

Imagery in the Gospel of John

Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of
Johannine Figurative Language

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The (not so) Good Shepherd:

The Use of Shepherd Imagery in the Characterisation of Peter in the Fourth Gospel

D. Francois Tolmie

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s a great deal of effort has been channelled into the narratological/narrative-critical analysis of the Fourth Gospel. As is well known, a narratological approach is dominated by a focus on the elements that are typical of narratives in general, such as characterisation, plot, setting and temporal relations within a narrative. A typical framework utilised by scholars who follow such an approach can be set out as follows:¹

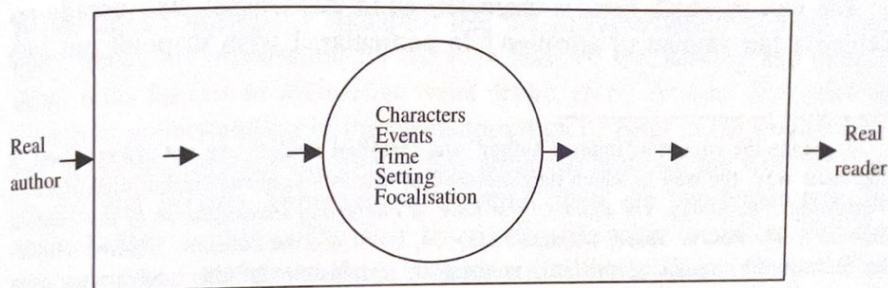


Figure 1: *Narratological framework*

When one wishes to study the process of characterisation, there are several alternative procedures that can be followed,² but to my mind, one of the most useful of these is that of Chatman,³ which constitutes an easy, yet accurate approach. It is based on the definition of characters in the narrative text in terms of a *paradigm of traits* – a trait being any relatively stable or

¹ See S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca 1978), 147. Slightly adapted.

² For a more detailed overview, see my *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: A Practical Guide* (San Francisco 1999), 39–61. See also T. Wiarda, *Peter in the Gospels: Pattern, Personality and Relationship* (WUNT 2/127; Tübingen 2000), 65–71.

³ Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (n. 1), 119–133.

abiding personal quality associated with a character. As such, the traits associated with a particular character may be unfolded, replaced or may even disappear in the course of the narrative. In practical terms this means that whenever an implied reader⁴ is confronted with a new character in the text, a paradigm of traits to be associated with this particular character is opened by the implied reader. As soon as the latter meets this character again in the text, it sorts through the paradigm of traits already associated with the character in order to account for any new information provided in terms of the traits already identified. If the new information cannot be accounted for in terms of these traits, a new trait will be added or a given trait will be reformulated, replaced or removed.

With regard to the process whereby traits are revealed to the implied reader, two processes are usually distinguished, namely direct and indirect characterisation.⁵ In the case of *direct characterisation* a specific trait is mentioned directly, while in the case of *indirect characterisation* a given trait is not named, but portrayed or illustrated. The implied reader has to consider the information provided and formulate it in terms of a trait. Indirect characterisation is usually achieved by narrating a character's actions, speech, external appearance and the environment within which he/she is situated.

The way in which Peter is characterised in this Gospel, has already received a fair amount of attention.⁶ In particular, I wish to point out two

⁴ Since the concepts "implied author" and "implied reader" are not always used in the same way, the way in which they are used in this article needs further clarification. Following J. L. Staley, *The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta 1988), 34, I will use the concept "implied author" to refer to the organising principle in the text, responsible for the total arrangement thereof. The concept "implied reader" will be used to refer to the intratextual literary construct that functions as the counterpart of the implied author. The difference between the implied author and the implied reader is based upon the difference between the linearity and the temporality of the text. Whereas the implied author is defined in terms of the static overarching view of the text, the implied reader is defined in terms of the temporal quality of the text. Staley, op. cit., 34, explains the difference between the two as follows: "While the implied author knows the text forward and backward, the implied reader only has knowledge of what has been read up to the given moment. It is thus encoded in the unidirectional, forward movement of the text, and as such, does not know what word comes next in the text, nor does it stop reading until the narrative is ended. Although the implied reader has a perfect knowledge and memory of what has been read, it is nevertheless limited by its temporal status."

⁵ For what follows, see S. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (New Accents; London et al. 1983), 59–67.

⁶ For overviews of studies of Peter in the New Testament, see L. Doering, "Schwerpunkte und Tendenzen der neueren Petrusforschung", *BTZ* 19 (2002): 203–223; and M. Diefenbach, "Ökumenische Probleme infolge johanneischer Auslegung. Eine wirkungs-

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important studies. In his analysis of the characterisation of Peter, *Alan Culpepper*⁷ points out that, next to Jesus, Peter is the most complex character in the Gospel and that the way in which he is characterised basically traces his preparation for the twin tasks of shepherding and martyrdom. To my mind, this view on the characterisation of Peter can still be accepted as an accurate reflection of the way in which this character functions in this Gospel.

In a more recent study, *Timothy Wiarda* investigates the portrayal of Peter in all four Gospels. At this point, I would like to highlight one part of his analysis of Peter in the Fourth Gospel, namely the list of distinctive qualities (or "traits") associated with this character in this Gospel:⁸

- 1) Outspokenness/bold expression
- 2) Quick initiative
- 3) Unrestrained action/expression of feelings
- 4) Opinion leader/influencer
- 5) Resistance in the name of loyalty
- 6) Desire to honour/serve Jesus
- 7) Devotion/desire to be loyal to Jesus
- 8) Courage
- 9) Grief at having his love questioned
- 10) Concern to compare his lot with another's

If one links Culpepper's statement that the characterisation of Peter basically traces his preparation for the twin tasks of shepherding and martyrdom, with the list of distinctive traits drawn up by Wiarda, one gains an excellent understanding of the characterisation of Peter in the Fourth Gospel. It is therefore not the aim of this article to replicate the work of Culpepper and Wiarda. However, to my mind, there are two issues that deserve further scrutiny. The first has to do with what I wish to call the *dynamic process* whereby Peter is characterised in the Fourth Gospel. This will be dealt with in the next section. The second issue is the way in which *shepherd imagery* is used by the implied author in the characterisation of Peter. In particular, I will be suggesting that this does not only play a role in Chapter 21, but also earlier in the Gospel. This will be discussed in Section 3.

und rezeptionsgeschichtliche Betrachtung des johanneischen Petrusbildes", *Catholica* 52/1 (1998): 44–66 – in particular 51–64.

⁷ R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Foundations and Facets: New Testament; Philadelphia 1983), 120–121.

⁸ Wiarda, *Peter* (n. 2), 117–118.

2. A first reading of the characterisation of Peter

One may look at the characterisation of a character in a narrative text in two ways. The first entails what could be called a *static view*, in the sense that one provides a summary or a scheme of all the traits associated with a particular character, i.e. the full picture of all the traits of the character that the implied reader will have at the end of the narrative – similar to the list drawn up by Wiarda. In such a case one will provide a list of all the traits of a particular character and perhaps discuss the relative importance of the various traits. In the case of a *dynamic view* one would be interested in exactly the same traits, but an additional aspect will receive attention, namely the *process* whereby these traits are revealed step by step as the narrative progresses in terms of the interaction between the implied author and implied reader.⁹ In other words, the narrative will be scrutinised episode by episode from the beginning until the end, not only in order to investigate the traits as such, but also to see if any pattern or development can be perceived as the characterisation of the particular character progresses. As far as I have been able to determine, such an approach has not yet been applied to the characterisation of Peter in this Gospel. This will be attempted in this section.

Peter is mentioned for the first time in 1:40–42, where his calling as a disciple is portrayed: Andrew, one of the first two disciples who follow Jesus, first finds his brother Simon and announces to him that they have found the Messiah. Andrew brings him to Jesus, who looks at him and tells him that he is called “Simon, son of John”, but that he will be called “Cephas” – which is then translated by the narrator as “Peter”. From a narratological perspective two remarks should be made in this regard. Firstly, of course, this event serves as a further way of characterising Jesus as a unique figure: he knows Peter even though he has not met him before and he is even able to foretell Peter’s future. Secondly, what happens here is also very important for the characterisation of Peter himself. As I have indicated above, the first time the implied reader meets a new character in the narrative world, a paradigm of traits is opened for the particular character by the implied reader. In this case, the very first time that Peter is introduced into the narrative world, the implied author uses the protagonist – whose identity as Logos and Son of God has already been established beyond doubt and whose views will thus be regarded as absolutely authoritative by the implied reader – to steer the characterisation of this character into a particular direction. Bearing in mind the importance of namegiving in the ancient world, it can be seen that the name that Peter receives is

⁹ See n. 4.

meant to focus the attention of the implied reader on the future significance of this character.¹⁰ He is "Simon Rocky"¹¹ or (in German) "Simon Fels".¹² This thus serves as a way to create an expectation in the implied reader that this character will act in the narrative world in a way that will correlate with the new name that he receives.¹³ If I were to reformulate the significance of this event in my own words, I would say that the notion that the implied author is communicating to the implied reader can be summarised as follows: "Take note of this character. He will play a significant role in the rest of the narrative. This was indicated by Jesus on the first occasion on which he met him."

As the narrative progresses, it will become clear – as Busse¹⁴ points out – that Peter still needs to grow into the role of a "rock", but at this stage the implied reader is not yet aware of this. On the contrary! The next time the implied reader meets this character he apparently lives up to the expectation created in 1:42, since he fulfils the role of a loyal spokesperson.¹⁵ In 6:60–71 many of Jesus' disciples turn back, because they are unwilling to accept his teaching. When Jesus turns to the twelve and asks them if they, too, wish to go away, Peter is portrayed as the spokesperson of the twelve, responding "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God." Peter, the one who received a new name from Jesus, now "names" Jesus with a unique name in the narrative world, "the Holy One of God".¹⁶ In terms of the characterisation of Peter, this is an example

¹⁰ See, for example, O. Cullmann, *Petrus: Jünger – Apostel – Märtyrer: Das historische und das theologische Petrusproblem* (Zürich 1970), 21; R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (AB; London 1984), 80; and R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium: 1. Teil: Einleitung und Kommentar zu Kap. 1–4* (HTKNT IV/1; Freiburg, Br. et al. 1967), 311.

¹¹ Πέτρος is usually interpreted as a nickname indicating a rough or tough character. See R. E. Brown, K. P. Donfried, J. Reuman et al., *Peter in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (London 1973), 90 n. 10. These authors point out Judas Maccabeus – meaning "hammerlike" – as another example.

¹² Cullmann, *Petrus* (n. 10), 21.

¹³ F. J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading John 1–4* (Minneapolis 1993), 69, puts it as follows: "Something will happen to Simon. For the moment it must wait, a chord struck, but left with the reader."

¹⁴ U. Busse, *Das Johannesevangelium: Bildlichkeit, Diskurs und Ritual* (BETL 167; Leuven 2002), 83.

¹⁵ See, for example, C. R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis 1995), 71.

¹⁶ J. L. Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John* (BIS 56; Leiden 2001), 151. With R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium: 2. Teil: Kommentar zu Kap. 5–12* (HTKNT IV/2; Freiburg, Br. et al. 1971), 111, it can be as-

of indirect characterisation by means of behaviour. In particular, the contrast between those who turn away and the disciples who remain loyal to Jesus is important. Against this background, Peter is characterised as the one who formulates the "Loyalitätserklärung"¹⁷ on behalf of himself and the other disciples.

Thus, the picture that the implied reader has gained of Peter at the end of 6:71 is a positive one. However, in Chapter 13, this changes quite dramatically. Peter receives attention three times, and in each case a negative trait (or traits) is revealed:

In 13:6–11 the implied author highlights three traits of Peter by means of indirect characterisation. First, his behaviour still portrays him as the spokesperson for the rest of the disciples when he openly objects to what Jesus is doing.¹⁸ Although this is not stated explicitly, it may be assumed that the other disciples also felt uncomfortable about Jesus' action in washing their feet. Secondly, two new traits are also revealed. The first can be called "an inability to understand Jesus" – illustrated by the fact that Peter and Jesus are talking on two different levels. The second trait can be called "impulsiveness"¹⁹ and is illustrated by the fact that Peter calls upon Jesus to wash not only his feet, but also his hands and his head.

In 13:21–25 Peter is mentioned again briefly. Usually these verses are considered in terms of the information that they provide with regard to the characterisation of the Beloved Disciple; but let us consider them against the background of the way in which Peter has been characterised thus far. In this regard the most significant development is that Peter's position as spokesperson is now somewhat modified, in that the implied reader now learns that there is another disciple who is in fact much closer to Jesus than Peter. Not only is this disciple identified by means of the honorary title "the disciple whom Jesus loved"; he is also situated physically closer to Jesus ("in his bosom" – with all the concomitant symbolic overtones). This perspective is further underscored by Peter's own behaviour. He who thus far has been portrayed twice as the spokesperson on behalf of the other disciples, now has to try to direct the uncertainty of the disciples (see verse 22) through someone else who is physically and symbolically closer to Jesus. The spokesperson is forced to use another spokesperson!

sumed that the title given to Jesus by Peter is used to indicate that Jesus participates in the being of God and that a very close intimacy exists between them.

¹⁷ Thus, Wrede. See Busse, *Johannesevangelium* (n. 14), 151.

¹⁸ Thus, correctly, Koester, *Symbolism* (n. 15), 72.

¹⁹ Resseguie, *Strange Gospel* (n. 16), 152, prefers the word "over-zealousness": "His is an *active* discipleship that becomes over-active – not unlike the religious leaders who have a propensity for over-zealousness." (Resseguie's italics.)

In 13:36–38 the two traits revealed in 13:6–11 are illustrated again by means of Peter's behaviour (indirect characterisation). By interpreting the place to which Jesus is going in a purely physical sense, Peter again illustrates the trait of inability to understand Jesus. The second trait, his impulsiveness, is illustrated by his reaction in declaring that there is no reason for Jesus to think that he will not be able to follow him, since he is actually willing to lay down his life for him. However, the most significant event in these verses is the twofold prediction by Jesus. In verse 36 Peter is told that he (in contrast to the Jews; see 7:34 and 8:21) will indeed follow Jesus afterwards. In verse 38 the second prediction follows: "Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times." It should be noted that these two predictions in a sense repeat the events in 1:42. Here – as there – the implied author uses the protagonist, whose reliability has been established beyond doubt, to foretell Peter's future behaviour. In this instance, however, the second prediction is extremely negative: Peter will deny Jesus three times.

If the characterisation of Peter took a negative turn in Chapter 13, what follows is even worse. At the arrest of Jesus (18:1–11) Peter attacks the slave of the high priest and cuts off his right ear (indirect characterisation). Although this behaviour could possibly be viewed positively as an act of bravery or self-defence,²⁰ the implied author removes all doubt in this regard by letting Jesus reprimand Peter: "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?". Thus, Peter's behaviour is interpreted as an attempt to prevent Jesus from obeying the Father. Shortly after this, Jesus' second prediction (13:38) is fulfilled: Peter fails dismally (18:17; 18:25; 18:26–27a) by denying three times that he is a follower of Jesus; twice even using the expression οὐκ εἶμι.

In 20:1–8 Mary Magdalene reports to Peter and the Beloved Disciple that she found Jesus' tomb empty, which induces them to go to the tomb immediately. What do the events that follow add to the characterisation of Peter?

On the one hand, the implied author seems to continue emphasising the leading role that Peter still fulfils among the disciples, in that he is mentioned first, i.e. before the Beloved Disciple (verse 2). Furthermore, it is explicitly stated that, although the Beloved Disciple reaches the tomb first, Peter is the first disciple to enter the empty tomb of Jesus. This could be

²⁰ I agree with Wiarda's interpretation of Peter's act. Cf. his *Peter* (n. 2), 110: "Through his individual action in striking the high priest's servant Peter displays *quick initiative, readiness to defend Jesus through violence, a measure of courage, misunderstanding of Jesus' mission to lay down his life, and resistance to Jesus' express wishes in the name of loyalty.*" (Wiarda's italics.)

interpreted as an indication of his continuing leadership role among the disciples.

On the other hand, the fact that the Beloved Disciple outruns Peter and reaches the tomb first, seems to be a repetition of what happens in 13:24, where the Beloved Disciple and Peter are "compared" and preference is accorded to the Beloved Disciple. It is perhaps possible that there is nothing symbolic behind the statement that the Beloved Disciple reaches the tomb first, though the fact that this circumstance is mentioned twice (verses 4 and 8) indicates that this aspect is important to the implied author and should not be interpreted merely as an insignificant detail. The other issue is much clearer. Whereas Peter enters the tomb and sees the linen wrapping lying there, as well as the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, the other disciple is portrayed as seeing *and* believing. According to the Fourth Gospel, the Beloved Disciple – and not Peter – is thus the first disciple to come to resurrection faith.²¹

How does the characterisation of Peter in 20:1–10 relate to the way in which he was characterised in the previous sections? As I have indicated above, the events in Chapter 18 constitute the low point in his characterisation. In contrast, the characterisation in 20:1–10 can be viewed as a sort of corrective: Even though he denied Jesus and even though he does not compare favourably to the Beloved Disciple (who was the only disciple who followed Jesus to the cross and who both saw and believed at Jesus' tomb), he is nevertheless portrayed as still fulfilling some kind of leading role among the disciples.

In Chapter 21 two significant developments in the characterisation of Peter occur. The first can be seen in verses 5 ff., where Peter is characterised indirectly by his own behaviour: After the disciple whom Jesus loved has identified the Lord, Peter tucks in his outer garment (τὸν ἐπενδύτην διεζώσατο), jumps into the sea and swims to the shore. Peter's behaviour has been interpreted in various ways, e.g. in terms of a gesture of respect

²¹ For a similar interpretation, see, among others, Brown et al., *Peter in the New Testament* (n. 11), 137–138; R. F. Collins, *These Things Have Been Written: Studies on the Fourth Gospel* (LTPM 2; Louvain 1990), 40–41; F. J. Moloney, *Glory not Dishonour: Reading John 13–21* (Minneapolis 1998), 162–163; and Resseguie, *Strange Gospel* (n. 16), 154. Verse 9 is problematic, but it is more feasible to interpret it as an attempt to emphasise the insight of the Beloved Disciple (thus, Brown et al., *Peter in the New Testament* [n. 11], 138 n. 295) than as an indication that Peter also believed. Alternatively, verse 9 can be viewed as an indication to the implied reader that even the faith of the Beloved Disciple was not yet complete. See Busse, *Johannesevangelium* (n. 14), 53: "Er konnte zwar die Zeichen Jesu (vgl. 2,11 mit 9,37 f.) lesen, aber sie solange nicht angemessen deuten sowie mit Hilfe der Schrift voll substanziiert und qualifiziert bekennen (vgl. 1,35–51; 4,39–42; 9,35–39; 11,25–27), bis der Auferstehungsprozess selbst endgültig abgeschlossen war." (Busse's italics.)

for Jesus,²² or in terms of the fact that greeting was regarded as a religious act and could not be done naked,²³ or that he tucked in his clothes so that he could swim more easily.²⁴ However, to my mind, Busse's²⁵ explanation is more feasible. He points out that "tucking in one's garments" would have been regarded by ancient readers, in the first instance, as an indication of Peter's "Arbeitsbereitschaft". Thus, in a highly symbolic episode of the narrative, Peter's behaviour characterises him indirectly as still willing to work for Jesus. This is further supported by the fact that he goes aboard and hauls the net with the 153 large fish ashore. If one considers these events against Peter's characterisation thus far, their significance is clear: After denying being a follower of Jesus, after having been to the empty tomb (without comprehending its real meaning), after having seen the resurrected Jesus twice (together with the other disciples – narrated in John 20) and after having been sent out together with the other disciples (20:21) – now, on the third occasion on which he meets the resurrected Jesus, he signals his willingness to work for Jesus. By means of this indirect characterisation, the implied author is preparing the implied reader for what is to come in verses 15–19.

In verses 15–19 a further significant event occurs. In the dialogue between Jesus and Peter, shepherd imagery dominates,²⁶ as has been pointed out by many scholars.²⁷ Since this has been discussed quite often in the literature on this chapter, it will suffice here to say that the implied author shows how Jesus, the Good Shepherd, takes Peter into his service as shepherd of his (i.e. Jesus') sheep. Furthermore, the wild promise that Peter made in 13:36 is now taken up again. Indeed, in the end Peter will be able

²² Wiarda, *Peter* (n. 2), 111 n. 145.

²³ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (2nd ed.; London 1978), 580.

²⁴ Brown, *John* (n. 10), 1072.

²⁵ Busse, *Johannesevangelium* (n. 14), 288.

²⁶ See, in particular, the way in which Jesus expresses Peter's task: βόσκει τὰ ἀρνία μου (verse 15), ποιμαίνει τὰ πρόβατά μου (verse 16), and βόσκει τὰ πρόβατά μου (verse 17).

²⁷ For example, R. Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK 2; Göttingen 1978 [= 101941]), 550–555; and R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium: 3. Teil: Kommentar zu Kapitel 13–21* (HTKNT IV/3; Freiburg, Br. et al. 1975), 429–438. See Busse, *Johannesevangelium* (n. 14), 267, for a good interpretation of the essence of this event: "Die drei Fragen des Auferstandenen ... zielen darauf ab, Petrus seine schäbige Tat bereuen zu lassen, damit er auf diese Weise rehabilitiert, von Jesus beauftragt werden kann, dessen Herde (10,1–18.26–28) an seiner Stelle sein Leben lang zu hüten. Die Funktion des Hirten wird Petrus mit allen Konsequenzen, die Jesus in Kap. 10 schon für sich reklamiert hatte, übernehmen müssen. Denn der Auferstandene sagt ihm seinen zukünftigen Märtyrertod im hohen Alter in kaum verschlüsselter Form an."

to follow Jesus and he will do what a good shepherd does: He will lay down his life.

To summarise: If one focuses on the dynamic process whereby Peter is characterised in the Fourth Gospel, a three-step picture (see the diagram below) emerges: It begins in a positive way with Peter receiving a new name from Jesus – one creating the expectation that he will play a significant role in the narrative world. This seems to come to fulfilment in Chapter 6, when he acts as spokesperson for the disciples. However, after this the “downward” plunge starts, as seen in Chapters 13 and 18, where new traits such as his impulsiveness and inability to understand are illustrated, culminating in his denial of Jesus (the lowest point). Chapter 20 brings a corrective: Although he denied Jesus and does not understand the meaning of the empty tomb, Peter is still to be regarded as a leader amongst the disciples. In Chapter 21, the last step can be viewed: He openly demonstrates his willingness to work for Jesus and is appointed as shepherd of Jesus’ sheep.

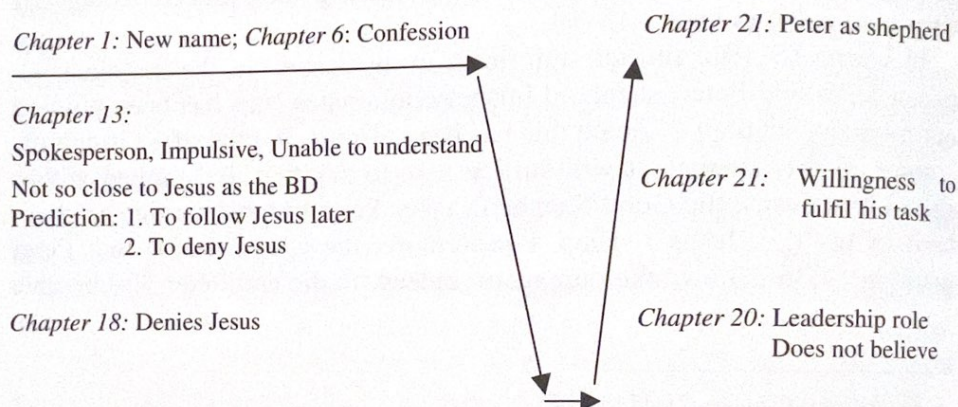


Figure 2: Schematic representation of the process whereby Peter is characterised in the Fourth Gospel

A second aspect that should be pointed out is the large extent to which the characterisation of Peter is dominated by what the protagonist says about him. This happens in three instances: 1. He receives a new name from Jesus – thus creating the expectation that he will play a significant role in the narrative world; 2. Jesus predicts that Peter will “follow” him; and 3. Jesus predicts that he will deny him. Of these predictions, it is only the last one that really materialises fully in the narrative world. The first one (regarding Peter’s significant role) materialises partly in Chapter 6, but is then weakened by events in Chapters 13–18. However, it is taken up again in Chap-

ter 21²⁸ and underlined by the emphasis that is accorded in that chapter to his future role as shepherd. The second prediction (that he will "follow" Jesus) also does not materialise in the narrative world, but is taken up again in Chapter 21 when Peter's death is predicted – as an event still lying ahead, in the future of the narrative world. However, owing to the way in which the reliability of the protagonist has been established in the narrative world, there is no reason for the implied reader to suspect that these two unfulfilled predictions would not materialise later on.

3. A rereading of the characterisation of Peter

In the analysis of the characterisation of Peter in the previous section, the importance of shepherd imagery has become clear. Owing to the significance of this imagery in Chapter 21, one could say that the final picture that the implied reader has of Peter at the end of the narrative is one of a shepherd: Someone who has received a threefold pastoral task from the resurrected Jesus, and who, in the end, will lay down his life.

Against this background a further question should be posed, namely whether there are other instances in which shepherd imagery is used to characterise Peter. This calls for a rereading of the characterisation of Peter in the light of the emphasis that shepherd imagery receives in Chapter 21.

The best place to begin such a rereading is Chapter 10. In this chapter the metaphor of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is introduced – as part of a very complex network of "metaphors, comparisons and climactic descriptions".²⁹ For our purpose the most important statement in this chapter is Jesus' depiction of the Good Shepherd in verse 11 as: ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τίθησιν ὑπὲρ τῶν προβάτων.³⁰ Let us again consider the brief dialogue between Jesus and Peter in 13:36–38 in the light of these words.

³⁶ Λέγει αὐτῷ Σίμων Πέτρος· κύριε, ποῦ ὑπάγεις;
ἀπεκρίθη [αὐτῷ] Ἰησοῦς· ὅπου ὑπάγω οὐ δύνασαι μοι νῦν ἀκολουθῆσαι,
ἀκολουθήσεις δὲ ὕστερον.

²⁸ The fact that Jesus is portrayed in Chapter 21 as addressing Peter in the same way as in 1:42 (1:42: Σίμων ὁ υἱὸς Ἰωάννου; 21:15–16: Σίμων Ἰωάννου) serves as a sign to the implied reader that this event is linked to Peter's calling. Thus, correctly, pointed out by Resseguie, *Strange Gospel* (n. 16), 154.

²⁹ J. G. van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John* (BIS 47; Leiden 2000), 90. See 55–92 of this work for a careful analysis of the dynamics of this metaphor in John 10.

³⁰ According to H. Thyen, "Johannes 10 im Kontext des Vierten Evangeliums," in *The Shepherd Discourse of John 10 and its Context* (eds. J. Beutler and R. T. Fortna; SNTSMS 67; Cambridge 1991), 130, this is the dominant theme of this discourse.

³⁷ λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Πέτρος· κύριε, διὰ τί οὐ δύναμαι σοι ἀκολουθῆσαι ἄρτι; τὴν
 ψυχὴν μου ὑπὲρ σοῦ θήσω.
³⁸ ἀποκρίνεται Ἰησοῦς· τὴν ψυχὴν σου ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ θήσεις; ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, οὐ
 μὴ ἀλέκτωρ φωνήσῃ ἕως οὗ ἀρνήσῃ με τρίς.

I would like to point out that Peter uses exactly the same words to describe his willingness to die for Jesus, as those that Jesus used when he described himself as the Good Shepherd. This fact has been noted by commentators in the past,³¹ but it does not seem as if its full significance has been grasped. Two issues should be pointed out in this regard: Firstly, one of the ways in which an implied author can characterise a character is by means of *speech*, i.e., not only in terms of what the character says, but also in terms of *how* he/she says it.³² In this case the fact that Peter uses exactly the same expression as Jesus could thus be significant for the purposes of gaining an understanding of the way in which he is characterised. Secondly, it might be coincidental, but it is nevertheless worth noting, that it is only in the Fourth Gospel that Peter uses the expression "lay down his life" when he promises to die for Jesus. According to Mark 14:31, Peter's words are "ἐὰν δέῃ με συναποθανεῖν σοι, οὐ μὴ σε ἀπαρνήσομαι," according to Matt 26:35, "κὰν δέῃ με σὺν σοὶ ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ μὴ σε ἀπαρνήσομαι," and according to Luke 22:33, "κύριε, μετὰ σοῦ ἔτοιμος εἰμι καὶ εἰς φυλακὴν καὶ εἰς θάνατον πορεύεσθαι."

How should we interpret Peter's words in the Fourth Gospel? I would like to suggest that the implied author deliberately puts this expression in Peter's mouth in order to link Peter's promise to Jesus' description of the Good Shepherd. In other words, the implied author portrays Peter as characterising himself indirectly as a good shepherd here. Furthermore, I would also like to suggest that this is meant *ironically*, i.e., Peter is portrayed as promising something without actually realising what he is promising. That Peter does not actually understand what he is promising, is suggested by the fact that he is portrayed in the same chapter as not really understanding Jesus and also as acting impulsively. Of course, the fact that Peter himself does not understand what he is saying does not imply that the implied reader is not meant to understand what Peter is actually saying, since it is, precisely, on the level of the implied author/implied reader that irony operates, often at the expense of the characters.

There is also a further issue that warrants closer attention, namely the use of the word ἀκολουθέω in these verses. Jesus uses it twice in verse 36 (ὅπου ὑπάγω οὐ δύνασαι μοι νῦν ἀκολουθῆσαι, ἀκολουθήσεις δὲ

³¹ For example, Barrett, *John* (n. 23), 453, and Brown, *John* (n. 10), 616.

³² Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction* (n. 5), 63, puts it as follows: "A character's speech, whether in conversation or as silent activity of the mind, can be indicative of a trait or traits both through its content and through its form."

ὕστερον) and Peter uses it once in verse 37 (κύριε, διὰ τί οὐ δύναμαι σοὶ ἀκολουθῆσαι ἄρτι;) – just before promising to lay down his life for Jesus. The word ἀκολουθέω is used often in the Fourth Gospel³³ – usually as a term indicating discipleship.³⁴ What is particularly important for our discussion is that it is also used twice in Chapter 10, where it is said that the sheep will *follow* the shepherd (10:4, 5) and again in 10:27, where Jesus says that his sheep hear his voice and *follow* him. Later, in 12:26, Jesus also says that whoever serves him, must *follow* him.

Is it mere coincidence that in the word ἀκολουθέω, we find another important instance of the shepherd imagery in Chapter 10 being echoed in 13:36–38, and, in this case, focusing not on the behaviour of the shepherd but on that of the sheep? I do not think so. If my interpretation is correct, and if 13:36–38 should therefore be read against the background of the shepherd imagery in Chapter 10, the brief dialogue could be interpreted as follows: In verse 36 Peter is portrayed as asking Jesus where he is going. Jesus responds that Peter will not be able to follow him now, only later. If this text is read against the background of Chapter 10, Peter is thus characterised as not being able to do what the sheep of the Good Shepherd do, i.e. to *follow* him. In verse 37 Peter objects by questioning this statement: How can Jesus say that he will not be able to follow him, i.e. that he will not be able to do what is expected of the sheep of the Good Shepherd? No, he will do even better! He will lay down his life for Jesus; he will not only follow Jesus (as is expected of Jesus' sheep), but he himself will act like a good shepherd. Jesus responds by repeating Peter's own words (τὴν ψυχὴν σου ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ θήσεις;): You will act like a good shepherd? No, instead you will have denied me three times before the cock crows!

If this interpretation is correct, shepherd imagery is already used in Chapter 13 to characterise Peter indirectly, although in this case, it is being used in a negative sense, with the implication that he is impulsively promising to act like a good shepherd.

As pointed out in section 2, Peter is subsequently characterised as failing dismally in his objective in Chapter 18. Does shepherd imagery play a role here, too? Stibbe³⁵ tries to make out a case in support for this. He draws attention to the fact that shepherd imagery is used in John 18:1–27, and even summarises this section as “the arrest of the shepherd”. He points

³³ It is used in 1:37, 38, 40, 43; 6:2; 8:12; 10:4, 5, 27; 11:31; 12:26; 13:36 (twice), 37; 18:15; 20:6; and 21:19, 20, 22.

³⁴ See Barrett, *John* (n. 23), 180, and Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium I* (n. 10), 308.

³⁵ M. W. G. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 73; Cambridge 1992), 96–105.

out several "narrative echoes" of Chapter 10 in 18:1–27.³⁶ In the case of 18:1–11, he indicates the following: 1. Similar narrative settings, in that the actions in 18:1–11 occur in and around a walled enclosure during the hours of darkness; 2. That Judas' approach to the garden is reminiscent of the approach of the κλεπτής in John 10; 3. That Jesus' protective stance towards the disciples imitates the conduct of the shepherd in John 10; 4. That John 10 itself anticipates the first step towards the passion, because it puts so much emphasis on the fact that the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

In the case of John 18:15–27, Stibbe detects three details that could be linked to John 10: 1. The fact that the courtyard of the high priest is described by means of the same word that is used for the sheepfold (αὐλή); 2. That the θυρωρός at the entrance of Annas' courtyard recalls the θυρωρός at the entrance of the sheepfold in 10:3; 3. That the anonymous disciple goes in and out of the αὐλή, just as the Good Shepherd does.

Some might object that Stibbe is reading too much into John 18; but even if all the details of his analysis cannot be accepted, what cannot be denied is that John 10 creates the expectation that Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, will lay down his life for the sheep. As events start to move in this direction in Chapter 18, it would only be natural for the implied reader to recall the powerful image in Chapter 10 and to interpret what is happening to Jesus in terms of this striking metaphor. If this is true of the characterisation of Jesus, it could also be true of the characterisation of Peter. He promised to lay down his life for Jesus. I have interpreted this as an (unintentionally ironic) promise to be a good shepherd. On the first occasion on which he receives an opportunity to lay down his life for Jesus, he does not do so. Indeed an example of a "not-so-good shepherd!"

Later, in 18:15, Peter and the other disciple are portrayed as *following* Jesus – in keeping with the behaviour expected of the sheep of the Good Shepherd. However, in Peter's case this is the only positive thing that can be said about him in this chapter. He goes on to deny Jesus three times, apparently fearing for his *life*. Thus, the dominant picture of Peter in Chapter 18 is one of someone fighting for his life, not one of someone willing to lay down his life for Jesus. If my suggestion is correct and we should read the characterisation of both Jesus and Peter against the background of Chapter 10, the contrast between the ways in which they act, comes to the fore: We see Jesus, acting like a Good Shepherd, and Peter, not acting like a good shepherd.

A last thought: It has been pointed out already that Peter receives the role of a shepherd in Chapter 21, with its full consequences, of which the most important is that of laying down his life. One final aspect remains to

³⁶ Op. cit., 103.

be pointed out, namely Jesus' last words to Peter in the narrative world of the Fourth Gospel. In verse 19 he calls upon him: "ἀκολούθει μοι", and then again in verse 22: "σύ μοι ἀκολούθει." Is it coincidence that it is precisely the word ἀκολουθέω that is used again? I do not think so. It indicates the only way in which Peter would be able to succeed as shepherd of Jesus' sheep. He can only "shepherd" Jesus' sheep by doing himself what is expected of the sheep of the Good Shepherd: *following* the Good Shepherd!