Gary W. Sneller “Traces of Oral Performance Language in the Written Greek Text of the Gospel of John—How Modern Translations of the Greek Text Betray the Linguistic World of the Gospel of John” August, 2017

“Every translation is a betrayal; it is misleading in some respects. But every translation is also a revelation.”1 Robert W. Funk “The repeated noun-epithet formulas in Homer as well as in other oral tradition narrative song, including South Slavic, belong to the poetics of oral traditional poetry, but not to that of written literature which tries to avoid repetitions. Translators of the Homeric poems into English vary the epithets in translation, because present day usage finds the degree of repetition which they represent awkward.”2 Albert Lord

Every translation is both a blessing and a curse, whether that translation is from one modern language into another or from an ancient language into modern. On the one hand, it is a blessing to be able to easily read texts originally written in a language unfamiliar to the reader, but on the other hand, it is a curse because it is virtually impossible to transfer the full richness of one language into another. Something is gained, but something is also lost. In the best of cases, translations provide access to knowledge, ideas, and insights that would otherwise remain hidden in an unknown language; translations are indeed “a revelation.” But in all honesty, it is also true that “every translation is a betrayal” because many linguistic nuances and subtleties are inevitably lost in translation (as anyone who has read assembly instructions translated from one language into another can readily attest). Language that was created in the nexus of one culture does not always have (maybe never has) an exact counterpart in language that was created in the nexus of another culture. The best that we can hope for in the process of translation is that the essential meaning of the words of one language is to the greatest extent possible faithfully communicated in the essential meaning of the words of another language. In this process, translations can sometimes become overly wooden and syntactically awkward for the taste of the reader; other times, translations can become so idiomatic that they lose all contact with the original words of the author.

Taking these observations about translations in general into the specific arena of the translation of ancient texts into modern language requires us to explore even deeper questions about how the modality of the word (what Walter Ong refers to as “the technologizing of the word”3) may affect translation and thereby impose a subtle but distinctive linguistic bias. As Albert Lord observed in the statement quoted in the epigraph above, modern translators of ancient Homeric texts, for example, almost always seek to conform the language of their translations to current linguistic/literary standards. This produces a text that is eminently readable in terms of modern linguistic (textual) style, but at the same time betrays the linguistic (oral) style of the original text which may in fact have a significant bearing on our understanding of the meaning of that text.

In this paper, I want to explore the possibility that our current translations of the Gospel of John (GJ) in fact betray the word modality/linguistic world of the Greek text thereby introducing a distinctive bias that in turn significantly influences our reception/understanding of the text. I will begin by examining in detail some distinctive oral linguistic characteristics of the written Greek text of the GJ, I will proceed to show how most translations consistently mask these distinctive oral linguistic characteristics thereby betraying the oral linguistic world out of which the GJ was created, and finally, I will briefly reflect on how a recovery of the oral linguistic world of the GJ can lead to new insights into the meaning of the Fourth Gospel (FG).

Traces of oral performance language4 embedded in the written Greek text of the Gospel of John.

It should go without saying that the GJ is a written text. We can **see** for ourselves that it is a written text, and the FG itself explicitly refers to its own textuality (20:30-31; 21:24-25). And yet over the course of the past half-century, an abundance of studies across a number of scholarly disciplines has raised to our awareness the significant insight that our **modern** understanding of written texts may not uncritically apply to our understanding of **ancient** written texts. This insight calls into question some of our most basic assumptions about ancient written texts. In particular, studies in oral traditional literature/oral performance, linguistics/human communication, sociology, philosophy, the modality/technologizing of the word, and media consciousness/media culture have revolutionized our understandings of the composition, reception, transmission, and interpretation of human discourse/texts. I will not attempt a review of that vast body of literature in this paper. In spite of some legitimate criticism (especially early on) about how to precisely identify oral vis-à-vis written/textual style and how to describe the interface between orality and textuality in human history and consciousness, it now can be said with increased certainty that the modality of the word as oral/textual (and now digital) plays a significant role in the composition, reception, transmission, and interpretation of human discourse/texts. Therefore, a consideration of the modality of the word must be a key component of any contemporary hermeneutics, especially when it comes to ancient texts.

Building on the pioneering work of Werner Kelber, Pieter J.J. Botha, Joanna Dewey, and others,5 a new generation of biblical scholars has increasingly pursued studies on issues of orality and textuality with regard to ancient Jewish and Christian texts, in particular with regard to New Testament studies, the Letters of Paul and the Gospel of Mark. These studies attempt to more adequately clarify the oral/textual media culture in which these texts were composed, received, transmitted, and given meaning and thereby re-orient our understanding of these texts. The GJ has been a fairly recent addition to these studies in orality/textuality which is ironic since the GJ appears to be the most **word-oriented** of the canonical gospels. This is perhaps due to the unique nature of the discourse language contained in the GJ which made it less usable for the application of traditional form-criticism and the influence of Rudolf Bultmann who focused on identifying written sources behind the GJ.6 But now studies by Joanna Dewey and Tom Thatcher in particular7 have drawn our attention to the oral matrix out of which the text of the GJ emerged. Since this paper is designed in part to add to our understanding of that oral matrix, our first goal is to identify possible traces of oral linguistics/performance language in the written Greek text of the GJ.

The most definitive identification of the characteristics of oral compositional style is still that of Walter Ong.8 He identified the key **distinguishing markers of the “oral style” of composition** as:

1. Relies on mnemonics/formulas—rhythmic, balanced patterns, repetitions/antithesis, alliteration/assonance, epithetic, standard thematic settings, proverbs, balanced patterns;
2. Additive rather than subordinative in phrasing, i.e. “and” phrases more prominent;
3. Aggregative rather than analytic (epithetic clichés);
4. Redundant/copious/repetitive (looping/spiral) thought;
5. Conservative/traditional;
6. Close to human life-world (concrete rather than abstract);
7. Agonistically toned;
8. Empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced (first-person speech);
9. Homeostatic;
10. Situational (practical examples rather than abstract categories);
11. Agile (not exact verbal memorization/repetition);
12. Enhanced by physical actions;
13. Heroic characters/formulaic numbers;
14. “Personal”/communal/unitive;
15. Promotes community/relationships; and,
16. Episodic, not strictly chronological.

Other studies in oral linguistics/composition from a number of different scholarly disciplines have further refined Ong’s general list of the characteristics of oral style in composition to specifically identify the predominance of asyndeton, parataxis, appositives, and parallelisms;9 thought expressed in an “idea unit”/“tone group”/“intonational unit” usually 4-7 words long;10 digressions (which give the hearer/audience a sense of the full and living cultural background to the story), similes of extended comparisons (that help the hearer/audience visualize and feel scenes, actions, and emotions), and verbal name-calling/fulsome expressions of praise;11 sentence structures that are common in conversational language (informal and short), repetitions, interjections, questions to include listener/reader (“Do you believe this?”), and demonstrative pronouns to verbalize body language;12 “listenability”: emphatic theme, symmetrical form/rhythmical structure of sounds, cadence of inversion, vivid dramatic movement/lively tone, oral patterns of anaphora and homoeoteleuton;13 verbal repetition and the use of phonetic mnemonic resources (specifically alliteration, chiasmus, and paranomasia).14

Using Ong’s general description of the “oral style” of composition, Pieter J.J. Botha and Joanna Dewey have identified some specific linguistic traces of this “oral style” in the gospels of Mark and John. In the Gospel of Mark, Botha points to these **distinctive oral linguistic markers**:15

1. Stylized expressions that recur whenever a new thought or saying needs to be formulated e.g. “he began to teach;”
2. Rhythmic use of words;
3. Stereotyped use of names;
4. Repetition of certain phrases used as an introduction to narrative units or expressions (in an “almost involuntary” repetitious way);
5. Penchant for double expression;
6. Repeated use of same verb in the same context;
7. Use of compound verbs with repetition of the preposition;
8. Series of three; and,
9. Evidence of oral thematic composition in the use of motifs and the combining of motifs into more complex themes.

Joanna Dewey similarly points to these **distinctive oral linguistic markers** in the GJ:16

1. Its Greek contains mainly simple clauses and frequent instances of present-tense verbs where written convention would normally require a past tense;
2. The use of a fair number of “ands,” but also regular use of “the next day,” “after this,” and other similar connectors (e.g. “and next,” “and then”);
3. FG’s narrative is made up of “happenings” that are “visible” and “many”;
4. Teaching is embedded in or tagged onto events (not presented as stand-alone teaching material);
5. Dialogue is normally restricted to two characters at a time and are highly “visualizable” and participatory;
6. FG is not a tight linear plot but the unfolding of similar events and discourses (repetition with variation); and,
7. Polemical nature of FG narrative about “the Jews” due to “agonistic tone” of oral stories.

Now to be sure, not everyone is in agreement with Dewey that these linguistic features of the GJ confirm an oral matrix for the composition of the FG.17 And indeed, considered individually and abstractly, these linguistic features may indicate nothing more than the distinctive **literary** style of the author. But taken as a whole and examined within the text of the entire FG and in light of evidence from studies regarding the media culture of the first-century, these linguistic features point to a decidedly oral matrix out of which the FG was composed, received, transmitted, and given meaning. My own study of the Greek text of the GJ confirms and adds additional evidence to Dewey’s conclusion that “the style of FG is heavily oral.”18

1. First of all, there are numerous traces of formulaic, repetitious, and rhythmic language in the GJ, e.g.

* **stereotyped use** **of names**

“Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother”—1:40 and 6:8 (although not 12:22);

“Philip, from Bethsaida”—1:44 and 12:21 (although not 6:5);

“Thomas, who is called the Twin”—11:16, 20:24, and 21:2 (although not 14:5);

“Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee”—21:2 (although not 1:45);

“Nicodemus who had at first come to Jesus by night”—19:39 (see 3:2, also 7:50);

“Judas who was to betray him”—6:71, 12:4, 13:2, 18:2, 5;

“Lazarus who was raised from the dead”—12:1, 9, 17; and perhaps also,

“the disciple whom Jesus loved”—13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20.

* **repetitious words/catch-phrases**

**ἀμὴν ἀμὴν** introduction to sayings—1**:**51; 3**:**3, 5, 11; 5**:**19, 24, 25; 6**:**26, 32, 47, 53; 8**:**34, 51, 58; 10**:**1, 7; 12**:**24; 13**:**16, 20, 21, 38; 14**:**12; 16**:**20, 23; 21**:**18;

redundant **ἀπεκρίθη καὶ εἶπεν** (aorist) introduction to direct speech—1:48, 50; 2:18, 19; 3:3, 9, 10, 27; 4:10, 13, 17; 5:19 (imperfect tense); 6:26, 29, 43; 7:16, 21, 52; 8:14, 39, 48; 9:20, 30, 34, 36; 12:30; 13:7; 14:23; 18:25, 30; 20:28;19

episodic transitional phrases **Τῇ ἐπαύριον** (“the next day”)—1:29, 35, 43; 6:22; 12:12; **Μετὰ τοῦτο/Μετὰ ταῦτα** (“after this/these things”)—2:12: 3:22; 5:1, 14; 6:1; **7**:1; 11:7, 11; 19:28, 38; 21:1; **Καὶ** (“and”)—1:14, 19; 2:1, 13; 4:27, 46b(?); 7:1, 53; 9:1; 10:40; 11:28; **Ἦν δὲ** (“now was”)—1:44; **2**:6(pl); 3:1, 23; 4:6; 5:5, 9b; 6:4, 10b; 7:2; 11:1, 2, 18, 38b, 55; 12:20(pl); 18:10, 14, 18, 25, 28b, 40b; 19:14, 19b, 23b, 41; **Πάλιν οὖν** (“again therefore”+ “he said”)—8:12, 21; 10:7;

catch phrases (“what/who do you seek?”—1:38; 4:27; 18:4, 7; 20:15/”come and see”—1:39, 46; 4:29; 11:34; “hour is coming and now is”—4:(21?), 23; **5**:25, (28?); 16:2, 21, 25, 32(2x); 17:1/“hour (time) has not yet come”—2:4; 7:6; 30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1.

* **rhythmic series of three**

1:1 **ἦν**...**ἦν**...**ἦν**;

1:3 **ἐγένετο**…**ἐγένετο**…**γέγονεν**;

1:6 Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος/ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ/ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης;

1:10 ἐν τῷ **κόσμῳ** ἦν, καὶ ὁ **κόσμος** δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ **κόσμος** αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω;

1:13 οἳ **οὐκ** ἐξ αἱμάτων **οὐδὲ** ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς **οὐδὲ** ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ’ ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν;

1:20 καὶ **ὡμολόγησεν** καὶ **οὐκ** **ἠρνήσατο** καὶ **ὡμολόγησεν** ὅτι ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ὁ χριστός;

1:25 καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτὸν καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· τί οὖν βαπτίζεις εἰ σὺ **οὐκ** εἶ ὁ χριστὸς **οὐδὲ** Ἠλίας **οὐδὲ** ὁ προφήτης;

2:12 Μετὰ τοῦτο κατέβη εἰς Καφαρναοὺμ αὐτὸς **καὶ** ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ **καὶ** οἱ ἀδελφοὶ [αὐτοῦ] **καὶ** οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ;

2:14 selling **βόας** καὶ **πρόβατα** καὶ **περιστερὰς**

3:1 Ἦν δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων/ Νικόδημος ὄνομα αὐτῷ/ἄρχων τῶν Ἰουδαίων;

4:12 **αὐτὸς** ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἔπιεν καὶ **οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτοῦ** καὶ **τὰ θρέμματα αὐτοῦ**;

5:3 multitude of sick people **τυφλῶν**, **χωλῶν**, **ξηρῶν**;

5:8 **ἔγειρε** (imperative)/**ἆρον** (imperative) τὸν κράβαττόν σου/καὶ **περιπάτει** (imperative);

5:37-38 οὔτε φωνὴν αὐτοῦ **πώποτε** **ἀκηκόατε**/**οὔτε** εἶδος αὐτοῦ **ἑωράκατε**/καὶ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ **οὐκ** **ἔχετε** ἐν ὑμῖν μένοντα;

9:7b **ἀπῆλθεν** οὖν/καὶ **ἐνίψατο**/ καὶ **ἦλθεν** βλέπων;

9:11b **ἀπελθὼν** οὖν/καὶ **νιψάμενος**/**ἀνέβλεψα**;

10:12 **θεωρεῖ** τὸν λύκον ἐρχόμενον καὶ **ἀφίησιν** τὰ πρόβατα καὶ **φεύγει**;

11:5 ἠγάπα δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς **τὴν Μάρθαν** καὶ **τὴν ἀδελφὴν αὐτῆς** καὶ **τὸν** **Λάζαρον**;

16:8-11Καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐκεῖνος ἐλέγξει τὸν κόσμον **περὶ** ἁμαρτίας καὶ **περὶ** δικαιοσύνης καὶ **περὶ** κρίσεως· **περὶ** ἁμαρτίας μέν, **ὅτι** οὐ πιστεύουσιν εἰς ἐμέ· **περὶ** δικαιοσύνης δέ, **ὅτι** πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ὑπάγω καὶ οὐκέτι θεωρεῖτέ με· **περὶ** δὲ κρίσεως, **ὅτι** ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου κέκριται);

18:3 μετὰ **φανῶν** καὶ **λαμπάδων** καὶ **ὅπλων**;

18:12 Ἡ οὖν **σπεῖρα** καὶ ὁ **χιλίαρχος** καὶ οἱ **ὑπηρέται** τῶν Ἰουδαίων συνέλαβον τὸν Ἰησοῦν;

Peter’s three denials 20:17, 25-27/three affirmations of love 21:15-17.

* **καὶ**/**ὅτι/ἵνα series**

**καὶ** series 1:1, 4-5, 10-11, 19-21, 24-25 [κἀγὼ series 1:31-34], 35-37 [καὶ λέγει series 1:43-47]; 2:1-4, 12, 13-16; 5:37-40; 6:17; 9:6-7; 10:3; 11:5; 12:21-22; 14:6; 15:6; 19:35; 20:2, 6, 8, 17, 19-20, 25, 26, 27; 21:2, 3, 9, 24;

**ὅτι** series 1:16-17; 12:6; 13:3; 14:28;

**ἵνα** series 1:7; 3:16-17; 17:21, 22-23, 24; 20:31; [note also **γὰρ** series 5:19-22; **νῦν** series 12:31].

1. There is also evidence of numerous **appositives** and **parallelisms** in the language of the GJ, e.g.

1:7 οὗτος ἦλθεν **εἰς μαρτυρίαν** **ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ** **περὶ τοῦ φωτός;**

1:12 ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν **τέκνα θεοῦ** γενέσθαι, **τοῖς πιστεύουσιν** εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ;

1:14 καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν **δόξαν** αὐτοῦ, **δόξαν** ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας;

1:18 **μονογενὴς** θεὸς **ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς;**

1:45 **Ἰησοῦν**/**υἱὸν τοῦ Ἰωσὴφ**/**τὸν ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ;**

3:13 καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀναβέβηκεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἰ μὴ **ὁ** ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ **καταβάς**, **ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου**;

3:20-21 πᾶς γὰρ ὁ φαῦλα **πράσσων** μισεῖ τὸ φῶς καὶ οὐκ **ἔρχεται** **πρὸς τὸ φῶς**, **ἵνα** μὴ ἐλεγχθῇ τὰ **ἔργα** αὐτοῦ/ὁ δὲ **ποιῶν** τὴν ἀλήθειαν **ἔρχεται** **πρὸς τὸ φῶς**, **ἵνα** φανερωθῇ αὐτοῦ τὰ **ἔργα** ὅτι ἐν θεῷ ἐστιν εἰργασμένα;

3:26 **ὃς ἦν μετὰ σοῦ** πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, **ᾧ σὺ μεμαρτύρηκας;**

3:30 ἐκεῖνον δεῖ **αὐξάνειν**, ἐμὲ δὲ **ἐλαττοῦσθαι;**

5:36 **τὰ** γὰρ **ἔργα** ἃ δέδωκέν μοι ὁ πατὴρ ἵνα τελειώσω αὐτά, αὐτὰ **τὰ ἔργα** ἃ ποιῶ μαρτυρεῖ περὶ ἐμοῦ;

6:1 ἀπῆλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης **τῆς** **Γαλιλαίας** **τῆς** **Τιβεριάδος**

7:18 ὁ δὲ ζητῶν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ πέμψαντος αὐτὸν **οὗτος ἀληθής ἐστιν** καὶ **ἀδικία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν**;

10:12 ὁ **μισθωτὸς** καὶ **οὐκ ὢν ποιμήν**, οὗ **οὐκ ἔστιν τὰ πρόβατα ἴδια**;

13:16 **οὐκ ἔστιν δοῦλος μείζων** τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ **οὐδὲ ἀπόστολος μείζων** τοῦ πέμψαντος αὐτόν;

14:26 ὁ δὲ **παράκλητος**, **τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον** (also τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας 14:16; 15:26; 16:13)

17:17 ἁγίασον αὐτοὺς **ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ**· ὁ λόγος ὁ σὸς **ἀλήθειά** ἐστιν;

19:10 οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι **ἐξουσίαν ἔχω ἀπολῦσαί σε** καὶ **ἐξουσίαν ἔχω σταυρῶσαί σε**;

19:26-27 λέγει τῇ μητρί· γύναι, **ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου**. εἶτα λέγει τῷ μαθητῇ· **ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου**;

1. Thatcher has identified **riddles** in the GJ as “oral form.”20 In addition, I would suggest that the many instances of **double entendre** in the GJ may be another indication of “oral style” (similar to punning), e.g. **καταλαμβάνω** (1:5), **ἄνωθεν** (3:3, 7), **πνεῦμα** (3:8), **ὑψόω** (3:14; 8:28; 12:34), **ὕδωρ ζῶν** (4:10-11), **τυφλοί** (9:40), **τελειωθῇ** (19:28, 30/cf. 4:34; 5:36; 17:4), perhaps also **ἐγώ εἰμι** in its absolute usage (4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8).
2. There are numerous instances of “**asides**” in the Fourth Gospel (e.g. 1:38, 41, 42; 2:9; 4:2, 8, 9, 25; 6:6, 23, 64b, 71; 7:5, 22, 39; 8:6, 27; 9:7, 14, 22; 10:23, 35; 11:2, 5, 13, 18, 30-31, 49, 51-52; 12:6, 16, 33, 43; 13:11, 28-29; 14:22; 18:2, 10, 13, 14, 32, 40b; 19:14, 23b, 31b, 35; 20:9, 14b, 15, 16; 21:4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 19, 23, 24) which mimic natural **digressions** in oral speech.
3. The extended dialogues/discourses which are distinctive to the GJ may also be an indication of the oral matrix out of which the GJ was composed, received, transmitted, and given meaning. It is clearly apparent that the extended dialogues/discourses of the GJ are quite different from the form critical controversy dialogues and scholastic dialogues (apophthegms) identified by Bultmann in the Synoptic tradition.21 Bultmann explained this difference by positing a **written** Revelation-Sayings (*Offenbarungsreden*) source behind the distinctive revelation discourses of Jesus in the GJ. Thus the extended dialogues/discourses of the GJ had a very different origin and style than the **oral** sayings tradition found in the Synoptic Gospels. But Geoffrey Rockwell, Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at the University of Alberta, Canada in his study of dialogue (“from Socrates to the Internet”) argues that dialogue was an essential oral form in ancient philosophical societies because “in an oral culture the process of definition is best carried out in dialogue.”22 In a linguistic environment in which the word exists primarily as oral event rather than as written artifact, the role of the interlocutor in dialogue is virtually essential for the creation of sustained, “analytic” thought. The dialogue form thus provided an opportunity for oral cultures to “wrestle” with the truth and in turn communicate that truth to others.23 In an oral linguistic culture, the dialogue form was an effective means of communicating truth, not through direct statement of propositional truth, but rather by allowing an audience to “overhear” a dialogue, vicariously enter into it, and hopefully accept the truth expressed in it. The dialogues of the GJ seem to fit this oral linguistic pattern perfectly.
4. Dewey has pointed out that the notorious “**aporia**” of the GJ may be better explained by oral style rather than an indication of textual displacement or literary strata.24
5. Dewey also notes that the Greek of the GJ consists mainly of simple clauses25 and this “style” is consistent throughout the Gospel (in narrative, dialogue, and speech material). These simple clauses, when read aloud (even in translation), give a certain “sing-song” quality to the text. This may be nothing more than unsophisticated literary Greek, but it may also be a reflection of oral **intonational units**.

Two additional features of the Greek text of the GJ are especially noteworthy as possible traces of oral performance language in the written text of the GJ.

(8) Dewey points to the “frequent instances of **present-tense verbs** where written literary convention would normally require a past tense.”26 And indeed the use of present tense verb forms in story-telling and in the dialogues/monologues (especially present tense first person “I” language) is quite extensive and distinctive in the GJ. Typically, the occurrence of these present tense verb forms in biblical Greek texts (when past tense verb forms would normally be expected) is identified in New Testament Greek grammars as instances of the “historical present.” Occurring predominantly in the Gospels of Mark and John, the “historical present” is presumed to be a stylistic technique utilized by the authors of these two gospels in particular to create a “vivid picture” of the event described in the minds of the readers.27 Some recent studies of the “historical present” have questioned this “vividness” function arguing that the “historical present” functions instead literarily to signal some intentional departure from the usual narrative expectation, e.g. introducing new participants into the scene or introducing a participant’s speech.28 However, both of these understandings focus on the “historical present” as a grammatical **literary** technique utilized by the authors of these written texts.

But reading/hearing the GJ with such an abundance of present tense verb forms **as oral performance** gives it a much different “voice.” It sounds much more like a personal oral telling of a story than an impersonal literary narrative. And the occurrence of present tense verb forms is consistent throughout the text. Some of the most striking examples occur in story-telling/ dialogues where the use of present tense verb forms puts the narrator/speaker and the reader/ listener right into the scene or dialogue as it is being told, for example, 1:29-37 (the Baptist and his disciples); 1:38-51 (Jesus and his disciples); 2:1-11 (the wedding at Cana)—

1 Καὶ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ γάμος ἐγένετο ἐν Κανὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας, καὶ ἦν ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐκεῖ· 2 ἐκλήθη δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν γάμον. 3 καὶ ὑστερήσαντος οἴνου **λέγει** ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν· οἶνον οὐκ **ἔχουσιν**. 4 καὶ **λέγει** αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὔπω **ἥκει** ἡ ὥρα μου. 5 **λέγει** ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ τοῖς διακόνοις· ὅ τι ἂν **λέγῃ** ὑμῖν ποιήσατε. 6 ἦσαν δὲ ἐκεῖ λίθιναι ὑδρίαι ἓξ κατὰ τὸν καθαρισμὸν τῶν Ἰουδαίων **κείμεναι**, **χωροῦσαι** ἀνὰ μετρητὰς δύο ἢ τρεῖς. 7 **λέγει** αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· γεμίσατε τὰς ὑδρίας ὕδατος. καὶ ἐγέμισαν αὐτὰς ἕως ἄνω. 8 καὶ **λέγει** αὐτοῖς· ἀντλήσατε νῦν καὶ **φέρετε** τῷ ἀρχιτρικλίνῳ· οἱ δὲ ἤνεγκαν. 9 ὡς δὲ ἐγεύσατο ὁ ἀρχιτρίκλινος τὸ ὕδωρ οἶνον γεγενημένον καὶ οὐκ ᾔδει πόθεν **ἐστίν**, οἱ δὲ διάκονοι ᾔδεισαν οἱ ἠντληκότες τὸ ὕδωρ, **φωνεῖ** τὸν νυμφίον ὁ ἀρχιτρίκλινος 10 καὶ **λέγει** αὐτῷ· πᾶς ἄνθρωπος πρῶτον τὸν καλὸν οἶνον **τίθησιν** καὶ ὅταν μεθυσθῶσιν τὸν ἐλάσσω· σὺ τετήρηκας τὸν καλὸν οἶνον ἕως ἄρτι. 11 Ταύτην ἐποίησεν ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν Κανὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἐφανέρωσεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ.

1 On the third day there happened to be a weddingin Cana of Galilee,and themother of Jesuswas there. 2 Now bothJesusand his disciples were invited tothe wedding. 3 And when they had run out ofwine, the mother of Jesus**says** to him,“They **have** no wine.”4 And Jesus**says** to her, “Woman, what [concern is that] to me and you? My hour **is** not yet **come**.” 5 His mother **says** to the servants, “Whatever he **says** to you, do [it]*.*” 6 Now there were there six water pots of stone, according to the [manner of] purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. 7 Jesus **says** to them, “Fill the water pots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And he **says** to them, “Draw [some] out now, and take [it]to the master of the feast.” And they took [it]*.* 9 When the master of the feast had tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it **is** from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast **calls** the bridegroom. 10 And he **says** to him, “Every man at the beginning **serves** the good wine, and when they have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!” 11 This beginningof signs Jesusdidin Cana of Galilee,and manifestedhisglory; and his disciples believed in him.

4:1-30 (Jesus and the Samaritan woman); 5:1-16 (Jesus and the lame man); 6:1-15 (Jesus feeds the multitude); 11:1-46 (the raising of Lazarus); 13:1-38 (Jesus and his disciples at supper); 14:1-31 (Jesus and his disciples); 20:1-10 (Mary, Peter, and John at the tomb)—

1 Τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ **ἔρχεται** πρωῒ σκοτίας ἔτι οὔσης εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ **βλέπει** τὸν λίθον ἠρμένον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου. 2 **τρέχει** οὖν καὶ **ἔρχεται** πρὸς Σίμωνα Πέτρον καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἄλλον μαθητὴν ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ **λέγει** αὐτοῖς· ἦραν τὸν κύριον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου καὶ οὐκ **οἴδαμεν** ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν. 3 Ἐξῆλθεν οὖν ὁ Πέτρος καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητὴς καὶ ἤρχοντο εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον. 4 ἔτρεχον δὲ οἱ δύο ὁμοῦ· καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητὴς προέδραμεν τάχιον τοῦ Πέτρου καὶ ἦλθεν πρῶτος εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον, 5 καὶ παρακύψας **βλέπει** κείμενα [pres part] τὰ ὀθόνια, οὐ μέντοι εἰσῆλθεν. 6 **ἔρχεται** οὖν καὶ Σίμων Πέτρος ἀκολουθῶν [pres part] αὐτῷ καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον, καὶ **θεωρεῖ** τὰ ὀθόνια κείμενα [pres part], 7 καὶ τὸ σουδάριον, ὃ ἦν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ, οὐ μετὰ τῶν ὀθονίων κείμενον [pres part] ἀλλὰ χωρὶς ἐντετυλιγμένον εἰς ἕνα τόπον. 8 τότε οὖν εἰσῆλθεν καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητὴς ὁ ἐλθὼν πρῶτος εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐπίστευσεν· 9 οὐδέπω γὰρ ᾔδεισαν τὴν γραφὴν ὅτι **δεῖ** αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῆναι. 10 ἀπῆλθον οὖν πάλιν πρὸς αὐτοὺς οἱ μαθηταί.

1 Now the first *day* of the weekMary Magdalene**comes** to thetomb early, while it was still dark, and**sees** *that* the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 Then she **runs** and **comes**to SimonPeter,and to the other disciple,whom Jesusloved, and **says** to them,“They took away the Lord out ofthe tomb, and **we do not know** wherethey laid him.”3 Petertherefore went out, and theother disciple, and were going to thetomb. 4 So they both ran together, and theother disciple outran Peterand came tothe tomb first. 5 And he, stooped down looking in, **sees** the linen cloths lying [present participle] *there;* yet he did not go in. 6 Then SimonPeter**comes**, following [present participle] him, and went intothe tomb; and he **sees** the linen clothslying [present participle] *there,* 7 and the handkerchiefthatwas around his head, not lying [present participle] withthe linen cloths, but having been folded together in aplace by itself. 8 Then the other disciple,who came to the tomb first, went in also;and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that it is necessary for him to rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.

20:11-18 (Mary and Jesus); 21:1-14 (the disciples go fishing and meet Jesus); 21:15-19 (Jesus and Peter)—

15 Ὅτε οὖν ἠρίστησαν **λέγει** τῷ Σίμωνι Πέτρῳ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Σίμων Ἰωάννου, **ἀγαπᾷς** με πλέον τούτων; **λέγει** αὐτῷ· ναὶ κύριε, σὺ **οἶδας** ὅτι **φιλῶ** σε. **λέγει** αὐτῷ· **βόσκε** τὰ ἀρνία μου. 16 **λέγει** αὐτῷ πάλιν δεύτερον· Σίμων Ἰωάννου, **ἀγαπᾷς** με; **λέγει** αὐτῷ· ναὶ κύριε, σὺ **οἶδας** ὅτι **φιλῶ** σε. **λέγει** αὐτῷ· **ποίμαινε** τὰ πρόβατά μου. 17 **λέγει** αὐτῷ τὸ τρίτον· Σίμων Ἰωάννου, **φιλεῖς** με; ἐλυπήθη ὁ Πέτρος ὅτι εἶπεν αὐτῷ τὸ τρίτον· **φιλεῖς** με; καὶ **λέγει** αὐτῷ· κύριε, πάντα σὺ **οἶδας**, σὺ **γινώσκεις** ὅτι **φιλῶ** σε. **λέγει** αὐτῷ [ὁ Ἰησοῦς]· **βόσκε** τὰ πρόβατά μου. 18Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν **λέγω** σοι, ὅτε ἦς νεώτερος, ἐζώννυες σεαυτὸν καὶ περιεπάτεις ὅπου ἤθελες· ὅταν δὲ **γηράσῃς**, ἐκτενεῖς τὰς χεῖράς σου, καὶ ἄλλος σε ζώσει καὶ οἴσει ὅπου οὐ **θέλεις**. 19τοῦτο δὲ εἶπεν **σημαίνων** ποίῳ θανάτῳ δοξάσει τὸν θεόν. καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν **λέγει** αὐτῷ· **ἀκολούθει** μοι.

15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus **says** to Simon Peter, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you **love** me more than these?” He **says** to him, “Yes, Lord; you **know** that I **love** you.” He **says** to him, “**Feed** my lambs.” 16 He **says** to him again a second time, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you **love** me?” He **says** to him, “Yes, Lord; you **know** that I **love** you.” He **says** to him, “**Tend** my sheep.” 17 He **says** to him the third time, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you **love** me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you **love** me?” And he said [vl **says**] to him, “Lord, you **know** all things; you **know** that I **love** you.” Jesus **says** to him, “**Feed** my sheep. 18 Truly, truly, I **say** to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you **grow old**, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry *you* where you **do not wish**.” 19 This he spoke, signifying by what death he will glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he **says** to him, “**Follow** me.”

Now to be sure, past tense verb forms also frequently occur in the GJ and often within narrative/dialogue passages there is a mixture of past tense verb forms and present tense verb forms. From the perspective of typical literary/written convention, this mixture of past tense verb forms and present tense verb forms may be nothing more than a stylistic choice by the author. But from the perspective of oral performance language and first century media culture, the occurrence of so many present tense verb forms in story-telling and dialogue in the FG points convincingly to an oral matrix out of which the GJ was composed, received, transmitted, and given meaning. Although the author of the GJ was clearly writing about Jesus who lived in the past, by continually reverting to the use of present tense verb forms, the author not only reveals the latent oral culture out of which the GJ was written, but also employs much of the noetic power of the oral word in a written text. In the GJ, the story of Jesus is **told** in such a way that the hearer/reader is drawn right into the written narrative and becomes an active participant in the scenes/dialogues/monologues contained therein. Thus the story of Jesus as told in the FG truly invites the hearer/reader to “experience” Jesus rather than promotes “cognitive information” about Jesus.29 This predominant use of present tense verb forms (especially the “historical present”) throughout the GJ is a significant indication that the written text of the GJ emerged out of a profoundly oral media culture.

Finally, (9) the Greek text of the GJ features an extensive use of **demonstrative pronouns for emphasis**. RenateEigenbrod in her study of First Nation/Aboriginal oral traditional literature in Canada identified the use of demonstrative pronouns for emphasis as a distinctive linguistic marker of oral language in those written texts. According to Eigenbrod, demonstrative pronouns in oral traditional literature “verbalize body language,”30 which is an important component of oral speech. This oral linguistic marker occurs throughout the Greek text of the GJ (although not often in translations) recreating a strong sense of oral storytelling when read aloud and coupled with the abundant use of present tense verb forms. In addition to demonstrative pronouns for emphasis, there also is an extensive use of **emphatic personal pronouns** in the Greek text of the GJ. Since Greek verb forms are inflective, these personal pronouns are grammatically unnecessary except for emphasis. In the examples below, occurrences of demonstrative pronouns are in bold type.

**1**:2**, 7, 8, 15, 18,** 19? [emphatic αὕτη], 26 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **30**, 31 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 33 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **33**, 34 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **41**;

**3**:**2**, 19? [emphatic αὕτη], 28 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 30 [emphatic ἐκεῖνον and ἐμὲ];

**4**:22 [emphatic ὑμεῖς and ἡμεῖς], **25, 29**, 32 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 35 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 38 [emphatic ἐγὼ and ὑμεῖς], 44? [emphatic αὐτὸς], **47**;

**5:6**, 9?, **11, 19**, 20 [emphatic αὐτὸς and ὑμεῖς], 30 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 31 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 33 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 34 [emphatic ἐγὼ and ὑμεῖς], **35** [+ emphatic ὑμεῖς], 36 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **37, 38** [+ emphatic ὑμεῖς], **39** [+ emphatic ὑμεῖς], **43**, 44 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 45 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **46, 47**;

**6**:14?, **27**, 29?, 39?, 40? [+emphatic ἐγὼ], 44 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **46**, 50?, 51 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 54 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 57 [emphatic κἀκεῖνος], 58?, 63 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 69 [emphatic ἡμεῖς], 70 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **71**;

**7**:7 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 8 [emphatic ὑμεῖς and ἐγὼ], **11, 15**, 17 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **25, 29** [+ emphatic ἐγὼ], **31**, 34 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], **35** [+ emphatic ἡμεῖς], **36**, **40, 41, 45**, 47 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], **49**;

**8**:14 [emphatic ἐγὼ and ὑμεῖς], 15 [emphatic ὑμεῖς and ἐγὼ], 16 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **18**, 21 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 22 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 23 [emphatic ὑμεῖς and ἐγὼ], 26 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 29 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 31 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 38 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 41 [emphatic ὑμεῖς and ἡμεῖς], **42** [+ emphatic ἐγὼ], **44** [+ emphatic ὑμεῖς], 45 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 46 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 47 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 48 [emphatic ἡμεῖς], 49 [emphatic ἐγὼ and ὑμεῖς], 50 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 54 [emphatic ἐγὼ and ὑμεῖς], 55 [emphatic ἐγὼ];

**9:2, 3, 8, 9, 12, 16, 19** [+ emphatic ὑμεῖς], **20**, 21 [emphatic ἡμεῖς], **24** [+ emphatic ἡμεῖς], **25**, 27 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 28 [emphatic ὑμεῖς and ἡμεῖς], **29** [+ emphatic ἡμεῖς], 30 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], **33**, 34 [emphatic σὺ], **36**, **37**, 39 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 40 [emphatic ἡμεῖς];

**10:1**, **3, 6**, 10 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 17 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 18 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **25** [+ emphatic ἐγὼ], 26 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 27 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 28 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **35**, 36 [emphatic ὑμεῖς];

**11**:**13**, 16 [emphatic ἡμεῖς], 27 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **29**, **37**, 42 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 49 [emphatic ὑμεῖς];

**12**:**21**, 32 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 34 [emphatic ἡμεῖς and σὺ], 46 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 47 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **48**, 49 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 50 [emphatic ἐγὼ];

**13**:6 [emphatic σὺ], 7 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 10 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 13 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 14 [emphatic ἐγὼ and ὑμεῖς], 15 [emphatic ἐγὼ and ὑμεῖς], 18 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **25**, **26**, **27**, **30**, 33 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 34 [emphatic ὑμεῖς];

**14**:3 [emphatic ἐγὼ and ὑμεῖς], 9 [emphatic σὺ], 10 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 12 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 14 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 16 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 17 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 19 [emphatic ὑμεῖς and ἐγὼ], 20 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], **21** [+ emphatic ἐγὼ], **26**, 27 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 28 [emphatic ἐγὼ];

**15**:3 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], **5**, 9 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 10 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 14 [emphatic ὑμεῖς and ἐγὼ], 16 [emphatic ὑμεῖς and ἐγὼ], 19 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 20 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **26** [+ emphatic ἐγὼ], 27 [emphatic ὑμεῖς];

**16**:4 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 7 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **8**, **13**, **14**, 20 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 22 [emphatic ὑμεῖς], 26 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 27 [emphatic ὑμεῖς and ἐγὼ], 33 [emphatic ἐγὼ];

**17**:3?, 4 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 9 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 11 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 12 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 14 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 16 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 18 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 19 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 22 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 24 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 25 [emphatic ἐγὼ];

**18**:**17**, 20 [emphatic ἐγὼ], **21** [+ emphatic ἐγὼ], **25**, 26 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 28? [emphatic αὐτοὶ], **30**, 33 [emphatic σὺ], 35 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 37 [emphatic σὺ and ἐγὼ], 38 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 40 [emphatic τοῦτον];

**19**:6 [emphatic ἐγὼ], 7 [emphatic ἡμεῖς], 9 [emphatic σὺ], **12**, **15**, **21**, **35** [+emphatic ὑμεῖς];

**20**:**13**, **15** [+ emphatic σὺ and ἐγὼ], **16**, 21 [emphatic ἐγὼ];

**21**:3 [emphatic ἡμεῖς], 12 [emphatic σὺ], 15 [emphatic σὺ], 16 [emphatic σὺ], 17 [emphatic σὺ], **21**, 22 [emphatic σὺ], **23**, **24**.

In summary, our analysis of the Greek text of the GJ confirms Dewey’s conclusion that “the style of FG is heavily oral.” Traces of oral performance language apparent in the Greek text of the GJ include: (1) **formulaic**, **repetitious**, and **rhythmic** language;(2) **appositives** and **parallelisms**; (3) **riddles** and **double entendre**; (4)“**asides**” which seem to mimic natural **digressions** in oral speech; (5) the extended dialogues/discourses of the GJ as an oral form defining and communicating truth; (6) the notorious “**aporia**” of the GJ as a feature of oral style rather than an indication of textual displacement or literary strata; (7) the pervasive and predominant use of simple clauses (oral **intonational units**); (8) the extensive and distinctive use of **present-tense verbs** in story-telling (and present tense first person “I” language in the dialogues/ monologues); and finally, (9) the extensive use of **demonstrative pronouns** and **personal pronouns** for emphasis/verbalizing body language.

Before moving on to show how most modern translations betray the oral linguistic world of the GJ, it is important to state clearly what this examination of traces of oral performance language in the text of the GJ is intended to demonstrate. It **is not** intended to demonstrate that the GJ originated as an oral composition, nor is it intended to suggest that the written GJ is a hybrid oral-written composition, a “missing link” as it were between oral composition and written composition blending the distinctive linguistic characteristics of orality and textuality. In a study of the Song of Solomon, Matthias Hopf identifies that Hebrew Scripture written text as a “chimera”—the physical presence of two distinct entities in one organism.31 “Accordingly,” he states, “the Song of Solomon **is** not a written text and **is** not an oral text, but rather oral and written at once.”32 He goes on in this study to identify certain “peculiar linguistic signals” that he suggests “hint at an underlying oral style” in the written text of the Song of Songs showing in fact that “this text belongs to those two spheres of the written and the oral word at the same time.”33 The author of the Song of Solomon thus created “a written text in the guise of spoken language.”34 Two distinct modalities of the word are present in one text.

In some similar way, I would suggest that the GJ shows evidence of being a text that exists in the two spheres of the written and the oral word at the same time. The GJ is obviously a written text, but it is written in such a way that it utilizes both the linguistic “style” and the noetic power of the oral word. In the oral/textual media culture of the First Century C.E., the impact of this oral linguistic style and noetic power would have been amplified as the text was performed/ read aloud for a live audience. That oral language impact, I contend, has been betrayed by most translations of the GJ causing modern readers to mishear/misinterpret this ancient text.

Translation betrayals of the oral linguistic world of the FG.

If indeed the Greek text of the GJ shows abundant traces of oral performance language, as the examination above demonstrates, this oral linguistic world out of which the GJ was composed, received, transmitted, and given meaning is almost universally betrayed by modern translations of the Gospel. Of course, one of the chief (and often expressed) goals of modern translations is to make ancient texts accessible to contemporary readers, and to facilitate this goal, modern literary conventions are naturally employed in the process of translation. Ancient language and style are made to conform to contemporary literary language and style for the ease of reading. Ease of reading is indeed a blessing for modern readers, but it is also a curse if it betrays the linguistic world of the ancient text. **Reading the ancient text through the eyes of modern literary style using the inherent presumptions of textual noetics, we may profoundly mishear the message of that ancient text**. To illustrate how modern translations of the GJ consistently betray the oral linguistic world of the ancient text by imposing a modern literary/written linguistic standard on the ancient text, I will focus on two prominent markers of oral performance language in the GJ—present tense verb forms and demonstrative/emphatic personal pronouns.

1. Almost without exception (see below), modern translations of the GJ consistently translate the numerous “historical present” verb forms of the GJ as past tense verb forms, e.g. 20:1-10 [RSV]

**1** Now on the first day of the week Mary Mag'dalene **came** to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and **saw** that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

**2** So she **ran**, and **went** to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and **said** to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

**3** Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb.

**4** They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first;

**5** and stooping to look in, he **saw** the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.

**6** Then Simon Peter **came**, following him, and went into the tomb; he **saw** the linen cloths lying,

**7** and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.

**8** Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;

**9** for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

**10** Then the disciples went back to their homes.35

The linguistic impact of translating present tense verb forms as past tense verb forms is to mute the oral performance voice of the ancient text. The interpretive impact is to introduce textual/ written noetics onto the text. The text is no longer encountered as a **present word** to be heard, but instead becomes an **ancient narrative** to be examined.

It is interesting to note that the KJV of 1611 and the ASV of 1901 retain the present tense verb forms of the Greek text in translation, but the impact is blunted by the archaic English verb forms (“cometh, seeth, runneth, sayeth”). The only modern translation that I have found that retains the present tense verb forms of the Greek text is the Scholars Version.36 This translation was done by distinguished Johannine scholar, Robert T. Fortna, who not incidentally is noted for his identification and reconstruction of a **written** Signs Gospel as a **literary** source for the GJ. Nevertheless, by retaining the present tense verb forms in translation, the Scholars Version “reads” more like a live “storytelling” rather than an impersonal literary narrative of past events. In a footnote to 1:15 (“John **testifies** about him and has called out”), the importance of retaining the present tense verb forms in translation is explained as a matter of faithfulness to the narrative intent—“Greek narrative alternates between past and present tense, rather like our use in story telling (‘When I told her, do you know what she says to me?’), but in Greek more acceptably **written** than in English. Other translations usually render these ‘historic presents’ in the past tense, **depriving the Greek narration of its immediacy and freshness**.”37 I would suggest that it is not only a matter of faithfulness to narrative intent to retain present tense verb forms in translation, but also a matter of faithfulness to the oral linguistic world out of which the GJ was composed, received, transmitted, and given meaning. Note how retaining the present tense verb forms gives a new voice to John’s telling of the discovery of the empty tomb in the Scholars Version—

1 Early on Sunday, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala **comes** to the tomb and **sees** that the stone has been moved away. 2 So she **runs** and **comes** to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one that Jesus loved, and **tells** them, ‘They’ve taken the Master from the tomb, and we don’t know where they’ve put him.’ 3 So Peter and the other disciple went out and they make their way [imperfect tense] to the tomb. 4 The two of them were running along together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to reach the tomb. 5 Stooping down, he could **see** [**sees**] the strips of burial cloth lying there; but he didn’t go in. 6 Then Simon Peter **comes** along behind him and went in. He too **sees** the strips of burial cloth there, 7 and also the cloth they had used to cover his head, lying not with the strips of burial cloth but rolled up by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who had been the first to reach the tomb, came in. He saw all this, and he believed. 9 But since neither of them yet understood the prophecy that he was destined to rise from the dead, 10 these disciples went back home.

The use of present tense verb forms throughout the narrative of the GJ, especially the frequent use of **λέγει**,38 has the oral linguistic/noetic effect of drawing both the speaker and the hearer into the narrative **as it is being told**. This impact of oral storytelling is lost when present tense verb forms are translated as past verb forms.

1. Additionally, almost without exception, modern translations of the GJ consistently fail to express the linguistic impact of demonstrative and emphatic personal pronouns. For the most part, demonstrative pronouns are simply translated with the corresponding personal pronoun and the emphatic personal pronouns are ignored completely, e.g. 1:1-18 [RSV] and 8:12-30 [RSV]

**11** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2He** [οὗτος] was in the beginning with God; **3**all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. **4**In him was life, and the life was the light of men. **5**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.39

**6**There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7He** [οὗτος] came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. **8He** [ἐκεῖνος] was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

**9**The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. **10**He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. **11**He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. **12**But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; **13**who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

**14**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. **15**(John bore witness to him, and cried, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.’”) **16**And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace. **17**For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18**No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, **he** [ἐκεῖνος] has made him known.

**812**Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “**I** am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” **13**The Pharisees then said to him, “**You** are bearing witness to yourself; your testimony is not true.” **14**Jesus answered, “Even if **I** do bear witness to myself, my testimony is true, for I know whence I have come and whither I am going, but **you** do not know whence I come or whither I am going. **15You** judge according to the flesh, **I** judge no one. **16**Yet even if **I** do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone that judge, but I and he who sent me. **17**In your law it is written that the testimony of two men is true; **18I** bear witness to myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness to me.” **19**They said to him therefore, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father; if you knew me, you would know my Father also.” **20**These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

**21**Again he said to them, “**I** go away, and you will seek me and die in your sin; where **I** am going, **you** cannot come.” **22**Then said the Jews, “Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where **I** am going, **you** cannot come’?” **23**He said to them, “**You** are from below, **I** am from above; **you** are of this world, **I** am not of this world. **24**I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that **I** am he.” **25**They said to him, “Who are **you**?” Jesus said to them, “Even what I have told you from the beginning. **26**I have much to say about you and much to judge; but he who sent me is true, and **I** declare to the world what I have heard from him.” **27**They did not understand that he spoke to them of the Father. **28**So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that **I** am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me. **29**And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for **I** always do what is pleasing to him.” **30**As he spoke thus, many believed in him.

Now to be sure, from the perspective of modern media culture/literary convention, substituting demonstrative pronouns with corresponding personal pronouns and ignoring emphatic personal pronouns in translation is grammatically acceptable and expedient. But from the perspective of First Century oral media culture/oral performance language, something significant is lost—the agonistic tone and natural body language of oral speech. Each occurrence of demonstrative pronouns and emphatic personal pronouns in the Greek text of the GJ is a “flag,”40 as it were, pointing to the oral matrix out of which the GJ was composed, received, transmitted, and given meaning. It is an indication that the narrator/speaker of the Gospel was seeking to engage the listener/reader actively in the telling of the story through voice inflection and body language/pointing (“I/you/we”). All of this linguistic impact is consistently missing in modern translations of the Greek text of the GJ. Thus, an oral language event created to be heard becomes a textual artifact to be examined.

New understandings about the meaning of the GJ arising from its oral performance linguistic world.

Approaching the GJ as oral performance language in the context of First Century oral media culture/consciousness is more than a matter of **mechanics** i.e. altering our understanding of how the GJ was composed, received, and transmitted. It also radically reorients our understanding of the **meaning** of the Gospel because meaning and modality of the word are intrinsically fused.41 Each modality of the word fundamentally impacts how human thought/ discourse is conceived and communicated and therefore also decisively impacts how human thought/discourse is given meaning. Each modality of the word engenders a distinctive linguistic world/noetic matrix creating in turn distinctive linguistic forms and hermeneutics. And even though it is now clear that each modality of the word did not and does not exist in an isolated (“hermetically sealed”) linguistic/noetic world, we proceed at great risk in determining the meaning of a text if we ignore its linguistic modality. So, briefly, I want to suggest how understanding (and immersing ourselves in) the oral linguistic world out of which the GJ emerged can give us new insights into the meaning of the Gospel. **By honoring the oral linguistic world out of which the GJ emerged, it radically redirects our focus from viewing this text primarily as a repository of theological, historical, or sociological data to understanding the GJ more accurately as linguistic act.**

Since the rise of the historical-critical method, Johannine scholarship (and indeed the bulk of biblical scholarship) has tended to focus its attention on mining the written text for nuggets of information about the theological ideas, historical setting, and sociological make-up of the author/people/community responsible for that text. It has asked questions and found answers that primarily address those issues. And those question and answers have generated an abundance of scholarship providing important insights about the possible theological development (heterodox Judaism/wisdom tradition, proto-Gnosticism/naïve Gnosticism, Platonism/Greek mythology, proto-Fourth Century creedalism), historical setting (early Judean/ eyewitness, mid-First Century Samaria/Syrian/non-Jerusalem, late-First Century Ephesus/Asia Minor), and sociological profile (Jewish/ Gentile, charismatic/prophetic/ancient “school”, internal/external conflict, conventicle/ church mainstream) of the Johannine community. The meaning of the GJ then is inevitably influenced/determined by the various answers given to these theological, historical, and sociological questions.

In recent years, new questions and new answers have been suggested by a literary-critical approach to the GJ. Focusing on the GJ as **written narrative**, R. Alan Culpepper and others42 have attempted to find the locus of meaning strictly within the narrative world of the written text. Issues of theological development, historical setting, and sociological make-up of the Johannine community are replaced by issues of how the various elements of the written narrative (narrator and point of view, narrative time, plot, characters, implicit commentary, implied reader) function to create meaning within the narrative world. The emphasis is on “how it [the text] works” not on how it came to be.43 This methodological approach does indeed seek to honor the GJ as linguistic act, but unfortunately, it focuses on the GJ as **written** linguistic act rather than oral linguistic act. As a result, this approach gives the GJ new contemporary (literary) meaning, but at the same time also distorts the oral linguistic world of the ancient text by introducing modern textual/literary noetics onto the text.44 So what new insights into the meaning of the Gospel arise when we understand (and immerse ourselves in) the **oral linguistic world** out of which the GJ emerged?

1. Understanding the GJ as oral linguistic act brings into new and sharper focus why Jesus is presented and speaks the way he does in the Fourth Gospel. As oral linguistic act/performance language, the GJ maximizes an “ontological” sense of presence. First of all, oral discourse is pre-eminently face-to-face linguistic act. Oral words must be spoken into existence by a **person** and heard by **people**. Oral words do not exist apart from the act of vocalization and hearing (and thus for continued existence the need for memory and repetition). Therefore, oral discourse always promotes an intense sense of **personal presence**. In the GJ, this “ontological” sense of personal presence arising from the noetics of the oral word is enhanced both by the predominance of speaking that occurs in this Gospel and by the manner of speaking—extended discourses, lengthy monologues, and an abundance of first-person “I” language. When heard as oral performance language, Jesus is experienced as “ontologically”/personally present in the words of the Gospel **as it is being told** and this “linguistically present Jesus” is able to speak directly to the hearer/audience at a time and place removed from when and where the Jesus to which this witness is given actually lived and spoke (“that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands” 1 John 1:1). As oral linguistic act/performance language, the GJ promotes an intense sense of the personal presence of the word. The ethereal word of God is personally present in Jesus as he speaks the word of God through the voice of the oral performer of the Gospel.

In addition to this “ontological” sense of **personal presence** inherent in oral language, oral words as living and powerful events in sound also promote a sense of direct encounter with, participation in, even a bringing into actuality, the **metaphysical reality** expressed by those words. In the noetic matrix created by oral language, an intense “noetic gravitational field” is created drawing together speaker, word, reality, and hearer into a unified whole. The GJ as oral performance language takes full advantage of this distinctive oral noetic field. From the very first “winged words”45 of the GJ, word, world/reality, speaker, and hearer are drawn inexorably together into a unified whole by the distinctive noetics of the spoken word. The life-giving, ethereal word of God (which by virtue of oral noetics participates in and makes present the very life of God) is “linguistically” experienced as “ontologically present” in Jesus, the speaker of the words of eternal life, who in turn is “linguistically” experienced as “ontologically present” in the words of the GJ as it is being spoken by the oral performer of the Gospel. Thus confronted by the reality (God, word/life of God, Jesus) made present by the noetics of the oral word, the hearer is faced with a decision—receive the word and thereby participate in the life of God or reject the word and thereby the life of God.

Rudolf Bultmann correctly captured much of this oral noetic impact in his interpretation of the GJ utilizing categories provided by existential philosophy.46 Unfortunately, these important interpretive insights were soon overshadowed in Johannine scholarship by historical-critical and *religionsgeschichte* issues of written sources and Gnostic influence. It is now perhaps possible to revisit these interpretive insights and appreciate them anew, no longer through the categories of existential philosophy/theology, but through the distinctive noetics of oral language. It is the oral performance language of the GJ itself that creates the linguistic/noetic “ontology” of presence, encounter and decision that is characteristic of the FG.

But the distinctive linguistic noetics introduced by the written text work to distort the noetic matrix created by the oral/spoken word. In this new textual matrix, the spoken word is silenced and stripped of its power to unite speaker, word (and the reality expressed in those words), and hearer. Instead, the written word creates a new noetic world in which the speaker (Jesus), word (text), and reader function differently—the speaker becomes a character in a detached “historical” narrative, the word functions to disclose propositional truth, and the reader becomes an outside observer of the narrative and distanced/dispassionate examiner of the word. Personal (oral) presence of the word is replaced by impersonal (written) objectification of the word. And so instead of experiencing the GJ as oral linguistic act that promotes hearing/ encounter and response, the Gospel becomes a textual artifact that must be dissected and examined for its wealth of theological, historical, and sociological data.

1. Understanding the GJ as oral linguistic act also brings into new and sharper focus the purpose of this text. Its purpose is explicitly stated in 20:30-31—“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” Textual noetics has a tendency to focus attention here on the words “signs,” “written,” and “book” because those words suggest a sense of objectivity, concreteness, and detachment. The author’s purpose from the perspective of textual noetics is to provide data/information that when fully considered hopefully leads to (or encourages steadfastness) in the faith statement that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Oral noetics, on the other hand, focuses attention here on the words “believe” and “have life” because those words suggest a sense of encounter and response. The author’s purpose is thus to provide personal testimony that invites participation in the reality expressed by the words of that witness.47

Over and over again, throughout this text, the emphasis is on **witness**. It begins with the introduction of John (the Baptizer) in 1:6-8. This introduction of John is most often viewed as a later interpolation (and unwelcome interruption) into an ancient poem or hymn about the Word/Jesus and therefore easily dismissed as important only to distinguish John from Jesus, the true light/life/word of God. But notice the positive and emphatic connection expressed in this introduction of John between testimony/witness and believing. This connection between testimony/witness and believing then continues throughout the GJ.

John’s explicit testimony is given in 1:15 (“John bears witness to him and cries out saying”48), 1:19 (“this is the testimony of John”)-27 and 1:29-34 (“And John bore witness”49 v. 32; “I have seen and have borne witness”50 v. 34). Further references to this earlier testimony are found in 3:25-36 (vv. 26, 28). And in the course of what sounds like the voice of John giving additional testimony about Jesus the Christ, John makes this remarkable statement—“The one coming from above is above all; the one being of the earth is of the earth and speaks of the earth. The one coming from heaven is above all. This one **bears witness** to what he has seen and heard, and no one receives his **testimony**. The one receiving his **testimony** certifies [sets a seal] that God is true. For the one whom God sent speaks the words [ῥήματα] of God …” (vv. 31-34a).

Right after this, the Samaritan woman who spoke with Jesus at Jacob’s well bears witness to Jesus as the Christ to the people of Sychar (4:29, 39) and many of them “believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” Later, after the people of Sychar had an opportunity to listen to Jesus themselves “many more believed **because of his word**” (v. 41-42). Soon after this, Jesus himself is embroiled in controversy about “bearing witness to himself” (5:31). He deflects that criticism by calling attention to the testimony of John (vv. 32-35), the testimony of his works (v. 36), the testimony of the Father who sent him (v. 37), scripture (v. 39), and indirectly, Moses (v. 46-47)! This controversy about testimony is renewed in 8:12-20 and 10:22-30.

Other references to testimony/bearing witness in the GJ include the crowd who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem (12:17), the Paraclete (15:26), the disciples as a whole (15:27), the disciple (Beloved Disciple?) at the cross who witnessed the piercing of Jesus’ body (19:35), and finally the Beloved Disciple in the epilogue who is “the one bearing witness (μαρτυρῶν) to these things and the one having written (γράψας) these things” (21:24).

Clearly, this text was created to be heard as a personal witness to Jesus **as it is being spoken** and a response to that personal testimony is required (similar to how an oral sermon functions today). Much has been written regarding the literary genre “gospel,” much of it focusing on the Synoptics. I do not wish to dive into the depths of that discussion in this paper except to suggest that honoring the GJ as oral linguistic act/performance language changes the focus from what does this text **look like** to what does this text **sound like**? And this text sounds very much like passionate, personal oral testimony about Jesus, not simply a passive theological narrative about Jesus. As oral performance language, this text could very accurately be “entitled”: The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple.51

1. Understanding the GJ as oral linguistic act also brings into new and sharper focus the distinctive language of the GJ that “identifies” Jesus as God (in particular 10:30—“The Father and I are one.”). This language is most often understood **theologically** as an expression of the developing Christology of the early church as it moved from a predominant Jewish identity to a predominant Gentile identity culminating ultimately in the orthodox creeds of later centuries. Theologically, the language of the GJ is considered to be one of the first (and clearest) statements of the early Church that Jesus was/is actually “of the same substance” as God. The noetics of textuality—Jesus as an historical person in the historical written narrative of the GJ who actually spoke these words—promotes this idea of substantive ontological identity.52

But when understood as oral performance language, the noetics of the oral word shifts our focus from **substance** to **sound**. We hear these words as they are spoken, not as propositional statements about ontological identity, but as performance language that suggests/promotes a sense of the acoustically experienced presence of God. Oral noetics re-orients our thinking to two important aspects of sound—tone and harmony. Each oral word, as sound, has a distinctive tone, but unlike written words which are visually distinct, discrete, and separate, oral words can be layered to create a new, richer sound—a harmony if the words have a resonant/sympathetic vibration or a cacophony if they do not.

From the perspective of oral noetics, the words that Jesus speaks in the GJ clearly have a resonant vibration with the ethereal word of God (1:1-5)—Jesus comes from the Father/from above; his words are Spirit and life; his words create a “crisis of decision” (acceptance or rejection of the life/light/truth/reality of God expressed in those words); receiving/hearing/ abiding in the word creates “life in harmony” with God.53 And under the influence of oral noetics, this ethereal word of God rings out/sounds forth in the present experience of the hearer as the word is spoken by Jesus through the testimony of the Beloved Disciple as it is spoken by oral performer of the GJ. An oral noetic matrix is created where the hearer is confronted acoustically (Bultmann: “personal address”) by the reality expressed in the words of Jesus, the Beloved Disciple, and the oral performer of the Gospel, and a response is required—acceptance or rejection of the word. Acceptance leads to “life in harmony” with God. Jesus, in the GJ, demonstrates perfectly what “life in harmony” with God looks like and speaks constantly about it. Hearers of the word as it is spoken (by Jesus, the Beloved Disciple, and the oral performer of the Gospel) are hopefully thereby also drawn into that same experience of the life of God.

But in typical Johannine fashion, the Jewish religious authorities in the GJ misunderstand the words that Jesus is saying. They like so many others in the GJ (and like most of those/us who later read the GJ in a textual noetic matrix) understood the words that Jesus was saying in substantive/literal terms. But Jesus as the speaker of the words of eternal life in the GJ, when he says “the Father and I are one” and makes other statements about his relationship with God, is talking about himself (and others) experiencing “life in harmony” with God, not substantive/ ontological identity with God. The oral noetics of the spoken word as layered/harmonic sound gives this language new meaning. It is not about substantive/”ontological” identity with God, but life that is lived in resonant harmony with God.

These three brief examples of how understanding (and immersing ourselves in) the **oral linguistic world** out of which the GJ emerged brings new insights into the meaning of the Gospel should not be viewed as an attempt to recover “the original meaning” of the Gospel. Rather, it is an attempt to illustrate that words heard in the noetic matrix of orality are perceived differently and given different meaning than words read in the noetic matrix of textuality. Misunderstandings about the meaning of this ancient text arise when we fail to recognize the important interpretive context generated by the modality of the word.

Conclusion

The wealth of recent studies in oral traditional literature/oral performance, linguistics/ human communication, sociology, philosophy, the modality/technologizing of the word, and media consciousness/media culture has revolutionized our understandings of the composition, reception, transmission, and interpretation of human discourse/texts. It is now clear that meaning and modality of the word are intrinsically fused. Each modality of the word fundamentally impacts how human thought/discourse is conceived and communicated and therefore also decisively impacts how human thought/discourse is given meaning. Words heard in the noetic matrix of orality are received differently and given different meaning than words read in the noetic matrix of textuality.

In the particular case of the GJ, since the text that we have is in fact a written text, modern textual noetics predominate when we read this text today. But ancient written texts were closer to the noetic world of orality than to the noetic world of textuality. Our study of the Greek text of the GJ has confirmed Dewey’s important observation that the style of FG is heavily oral and we have demonstrated how most contemporary translations of the GJ betray that oral linguistic world. As a consequence, the meaning given to the words of the GJ by contemporary readers of the Gospel is subtly, but decisively influenced by the noetic/interpretive matrix of textuality. Hearing the GJ as oral performance language allows the words of the GJ to be “winged” once more so that our contemporary understanding of this Gospel is given new meaning.

**Endnotes**

1Robert Funk, Honest to Jesus (San Franscisco: HarperSanFrancisco/Polebridge Press, 1996), p. 81.

2Albert Lord, “Characteristics of Orality,” Oral Tradition, 2/1 (1987): 63.

3Walter Ong, Orality and Literacy—The Technologizing of the Word (New York/London, Methuen and Co., 1982).

4I use the term “oral performance language” in this paper to draw attention to the oral linguistic culture/noetic world that was predominant in the First Century C.E when the GJ was created. See Kelly Iverson, ed. From Text to Performance: Narrative and Performance Criticisms in Dialogue and Debate (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers/Cascade Books, 2014). The term “oral performance language” has some points of contact with “performative language” (see J. L. Austin, How To Do Things With Words (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), but rather than focusing on how some words function specifically as performative utterance, the term “oral performance language” draws attention to the distinctive oral noetic matrix of spoken language.

5Werner Kelber, The Oral and the Written Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Pieter J.J. Botha, Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock/Cascade Books, 2012); Joanna Dewey, “Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark,” Interpretation 53 (1989): 32-44; also, Thomas Boomershine, Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospels as Storytelling (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988).

6Rudolf Bultmann, The Gospel of John: A Commentary, translated by G.R. Beasley-Murray, R.W.N. Hoare, and J.K. Riches (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); see also Robert Fortna, The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) and Urban C. von Wahlde, The Gospels and Letters of John, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

7Joanna Dewey, “The Gospel of John in Its Oral-Written Media World,” in Jesus in Johannine Tradition, Robert Fortna and Tom Thatcher, eds. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001); Tom Thatcher, The Riddles of Jesus in John: A Study in Tradition and Folklore (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) and Why John WROTE a Gospel (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006).

8Ong, Orality and Literacy, pp. 31-77.

9Lord, “Characteristics of Orality,” pp. 55-56.

10EgbertBakker, “How Oral is Oral Composition?” Chapter 3 in Pointing at the Past: From Formula to Performance in Homeric Poetics. Hellenic Studies Series 12 (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2005), p. 11.

11Faculty.gvsu.edu (Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI) “Characteristics of Oral Composition,” pp. 2-3. [article downloaded to computer; web page no longer available] For an examination of asides as oral performance language in the Gospel of Mark, see Thomas Boomershine, “Audience Asides and the Audience of Mark—The Difference Performance Makes,” in Kelly Iverson, ed. From Text to Performance: Narrative and Performance Criticisms in Dialogue and Debate.

12RenateEigenbrod, “The Oral in the Written: A Literature Between Two Cultures” Department of English, Lakehead University Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada https://www. researchgate.net/publication/252465332\_THE\_ORAL\_IN\_THE\_WRITTEN\_A\_LITERATURE\_BETWEEN\_TWO\_CULTURES, p. 93.

13RollinRamsaran, “From Mind to Message: Oral Performance in 1 Corinthians 15” Emmanuel School of Religion, Johnson City, Tennessee ([https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/ pdfs/ramsaran.pdf](https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/%20pdfs/ramsaran.pdf)), pp. 25-28.

14Michela Craveri and Rogelio Valencia Rivera, “The Voice of Writing: Orality Traces in the Maya Codices” Chapter 5 in Tradition and Innovation in Mesoamerican Cultural History edited by Roberto Cantú and Aaron Sonnenschein (Muenchen: LINCOM Gmbtt, 2011), p. 81.

15Botha**,** “Mark’s Story as Oral Traditional Literature” HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies Vol 47, No 2 (1991) ([http://www.ajol.info/index.php/hts/article/view/ 148148](http://www.ajol.info/index.php/hts/article/view/%20148148)), pp. 317-319.

16Dewey, “The Gospel of John in Its Oral-Written Media World,” pp. 250-251. Also, Catrin Williams, “Abraham as a Figure of Memory in John 8:31-59” in The Fourth Gospel in First-Century Media Culture, Anthony Le Donne and Tom Thatcher, eds. (London/New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011) identifies these distinctive “formulaic repetition of key words and motifs” (“Abraham” vv. 33, 37, 39[3x], 40, 52, 53, 56, 57, 58; “to do” vv. 34, 38, 39, 40, 41, 44, 53; “truth” vv. 32[2x], 40, 44[2x], 45, 46; “free” vv. 32, 33, 36[2x]; “father” vv. 38[2x], 39, 41[2x], 42, 44[3x], 49, 53, 54, 56); a virtual repetition of statements vv. 32-33, 51-52; “remaining in, making a place for, hearing, and keeping” Jesus’ word vv. 31, 37, 43, 51, 52, 53) which she argues indicates that this passage was designed for “oral delivery.” (p. 208)

17Michael Labahn, “Scripture *Talks* Because Jesus *Talks*” in Fourth Gospel in First Century Media Culture, p. 134; also Sara Winter, “Little Flags: The Scope and Reconstruction of the Signs Gospel” in Jesus in Johannine Tradition, pp. 219, 221, 222.

18Dewey, “The Gospel of John in Its Oral-Written Media World,” p. 250.

19Note also, “asked and said” (1:25)/“testified and said” (12:21)/“cried out and said” (12:44)/“denied it and said” (18:25); “cried out saying” (1:15; **7**:28 [“cried out … teaching and saying”], 37; 18:40; 19:6, 12)/“answered saying” (1:26; 12:23 [present tense])/“bore witness saying” (1:32)/“spoke saying” (8:12)/“asked saying” (9:2, 19; 12:21)/“urged [imperfect tense] him saying” (4:31)/ “quarreled saying” (6:52).

20Tom Thatcher, “The Riddles of Jesus in the Johannine Dialogues,” Jesus in Johannine Tradition, p. 264.

21Rudolf Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, translated by John Marsh (New York/San Francisco/London: Harper and Row, 1963; revised edition), pp. 12-27.

22Geoffrey Rockwell, Preprint Defining Dialogue: From Socrates to the Internet (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books (an imprint of Prometheus Books), 2003), http://geoffreyrockwell. com/publications/Defining.Dialogue.Ch.3.pdf, p. 27.

23Ibid., p. 24 [quoting Ong, Orality and Literacy, p. 34].

24Dewey, pp. 248-249—“The inconsistencies and sudden shifts (aporias) in the Johannine narrative that the signs source theory resolves can also be explained as the result of oral composition or of the interaction between oral and written versions of the story. Listening audiences tolerate narrative inconsistencies, and even theological tensions, much more easily that we with our print-formed minds do. Furthermore, the colloquial nature of the Greek of FG suggests that its author was not highly educated, and thus probably not a fluent reader. He would more likely have garnered his information from hearing than from working with a written source.”

25Ibid., p. 250.

26Ibid.

27See, for example, A.T. Robertson and W. Hersey Davis, A New Short Grammar of the Greek Testament, 10th Edition (New York/London: Harper and Brothers, 1933), p. 299—“the “historical or dramatic present” is due to a vivid picture in the writer’s mind; “it is particularly common in Mark (due to Peter’s vivid narrative)” and H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (Toronto: MacMillan Co., 1955), p. 185—“the present tense is thus employed when a past event is viewed with the vividness of a present occurrence.”

28See, for example, Steven Runge, “The Verbal Aspect of the Historical Present Indicative in Narrative,” [www.ntdiscourse.org/docs/ReconsideringHP.pdf](http://www.ntdiscourse.org/docs/ReconsideringHP.pdf) and Mavis M. Leung, “The Narrative Function and Verbal Aspect of the Historical Present in the Fourth Gospel,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 51/4 (December, 2008): 703-720.

29Thus perhaps Bultmann’s well-known statement that in the GJ, “Jesus as the Revealer of God, reveals nothing but that he is the Revealer” [Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 2, translated by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), p. 66] takes on new meaning. I would suggest that the identity of Jesus in the GJ is not really about him being the Revealer of God (taken from a presumed Gnostic redeemer-myth), but rather that he is the Speaker of the Word of God.

30Eigenbrod, p. 93.

31Matthias Hopf, “Being in between: Canticles as a ‘Chimera’ between Written and Oral Styles of Speech” Perspectives in Religious Studies, vol. 42/1 (2015): 11-27.

32Ibid., p. 11 [emphasis by author].

33Ibid., p. 12.

34Ibid., p. 27.

35See also, NRSV, NIV, CEB, LB, TEV, The Message, NASB, ESV, NJB, Urban C. von Wahlde’s translation in The Gospel and Letters of John, Eerdmans Critical Commentary, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publ., 2010), pp. 561-609.

36Robert J. Miller, ed., The Complete Gospels, (Salem, Oregon: Polebridge Press, 2010; Fourth Edition).

37The Complete Gospels, p. 210 [emphasis mine].

38In her recent study of the historical present in the GJ [“The Narrative Function and Verbal Aspect of the Historical Present in the Fourth Gospel,” The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 51/4 (December, 2008): 703-20], Mavis M. Leung excludes **λέγει** from her study “because the verb’s historical present … has likely become a ‘stereotyped idiom’ that no longer carries rhetorical force.” [p. 704]. But **λέγει** alone occurs 119 times in the GJ; 112 times in what could be identified as historical present! The exclusion of **λέγει** overlooks the extensive use of this present tense verb form throughout the GJ.

39Translations almost consistently introduce the masculine personal pronoun here anticipating the later identification of the Word with Jesus (implied in v. 14 and named in v. 17). I would argue that the emphasis should be on the Word (as life and light) until v. 14. The only exception that I have found is the Scholars Version, but unfortunately it translates the Word as “the divine word and wisdom” introducing an unnecessary theological component to the Word.

40Cf. Sara Winter, “Little Flags: The Scope and Reconstruction of the Signs Gospel.” She uses the phrase “little flags” in reference to the occurrences of perfect tense verb forms in the GJ. She identifies these occurrences as functional markers to the insertion of “glosses on the Signs Gospel” and therefore “little flags marking SG material.” p. 222.

41Egbert Bakker, p. 2—“Speaking and writing, sounds heard and visual signs seen, are different media for using language, but the difference goes deeper than the obvious difference between sound and sight, or hearing and reading. Speaking and writing for us are different activities that call for different strategies in the presentation of a discourse and its comprehension by its recipients.” See also Rockwell, p. 10 [quoting Ong, Orality and Literacy, p. 33, 34]—“Another point Ong makes is that ‘in an oral culture, restriction of words to sound determines not only modes of expression but also thought processes.’”

42R. Alan Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel—A Study in Literary Design (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Robert Kysar, John’s Story of Jesus (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); Gail R. O’Day, Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

43Culpepper, p. 5.

44See especially Culpepper, p. 231—“In **reading** the gospel, one is drawn into a **literary** world created by the **author** from materials drawn from life and history as well as imagination and reflection.” [emphasis mine]; p. 233—“The **original readers** no doubt felt that the **narrator** [implied author] was speaking to them … .” [emphasis mine]; p. 234—“The effect is a profound challenge to accept the **literary world** as representative of reality, to see Jesus as the **narrator** sees him, and to see the world in which we live as a mere appearance concealing and revealing the reality of a higher plane of life which can only be experienced by accepting the perspectives affirmed by the gospel. Our **reading experience**, however, must inevitably be different from that of the gospel’s **intended readers**, for both their world and their assumptions about their world were much closer to the **implied author’s** than ours are.” [emphasis mine]; and p. 237—“When once again we **learn to read the gospel** [as the evangelist assumed it would be, p. 236], we will be able to deal with the relationship between our world and its world ‘above’ rather than the relationship between the evangelist’s world and Jesus’ world, or their world and our world. Then, when the horizons of our world and **the world of the narrative** merge, we will have heard the gospel, the story will have fulfilled its purpose, and the truths to which it points can once again abide in its readers.” [emphasis mine]

45This phrase is from Albert Lord, The Singer of Tales (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

46See Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Volume 2 and The Gospel of John: A Commentary.

47This noetic experience of participation in the reality expressed by oral words is perhaps the basis for the “realized eschatology” so often identified in the GJ.

48My translation; in the Greek text the verb forms are present indicative (μαρτυρεῖ), perfect (κέκραγεν), and present participle (λέγων). The Greek perfect verb form as described in classic NT grammars expresses the sense of past action with continuing results. Some recent grammatical studies from the perspective of “verbal aspect” suggest that the Greek perfect tense verb form may express past, present, even future action and not strictly past action and that its expression of past/present/future action is determined by context. See Madison N. Pierce, Durham University, Abbey House, Palace Green, Durham, DH1 3RS, England

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49The Greek verb form found here is aorist indicative (ἐμαρτύρησεν). In the GJ, the Greek verb μαρτυρέω occurs 17 times in present verb forms, 1 time in imperfect verb form (12:17), 8 times in aorist verb forms (only 3 indicative mood—1:32; 4:44; 13:21), 5 perfect verb forms, and 1 future verb form (15:26). The predominance of present verb forms gives a sense of witness that is currently taking place.

50Both Greek verb forms here are perfect tense.

51Not Gospel as a literary genre; see my paper “The Strange Absence of the ‘Gospel’ in the Gospel of John,” (2015) [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu). Cf. James M. Robinson, “LOGOI SOPHON: On the Gattung of Q” in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, Trajectories Through Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

52An alternative interpretation is to view this language as metaphorical or an expression of mystical religious experience. See my paper, “And the Word Became Flesh”*Cur Verbum Caro*?—A Johannine Metaphysics of the Word,” (2016) [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu).

53This acoustical/harmonic quality of oral words also gives new meaning to the language of “abide in me/in my word” and “oneness”—“I in the Father and the Father in me” (14:11); “The glory that you have given me I have given to them , that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you [the Father] in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and loved them even as you have loved me” (17:22-23).

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