

Narrative Strategies in the Prologue and the Metaphor of $\alpha\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\beta$ in John's Gospel

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Abstract: This article argues for a metaphorical connotation for the term $\alpha\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\beta$ in the Gospel, beyond its use in the prologue (John 1:1-18): this stands against the consensus of scholarship. It draws on some insights regarding short story openings, to argue that $\alpha\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\beta$ and $\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\beta$ function as non-sequential sequence signals, and character-substitutes, to pique the reader's curiosity as to the identity of the Logos, and prepare for the introduction of the name "Jesus Christ" in v.17. These narrative dynamics, the structure of the prologue, and the operations of implicature (Grice), create a strong link in the implied reader's mind between the Logos and Jesus. The implied author uses the implicative force of this connection to add metaphorical freight to the term when used later in the Gospel. The article explores six instances where the term $\alpha\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\beta$ appears (6:60; 7:36; 8:37; 10:35; 12:48; 17:17) and where, it is argued, the possibility exists of a usage which echoes that of the prologue.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). With this striking sentence the implied author of the Gospel of John begins his narrative. "The Word" $\alpha\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\beta$ is to serve as a metaphor for the story's main character. It is a metaphor that dominates the prologue (John 1:1-18). It is not the only metaphor used. Indeed, it might be argued that it is quickly displaced by another, that of "the Light". Yet the use of the metaphor, "the Word", is so striking that it remains foremost in the reader's mind. It has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, such attention as serves only to promote its dominant place in the prologue. In the opinion of many scholars, having introduced this metaphor in the prologue, the implied author chooses to ignore it in the remainder of the gospel narrative.¹

1. See R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966) 19 (The view is implied in a remark appearing in Appendix 2 of his commentary: the *logos* concept is the work of "the theologian of the Prologue", p. 524 and *passim*). Also, R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 225; L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995)

The following comment by Elizabeth Harris, in her book *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist*, may serve as a summary of such opinion: “[T]he figure of the Logos...is introduced abruptly in the prologue and then dropped....”² For his part, C. H. Dodd states that “[i]t is never expressly said in the body of the gospel, apart from the Prologue, that Christ *is* this divine *lovgoß*.”³ It would seem that other metaphors, such as, for instance, that of “the Light” are preferred (see John 8:12).

In this article, I will argue that the implied author creates a strong link between the metaphor of “the Word” (or, “the Logos”)⁴ and the character of Jesus, by the narrative strategies adopted in the prologue. Indeed, though the proper name, Jesus Christ, is introduced into the narrative almost casually at v.17b, the flow of the prologue is toward this point. There are two strategies that the implied author adopts in order to have the reader understand that the metaphor of “the Word” has its referent in the character of Jesus, and operates as a substitute for this character in the prologue. One is the use of term, “the Word” as a non-sequential sequence-signal; the other is the implication carried for this link by the way the prologue’s narrative is structured.

As the implied author forges a strong association between the metaphor, οJ *lovgoß* and the name and person of Jesus in the prologue, he is then able to use this association to further an allusive, but suggestive use of the metaphor later in the narrative. Later in this article, I provide six examples where this term is used in other parts of the gospel. While οJ *lovgoß* is not used in a titular sense beyond the prologue, nor as Dodd points out is a Christological use explicitly present elsewhere, I would argue that its use in these instances is sufficiently ambiguous, or at least suggestive, that it may take on a metaphorical as well as a literal connotation.

Both the nature of the prologue itself, and the possible linguistic and conceptual background to the implied author’s use of the term οJ *lovgoß*,

111. Admittedly, some of this comment concerns the use of οJ *lovgoß* as a christological title, see the caveat on this below pp. XXXX.

2. E. Harris, *Prologue and Gospel* (JSNTSup 107; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), in an appendix, 196.

3. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) 267 (emphasis original).

4. As the Greek word *lovgoß* has a wide range of meanings, and the connotations possible in its use in John 1:1,2 and 14 are not fully captured by the English translation “word”, scholars often use the transliteration, Logos. I make use of both the scholarly convention and the conventional English translation in this article. I use the transliteration “Logos” to signal the fact that the nuances of the Greek run beyond the meanings that normally inhere in the English translation. But as a metaphor, the English translation, “the Word” has a certain resonance in a narrative made of words, that presents much of what the implied author wishes to convey about God in words spoken, often at length, by the narrative’s main character, who is in himself a “communication”, a “Word” from God. Indeed, he is more than this: he is God.

have generated much interest and attention amongst scholars. For reasons of space, this article does not enter into the debate over the extent, structure or unity of the prologue. Some of what is laid out here would indeed support an argument for the essential unity of the prologue, and its connection with what follows. However, the detail such an argument would require necessarily belongs to another occasion. Nor can we enter into exploration of the possible background of the term, οἱ λογγοί.⁵ What is primarily of interest, anyway, is the way in which the implied author creates a strong association in the reader's mind between this metaphor and the Gospel's main character.

"THE WORD" AS A NON-SEQUENTIAL SEQUENCE SIGNAL

In an article published in 1965, J. M. Backus, drawing on some work in structural linguistics, defines a sequence-signal as any word that appears in a sentence (the sequence-sentence) following another sentence that depends upon that preceding sentence for its full meaning, because the preceding sentence contains the referent for that word, or sequence-signal. He gives as an example the opening sentence of Stephen Crane's short story *Maggie*. "A very little boy stood upon a heap of gravel for the honour of Rum Alley. He was throwing stones at howling urchins from Devil's Row."⁶ The pronoun, "he", is the sequence-signal in the second sentence which finds its referent in the noun "boy" in the first. He goes on to state that if the story began with the second sentence, "He was throwing stones at howling urchins from Devil's Row", then the pronoun "he" would be a sequence-signal out of sequence (that is, lacking an immediate referent), or a nonsequential sequence-signal.

Many stories begin with nonsequential sequence-signals, the most common type being the referentless pronoun. An example of one such is found at the beginning of Somerset Maugham's *The Force of Circumstance*. "She was sitting on the verandah waiting for her husband to come in for lunch." Another is the intriguing line, which forms part of the title of Backus's article, from a story called *The Honey Bee*. "He came into her line of vision walking backward." (Actually, there are two nonsequential sequence-signals here: the pronouns "he" and "her"). Backus calls these referentless pronouns, "character-substitutes".

Another type of character-substitute that functions as a nonsequential sequence-signal is the noun-phrase, closely related, says Backus, to the referentless pronoun. A noun-phrase is a noun that points to a specific

5. For which, in addition to the commentaries, see C. A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue* (JSNTSup 89; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

6. J. M. Backus, "'He came into her line of vision walking backward': Nonsequential sequence-signals in short story openings", *Language Learning*, 15 (1965), 67-83, see pp. 67-68.

referent by the use of the definite article, or a demonstrative adjective such as “this”, for example “the man” or “this man”.⁷ An example is found in Crane’s story *Three Miraculous Soldiers* that begins, “The girl was in the front room peering through the blinds.”⁸ The presence of the definite article prompts the reader to ask, “What girl?” The non-sequential nature of the signal piques the reader’s curiosity as to the identity of this character.

I suggest that the arthrous noun (or, noun-phrase), “the Word”, in the opening verse of John’s Gospel functions as a nonsequential sequence-signal (as well as a character-substitute) which prompts the reader to ask, “What Word?”, and to wonder as to the identity of this mysterious figure. And because the implied author quickly raises the expectation of the reader that this Word is a human character, the question is more likely to be framed, “Who is this Word?”.

In the next verse a sequence-signal appears which plays an important part in the implied author’s narrative strategy. Normally speaking it is rendered in English as “he”; but, as it is the Greek demonstrative pronoun οὗτοσ, it might more literally be translated as “this one”. “This one was in the beginning with God” (v.2). Its referent is, of course, “the Word”. As a demonstrative, it functions as a kind of literary “index finger” (we might even call it “the Johannine index finger”) which points the reader back to the noun-phrase, the character-substitute, encountered in the metaphor of “the Word” in verse one. It will also be used to place this character-substitute in juxtaposition with another character about to be introduced; and finally to link the character Jesus with the metaphor of “the Word”, as well as another major metaphor, that of “the Light”. In a sense, it points both back to “the Word”, and implicitly forward to the character yet to be named as Jesus Christ. In this manner, I would argue, it also functions like a nonsequential sequence-signal.⁹ It is, in a sense, a “referentless” demonstrative pronoun to the extent that, for the most part its referent is the mysterious metaphor, the noun-phrase “the Word”, itself a character-

7. I follow Backus in his use of the term “noun-phrase” here; it provides convenient shorthand for the phenomenon we are discussing. Grammatically, however, a noun-phrase may be any phrase that does the duty of a noun; see J. C. Nesfield and F. T. Wood, *Manual of English Grammar and Composition* (4th ed.; Hampshire: Macmillan, 1964) 17.

8. See J. M. Backus, “Nonsequential sequence-signals”, 75.

9. That it functions like a nonsequential sequence-signal would be particularly the case if, as some scholars argue, v.2 has been added to a prior hymn source in writing the prologue; see, for example, E. L. Miller, “The Logic of the Logos Hymn: A New View”, *NTS* 29/4 (1983), 552-561, see p. 555; see also Schnackenburg, *John*, Vol. 1, 236. We might then assume that the reason the (somewhat redundant) gloss was added was specifically to prepare the way for the introduction of the character Jesus Christ (v.17), “this one” who is truly the Logos/Light, in contradistinction to “that one”, John, who is merely a witness to the Logos/Light.

substitute. In v.18 it is no longer referential in the same sense: it now refers back to the Son/Logos who has been named as Jesus Christ.

THE IMPLICATIVE DYNAMICS OF THE PROLOGUE'S STRUCTURE

In order to examine the dynamics of this, I must sketch out briefly the implicative force of the structure of the first 18 verses of the Gospel narrative. In speaking of the implicative force of the prologue's structure, I am drawing explicitly on a speech act notion of implicature put forward by H. P. Grice.¹⁰ This states that a speaker may imply or tacitly suggest some meaning by the way in which something is said. I extend it to mean that a writer may also imply and tacitly suggest a meaning by the way a piece of discourse is structured. What is implied and tacitly suggested in the prologue is that Jesus Christ, introduced as a named character almost incidentally in v.17, is the referent to whom the metaphor "the Word" applies. However, because the implied author wishes to pique the reader's curiosity about his narrative's main character, and because he wishes not only to throw a certain cloak of mystery around him, but also to suggest his origin in divine pre-human history, he does not make the link immediately.

Thus the whole prologue builds toward the revelation of the name, Jesus Christ, at v.17. Jesus is introduced to the narrative under the cover of a series of metaphors, of which the dominant one is the metaphor of "the Word". But the Word is linked quickly with another metaphor, that of Light. A series of statements are made which suggest the divine origin of this Word/Light (or, "Logos/Light"). At verse six another character is introduced by the name of John, and this character is put into juxtaposition with the Logos/Light. First, it is said that he has come as a witness to the light. The Johannine index finger is directed at him as the narrator says decisively, "*This one* (οὗτος) came as a witness to the light...". Next it is stated that he is not the Light but simply a witness to the Light. It is interesting that at this point (namely v.8), another demonstrative pronoun is used, and may be translated, "that one" (ἐκεῖνος). The Johannine index finger comes into play again, and puts John at some narrative distance from the implied author, and hence the implied reader. Indeed, by using the demonstrative pronoun ἐκεῖνος rather than οὗτος, the implied author, securing the fact that John is the antecedent of the pronoun in the reader's understanding, also places the character John at a distance from, and hence over against the metaphor and character-substitute, the Light. "*That one* was not the Light, but came in order to bear witness about the Light". Having momentarily

10. See H. P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation" in P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3: Speech Acts* (New York: Academic Press, 1975) 41-58, see pp. 43-44; see also D. Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 151; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 75-6.

had the spotlight put upon him, John is already fading into the background.¹¹ The focus must remain on the figure of the Logos/Light. The implied author then states that this Logos/Light was coming into the world.

By using the Johannine index finger in this way to distinguish between the Logos/Light and John (ου|τοβ, ejkei'noβ) and by introducing John into the story at this point, the implied author infers that this Logos/Light, like John, is another human character. So, in a sense, though commentators find it striking, it is no surprise to the reader when the implied author says at v.14, "The Word (he reverts to the strong, dominant metaphor) became flesh and dwelt among us."

John is now brought into the narrative once more, and is made specifically to point to the Word; indeed, he uses the Johannine index finger. "This is the one of whom I said, 'The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he was before me'." (v.15) There is a delicious irony here, created by the structure of the narrative, for, of course, as a character-substitute, "the Word" has entered the narrative discourse ahead of the character John, while appearing after him, both chronologically (or later in story time) and in terms of the narrative discourse, as the human character, Jesus Christ.

We conclude this brief analysis by observing that, as has already been said, the name Jesus Christ is dropped into the narrative abruptly at v.17. "The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." However, by this stage there is no doubt in the reader's mind that this character is the referent for the metaphor, "the Word". This is not merely because, as a nonsequential sequence-signal, the Word must logically attach itself to a named character, but also because a series of narrative strategies such as the juxtaposition raised between John and the Word through the use of such things as the Johannine index finger ("this one/that one"), the chronological and sequential entry of John and the Word-cum-Jesus into the narrative, the function of John as a witness in verse 15: all serve to create a strong link in the mind of the reader between the metaphorical term, οJ lovgoβ, and the character Jesus Christ.

Thus the narrative dynamics of the Prologue suggest that the Logos introduced at the beginning of the narrative is a human character. Attention is deflected away from the first named character, John, and it is made clear that he is not the referent for "the Word". At the same time, the implication is clear that the Logos/Light is another human character who, like John, has resided in the world, though neither

11. See F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (transl. and edited by R. W. Funk; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) 351 (#291/3): "Jesus has now been introduced [presumably in the immediate context through the reference to 'the light'] so that John is the remote person."

known by the world nor accepted by his own. It is possible to read v.9 not as a statement that the true Light was coming into the world, but that this Light enlightens all who are born into the world.¹² However, even if this reading is adopted, it remains the case that the Light is described as being in the world in the following verses.

Within a short space of discourse time the clear statement is made that “the Word” (also to be identified as the Light) has become a human being (v.14). It is important to note that, at this point, two statements are made that will clearly identify Jesus Christ as the referent for the character-substitute, “the Word”, and prepare the way for an important title that will be used of the character Jesus in the body of the Gospel.

In the first place, it is said that the glory of the Word is “as [one] only-begotten from the Father” (ω|β monogenou|β para; patro|β). The descriptor “only-begotten” is used again in v.18 where it is said that the only-begotten [Son, or God] is in close relationship with the Father.¹³ However we understand the nature of this only-begottenness (whether that of a Son, or God), it is clear that this only-begotten one is in relationship with another who is given the title “Father”. Elizabeth Harris, who favours the reading monogenh;β qeov|β, makes the point that this reading brings the thought back to that of vv.1,2 which is that the Logos is God.¹⁴ However, a reading of the Gospel as a whole, would have the reader in no doubt that the implied author understands the relationship of the “only-begotten one” (who is the Logos) to the “Father” as one that makes the use of the title “Son” entirely appropriate. The use of “Son” is, in fact, one of the implied author’s main ways of having the character Jesus describe his relationship with God.

12. That is, the phrase “was coming into the world” may be taken as relating either to (a) “the true light”, or (b) “everyone” (NRSV, cf. RSV, “every man”). On this see Brown, *John*, 1.9-10; see also C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John* (London: SPCK, 2nd edn, 1978) 160-61. Both Brown and Barrett prefer the reading that refers the phrase to “the true light”, and see it as a reference to the incarnation. Bultmann, however, refers the phrase to “every man”, see R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971) 52, fn. 2. While there has been support for both readings in versions and commentary across the ages, most modern commentaries and English translations favour the first reading (a); see further marginal references in B. Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament* (4th ed.; Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1993) and B. M. Newman and E. A. Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of John* (London: United Bible Societies, 1980) 16.

13. Here, in fact, we meet a *crux interpretum* in that the major Greek manuscripts offer at least two possible readings: ο| monogenh;β ui|Jov|β (“the only begotten Son”) or [ο|] monogenh;β qeov|β (“[the] only-begotten God”, or “unique (?) God”). A majority of the committee producing the third edition of the UBS Greek New Testament favoured the reading monogenh;β qeov|β and gave it a {B} = “some degree of doubt” rating. Dissent from the majority opinion by one member was such that his opinion that “a D decision would be preferable” was recorded (see B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1971] 198).

14. See E. Harris, *Prologue and Gospel*, 109.

The other statement is that the Logos is “full of grace and truth” (plhvrhß cavritoß kai; ajlhqeivaß). It is these very qualities or virtues that are said to come through Jesus Christ in v.17b. Thus a strong identification is made between oJ lovgoß and the named character, Jesus, through the association created by the repetition of these words.

Given the way in which the prologue has been building to v.17 and creating an association between the mysterious figure of the Logos/Light and the named character, Jesus Christ, it is impossible that a reader can fail to understand that v.18 (widely accepted as formally closing the prologue) also speaks of Jesus Christ. The “only-begotten”, already associated in the reader’s mind with the Logos, is said to be close to the Father’s heart. Moreover, and here the Johannine index finger comes into play once more, “that one” has made the Father known. The verb used here is very suggestive in the light of the metaphor of the Word. The verb (ejxhgevomai) is used of recounting a narrative,¹⁵ or of expounding something, or of communicating divine mysteries.¹⁶ Morris points out that “[f]rom this root we derive our word “exegesis” and makes the nice comment that “[i]t is a suggestive thought that Christ is the “exegesis” of the Father”.¹⁷

The Word who was in the beginning with God, who became flesh, who is an only-begotten one in close relationship with the Father, is the one who is to explain God. Readers discover that in the body of the Gospel Jesus not only explains the nature of God, but he himself shows forth God’s nature and being. At 14:7 Jesus states that to know him is to know his Father also. This prompts Philip to ask, “Lord, show us the Father and we shall be satisfied” (14:8). To this Jesus replies, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father” (14:9).

SIX lovgoß STATEMENTS AND THEIR IMPLICATIVE ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE LOGOS

In view of this strong link between the Word and Jesus Christ in the opening verses of the Gospel, it is somewhat surprising to find that the implied author does not appear to use this metaphor again in the rest of the narrative.¹⁸ This, at least, is the consensus among many Johannine

15. See Luke 24:35; Acts 10:8; 15:12,14; 21:19 (see Barrett, *John*, 170).

16. See the discussion of this verb in E. Harris, *Prologue and Gospel*, 109-115.

17. Morris, *John*, rev edn, 101, n. 130.

18. Martin Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (JSNTSup 71; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) 29, speaks of “the mysterious disappearance of the Logos after Jn. 1:1-18”. Scott later states that “*nowhere* in the Gospel is Jesus referred to as either Logos or Sophia outside of the Prologue” (p. 115). Nonetheless, he contends that Sophia appears in the Gospel as the claims and the person of Jesus are understood to carry allusions to and parallels with Sophia, to the extent that Sophia may be understood to replace the Logos (see summary, p. 173). It seems to me that as Scott’s argument is predicated on allusions

scholars: the metaphorical use of this term is confined to the Prologue. There are, however, a number of instances in the Gospel where the noun-phrase “the Word”, or something similar, is used where I believe the metaphorical import given to it by its use in the prologue means that a degree of resonance with that metaphorical usage is present at these points. Here the operations of implicature suggest that not only may the word have a surface level, plain meaning, but it may also carry a metaphorical undertow. On six occasions, in particular, the term *oJ lovgoß*, is used in the same nominative form as it is in the prologue, and here the possibilities of a metaphorical association are strong. In each of these instances, context, and resonance with themes and assertions pertaining to Jesus elsewhere in the narrative, give implicative force to the words, and especially the noun-phrase *oJ lovgoß*. This force is often ironic, and sometimes even ambiguous; by ambiguous, I mean that the grammatical referent of *oJ lovgoß* might well be taken to be Jesus, even though this need not *necessarily* be the case. This is so with the first of our examples.

JOHN 6:60

In chapter six, after Jesus has been speaking of himself as “the bread of life”, and saying how people must eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to find true life, many disciples take offence and are reported as saying: “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” (6:60, RSV). The Greek might be rendered more literally as: “Difficult is the word, this one. Who can listen to it?” (*sklhrovß ejstin oJ lovgoß ou|toß ~ tivß duvnatai aujtu' ajkouein*).

It is possible that the pronoun may be taken as masculine not neuter, so that the question can be rendered “Who can listen to *him*?”. There is debate about this amongst scholars: Westcott, for instance, holds that this is “an unlikely rendering”, while Barrett states that “the balance of probability is...slightly in favour” of reading “him”.¹⁹

Whether or not the teaching against which the objection is raised includes the specific reference to eating the “flesh” of the Son of Man and to drinking his blood (6:52-58) or more generally to the life-giving bread that has come down from heaven, the disciples and the crowd find it difficult to accept, in large measure because they understand that the metaphor is to be applied to Jesus.²⁰ Indeed, if we restrict the

and intertextual resonances between Jesus and the figure of Sophia, then it is equally as probable that the implied author might set up intratextual resonances, and use implicature, to continue to evoke the figure of the Logos throughout the Gospel.

19. B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1882) 109; Barrett, *John*, 302-303. See also Bultmann, *John*, 444, fn. 4 (not a reference to Jesus), Morris, *John*, rev. edn., 338, fn. 143 (could refer to Jesus), Brown, *John*, 1.296; Newman and Nida, *Translator's Handbook*, 212.

20. See the discussion in Barrett, *John*, 302; Brown, *John*, 1.299; F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Sacra Pagina 4; Collegeville, MI: The Liturgical Press, 1998) 230.

reference purely to vv.35-50 (or 25-50), it remains the case that the “word” that is objectionable is that Jesus describes himself as bread that has had a divine origin. This would clearly link this metaphor “bread of life” with the metaphor of “the Word” in the prologue: both have a divine origin.

Thus (if one may be excused the pun) these disciples find this teaching more than they can stomach. Indeed, as they are invited to see Jesus as the real food necessary to life, they cannot stomach him. He is the unacceptable Word whose teaching they cannot receive.²¹ The reader is told that many abandoned him at this point. They did not just refuse to accept Jesus’ teaching; they “refused” him. It might be noted in passing that the noun-phrase employs the use of the Johannine index finger (“the Word, this one”) that makes a further implicit link with the usage of the prologue. Furthermore, after many disciples have left, Jesus turns to his closest associates and asks, “Will you also go away?” Their spokesperson, Peter, is made to reply, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”(6:68). Here, interestingly, the implied author chooses to use the plural of a Greek synonym for *lovgoß* when Peter speaks of “the words of eternal life” (rJh'ma, here plural: rJhvmata²²). Is this perhaps so that he can draw a contrast between the words that Jesus speaks, and the Word that is Jesus himself?²³

JOHN 7:36

The seventh chapter of the Fourth Gospel is taken up with a great debate amongst Jesus’ Jewish listeners as to who he is. Some wonder whether he might be a prophet, others whether he is the expected Messiah. Still others recognise him simply as someone wanted by the religious authorities. Jesus’ own words confuse them, for he claims that his teaching has come from God, and implies that his origins lie with God too. When the temple police are sent to arrest him, Jesus speaks of going away to the One who sent him, somewhere where, though they search, they will not be able to find him. The crowds are puzzled as to what he might mean and ask: “What is this statement he made, ‘You will seek me and not find me’?”(7:36). A more literal translation of the Greek might be given as “What is the word, this one which he says...?” Or even, “Who is the Word, this one [of] whom he says, ‘You will seek me and not find me’?” (tivß ejstin oJ lovgoß ou|toß o{n ei\pen, Zhthvsetev

21. See here M. W. G. Stibbe, *John’s Gospel* (London: Routledge, 1994) 24.

22. It might be argued that rJhvmata is used here in order to create a link with 6:63 so that Peter, thereby, shows that “he has correctly understood what Jesus said” there (see Morris, *John*, rev. edn, 344). The lack of an article may place increased stress on the *words* of Jesus (“you have words [that bring] eternal life”). This is entirely possible. However, on the basis of Johannine usage there seems to be no reason why the implied author might not equally have used the plural of *lovgoß* (cf. 7:40; 10:19; 14:24; 19:13).

23. On this see M. W. G. Stibbe, *John* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 17.

me ktl...). As was the case at 6:60, a noun-phrase is used which brings together the two verbal indicators used in the prologue to introduce Jesus.²⁴ Grammatically, and on the lips of the speakers, the noun-phrase οἱ λογοὶ οὐτοῦ refers to the statement Jesus has just made about going where he cannot be found and they cannot come. However, the context gives an ironic twist to this question. Jesus comes to Jerusalem in secret (7:10) while the crowds seek him and debate his identity (7:11,12, 25-27, 31, 40-43). Reference is made to Jesus' deeds, both by Jesus himself (7:21) and by some among the crowd, who describe these as "signs" such as might be expected of the Messiah (7:31). Jesus speaks of his heavenly origins (7:28,29) in a proclamation that rings with irony, for, in truth, his origins are veiled from his audience, who nevertheless think they know where he is from (7:27a). As the arresting party arrives, Jesus alludes proleptically to his departure (or return) to the One who sent him (7:33,34). The authorities fail to arrest Jesus because his "hour" has not yet arrived (7:30,32, 44). Thus the whole passage resonates with the question of Jesus' true identity and the failure of those around him to comprehend who he is and where he is from. Consequently, v.36 might well be read as an ironic commentary on this situation: "Who is this Logos of whom he says, 'You will seek me and you will not find me, and where I am you cannot come'?" If, as Brown maintains, the theme of wisdom is strong here, then added metaphorical resonance is given to the question.²⁵ This resonance is further strengthened if, as Scott maintains, there is already a link between Sophia and Logos in the literature that provides a background to the Gospel, especially if the Gospel makes conscious use of this link.²⁶

JOHN 8:37

John 8:37 reads, "Yet you seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you" (RSV): ajlla; zhteitev me ajpokteinai, o{ti oJ logoi oJ ejmo;β ouj cwrei' ejn uJmi'n. The context is, once again, a debate with "the Jews" about Jesus' origins and identity. Jesus speaks of his Father, the God from whom he has come and on whose authority he acts. He accuses his interlocutors of failing to be true children of Abraham; in fact, they are children of the devil. "The Jews" for their part accuse Jesus of having a demon. The debate ends with "the Jews" seeking (literally) to kill Jesus after he has claimed precedence to Abraham, thus making himself equal

24. J. N. Sanders punctuates John 1:1b, 2 to read, kai; qeo;β h\ n. οἱ λογοὶ οὐτοῦ, and draws attention to its repetition here and at 6:60; see J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin (eds.), *The Gospel According to St John* (London: A. & C. Black, 1968) 69-70. This echo may have been even more striking for early hearers of the Gospel than for early readers; either way, it remains a strong verbal echo.

25. See Brown, *John*, 1.318.

26. On this see M. Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus*, chapter three. Space precludes a thorough discussion of this aspect of the Johannine use of the Logos metaphor.

to God in their eyes. They recognise, then, that in Jesus' words, "...before Abraham was, I am" (8:58b), the answer to their question, "Who do you claim to be?" (8:53b) is an implicit claim to divinity. In the context of this exchange, Jesus' words at 8:37 are fraught with irony, for not only do "the Jews" reject his words but he himself finds no place among them.²⁷ The irony is heightened by the fact that, according to the narrator, Jesus' interlocutors are Jews who believe in him (8:30,31). But they fail to "continue in [his] word" (8:31) and cannot accept the truth that will make them free. Implicit here is an echo of the prologue's claim that the Logos/Light who was with God (= the same as God) found no place among his own people. Indeed, given the fact that 8:12,13 reintroduces the metaphor of Light, the whole exchange may be taken as a narrative enactment of the prologue's theme.

JOHN 10:35

John 10:35 contains a mention of οἱ λογγοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ which, on the face of it, is a reference to the scripture which Jesus cites. However, the context in which it occurs, namely one where "the Jews" wish to stone Jesus for making himself God, makes Jesus' reply very suggestive. The narrative echo effects with 1:1-3, 10, 14, are strong in the phrasing the implied author has chosen (προῦθ οὐβ οἱ λογγοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰγεβντο)²⁸ and again the incident portrays a stand-off situation in which "the Jews" are unable to accept Jesus' claims even though they have asked to be told plainly if he is the Christ (10:24). Wayne Meeks makes a pertinent comment on this. "To those of the Gospel audience who are equipped with good memories, the comparison is bolder still: If those to whom the Logos came can be called gods, how much more the one who *is* the Logos?"²⁹

A. T. Hanson, in fact, understands the phrase to be a reference to the "pre-existent Word", and argues that the writer understood the psalm quoted in v.34 (Psalm 82) as having been addressed by this Word of God in its entirety to the Jews "primarily on Sinai".³⁰ A number of scholars find this interpretation "attractive", but generally reject it in favour of

27. C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959) 75, notes the difficulty in deciding whether εἰν means "within" or "among".

28. See here T. L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 378; also E. Hoskyns and F. N. Davey, *The Fourth Gospel* (2nd ed; London: Faber & Faber, 1947) 392.

29. W. A. Meeks, "Equal to God", in R. T. Fortna and B. R. Gaventa (eds.), *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990) 309-21, see p. 314. Rev 19:13 is a highly suggestive intertextual correspondence, especially if the Apocalypse has come out of the same Johannine stable.

30. A. T. Hanson, "John's Citation of Psalm LXXXII", *New Testament Studies* 11 (1964-65), 158-62; see also Westcott, *John*, 160, whose thought Hanson develops.

the more natural interpretation of it as “the message”.³¹ Nonetheless, leaving aside the subtleties of scriptural exegesis that may also influence a reading of this passage, the operations of implicature make a reference to the Logos at least implicitly possible, at a secondary level of meaning if not at the primary level.

JOHN 12:48

“[T]he word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day” (12:48, RSV): oJ lovgoß o;n ejlavlhsa ejkei'noß krinei' aujto;n ejn th' ejscavth/hJmevra/. This statement comes in the context of Jesus' final public proclamation (12:44-50). It is a word of judgment on those who reject him. Jesus speaks of *that* word (oJ lovgoß...ejkei'noß) which will judge on the last day. Thus, Jesus appears to put a distance between himself and the word that he speaks. It is, however, an ironic distance and a play on words (by the implied author) made possible precisely because of the way in which oJ lovgoß and Jesus have been linked in the prologue. Jesus, the Logos, is the one who will really be the judge on the last day, and his judgment will be on the basis of his message (oJ lovgoß) delivered in the story world (see 5:22; 8:14-16, 26).³²

R. E. Brown, indeed, offers “has *him who* [for, ‘that which’] judges him”, as an alternative translation for the phrase in v.48a, “already has his judge” (e[cei to;n krivnonta aujto;n).³³ He notes that “in the Targums (Neofiti I, Pseudo-Jonathan) it is God's *memra* or word that takes vengeance...[and this]...offers a parallel to John (48) when the word that Jesus has spoken is the agent of condemnation”.³⁴ God's *memra* is a possible background concept to the metaphor of the Logos in the prologue. Barrett, meanwhile, finds a possible source for 12:48 in 7:51 where the Law is the judge. This points to the active role that the Law plays in judgment in Jewish thought, and Barrett concludes by drawing attention to “the connection between *lovgoß* as a Christological title and the Law” in John 1:1.³⁵

It should be noted that this statement comes in an epilogue (12:44-50) that closes the public ministry of Jesus (and ends the first part of the Gospel). In this epilogue, the implied author has Jesus address the

31. The word is Beasley-Murray's; see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987) 177; see also Carson, *John*, 398. For further discussion see also Brown, *John*, 1.410-411; Morris, *John*, rev. edn, 467-68, n. 96; and Schnackenburg, *John* 2.312 (who appears to accept Hanson's reading implicitly despite some reservation).

32. See also the intertextual resonance in Rev 19:11-16.

33. Brown, *John*, 1.490 (italics mine).

34. Brown, *John*, 1.492.

35. Barrett, *John*, 434. Barrett also notes the role of Wisdom (“often equated with the Law”) as “as assessor with God in judgment”.

reader and so invites the reader to consider his claims.³⁶ Robert Kysar states that “[c]haps. 1-12 end, then, much as they started – with the claim that Jesus is the Word of God, and he has been the Word of God by constantly obeying the Father’s will”.³⁷ In fact, there is here an echo of John 5:19-30 where the reader learns, among other things, that the Son (viz. the Logos, Jesus Christ) has been given all judgement (5:22).

JOHN 17:17b

John 17:17b, “Your word is truth”: οἰ λογος οἰ σο;β ajlhvqeia vjstin, is almost a parenthetical clause,³⁸ with possible intertextual allusions to Ps 119:142. It comes in the context of Jesus’ prayer for his disciples that concludes the farewell discourses. Jesus has earlier referred to himself as the Truth (14:6) and the narrator has linked the Logos with the truth (1:14), followed by an explicit linking of this truth with Jesus Christ (1:17). Furthermore, Jesus has proclaimed that the One who sent him is true (ajlhqinovβ, 7:28) and by this point in the discourse the connection between Jesus and the One who sent him has been well and truly forged in the reader’s mind. All that is said in chapter seventeen serves only to strengthen that link. In 8:32 Jesus has told his audience that the truth will make them free, and in 8:36 that the Son will make them free (see 14:6). Again, we should recall that those words were directed at would-be disciples who are to remain in his word if they are to be truly his disciples (8:31). And later, those who are indeed his disciples (his “own”: tou;β ijdivouβ, 13:1) are instructed to remain in him, as branches of a vine. At this point in the narrative it hardly seems possible that the implied author does not intend at least an implicit allusion to the Logos.³⁹

We find, again, that commentators pick up these allusions. D. Moody Smith states that “[w]e do not err in seeing here a subtle allusion to the prologue...” where the Word is fully identified with Jesus Christ “and that identification here stands in the background”.⁴⁰ Again, C. K. Barrett writes: “Both λογος and ajlhvqeia, ‘message’ and ‘truth’,

36. Note that there is no audience in the narrative for these words of Jesus, who has withdrawn from the crowd (see 12:36b); for further discussion of this see Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act*, 106-107.

37. R. Kysar, *John* (ACNT; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1986) 204; see Barrett’s comment on v.50: “[Jesus] is the Word of God, or he is nothing at all. In the first part of the gospel, which here closes, Jesus lives in complete obedience to the Father...” (*John*, 435).

38. So B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972) 528; Brown, *John*, 1.762.

39. Some readers, at least, will surely make this connection: cf. Barrett, *John*, 510; see also Newman and Nida, *Translator’s Handbook*, 540; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991) 566. Intertextual resonances in the Apocalypse are Rev 3.14; 19.11.

40. D. Moody Smith, *John* (ANTC; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1999) 315.

approximate to the person of Jesus himself, who, as John emphasises, is the Word and the Truth."⁴¹

CONCLUSION:
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NARRATIVE OF THE METAPHOR'S USE

Now that we have surveyed these six instances where resonance with the use of the noun-phrase οἱ λογος in the prologue may lend to these locales a metaphorical echo, a note of caution must be entered. A distinction must be made between the decided use of οἱ λογος in the prologue as a metaphor for Jesus and later appearances of the term. In the prologue, the metaphorical use provides what may be (and is) described as a "title". It is a christological use of the term which does not seem to appear elsewhere in the Gospel; and I am not arguing for its use as a christological title elsewhere. Having said that, I would maintain that there is another level of resonance that is best described as giving rise to "narrative echo effects".⁴² These are recurrences of words, phrases, images and themes that set up patterns of connection between parts of the narrative. Indeed, it is the very narrative context in which the verbal construct is found which allows for the development of implicit connections and echoes. Thus it is not the mere appearance of the term οἱ λογος which alone sets off the metaphorical resonance. It is the setting of words and phrases in a particular context that is important. In some cases context suggests to the implied reader that a metaphorical resonance would be absurd (see 21:23). Nonetheless, even the lexical structure of a sentence itself may provide a degree of ambiguity to the use of the term οἱ λογος. This, I suggest, is the case in 6:60, 7:36 (arguably), 10:35, and 17:17b.

Other examples of ways in which the implied author plays with the possibilities for intra-textual associations with the metaphor of "the Word" established in the prologue could be explored. There is a possible echo effect with the prologue's Logos image at the conclusion of the account of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman. The narrator tells the implied reader that many other Samaritans believe in Jesus by reason of her testimony (4:39: *dia; to;n logon th'β gunaikovβ*). When Jesus comes to stay in the village, many more believe because of his teaching (4:41: *dia; to;n logon autou*). The narrator then says that the Samaritans tell the woman that her "word" has become redundant (4:42). Is this because now that *the* Word has come into their midst, any other word is rendered unnecessary?⁴³ Again, at 5:37,38 Jesus tells "the

41. Barrett, *John*, 510; see also Westcott, *John*, 245; Carson, *John*, 566; Sanders & Mastin, *John*, 375.

42. See here M. W. G. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 73; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 29.

43. See Brown, *John*, 1.174-175.

Jews" that they have never heard God's voice nor seen his face and they do not have his *word* dwelling in them, because they do not believe in the one whom God has sent. These verses echo 1:18 that indicates that Jesus makes visible (and his words make audible the voice of) the Father who sent him. Furthermore, the narrative's discourse makes it clear that to know Jesus, and to have him remain in one, is the means of knowing God. He is, *par excellence*, the Logos who must dwell in the believer (see 8:31, 32; 14:23; 15:4; 17:3).

The instances given in this article are those where an implicit, if not explicit, metaphorical connotation can attach to the use of the term οἰ λογος. I have tried to show that the narrative dynamics, and the use of the metaphor, "the Word" as a nonsequential sequence-signal in the prologue, have both cemented a link in the reader's mind between "the Word" as a character-substitute and the person of Jesus, and have given to that metaphor a resonance which has a strong implicative force in the rest of the story. We have seen that frequently, when reading these passages, commentators are driven to think of the implicit connection between the use of the noun-phrase, οἰ λογος, in this context and the metaphorical connotations it bears in the prologue.

I conclude with two suggestions as to the implications of this for a reading of this Gospel. The first I make with some temerity, given the vast literature that has been generated by the writer's use of this metaphor in the prologue. It is that scholarship needs to attend to the dynamics of the use of the term within the narrative as a whole, not simply the question of its use in the prologue. One cannot, of course, wholly ignore nor abandon attempts to find the literary origins of the term in the philosophical and cultural milieu outside the Gospel. But there is a danger that all this industry diverts attention from its ironic use within the narrative. Second, and this is a theological point which also would bear more elaboration, the writer adopts the striking image of "the Word" to capture something of the nature and significance of his main character. "The Word" becomes flesh in the delineation of a human character. The metaphorical association is carried forward into the implied author's story of Jesus. The implied author uses both metaphor and narrative because they are sufficiently capacious vehicles to carry the weight of a character whose true being cannot easily be contained, indeed can never be fully captured, in mere words.