

The Work of the Writers and First Readers

We may speak of writers, readers and reciters, but before we do we need to define what we mean by all three.

Firstly, we consider the 'writers'. Most of the books and letters of the New Testament have the name of someone attached to them. We have names associated with each of the four Gospels, but they were later ascriptions (according to mid second century traditions) and are unverifiable. We have the name of Paul attached to the majority of the Letters, but more times than we think it should. The names of companions of Paul attach too, sometimes a single name, sometimes two, but we don't know if they really contributed. Names are ascribed to other letters, such as Peter, James and John. But the First Epistle of Peter cannot possibly have come from the hand of an uneducated, illiterate fisherman, it is argued. This letter is one of the finest writings of the New Testament. Also, it looks much more like the work of a Gentile. Yet, consider I Peter 5.12: it says, 'Through Silvanus... by means of a few words I have written...'. Is this the same Silvanus as is mentioned in 2 Cor. 1.19, 1 Thess. 1.1 and 2 Thess. 1.1?

We do have the name of another writer. One called Tertius. He declares himself to be '*the one writing*' the Letter of Paul to the Romans (Ro. 16.22). He gives his own greetings 'in the Lord'. Elsewhere too, it seems, there are others (possibly unnamed) who are writing for Paul. When Paul does write in his own hand, towards the end of a letter, and also about the large (alphabetical) letters he is using, we are left to our own devices to interpret what this means, besides that he himself (?) is validating his letters (1 Cor. 16.21; Gal. 6.11; Col. 4.18; 2 Thess. 3.17): has he an eyesight problem, or is he just unused to writing?

Discussion centred in the past on how long it would take a man to write a letter. J. Jeremias (*Das NT Deutsch: Die Pastoralbriefe*, 1953, p.5) said, 'The composition of a letter the length of 2 Timothy demanded of the ancient art of writing not hours but days of laborious work.' Before him, O. Roller (*Das Formular der paulinischen Briefe*, 1933) characterized writing materials as rough, especially the papyrus; the reed pens were inadequate, as were the inks: all these contributed to the difficulty. Further, it was understood that when it came to the longer document, the common proceeding was for the scribe to take down the gist of the message from its originator on wax tablets and then compose fair copy at his own leisure. The sender would only have to check that it represented his thoughts and add a few words of greeting. F.F. Bruce ('The Epistles of Paul', *Peake's Bible Commentary*, Mt. Black & H.H. Rowley, Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, 1962) represented many when he bristled up at this being in any way how it was with Paul: 'Here is a man with something to say, and what he has to say is so much part of the man himself that there can be nothing artificial or merely conventional about the way he says it.' The fear of many academics was always of the 'artificialities' and 'conventions' that would have been followed if these letters were truly Graeco-Roman! (See also in Peake's Bible Commentary the article titled 'The Literature and Canon of the New Testament' by J.N. Sanders: I refer to this elsewhere at length, but here now only to the way it begins: 'The NT can hardly be considered as literature at all...!')

So, we may rightly deduce that Paul always had another, or others writing with him. We may be correct in thinking that all the writers named as responsible for the New Testament Books, had a writing practitioner working with (or is it 'for'?) them too. The kind of picture that comes into focus is of (a minimum of) two, who collaborate in the same writing venture. One would be the one with the thoughts, ideas, or teachings to share (and the authority of the church to share them). The other would be the one facilitating his sharing of such things. He would be the rhetor: the one trained in 'writing', proven in his 'professional' skills in compositional method and in the fine art of writing. He is not an amanuensis (as scholars have long posited). He does not

simply write down what is dictated to him. Rather, we may liken this rhetor to the modern day *ghost writer*, one who is employed by a busy celebrity figure unused to writing for the popular market. (The great and the good, and young footballers alike use them today.) Tertius, we may deduce, was Paul's ghost writer, in the writing of his Letter to the Church in Rome.

H.C. Lawson-Tancred (p.5, *Aristotle: The Art of Rhetoric*, Penguin Books, 1991) refers in his introduction to the period 400-320BC during which rhetorical theory made significant forward steps: in that era a new post was born, that of the *logographos*. 'For the first time there was a class of men whose primary occupation and means of livelihood was the production of effective speeches, often on topics in which they were not directly involved themselves.'

For the sake of moving on, in *the general case* we may name the New Testament 'writers' as the ones *for whom* works were written in cooperation with the rhetor (or the *logographos*). It raises interesting questions, of course. We have some letters written for Paul, but after his death, and one, at least, for Peter, written after his death (II Peter). We have Gospels with ascriptions that were later added. We have one purporting to be by John (understood to be 'the beloved disciple' of the Gospel), but completed after his death.

In *specific cases* there may have been churchmen who possessed *both* the thoughts to share *and* the skills to share them. Was the Letter to the Hebrews the product of such a person? Or was this the work of a rhetor employed by a *group* of leading churchmen? (Were *all the Gospels* produced in *this way*?) Or was the First Letter of John the product of one person? Questions abound! But we must move on and turn now to a consideration of other first century practitioners.

In regard to 'readers' and 'reciters', we first ask what differentiated the reader from the reciter? They were both readers of course, but the reader, simply, was a reader only. Handed a Letter a short time before it was to be read in public, he would have read it quietly to himself to establish for himself its contents, structure, style and purpose. The reciter, however, would have required possession of a text, like a Gospel, a long time before he would have been expected to present it from memory, dramatically and convincingly. He would have needed time to read and to study the contents thoroughly and memorize them carefully. And he would have had to practise his delivery, before he recited it in a public place.

We may judge that the majority of the New Testament's Letters were written to be *read* out aloud (some *are* private), but with the Gospels and Acts in particular, we may easily imagine how their texts had been written for *recital*. With the exception only, perhaps, of Matthew's Gospel, they read like dramas.

The results of my rhetorical analysis and full parsing of the books of the New Testament do provide new evidence for assessing just what kind of literature it is that we are handling. It is clear to me that there is much more to the study of the Gospels and Acts than just their historiographical, evangelistic, Christological, soteriological and theological purposes. The manner of their literary composition, their structures, sub-structures and writing style (which evidence technical, even professional proficiency), would seem to suggest that these books were written to function in ways beyond those previously known.

When we see what we now can see, we need ask why the rhetor took so much trouble to exercise such great precision and care in the structuring and constructing of his work? It was not, surely, to satisfy the demands of ancient rhetoric for no real purpose? No, it was because the rhetor was writing for a reader or a reciter who would present his work. Conventions had to be followed, not for their own sake, but to enable the reader and the reciter to do their work.

It is all down to the text that the rhetor was to produce. I refer you to page 5 of 'Mark: Literal English Translation' for an example of a fourth century text of columns of rows of (generally 12 to 14) letters, with no spaces between words. It compares with earlier texts like that of the Bodmer Papyrus (P75, 175-225?AD), a single column presentation of rows of (approximately 25) letters, with no spaces between words. The very first texts likely had formats of this kind. Thus, they all required interpretation. That the literature itself is styled and structured is to me indication that the rhetors wrote in the ways that they did to assist their readers with this interpretation.

There are four useful aids that the rhetor, under the rules of ancient rhetoric, provided his reader/reciter. He provided others, and they are all fascinating, but I judge that these four were the most useful. We look at them here:

i) In every one of the twenty-seven New Testament books, **the ABB' style of writing** is used, where A is the introductory piece; B is the first development and B' is the second and completing development. Indeed, in many instances Parts B and B' can be read as 'dualities'.

In all the books, these A, B and B' parts each break down into three parts, abb'. And each of these, in most New Testament texts, breaks down further into three parts, say .a.b.b'. In many texts each of these breaks down still further into three parts, represented, say, by (.a)(.b)(.b'). To the scholar or reader today of the New Testament who has never known this before, it will be considered an impossibility. But it isn't! It is certainly impressive, but the method can be learned and applied. (I have personally prepared some sermons in this style. With practice, it *can be* mastered.)

The reader/reciter, once he had discerned the writing style of the rhetor, would have been able to break down any text of unseparated letters into words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and so on. He would have been able to define the beginnings, endings and extent, therefore, of all the writers' passages, just as the rhetor intended. The rhetor's writing style would also have assisted the reciter in setting the contents of a text to memory.

What is apparent in each New Testament book is that the rhetor, in his opening piece of his text, displays his style to his reader. Deliberately, it seems, the writer provided for the reader the simplest version of what will follow in his text. One of the best examples is in the opening of John's Gospel:

'In the beginning was the word	(a)
and the word was with God	(b)
and the word was God.'	(b')

This is the opening, three-part 'piece' of the Integral Prologue, 1.1-18, which is, itself, made up of three whole parts (A: vv.1-5; B: vv.6-13; B': vv.14-18). Part A, vv.1-5, could not have been written more simply. The middle and final parts, parts B and B' (see 'John: Greek'), however, display a complexity of the kind which the reader/reciter will encounter throughout the Gospel. This rhetor, then, made it his business to ease the reader/reciter into recognition of his book writing style.

If, therefore, the Integral Prologue to John's Gospel is an ABB' structure, for comparison, the Prologue to Luke's Gospel (1.1-4) is an abb'/abb' structure, a threefold *protasis*, followed by a threefold *apodosis*. Luke so begins his text, for the reader/reciter's sake, with a simple version of what will follow in 1.5-38 (1.5-25/26-38) and 1.39-80 (1.39-56/57-80). As with the rhetor of John's Gospel, he is helpfully introducing *his* style. In the Acts of the Apostles, his second book, Luke presents a more complex A(abb'):A'(abb'), two-part Prologue (1.1-5). Here, he appears to expect his reader/reciter to understand what he is doing. (Because he has read his first work

already?) Mark, in his Gospel, also has an ABB' structured Prologue (see 'Mark', both 'Greek' and 'Literal English Translation'). It well displays *his* book writing style, as also the limits of the Prologue itself (1.2-20, not 1.1-13, nor 1.1-15). The first readers/reciters will have understood these things: subsequent readers, clearly, have not.

It may be observed that Paul lists 'nine' fruits of the Spirit in Gal. 5 and 'nine' gifts, or manifestations, of the Spirit in I Cor. 12. Why not 'ten', or 'eight'? The answer is that he was writing in 'threes' and 'multiples of threes', just like the writer of John's Gospel and, indeed, just as all of the New Testament writers. In the Gospels and in the Letters we find similar listings which display conformity with this writing style. To each line, in the listings, are three component pieces, either of single words, or of single phrases. The rhetors appear to have delighted in such presentations. Listings appear so frequently! To the first readers/reciters they will have been easily recognized.

There is, of course, more to say about the writers' styles than just their three-part presentations. The New Testament writers demonstrate variety in the use of it. Though all the rhetors were trained in classical Greek and the art of rhetoric and had manuals available to help them (the products of instructors like Anaximenes, Aristotle and Cicero), some were either *able to write* better Greek than others, or they deliberately *chose not to write* in their best Greek. In this respect, and for an example, we might give a little consideration to Mark's style and method and his use of an unpolished, *koine* Greek. Did he lack skill? Or was it because he first wrote his Gospel in Aramaic? Others have judged, I also, that it was neither of these, but that he chose to write in a style that was appropriate to popular drama and for popular consumption. He 'dumbed' down his presentation, therefore, in order to reach as wide an audience as possible.

Lastly, on this matter of style, we ask: Where did this writing style originate? It is a fact that such a style is to be found in use in the writings of the *Old* Covenant literature. We find its use, for example, in Genesis and I and II Kings (for details of this, see my book, *The Markan Matrix...*, pp.24-25). It would appear, therefore, that Paul's writing practitioners were influenced in their choice by their Old Covenant predecessors. Subsequently, all rhetors were influenced.

ii) ***Anaphoras, anastrophes and inclusios*** are found in all of the twenty-seven New Testament books. They will have assisted the reader/reciter in his (her?) search for the sub-structures and structures of the texts.

Anaphoras are word or phrase repetitions which help define the openings of new sections or pieces in the texts. Once the readers begin to identify the rhetors' choices, the work of 'parsing' is made easier. Examples in the Letters include: 'Beloved' (see I John) and 'Brothers' (see I and II Thessalonians). The Gospel writers have their favourites: for Matthew, it is 'Then'; for John, 'These things..'

Anastrophes ('hook words') are word repetitions that the rhetor includes, firstly, at the ending of a completed ABB' construction, and secondly, in the opening of the ensuing ABB' construction. They had a mnemonic function, acting as 'prompts' to the reciter, in two ways. As he completed one section, he was helped to remember the opening words of the section that followed. He was also helped to see that the two sections were significantly linked in the rhetor's thinking.

Inclusios are word repetitions which work at different scales/literary levels. By employing repetitions of a word at the beginning and the ending of a passage, the rhetor can establish, for the reader's/reciter's understanding, the full extent of one of his constructions. If the rhetor is defining a simple ABB' piece, then the key word or phrase will be found by the reader/reciter both in the Aa position and the B'b' position. Or if the rhetor is defining an ABB'/ABB' composite, or an ABB'/ABB'/ABB' composite

(see Paul for much evidence of these), the same word or phrase will be found only in the first, Aa, piece and the last, B'b', piece, as underlined.

New Testament rhetors also begin and end whole works with similar details or themes. Inclusions can work at the grandest scale possible. Consider Luke's opening and closing pieces of his Gospel. His story begins in the Temple in Jerusalem (contrary to the stories of the other Gospel writers). It also ends in the Temple in Jerusalem (also contrary to the stories of the other Gospel writers). Similarly, the First Day's telling by Mark, of Jesus' night-time rising and temporary disappearance, has its parallel in his final Day's telling (the Twenty-eighth Day's telling) of Jesus' resurrection. Mark's Narrative begins and ends, therefore, on similar themes. (Note also: the *setting* sun in the first day's telling and the *rising* sun in the last day's telling. Something is meant!) Additionally, Mark's Prologue and (original) Epilogue, which cradle his Narrative, exhibit some balances of themes and details. These act like inclusions.

iii) **A skeletal outline** is found in each of the twenty-seven New Testament books. The rhetor was expected to have a book plan. The reader/reciter would be on the look out for it and would be content when he had found it. The writing rules required that it be a 'hidden' structure: if it was too obvious the work would be dull to listen to.

In Mark's Gospel, the narrative scheme (excluding for now the Prologue and Epilogue) is one of four times seven, Four Series of Seven Days, where there are two outer series and two inner series in the pattern: A,B,B',A'. Each Series of Seven Days is formed by an initial 'three-day' Sub-series, a turning point of a 'day' and a concluding 'three-day' Sub-series.

In Matthew's Gospel, the scheme is a chiasm of eleven sections, Sections 1-5,C,5'-1'. Each of these Sections comprises 14 parts, with the exceptions only of the balancing Sections 2 and 2' which both contain three lots of 14 parts (in an ICI', or ABA' arrangement). Matthew gives clear indication in his opening piece, Jesus' genealogy, that he is repeatedly using 'fourteens' in his presentation. It is noted that the middle five sections, 4,5,C,5',4', comprise 70 pieces and the first and last three sections, 1,2,3 and 3',2',1' comprise 70 pieces each. Three times over 70 pieces are found.

Luke's two works, his Gospel and the Acts, like Matthew's Gospel, are eleven section chiasms, Sections 1-5,C,5'-1'. In the Gospel, the same is used for the Genealogy, as also for the central teaching section. Luke's two books exhibit usage of sectional forms: ABB', AA' (or II') and ABA' (or ICI'). The latter breaks down, for example, as I(ABB'),C(ABB'),I'(ABB'). Luke never uses one form for one book-section, without using the same form for its parallel.

The Gospel of John can be described in one way as a seven times twelve chiasm, with Sections 1-3,C,3'-1' where each section is made up of twelve parts (abb';abb':abb';abb'). (He displays this interest in 'sevens' throughout his work: seven feasts, seven 'longer I am sayings' and seven signs.)

The Revelation to John is a seven times seven chiasm, with Sections 1-3,C,3'-1' where all the sections comprise an introduction and seven parts.

Meanings clearly attach to book structures. The prime candidates for interpretation are Mark's 4x7 scheme, John's 7x12 scheme and the Revelation's 7x7 scheme. Numbers meant much to the early writers and audiences. '4' had its 'universal' significance; '7' was a sacred number in earlier religions, but to early Christians it signified 'completion', 'perfection' and 'fulfilment'; and '12' was related to 'God's elective purposes'. How do we interpret Mark, John and the Revelation? Mark: 'Jesus' fulfils God's universal purposes'? John: 'Jesus completes God's elective purposes'? The Revelation: 'All will come to its perfect completion'?

Another candidate for interpretation may be considered, but for different reasons. The structure of Paul's Letter to the Romans is a 1,2,C,2',1' section chiasm. The Old Covenant's five books of the Law are arranged in the same way (I got this from a 1980's Jerusalem computer aided reading of the Hebrew and checked it out for myself). Did Paul and Tertius know its structure? If they did, then did they intend their audiences to make the connection? My analysis of the Letter affirms that 'the Law' is a significant issue in all the sections of Paul's and Tertius' composition. Aren't they saying 'Romans' is 'the New Law'? And isn't there something very similar to this in Matthew's writing? For he presents Jesus as 'the new Moses' and arranges *five* teaching blocks in chiasm, sections 2,4,C,4' and 2', interspersing them with other material.

Chiasms may have symbolic meaning. What we can say with certainty, nevertheless, is that they offered every advantage to the reciter. If he could remember his way into the centre, he could most certainly remember his way out from there. Essentially, chiasms *halve* the amount of structural information the reciter had to remember.

In the first and second centuries, both the reader and the reciter would have been looking in the text for the rhetors' book structures. As each took a manuscript into his hands for the first time, his first task would have been to separate columns of lines of letters into words and words into sentences and sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into sections and so on. He would have been satisfied when he was able to discern the skeletal outline.

iv) **Edentations** are found in all our second to fourth century manuscripts of New Testament Books. In the rhetors' *original documents (exemplars)*, they will have added clarity to the presentations and been valuable visual aids for the readers' right readings of the texts.

Edentations vary a little in their presentation, but in all of them is a protrusion of a single letter or a half letter in the left hand margin of a presentation. Edentations behaved like the 'indentations' or 'indents' that we commonly employed to signal new paragraphs in our writings in the last century. For the reader, then, who had the rhetor's original document, these edentations were the clearest visual signifiers of his sectional and sub-sectional divisions.

In the laying down of the Greek letters in close juxtaposition, fourth century 'copyists' provided the relief of a *space* in the line above where the edentation appeared, towards the right hand margin of the column of letters. This space gave emphasis to the feature and the protruding letter was always the first letter of a new sentence and new paragraph (or section). Earlier copyists, of the second and third centuries, however, left no space before the edentation, but rather kept the rhythm of letters going in tight formation. The protruding letter in this case was simply the next letter to be written. The new paragraph, therefore, was begun in the line above it.

This earlier presentation of the edentation was flawed: it did not always show up clearly enough for it to be seen by the copyist. As a result, these signifiers of the rhetors' structures got corrupted, by loss as also by addition. We would have liked sight of even just one of the *exemplars* today, yes? But the next best thing, of course, is that we can now recreate them all, by examination of each text for evidence of the rhetor's writing style and structure.

It was the rhetor's job to facilitate the reader's work of preparation and presentation and the reciter's work of preparation, memorizing and delivery. These four aids helped each one in his (her?) own distinctive task. And information about these things, of course, is information that we can use today. Indeed, it is vital for our reading of the New Testament Books. It is New Testament information that helps us

define whole texts in terms of their parts and their wholes. It gives insight into the processes of their production. It also opens up to our gaze the purposes of the church's early succession of message bearers.

In moving to a conclusion of this study, we may attempt further clarity on the churches' use of writers (rhetors), readers and reciters. It appears very likely that the church and its principal message bearers turned for help in the first place to those who had a practised and professional expertise. Rhetors were needed to do the writing and readers and reciters were needed to read and recite. But is it the case that only those who were educated in reading and writing were always used?

Literature played an important part in the establishment and growth of the Early Church. The need for communicators will have required that others became involved. Those educated in reading, writing and rhetoric, therefore, may well have been sent out to train others. Those so chosen, to be trained, would not have had to have had a formal education. They would only have had to be able to learn the contents of a manuscript, orally and accurately off by heart. Because oral education was effective and widespread throughout the Mediterranean world at that time, there would have been many likely candidates in the churches.

A final and most important issue has to do with how the church came to lose sight of the internal characteristics of its New Testament texts and how it let slip through its fingers the expertise that was needed to do the texts justice. We have to entertain the possibility that this loss occurred early in the life of the church.

One possible cause for the loss is that the church's writing scholars were wiped out in the persecutions. Under Nero, according to tradition, leading, named apostles were put to death (such as of Peter and Paul). Trials, executions and banishments took place under the ensuing emperors. Zero tolerance was shown to all those who were persistent in their profession of Christian faith. Known scholars, therefore, would have been very vulnerable.

A second possibility is that it was the *influence* of the church's writing scholars that was wiped out. Not the scholars themselves. The evidence of the New Testament Books themselves is that the later writers disagreed with earlier ones (the writers of the Pastoral Epistles and of II Peter with the writers of the Gospels). They wanted, it seems, to commend texts for their historical factuality; they wanted to set aside debate and argument; and they wanted to affirm that the authorship and the authority of the texts were of God and not of man. Is the finger of blame, then, to be pointed at these later writers and not at emperors? Did this later group of writers gain the upper hand? Did they lead others to ignore any consideration of the rules of rhetoric, to which the books were written?

Tensions may well have existed between the writers, but what we observe is that they all did share the same writing discipline. It would appear that we cannot easily blame this later group of writers for the loss.

The third and most likely possibility has to do with 'language'. The missionary church needed translations of the Greek in the mother tongues of new converts (a manuscript exists from as early as the second century, in Syriac). The western church wanted Latin versions. And Augustine wrote, '...in the early days of the faith, no sooner did anyone gain possession of a Greek manuscript, and imagine himself to have any facility in both languages (however slight that may be), than he made bold to translate it' (*De Doctr. Christ.*, ii, II). The quality of the Latin varied. Different versions mushroomed. The fourth century project of the Latin Vulgate was born of this.

Is it simply the case that expertise in Greek was not widespread in the western church and that Latin translations did not replicate the internal characteristics of the

Greek texts? (Because they could not? Or because no one tried? Or because no one realized there was anything to replicate?)

The lesson for today at least is clear, whatever the answers to all these questions. We need to be studying the Greek texts to regain both information and expertise that was lost centuries ago. All around the world today the church struggles to find a common path to the *truths* of the New Testament Books. As a result, it is intolerably divided in the ways it commends the living of 'the new life'. The supreme requirement has always been that of a purely literary analysis of the New Testament Books. In this website I present, therefore, the results of my rhetorical analysis and full parsing of all twenty-seven books, as well as my own, first explorations into the meanings of the findings.