

GENRE AND NARRATIVE COHERENCE IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis embarks upon a thorough investigation into the relationship between genre and interpretation, using the principle of narrative coherence to provide a methodological basis upon which to build. It argues that the attempt to find a single or even simple hybrid genre for Acts is an academic cul-de-sac that is curtailing effective progress, and advocates instead a model of fluid intertextuality that sees the author make use of many different genres. It then goes on to explore these findings in three separate studies, all of which make use of different intertextual and generic frameworks to interpret the text in new ways. The first study makes use of a device seen in Epic and Tragedy, the second makes use of wider systems of characterisation, particularly of divinely elected heroes, and the third looks at the use of comedy in sections of the narrative. Overall, the conclusion of the thesis is that only a change in methodological basis from history and source to narrative and text will allow biblical studies to make substantial progress in the interpretation of the scriptures.

To Anna Callaghan and Father Denis Labartette, because I don't know who I would be now if you hadn't had faith in me then.

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FOREWORD

This thesis brings to fruition a study that began in my very first year of university, during which I read English literature and Theology joint honours. Although in the end I switched to pursue theology alone, it was not before I had developed a pretty serious interest in literary theory, an interest that has never gone away, and has informed my study of the biblical text at every turn.

In many ways, however, an interest as consuming as mine in the theory of literature owes its existence to an even longer standing interest in literature itself. I was fifteen when I read Mark's gospel – my first biblical text; but by this age I already had Shakespeare, Dickens, Homer, and many other great authors to draw upon. I found the Bible so interesting that I read the whole thing. Genesis fascinated me, Paul challenged me, Qoheleth amused me. It was all very edifying until I went to university.

There, I found traditional, accepted interpretations of the Bible that beggared belief. I can honestly say I was amazed and dumbfounded by the Q hypothesis, JEDP, the subjective genitive, and many other broadly-accepted theories by which the biblical text was explained. I knew there was something wrong from the outset, but I had not yet the tools to do anything about it.

Eight years later I am a little better equipped. A mad passion for Romans threw me into a frenzied search for practical and effective methodologies - and I never did quite stop looking. Beginning with the New Critics, structuralism and formalism, moving through the various post-structural methods and finally, ultimately, to Bakhtin, I found the resources I needed to understand what it was I wanted to do. It was only natural that when I began looking at the more narrative texts in the New Testament, that I should apply these tools. Here, they became even more fruitful.

However, the application of literary theory to biblical studies, or rather, the lack of it, has remained an ongoing problem during my time in academia. Many of the biblical texts remain fathomlessly mysterious, while a whole world of resources for their interpretation remains largely unexploited. The few who do make use, either by learning or instinct, of good literary methods, are not heard as often as they should be. This PhD was always about bringing those methods to the fore in a pragmatic and productive way, increasing their appeal and use in the future.

I am acutely aware that a thesis made up of more than fifty percent methodology can be a long and painful read. I wanted the proportion to be less, and experimented with different formats in order to achieve this, but ultimately I concluded that only a comprehensive and searching examination of the genre question was the best way for someone of my particular abilities to facilitate progress on Acts, or for that matter on any biblical text. I offer sincere apologies to readers who find it hard to work through, but also hope that I have managed to keep it interesting enough that those readers will be relatively few in number.

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION: GENRE AND NARRATIVE

1. Introduction

This study is the investigation of what makes Acts Acts. It is about generic expectations, intertexts, narrative frameworks. It is about the way Acts manipulated expectations and emotions to inform and entertain its earliest readers.

Naturally, such a statement only triggers more questions; what do we know about the earliest readers or audiences? Were they a monolithic entity, or would they vary across physical and social space; and if they did, what strategies might appeal to each group? What might their expectations have been, and what did they think of as entertainment?

But the methodological challenges were the greatest. From narrative to genre to historicity, it was apparent from the outset that the platform upon which I wanted to build was not theoretically sound. Most of the mainstream, accepted scholarship on Acts either engaged with literary theory in a way I found unsatisfactory, or worse, did not engage much at all. If I wanted to make serious inroads into reconstructing the earliest responses towards Acts, there was a lot more work to do than I had realised. At the same time, it was apparent that there was an urgent need to do it.

Constructing a methodological framework appropriate to this task required the answering of two big initial questions. The first was to work out how anybody understands any text; the second, how a modern reader understands a modern text. These things being understood, the main question - how an ancient reader understood an ancient text, would be slightly less arduous. One concept above all has been useful – intertextuality. The last four decades or so have seen literary theorists make huge strides as a result of this concept, but biblical studies has not, in my opinion, made enough use of it.

Although the term intertextuality has found its way into biblical studies very successfully,¹ scholars have not generally engaged with it in all its theoretical ramifications. Though there are some notable exceptions,² it seems that its most regular application is to references or strong allusions to the Old Testament in the New, allusions to one part of the New Testament in another, or other, similar ideas. Studies of this sort have no doubt been enhanced by their application of selected literary-critical ideas, but do not really extend beyond the boundaries of traditional historical-criticism. Such ideas are useful and productive, but are not taking full advantage of significant advances in literary theory. Even less productive are those studies (which I shall leave unnamed for the moment) that make uncritical use of literary methods, applying terminology as if it can make an hypothesis stand merely by its presence.

Applied properly, intertextuality as a concept governs the attribution of meaning to the entire reading process.³ The allusions that biblical scholars so frequently and correctly notice are only a small part of its conceptual parameters – much more important is the accumulation of narrative structures that accrue with every single narrative we encounter,

¹Among those to lay claim to the concept in recent years are Dale C. Allison, *The intertextual Jesus: scripture in Q* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2000); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of scripture in the letters of Paul*. (London: Yale University Press, 1989); Christopher A. Beetham, *Echoes of scripture in the letter of Paul to the Colossians* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Kenneth Atkinson, *An intertextual study of the Psalms of Solomon : pseudepigrapha* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001); Kenneth Duncan Litwak, *Echoes of scripture in Luke-Acts: telling the history of God's people intertextually* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005).

²A good overview is provided by Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and biblical scholarship: an introduction* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000). See also L. Juliana M. Claassens, "Biblical Theology as Dialogue: Continuing the Conversation on Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Theology," *JBL* 122, no. 1 (2003): 127-144. More recently, see Roland Boer, ed., *Bakhtin and genre theory in biblical studies* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

³Obviously, this cannot be neatly summarised here – the first half of the present study explores it alongside other ideas, and the second half applies it to various parts of Acts. The best explanation of the concept comes from the horse's mouth; M Bakhtin, *The dialogic imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (London: University of Texas Press, 1981). A shorter but very cogent explanation is provided by Jonathan Culler, "Presupposition and Intertextuality," *MLN* 91, no. 6 (1976): 1380-1396. One might also read Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," in *Desire in language: a semiotic approach to literature and art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora and Alice Jardine (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 64-91, though this is not light work.

and their application to every subsequent narrative we read. If one applies an inappropriate set of intertexts to the narrative in hand they will not interpret it properly – this is of course the same as saying that if we read *Hamlet* as a romance (a relatively small mistake in the scheme of things), it becomes far less intelligible, and we will certainly fail to grasp significant portions of the meaning Shakespeare intended to convey.¹ Why? Because if the audience thinks it is watching a romance it focuses on relations between Hamlet and Ophelia and expects them to be the pivot around which the plot swings; fitting events into that framework means paying less attention – the wrong amount of attention – to the events leading up to Hamlet’s ultimate but doomed revenge on his father’s killer. The audience configures the events wrongly because they have a narrative framework in mind which happens to be incorrect.

Genre dictates expectations: no problem so far. But it is more complex than that. For there *are* elements of romance in *Hamlet*: a metatextual framework that exists within the tragedy and gives it depth. And there are historical stories, supernatural stories, stories about madness, about princes, about Denmark, England, castles, wine, and endless other things. It is not the way that these things behave in the real world that matters, but the way they have behaved in stories told before. It is the complex interplay of all these stories, the expectations they trigger, and the way those expectations are manipulated, that makes *Hamlet* the masterpiece it is – *Hamlet* is from start to finish *intertextual*. Many of these intertexts are so faint that they could not realistically be called “sources,” or connected in any way that implies a mutual genre. But their presence influences anyone watching or reading *Hamlet*.

A sceptic might say that some proponents of intertextuality use it in a sense so attenuated that they probably should not bother, and I think there might be some justice in this.

Intertextuality is more or less infinite, as texts and their links to other texts can be traced

¹ I will discuss intentionality in more thorough detail in “Preliminaries,” 52.

and chased forever, but only some of these connections can be meaningfully recovered and used to assist interpretation; the intertext, says the wise man, should be judged by its fruit. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that the intertextual parameters of any text *are* vast, and that reductionism is a pragmatic decision that enables interpretation rather than a theoretical one that excludes a text on other grounds.

1.1. Outline of the Thesis

Given the unusual number of difficult and complex problems that affect the study of Acts, many of which are simply distractions in the context of this study, I begin the thesis with a “Preliminaries” chapter. This outlines the way I position myself in the academic debate, as well my stance on dating, textual issues, the problem of unity, the “we” passages, sources, and the preface. By establishing a position on these from the outset, I hope to avoid complicating the rest of my thesis by having to tackle them in the midst of the issues I actually want to deal with. I also tackle some terminological issues from literary theory more generally. Chapter 2 is a review of some of the most important or current genre proposals for Acts, illustrating also the methods used to make such proposals, and arguing that the preponderance of competing proposals under the current methodological framework is indicative of a problem. This clears the way to enter into a theoretical discussion of genre and narrative configuration. This section is the methodological meat of the thesis, and is sometimes tougher and chewier than I would like. I assure you I did my best to not overcook it.

Having established a position on the key elements of Acts studies, and a methodological stance that is as clear and purposeful as possible, there are a series of studies on the text of Acts itself, which between them illustrate most of the important aspects of the method. While I regret that these studies, which I like to call “the good bit (you are free to disagree)”,

occupy only half of the thesis, I also know that they would face insuperable opposition if I did not first demonstrate that they are methodologically viable. If anyone were to read these studies expecting to find an affiliation with a single genre, or a fixed position on historical veracity, they would come away entirely confused. The methodology not only allows the studies to steer their way through what is a veritable minefield, but also points scholarship in a direction that might generate more studies along the same lines.

As to the studies themselves, the first shows how a device right at the beginning of the text configures it through to the end, relying purely on narrative logic. I argue that the device (in Acts 1.6) would be detected by any first century reader, but has become less important in modern story-telling and has remained unnoticed by biblical critics unused to the device. I place this study first because its focus on a specific mechanism for narrative construction is, in my opinion, the easiest one to follow and therefore offers the best introduction to the sort of ideas I am advocating in this thesis.

The second study explores the configuration of Paul's apostolic status, and shows how apparent discrepancies in the narrative actually indicate a subtle and intelligent narrative design by the author. This study is similar to the first but in that it traces the construction of the narrative, but focuses on smaller clues spread over a larger number of verses.

The third and final study explores some elements of comedy in Acts, in particular the Miletus speech. The application of intertextual frames to read the text makes it clear that the Miletus speech has more to say for itself than has often been assumed. This study takes a rather different tack to the previous two in that it looks at the construction of narrative on the micro-level of just one or two passages, and explores the ways in which Luke builds specific scenes with particular intentions. Both macro and micro-levels of narrative construction need to be better understood if we are to really get to grips with Acts (or any

ancient text); while I am aware that tackling both in one thesis is possibly too ambitious, I also feel that the same methodology works in principle for both.

The studies remain some distance ahead of us, however; in this introduction I want to survey some of the underlying problems that are addressed in the first half of the thesis. This is because the issues addressed there are taken separately for reasons of clarity and brevity, but are actually highly interrelated. By discussing them briefly here, I aim to outline the problems from a more holistic perspective. I hope this will help the reader to follow the various strands as they are coming together.

1.2. Historicity, Fiction and the Genre of Acts

Perhaps the most immediate problem in scholarship on Acts is the question of its historicity, which underlies the majority of debates on its genre. In a 2006 article, Thomas E. Philips makes a helpful statement in his review of the genre question:

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, issues of historical accuracy and reliability dominated Acts scholarship. As early as the turn of the twentieth century, surveys of scholarship demonstrated that Acts scholarship was clearly divided into two traditions, a conservative (largely British) tradition which had great confidence in the historicity of Acts and a less conservative (largely German) tradition which had very little confidence in the historicity of Acts. Several subsequent surveys of scholarship have demonstrated that the same division continues within Acts scholarship to the present time.¹

Philips is right to note this polarisation between those who wish to place Acts in the genre of Hellenistic historiography in the mould of Thucydides and Polybius, and those who want to

¹ Thomas E. Philips, "The Genre of Acts: Moving Towards a Consensus?," *CBR* 4, no. 3 (2006): 365.

align Acts with a variety of non- or semi- historical genres. The number of scholars who support this classification is impressive, and includes almost all of the great scholars of the last century.¹ Nonetheless, dissenting voices have appeared in the last few decades, and their influence has been significant.² The sustained pressure on the consensus of historicity is perhaps best seen in the conclusion to Philips' article on the state of the question, which concludes on this note:

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- ¹ Charles Kingsley Barrett, *Luke the historian in recent study*, ed. Arthur S. Peake (London: Epworth, 1961); Conzelmann, *Acts*; Christoph Heil, "Arius Didymus and Luke-Acts," *NovT* 42, no. 4 (2000): 358-393; J. Rendel Harris, "Did Judas Really Commit Suicide?," *AJT* 4, no. 3 (1900): 490-513; Duane Frederik Watson, "Epideictic Rhetoric of Farewell: Paul's speech to the Ephesian Elders," in *Persuasive artistry: studies in New Testament rhetoric in honor of George A. Kennedy*, ed. Duane Frederick Watson (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and self-definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts, and apologetic historiography* (NovTSup64; Leiden: Brill, 1992); Philip Schaff, *History of the apostolic church with a general introduction to Church history* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1854); Étienne Trocmé, *Le livre des Actes et l'histoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957); Clare K. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the rhetoric of history: an investigation of early Christian historiography* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); W.C. van Unnik, "Luke's Second Book and the Rules of Hellenistic Historiography," in *Les Actes des Apôtres: traditions, rédaction, théologie*, ed. Jacob Kremer, Journées bibliques de Louvain (28th: 1977) (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979), look up on 92 of auguries; David L. Balch, "METABOLH POLITEWN -Jesus as Founder of the Church in Luke-Acts: Form and Function," in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, ed. Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd C. Penner, Symposium (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 139-188; Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: a sociological approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Stanley E. Porter, *Paul: Jew, Greek and Roman* (Brill, 2009); Adolf von Harnack, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. John Richard Wilkinson (London: Williams and Norgate, 1909); Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: a socio-rhetorical commentary* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998); Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971); Colin J. Hemer, *The book of Acts in the setting of Hellenistic history*, ed. Conrad H. Gempf (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990); Henry Joel Cadbury, *The making of Luke-Acts* (London: Macmillan, 1927).
- ² Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with delight: the literary genre of the Acts of the apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2009); Loveday Alexander, *Acts in its ancient literary context*, ed. John M. G. Barclay (London: T & T Clark, 2005); Loveday Alexander, "The Preface to Acts and the Historians," in *History, literature and society in the book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 73-103; Loveday Alexander, *The preface to Luke's Gospel: literary convention and social context in Luke 1, 1-4 and Acts 1, 1* (SNTSMS 78; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Mikeal Carl Parsons, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008); Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2000); Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *Does the New Testament imitate Homer? Four cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

Now, however, the question of Acts' genre has come full circle and is again raising the question of historicity. Is Acts history or fiction? In the eyes of most scholars, it is history—but not the kind of history that precludes fiction. As Pervo has suggested, Acts is probably both fiction and history at the same time. If we can adapt MacDonald's term, perhaps we should say that Acts is historical mythomachia.¹

The possibility raised here is that Acts blends fictional and historical modes and is a blend of several genres: this invites questions of the whole idea of classification. A mixed designation that incorporates both history and fiction seems to satisfy neither group, and even were such a mixed genre to achieve the status of consensus there is no methodological framework to make use of such a conclusion. So what is there to gain from pursuing the question of genre?

1.3. The Problem of Classification

The method by which scholars typically classify Acts involves delineating the features of a particular genre, demonstrating that Acts can also be described along such lines, and the subsequent placement of the work within said genre.² While this method is at least systematic, it leaves very little room for negotiation. For one thing, it requires a consensus that may never come; there are many competing claims and most of them have too much merit to be dismissed entirely. Even if a consensus *could* be reached, it would have to be one that prioritised one genre over all the others (or perhaps it might involve two or even three genres), minimizing potentially useful parallels and actually hindering the investigation. Alternatively, scholars concede that there are no appropriate criteria by which to decide the "correct" genre from the range of options, and give in to their perplexity, leaving any

¹ Philips, "The Genre of Acts," 385.

² Similar points are made by Christopher N. Mount, *Pauline Christianity: Luke-Acts and the legacy of Paul* (NovTSup 104; Boston: Brill, 2002), 132-133.

potential gains from genre theory unexplored. Either way, the methodology of cataloguing features and slotting a text into the pigeonhole whose features it most shares falls down whenever the features do not fit as neatly as we would like.

Biblical scholars should not berate themselves too much for this methodological shortfall, however: the same problem has long troubled genre theorists. As recently as 2003 Hayden White is able to state: "no one has ever produced a compelling theory of genre in spite of the millennial effort to do so."¹ At about the same time, Mark Salber Phillips claims that the conception of genres as a problem of taxonomy and classification is one that modern literary scholarship is moving beyond:

Traditionally, of course, genres were thought of as fixed and autonomous "kinds," and much of the effort of genre theory went into sorting these out into a variety of elaborate taxonomies – with predictably unsatisfactory results. Recent theories, however, have given less emphasis to classificatory rules and more to communicative possibilities. "Some have concluded," writes Alistair Fowler, "that genre theory, being unhelpful in classification, is valueless. But in reality genre is much less of a pigeonhole than a pigeon, and genre theory has a different use altogether, being concerned with communication and interpretation." (KL 37)²

While secular literary theory has struggled to move beyond the traditional model of genre classification, biblical scholars have only just begun to question it at all. Richard Burrige's attempt to classify the gospels as biography remains one of the most impressive attempts by

¹ Hayden White, "Anomalies of Genre: The Utility of Theory and History for the Study of Literary Genres," *NLH* 34, no. 3 (2003): 597-598. See also Mary Depew, "Iambeion kaleitai nun: Genre, Occasion, and Imitation in Callimachus, fr. 191 and 203Pf.," *TAPA* 122 (1992): 313.

² Mark Salber Phillips, "Histories, Micro- and Literary: Problems of Genre and Distance," *NLH* 34, no. 2 (2003): 412; Alistair Fowler, *Kinds of literature: an introduction to the theory of genres and modes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 37.

a biblical scholar to embrace genre theory,¹ but ultimately resorts to being a nuanced and complex system of classification – precisely the sort of “elaborate taxonomy” that Philips thinks unhelpful. The necessary leap from classification to an understanding of how genre enables communication is a big one, and it is not surprising that biblical scholars have largely failed to make it. Yet in my opinion, without this leap the question of genre is merely an academic cul-de-sac lacking any potential for improving our understanding of the text. The act of classification needs to be connected in a measurable way to the act of communication.²

1.4. The Rational of Classifying

As will be seen in chapter 2, by far the most common classification for Acts is as some sort of Hellenistic historiography. This puts Luke in the company of Polybius, Tacitus and Josephus, all of whose works appear at first sight to be very different to Acts. Typically, scholars that propose a historical genre state a limited number of shared criteria, including the preface, content, truth-claims, and “we” passages.³ As is seen in the next chapter, the preface and “we” passages are seriously contended, and it is difficult to use them as evidence for the investigation, which is not huge cause for optimism about historical accuracy – Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*, Philostratus’ *Stories of Apollonius of Tyana*, or even Lucian’s *The Passing of Peregrinus* could all be said to make truth-claims and contain some “true” content, and yet no modern scholar would simply assert their veracity. Of course, the act of classification is never entirely objective, and for many scholars there is an underlying desire to “prove” the historical value of Acts that is absent from analysis of other ancient texts. Such a desire

¹ Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels?: a comparison with Graeco-Roman biography*, Society for NTS (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

² It is difficult to prove a negative, and my argument – that the current binary approach is unhelpful for interpretation, can only be proved by the lack of useful research done on account of it. I hope that by the end of the first half of this thesis the reader will be in a position to understand why I feel such an opinion is justified.

³ Perhaps the best and most comprehensive attempt is by Hemer, *The book of Acts in the setting of Hellenistic history*.

combines with an artificially clear demarcation between history and fiction to force scholars down a binary route; forced to choose one or the other, many scholars are (in my opinion quite justifiably) reluctant to classify Acts as fiction.

Nonetheless, if considering Acts a fiction is a leap too far, a leap in the direction of Hellenistic historiography is a leap too far the other way. A binary opposition between the two is unhelpful and unproductive, either for classification, where neither designation has convinced, or in interpretation, where both approaches bear fruit, as we will see in the following chapters.

2. Preliminaries

This short chapter aims to simplify matters later in the thesis explaining where I locate myself in scholarship, and by providing a kind of glossary of key terms and issues. The first half covers key issues in the study of Acts, and extends beyond merely describing them and into the author's stance on each subject. The second half looks at key terms of literary theory that the author uses throughout the project, together with how they should be used in this study.

2.1. Introduction: my location in the debate

It is important to make clear from the outset that I am not a biblical-literary critic: I am a historical critic with a literary toolbox. Useful and important as I consider literary criticism of the Bible to be, this thesis has little to do with feminist, masculinist, queer, post-colonial, Marxist, or any other theory of this sort. These are actually bodies of ideological theory that can be applied to literature in order to critique it, and are not of themselves theories about how literature operates in a technical sense. The Formalists and New Critics are in a sense my predecessors, but my own work is far removed from them, depending as it does heavily on Bakhtin's work, which was to a large extent conceived as a critique of Russian Formalism.¹ Closer still to my own theoretical approach are those scholars who have attempted to understand narrative as a distinctive theoretical entity, such as Wayne Booth² and Gerard Genette,³ but narrative theory is moving beyond these pioneers, and my work is

¹ For a brief overview of Bakhtin's role in the development of narrative theory see Brian McHale, "Ghosts and Monsters: On the (Im)Possibility of Narrating the History of Narrative Theory", in *A companion to narrative theory*, eds. James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2005), 60-73. For a recent explanation (defence?) of the Formal/New Critical methods in Biblical Studies, see James Resseguie, "Formal/New Critical Interpretation", in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (London: Routledge, 2007), 114-115.

² Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (London: Penguin, 1991).

³ Gerard Genette, *Narrative discourse: an essay in method* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980).

no exception.¹ My work is really a development of Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical work, which was probably the single most effective critique of Russian Formalism, and by proxy, New Criticism;² he is the most influential literary theorist of the modern age (an English translation only became available in 1981). While Bakhtin does not deal with genre classification in a sustained and cogent way, it is possible to work from his theory of the novel to a theory of genre without great difficulty – and that is really how I see my own methodology. Nonetheless, the work of genre theorists was also required in order for me to put this method together, including Alastair Fowler, Ireneusz Opacki and Jacques Derrida. All of these scholars do have ideological agendas, as any student of Bakhtin or Derrida will tell you, but it is their work on the way narratives function both individually and in dialogue with each other that is important for this thesis. There are other bodies of theory too, of course, such as that which deals with the boundary between history and fiction,³ or with the cognitive process;⁴ everything that is capable of furthering our ability to understand what the author was attempting to communicate to his intended audience. In this I am joining a significant body of mainstream scholarship: the recent books *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan narrative and Greco-Roman discourse* and *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel*, are both collections of essays attempting to establish the context of Acts in its Graeco-Roman and Jewish contexts, and much of Loveday Alexander's work could be considered as an attempt to establish how the narrative would have been understood by its ancient readers. The only real difference between myself and these scholars is that I explicitly tackle the theory in a way that is as comprehensive as possible. To my knowledge the only other biblical scholar

¹ One theorist who appears to have finally moved beyond the pioneering but ultimately limited models established by these influential figures is Richard Walsh. See for example: *The rhetoric of fictionality: narrative theory and the idea of fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), 82-85.

² See for example, David Herman, "Histories of Narrative Theory (I): A Genealogy of Early Developments", in *A companion to narrative theory*, eds. James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2005), 24.

³ Walsh, *Rhetoric of fictionality*, 9-30.

⁴ See for example, Carol A. Newsom, "Spying Out the Land: A Report from Genology," in *Bakhtin and genre theory in biblical studies*, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 19-30.

that has attempted this in the field of genre is Richard Burridge.¹ I have a lot of respect for Burridge's work, which is bold and purposeful, but in my opinion it is not adequate to the needs of biblical scholarship, as I hope my dialogue with it will demonstrate.² What I hope to construct in this thesis is a complex model that demonstrates something of how ancient readers interacted with genre to read the book of Acts, and to show how that might help us as modern critics trying to interpret the same text.

2.2. Unity with Luke's Gospel

The unity of Luke-Acts has been a foundational aspect of the study of both books since Cadbury published *The Making of Luke-Acts* in 1927.³ The term "Unity of Luke-Acts", and particularly the hyphenated name "Luke-Acts", covers a variety of positions, but basically presupposes that Luke's Gospel and the book of Acts are in some sense two parts of one unified work. The reasons that his hypothesis has caught on quite so well are obvious enough – it does make a lot of sense. One author, one continuous story, one theology (for the most part), and a huge number of parallels between the two texts combine to make it reasonable to consider the interpretation of one book dependent and interrelated to the interpretation of the other. Robert Tannehill's two volume commentary, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*⁴ attempts to interpret the entire two volume story as a coherent whole, and has enjoyed such success that it is now something of a standard text in Acts scholarship. On the

¹ Burridge, *What are the Gospels?* I am also aware that Sean A. Adams may publish a monograph developing Burridge's ideas in the immediate future.

² See pages 40-41 and 91-92 of this thesis.

³ Cadbury, *The making of Luke-Acts*.

⁴ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume One: Luke* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1990); Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume Two: The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1994).

whole, it is hard to disagree with the conclusion of Micheal Bird's recent literature view, which concluded that the majority position is definitely one of unity.¹

The unity of Luke's gospel with the book of Acts is a presumption that goes beyond authorial unity (though there are still a few scholars who doubt this)² to an understanding of the two-volume work as one continuous narrative. At the most emphatic end of the spectrum, it is assumed that the two works were divided simply because the length of a scroll made it inconvenient to do otherwise, and that the second ascension scene that opens Acts was added later in the history of transmission.³ At the suspicious end it is considered that despite some enlightening parallels they are essentially separate narratives.⁴ In between these poles are a range of opinions that vary from Gregory Sterling's hypothesis that Luke had both volumes in mind from the outset but distributed them as separate entities,⁵ to Darryl D. Palmer and C.J. Hemer's insistence on a difference "in type, even when we grant their essential unity and continuity,"⁶ to Martin Dibelius' reservations about considering the two works as unified at all.⁷

Having said all this, there are significant problems with the assumption of unity. Parsons and Pervo's monograph, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke-Acts*, points out a series of difficulties. In generic terms, it is not easy to reconcile Luke and Acts within one genre (this will be

¹ Michael F. Bird, "The Unity of Luke-Acts in Recent Discussion," *JSNT* 29, no. 4 (2007): 426.

² See for example, A.W. Argyle, "The Greek of Luke and Acts," *NTS* 20 (1973): 441-445. One recent scholar to argue this point is Patricia Walters, *The assumed authorial unity of Luke and Acts: a reassessment of the evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). A survey of past hypotheses can be found in I. Howard Marshall, "Acts and the 'Former Treatise'," in *The book of Acts in its ancient literary setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1993), 165-166.

³ Bonz, *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic*, 152-153.

⁴ F. Scott Spencer, "Acts and Modern Literary Approaches," in *The book of Acts in its ancient literary setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1993), 410-411; Mikeal Carl Parsons and Richard I. Pervo, *Rethinking the unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁵ Sterling, *Historiography and Self-definition*, 336.

⁶ Darryl W. Palmer, "Acts and the Historical Monograph," *Tynbul* 43, no. 2 (1992): 374; Hemer, *The book of Acts in the setting of Hellenistic history*, 33.

⁷ Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 2.

discussed below), in narrative terms, both volumes appear to have distinct beginnings, middles, and endings, and in theological terms, there are different emphases across the two works.¹

Advocates of all positions run into problems. Aune, advocating generic unity, can no longer group Luke among the other Gospels. Tannehill also advocates unity, but finds he must use a different style of commentary for his volume on each of the two books. Those who oppose unity must account for the structural parallels analysed by Charles Talbert, and the prospective unity noted by Loveday Alexander.²

Important general considerations are worth noting. F. Scott Spencer does not deny unifying elements, but argues that each work can stand as a complete narrative, and that to treat them as one work is to lose some of the value of each.³ Critics of unity have made an argument from reception history – Luke and Acts have never been placed alongside one another in any known canon of the New Testament;⁴ this means that throughout history the books have rarely been read as one continuous narrative. Luke Timothy Johnson has argued against the validity of such evidence,⁵ while Markus Bockmuehl has weighed in for the other side.⁶

Without going over the entire argument, one must admit that both sides have a point. The unity of Luke-Acts may be widely held, and *prima facie* has much to commend it; but the

¹ Mikeal Carl Parsons and Richard I. Pervo, *Rethinking the unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1993).

² Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts*, (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974); Loveday Alexander, *Acts in its Ancient Literary Context*, 207-229.

³ F. Scott Spencer, *Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 15.

⁴ Andrew Gregory, "The Reception of Luke and Acts and the Unity of Luke-Acts," *JSNT* 29, no. 4 (2007): 459-472; C. Kavin Rowe, "History, Hermeneutics and the Unity of Luke-Acts," *JSNT* 28, no. 2 (2005): 131-157; Markus Bockmuehl, "Why not Let Acts Be Acts? In Conversation with C. Kavin Rowe," *JSNT* 28, no. 2 (2005): 163-166; C. Kavin Rowe, "Literary Unity and Reception History: Reading Luke-Acts as Luke and Acts," *JSNT* 29, no. 4 (2007): 449-457.

⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, "Literary Criticism of Luke-Acts: Is Reception-History Pertinent?," *JSNT* 28, no. 2 (2005): 159-162.

⁶ Bockmuehl, "Why not Let Acts Be Acts?"

questions highlighted above, about the genre and narrative structure of the supposed double entity, are significant, and it would be unwise to ignore them.

One often notes that refutations of these concerns are not particularly attentive to literary theory. One might look at Bonz, who explains the causes for all the differences between the two texts as if by doing so the differences are nullified.¹ For example, she argues that differences in style are attributed to Luke's need to incorporate sources in his Gospel but not in Acts:² true, perhaps, but the difference remains, and one wonders whether a reader would make such conscious allowances for an author's difficulties with the amalgamation of his materials.

For another example one might turn also to Joel B. Green. He argues that Luke and Acts constitute a single narrative cycle in which Acts forms the *realization* element of a cycle that moves from *possibility* to *realization* to *result*. The latter half of Acts tackles this *result* more specifically, which is the increased "Jewish antagonism to the Christian movement."³ Such a framework forces Acts into a smaller role than it wants to fulfil, as I demonstrate in the first two of the studies. Robert C. Tannehill resolves the problem of narrative unity by describing "narrative purpose" in terms that might be better described as "theological purpose."⁴ His terminology also confuses this "purpose" with "story" and "plot", making three very distinct terms oddly synonomous.⁵

¹ Bonz, *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic*, 12, footnote 50.

² Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 12, footnote 50.

³ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The new international commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan. ; Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 7-8.

⁴ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Volume 1*, 1-2. He reiterates this position in Robert C. Tannehill, "The Story of Israel within the Lukan Narrative," in *Jesus and the heritage of Israel: Luke's narrative claim upon Israel's legacy*, ed. David P. Moessner (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999), 339.

⁵ There was considerable debate about the suitability of these terms, particularly from a deconstructionist perspective. See for example: Jacques Derrida, "Living on - Border Lines," in *Deconstruction and criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (London (etc.): Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 94; Jonathan D. Culler, *The pursuit of signs: semiotics, literature, deconstruction* (London: Routledge &

It is important to understand what is at stake in the issue of unity. If Luke and Acts are one book separated for some reason but otherwise a single work,¹ the end of the entire work is Paul in Rome, and Jesus' resurrection and ascension belong in the middle. If this is the case, one needs to read the two books together to make sense of the whole, and interpretation needs to proceed from this basis. Michael F. Bird argues that the decision "regarding the unity or disunity of Luke and Acts invariably affects how Luke's overarching literary and theological purposes are understood,"² and this in turn affects New Testament theology more widely, especially Gospel studies.

If the two books are distinct entities, however, treating them as one book distorts the narrative flow of each, making both the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts the mid-point in a larger narrative scheme. Such a radical procedure should not be embarked upon lightly.³ Having said that, the only possible way to decide the question of unity is to continue to explore the texts both as independent units and as a single entity.

The bigger concern is that the whole unity versus separate entities debate might be something of a cul-de-sac. In practice, neither pole is likely to be correct. If Luke-Acts is one volume entire, it would not be possible to read them as separate entities, but canonical history and the modern reading habits of Christians suggests that taking them separately works. Assuming, then, that they can be read as distinct entities, Acts is at least a sequel to the gospel that relies heavily on characters and religious ideologies put forward in the "first word", and which alludes to and draws parallels with its narrative. Sterling's conception of Luke creating the frame for the overall work, completing the Gospel, and distributing it while he works on Acts, has Luke writing two distinct works that have each other fully in mind

Kegan Paul, 1981), 170-172; Jerome S. Bruner, *Actual minds, possible worlds* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1986), 17-21.

¹As a matter of "physical expediency"; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 8.

² Bird, "Unity in Recent Discussion," 441.

³ In this I am in significant agreement with Spencer, *Acts*, 15.

from the outset.¹ While I am unwilling to speculate on historical circumstances in this way, I think Sterling offers an interesting compromise here, which allows for a strong intentional unity of significant interpretative value while preserving the integrity of the two individual narratives.

One common but difficult assumption is that the demonstration of unity at some locations in the narrative is proof of unity at all points. Loveday Alexander, who is certainly one of the very finest scholars on Acts, falls down here. Having made a strong case for prospective unity dictating at least one major aspect of Acts, she admits to having been “converted to unity”.² The presupposition underlying her conclusion is that a clear answer exists, and merely lacks evidence; it is my opinion that such a supposition is fundamentally erroneous: no clear position exists.

The basic structures of a number of stories might well exist in any author’s mind as he composes one of them, and if those stories are related, there is every reason for the author to have some sort of macrostructure, and even some elements of microstructure, in place before he starts writing at all. Such a literary conception might be entirely arbitrary, so that at one point there might be an absolutely concrete idea of how the two works are connected, while at another there is only a vague retrospective concern for unifying the two. The extent to which Luke had Acts in mind when he began his gospel is impossible to ascertain: strong points of contact coexist with discrepancies, problems, differences in style. Though the unity of the books is often very strong, if they were originally one work and the dividing factor merely the size of a scroll, Luke has inadvertently found for his stopping point a scene that looks rather like a narrative climax. The second ascension scene (unless it can be proven as an interpolation – on which point see chapter 5) does not exactly recapitulate the first, and it also looks suspiciously like Luke has changed style at this “midpoint” to such

¹ Sterling, *Historiography and Self-definition*, 331-339.

² Alexander, *Acts in its ancient literary context*, 223.

an extent that scholars would like to place the first half in one genre category and the second in another. Absolute ideas about unity, whether for or against, may hamper interpretation. This is roughly what Bird concludes, before asking the question at the heart of the matter:

Scholars need to be conscious of the fact that many of the purposes proposed for Luke–Acts are contingent on a prior assumption of literary and theological unity. If that assumption is either stripped away or undermined, then the apparent purpose or thematic cohesion of Luke–Acts becomes open to question (cf. Rowe 2005: 147–48). Likewise, to argue that the Gospel and Acts were composed for two completely different reasons can become equally artificial if it can be effectively shown that the volumes do exhibit an intentional form of unity on some horizon or other. This creates a methodological conundrum as to whether or not one should start with an affirmation of unity and then pursue the purpose of Luke–Acts, or pursue the purpose(s) of Luke and Acts without any prior commitment to unity.¹

Bird’s methodological conundrum is serious enough to dictate my approach: any presupposition about the relationship of the two volumes is likely to hinder than help. Positing interpolations to account for the second ascension scene is one of many ways in which an assumption of unity might prove problematic, and ignoring the parallels that run across Luke–Acts, working themselves out most fully in Paul’s and Jesus’ parallel journeys and trials, would serve scholarship no better.

¹ Bird, “Unity in Recent Discussion,” 441.

In this thesis I assume that the two narratives are distinct entities with several types of unity between them. Such a position simply accepts that it is impossible to know in advance whether a given passage is better interpreted as part of Luke-Acts or simply Acts. However, this thesis is about Acts rather than Luke-Acts, so reference to the Gospel comes only when strictly necessary.

2.3. Preface

The preface to Acts has long been considered key to several other important issues, ensuring hotly contested debate on the topic. In essence, however, this debate can be boiled down to two questions:

1. Does the preface to Luke's Gospel cover Luke-Acts, or just Luke?
2. Is the preface a genre-indicator?

These are the essential questions and are obviously pertinent to the present study.

Addressing them, however, is difficult. The questions are not separable in any practical sense, because as has been seen above, unity and genre are themselves intertwined. What is more, if the preface to Luke's Gospel is taken as applying to Acts, the available data from which to establish what Luke has explicitly stated in regard to his purpose and historical credentials is significantly increased. The question is not as to whether the Acts preface refers back to the Gospel; that much is undisputed: "Τὸν μὲν πρῶτον λόγον ἐποιήσαμην περὶ πάντων, ὃ Θεόφιλε, ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν" (Acts 1.1), establishes the retrospective connection firmly. The difficulty lies in establishing whether Luke's Gospel refers *forward* to Acts. Such prospective unity at such an early stage in the composition of the Gospel would firmly connect the two works and allow key historiographical terms from the Lukan preface to be applied also to the Acts narrative. These include: ἀνατάσσομαι (I

arrange in order), αὐτόπτης (eyewitness), ἀκριβῶς (accurately/truthfully) and καθεξῆς (successively/point by point). Obviously, given the desire to establish the veracity of the biblical text, these are important terms.¹

The arguments are long and complex, made only more difficult by these problems regarding the prologue in Luke's Gospel.² Luckily, they can be summarised with extreme brevity: we cannot be certain if Luke intends to cover Acts with the Gospel preface. Loveday Alexander is quite correct when she says: "These verses contain no explicit indication that a second volume is in sight: it is only with hindsight, after reaching the beginning of Acts, that the reader is encouraged to explore the connection."³ The reader of Acts is supposed to be able to refer back to Luke's Gospel, but that Gospel preface may not have been written with Acts in mind. Thus, while it is worth bearing the Gospel itself in mind when interpreting Acts, it goes beyond the evidence to use the Gospel preface as covering Acts. For this reason the Acts preface is the only one that will be applied to Acts in this thesis:

Τὸν μὲν πρῶτον λόγον ἐποίησάμην περὶ πάντων, ὦ Θεόφιλε, ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν,² ἄχρι ἧς ἡμέρας ἐντειλάμενος τοῖς ἀποστόλοις διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου οὐς ἐξελέξατο ἀνελήμφθη.³ οἷς καὶ παρέστησεν ἑαυτὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τὸ παθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις, δι' ἡμερῶν τεσσαράκοντα ὀπτανόμενος αὐτοῖς καὶ λέγων τὰ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ.⁴ καὶ συναλιζόμενος παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων μὴ χωρίζεσθαι ἀλλὰ περιμένειν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πατρὸς ἣν ἠκούσατέ μου (Acts 1.1-4)

¹ One suspects that the importance for conservative scholars of applying these terms to Acts is what makes Porter rather uncritically attack Pervo for minimizing the "historical preface" of Acts, when clearly, the truth-claims made are all in Luke's Gospel. See Porter, *The Paul of Acts*, 16.

² A wide-ranging recent discussion can be found in David P. Moessner, *Jesus and the heritage of Israel: Luke's narrative claim upon Israel's legacy* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999), 9-126.

³ Alexander, "Preface to Acts," 77.

It is not abundantly clear where the preface ends, but certainly no later than the middle of verse 4, where Jesus' speech appears to shift from reported to direct. Thus the properties of the Acts prologue are, according to Alexander, the use of the authorial first person, a dedication, and a brief recapitulation of the previous volume. According to her assessment there are no prefaces in any other extant text that look like it – if it was once indicative of a genre, there is no longer any way to know which one. However, Alexander concludes: “the preface to Acts, taken on its own, does not set up expectations for the informed reader that the text which follows belongs to the genre “Hellenistic Historiography.”¹ Though the preface is still put forward by some as evidence of historicity, her work has never been seriously challenged.

Positively then, what *can* be said about the preface? In the introduction to the second part of this thesis the configuration of the preface into the first chapter of Acts is considered in more detail. At this stage, there is only a little to be gleaned from it – however, that little is actually quite important. The preface, in my opinion, may not make a generic claim, but it does make truth-claims of a real and serious sort, and this needs to be respected if Acts is to be understood (though even Richard Pervo, whose classification of Acts diverges more than any other from the consensus of historiography, would not dispute its application to history in some sense). At the outset of the narrative, Luke claims that Jesus' resurrection and subsequent appearances are historical facts: “παρέστησεν ἑαυτὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τὸ παθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις.” There is no sign of irony or fiction here, and whether or not these truth-claims are genre-bound they do help to define the expectations of the reader. Samuel Byrskog, discussing the “we” passages, argues that scholars who focus on narrative and literary elements of Acts:

¹ Alexander, “Preface to Acts,” 100.

fail to appreciate that the literary and narrative rhetoric is essentially persuasive precisely as a rhetoric that makes visible its diachronic elements, as the author seems to indicate in the prologue of the Gospel.¹

This is a valuable point, and could be applied equally to the Acts preface. Whether such claims are empty rhetoric or pious testimony is a different matter of course, but from the perspective of authorial intentionality, a relationship to real-world events is integral to the communicative strategy and therefore essential to the proper interpretation of Acts.²

2.4. "We" Passages

The infamous passages of Acts in which the narration shifts from third person singular to first person plural occur in approximately 12% of the Acts narrative. Scholars dispute where they begin and end, creating more or fewer passages of smaller or greater size, but all locate them as occurring somewhere within 16.10-17; 20.5-21.18 and 27.1-28.16.³ The most conservative hypotheses suggest that they are reports from an eyewitness, most likely Luke the beloved physician of Col 4.14, 2 Tim 4.11 and Phm 1.24,⁴ while at the other end of the spectrum scholars suppose that it is a literary device familiar to sailing narratives and most

¹ Samuel Byrskog, "History or Story in Acts - a Middle Way? The 'We' Passages, Historical Intertexture, and Oral History," in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, ed. Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd C. Penner, Symposium (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 260.

² This is discussed at some length by Matthew L. Skinner, *Locating Paul: places of custody as narrative settings in Acts 21-28, 10-18* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). See also Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 10.

³ William Sanger Campbell, "The Narrator as 'He,' 'Me,' and 'We': Grammatical Person in Ancient Histories and in the Acts of the Apostles," *JBL* 129, no. 2, (2010): 385; Stanley E. Porter, *The Paul of Acts: essays in literary criticism, rhetoric, and theology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 28-33.

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: the Greek text* (London: Tyndale Press, 1952), 2-6; Charles Kingsley Barrett, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), xxvii-xxx.

visible in the Epic.¹ William Sanger Campbell has recently divided the proposals made by scholars to account for the passages into four categories.

1. The author used the first person because he was an eyewitness to those events.(author-as-eyewitness)
2. The author used the first person because his source was an eyewitness to those events. (source-as-eyewitness)
3. The author used the first person because he wished to create the impression that either he or a source was present at those events. (fictional eye witness)
4. The author used the first person because literary convention demanded he do so (conventional eyewitness).²

Although the first two options are by far the most popular, they present certain difficulties that have proved intractable. These include the contradiction between the author's withholding his identity for most of the narrative only to reveal it here, and the lack of clear entrance onto, or exit from, the relevant passages, by any character who might conceivably be the narrator. Campbell has shown that neither Thucydides, Polybius or Josephus use the first person in the same way or with the same effect, and this casts doubt on the idea that Luke's use of the first person equates to some kind of historical veracity.³As Susan Marie Praeder argues:

¹ There are a range of hypotheses supporting a non-historical/fictional "We."Eckhard Plümacher, "Wirklichkeitserfahrung und Geschichtsschreibung bei Lukas. Erwägungen zu den Wir-Stücken der Apostelgeschichte," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 68, no. 1/2 (1977): 2-22, is quite close to Robbins; Bruno Bauer, *Die Apostelgeschichte: eine Ausgleichung des Paulinismus und des Judenthums innerhalb der christlichen Kirche*. (Berlin: Hempel, 1850), thinks Luke invented most of the content.

² William Sanger Campbell, "The Narrator as 'He,' 'Me,' and 'We': Grammatical Person in Ancient Histories and in the Acts of the Apostles," 386.

³ Campbell, "'He,' 'Me,' and 'We'."

First person comments are not the same as first person narration. First person commentary is the role of ancient historians at the time of narration, the "I" or "we" who evaluate sources, inform readers of this or that point, state personal opinions, and the like. First person narration refers to the roles of ancient historians as prior participants in the narrated events. First person comments prepare for the sometimes sudden introduction of ancient historians as first person singular and plural participants. In cases of third person participation, first person comments distinguish authorial observations at the time of narration from prior activities and experiences of the authors-to-be. In Acts there is no preparation for the sudden introduction of the first person plural participants. The only first person singular and plural comments are in the prologues in Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1. These comments come too seldom and too soon in Luke-Acts to prepare for the first person passages.¹ The author of Acts is not identified as a prior third person participant, and there are no authorial observations outside the prologues.¹

Her point is that there are none of the normal conventions of Hellenistic historiography present here to allow the reader to make sense of the passages from the norms of that genre. However, if the two historical options have proven unsatisfactory, the rhetorical options have fared little better. Vernon K. Robbins, the main proponent of the rhetorical approach, fails to find convincing parallels in contemporary literature,² which makes the category of "conventional eyewitness unlikely. "Fictional eyewitness" is either poor historical rhetoric or a variant of "conventional eyewitness", and in either case works no better than the other options.

¹ Susan Marie Praeder, "The Problem of First Person Narration in Acts," *NovT* 29 (1987): 208-209.

² Vernon K. Robbins, "By Land and By Sea: The We-Passages and Ancient Sea Voyages," in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 215-242.

If Luke the physician, or indeed anybody, was in attendance for the events covered by the “we” passages, the innocuous nature of this narrator’s entry and exit do very little to explain the logistics of this, sometimes giving the impression that somebody was present one moment and absent the next. The same problem exists if this is a rhetorical device – one would still expect an attempt at veracity to account for this problem, and parallels from clearly fictional accounts (such as those cited by Robbins) clearly demarcate in a way that Acts does not.¹

It is possible that the narrator made use of a source but integrated it poorly into his story. It would be odd, however, to assume that Luke, whose style is consistent and artful for much of his two narratives, would fail to properly integrate one source at several points, while assimilating other sources so well that they are undetectable.² Samuel Byrskog observes that whether historically accurate or not, the sort of information typically contained within the “we” passages adds realism to the narrative, “strengthens the diachronic dimension in the story and presents a conceptual bridge between the *now* of the narrator and the *then* of Paul.”³ This presents the possibility that the very arbitrariness of the “we” sections is rhetorically functional and serves a definite purpose that scholarship has not yet discovered – it cannot simply be asserted that such a device demonstrates a source.

This thesis makes use on several occasions of passages from within a “We” section, making it necessary to outline a stance, if only to anticipate objections. However, given the intractable nature of these problems and the fact that none of the studies in this thesis depend upon reaching a conclusion one way or the other, the question will not be pursued any further in this project.

¹ E.g. *Odyssey* 9.39-41, *Aeneid* 3.1-9.

² Some scholars are more confident. Stanley E. Porter has “reconstructed” the original “We” document. See *The Paul of Acts*, 42–46.

³ Byrskog, “History or Story?” 263; Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Volume 2*, 246-7.

2.5. Dating

The dating of Acts is complex, and inextricably tied to several other problems. If the unity of Luke-Acts were absolute, the dating of the two would probably be close, suggesting an early date for Acts. Likewise, if the “We” passages represent the eyewitness account of Luke the physician, this would also delimit the date to the first century. The source question plays a similar role. If, as Haenchen, Walton and others have supposed, Acts is ignorant of the letters of Paul,¹ this suggests an early date, since a collection of epistles appears to have been in circulation by 100 C.E.,² and it is unlikely, though by no means impossible, that Luke was in total ignorance of an extant collection. On the other hand, if Pervo is correct in arguing that Acts is dependent on the letters and on Josephus, the date can be no earlier than the last decade of the first century, and could be later. The latest possible date comes when Irenaeus clearly cites Acts sometime between 175 and 200 CE; the earliest possible date is the last event of the book, which is Paul’s arrival in Rome, at around 61-63 CE.³ Usually, scholars posit a date closer to the earliest than the latest possible option. Vernon K. Robbins argues that this is not primarily based on the evidence:

The scholarly consensus is much closer to Robinsons’s [early date] than Knox’s [late date], since a date of 62 CE is less than two decades earlier than 80 CE, while 150 CE is seven decades later. This means that the general scholarly consensus is an “early dating” based on a desire to have the canonical form of Luke and Acts produced

¹ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 81-90; Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 12-33, gives a good overview of the situation. His entire monograph represents an argument against the epistles as a source for the Miletus speech, and by proxy for the whole of Acts.

² Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts: between the evangelists and the apologists* (Santa Rosa, California: Polebridge Press, 2006), 57-58.

³ Vernon K Robbins, “A Socio-Rhetorical Look at the Work of John Knox on Luke-Acts,” in *Cadbury, Knox, and Talbert: American contributions to the study of Acts*, ed. Mikeal Carl Parsons and Joseph B. Tyson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 93.

during the first century, as soon after the Gospel of Mark (and for some, after the Gospel of Mathew) as appears to be feasible.¹

Speculating as to the reason for this desire, he suggests:

If we ask why the earlier date for Luke-Acts is more attractive to a majority of people, the reason appears to lie in a double principle: (a) Luke and Acts are documents in the sacred canon of the Christian community, and (b) it is considered best for a canonical document to have been written as close to the origins of Christianity as possible.²

I tend to agree with Robbins here: there is a tendency in scholarship to favour an early date, and in the absence of clear evidence either way, scholars have steered closer to the earliest than the latest possible date. That situation may now be changing. Richard Pervo has recently produced a monograph looking in great detail at the possible date of Acts, and has opted for a late date. His detailed analysis argues that while it is impossible to be certain, all probabilities point to a date of somewhere around 115 C.E.. Joseph B. Tyson supports Pervo's conclusions, saying:

In my judgement he has presented a substantial argument for dating it in the period 100-130 CE. Although the consensus dating of Acts in ca. 85 CE has long held, few

¹ Robbins, "John Knox on Luke-Acts," 93.

² Robbins, "John Knox on Luke-Acts," 92.

scholars have been willing to lay out convincing arguments either for this date or for a meaningful context for its composition.¹

My own research appears to support a late date, but I do not want the present work to stand or fall on that hypothesis. Of the three separate studies that comprise this project, only one (comedy and character) depends in any way on dating, arguing as it does that the letters are a source. However, this study makes its own case rather than being dependant on other hypotheses. The second study (Paul as apostle) could also be seen as making a claim to the letters as source, but could also theoretically reflect the real-life issues that were recorded in the letters. The evidence of these studies points, in short, to the letters as a source for Acts, and should be taken as contributing to the debates over both dating and sources. Sources are a wider issue, however, and must be tackled separately.

2.6. Sources

The sources from which the text in its present form was derived is a perennially favourite question of biblical scholars, who have traditionally been interested sat least as much in the *historical events behind* the text as they are in the text itself. In this school of thought, if the text can be divided into several component parts, these earlier documents can be dated to a period closer to real events. The closer to real events the source might be, the more likely it is to be accurate. In many respects this is the same approach as has traditionally been applied to other historical texts, and yet scholarship in other disciplines has moved forward

¹ Joseph B. Tyson, "Wrestling with and for Paul: Efforts to Obtain Pauline Support by Marcion and the Author of Acts," in *Contemporary Studies in Acts*, ed. Thomas E. Philips (Macon: Mercer University, 2009), 14.

considerably in the last few decades, leaving biblical scholarship trailing behind.¹ It is certainly true that the study of Acts has shifted its general emphasis away from source criticism – recent commentaries such as those by Pervo and Parsons show that no longer is the sole focus on dividing Acts up into smaller pieces.² However, it is remarkable just how frequently sources are cited as the reason for problems scholars have with understanding the text (this thesis will show many examples of the practice). In the opinion of this author, however, the practice is in line for a review. What follows is perhaps only a brief outline of the situation, but one that demonstrates a variety of confusions and difficulties that scholarship is faced with as a consequence of this legacy.

As is the case with many biblical texts, the debate over the possible sources of Acts is a complex one with a long history. Even having dealt separately with the “we” passages, it is impossible to give a full description of the various hypotheses. In this small section it is only necessary to give a brief overview of the situation as it has developed over the last century.

2.6.1. The sources of Acts

Both Luke’s Gospel and the Septuagint represent known sources of a kind that need not be discussed at any length here, simply because they are not contested. Other possible sources from extant literature are the Pauline epistles and Josephus’ *Antiquities*. Theoretical documents abound, several of which will be discussed in this chapter.

The question of whether the Pauline epistles are a source has divided scholarship for some time. Despite many points of contact, the fact remains that not only does Acts not directly cite a Pauline epistle, but worse, the depiction of Paul in Acts clashes with Paul’s self-portrait

¹For a discussion of the trend in the classics, see Tim Duff, *Plutarch’s lives: exploring virtue and vice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 5-9.

²Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*; Mikeal Carl Parsons, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008). Both commentaries are excellent.

in the epistles. It is for this reason that John Knox has long disputed the tendency of scholars to give Acts and the letters equal weighting when reconstructing Paul's life and mission.¹ Conzelmann admits that it is "almost inconceivable that the author of Acts knew nothing at all about the letters.", but asks: "did he purposely ignore them?"² He understands the points of crossover as dependent upon "traditions in the Pauline churches."³ Haenchen goes further, taking it for granted that Luke knew nothing at all about the letters. Ultimately this conclusion is borne of Luke not presenting a portrait of Paul consistent with the epistles.⁴ Recently, Richard Pervo has presented a comprehensive list of contact points between Acts and the letters, making a solid case for seeing them as a source. His argument is simple – probability suggests that the letters are a source, but scholarship is averse to such a conclusion for reasons of biblical authority – scholarship is uneasy about assuming Acts is supported by the letters because: "if [Paul] did know them, his standing as a historian lies open to censure."⁵

When it comes to Josephus, Conzelmann is agnostic,⁶ while Haenchen makes no mention of him as a potential source.⁷ However, dependence on Josephus was once in fashion, and there is plenty of evidence in favour of that hypothesis.⁸ Once again, Pervo has brought this

¹ See for example, John Knox, "A Conjecture as to the Original Status of II Corinthians and II Thessalonians in the Pauline Corpus," *JBL* 55, no. 2 (1936): 145-153; John Knox, "'Fourteen Years Later': A Note on the Pauline Chronology," *JR* 16, no. 3 (1936): 341-349; John Knox, "The Pauline Chronology," *JBL* 58, no. 1 (March 1, 1939): 15-29; John Knox, *Chapters in a life of Paul* (London: A. & C. Black, 1954); John Knox, "A Note on the Format of the Pauline Corpus," *HTR* 50, no. 4 (1957): 311-314.

² Conzelmann, *Acts*, xxxiii.

³ Conzelmann, *Acts*, xxxiii.

⁴ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 89, 113.

⁵ Pervo, *Dating Acts*, 52.

⁶ Conzelmann, *Acts*, xxxiii.

⁷ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 81 ff.

⁸ Joseph Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul* (London: Allen & Unwin, n.d.); Max Krenkel, *Josephus und Lucas: der schriftstellerische Einfluss des jüdischen Geschichtschreibers auf den Christlichen*. (Leipzig: H. Hassel, 1894).

evidence together and shown its strength.¹ Luke may or may not take information from Josephus and the letters, but there is no clear basis for excluding either source.

These two – Josephus and the letters - represent extant texts that can be analysed. When it comes to sources that are not extant, proving their existence is itself a significant problem. There is broad agreement that Luke, especially in Acts, reworks his sources to the point of undetectability. Dibelius, for example, says:

[In the gospel] it was a case of framing and piecing together fragments of tradition... If however we read in Acts the scenes of the Apostolic Council or of the trial, we become easily convinced that here Luke has not only fitted together, joined, and framed fragments of tradition, as in a mosaic, but that in Acts there is a greater depth of original composition. It is worth establishing what proportion of the whole work is taken up by these literary endeavours; until this is done, we must consider as hopeless every attempt to divide entirely into different sources the text of Acts – this is where I can say that the search must be a negative one.²

Scholars old and new agree with this point of view, including Mattill, Pervo, Byrskog, Bonz and Penner.³

Conzelmann is not deterred by this problem, however:

¹ Pervo, *Dating Acts*, 149-199.

² Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 2.

³ A. J. Mattill, "The value of Acts as a source for the study of Paul," in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Edinburgh: Clark, 1978), 84; Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 50; Byrskog, "History or Story?," 259; Bonz, *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic*, 96; Todd C. Penner, "Contextualizing Acts," in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, ed. Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd C. Penner, Symposium (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 71.

But the relative unity of style does not prove that no sources have been used. In the Gospel of Luke we may observe in a controlled setting the way in which the author reworks the language of his sources.

The question is: did Luke use rather extensive sources which offered a connected historical account, or did he rely on individual traditions [...]¹

Such enthusiasm for underlying sources naturally affects the way the text is read, with the critic looking at stylistic variation not as a literarily functional device, but a failure in an assumed ideal stylistic unity. And deviation in style is a failing, an error, and potential evidence of a seam that joins two originally disparate documents.

Haenchen, like Conzelmann, admits that “no sources can be inferred in Acts by stylistic criteria.”² Yet like Conzelmann, he is prepared to discuss the “Antiochene Source” at some length.³ This source had long been posited by Wendt, Jeremias and others,⁴ and is still cited by Pervo in his 2009 commentary.⁵ To demonstrate the validity of the “Antiochene source,” Haenchen claims the insertion of Saul’s approving oversight into the martyrdom of Stephen, and shows how Luke has “dovetailed the story of Stephen with his next item of tradition: the account current among the communities of Paul’s conversion before Damascus.” This

¹ Conzelmann, *Acts*, xxxviii.

² Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 81.

³ Conzelmann, *Acts*, xxxvii; Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: a commentary*, 88-89.

⁴ Joachim Jeremias, “Untersuchungen zum quellenproblem der Apostelgeschichte,” *ZNW* 36 (1937): 205-21; Hans Hinrich Wendt, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 21-40.

⁵ Pervo, *Acts*, 13-15.

assertion is largely drawn from the fact that Saul is not involved in the actual martyrdom, but merely “inserted” at the end of the scene.¹

The problems here are manifold. Firstly, it supposes that at least one of these two sources is written, and that Luke followed it in a certain way – restricted so severely as to be unable to make Saul a chief persecutor, but not sufficiently restricted that he could not slot him in without difficulty. Secondly, the positing of these two “traditions” as formative to key elements of the text suggests or assumes a cut-and-paste exercise, rather than earnestly searching out the manner in which they are used to produce overall coherence. Thirdly, and of most immediate importance, is the lack of respect for the aesthetic value of this “insertion.” The ominous introduction of Paul at this point would have been quite a moment for the target reader; here is the hero of the early Gentile church, making his first appearance, and it is one that comes at a critical moment in the persecution of the first Christians. Paul is a villain, and this dramatic introduction emphasises his presence. The only assumption one needs to make to see the aesthetic value in introducing Paul in this way is that literary artistry matters to Luke.

2.6.2. Literary Artistry and The Negative Search for Coherence

Looking through the text and into history is an important objective in biblical studies, which has always had to engage with the issue of biblical veracity as well as meaning.² Q, for example, is considered the earliest Gospel, and receives much attention despite the fact that it is not extant and may never have existed.³ In this model of scholarship texts themselves are artefacts in a historical search – their value is bound up with their ability to shed light on

¹ Haenchen, *the Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 83.

² John A. Darr, *Herod the Fox: audience criticism and Lukan characterization* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 13-14.

³ Mark S. Goodacre, *The case against Q: studies in Markan priority and the synoptic problem* (London: SCM, 2001), 1-6.

the Christ-event and the early church. It is in the interests of the historical critic to reach back to the earliest available documents, and this motivates him to search for fissures in the text that may reveal an exciting insight into an earlier period. Methodologically, however, this is a cause for concern. At the most basic level, I want to ask *if it is possible to search a text for incoherence*.¹ How does one embark upon a search for a fissure in the text? The structure of any work of literature is likely to be highly complex, with some elements that do not make immediate sense having their coherence validated later in the text. An emphasis on finding seams in the text fails to respect this complex coherence, and serves only to discourage scholars from fully exploring how what appears incoherent or inconsistent at one point in the text can be relevant at a later point. The same could be said of elements that might have been intelligible to an audience familiar with the appropriate context but are less than clear to a later reader. For both of these difficulties an enthusiasm for finding sources equates to an unwillingness to work out how a text makes sense as a whole.

In his 1964 book, *The Sources of Acts*, Jacques Dupont illustrates this problem. He is positive about the existence of sources but is forced to admit the difficulty of finding any. Looking over source theories from the decades preceding his work, he finds flaws with all of them. Exploring Harnack's hypothesis that Acts chapter 2 and 5.17-42 could be seen as embellishment of the same source that is used in 3.1-5.16. Harnack's evidence for this is the repetition of key themes and even features, Dupont is dubious. First he summarises Harnack's evidence:

In Harnack's system, each of the two sources begins with the account of a miracle – in the one case the miracle of Pentecost (2.1-13), in the other, that of the cure of the lame man (3.1-10); this analogy is certainly very vague and it is difficult to see how it can form the basis of a parallelism in the proper sense of the term. After the miracle

¹ Darr, *Herod the Fox*, 14.

follows a great missionary discourse by Peter (2.14-36; 3.11-26). The relationship between these two passages is unmistakable.¹

But Dupont observes obvious difficulties here:

We cannot, however, ignore the fact that Peter's missionary discourse all have a certain resemblance; this makes it necessary to extend the the parallelism to the discourses of ch. 4, 5 and 10. Further, it is with the inaugural discourse of Paul (ch. 13) that the discourse of Pentecost has the deepest affinity. Thus we do not merely find ourselves in the presence of two, but of six parallel discourses.²

Dupont goes on to observe that the only real evidence for parallelism is in the double arrest of the apostles and their two appearances before the Sanhedrin, but here again the leap to a source is far from unavoidable:

J. Jeremias showed in 1937 that there was a continuity between these two narratives; far from being a repetition, they complete each other. To realize this it must be remembered that the Jewish law only allowed a breach of the law to be punished if the culprit were aware of the consequences of his act. In practice, immediate prosecutions could only be made against those who had done their

¹ Jacques Dupont, *The Sources of Acts: the present position*. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 42.

² Dupont, *The Sources of Acts*, 42.

Rabbinical studies; in the case of ordinary people, they first had to be given a legal admonition [...] ¹

In this example it is recourse to social and legal convention that offers a competing explanation of events, and if it is true, the source-based explanation offered by Harnack actually hinders the reconstruction of the history behind the narrative. Had Harnack been more thorough in attempting to establish the coherence of the text he may have discovered Jeremias' solution for himself, and the perceived fissure would have in fact been a clue to the interpretation of the narrative rather than a red herring in the search for the original sources.

What I am arguing amounts to this: source-critical methods have an unacknowledged basis in narrative coherence, the establishing of which is the object of much literary theory, and narrative theory in particular. The view that literary theory is largely unhelpful to the traditional historical-critical objectives is neatly highlighted by the work of a literary-minded scholar, Marianne Palmer-Bonz:

In contrast to proponents of historical criticism, who seek to understand a text by fixing its location within a particular historical, social, and cultural grid, and by understanding its organic development from earlier sources, literary critics focus on various elements of the text as a narrative and formal unity. Thus, for the majority of New Testament interpreters, who view Luke-Acts as one extended text, such a

¹ Dupont, *The Sources of Acts*, 44.

compositional approach should be enthusiastically welcomed as a useful balance to the more analytical methods of historical criticism.¹

It is not my intention to belittle this statement by Bonz, which has much merit in its attempt to show the validity of literary criticism and its value for exegesis. It contains, however, at least two misconceptions, which seem to me to be the result of a confusion between biblical literary criticism and the application of secular literary theory to biblical texts.

Firstly, a literary theorist does in fact attempt to fix a text within a “particular historical, social, and cultural grid;” if he did not, he would not be able to read the text at all – knowledge of all of these things is essential to any reading of any text (though the truth or accuracy with which the author reports history is a different matter). Burridge’s argument in *What are the Gospels?* amounts to a claim that ancient audiences would have been able to understand the Gospels as ancient biographies – it is largely an argument from modern genre theory. Meir Sternberg critiques traditional biblical criticism from the standpoint of narrative coherence, and observes that if one has to know something of the language and idiom of a text to interpret it, surely knowledge of cultural morality is useful for similar reasons.² The only thing a literary theorist does not want to focus on is its “organic development from earlier sources,” and even this, insofar as it aids interpretation, is perfectly acceptable to a literary theorist.³ This is because if there is a real distinction between the historical and literary critic, it is that the latter subordinates known elements such as social, political and economic factors to the primary goal of making sense of the text as a whole, while the historical critic also subordinates the text into the primary goal of getting at the history and real events behind the text. It is therefore not a shift, as Ernst

¹ Bonz, *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic*, 9.

² Meir Sternberg, *The poetics of biblical narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987): 7-22.

³ Sternberg, *The poetics of biblical narrative*, 13.

Haenchen supposes, into “literary embellishment” which is “in no sense rigorously demonstrable,”¹ but away from hypothetical documents and into real ones, with a corresponding methodological development in order to accomplish this. Bonz is also erroneous in her supposition that focusing on the “various elements of the text as a narrative and formal unity” contrasts with the source-critical method; I argued above that source theories are based upon supposed failures in coherence, placing source and narrative theories on a very similar methodological footing. Source-critics are merely quicker to find a failure in the coherence of a text and happier to posit a solution that, if it were correct, would help achieve their particular objective of discovering earlier documents and shed light on primitive Christianity.

As I have already tried to say, literary criticism of the Bible, important as it is, is not, and should not be taken as, the only use of literary theory that can be important to biblical scholarship. Biblical literary critics use literary theory to achieve certain goals, such as challenging the ideologies behind biblical texts and their interpretations by later readers. But literary theory is more than ideological, it is also technical: genre and narrative theory do not primarily function as tools of critique, but as tools of analysis.

A further and perhaps more disquieting misconception in Bonz’s statement, however, is that the methods of historical-criticism are “more analytical.” The difference between historical-critical theory and literary theory does not lie in analytical complexity, but in the complexity of results – literary theory is, after all, analysing a very large body of texts, and looking at such intricate elements as intertextual allusions, symbolism, and generic mutation. Such things are difficult to measure and quantify in any precise way. Historical criticism on the other hand, frequently attempts to find singular purposes and objectives. A move into literary theory inevitably produces unsatisfactorily complex results, from which the extrapolation of clear or simple answers is almost impossible. Given such complexity, it

¹ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 88.

would be better to remain with the more traditional methods. The problem is that literary theory consistently crops up to counter its findings.

2.6.3. MacDonald's Intertextually-Founded Coherence in Acts 10.1-11.18

Another example of possible doubt on a source theory is Peter's vision in Acts 10.1-11.18, in which the Lord tells him not to regard "anything profane that I have made clean." This is paralleled by an angelic visitation to Cornelius, who is then commanded to send for Peter. This double divine intervention results in the first Gentile conversion, and leads into the second half of the narrative and the worldwide evangelical mission.

The trouble with the story is that it is not obvious how the vision, in which animals are declared clean, and which appears to relate to Jewish regulations, relates to the ritual purity of Gentiles. This problem has caused several influential scholars to put forward the idea of two sources¹ – one which pertains to Cornelius and Gentile purity, and one about a vision to Peter originally relating to dietary regulations. Conzelmann goes so far as to say, "The original intention of the vision does not conform to Luke's use of it." "Literary seams," he informs us "are visible." But reading further reveals that the "Lucan insertion" is proven merely by the presumption of the Petran vision – which means that the vision remains the basis of the problem.²

MacDonald demonstrates that the problem of most commentators revolves around the unnatural interpretation of the vision, which most obviously relates to animals, in terms of people. He then painstakingly demonstrates that in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and many subsequent imitators, events are depicted in which the behaviour of animals is interpreted

¹ Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 109-22; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 80; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of The Apostles*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday Image, 1998), 448.

² Conzelmann, *Acts*, 80, 82.

as an oracle. He also demonstrates that the vision accompanied by a corroborating dream (another problem for interpreters of Acts is the redundancy of the double-vision) is a common arrangement, before discussing the literary pedigree of the various incidents that comprise the episode, and several points in the text (such as placing Peter by a harbour, as is the case with Agamemnon in *Iliad* book 2), that suggest Homeric imitation.¹

It is not necessary here to argue MacDonald's case at any length; the simple fact that a Homeric text, which was a key piece of literature in the ancient world, offers a clear parallel and potential alternative to an influential view, demonstrates the importance of exploring intertextual solutions before resorting to source-criticism. The vision + dream combination, and the use of animal behaviour as oracular indication, are not uncommon or unusual in Hellenistic literature, and this fact undercuts the basic premises of source-critical approaches to this passage.

2.6.4. Modern Approaches to the Source Question

Richard Pervo perhaps represents the most literary end of commentaries on Acts, and published only recently, in 2009. One would therefore expect, and often finds, a more reserved application of source hypotheses. Indeed, his opening statement under the subheading "Sources" plainly posits not only the Pauline Epistles, but Josephus, as sources.² His bold statement that "either Luke knew of the letters but declined to consult them or he made such use of them as suited his needs and purposes,"³ demonstrates this move away from sources as the primary issue in the analysis of a text.

¹ Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *Does Acts imitate Homer?*, 19-65.

² Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 12.

³ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 12.

Nonetheless, Pervo posits a form of the Antiochene source, which he calls the “Gentile mission source.” This hypothetical document “served as a description and justification of the gentile mission:”¹

[...it was] not anti-Pauline in the sense of the Pseudo-Clementines (or even of Matthew), but it took care to note that Paul began as a subordinate of Barnabas and Antioch, and that Barnabas took the side of Peter in a conflict at Antioch.²

His reasoning is again based upon coherence –an Antiochene mission without apostolic guidance conflicts with the Lukan ideology present elsewhere in the text, and must therefore be a source. Traces can be found in 2.1-13, which explains events at Pentecost, and Peter’s subsequent speech. Further investigation shows that it is dissatisfaction with the sense of the passage that prompts his assertion of a source for this episode:

Pentecost may be the most exciting and the least comprehensible episode in Acts. The story collapses at the slightest breeze. A redactional solution almost leaps from the page: Luke had a story about ecstatic speech that he transformed, either out of distaste for glossolalia or to expound universalism, or both, into a linguistic miracle focusing on what was heard.³

¹ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 13.

² Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 13.

³ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 59-60.

Here again, Acts is perceived to fail the coherence test: I would say unfairly, and chapter 5 will argue that point.¹

2.6.5. Coherence as the Acid Test

Sources, particularly non-extant sources, are hypothesised principally from a perceived failure in the coherence of the text; proving that coherence underlies historical-critical approaches in a fundamental way. Whether it is parts of Genesis that appear incompatible with others, or Luke's gospel being inexplicable without positing a non-extant source, the way the text fits together and works as a unit is almost always a pillar of the source hypothesis.

Biblical criticism unconsciously assumes coherence as a basic premise at every turn. The notorious "subjective genitive" debate in Pauline studies is founded on the idea that the traditional objective genitive reading is incoherent,² while careful argumentation attempts to demonstrate that for each key phrase, one reading of the genitive is more coherent than the other. All this with continual glances in the direction of theological coherence, which from a literary perspective is merely a form of thematic coherence. So when analysing source theories from the perspective of literary coherence, the literary theorist is not breaking the established rules of historical-criticism but emphasizing the importance of a tacitly agreed principle. She merely refuses to split the text into component parts unless she

¹ See 179-80.

² Richard B. Hays, *The faith of Jesus Christ : an investigation of the narrative substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, Dissertation series/Society of Biblical Literature no. 56 (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983); Douglas A. Campbell, "Romans 1:17 - A Crux Interpretum for the πίστις Χριστού Debate," *JBL* 113, no. 2 (1994): 265-285; Douglas A. Campbell, "Pistis and Nomos in Paul: A Linguistic and Structural Perspective," *JBL* 111, no. 1 (1992): 91-103; James D. G. Dunn, "Once more, Pistis Cristou," in *The faith of Jesus Christ*, ed. Richard B. Hays, 2nd ed. (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 2002), 249-271; C. E. B. Cranfield, "On the πίστις Χριστού Question," in *On Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 81-98; Roy A. Harrisville, "BEFORE PISTIS CRISTOU: THE OBJECTIVE GENITIVE AS GOOD GREEK," *NovT* 36, no. 3 (2006): 233-241; Barry Matlock, "The Rhetoric of πίστις in Paul: Galatians 2.16, 3.22, Romans 3.22, and Philippians 3.9," *JSNT* 30, no. 2 (2007): 173-203.

has first employed every possible tool for exploring the unity of a text as it stands, which means that while in terms of the actual pragmatics of interpretation, they can be poles apart, in terms of methodological premises the separation between historical-critical, particularly source-critical approaches, and literary ones, is actually minimal – both rely on the basic premise that a text should be coherent.

It is true that in recent years scholarship has become less focused on source-criticism, but the situation is not simply one of fashion. Pervo, as we saw above, still relies upon it in 2009, while Haenchen rails against it in 1965. As he complains at one point in his commentary:

[...] these results are the more significant for being those of scholars in eager quest of historical results, scholars for whom the discrimination of sources represented their most valuable tool. The inadequacy of their method can be unusually well illustrated from the beginning of the passage. With 13.1 Luke beings a new scene sharply divided from the preceding one. Those who believe Luke's method was the assembly of fragments from different sources will thus be inclined to conjecture the beginning of a new source.¹

Marianne Palmer-Bonz has expressed concerns more recently:

Since the identification of Luke's sources must depend on indirect criteria such as style, word usage, or variations and contradictions in conceptuality and theological

¹ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 401.

viewpoint, judgments are highly subjective and appear to be contingent upon the specific preconceptions of the individual interpreter.¹

These remarks express reservations about source hypotheses that have little to do with her preference for a literary-minded approach. The need to readdress the traditional methods does not result from an act of usurpation by the now fashionable literary theory, but from the realisation that its own results are always potentially flawed. In this sense, literary theory provides a way forward capable of resolving some of the difficulties that have dogged historical criticism. As Loveday Alexander notes with customary tact: “The more we can make unified sense of the narrative as it stands, the less need we have to resort to source-criticism.”²

2.7. Textual Problems

It is well known that Acts has an unusual and problematic textual history; consequently, it is only necessary to summarise the situation very briefly before outlining my own position. In justifying my position I hope to avoid having to explain my stance later in the thesis.

Traditional scholarship maintains that there are two distinct traditions for the transmission of the text of Acts. Nestle-Aland along with most western scholarship favours the “Old Uncial” version, and sees the “Western Text” or “D-Text” best represented by Codex Bezae as a late editorial expansion that made various emendations for a variety of reasons.

Recent textual scholarship has confirmed support for the “Old Uncial” by casting doubt on the whole idea of a polarised textual tradition. The work of Boismard and Lamouille suggests

¹ Bonz, *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic*, 96.

² Alexander, *Acts in its ancient literary context*, 224.

that the D-Text may not represent a “single tradition or type.”¹ Since that time, Codex Oxyrynchus (P¹²⁷) has provided fertile ground for that suspicion. Georg Gäbel argues that a comparison of Oxyrynchus and Codex Bezae illustrates that both came from a common ancestor but were significantly amended.² This hypothesis gains support from David Parker, whose *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* already suggests that the D-Text was more the result of a process than a single redaction,³ and his latest publication on Codex Oxyrhynchus offers more support for this view.⁴ Instead, Parker understands the form of Acts to have been continually treated with liberality by editors and/or scribes: in support of this he cites Read-Heimerdinger’s argument that narrative tends to suffer more variation in transmission than dialogue.⁵

The arguments against the traditional view of a polarised textual transmission from which one must be preferred seem to me to be substantial enough to defer the entire issue. In this thesis the Nestle-Aland version of Acts is always preferred.

3. Terminology

Literary theory is a complex arena that divides into several large fields. Within biblical literary criticism and secular theory, for example, we cannot expect to find uniform use of

¹ M. E Boismard and A. Lamouille, *Le texte occidental des actes des apôtres reconstitution et réhabilitation* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1984). The observation comes from Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2009), 3.

² Georg Gäbel, “The Text of P127 (P.Oxy. 4968) and Its Relationship with the Text of Codex Bezae,” *NovT* 53 (2011): 107-152.

³ David Parker, *An introduction to the New Testament manuscripts and their texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 298.

⁴ David Parker, “Acta Apostolorum (Papyrus 4968),” in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, ed. P. Parsons et al., vol. 74 (London: Egypt Exploration for the British Academy, 2009), 1-20.

⁵ D. C. Parker, *An introduction to the New Testament manuscripts and their texts*, 299; Jenny Read-Heimerdinger, *The Bezan text of Acts: a contribution of discourse analysis to textual criticism*, JSNT. Supplement series 236 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 17-19.

technical terminology. Consequently, to avoid confusion later in my thesis, I wish to clarify some terms at this point.

3.1. Author/implied author

The term “implied author,” coined by Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* in 1961,¹ was originally part of an ongoing theoretical debate about the nature of intentionality. Booth argued that the author present in the text is a rhetorical construct rather than a real person, who could only be known to the extent that he wished to be.² This concept of implied author has remained with literary theory ever since, though many have challenged it, including Gerard Genette,³ and more recently and comprehensively, Richard Walsh.⁴ Booth’s recent defence of the concept actually brings to its support the very problems that I personally would use against it – namely that all people present “implied versions” of themselves all the time, and that this is a great service to everybody forced to communicate with them.⁵

The implied author is a useful idea in that it creates a rhetorical distance between the person writing and his presentation in the text. From the point of view of biblical scholars one might argue that it is especially important to bear this distance in mind when looking at the truth-claims made by texts and their authors. However, a problem of more direct importance for this thesis is the methodological ambiguity surrounding the term. The dialogue between

¹ See for example, Booth, *The rhetoric of fiction* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

² Booth, *The rhetoric of fiction*, 67-83.

³ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. trans. Jane E Lewin, (2nd ed.), (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988). pp. 64–66.

⁴ Richard Walsh, *The rhetoric of fictionality*, 82-85.

⁵ Wayne C. Booth, “Resurrection of the implied author: why bother?,” in *A companion to narrative theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 75-88.

Richard Walsh and Wayne Booth is intelligent and insightful,¹ but ultimately I believe (and will argue in chapters 3 and 4) that much confusion in narrative theory comes from a long-standing shortfall in the theory of communication generally, primarily in regard to the idea of fiction for which the term “implied author” was originally constructed. I for one tend toward extreme caution, particularly in literary theory, of a naïve classification of authors and their statuses or roles.² Consequently, I choose to avoid the methodological complication that comes from the use of the term “implied author,” leaving it to the reader to apply his own ideas on the problem as he sees fit.³ This section is here simply to show an awareness of the complexity involved, and for those readers who are not aware of the difficulties, to ensure that the term “author” is understood neither to imply a full connection between author and narrator or a lack of distance between the authorial persona and the author as person.

¹ The term was coined by Wayne C. Booth, *The rhetoric of fiction*; He defends the term in “Resurrection of the implied author: why bother?,” in *A companion to narrative theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 75-88. Richard Walsh's essay could be seen as a response addressing the entire theoretical body of fictional narrative, and is certainly intended to undermine Booth's premises. Richard Walsh “The Pragmatics of Narrative Fictionality,” in *A companion to narrative theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 150-164.

² Perhaps the most challenging questions are those raised by Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” in *The Foucault reader*, ed. Paul Rabinowitz, Peregrine books (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 101-120.

³ While I was impressed by the methodological section of Osvaldo Padilla, *The speeches of outsiders in Acts: poetics, theology and historiography*, Society for New Testament Studies monograph series 144 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 7-17, I cannot concur with his decision to use the terms “author”, “implied author,” and even “narrator” interchangeably (11-12). The latter term has a very distinct connotation in my view, though I accept that an omniscient narrator such as the one in Luke-Acts is not as far from the author as a limited narrator of whatever kind. The “we” passages represent one very clear unknown in this respect, and should warn scholars to caution with their use of such terminology.

3.2. Target Audience/Ideal Reader

I want to take a rather different stance with the reader, which is a different matter due to the different type of entity to which it refers. While the theoretical conceptualization of authorship can be safely ignored barring certain qualifications, readers are a very different business and affect any argument that claims to engage with “ancient readers,” “original readers,” or “target readers.”

The concept of “ideal reader” is probably the best starting point. The term has its roots in New Criticism, and is defended by Cleanth Brooks, who states:

The formalist critic assumes an ideal reader: that is, instead of focusing on the varying spectrum of possible readings, he attempts to find a central point of reference from which he can focus upon the structure of the poem or novel.¹

In the years since Brooks made this statement about the assumption of an ideal reader, the concept has been extensively scrutinised, and for good reasons. Most obviously, it has its origins in a movement that was very much a reaction against the author-focused criticism that it succeeded, and as such was part of a deliberate move away from the author as controller of the text.² Modern scholarship has found a better balance and no longer needs to sever the author from his work. Matthew L. Skinner complains of the “perfectionist connotations”³ implicit in the “ideal reader”; his reservations originate with Alastair Fowler,

¹ Cleanth Brooks, “The formalist critics,” in *Literary theory: an anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 54.

² See for example, Meyer H. Abrams, *The mirror and the lamp: romantic theory and the critical tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 27.

³ Matthew L. Skinner, *Locating Paul: Places of Custody as Narrative Settings in Acts 21-28* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 15, footnote 28.

who observes the process of “construction” in all reading while simultaneously arguing that no reader can fully know the author’s mind. Such an argument reduces the ideal reader to a theoretical construct rather than anything approaching the intended recipient of a communication.¹ To avoid these difficulties and others (such as the question as to where Acts would have been read or performed) the term “target audience” is preferred to “ideal reader”.

The concept of the target audience has specific importance to biblical studies because the object of study is not restricted to interpretation: one of the most important traditional aims of the historical critic (as distinct from the literary critic) is to look at the reality behind the text, and this inevitably means focusing not just on the events depicted in the text but also at who wrote it and who read it. Nonetheless, a focus on specific readers (such as the identity of Theophilus)² cannot be anything but speculative in the vast majority of cases. The term “target audience” encompasses not any individual but a broad “cultural repertoire” that Luke could expect his readers to have at their disposal.³ The ideal reader is not an individual but a *typical* individual, who shares a body of literature and a range of ideological perspectives with the author. After all, an actual author writes his text, in the majority of cases, not for one reader, but for a number of individuals who he feels will have in common the ability to interpret his work, due to a shared knowledge, shared ideology, and shared ideas. These views cannot be entirely cognizant with that of the author – otherwise he would not need to write to them at all – but he must nonetheless feel sufficiently able to predict how his audience will react to what he writes, because of their common understanding of the world and of literature. The latter of these forms the subject of

¹ Fowler, *Kinds of literature*, 257-272.

² For an overview see Robert F. O’Toole, “Theophilus,” in *The Anchor Bible dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 511-512. Another good example of the assumption of Theophilus is in Gerald Downing, “Theophilus’s First Reading of Luke-Acts,” in *Luke’s literary achievement: collected essays*, ed. Christopher Mark Tuckett (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 91-109.

³ Spencer, “Modern Literary Approaches,” 409.

extensive investigation in this first half of the thesis: in the former the social sciences are especially useful. As the preface to Neyrey's *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* says: "The social sciences [...] look to typical, repeated patterns of social interaction characteristic of a given group of human beings in a specific time and place."¹ This knowledge allows the modern critic to understand "better the particular and distinctive,"² which is to say that only by knowing what constitutes "typical" can we understand what the author accepts and what he challenges. In essence, this is the same argument as Meir Sternberg uses in *the poetics of biblical narrative*, which is entirely focused on literary theory as it applies to the Hebrew Bible.³ In this sense questions of history revolve around the sender and receivers of the text rather than the communicated events themselves. Joseph B. Tyson says in his discussion of scholarly trends:

When I ask if we are moving back to history, I do not ask about historicity but rather about the historical and social context within which Acts was written and first heard or read. If it is the case that our author was a part of a literary world that prized rhetorical skills, what does the publication of Acts suggest to us about this world? Where does it fit in terms of what we know about the political, social, economic, even ideological and intellectual dimensions of this world?⁴

¹ Jerome Neyrey, ed., *The social world of Luke-Acts: models for interpretation* (Peabody Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), xii.

² Socio-rhetorical criticism can be seen in this light as providing information about the target audience. See the Introduction to Neyrey, *Social World of Luke-Acts*.

³ Sternberg, *The poetics of biblical narrative*, 7-22.

⁴ Joseph B. Tyson, "From Rhetoric to History and Back: Assessing New Trends in Acts Studies," in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, ed. Todd C Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, Symposium (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 39-40.

This type of reading involves engaging empathetically with as many of the key ideological and literary constructs through which the target audience would have interpreted the text as possible, and can only ever be a partial and fragmented reconstruction. Yet despite the inherent weaknesses of creating such a typical target audience for Acts (or indeed, typical target audiences – a plurality of competences, such as the differences between Jewish and pagan readers, must be accounted for), it remains a necessary concept, primarily because of the distinct importance of that readership – the early church – to biblical studies, which I discussed above.

In this project, the target audience is understood as the readership Luke would have expected to find. When he alludes to Jewish ritual, concepts of honour and shame, citizenship, and other fundamental ideological constructs, the target audience would have had enough knowledge to easily understand his meaning and many of its complex allusions. There are of course countless differences between ancient ideology and our own, and some of them are no doubt vaster than we are able to comprehend, but it is possible to edge toward a better understanding through the text itself.

3.3. Intentionality

By “intentionality” or “authorial intention,” I refer to the communicative aims of the author. I do not mean to suggest that Luke had a single theological intention in writing, nor do I want to imply that I have special access to what Luke wanted to achieve. Instead, the term reflects scholarship in literary theory which after swinging away from an exclusive focus on the author in traditional scholarship to an almost complete rejection of that focus in New

Criticism, has become comfortable with the fact that authors have communicative aims and strategies which they are attempting to convey in their work.¹

Intentionality is difficult to define because people are not always fully aware of their intentions. For purely practical reasons, I want to see the concept as a spectrum with full, conscious intentionality at one end, semi-conscious intentionality in the middle, and assumed knowledge or presupposed ideas at the far end, representing that which the author does not really intend at all.

Assumed knowledge or presupposed ideas are the presuppositions the author approves of unknowingly, such as the role of women, the status of ethnic groups, and the conception of the supernatural realm. Though the author communicates these ideas, he or she is seldom aware of doing so. These ideas form an essential basis for story-telling, and the target reader would no doubt have shared a great many of them, or at least been thoroughly familiar with the author's position.

Semi-conscious intentionality covers those communicative aims that the author fulfills naturally and without much thought. This category is important because traditional biblical scholarship (Redaktionkritik) has often overlooked it, consequently assuming that the author is fully conscious of all his communicative intentions. Andrew C. Clarke feels able to say in 2001 that he hopes his study of the Peter/Paul parallels will shed some light on the "purpose of Acts as a whole."² His eventual argument is that the parallels demonstrate unity and continuity between Jewish and Gentile Christianity.³ I would question whether Luke would have held this to be his main purpose, or even his purpose at all, even while I agree that he

¹ A fascinating article that elucidates this subject with considerable depth is Edward Jayne, "The Rise and Fall of New Criticism: Its Brief Dialectic History From I.A. Richards to Northrop Frye", in *American Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1975, revised March 2005), http://edwardjayne.com/critical/new_criticism.pdf Last accessed 17-05-2012.

² Andrew C. Clark, *Parallel Lives: the relation of Paul to the apostles in the Lucan perspective* (Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2001), 5.

³ Clark, *Parallel Lives: the relation of Paul to the apostles in the Lucan perspective*, 337-338.

probably intended to emphasise this point. My view moves this purpose lower down the spectrum and makes room for further, more deliberate communicative aims while not denying the possibility of other, less conscious intentions. Dennis R. MacDonald's monograph on Acts as an imitation of Homer is more subtle, allowing for the possibility that ancient writers were always imitating one or another ancient text, but even his work appears to suppose that Luke would have carefully constructed those scenes that imitate Homer with a conscious, clear, and often unitary intention.¹ My own view would be that Luke imitated Homer in multiple ways without always giving it very much thought, and certainly without a unitary purpose. As becomes evident throughout this thesis, Luke borrows from a large body of literature in the composition of Acts, and is constantly in dialogue with multiple genres, texts and ideologies. The composition of such a complex and creative work requires a significant amount of semi-conscious intentionality. Like most authors, Luke had multiple communicative strategies, most of which were familiar to him from a lifetime of reading and were his only frames of reference for writing. His imitation or dialogue with other genres and authors was his only and natural means of writing, and was not for the most part consciously constructed.

Full or conscious intentionality covers those parts of the text that *are* consciously and deliberately constructed. As Andrew Clark and Charles Talbert have demonstrated, Acts is constructed in complex parallels both internally and with Luke's Gospel. Marianne Palmer Bonz has shown that such techniques of construction were common in the period.² I would not want to deny that Luke has conscious communicative aims or that he has deliberately designed his works to make those aims manifest in the most effective way possible.

Conscious intentionality does have an important and undeniable role to play in interpreting

¹ Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *Does Acts imitate Homer?*, 2. An example might be Luke's imitation of Hector's farewell to Andromache in the Miletus speech, which "serves a new interpretation of heroism, (102)".

² Bonz, *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic*, 27, 48.

Luke. However, the emphasis on this latter classification in biblical scholarship appears to have led scholars to believe that New Testament texts were written or redacted with the aim of conveying specific and singular theological agendas, much in the same way that Josephus wrote the *Contra Apionem*. I very much doubt even whether Josephus had a single intention when he wrote this text, but in any case, applying such a presupposition to Acts devalues the literary artistry and de-emphasizes any subtleties that nuance meanings within the text. In large part, such suppositions both stem from and perpetuate the problems that have arisen in source theory. Thus, in this thesis I want to be clear on my opinion that while Luke did compose his work with a good degree of conscious, carefully structured thought and preparation, his communicative intentions were in large part of the more ordinary semi-conscious kind that inevitably forms the majority of any large narrative composition. The practical consequence of this is that while I frequently suggest that Luke is imitating, echoing, parodying or alluding to certain texts, this does not necessitate the attribution of a conscious motivation.

3.4. Mode

Genre is the subject of this thesis and is discussed at considerable length over the next few chapters. However, while engaged in this discussion I found the term too broad to be adequate to cover all the various stratifications between bodies of literature. I have therefore used the term “mode” to cover major differences in literary types that are not generic. Mostly, this distinction is used at the level of the fictional versus the historical mode. The term does also appear, however, in another sense common to literary theory, when the text is seen to rely consistently upon a genre which it clearly could not be classified as. In this case one might say that Thucydides or Virgil makes use of the tragic mode, or that

Hebrew novels make use of the Septuagintal mode. The two uses of the term are quite distinct in practice and are always intelligible in context.

3.5. Narrative Configuration and Narrative Coherence

Although these two terms will be rigorously described in the next part of the thesis, it might help the reader to briefly describe here what I do and do not mean by them. Narrative coherence is the sense made by the whole of the narrative, assessed as an accumulated total of all the parts that fit together. That is to say, an incoherent portion of a narrative is not incoherent in this sense because one cannot understand it, but because there appears to be no reason for it to be there, or worse, it appears to work at odds with other portions of the narrative. Thus Cervantes' placing of Sancho Panza on a pony that has recently been stolen is narratively incoherent.

Coherence is the sum total of the ability of each part to fit into the whole, but configuration is the process of fitting each part into that whole. The magically reappearing pony in *Don Quixote* cannot be configured – we know the pony is stolen, we do not think that Cervantes was depicting a reality where stolen ponies reappear without explanation, and we are left with no logical or sensible way to make sense of this element of the text. In the terms I am using, this constitutes a configurative failure: the reader cannot successfully place the information in a framework that operates usefully alongside the rest of the narrative, and must be confused by it.

One of the problems I discuss in this thesis is the difference between history and fiction; I argue that coherence and configuration operate differently across these two modes. In history the reader expects to find the same logic as that which operates in the real world, while in fiction a different logic applies. While in practice there is no text of either mode that

does not make use of both types of logic, the primacy of logic-type dictates reader expectations and to some extent dictates perception of mode.

Chapter 2. A SURVEY OF GENRE PROPOSALS

1. Introduction

In this chapter it is necessary to review the most significant proposals that have been put forward for the genre of Acts. As was noted in the introduction to the thesis, scholarship can be roughly divided into those aiming to preserve a historiographical designation, usually of a Hellenistic variety, and those who are more interested in comparisons with non-historical literature. If “historical” is contrasted with “non-historical,” “Hellenistic” should perhaps be contrasted with “Hebraic” or perhaps more broadly, “Jewish.” The literature of Diasporic Judaism in this period was strongly influenced by Hellenism, but retained a distinct style. Twentieth century scholarship was in general agreement that Acts was a Hellenistic historiography of some description, but has simultaneously remained keen to explore biblical allusion and Semitic style.¹ Henry Joel Cadbury saw no contradiction in asserting that the Semitisms of Acts were stylistic at the same time as classifying the text as a history. In 1992 Mikeal C. Parsons observed that Robert C. Tannehill had ten references to non-canonical sources in his entire two volume narrative commentary on Acts.² So on the one hand, Jewish derived theologies and views of history are often assumed as normative for Luke and Acts,³ while at the same time, Hebrew historiography is not generally considered a viable generic classification for either text. In part, this is the heritage of a conservative approach that wants to claim both the essential continuity of the two testaments and the truth-value of Acts (for which the “objective” history of a Thucydides is considered a better option than the Torah).

¹ James D. Yoder, “Semitisms in Codex Bezae,” *JBL* 78, no. 4 (1959): 317-321; Donald W. Riddle, “The Logic of the Theory of Translation Greek,” *JBL* 51, no. 1 (1932): 13-30; Max Wilcox, *The semitisms of Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); Sherman E. Johnson, “The Septuagint and the New Testament,” *JBL* 56, no. 4 (1937): 331-345.

² Mikeal C. Parsons, “Reading Talbert: New Perspectives on Luke-Acts,” in *Cadbury, Knox, and Talbert: American contributions to the study of Acts*, ed. Mikeal Carl Parsons and Joseph B. Tyson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 165; Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Volume 1*; Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Volume 2*.

³ Penner, “Contextualizing Acts,” 12.

Luke wrote in Greek and probably to a Greek audience; it must be acknowledged that this rules out Hebrew historiography as a mutually available interpretative framework. However, it would not necessarily rule out a Jewish world-view. Jews were spread across the entire Diaspora during this period, and were immersed in Greek literature. The Diaspora was a literary as well as a cultural fact. Hebrew historiography is a long way distant from a multiculturally influenced Judaism that was Greek speaking, was writing in the Greek language, and even preferred its Hebrew-language scriptures translated into Greek for them. Sharp divisions between Jewish and Hebrew style had been substantially blurred by a long process of cultural integration, and a strict line between the two literary milieux probably cannot be sustained.¹

In practice, however, most scholarship tends to swing one way or the other. Following recent trends, Joseph B. Tyson has expressed concerns that the Jewish element to Acts (“Luke is ‘obsessed’ with the Jews”) is being undervalued.² Perhaps this is true, but a significant volume of contributions which focus on the Jewish side of things was published just a few years before Tyson wrote, and did offer some valuable insights.³ William Kurz, for example, observes in it that there is a growing consensus that Luke’s two volumes are centrally concerned with promise and fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.⁴

Yet scholars who remained keen to find a rigid generic class in which to place Acts did not have an option that incorporates both Jewish and Greek elements until Gregory Sterling’s 1992 monograph on a genre he called “apologetic history.”

¹ A good overview of this subject can be found in Andrie Du Toit, “Paulus Oecumenicus: Interculturality in the Shaping of Paul’s Theology,” *NTS* 55 (2009): 121-143.

² Tyson, “From History to Rhetoric and Back,” 38, 41.

³ Moessner, *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel*.

⁴ William S. Kurz, “Promise and Fulfillment in Hellenistic Jewish Narratives and Luke-Acts,” in *Jesus and the heritage of Israel: Luke’s narrative claim upon Israel’s legacy*, ed. David P. Moessner (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999), 147-170.

2. A Look at Some Proposals

2.1. Acts as an Apologetic History

Something like this genre designation was put forward under the name “general history” by David Aune, who discusses several variants of history that he thinks could be classified under this umbrella term. These include Genealogy or Mythography, Travel Descriptions, Local History, Chronography, and History proper. This genre he describes as narrating:

The important historical experiences of a single national group from their origin to the recent past. This usually involved contacts with other nations [... it] is a genre that first appeared in the Hellenistic period. In one sense, Herodotus anticipated general history because of the scope of his undertaking. Yet for the ancients, general history began with the *Historai* of Ephorus.¹

Aune’s approach to the genre of Acts is most often summarised by his somewhat problematic remark:

By itself, Luke could (like Mark, Matthew and John) be classified as a type of ancient biography. But Luke, though it might have circulated separately, was subordinated to a larger literary structure. Luke does not belong to a type of ancient biography for it belongs with Acts, and Acts cannot be forced into a biographical mold.²

While Aune argues that unity tells against a separate classification, it might be easier to suggest that a separate classification tells against unity. The fact that left to its own devices

¹ David E. Aune, *The New Testament in its literary environment* (Cambridge: Clarke, 1988), 88.

² Aune, *Literary Environment*, 77; Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, 103; Balch, “Jesus as Founder,” 141; Philips, “The Genre of Acts,” 376; Palmer, “Acts and the Historical Monograph,” 374; Philips, “The Genre of Acts,” 376.

Luke could be neatly fitted into the same genre as the other gospels, but in combination with Acts can be called nothing more precise than “general history,” must be suggestive of a problem. Realising this, Richard Burridge comments that “this is an odd result; some other way of dealing with the problem of the two-volume nature of Luke-Acts needs to be found: perhaps Luke itself could be one genre, and Acts another, related genre.”¹ His suggestion must be taken seriously – especially if Aune’s hypothesis is the result of not doing so.

Aune achieves his classification by describing historiography in terms of method rather than form, which allows him to define Acts as historiography purely on the grounds of the preface’s claim to be reporting truth. His belief in the strong unity of Luke-Acts allows him to utilise the truth-claims made there to bolster Acts’ own claims.

Gregory Sterling shares Aune’s basic designation, but significantly improves and clarifies his ideas. The hypothesis that Acts can be located within a tradition in which non-Greeks define and describe their own histories in order to engage with Greek views of their people, and ultimately to put their own perspective forward, certainly finds common ground with Aune, but benefits from more specificity in the tracing of a tradition and its rhetoric, as Sterling himself reflects when he says “I cannot see how Aune can place Polybios and Berossos in the same subdivision! The gulf that separates them is far greater than what they might share in common.”² Sterling’s meticulous and well-evidenced work has reached such status that Thomas E. Philips’ recent review of the genre question looked toward apologetic history and *mythomachia* (see MacDonald, below) as two strands of an approaching consensus on the genre of Acts.³

Sterling works very hard to trace the tradition of apologetic historiography back beyond Herodotus as far as Hekataios of Miletus, in the early 5th century BCE (he advised Miletos not to revolt against Perisa in 499). The tradition is then traced through Herodotos, Hekataios of

¹ Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, 103.

² Sterling, *Historiography and Self-definition*, 10, footnote 54.

³ Philips, “The Genre of Acts,” 385.

Abdera, Megasthenes, Berossos, and Manethon, through to the Hellenistic Jewish Historians, Demetrios, Artapanos, Pseudo-Eupolemos, Eupolemos, and finally to Josephus, who is roughly contemporary to Luke. Having drawn out the common apologetic purpose of these texts, as well as some key similarities in style and content, he then goes on to analyse Luke-Acts (as a unity) in the same way, concluding that Acts fits neatly into this tradition:

The author shared the same outlook as the writers of this genre: they belonged to subgroups within the larger Greco-Roman world. It was this consciousness which led them to write the story of their group (Content). Common to all of the works is the emphasis on the antiquity of the group. The way the author made his case varied: it could be chronological as in Berossos, Manethon, Demetrios, Eupolemos, and Josephos; it could be through cultural claims as in the tradition before Josephos; or it could be by claiming continuity with a tradition recognized for its antiquity as in Luke-Acts.¹

As indicative of a common socio-ideologically driven need to justify oneself when living as an alien under a superior political power, Sterling certainly finds a common strand that emphasizes a tradition of writing. Likewise he argues that certain Hellenized or Hellenizing elements, both in terms of literary style and cultural alignment, are present in most of these texts.

Gregory Sterling's contribution to the genre of Acts has and will continue to be extremely influential in its recognition of generic hybridity that reconciles the Jewish with the Hellenistic elements of Acts. Unfortunately, they fail to convince as a hypothesis for the genre of Acts. The ideology of self-justification has no generic basis, and could come in a

¹ Sterling, *Historiography and Self-definition*, 386-387.

variety of forms. *Contra Apionem* might constitute the classic apology, but in its way, the *Aeneid* justifies the antiquity of the Romans, their right to rule, and their place in the world. Polybius and Dio Cassius propagate similar agendas in their Hellenistic and Roman histories. Most texts are apologetic in some respect, whether for a personal perspective on the world, the worthiness of true love, or divine sanction for an empire. When faced with authors who share a common life-situation (a foreigner living in a Greek city, a Jew living among pagans, etc.), there will be similar agendas present across a range of genres.

A concrete manifestation of this problem becomes evident in Sterling's reservations about Artapanus:

Virtually all contemporary assessments of it attach the term "romance" to it. We need to be careful, however, about how we define romance. Romance in the sense of novel is not an appropriate designation for Artapanos. The extant novels which we have differ greatly from Artapanos: they are heavily erotic, are personal in their orientation, and are designed to entertain rather than make claims on behalf of the author's own ethnic group. [...] I would therefore call it a romantic national history. [...] What makes it history rather than romance is its purpose.¹

Sterling wants to keep Artapanus within the genre he has designated because he meets all the criteria that can be put forward for this designation. Ultimately, however, Artapanus cannot easily be squeezed into this mould. Richard I. Pervo, writing before Sterling and with a rather different agenda, goes further in his description of Artapanus:

Why is Artapanus most often called a novel but Demetrius, Eupolemus, Cleodemus, and 2 Maccabees described as history? Of the fragmentary writings [...] only

¹ Sterling, *Historiography and Self-definition*, 186, 187.

Eupolemus and Artapanus present questions of genre. Eupolemus is laudatory and apologetic. He does not shrink from invention, especially of letters. His narrative style must have been exuberant. This is no Thucydides redivivus, but he is a historian of sorts. In the case of Artapanus, however, a different spirit is at work.¹

Pervo observes that Artapanus' style is far closer to a novelist than a historian.² So Sterling and Pervo see a similar problem with Artapanus, and though both fit the text into their own generic schema, one has to side with Pervo on the issue of classification and conclude that Artapanus must be considered an entertaining story featuring some historical figures, but being mostly fictional in style. Acts is closer in style to Artapanus than to the other historians Sterling discusses, and if *he* must be placed in a different genre, his relationship to Acts cannot simply be ignored. Neither Acts nor Artapanus can be easily placed among the apologetic historians.

The problem of Acts' apparently closer relationship to Artapanus than to the more "historical" histories is also present elsewhere. Niehoff, for example, highlights several aspects of Josephus' narrative technique which combine to reduce and minimise tension in the narrative episodes and therefore reassure the reader of God's benevolence.³ This is at enormous variance with Luke's style, especially in Acts. Another significant difference- that of explicit narration, is dismissed by Clare K. Rothschild as part of Luke's "simultaneous commitment to biblical history, which precluded open exposure of authorial commentary of the type prevalent in Polybius and Josephus."⁴ But Josephus cannot be accused of a lack of commitment to biblical history, especially in *Antiquities*. The difference between explicit and

¹ Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 118; See also Lawrence M. Wills, "The Jewish Novellas," in *Greek fiction: the Greek novel in context*, ed. John R. Morgan and Richard Stoneman (New York: Routledge, 1994), especially 223-224.

² Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 118-119.

³ Maren R. Niehoff, "Two Examples of Josephus' Narrative Technique in His 'Rewritten Bible'," *JSJ* 27, no. 1 (1996): 31-45.

⁴ Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the rhetoric of history*, 95-96.

implicit narration dictates style to an extent that it raises questions about whether the two techniques can be represented by the same genre.¹

2.2. Acts as an Institutional History

Hubert Cancik describes Luke-Acts as “a History that narrates the spread of an institution, a thesis that applies to both logoi; that is, the first logos is not a biography,”² which places him to some extent alongside Aune. His own slant on this genre nonetheless brings new elements into the discussion. He argues that Luke-Acts contains ten features of this genre, and provides examples from the wider literature and from Luke-Acts of these features. The list entails:

1. Election of successors(s)/election to supplement leadership: a fixed topos in the historiography of philosophy and religion. (Acts 1.12-26; 6.1-7)
2. Definition of Membership (1.21-26 (criteria for apostles); 10.45; 11.18; 15.1 ff. (reception of the Spirit)).
3. Financial Questions: no fees are charged, and there is “life in common” in the Academy (Acts 2.44-45; 4.32-35; ch. 11)
4. External Growth (Acts 1.15; 2.41, 47; 4.4; 8.14; 9.31)
5. Elaboration as a consequence of Growth (such as in Lucian’s account of the addition of mystery initiation in the Glycon cult) (Acts 15.22-29).
6. Reports of internal structure, roles, functions, and leadership of the group (Acts 13.1-3; 20.8; 21.8).
7. The relationship between periphery and centre (Acts 11.22-23, though Cancik admits this is not really a topos of the genre)
8. Naming: a fixed topos (Acts 11.26)

¹ See also: Byrskog, “History or Story?,” 265; and Campbell, “The Narrator as ‘He,’ ‘Me,’ and ‘We’: Grammatical Person in Ancient Histories and in the Acts of the Apostles.”

² Hubert Cancik, “The History of Culture, Religion, and Institutions in Ancient Historiography: Philological Observations concerning Luke’s History,” *JBL* 116, no. 4 (1997): 673.

9. Boundary setting over against other organizations (see 10).
10. Divisions within Schools, new foundations, and apostasy (throughout, mainly with Jews)¹

Cancik's argument has several strengths, principal among which is its engagement with philosophical schools and other institutions of the period; fundamental aspects of culture that must be considered part of the target audience's cultural repertoire. As Christoph Heil observes:

The new Classicism of the Augustan time showed increasing interest in 'old' and 'foreign' wisdom. Luke is very well aware of this interest and uses it in his presentation. The *interpretatio Graeca* of Luke and the later Christian apologists made it possible to understand the eschatological Jewish prophet and his followers as "philosophers".²

Cancik shows that Acts' engagement with Hellenistic philosophy is serious and sustained. Yet there are significant problems with his classification. Primarily, this "theme" can only be said to account for most of the narrative of the first six chapters of Acts (remembering that Cancik wants to account for Luke-Acts in its entirety).³ Both before and after this, institutional growth does not seem to account for the whole of the narrative. While it is evident that there are elements of institutional development characterising the book of Acts, using this genre to account for the entire narrative, let alone the entirety of Luke-Acts,

¹ Cancik, "The History of Culture, Religion, and Institutions in Ancient Historiography: Philological Observations concerning Luke's History," 679.

² Heil, "Arius Didymus and Luke-Acts," 390-391.

³ Cancik, "The History of Culture, Religion, and Institutions in Ancient Historiography: Philological Observations concerning Luke's History," 673.

would represent a serious under-reading of the narrative. Mark Reasoner expresses this concern when he argues:

If one starts with the narrative of Acts, these parallels begin to appear more incidental than constitutive of Acts' plot. The story that comes to us in Acts is more focused. If we allow institutional history such thematic prominence as to entitle the story in accord with it, we will miss a bigger point that Luke is making in Acts: divine necessity plays out in the lives of those who proclaim and encounter the word of Jesus.¹

Reasoner is able to follow this line of argument for all of Cancik's ten points, and with considerable success. His alternative theme of "Divine necessity in History" does not constitute a genre, but does account for more of Acts' content, serving also to cohere more of the story together. For Reasoner, Cancik has highlighted some useful points, but they are secondary and not constitutive of a genre.²

Christoph Heil attempts to explore Cancik's suggestions by looking more closely at sub-genres of philosophical history. He attempts to narrow Cancik's classification to one of three of these, and finds that Arius Didymus, whose work represents the only sub-genre of philosophical history that is interested in biographical as well as philosophical issues.³ After a lengthy and judicious attempt at comparison he concludes:

The comparison of Luke-Acts with Arius Didymus showed only a few, rather superficial connections and, at the same time, made the exceptional position of Luke's history clear. The author of Luke-Acts does not share the strictly philosophical

¹ Mark Reasoner, "The Theme of Acts: Institutional History or Divine Necessity in History?," *JBL* 118, no. 4 (1999): 636.

² Reasoner, "The Theme of Acts: Institutional History or Divine Necessity in History?," 659.

³ Heil, "Arius Didymus and Luke-Acts," 360.

and historiographical features of the περι αιρεσεων genre. Therefore Cancik's thesis that Luke's second book is related to the ancient historiography of philosophy, must be rejected.¹

His objections are mostly narrativist, if less explicitly so than Reasoner's.² These two scholars find through their quite different methodologies that the sort of history Cancik proposes simply does not account for the connectedness and purpose of the story, including the interaction of speeches, miracles, and travel narratives. Reasoner also goes so far as to ask for more clarification on what the boundaries of such a genre as "Institutional History" might be.³

2.3. Acts and the Ancient Bios

In 1974, Charles Talbert proposed that Acts is an example of the ancient *Bios* genre. More specifically, his suggestion was that Luke-Acts is philosophical biography of Jesus (the Gospel), and his successors (Acts). His main focus is on the succession component of the Lives of philosophers; which he believed, extrapolating mainly from Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, frequently followed an A+B format like that of Luke-Acts.

The first and most obvious point to be made here is that Talbert makes this case in order to explain the unity of Luke-Acts: the designation makes the Gospel the biography of "a founder of a philosophical movement" and Acts "a biography of his successors." Burridge has already elaborated greatly the idea of Gospel as biography, but the sort of description he uses for the *Bios* genre could not apply to Acts:

¹ Heil, "Arius Didymus and Luke-Acts," 393.

² Heil, "Arius Didymus and Luke-Acts," 384-387.

³ Reasoner, "The Theme of Acts: Institutional History or Divine Necessity in History?," 648-49; Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, 40-42.

Βιοί are works mostly in prose narrative and of medium length; their structure is a bare chronological framework of birth/arrival and death with topical material inserted; the scale is always limited to the subject; a mixture of literary units, notably anecdotes, stories, speeches and sayings, selected from a wide range of oral and written sources, displays the subject's character indirectly through words and deeds.¹

This citation makes it evident that the generic classification of biography, while perhaps not perfect for Luke's Gospel, is far more appropriate to his first volume than to Acts.² Talbert's theory attempts to resolve this problem by making Acts the biography of a number of people, chosen because they followed in the footsteps of the founder. Thus the first half of Acts would be about Peter, the second about Paul. He hypothesized that Luke used the succession theme to demonstrate the continuity of teaching between Jesus and his apostles in order to support what he considered to be the correct take on Christianity.

Talbert's desired contribution to the genre debate seems to be a classification of Acts alongside the (b) volume of intellectual biography, which forces Luke-Acts into a subgenre whose existence is for the most part implied through the work of Diogenes Laertius; but this is the least persuasive part of his argument—something that is widely acknowledged.³ The evidence Talbert produces for this is by no means extensive, proving little more than that biographies of philosophers contained succession narrative. It must also be observed that the succession elements available in antiquity tend to form a relatively small proportion of

¹ Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, 153. A recent defence of this hypothesis can be found in *The Limits of Ancient Biography*, eds. J. Mossman and Brian Ging (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2006), 31-50.

² For some interesting and pertinent reservations about reading the Gospels as biography see Mark Edwards, "Gospel and Genre: Some Reservations", eds. J. Mossman and Brian Ging (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2006), pp. 51-62.

³ Philips, "The Genre of Acts," 368; J. T. Carroll, "Luke-Acts," in *The New Testament today*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 58-69; Alexander, *Acts in its ancient literary context*, 43-68.

the overall work. Perhaps his best example, the life of Pythagoras, dedicates only chapter 36 to succession. In a balanced appraisal of Talbert's suggestion, J. Bradley Chance is forced to admit:

The (a+b) pattern was not a dominant pattern in ancient biographical literature. Of the plethora of lives, noted by Talbert himself for example, only a handful offer such a pattern. And only a number out of this handful offers much more than a mere list of successors. Such a lack of numbers proves nothing on a purely theoretical basis, but does allow one to ask whether the pattern was prevalent enough that the author of Luke-Acts could have expected his readers to pick up on this pattern and interpret the function of his two-volume work accordingly.¹

Loveday Alexander has suggested that this (a+b) model may not exist in the sense Talbert proposes. Most of the examples we have come from compilations of Lives and are not drawn up by people affiliated with the school. So while Talbert has:

Anecdotes → Life → Collected Lives

in which the "Life" element remains largely hypothetical, Alexander points out that it might be reduced to:

Anecdotes → Collection²

¹ J. Bradley Chance, "Talbert's New Perspectives on Luke-Acts: The ABC's of Ancient Lives," in *Cadbury, Knox, and Talbert: American contributions to the study of Acts*, ed. Mikeal Carl Parsons and Joseph B. Tyson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 193.

² Alexander, *Acts in its ancient literary context*, 55.

Neither is her abbreviated model purely hypothetical; evidence for it comes from the life of Socrates, which went straight from the anecdotes provided by Plato, Xenophon, Aristophanes and others, into *Lives*, without ever being converted into a biography.

Talbert has brought the cultural and narrative trope of succession to the attention of scholarship, but these ideas do not have specific generic connotations. To claim that two or multi-volume works with succession as a key element were produced in schools founded by particular philosophers is stretching the evidence.

Talbert's hypothesis begins to look more important when related to succession in the Old Testament. The key successions of the Old Testament, Moses to Joshua, David to Solomon, and Elijah to Elisha, clearly resonate well with Acts: Moses and David in particular are frequently cited by the Apostles and by disciples. The story of Elijah and Elisha may not be cited directly, but there are certainly parallels, particularly with the Ascension and also with miracles. Peter's raising of a dead woman from her bed is, for example, not only parallel to a miracle of Jesus, but to a miracle shared by Elijah and Elisha.¹ These parallels always deserve serious consideration when examining the intertextual relations of Acts, and Talbert is right to bring them in. His survey of succession in the Old Testament is wide-ranging and useful, and firmly fixes the apostles within a tradition as successors to Jesus.

In recent times Talbert has conceded that "various genres were shaped by the succession principle,"² a realization which allows the really useful points of his analysis to be brought into the discussion without having to make unjustified leaps in terms of generic classification. Thus, Talbert deserves credit not just for some very sound observations about Acts, but also for having the humility to concede defeat on a point he put forward very vigorously.

¹ 1 Kings 17.17-24 and 2 Kings 4.8-37. Acts 9.35-43.

² Charles H. Talbert, "Succession in Mediterranean Antiquity: Luke-Acts," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1998 seminar papers: one hundred thirty-fourth Annual Meeting, November 21-24, 1998, Walt Disney World Swan and Walt Disney World Dolphin, Orlando, Florida*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 175.

Overall, it must be said that Talbert has earnestly sought to solve the problem of the genre of Luke-Acts, and has been resourceful and tenacious in his attempt to do so. The wider consensus, including of late, perhaps, his own opinion, is that he has not quite succeeded. Nonetheless, his work has earned my sincere admiration for its boldness, scope, and innovation, and has advanced the study of Acts in many respects.

2.4. Acts and the Historical Monograph

Darryl W. Palmer suggested in 1992 that Acts should be considered an historical monograph.¹ He was not the first to do so; Conzelmann had suggested the same in 1963,² Plumacher³ and Hengel in 1979.⁴ Palmer describes the historical monograph as a selective history covering a specific period or event, and cites examples such as Sallust's *Catiline Conspiracy* and *Jugurthine War*, but also shows that Cicero had a concept of it, as did Polybius. He says of Sallust:

His works conform to the theoretical requirements for a short monograph: they each comprise a single volume, cover a limited historical period, and focus on one theme and, to a significant extent, on one person.⁵

This description more or less agrees with Aune's, and while there is some room for debate over whether something like *The Peloponnesian Wars* could be considered a Monograph, there is sufficient specificity here to see that Acts might easily be said to fit into such a genre.¹

¹ Palmer, "Acts and the Historical Monograph."

² Conzelmann, *Acts*, xl.

³ Eckhard Plümacher, "Die Apostelgeschichte als historische Monographie," in *Les Actes des Apôtres. Traditions, rédaction, théologie*, ed. Jacob Kremer, BETL 48 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979), 457-466.

⁴ Martin Hengel, *Acts and the history of earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 36.

⁵ Palmer, "Acts and the Historical Monograph," 387.

The trouble is that the Monograph is not really a genre at all. Richard Pervo makes this point,² and has the support of such scholarly heavyweights as Ben Perry,³ who uses the term to discuss the novel. Palmer's discussion itself implies an element of crossover between novel and monograph: He cites Gabba, for example, who says, "In the same climate of paradoxographical literature the "novel" is born and develops; the novel in antiquity is in fact a form of history."⁴ Conzelmann, meanwhile, suggests this designation for 3 Maccabees, which is not easy to classify as Hellenistic Historiography.⁵ Palmer is correct to note that the historical monograph could be as entertaining as a novel,⁶ but he does not discuss the manner in which one can differentiate between different kinds of monograph, and thus approach some kind of generic classification. Pervo observes:

The monograph is an important formal category for comparison with Acts. Not all monographs were historical. The structure could be used for outright fiction or other purposes. Monograph refers more to a structure and design than to a specific genre.⁷

The monograph is therefore better described as a format than a genre, though perhaps a format capable of participating in a limited number of genres.

¹ I restrain myself from being pedantic about the length of a monograph, since it is not a point I have a particular need to argue; but one only has to look at the difference in length between *Jugurtha* and *Catiline* to see how the issue might be problematized.

² Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 6, footnote 35.

³ Ben Edwin Perry, *The ancient romances: a literary-historical account of their origins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 146-147.

⁴ Emilio Gabba, "Literature," in *Sources for ancient history*, ed. Michael Hewson Crawford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 15.

⁵ Conzelmann, *Acts*, 6. For a full and useful discussion of the problem of classifying 3 Maccabees, see Sara Raup Johnson, *Historical fictions and Hellenistic Jewish identity: third Maccabees in its cultural context*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

⁶ Palmer, "Acts and the Historical Monograph," 374-375, 388.

⁷ Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 6.

2.5. Acts and Epic

Although it is not particularly common to see Acts compared to Epic, in the ancient world Epic was so important to education and culture that anybody who could read Greek probably knew Homer.¹ As the most influential of all texts in this period, the Homeric epics in particular provide two certain reference points between the author and audience of any text in that milieu. T.J. Luce begins his book *The Greek Historians* with a discussion of Homeric influence, and makes it clear that this is fundamental to understanding them. According to him, imitation of and reaction against Homer shaped the historical mode more than any other factor.² If it has been underexplored as a genre, Todd Penner explains the scholarly reluctance to depart from historiographical models:

The delineation of Acts as a piece of ancient *historia* says something about personal commitments to both Acts and history; it means something to designate early Christian texts in this manner. The resistance to reading Acts as a novel or epic – in part because of the undeniable aura of fictionality that surrounds those genres – suggests that specific theological and ideological commitments shape the kinds of questions we ask and the methods we practice.³

As if to illustrate Todd Penner's point, Clare K. Rothschild attacks Marianne Palmer-Bonz for trying to "claim for Luke-Acts one category *over* another."⁴ Rothschild would suggest that the influence of Epic does not equate to history, and of course, she is right. But if ancient audiences perceived history as intimately related to epic, this does not mean they would not be able to delineate between the examples of that genre discussed by Bonz and the histories

¹ Karl Olav Sandnes, *The challenge of Homer: school, Pagan poets and early Christianity*, Library of NTS 400 (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 3-58.

² T. James Luce, *The Greek historians* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1-6.

³ Penner, "Contextualizing Acts," 11-12.

⁴ Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the rhetoric of history*, 8, footnote 30.

that Sterling and Rothschild discuss, even when the differences that enable such delineation are not very clear to a modern critic. The ancients' generic perceptions must have been as appropriate to their own literature as our modern ones are for ours.

Nonetheless, Bonz does go too far when she argues that Acts is an Epic:

Indeed, could it be that Luke-Acts was composed as a foundational Epic for the newly emerging Christian communities of the Greco Roman world, written to confer ancient Israel's religious heritage definitely and exclusively upon the church?¹

Dennis MacDonald, another important voice in this area, argues that interpreters need to consider the Hellenistic literature, the Epics in particular, just as much as Jewish literature, when interpreting Acts. His examples do not serve to interpret Acts *as Epic*, as Palmer-Bonz appears to do, so much as *some of Acts in the light of Epic*,² a practice which Gregory Sterling also notes the value of.³

Alexander makes some very useful points on this subject, most important of which is her observation that "Such readings can be exciting and illuminating in their own right, but they are essentially ahistorical: they tell us nothing of deliberate imitation or conscious evocation."⁴ This is a basic but under-appreciated reality: Homer was so pervasive as a cultural phenomenon that imitation did not require much conscious thought: less perhaps than stock Shakespeare tropes from *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*, used today without any conscious reference to the plays themselves.

¹ Bonz, *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic*, 29.

² I do not agree with Sandnes, "Imitatio Homeri? An Appraisal of Dennis R. MacDonald's 'Mimesis Criticism'." *JBL* 4, 2005, 715-32; who appears to want allusions to be actual references before he will accept them. Such an approach would ensure that Acts is never understood in its literary context.

³ Sterling, *Historiography and Self-definition*, 361.

⁴ Alexander, *Acts in its ancient literary context*, 169.

But while such unconscious imitation is bad news if it is a single redactional purpose being sought after, it is nonetheless a literary fact, and must be dealt with, whether it is quantifiable and controllable or not – particularly in the case of epic influence on Greek literature.¹

2.6. Acts and the Novel

Richard Pervo, in his 1987 book, *Profit With Delight*, convincingly argued that more parallels can be found between Acts and the novels of the period than between Acts and historiography. His use of the comparison was not the first,² but is certainly the most extensive. Often been criticised for wrongly designating Acts a novel, Pervo himself is reluctant to make such a claim. He makes two particularly important points with significant interpretative ramifications. These are judiciously summarised by Thomas E. Philips:

For Pervo, Acts was distinguished from the histories of the era by two major criteria. First, Acts was a popular, as opposed to a learned, document. ‘Luke did not write a learned treatise. He was a “popular” writer’ (1987: 11). Second, as popular literature, Acts maintained a deeper interest in entertaining its readers than did the learned historiography of the time (1987:11). For Pervo, many of the literary themes (e.g. persecution, conspiracies, riots and travels) and literary devices (e.g. wit and

¹ Alexander, *Acts in its ancient literary context*, 173.

² Susan Marie Praeder, “Luke-Acts and Ancient Novel,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1981 seminar papers: one hundred seventeenth annual meeting*, ed. Kent Harold Richards (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1981), 269-292; Praeder, “Luke-Acts and Ancient Novel”; S.P. Schierling and Schierling M. J., “The influence of the Ancient Romances on the Acts of the Apostles,” *Clasbul* 54 (1978): 81-88.

irony) in Acts would have entertained ancient readers and encouraged them to read Acts as something other than historiography (1987: 12-85).¹

Cadbury had made the same conclusion about the popular nature of Acts in 1958, suggesting that his sources were to blame.² More recently, Loveday Alexander has made the same assertion.³ If true, the designation of “popular literature” does not place Acts within a specific genre, but does further distance it from the Thucydidean tradition. The designation of “popular” has also met with support from outside of biblical studies. Richard Stoneman approvingly cites M. Reiser’s 1984 study of Mark’s Gospel and the *Alexander Romance*, whose common elements range:

from syntactic features to aspects of narrative style, including parataxis and repetition, absence of complex narrative, vagueness of geographical and chronological reference, ideal scenes and miracles which accompany the deaths of Jesus and Alexander. Both texts thus exhibit the linguistic and stylistic features of popular literature in the service of a portrait of a unique figure.⁴

MacDonald has also compared Mark’s Gospel to Homer, and has highlighted illuminating parallels,⁵ raising the possibility that Mark is able to present the story of Jesus in dialogue

¹ Philips, “The Genre of Acts,” 369-370.

² Cadbury, *The making of Luke-Acts*, 134.

³ Alexander, *Acts in its ancient literary context*, 206.

⁴ John R. Morgan and Richard Stoneman, eds., *Greek fiction: the Greek novel in context* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 124; M. Reiser, “Der Alexanderroman und das Markusevangelium,” in *Markusphilologie*, ed. Hubert Cancik (Tübingen: WUNT, 1984), 131-63.

⁵ Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

with the Greek Epics *and* the legends surrounding Alexander the Great. Such complex dialogue makes a good deal of sense in terms of the importance Mark attributes to Jesus and the events surrounding him. Add to this that the *Alexander Romance* almost certainly imitates Homer,¹ and that Mark certainly imitates and alludes to the Septuagint, and one is faced with multiple levels of complexity behind and beyond the surface texture of the Gospel. This makes simple linear interpretation that treats the text as if it were directly mimetic something of a fallacy. Pervo observes the likelihood that Mark is a source for Acts, and this is an important point: if Mark is a source for Luke, it must have been available to him as a potential source for Acts. Pervo notes similarities between Acts 1.7 and Mark 13.32² and Acts 5.12-16 and Mark 6.55-56³ as instances where this appears to have occurred.⁴

If biblical scholars are uncomfortable exploring Acts in the light of texts like the *Alexander Romance*, it may be due to the perception of history as having a certain staid, static form. This preconception about what history should look like makes a presupposition about Acts as *historia* also one against Acts as a popular text. In recent times, genre theorists have challenged this assumption:

I want to argue against the customary assumption that history is a single, stable, and rather decorous literature and suggest instead that it is best understood as a cluster of overlapping and competing genres, "low" as well as "high." The result is a much more nuanced and flexible picture of historical thought - one that is better able to accommodate the range of methods, ideologies, and rhetorics that make up the practice of any given era of historical writing. And since the so-called "minor" genres

¹ Richard Stoneman, "The Alexander Romance: From History to Fiction," in *Greek fiction: the Greek novel in context*, ed. John R. Morgan and Richard Stoneman (New York: Routledge, 1994), 120.

² Pervo, *Dating Acts*, 36.

³ Pervo, *Dating Acts*, 37.

⁴ Pervo, *Dating Acts*, 35-49.

often give us the best evidence of the force of new agendas or the demands of new audiences, a genre theory that pays attention to the full range of historical writing is much better able to capture the sense of new directions in thought or practice.¹

If Mark Salber Phillips is correct, even fixing Acts within a matrix of historical genres will require a broad understanding of history and contemporary historically orientated texts. It is possible that the interpretation of Acts, as well as insights into the ideological demands that underlie its form, suffer as a consequence of a narrow conception of history that is not necessarily accurate.

The second of Pervo's arguments summarised by Phillips is that Acts creates suspense and excitement,² and that this is rather more in the novelistic than the historiographical way. It is a difficult point to prove, because histories do contain many exciting episodes³ – but it is a good general observation, that Acts is indeed very concerned to entertain, and is full of exciting episodes, miracles, and last minute escapes, which are in a density and style that are very unlike Hellenistic historiography. In histories the improbable is generally commented upon and assessed for likelihood, which allows the narrator to maintain credibility whether or not his audience accepts the account he presents them with - in Acts this is never the case. While neither the generation of suspense, the presence of exciting episodes, or the lack of critical distance are not without parallel in Hellenistic historiography, their pervasive role in the narrative strategy of Acts also appear to distinguish it from that genre. In short, there are more unbelievable events than a historian would narrate, and less critical distance than a historian would create if he narrated them.

¹ Phillips, "Histories, Micro- and Literary: Problems of Genre and Distance," 213.

² Phillips, "The Genre of Acts," 370.

³ Porter, *The Paul of Acts: essays in literary criticism, rhetoric, and theology*, 15.

Pervo's later article on Direct Speech in Acts as indicative of genre shows that Acts has around 51% direct speech;¹ behind only *Azaneth*, *Callirhoe*, and the *Protevangelium of James*, and marginally ahead of *Judith* and *Susanna*; two Jewish novellas. The first historian to figure in the list is Sallust's *Catiline*, with 28%.² Polybius' *Histories*, on the other hand, does not have enough direct speech to achieve 1%.³ This survey of the relevant contemporary literature aligns Acts more closely with the "Jewish novella." These unrepentantly popular novellas vary in content and themes, but have a consistent ideology and consistent themes, most important of which is probably faith in God despite great peril leading to ultimate victory. They also lack a strong emphasis on romance (with some partial exceptions), which is a key difference between Acts and the Graeco-Roman novel.

Lawrence M. Wills divides Jewish novelistic literature into three groups:

1. National hero novellas: rousing adventure stories which champion the exploits of the ancient heroes of the Jews. The best preserved example probably being by Artapanus in about 200 BCE.
2. Novellas that treat figures who were unimportant or unknown to Jewish history, or are depicted in such a way that their historicity is patently unbelievable. This would include Esther, Daniel, Tobit, Azaneth, or Judith.⁴ They present a semblance of historical verisimilitude to create atmosphere, but nevertheless contain incorrect and patently unbelievable historical figures. Wills thinks these texts were likely read as fictions, or in some cases, satires or farces.
3. Historical Novellas, which treat historical figures from the recent past in a way that, however implausible to us, was probably received as factually true, such as third

¹ Richard I. Pervo, "Direct Speech in Acts and the Question of Genre," *JSNT* 28 (2006): 288.

² Several long speeches help *Catiline* reach this figure.

³ Pervo, "Direct Speech in Acts," 301.

⁴ More detail on the patent lack of historicity in these texts can be found in Johnson, *Historical fictions*, 9-55.

Maccabees, and the Tobiad Romance and Royal Family of Adiabene contained in Josephus' Antiquities.¹

The most likely category for Acts is the last, if only because it deals with "historical figures from the recent past." According to Wills' classifications, this also means that the target audience could have received it as "factually true." Thus the historical element of Acts, on this understanding at least, would be taken quite seriously without trying to slot Acts into an explicitly historiographical genre. Such a hypothesis incorporates the apologetic elements of Sterling's analysis with more narrational and entertainment-based elements – the novellas did focus strongly on individual figures (bios) and the heroic ideology owes something to epic. As Wills comments, "The Jewish novellas constitute perhaps our best laboratory for discerning the process by which indigenous narratives of various kinds were transformed into popular literature."² Approached from another angle, one might say that they show us how ideological frameworks similar to that of Josephus were expounded in the realm of popular narrative.

Pervo, writing before Wills, makes a more general statement about the Jewish novellas which does not fully account for the fictional works:

Jewish novelists did not invent their characters. They elaborated figures and events from myth, legend, Scripture, and history. The writers of historical fiction took pains to emulate both their own and Greek historians. As in the case of Luke, it is not valid to insist that the authors were either telling the truth or engaging in deceit.

¹ Wills, "The Jewish Novellas," 223-224.

² Wills, "The Jewish Novellas," 225.

Comparative analysis leads to the conclusion that their devices were employed, as by Chariton, for example, to create verisimilitude.¹

This statement does not hold very well for Tobit, or even Judith, but is applicable in the case of the Daniel novellas, the Josephus novellas, and 2 and 3 Maccabees, as well as the biblical rewrite of Artapanus, Joseph and Azaneth, and even *Esther*, at least to some degree.² There is in general a stronger urge to historical verisimilitude in the Jewish Novellas than the Greek novels, though there is also a comic tendency (*Susannah, Esther, Tobit*)³ that seems to come in inverse relation to historicity.

Analysis of the relationship between Acts and the Jewish Novella is, however, significantly compromised by the process of Hellenization that was well underway in the Jewish literary milieu. Application of the sort of intertextual relations between Jewish and Greek history that Sterling discusses cross over easily into the realm of the novel.⁴ By the time sexuality becomes a factor, as in the case of *Susannah*, or more obviously, *Joseph and Aseneth*, the boundary between the two is quite blurred. Nonetheless, Jewish novellas are always explicit about their religious orientation, and are to some extent stylistically Septuagintal – in both of these respects Acts can be seen as belonging among them.

¹ Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 120.

² Esther claims to account for the festival of Purim.

³ David McCracken, "Narration and Comedy in the Book of Tobit," *JBL* 114, no. 3 (1995): 401-418; Wills, "The Jewish Novellas," 227. See chapter 7 of this thesis for a more thorough discussion of the comic element.

⁴ Sterling, *Historiography and Self-definition*; Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 121.

Given their common traits, it is somewhat surprising that more work has not been done on the comparison between Acts and this genre, but the fact is that very little secondary literature makes use of the Jewish novella for interpreting Acts.¹

3. Pick a Box, Any Box: the options so far

The options outlined above all have merits – but that very fact tells against them. If firm boundaries exist between genres then the presence of two or more in any significant measure does not represent interpretative data but a problem to be solved. Genre as classification is restrictive.

In the introduction to his 2002 monograph *Pauline Christianity: Luke-Acts and the Legacy of Paul*,² Christopher Mount briefly surveys the issue of genre, before launching into some extraordinarily perceptive criticisms of the methodologies surrounding genre-studies in Acts. Speaking of Talbert's³ hypothesis (the philosophical *Bios*), he says:

He achieves this result using a method of comparison that selectively defines certain similarities (with some biographies in Diogenes Laertius over against similarities

¹ Among the better scholars in this regard are D.P. Bechard, *Paul outside the walls: a study of Luke's socio-geographical universalism in Acts 14:8-20* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2000), 493, and Rick Strelan, *Strange acts: studies in the cultural world of the Acts of the Apostles* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 492-3. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the rhetoric of history*, is among the worst, for she rebuts Pervo quite passionately in half a dozen locations without citing much Jewish literature outside of Josephus.

² Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 59-68.

³ To be fair to Charles H. Talbert, *Literary patterns*, 132-133, he was unfortunate in that he was educated in an era very different to our own in terms of genre and literary theory. His willingness to take the problem on was, and remains, admirably brave.

with Mk) and suppresses differences (for example, concerning the speeches in Acts):

his similarities are “remarkable”; any differences are “not decisive.”¹

Mount goes on to observe that “while Talbert’s conclusions have not been widely accepted, this methodological procedure has been repeated to establish virtually every genre identification proposed for the gospels in general and Lk-Acts in particular [...].” He then demonstrates this with examples from several scholars,² and suggests that “The proposed comparisons (genre identifications) rhetorically and methodologically define certain similarities over against differences in an arbitrary manner to establish the proposed genre.”³

Mount’s point highlights a fundamental problem of method in the study of Acts’ genre: the ill-defined methodology with which the search for the genre of Acts goes on is essentially a binary method of classification which only serves to suppress “other possible generic configurations of similarities and differences” because it relies upon “an inadequate approach to comparison.”⁴ Mount would rather use more specific terminology, such as “X resembles Y more than Z with respect to V”. “Comparison is always partial, relative, and determined by the interests of the observer.”⁵ He goes on:

¹ Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 64; Charles H. Talbert, *Literary patterns, theological themes, and the genre of Luke-Acts*, 132-133. In this he aligns himself with modern genre theory, but this will be discussed in the next chapter.

² Although in the case of MacDonald his criticism comes shortly before the publication of *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer*, which is much more congenial to his ideas, and in the case of Pervo, his criticisms are, at least in my opinion, unfair. I have always understood Pervo’s point to be that Acts has more in common with the novel than with historiography, but that the resemblances are often ignored for reasons of piety. He then highlights the similarities. Pervo never, as far as I recall, argues that Acts is a novel. “My intent is that such investigation [of the relevance of the novel for interpreting Acts] proceed alongside, as well as in competition with, historiographical models.” Pervo, *Profit in Delight* 137.

³ Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 64.

⁴ Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 65.

⁵ Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 65.

Although the debate about the genre of Lk-Acts has been characterized by an unsuccessful attempt to discover a definitive point of similarity or difference to determine comparison, this search for *the* genre of Lk-Acts has illuminated the complexity of the literary relations of Lk-Acts, a complexity that scholars have *relentlessly minimized*. The various comparisons (with historiography, biography, novel, gospel traditions) suggest oral and literary traditions within which the author was writing and placing his work, traditions that are important indications of the social and literary (and thus interpretative) matrix within which Lk-Acts belongs.¹

Taking this statement seriously means problematising an already difficult research field, and might suggest the abandonment of the whole enterprise. Indeed, this is exactly what Mount does – refuses to pursue the search for a definite genre of Lk-Acts.²

Mount's comments on the genre of Acts (or in his case, Luke-Acts), while covering only a few pages, are extraordinarily insightful. Most important is his frank assessment of the methodology applied, as well as some tantalising comments about intertextuality and its role in creating generic expectations.³ He does not use the term "binary classification," which is the one I want to use to discuss this classificatory approach to genre, but in essence he advocates moving away from a binary system into something with more fluid boundaries.

This search for *the* Genre of Acts (or Luke-Acts) has involved many suggestions, and none of them are without merit. This appears to create a "pick a box, any box" situation. But even a

¹ Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 67. My italics.

² Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 67. He is not alone. Penner, "Contextualizing Acts," 14-15, admits to wanting to skirt the issue as unhelpful; Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," in *Modern genre theory*, ed. David Duff (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 219-231, questions the entire enterprise of generic classification.

³ Comments which I am sorry he does not pursue. Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 68-69.

small amount of reflection on that theoretical stance shows that it could never be adopted at a pragmatic level. The reader, using this idea, is supposed to say to herself “Luke-Acts is a philosophical *bios*” and read accordingly, minimizing any features that are clearly *not* part of that genre, or are discordant with it. While most scholars acknowledge flexibility within a genre, there is simply no way to tell whether a text is bios containing elements of epic or epic containing elements of bios. This is a matter of importance.

In reality, one might use Talbert’s hypothesis to explore the successional elements of Acts, but must also acknowledge Acts’ apparent lack of interest in biography for its own sake. One might note historical but *non-biographical* information (such as the institutional elements early in Acts, or the history of Jewish relations that figures in the life of all three protagonists), but must also accept the strong focus on individual characters throughout both Luke and Acts. Sterling’s suggestion significantly improves our understanding of Acts’ as Jewish writing in a Hellenized context, and MacDonald’s exploration of Homeric parallels highlights what Luke shared with Greek literary history. The notion that one of these proposals must be accepted over and against another is counter-productive – all can be fruitfully used to understand elements of Acts, and together, they can illuminate the whole.

Chapter 3. THE THEORY OF GENRE

1. Introduction

In the last chapter the most important proposals for the genre of Acts were briefly analysed. In the conclusion I raised concerns about both the methodological approach to generic classification and about the possible benefits of any consensus that might come about. In this chapter I want to develop a methodological strategy which advances interpretation while avoiding a rigidity too inflexible to cope with the precarious nature of genre.¹ Genre and literary theory require methodological clarity if they are to avoid the accusation of subjectivity, but this requirement must be balanced against the warning of F. Scott Spencer:

Modern literary theory has its own complex jargon and method of argumentation which can quickly weary even the most diligent student in search of practical aids to understanding the biblical text. The burden is on the biblical critic informed by secular literary theory to demonstrate clearly and succinctly how such theory enhances comprehension of the biblical message. It is frustrating to wade through some heavy discussion of literary methodology to arrive at a few pages of application to biblical study which reveal nothing that could not have also been deduced by more conventional means.²

I take this advice very seriously – any methodology developed here must be helpful, which means pragmatic and workable. This chapter aims to steer between the Scylla of

¹ Byrskog, "History or Story?," 283.

² Spencer, "Modern Literary Approaches," 412; Charles H. Talbert, "Review of Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. Volume One: The Gospel According to Luke*," *Biblia* 69 (1988): 138.

methodological madness and the Charybdis of failing to convince. I define a good method as one that is both simple and effective.

Biblical critics have not yet come fully to terms with genre theory, which is immensely complicated and particularly fluid in nature. Secular theorists, of course, have at least nearly as much trouble: advances in recent years have come mainly from the surrendering of ideas about fixed structures and an acceptance of dialogue between genres. In this chapter it is not only genre but narrative and cognitive theory (the latter is becoming more and more important in understanding genre) that are brought in to the discussion.

Any discussion about genre within biblical studies needs to begin with two primary objectives. The first is to move away from a prescriptive approach to genre toward a more flexible model (while avoiding so much flexibility that it becomes pointless). The second is to establish how genre enables and assists communication in literature. In my opinion, any study of biblical narrative that does not first resolve these two problems cannot hope to make effective progress.

2. Genre, Classification, Hybridity

When looking at the main suggestions for the genre of Acts, the most striking observation is that most of them do have a basis in the literature of the period – suggesting that Acts could claim commonality with several genres. Thomas E. Philips, looking at the developing picture in research on the genre of Acts concludes that a consensus is growing which sees Acts “as a history, but one that contains fictional elements.”¹ This consensus is perhaps an awkward one, but it is a begrudging acknowledgement of generic hybridity. Acts scholarship is finding

¹ Philips, “The Genre of Acts,” 385. That this can be said for most genres has been observed since the formalists. See for example, Boris Eichenbaum, “Introduction to the Formal Method,” in *Literary theory: an anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 8-16.

in practice what genre theorists have established in principle – that fixed genre categories have very limited use for interpreting texts.

A consensus of hybridity does not necessarily allow interpretation to progress any further. The most widespread but implicit hope appears to be that a definitive answer in regard to genre will provide validation for the truth-value of the biblical narrative. In Gregory Sterling's discussion on genre and historiography, he argues that genre is more important than this sort of validation, and quotes E.D. Hirsch in support, who says: "An interpreter's preliminary generic conception of a text is constitutive of everything that he/she subsequently understands."¹ On this basis Sterling argues: "The significance of this claim is that it makes genre an indispensable aspect of interpretation."² The trouble with this is that where several genres appear to be present, a definitive classification actually appears to hinder interpretation by minimizing all the aspects more appropriate to other genres. Persisting with a binary model actively hinders us from making use of at least some of this "indispensable aspect of interpretation."³ A rare exception is Richard Burridge, who discusses the purpose of genres for six pages but whose conclusion does not escape a certain prescriptivism. Burridge belies his own discussion, which talks of the thwarting of expectations, by concluding that "Through genre we are enabled to understand even old or unfamiliar works, like the Gospels."⁴ This can help if only one set of expectations is raised – but in the case of Acts there are at least six.⁵

¹ Sterling, *Historiography and Self-definition*, 16; Eric Donald Hirsch, *Validity in interpretation* (New Haven, 1971), 74.

² Sterling, *Historiography and Self-definition*, 16.

³ A promising collection of essays has recently appeared, in Boer, *Bakhtin and Biblical literature*. Binary classification is a prominent idea in this collection.

⁴ Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, 38.

⁵ This reductionistic tendency is evident in Burridge's more recent work. See for example Richard A. Burridge, "Reading the Gospels as Biography," in *The limits of ancient biography*, ed. Judith Mossman and B. C. McGing (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2006), 31-50, in which other proposals are considered to be either right or wrong (33, footnote 7), but generic dialogue with the biographical genre is considered as ample evidence for classification, (32, 33, 42).

More often, scholars adhere to a principle of binary classification that is intolerant of divergence from what is considered the correct taxonomy: Mark Edwards sums this up nicely when he says that:

During the last few decades it has become almost a dogma in some quarters that every work of Greek or Latin literature was written in conformity with certain rigid precepts, known to the audience of the time but obscure to us, and that therefore the initial task for a critic of the Gospels is to assign them to a genre and learn its rules.¹

This tendency is evident everywhere in biblical studies. For example Burridge, despite cataloguing many features, is not prescriptive enough for Adela Yarbro Collins, who states:

Burridge acknowledges the lack of clear ancient criteria for defining a *bios* by attempting to define the genre inductively, using a list of generic features derived from modern literary criticism. He has chosen generic features that are likely to reveal the particular pattern for each genre that constitutes the "contract" between author and reader. These include opening features (title, opening words, prologue, or preface), subject (i.e., subject matter or content), external features (mode of representation, meter, size or length, structure or sequence, scale, sources, methods of characterization), and internal features (setting, topics, style, tone, mood,

¹ Mark Edwards, "Gospel and Genre: Some Reservations," in *The limits of ancient biography*, ed. B. C. McGing and Judith Mossman (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2006), 51. ff.

attitude, values, quality of characterization, social setting, occasion of writing, author's intention or purpose) (p. 111).¹

But then complains:

Burridge is surely correct in taking the position that the last centuries B.C.E. and the first century C.E. was a time of flexible genres. But if our goal is the interpretation of texts, it is not helpful to stay at that level of generality. Although it is a necessary corrective to an unrealistically rigid notion of genre as a set of pigeonholes, an emphasis on flexible boundaries and "crossings" between genres and overlapping circles of genera proxima does not illuminate what is distinctive about particular genres.²

Richard Pervo is arguably even less prescriptive than Burridge in his 1986 monograph *Profit with Delight*, in which he does not attempt so much to classify as to compare. Stanley E.

Porter is a recent critic:

The most telling [logical and literary problem] is perhaps Pervo's failure to identify the book of Acts with either historical writing *or* the ancient novel. Such a mixed genre as he posits does not appear to have been a recognized genre of the Greco-Roman World. Pervo is quick to point out what he sees as parallels in Acts and ancient novels – such as imprisonments, shipwrecks, travel narrative, and various humorous and lighthearted elements – all of which are paralleled in *both* fictional

¹ Adela Yarbro Collins, "Review: Genre and the Gospels," *JR* 75, no. 2 (1995): 240.

² Adela Yarbro Collins, "Review: Genre and the Gospels," 240.

and historical texts of the ancient world, but that do not necessarily imply confusion in the use made of them.¹

Porter works on the assumption that a mixed genre is an impossibility: if Acts is to be considered a novel, there is the problem of history; if history, the problem of the novel. Pervo's non-identification of Acts in precise and recognised terms is seen as a failure that leaves his thesis open to criticism. Yet genre theorists have moved away from such rigidity in recent years. One might quote Mark Salber Phillips, who says:

Considered as frameworks of communication, genres can neither be fixed nor autonomous. Rather, their identities are always interrelated with those of other genres, so that contrast and combination are a key feature of the way genres develop and change. Genres, to put this differently, are necessarily responsive to each other as well as to the social conditions that frame them. In this way, they form larger groupings or systems, which are themselves historically conditioned and variable. Accordingly, as authors innovate and the conditions of knowledge and communication change over time, genres undergo a process of revision that registers new relations of authors, readers, and disciplines.²

If Phillips is right in this, any critical process which rules texts out of the interpretative process on principle is likely to be a hindrance: the only way to definitively rule out a text is to establish its postdating the text in hand, and this, as biblical scholars have learnt, is not an easy task.

¹ Porter, *The Paul of Acts*, 15.

² Phillips, "Histories, Micro- and Literary: Problems of Genre and Distance," 212.

Ruling in any text that was likely to have been in use at the time of Acts' publication then, each text contains data about the interpretative strategies available by contemporary readers. Genres are one way that readers narrowed the range of available options and received initial indicators about what they might expect a text to do. As an example of this, one of Porter's criticisms of Pervo relates to his description of the novel as having a predictable outcome.¹ Porter argues that the outcome of Acts is not predictable in the way that the ancient romances are; in his view this proves the error in Pervo's hypothesis.² But such a reading depends on what the reader expects: if one reads a novel as a history, it is natural that they will interpret it badly and fail to properly follow the codes laid down by the author; likewise, if one reads a history as a novel, it is always likely to disappoint.³ Right across the criticisms of Pervo the same problem occurs. David Balch's argument that this genre, as well as Talbert's *bios*, would make the focus of Acts the individual, rather than on the sort of universal, political concerns that he considers central to Acts.⁴ The problem could just as easily be looked at from the opposite perspective— if one thinks Acts is about the development of an institution as Cancik does (see above), other important elements have to be minimised. Expectations about the communication dictate its success, so readers merely need to formulate the correct expectations. Unfortunately, literary artists have always taken great pleasure in toying with those expectations and subverting them to create new artistic effects.

¹ To read Pervo's description of the novel see Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 104-114.

² Porter, *The Paul of Acts*, 16.

³ This is a point that I prove in the second part of the thesis, where the readings of Acts show how the target audience would organise the text.

⁴ Balch, "Jesus as Founder." See also Bonz, *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic*, 13, who criticises Balch on similar grounds.

2.1. Pure Forms and Popular Texts

As noted in the previous chapter, Acts has occasionally been called a popular text;¹ a hypothesis which is significant and underrated. In the aftermath of *Profit with Delight*, Pervo has maintained this idea:

In the Greco-Roman world, genre was intimately bound up with style and, to a large degree, with content. Among items that distinguish Luke and Acts from learned historiography are the persistent use of an omniscient narrator, the volume of dialogue and direct speech, techniques of plotting and structure, the quantity of entertaining narrative, limitations of style, the nature of the subject, and the presence of what I describe as “fiction.” These are compelling reasons for including more “popular” texts on the menu of works to be compared with Luke and Acts. There is another: popular texts were much less likely to be concerned with the fine points of generic distinction than were more sophisticated literary compositions.²

The idea behind both Porter’s criticisms of Pervo and many of the genre proposals for Acts is that of the pure generic form. Certainly, such a notion has a basis in the practice of ancient writers, who looked always to “a few unchanging models of acknowledged mastery.”³ At the

¹ Cadbury, *The making of Luke-Acts*, 133-4, has made suggestions of this nature, as has been noted. Even David Balch, “Jesus as Founder,” 143, links Asian historiography with a populist tendency and implies that this is important for his reading of Acts.

² Richard I. Pervo, “Israel’s Heritage and Claims Upon the Genre(s) of Luke and Acts,” in *Jesus and the heritage of Israel: Luke’s narrative claim upon Israel’s legacy*, ed. David P. Moessner (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999), 135.

³ John Marincola, *Authority and tradition in ancient historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12.

same time, John Marincola, who makes this statement, also makes it clear that innovation and individuality were fundamental to good style.¹ Modern scholars question not only the extent to which such rigidity was observed by ancients, but even whether it was primarily a literary observation at all. Hayden White thinks that “generic purity is a supreme value among aristocratic, conservative, and reactionary social groups and political parties.”² Mikhail Bakhtin observes that pure generic forms are primarily a social construct:

Novelistic discourse is a poetic discourse, but one that does not fit within the frame provided by the concept of poetic discourse as it now exists. This concept has certain underlying presuppositions that limit it. The very concept – in the course of its historical formation from Aristotle to the present day- has been oriented toward the specific “official” genres and connected with specific historical tendencies in verbal ideological life. Thus a whole series of phenomena remained beyond its conceptual horizon.³

Of course, the period in which Acts was written was far closer to Aristotle than we are today, and traced much of its literary culture directly back to ancient Athens. In that epoch, pure forms such as tragedy, comedy, epic and history were considered immutable and eternal. This is something that Daniel Selden discusses in the context of the Greek Novel:

¹ Marincola, *Authority and tradition in ancient historiography*, 14.

² Hayden White, “The Narrativization of Real Events,” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 4 (1981): 69.

³ Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 269.

Plato is adamant about one thing: literary kinds must remain distinct and, in fact, the mixture of genres serves the Athenian Stranger as the principal paradigm for political degeneration [...]

Long after the different genres ceased to be occasional and to fulfil specific social functions, they continued to bear the marks of status, class, ethnicity, and gender, and for writers to uphold the propriety of these distinctions was felt implicitly to validate a social order. In this case, theory stands in dialectical relation to authorial practice. The hybridization of which Plato complains in the *Laws* was already fact [...]¹

If Acts was indeed intended as a popular text, a fixed and formal generic categorisation is not necessarily the correct approach to the genre question, and any attempt to place it in a single category is flawed from the outset. This does not mean that Acts cannot be seen as history – the elevation of the history genre above the level of popular style itself rests on a misconception, as we saw in the previous chapter. This problem is further exacerbated by the multiplicity of styles available in this social context: the Jewish fictions generally called “Jewish Romances” or “Jewish Novels” are probably identified as such because of a certain popular character, but they present a very different style of narrative to that of their Greek counterparts.²

¹ Daniel Selden, “Genre of Genre” in *The search for the ancient novel*, ed. James Tatum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 40-41. One might also add that Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the rhetoric of history*, 95, argues that Hellenistic historians were using techniques and styles from epic, tragedy, and scientific approaches.

² On this problem see Sara Raup Johnson, *Historical fictions and Hellenistic Jewish identity: third Maccabees in its cultural context*, Hellenistic culture and society 43 (Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 2004), 1-34.

The popular text is defined by its appeal to a broad audience,¹ and by definition reaches beyond the confines of a socially-elite readership, giving it greater potential for poetic licence. This is not to say that popular literature always has or had a direct interest in subversion or social upheaval – but ideological relations of cultural power create a hierarchy of restriction: the ideology of the group who benefits most from the current state of affairs is seldom interested in new and radical change.

Having said this, it must be added that even among first-rate ancient authors, subversion of genre was a normal and useful activity. Burrige cites R.K. Hack:

“Horace, the perfect artist, was a desperate mixer of genres.” Furthermore, the best of his poems are the very ones which break the rules: the validity of the laws “is in inverse ratio to the originality and personal merit of the poems”. So a contradiction emerges where “the laws of the lyric genre upheld by Horace the critic are definitely annulled by Horace the poet.”²

If genre can be routinely subverted even by those first-class poets who were engaged in enforcing generic boundaries through their criticism,³ it can be reliably inferred that those authors who, so far as can be known, had no interest in criticism, were more than happy to disregard propriety whenever it suited them. For Acts, this might mean that generic

¹ Pervo, “Direct Speech in Acts,” 303, argues that popular does not refer to a mass market, but to “less demanding and more enjoyable compositions.” I both agree and disagree with him – the popular text was not read by *everyone*, but could be read by *anyone* (at least, anyone that could read and had access to the texts).

² Burrige, *What are the Gospels?*, 57; R. K. Hack, “The Doctrine of Literary Forms,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 27 (1916): 30-32.

³ Depew, “Genre, Occasion, and Imitation,” presents several good examples of Callimachus’ willingness to break generic convention.

boundaries are merely an expensive myth that restricts resources and limits interpretation of the text.

2.2. The Process of Generic Change

If genre is part of the author's communicative strategy, it follows not only that its use will affect the nature of the communication, but that the nature of the communication affects the use of genre. Two communicative priorities that are always instrumental in generic change are particularly important - the inevitable loss of communicative efficacy through stagnation, and the continual change in what needs to be communicated.

Formalist Yury Tynyanov looks at the way in which devices lose and renew their communicative efficacy. As the features of a successful genre become more familiar, the genre becomes more automatised. Automatisation is the process by which a genre develops more and more fixed features; as this happens, genres "lose their potency and cease to be perceived as artistic entities as a result of formulaic repetition and over-familiarity."¹ This process in turn leads to canonisation, which is:

The process whereby a genre acquires cultural recognition or prestige through inclusion within a select list or 'canon' of highly valued genres [...] this being another form of automatisisation, and the price of official acceptance being the loss of a genre's subversive potential.²

Automatisisation, the process by which generic boundaries become more ossified, creates strong and familiar conventions whose subversion leads inevitably to new genres: every new genre is a subversion of existing ones. The process of defamiliarisation, which enables art to

¹ David Duff, ed., *Modern genre theory* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), x.

² David Duff, *Modern genre theory*, x.

create poetic effects, is made possible only because the static features formed by the developing genre create expectations that can then be manipulated: “given that the principle is preserved, the construction can be dislocated endlessly: the lofty *poema* can be replaced by the frivolous tale, the noble hero by a prosaic hero [...]”¹ Tynyanov describes a four step process:

1. An opposing constructive principle takes shape in dialectical relationship to an automatised principle of construction;
2. It is then applied – the constructive principle seeks out the readiest field of application;
3. It spreads over the greatest mass of phenomena;
4. It becomes automatised and gives rise to opposing principles of construction.²

Seen in this way, generic mutation is absolutely inevitable, but also derives its meaning not in isolation, but in dialogue with the constructive principle against which it was created:

*The whole point of a new construction may be in the new use to which old devices are put, in their new constructive significance, and this is just what is overlooked if we adopt a ‘static’ approach.*³

Ireneusz Opacki, a Polish literary theorist, focuses not just on the power struggles that lead to the overthrow of old, automatised traits, but also on the adoption of successful and dominant traits. To Opacki, the subversion of generic traits is only one of several ways in which new works absorb elements of the most successful contemporary genres. These successful genres, which he calls “royal genres,” achieve their status by successfully speaking

¹ Yury Tynyanov, “The Literary Fact,” in *Modern genre theory*, ed. David Duff (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 32.

² Tynyanov, “The Literary Fact,” 38.

³ Tynyanov, “The Literary Fact,” 35, his italics.

into new social situations. There is a necessary link between literary elements and “a completely new set of problems introduced by a given stage of history:”¹

Every literary trend – or a phase of it – has underlying it certain defined socio-historical factors, which shape a specific attitude towards the world and a certain sphere of interests and problems. In turn, this brings with it the creation of a specific system of poetics, an ensemble of means of expression, of ways of structurally linking them, which - growing out of the ‘extraliterary’ environment of the trend – carry in them historically specific meanings and functions.²

Opacki explains this with a simple model. If the Royal genre has for its constituent features **a b C D E f**, with **C D E** as its principal components, then an earlier genre, reforming itself in the light of the new, might move from a **k I M N O p** form to a **b c M N O d** form (for example), adopting successful aspects of the new, successful genre to reinvent itself.

These insights are notable in that they are fundamentally against the idea that genres can be fixed and permanent. Just as importantly, they suggest that authors integrate the most effective communicative strategies into their own, or subvert (by parody, for example), a generic trait that has ceased to be efficacious. In both of these respects, genre is dialogical, and cannot be usefully squeezed into a binary mould that sees each genre as distinct.

¹ Ireneusz Opacki, “Royal Genres,” in *Modern genre theory*, ed. David Duff (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 119.

² Opacki, “Royal Genres,” 119.

3. Genre, Conventions, Expectations¹

It should be evident by now that intertextuality is critical to genre theory – all similarity and difference is actually relational, whether directly or indirectly, as texts make use of texts that have made use of texts that have made use of texts.

The binary logic that rules one text in and another out is a necessary element of critical thinking – the process of classification is fundamental to any quantifiable insight that wants to move beyond the purely theoretical.² But the scholar of literature must bear in mind that such classifications limit and demarcate between texts in an artificial manner, enabling criticism through reductive means.

Richard Walsh has explored the conception often expressed by writers that they are not creating things newly but “mediating a pre-existing story” in fictional narrative – manifestly untrue as it is, the idea is a common one.³ Wanting to come to terms with the author as creator of a story who simultaneously perceives him or herself as “medium” of the text, he concludes:

The authority to which fictional narratives appeal may be cast in [terms of verisimilitude], and it is certainly a function of truth. But the truth with which they are concerned is not grounded in correspondence. Fundamentally, it is less a matter of any kind of representational accuracy than an appeal to a specifically narrative rightness. This sense of narrative rightness has to do with the concord between the story in hand and other, prior narratives, not ultimately in the sense of a relation to

¹ So far it has been argued that culture and intertexts are essential to literary interpretation. In this section though, I want to focus firmly on genre’s literary relations, mainly for the sake of simplicity.

² Adena Rosmarin, *Power of Genre* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 21-22; Carol A. Newsom, “Spying Out the Land: A Report from Genology,” in *Bakhtin and genre theory in biblical studies*, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 21.

³ Richard Walsh, *The rhetoric of fictionality*, 130-132.

sources, to a tradition, or even to a given set of narrative conventions, but rather to a way of meaning or of understanding – a rhetoric, but one with cultural roots so deep that it effectively usurps the authority of logic.¹

Above it was claimed that genre dictates expectations, but here Walsh takes it further, and claims that readers rely on prior narratives and the conventions they have laid down as a resource for decoding an unfamiliar text. This is part of a system that compensates for the impossibility of informational saturation: the information conveyed in a narrative is that which the author considers most pertinent: a principle that dictates an expectation of relevance in the reader, who expects words, phrases and allusions with which he is familiar to work in the ways in which he is accustomed. This creates a “logic” that is distinctively narrative. Thus, “as soon as the man walked into the room I knew I couldn’t trust him” is expected to have certain consequences, and the allegedly untrustworthy character is expected to do something untrustworthy at some point. This is clearly not a real-world principle – in the real world we might declare our trust or distrust for someone and nothing may ever come of it; but the contract between author and reader of fiction dictates that if the information is included, *it must be relevant*. This would be true even when it works the other way – Jane Austen and Wilkie Collins both demonstrate in their novels the power of the red herring, and manage to leave readers highly suspicious of any character who is apparently without fault.

The expectation of relevance combines with the conventions of literature to create a system of conventions and precedents. In a form of communication that does not allow for the receiver to check and validate his interpretation of the message, this is a valuable way to

¹ Walsh, *Rhetoric of Fictionality*, 146.

increase the reference points by which it can be decoded. Alastair Fowler calls this principle “redundancy”:

Now we know that a unidirectional link, since it offers no chance for questions or corrections, calls for increased “redundancy” in the message. By redundancy – a somewhat misleading term – is meant that property of communication systems “which arises from a superfluity of rules, and which facilitates communication in spite of all the factors of uncertainty acting against it.”¹

Genre is one of these properties: a reader sees generic patterns in a text and organises his expectations accordingly. In this sense, genre is one of the earliest available as to what prior narratives should be used to decode the text, allowing the reader to narrow the range of appropriate intertextual frameworks for the text in hand: a reader knows what to expect from an Agatha Christie novel before they have read a single line.

3.1. Intertextual Signposting, the Expectation of Relevance and the Cognitive Environment

Whatever level of coherence an individual narrative might achieve, readers are obliged to configure texts with the expectation of full coherence: any other expectation would make the configurative process impossible because there would be no way to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant data. Prior narratives (intertexts) operate as tools in searching for this relevance by providing a bank of conventions and codes – signposts by which to navigate the story.

¹ Fowler, *Kinds of literature*, 21.

Recent cognitive theory both supports and nuances this idea by suggesting that people unconsciously assume the relevance of a communication and seek out a context which maximises that relevance. The human mind is such that: “every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance.”¹

It is not that first the context is determined, and then relevance is assessed. On the contrary, people hope that the assumption being processed is relevant (or else they would not bother to process it at all), and they try to select a context which will justify that hope: a context which will maximize relevance.²

Wilson and Sperber use several examples to illustrate this. Here is one: Alan asks Lisa if she would like to join him and his family for supper, and she replies: “No thanks, I’ve eaten.” Clearly, only context can supply the meaning of this sentence, which is not that she has eaten in her lifetime, or that she has eaten a jelly bean, but that she has eaten to such an extent and within such a time frame that she does not desire another meal at this juncture.³ Likewise, Alan knows that this is what Lisa means because it is the easiest way to interpret her statement.⁴ Context is essential to decoding, with no utterance ever decoded without inference. Richard Walsh summarises as follows:

Explicit language is not categorically privileged; nor, in fact, is it categorically distinct.

Sperber and Wilson argue that the distinction between the explicit and implicit

¹ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: communication and cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 158; Walsh, *Rhetoric of Fictionality*, 25.

² Walsh, *Rhetoric of Fictionality*, 25; Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance*, 142.

³ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, “Truthfulness and Relevance,” *Mind* 111, no. 443 (2002): 606-607.

⁴ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, “Truthfulness and Relevance,” 605, 608.

“content” of an utterance, conventionally understood as a distinction between decoded assumptions and inferred assumptions, actually has an irreducibly relative aspect. Their claim is “that no assumption is simply decoded, and that the recovery of any assumption requires an element of inference.”¹

The communicator of the message is “pointing” to mutual elements of a “cognitive environment:” a range of shared suppositions, values, and ideas that allow Lisa to indicate her meaning to Alan. She assumes that he will know what she means by making her statement because people frequently do not have two meals in quick succession. It is the construction of this shared cognitive space that both facilitates and dictates the efficacy of the communication. When author and reader share large aspects of their semiotic world, the creation of an appropriate cognitive environment is relatively simple: Wilson and Sperber go so far as to argue that: “The more information she leaves implicit, the greater the degree of mutual understanding she makes it manifest that she takes to exist between her and her hearer.”² This is part of a narrative rapport, a rhetoric of mutuality that is more than a mere rule of communicative efficiency. The importance of establishing mutuality through implicature increases the likelihood of a culturally distant reader losing the thread of the literary communication: an appropriate cognitive environment might actually be outside the imaginative range of such a reader, making it impossible to understand and decode the text with any degree of accuracy. If, for example, Alan and his family were for some reason unaware that having one meal might prevent you from wanting to eat another, Lisa’s communication would make no sense at all.

In this setting, intertextuality is a term that covers mutually known cognitive elements - a vast resource of contextual frameworks that can be used as tools to decode the text. The

¹ Walsh, *Rhetoric of Fictionality*, 24-25; Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance*, 182.

² Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance*, 218.

author can rely on the reader having access to these intertextual elements because they are diffuse: even when a certain text is not shared between author and reader, other texts employing similar strategies will be known by that reader, because they are broadly spread across a range of texts. The scale of this intertextual matrix is intimidating: effectively all prior texts contribute to the process of interpreting every subsequent text, sometimes in the tiniest ways. Jonathan Culler says: “we are faced with an infinite intertextuality where conventions and presuppositions cannot be traced to their source and thus positivistically identified.”¹

Prior narratives form a large part of the mutuality between author and reader that contextualises the text in hand and allows communication to be effective. By alluding to other narratives, the author is effectively if unconsciously indicating to his reader that certain strategies are being, or are definitely not being, employed. That is to say, yes, genre dictates readerly expectations, but no, this does not mean that a reader identifies a genre and then ceases to modify those expectations.

3.2. Multicultural Literary Environments and Intertextual Dialogue

The ongoing intertextual dialogue that creates generic mutation always and inevitably occurs in proportion to its available dialogue partners, which means that where exposure to other literary cultures is greater, the speed of mutation is invariably higher. In a local context with few competing literary cultures (as was the case in ancient Athens) the process is slower, and literature appears to be more stable. When, on the other hand, the literature of one culture is exposed to that of many others, the process is rapid and radical, shifting continually to assimilate, subvert, parody, and emulate these new ideas – it is this context that Bakhtin sees as integral to the creation of the novel, suggesting in effect that novels are

¹ Jonathan Culler, “Presupposition and Intertextuality,” 1382.

texts whose very essence is the playing of genres against each other.¹ In a literary environment that contains the different works of multiple cultures, genres become both derivative and transformative of each other in a way that is socio-ideological as well as literary. This is evident in a work like *Joseph and Azaneth*, where individualism and erotic love moves from the Greek romance to the Jewish “Adventures of a Legendary Figure” genre.²

Hybridization in Acts – interplay between intra-religious and inter-religious polemic, for example, is manifest at the generic level in several ways – apologetic-historical elements from the Jewish milieu are in dialogue with Greco-Roman apologetic elements; Jewish historiography in dialogue with Hellenistic historiography, the Jewish novel with the Greek novel. And neither is it merely Greek/Jewish dialogue, interesting as this is – there is also the Jewish novelistic style in interplay with the Septuagint, and no doubt with other “oriental” ideas; Paul as prophet in dialogue with the Old Testament prophets (as well as the Greek philosophers); biographical elements with novelistic elements and so on.

In the period in which Acts was composed, the Roman Empire had created an environment in which a very large number of different literary cultures were accessible. Richard Burridge³ and Joel B. Green have commented on the instability of genres in this period, and rightly so, but the observation says very little about the processes behind it. As well as a rich literary tradition of their own, Jews were engaging with the even richer literary traditions of the Greeks, and also coming to terms with Roman culture and literature. As well as these three major influences, the colonised nations all had more or less influential traditions of their own. Altogether, the multi-cultural world in which these authors lived gave them access to a plethora of literary influences. The Greeks and Romans had themselves been immensely

¹ Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel.”

² Such as the various stories about Moses, by Philo, Artapanus, and Ezekiel. *The Testament of Joseph* and *1 and 2 Maccabees* are other examples of the “adventures of a legendary figure” genre.

³ Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, 58-61.

influenced by this intercultural exchange, as is evident in the contemporary debates over the genre “Tragic History,”¹ which Polybius famously laments, the Greek Romance (which Anderson thinks is of Eastern origin anyway),² or even the *Aeneid*, which reflects the massive influence of Homer, but also tragedy and other genres.

3.3. Modern and Ancient Literary Styles³

If a text represents a dialogue between literary cultures, it is worth taking a moment to reflect on what that dialogue might look like. This is a difficult enterprise and one that is unlikely to catch the full range of allusions inherent in an ancient text. In order to grasp the process involved, a good place to start might be the modern conventions for framing this dialogue. For this reason I take Irvine Welsh’s famous book *Trainspotting* as an example. The protagonist opens the novel with a famous monologue:

Choose life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose a fucking big television, Choose washing machines, cars, compact disc players, and electrical tin openers. Choose good health, low cholesterol and dental insurance. Choose fixed-interest mortgage repayments. Choose a starter home. Choose your friends. Choose leisure wear and matching luggage...⁴

¹ F. W. Walbank, “History and Tragedy,” *HZfAG* 9, no. 2 (1960): 216-234.

² Graham Anderson, *Ancient fiction: the novel in the Graeco-Roman world* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1984), 26-27.

³ I find that in the final version of the following section, much direct reference to Bakhtin has been lost. I therefore want to make it clear at this point that all of the ideas expressed here originate to some extent with his work. See Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel.”

⁴ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (London: Vintage, 2010), 1.

In these opening lines a range of social discourses are being pitted against one another in both complex intertextual dialogue and the unitary voice of a stylised speaker. "Choose life" alludes to a genre of positivistic philosophies, charitable organisations and advertisements ("Drugs: Just Say NO," springs to mind, and this is of course particularly appropriate), while the first four "choices" in combination bring the reader into a realm of serious social intercourse, which at this point she has no reason to doubt the sincerity of, by the end of the fifth sentence, irony is evident ("Choose a fucking big television"). This introduces an anti-materialist, almost nihilistic tone that engages with the legacy of Marxism and represents a rejection of modern capitalism that demonstrates intellect and penetrating insight. The stylisation of coarse language suggests that identifying this (as yet undisclosed) speaker with academia would be inappropriate, and indeed, his discourse appears to exclude him from the very social milieu that might naturally be associated with such elevated philosophy – he rejects as pointless the material culture that he would need to accept if he were to achieve social parity with the probable audience. In short, Welsh represents multiple discourses in the language of a marginalized social figure. This figure's multiple allusions to various spheres of philosophy and culture are used to present a highly subversive perspective of normative society.

Welsh is problematizing the received social image of what a heroin addict and criminal such as Renton should be and do, by pitting his ideological standpoint against the normative ideology of his target reader. Through the choices he makes about how he treats these different ideological codes, he manages to embrace the voice of a despised individual and defamiliarise normative social behaviour by looking at it through these alien eyes. This dialogical tension is present throughout the modern novel, and is easy to perceive (if only on an unconscious level) for a competent modern reader. Dickens makes use of it in all his characterisations (a particularly brilliant example is Mr Bumble in *Oliver Twist*); before him, Chaucer makes pervasive use of it in the *Canterbury Tales*, where *The Nun's Priest's Tale*

finds its principal humour through its incredible dullness and piety. The heritage of this style is so strong as to make any other style seem obscure (take for example, Seamus Healey's translation of *Beowulf*). But whether a reader picking up *Trainspotting* in a thousand years' time would be able to perceive any of its nuances is another matter. Marx, capitalism (and cynicism about it), and linguistic markers of social stratification are all diachronic to differing extents, and could all conceivably disappear before our hypothetical archaeologist rediscovers Welsh's novel in the thirty-first century.

Ancient prose style, particularly Greek style, was quite different in this regard. Mikhail Bakhtin delineates between two historical types of style and sheds light on the processes by which generic dialogue can be detected within both modern and ancient literature. What he calls "the first stylistic line" is the style dominant in modern literary culture, described above in the example from *Trainspotting*. This style represents alien voices *as themselves*, that is, it gives them distinct accents, ideas and perspectives, detectable on the linguistic level. The dominant literary style in the ancient Greek milieu was rather different. This style brought alien genres and languages into its sphere but *radically stylised them* in line with its own literary consciousness. Bakhtin uses the Sophistic novel as his prime example of this style, which is:

characterized by sharp and relentless stylization of all its material, that is, by a purely monologic - abstractly idealized-consistency of style. It is precisely these Sophistic novels, in fact, that express most fully the thematic and compositional nature of the novel as a genre in its ancient form.¹

¹ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 372.

In this type of novel, heteroglossia forms the dialogising background to the text, but seldom enters the narrative directly;¹ allusion to other texts and borrowing from other genres abounds, but the heteroglot voice as such is kept out of the narrative. Bakhtin uses the Sophistic novels as the classic example of this style, but it is so common in the Greek world that one could look almost anywhere, as a brief look at Heliodorus is sufficient to illustrate. In the first book, which opens with the pirates looking down upon the beach and seeing the protagonists, Chariclea sees them:

When she heard the noise around her, and their shadows before her eyes, she lifted herself up a little and looked back; but then at once stooped down again, no whit dismayed by the strange colour of their skin nor yet abashed to see the thieves in harness, but applying herself only to bind up his wounds that lay before her. Such is the force of earnest desire and true love; it despiseth all outward chances, be they pleasant or otherwise, only beholding that which it loveth, and thereabout bestoweth all diligence and travail. But when the thieves passed by and stood before her, and seemed as though they would enterprise somewhat, she lifted herself up again, and beholding them black and ill favoured said: — ‘If you be the spirits of those who are slain here, you trouble us wrongfully, for most of you were slain by your own hands: as for us, if we slew any, we did it but in our own defence to repel the violence which was proffered to my virginity. But if you be men alive, it seemeth you are thieves and you have come here in good season: rid us, I pray, from these present miseries and by death finish this our unhappy tragedy.’ Thus did she sorrowfully lament. ²

¹ Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 375.

² <http://www.elfinspell.com/HeliodorusBk1.html>. Last accessed 25-09-2011.

This English translation manages to retain the unitary style of the narrative, which, even when Chariclea speaks, remains relatively unchanged. Dialogue in this text is manifest in the style, which alludes to epic (as does beginning *in medias res*), but also more generally to socially elite modes of discourse; to the romance novel, as is evident from the lovers, the pirates, the mention of virginity and so on; the tragic genre, as is clear from the overall image and particularly from the last line, and several levels of philosophical discourse (spirits, Fortune, true love, stoicism, nobility in self-defence, etc.).

None of this is intended to suggest that the two stylistic lines are mutually exclusive. The *Satyricon*, a Latin text that is only extant in fragmentary form, but which can be securely dated to the first century, appears to make use of style considered radical when used in the modern era by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and (perhaps most similar to Petronius) J.P. Donleavy. Petronius' stream-of-consciousness is not a pervasive element of his literary style, but is perhaps the most startling of his distinctly modern-feeling literary achievements.

Anderson translates *Sat x1i-x1vi; 1viii f* as follows:

And listen, we're going to have a great show at the festival in three days' time. Not just a gladiatorial school, but most of them freedmen. Good old Titus has a big heart and a hot head. Whatever he's got for us, it'll be *something* anyway. For he and I are like that and I'm telling you he doesn't mess about. He's going to give us cold steel – and no escape. There'll be butchery right in the middle of the arena so that the whole theatre can get a good view. And he's got the lolly: his father left him thirty million. If it costs him four hundred thousand – so what? His fortune won't feel it, and he'll go down in history. Right now he's got some real Goliaths, and a woman riding a chariot – and Glyco's steward thrown to the lions. But that's just giving himself away. What's the slave done, when the missus forced 'im? She should've

been tossed by a bull: she's only worth peeing into. But when you can't beat the ass you beats the saddle... But I can catch a whiff of the dinner Mammaea's going to give us...¹

Petronius' stylistic aberrations are, however, unique to comedy (and satire) in the Graeco-Roman milieu, which is perhaps the most natural place for them; parodic stylisation is one of the most obvious reasons to impersonate the voice of another; Lucian does similar things with *The Passing of Peregrinus*.² The fact that the heteroglot style appears to be largely restricted to comedy suggests that the technique is not highly developed in the Greco-Roman milieu.

Hebrew prose style bears more similarities to our own modern style than does Graeco-Roman prose – as early as *Samuel* there are definite indicators of its presence. Robert Alter says of the typical Old Testament author:

He feels entirely free, one should remember, to invent interior monologue for his characters; to ascribe feeling, intention, or motive to them when he chooses; to a supply verbatim dialogue (and he is one of literature's masters of dialogue) for occasions when no one but the actors themselves could have had exact knowledge of what was said.³

¹ Anderson, *Ancient fiction: the novel in the Graeco-Roman world*, 71.

² The English text is available at <http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/lucian/peregrinus.html>. Last accessed 25-09-2011.

³ Robert Alter, *The art of biblical narrative* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 35.

Hebrew prose is heavily based on dialogue,¹ and Alter finds several examples where heteroglot voices are represented artistically as themselves (the second stylistic line). Both Hannah's conversation with Eli in 1 Sam. 1,² and David's conversation with Ahimlelech in 1 Sam. 21 represent a priest who speaks *ex Cathedra*, but have different stylisations for the other actor – David, terse, confident, secretive; Hannah, humble, miserable, modest.³

Narrative reticence also plays its part in creating atmosphere and tension, with ambiguity an important tool for the biblical author. David's early ambition is revealed, for example, not in any authorial declaration of his ambition, but in his asking again (after he has been told), "what will be done for the man who kills this Philistine?"⁴

All of this would suggest that the Jewish and Greco-Roman literary styles were intrinsically different. The Jewish novellas, however, throw cold water on this potentially useful avenue of delineation. They take a different tack altogether, with little or no visible representation of characters as themselves, and no character development in anyone except possibly (if a reader was to be extremely generous) Azaneth. Instead, an ossification of certain types of character – the steadfast, faithful servant of God who, forced by injustice becomes a hero – is evident, and usually in a militaristic stance such as in Judith (where Judith kills Holofernes, and in the triumphant ending the Jews slaughter the escaping enemies), Esther (where Haman is hung and the Jews slaughter there would-be executioners), and 2 Maccabees (thirty-five thousand troops and the head of Nicanor). The fading of the heteroglot voice combined with the ossification of character and plot are representative of a move away from Hebrew style and into the Graeco-Roman literary world.

Taken as a whole, the style of Acts would have to be described as falling into the normal range of Graeco-Roman prose (though in chapters seven and eight I highlight hints of a more

¹ For a recent statistical analysis see Pervo, "Direct Speech in Acts."

² Alter, *art of biblical narrative*, 85.

³ Alter, *art of biblical narrative*, 71.

⁴ Alter, *art of biblical narrative*, 115.

heteroglot style similar to that of Petronius). This does not mean Luke has not made use of his Jewish heritage – it is quite evident that he has – but that the distinction between Jewish and Greek style is not clear enough to be useful for interpretation. The important consequence of this for the modern interpreter is that in Acts, as in other Graeco-Roman and Diasporic Jewish literature, the nature of its style is such that the presence of other texts is less evident than we are used to finding, and therefore more difficult to spot.

4. Generic Hybridization in Interpretation

The dialogue of so many literary and cultural perspectives in the Hellenistic milieu made rapid generic mutation inevitable, destabilising genres and making it quite natural for Luke to create his text from a composite of various literary elements, particularly given his multicultural heritage: Luke was affiliated with the Septuagint (whether through Judaism or Christianity), and living in a city under Roman rule, meaning that his home city (wherever that was), his imperial conquerors (and their Hellenistic influences) and Jewish/Christian culture would have been competing influences, along with the lesser influences exerted by each of the cultures living within the Empire. Nor is the matter as simple as Luke picking from a range of literary options made available in the texts of other cultures: each element of each literary style would have carried an ideological freight related to the ideological status of its source-culture. Luke's rejection or subversion of literary elements may have made just as strong a statement as his acceptance of others. Much of this dialogue is lost to us now, though some of the more obvious elements remain.

In the New Testament, the most obvious example of intertextual dialogue is with the Septuagint, but every one of the attempts to place Acts within a certain genre highlights some form of *intertextual dialogue with that genre*. The existence of other genres and other texts within Acts is manifest both explicitly and implicitly, in citation but also allusion, and

the relative strength of these different presences is what gives the appearance of strength and weight to the various attempts to classify the genre of Acts. Taking the epic genre as an example, it is immediately evident that Acts is in some form of dialogue with that genre, simply because it is so pervasively influential that it is impossible for a narrative of this period not to be: both narrative and social codes are founded upon Homer. Precisely because of this, even a strong relationship between Acts and that genre does little to assist classification. Instead, one should pay careful attention to Homeric allusion and to how it might resonate with the ancient reader. In the second part of this thesis every one of the three studies draws something from the *Iliad*, and each one achieves something slightly different by doing so.

Gregory Sterling's thesis of apologetic historiography is built upon the need for an alien social group living amidst potentially hostile superior powers to interpret itself favourably in the light of the dominant culture. This ideological dialogue, which manifests itself at the level of genre and lends itself to flexible generic boundaries, relies not only upon mutualities in literary style and intertexts, but takes common tropes such as faith, courage, strength and citizenship. Every positive aspect of one culture can be framed narratively to impress itself upon another in intelligible terms, and this is what happens in Acts – the alien Jewish religion and the alien concept of a crucified Messiah is brought to the attention of a Greek readership through these positive cultural ideas, arguing that this unfamiliar religious sect leads its followers to the best of the known virtues, and has a God more powerful than any other.

So Jewish/Greek dialogue is a major part of Acts, though not a singular purpose or even necessarily a conscious choice on the part of the author.¹ When it comes to the more

¹ I do not wish to enter into discussion on the extent and type of Jewish dialogue with other cultures in this period. For a solid discussion of these issues see Tessa Rajak, *The Jewish dialogue with Greece and Rome: studies in cultural and social interaction* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), or

internal Christian/Jewish dialogue, a different relationship emerges. Acts still wants to appear favourably to a Jewish audience, as is clear from its sustained argument that Jesus is prophesised in the Old Testament. But Acts differs from the ideology of contemporary Jewish literature in several important aspects. Military ideology, for example, is central to much Jewish literature of the period, but entirely absent from the Christian ideology of Acts. Wider ideological agreement on the theme of righteous and unrighteous death provides demonstrates the ideological consensus that God will punish the unrighteous and save the obedient. In Acts, Judas, Ananias, Sapphira, and Herod, all meet an ignominious end; in 2 Maccabees there is Andronicus, Jason, Callisthenes “and some others,” Antiochus, Menelaus and Nicanor. Particularly analogous are the deaths of Herod and Antiochus, who both have to suffer at the hands of worms, and do so because of their ungodly arrogance. In this the two works are very closely related. Yet where much Jewish literature of the period (Esther, Judith, Maccabees) speaks of an ultimate victory in which God allows the Jews to take vengeance their enemies, Acts clearly avoids any sense of a military solution, or even military courage as playing a positive role.

When it comes to the ideological zone of martyrdom, there are also similarities.¹ The piety of Eleazar’s speech is every bit the match of Stephen’s: “For even if for the present I should avoid the punishment of men, yet whether I live or die I shall not escape the hands of the Almighty.”² But there are key differences. Eleazar makes his stand against the Gentiles, and he makes it for the Torah and Temple. Stephen is presumably a Diasporic Jew, and in a sense, from “among the Gentiles.” He makes his stand against Jews persecuting him in a manner that places them in the role of wicked oppressors. Stephen is accused of being an

Judith Lieu, *The Jews among pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (New York; London: Routledge, 1992).

¹ See for example, Rajak, *Jewish dialogue*, 96-133.

² 2 Maccabees 6.26.

enemy of both Torah and Temple – but Acts takes some pains to express that Stephen has committed no offence against either:

συνεκίνησάν τε τὸν λαὸν καὶ τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους καὶ τοὺς γραμματεῖς καὶ ἐπιστάντες συνήρπασαν αὐτὸν καὶ ἤγαγον εἰς τὸ συνέδριον, ¹³ ἔστησάν τε μάρτυρας ψευδεῖς λέγοντας· ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος οὐ παύεται λαλῶν ῥήματα κατὰ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου [τούτου] καὶ τοῦ νόμου· ¹⁴ ἀκηκόαμεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ λέγοντος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος οὗτος καταλύσει τὸν τόπον τοῦτον καὶ ἀλλάξει τὰ ἔθνη ἃ παρέδωκεν ἡμῖν Μωϋσῆς. ¹⁵ καὶ ἀτενίσαντες εἰς αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ καθεζόμενοι ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ εἶδον τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ πρόσωπον ἀγγέλου.

In fact, Stephen is able to say to the Jews:

"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your father's persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."¹

The two martyrs then, have a great deal in common; this ultimate sacrifice is a powerful weapon, and Luke paints a character that is brave, noble and unafraid of death, much as Eleazar is described. But Stephen's piety turns Eleazar's principles back upon the Jewish people – piety is not reserved for the Jews against the Gentiles, and obedience to Moses is not restricted to keeping the traditions, but involves listening to his words and acting upon them.

¹ Acts 7.51-53

The Jewish milieu had by this time already borrowed greatly from the Greek, making it impossible to know exactly who Luke was imitating or subverting, and of course, pagan martyrdom also carried a cultural freight; Luke cannot help but engage with one when he engages with the other.¹

5. Conclusion: Genre and Narrative Coherence

The perception of genre espoused in this section is one that eschews fixed boundaries. Even those genres that have become automatised, such as the great epics, are absorbed in some form by new genres wanting to ironise them, borrow their cultural prestige, or simply adopt their well-known structural principles in order to provide a contextual frame for the reader. Literary artistry creates a prerogative of change because any work that is imitated too often becomes formulaic and loses its efficacy. Likewise, changing social circumstances, including the introduction of the literary forms of alien cultures, create new social and literary conditions that naturally bring about changes in literary style. Genre is a system of classification that has always been socially charged and hierarchical, but authors have not been as mindful in the creation of their works as the history of scholarship has supposed. Very few genres in the period of Acts' composition were fixed enough to be identified by taxonomy alone.

Every work of literature steps into an ongoing conversation with its social and literary environment, and in that setting makes itself heard – its communication can only be properly understood as a response anticipating a response. Literature, particularly prose narrative, is capable of artistically representing other genres and voices and communicating its message by refraction against them, which means that their presence in a text is not

¹ For some examples of Pagan martyrdom see Herbert Musurillo, *The acts of the pagan martyrs: Acta Alexandrinorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

necessarily significant in terms of classification. Heliodorus makes considerable use of the Epic style in his opening lines, Achilles Tatius draws upon Socratic dialogue, Josephus upon Greek ideas of philosophy.

Acts sits well in this dialectical context: a narrative on the cusp of two cultures, one dominant, one uncomfortable in its subjugation. Acts makes particular use of the Septuagint, the Jewish novella, the *Bios*, the Epic, and even the Greco-Roman Novel, while engaging in a dialogue with Hellenistic historiography, particularly the sort written by outsiders to describe their own culture in Hellenistic terms. More specifically still, Acts is in dialogue with the early Christian movement, defending Luke's view of that movement from within an ideological framework shared or at least understood by most Hellenized people: the combination of common texts and common culture allowed Luke to direct his audience as to how to read his narrative.

5.1. Using Genre and Narrative Coherence as a Means of Interpretation

The most important principle established through this methodological study is that anything resembling a binary classification of Acts' genre is likely to be unhelpful in interpreting the text, because any presupposition that rules out the use of a given genre as a possible clue to the interpretation of the text simply reduces the number of intertextual frames we apply to the text. This does not mean that some genres are not more significant than others, or that the ancients could not have placed Acts into some specific category. It merely means that in our attempt to reconstruct the target audience's likely reading of Acts, the net must be cast as broadly as possible. Attempting to narrow the range of texts used to interpret Acts by first identifying its genre is a methodological error that minimizes potentially important textual elements.

The most obvious application of these findings is an ecumenical approach to the text which makes use of any genre that suggests itself, either through similarity or difference. An eye for the signposts that point to other texts or genres must be developed in reference to Luke's literary and cultural world. These signposts were known to the target audience of Acts through their presence in countless other narratives available in that period, and reconstructing them two thousand years later means developing a deep familiarity with as many texts as possible that were likely to have been important in Luke's literary background and semiotic space.

In the next chapter we begin to look at narrative configuration – the search for these signs. This is approached through what is perhaps the biggest problem in the quest for the genre of Acts - the question as to whether Acts should be grouped among histories or fictions. This should put some meat on the bones of the method while also overcoming some anticipated reservations about an approach to genre that is non-classificatory.

Chapter 4. HISTORY AND FICTION

1. Introduction

In the investigation so far it has been evident that the question of history and historicity is an important underlying issue in the study of Acts' genre. In this chapter I hope to move past that issue by demonstrating that the model of genre developed in the previous chapter allows fictional and historical traits to exist in tension while allowing truth-claims to stand. Working from known intertexts and an assumption of some shared cultural knowledge, this chapter argues that readers of Acts were given sufficient signposts to understand these claims and integrate them into the interpretative process.

One might think that classifying a narrative as either fictional or historical is a simple matter, with Acts somehow constituting a difficult exception, but this is not the case. Texts that play with the boundaries between history and fiction are commonplace, from histories that imaginatively recreate events, to historical novels such as *War and Peace*, to stories with pseudo-historical claims like *The Turn of the Screw*, or even *Callirhoe*. Roland Boer, in a brilliant deconstruction of Martin Noth's *Deuteronomistic History*, shows that by Noth's own, seminal analysis, there is very little to separate sections of the Hebrew Bible from the historical novel.¹ The stories of Joseph, of Saul, David, Absalom, Ruth, Esther, Job and Jonah are all good examples, while Abraham, Noah, the tower of Babel and many other stories have touches of the mythical.

To illustrate the difficulty, one might take Homer, Herodotus, *Apollonius of Tyana*, *War and Peace*, and *Sharpe's Rifles*. All of these texts have externally referential elements of different strengths and natures – that is to say, all refer to a historical reality outside of the text, - but only one of them is usually classified as a history. *The Stories of Apollonius of Tyre*, according

¹ Roland Boer, *Novel histories: the fiction of Biblical criticism*, *Playing the texts 2* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 21-46, especially 38-40.

to Ewen Bowie, resists classification in several different ways as part of its rhetorical strategy.¹ Herodotus, always classed as a history, but often considered less historical than Thucydides, presents a different challenge to the notion that external reference value equates to the historiographical mode. Interestingly, despite much criticism of the historicity of his accounts, nobody is suggesting that Herodotus is fictional; rather, they suggest it is bad history;² and as Meir Sternberg has observed, “bad historiography does not yet make fiction.”³ Both of Homer’s works have external referents, and can in some sense be called historical, or even history in the generic sense, and yet are certainly not in anything like the same mould as Thucydides, Polybius or Appian. The remaining two refer to two different types of referents – Sharpe is a fictional character placed in a historical context, while Napoleon is a historical person in a historical context, but fictionalised. As a simple exercise, these books could be handed to any modern person, and upon request they will be divided into two piles – four fictions and one history. Ancient readers would no doubt have seen it differently, but that does not mean that the ancient person was somehow deficient in his skills of generic delineation. Rather, it means that their own literary instincts were developed to read their own literature.

¹ Ewen Bowie, “Philostratus: Writer of Fiction,” in *Greek fiction: the Greek novel in context*, ed. John R. Morgan and Richard Stoneman (New York: Routledge, 1994), 187.

² See especially O. Kimball Armayor, *Herodotus’ autopsy of the Fayoum: Lake Moeris and the Labyrinth of Egypt* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1985); Detlev Fehling, *Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot: Studien zur Erzählkunst Herodots.*, Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte Bd.9 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971). A more impartial discussion can be found in Kenneth H. Waters, *Herodotos, the historian: his problems, methods, and originality* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 152-166. For a refutation of arguments against Herodotus, see W. Kendrick Pritchett, *The liar school of Herodotos* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1993).

³ Sternberg, *The poetics of biblical narrative*, 25.

1.1. An Overview of the Theoretical Problem

Part of the problem in discerning between fiction and history is that fictionality itself has held an anomalous status in communication theory. For a long time a dissonance existed between a theoretical model that posited truth as an integral element of communication, and the importance that *readers* give to fiction, which is by definition not true. H.P. Grice's maxims of communication, perhaps the most widely accepted model of the last century, include "be relevant" and "do not say what you believe to be false."¹ But these two maxims exist in paradox within fiction, which obviously manages to be relevant (that is, many people bother to read it), while being able to be absolutely false. Several attempts have been made to account for fictionality within this framework. One such attempt sees fictionality as an imitation display text. First expounded by Richard Ohmann, and developed by John Searle,² this model sees fictionality as suspending the appropriateness conditions for communication. Fictional texts then meet the criterion of truth by imitating it.

This mimesis model, however, falls short of an effective solution. Such an account of the value of fiction sees it as a pretended discourse. In this model:

[a] novel is the equipment for the reader's game of make-believe, but if involvement in fiction is an act of make-believe, then either the emotions aroused are also make-believe, framed and qualified as part of the game, or they remain irreducibly paradoxical.³

¹ H. P. Grice, *Studies in the way of words* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 27.

² Richard Ohmann, "Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature," *P & R* 4, no. 1 (1971): 1-19; John R. Searle, "Indirect Speech Acts," in *Syntax and semantics/general editor John P. Kimball*. Vol.3, *Speech acts*, ed. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (New York (etc.); London: Academic Press, 1975), 59-82.

³ Walsh, *Rhetoric of Fictionality*, 156.

When a text moves a reader on a genuine emotional level, the idea of make-believe is inadequate, and the reality that known fictional discourse creates real emotional effects jars with the theoretical tenet that for communication to be effective it must be true.

Another concept in literary theory that attempts to explicate fictional discourse in line with speech-act theory is that of “fictional worlds,” articulated by Nelson Goodman, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Thomas Pavel.¹ In this model the reader creates a fictional world based on a principle of minimal departure from reality: the reader assumes the norms of his own physical and social world, and differentiates the textual world from it according to textual cues. This theory is essentially a development of mimesis theory and suffers from the same faults; as such it does not make any significant advance on the “make-believe” problem, which is ultimately one of *relevance*. No matter how a fictional world is constructed or enjoyed, it remains fictional; any communication model that places truth at its centre fails to account for its relevance. In short, both the imitation speech-act and the fictional world’s models assume relevance and work to close the theoretical distance between fiction and the truth maxim.

2. Fiction and Cognition

If explicitly untrue statements do not meet the basic requirements for redeeming the communicative principle of truth, Grice’s communication model cannot account for fiction without relegating it to the function of “pretended speech-act.” Sperber and Wilson’s development of this theory is to deprioritise the truth maxim and replace it with a highly prioritised relevance maxim. Optimal relevance in this model is supplied primarily by

¹ Thomas G. Pavel, *Fictional worlds* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1986); Nelson Goodman, *Ways of worldmaking*, Harvester studies in philosophy 5 (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978); Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as virtual reality: immersion and interactivity in literature and electronic media*, Parallax: re-visions of culture and society (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

context, as was seen above.¹ What this increased dependence on context means for the truth criterion is complex, but a look at this example will show that it cannot be said to simply apply to the majority of speech acts. Even if it is accepted that Lisa's statement above (I've eaten) is in all important senses true, there are plenty of exceptions:

- A. Do you fancy going out?
- B. It's raining.

Context assures that B is assumed to imply that she does not want to go out in the rain. A assumes that what B says is relevant, and therefore seeks an appropriate interpretative context, which in this case means taking "it's raining" as a direct response to his question – rain is unpleasant, and it is better to go out when it is dry. But what if it is not raining? The conversation might then continue:

A: No it's not.

B: (Tersely) well it might.

B is now making it clear that she does not want to go out, and a relevance is achieved that depends on B having made an untrue statement – if it were actually raining, A would have no cause to feel rejected, but since it is not, he knows that B does not want to go out with him. So in this example, the success of the communication relies upon untruth for its relevance. Other examples might include exaggeration: "I'd kill for a cup of tea," sarcasm: "cos we all know how brilliant *you* are at Chess," and rebuttal: "What's wrong dear?" "Nothing!" Of course, all of these answers have strong contextual elements that dictate their meaning far more than their explicit content, which in all of these cases is literally untrue.

¹ 106-109.

Literal statements can therefore no longer be defined as statements that do not require inference,¹ since inference is ever-present. The benefit of this in dealing with the question of fictionality is that it allows the communication of fiction to be relevant without finding some unintuitive relationship to truth. Instead, the reader of a fictional text would unconsciously seek the appropriate framework in which to decode the narrative— in this case the various conventions of fiction inform her that literal truth is not part of the required context. Sidestepping the entire problem of true/false, she is then able to configure the text according to a referentially *deprioritised* narrative modality that suspends the restrictions associated with the historical mode, but does not suspend external referentiality itself – the deprioritisation of literal truth merely means that such references are subordinated to fit within a fictional framework. Relevance, freed from the truth criterion can be as simple as “enjoyment.”² In a cognitive environment that deprioritises external reference, the internally referential is prioritised in an inverse ratio because it is necessary to apply an interpretative framework that makes the text relevant. Where one system of configuring the text fails, another must be applied. Authors take advantage of this unconscious rule when alternating between fiction and history to allow readers to work out for themselves which referential system they are meant to be operating in at a given moment.

To take an example of this from the ancient world, one might look at Xenophon. When he composed the *Cyropaedia*, he presumably expected his reader to suspend questions of sources and the like while acknowledging the historical basis of Cyrus’ life story. He goes about this in a number of ways, applying conventions with a rich history in his literary milieu, such as the opening “utopian state” theme with which he describes Persia at the time Cyrus was born, and the “excellent youth” theme that the ancient reader must have used to

¹ Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, “Truthfulness and Relevance,” 587 date this tendency back to classical rhetoric, but as an example use the discussion in David K Lewis, “Languages and Language,” in *Philosophical papers* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 167.

² I do not wish to explore the theory behind why literature might be enjoyable, and in any case there are, to my mind, no satisfactory answers in scholarship.

configure the detailed and completely unsourced dinner scene with his grandfather.¹ The series of romanticised places and events depicted without critical distance forces the audience to suspend disbelief and simply enjoy the narrative, while the real existence of the various characters simultaneously prevents the reader from dismissing the entire story as fiction. External reference is present but deprioritised and the reader is led to expect narrative rather than real-world logic to apply, which in turn suggests what narrative cues she should be looking for and allows her to begin the configurative process. So for example, The “utopian state” of the Persians means they will be an honourable people, while the “excellent youth” theme that describes Cyrus’ childhood means he will go on to great things. These are elements of narrative, not real-world logic, though of course they have an ideological basis that touches upon the world outside the text and is an integral part of the communication.

2.1. History as Constrained Narrative

This understanding of the reading process incorporates and allows for every stage of the fictional/historical spectrum by acknowledging the mind’s ability to navigate complex literary terrain, while removing the primacy of truth as key to effective communication. Freed from the problem of truth, fiction becomes a narrative form under minimal constraint, while history becomes the mode in which truth-claims restrict the poetic licence – an agreement between author and reader that the events narrated will have some basis in truth:

¹ The excellent youth theme can be found in *Plutarch’s Lives*. See 1.6.2 for Theseus, 2.6.2 for Romulus. Diogenes Laertius suggests that stories about the early excellence of Plato (3.4-5) and Pythagoras (8.2-3) were also extant.

Fiction is no longer seen as narrative with certain rules (of reference) in abeyance. Rather, non-fictional narrative is seen as narrative under certain supplementary constraints (connoting historicity, objectivity, etc.) that serve to establish a rhetoric of veracity.¹

This “rhetoric of veracity” naturally varies from literary epoch to literary epoch, but history as a narrative mode must always exist in dialectical tension with fiction: if the rhetoric of either mode is to be successful it must account for the other and distinguish itself accordingly. This is axiomatic whenever fictional and non-fictional narratives exist side by side, or to be more precise, since narratives that do not make truth-claims have co-existed with narratives that do. History as a narrative mode must distinguish itself from fiction by some technique or other, while fiction plays at being history by parodying or alluding to historical conventions, while never needing to subject itself properly to these constraints.

Bonz argues in *The Past as Legacy* that histories are less coherent than the epic, containing less compositional unity.² Such an argument would not stand up to scrutiny for all the reasons of generic hybridity that have been discussed already. Nonetheless, there is some merit to the idea. Kalle Pihlainen suggests that while the restrictions placed on history do not always manifest themselves on the micro-level, on the macro-level they serve to distinguish the modal difference:

Although the process of narrative construction is quite similar in both literary and historical narratives, the difference that referentiality brings is reflected in the narrative form, or rather, in the system of signification that the narration employs.

¹ Walsh, *Rhetoric of Fictionality*, 39.

² Bonz, *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic*, 22.

Although we cannot see any textual difference between historical narratives and fictional ones when examining them on the level of the individual statement or on the level of conjunctions of these statements, there is a distinct difference to be perceived in the coherency of the systems of signification that are created by these respective types of narrative.¹

Pihlainen admits that this is a “general rule,”² which cannot be easily be relied upon. As he observes, complexity is “not a necessary outcome of fictionalization.”³ But he is right to claim that the contemporary reader’s instinctive ability to assess narrative truth-claims is not attributable to any single textual element: such decisions are made over larger units. The decoding of the text is a process that occurs over the whole narrative, with each individual element adding something to the whole. In the historical mode these elements can sometimes be valuable for reasons of purely external reference – such and such a nation was utterly repugnant because it did this and that, with social and cultural relevance but no intrinsic narrative value – that is, the data leaves no thread to be picked up later in the text. When external reference is entirely deprioritised, narrative logic suggests to the reader that *there is a thread*, that all information will play a role in the story at some point – one classic example of which is the fairy-tale trope in which the protagonist performs seemingly insignificant acts of kindness in the early part of the text and is rewarded by those he has helped later in the story.⁴ A deprioritised external referentiality means that the reader decodes the narrative on the assumption that all data *is relevant to the story itself*, even if

¹ Kalle Pihlainen, “The Moral of the Historical Story: Textual Differences in Fact and Fiction,” *NLH* 33, no. 1 (2002): 43.

² Pihlainen, “The Moral of the Historical Story,” 43.

³ Pihlainen, “The Moral of the Historical Story,” 43.

⁴ A trope used to great effect recently in the novel *Q&A* by Vikas Swarup.

the sole reason for its relevance is to play upon the constructive principle of a historical genre.

3. The Conventions of Reading

Relevance theory relies upon a mutual cognitive environment between author and audience. The author predicts or assumes his audience's access to aspects of this environment and signposts it through title, preface, allusion, reference or citation, by whatever will serve the necessary purpose:

Successful communication hinges on the potential context that is mutually shared by the reader and the communicator. That is, only when the communicator's intention and the receptor's expectation meet, can communication be a success.¹

These indicators are naturally synchronic, reliant as they are upon social and literary norms that are always changing. Consequently, the reading of an ancient text is problematised by inadequate access to the total context, making the primary job of the biblical critic one of reconstructing an appropriate cognitive environment within which to decode the message. This can only be done via the contemporary and antecedental textual framework – a semi-taxonomic enterprise which even it were made possible by having all the texts extant and prioritised, in the absence of secondary data from the social sphere itself would be extremely liable to misinterpretation. Nonetheless, mechanisms that narrowed the range of

¹ Sang Zhonggang, "A relevance Theory Perspective on Translating the Implicit Information in Literary Texts," *JT* 2, no. 2 (2006): 44.

potential contexts must have existed because communication requires it; in literature such context is provided largely by conventional reference to prior narratives.

Peter Rabinowitz has formulated a system for looking at the conventions of narrative as an aid to interpretation.¹ His classification divides the process of reading into four conventions: Notice, Signification, Configuration and Coherence.²

Notice is the way the text highlights important elements for the reader's attention. In modern fiction this includes apparently incongruous elements of the text that evade immediate coherence within the narrative. Such elements suggest their importance because of the very fact that they flaunt the law of relevance: the rule that everything in the narrative should have a purpose. Other loci of strong conventionality include the beginning of the narrative and the beginning and end of each section, all of which can exploit their position to Notice an aspect. In reality Notice conventions are densely distributed throughout any narrative.

Following the conventions of Notice are those of Signification, which is the type of importance given to the Noticed element. Rabinowitz observes the use of names, such as Lev, from "lion", and Nicolaevich Myshkin, from "mouse" (in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*). Bonz argues similarly for Lydia in Acts:

As the Spirit directs the Pauline mission toward Rome, the center of world power, its converts begin to include a number of gentiles with a degree of wealth or social position. One early example of this is phenomenon is Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth from Thyatira (Acts 16.14) whose felicitous combination of name, occupation,

¹ Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before reading: narrative conventions and the politics of interpretation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998).

² For the sake of clarity I will continue to capitalise these terms when I use them in this sense proposed by Rabinowitz.

and place of origin suggests that Luke is presenting the reader with a symbolic character. Rather than representing a historical person, therefore, Lydia is almost certainly a Lukan literary creation; she epitomizes a type of convert that Luke wishes to introduce at this point in his portrayal of the historical development of the mission, a convert who, although relatively low in social status, is somewhat well-to-to nonetheless.¹

If Bonz is correct (and I do not wish to argue her point here), she is arguing that the name has Notice value because of Lydia's historical association with riches, and that the natural Signification of this particular name is to attribute to Paul's converts in general the sort of status that Lydia represents through her name and profession. She is essentially a metonym for the wealthy and socially-respectable converts that Luke wishes to attribute to the Pauline mission whose name carries matching consequences – this is narrative rather than real-world logic. Such an interpretation clearly has implications for the historicity of Acts, but also makes an ideological claim about the ideal convert to early Christianity, and potentially clarifies an element of Lukan intentionality that might otherwise go unobserved.²

Signification is the cognitive consequence of a Notice convention, because the search for relevance ensures that the meaning of the Noticed element will be sought. Individually, Signified aspects are often ambiguous or barely memorable at all: it is the accumulation of Noticed elements within a particular range or theme that create a framework of Significations – this is Configuration. It is impossible for an author to have absolute control of the configurative process, because every reader has a unique range of cognitive resources. The attempt to configure narrative, however, is certain. Authors assume that readers will

¹ Bonz, *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic*, 167.

² Pervo, *Dating Acts*, 31, makes a similar point in a less direct way about Eutychus, whose name means "lucky."

decode the message, while readers assume that the message makes sense. Thus, authors try not to leave elements in the text whose significance they do not control, and readers assume they have achieved this. The message's success depends on the presupposition of its own optimal relevance.

Rabinowitz' final convention is Coherence. In Rabinowitz' terminology, Coherence is not just the end product of Configuration (though in practice this is often the case, for example in the resolution of the plot), but also the result of reflection on the entirety of the narrative. For Rabinowitz, genre is an important part of coherence, and in this respect it can be understood as playing a lead role in the formation of an interpretative framework for the text— a frame then becomes a resource for decoding the next narrative. At this point genre becomes *intertextual*, acting as a means of narrowing the possible interpretative strategies and directing the reader along the interpretative paths intended by the author. While individual Notices and their concomitant Significations control each element of the text's interpretation, Genre allows the reader to deduce at the outset an indication of the form final coherence might take, and provides a range of strategies by which she might begin to decode the individual conventions.

Clearly, different conventions apply to different types of literature, but such differences are slight and difficult to quantify. Only at the level of Configuration and Coherence is it possible to see sufficiently large distinctions which can help to differentiate between the two modes. Kalle Pihlainen's systems of signification are seen here as the need to apply different interpretative frameworks in order to configure the narrative into a coherent whole.¹

In a historical text, frequent and prioritised external referents for many Noticed elements may result in a failure to achieve this tight internal coherence – but since the relevance lies in real-world relations, the reader does not expect significations to configure in the same

¹ See above, 133-134

way and is not disappointed by the lack of internal coherence; all that is required is sufficient coding to inform the reader of this modality, resulting in a cognitive environment that expects external referentiality to partially usurp internal coherence. If however, the codality suggests the prioritisation of internal referentiality, Notice leads to Signification to Configuration to Coherence. This is not a simple rule, as anyone who has encountered the long digressions in *Leucippe and Clitipho* or the allusions to classical tragedy in Thucydides will testify: but it is fair to say that *clear and repeated external referentiality that does not contribute to the internal coherence of the narrative is a convention of the historiographical rather than the fictional mode*. Truth-claims, perhaps surprisingly, can be configured within either mode, and great authors from Dickens to Chariton make use of them without prioritising external referentiality.

3.1. Propositional versus Poetic Implicatures

If messages must be contextualised in order to be processed, and if the historical mode tends toward a prioritised external referentiality, it follows that the Signification system used to process historiographical works tends to rely heavily on the real world as the chief source of relevance, even if that real-world information is often sourced from other texts. External reference tends to be direct in nature, making the Significations more propositional than poetic. One might take almost any example from among the highly rated historians:

The first death under the new emperor, that of Junius Silanus, proconsul of Asia, was, without Nero's knowledge, planned by the treachery of Agrippina. Not that Silanus had provoked destruction by any violence of temper, apathetic as he was, and so utterly despised under former despotisms, that Caius Caesar used to call him

the golden sheep. The truth was that Agrippina, having contrived the murder of his brother Lucius Silanus, dreaded his vengeance; for it was the incessant popular talk that preference ought to be given over Nero, who was scarcely out of his boyhood and had gained the empire by crime, to a man of mature age, of blameless life, of noble birth, and, as a point then much regarded, of the line of the Caesars. (Annals 13.1)

Tacitus conveys information whose primary value is in its external reference. Very little of it configures meaningfully or artfully into a narrative whole, but instead it relays data (much of which has high narrative potential) in a simple, propositional way, with minimal allusion. The death of Silanus is related and explained, without any expectation that it will be developed later in the narrative.

Literary works on the other hand, can be described as:

[...] characterized by “careful use of language, being written in a literary genre (poetry, prose fiction, or drama), being read aesthetically, and containing many weak implicatures” (Meyer 1997: 24). The weak implicatures are the implicit information in the literary texts. [...] Owing to the implicit information in the literary texts, the author of the source text often becomes more capable of communicating a richness of ideas, feelings and impressions that are not necessarily expressed in words.¹

¹ Zhonggang, “Translating Literary Texts,” 43; Jim Meyer, “What is Literature? A Definition Based on Prototypes,” in *Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session*, ed. Stephen A. Marlett, vol. 41 (1997), 24, <http://www.und.nodak.edu/dept/linguistics/wp/1997Meyer.PDF>. Last accessed 25-09-2011.

Weak implicatures are, unfortunately, not the easiest things to define. Sperber and Wilson's account describes these weak implicatures as "poetic effects," which create a change in the cognitive environment "resulting from relatively small alterations in the manifestness of many assumptions, rather than from the fact that a single assumption or a few new assumptions have all of a sudden become very manifest."¹ Such implicatures have an irreducibly imaginative nature. Take for example the pathetic fallacy used to open Robert Browning's *Poryphryia's lover*.

The rain came early in tonight,
 The sullen wind was soon awake,
 It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
 And did its worst to vex the lake:
 I listened with heart fit to break.

Propositionally, these lines have no information relevant to the story whatsoever. The weather is irrelevant to the following events, which occur indoors, and neither the lake, nor the damage to the trees, figure in anyway. Yet it might be argued that without these lines, Browning's poem would be much the worse – the implications for the bleakness of the protagonist's mood, the destruction that reverberates through the opening impressions, all sit in counterpoint to Poryphryia's metonymic and symbolic light, tending the fire and

¹ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: communication and cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 222.

freeing her long blonde hair. At the same time, the madness of the unnamed man, who goes on to strangle her with her hair so as to preserve her at the moment he realises she loves him, is prefigured in these lines. Thus, in this highly poetic form configurative value exists in cognitive effects that have no propositional value at all – the complete opposite to Tacitus, above, and as Kalle Pihlainen has noted (above), a generally applicable distinction between history and fiction.¹

Sperber and Wilson elaborate further on these poetic effects:

Poetic effects create common impressions rather than common knowledge. Utterances with poetic effects can be used precisely to create this sense of apparently affective rather than cognitive mutuality. What we are suggesting is that, if you look at these affective effects through the microscope of relevance theory, you see a wider array of minute cognitive effects.²

These tiny cognitive effects create the distinctive enjoyment of literature; a style that history can and does make use of, but which is often relegated in that mode to a secondary role. It is important to note, however, that large, propositional utterances are far easier to see than the “marginal increase” in the “manifestness of a great many assumptions” created by these minute implicatures. The modern reader might not recognise the value of the former, but he will always see them; the latter become more difficult to see as cultural and literary distance increases.

Certain conventions definitely Notice the presence of certain intertexts and their typical range of implicatures. “Once upon a time...” suggests a certain contextual frame, “The world

¹ 133-134

² Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: communication and cognition*, 224.

of the Lord came to..." suggests another – and both of these imply different types of configuration, alerting the reader to notice particular elements and put them together in particular ways. Once they are introduced, the appropriate intertexts enter the cognitive framework of the reader, but *this does not mean that there is an assumption of genre*. If someone began a novel (and I'm sure someone has) with "Once upon a time I met a girl. Then I murdered her." it would not mean that the murder should be read as a fairytale. Rather, the fairytale genre adds something surreal to the idea of murder, and is a discomfitingly unreal view of a brutal crime. But even "I met a girl" is highly conventional: placed at the beginning of the narrative, the accumulation of conventions present in this single sentence suggests an interpretative framework for the entire story. Genres and their intertextual affiliations suggest conventional frameworks that the reader might use to decode the narrative, but these can be played against each other and flouted in complex ways: such difficulties should inspire caution rather than classification when the very Greek and historiographical-sounding prefaces to Luke and Acts are followed by heavily Semitic and Septuagintal style full of prophecy and the supernatural.

Sperber and Wilson do not tackle the problem of fiction at any particular length or with any rigour, but they do talk at some length about what they call "poetic effects," which create a change in the cognitive environment "resulting from relatively small alterations in the manifestness of many assumptions, rather than from the fact that a single assumption or a few new assumptions have all of a sudden become very manifest."¹ These poetic effects obviously incorporate literary allusion and the various intertextual, non-propositional effects of literature:

¹ Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: communication and cognition*, 59.

They marginally increase the manifestness of a great many manifest assumptions. In other words, poetic effects create common impressions rather than common knowledge. Utterances with poetic effects can be used precisely to create this sense of apparently affective rather than cognitive mutuality. What we are suggesting is that, if you look at these affective effects through the microscope of relevance theory, you see a wider array of minute cognitive effects.¹

Such small implicatures so widely dispersed are too small for conscious notice, meaning that they affect the unconscious and manifest themselves emotively. They provide a poetic context that alerts the competent reader of deprioritised external referentiality.

There is no doubt that a large number of fictions, particularly in the ancient world, employ a range of “historical” techniques, and that histories employed many “fictional” techniques. The point, however, is not that one genre employs one technique and one the other, but that the reader is capable of constructing an intricate and nuanced cognitive environment which finds the appropriate balance between the two, particularly in her native literary milieu. Acts contains elements of both fictional and historical modes, and to make a classification that excludes or minimise one type of effect reduces interpretative resources dramatically. Instead, it is important to explore the type of cognitive environment an ancient reader would have used to decode Acts.

3.2. The Hebrew Bible and the Rhetoric of Historicity

The preference of Acts scholars for minimising the poetic in favour of the propositional also finds justification in the truth-claims that Acts definitely does make, both explicitly in the

¹ Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: communication and cognition*, 224.

preface and implicitly throughout the text, by telling the (partially) verifiable story of historical characters, by adding small details such as the numbers of converts of people present, and by alluding strongly to Old Testament prophecy and its fulfilment. This last in particular expresses a modal link between Acts and the Hebrew bible, which as was noted above, employs techniques that cannot be easily associated with historiography.

Acknowledging the multiple narrative techniques utilised by it, prominent literary theorist and biblical scholar Meir Sternberg's work goes against Robert Alter and others to argue that the Hebrew bible *is* Historiography, despite the atypical historiographical conventions such as unsourced information, omniscient narration (such as inner-voice narration and Divine-voice narration), strong ideological content, including the attribution of divine motives and such like, that appear to militate against this view. As John J. Collins has observed, such devices present a problem for any scholar attempting to assert biblical historicity:

Any attempt to treat the OT narratives as reliable historical information is beset by the problem that there is a gulf between anything that can be established by critical historiography and the confession of divine activity that is central to the biblical texts.¹

Sternberg attempts to reconcile the fact that the Bible makes serious truth-claims with this fundamental problem of undemonstrable and sometimes unknowable assertions. For Sternberg, this is a fact of biblical rhetoric, and the "category-mistake" of attributing the status of fiction to the Bible is one that comes from misunderstanding the nature of the historiographical mode. In this, he echoes White and others, whose post-structuralist

¹ John J. Collins, "The 'Historical Character' of the Old Testament in Recent Biblical Theology," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979): 191.

approach to historiography has been influential in scholarship for some years. At times, Sternberg makes this quite explicit:

For history-writing is not a record of fact – of what “really happened” – but a discourse that claims to be a record of fact. Nor is fiction-writing a tissue of free inventions but a discourse that claims freedom of invention. The antithesis lies not in the presence or absence of truth value but in the commitment to truth value.¹

“Commitment to truth value” is, I think, a phrase which reflects Sternberg’s own views of the Bible, and should be considered carefully. Strictly speaking, commitment to truth-value, by Sternberg’s own definition in this quotation, is irrelevant – what matters is the *claim* to truth value, and since any given history could be full of outright lies, commitment is not even subservient to claim, but a different matter altogether. Other than this, however, Sternberg’s point is absolutely correct: any text that genuinely claims to be history must in some sense be so, even if it is merely *bad* history. The conditions for a genuine claim of that nature will vary across literary epochs, but a conventional means of distinguishing between the two modes must always exist, and allow a reader to make a distinction between types of untruth – fiction or lies.

Sternberg is wary of the attempt to find formal distinctions between history and fiction:

There are simply no universals of historical vs. fictive form. Nothing on the surface, that is, infallibly marks off the two genres. As modes of discourse, history and fiction

¹ Sternberg, *The poetics of biblical narrative*, 25.

make *functional* categories that may remain constant under the most assorted formal variations and are distinguishable only by their overall sense of purpose.¹

This rather unquantifiable element, the “overall sense of purpose,” is commonsensical rather than rigorously scientific, but finds considerable agreement with Pihlainen’s view that the system of significations rather than any individual element is what allows a reader to distinguish between the two modes. Sternberg is effectively arguing that Hebrew narrative, while formally much like fiction, still has a claim to the genre of history on the grounds of this “commitment to truth value.” He does admit the apparent contradiction that formally, such devices as omniscient narration that “reveals the hidden acts of God, the secret thoughts of all the participants” as well as “the abundant dialogue scenes”² could easily be mistaken for fiction, but it is also evident that the Bible:

claims not just the status of history but of *the* history- the one and only truth that, like God himself, brooks no rival [...] Suppose the Creation narrative elicited from the audience the challenge “But the Babylonians tell a different story!” or the Exodus cycle met with the protest “But the Egyptians deny the whole thing!” Would the biblical narrator just shrug his shoulders, as any self-respecting novelist would do? One inclined to answer in the affirmative would have to make fictional sense of all the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, and I do not see how even a confirmed anachronist would go about it with any show of reason.³

¹ Sternberg, *The poetics of biblical narrative*, 32.

² Sternberg, *The poetics of biblical narrative*, 32.

³ Sternberg, *The poetics of biblical narrative*, 32.

So on the one hand, Sternberg recognises the apparently fictional element in the composition of the Bible, while on the other hand, he correctly observes that the biblical narrator makes serious truth-claims; this is the contradiction that faces the Old Testament. Sternberg solves it with simplicity and literary insight: by recourse to the rhetoric of inspiration the biblical narrator is able to have it both ways.

3.2.1. Acts and Inspired History

A necessary requirement of Sternberg's hypothesis is that the Hebrew Bible was an established or even dominant genre in ancient Israel. Assuming that this is the case, truth-claims are established by convention and can be accepted by the reader without difficulty. This is clearly not true for Acts, which is making essentially *biblical* truth-claims to an audience that might not even know the Hebrew Bible or Septuagint, but which certainly respects the very different and perhaps even opposing rhetoric of objectivity made prominent by Thucydides and others. The biblical context would be relevant to Diasporic Jews, but there is some question as to how it could be understood by the Greek Pagan reader. Commenting on this, Loveday Alexander argues:

'Ancient readers' of course, are not a homogenous group: and readers who shared Josephus' background knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures would probably have no difficulty in recognizing Acts as a historical narrative in scriptural style. But for readers educated in the Greek classics, much of the narrative content of Acts would place it in the danger-area of fiction – though with a disturbing under-current which suggests that it might after all be fact. It deals with many of the topics which were pushed into the convenient no-go areas at the edges of the map of verifiable 'fact'

by Greek historians – distant places, non-Greek traditions, private beliefs, supernatural events.¹

What Alexander alludes to here is that literary conventions for Greek readers would have dictated their configurative practices for Acts. Luke's response to the literary norms of a Greek audience necessarily meant negotiating multiple generic expectations in order to ensure the success of his communicative aims. Any mutual cognitive framework would have included Homer and Hesiod, Thucydides, Chariton, and everything in between. Thucydides, as most agree, sets the standard for history writing, and it is a very different standard to Acts. In this environment any unsubstantiated truth-claims must have been potentially open to criticism, as is evident by the fact that Homer, the closest thing the Greeks had to a Bible, had long been criticised by Historians, had had its history corrected in commentaries and such like, becoming very much a disputed history of the origins of Ancient Greece.² On the other hand, the convention of appealing to the muse was one of the oldest and most venerable, known through Homer and Hesiod, and more recently emulated by Virgil. This poetic style of history had a momentum of its own, capable of upholding some sort of truth claim – the existence of criticism of Homer's truth-claims demonstrates that he was not automatically undermined by the historicity-criteria established by the great Greek historians. It is also worth remembering that the period of Acts' composition was one in which the respected historian Plutarch could write of the infant Romulus being fed by a she-wolf and a woodpecker as "the story which has the widest credence and the greatest number of vouchers,"³ and discuss the existence of a minotaur without any sign of

¹ Alexander, *Acts in its ancient literary context*, ed. John M. G. Barclay (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 161-162.

² See for example John Linton Myres, *Homer and his critics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 20.

³ "Life of Romulus" 3-4.

cynicism.¹ The mythical past had some credibility to ancient Greeks. At the same time “pure” fiction (defined as narrative that completely deprioritises external reference) was a very young generic mode: Chariton may only have been around a few decades, and there is nothing earlier that we know of (which only means that the genre was probably not pervasive); the vast majority of narratives before this time, whether tragedy, epic or mythology, were oriented around the mythical Greek past, and were of real importance to Greek identity.² In some sense that a modern reader may not be able to fully comprehend, there was a mode of storytelling in Ancient Greece that operated on a similar level to that of Hebrew historiography discussed by Sternberg— a style that straddled the boundaries of both history and fiction.

That this more mythic truth claim was still valid in the period of Acts is also evident in those historiographical genres in which a historical core was in dialogue with fictional technique, such as *The Alexander Romance*, *the Ninos Romance*, *the Cyropaedia*, and *The Stories of Apollonius of Tyana*. These texts combined a historical core with adventures and narrative patterns that a modern mind would call fictional, and aimed to entertain and engage while giving some priority to external referentiality. Ewen Bowie argues that the strength of this historical element in *Apollonius* would form part of the reader’s understanding of the text:

A feature which *Apollonius* shares with works on Pythagoras and on Jesus of Nazareth is that it concerns a figure in whose historicity many readers believed. By the time Philostratus wrote many local traditions were already well established, associating Apollonius with miracles in mainland Greece, Ionia, Cilicia and Syria. That of Apollonius’ vision at Ephesus of Domitian’s simultaneous murder in Rome was

¹ In the “Life of Theseus.”

² See for example James J. Clauss, *The best of the Argonauts: the redefinition of the epic hero in book 1 of Apollonius’s Argonautica*, Hellenistic culture and society 10 (Berkeley, California; Oxford: University of California Press, 1993), 1-10.

famous enough to be written up by Cassius Dio. Some readers might know the previous literary works to which Philostratus refers and from which he must draw much: that on Apollonius' youth by Maximus of Aegeae [...] All this establishes a presumption shared by writer and reader that there is a set of historical facts concerning Apollonius on which Philostratus may draw. He may select well or ill, he may elaborate without warrant, but he and his readers would agree that his story has a historical core. It differs in this from the novels.¹

The Jewish novellas, it will be recalled, differ from the Greek novels in their stronger tendency towards historical verisimilitude,² a generic convention that the author of Acts could not help but be aware of. The level of priority given to real-world logic and external referentiality was therefore hugely variable; in a literary milieu such as this, readers would have highly developed instincts for assessing truth value and the priority of external referentiality. Authors would have complex and subtle ways of manipulating those instincts, which would have involved partially utilising multiple signification systems and generic frames. If we as modern readers want to fully understand the way these texts create meaning we need to be conversant with a wide array of texts of either mode, and importantly, of texts that exist on the generic borders between history and fiction, as Acts does.

3.2.2. Heliodorus and the Rhetoric of Realism

If it is difficult to put flesh on the bones of how authors in the ancient world engaged with the dialogue between fiction and history, it might be useful to look at how Heliodorus does

¹ Bowie, "Philostratus," 193.

² 82-85.

so in the *Aithiopika*. In a fascinating study, John R. Morgan looks at how Heliodorus creates the illusion of historicity for his readers through a combination of techniques and devices from Hellenistic historiography.¹ Heliodorus feigns, for example, authorial uncertainty on a number of occasions, throwing phrases such as “I think (οἶμαι),”² and “perhaps (τάχα).”³ He hints that his sources may not be precise on certain details,⁴ he offers alternative explanations for events.⁵ All of these techniques are found in genuine historians and are markers suggestive of the historical mode – they each imply that the author is not omniscient, but dependent on sources of some sort. Offering a possible alternative suggests that the author does not know what happened – this is of course impossible in a world he created himself. Heliodorus also maintains a rhetoric of plausibility – that is, he sticks to ethnic stereotypes, known “facts,” geography, and other details present in extant historiographical texts. According to Morgan, this “anchors his story in the real world.”⁶ Taken as a whole, these devices produce the illusion of realism that increases the narrative’s impact, making it seem more important and intense than an “unreal” event could be.⁷

In relation to Acts, several important observations can be made. Acts makes a very limited use of these techniques. It certainly does make use of realistic details, but it is highly questionable that these could be said to amount to authorial uncertainty: they definitely never stretch to raising the possibility of a competing explanation. Examples of this technique include 1.15: “ἦν τε ὄχλος ὀνομάτων ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ὡσεὶ ἑκατὸν εἴκοσι”, which offers only the faintest uncertainty and no possibility of an alternative version of events; several comments referring to the number of people saved (such as 2.41 and 4.4); the

¹ John R. Morgan, “History, Romance, and Realism in the *Aithiopika* of Heliodorus,” *CA* 1, no. 2 (1982): 221-265.

² Morgan, “Realism in Heliodorus,” 227–228, citing such instances as 1.8.1; 2.22.1; 6.5.1; 10.6.5.

³ Morgan, “Realism in Heliodorus,” 228, citing 2.20.2; 6.14.6; 7.5.2; 9.11.6; 9.19.2.

⁴ Morgan, “Realism in Heliodorus,” 228–229.

⁵ Morgan, “Realism in Heliodorus,” 229.

⁶ Morgan, “Realism in Heliodorus,” 234.

⁷ Morgan, “Realism in Heliodorus,” 261.

comment on 4.22: “ἐτῶν γὰρ ἦν πλειόνων τεσσαράκοντα ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐφ’ ὃν γέγονει τὸ σημεῖον τοῦτο τῆς ἰάσεως” offers neither uncertainty nor competing explanation; the same is true of 27.37 “ἡμεθα δὲ αἱ πᾶσαι ψυχαὶ ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ διακόσται ἐβδομήκοντα ἕξ,” and 1.12: “Τότε ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἀπὸ ὄρους τοῦ καλουμένου Ἐλαιῶνος, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐγγὺς Ἱερουσαλὴμ σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν.” These examples certainly constitute a nod in the direction of a “rhetoric of realism”, but none of them accept any need to validate, verify, question or doubt a source. The one possible exception is the “we” passages, which as we have seen offers precious little for comparison with any of the Greek historians.¹ Luke makes truth-claims in Acts almost exclusively through appeal to the Divine. The prologue offers nothing taken separately to the Gospel, but even that preface is surely not strong enough to sustain the two narratives through without any further support from the text itself. It is not then, his pose as a *Hellenistic Historian* that is responsible for the impression that he wants his narrative to be understood as a record of true events. While Luke could not have naively expected readers to follow a specifically Hebrew rhetoric of Inspired History, he steers so clear of the rhetoric of Hellenistic historiography that one might suspect he does so deliberately. His rhetoric of veracity does not come from the genre of Hellenistic historiography, and could not come solely through the Septuagint, simply because his audience could not be expected to be familiar with it. What he does is play upon the conventions discussed above – the rhetoric of Divine history, in dialogue with the Greek classics.²

¹ See pages 24-28.

² On the likelihood of Acts’ readers being versed mainly in the Greek classics, see for example Strelan, *Strange Acts*, 1-26.

3.2.3. The Open Text and the Septuagint

There is no doubt, however, that the Septuagint is an important, if not pivotal text to the author of Acts, and this leaves the question as to what extent familiarity with it would be necessary to understanding Acts; at present, we are faced with the problem that Luke appears to be writing for Greek readers while depending heavily on a text unknown by the majority of them.

While it is true that familiarity with the Septuagint would have enriched the reading experience for the target audience of Acts, a text's excess coding is capable of overcoming such gaps in the cognitive environment. Umberto Eco calls this type of narrative an Open Text, which means that it lays down markers for the reader to follow, and gives out enough information about its narrative codes that a reasonably competent reader can follow them, imbibing the narrative's own codality for the duration of his reading. Eco quotes the first sentence of Scott's *Waverley*:

What could my readers have expected from the chivalrous epithets of Howard, Mordaunt, Mortimer or Stanley, or from the softer and more sentimental sounds of Belmore, Belville, Belfield and Belgrave, but pages of inanity, similar to those which have been so christened for half a century past?¹

From this he observes that even though a high percentage of his target audience would not be familiar with the literature to which he has alluded here, it does not mean they cannot understand it. Merely by accepting the basic premise of the statement in the interests of

¹ Umberto Eco, *The role of the reader: explorations in the semiotics of texts* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), 7.

continuing the reading process, the reader is able to continue enjoying the text. While Scott is “clearly calling for a very specialized type of reader,” he also:

[...] *creates* the competence of his Model Reader. After having read this passage, whoever approaches *Waverley* [...] is asked to *assume* that certain epithets are meaning “chivalry” and that there is a whole traditions of chivalric romances displaying certain deprecatory stylistic and narrative properties.¹

The reader does not need to know these texts, because sufficient information has been given to establish what the author wants to say. Other examples are not difficult to find. *Don Quixote* operates not on an assumption that the reader has read every chivalrous romance Cervantes mentions, but that he knows the genre reasonably well, if only by repute. From this, all kinds of specific names, deeds and traditions are posited of which very few of Cervantes’ readers could have been expected to have detailed knowledge.

Of course it is in ancient literature that examples need to be found, but here it is exactly the same – the only difficulty is that our modern reading competence is lower and the allusions more difficult to pick up. A look at the notes to Whitmarsh and Morale’s translation of Achilles Tatius highlights just some of the allusions made and voices present in the text. The notes to the first page provide information on half a dozen allusions, including the antiquarian tone produced by the word “Assyrian”, references to the mythological foundation of Thebes, the “hint of eroticism” in the description of gardens and sculpted landscapes common to Greek literature, some allusions to the *Iliad*, the commonality in ancient literature of the theme of the “all-conquering power of Aphrodite and Eros” and

¹ Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 7. His italics.

allusions to Plato and Socrates.¹ Whitmarsh and Morales are outstanding classicists, but one suspects that a moderately educated Greek in the ancient world would have picked up many more allusions than this.

Acts achieves very similar things. When it says in 1.12: “Τότε ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ ἀπὸ ὄρους τοῦ καλουμένου Ἐλαιῶνος, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐγγὺς Ἱερουσαλήμ σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν,” it relies on some cultural knowledge of the Jewish Sabbath to characterise the apostles as Jews. But the prior information required is in real terms limited to the understanding of the Sabbath as a day in which limits are set upon work done – and this, along with the existence of a holy book, is one of the most knowable things about Judaism – Augustus granted a concession to Jewish citizens if the monthly distribution of food fell on a Sabbath,² and the Maccabees famously refused to fight on that day.³ The process of creating competence is also evident in 1.16 “ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, ἔδει πληρωθῆναι τὴν γραφὴν ἣν προεῖπεν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον διὰ στόματος Δαυὶδ περὶ Ἰούδα τοῦ γενομένου ὁδηγοῦ τοῖς συλλαβοῦσιν Ἰησοῦν[...].” Here the fulfilment of scripture, the holy spirit as the Divine voice, the prophet David, and the betrayal of Jesus, are all introduced to an unfamiliar reader with sufficient encoded redundancy to guarantee the communication – an Old Testament prophet spoke with divine authority that this event would come about. Parallel and pre-existing ideas in the Greek literary sphere (such as oracular literature and mythology) provided relevant intertexts for a reader unfamiliar with the Septuagint.

Hellenistic historiography might even help provide the context in which to configure such elements. Clare Rothschild has pointed out that the traditional attribution of post-enlightenment generic assumptions about historiography have taken the emphasis away

¹ Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, trans. Tim. Whitmarsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 146.

² James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Milton Keynes: Word, 1988), xlvi.

³ 1 Maccabees 2.33-37

from their theological content,¹ and that history as a Greek genre (despite many changes over several centuries) always had a strong theological element: a rhetorical strategy aiming to convince the reader of the truth in the historian's claims:

As a literary technique, divine causation is reserved by historians to describe events for which natural explanations fall short in terms of either plausibility or capturing an event's truth", or significance, or both. In such cases ancient historians seemed to believe that their concept of "historical truth" suffered neglect in the bare presentation of facts. [...] Recourse to fate as a causative explanation for a certain event, for example, not only imparts greater significance to a particular set of circumstances, but in so doing enhances the impression of the overall work as clear, accurate and true.²

If this is correct (and Rothschild cites examples from such difficult cases as Thucydides and Polybius, Herodotus and Arrian), then the Greek reader of Acts did not have to cope in any significant sense with a "new" contextual framework, but merely another composite framework established from an understanding of historiography (the sort of truth-claims alluded to in the prologue), Epic (which carried a strong view of fate and destiny), and a basic cultural knowledge of Judaism. Such a composite cognitive environment is created as a normal part of processing an unfamiliar text, with only the degree of mutuality that the reader is able to create being a variable factor. Sternberg's understanding of the truth-claims made by the Hebrew Bible has its analogies in the Greek world, and the target reader was able to construct an appropriate relevance framework to read it without extreme conceptual

¹ Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the rhetoric of history*, 4-5.

² Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the rhetoric of history*, 9-10, 15.

difficulty. The question of how much mutuality the Greek reader would be able to establish with a semantically orientated Greek text like Acts is, however, a complex and difficult one that can only be investigated through examples. In the second part of this project an attempt will be made to begin this process.

4. Conclusion to Part 1: The Creation of a Cognitive Environment for Acts

In Part 1, several areas of literary theory have been explored. To begin with, a survey of genre proposals demonstrated that many different genres appear to be present in Acts, if only partially. The methodology used to argue for one genre or another was analysed and found wanting. This led to a theoretical discussion of genre utilising approaches from secular literary theory.

Genre is not a simple subject, however, and nor were the conclusions. The idea that genre is an instrument of classification was refuted. Instead it was argued that genre is an instrument of interpretation, shaping the way that readers understand texts by reference to prior narratives that bear some relation. Classification can have a limited value if it points the critic outside of the text's native milieu to establish some of the closest literary relationships, but all contemporary literature is related, even, and sometimes especially, through antithesis. For this reason it is fundamentally erroneous to exclude texts from the comparative process.

An alternative model was proposed, in which signs, hints, allusions, and references to other narratives are discovered and explored, regardless of their genre or the strength of their relation to the text in hand. The potential application of all contemporarily available literature to Acts without these prejudices will enable better, fuller, and more fruitful interpretation.

This concept of genre was applied to the problem of whether Acts belongs within the historical or fictional mode. It was argued that the target audience of Acts would have been able to use a wide range of modalities to interpret a text that made genuine truth-claims, and though a lack of markers from the historical rhetoric established by Thucydides and other Greek historians meant they would not have been able to align Acts with the Hellenistic histories, they would have understood the rhetoric of divine inspiration and would have taken that seriously, though just how seriously is a difficult question. The problem of genre-based truth-claims, however, can be set aside as irrelevant, and literally so, because as a question of relevance they would have been set aside by a target audience comfortable with this rhetoric.

The categorical confusion that arises when scholars see the truth claims of Acts can be seen through the lens of relevance theory as a modern reader's searching for optimal relevance, but failing to find the appropriate literary and cultural codes. This causes him to insert Acts into an anachronistic and inadequate cognitive framework, which usually involves maximizing some features and minimizing others. One critic, paying attention to the conventions of style, narrative logic, dialogue, supernatural events, and a wide number of intertextual frames, and, not having the cognitive resources that Luke assumed in composing it, correlates Acts with conventions familiar to him and finds that Acts is a fiction. Another has formed an understanding of the Bible as history, and therefore reads the preface, the historical references, and most importantly, the fact that Acts is a biblical text, and concludes that it must be a history, *for exactly the same reason* – the lack of a more appropriate cognitive environment. What is needed (and one suspects that the controversial status of biblical historicity does not help here) is to read widely in the literature of the period and to simply allow the text to create the reading competence it requires.

Acts draws upon basic cultural knowledge of the Torah in the Hellenistic world, Greek literary conventions relating to the inspiration of the muse, and a strong body of truth-

claiming, historically bound literature to make its own truth-claims while also managing to be highly entertaining. It ensures the veracity of the communication by recourse to redundant coding that creates competence in the reader rather than relying upon the presence of all necessary information beforehand. Familiarity with the Septuagint would have enriched the reading of Acts, but was not necessary to its enjoyment or understanding.

In the second part of the thesis the focus will be on the way in which an ancient audience might have configured Acts. It will be a largely intertextual procedure, exploring the narrative logic of Acts and demonstrating that precedent existed within the ancient world for such a reading. The intertexts come from a wide range of ancient literature, allowing no conclusions to be formed about the genre of Acts. Instead, it aims to at least partially reconstruct the unconscious process of an ancient reader.

PART 2: THE STUDIES

Introduction to the second part. CONFIGURING THE NARRATIVE OF ACTS

1. Introduction

The first half of this thesis has argued that intertextual paradigms are more important than biblical scholarship usually accepts, and that narrative coherence is based on complex but intelligible webs of narrative logic alluded to by these paradigms and made configurable by them. The investigation that has as its end goal the discovery of a genre misses the point: if one genre was intended it would be an easy thing to identify it, but this is rarely the case. Instead of an end-goal of a single genre scholarship needs to have a start-point of multiple genres – it needs to establish what the strongest intertextual systems are likely to be and to explore these with the aim of making sense of a narrative. When coherence appears to fail, the likelihood is not that the author failed to make his text work, but that we as anachronous interpreters have missed a trick.

In this part of the thesis I intend to prove the point that coherence can be found – and by coherence I mean clear, demonstrable coherence, in places where scholarship has struggled to find it. This is not so much an attack on that scholarship as an attempt to move forward from it: for this reason I do discuss on many occasions what scholars have said or not said about a particular passage, but I do not want to focus overly on the failings of the old paradigm so much as the potential of the new one. The old paradigm, as I have tried to explain, is more wedded to the one I am proposing here than scholars often realise.

2. Intertext and Convention: from Beginning to End

If the mechanisms by which readers configure text and establish coherence are essentially synchronic, and mutating at whatever speed genre does, the task becomes one of reconstructing conventions and the the systems of signification they produce. Even in

regard to a single text, a comprehensive account of these systems could only be established via the contemporary and antecedental framework – a taxonomic enterprise which even if it were made possible by having all the texts extant and accurately dated would, in the absence of secondary data from the social sphere itself, be extremely liable to misinterpretation. Nonetheless, conventions referring to prior narratives and socio-ideological codes must have existed because any communication requires this contextualisation; even if the author had somehow escaped recourse to the devices, styles and conventions appropriate to his day, the reader would still place the text within his own synchronic contextual framework, resulting in all kinds of interpretative chaos: the author's business is and always has been to create a structure that the audience or reader can reliably follow using available resources.

In the previous chapter I discussed the idea that narrative conventions operate differently with different modalities and different genres, but in complex ways that create multiple structures even within one text. In the following studies, three different types of structures will be explored for Acts.

When a communication begins, the receiver immediately attempts to contextualise it; this process is extremely quick and mostly subconscious, but the work of interpreting is done at the outset because the communication is literally irrelevant until the receiver has some established its context. In literature, this rule works itself out by having strong conventions at the beginning of the text, which the reader can make use of to establish the most important systems within which she should be working. In modern literature the problem is largely resolved by the cover, the title, the publisher, the price of a text – even if any of these were knowable for Acts, we cannot necessarily recover what they would have meant to the original audience. Conventions within the narrative itself are, however, still worth looking for. With this in mind the first two studies take as their springboard the first chapter of Acts,

and aim to demonstrate that conventions at the beginning of the narrative dictate interpretation through to the end.

2.1. A note on method (or the lack thereof)

Before going any further in this study it is worth briefly justifying my method (or more accurately, my lack of it) in these studies. After more than a hundred and fifty pages of methodology the reader might feel she deserves at least some understanding of the process by which I arrive at my outcomes. Equally, however, it must be clear by now that the process I have been describing is an enormously complicated one: each phrase or allusion, any unit of text, no matter how small, is capable of pointing to other generic spheres, social discourses and/or specific narratives. Worse, each one of these allusions is in dialogue with the rest, creating a complex web of allusion that could not be consciously apprehended even by the author. In this context any attempt at a specific A+B=C type methodology is doomed to fail. Since there is then, no chance that the route by which I arrive at my research outcomes will be replicable in any straightforward sense, any attempt to distill it into steps would probably equate to unnecessary and counter-productive reductionism. I would rather admit from the outset that the method largely relies upon the application of literary instinct and is developed by reading as much of the appropriate literature as possible. There are, unfortunately, no shortcuts. Further, once potential allusions, parallels or echoes have been detected there is still no method to the tracing of patterns that form narrative coherence, because simple patterns are uncommon in any texts beyond some children's stories and mythological tropes. One might for example, create a formula for Wilkie Collins or Jane Austen, but even for these quite formulaic authors such a pattern would equate to crude reductionism at best. The Greek romances are a good example of this in the ancient world, but there is significant divergence even within the narrative structures of say, Heliodorus and Chariton. Readers need to be surprised, and like a game of chess, the potential variation across a large number of small and predictable steps is more or less infinite. The only rule is

that the narrative has to make some sort of sense, that the patterns *are* patterns; that they will work themselves out; that units of text are likely to be *relevant*. In this short introductory chapter to the first study, I hope to justify to some extent my reasons for opting for the particular intertextual frameworks that we will be exploring. In the study itself, I hope the pattern itself will emerge as a clear one, both predictable and yet capable of surprising the intended audience.

2.2. Confusion and Convention in the Preface to Acts

If some provisional contextualisation is required immediately upon beginning to read a narrative, a good place to begin a search for potentially useful conventions is the beginning of the text. Since conventions here come to the reader without prior signposting they themselves need to be more revealing, and some phrases occur with remarkable frequency. Epics began in *media res* and with an appeal to the muse or Goddess; Hebrew prophetic literature frequently opens with a reference to words or visions from God. As these examples show, the fact that these are the first words of a narrative mean that the signposting has little choice but to point to other, prior narratives, and usually in a relatively unspecific way to whole or even groups of narratives. This process helps a reader to quickly create a provisional idea of the sort of cognitive resources he will need for decoding the text, and while this is naturally subject to much revision and further nuancing, this initial orientation makes it possible to at least begin the reading process.

When searching for keys to the generic conventions of Acts, we have observed that there has been a consistent scholarly focus on the preface, but that Loveday Alexander has questioned whether the preface is even a genre-indicator; even if it were a genre-indicator to the contemporary readership its nature may no longer be recoverable. However, the most unusual feature of the preface - the transition into narrative - is particularly unusual and therefore probably of a high Notice value. The only trouble is that while we can see this

Notice, we cannot necessarily configure it. Alexander speculates that: “this irregularity may be due simply to lack of competence on Luke’s part, or to lack of interest in maintaining the formal preface-style with which he begins.”¹ Incompetence is of course a possibility, but one that I have explicitly placed at the bottom of my list of options. Lack of interest appears to go no further: it merely suggests that Luke was interested in something else instead; but if Luke skipped over the preface in order to press on with something else, this is surely incompetence by another name. Instead, I would prefer to investigate the idea that the preface itself tells us something about Luke’s interests and points in a direction the reader is meant to follow.

The transitional oddity is rather difficult to investigate, however; it has no very close parallels, and only a few that are comparable in any useful sense. D. W. Palmer cites several examples, but Alexander points out that while they do have brief transitions, the appropriate particle is used in all of these cases.² In my opinion, the technique used in the preface is purposeful and stylistically complex; it is part of a series of conventions in the first half of the first chapter that would have orientated the ancient reader and directed them to read in a particular way. I will begin this chapter with a brief exploration of these conventions before going on to the main study, which focuses on a device in 1.6-8 that is a direct interpretative factor throughout the entire narrative. At the end of the chapter it will be worthwhile to go back over the conventions exposed in this preliminary study to discuss the overall effect of the first eleven verses of Acts.

Admittedly, the route by which I am about to explore the preface is circuitous, but it is context that provides the necessary evidence. The conventions that open the story need to

¹ Alexander, “The Preface to Acts and the Historians,” in *History, literature and society in the book of Acts*, ed. Ben. Witherington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94.

² D. W. Palmer, “Acts and the Ancient Historical Monograph,” in *The book of Acts in its ancient literary setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1993), 22–23; Alexander, “Preface to Acts,” 94.

be understood as part of an integrated whole. Essentially, this section of my thesis, which is about a conventional schema that runs through the entirety of Acts, can also be seen as providing evidence that the preface Notices the reader as to where the text is going by providing initial indications of a particular system of significations.

3. Acts 1.1-11- Dropped Into a Dream

3.1. Transition and Displacement

The preface to Acts, we have seen,¹ slips into narrative without the conventional indicator of either a prospective sentence or an appropriate particle. This is generally viewed as an error, or at least a stylistic difficulty. Pervo, for example, says that:

The preface, which lacks a clear ending, complicates resolution of this question [the end of the introduction]. Moreover, the syntactical nature of v.3 is disputed, and the summary – if that is what it is – shifts from indirect to direct speech in the course of v.4. One may also ask whether v.6 introduces a distinct scene.²

There are three separate complaints here: verse 3 has unclear syntax, verse 4 appears to change from indirect to direct speech mid-flow, and verse 6 fails to organise itself into a proper scene; all of these problems are to do with clarity, with verses 4 and 6 in particular seemingly failing to orientate the reader properly, first as regards speaker (v.4) and then as regards location (v.6).

¹ 23-26.

² Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2009), 32.

3.1.1. Verse 4

The transition to direct speech here effectively creates the entry into the narrative world, which had previously been in the summary mode, and the voice of an extradiegetic, and importantly, heterodiegetic narrator.¹ Entry into the narrative world is made when the mood changes from non-focalized summary to internally focalized scene (through the apostles) as Jesus begins to talk. The voice changes during the monologue itself. This is a subtle shift, created by the tight relationship between transposed and reported speech in 1.4:

καὶ συναλιζόμενος παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων μὴ χωρίζεσθαι ἀλλὰ
περιμένειν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πατρὸς ἣν ἠκούσατέ μου,

The switch takes place with the transition from the infinitives to the use of the aorist 2nd person plural ἠκούσατέ; but the transposed portion of the monologue is similar enough to allow the transition to reported speech with only the slightest jolt for the reader. The effect is one of being cast adrift from the ordered and Hellenistic world of the preface (authorial first person, dedication, recapitulation) into the world of the story, another (literary) country, another (pseudo-historical) time. It moves away from historiography and into a dreamlike environment that does not respect space and time in the same way.

This does not necessarily indicate that Luke has moved into pure fiction, but only that he has moved into a narrative world of a mythological cast that makes for an emotive and powerful story. One might even see it as a manner of straddling the two domains—logical/supernatural

¹ In Luke's gospel, the use of the first person plural in the preface: διήγησιν περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν, places the narrator inside the narrative, but in Acts this is not the case. The story only becomes homodiegetic during the "we" passages.

or historical/literary, made possible by the juxtaposition of a preface that, if not closely related to the historiographical genre, is “at home in the broad tradition of technical prose”;¹ i.e., non-fictional, logical works, with a mode of discourse that is entirely literary in nature – imaginative, supernatural, and deliberately unmoored from the sort of specific temporal and spatial points that are unavoidable in reality or in its narrative representation. The unannounced shift into speech is so stylistically orientated, and so manifestly against the normal conventions of historiographical writing, that the reader cannot help but infer that even if the historiographical genre was being invoked by the prologue, it is being subverted now. Certainly, the prologue’s historiographical claims are important in some sense, but they cannot survive unaltered through these first eleven verses.

3.1.2. Verse 6

The difficulty with verse 6: Οἱ μὲν οὖν συνελθόντες ἡρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες· κύριε, εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ; is that 6-8 form a scene that cannot be placed either with what comes before (ὄπτανόμενος αὐτοῖς καὶ λέγων τὰ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ·), or what comes after (Καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν, βλέπόντων αὐτῶν ἐπήρθη, καὶ νεφέλη ὑπέλαβεν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν). Instead, the dialogue appears at the start of the verse 6 to belong to the former situation, a selection of some of the things Jesus said during the forty days, but at the end of the dialogue to have been part of the ascension scene,² with the reader staring up into the clouds at the departing Jesus, a definite scene if ever there was one, but one that is strikingly non-historical – a supernatural event with absolutely no critical distance or mention of sources.

¹ Alexander, “Preface to Acts,” 103.

² Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 41, says “Readers are not immediately aware that these verses constitute a distinct episode, and its location is only revealed at its close.”

These two shifts in scene: during verses 4 and 6-8, give an atmosphere to the introduction of Acts that cannot be paralleled elsewhere in Acts or the Bible. The nearest equivalent in terms of story is 2 Kings 2, which includes a beloved master ascending to Heaven, onlooking disciples, and the inheriting of the Spirit, but this passage has different aims to the introduction to Acts and achieves them in a very different way. There is no temporal or spatial displacement in the narrative, and the emphasis is on the loyalty and devotion of Elisha; the giving of the Spirit occurs in a very different way and is even of a slightly different kind – a double portion of Elijah’s spirit rather than straightforward giving of the Holy Spirit. The focus in this ascension scene is more on Elisha than anything else, an element manifest in the fact that the other disciples leave the two prophets alone at the pivotal moment and do not understand what has happened afterwards. The two narratives share only some general features of succession-narrative, while in actuality being quite distinct types of discourse.

Analepsis and prolepsis are other ways in which displacement occurs in the introduction to Acts. These also are more pronounced in the first eleven verses than anywhere else. Taking the ascension scene as the beginning point of the “first narrative,”¹ the verses in which Jesus says many things about the kingdom of God are all analeptic in nature. And within these are several proleptic statements, advance notices of the coming of the spirit, and witnessing to the ends of the earth. When the reader realises his entry into the first proper scene in verse 9, he has only two verses of the first level narrative (both of which have their own heavy mythos about them) until there is more prolepsis: Jesus will return. After the imaginative movement and indefinite physical location of the narrative up to this point, the effect of verse 12 is like a splash of cold water – the reader is suddenly brought back into reality and all its dullness:

¹ The point in narrative time that the narrative most appears to be located in.

Τότε υπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ ἀπὸ ὄρους τοῦ καλουμένου Ἐλαιῶνος, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐγγὺς Ἱερουσαλήμ σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν.

Suddenly the reader finds himself in the midst of concrete names of known places, with walking, that most undreamlike activity, phrased with a reference to distance that seems to evoke even more physicality than usual.

When they get back to Jerusalem, where we know they have been instructed to wait, they go into an upper room, and the apostles are all named before the reader is informed that οὗτοι πάντες ἦσαν προσκατεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν τῇ προσευχῇ. All of this information is notably unexciting. But the narrator has reported the speech of Jesus, and the reader knows that the Holy Spirit will come and the apostles will be witnesses to the end of the earth: suspense underlies this static period of waiting. The reader has inferred that the words of Jesus, in coming from an authoritative narratorial voice, have made the future predictable merely by declaring it – the status of Jesus as Divine figure generates narrative logic along the mythological/divine history trajectory with which the ancient reader is already comfortable.

Is the arrival of the Holy Spirit the historical fulfilment of a prophecy or an element of literary configuration? The two are not, of course, mutually exclusive. The question is whether the discourse is framed in the fictional or historical mode, and the answer to that has to be the fictional. This is mostly because of the indirect implicatures that fill the first ten verses, described above. Such a mode of discourse avoids external referentiality far too thoroughly for words spoken in it to be treated as historical; this is much more like *The Education of Cyrus* than the *Anabasis of Alexander*. What is more, the way in which the fulfilment occurs – in the sense, that is, of narrative depiction, with its tongues of flame and so on, returns the reader to that supernatural spectrum so beautifully established just previously.

It is important to understand at this point that it is not the supernatural events themselves that imply fictionality but the unfixed, fluid nature in which they are framed, combined with a total lack of critical distance over features that would require verification if they were contained within historical discourse. Rather than the preface-transition at verse 4 and the unplaceable dialogue of 1.6-8 being matters of lack of interest or competence, all of these elements combine in the creation of a mythical framework. It invokes the supernatural and the divine and weaves them expertly into the story.

Exegetes have two options here. They might decide that the preface is faulty, that the transition into a scene at verse 6 is also inadequate, and that the narrative, angels, resurrection and all, is too deficient to achieve what it is supposed to. Or they can see both transitions as deliberate conventions that the reader would in some sense be able to follow. If they take this latter option, there are no known parallels among ancient prefaces, and it is unlikely that the small, almost incidental (when taken singly) transition at verse 6 will lead to the discovery of good parallels - not unless some extraordinary scholar well-versed in classical literature happens to recount one. However, there is a third convention in this passage, tied closely to the other two, indicative of a well-known intertextual framework and demonstrable in its outworking through the entire narrative; and to that we will turn in a moment. The purpose of these initial comments is twofold: to provide some clarity as to my earlier remarks about signposting at the beginning of a narrative and how it can assist with the reconstruction of an ancient reader's initial decoding processes; and to demonstrate that the device I am about to discuss: the "ambiguous oracle", is signposted for the reader by a range of techniques in these opening verses. My observations so far also suggest that what is presented at the beginning of the narrative is a deliberately unreal scene with multiple indications of something that might be better described as mythical and esoteric than historiographical but incompetent.

Chapter 5. THE AMBIGUOUS ORACLE¹

“none of woman born shall harm Macbeth.”²

1. The Oracle and the Plot

1.1. The Outline of the Plot: 1.6-8

Οἱ μὲν οὖν συνελθόντες ἡρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες· κύριε, εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ; ⁷εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· οὐχ ὑμῶν ἐστὶν γινῶναι χρόνους ἢ καιροὺς οὓς ὁ πατήρ ἔθετο ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ, ⁸ἀλλὰ λήμψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες ἐν τε Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ [ἐν] πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς.

Of these verses, 1.8 is generally considered to be the pivotal verse for the outline of Acts,³ with various interpretations of 1.6-7. Tannehill, for example, argues that these verses are important in recognising the continuing problem created by Israel’s rejection of the Gospel. He claims 1.6 is:

[...] a further expression that has already been expressed in Luke. Indeed, the restored reign for Israel is simply another expression of the hope that Gabriel, a messenger with divine authority, aroused in Luke 1.32-33. The narrative does not

¹ The remainder of this chapter is a revised form of one that is published as “The Ambiguous Oracle: Narrative Configuration in Acts,” *NTS* 54 (2011): 530-546.

² Act 4 Scene 1.

³ See for example, Parsons, *Acts*, 20.

allow us to forget about this hope now that its fulfilment is becoming problematic through the rejection of Jesus.¹

Such a view depends heavily on unity with Luke's Gospel, demands an interpretation of continuing hope for Israel throughout Acts,² and yet fails to fully explain the literary purpose of the verse. Tannehill is right to observe that hopes for Israel are problematized significantly in Acts, but if 1.6 simply reminds the reader of hopes raised in Luke 1.32-33 and 2.32, it begs the question as to how readers made sense of it in the context of all the Jewish rejection and persecution that goes on throughout the Acts narrative.

Pervo, whose approach to the unity of Luke-Acts is somewhat more agnostic, sees the disciples' question as merely a platform upon which to have Jesus make an important statement, outlining his view on the correct attitude to the problem of Israel before going on to map out the course of the evangelical mission.³ But if the question asked in 1.6 is merely a vehicle for Jesus to outline his plans, it is an odd one. It seems a striking sort of question, because it impinges upon a central theme of Acts (and as far as is known, early Christianity in general) – that of the Jews and their salvation. So whether one interprets along the lines of Tannehill, who recognises the importance of this statement but does not explain how it coheres with the narrative, or of Pervo, who underplays the statement's importance to Acts and early Christianity but recognises it as having a literary function, 1.6-8 operates as two distinct entities - Jesus brushes off the question of Israel before addressing the universal mission.

¹ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume Two: The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1994), 15.

² Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Volume 2*, 3.

³ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 41.

Another scholar who has pursued the line of literary parallels for these verses is J. Bradley Chance, who compares Acts to Xenophon of Ephesus' *Ephesian Tale*, and observes that "divine prophecy" in the beginning of each text plays an important role in the development of both plots. Xenophon's oracle runs as follows:

Why do you long to discover the end and the start of their illness?

Both are in thrall to one illness, and thence must the cure be accomplished.

Terrible their sufferings which I can foresee and toils neverending.

Both will take flight o'er the sea pursued by a frenzy of madness.

Chains will they bear at the hands of men who consort with the ocean,

And one tomb and annihilating fire will be their nuptial bower.

Yet in time, when their sufferings are over, a happier fate is in store.¹

There is no need to go into the details of his analysis here, as his observations are unproblematic:

Thus, interpretation of the oracle itself contributes to the development of the story line in Xenophon. It was interpretation of the oracle which led the fathers to marry the children and to send them on the sea voyage which would eventually bring about the many adventures of the couple. Further, reflection on the oracle leads the

¹ 1.6. This translation: Longus and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Daphnis and Chloe, Anthia and Habrocomes*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library 69 (London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 227.

lovers to anticipate separation and to vow fidelity. While this vow does not in itself create the adventures to come, it infuses them with a certain tension and pathos which would not otherwise be present.¹

Chance compares this to Acts, and asks:

Do we find the characters reflecting upon and interpreting this feature of the prophecy and, in response to their own interpretations, making decisions and taking steps that move the plot along? The short answer is “No.”

For Chance this represents a fundamental difference between Luke and Xenophon:

For Luke, divine guidance cannot be reduced to a plot device, as much as it may contribute to plot. The guiding hand of God lies at the centre of Luke’s view of the movement of *history*, not only the movement of *story*.²

This conclusion, which implicitly privileges the importance of the history genre, suggests that because Luke is telling an historical story, he has different aims and objectives to Xenophon, and these are discernible when we read the text because of particular narrative elements and the way they are used. As we have seen already in this thesis, such an approach is probably not sufficiently complex for the task of properly interpreting narrative. The

¹ J. Bradley Chance, “Divine Prognostications and the Movement of Story: An Intertextual Exploration of Xenophon’s Ephesian Tale and the Acts of the Apostles,” in *Ancient fiction and early Christian narrative*, ed. Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance, and Judith Perkins, SBL Symposium Series (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 222.

² Chance, “Divine Prognostications,” 234.

ambiguous oracle of Acts demonstrates the sort of problems created by not only incorrect generic assumptions (that Acts is a history and therefore would not use a device from non-historical genres) but also the inflexibility created by an inappropriate methodology that boxes texts into narrow categories and interprets them only on that basis.

1.2. Question and Answer in Acts 1.6-8

Oracles in ancient literature usually take a Question and Answer format. Although this is not always the case,¹ a question put to a divine figure would definitely take the reader into a rich realm of literary codes and conventions. Joseph Fontenrose catalogues over 500 oracles given in ancient literature by the Delphic Oracle alone, using sources varying from historical to entirely fictional,² and it is certain that the contemporary reader of Acts possessed a contextual framework that the modern reader simply does not have. The question the Apostles ask: “Οἱ μὲν οὖν συνελθόντες ἡρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες· κύριε, εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τοῦτω ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ;” is of a very particular sort: it is framed in a construction with two participles, and the verb ἐρωτάω is in the less common imperfect tense.³ The cumulative effect of these three elements is to make the question seem drawn out; the imperfect tense of the verb itself may often be better translated “to urge” or “to beseech,” with an almost iterative sense that implies continued asking, than simply “to ask.” This is particularly noteworthy in the New Testament, where there are only about 13 uses of the imperfect tense of this verb, almost all of which are better translated in this way.⁴ When

¹ David Edward Aune, *Prophecy in early Christianity and the ancient Mediterranean world* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 52.

² Joseph Eddy Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle, its responses and operations, with a catalogue of responses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

³ Over 130 uses in the Septuagint and BGT, of which about seventeen are imperfect, 60 aorist, and the rest are participles or simple future.

⁴ 13 uses: Matt 15.23, 16.13; Mk 4.10, 7.26, 8.5; Lk 7.3; Jn 4.31, 40, 47, 9.15, 12.21,

it comes to the Lukan corpus, there are 22 uses,¹ of which only 4 are in the imperfect, and all clearly take an imperfect-type meaning.

Other than the one which is our present object, the other three are Luke 7.36:

Ἡρώτα δέ τις αὐτὸν τῶν Φαρισαίων ἵνα φάγη μετ' αὐτοῦ, καὶ εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ Φαρισαίου κατεκλίθη.

Acts 3.3:

ὃς ἰδὼν Πέτρον καὶ Ἰωάννην μέλλοντας εἰσιέναι εἰς τὸ ἱερόν, ἠρώτα ἐλεημοσύνην λαβεῖν.

And Acts 16.39:

καὶ ἐλθόντες παρεκάλεσαν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐξαγαγόντες ἠρώτων ἀπελθεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως.

All of these instances seem appropriate uses of the imperfect – the tense has an iterative value that suggests a question has not been asked just once, as would seem to be the case in the seven aorist instances. In Luke 7.36 the suggestion appears to be that Jesus went reluctantly with the Pharisee because of his persistence: the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees makes this quite plausible. In Luke 11.37 a Pharisee asks him a similar question in the simple present tense, but this construction is altogether different. The third time the imperfect is used by Luke it is placed in the mouth of a beggar – a situation in which an iterative value is quite natural. On the fourth occasion, the Philippians are asking Paul to

Acts 1.6, 3.3; 16.39. Of which only two are arguably better translated in the simple sense – Matt 16.13 and Mk 8.5. Of these two, only the latter seems to have an insuperable case for being translated in a manner that does not imply the iterative sense.

¹ Luke: 4.38, 5.3, 7.3, 8.37, 9.45, 11.37, 14.18,19, 32, 16.27, 19.31, 20.3, 22.68, 23.3. Acts 1.6, 3.3,10.48, 16.39, 18.20, 23.18, 23.20.

leave, but are worried about having imprisoned a Roman citizen. In this context the imperfect, with its concomitant suggestion of reiteration, suggests that the people are not able to demand that he leaves, but are urging him from a position of weakness, rather like the beggar in Acts 3.3. Thus the use of this verb and this tense in Lukan narrative carries with it an iterative or at least conative value.

This verb combined with the two participles leads to an interpretation of the verse in which the Apostles are badgering Jesus, and he answers only because he has to: “Having gathered together they were asking him, saying...”

In this context, Jesus gives them a very strange answer. While the latter half of the response dictates the missionary theme of the book, and also explains large parts of the plot structure, it must be noted that the first part of the answer: “εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· οὐχ ὑμῶν ἐστὶν γινῶναι χρόνους ἢ καιροὺς οὐς ὁ πατήρ ἔθετο ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ,” is far more esoteric and ambiguous. Furthermore, its position – syntactically connected to what is widely considered the key verse for outlining the direction of the narrative, suggests that it requires close attention.

The reluctance suggested by the construction of 1.6 in the context of oracular literature goes some way to explaining the reply: this is not a piece of advice or an instruction given by Jesus, but an ambiguous response to a persistent question, and this warns the reader not to accept the oracle at face value. The context – the question as to the restoration of Israel, suggests the interpretation “you will be my witnesses *to the Jews* in Judaea, Samaria, and *the whole Diaspora*.” But what it explicitly says amounts merely to a geographical reference, and could include or exclude any nation or group.

Tannehill sees the response as entirely unambiguous. This interpretation is almost inevitable given his strong view of the unity of Luke-Acts: “[...](Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 8); the universal scope of the mission, which begins in the Jewish homeland and reaches out to the entire

world (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8)."¹ It is by reading Acts through Luke that he sees “ως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς” as equivalent to “εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. ἀρξάμενοι ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ”, which in semantic terms is always a problematic assumption. The Gospel reference is certainly inclusive, but Acts is more ambiguous at this point – either a Diasporic or a non-Diasporic interpretation is possible.

1.3. The Trouble with the Answer

Pervo and Haenchen also agree that verse 1.8b is universal in scope, as does Parsons.² None of these scholars see any ambiguity in Jesus’ response. However, if scholars can conclude that this outline explicitly includes the mission to the Gentiles, one might reasonably expect the Apostles to have understood it similarly, but this does not appear to be the case. The vision in Acts 10 seems to cause Peter, who was at the ascension, and should therefore have heard Jesus tell them to go to the Gentiles with the good news, considerable confusion. He in turn has to work hard to explain the events of Acts 10 to the Church elders. Either both Peter and the church have been ignoring Jesus’ command up to now, or they misunderstood it.

There is a definite discrepancy between the explicit outlining of a universal mission by Jesus in 1.8, and the confusion of first Peter, and then the Jerusalem church, in Acts 10.

Fundamentally, this is a problem of coherence: if the divine commission definitively includes Gentiles in Acts 1, there is no need for the lengthy complications that go on in Acts 10.

Given Peter’s broader characterisation in the Gospels it might be possible to configure this confusion as resulting from a misunderstanding on his part, but the evidence does not appear to support this: in Luke’s Gospel Peter makes very few blunders. Incidents not

¹ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Volume 2*, 11.

² Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 28; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 144; Parsons, *Acts*, 28.

reported include; walking (or not) on water (Matt. 14.24-31); Jesus' response to his request for an explanation in Matt. 15.16: ἀκμὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀσύνετοί ἐστε; rebuking Jesus in Matt. 16.22 and Mark 8.32; falling asleep in Matt. 26.40 and Mark 14.37; confusion over foot-washing in John 13.8-9; cutting off a man's ear in John 18.10; and becoming upset in John 21.11. Luke takes no advantage of these opportunities to portray Peter as dull-witted, confused or indecisive. Peter is only confused at the transfiguration, and his only other unfavourably reported deed is the betrayal (when the cock crows), which is not a matter of confusion but of cowardice. There is also clear evidence in the text of Acts 11 that this is *not* a matter of Peter's individual confusion. He goes to some lengths to explain himself to a sceptical Jewish church. When they accept his testimony it is on the evidence of the Gentiles receiving the spirit, with no suggestion that Peter had missed the point during Jesus' ascension:

¹⁶ἐμνήσθην δὲ τοῦ ῥήματος τοῦ κυρίου ὡς ἔλεγεν· Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι, ὑμεῖς δὲ βαπτισθήσεσθε ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ. ¹⁷εἰ οὖν τὴν ἴσην δωρεὰν ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς ὡς καὶ ἡμῖν πιστεύσασιν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, ἐγὼ τίς ἤμην δυνατὸς κωλύσαι τὸν θεόν; ¹⁸Ἀκούσαντες δὲ ταῦτα ἠσύχασαν καὶ ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεὸν λέγοντες· ἄρα καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ὁ θεὸς τὴν μετάνοιαν εἰς ζωὴν ἔδωκεν.

The church's attitude to Peter's actions provides ample evidence that they were of the opinion that Gentiles were excluded, and that the Cornelius episode was instituted by God and provided necessary clarity.

The conflict appears obvious: on the one hand, Jesus told the apostles to evangelise to all nations; on the other, when Peter converts a Gentile the church reacts to it suspiciously, and are placated only when convinced that the new instructions come from God. One immediate possibility is that disparate sources were amalgated in the construction of Acts,

and at this point and that at several points the redaction was less than perfect (there are lots of theories surrounding Peter's vision, Cornelius' vision and so on), resulting in an end product that lacks cohesion. I do not believe this to be true: I believe that a simple explanation, and one that is fully coherent, is possible, and makes better sense of the narrative.

The simplest explanation is that nobody expected this inclusion, and the consensus was that newcomers had to become ritually clean in the traditional sense. If the reader had, up this point, made that assumption, what occurs here would make sense. Acts 11.20-21 even goes so far as to suggest something of this sort: “Οἱ μὲν οὖν διασπαρέντες ἀπὸ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς γενομένης ἐπὶ Στεφάνῳ διῆλθον ἕως Φοινίκης καὶ Κύπρου καὶ Ἀντιοχείας μηδενὶ λαλοῦντες τὸν λόγον εἰ μὴ μόνον Ἰουδαίοις.” There are some apparent exceptions to this, including 11.20 itself, in which it is made clear that some of those who had fled the persecution had begun talking to “Ἑλληνιστὰς” in Antioch. It is unclear, in my opinion, what this phrase achieves, but its apposition to the phrase highlighted above suggests that it is not intended to contradict it. Another example is the Ethiopian Eunuch in 8.26-40, but he is not strictly a Gentile, for Philip finds him reading the Torah and seeking instruction. There is a definite broadening of converts away from the strictly Jewish that begins with Samaria in chapter 8 and continues to grow until it reaches Rome; but Cornelius and his household are clearly demarcated as Gentiles in some way that Samaritans¹ and proselytes are not. There must be *some* distinction, because the author is clear both that Gentiles were not being evangelised and that Samaritans and Ethiopian's were. He is also clear, through Peter, that the conversion of Cornelius and his household represents an epiphanic moment in which Gentile conversion becomes acceptable.

¹ While I do not wish to go into speculative arguments on whether the Samaritans were considered to be Gentiles or not, James Alan Montgomery, *The Samaritans; the Earliest Jewish Sect: their History, Theology, and Literature* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1968), 154-164, especially 156-7, provides an interesting survey of the evidence. Reading between the lines of Josephus, he argues persuasively that the relationship was unique.

The general failure to implement Jesus' commands suggests that his answer in 1.6-8 is not as clear as has been thought. We are faced with deciding whether the ambiguity was created by incompetence, or whether it is actually us, the modern readers, who have the problem. When one considers the number of oracles with ambiguous answers in ancient literature,¹ it does appear that the contemporary reader of Acts would have been better equipped than us to decode the conventions that surround this literary device.

The evasive answer to the question "is this the time for the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel," has a (contextually) natural and a (contextually) less likely, but *syntactically* equally viable interpretation. The reader knows these must exist, and the suspense is created by wondering what the true meaning of the oracle will be and what trouble will be caused by the Apostles' misinterpretation.

The device disturbs the linear course of the narrative in order to generate interest – the implied reader knows there is a dissonance between the outcome projected by the oracle and the outcome expected by the Apostles, and possibly even as known in real-world history. The reader uses the contextual framework of oracular literature to begin to configure the narrative, and thus to interpret it.

For the sake of convenience let us label the two interpretations of the oracle as follows:

Interpretation 1: The ostensible interpretation, in which the Apostles are witnesses to the Diaspora all over the world.

Interpretation 2: The secret, correct interpretation, in which the Apostles are witnesses all over the world, but Jewish rejection will prevent the restoration of the Kingdom.

¹ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 437-438, lists more than 60 out of about 425. There are no ambiguous responses in historical oracles (75 according to his criteria, which favour literature verifiable by witnesses).

After receiving the oracle and being convinced of the first interpretation, the Apostles receive the Holy Spirit and begin to preach. Interpretation 1 looks sound. This is what one expects and is part of a tradition in which the recipient of the oracle obeys its advice and acts accordingly. It is the law of narrative, however, that such behaviour will backfire; in fact whenever it appears that everything is going well and nothing untoward seems likely to occur, especially early in a narrative, we know that there will be trouble.¹ The projected outcome is on course even though the reader is aware it cannot come about – a juxtaposition that naturally evokes excitement. The Apostles enjoy success in Jerusalem and a big increase in numbers. The resistance of the Jews gradually increases, until eventually Stephen is martyred in Acts 7. This persecution at the hands of the Jews forces a re-evaluation of the oracle, the key to which is evident:

Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ διωγμὸς μέγας ἐπὶ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τὴν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις, πάντες δὲ διεσπάρησαν κατὰ τὰς χώρας τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ Σαμαρείας πλὴν τῶν ἀποστόλων.²

This verse shows that the message has now spread not just further in Judaea, but also into Samaria – and this happens precisely because of Jewish resistance. The statement is followed some time later by Peter in 12.11: “νῦν οἶδα ἀληθῶς ὅτι ἐξαπέστειλεν [ὁ] κύριος τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξείλατό με ἐκ χειρὸς Ἡρώδου καὶ πάσης τῆς προσδοκίας τοῦ λαοῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων.” These words come at the end point of the Judaea mission, and the underlined phrase formally closes it. The Samaritan portion of the mission began with

¹ See for example, Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before reading: narrative conventions and the politics of interpretation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 116–117.

² Acts 8.1.

Stephen's stoning, and the Judean portion ends with this final persecution of Peter, in which he implicates the Jews.

1.4. Jewish Mission: Ups and Downs

The narrative is structured in such a way that the Jewish mission is bound to fail. But in the first half of Acts, where the oracular response is still understood to be working itself out directly through Interpretation 1, the impression of successful preaching to the Jews is initially strong. Gerhard Krodel, for example, states that the:

presence of these Jews from every nation under heaven [symbolizes] the beginning of the gathering of the scattered tribes of Israel and thus the restoration of the kingdom to Israel before the parousia.¹

This restoration, however, does not occur in the narrative of Acts; a fact that makes one wonder as to why it is implied by this scene. Krodel is not incorrect in theorising that the suggestion of restoration is present, but in failing to understand that the suggestion is part of a refracted authorial intention to suggest that the plot is following Interpretation 1, while planning already to subvert it. If the course charted by Interpretation 1 was followed to its completion, the narrative would be poor reading.

Up until Acts 10 the Apostles are under the impression that the oracular response was clear, that the whole Diaspora will be restored to Israel, and that it is their task to spread the good news to all Jews, as Acts 11.19 explicitly states. Non-fulfilment seems a real possibility at the

¹ Gerhard Å. Krodel, *Acts* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Pub. House, 1986), 77; Gary Gilbert, "The List of Nations in Acts 2: Roman Propaganda and the Lukan Response," *JBL* 121, no. 3 (2002): 507.

point of Stephen's martyrdom, but here we see that the disciples had continued to preach to Jews wherever they found themselves. The interpretative possibilities therefore remain open until Acts 10, where the vision to Peter represents a significant plot-twist, and the reader is finally given a tangible sign of movement toward Interpretation 2.

Lawrence Wills, discussing the depiction of the Jews in Acts, argues that the consistent pattern of evangelism in the latter half of the narrative is:

Initial missionary success → resistance by Jews → movement → new success¹

He supports this hypothesis with the fact that the rare instances of Gentile resistance (16.11-40, 17.18-18.1, 19.24-20.1) do not directly lead to new missionary success.² The narratives of Gentile resistance are also longer (excluding speeches), and the trouble on both occasions is attributed to that most base of human motives, greed:³ the salient point is that Gentile resistance is explained at length, while Jewish resistance is seldom explained in the latter half of Acts.

What Wills argues is in effect that the portrayal of Jewish resistance serves mostly to demonstrate that through divine providence the continued rejection of the Jews continually causes success and expansion for the mission to the Gentiles. He observes:

Missionary successes among the Jews do occur, but these do not inaugurate the blessings of the end of time; the *opposition* of the Jews is what inaugurates the successes of the worldwide Gentile mission.⁴

¹ Lawrence M. Wills, "The Depiction of the Jews in Acts," *JBL* 110, no. 4 (1991): 639.

² Wills, "The Depiction of the Jews in Acts," 643–644.

³ Wills, "The Depiction of the Jews in Acts," 649.

⁴ Wills, "The Depiction of the Jews in Acts," 640–643.

Wills' article suggests that there is a continuing plot structure in which the Apostles preach to the Jews, but failure in that mission leads directly to success among the Gentiles. This implies that the oracle itself, in encouraging the Apostles to believe that the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel is imminent, and therefore to preach to the Jews, is subtly manipulating the Apostles into unknowingly furthering the Divine intention. This is narrative logic, with precedent in ancient literature (as I will demonstrate shortly).

It is worth noting that Jewish rejection of God's message is not solely a Christian ideological construct, but one with foundation among the Jews of the period themselves. David Moessner discusses this in connection with the work of O. H. Steck, and reaches some interesting conclusions for Acts that are worth quoting in full here:

[O.H. Steck amassed] overwhelming evidence that one conceptual canopy of Israel's past and the role and fate of her prophets within that history covered all its literature from 200 B.C.E to 100 C.E.:

A. The history of Israel is one long, unending story of a "stiff-necked" and disobedient people;

B. God sent his messengers, the *prophets*, to mediate his will (i.e. the Law), to instruct and admonish them in this will, and to exhort them to repentance lest they bring upon themselves judgment and destruction;

C. Nevertheless, Israel *en masse* rejected these prophets, even *persecuting* and *killing* them out of their stubborn "stiff-neckedness";

D. Therefore, Israel's God had "rained" destruction upon them in 722 and 587 BCE and would destroy them in a similar way if they did not hearken to his word.

This understanding encompasses the wide divergences of the multi-hued Judaism of the intertestamental and early NT period and is an inner Jewish critique of its own history that can vary widely in tone and application. For instance, how faithfulness to the covenant law should be expressed or which group in fact in the past may have constituted a faithful remnant, etc. are all operative within this unifying view. The author of Luke-Acts shares this orientation to Israel's past but with a major modification: the cycle of stubborn disobedience has been definitively broken by the coming of the prophet like Moses, the Anointed One, Jesus of Nazareth [...].¹

Whether or not Steck's work can be accepted unreservedly, the fact that Jewish history can be seen as presenting itself in this way suggests that this narrative construction sits within a specific cultural context. The ambiguous oracle is part of a strategy to take advantage of this Jewish self-perception, and uses it to vindicate both the Gospel and the Apostles from the failure of the Jewish mission, implying that the rejection of Jesus is a long overdue national catastrophe that will bring about their just destruction.

¹ Moessner, "'The Christ Must Suffer:!' New Light on the Jesus-Peter, Stephen, Paul Parallels in Luke-Acts," *NovT* 28, no. 3 (July 1986): 225-226, citing O.H. Steck, *Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten* (WMANT 23; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1967), 60-80.

2. Paul's role

2.1. Arbiter of the Divine Will

Paul's role in Acts is very interesting when viewed through the lens of this device. The reader has known from 9.15 that he will be God's chosen instrument to both Gentiles and Jews: "εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· πορεύου, ὅτι σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι οὗτος τοῦ βαστάσαι τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐνώπιον ἐθνῶν τε καὶ βασιλέων υἱῶν τε Ἰσραὴλ." But since this remark is made to Ananias, rather than Paul, the reader has no idea as to whether he knows of his divinely ordained role until Acts 22.15: "ἔση μάρτυς αὐτῷ πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὧν ἐώρακας καὶ ἤκουσας", by which time any suspense is long gone. God's comment to Ananias is also interesting in that it says nothing of success or failure in either the Jewish or Gentile mission, and yet manages to sound rather triumphal – a triumphalism that centres around Paul rather than around the results of any particular event.

In a sense, Paul stands outside of the oracular framework: he was not present for the oracle, and thus never misinterprets it. Yet he is the first to instigate Interpretation 2. He also enjoys a knowledge that even the reader does not always share (he knows his role is to the Gentiles but the reader is left wondering whether this is the case). The reader does not have all the available information, and this allows the narrative to retain interest while adding depth to characterisation.¹ Luke utilises the technique in order to entertain, but also because he wants Paul to be the centre of readerly interest.

Paul brings about the mission to the ends of the earth but is quite ostensibly not the instigator of either Gentile conversion or Gentile mission. As is seen above, Peter converts Cornelius before Paul has had any involvement with the evangelizing of non-Jews. In Acts 11,

¹ A technique that is employed in the Old Testament, and which Robert Alter calls "the art of reticence." See Robert Alter, *The art of biblical narrative* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 114–130.

Luke carefully – almost awkwardly – constructs the narrative to ensure that Paul is not involved with the first large-scale Gentile mission, which is instigated by men from “Cyprus and Cyrene (11.20),” and is approved by Barnabas (11.23), and even by God (11.21).

Barnabas then goes to Tarsus, finds Saul, and brings him back to Antioch, from where the first “missionary journey” begins.

Even then however, Paul’s involvement is carefully managed. Paul and Barnabas are set aside by God: ‘ἀφορίσατε δὴ μοι τὸν Βαρναβᾶν καὶ Σαῦλον εἰς τὸ ἔργον ὃ προσκέκλημαι αὐτούς.’ (13.2), but He does not reveal his intention in terms of either Jews or Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas then go and preach in the Synagogue at Pisidian Antioch – which implies that they interpret the “work” as evangelism to the Jews.

The scene at Pisidian Antioch builds up very carefully. One notes that while Luke appears to have mentioned Gentiles in this section, both of these references were qualified, referring instead to something more like the religious status of the Ethiopian Eunuch: the first is used by Paul in 13.16: “Ἀναστάς δὲ Παῦλος καὶ κατασείσας τῆ χειρὶ εἶπεν· ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται καὶ οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν, ἀκούσατε.” The second is 13.43: “ἠκολούθησαν πολλοὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ τῶν σεβομένων προσηλύτων τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Βαρναβᾶ”. The word “ἔθνη” is carefully circumnavigated. It is only after considerable trouble from the Jews that Paul declares in 13.46-47:

παρρησιασάμενοί τε ὁ Παῦλος καὶ ὁ Βαρναβᾶς εἶπαν· ὑμῖν ἦν ἀναγκαῖον πρῶτον λαληθῆναι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ· ἐπειδὴ ἀπωθεῖσθε αὐτὸν καὶ οὐκ ἀξιους κρίνετε ἑαυτοὺς τῆς αἰωνίου ζωῆς, ἰδοὺ στρεφόμεθα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη.⁴⁷ οὕτως γὰρ ἐντέταλται ἡμῖν ὁ κύριος· τέθεικά σε εἰς φῶς ἔθνων τοῦ εἶναί σε εἰς σωτηρίαν ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς.

Gentile mission is placed in opposition to Jewish mission: you do not want it so we will turn to them. The passage also opens the third phase of the oracle by using the same words as Jesus himself: something that Peter did not do in his interaction with Cornelius, who resided in Samaria, and was therefore representative of the second rather than the third stage of the oracle.

So Paul is innocent of any allegation of instigating the Gentile mission, but instead is awarded credit for bringing about the final stage of the prophecy despite being absent when it was delivered.

2.2.A Final Twist

These early twists – the rejection in Jerusalem and the expansion to Gentiles - are not the most significant. The irony of the narrative is that the Apostles accomplish the opposite of what they wish to happen precisely by trying to bring it about, yet in perfect fulfilment of the oracle – the sort of reversal that Marianne Palmer Bonz considers important to Epic.¹

Jewish rejection of the message continues almost entirely unabated, and eventually, after being an instrument for pushing Paul and the mission all over the Mediterranean basin, it produces a final, bitter-sweet twist: “γνωστὸν οὖν ἔστω ὑμῖν ὅτι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπεστάλη τοῦτο τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ· αὐτοὶ καὶ ἀκούσονται” (Acts 28:28).

The καὶ is semantically ambiguous and makes both “they also will listen” and “and *they* will listen” possible. But the context favours the latter – the Isaiah prophecy states quite plainly that the Jews are not listening, so Paul declares his intention to take his message to the Gentiles, because *they* will listen.² This twist represents the climax, and effectively declares the end of the Jewish mission. The reader has been forced to reassess again, and this time in

¹ See for example, Bonz, *The past as legacy*, 21, 190.

² Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 680.

a way that may genuinely surprise her – it is a brilliant ending: the oracle is fully understood at last, and it had never included the Jews. It does not nullify the promise to restore the Kingdom to Israel, but it has cancelled the Apostles’ obligation to try and bring that about: when they did try, they only brought about the opposite. It is Paul who makes this final decision on Jewish mission, but then, he has always had the divine prerogative in mind in a way that the Apostles did not.

2.3. The Third Attempt

Not that Paul’s decision is made lightly. An interesting element that must be considered here is that Paul’s declaration in Rome is actually the third of its sort. The first (13.46-47) is discussed above; the other occurs at 18.6:

ἀντιπασσομένων δὲ αὐτῶν καὶ βλασφημούντων ἐκτιναξάμενος τὰ ἱμάτια εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· τὸ αἷμα ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ὑμῶν· καθαρὸς ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν εἰς τὰ ἔθνη πορεύσομαι.

Dibelius makes the astute observation that the three statements take place in Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome, and as such represent each of the chief regions of the Pauline mission.¹ Rome then, is the final region, and equates to the last chance for the Jews to believe the Gospel. Tannehill has argued, “nothing prevents us from understanding the announcement in 28.28 as applying to Rome and leaving open the possibility of preaching to Jews everywhere,”² but there is nowhere left to preach; at least, not in a narrative sense. In each region, Paul has tried, has failed, and has pronounced his intention to go the Gentiles instead. Tannehill does note from Acts 28.22 that “it is recognized that such resistance is

¹ Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 150.

² Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Volume 2*, 350.

appearing everywhere.”¹ The climactic ending does gain special significance from the fact of its happening in Rome, but also from the fact that the last of the three great doors has closed. Paul persisted in Jewish mission until there were no other options, and then, with scriptural support, accepts the inevitable as God’s will.

3. Support from Oracular Literature

3.1. Legendary/Historical Oracles

The most obvious parallel in oracular literature is that of Oedipus, who asks the oracle about the identity of his parents and is told “Do not go home, or you will kill your father and marry your mother.” Oedipus takes the oracle’s advice, not realising that home is in reality Thebes, not Corinth, because his parents are actually Jocasta and Laius, a fact the oracle does not reveal. This leads to him unknowingly killing his father, before he solves the riddle of the sphinx and is given his mother as wife. In this example the oracle not only governs the plot of various plays by Aeschylus and Sophocles, but also produces much of the meaning found in these great works. The prophecy to Jocasta that leads to Oedipus’ adoption by the King and Queen of Corinth in the first instance functions in a very similar fashion.

Another well-known example is that of Croesus King of Lydia in Herodotus, in which the King asks whether he should attack Persia, and the response is “if you attack Persia you will destroy a great nation.”² That nation was of course Lydia, an interpretation that Croesus does not consider until it is too late.

¹ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Volume 2*, 350.

² 1.53

These oracles however, are given with the motive of divine retribution against ancestors,¹ and while this is an important element of the ambiguous oracle, it is not one that can be explored in relation to the Jews in anything other than a speculative way. In any case, the oracles do not always have this underlying motive. Examples include:

- The oracle to Kylon that he must attack Athens at “Zeus’ greatest festival.” He misinterprets the festival and fails in his bid to take over the city.²
- The Heraklids ask how they might conquer the Peloponnesos, and are told they will be given victory if they go through the narrows. They misinterpret the oracle, attack through the wrong narrows, and are defeated.³ Similarly, they enquire as to when they should return from Marathon, and are told to wait for the third harvest. They misinterpret this to mean the third year rather than the third generation, and suffer defeat again.
- Philip of Macedon asks how he might vanquish the Persians, and is told: “Wreathed is the Bull. All is done. There is also the one who will smite him.” Philip assumes this is favourable to him, with Persia being the Bull. Instead, the oracle actually refers to Philip’s assassination at a sacrificial ritual.⁴

These three examples also illustrate that most ambiguous responses are preserved in legendary or quasi-historical literature, with fictional responses comprising only 15 of Fontenrose’s catalogue of 500. Most of these responses are reported, or at least cited, in a way very different to the manner that I am claiming lies behind Acts. On the other hand, Fontenrose argues that there are no reliable historical examples of ambiguous oracular responses, and that the ambiguous response is by its nature associated with myth and

¹ Laius is punished for the rape of Chrysippus, while Croesus is being punished on behalf of Gyges, his ancestor, for stealing the Lydian throne.

² Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 68; Rosalind Thomas, *Oral tradition and written record in Classical Athens*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 272–281.

³ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 68. Apollodorus 2.8.2

⁴ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 67, 337. Diodorus Siculus 16.91.2

legend. What all of this tells us is that the literary culture surrounding oracles does appear to differentiate between the strictly historical reporting of mundane oracles and the more literary/legendary ambiguous responses of the sort used in Acts. It leaves open the question as to whether there was an identifiable framework by which the reader of Acts could decode the text.

There is also one example which offers an insight from contemporary literature – that of Josephus, who in the *War*, 6.312-313, says:

The thing that most encouraged them toward war was an ambiguous oracle that was found in their ancient writings, that at that time someone from their country will rule the earth. This they took to apply to themselves, and many of the wise men were deceived in their judgement about what was revealed. For the oracle concerned the government of Vespasian, who was proclaimed Emperor in Judea.

Josephus claims that it was the oracle in their own scriptures (probably Numbers 24.17-19), that gave the Jews the confidence to fight, and thus led them to their disastrous fate.

Josephus writes history, and like Herodotus in the Croesus episode, does not attempt to build suspense in his narrative.¹ Nonetheless, the idea of the ambiguous oracle is definitely present.

¹ See Maren R. Niehoff, "Two Examples of Josephus' Narrative Technique in His 'Rewritten Bible'," *JSJ* 27, no. 1 (1996): 35, for other examples of this in Josephus. Niehoff argues that Josephus alleviates tension surrounding God's action as part of a rhetoric that depicts God as consistently righteous.

3.2. Literary Oracles

Of course, the oracle of Acts is not actually an oracle at all; it does not occur in a temple and is not given by a priest. The device is, however, an old and varied one, and its range certainly exceeds this strict format. For readers of the Old Testament the most obvious example of the device is Joseph's dream prophecy. Joseph tells his brothers the dream he has had, and their attempting to prevent its fulfilment actually brings it to fruition. Visions or dreams are common manifestations of this device; the vow in the story of Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11 represents another possible form.

As well as the obvious examples from the Greek Epics, the device is preserved in the more contemporary genre of the novels. The example in Xenophon's *Ephesiaca* is not the most subtle, though it is used as an ambiguous oracle, in the sense that misinterpretation leads to the development of the plot. The device also occurs as a dream vision in Heliodorus 1.31:

“Thyamis, I deliver to you this maiden; you will have her and have her not, you will be a wrongdoer and will slay your guest; yet she will not be slain.” The effect of this vision was to put him in a state of perplexity, in which he kept turning its indications this way and that, as he tried to make out their meaning. Tiring at length of this, he shaped the solution to suit his own desire. The words “you will have her and have her not” he supposed to mean “as a woman, and no longer a virgin”; and “you will slay” he took to signify the wounding to end virginity – which would not be fatal to Chariclea.

This was the sense in which he construed his dream, according to the promptings of his passion.¹

Thyamis' misinterpretation governs the development of the plot for some time to come, but does not govern the entire narrative – there is, one finds in novels, a great variety in the significance of various oracles. For example, Achilles Tatius has Clitipho dream:

I had a dream in which my lower parts were fused up to the navel with those of my bride, while from there we had separate upper bodies. A huge, terrifying woman with a savage countenance appeared: her eyes were bloodshot, her cheeks rugged, and her hair made of snakes. She was wielding a sickle in her right hand, and a torch in the other. This creature attacked me with a furious passion: raising her sickle she brought it down on my loins, where the two bodies were joined, and lopped off the bride.²

This dream does not appear to give enough information to direct the plot in specific terms, and neither does Clitipho, though filled with apprehension by the vision, use it explicitly as a guide to future actions. Nonetheless it serves to add tension to the immediate narrative, and has obvious implications that are resonant until the final reuniting of the lovers.

The sophistic novels make use of another device that directs the plot from beginning to end; the *ekphrasis*, in which the interpretation of a picture (in the two extant examples, Longus

¹ 1.18-19. This translation: Heliodorus of Emesa, *Ethiopian story*, trans. Walter Lamb (New York: Dutton, 1961), 19-20.

² 1.3. This translation: Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, trans. Tim. Whitmarsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6.

and Achilles Tatius) provides a narrative framework. In Achilles Tatius, the *ekphrasis* creates a bivalent interpretative framework for the behaviour of Leucippe:

'Selene riding on a bull' clearly points to a description at the very beginning of the novel which is of particular interest for us: on a votive picture in the temple of the Phoenician love-goddess Astarte in Sidon, a girl is shown, riding on a bull over the water towards Crete. The girl can be easily identified as Europa, being abducted by the Zeus-bull – and this is also the reading of the anonymous I-narrator of the frame story. Europa is thus another traveller connected to our heroine. But at the same time, the depicted girl displays quite an active behaviour, for she seems to control the bull by one of its horns or sail on him like on a ship, using her peplos as a sail. This, and the context the picture is set in, rather suggest the identification with Astarte – the scene therefore showing her as she defeats her partner Baal, often depicted as a bull, on her own territory the sea.¹

The sophistic style may well have included such devices normatively within the genre, and this can be seen as a development arising from the dialogue of second sophistic intellectual culture and the literary conventions pre-existing in the period regarding oracles and a proleptic plot-structure.

3.3. Foundation Narratives

Walter T. Wilson's discussion of Acts 10 argues that the conversion of Cornelius can be understood within a multi-generic tradition familiar in the ancient world that relates to the

¹ Helen Morales, *Vision and narrative in Achilles Tatius' Leucippe and Clitophon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37–38.

founding of new cities. His article is interesting in elucidating the interpretative strategies that might be available to Greek readers of the Cornelius episode, but here I want to look at its implications for the ambiguous oracle.

Wilson draws from a wide range of scholarship and ancient literature to elaborate a narrative pattern in the creation of a new city. Some of its principal components include:

1. The impetus for corporate formation is a social conflict in the incipient community's place of origin brought on when group members themselves transgress rules that used to organize their lives.
2. The embryonic community must separate from its former home and reconstitute itself as an independent entity.
3. The sacralisation of group formation becomes most vivid in the recording of divine interventions that superintend and/or model critical developments. Narrative devices such as epiphanies show how both the new space for community construction and the decision for the group to enter that space originate from supernatural sources. Since the character, timing, and location of this gift are of divine choosing, the mapping of the community's spatial and perceptual frontiers is experienced as something foreign and decentering by human characters, who are led, reluctantly, by forces beyond their control or comprehension.
4. The otherworldly quality of these forces is expressed also in the human experience of divine interventions as ambiguous and enigmatic. Confrontation with epiphanal and physical alienness catalyzes a reassessment of cultural categories and values, providing symbols and tools for the social reconstruction on which the success of the new community will rely.¹

¹ Paraphrased from Walter T. Wilson, "Urban Legends: Acts 10:1-11:18 and the Strategies of Greco-Roman Foundation Narratives," *JBL* 120, no. 1 (2001): 96-98.

This paraphrase, taken mainly from the first half of Wilson's "eight agreements" between the Cornelius episode and the narrative pattern of foundation myth, shows the extent to which the model applies to the ambiguous oracle. Step 3 in particular describes the progress of the apostles in their attempt to fulfil the Divine command given in 1.7-8. Wilson's other agreements also apply less directly to the narrative pattern I have sketched in this chapter. The "impulse toward cultic conservatism"¹ applies equally to the Cornelius episode as the rest of Acts, as does "The effective integration of strangers, of individual of different ethnic and /or geographical origins."² Agreement eight, which describes the "final scene of the drama of communal origins" is "organized by a series of official acts by which the group publically and liturgically affirms decisions made on behalf of its leader."³ This perfectly describes the end of the Cornelius episode, but also describes Paul's final confirmation from scripture of Jewish rejection and the acceptance of the Gentiles in their place. The finality of that action, which as we have already seen is emphasised by the fact of its threefold repetition in the three geographic regions, is shown here to have some narrative precedent as part of framework in which final confirmation occurs in dialogue with Divine ordinance. In Acts 28, the Divine ordinance comes both from scripture and the fulfilment of the original command in Acts 1.6-8.

4. Conclusion

This study has explored Acts 1.6-8 at some length, seeking out literary conventions that might help us configure the narrative in a similar manner to its contemporary readers. The study investigated the framework created by the device we have termed the ambiguous

¹ Wilson, "Foundation Narratives," 97.

² Wilson, "Foundation Narratives," 98.

³ Wilson, "Foundation Narratives," 98.

oracle, and by looking at the literary tradition behind oracles, found what appears to be a clear plot-device, which has precedent in the period and which configures the narrative and generates interest.

In the introduction to part 2 we looked at the conventions governing the first eleven verses and the way they subvert place and time to produce a dreamlike effect. The lack of clear configurative structures resulting from the two transitions (in verses 4 and 6) presented an early indicator that the opening to the narrative might be point towards dreams or the supernatural. In this context the ambiguous oracle naturally stands out.

What is the relationship between the three devices? All three create fluidity in either time or space to produce uncertainties in the narrative. They suggest that it is to the narrative dimension that attention should be paid. This is perhaps as close to a genre indicator as Acts is likely to provide, and it is not suggestive of the historiographical mode – at least not in any Hellenistic sense.

We might recall that J. Bradley Chance argued that Acts does not use the oracle device in the same way as Xenophon, because Acts is an historical rather than a fictional work. Using his own line of argument, we would now be forced to say that since it does use this device in a way similar to the *Ephesiaca* and other fictional texts, in that it influences the decision-making of the characters, particularly through misinterpretation; Acts is more fiction than history. But personally, I would not jump to this conclusion. The device certainly shows the hallmarks of fiction, but as we have already argued, the border between the two genres has never been as clear as we would like to think, and that what we termed a rhetoric of divine history was used in the ancient world take advantage of fictional conventions while maintaining truth-claims. The ambiguous oracle has precedent in Hebrew historiography as well as the mythical pre-history of the Greek world in which all Greek readers were

immersed, and cannot be used as a *prima facie* argument for fiction. Most of the instances in which this device was used were considered to make some sort of truth claim.

Nonetheless, narrative logic of this strength and focus makes it hard to see how Acts could have been read within the tradition of Hellenistic Historiography. The text alerts the reader to clear narrative-oriented conventions as early as 1.4, and applies its logic to the entire narrative framework. Hebrew historiography finds parallels in Joseph, but Hellenistic Historiography disdains oracles of this sort. They occur, as we have seen, but they are not made to function as signification-systems by which to navigate the story. Luke, speaking to an audience that was Greek in culture, must have known that his readers would have interpreted these conventions as establishing the precedence of narrative over real-world logic, with all that this implies.

At the same time, this text never puts itself forward as pure fiction. It makes truth-claims, it wants to be taken seriously; it is not a novel. The first readers would certainly have known this and applied the conventions of parallel narratives such as those of epic and mythology, stories that worked like stories but had a basis in the real-world origins of Greek civilisation. Did the Greeks think that Theseus or Oedipus, Jason or Perseus, were entirely fictional? I would not like to argue for a clear status in terms of the truth value of Acts, but I would resist the temptation to say that the artifice of narrative logic necessarily equals fiction, or that popular texts were never taken seriously. Like *Stories of Apollonius of Tyana*, Acts plays with conventions, and the result of this is probably more subtle than readers as culturally distant as us are able to fully comprehend.

Chapter 6. THE CONFIGURATION OF PAUL'S APOSTOLIC STATUS

1. Introduction

In the last chapter I argued that the ambiguous oracle controls the plot of Acts in several important ways. One consequence of reading the text in the light of that device is that Paul begins to figure much earlier in the text – he is alluded to in 1.8; at which point the author must have been clear in his own mind about who would be fulfilling the Divine command. This is also evident in that Paul has responsibility placed upon him for worldwide mission but taken away in regard to the actual principle of Gentile conversion– for which Peter shoulders the responsibility. Given the evident hostility against Gentile conversion to which Paul responds in Romans and Galatians, it is perhaps not surprising that Luke would choose to portray Peter as the instigator of Christian mission to non-Jews, and Paul as the servant of God in bringing the mission to the ends of the earth. Such a strategy awards Paul an enormous amount of credit for the spread of early Christianity while distancing him from the controversial nature of Gentile inclusion.

It has been suggested that Peter is awarded the first Gentile conversion because that particular point in Christianity required apostolic authority.¹ This reading certainly has merit. On the other hand, it appears to me that to simply make Paul subordinate to the Apostles would be too simplistic a reading of the text. In this chapter I explore this problem. Firstly, I review the consensus against Paul being one of the Twelve. After this I look at the problem from a purely narrative perspective, arguing that Luke employs some subtle tricks to achieve some nuanced ends here, creating a narrative rather than propositional argument for Paul's status in early Christianity.

It is important to note from the outset that I am not entirely clear as to exactly what Luke intends with his depiction of Paul's role and status. In particular, the question as to whether

¹ Pervo, *Acts*, 264-66.

Paul is constructed as one of the twelve is not one I feel able to answer. I want to restrict this chapter to demonstrating that some refraction and subtlety exists in the narrative construction of Paul's character; thus, this chapter is both a contribution for debate on this specific problem and a second demonstration of the methodological framework I elaborated in the first half of the thesis.

2. Paul as Apostle in Scholarship

On the subject of Paul as apostle, scholarship has found the election of Matthias to pose an insuperable problem, but has responded in a number of ways to the tensions created by the contrast between the apparent exclusion of Paul from the apostolate with his obvious centrality and the various narrative techniques that emphasize it. And this problem is only exacerbated if one takes the evidence of the Pauline letters into account. As recently as 2009, Joseph Tyson asks:

How can one reconcile Paul's vehement definition of himself as an apostle in Gal 1.1 and his repeated claims to the designation in Rom 1.1; 11.13; 1Cor 1.1; 9.1; 15.9; 2Cor 1.1; 12.12 with the almost total denial of the title to him in Acts?¹

The principle problems of the letters appear to be the issue of Gentile Christianity versus Jewish Torah-obedient Christianity, and Paul's apostolic status. Whether Luke used the letters as a source, was an eyewitness to events, or simply had access to traditions and sources, he had to be aware of both of these problems. While the former is intricately

¹ Joseph B. Tyson, "Wrestling with and for Paul: Efforts to Obtain Pauline Support by Marcion and the Author of Acts," in *Contemporary Studies in Acts*, ed. Thomas E. Philips (Macon: Mercer University, 2009), 20.

narrated in Acts, the latter is, according to most scholars, curtailed at the outset, decided against Paul by the election of Matthias.

And yet Acts is unashamedly pro-Paul. To reconcile this obvious problem, a difference between “apostle” and “The Twelve Apostles” is sometimes posited. J.B. Lightfoot, influentially entering the debate with his 1865 commentary on Galatians, specifically discusses the subject in an excursus entitled “The Name and Office of Apostle.”¹ In this interesting essay he disparagingly refers to the suggestion of a certain Philip Schaff:

Nay so far has the idea of this restriction of number been carried by some, that they hold the election of Matthias to have been a hasty and ill-advised act, and to have been subsequently reversed by an interposition of God, St Paul being substituted in his place. It is needless to say that narrative of St Luke does not betray the faintest trace of such a reversal.²

But Lightfoot’s own explanation of the office brings other difficulties, particularly for Luke’s narrative technique, to light. He draws inferences about the exclusivity of the twelve from the whole of the New Testament, but is forced to admit:

St Luke uses the word more frequently, and indeed states explicitly that our Lord gave this name to the Twelve, and in his Gospel it is a common designation for them. But, if we are disposed to infer from this that the title was in any way restricted to

¹ Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians: a revised text* (London: Macmillan, 1890), 92–101.

² Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 94; He refers to Philip Schaff, *History of the apostolic church with a general introduction to Church history* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1854), 194.

them, we are checked by remembering that the same evangelist elsewhere extends it to others – not Paul only, but to Barnabas also.¹

His remarks about the relative roles of Paul and Barnabas are to a large extent based on the assumption that the account in Acts is the historically correct one:

If therefore St Paul has held a larger place than Barnabas in the gratitude and veneration of the church of all ages, this is due not to any superiority of rank or office, but to the ascendancy of his personal gifts, a more intense energy and self-devotion, wider and deeper sympathies, a firmer intellectual grasp, a larger measure of the Spirit of Christ.²

And finally, he admits to problems with the criterion of election by “outward, personal communication with the Lord”:

With Matthias it certainly was not so. The commission in his case was received through the medium of the Church. Even St Paul himself seems to have been invested with this highest office of the Church in the same way. His conversion indeed may be said in some sense to have been his call to the Apostleship. But the

¹ Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 94.

² Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 97.

actual investiture, the completion of his call, as may be gathered from St Luke's narrative, took place some years later at Antioch. (Acts xiii.2)¹

Lightfoot overplays this last point; the narrative itself highlights the divine call far more than the visit to Antioch, which is rather innocuous by comparison. Lightfoot operates on the assumption that the election of Matthias is reported simply because it was true, and does not connect the various narrative links that revolve around Paul's apostleship.

In 1939, Martin Dibelius makes the sort of comment that has become typical in reference to Acts 17: "The speech on the Areopagus is the only sermon reported by the author which is preached to the Gentiles by the apostle to the Gentiles."² The comment reflects a widespread acceptance that Paul is not only an apostle, but in some respects, *The Apostle*. Yet when pressed, scholars are reluctant to commit. In 1963, Conzelmann tackles Luke's application of the term "apostle" to Paul and Barnabas in 14.4 by stating:

The usage of the term apostle here has apparently been taken over from a source. Since v. 4 is Lukan (ἐσχίσθη, "divided," is used to form a typical scene; concrete material is absent), the author has probably been influenced here by v.14, which comes from a source. Others assume that ἀπόστολος, "apostle," is used here in a general, nontitular sense. But this would be unique in Luke.³

Here Conzelmann resorts to a source for what might otherwise prove a particularly awkward use of a word. His confidence in this explanation is once again misplaced, however – on

¹ Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 98.

² Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 26.

³ Conzelmann, *Acts*, 108.

closer inspection, the only reason he posits the use of a source in verse 14 is because of the reoccurrence of the same term there.¹ Haenchen notes “The commentaries generally trace this usage back to the source employed by Luke; but as the passage contains no other trace of such a source it would perhaps be better to assume that Luke appropriated the expression from the following story (14.14).”² This is in line with his short essay on the subject in his introduction, where, after elaborating Paul’s own claim to be considered the equal of the twelve, he adds:

Acts takes another view. In Acts only the Twelve are Apostles. They were called by the Lord himself and lived in community with him from his baptism to the Ascension (Acts 1.21f.). They had eaten and drunk with the risen Christ (10.41). They alone, therefore, could fulfil the conditions of apostolic witness. Paul, like any other Christian missionary, must appeal to their authority (13.31).³

At the same time, however, Haenchen speaks extensively about Paul, even dedicating a section to him in his introduction, describing him as a great miracle worker and outstanding orator.⁴ He in fact considers it remarkable that Acts does “not affirm Paul’s real claim,”⁵ which is to be an apostle.

In 1994, Tannehill is surprisingly reluctant to address the problem of Paul’s apostolic status, but does not shy away from the strong parallels between Paul, Jesus, and Peter,⁶ which are

¹ Conzelmann, *Acts*, 110–111.

² Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 420 footnote 10.

³ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 115. My italics.

⁴ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 113–114.

⁵ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 114.

⁶ See for example, Robert C. Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation vol II: The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1994), 160 ff.

an important part of the problem. These parallels had already been presented quite comprehensively by Charles Talbert in his famous 1974 monograph *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, And the Genre of Luke-Acts*,¹ in which he demonstrated with some rigour the strength of the patterning Luke uses to link these three figures.

Pervo tackles this problem at some length. He too shows some inclination toward a source-orientated solution to 14.4 and 14, but seems to appreciate that this is not sufficient to resolve the problem.² It is odd, however, that he makes no connection between the use of ἀπόστολοι here and the healing of a lame man in the previous passage, which is strongly parallel to that of Peter's healing of a cripple in chapter 3. There, Pervo observes that "Miracles, mentioned for the first time in this journey, revealed divine support. This summary [14.3] again shows that Paul and Barnabas were the full equals of Peter and his colleagues[...]"³ Though Pervo makes no comment on the point, he appears to assume that mere clumsiness or a lack of political tact allows Luke to show Paul and Baranabas' equality with the twelve and label them apostles immediately afterwards without any intention of entering the debate surrounding apostleship. Joseph B. Tyson admits the inconsistency of Luke in applying the term at this juncture.⁴ He understands the inconsistency to be created by the conflict between Luke's rehabilitation of the twelve and the historical appropriateness of labelling Paul ἀπόστολος.⁵ Andrew C. Clark gives a helpful survey of scholarly opinion before concluding that the use of the title fits in with a general pattern of drawing parallels between the first and the second half of Acts.⁶ This latter suggestion is a

¹ Charles H. Talbert, *Literary patterns, theological themes, and the genre of Luke-Acts* (Missoula, Montana: distributed by Scholars' Press, 1975), chapter 2, and especially 15-18, 23-24.

² Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 350.

³ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 350.

⁴ Tyson, "Wrestling with Paul," 22.

⁵ Joseph B. Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts: a defining struggle* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 72.

⁶ Andrew C. Clark, *Parallel Lives: the relation of Paul to the apostles in the Lucan perspective* (Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2001), 136-149.

good one, but would be significantly improved if it took account of the election of Matthias and that scene's exclusive description of an apostle.

Scholarship has therefore not found a way to resolve the tension between the undeniably partisan depiction of Paul by Luke and the outright rejection of Paul's most important claim. The conflict, however, is evident; a review of Paul's depiction in Acts will make this clear.

2.1. Luke's Portrayal of Paul

Detailed analyses of Paul's status as apostle are hard to find; a situation which probably reflects the overwhelming consensus that Paul cannot be classified among the twelve. But monographs that focus on one or another aspect of the portrayal of Paul in Acts are somewhat less rare. Two in particular are very striking: those by John Clayton Lentz and Christopher Mount.

Lentz, writing in 1993, argues persuasively that Paul is continually depicted as a high status individual, in both social and moral terms. According to Lentz, Luke takes almost every opportunity to show, by the criteria of his own period, that Paul meets all the requirements of a person deserving universal respect:

The first readers/hearers of Acts would have recognized and understood both the explicit and implicit status indicators given to them by Luke. They also would have realized that the Paul of Acts was a man of such status and prestige that he could

presume to influence the governor and arrange for his case to be heard by Nero in Rome.¹

The case is built around several aspects of Paul's depiction, each of which is taken in isolation. Paul's status as Greek, Roman, and Pharisee comes first. According to Lentz, anyone fulfilling the necessary obligations of the first two could not be living as required by the third, and vice versa:

It is admitted that here were some Jews who would have had the citizenship of their Greek city and other Jews who would have possessed the citizenship of Rome and still others who, presumably, would have held both. However, the evidence indicates that Jews who would have aspired to or held these citizenships were not, as a rule, included among those who would have been perceived as among the strictest, more zealous, law-abiding Jews. Yet, this is precisely the difficulty of the portrayal of Paul in Acts – he claims that he has been all three from birth! In other words, while each of the specific claims, in and of itself, is not problematic, the combination of the three in one person is doubtful.²

Lentz also highlights Paul's conversation with Festus in Acts 26, and verses 24-25 in particular:³

¹ John Clayton Lentz, *Luke's portrait of Paul*, Society for NTS. (SNTS 77; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 170.

² Lentz, *Luke's portrait of Paul*, 60.

³ Lentz, *Luke's portrait of Paul*, 83ff.

Ταῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀπολογουμένου ὁ Φῆστος μεγάλη τῆ φωνῆ φησιν· μαίνη, Παῦλε· τὰ πολλά σε γράμματα εἰς μανίαν περιτρέπει.²⁵ ὁ δὲ Παῦλος· οὐ μαίνομαι, φησίν, κράτιστε Φῆστε, ἀλλὰ ἀληθείας καὶ σωφροσύνης ῥήματα ἀποφθέγγομαι.

Luke's attribution of these particular concepts to Paul: truth and self-control/good judgement, combined with his ability to converse with Festus (who also acknowledges Paul's great learning), summarise the portrayal of Paul that has been going on throughout the narrative. Lentz eventually concludes:

In the various scenes in which Paul stands before, and is implicitly compared with, those in authority, Luke's intention is to place him in elite company. Even if Paul does not possess the official titles of his antagonists, he shows that he is their moral superior.¹

Lentz highlights here a Lucan strategy of implication by repeated example, with no clear or explicit statement – the same strategy that contrasts Paul with the other apostles.

Overall, Lentz's interpretation is difficult to ignore. The wisdom of his thesis is to refrain from attempting to answer the question of why Luke portrays Paul in this way – though he does observe that the evidence points in favour of an “expansive and evangelistic,” rather than an “introspective and defensive” text. It is hard to disagree on this point. In no other respect does Lentz claim to know the intentionality behind the device, and this makes his contribution to the study of the Lukan Paul an altogether useful one.

¹ Lentz, *Luke's portrait of Paul*, 104.

2.2. The Construction of Pauline Christianity

Christopher Mount presents similar concerns to Lentz in his 2002 monograph on Luke's construction of early Christianity. He argues that it is Luke, rather than history itself, which is responsible for modern scholarship's understanding of an early Christianity in which Paul was the central figure:

Paul is portrayed as a Roman citizen. An orator, an eminent Pharisee, a called instrument of God's purposes for salvation: In short, an idealized participant in the fulfilment of biblical history as conceived by the author of Luke-Acts, an idealized character bridging Jewish and Graeco-Roman society. Luke-Acts "Paulinism" is a literary construct that has been imposed on, not derived from, the λόγοι (Lk 1.4) available to the author.¹

Mount's approach is to scrutinise the way that Pauline communities are constructed and look for seams in the narrative. He finds hints and suggestions throughout that imply a Pauline bias in the Lukan account rather than a Pauline primacy in the historical movement of Christianity. An example of this is the Corinth sequence in Acts 18.1-17. Mount argues:

The information conveyed by Acts 18.2-3, which interrupts the expected connection between 18.1 and 18.4, does not fit well with the author's intention to portray a Pauline origin for Christianity at Corinth. The author identifies Aquila as a Jew (18.2)

¹ Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 103–4.

and a σκηνοποιός (18.3), but avoids any suggestion that he and his wife are Christians. There can be no Christian mission at Corinth prior to Paul's arrival. Since, however, no account of their conversion to Christianity is given, the impression that Priscilla and Aquila are not associated with a Jesus movement in Acts 18.2-3 makes little sense in light of 18.18-28 [the journey to Antioch and the Apollos episode, in which Aquilla and Priscilla better explain "the way" to him].¹

Mount's study is difficult, and not entirely convincing; but it is interesting how well it stands up to more conservative approaches. One might compare, for example, his exploration of the Miletus speech with that of Steve Walton. Walton concludes that the source for the speech predates the Pauline letters, and therefore the author of the source was probably at the speech taking notes.² Mount takes a rather different stance: "These elders are an authorial construct to provide an appropriate audience for Paul's farewell speech – a literary device superimposing a 'Pauline' order on the information the author has about Ephesus."³ The depiction of Paul is therefore a difficult matter, hampered by the lack of exegetical will to look past source theory as a solution to difficult passages, and by a more general presumption of historicity which allows the positing of an event's occurrence as the sole criterion for its inclusion in a text. A narrative approach offers the possibility of supplying motivation for Luke's inclusion of particular scenes and characters, for his reticence at some points and exuberance at others.

¹ Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 132–133.

² Steve Walton, *Leadership and lifestyle: the portrait of Paul in the Miletus speech and 1 Thessalonians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). On the Miletus speech, see the next chapter of the present study, part III.

³ Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 128.

3. Paul's Parallels

Joseph B. Tyson remarks in 2009:

An intriguing aspect of the characterization of Paul in Acts is the parallelism with Peter. Both characters deliver speeches, perform healings and resurrections, defeat workers of magic, correct inadequate teaching, are miraculously released from prison, and witness the giving of the Spirit and the phenomenon of glossolalia among converts.¹

It has long been accepted that parallels between the depiction of Paul, Peter, and Jesus, do exist in the book of Acts, and that they have some polemical motivation. F.C. Baur thought that Luke was attempting to harmonise Gentile and Jewish versions of Christianity through them.² Other theologians have seen the parallels, which Peter and Paul also share to a large extent with Jesus, as part of a Lucan theology that values the imitation of Christ and his suffering.³ Many (such as Pervo, above) regard the parallel episodes as demonstrating Paul's equality with Peter, and it has even been suggested that Paul surpasses Peter in miraculous excellence.⁴ Haenchen's views sometimes appear to go in this direction:

Luke portrays in Paul (as in Peter before him) the great *miracle-worker*. Paul blinds Elymas (13.6-12), gives the cripple at Lystra the power to walk (14.8-10) and, when

¹ Tyson, "Wrestling with Paul," 16.

² Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paul, The apostle of Jesus Christ: His life and work, his epistles and his doctrine. A contribution to a critical history of primitive Christianity*, ed. Eduard Zeller (London: Williams and Norgate, 1876).

³ See for example, David P. Moessner, "'The Christ Must Suffer': New Light on the Jesus-Peter, Stephen, Paul Parallels in Luke-Acts," *NovT* 28, no. 3 (1986): 220-256.

⁴ Matthias Schneckenburger apparently held his opinion, though his work is not easy to obtain. See W. Ward Gasque, *A history of the criticism of the Acts of the Apostles*, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese* 17 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1975), 34.

apparently killed by stoning, rises up and continues his mission (14.19f.). In healings and exorcisms, moreover, the touch of his hand is superfluous: his very body-linen, his handkerchiefs, are so full of his miraculous power, that they quell disease and drive out evil spirits (19.12). In such a context it is not surprising that a serpent's venom should leave him unscathed (28.3-6), or that Eutychus should return to life (20.7-12) when Paul lies upon his corpse.¹

These are the same parallels that Talbert makes use of for his hypothesis of a succession narrative, which reflects his own understanding of Paul's equality. Joseph Tyson also observes them, but does not show how they contribute to his understanding of Acts as an anti-Marcionite text.² C.K. Barrett is more explicit:

The root of the matter is that Acts is an apologetic document, written not with a single eye to the truth but in order to make a case. How else can one account for the absence from Acts, which purports to tell the story of the apostolic church, of those polemical features and controversial events which appear either on or just below the surface of the unquestionably genuine and transparently truthful Pauline letters. How else can one understand the careful parallelism between Peter and Paul that Acts presents? The author of Acts is so evidently a partisan of Paul's that this can only have been worked out in the interests of Paul.³

¹ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 113.

² Tyson, "Wrestling with Paul," 16.

³ Charles Kingsley Barrett, "How History should be Written," in *History, literature and society in the book of Acts*, ed. Ben. Witherington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 37.

But if Paul is so conspicuously played to advantage in these parallels, and if Luke is “so evidently a partisan of Paul’s”, for what reason does Luke exclude Paul from the twelve so violently and prematurely? Any interpretation of Acts must come to terms with this problem. At this point it is worth a brief recapitulation of the most important parallels.¹

3.1. The Magician (8.9-24/13.5-12)

The interesting parallel of defeated magicians is not discussed by either Pervo or Conzelmann, and Tannehill merely discusses the two incidents along with the burning of the books (19.18-19) as part of a Lucan anti-magic polemic.² Talbert notes the parallel in a table but does not discuss it.³ Perhaps this indifference to the parallelism is because the actual parallel elements are general rather than striking, and because the differences are so significant that to render an analysis of the two accounts as parallel is simply not viable in the same way as the healing of the lame man, or even the miraculous escape from prison. Nonetheless, the scenes are valuable principally because through them Paul is depicted as *more impressive than Peter*. This is evident from the general details, rather than any specific literary device or allusion: Peter makes a speech of moderate severity:

Πέτρος δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν· τὸ ἀργύριόν σου σὺν σοὶ εἶη εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὅτι τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνόμισας διὰ χρημάτων κτᾶσθαι· ²¹ οὐκ ἔστιν σοι μερὶς οὐδὲ κληῖρος ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ, ἢ γὰρ καρδία σου οὐκ ἔστιν εὐθεῖα ἔναντι τοῦ θεοῦ.
²² μετανόησον οὖν ἀπὸ τῆς κακίας σου ταύτης καὶ δεήθητι τοῦ κυρίου, εἰ ἄρα

¹ Clark’s treatment of these parallels is the most recent and best. See *Parallel Lives: the relation of Paul to the apostles in the Lucan perspective*.

² Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Volume 2*, 161.

³ Talbert, *Literary patterns, theological themes, and the genre of Luke-Acts*, 24.

ἀφεθήσεται σοι ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας σου, ²³εἰς γὰρ χολὴν πικρίας καὶ σύνδεσμον ἀδικίας ὀρῶ σε ὄντα. ¹

If there were historical consequences to this curse Luke not only does not report them, but explicitly excludes the idea that they happened immediately: Simon requests prayer that these things will not happen. In the case of Paul's encounter with a sorcerer, things are very different:

Σαῦλος δέ, ὁ καὶ Παῦλος, πλησθεὶς πνεύματος ἁγίου ἀτενίσας εἰς αὐτὸν ¹⁰ εἶπεν· ὦ πλήρης παντὸς δόλου καὶ πάσης ῥαδιουργίας, υἱὲ διαβόλου, ἐχθρὲ πάσης δικαιοσύνης, οὐ παύση διαστρέφων τὰς ὁδοὺς [τοῦ] κυρίου τὰς εὐθείας; ¹¹ καὶ νῦν ἰδοὺ χεὶρ κυρίου ἐπὶ σέ καὶ ἔση τυφλὸς μὴ βλέπων τὸν ἥλιον ἄχρι καιροῦ. παραχρῆμά τε ἔπεσεν ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἀχλὺς καὶ σκότος καὶ περιάγων ἐζήτει χειραγωγούς. ¹² τότε ἰδὼν ὁ ἀνθύπατος τὸ γεγονός ἐπίστευσεν ἐκπλησόμενος ἐπὶ τῇ διδαχῇ τοῦ κυρίου. ²

Here Paul is presented as full of the Holy Spirit, acting decisively, striking down his enemy and converting in the process an official of considerable importance. This is very much in keeping with the sort of argument Lentz makes, but on this occasion implicates Peter in the quest to demonstrate Paul's status.

¹ Acts 8.20-23

² Acts 13.9-12

3.2. Healing of a Lame man (3.1-26/14.8-18)

Paul's healing of a lame man does not account for all the parallels in this sequence – Tannehill has observed that 14.3 also reflects language used in 4.29-30,¹ where the believers pray “καὶ τὰ νῦν, κύριε, ἔπιδε ἐπὶ τὰς ἀπειλὰς αὐτῶν καὶ δὸς τοῖς δούλοις σου μετὰ παρρησίας πάσης λαλεῖν τὸν λόγον σου, ³⁰ ἐν τῷ τῆν χειρᾶ [σου] ἐκτείνειν σε εἰς ἴασιν καὶ σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα γίνεσθαι διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ ἁγίου παιδός σου Ἰησοῦ.” The request to have His servants speak with frankness is fulfilled in the narrative that immediately follows, and the miracles do occur, though mostly in summary form until Peter heals Aeneas and then Tabitha in 9.32ff. But Paul also embodies the answer to these requests, at least as much, and probably more, than any other character. In 9.28, 13.46, 14.3, and 28.31, his behaviour is described with some form of παρρησία. It is in this context, that the parallel miracle occurs – a context that suggests that the Lord is answering the prayers of his believers through Paul.

The miracle itself has several important parallel features: the man is lame from birth, eyes are fixed upon him, he jumps up on his feet, and in both, there is the suggestion of the miracle workers being mistaken for Gods. Several of these features share words. There is “χωλὸς ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ”, in 3.2 and 14.8, and the command to walk in 3.6 and 14.10 is περιπάτει. There is ἀτενίσας in both 3.4 and 14.9, ἰδὼν in 3.3 and 14.9, and ἄλλομαι in both 3.8 and 14.10. The phrase “καὶ τις ἀνήρ,” which introduces the crippled man in both cases, is unique to these two instances.² Seldom noted, but perhaps of some importance, is that Peter and Paul have their respective shadows in these episodes, John for the former and Barnabas for the latter. The cumulative effect of these parallels would be strong on the ancient audience.

¹ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, vol. 2, 123.

² Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 352.

The question, in this instance, as to whether one or the other accounts is the more impressive, is not an easy one to answer, and while it is possible that something Luke intended to be noticed is being missed by modern critics, the more likely option is that neither account is intended to be superior.

3.3. Delivery from Prison (12.3-17/16.1-40)

Other than the fact of a clearly miraculous escape from prison, these two accounts have little in common. As to which is the more impressive, Paul's account must take the prize. There are several reasons for this, including his conversion of the gaoler, but also the calmness Paul exhibits, which gives his persona a weight lacking in Peter's episode. It would be speculative to ask whether the chains' falling away from all the prisoners in Paul's account adds anything, but certainly, his calling out to save the gaoler from suicide does. As Pervo rather sarcastically notes:

As the blade was about to descend, this poor fellow was halted by reassuring words from the all-seeing Paul: every prisoner was in place. Paul adds to his manifestation of philosophical virtue a demonstration of good citizenship. The strength of his charismatic character kept all the prisoners from flight.¹

Both accounts have multiple intertextual relationships with the literature of the period, including Artapanus, Euripides, Dionysius legends, Ovid, Philostratus, and 3 Maccabees.²

¹ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 409.

² See for example, Conzelmann, *Acts*, 93-94; Pervo, *Acts: a commentary*, 409-410. A comprehensive and useful study of prison escapes is: John B. Weaver, *Plots of epiphany: prison-escape in Acts of the Apostles*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche Bd. 131 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004).

Pervo thinks that Paul's account has an appropriately Graeco-Roman flavour,¹ and this is a valid point. More noteworthy, however, is Paul's response when released; demanding that the magistrates release him in person, and terrifying them with his citizenship. This passage, which seems arrogant to the modern mind, is part of the social status Paul is depicted as having in Acts. Peter has no such authority.

3.4. Vicarious Healing (5.15/19.11-17)

Vicarious healing is one of the most interesting of the parallel episodes. Tannehill notes the similarities between Jesus, Peter and Paul in regard to their power being used separately from their person.² Peter is so magnificent that even his shadow is considered an effective panacea, but Paul's case goes even further. It is not that handkerchiefs are better than shadows, of course, that makes Paul's healing episode more impressive, but the framing of the information within the "Sons of Sceva" narrative.

Επεχείρησαν δέ τινες καὶ τῶν περιερχομένων Ἰουδαίων ἐξορκιστῶν ὀνομάζειν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἔχοντας τὰ πνεύματα τὰ πονηρὰ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ λέγοντες· ὀρκίζω ὑμᾶς τὸν Ἰησοῦν ὃν Παῦλος κηρύσσει. ¹⁴ ἦσαν δέ τινος Σκευᾶ Ἰουδαίου ἀρχιερέως ἑπτὰ υἱοὶ τοῦτο ποιοῦντες. ¹⁵ ἀποκριθὲν δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ πονηρὸν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· τὸν [μὲν] Ἰησοῦν γινώσκω καὶ τὸν Παῦλον ἐπίσταμαι, ὑμεῖς δὲ τίνες ἐστέ; ³

This part of the passage is the point of highest interest. Such an exchange could have happened anywhere, and Luke could easily have the exorcists cite Peter or Barnabas.

¹ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 409.

² Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Volume 2*, 239.

³ Acts 19.13-15

Instead, the focus on Paul implies his authority in such a way that only Jesus is more important. This is a classic example of the imposition of a Pauline character on an episode.¹ A focus on the historicity of this episode and its origin in a source normally curtails any real attempt to understand it narratively. Much is deduced from the word ἀμφοτέρων, whose semantic range is usually limited to “both” being used here in reference to seven sons. This is supposed to be a tell-tale sign of a source, as Pervo suggest and others suggest.² The adjective’s use in Acts 23.8 problematizes this evidence, however. The fact is that this episode has a clear and definite narrative purpose, which is only helped by its almost slapstick nature. The semantic range of one word, given its use in 23.8, is scant evidence for reducing the scene to a badly cohered source-based episode.

But in any event, a source theory for an isolated episode does not account for the placing of the episode in a particular location; for this a narrative answer must be found. Mount’s narrative perspective sets the source issue to one side to search for coherence in the text as it stands, and helps to locate the episode in a series of anecdotes that relate unusual aspects of Paul’s adventures.³

4. The compound argument: The Example of Socrates

The combination of all of these parallels, whether general or specific, combined with the ideas of Lentz and Mount, equate to a narrative argument for (at the least) Paul’s equivalence to Peter. However, Luke’s narrative polemic for Paul goes much further. And there are several other elements to his narrative construction. If, as Mount has argued, Luke creates or at least emphasises Paul’s role in the creation of churches, and as Lentz argues, depicts a Paul that is exemplary within the ideological framework of his day as a social and

¹ Mount, *Pauline Christianity*, 121–122.

² Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 475; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 164.

³ The relationship of these episodes will be discussed further in the following chapter.

moral hero, then Luke's narrative construction of Paul already exhibits much more careful and elaborate care than that of Peter. But even beyond this, other intertextual relationships are apparent. One in particular, which relates to the Socrates literature, covers large areas of popular ideology about what a hero should look like in terms of wisdom, faith and courage.

The Socratic paradigm was hugely influential in the ancient world, particularly in the arena of philosophy and the virtues. Reference to him is pervasive, and can be found in Dio Chrysostom,¹ Seneca,² Epictetus,³ Plutarch⁴ and others.⁵ Though these references cannot be classified within a single genre, MacDonald's first criterion for the possibility of imitation would easily apply:

Accessibility: criterion one, pertains to the dating of the proposed model relative to the imitation and its physical distribution and popularity in education, art, and literature [...] the more widespread the circulation and popularity of the model, the stronger the case that the author used it. Less obvious but no less important is the accessibility of the model to the intended readers.⁶

¹ Or. 13. On the wider dialogue between Jews and Christians with Hellenistic philosophical notions, see Loveday Alexander, "Foolishness to the Greeks': Jews and Christians in the Public Life of the Empire," in *Philosophy and power in the Graeco-Roman world: essays in honour of Miriam Griffin*, ed. Miriam T. Griffin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 229-249.

² 29-33

³ 1.19.6

⁴ *Moralia* 575b-598f.

⁵ Harold A. S. Tarrant, "The Hippias Major and Socratic Theories of Pleasure," in *The Socratic movement*, ed. Paul A. Vander Waerdt (London: Cornell University Press), 107, discusses Socratic influence on Lucian, and the Cynics; Gisela Striker, "Plato's Socrates and the Stoics," in *The Socratic movement*, ed. Paul A. Vander Waerdt (London: Cornell University Press), 242, discusses Socratic influence on Plutarch and Zeno; Julie Annas, "Plato the Skeptic," in *The Socratic movement*, ed. Paul A. Vander Waerdt (London: Cornell University Press), 309-340, discusses Socratic influence on Plutarch and Cicero.

⁶ Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *Does the New Testament imitate Homer?*, 2-3.

He is the prime example of the ascetic, holy life, sage, martyr, and prophet – the role-model of Stoics and Cynics, even those that disagreed with him were forced to engage his opinions. Loveday Alexander provides a detailed comparison of the Lukan Paul and the Socratic paradigm, and divides it into seven units: Call, Mission, Daimonion, Tribulations, Persecution, Trial, and Facing Death.¹ There are significant points of allusion in Acts; such as the Areopagus speech, where the term δαμόνια is used in reference to Paul’s preaching of Jesus,² and the sevenfold use of the term ἀπολογία (in either verb or noun form) in the trial context.³

Added to this are the allusions to Christ as a Socratic *Symposium* figure – something Gregory Sterling makes mention of.⁴ But the allusion to Socrates is somewhat out of place in the Gospel, whose Palestinian setting is so alien to the Athenian urban capital in which Socrates lived and died, and it would be inappropriate for Luke to do any more than create the small echoes that he does. In Acts, however, which is almost entirely urban in nature, it is easy to draw multiple parallels between Paul the wandering prophet, and Socrates.

Given the influence of the Socratic paradigm in the ancient world,⁵ such multiple allusions can only strengthen the depiction of Paul as a singularly important individual, not only by his likeness to Socrates, but through that, by his likeness to Christ.

¹Alexander, *Acts in its ancient literary context*, ed. John M. G. Barclay (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 63–64.

²Alexander, *Acts in its ancient literary context*, 64.

³Alexander, *Acts in its ancient literary context*, 65.

⁴Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and self-definition*, 370.

⁵A. A. Long, for example, refers to him as one of the three great Philosophers of Ancient Greece. See “Hellenistic Ethics and Philosophical Power”, in *Hellenistic History and Culture*, Peter Green, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), <http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft0000035f;chunk.id=ch5;doc.view=print;> last visited 24-3-2012.

5. Apostolic Status

Having explored the strength of Luke's construction of Paul then, it is time to return to the construction of his apostolic status. There are several pieces of evidence which must be considered. They include some of the elements already discussed, such as Luke's explicitly naming Paul and Barnabas as apostles in 14.4 and 14.14. Taken on its own, this awkward fact would suggest fourteen apostles, and therefore pose considerable difficulties – difficulties that can be overcome with historical reasoning, but as we have seen, cannot be easily overcome from within the narrative itself. It is unlikely that Luke would see fit to announce Paul's apostleship in such an incidental manner as this; it is more plausible that he uses the term in a more general sense, without any reference to the twelve. It is, however, part of the ongoing construction of Paul's status, and an important reminder that he is in a very real and important sense an apostle – sent out by God to do His work.

5.1. Divine Election

Paul's divine election is another important element of the Lucan construction of his apostolic identity. As was observed above, even Lightfoot, who specifically rebuffed the idea that Paul could claim to be one of the twelve, is forced to admit that Paul has more right to claim divine appointment than does Matthias. Acts 9.15 definitely and distinctively confirms that it is "The Lord" who is sending Paul out: "εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· πορεύου, ὅτι σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι οὗτος τοῦ βαστάσαι τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐνώπιον ἐθνῶν τε καὶ βασιλέων υἱῶν τε Ἰσραὴλ·" The use of the noun ἐκλογή is unique in Luke-Acts, but approximate verbal equivalents feature several times, and frequently, a decision made by Jesus or God depends upon them. The first and most relevant example is certainly the use of it by Jesus to elect the twelve, in Luke 6.13: "καὶ ὅτε ἐγένετο ἡμέρα, προσεφώνησεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐκλεξάμενος ἀπ' αὐτῶν δώδεκα, οὓς καὶ ἀποστόλους ὠνόμασεν·" But other relevant uses

include Acts 1.2, when an apparently awkward construction emphasises with a little too much strength that Jesus had chosen his apostles: “ἄχρι ἣς ἡμέρας ἐντειλάμενος τοῖς ἀποστόλοις διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου οὗς ἐξελέξατο ἀνελήμφθη.” In Acts 1.24, the apostles ask for God to show them his choice: “καὶ προσευξάμενοι εἶπαν· σὺ κύριε καρδιογνώστα πάντων, ἀνάδειξον ὃν ἐξελέξω ἐκ τούτων τῶν δύο ἕνα” but importantly, there is no divine confirmation that the right decision has been made. And in 15.7, Peter refers to God’s decision to bring faith to the Gentiles through him: “ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς διὰ τοῦ στόματός μου ἀκοῦσαι τὰ ἔθνη τὸν λόγον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καὶ πιστεῦσαι.” These examples therefore represent three apostolic moments – Jesus’ choice of the twelve, a further reference to Jesus choice of the twelve, and the prayer that God choose a member to replace Judas amongst the twelve.

Being chosen by God is one claim that Paul can definitely make, though he does not make it until very late in the narrative, in his third conversion account:

ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ στήθι ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας σου· εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ὤφθην σοι,
προχειρίσασθαί σε ὑπηρέτην καὶ μάρτυρα ὧν τε εἶδές [με] ὧν τε ὀφθήσομαί σοι,
¹⁷ἐξαιρούμενός σε ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰς οὓς ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω σε¹

Again, the revelation becomes stronger as the narrative goes on, and this time, the verb ἀποστέλλω is explicitly attributed to Jesus in reference to Paul.

¹ 26.16-17

5.2. Witnessing and Sending Out

Paul's election does not equate to his being one of the twelve, which is problematized by the Matthias episode and the two statements that the apostles were "witnesses from the beginning," in 1.22 and 10.39. But these two statements are not entirely without difficulties. Both place a heavier emphasis on witnessing the resurrection than anything else (something that is also emphasized by the apostles in various other contexts. See for example 3.15). Fuller, who like other scholars thinks that Luke excludes Paul from apostleship, says of 1.22:

The resurrection remains for Lucan theology the centre of the Christian message. Yet the nuance is subtly altered: by placing the resurrection among the whole series of events from John the Baptist to the ascension, Luke treats the resurrection as one verifiable historical fact among others, albeit the central fact.¹

As Tyson has observed, the criterion of being present from the baptism of John would, for a pedantic mind, exclude all the apostles. Whether or not the target audience could be relied upon to make such an observation is impossible to say.² The criterion does, one is forced to admit, exclude Paul more than most, but the more important criterion: that of being a witness to the resurrected Christ, is one that Acts does claim for Paul. This occurs later in the narrative:

¹ Reginald H. Fuller, "The Choice of Matthias," in *SE.*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, vol. VI, International Congress on New Testament Studies. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1973), 145.

² Tyson, "Wrestling with Paul," 22 footnote 26.

ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν προεχειρίσατό σε γνῶναι τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ
καὶ ἰδεῖν τὸν δίκαιον καὶ ἀκοῦσαι φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, ¹⁵ὅτι ἔση μάρτυς
αὐτῷ πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὧν ἔώρακας καὶ ἤκουσας.¹

Once again, this is strongly worded and definite in purpose – it designates Paul a witness of what he has seen and heard, and also a conduit of His will and hearer of His voice. The combination of the information revealed in the three accounts (and I do not wish to argue here that this is their sole purpose), makes clear that Paul is elected by Christ, a witness to the resurrected Christ, and a knower of the will and righteousness of Christ.

In Peter’s words to Cornelius in 10.40-41 there is the possibility of interpreting that the apostles had to have eaten and drank with Jesus after his resurrection. In fact, Peter only states that God only showed Jesus to that group, and that for them his resurrection was a material fact;² Peter has not been introduced to the story of Paul at this point, of course. The narrative, and particularly the “Damascus moment”, leaves no doubt at all as to whether Jesus was also revealed to Paul. One of many small points, perhaps, but in my opinion Luke builds his case on the accumulation of these small points, and carefully avoids making any single and definitive statement.

5.3. Barnabas as Apostle?

Any discussion of Paul’s apostolic status must take in the fact that Barnabas could conceivably make the same claim. In both 14.4 and 14.14, Barnabas and Paul are designated as apostles together, and Barnabas features with Paul for much of their missionary activity, to the extent they sometimes appear to be speaking simultaneously.³ On occasions where

¹ 22.14-15

² Pervo *Acts*, 281.

³ 13.43, 46; 14.14; 15.12.

they are named together Barnabas is often named first; though whether this is suggestive of anything is hard to know.

Barnabas' claim to the role of apostle, when taken over the course of the entire narrative, cannot be successfully compared to Paul's. It runs into several problems that make Luke's emphasis of Paul over Barnabas quite clear. One obvious issue is the construction of Barnabas as a character and the narrative's focus upon him: Barnabas never talks except as a part of Paul's voice. The closest to speaking independently of Paul is in his disagreement with him over John Mark in 15.36-39, but even here, Paul's speech is reported where Barnabas' is not. When Barnabas does speak as part of Paul's voice, one always receives the impression that it is Paul speaking rather than Barnabas, in much the same way as in the first half of Acts one always feels it is Peter speaking when Peter and John reportedly speak together. The narrative barely follows Barnabas other than to trace his actions towards Paul.¹ Moreover, Barnabas has no strong claim to having seen the resurrected Lord or of speaking to him, receives no vision nor Damascus moment, nor has any Ananias-type prophecy made about him to select him as God's chosen instrument (the phrasing of which is unequivocal: ὅτι σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι οὗτος τοῦ βαστάσαι τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐνώπιον ἐθνῶν τε καὶ βασιλέων υἱῶν τε Ἰσραήλ·). Nothing of this occurs in regard to Barnabas, because Luke never allows Barnabas a claim to anything like the unique and pivotal role he inscribes across the construction of Paul's narrative. Overall, one must conclude that Barnabas is never intended to compete with Paul in any serious way, even if he does manage to be involved in almost everything Paul does. Paul is the superhero; Barnabas is the sidekick.

¹ The obvious though brief exception to this is 4.36-37.

5.4. The Election of Matthias and its Narrative Value

The election of Matthias is the subject of relatively little attention, but the attention that it does receive is almost always focused upon its value as a historical incident. Several themes recur. Firstly, the death of Judas is quite different in Luke's account to that of Matthew,¹ and this discrepancy is the subject of some debate. Secondly, there is a suggestion that had it been up to Luke, Jesus would have commissioned the replacement personally.² Thirdly, there is a focus on the concept of lottery in the ancient world, particularly in the Old Testament and Qumran.³ Fourthly, the absence of Matthias in the following narrative is again supposed to demonstrate that the incident is historical, since Luke would have given him a further role in the narrative if at all possible.⁴ Fifthly, the whole notion of the twelve, its earliest origins, the traditions behind it, and so on, are frequently discussed with reference to this scene.⁵

With the partial exception of the first and last, all of the above criticisms implicitly engage with the narrative value of the episode, specifically in terms of narrative configuration. The manner of the death of Judas, scrutinized so regularly in regard to its disparity to Matthew, has faced countless questions about its origin in one or more sources; the question is not one of its narrative function but its value as historical data. Theological differences are cited

¹ Fuller, "The Choice of Matthias," 143; Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 51–51; Parsons, *Acts*, 33; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of The Apostles*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 219; Charles Kingsley Barrett, *Acts*, vol 1, 92–93.

² Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 48, 54; Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 164; Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Volume 2*, 21; Annie Jaubert, "L' élection de Matthias," 277.

³ William A. Beardslee, "The Casting of Lots at Qumran and in the Book of Acts," *NovT* 4, no. 4 (1960): 245–252; Jaubert, "L' élection de Matthias," 279; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 11; Étienne Trocmé, *Le livre des Actes et l'histoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), 198–200; Barrett, *Acts*, vol 1, 104–105.

⁴ Trocmé, *Le livre des Actes et l'histoire*, 199; Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 48; Fitzmyer, *The Acts of The Apostles*, 221.

⁵ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Volume 2*, 22; John P. Meier, "The Circle of the Twelve: Did It Exist during Jesus' Public Ministry?," *JBL* 116, no. 4 (1997): 635–672; Ezra P. Gould, "St. Paul and the Twelve," *JBL* 18, no. 1/2 (1899): 184–189; Jaubert, "L' élection de Matthias,"; Schuyler Brown, *Apostasy and perseverance in the theology of Luke* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 87ff; Fitzmyer, *The Acts of The Apostles*, 220.

as a potential reason for the discrepancy, but narratively the episode appears to have been dismissed. The manner of the election of Matthias is considered so unimpressive that this alone provides proof of historicity – if Luke had invented the episode, surely Jesus himself would have chosen Matthias, and the new apostle would have had deeds to prove his worth. It is narrative instinct that raises these questions: Luke could have done better here, and in fact did so badly that he must have been restricted by loyalty to facts and sources. The search for historical or literary parallels to the method of election by lottery is in dialogue with the search for narrative coherence – what is the narrative value of the election, and would it have meant more to the original than it does to the modern reader? The absence of Matthias in the remaining narrative of Acts is considered historical because it is a glaring configurative failure, and actually appears to belie narrative logic. Matthias, chosen at the beginning of the text, should feature strongly in it. This is especially true given the various levels of importance attached to the issues surrounding the apostolate in the early church, the Pauline corpus, and Luke's Gospel. Finally, the notion of the twelve, very rarely raised as an issue in the Acts narrative itself, is nonetheless implied here to be of the utmost importance, and scholars plumb the scant information for something concrete, usually concluding with Lightfoot that the concept of the twelve is not as important to early as to later Christianity. The trouble with this, as has been noted, is that it comes from the New Testament as an entirety, rather than specifically from Luke.

Another narrative problem, less often raised, is that of Peter being apparently unaffected by the Spirit. His competence to make a speech and interpret God's will is just as sound here as it will be after Pentecost – an odd narrative oversight, and one that is compounded by the lack of any Divine indication of approval over Matthias' election, when almost every other good decision made in Acts is either instigated or approved by the Divine – one might even say that this is the main criterion for deciding what a good decision is.

These are substantial narrative problems, but because of a scholarly tendency towards source rather than narrative answers their location within the narrative framework is generally overlooked. A little reflection, however, shows that these difficulties have the cumulative effect of casting doubt over the whole business of the election of Matthias. Jesus should have appointed him, but did not. Peter has not yet received the Spirit, and makes this decision without it. Matthias plays no further role in the narrative. The election of a twelfth apostle is either a nadir of narrative planning or a failure on the part of the modern interpreter.

If narrative logic seems to imply that Matthias should feature strongly as an apostle in the narrative, but it is in fact Paul that does so, an awareness from the letters of Paul's dispute over apostolic status raises suspicions that Luke is engaging, however subtly, in the argument.

Let me reiterate at this point the narrative tricks Luke has missed if we take the position that the Matthias episode is incidental and that Luke excludes Paul from apostolic status. Jesus should have elected Matthias personally, but he did not. Peter suggests the election that leads to Matthias' appointment before rather than after he receives the Spirit. Matthias subsequently disappears from the narrative. Later, Paul is elected by Jesus, is made a witness to the resurrected Christ, and performs the task Jesus handed to the apostles before he ascended. With such an agglomeration of data it seems unlikely that Luke simply did not think his narrative through.

6. Refraction of Intentionality and Configurative Value

Refraction of Intentionality is a pervasive narrative device, particularly in the fictional mode. In Hellenistic Historiography as in modern historiography, the technique is less fundamental because the explicit narratorial voice and its concomitant critical distance allows the author to remain ambivalent about the truth of events or to explicitly discuss them and give an

opinion. In Hebrew historiography, which generally enjoys the best of both worlds, both techniques are employed to good effect. Typically, non-obedience of the Divine Will is noted either explicitly or implicitly, and from this point the generic conventions provide sufficient clues for narrative configuration (generally, obedience to God means that no matter what appears to be going wrong, the obedient actant will triumph, while the opposite is true for the disobedient actant). The lack of any comment on Bathsheba's behaviour is a persistent problem for some critics that has led to some very presumptuous interpretations.¹ David's generally reticent portrayal creates a good deal of narrative tension, as Alter has observed,² and Deryn Guest's hypothesis of a Chiasmus in the book of Judges that expresses implicit disapproval makes more sense of the text than the sanctioning of some otherwise troubling deeds.³

Refraction in the Greco-Roman novels is so pervasive that narratives can be written in the first person, and as was seen in the previous chapter, the oracular device is itself a refractive technique. In the *Iliad*, it has been suggested that the light-hearted play of the Gods is supposed to contrast unpleasantly with the fate of the humans below.⁴

The present interpretation is one that relies entirely on refraction. Luke never makes his intentions explicit, but allows his presentation of the "facts" to speak for themselves. If refraction is a style more applicable to Epic, myth and fiction than to Hellenistic historiography, the classificatory mistake that designates Acts in the same bracket as Thucydides is the one that does not allow interpreters to read the Matthias episode as an essential early signifier in the Luke's dialogue with his audience regarding Pauline apostolic status.

¹ Deryn Guest, "Looking Lesbian at the Bathing Bathsheba," *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 16, no. 3 (May 2008): 227-262.

² Alter, *art of biblical narrative*, 114-130.

³ Deryn Guest, "Judges," in *Eerdmans commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and J. W. (John William) Rogerson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 227-262.

⁴ See the introductions to most translations.

Misunderstanding the refractive capacity of a text means that the statements and deeds of characters are too easily seen as simple reports. Consequently, approval or disapproval (something that Luke is rarely explicit about) is interpreted according to only the most obvious evidence. This is perfectly adequate to deal with a case like Ananias and Sapphira, but even there, it is Peter, not Luke, who disapproves. In more subtle cases of refraction the standard model of interpretation, which is oriented around the history genre, leads to shortcomings. As Bakhtin observes:

A prose writer can distance himself from the language of his own work, while at the same time distancing himself, in varying degrees, from the different layers and aspects of the work. He can make use of language without wholly giving himself up to it, he may treat it as semi-alien or completely alien to himself, while compelling language ultimately to serve all his own intentions [...]. Therefore the intentions of the prose writer are refracted, and refracted *at different angles*, depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien, already embodied and already objectivized.¹

Understanding refraction in this way allows us to see the Election of Matthias as a pious but flawed attempt to do God's will. There is no evidence of Divine approval, no shaking of the room or voice from the Lord, as occurs elsewhere in Acts. The lottery does nothing to convince the reader of the veracity of the episode, and Matthias' subsequent disappearance further enforces the idea. If these problems are interpreted through the known historical problems surrounding Paul's apostolate, and combined with the increasingly strong

¹ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 299–300.

presentation of Paul throughout Acts, it becomes impossible to view Luke as so naïve in his narrative construction as to be unaware of the problems he is causing.

One thing Luke never does, however, is suggest that scripture has been erroneous. It is now worth turning to the support Peter cites from scripture to support the replacement of Judas.

6.1. Refraction and Citation

That Peter cites scriptural support for the replacement of Matthias, nobody would deny. But what, ultimately, does Peter's choice of citations prove? Another look at them is useful here:

γέγραπται γὰρ ἐν βίβλῳ ψαλμῶν· γενηθήτω ἡ ἔπαυλις αὐτοῦ ἔρημος καὶ μὴ ἔστω ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν αὐτῇ, καί· τὴν ἐπισκοπὴν αὐτοῦ λαβέτω ἕτερος.¹

That Judas' place be abandoned, and that another should take his place, Peter proves. But this could of course apply to anyone, and may actually help Paul's cause, for if it were not the case, there would be no need to rank anyone as equals of the apostles – they were there first, and would naturally be considered the principal eleven – but a need for a twelfth opens the door for another person to become their equal. Luke's narrative construction opens the door for a twelfth apostle, and then appears to close it again. The door, however, remains ajar.

Of course, this would mean that Peter misunderstood scripture, but equally, this is his only action in Acts that occurs without the help of the Spirit. It would require the reader to be dubious about this election, but there also, the increasing centrality of Paul in the developing

¹ Acts 1.20

church, and the complete absence of Matthias from any tradition after this point, would ring alarm bells for the target audience. One might understand this as a respectful narrative argument against anti-Paulinists, who perhaps claimed support from the idea that the twelve was established before Paul and consequently his importance had to be secondary: Luke answers that the election of another apostle was a mistake on the part of the eleven in the days before the Spirit came. It was well-intentioned and based on sound scriptural evidence that a replacement was necessary; but the choice was a mistaken one. Paul was in every conceivable way the choice of the Lord, accompanied with signs and wonders, and even the personal voice of Jesus.

7. Luke's Narrative Argument: a Summary

Having outlined the main points of Luke's narrative argument, it is now worthwhile to go over the evidence that occurs in the narrative, in order to explore how it might look to the target audience.

Firstly, it is important to keep in mind the assumptions of the target reader, in which, especially if the letters are a source, Paul is the central figure in Gentile Christianity, and very much admired. The context of dispute over Gentile conversion, Judaism and obedience to the Torah, ensure that these subjects are inter-related in the minds of these readers. Luke engages with this difficult debate.

He begins with the very clear statement that the apostles were chosen personally by Jesus, and that they received post-resurrection commands through the Holy Spirit in 1.2: "ἄχρι ἣς ἡμέρας ἐντειλάμενος τοῖς ἀποστόλοις διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου οὐς ἐξελέξατο ἀνελήμφθη." The awkward phrasing here seems almost to throw the emphasis of the sentence onto the fact of Jesus' choosing of the apostles. No commentator seems to have an explanation for this

awkwardness.¹ After this comes the ambiguous oracle – a command given to the apostles, which they fundamentally fail to understand. The target audience knows, as Gentiles, that the mission will reach across the entire Graeco-Roman world, and the tension in the early part of the narrative is created by the apostles showing no inclination to embark upon this task. Matthias is elected, but the textual indicators, combined with their own knowledge of the apostles, tells them that something is wrong. Matthias is not a key figure in the early church, and the election itself is somewhat unimpressive. Nonetheless, Peter has demonstrated from Scripture that there must be a twelfth apostle. The target reader would like to see Paul be acknowledged as such but know from the letters the matter was not a simple one. By proving that a candidate is required and then selecting an innocuous one, Luke gives those readers hope. At this stage there is no way the reader can be sure of the error, but Matthias' candidacy is refuted by history.

The growing persecution which leads to the unintentional spreading of the mission to the preordained second stage (Judaea and Samaria) brings Paul directly into the narrative as a menacing figure hanging over the church. When he is converted, Ananias is told of him, “ὅτι σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι οὗτος τοῦ βαστάσαι τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐνώπιον ἐθνῶν τε καὶ βασιλέων υἱῶν τε Ἰσραήλ,”² which romantically depicts Paul as the one who will willingly suffer in order to atone for his sins against the faithful. It also expresses in a way that the election pericope did not, that Paul is divinely appointed by Jesus to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. It does not, at this stage, depict him as an apostle in the strict sense, and certainly not as one of the twelve. Nonetheless, it is the strongest statement by Jesus on anyone regarding the duties that the apostolate actually carries.

¹ The awkwardness of phrasing is mentioned by most commentators, but little explanation given. The assumption is probably of incompetence. See for example Conzelmann, *Acts*, 3-4; Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 36-37.

² Acts 9.15

Meanwhile, Peter, speaking to Cornelius, makes a statement about apostleship which places more emphasis on being a witness of the resurrection: “τοῦτον ὁ θεὸς ἤγειρεν [έν] τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτὸν ἐμφανῆ γενέσθαι, ⁴¹ οὐ παντὶ τῷ λαῷ, ἀλλὰ μάρτυσιν τοῖς προκεχειροτονημένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἡμῖν, οἵτινες συνεφάγομεν καὶ συνεπίομεν αὐτῷ μετὰ τὸ ἀναστῆναι αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν.”¹

As the narrative continues, Paul and Barnabas are sent out, specifically by God, and then Paul goes about performing miracles enough to place him beside, or even ahead of, Peter. He is decisive, he is full of the Spirit, and most of all, he is a missionary and a martyr, suffering and enduring for the Gospel, and doing a fine imitation of Christ.

By the time the conversion is recounted again, Paul has done so much to cement his position as worthy apostle that it is hardly a surprise to hear Ananias’ words altered to make more explicit the position Luke has been elucidating through the narrative: “ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν προεχειρίσατό σε γνῶναι τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἰδεῖν τὸν δίκαιον καὶ ἀκοῦσαι φωνῆν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, ¹⁵ ὅτι ἔση μάρτυς αὐτῷ πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὧν ἐώρακας καὶ ἤκουσας.”² Importantly, this version of the Lord’s words brings Paul much closer to the criteria that Peter has set out to Cornelius: Paul has seen and heard the Lord (post-resurrection), he was chosen by the Lord, and according to this account at least, is an almost direct instrument of the Lord’s will.

14.4 and 14, in which Paul and Barnabas are named apostles, is both a mere reference to their being sent out, and a suggestion that this is enough to give them all the authority they require. Following this, Paul’s journey to Rome is given Divine approval: “Τῇ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ νυκτὶ ἐπιστὰς αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος εἶπεν· θάρσει· ὡς γὰρ διεμαρτύρω τὰ περὶ ἐμοῦ εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ, οὕτω σε δεῖ καὶ εἰς ὠμὴν μαρτυρῆσαι.”³ This gives all of Paul’s subsequent trials and tribulations a certain surety, and has the effect of nullifying the negative aspects of

¹ Acts 10.40-41

² Acts 22.14-15

³ 23.11

any persecution, plot, trial, or imprisonment; because they appear to be part of the Divine plan to see Paul arrive in Rome.

Finally, in the third account of the conversion, Paul is officially sent to the Gentiles by Jesus:

ἐγὼ δὲ εἶπα· τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δὲ κύριος εἶπεν· ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις.¹⁶ ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ στήθι ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας σου· εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ὤφθην σοι, προχειρίσασθαί σε ὑπηρέτην καὶ μάρτυρα ὧν τε εἶδές [με] ὧν τε ὀφθήσομαί σοι,¹⁷ ἐξαιρούμενός σε ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰς οὓς ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω σε¹

This final confirmation completes a long and careful sequence of informational disclosure that makes each stage plausible to the reader. The miracles and visions have confirmed and bolstered Paul's apostolic status, his virtue, self-control, and social status have of course been continually affirmed and re-affirmed throughout; Paul is the new Socrates, the new Aeneas; brave, courageous, full of the Spirit. At certain points in the narrative Luke has found a setting in which to attribute to a Divine (and therefore omniscient narrative) voice an explicit statement to add to this depiction, and finally in 26.15-17 Jesus is seen to have personally appointed Paul as apostle to the Gentiles. Finally of course, it is Paul that fulfills the Divine command (given to the other apostles) by reaching a point which allows the Gospel to go to the ends of the earth. Thus the depiction, which runs from Acts 1.2, finishes in 28.28, where Paul now has such authority that the reader will not doubt his interpretation of the Divine will when he rejects the Jews in favour of the Gentiles.

Whether or not Luke intends to place Paul directly into the Judas vacancy, or whether he merely wishes to imply it, is difficult to ascertain. But the Lucan presentation in Acts certainly does, contrary to the scholarly consensus, create a Paul who can make a case for his apostolate.

¹ 26.15-17

8. Parallels in Ancient Literature

In the first study I took a definite and clearly defined device – the ambiguous oracle, and presented a number of parallels in order to demonstrate that the device followed certain conventions and was recognisable by them. In this study it must be apparent that there will be no direct parallels for the entire framework – it is too complex, too convoluted for that. The question is not, however, whether that specific framework was available to the ancient reader, but whether the ancient reader was capable of interpreting the data.

A good place to start is with Dennis R. MacDonald, who has drawn scholarly attention to parallels between Acts and Homer. He looks at the election of Matthias in the light of *Iliad 7*, and finds an impressive number of parallels.

In this famous scene, Hector asks for single combat with the Achaeans and they, hardly queuing to accept his offer, resort to drawing lots. Ajax draws the lot and fights Hector, but the result is a draw. MacDonald thinks that “the problem presented to Luke by the death of Judas was not his vacating the office but his disqualification as a judge over a tribe of Israel in the kingdom of God.”¹ This may look like a reaffirmation of the classic stance as to why the replenishing of the apostles was required, but MacDonald’s hypothesis also tackles the manner of election:

What Luke needed was a procedure by which the early church could allow God to select someone worthy to replace Judas, and the lottery in *Iliad 7* was ideal for this purpose. Here nine worthy heroes offer to fight Hector, the army prays that Zeus will select the right man, and the lot indeed selects the one they most want. For the creation of a replacement for Judas Luke needed no historical memory, oral

¹ MacDonald, *Does Acts imitate Homer?*, 117.

tradition, or source. All he needed was an appropriate literary model; he found it in Homer.¹

MacDonald demonstrates ably that his parallel meets the criteria of accessibility, density and order; that is, Luke and his audience would be familiar with the scene, there are a good number of points in common and they occur in a similar order. However, he admits “I have found no imitation of the casting of lots in *Iliad* 7.” The criterion of analogy is one he cannot fulfil.

I would like to speculate at this point that the criterion of analogy falls down because the scene holds a particular purpose, rarely required by ancient writers in the construction of their narratives: the lot demonstrates Divine ambivalence. The fight ends in a draw, the fate of Troy is already decided, and Zeus opens book 7 by commanding the gods not to intervene. The draw between Hector and Ajax is an anti-climactic result that achieves very little, and thus was not normally required by later writers. However, an anti-climactic result that achieved very little was perfect for the Election of Matthias.

What other parallels exist in ancient Greek literature? Heroes chosen by God to overcome impossible odds is a common theme, and one which Marianne Palmer Bonz has mentioned in her discussion of Acts as Epic, particularly in relation to Paul as Aeneas.² Other figures provide all the twists, turns, plots and pathos that an audience could want; prominent candidates include Jason and Theseus, both of whom are entangled in oracles, overcome plots and achieve great deeds.

In Hebrew literature this type of protagonist occurs more than once. Most prominently, Joseph and David, both younger brothers and initially peripheral figures that are hand-picked by God and overcome all odds as a result, with many trials along the way. It is not my

¹ MacDonald, *Does Acts imitate Homer?*, 177.

² See for example Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2000), 182-183.

intention to go into detail here, partly because I do not believe that any one parallel is particularly close. Instead, I simply want to assert that a glance through an Encyclopaedia of Greek or biblical mythology will provide an array of stories in which a deity's selection of an individual (whether it be of a rightful heir, such as Jason or Theseus, or as often in the biblical narrative, a righteous person, such as Joseph or David) leads to that person eventually fulfilling the objectives of the deity in the face of impossible odds.

9. Conclusion

If the epistles of Paul make anything clear to the modern reader, it is that there was a dispute of some severity over the Gospel he proclaimed, which turned upon his apostolic authority. If Paul had authority equivalent to the Twelve, his Gospel was valid. If, however, he was only one of many converts to Christianity his Gospel was heresy wherever it disagreed with those of higher authority than he. The trouble for Luke is not simply whether or not Paul has this authority, but why it should be in any doubt at all. Luke is always subtle, always careful in his narrative argumentation, as was seen in the previous chapter. In this chapter a picture emerges of a narrative capable of the complexity required to not only tackle the issue of Paul's authority (a relatively simple matter of attributing certain statements to a divine/omniscient narrator), but of addressing the very intricate and delicate issue of why, if he was divinely ordained as apostle to the Gentiles, that Peter, John, and James could ever doubt this. Luke's navigation of this matter hinges around the appointment of Matthias – whether an invention all of his own, or based upon a very specific tradition of a real event, Luke uses this episode as the foundation of his answer.

It is impossible to say whether Luke intended to make a clear case for Paul being a twelfth apostle, or whether he only wanted to leave the subject open to debate. It is certainly possible that the subject had been one of intense debate and scrutiny already, and that his own contribution merely affirmed or denied certain existing hypotheses. But whether or not

Paul was arraigned in this narrative as one of the twelve, he was certainly being set up as *the Divinely appointed Apostle*, and this is something scholars have always recognised. My point is simply that this status is not due to a historically reality that Luke unintentionally reflects, but to a narratively configured polemic that makes any other conclusion unavoidable.

This reading of the text relies upon the configuration of a large number of narrative elements that have been at some time or another attributed to a source or otherwise called into question, and this is an important part of the thesis. The search for sources obscures the possibility of coherence. When looked at as coherent entities, biblical texts might perform relatively well. The consequence of this approach for Acts is the loss of some treasured ideas about early insights into Christianity, but the reward is adequate compensation. Instead of some doubtful historical “facts,” none of which can be proven with certainty, and some of which appear contradictory or confusing, what we have is an authorial agenda that is unmistakable in its ideological purpose, and which presents one influential perspective on events in the early church. It is one that acknowledges the eleven, but insists upon Paul as the pre-eminent figure of the early church. What I have outlined here is how Luke engages with the history he inherited to create the history he wants.

Chapter 7. COMEDY AND CHARACTERISATION IN ACTS

1. Introduction: the Bible and comedy

In the previous two chapters I looked at how signifiers at the beginning of the narrative configure it to the end. The ambiguous oracle described the outworking of a particular device, while the discussion of Paul's apostolic status highlighted a number of features and suggested that together they create a narrative framework for the reader. We have moved then, from a clearly demarcated device that enables the reader to chart a course through the text, to a narrative strategy that is carefully inscribed into the text and creates in its ultimate coherence an argument built almost entirely without a prepositional basis.

In this chapter I want to explore yet another outworking of my intertextual model, by exploring a smaller unit of text to see how Luke creates a framework of significations for a specific passage. After looking at two aspects of large-scale narrative patterning, I want to look at an example of small-scale patterning to demonstrate that the methodology I have elaborated can also be manifest in tightly allusive clusters that create their own framework of significations independently of the wider narrative scheme.

The presence of comedy in Acts is far from readily obvious, and indeed, the majority of scholars see the text as fundamentally serious in nature. A little reflection at the outset of this chapter will demonstrate that this near-consensus view is not the only one possible, and that evidence of comedy in Acts has been leaking through historical criticism for many years. The present discussion will hopefully pave the way for an honest look at some of the more amusing moments in the narrative. This exploration will culminate in a detailed analysis of the speech to the Ephesian Elders in Acts 20.18-35.

1.1. Comedy in the Bible and comedy in Acts

If the humour of Acts is an oft overlooked element of interpretation, it is little wonder – the Bible and laughter are not associated as frequently as they might be. The reasons for this neglect are both simple and complex. One simple reason is that the humour of the ancient Near-East, or even of ancient Greece and Rome, often seems alien to the modern reader, and is sometimes difficult to detect: Yehuda T. Radday talks of the “Poker-face” of the biblical narrator, especially when employing comic elements that make use of subversive undertones.¹

One might also argue that critics are not interested in humour but are looking for other things- perhaps an over-generalisation, but one with a good deal of truth. This approach might make sense if it were possible to examine humour as an entirely separate narrative element; humour could then be left to those who are happy to search for it. Unfortunately for biblical critics of this persuasion, when humour is present in a text its dialogue with all other textual elements is not only inevitable but also an important part of the interpretative process. Exegesis that ignores humorous elements fails in its principle task – making sense of the text as a coherent whole.

2. Humorous Episodes in Acts

It does seem odd that so few scholars see much humour in Acts. In several places where comedy might be detected one tends to find talk of sources rather than comedy, while at other points there simply seems to be little focus on humour, as if comedy were simply not the remit of a biblical scholar. Once one accepts that comedy is expected *not* to be found in

¹ Yehuda T. Radday, “Humour in Names,” in *On humour and the comic in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Athalya. Brenner and Yehuda T. Radday (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 67.

the pages of the New Testament, it becomes easier to see how scholarship manages to avoid it almost entirely.

In a rare discussion of comedy in Acts, Pervo lists a number of episodes, including the escape of the apostles in 5.17-25; Peter's escape from jail in Acts 12.5-17; the exorcism of 16.16-18, and chaos in the Sanhedrin in 23.6-10.¹ A discussion of these incidents is not necessary here, and I leave the reader to form his own opinion. I will be focusing on those episodes that relate to the characterisation of Paul.

2.1. Healing at Lystra (14.8-20)

The episode in Lycaonia is odd mainly because of the crowd's reaction to the healing. Paul is mistaken for Hermes, Barnabas for Zeus, and the locals rush off to find a priest and make sacrifices.

Scholars comment on the overreaction of the locals. Pervo argues that "no allowance for miscommunication readily compensates for the confusion of heralds of a new god with two of the old gods."² Haenchen concedes Loisy's point and observes:

That the priest of Zeus would immediately believe that the two wonder-workers were Zeus and Hermes, and hasten up with oxen and garlands, is highly improbable, quite apart from the fact that the animals had first to be brought from the pasture and the garlands woven. It is not only the priest's credulity, moreover, but that of the people which is unconvincing.³

¹ Pervo, *Profit with delight*, 61–64.

² Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 353.

³ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 432.

These difficulties lead most scholars to the conclusion that the answer is supplied by context. Several legends connect Lycaonia to an incident in which Zeus and Hermes are offended by a lack of hospitality and punish the offenders. As Pervo says: “these yokels are determined not to be taken unawares again.”¹

Much academic energy is also spent on speculation as to why Paul is identified as Hermes rather than Zeus. This particular question has led Weiser to suggest that since Luke would have preferred to associate Paul with the more important deity, a source must be responsible (In the previous chapter it was observed that the term “apostle” led to a similar conclusion for this episode).² Conzelmann reviews archaeological evidence that suggests the veneration of Zeus and Hermes together at this location, and whether it is actually Zeus and Hermes or the local equivalents that Paul and Barnabas were mistaken for. Parsons, following Dean P. Bechárd, sees the episode as a defence “against the charge of manipulating the uncritical naiveté of rural folk.”³ This reading has merit, and indeed Tannehill’s (and others’) observation that this scene very closely parallels scenes in the Gospel and in Acts 3, are important interpretative elements in the characterisation of Paul as apostle.⁴

Pervo, however, has repeatedly hinted that this episode is intentionally witty. He notes that “appreciation of the humour requires familiarity with the myth.”⁵ It must be admitted that such a reading resolves several issues. Barnabas is proclaimed as Zeus, the chief of the Gods, despite it being Paul who is recognized as the healer. And in any case, neither Zeus nor

¹ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 354–355.

² Alfons Weiser, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Orig.-Ausg. (Gutersloh: Gutersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1981), 351.

³ Parsons, *Acts*, 201.

⁴ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts. A Literary Interpretation: volume two: The Acts of the Apostles*, 177.

⁵ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 353–354.

Hermes are considered “healing deities.”¹ What is more, a pejorative depiction of the Lycaonians seems to be historically plausible, with Cicero among others making derogatory remarks.² Pervo has not expanded this comedic reading at any length, but the evidence is cumulative and strong. Most scholars are in agreement that the Lycaonians, like all Barbarians in the ancient world, were considered to be ignorant yokels.³ Added to this, the improbably rapid appearance of bull, garlands and priest, and the immediate conclusion of deity incarnate – a cognitive leap that Rick Strelan works very hard to explain -⁴ make little sense in any other context. One naturally looks to verses 11-13:

οἱ τε ὄχλοι ἰδόντες ὃ ἐποίησεν Παῦλος ἐπήραν τὴν φωνὴν αὐτῶν Λυκαονιστὶ
λέγοντες· οἱ θεοὶ ὁμοιωθέντες ἀνθρώποις κατέβησαν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ¹² ἐκάλουν τε τὸν
Βαρναβᾶν Δία, τὸν δὲ Παῦλον Ἑρμῆν, ἐπειδὴ αὐτὸς ἦν ὁ ἡγούμενος τοῦ λόγου.
¹³ ὃ τε ἱερεὺς τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ ὄντος πρὸ τῆς πόλεως ταύρους καὶ στέμματα ἐπὶ τοὺς
πυλῶνας ἐνέγκας σὺν τοῖς ὄχλοις ἤθελεν θύειν.

The most natural interpretation of this scene is as a comic episode. The humour is in dialogue with a social group – that is, it is satiric in nature, and is therefore easily lost upon the modern reader with little knowledge of that group.

The identification of Paul with Hermes is one that I wish to develop throughout this chapter. In essence I want to argue that the identification of Paul with “the chief speaker” is a part of a gently satiric characterisation of Paul that reaches its climax in the Miletus speech. For now

¹ Pervo, *Acts*, 354.

² Dean Philip Bechard, *Paul outside the walls: a study of Luke’s socio-geographical universalism in Acts 14:8-20* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2000), 278–282.

³ Dean Philip Bechard, *Paul outside the walls* (Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 2000), 278-291.

⁴ Rick Strelan, “Recognizing the Gods (Acts 14.8–10),” *NTS* 46 (2000): 488-503.

it is only necessary to remember the occasions on which reference is made of Paul as a talker.

2.2. The Sons of Sceva

A quick survey of the commentaries produces only two scholars that see humour in this episode. One of them is Dibelius, who argues on the grounds of a “comic undertone” that this story “was not fashioned by Christian interests.”¹ His approach seems to be (and he applies the same logic to the Eutychus episode²) that since Luke was not interested in humour, he would not write it, but might insert an episode taken from elsewhere.³

Conzelmann notes the “burlesque antecedents”,⁴ but goes even further than Dibelius in seeing redaction here. According to Conzelmann there was originally only one demon, and the episode included the exorcism formula. The redaction has left the episode a little confused, and it is from this confusion (incoherence) that Conzelmann has presumably extrapolated his notion of what the story should look like.⁵ Even Haenchen takes the relative failure to extol the name of Jesus as a form of inconsistency:

That the name of the Lord Jesus is extolled, moreover, may be established only very indirectly by this story. So it appears that Luke has here made use of material alien

¹ Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Heinrich Greeven, Study ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 19.

² Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 18. On Eutychus 2.5. of this chapter.

³ Pervo, *Acts*, 476.

⁴ Conzelmann, *Acts*, 163.

⁵ Conzelmann, *Acts*, 164.

to his purpose, which he could not quite mould together in spite of all his vigorous efforts to do so.¹

This seems a particularly thin criterion for attribution to a source, and relies upon a presupposition that extolling the name of the Lord is *always* a priority for Luke in Acts. The importance of Paul, as demonstrated in both of the previous chapters, is not considered an appropriate emphasis.

Pervo, who takes a more open-minded approach, says of Dibelius' comments: "disapproval is not a valid ground for such attributions."² He sees this pericope as "formally, a parody of an exorcism," and even goes so far as to suggest that it parodies Mark 5.1-20/Luke 8.26-39 in particular.

Here then, is a clear example of humour, agreed upon by at least two prominent scholars, even if one does not like it. It is slapstick in nature, and makes a family of prominent Jews look ridiculous.

2.3. The Riot at Ephesus

Mobs and riots carried ideological and semantic freight in the ancient world that they do not today, and they certainly appeared to carry some literary connotations.³ This intertextual framework incorporates political history and several of the novels – such a variety means no particular generic affiliation or emotional register can be assumed.

¹ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 566.

² Pervo, *Acts*, 475.

³ Wills, "The Depiction of the Jews in Acts"; Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 34–39.

Commentaries also tend to overlook this episode, which could be subtitled: “Much Ado Goes Nowhere.” The comedy in this scene is multiple, but in essence stems from the huge amount of fuss made contrasted with the very harmless results. Exaggeration is hardly to be doubted here, and it is this that leads to the comic effect of the final anti-climax. In particular, the speech of Demetrius, who, as Tannehill says, has first appealed to his commercial interests and second to the honour of the temple,¹ with such highlights as “he has persuaded everyone into believing that manufactured Gods are not genuine,” and “the entire civilised world will see her majesty slipping away!” is surely intended to be satirical, a parodic representation of the language and culture of a social sub-set. Two hours of chanting “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” is also a little excessive, and the same sort of satire that gives Esther much of its comedy.² There is also clear comedy in verse 19.32: ἄλλοι μὲν οὖν ἄλλο τι ἔκραζον· ἦν γὰρ ἡ ἐκκλησία συγκεχυμένη καὶ οἱ πλείους οὐκ ᾔδεισαν τίνος ἕνεκα συνεληλύθεισαν. Added to this is the dragging in, physically, of Gaius and Aristarchus, which adds mock-drama to the episode – the comic speech has already signified that we are in the wrong genre for tragedy.

Several commentators have objected to the story, and though it is not explicitly stated, one suspects that the episodic and comic nature of the pericope does not strike them as Lukan or genuine.³

One might also observe here that Paul is prevented from talking here by the Asiarchs, despite there being, as Pervo notes, no way they could note that he planned on doing so:

¹ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts. A Literary Interpretation: volume two: The Acts of the Apostles*, 243.

² Yehuda T. Radday, “Esther with Humour,” in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew*, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 294-313.

³ For a brief survey see Pervo, *Acts*, 487-488.

It is essentially immaterial if one claims that their admonition was based on their knowledge of what Paul would do in such a situation. The narrator could have intimated this by saying “fearing that...” The text has given no hints thus far that Paul would take the action contemplated here.¹

It is an interesting problem, and one that suggests the Asiarchs, and perhaps anybody who knew Paul, knew exactly what he would want to do in this situation.

2.4. Told you so

Another potentially comic moment is Acts 27.10. Pauls warns:

ἄνδρες, θεωρῶ ὅτι μετὰ ὕβρεως καὶ πολλῆς ζημίας οὐ μόνον τοῦ φορτίου καὶ τοῦ πλοίου ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν μέλλειν ἔσεσθαι τὸν πλοῦν.

And when nobody listens (27.21):

ὁ Παῦλος ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν εἶπεν· ἔδει μὲν, ὦ ἄνδρες, πειθαρχήσαντάς μοι μὴ ἀνάγεσθαι ἀπὸ τῆς Κρήτης κερδήσαι τε τὴν ὕβριν ταύτην καὶ τὴν ζημίαν.

This classic “I told you so” moment, seemingly small in itself, is another illustration of Luke’s willingness to gently satirise his hero as a talker.

¹ Pervo, *Acts*, 487, footnote 15.

2.5. The Eutychus Episode

The Eutychus episode (Acts 20.7-12) is the most important example of a comedy episode in Acts outside of the speech that forms the main focus of this chapter. In it, Paul talks for so long that even though the room is well lit, a boy falls asleep and topples from a third story window.

Dibelius, who can see the humour, does not like it; he comments on its “secular” nature and attributes it to a source. Nonetheless he says: “Although the room was brightly lit the boy fell asleep: the length of the speech was the reason!”¹

For Dibelius, the episode is too irreligious for Luke to have written, but not so heathen that he could not include it. One wonders that an author might be ambivalent enough to insert passages he would not deign to create, especially when they are not fundamental to the plot.

This reluctance sometimes verges on the incredible. Tannehill, for example, notes that “the sparse narrative style of most biblical narrative does not encourage irrelevant details, yet the significance of the lamps is not indicated,” and goes on to advocate a symbolic reading of the episode in which “the world of breaking bread is a world of abundant light. When Eutychus falls asleep, he falls into a place of death and darkness.”² In any other context, a boy listening to a long talk in a well-lit room, and yet falling asleep, presents perfectly evident meanings for the talk and the lamps – symbolism not required; but in the biblical setting the significance is better explained as mystical than humorous.

¹ Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 18.

² Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts. A Literary Interpretation: volume two: The Acts of the Apostles*, 249.

The warning signs are certainly present that this is a comedy scene: Εὐτυχος means “good fortune,” for one thing, and yet only Pervo comments on this. His footnote says “Εὐτυχος (“lucky”) was probably a common servile name.”¹

But since the boy escaped death by the narrowest of margins, the name seems oddly apt for a strict historical report. In “Humour in Names,” Radday makes certain observations about the way Hebrew authors use names:

One of the reasons why the humorous implication in a person’s name occurring in the Bible is so frequently overlooked by scholars is that the narrators themselves poker-facedly never let us sense that they were not speaking in earnest, which is, after all, one of the components of good humour.²

The other signs of comedy have already been noted – Paul prolongs his talk until midnight, and more telling, the room was (explicitly) well- lit. But this is not all. It is the end of the scene that really makes it amusing:

ἀναβὰς δὲ καὶ κλάσας τὸν ἄρτον καὶ γευσάμενος ἐφ’ ἱκανόν τε ὁμιλήσας ἄχρι αὐγῆς, οὕτως ἐξῆλθεν.¹² ἤγαγον δὲ τὸν παῖδα ζῶντα καὶ παρεκλήθησαν οὐ μετρίως.³

After the possible miracle, Paul returns to the upper room and continues the talk until dawn.

One can read what follows in two or perhaps even three ways.

¹ Pervo, *Acts*, 510.

² Yehuda T. Radday, “Humour in Names,” in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 66.

³ Acts 20.11-12

1. Paul left, and then the disciples left. When this happened they were very much comforted to know that the boy was alive.
2. Paul left. They left, and were much relieved. Also, the boy was alive.
3. Paul left. They left. The boy was alive. All this was very comforting.

This technique is called syllepsis, and is employed in ancient literature. Daniel Selden describes an example from Apuleius:

A young adulterer pays a visit to the wife of a day labourer who is temporarily off work. Suddenly the husband returns: what are they to do? The woman hides her lover in an old crock stashed in the corner of the bedroom, but when the husband enters, he goes immediately to fetch the tub, which he has arranged to sell for six denarii. His wife berates him for his lack of business sense: she, a mere woman, has not only found someone who will buy the crock at seven, but the man is already down inside the jar inspecting its insides. The husband is delighted to see a prospect for financial gain and, when the lover emerges to complain that the tub is caked with grime, he jumps into the crock to clean it. Now the wife leans across the vessel and, as her lover has his way with her outside, she directs her husband where to scrape the dirt within. With both jobs finished, the young man pays his money and the husband is enlisted to cart the old jar to his rival's home.¹

¹ Daniel Selden, "Genre of Genre" in *The search for the ancient novel*, ed. James Tatum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 47–48, quoting Apuleius, *Asinus aureus* 9.5–7.

The comedy in this episode comes from the opposition of two orders of logic, which were “diametrically opposed in the Roman mind;” that of the “good housewife” and the “artful adulteress.”¹ Selden observes that:

Her actions are entirely legible within both plots until, spread over the tub between her husband and her lover, it is no longer possible to tell to which scenario her posturing belongs: “she kept pointing out with her finger spots to be rubbed, saying, ‘There... here... there... there’”²

The presence of this device in the Eutychus episode is also clear from the word “οὕτως” in verse 11, which is the only example in the New Testament of “the classical liberty to use ‘οὕτως’ (‘so,’ ‘thus’) to summarize the content of a preceding participial construction.”³ Immediately there is the indication of a step into another stratosphere of language, a hint of a parodic construction. Mikhail Bakhtin comments more generally on the use of subordinate conjunctions:

Pseudo-objective motivation is generally characteristic of novel style, since it is one of the manifold forms for concealing another’s speech in hybrid constructions. Subordinate conjunctions and link words (“thus,” “because,” “for the reason that,” “in spite of” and so forth), as well as words used to maintain a logical sequence

¹ Selden, “Genre of Genre” 48.

² Selden, “Genre of Genre,” 48.

³ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 503.

("therefore," "consequently," etc.) lose their direct authorial intention, take on the flavour of someone else's language, become refracted or even completely reified."¹

The accumulation of the boy's name, the focus on how well lit the room was and how long Paul talked for, the syllepsis, and the hint of pseudo-objective motivation (the biblical poker face), all suggest this interpretation of the Eutychus episode. It seems unlikely that the ancient reader, accustomed to all of these techniques as he was, could have missed them. In term of intentionality, the craft in the syllepsis suggests of itself that the author knew precisely what he was doing.

At this point in the discussion then, there are many incidents of potential comedic value. These provide a context for humour in the narrative generally and more specifically for the series of episodes that occur from 19.11 (the Sons of Sceva), which includes several of the most obviously comic moments, including the riot at Ephesus (19.21-40) and 20.7-12 (Eutychus). The only non-comic passage in this sequence is the summary travelogue in 20.1-6. After this comes the Miletus speech, which forms the main subject of this chapter.

3. The Problem of the Miletus Speech: Acts 20.17-38

The speech to the Ephesian Elders at Miletus is an important and unusual speech in the New Testament, and the only example in Acts of Paul giving a speech not to potential converts but to established believers. As such, it supposedly offers a unique insight into the life of the early church, and into Paul's perspective on how the elders of a church should conduct themselves.

¹ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 305.

Interpretation of the speech has never been straightforward, however, and biblical scholarship has struggled with a number of issues (which will be reviewed shortly). In this chapter I want to suggest that these difficulties arise from a failure to recognise the speech's character as a gentle parody of Pauline style.

In the Preliminaries I discussed the question of the Pauline corpus as a source for Acts,¹ and this speech forms one of the key foci for this debate. Steve Walton is one of those scholars who assume from this speech alone that Luke could not have been reliant upon the letters of Paul.² C.K. Barrett supposes that the overlap in terms of historical information and Pauline character/style between Acts and the letters does not come from Luke's use of the epistles, but from another source, with the result being that Acts and the letters largely verify each other, and it is in his essay on this speech that such ideas come to the fore:

These coincidences are the more important if we allow, as it seems that we must, that Luke had not read the letters left by Paul, for they mean not only that Luke had taken the trouble to inform himself on the themes on which he was writing but also that the tradition about Paul that continued to circulate after his death was by no means inaccurate.³

Lack of theological content is another interpretative difficulty. Haenchen observes that "the speech does not have the task of conveying theology at all – apart from the fact that Paul

¹ 30-35.

² Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 212.

³ Charles Kingsley Barrett, "Paul's address to the Ephesian Elders," in *God's Christ and his people: studies in honour of Nils Alstrup Dahl*, ed. Nils Alstrup. Dahl, Jacob. Jervell, and Wayne A. Meeks (Oslo: Universitetsforl., 1977), 117.

himself is presented for imitation.”¹ It must be admitted that he is more-or-less correct. Other than 20.21, where the Gospel is recapped in very basic terms: “διαμαρτυρόμενος Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἑλλήσιν τὴν εἰς θεὸν μετάνοιαν καὶ πίστιν εἰς τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν,” theology is largely absent from the speech. Paul predicts his own death, declares his innocence, warns against future problems, and commends the Ephesian elders to God. A saying of Jesus found nowhere else in the New Testament completes the speech, but that proverb is a common Hellenistic one (it appears in Thucydides 2.97.4), and not theologically valuable.

The lack of a clear structure is also a problem, and one so acute that Walton lists more than twenty scholars’ outlines.² He himself finds a considerable number of themes, including “Faithful fulfilment of leadership responsibility,” “Suffering,” “Attitude to wealth and work” and “The death of Jesus;” added to which are retrospective and prospective elements, and “The Charge to the Elders.”³ Marion Soards breaks the speech up into “Paul’s recalling of His Asian Ministry,” “Words about the Future,” “Information for the Ephesian Elders,” and “Concluding Blessing and Admonition,” with two to three subsections for each.⁴ Both analyses reveal the arbitrary shifting about that this speech seems to do. This rapid changing of subject is quite unusual,⁵ and makes any search for structure intrinsically awkward. Haenchen thinks the number of themes “gives the impression of a long address,” when in fact it is not one of the longer examples in Acts.⁶

A third difficulty arises from Paul’s wont of modesty in this speech. There is obvious potential for inappropriateness in any first person encomium for inappropriateness, but the immodesty of this particular speech is particularly pronounced. Parallels have been cited by

¹ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 597.

² Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 66-67.

³ Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 76-93.

⁴ Soards, *The speeches in Acts*, 105.

⁵ Marion L. Soards, *The speeches in Acts* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994), 105; Haenchen, *Acts*, 596; Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 71.

⁶ Haenchen, *Acts*, 595.

both Walton and Francis Watson, but these parallels, which are explored below, are simply not applicable when scrutinised in any detail. Scholars have handled the issue of immodesty in several ways. Both Dibelius and Haenchen think that Luke essentially sacrifices characterisation in view of the need to give Paul such an encomium:

Dibelius:

We can see that Luke would also like to provide the apostle with an encomium of the kind that biographies are wont to give their heroes.¹

Haenchen:

The strangeness disappears if one recognizes [...] that this speech is not Paul's self-attestation at all, but only acquires its true meaning as Luke's witness about him.²

Another approach is to simply minimise the immodest aspect. Beverly Roberts-Gaventa goes to great lengths to achieve this, and the result is this: "Put succinctly, the Paul who takes leave of the Ephesian elders offers himself less as the church's hero, a model to be emulated for his own behaviour, than as an instantiation of God's own will."³ The irony of such a statement serves only to highlight the difficulty of this approach. The question, however, is not whether the immodesty of the speech is inappropriate to the modern reader, but to the ancient one; this is a subject that will be explored below.

¹ Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 155.

² Haenchen, *Acts*, 596; Gaventa, "Miletus Speech," 45, "it is not his work alone but that of the entire Christian witness"; Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 517; "The speech takes no pains to conceal its origin in the post-Pauline era".

³ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Theology and Ecclesiology in the Miletus Speech: Reflections on Content and Context," *NTS* 50, no. 1 (2004): 46.

4. An Analysis of the Speech

4.1. Talking

Though I do not intend to provide a rhetorical structure for the speech, I nonetheless want to begin by presenting my own verse division. The speech covers eighteen verses: 20.18-35; breaking them up in the following way can account for fifteen of them:

Paul on Himself: 18, 19, 20, 22-3, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35.

Paul on Talking: 20, 21, 27, 31.

Paul on his own talking: 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, 31.

This analysis leaves only verses 28-30, which means that over 80% of the speech is dedicated to these three themes – Paul talking about talking, talking about himself, and talking about his own talking. While it is difficult to know how the Ancients perceived a man overly fond of talking, there is some evidence to suggest that such behaviour bordered on inappropriate, and could be a source of humour. In his influential and humorous character sketches, Theophrastus includes the following among the traits of “The Talker:”

*He knows all about it, and that, if they listen to him, they will learn; when people say they must go, he keeps them company and delivers them home. [...]When people say that they are going, he loves to escort them, and to see them safe into their houses.*¹

¹ Theophrastus, *Characters*, ed. James Diggle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 89.

Similarly, but much more contemporaneously, Lucian of Samosata's *Rhetorum Praeceptor* advises that:

the tongue is an unruly member; do not attempt to rule it; never care whether your firstly is logics firstly, or your secondly and thirdly in the right order; just say what comes; you may greave your head and helmet your legs, but whatever you do, move, keep going, never pause (18).

Lucian appears to satirise not only loquaciousness itself, but also structural deficits – both of which are apparent in this speech. A second century Greek satirist then, feels able to make a joke of these elements.

Paul's ability to talk is voiced almost from the outset of his characterisation, when immediately after his conversion he begins arguing with the Jews about Jesus in 9.20. There is no suggestion of comedy here, but the Lukan Paul is always loquacious. In the Lystra episode (14.8-20) Paul finds himself mistaken not for Zeus, but for Hermes – this despite there being no suggestion in the narrative that he is anything less than the equal of Barnabas. In fact, the reason for the mistake is that he is “ὁ ἡγούμενος τοῦ λόγου.” There are other moments that hint of talking-related comedy too. The Eutychus incident, explored below, has long considered awkward for this reason. And there is the riot of Ephesus, where Paul is desperate to rush in and talk everyone into behaving themselves, and is prevented from doing so by the Asiarachs. The interesting question is how these figures knew that Paul intended to burst in. Commentators highlight various difficulties. Haenchen says: “The text presupposes that the Asiarachs, and indeed every one of them, have no sooner heard about

the riot than they immediately think about Paul and send him a warning note!"¹ Pervo wonders what Paul could possibly have said that would be helpful.² In an interpretation that sees the riot as entirely serious, such questions are valid and suggest the narrative is deficient; on a comedy interpretation, they become amusing elements of Paul's enthusiasm for an opportunity to wax lyrical.

4.2. Immodesty

We have already observed that the issue of immodesty is one that challenges some commentators. Examples include "δουλεύων τῷ κυρίῳ μετὰ πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης (v19)," "ὡς οὐδὲν ὑπεστειλάμην τῶν συμφερόντων τοῦ μὴ ἀναγγεῖλαι ὑμῖν (20)," and "ἀλλ' οὐδενὸς λόγου ποιῶμαι τὴν ψυχὴν τιμίαν ἐμαυτῷ (24)" to name but a few.

Another of Theophrastus' characters, "the Boastful man," is described in the following fashion:

And he will claim that during the food shortage he spent more than five talents on handouts to destitute citizens – he just could not say no. When he finds himself sitting next to complete strangers he will ask one of them to work the calculator, and then he does an addition, counting from the thousand-drachma to the one-drachma column, and putting a plausible name to each item, and reaches as much as ten talents, and says that these are the sums he has contributed towards loans for friends – and he has not included the trierarchies all his other compulsory public services.³

¹ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 574.

² Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 495.

³ Theophrastus, *Characters*, 132-133.

This description is dangerously close to Paul's comments at times, and suggests that such comments are open to satire. Of course, Theophrastus, while influential, pre-dates Paul by some centuries. Evidence of Greek views on modesty in Paul's own period is not particularly rare. The Hellenophile and influential rhetor Cicero, for example, says:

My belief is that, even the best speakers, even those who have the best language at their command, unless they rise to speak with some misgivings, and feel some nervousness in their Exordium are wanting, if I may say so, in proper modesty¹

After this, Cicero says of the extreme modesty of Crassus that it: "far from being a drawback to his eloquence was really a help to it, being a testimony of his sincerity."² Finally, in a letter to Luceius in which he wishes to persuade the addressee to write a monograph about him he states:

But if I fail to obtain my request from you, [...] I shall perhaps be forced to do what certain persons have often found fault with, write my own panegyric, a thing, after all, which has a precedent of many illustrious men. But it will not escape your notice that there are the following drawbacks in a composition of that sort: men are bound, when writing of themselves, both to speak with greater reserve of what is praiseworthy, and to omit what calls for blame. Added to which such writing carries less conviction, less weight; many people, in fine, carp at it, and say that the heralds at the public games are more modest, for after having placed garlands on the other recipients and proclaimed their names in a loud voice, when their own turn comes

¹ De Oratore 1.26.119

² De Oratore 1.37.122

to be presented with a garland before the games break up, they call in the services of another herald, that they may not declare themselves victors with their own voice.¹

This is exactly the sort of discussion of writing one's own encomium that we would expect to find if my hypothesis is correct. It demonstrates that the practice does occur, but is awkward, and forces one to play certain facts down in the name of modesty. It places it in the sort of sphere most liable to be parodied.

Lucian of Samosata can be relied upon to take it that one step further. He depicts the protagonist of the *Rhaetorum Praetor* as constantly singing his own praises (e.g. 21). This "guide to the easy road" is clearly an object of satire, whose arrogance is a central theme of his characterisation.²

There are also parallels in the Jewish milieu. In 1.3-6, Tobit waxes lyrical about his bravery and exploits, his steadfastness when all others scattered, placing particular emphasis on his travelling alone to working in Jerusalem. The speech, which sees "παῖς" appear eight times in three verses, turns out to be less than strictly accurate: "I know Ananias and Nathan, the two sons of the great Shemaiah. They used to go to Jerusalem with me; we have worshipped together there and they have never strayed from the right path (5.14)."³ It is the issue of modesty though, which McCracken thinks most awkward:

¹ http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Letters_to_friends/5.12. Last accessed 25-09-2011.

² Jennifer Hall, *Lucian's satire*, Monographs in classical studies (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 252–273.

³ McCracken, "Tobit," 409.

When a paragon speaks in his own voice and asserts repeatedly that he is a paragon – indeed, the one and only paragon among his people – we have a potential difficulty: Must a paragon be modest to be a paragon?¹

McCracken goes on to provide a convincing analysis of *The Book of Tobit* as a comedy and in doing so gives an example of a similar style of satire in the same literary milieu, which was available to a similar audience (Diasporic Jews) in the same period.

Luke's depiction of Paul might be considered unfair, but as Haenchen has observed, such immodesty does occur rather frequently in the Pauline letters. He cites 1 Cor. 4.16 and 11.1; Gal. 4.12; 2 Cor. 3.1;² but this is far from exhaustive; he misses for example, Philippians 3.17 and 2Thess 3.7. There are other examples, such as Philippians 3.4-6, 1 Cor 3.10, 15.10, and 2 Cor 11.21-29, of his singing his own praises. Paul's talk of supporting himself is another form of boasting, and becomes an explicit part of the speech in verses 33-34. One of his favourite topics, examples include 1 Cor. 4.12, 9.6; 2 Cor. 6.5, 11.9, 27, 12.13; Eph. 4.28; 1 Thess. 2.8, 4.9-12, 5.12-14; and 2 Thess. 3.7-10. Given this rather large body of immodest moments and the social stigma attached to such statements, it is little wonder that they find themselves the object of parody.

4.3. Rhetoric

The rhetoric of the speech is spectacular and has been hailed by many. In the opinion of rhetorical critic George A. Kennedy, it is "the most personal of the Apostle's discourses in

¹ McCracken, "Tobit," 407.

² Haenchen, *Acts*, 596.

Acts and the finest.”¹ It appeals to pathos and ethos throughout, and contains hyperbole (δημοσία καὶ κατ’οἴκου), repetition, epibole, synonymy (a form of amplification by repetition), paronomasia, an enthymeme, exemplification, and a maxim.

4.3.1. Repetition

Marion Soards breaks down the various repeated words and phrases as follows:²

Appeals to the knowledge of the audience:

ὕμεῖς ἐπίστασθε (18)

διὸ γρηγορεῖτε μνημονεύοντες (31)

αὐτοὶ γινώσκετε (34)

Lack of hesitation in preaching:

ὥς οὐδὲν ὑπεστειλάμην τῶν συμφερόντων (20)

οὐ γὰρ ὑπεστειλάμην (27)

The use of the verb διαμαρτύρομαι:

διαμαρτυρόμενος (21)

διαμαρτύρεται (23)

διαμαρτύρασθαι (24)

The words: Καὶ νῦν (22, 25)

¹ George Alexander Kennedy, *New Testament interpretation through rhetorical criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 133.

² Soards, *The speeches in Acts*, 106-108.

The words: τῆς χάριτος (24,32)

The words: ἐγὼ οἶδα (25, 29)

Soards is not comprehensive in this analysis; other repetitions include πᾶς, which features eight times, though it is unmentioned by Soards. This multi-repetition of the adjective parallels Tobit's speech (discussed above). The verb μαρτύρομαι (26) can be added to διαμαρτύρομαι, above, giving four instances in as many verses; ἰδοὺ must be added to the two instances of Καὶ νῦν, and there is Καὶ τὰ νῦν in verse 32; the lack of hesitation about preaching goes on in both instances to add τοῦ μὴ ἀναγγεῖλαι.

Some of these repetitions are connected – “you yourselves (appeal to the knowledge of the audience)” and “I myself know” make a five-fold repetition. Add to this the uses of “ἐγὼ οἶδα”, and there are seven references to knowledge using personal pronoun for emphasis. The four-fold mention of witnessing combined with the two “I have not hesitated to tell you” equate to six references of this sort, five of which refer to Paul's eagerness to share with the Ephesians.

C.K. Barrett thinks the speech is “formless and repetitious,”¹ but comedy makes good use of repetition: in this speech Luke's literary artistry does not simply disappear but turns toward humour with results that were probably highly successful.

One might object at this point that the Areopagus speech employs at least a fair number of these techniques, but here they are entirely appropriate to the setting, and used with very different results. Like the Miletus speech it employs πᾶς eight times in a similarly compressed space:

¹ Barrett, “Speech,” 110.

Athens

1. **17:22** κατὰ πάντα ὡς δεισιδαιμονεστέρους ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ
2. **17:24** ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ,
3. **17:25** αὐτὸς διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν
4. **17:25** καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα·
5. **17:26** ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν
6. **17:26** κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου τῆς γῆς,
7. **17:30** παραγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν,
8. **17:31** πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν ἀναστήσας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν.

When it comes to the Miletus speech, certain differences in approach become evident:

Miletus

1. **20.18** πῶς μεθ' ὑμῶν τὸν πάντα χρόνον ἐγενόμην
2. **20.19** δουλεύων τῷ κυρίῳ μετὰ πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης
3. **20.25** οὐκέτι ὄψεσθε τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ὑμεῖς πάντες ἐν οἷς διήλθον κηρύσσων
4. **20.26** ὅτι καθαρὸς εἰμι ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος πάντων·
5. **20.27** οὐ γὰρ ὑπεστειλάμην τοῦ μὴ ἀναγγεῖλαι πᾶσαν τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θεοῦ ὑμῖν.
6. **20.28** προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς καὶ παντὶ τῷ ποιμνίῳ,
7. **20.32** καὶ δοῦναι τὴν κληρονομίαν ἐν τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις πᾶσιν.
8. **20.35** πάντα ὑπέδειξα ὑμῖν ὅτι οὕτως κοπιῶντας

Some of these are amusing even taken in isolation; combined, they clearly represent overplayed rhetoric.

Another key repetition comes from an example of inflection. In Athens, Paul uses “θεός” in all cases within a few verses, emphasising “God” in combination with “all” which emphasises the main theme of the speech: God’s reaching out to all nations. In Miletus, the inflection comes from the first person personal pronoun, which appears twelve times in total, with all four cases represented in verses 23-25. Again the clear emphasis appears to be on self. One might even say the speech is all “me me me.”

4.3.2. Pathos

Pathos is fundamental to the art of the ancient rhetor, and Paul certainly makes use of it.

The Miletus speech is loaded with appeals to pathos, including:

- Verse 19: δουλεύων τῷ κυρίῳ μετὰ πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ πολλῶν δακρύων καὶ πειρασμῶν τῶν συμβάντων μοι ἐν ταῖς ἐπιβουλαῖς τῶν Ἰουδαίων
- Verses 22-24a: Καὶ νῦν ἰδοὺ δεδεμένος ἐγὼ τῷ πνεύματι πορεύομαι εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ συναντήσοντά μοι μὴ εἰδώς, πλήν ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον κατὰ πόλιν διαμαρτύρεταί μοι λέγον ὅτι δεσμὰ καὶ θλίψεις με μένουσιν. ἀλλ’ οὐδενὸς λόγου ποιοῦμαι τὴν ψυχὴν τιμίαν ἐμαυτῷ
- Verse 25: Καὶ νῦν ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ οἶδα ὅτι οὐκέτι ὄψεσθε τὸ πρόσωπόν μου
- Verse 31: ὅτι τριετίαν νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν οὐκ ἐπαυσάμην μετὰ δακρύων νουθετῶν ἕνα ἕκαστον.

It almost seems that Paul is following the advice of the guide to the easy road, who urges his disciple to: “Appeal constantly to the pathetic instinct, smite your thigh, mouth your words well, punctuate with loud sighs (*Rhetorum Praetor* 19).”

But once again, if it is true in this speech, it is true in the letters, where such appeals are a commonplace. Examples include: Rom. 15.30-31; 1 Cor. 5.11-16; 9.15, 19; 2 Cor. 2.4, 4.7-18, 7.2-7; Eph. 3.1-13; Philip. 1.12-26, 4.10-17; Col. 1.24-29, 4.4, 18; 1 Thess. 1.7-12; 2 Tim. 4.6-8. Taken individually, it is fair to say that no letter, except perhaps 1Cor. overuses the device; but taken as a corpus Paul's appeal to pathos begins to look a little unfortunate in its regularity.

4.3.3. Flowery Phrases

Repetition is not the only strongly pronounced rhetorical feature in this speech. Other Pauline turns of phrase abound throughout, and it is worth a brief look at this here. Barrett's thinks the parallels are close, but not close enough to be convincing:

Luke uses words that are superficially Pauline, but improbably represent words that Paul actually used. They are significant as the (by no means misleading, except to a somewhat pedantic reading) deposit of Paulinism that permeated to the next generation.¹

Verse 19 is a good example of the flowery language in question:

δουλεύων τῷ κυρίῳ μετὰ πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ δακρύων καὶ πειρασμῶν τῶν συμβάντων μοι ἐν ταῖς ἐπιβουλαῖς τῶν Ἰουδαίων.

Hans Conzelmann's note on this verse states:

¹ Barrett, "Speech," 112.

This verse sketches the picture of Paul as he should always be remembered. Flowery phrases from ecclesiastical language are woven into the speech: δουλεύειν κτλ., “serving, etc.,” compare 1 Thess 1:9-10; Col 3:24; Eph 6:7; μετὰ δακρύων, “with tears,” compare vs 31 and 2 Cor 2:4 (these are in part from popular rhetoric: μετὰ πάσης, “with all,” cf. 4:29: 17:11; Eph 4:2).¹

His references are rather a lot to work through, but worth doing. 1 Thess, 1.9-10, Col. 3.24 and Eph. 6.7 merely have Paul using δουλεύειν in reference to what his audience are or should do; there are at least another twenty in the Pauline corpus (disputed letters included). 2 Cor 2.4 is more instructive: “ἐκ γὰρ πολλῆς θλίψεως καὶ συνοχῆς καρδίας ἔγραψα ὑμῖν διὰ πολλῶν δακρύων, οὐχ ἵνα λυπηθῆτε ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀγάπην ἵνα γνῶτε ἣν ἔχω περισσοτέρως εἰς ὑμᾶς.” This is an emotive verse in an emotive passage, and as Conzelmann says, from popular rhetoric. Paul’s twofold use of it in this speech is not only suggestive of the popular rhetor, but, combined with δουλεύειν, reminds the audience of Paul’s overzealous style. μετὰ πάσης is not very regular in Paul (five examples), but is a rhetorical flourish. Thus the whole verse combines Pauline parallels with popular rhetoric in the construction of a flowery sentence, and appears to be a rather crude attempt to praise his own ethos both explicitly and through a clever turn of phrase.

There are other flowery phrases that are more strikingly parodic of Pauline language. Verse 24 “τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ” does not exist in the Pauline corpus, but amalgamates “τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ,” and “τὸ εὐαγγέλιον [τῆς] θεοῦ,” both of which are quite common. Thus it embellishes and exaggerates regular phrases in Pauline rhetoric while reducing clarity.

¹ Conzelmann, *Acts*, 173.

Likewise, Καὶ τὰ νῦν παρατίθεμαι ὑμᾶς τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ λόγῳ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ, might sound Pauline, but is more complex and less coherent than similar phrases in the Pauline corpus. Ephesians, for example, uses τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ several times (1.6, 7, 2.7, 3.7), but with “glory,” “riches,” and “gift,” all of which are more intelligible than “word”. The whole verse sounds very good, but cannot be said to mean anything: the NIV translates it as: “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace.” In fact, the whole of verse 32 is suspect. In full it reads:

Καὶ τὰ νῦν παρατίθεμαι ὑμᾶς τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ λόγῳ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ, τῷ δυναμένῳ οἰκοδομῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν κληρονομίαν ἐν τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις πᾶσιν.

Neither half of this verse is easy to interpret, and their location together only compounds the problem. Pervo has to translate it as “finally, I entrust you all to the gracious message of God, which has the power to build you up and give you what is in store for all of God’s own.” To translate τῷ λόγῳ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ as “his gracious message” is at best a paraphrase, and yet, given such direction the phrase becomes singularly unimpressive, giving the lie to its elaborate veneer. The same could be said of “what is in store for all of God’s own,” which needs to be paraphrased in this fashion to make any sense at all.

“οὐ γὰρ ὑπεσσευλάμην τοῦ μὴ ἀναγγεῖλαι” in verse 20, and verse 27, where the same phrase occurs with the addition of “πᾶσαν τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θεοῦ ὑμῖν,” are also elusive in terms of purpose. The former reports that Paul told them absolutely everything he could think of, while the latter is flagrantly immodest.

Barrett describes verse 21: “διαμαρτυρόμενος Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἕλλησιν τὴν εἰς θεὸν μετάνοιαν καὶ πίστιν εἰς τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν” as “only superficially Pauline [...] a

subjectivised version of Paulinism.”¹ “ἦν περιποιήσατο διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου” is again close to Paul (Rom.8.32, Heb. 9.12), but is more elaborate and ambiguous than the instances elsewhere. Famously difficult, commentators have struggled to understand it for so long that it has undergone some adjustment from the scribes.² Parody by its nature has to sound like the person or genre being parodied – otherwise it is not a parody at all. But it has to take the language to a further extreme in order to attain the humour. That is exactly what happens with these phrases.

4.4. The Conclusion to the speech

Scholars have occasionally noticed that the conclusion to the speech is not as appropriate to its context as it might be:

³⁴ αὐτοὶ γινώσκετε ὅτι ταῖς χρεῖαις μου καὶ τοῖς οὖσιν μετ’ ἐμοῦ ὑπηρέτησαν αἱ χεῖρες αὐταί. ³⁵ πάντα ὑπέδειξα ὑμῖν ὅτι οὕτως κοπιῶντας δεῖ ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι τῶν ἀσθενούντων, μνημονεύειν τε τῶν λόγων τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ὅτι αὐτὸς εἶπεν· μακάριόν ἐστιν μᾶλλον διδόναι ἢ λαμβάνειν.³

Verse 35 does not easily refer back to the singular object of providing for oneself, but seems to refer instead to the entire speech. This is because of πάντα ὑπέδειξα, which cannot be considered to naturally restrict itself to the previous verse (αὐτοὶ γινώσκετε ὅτι ταῖς χρεῖαις μου καὶ τοῖς οὖσιν μετ’ ἐμοῦ ὑπηρέτησαν αἱ χεῖρες αὐταί) because it requires plural objects,

¹ C. K. (Charles Kingsley) Barrett, *Acts*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 969.

² Bruce Manning Metzger, *A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament: a companion volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (fourth revised edition)*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 480–481.

³ 20.34-35.

and a good number of them at that. Given also its location at the end of the speech in which Paul refers largely to himself, the phrase “in all things I have shown you” would most naturally refer back to the whole. However, if this is the case, “κοπιῶντας δεῖ ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι τῶν ἀσθενούντων” does not seem to adequately summarise, and neither does “μακάριόν ἐστιν μᾶλλον διδόναι ἢ λαμβάνειν.”

The lack of connection between the conclusion and the rest of the speech is usually resolved in one of two ways. Haenchen simply accepts that the connection is “not very close.”¹ Walton supplies a middle term to connect the conclusion more strongly to verse 34: “The elders should be self-supporting so that they too can care for others.”²

Another ambiguity comes from Walton’s observation that τῶν ἀσθενούντων may refer not only to the sick and the weak, but also to the morally imperfect or “ethically weak.”³ The relevance of the Jesus maxim also being an issue, it is worth asking how these final two verses cohere with the rest of the speech. It is rather striking that there is one reading that appears to make sense:

By all of these things (that I have said) I have shown you that it is necessary to work hard to help the morally imperfect, and to remember the words that the Lord Jesus himself said: “it is more blessed to give (the benefit of my wisdom) than to receive (listen).”

¹ Haenchen, *the Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 594.

² Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 84; Barrett, “Speech,” 116; Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 528; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 176.

³ Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 171.

Here is an example of the syllepsis observed both in Apuleius and the Eutyclus episode.¹

5. Some Parallels

5.1. A Similar Episode in Acts

There is one other speech-related incident in Acts that might be relevant in this context.

Tertullus' speech in 24.2-8 is a little odd. Mikeal C. Parsons in particular has noticed several difficult aspects. Firstly, Tertullus flatters Felix rather heavily, dragging out the Exordium for rather too long in a speech that then promises brevity (ἵνα δὲ μὴ ἐπὶ πλεῖόν σε ἐγκόπτω, 24.4).² The speech also concludes rather lamely,³ giving the impression that it is all rhetoric and no content. Quintilian criticizes speeches in which the Exordium exceeds its proper place, and Plutarch warns against flatterers.⁴ More troublesome for Tertullus though, is that his praise of Felix is manifestly inaccurate. In his annals Tacitus reports a praiseworthy incident involving Marcus Antonius Pallas before adding:

Not equally moderate was his brother, surnamed Felix, who had for some time been governor of Judaea, and thought that he could do any evil act with impunity, backed up as he was by such power. It is true that the Jews had shown symptoms of commotion in a seditious outbreak, and when they had heard of the assassination of Caius, there was no hearty submission, as a fear still lingered that any of the emperors might impose the same orders. Felix meanwhile, by ill-timed remedies,

¹ 247-251.

² Parsons, *Acts*, 324.

³ Parsons, *Acts*, 324; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: the Greek text* (London: Tyndale Press, 1952), 467.

⁴ Parsons, *Acts*, 324–325.

stimulated disloyal acts; while he had, as a rival in the worst wickedness, Ventidius Cumanus[...]¹

There is also evidence within Acts, when the narrator reports:

ἄμα καὶ ἐλπίζων ὅτι χρήματα δοθήσεται αὐτῷ ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου· διὸ καὶ πυκνότερον αὐτὸν μεταπεμπόμενος ὠμίλει αὐτῷ.²⁷ Διετίας δὲ πληρωθείσης ἔλαβεν διάδοχον ὁ Φῆλιξ Πόρκιον Φῆστον, θέλων τε χάριτα καταθέσθαι τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὁ Φῆλιξ κατέλιπε τὸν Παῦλον δεδεμένον.²

These difficulties point in the direction of humour, satire, and importantly, the characterisation of Tertullus as one who is happy to be blatantly dishonest in his excessive flattery of a man who had a dubious reputation at best. The use of a speech to add humour and characterisation at this point demonstrate that Luke is capable of refracting his own intentions across the voice of a character who is employing rhetoric.

5.2. Parallels in the wider Milieu

Having explored the speech's internal problems, offered an alternative approach, and demonstrating that the alternative has precedents in Acts, it is now necessary to look at the wider literature to see what parallels are to be found. The first issue is whether there are any other extant first person encomiastic speeches, and if so, what form they might take.

¹ 12.54

² Acts 24.26-27

Watson has suggested that such examples do exist in the ancient world, but offers no examples, referring instead to Theodore Burgess, who offers two: Dio Cassius and Arrian.¹

5.2.1. Dio Cassius and Pompey (*Roman History* 36)

Dio Cassius' speech by Pompey in his *Roman History* is epideictic and in the first person. It is the part of the history that deals with his appointment as General against the pirates:

Do you not recall how many hardships I underwent in the war against Cinna, though I was the veriest youth, and how many labours in Sicily and in Africa before I had as yet come fully of age, or how many dangers I encountered in Spain before I was even a senator?²

Though this looks like a first-person encomium, the context of the speech is interesting. This is how Dio Cassius introduces Pompey's speech:

Pompey [...]desired to appear forced to accept. He was always in the habit of pretending as far as possible not to desire the things he really wished, and on this occasion did so more than ever, because of the jealousy that would follow, should he of his own accord lay claim to the leadership, and because of the glory, if he should be appointed against his will as the one most worthy to command.³

¹ Theodore C. Burgess, "Epideictic Literature," *Studies in Classical Philology* 3 (1902): 113–126.

² Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 36.25.2

³ *Roman History*, 36.24.5-6

This context problematizes the speech significantly – Dio Cassius is presenting Pompey as disingenuous, and explicitly stating that Pompey wished to pretend that he did not want the role, while actually advertising for the post. One might go further and say that Dio Cassius is actively hostile to Pompey’s appointment, as his treatment of Aulus Gabinius in 36.23.4-5 demonstrates: he devises the scheme which leads to Pompey’s appointment, because he wished to do Pompey a favour, and not for the “common good”, which was not in his thoughts, because he was “a very base fellow.” Dio Cassius therefore portrays Pompey as giving a speech which was good enough to be successful, but which leaves the reader feeling that it is false and insincere, a non-comic parody of a genuine attempt to refuse the post.

5.2.2. Arrian and Alexander (*Anabasis VII*)

This is another speech with clearly epideictic features. Alexander praises the deeds of both his father and himself to his Macedonian troops. Once again however, it has a very definite context. The background is that the Macedonian army, humiliated by Alexander’s perceived slighting of them in favour of the Persians, feel that when he discharges old and unfit soldiers from service, that they should all be allowed to leave. They cause a disturbance, and Alexander, after punishing the worst offenders, gives a speech defending his ethos in respect to them:

I now propose to speak, Macedonians, not with a view to checking your homeward impulse; so far as I am concerned, you may go where you will; but that you may know, if you do so go away, how you have behaved to us, and how we have behaved to you.¹

¹ *Anabasis of Alexander VII.9.1*

But this is just a strategy in what is evidently a deliberative speech, as the conclusion makes plain:

and when you reach home, tell them there that this your King, Alexander, victor over Persians, Medes, Bactrians [...] who in the line of march captured Carmania and the country of the Oreitans; whom, when his fleet had sailed from India to the Persian Sea, you led back again to Susa – tell them, I say, that you deserted him to the care of the wild tribes you had conquered. This, when you declare it, will be, no doubt, glorious among men and pious in the sight of heaven. Begone!¹

These two examples are the only ones cited on the subject of the first person encomium; evidence for the existence of a genre or speech-type of this sort is slim. It is important to remember that people of all epochs are likely to brag a little, and that instances of this will always be found, but speeches that take this line strongly and unambiguously are either rare or simply non-existent.

5.2.3. The Passing of Peregrinus

Ironic or satiric examples, however, are a different matter. Dibelius is reluctant to use Lucian's *Passing of Peregrinus* as a parallel for the Miletus speech:

¹ Anabasis VII.10.5-7

Perhaps we may infer from this that the inclusion in speeches of retrospects such as these is in accordance with tradition (although Lucian's account is coloured by satire)¹

Actually, the parallel is an excellent one. Lucian introduces it with:

You will find the style familiar, of course, as you have often stood near while they were ranting.²

Peregrinus presents himself as the very pinnacle of nature. The climax of the satire is as follows:

These are the two noblest masterpieces that the world has seen—the Olympian Zeus, and Proteus [Peregrinus]; of the one, the creator and artist was Phidias, of the other, Nature. But now this holy image is about to depart from among men to gods, borne on the wings of fire, leaving us bereft." After completing this discourse with copious perspiration, he shed tears in a highly ridiculous way and tore his hair, taking care not to pull very hard;³

¹ Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 155, footnote 42.

² *The passing of Peregrinus*, line 3. <http://www.tertullian.org/rpearce/lucian/peregrinus.htm>. Last accessed 25-09-2011.

³ *The passing of Peregrinus*, line 6. <http://www.tertullian.org/rpearce/lucian/peregrinus.htm>. Last accessed 25-09-2011.

What does this parallel tell us? Lucian was writing about half a century after the latest likely date for Acts, and feels that such speeches are both commonplace and easy targets for satire. We will return to Lucian in 6.

5.2.4. Achilles Tatius and Leucippe

Another good example of an encomium in the first person is in Achilles Tatius, where the heroine, after a series of absurd tribulations, is faced with the prospect of being ravaged and/or tortured:

Do the worst which your malice can suggest; - extend my hands upon the wheel; bare my back to the scourge; burn my body in the fire; smite off my head with the sword; it will be a novel sight to see one weak woman contend against all your tortures, victorious against all! [...] “You little think of how your unblushing cruelty will redound hereafter to my praise; you may kill me in your fury, and my encomium will be this: ‘Leucippe preserved her chastity despite of buccaneers, despite of Chaereas, despite of Sosthenes, and crown of all (for this would be but trifling commendation), she remained chaste despite even of Thersander, more lascivious than the most lustful pirate; and he who could not despoil her of her honour, robbed her of her life.’ [...] I stand before you a feeble woman, naked and alone, having but one proof against sword and fire and scourge. Burn me, if you will; you shall find that there be things over which even the fire is powerless!”

This parallel is difficult to date, but the *Terminus post Quem* is the late second century. The literary type is again far from serious, and the rhetoric again close to Paul’s.

6. Other Parallels and Data

Though not a speech, perhaps the most ancient and important parallel is that of Hector's farewell to Andromache, recently discussed by Dennis R. MacDonald. He suggests that Luke deliberately imitates this popular representation of heroism – so popular in fact, that it has been imitated by Sophocles, Aristophanes (comedically), Plato, Xenophon of Ephesus, Apollonius, Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus, Vergil, Seneca, Ovid, and Silius Italicus, among others.¹ He observes a number of shared motifs:²

- Motif 1: Hero states that he does not know what dangers he must face.
- Motif 2: Hero boasts that he would never shirk his duty.
- Motif 3: Hero warns of disaster after he leaves.
- Motif 4: Hero expresses concern for the freedom of loved ones.
- Motif 5: Hero invokes his gods. "Zeus and you other gods."
- Motif 6: Hero prays that his successors will be like him.
- Motif 7: Hero cites a comparative quotation.
- Motif 8: Hero states his willingness to face his destiny with courage.
- Motif 9: Hero commands his audience to attend to their tasks.
- Conclusion (10): Tearful separation.

The problem here is that *all of the motifs are instituted by the hero*. Luke could have selected other key ideas from the scene, such as the statement that the hero's courage will lead to destruction, the request not to be left without a loved one, or the location at the gates. Instead, Luke places these parallels into Paul's mouth: it is not Luke comparing Paul with Hector, but *Paul comparing Paul with Hector*. Homeric comparisons were extraordinarily

¹ MacDonald, *Does Acts imitate Homer?*, 93.

² MacDonald, *Does Acts imitate Homer?*, 93–97.

common in ancient literature, and they were not always flattering. Lucian depicts Leontichus as attempting to impress his courtesan Hymnis, by depicting himself as Achilles, with only the most token effort at having his servant tell his battle stories for him, in *Dialogues of the Hetaerae* XIII.¹ His attempt at self-glorification is less than successful – it results in Hymnis leaving in disgust.²

Another good example of Homer being used badly by a character who is not intended to come off well is Gryllus, in the work by Plutarch that normally goes under that name. Judith Mossman has recently argued that the *Gryllus*, in which one of crew that was transformed by Circe into a pig is given the power of speech in order to debate with his erstwhile captain, puts Homer into the mouth of the pig in inappropriate ways to demonstrate that the pig is not as learned as he pretends to be.³ For example, at 989e Gryllus refers to seeing Odysseus in his finery on the island of Crete – the trouble is that this particular incident is one that never happened – Odysseus makes up the story while lying to Penelope (*Odyssey* 19. 172-235). At another point in the dialogue:

Gryllus sums up his argument that animal courage is superior to human by using Homeric compound words to illustrate that poetic comparisons indicating courage are made with animals, not with humans. However, the word used for courage (for which there would have been alternatives) is *andreia*, manliness, which rather does away with Gryllus' point.⁴

¹ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/wl4/wl417.htm>. Last accessed 05/08/2011

² I have Nicholas Wilshere of the University of Nottingham to thank for this parallel.

³ In a paper delivered by Dr Mossman at the Playful Plutarch Conference in Oxford in July 2011. See <http://www.classics.ox.ac.uk/plutarch/>. Last accessed 05/08/2011.

⁴ Page 7 of her paper. She cites lines 986F, 987C, 988A (used of the female sphinx) 988B, 988C, 988D, and this passage.

Gryllus also gives examples of brave female animals, but appears to err once more: of the four he mentions, only two, the Crommyonian sow and the Sphinx, are traditionally considered female. The Teumessian vixen (Pausanias 9.19.1) and the Python “seem to have been feminised for the sake of argument.”¹ Dr Mossman makes a good many points of this sort, and demonstrates Plutarch’s placing of Homer in Gryllus’ mouth is one of a number of amusing indications that the pig’s argument is fundamentally flawed. The use of Homer is one part of the pig’s faulty argument, spun into the whole with various clues along the way.

Other, more general information is also available. Rhetoricians, according to Lucy Hall, were pilloried in ancient literature for at least the five centuries prior to Acts, though often for much less pleasant things than Luke parodies here, including dishonesty and debauchery.² Anybody setting themselves up as wise was likely to come in for some ribbing, as the Tavern of the Seven Sages in Pompeii demonstrates in language too explicit to discuss here.³ One might observe also that Lucian feels able to satirise the use of “hackneyed themes and equally trite illustrations:”⁴ no critic seems keen to assert the originality of Acts: 20.28-9:

προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς καὶ παντὶ τῷ ποιμνίῳ, ἐν ᾧ ὑμᾶς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἔθετο ἐπισκόπους ποιμαίνειν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἣν περιεποιήσατο διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου. Εγὼ γὰρ οἶδα τοῦτο, ὅτι εἰσελεύσονται μετὰ τὴν ἄφιξίν μου λύκοι βαρεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς, μὴ φειδόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου.

¹ Mossman, 7.

² Hall, *Lucian’s satire*, 254–255.

³ John R. Clarke, *Looking at laughter: humor, power, and transgression in Roman visual culture, 100 B.C. - A.D. 250* (Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 2007), 125–131.

⁴ Hall, *Lucian’s satire*, 255.

These verses are the only two that do not primarily emphasise Paul in some fashion. If one can reasonably postulate that these verses are parodic, nothing remains to be taken seriously, and the entire speech is left in the realm of comedy.

7. Conclusion

On a serious reading, this speech presents some serious problems and does little to commend itself as a piece of literary art: the same Luke who can write beautifully elsewhere has had some kind of miniature breakdown, suddenly and inexplicably undermining his own characterisation of Paul while not achieving anything particularly special in terms of either theology or coherence. It is an odd speech on this serious reading, and one that has led to considerable confusion.

Read as comedy, the speech comes to life. Here is Paul in the warts and all portrait that is evident in the letters; a portrait his audience were probably aware of, and one that Luke would be unwise to entirely ignore. Instead, he takes the unavoidable but uncomfortable presence of these socially awkward moments from the epistles and turns them into a robust and ribald joke at Paul's expense. Loaded with parodies of Pauline rhetoric, boasting, and references to his zealous loquacity, Luke takes these traits and acknowledges them playfully. By so doing he allows his portrait of Paul to withstand charges of ignoring the clear facts, and yet only makes his Paul more lovable, more human, and more interesting.

The ancient Greek or Roman audience, no matter whom or where they were in the Empire, would have been exposed to rhetoric. It was so common in the ancient world that it could hardly be avoided. The audience would have had a competence in the art that came purely from their routine exposure to public speakers. The rhetoric so thoroughly analysed by biblical scholarship would have been understood intuitively by many normal people in this

environment, and they would have been alive to the subtle humour that is so essential to parody.

Chapter 8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Summary

This thesis has attempted to achieve several objectives related to genre and narrative theory in the book of Acts. In this brief concluding chapter I want to summarise the findings of each chapter before considering them in their mutual relationship.

In the first chapter I described and assessed the most important genre proposals for Acts, covering six possibilities: Apologetic History, Institutional History, Ancient Bios, Historical Monograph, Epic and Novel. Looked at through the eyes of contemporary Acts scholarship, any consensus as to the correct proposal must come at the cost of minimizing the merits of the others. Biblical scholarship has followed what we have called a binary model in their approach to genre, and this type of method has been much challenged by theorists in recent years on a number of grounds. Not only is it inadequate to the task for which it was designed – that is, to classify the genre of Acts – but even if a consensus were reached it would not necessarily help with the interpretation of the text. The chapter therefore argued for a shift in methodological focus from classification to interpretation.

The second chapter explored genre from a theoretical point of view. Looking at the classical roots of the binary model, it was argued that it has more to do with social hierarchy and other ideological systems than with the texts themselves. Concepts such as the popular text, generic hybridity and mutation, ossification, and intertextual dialogue were explored. It was argued that generic change is a constant process, and that stable genres are the exception rather than the rule. It was also observed that the speed of generic mutation has much to do with available literary influences and the speed of social change: the sheer volume of such influences at the time of Acts' composition would have destabilised literature enormously, making it quite natural for Luke to draw on these influences and utilise them as resources for his text.

All of the above factors render the binary model, in which a classification that excludes some genres in preference of one or even a small number of specific genres, an unsound theoretical construct, and certainly not one which is appropriate to the literary environment in which *Acts* was produced. An intertextual model that favours seeing the influence of all available literary influences as possible interpretative tools was proposed in its place.

The model proposed has its origins in cognitive, narrative, and genre theory. It sees prior narratives as establishing systems of conventions that provide readers with frameworks by which to configure texts. Whether intertexts or genres, such frameworks can be used in multiple combinations by an author, who shares a bank of prior narratives with his audience. This allows him to create a sort of narrative map, a system of significations established primarily from known conventions for his audience to follow. Such a model understands the author to have utilised any or all available narratives to construct this framework, and is consequently quite different to the binary model.

In response to the continuing tendency of genre questions to revolve around the historicity (or otherwise) of *Acts*, chapter four attempts a specific answer to that question. Literary theorists have struggled to resolve this problem in the realm of secular literature, primarily because the Gricean model of communication that privileges truth has relegated fiction to “pretend truth,” the consequence of which has been the understanding of fiction as a sub-compartment of serious, factual communication. The result has been a privileging of historical genres (“truth”) over fiction and its rhetorical singularities. The relevance model resolves these difficulties by deprioritising the truth principle in favour of one of relevance. Once truth is deprioritised, the historical mode is seen not as privileged but constrained narrative, because its rhetoric of veracity removes liberties present in the fictional mode. Seen this way, it is understandable that authors make use of as many elements of rhetoric from fiction as possible in order to optimise the effectiveness of their communication. Although fixed rules are unhelpful here, it is argued that, in general, the conventions of

fiction benefit from a stronger system of Significations because “narrative logic,” established as it is by prior narratives, can be configured by following patterns familiar to the reader. This is not the case in “real-world logic,” which brings with it all the arbitrariness of real events, and is not configurable by narrative conventions. This means that in order to create a rhetoric of veracity it is usually necessary for authors of history to rely more heavily on propositional logic, which is less complex and less artistic than its fictional counterpart. Fiction makes use of many small implicatures, most of which are very small, to create an array of minute cognitive effects and communicate a “richness of ideas, feelings, and impressions that are not necessarily expressed in words.”¹

Building on these differences, it is argued that the narrative of Acts takes advantage of fictional rhetoric while maintaining its rhetoric of veracity by appeal to Divine omniscience as principle source. This has partial parallels in Homer and Hesiod, and the Hebrew bible, making it intelligible to Greek and Jewish educated audiences. In short, Luke created a narrative that makes serious truth claims while taking advantage of many of the privileges of fiction, resulting in an entertaining and exciting text that maintains a rhetoric of veracity throughout. By placing the Deity as the author of events themselves, truth claims and narrative logic were able to co-exist.

One important aim of the first part of the thesis was to challenge the consensus of binary classification as one that is not methodologically sound. Authors can utilise any and all literary resources to create narratives, and any attempt to interpret a text through genre needs to respect that if it is to make any progress. Secondly, the continuing desire of biblical scholars to delineate between history and fiction is not only questionable in genre-theoretical terms but also in terms of narrative rhetoric. Modern category distinctions are not the same as those used in the ancient world, and this applies particularly to a tradition of important and influential texts that appealed to the Deity to provide its rhetoric of veracity.

¹ See my discussion in 138.

The second part of the thesis tests out the new methodological framework in the text of Acts itself. The first study looked at the device I have labelled “the ambiguous oracle,” a device which is well established in antiquity, with origins in Tragedy and Epic, but extending in this period to many genres including the novel. To my knowledge, it is not used in the same way in any Hellenistic historiography. I argued that the device is manifest throughout the Acts narrative and is a key tool for configuring the narrative from beginning to end. The device emphasises the importance of Paul as arbiter of the Divine will and chosen instrument for the salvation of the Gentiles, and depicts a situation familiar from oracular literature in which misinterpretation actually brings about the Deity’s intention.

In the second study I explored the construction of Paul’s apostolic status, arguing from Matthias’ election to Paul’s last account of his conversion that Luke intended to depict Paul as the divinely appointed twelfth apostle. The device relies on pervasive hero characterisations in both Greek and Hebrew literature that understand heroes as singled out by a deity and assisted through impossible odds to show courage in the face of danger and overcome adversity. The device makes sense of the apparent contradiction between an enthusiastic portrayal of Paul as principle hero in the early church and the apparent exclusion of him as member of the twelve at the very outset of the narrative, against Paul’s own claims in his epistles. It ties in with the ambiguous oracle and means that Paul is under the surface of the text in the early chapters despite not being explicitly mentioned.

The third study moves away from the devices that configure the text on a macro-level to something operative on a smaller portion of the text. Comedy in Acts, so infrequently considered to be an important element, is seen here to govern a significant portion of text and to add significant value to interpretation. Much evidence is put together to demonstrate this case, including several parallels from ancient literature, social norms (especially for public speaking), and Homeric imitation.

2. Conclusions

2.1. The narratives that make Acts Acts

The studies serve to illustrate that no genre should be excluded as a potential tool for the interpretation of Acts. To be sure, there are some influences that are stronger than others, but influences do come from a wide range of texts.

Homer and the Septuagint are probably the biggest influences on Acts. As one would expect in Greek literature of the period, Homer features everywhere; in terms of genre, specific scenes, characterization, and plot structure. Paul's story and character have clear analogies with Odysseus and Aeneas (the *Aeneid* itself being an imitation of Homer several centuries closer to Luke's own period), his moral code has an Epic feel, and the scope of his story covers the same global proportions. He is brave and fearless, honest but crafty, and most importantly, predestined by Divine decree to succeed in his quest. In this and other aspects it is not just Homer, but the mythos of most ancient Greece, from which Luke finds ample precedent for this character trajectory, and for the most important of his plot trajectories – the ambiguous oracle. All of these devices and character roles are also extant in the Hebrew tradition.

These ancient texts are the easiest ones to notice because we are familiar with them from the normal course of our scholarship, and because we expect them to be there. The use of other narratives is less apparent. The dialogue with 2 Maccabees, for example, in Stephen's martyrdom, characterisation of the hero, and general theology of salvation, are not entirely obvious, and are probably not intentional or direct. Nonetheless, 2 Maccabees represents a Jewish literary style and ideology that Acts also makes use of.

Comedy in Acts offers an almost unfathomable range of possibilities in terms of literary resources. Not only are their parallels and precedents in light-hearted or comedic texts such as *Leucippe and Clitipho*, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, or *The Metamorphoses*, but the presence of satire demands that a number of serious texts are also engaged in the dialogue. The entire tradition of rhetoric is fundamental to understanding the Miletus speech, as is a knowledge of how speeches are presented in the historical genres.

The texts that make Acts Acts then, cover Hebrew and Hellenistic historiography, Greek epic, tragedy and comedy, Greek novel, Bios, Apologetic History and Institutional History, Jewish historical (and quasi-historical) novellas, oratory and satire, to name only the most noticeable ones. A fluency in all of these is required to really grapple with its narrative.

2.2. The Narrative Coherence of Acts

In this thesis I have not attempted to outline every aspect of the narrative coherence of Acts: such a task would require far more space than I have available. Instead I have limited myself to looking at two significant trajectories for the overall narrative construction and a third device that governs the interpretation of smaller areas of the text.

Clearly, the ambiguous oracle and Paul's apostolic status go hand in hand. Readers would naturally have seen Paul's fulfilment of the Divine command given to the apostles as an important part of his characterisation, and would also have seen Paul's divinely advocated prominence as evidence of his ability to fulfil the Divine command.

The narrative starts with the fluid and unfocused series of open scenes that were described at the beginning of the first study. These scenes appear to set a certain mood, though any parallels that may shed light on what that mood remain undetected for the time being. On the premise that clear, linear prose with clear demarcation between scenes would represent

normal reality, one might speculate from context that Luke is creating a mythic/fantastical/dreamlike atmosphere. In the midst of this uniquely stylized portion of narrative is placed the ambiguous oracle, and it is probable that the wider construction in which this device sits would have assisted the reader with its interpretation. Primed as she is by the oracle, the reader would be expecting the accompanying set of expectations – thus, the apostles have almost certainly misinterpreted the oracle and are about to make some mistakes. It is here that the election of Matthias occurs, with scripture (which offers an infallible voice) proving that Judas must be replaced, but not validating the apostles' method of doing so. Matthias' non-existence in history and subsequent disappearance from the narrative provide further grounds for suspicion. Eventually Paul appears and is heralded as God's chosen instrument, from which point on focus is almost entirely on Paul's fulfilling of the Divine command through a combination of personal excellence and Divine direction. Paul is in essence the figurehead of Lukan Christianity in the post-resurrection age; self-controlled but courageous, frank but well-spoken, educated but choosing to shun opulence for the sake of the Gospel.

The possible motivations behind the parodic elements of Luke's portrayal of Paul have already been discussed. The most likely explanation is that Luke and his audience were aware of the Pauline epistles and the potentially humorous elements of them. If this was the case, Luke take the opportunity to increase the entertainment value of his narrative while simultaneously adding realism and depth to his characterisation and disarming a potential problem with his depiction of a near perfect Paul.

2.2.1. The Importance of Paul to Acts

One thread in common throughout all three studies is Paul. This is particularly interesting given that the first two trace their beginnings back seven chapters or so before Paul makes

an appearance. Such an interpretation places Paul firmly into the beginning of the narrative, and makes him pivotal even to scenes such as those that dominate the early chapters and do not involve Paul at all, such as the ascension, the election of Matthias, Peter's healing miracles, and the various Jewish persecutions. Certainly, paving the way for Paul is not their only purpose, though in so far as scenes such as the martyrdom of Stephen, Philip and the Eunuch, and other episodes are integral to the spread of Christianity, Paul is very much under the surface even at these points.

2.3. Sources and Narrative Coherence

This thesis has continually suggested that the traditional focus on sources as an explanation of narrative difficulties is unhelpful, and that narrative solutions to narrative problems are often available if the right methodologies are applied. In the section on the sources of Acts I highlighted various issues that have arisen from historically important hypothetical sources, and presented solutions from a number of scholars that do not resort to source related incoherence as the natural solution. As a lengthy discussion of this problem could easily form a doctoral dissertation in itself, I restricted myself to problematizing assumptions held by scholars in regard to the way texts were constructed in the ancient world.

In the studies this was taken a stage further by demonstrating several systems of signification that are coherent only when considered as a whole. In this system the ascension scene, the election of Matthias, the Miletus speech, and all the scenes that operate with these Signification frameworks to elaborate the plot or characterisation cannot be isolated and considered as interpolations.

2.4. Genre and Methodological Strategies

If the theoretical case has been made for a non-classification of Acts' genre, and if studies have highlighted the presence of many genres within the text, this suggests that scholarship might benefit from moving from a focus on classification to one that explores the relationship between Acts and other systems of Signification in literary texts of the period. Such a method cannot be reduced to anything that might be called a simple scientific process – it is deep familiarity with texts and a willingness to approach Acts with an open mind that will produce results of interpretative benefit. All three studies in this thesis share these two principles – ranging widely across a variety of ancient literature to find systems of signification that would have been familiar to an ancient reader.

Another way in to these systems is to look at “inconsistencies” that traditional scholarship has used to posit sources, and see them as a potential starting point for studies of coherence in Acts. The ambiguous oracle begins at 1.6-8, where scholars had separated two verses that appear to be naturally connected; the impetus for the second study came from the dissonance between the election of Matthias and the rest of the narrative; the impetus for the third study came from a suspicion that Paul singing his own praises to quite the extent that he does is not appropriate to a serious historical speech. Any apparent textual problem presents the possibility of a lost intertextual tradition just as strongly, or perhaps more strongly, than the possibility of a source. When the question “why doesn't this fit into the wider text?” is asked, the answer is almost automatically some form of incoherence. If the question “how might this fit into the wider text?” is asked, diligent research might provide a different type of answer.

Potential Avenues of Future Research

Certainly, this thesis has not been comprehensive in finding coherence in Acts. In particular, I have steered clear of two related areas to which I could not find an answer – the sequence involving Macedonia that begins at 16.6, and the “we” passages more generally (one of which begins in 16.10). There are other portions whose coherence I have not attempted to establish, such as the section surrounding Apollos in Acts 18.24-19.1. My personal suspicion is that a shift in emphasis away from sources and towards dialogue will lead to some interesting discussions as to how Luke weaves problematic areas of the Pauline corpus (Apollos features in 1 Corinthians 3, in which Paul appears to berate the church for diving up into groups depending on who baptised them), and that this will result in a clearer picture of Luke as an interpreter of the Pauline corpus.

One area that I seriously considered exploring in more detail was the issue of narrative dissonance – that is, those passages or phrases that, without attributing them to a source, do not appear to be relevant to what we think we know of Luke’s aims. Perhaps the clearest example of this is in 5.12-14, where despite a continual focus on numbers being added to the disciples and their fearlessness in the face of persecution, the text adds:

Διὰ δὲ τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἀποστόλων ἐγένετο σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα πολλὰ ἐν τῷ λαῷ. καὶ ἦσαν ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἅπαντες ἐν τῇ στοᾷ Σολομῶντος, ¹³ τῶν δὲ λοιπῶν οὐδείς ἐτόλμα κολλᾶσθαι αὐτοῖς, ἀλλ’ ἐμεγάλυνεν αὐτοὺς ὁ λαός. ¹⁴ μᾶλλον δὲ προσετίθεντο πιστεύοντες τῷ κυρίῳ, πλήθη ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν,

5.13 is the difficult verse, sandwiched neatly in between two much more unified, positive comments on the success of the mission. There appears to be no need at all, in purely

literary terms, for this statement to be here. It says, in effect, that many believers were too scared to publicly join the apostles. What might be the reason for such an inclusion? An interesting possibility is that Luke wanted to counter a rumour/tradition that the Gospel was never embraced in Jerusalem by more than a few individuals, and uses this verse to say “there were loads of them, but they could never come out in public to support us.” These few words then, might offer a genuine insight into the perception of Jerusalem’s importance in the early church, as well as the reception of the Gospel there; in essence, a possible sign of socio-ideological dialogue underneath the surface of the text.

I decided against embarking upon a study of apparently dissonant verses because it runs counter to my other aims – despite my instincts as to verses such as these, future studies might make sense of them within the broader signification framework of Acts.

All of these potential avenues of exploration serve to demonstrate that there is much work to be done if Acts is to be understood more fully. While the traditional search for sources has not tended to help interpretation, a focus on narrative coherence turns these episodes into an exciting opportunity to learn more about the Acts narrative and what it meant to its earliest readers.

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