# The Voice of John in the Canonical Edition of the New Testament

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## Prologue

Every publication combines at least three narratives: the publisher's narrative, the editors' narrative, and the author's narrative. These three narratives with their different characters, settings, and plot lines provide a complex set of challenges for interpreters of literature who are interested in better understanding a text in its published form.[1]

## Gospel according to John

In the conclusion of the Gospel according to John, editors addressed readers with the words, "This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24). They explained that a disciple had written a manuscript and that his report sheds light on what truly happened.[2] The editors used the first-

1. In the following, present tense will be used to describe the narrative world of readers, independent of which voice is telling the story. When the implied author, editors, or publisher spoke with their discernable voices, past tense is used. The term *canonical edition* assumes that the manuscript evidence of the New Testament is best understood as deriving from one archetype, an edited collection published during the middle of the second century. This edition achieved canonical status in the developing catholic movement. See David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

2. Although all other writings of the New Testament use a genitive in the titles, the four gospel books do not. The title in the Greek manuscripts is "Gospel according to John" and not "The Gospel of John." The writings of the New Testament are publications and not documents; publications only exist in copies, a document only exists in



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person plural form "we know" to identify their voice, they referred to the author in the third-person as "this disciple," and their remark was followed by a note from the publisher who wrote in the first-person singular, "I suppose" (John 21:21–25):

> Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them.*
> When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!"**
> * **He was the one who** had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?"
> ** So, the rumor spread in the community that **this disciple** would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.
> But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, **I suppose** that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Modern conventions separate the voice of the source from the voice of editors. In the above and the following quotes, editorial notes are represented as notes, with asterisks (*) marking the points of reference. Ancient and medieval manuscripts typically show critical notes in the margins.[3] When scribes copied annotated manuscripts, however, they sometimes moved notes from the margins into the main text body. Such manuscripts look like the published form of the Gospel according to John.

Editors could have used the author's voice, "I, the disciple whom Jesus loved wrote these things down, and I testify that everything I wrote is true"—which is the narrative perspective used in the Gospel accord-

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one exemplar, the original. The implied publisher made this distinction. Quotations from the Christian Bible are taken from the NRSV (all emphasis is added); Greek quotations follow NA[28].

3. E.g., Readers add notes, scribes list corrections, editors include references, or publishers add titles (David Trobisch, "Structural Markers in New Testament Manuscripts with Special Attention to Observations in Codex Boernerianus [G 012] and Papyrus 46 of the Letters of Paul," in *Layout Markers in Biblical Manuscripts and Ugaritic Tablets*, ed. Marjo C. A. Korpel and Josef M. Oesch, Pericope 5 [Assen: Van Gorcum, 2005], 177–90).

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ing to Luke.[4] The Fourth Gospel, however, lived up to what the publisher suggested in the title. It was entitled "Gospel according to John" and not "Gospel of John." Readers are expected to distinguish between John's voice and other voices.

In their first remark (*), editors referenced an earlier passage in John's manuscript, "One of his disciples [The one whom Jesus loved] was reclining next to him; Simon Peter, therefore, motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking.[5] So, while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?' " (John 13:23–25). By quoting "Lord who is it?" in their editorial remark, the editors identified the author as one of the twelve disciples.[6] Through the title Gospel according to John, the publisher identified this disciple as John. The second editorial remark (**) also quoted from the manuscript of the beloved disciple, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" (John 21:22). The editors reminded readers that in John's manuscript Jesus did not say that John would still be alive, he said, "If it is my will that he remain." It had not been Jesus's will.

By adding remarks instead of changing the wording, the editors demonstrated respect for the manuscript of the beloved disciple. They wanted readers to distinguish the voice of the editors from the voice of the author. And by referring to books in the plural and using the first-person singular, the publisher referenced the Gospel according to John as part of the four-gospel volume of the canonical edition and differentiated his or her voice from the voice of the editors.

Once readers recognize the strategy of the editors to explain a difficult expression by pointing to other passages in John's manuscript, they will discover many more editorial comments. The story of Mary anointing Jesus's feet (John 12:4–8) may serve as an example:

4. "I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3).

5. "The one whom Jesus loved" is another editorial note, possibly moved from the margin into the text body.

6. The editors used the same technique to identify Lazarus, Caiaphas, and Judas Iscariot. For Lazarus, John 11:1–3 references John 12:1–2; for Caiaphas, John 18:13 references John 11:49–50; for Judas Iscariot, John 6:68–71 references John 18:2–3 (David Trobisch, "The Gospel according to John in the Light of Marcion's Gospelbook," in *Das Neue Testament und sein Text im 2. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jan Heilmann and Matthias Klinghardt, TANZ 61 [Tübingen: Francke, 2018], 174–75).

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> But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples*, said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?"** Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."
> * The one who was about to betray him.
> ** He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.

The first editorial remark (*) distinguished between Judas the betrayer and another disciple with the same name.[7] The second remark (**) referred readers to a detail in the narrative that would come up later in John's manuscript, the common purse.[8]

In the episode about Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–9), however, the editors also provided information that was not taken from John's manuscript:

> Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John,"* he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria.… A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."** The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"***
> * Although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized.
> ** His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.
> *** Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.

With their first remark (*), the editors informed readers that Jesus did not perform baptisms but Jesus's disciples did. This information was not taken from John's manuscript.[9] The editors could have changed the word-

7. See "Judas (not Iscariot) said to him" (John 14:22).

8. "Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you are going to do.' Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because *Judas had the common purse*, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival'; or, that he should give something to the poor" (John 13:27–29).

9. John's manuscript implied that Jesus performed baptisms: "After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him' " (John 3:23–26). In their final editorial remark, "the rumor spread in the com-

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ing to "and *the disciples* baptized" (John 3:23) but chose not to do so. The second remark (**) added an explanation for why Jesus was alone with the woman. From the information provided later in the manuscript, the editors concluded that the disciples were gone to buy food.[10] In the third remark (***) the editors provided cultural background information. They told readers that in Jesus's time Judeans did not mingle with Samaritans.

The publisher of the four-gospel volume presented the Gospel according to John following three other gospels. The editors of the Fourth Gospel assumed that readers would remember central characters from the previous accounts, for example, John the Baptist: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light" (John 1:6–8). From the description, "not being the light but testifying to the light," readers of the three preceding gospel books recognize that this reference pertains to John the Baptist and not to the disciple John who is mentioned in the title (cf. Matt 3; Mark 1; Luke 1).

In the following sentence, the editors alluded to other stories as well: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (John 1:9–11). With the expression "coming into the world" editors referred to the stories of Jesus's birth, and the phrase "his own people did not accept him" pertained to the rejection of Jesus in his hometown Nazareth.[11] Of the three Synoptic Gospels, however, only the Gospel according to Luke mentions John the Baptist before giving an account of Jesus's birth, and only Luke narrates the rejection in Nazareth at the very beginning of Jesus's ministry. The suspicion arises that the editors of the Gospel according to John expected their readers to prioritize the Gospel according to Luke.

The implied author of the Third Gospel, Luke, explains that he had used sources based on "eyewitnesses" and sources based on "servants of

munity that this disciple would not die" (John 21:23), the "rumor in the community" also was information independent of John's manuscript.

10. "Just then his disciples came…. The disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something'" (John 4:27, 31).

11. See Matt 1 and Luke 2 for Jesus's birth, and Matt 13:53–58; Mark 6:1–6; and Luke 4:16–30 for the rejection in Nazareth.

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the word."[12] The publisher of the canonical edition represented the first category by the Gospel according to Matthew who is an eyewitness and the second category by the Gospel according to Mark who is a companion of Peter and Paul, suggesting to readers that Luke used the writings of Matthew and Mark.[13]

In the Gospel according to Luke, an unnamed woman anoints Jesus's feet during Jesus's early ministry in Galilee.[14] John's manuscript refers to this story:

> Luke 7:36–38: "One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house [2] and took his place at the table. And a woman [3] in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.
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> John 12:1–3: Six days before the Passover [1] Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus [2], whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary [3] took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

The disciple John insisted (12:1) that the anointing did not happen at the beginning of Jesus's public activity but that it took place on the last Sabbath before Jesus's death. He also testified (12:2) that the place of the event was not the home of a Pharisee in Galilee but the home of Lazarus in Bethany, just outside Jerusalem. Most strikingly, (12:3) the woman who anointed Jesus was not "a woman in the city who was a sinner," it was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. John's manuscript corrected the Gospel according to Luke when it came to historical detail with the authority of an eyewit-

12. Luke 1:2, "As they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses [αὐτόπται] and servants of the word [ὑπηρέται τοῦ λόγου]."

13. Matthew is one of the twelve disciples of Jesus and an eyewitness. Mark, in the context of the canonical edition is an associate of Paul and an associate of Peter. He is not an eyewitness of events concerning Jesus (Trobisch, *First Edition*, 46–49).

14. The context places Jesus in Capernaum (Luke 7:1) and Nain (Luke 7:11) in Galilee.

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ness. John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, was there, and he wrote it down, and as the editors put it, "We know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24).

Also, the story of a miraculous catch of fish, which happens in the Gospel according to Luke early in Jesus's ministry, was placed by the manuscript of the beloved disciple after Jesus's death (cf. Luke 5:1–3, 9–10 with John 12:1–2, 14). John supported his version by adding four eyewitnesses to the three mentioned in Luke's account: Thomas the Twin, Nathanael of Cana, and two unnamed disciples.[15] The story of the woman anointing Jesus's feet and the story of the miraculous catch of fish are both found in the Gospel according to Luke but not in Matthew's and Mark's accounts.

According to Luke, after his resurrection, Jesus shows himself to two disciples on their way to Emmaus, then to all disciples in Jerusalem on Easter Sunday, and he ascends to heaven the same evening (Luke 24). According to the manuscript of the beloved disciple, however, this is not what happened. In addition to Jesus's appearance in Jerusalem on Easter Sunday, Jesus also appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem the following Sunday and again at the Lake of Galilee.[16]

Even the most casual readers of the Gospel according to John will notice several long monologues of Jesus. One example is loosely connected to a discussion between Jesus and the "Jews" regarding Jesus's healing of a man on the Sabbath (John 5:19–47):

> Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you have been made well! Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you." The man went away and told the *Jews* that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore, the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the *sabbath*. But Jesus answered them, "*My Father* is still working, and I also am working."*
> * For this reason, the *Jews* were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the *sabbath*, but was also calling God his own *Father*, thereby making himself equal to God.

The editorial remark (*) referred to the words "Jews," "Sabbath," and "my father" in the manuscript of the beloved disciple. Then the conversation

15. From the perspective of John's manuscript, John was one of the two unnamed disciples.

16. David Trobisch, "The Authorized Version of His Birth and Death," in *Sources of the Jesus Tradition: Separating History from Myth*, ed. R. Joseph Hoffmann (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010), 131–39.

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shifts. The following section is neither a typical story told from the perspective of the disciple John nor an editorial commentary. The expression, "Jesus said to them" introduces direct speech:

> Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for **whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise**. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just **as the Father raises the dead and gives them life**, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has **given all judgment to the Son**, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.… Very truly, I tell you, **the hour is coming**, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.… **You sent messengers to John**, and he testified to the truth.… But I have a testimony greater than John's.… **You search the scriptures** because you think that in them you have eternal life.… If you believed **Moses**, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?"

This monologue of Jesus connects to the narrative only superficially. If this speech were removed, readers would not miss it. It addresses timeless theological topics like Jesus as Son of God, resurrection from the dead, judgment day, the impending end of the world, the prophetic significance of John the Baptist's testimony, the authority of Jewish Scriptures, and Moses's predicting Jesus.

Another example is the speech following John's account of Jesus's last visit to Jerusalem. Whereas the Gospel according to Luke reports that Jesus sent two disciples to fetch a donkey and that the disciples made Jesus sit on it, the manuscript of the beloved disciple insists that Jesus himself picked the donkey and mounted it.[17] In the Gospel according to Luke, the voice of God was heard during Jesus's baptism and his transfiguration (Luke 3:21–22 and 9:34–39). The beloved disciple's manuscript insisted that the voice of God also came from heaven when Jesus entered Jerusalem

17. See Luke 19:29–35. The reaction of the Pharisees is different as well: "Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out' " (Luke 19:39–40). The manuscript of the beloved disciple has, "The Pharisees then said to one another, 'You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!' " (John 12:19).

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on the colt. In typical fashion, John's manuscript corrected some historical details in Luke's narrative. Jesus's exchange with the crowd is followed by a monologue (John 12:44–50):

> Then Jesus cried aloud: "**Whoever believes in me** believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. **I have come as light** into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for **I came not to judge the world, but to save the world**. The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, for **I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak.** And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, **I speak just as the Father has told me.**"

Again, the monologue is introduced as direct speech, "Then Jesus cried aloud." The narrative setting in the first century is abandoned, and in a detached and timeless fashion the monologue picks up recurring themes: believing in Jesus, light in the world, and judgment day. One new topic, however, is introduced. Readers now learn that Jesus channeled what God commanded him to say, "I speak just as the Father has told me." Jesus's speeches are the word of God.

In the third example, Jesus's monologue again follows a passage from the manuscript of the beloved disciple.[18] The eyewitness account reports from John's perspective the last shared meal with Jesus. In the following, however, Jesus talks to readers of the Gospel according to John, removed in time and place from the narrated events. Toward the middle of the very lengthy monologue (John 14–17), which is interrupted only by short questions from the disciples, John's manuscript identified the source of these speeches, the Spirit of truth: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:12–13).

The monologues are speeches of Jesus, Son of God. Whereas the editors tried to smooth out difficulties in the narrative of John's eyewitness

18. "So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night" (John 13:30).

account, the monologues explain what neither John nor the editors could have expressed persuasively in their own voices. The monologues record the voice of God through Jesus of Nazareth, who was present when his father created the world.

In summary, the publisher expected readers to believe that the editors had prepared for publication a manuscript written by Jesus's disciple John and that they had restricted their work to adding remarks. In their remarks, the editors always referenced an expression found in the implied manuscript of John. They sometimes cross-referenced other passages in John's manuscript; sometimes they provided information from outside the text; sometimes they wrote in the first-person plural; and sometimes their comments expressed timeless and general ideas. In the context of book publishing in antiquity, this strategy suggested to readers that the editors had used an autograph.[19]

By placing the Gospel according to John as the last gospel book of the four-gospel volume, the publisher of the canonical edition expected readers to be familiar with the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke when they started to read the Gospel according to John. According to the publisher's narrative, John's eyewitness account corrected details reported by the Gospel according to Luke, who had used the gospel books ascribed to Matthew and Mark and similar publications. Furthermore, the editors implied that the monologues of Jesus were spiritual revelations to John, the beloved disciple, who wrote them down. They were understood as speeches of God transcending the time and place of the narrative setting.

The publisher expected readers to distinguish three voices: (1) John's voice in the eyewitness account of the beloved disciple, (2) the voice of God in the monologues of Jesus, and (3) the voice of the editors.

19. In a fragment attributed to Peter of Alexandria who died ca. 311, the bishop writes that the autograph of the Gospel according to John was still on display in the church of Ephesus, "And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the third hour, as the correct books render it, and the copy itself that was written by the hand of the evangelist, which, by the divine grace, has been preserved in the most holy church of Ephesus, and is there adored by the faithful" ("Fragments from the Writings of Peter," 5.7, *ANF* 6:282). Peter's argument is introduced to show how the reference to an autograph of John was used to argue the authenticity of one variant (Jesus died at 9:00 am, the third hour of the day) over another (Jesus died at noon, the sixth hour). Both readings are attested in Greek manuscripts of John 19:14.

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## Revelation of John

The canonical edition includes four other writings ascribed to a certain John: the Revelation of John and three letters of John. Because their titles mention John without any distinction, the publisher's narrative suggested that these writings were authored by the same person. Therefore, readers were encouraged to apply the publisher's reading instructions for the Gospel according to John to the letters of John and the Revelation of John as well.

Readers of the Revelation of John who follow the reading instructions will recognize the same three voices: the voice of John, the voice of God, communicated through Jesus Christ to John with the help of an angel, and the voice of the editors: "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw" (Rev 1:1–2) The editors introduced John as someone "who testified to the word of God" and who testified to "what he saw of Jesus Christ," reminding readers of the two distinct parts of the manuscript of the beloved disciple: the monologues containing the voice of God and the eyewitness account of the beloved disciple. The implied publisher expected readers who encountered the Gospel according to John and the Revelation of John as integral parts of the canonical edition, to conclude that the same editors prepared for publication two different manuscripts authored by John.[20]

Furthermore, as with the Gospel according to John, the editors of the Revelation of John indicated where their prologue ended and where John's autographed manuscript began. The editors talked about John in the third-person ("all that he saw"), whereas John wrote his manuscript in the first-person ("I, John"):

> I, John,… was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna,

20. In John 16:13 the Spirit proclaims, "things that are to come," which corresponds to Jesus Christ's revelation to John about "what must soon take place" (Rev 1:1–3).

> to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea" (Rev 1:9–11).

John heard a voice that commanded him to "write in a book what you see," and it is this manuscript that the editors presented to their readers. As with the Gospel according to John, the publisher asserted the existence of an autograph, a manuscript written in John's hand.

Editorial comments seem to have been added to John's manuscript the same way they were in the Gospel according to John (Rev 2:5–7):

> Remember then from what you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.* To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.
> * Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

The editorial voice can be distinguished because it talked about the Spirit, whereas in John's manuscript the Spirit was speaking. The same admonition appears in slight variations at the end of every letter to the seven congregations but in one instance also outside of this section (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; and 13:9). Maybe the editors wanted a liturgist to speak this sentence.

The narrative episodes of John's visions almost always begin with a passage written by John in the first-person, and then they transcend into general descriptions with no mention of John (Rev 13:1–10):

> And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed.
> *In amazement the whole earth followed the beast. They worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" Also, it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. It was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been*

> *written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered.**
> * Let anyone who has an ear listen: If you are to be taken captive, into captivity you go; if you kill with the sword, with the sword you must be killed. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

Whereas the passage written in the first-person complies with the perspective of an eyewitness report, the following descriptive section describes events from an omniscient and omnipresent perspective that a human being like John could not have experienced. These passages compare to the "Word of God" monologues in the Gospel according to John. Using an expression of the editors of the Revelation of John, these passages "show his servants what must soon take place" (Rev 1:3).

In the editorial remark (*), the narrative setting describing the global threat of the beast is abandoned. The editors addressed the readers directly, and they applied the passage from John's manuscript to the experience of being persecuted. The editors suggested not to respond with violence.

A dramatization of the script could assign the sections to three voices. One actor could perform the passages in the first-person singular representing John on Patmos, another one could be the voice of an angel and proclaim the predictions, and a third voice could recite the editorial remark, which professes the moral of the story. These three voices are distinguishable in many visionary episodes of the Revelation of John.

At the end of his manuscript (Rev 22:10–17), John recorded dialogue with the angel who had shown him what would happen:

> I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"
> *And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy. See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.* It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."**

> * Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.
> ** The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes, take the water of life as a gift.

John's eyewitness testimony is followed by a monologue of Jesus, introduced again as direct speech, "And he said to me." In their first comment (*) editors interrupted the voice of Jesus and spoke directly to readers. The second comment (**) was a liturgical remark.[21] It reminded readers that the book was produced to be read aloud to an audience.[22] The shift between Jesus's voice in the first-person singular and the voice of the editors is apparent.

Then the voice of the narrator changes back to the first-person:

> I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

The shift to the first-person singular with its clear reference to "the book" has a direct parallel in the last sentence of the Gospel according to John: "But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). In the Gospel according to John, this was the voice of the publisher. The observation suggested that the same person who published the four-gospel volume also published the Revelation of John.

The book ends with another liturgical remark that brings the public reading of the Revelation of John to a closure: "The one who testifies to

21. Like the invitation to "come and eat" and break bread with the resurrected Jesus (John 21:12), the invitation of the Spirit to "come and drink the water of life" (Rev 22:17) can easily be understood as a reference to the Eucharist, the liturgical setting in which John's manuscripts were performed.

22. "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near" (Rev 1:3).

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these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen." The voice of Jesus promises his imminent return. The congregants reply. Like many letters of Paul, designed for public reading, the last words are a wish of grace.[23]

The publisher of the canonical edition presented the Revelation of John the same way as the Gospel according to John: editors had prepared for publication a manuscript written by John, the beloved disciple of Jesus. Both manuscripts of John contained an eyewitness account and visions. In both, John the beloved disciple of Jesus had written down what he had "heard and seen."

## Letters of John

The publisher of the canonical edition presented three more writings of John, numbered them and gave them the title "Letters of John."

The First Letter of John does not provide a formal letter opening. The name of the letter-writer, the addressee, and a salutation are missing. Instead the writing opens in the first-person plural, "We declare to you what was from the beginning." In the Gospel according to John, passages in the first-person plural would signal that they were written by editors and not by the beloved disciple. The title First Letter of John, however, identified the author as John. The suspicion that, again, editors had prepared a manuscript of John for publication, is confirmed by passages written in the first-person singular, such as "I am writing these things to you."

Seen from this perspective, the publisher presented an autograph of John, to which editors added a prologue and an epilogue and five remarks:

> Prologue:[24]
> My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. (*1)
> Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning. (*2)
> Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. (*3)

23. See 1 Thess 5:27, "I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of them. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

24. Prologue 1:1–18; (*1) 2:1b–6; (*2) 2:7b "the old commandment is the word that you have heard"; (*3) 2:9–11; (*4) 2:15–25; (*5) 2:27–5:12; Epilogue 5:14–21.

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> I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven on account of his name.
> I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.
> I am writing to you, young people, because you have conquered the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father.
> I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.
> I write to you, young people, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (*4)
> I write these things to you concerning those who would deceive you. (*5)
> I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.
> Epilogue

To begin an autograph with the words "I write," fits the genre well.[25] In the context of the canonical edition a remark written by John in his own hand, presented in a clearly distinguishable editorial framework, would have endorsed the editions of the Gospel according to John, the Second and Third Letter of John, and the Revelation of John.[26]

In the Second Letter of John , one editorial comment may have been included (2 John 6–11):

> I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father. But now, dear lady, I ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, let us love one another.*
> * And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning—you must walk in it. Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist! Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for but may receive a full reward. Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to

25. See Gal 6:11, "See how large letters I write when I write with my own hand."

26. David Trobisch, "The New Testament in the Light of Book Publishing in Antiquity," in *Editing the Bible: Assessing the Task Past and Present*, ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Judith H. Newman, RBS 69 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 161–70.

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> you and does not bring this teaching; for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.

Following reading instructions from the other Johannine writings, the editorial nature of the comment was discernable by the shift to the first-person plural "we walk." The reference point to John's letter was the word "love," clearly marked in the opening words "this is love." The formula "from the beginning" was a favorite term of the editors used in the prologue to the Gospel according to John and in the prologue to the First Letter of John (John 1:1; 1 John 1:1).

The ending of the Second Letter of John suggested to readers that the whole letter was written by John's hand and that the publisher may have had access to it: "Although I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink; instead I hope to come to you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete" (2 John 12). The letter concluded with a greeting from the congregation where John was staying: "The children of your elect sister send you their greetings" (13). In the implied original letter, the one that was sent, the salutation from the congregation, written by another hand, would have authenticated John's autograph.[27]

The confidential character of the Third Letter of John indicated that it was not meant to be read to the congregation. The negative remarks about Diotrephes would hardly have gone over well with Diotrephes sitting in the audience.[28] The letter was addressed to a certain Gaius. In the provenance narrative of the canonical edition, the character Gaius plays a significant role. He is the host of Paul in Corinth, when Paul wrote the Letter to Romans, and he is mentioned in 1 Corinthians as one of the few who were baptized by Paul (Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14). In the context of the canonical edition, mentioning Gaius allowed readers to determine Corinth as the address of the Second and Third Letters of John. The greeting (2 John 13) that authenticated John's hand came from Corinth, making Corinth the guarantor of good provenance; and for lack of an alternative, Patmos becomes the place where John wrote these two letters.[29]

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27. See Rom 16:22. In his autographic subscription, literary Paul authenticates the hand of Tertius who had copied Rom 1–15.

28. "Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority" (3 John 9).

29. Rev 1:9, "I, John,… was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

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The autographs used to create the First Letter of John supported the publisher's claim to have used first-century documents when the second-century the canonical edition was prepared.[30]

## Epilogue

The publisher of the canonical edition gave John a prominent voice. A publisher's narrative, however, does not necessarily represent historical fact. Even when the publisher claimed to preserve historical documents written by the hand of John the beloved disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, this claim would have been a literary claim and poetic license was customary. The writings assigned to John describe what a second-century publisher believed had happened a century earlier. They are a valuable source to assess controversies among Jewish, Marcionite, gnostic, catholic, and other faith-communities with ties to the Jesus tradition.

To understand the voice of John as an integral part of the canonical edition of the New Testament is, of course, not the only perspective one can take. Trying to understand a second-century text in its oldest published form, however, is a noble charge for any exegete.

30. Autographic subscriptions are discernable for the Letters to Romans, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, and Hebrews (David Trobisch, *Paul's Collection of Letters: Exploring the Origins* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994], 29–33).

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