

LARS HARTMAN

Text-Centered New Testament Studies

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament*

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Mohr Siebeck

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zum Neuen Testament

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Martin Hengel und Otfried Hofius

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on Early Jewish and
Early Christian Literature

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Preface

When the articles of this collection are presented as “text-theoretical studies,” this may sound somewhat presumptuous, both to professional text theorists and to colleagues in exegesis who are more proficient in theory of literature, text linguistics, etc. than I am. Nevertheless the papers here gathered reflect a growing conviction on their author’s part that exegesis can gain a good deal from what is done in these fields. Our task as historians and as theologians is furthered, I believe, if we pay more regard to such literary aspects as these disciplines teach us to focus on, for example taking seriously that the texts present themselves to their readers in a given shape; they also can make us realize that, when we exegesete concentrate our attention on the contents of the texts, the understanding of these contents can be improved, if we pay greater respect to their pragmatic aspects.

Had the articles of this volume been arranged according to the dates of their first publication, the reader could rather easily have observed a certain development on my part. Without being very advanced, the more recent contributions hopefully reveal that I have learnt a little since the publication of the earliest one in 1975. The articles which are here published for the first time were originally prepared for particular occasions and have not been revised before publication. But, as is also the case in almost all of the other chapters of this book, I have supplemented their bibliographies with some more recent literature. The abbreviations of periodicals etc. follow S. Schwertner’s *Abkürzungsverzeichnis in the Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (2nd ed., Berlin/New York: de Gruyter 1994).

Lastly I want to express my sincere gratitude to Professor David Hellholm, friend and colleague, who has spent so much time and energy on this book sparing no pains in editing it. The reader will easily realize that he is an adroit editor; that he is also an expert text linguist may already be known. Thus I have felt being in reliable hands during the production of this volume.

Uppsala, December 1996

Lars Hartman

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I.

Narrative Texts

Gospels and Apocalypses

1. Some Reflections on the Problem of the Literary Genre of the Gospels¹

1. The Problem of the Literary Genre

Let us imagine that we are taking part in the ceremonial conferment of degrees which takes place at the end of the academic year in the University Hall. When the Vice Chancellor of the University has opened the ceremony, the professor who has been assigned the task of delivering the festival lecture comes to the *cathedra*. After the obligatory introductory ceremonial addresses to the honourable guests the lecturer begins his presentation: "Once upon a time there was a poor shoemaker who lived in a little cottage at the edge of the forest" The learned professor continues on the same line, giving the main part of his treatment of, say, a sociological topic, in the form of a children's story.

It is not hard to guess that a lecture of this kind would provoke wholly different reactions. Some would find the approach original, others eccentric, daring, or unworthy of the situation. The reasons are obvious. The situation and the normal way of shaping an academic discourse have established a convention so that the audience has certain expectations of a conferment lecture. An expert on literary criticism or linguistics might be prepared to regard the phenomenon as a kind of "reader's expectation".² In our example two systems of such expectations collide, and the collision causes delighted smiles or dissatisfied grimaces.

I have made up this example in order to point to an essential aspect of the problem which I shall discuss in this paper. Mostly without thinking, we distinguish between different types of literature, or genres, and connect them with particular contents and usages. Do the Gospels belong to a type of literature which their first readers/listeners associated with a specific function; and did they then have certain expectations of their content in a way which may be suggestive of how we spontaneously react to examples of the genres of the academic lecture and of the children's story?

¹ A slightly revised translation of Hartman 1978, a paper read in the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences, Uppsala, February 1977.

² See, e.g., Weinrich 1971, 30f., 140.

However, scrutiny of the literary genre of the Gospels raises several issues. Already the designation "genre" is problematic: it is not always used in the same manner, and some people are even sceptical of using it at all.³ Furthermore, "Gospel" is actually a label which was affixed to these New Testament books long after they were written; moreover a couple of centuries later it was also applied to documents which look very different from those which we are wont to call Gospels.⁴ (Yet I disregard modern phenomena like Levi Dowling's "The Gospel of the New Age".) As a matter of fact most of the scholars who have dealt with the history of Early Christian writings maintain that the Gospels represented a new type of literature.⁵ Then one may wonder whether it is fair to speak of a reader's expectation or of any conventions which Mark and his colleagues followed. But it is also suggested that there are far-reaching similarities between, on the one hand, some sources and earlier stages of the Gospels, and, on the other, other kinds of literature from Antiquity. From such similarities conclusions are drawn as to the background and function of these sources. This means that also the pre-history of the Gospels belongs to the problems which are raised by our topic. Thus, discussing the question of the genre of the Gospels means to enter a scholarly underground. Yet I dare do so, albeit with some simplifications and leaving aside many suggestions and theories.⁶

Why, however, ask the question at all? In our days we are not much concerned about the rules for different types of literature. In Antiquity people seem to have been more prone to adhere to literary conventions when they sought to express themselves in writing.⁷ They were not free in their choice of such vehicles, but nor are we, really, because the conventions which we share with our culture dictate that the form of expression we use is normally connected with a particular type of contents and with a certain function or usage.⁸ Therefore, an academic lecture in the form of a children's story would make a strange impression. But this adherence to literary conventions also makes parody and burlesque possible, whether an author is writing a political satire using the form of a traveller's report (like Jonathan Swift) or gives a speech to the Opposite

³ A fine survey which was instructive for the composition of this paper is Doty 1972. See also the discussion in Knierim 1973. Among writers on literary criticism see, e.g., Wellek/Warren 1949, chap. 17, and Weisstein 1968, chap. 6.

⁴ See below, footnote 16.

⁵ See, e.g., Kümmel 1973, 12f.; Vielhauer 1975, 349-354.

⁶ See the surveys and discussion in Schmidt 1923, 50-134; Theißen 1971; Vielhauer 1975, *loc. cit.*

⁷ E.g., Gunkel 1917, 2ff.; Rahn 1969.

⁸ See, e.g., Fowler 1970-71, 201; Jauß 1970-71, 12f.

Sex lending it, say, the appearance of the minutes of a committee meeting, using the form, style and vocabulary of such a document.

The conventional linkage of genre with usage and contents influences our approach to an unknown text. Thus, when we examine its possible sociolinguistic function, we note features of its contents, style etc. and look for parallels in other texts, the function of which we know. The similarities lead us to the conclusion that the unknown text has the same sociolinguistic function as those from which we collected the "parallels". Thus some scholars have maintained, for example, that Mark is a literary relation of the "biographies" (*vitae, bioi*) of Antiquity, the heroes of which are philosophers or popular wandering preachers; often Philostratos' work on *Apollonios* (the first half of the 3rd century C.E.) is adduced as an example⁹. From this similarity they draw, *inter alia*, the following conclusions: in some Early Christian circles Jesus was regarded as a popular charismatic preacher, who, like other wandering preachers, performed miracles which testified to his authority.¹⁰ The Gospel of Mark was intended to be a piece of religious propaganda written in and for a so-called "Hellenistic" environment, i.e. the sort of milieu in which such "proofs" were highly esteemed.¹¹ There is a slightly more complicated form of this theory, according to which the generic similarity is rather to be sought between the philosophers' *vitae* and pre-Marcan collections.¹² Then the editing hand of the evangelist has firmly grasped the material and Mark has changed, indeed rejected, its tendencies to represent Jesus as mainly a performer of miracles.¹³

Accordingly, New Testament scholars have been interested in the question of the genre of the Gospels not least because they have assumed that also in this case there is a correlation between genre and sociolinguistic function.¹⁴ In addition, when the genre of a text is known, this immediately determines the possibilities of using it as a historical source. Thus, for example, you cannot use Aristophanes' comedy *The Clouds* as a

⁹ Schulz 1964, 143f. Cf. Petzke 1970.

¹⁰ The term θεῖος ἀνὴρ is often used of such figures. Cf. Bieler 1967 and von Martitz 1969, 338f.

¹¹ In the light of modern research "Hellenistic" cannot be used to designate some sort of cultural contrast to "Palestinian" or "Jewish". See, e.g., Hengel 1973.

¹² See Robinson 1965, 131ff. [= 1971, 46ff.] (there more lit.); Koester 1968, 230ff. [= 1971, 187ff.]; Achtemeier 1970.

¹³ Weedon 1968. See also the preceding note.

¹⁴ Since the beginning of the century, they, as well as their Old Testament colleagues, have been wont to speak of the "Sitz im Leben" (viz. of Israel and of the Early Church, respectively) of different types of texts and traditions. Of course, this is much the same as defining their sociolinguistic function.

source when studying Socrates without taking into account that the play is a comedy, viz. it mocks at the great philosopher.

I shall refrain from mentioning other suggestions as to which genre the Gospels might represent, or to which genre they might be mostly akin, although there is no lack of such suggestions.¹⁵ But one who does not daily run in and out of the exegetes' workshops may naturally wonder, "is it so difficult, after all?". Why not simply register a number of characteristics of relevant texts, compare them and draw some conclusions? Hopefully, Biblical scholars are no more insensible in their literary studies than their colleagues in other departments, but the difficulties in arriving at precise results in literary research of this kind, including the ambiguities of the material, are so many and so great as to explain why the suggestions differ so widely. Some of the sensitive questions are: what constitutes a genre?, to what extent is a genre bound to be used with specific functions in specific situations?, which comparative material is relevant? More specific questions run as follows: is it significant that the ancient philosophers' "biographies" are about 150 years younger than the oldest Gospel, and the ancient romances of the same age? — they have also been adduced for elucidation. Does it matter that most of the material of the Gospels has a probable pre-history in the form of traditions, viz. traditions which have obviously been used, in written and/or oral form, in the Early Church? Does the earlier usage have a bearing when these traditions appear as elements in a Gospel? Does it, e.g., cause any tension vis-à-vis the associations or the ideological perspective which are present when the Gospel is a literary whole? Here the assessment is complicated by the circumstance that the evangelists are not simply authors who conceive and shape a work on their own, but rather should be regarded as redactors who select, combine and edit material which to a very great extent already exists and is used in their environment. But nonetheless they moulded the material in a form which after some time acquired the name "Gospel".

2. Remarks on the Concept of Gospel

In what follows, I shall begin with a few remarks on the concept of "Gospel" (2.1.), then define how I shall use the word "genre" (2.2.). These considerations lead to the discussion of the main problem of this paper, viz. can the Gospels be assigned to a "genre" of any kind, or are they at least so similar to texts belonging to a given genre that the similarity is instructive? (3) In order to avoid undue complication, I shall concentrate on the Synoptic Gospels, disregarding John and other, later Gospels.

¹⁵ See, instead, Schmidt 1923 and Theissen 1971.

2.1. First, "Gospel" as a term. In any textbook on Early Christian literature we find the information that its usage of a script is considerably younger than the New Testament Gospels.¹⁶ Thus, the first indisputable example is found in the passage of St. Justin's *Apology* from the mid-second century, where he reports that at the Christian worship they read from the "memories (ἀπομνημονεύματα) of the apostles, which are called Gospels" (1.66.3).¹⁷ Before Justin, but also in his days and later, the term is used with another meaning, the earliest example of which is in Paul. He, however, did not invent it, but took over an already established Christian usage, according to which the term stands for the Christian preaching about Jesus. In the oldest Gospel, *Mark*, it has precisely this meaning, and we encounter it already in the first verse: "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God".¹⁸ The verse becomes a sign on a meta-level in relation to that which follows and tells the reader that the book contains good news about Jesus Christ. *Mark*'s usage elsewhere in his book supports the opinion that the term does not refer to the book as such; cf. e.g., 8:35: "he who loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will save it". Here the readers are not expected to risk their lives for a book but for a message which determined their lives in a definitive manner.

Now, when we encounter the word "Gospel" in the first verse of *Mark*'s Gospel, it represents the earliest Christian usage and is not a genre designation. But nevertheless it says something about the purpose, usage and perspective of the following text, i.e. it served the Christian message about Jesus. His death and resurrection have been a kernel topic in Early Christian faith and preaching, and have also been crucial among the events denoted by the term "Gospel". But being crucial does not imply that there was nothing outside the centre, on the contrary. The *Gospel* of *Mark* is a good example. In a classical formulation it has been called "a passion narrative with a long introduction" (M. Kähler). The narrative of the passion of Jesus begins in the fourteenth of the sixteen chapters. The narrative of the preceding chapters steers towards the passion narrative *via* some previews of how the whole story will end. Thus, the first notice to this effect is at the beginning of the third chapter, where the narrator tells his readers: "the Pharisees went out and conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him" (3:6). In chapters 8, 9

¹⁶ See, e.g., Kümmel 1973, 11f.; Vielhauer 1975, 252ff.

¹⁷ 2 *Clem.* 8:5 is of more or less the same age: "The Lord says in the gospel". — When Justin calls the Gospels ἀπομνημονεύματα this may be intended to help non-Christian readers to have some associations to contemporary literature, in which, on the basis of personal memories, anecdotes and sayings of renowned people were gathered. See Schwartz 1896.

¹⁸ We need not discuss the fact that there may be some hesitation how to assess the manuscript attestation: a shorter reading lacks "the Son of God".

and 10 we encounter three solemn statements of Jesus on his death and resurrection, each followed by passages which develop the theme of adversities and passion as applied to the disciples. Moreover the geographic line of the narrative has a similar function: from Galilee to Jerusalem; from Jerusalem come the enemies who confront the hero in the beginning of the story, and there he is to be executed.¹⁹ In other words, to the Early Christian "Gospel" did not belong only that which Paul called "a crucified Messiah" (1 Cor 1:23) and his resurrection, but also material which dealt with his acts and his preaching, including his ethical teaching on, e.g., marriage and property.²⁰ This religious perspective gives a particular sociolinguistic dimension to that which a reader encounters in a Gospel. They have to do with human fundamentals and with ways of understanding human existence and the aim and meaning of human life.

2.2. The deliberations above, concerning the "Gospel" concept, have bearing on my main interest in this paper, because overarching expectations concerning contents and their relevance often pertain to genre. My example of the story-telling confrerment lecturer is an illustration hereof, as the form of the children's story has not normally the kind of contents encountered in a scholarly lecture, nor has it the function of such a text.

Thus, I assume that there really is something which may be called a literary genre. I am not thinking of Plato's and Aristotle's distinctions between lyrics, epics, and drama, nor of genre in the sense of sets of strict rules to which an author must conform.²¹ But I have in mind vaguer but nevertheless distinguishable literary conventions, visible in so many texts that we may speak of a type of literature.

Such conventions are common to readers and author, and somehow function with both parties: the author adopts them more or less faithfully, and the attitudes and expectations of the readers are determined by them. They may manifest themselves in several properties of the text, and it can be a matter of discussion whether a text must necessarily have this or that property in order to belong to a particular literary genre. Among these conventions, however, are also such as are not visible in the text but pertain to its usage in the group or society, and its function in the life of this social entity.

I suggest that we gather the possible genre constituents in the following four groups:²²

¹⁹ For older and newer discussions concerning the composition of Mark, see Pesch 1976, 15-63.

²⁰ See, e.g., Roloff 1969; idem 1970.

²¹ With, e.g., Cicero and the Neo-classicists; see e.g., Weisstein 1968, 143f.

²² The features I shall discuss are of course treated in the literature mentioned in note 3 above. But I have arranged the elements more systematically and have also tried to be more precise.

C. 1. On the *linguistic surface* of the text: its style, vocabulary, sentence structure, phraseology; e.g. the "once upon a time" of the children's story, the turns of phrase typical of the old German scholarly prose, the standing epithets of the epic hexameter ("Athene of the shining eyes" etc.).

C. 2. Concerning the *contents of the text*, or, in other words, its locutionary level:²³ on the one hand, this group of constituents has to do with characteristics of the text as a whole, such as the structure of its presentation, main motifs, kind of "plot", themes, choice of topics. For example, the typical construction of a detective story with its culmination in a scene where the hero presents the solution; furthermore, the topics of the articles and items on athletic competitions in the newspapers. On the other hand, these constituents have to do with the same sort of properties in parts of the work: the structure of episodes or other portions thereof, their motifs, ways of organizing and presenting the material in shorter narrative units or in pieces of another literary kind. For example, the feature of the short interviews which may be part of articles on athletic or other events. Or the structure and motifs in the anecdotes used in some homiletic traditions, the so-called *exempla*.

C. 3. Whereas the constituents of C. 1 and C. 2 above, can be found in a text whether this text functions within a communication or not, the following ones all envisage an *addressee of the text*.

First, characteristics which are connected with the illocution of the text,²⁴ viz. what its author wants to say through that which he says, or, using another word, his "message". As in the case of C. 2, we can expect this constituent to be found both in minor parts of the text and in the work as a whole; for example, a part of a scholarly paper, in which the author argues against suggestions or results presented by other scholars — the "message" is that in the controversy in question the author is right and the others are wrong. This in turn is a part of the "message" of the paper as a whole, which, hopefully, sheds light on a scholarly issue. In this connection we should also take into account that parts of the text as well as the texts as a whole have semantic functions of some kind or other. Thus, e.g., I have demonstrated that so-called apocalyptic timetables which are found in Jewish apocalyptic texts have a semantic function which is not primarily informative or descriptive, but rather exhortative.²⁵

C. 4. A text of a particular genre is normally used in a particular way, and mostly this usage is also located to a *particular type of audience*, which

²³ Of course, the expression is inspired by J. L. Austin. Cf. Urmson 1967, 213.

²⁴ See the preceding note.

²⁵ Hartman 1975-76 [No. 6 in this volume].

is determined by features belonging to C. 1–3, above. As an example, let us return to the hypothetical case of the conferment lecture. It is part of the convention, shared by lecturer and audience, that the children's story and the academic paper, as well as the football game report, are used in different ways. They belong to different types of situation, and have different sorts of audiences with different expectations (notwithstanding the circumstance that, say, a professor may belong to different audiences on different occasions).

There are not always sharp borderlines between the different linguistic aspects which I have collected in these groups of genre constituents. Thus, for example, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between form and contents. Furthermore, even though we may list features which may be typical of a genre, it is by no means necessary that all are represented in every individual case of a given genre. Nor is it necessary that features from all the possible groups of constituents are present in a text in order that we may discern a genre or a literary convention. Thus, for example, the academic lecture nowadays rarely has a particular style, including sentence constructions and phraseology, but very often it only represents a general, rather faded, everyday language. Nevertheless certain features which could be listed under C. 2–4 must be present before it can be called an academic lecture.

We may ask ourselves whether any of these constituents are weightier than others, when it comes to deciding what is typical of a genre. I am inclined to believe that in those cases where stylistic properties are a typical feature, this plays an important role (C. 1). But then it must be combined with a particular type of contents on what I have called a locutionary level (e.g., the type of "plot", C. 2) and with a specific sociolinguistic function (C. 4). Once, for example, the Swedish writer of children's books, Astrid Lindgren, wrote an article which questioned a bizarre effect of the Swedish taxation system, choosing to use the form of a children's story of a witch by the name of Pomperipossa. The style was there, together with the construction of the plot, but its usage was alien and so was its type of illocution or its message, but the odd stylistic and formal features strengthened the political effect. (Actually the taxation rules were changed eventually.) For some genres certain "illocutionary" characteristics are presumably obligatory (C. 3) and normally these are also connected with a particular usage and sociolinguistic function (C. 4), as well as with specific "locutional" properties, such as topics and types of motif (C. 2). Take, for example, the sort of speeches politicians give in election campaigns: they hardly deserve to be characterized as such if they do not address presumptive voters, do not touch on political

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