

Parsing and Rhetorical Analysis

Here, I draw attention to a particular matter which may, or may not, have become apparent through the pages of this website. Parsing and rhetorical analysis work equally well together at both micro and macro levels. I will illustrate my point firstly with a look at the two books of the Gospel of John and the Revelation to John, and secondly with a look at some of the 'centres' of the New Testament Books.

Illustration 1: the Gospel of John and the Revelation to John

With the Revelation, my parsing attempts required only minor revisions to the scheme that satisfied me (and all the literary-structural criteria I identified then) in 1988. They are found in those sections of the book, basically, that are outside of the numerical/numerological scheme, in the Prologue and the Epilogue. Parsing has disclosed that the Prologue is a three-part presentation: ABB', with verses: 1.1-3; 4-6; 7-8, where each part breaks down further into three parts, abb'. In this case, *the limits* of the Prologue are unchanged from before. Parsing disclosed that the Epilogue is also a three-part scheme: ABB', 22.16-17; 18-19; 20-21, where each part breaks down further into three parts, abb'. Before parsing, I viewed the Prologue and the Epilogue as consisting of two parts each, and the Epilogue as having limits 22.6-21. Verses 22.6-15 have now been added to the preceding Section 1'. Furthermore, this new ending to Section 1' now exhibits similar characteristics to the ending of the section that precedes it, Section 2'. In regard to these verses, 22.6-15, rhetorical analysis confirms the results of parsing. But in regard to the book as a whole, parsing affected no really significant change to my earlier rhetorical analysis.

With John's Gospel, many minor changes have been made to my earlier summary of the literary-structure. In the latter half of September 2003, I carried out my first parsing of this book. It had a major effect, though not at all on my understanding of the book's sectional scheme, nor upon my understanding of the form of the sectional structures (all ABB'/ABB':ABB'/ABB'). It was that many of the pieces that made up the sections were being differently identified. (I did not decide to go with early manuscript evidence and drop 7.53-8.11 from a reconstruction of mine of the original text: there is a case for considering its inclusion!)

It was the discovery of the writer's style in the Prologue (1.1-18) which set me on my way parsing to establish the writer's *abb'* divisions of his text throughout his work. Parsing also threw light on other aspects of the writer's rhetorical discipline, in particular the writer's predilection for repeating opening phrases to define the parts with which he made up his wholes. Whilst it was a delight to parse the Gospel of John, it was, however, a shock to find that on Easter Day over all these years, in our churches, we may never have been reading the presentation as the writer intended. John 20.1-18 is the appointed Gospel reading. In my old summary of literary-structural analysis, 20.1-18 is shown as the first of three parts: 20.1-18; 19-29; 30-31. Parsing persuaded me that the three parts are in fact 20.1-13; 14-29; 30-31.

Essentially, 20.14-29 can be seen to be a three-part whole, where the two *appearances* of Jesus in the Upper Room are B and B' parts (satisfying the criteria for B being the first development and B' being the second and completing development), and where Jesus' *appearance* to Mary is the opening, A part. The ending of the A part is suggested then as 20.18, because the B part clearly begins with 20.19. Rhetorical analysis was showing up also the writer's significant use of an opening phrase: at 20.14, *ταῦτα εἶποῦσα* (see, including variations: 6.59, 7.9, 8.20,30, 9.6,22, 10.6, 11.11,28,43, 12.36b,41, 13.21, 14.25, 15.11,17, 16.1,25, 17.1 and 18.1). Rhetorical analysis showed too the repeat of 20.2's content at 20.13 (an *inclusio*). This passage on the 'Empty Tomb' parses into an ABB' whole with three pieces per part. All three parts of 20.14-29 (20.14-18; 19-23 and 24-29) parse into three parts. What do I draw from all this, besides the fact that we have been reading to our *own* design? That '*seeing* and *believing*' is the B issue, and '*believing*' the B' issue, of 20.19-23 and 24-29 respectively. And that the writer of this Gospel intended a dramatic pause before v.14, a new beginning.

Illustration 2: the 'Centres' of the New Testament Books

In the earliest stages of my literary-analytical work, when I was simply looking for 'signifiers of structure' in texts, I did observe something special at, or around, book centres.

Specifically, I found firstly in Mark's Gospel, just after the central point, between the two middle sections, Sections B and B', the piece, 8.27-30 (of 8.27-9.1, a Day's telling). It is, of course, Mark's highly significant disclosure, in the mouth of Peter: 'You are the Christ'. It was only after a full rhetorical analysis and parsing that I saw a possible further significance. What appeared to be the title of the book, at 1.1, presented a problem. Was the phrase, 'Son of God', original to the Gospel, or not? (It's not, according to Codex Sinaiticus.) Given that this immediately post-central Gospel piece restricts to 'the Christ' only, and does not mention 'the Son of God', it is tempting to say that the title phrase was complete without it. But the matter is not quite as simple as that. We have to reckon with two things: a question, 'Could Peter have been given the two identities of Jesus to utter?' (Matthew clearly thinks so: Mt.16.17) and an issue: the very next Day's telling (9.2-29) does present Jesus as the 'Son of God'. The matter cannot be fully settled this way. But before leaving Mark's Gospel for Luke's, there's another issue if the 'centre' is to be addressed fully. Given that there are two central sections to Mark's Gospel and that there are two central days to the telling of these sections, it could be said that there are two centres (or, even, three!) to this Gospel. That these two days begin similarly is one feature to note: 'And thence rising up (he went/he came) into the region of'. The first speaks of the good news as not being for Jews alone, but also for Gentiles (7.24-30). The second speaks of Old Covenant and New Covenant difference (10.1-16). These issues, at these centres, are hugely important in this rhetor's overarching purpose.

With the Gospel of Luke, an analysis for structural signifiers showed verses 13.31-35 to be the significant centre to the Gospel (Jerusalem: Jesus is to be killed there). Likewise, as I examined the Acts of the Apostles another significant centre was discerned in 13.42-47 (here Paul and Barnabas say, '... behold, we turn to the Gentiles.'). Here at the centre of the Acts is explanation of the book's scheme, which starts in Jerusalem, turns in Antioch and ends in Rome. [As I write this I am being bombarded by maggots, dropping from holes in my work-room ceiling! It's a little distracting.] The theme, 'Rejection by Jews', is common to both book centres. Parsing confirms that they are of the same AA' structures. Rhetorical analysis confirms the common use of an uncommon word, *ἐρχομένη* (the principal papyrus, P⁷⁵, so reads).

It was not until after I had carried out a full rhetorical and parsing analysis of Matthew's and John's works that I discovered particularly interesting features too in both of these book centres. I refer on page 22, to what I found in Matthew's Gospel. It does appear that Matthew was bringing 'old and new things' out from his treasure store. He likely viewed himself, therefore, as a 'teacher of the law, *discipled* in the things of the kingdom of heaven' (Mt.13.52). In John's Gospel, it is something a little different. (I refer to this on page 26.) Just after its centre, in 11.1-10 and in its closing three-part, abb' piece, in Jesus' mouth are these words, 'Are there not *twelve* hours of the day? If anyone walks in the day... If anyone walks in the night...' Here, the rhetor is likely indicating why he chose to present his Gospel sections in *twelve parts*. Each part symbolizes an hour of 'daylight'. Elsewhere in the Gospel, Jesus is, clearly, the life and light of God in the world.

In the central section of the Revelation to John, key book themes converge in visions of victory over evil, judgement and salvation. The section concludes: God's 'righteous acts have been revealed'. At the conclusion of the central section of Paul's and Tertius' Letter to the Romans is a glorious ending which parses beautifully. Just after the central 'point' of IThessalonians (a two-section presentation), the opening section's beginning is repeated in the second section's beginning (compare pieces: 1.3-5 and 2.13-14). The chiasmic structure of Hebrews does not disappoint for the contents and emphases of its central section.

To the rhetors of the New Testament Books, the 'centres' of their works were a very important focus. A rhetorical analysis and a parsing of these 'centres' and the Books in their entirety expose their writers' various, theological, soteriological, evangelistic and Christological interests, as *also* their literary intentions.