthermore, this book project seeks to explore the persuasive manner in which the text of the Fourth Gospel is crafted and presented to the reader by both the implied author¹⁶ and the narrator.¹⁷ The analysis will focus on the communicative strategies employed by the implied author to convey the intended message of the Gospel. Through a careful examination of the text and a reconsideration of the author's communicative approach, this study contends that the performative nature of literary devices is essential to understanding the literary depth of the Fourth Gospel and, as such, merits further investigation. While commenting on the literary nature of the Fourth

¹⁶ According to Van der Watt, "*Repetition*", p. 88, an implied *author* can be broadly described as an inner-textual construction (personified) that knows everything that happens and is supposed to happen in the narrative. He/she is the planner of the narrative, and systematically unfolds the different events of the narrative, implying that all the tensions, rhetorical strategies, the movement of the narrative, etc., are consciously planned. By gradually leading the implied reader through the narrative to the point he wants to make, he will provide the implied reader with the necessary information, creating tension, systematically and strategically making information available. In suggesting such a conscious force of construction behind the narrative, it allows the interpreter to assume that what is presented should have some rationale and strategy behind it (cf. F.J. Moloney, "*Who is 'The Reader' in /of the Fourth Gospel?'*" In *The Interpretation of John*, ed. J. Ashton [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997], p. 219.). He further asserts that the narratological distinction between the implied author and implied reader provides a theoretical framework within which the performative power of literary devices in the Fourth Gospel may be considered (cf. Tolmie, *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: A Practical Guide*, p. 5ff; W.C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 2nd ed. [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983], pp. 74-75).

¹⁷ When one reads the text, one listens to someone's voice telling the story. This voice is the narrator of the story. Jeong, (*Thematic*, p. 16), says, "The narrator's presence can be inferred from the fact that someone is telling the story in the text. This is the Reporter of the events in the story." The narrator reports the events and takes the implied reader from one scene to another and clarifying the time and the activities of the characters in the story. The narrator, therefore, should not be confused with the implied author of the story. D.M. Gunn, and D.N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 53; cf. Conroy, *Absalom!: Narrative and Language in 2 Sam 13-20* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), p. 24; J.L. Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel: A Narrative Design and Point of View in John* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 23, suggest that the "narrator is a character who tells the story while other characters enact it."

Gospel, Van der Watt¹⁸ acknowledges that “reading the text of John brings both exciting and challenging questions, particularly when one focuses on the narrative style or the communicative strategy of the Gospel.” The book draws its motivation from Van der Watt’s acknowledgement and assertion, where he emphasises that “the reader is challenged not only by the complexities of the text, but also by the wide range of possible interpretations and approaches to it.”

1.2. Problem Statement

This book examines the nature and effect of the literary devices employed to shape the reader’s experience of the Fourth Gospel. While these widely recognised techniques have received attention in Johannine scholarship, their performative function – their ability to actively engage and influence the reader – remains one of the most significant yet under-explored dimensions of the text. Approaching the Gospel as both reader and interpreter, I was compelled by repeated readings to explore this literary dynamic more deeply, leading to the present study.

As previously mentioned, the impetus for analysing the literary devices of the Fourth Gospel in this way is drawn from the work of Van der Watt,¹⁹ titled: “Ethics Through the Power of Language: Some Explorations in the Gospel According to John.” In his exploration of the ethical dynamics of the Fourth Gospel – particularly chapter 8 – Van der Watt argues that the Gospel’s central purpose, as stated in John 20:30-31, is expressed in performative terms. This suggests that the Gospel was written with the intent of bringing the implied reader to faith, or of strengthening their existing faith, through the words of the text itself. However, he also cautions that this central purpose must be studied within the broader context,

¹⁸ Van der Watt, *An Introduction*, p. 1.

¹⁹ Van der Watt, “*Ethics*”, p. 421.; See also his extend work on the theme of ethics in J.G. Van der Watt, *A Grammar of the Ethics of John: Reading John from an Ethical Perspective* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019).

especially in relation to the preceding verses.²⁰ His assertion is particularly significant for this book project, as he states:

The presence of the divine and resurrected Jesus led to Thomas' climactic confession (20:28): 'my Lord and my God', changing his status from that of an unbeliever to that of a believer (καὶ μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός – 20:27; cf. 20:25). Henceforth people will not be in the privileged position of Thomas to see the risen Jesus physically; they will come to faith without the 'assistance' of the physical presence of the resurrected Jesus (20:29). How will this happen? Through the written Gospel, people will 'meet' Jesus and come to faith (verse 29).²¹

This book applauds the insightful contribution made by Van der Watt. It aims to take this argument further by asking the question: *How does the implied author ensure that the implied reader 'meets' Jesus in the written words of the Gospel?* While this book agrees with Van der Watt's observation on the performative nature of the Gospel's purpose (20:31), it posits that analysing the performative role of literary devices – such as misunderstanding, irony, forensic dialogues, asides, and repetition – in the Fourth Gospel can advance research on its performative nature.

To the best of my knowledge, no significant studies have been published on this topic since Van der Watt's work in 2010 and my own PhD thesis in 2024. This continued lack of focused scholarship underscores the relevance of the present book and its contribution to the ongoing expansion of research in this area. Although individual instances of these literary devices have been noted in various commentaries, their cumulative impact has received limited academic attention. This study seeks to address that gap by

²⁰ Van der Watt, "Ethics", p. 142; cf. J.G. Van der Watt, "The Cross/Resurrection-events in the Gospel of John with Special Emphasis on the Confession of Thomas (20:28)," *Neotestamentica*, No. 37(2003): pp. 127-145.

²¹ J.G. Van der Watt ("The presence of Jesus through the Gospel of John," *Neotestamentica*, No. 36[2002]: p. 92), adds, "Rhetorically the author of the Gospel wants to take his readers by the hand, guide them through the narrative of the Gospel with the purpose that they will "see" or meet Jesus, confess Him as Christ and receive eternal life. Instead of hearing the words from the mouth of Jesus himself or seeing Him doing signs, the reader is confronted with these actions of Jesus through the text."

examining the combined effects of these devices and exploring their broader significance and implications within the Fourth Gospel.

In light of this, the book aims to contribute to the field by addressing the central research question:

“What is the current state of research on the performative nature of literary devices in the Fourth Gospel, and how does this research inform or create space for further investigation?”

To address the central research question, this study will investigate the following subsidiary questions:

- Does the study of misunderstanding contribute to understanding the performative nature of the Fourth Gospel?
- Does the study of irony contribute to understanding the performative nature of the Fourth Gospel?
- Does the study of forensic arguments contribute to understanding the performative nature of the Fourth Gospel?
- Does the study of asides contribute to understanding the performative nature of the Fourth Gospel?
- Does the study of repetition contribute to understanding the performative nature of the Fourth Gospel?
- What new contribution did the application of speech act theory bring to the study of the performative nature of the Fourth Gospel’s literary devices?

The problem statement outlined above – particularly the research questions – is deemed both valid and appropriately formulated to guide this study toward achieving its objective and making a meaningful contribution to Johannine scholarship.

1.3. Motivation for the Research – the Research Gap

The literary devices of the Fourth Gospel are widely recognised by Johannine scholars and are believed to have been purposefully employed in the composition of the text. This study contends that these devices are intentionally used to enhance the effectiveness of the Gospel’s overarching

purpose. As Wead²² observes, such literary techniques serve to draw the reader's attention to the author's thought patterns.

While other scholars have made significant contributions in identifying, describing, and defining the literary devices in the Fourth Gospel,²³ this study seeks to advance the field by exploring and demonstrating their cumulative performative nature – that is, the potential effect these devices may have on the implied reader as they engage with the text.

This study argues that the performative nature of the Fourth Gospel lies in the implied author's communicative strategy, a central element of which is the purposeful use of literary devices throughout the narrative to impact and challenge the reader. In crafting the Gospel, the implied author employs these devices to capture the implied reader's attention and to invite them to adopt the author's perspective concerning Jesus Christ's origin, identity, and mission. In doing so, the text seeks to move the reader toward faith in Jesus Christ, as articulated in John 20:30–31.

This type of analysis is therefore seen as a valuable contribution to understanding the literary power embedded in the text of the Fourth Gospel. It also offers insight into how the Gospel should be read and interpreted by those who seek to preach from it or conduct research on it. The task at hand, then, is to demonstrate how these literary devices engage and guide the implied reader toward an encounter with Christ within the text – and, in doing so, ensure that the central purpose of the Gospel is attainable.

²² D.W. Wead, "The Literary Devices in John's Gospel", PhD diss. (Switzerland: University of Basel, 1970), p. v.

²³ Cf. for an example O. Cullmann, "De Johanneische Gebrauch Doppeldeutigen Ausdrücke als Schlüssel zum Verständnis des Vierten Evangeliums," *Theologische Zeitschrift*, No. 4(1948): pp. 360–372; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 152-199; D.A. Carson, "Understanding Misunderstandings in the Fourth Gospel," *Tyndale Bulletin*, No. 33(1982a): pp. 59-91; M.E. Dolan, *Irony in the Gospel of John Part II: Specific Uses of Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Jamaica: St. John's University, 1987), etc.

1.4. Recent Research on the Performative Dynamics of the Fourth Gospel

The survey of recent Johannine scholarship on this topic serves not only to acknowledge prior academic contributions and identify existing research gaps but also to position this study within the broader scholarly discourse. This section thus contextualises the present work, clarifying its relevance and the contribution it seeks to make. In this regard, a few published studies are particularly noteworthy for their relevance to the current investigation.

The first study of note is the doctoral thesis by D. Wead, titled ‘The Literary Devices in John’s Gospel’ (1970). In his introduction, Wead acknowledges that the author of the Fourth Gospel employed a range of distinctive literary devices in shaping the narrative. He emphasises that these literary tools are integral to any serious study of the Gospel and notes, interestingly, that several of these techniques were not unique to the Johannine text but were already present in ancient literary traditions.²⁴

Wead²⁵ continues to avow that these literary tools have also been employed by Homer, the Greek poets, and Aristotle in their literary works. This observation is indispensable for this study, as it is common knowledge that the works of Greek poets, Aristotle, and Homer were aimed at persuading readers to adopt or reject certain points of view at the time. In the same vein, it can be pointed out that, in reference to the Fourth Gospel, it seems that literary devices were also employed by the implied author with the purpose of converting non-believers and strengthening those who already believe in Christ. In his study, Wead examines literary devices, e.g., double meaning (pp. 30-46), irony (pp. 47-68), and misunderstanding (pp. 69-70).

This research by Wead is insightful; however, it must be noted that his study does not venture into a comprehensive demonstration of how these literary devices function to persuade (performative nature/power) the reader to come to faith in Christ, let alone to strengthen the believers who already believe in Christ. Therefore, while the current study will make use of some

²⁴ Wead, “The Literary Devices in John’s Gospel”.

²⁵ Wead, “The Literary Devices in John’s Gospel”.

of the findings from Wead, it will proceed to demonstrate how these literary devices stimulate the implied reader's interest in the text and further show how they reinforce the attainability of the primary purpose of the Gospel, i.e., that the reader should believe in Christ to attain eternal life.

The second published project is the book by Allan Culpepper (1983), titled *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*. Many Johannine researchers have given due accolade to the work and contribution of Culpepper in this publication. The most invaluable contribution of his work, related to the current study, is his description of the distinction between the narrator's explicit and implicit commentary.

With regard to his discussion of explicit commentary, he asserts that the narrator communicates through character development, events, settings, and narrative asides, which he refers to as the obvious features in the text.²⁶ In contrast to explicit commentary, Culpepper states that "implicit commentary is information conveyed through literary features such as misunderstanding, irony, and symbolism." This study notes with gratitude that although Culpepper did not use the term "performative," he successfully highlights the potential effects of these literary devices on the reader.

In his conclusion to the discussion of implicit commentary, he remarks:

Symbols, just like the misunderstandings and irony are a form of a silent communication between the author and the reader.²⁷

He continues to highlight that through these literary devices; the author and reader are drawn together in a shared perception of meaning and reverence before mystery. He makes a conclusive proposition that if the Gospel is read in the manner in which it calls for itself to be experienced, then the author and the reader will be united in the transformation brought about by an encounter with transcendent mystery.

While acknowledging the contribution of Culpepper's study, particularly his view on implicit commentary, this study observes that the application of

²⁶ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 6-7.

²⁷ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 202; cf. Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, pp. 28-50.

speech act theory to the analysis of Johannine literary devices – such as misunderstandings, irony, forensic dialogues, asides, and repetition – remains an open area for exploration. Engaging with this has the potential to bring a fresh and renewed perspective, enriching our understanding of the performative power of the Fourth Gospel.

The third contribution I wish to highlight is Jan G. van der Watt's 2010 article titled "Ethics Through the Power of Language: Some Explorations in the Gospel According to John." As previously noted, this publication served as the primary inspiration for this book project. It is important to note, however, that van der Watt's study focuses specifically on the ethical dimension within the text of John 8. By doing so, it opened the door for further exploration – such as this study's investigation of performativity across the entire Gospel of John through a speech-act interpretive lens.

In discussing the theme of ethics – which he regards as a major, if not the central, theme in the Gospel of John – Van der Watt's key point of departure is the claim that the Gospel's stated purpose (John 20:30–31) is formulated in performative terms.²⁸ He argues that this is evident in the author's intent to bring about a particular response in the life of the reader. In his findings, Van der Watt proposes that the decision to believe in Christ constitutes the fundamental ethical action in the Gospel. He further asserts that the performative language of the text is aimed at eliciting precisely this ethical response from the reader.

Van der Watt's study is crucial in clarifying the research gap that this current study seeks to address. As previously noted, both studies share the same foundational claim: that the Gospel of John is composed in performative terms. However, the present study advances this conversation by proposing that the performative nature of the Gospel's purpose is reinforced through the strategic use of literary devices – an aspect observable throughout the Gospel's communicative strategy. This study contends that the author employs these literary techniques to make the Gospel's central purpose more impactful and achievable in the life of the reader.

²⁸ For further discussion on this topic, see Van der Watt, "Ethics", p. 10.

While affirming Van der Watt's conclusions, this study seeks to examine the performative dynamics of the most commonly acknowledged literary devices in the Fourth Gospel. It aims to demonstrate conclusively that the implied author intentionally employs these devices to support and enhance the Gospel's central aim.

It is acknowledged that many other discussions on Johannine literary devices appear in books, commentaries, and scholarly articles not addressed here. As already noted, this study will engage with recent scholarship on each literary device in the relevant chapters. In addition, it will identify and highlight specific research gaps that warrant further investigation within each of those focused areas.

1.5. Methodology: Speech Act Theory

Since this study aims to investigate the pragmatic effects of literary devices inherent in a narrative on the reader, speech act theory is considered an appropriate analytical approach. Accordingly, this framework will be employed to explore the performative nature of the identified literary devices in the Fourth Gospel. This defines the interpretive lens through which the study will engage the text.

1.5.1. Rhetoric and Speech Act Theory: A Synopsis

The current study can be broadly situated within the field of rhetoric, as it seeks to investigate the persuasive elements embedded in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel. However, while acknowledging the Gospel's rhetorical character, this study more specifically aligns with the domain of pragmatics, given its focus on the performative nature of literary devices within the text. A rhetorical approach to literary texts maintains that the persuasive power of a narrative lies not only in *what* is said, but also in *how* it is presented. When commenting about this matter, Ryken²⁹ correctly points out, "We

²⁹ L. Ryken. "The Literature of the New Testament". In *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. L. Ryken, and T. Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), p. 367; cf. J.G. Van der Watt, *A Grammar of the Ethics*, p. 32; J.L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 41.

cannot fully comprehend the ‘what’ of New Testament writings (their religious content) without first paying attention to the ‘how’ (the literary modes in which the content is embodied).”

This study considers the distinction between *what* the text says and *how* it says it to be critical, as both aspects work together to prompt the reader to respond actively to the message. Demonstrating this dynamic is central to the aim of the study. In this regard, Odiam³⁰ contributes valuable insight, stating that “rhetoric does not only aim at persuading people but also at moving the audience to act in a particular manner.” Odiam³¹ further points out that “there is a difference between the questions ‘what does a text mean?’ and ‘what does a text do?’” He indicates that “the substance of rhetoric concerns situation and issues of human life and behaviour. Arguments are presented in such a way as to confront the hearers with ethical choices that demand reasoned responses of decision and action.” As previously mentioned, this study is particularly concerned with how the text of the Fourth Gospel – through its use of literary devices – confronts readers and calls them to make a decisive response: either to place their faith in Jesus Christ or to reject him.

The present study of the performative nature of literary devices in the Fourth Gospel will also focus on how the text is presented and the potential effects it may have on the implied reader. In discussing the historical development of rhetoric, Lausberg³² notes that its origins can be traced back to the Greek poet Homer, who lived around 800–750 BC. Aune³³ adds,

By the first century BC, rhetoric had gained influence over the composition of letters, particularly among the educated. Their letters functioned not only as a means of communication but also as sophisticated instruments of

³⁰ A.R. Odiam. “The Rhetoric of the Fourth Gospel: A Key to Preaching”. Phd Diss. (Louisville: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), p. 4.

³¹ Odiam, *The Rhetoric of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 18; cf. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 30.

³² H. Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*. Trans. M.T. Bliss, A. Jansen, and D.E. Orton, ed. D.E. Orton, and R.D. Anderson (London: Brill, 1998), p. 20.

³³ D.E. Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), p. 160.

persuasion and media for displaying literary skills. Historians were often more concerned with convincing their readers that their account of events was more reliable than that of others – a purpose similar to that of legal and advisory oratory.

Aune also contends that Hellenistic historians sought to influence the attitudes and behaviour of their readers by portraying individuals as examples of virtue or vice, ultimately arguing that their task was essentially one of persuasion. When studying or conducting research on the New Testament, it is therefore essential to acknowledge that these writings emerged from such a rhetorical and literary context. In this regard, the current study affirms Aune's perspective. The Fourth Gospel, too, is constructed in a way that seeks to persuade the reader to make a decision while engaging with the text – as clearly indicated in its stated purpose (John 20:30). It contains rhetorical elements that aim to enhance its reception and impact in the life of the reader.

In this study, rhetorical elements are understood in terms of what Anderson³⁴ refers to as “textual rhetoric” – an approach that focuses not on the formal structure of the text or its genre, but rather on stylistics, argumentation, and the progression of ideas. As noted earlier, this positions the investigation more within the field of pragmatics than within traditional rhetorical analysis. Tolmie,³⁵ in discussing the breadth of the rhetorical field, cautions that the term rhetorical has become so widely used that it can refer to nearly any form of literary criticism today. He emphasises the importance of clarifying one's use of the term. In response, this study adopts a more narrowly defined understanding of rhetorical, referring specifically to an approach that analyses how a text is crafted to persuade its readers. This clarification is crucial, given the term's potential vagueness.

Therefore, the study will attempt the exploration of literary devices from a speech act interpretive angle. In the field of pragmatics, the central contention is that narratives (ancient or modern) do not only exist to provide

³⁴ R.D. Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul* (Kampen: Pharos Publishing House, 1996), p. 22.

³⁵ D.F. Tolmie. “A Rhetorical analysis of the Letter to the Galatians”. PhD diss. (Free State: University of Free State, 1994), p. 13.