

Paul's Areopagus speech has long fascinated New Testament readers.¹ Historical-critical issues have received the most attention as scholars focused on "the question whether the Paul who speaks here is the Paul of the letters."² Investigations of narrational and rhetorical techniques have played subservient roles in the effort to answer this one burning question. The present essay eclectically combines ancient and modern literary-critical methods in order to lift narrational and rhetorical matters out of their role of subserviency.³ The results of literary-critical investigations of biblical narratives often offer valuable correctives to historical-critical exegesis.⁴ A literary-critical investigation of the narrative of Paul in Athens allows us to appreciate better its subtlety and

¹ For bibliography see Ernst Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte neu übersetzt und erklärt* (MeyerK 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965); English translation: *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), p. 516, and F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester/Grand Rapids: Apollos/Eerdmans, 3rd edn, 1990), pp. 379-380.

² Haenchen, p. 528. Philip Vielhauer's essay, 'On the "Paulinism" of Acts', in Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martin (eds.), *Studies in Luke-Acts*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), pp. 33-50, which largely summarizes and restates Dibelius' position, remains the authoritative statement for those who hold that Paul could not have made such a speech. Hans Conzelmann, 'The Address of Paul on the Areopagus', in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, pp. 217-230, is in this camp and says quite skeptically, "Not historical memory but a literary device takes the inscription on an Athenian altar, to unknown gods, well known to travelers through travel guides, and changes it into the singular and then uses this as a point of departure for Christian ideas. Surely Paul (!) cannot have spoken *this way*, nor can the Christian missionary begin his preaching in this way everywhere. It can only be the work of an author developing his paradigmatic discussion" (p. 220, italics his). Contrast Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), p. 24: "Whether or not Paul ever delivered precisely such an address 'in the middle of the Areopagus,' it is clear that he could have done so, for he reminded the Thessalonians (whom he had visited before reaching Athens) that they had 'turned from idols, to serve a living and real God, and to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come' (1 Thess. 1:9-10)." David Wenham, 'The Paulinism of Acts again: two historical clues in 1 Thessalonians', *Themelios* 13 (Ja-Feb, 1988), pp. 53-55, also cites 1 Thess 1:9-10 as an often overlooked historical clue. A comment by W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989), p. 359, reveals that this in an issue which still elicits strong emotions in some quarters: "Although some still take Philipp Vielhauer's famous essay as gospel truth, there are signs that it is being recognized as a gross overstatement of the evidence."

³ The approach I take is influenced by the semiotic theory of A. J. Greimas. Daniel Patte, *The Religious Dimensions of Biblical Texts: Greimas's Structural Semiotics and Biblical Exegesis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 1-2, presents Greimas's semiotics "as a theory that can generate a broad range of exegetical applications beyond those already implemented. This theory offers many other exegetical possibilities that, at times, other types of exegesis--in particular, the different kinds of 'literary critical' exegesis--already implement, whether or not they call upon Greimas's semiotics." These observations suggest the possibility that Greimas's semiotic theory could serve as the foundation for eclectic methods appropriating insights from various types of literary criticism. This paper presents one such attempt.

⁴ See *Religious Dimensions*, pp. 3-10, for a discussion of the complementary relationship between historical-critical and literary-critical methods.

sophistication, and suggests that historical and theological arguments both for and against the essential authenticity of the speech are based on inadequate reading strategies. Specifically, historical-critical scholars have failed to occupy the position of the implied reader when interpreting the Areopagus speech, a position that distinguishes between the oratees of the speech--a group of philosophically inclined pagans who are uninformed outsiders in relation to Christianity--and the narratee--Theophilus--who is an informed insider on the basis of his reading of Luke/Acts to this point in the narrative.

Before proceeding to my analysis of the speech from the position of the implied reader, I will delineate the entire story of Paul in Athens first as a narrative discourse unit, and second as a narrative schematic unit. A narrative discourse and a narrative schematic delineation of a textual unit are based on divergent criteria, which, as I will show later, are not unrelated to the differing impressions this story makes on historical-critical scholars who defend or deny the its essential accuracy.

THE NARRATIVE DISCOURSE UNIT

Acts 17:15-34 can be considered a narrative discourse unit. A unit of narrative discourse is identified by three criteria. First, it is identified by transformations in the spheres of character, location, and/or time.⁵ Paul is separated from Silas, Timothy, and the brethren in v. 15. New characters, unrelated to those found in vv. 15-34, appear in 18:2. The location shifts in v. 15 from Beroea to Athens and then, in 18:1, from Athens to Corinth. Temporal data, though chronologically imprecise, is present. A message is sent to Silas and Timothy in v. 15 ἵνα ὡς τάχιστα ἔλθωσιν

⁵ Daniel Patte, Structural Exegesis for New Testament Critics (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), p. 16. These processes of transformation are called actorialization, spacialization, and temporalization in Greimasian theory. See Religious Dimensions, pp. 176-177, for a discussion of them and the simultaneous effects of "disengagement" and "engagement" that they produce in religious discourse.

πρὸς αὐτὸν (that they might come to Paul as soon as possible), and in v. 6 we also read Ἐν δὲ ταῖς Αθήναις ἐκδεχομένου αὐτοῦ τοῦ Παύλου (Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens). Then, 18:1 begins with Μετὰ ταῦτα (After these things). Secondly, a narrative discourse unit is identified by a change of theme at the beginning and end of the unit.⁶ A new theme is encountered in v. 16 with the mention of idolatry. After chapter 17, Paul is back among Jews and the theme of idolatry is left behind. Thirdly, a narrative discourse unit is identified by inverted parallelisms between the unit's introduction and conclusion.⁷ Inverted parallelisms take diverse forms depending on the type of discourse under analysis and the subject matter.⁸ In this case we may note two inclusions and a transformation. The first inclusion expresses skepticism.

What would this babblers say? (17:18) / . . . some mocked . . . (17:32a)

The second inclusion expresses curiosity (17:19/17:32b)

May we know what this new / We will hear you again about
teaching is which you present? (17:19) about this. (17:32b)

While the inclusions leave the impression that little has been achieved, the final sentence of the unit announces a transformation: some joined Paul and believed (v. 34).

THE NARRATIVE SCHEMATIC UNIT

Acts 17:15-34 can also be considered a narrative schematic unit.⁹ This delineation employs different criteria from the former and offers us another perspective.

In brief, the narrative schema subdivides a narrative into three parts of the narrative

⁶ Structural Exegesis, p. 15.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

⁹ Delineation of units on the basis of these two models do not always coincide as they do here.

development: (1) a situation of lack and the establishment of a qualified subject, (2) the decisive action(s), (3) a situation of lack is overcome, and the retribution and recognition of the subjects take place.¹⁰

The narrative of Paul in Athens yields rather well to such a generalized narrative schematic analysis. Verses 16-18 establish a situation of lack, a lack of proper understanding of Paul's *καταγγελία*. The Athenians misunderstand Paul's preaching of Jesus and the resurrection as the proclamation of foreign deities because of their polytheistic and idolatrous religiosity. In vv. 19-20 Paul is established as the subject qualified to overcome lack of understanding of his *διδασχία*. The mandate or assigned task is the challenge of making his teaching intelligible to the Athenians. Paul, the hero, accepts the challenge and, by the decisive action of making a speech, struggles to attain victory. Ironically, victory is intimated by the mocking of some upon hearing of the resurrection of the dead (v. 32). This shows that the lack of understanding which allowed the Athenians to interpret *τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν* in a way perfectly understandable and palatable to them, i.e. as foreign deities, has been overcome, and the real offense is now apparent. Paul also receives recognition: the willingness of part of the audience to hear Paul again shows that he has maintained his position as qualified subject and hero.

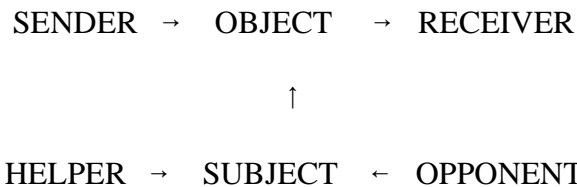
The previous narrative discourse analysis of the unit foregrounded the theme of idolatry, since idolatry is mentioned at the beginning of the discourse unit and signals the change of theme. In the narrative schematic analysis, however, the lack of proper understanding of Paul's proclamation of Jesus and the resurrection is foregrounded. From this angle, idolatry is only an obstacle to be removed in the process of overcoming the lack. As I will demonstrate in my concluding remarks, the contrasting emphases these two analyses support are not unrelated to the different impressions

¹⁰ Structural Exegesis, p. 16.

this narrative makes on historical-critical scholars.

ACTANTIALIZATION IN ACTS¹¹

Now that I have marked the boundaries of the narrative unit to be interpreted, I will establish the actants encountered in the unit. An actant is a role or a function in a narrative. The same actant can be performed by a number of different characters or actors. It is obvious that Paul is the main actor in this unit--he is the subject or object of every verb in vv. 6-20. He is the bearer (εἰσφέρεις, v. 20) of some new teaching (ἡ καινὴ . . . διδασχῆ, vv. 18-20) which is aimed at anyone who will listen (v. 17).¹² But where did he get this message? Is it his own invention? Are others involved in his work? Do others perform the same function? Does it always meet with opposition? To answer these questions I will briefly examine the actantialization in Acts. For this task I use A. J. Greimas's actantial mythical model.¹³



All actants are explicit or implicit in 1:8. The paradigmatic subject is "witnesses" (μάρτυρες), in this case the apostolic band (they are the subject of the verbs). The object is the word of witness (ὁ λόγος, i.e. the content of their witness).¹⁴ The sender is Jesus (the one enunciating this

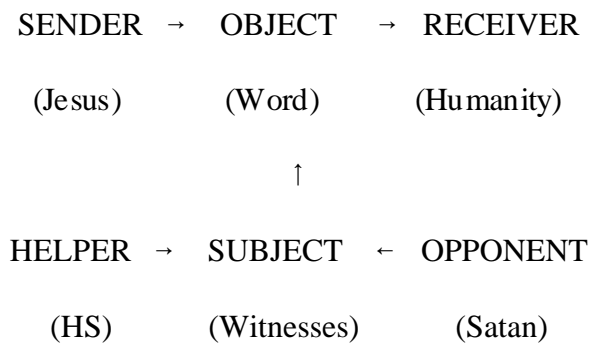
¹¹ Actantialization must be distinguished from actorialization. An actant is a function. The same function may be performed by a variety of actors in a given narrative.

¹² I say main actor rather than character. As Patte, in *Religious Dimensions*, p. 97, explains, "Greimas speaks of 'actors,' rather than 'characters,' in the discursive syntax component, because the phenomenon of 'actorialization' is not limited to the establishment of 'characters.' It also includes the generation of 'enunciator,' 'enunciatee,' 'narrator,' 'narratee,' etc., who are also 'actors.'"

¹³ A. J. Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method* (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p. 207.

¹⁴ Subjects "witness" with the word in Acts (e.g. 2:40-41; 8:25).

commission). The receiver is the entire world (πάση τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς). The helper is the Holy Spirit. The need for a helper implies an opponent. This piques the reader's curiosity which will eventually be satisfied by an initial identification (4:1ff.). Nevertheless, just as the reader will discover that the Apostles are not the only witnesses, she will later discover that the Jewish leaders are not the only, nor the paradigmatic opponent in the actantial model. They, and all who oppose the witnesses, are under the power of, and filling the role of, Satan, the oppressor and arch enemy in Acts (5:3; 10:38; 13:10; 26:18). Thus we have the following actantial model.



The application of the actantial model to sub-units within the narrative must allow for homologation. One must also allow for greater specificity and, infrequently, transposition in actantial roles. The following table illustrates these phenomena in some detail.

SUBJECT (Witnesses)

Apostles	1:8 - 2:13; 4:32-37
Peter (and the apostles)	2:14 - 2:47; 5:1-42
Peter (and John)	3:1 - 4:31; 8:14-25
Stephen	6:1 - 7:60
The dispersed ones	8:1-4; 11:19-21
Philip	8:5-13, 26-40

Saul/Paul	9:1-30; 16:1 - 28:31
Peter	9:31 - 11:18; 12:1-23
Barnabas	11:22-24
Paul and Barnabas	11:25-30; 12:24 - 15:41
<u>OBJECT (Word)</u>	
Word(s)	1:8 (implicit); 2:22,41; 4:4,29; 6:4; 8:4,21; 10:36 (twice),44; 11:19; 14:25; 16:6; 17:11; 18:5
Word of God	4:31; 6:2,7; 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5,7,44,46,48; 17:13; 18:11
Testimony to the resurrection	4:33
The words of this life	5:20
Word of the Lord	8:25; 13:49; 15:35,36; 16:32; 19:10,20
Word of this salvation	13:26
Word of his grace	14:3; 20:32
Word of the gospel	15:7
New teaching	17:19
The gospel of the grace of God	20:24
<u>SENDER (Jesus)</u>	
Jesus/Lord	1:8; 9:15
Holy Spirit	13:2
<u>RECEIVER (Humanity)</u>	
Humanity	1:8
(All Judea	3:26

and Samaria	8:5
and to the end of the earth)	13:46-47
<u>HELPER (Holy Spirit)</u>	
Holy Spirit	1:8 - 28:31
Gamaliel	5:34-39
An angel of the Lord	5:19-20; 8:26; 10:3-6; 12:7-23; 27:23-24
Lydia	16:14-15
Jesus	18:9-10
Son of Paul's sister	23:16-22
<u>OPPONENT (Satan)</u>	
Satan (origin of all wickedness and ignorance)	5:3; 10:38; 13:10; 26:18
Jewish rulers	4:1 - 12:23; 23:1-5; 24:1-8; 25:2-3,7
Saul	8:1-3; 9:1-2
Simon	8:20-23
"Jews"	9:23-24; 13:45 - 14:19; 17:5-9,13; 18:6,12-17; 19:9; 20:3,19; 21:11, 27 - 22:30; 23:12-15
"Hellenists"	9:29
Circumcision party	11:2-3; 15:1-5
Owners of possessed girl	16:19-24
Demetrius	19:20-27

The paradigmatic subject is "witnesses."¹⁵ This designation is reserved for the Apostles, Stephen, and Paul, all of whom saw the risen Lord. But as the table reveals, others may play an homologous role. The object, though known by many names, is clearly verbal witness to Jesus and the resurrection. The receiver is all humanity. Thus it is natural and fortuitous that the helper invests the subjects with miraculous abilities of word and deed. The subjects powerfully confute all who would challenge them, and work miracles which validate their message. In addition, they are granted the power to speak in tongues and prophesy. The initial and most prominent occurrence of speaking in tongues in Acts emphasizes the ability to be understood in foreign languages. Thus both of these gifts from the helper are extremely valuable for the accomplishment of a task which consists of communicating a message.

This analysis of the actantial mythical model operative in Acts dramatizes the monotony of both the overall narrative and its sub-units. The model pervades the whole and the parts. As I will later show, an awareness of the presence of this model in the Athens narrative is significant in adjudicating the relative merits of the arguments for or against historical authenticity. Now, however, I will take up the rhetorical unit embedded within the narrative subunit I have delineated--the Areopagética.

THE RHETORICAL UNIT

(17:22-31)

It is crucial at this point that we distinguish between the narrator, the orator, the oratees, and the narratee. As readers we are about to enter into what is arguably the most sophisticated speech composed by the most accomplished narrator and speech writer in the New Testament. It will not

¹⁵ See Robert P. Casey, 'Μάρτυς', in F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (eds.), *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 5, *Additional Notes to the Commentary* (London: MacMillan, 1933; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 31-33.

do to be insensitive to the fact that this speech is to be heard on two levels: that of the oratees who are inquisitive and philosophically inclined pagans, and that of the narratee, Theophilus, who, like the implied reader, is now, on the basis of his reading of Acts up to this point, an insider. We often speak of the omniscient narrator, but in this case the narratee's knowledge of the orator and what he represents is so superior to that of the oratees, who are even made to admit their ignorance explicitly in v. 20, that we would do well to speak of the narratee's shared omniscience with the narrator. This sets up a situation which the narrator fully exploits to create a highly entertaining reading experience. Much of that entertainment is derived from the deliberate use of double entendre, words and phrases which have one set of associations for insiders in the Christian movement such as the orator, and another for outsiders such as the oratees of this speech.

The orator opens his proem or exordium with the conventionalized vocative salutio "Men of Athens."¹⁶ Then, in his captatio benevolentiae, he employs an ambiguous word which only occurs twice in the New Testament, both times in Acts: δεισιδαίμων (v. 22).¹⁷ This word can have a positive or a negative connotation--either very religious, or very superstitious. When the orator says, "I perceive that in every way you are thoroughly god-fearing," does he mean "thoroughly religious," or "thoroughly superstitious." There is no consensus on which meaning is intended in v. 22.¹⁸ Historical-critical scholars argue in favor of one or the other on the basis of their estimation

¹⁶ On the possibility that this was not a appropriate salutio in this situation see George Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism (Chapel Hill/London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 130. For a discussion of the rhetorical terms of arrangement employed in the following analysis see Kennedy, pp. 23-24.

¹⁷ See entry under δεισιδαιμονέω, LSJ, p. 375. δεισιδαιμονία appears in 25:19.

¹⁸ E.g., Haenchen, p. 520, decides in favor of "the cautiously appreciative 'religious.'" Cf. Bruce, p. 380: "[δεισιδαιμονιστέρους] was as vague as Eng. 'religious,' and here one may best translate 'very religious,' 'uncommonly religious.' But KJV 'too superstitious' is not entirely wrong; to Paul the Athenian religion was mostly superstitious . . ." It is not really accurate to say δεισιδαιμονιστέρους was as vague as "religious" since, according to Webster's, "religious" carries no connotation of superstition. One must prefix a qualifier like "overly" to "religious" to arrive at an approximation to superstitious. Not even "pious" is analogous since its negative connotation is rather hypocrisy. Unfortunately, we simply have no suitable word available, and I make no claim for the superiority of my

of what the Paul of the letters might mean by this word. The answer, however, is not either/or but both/and.

Recognizing that the author has chosen to have the orator begin his speech with an ambiguous statement, the reader is faced with the responsibility both of deciding how the oratees would interpret this ambiguity and how the narrator expects the narratee to interpret it. Due to the conventions of rhetoric, in this case the captatio benevolentiae, the oratees can hardly expect the orator to begin by insulting them. Even less so if the situation portrayed is not deliberative but forensic as George Kennedy suspects.¹⁹ Yet they should probably be imagined to recognize this as a remote possibility since the orator has already appeared in their midst as another Socrates. Like Socrates he makes a general nuisance of himself by accosting anyone and everyone with his arguments (v. 17), and by apparently introducing foreign divinities in Athens (v. 18).²⁰ So although there is room for doubt about the sincerity of the orator's introduction, due to the gravity of the situation, the oratees should probably be imagined to give the orator the benefit of the doubt. From their perspective, unless he is a fool, or exceedingly arrogant, he must be complimenting them.

But the narratee is operating in a different space--that of the entire narrative of Acts to this point. The narratee knows by now who the orator is and what he represents. Indeed, solely on the basis of the sub-narrative unit we are examining, the narratee, informed at the outset by the narrator, knows that the orator strongly disapproves of Athenian religion (v. 16), and can hardly be sincerely commending it. With this superior knowledge the narratee is in a position to be entertained by this wily orator who simultaneously compliments and insults, leaving the oratees confused, if not

attempt over others. Bruce's most valuable observation is the one he does not develop: "Cf. δεισιδαιμονία in 25:19, where it might have one meaning for the speaker and another for the person addressed."

¹⁹ Kennedy, pp. 129-130. This also appears to be Bruce's position (Bruce, pp. 377-378).

²⁰ Haenchen, p. 527.

oblivious, but the narratee in stitches. And so from the very beginning of this speech the narratee is made aware that the orator is capable of addressing his audience with tongue in cheek. Now that the narratee is sensitized to this capability, he will be on the look out for it. He will know that should more such ambiguities appear, their proper interpretation will not involve an either/or but a both/and. He will not have long to wait.

In the orator's narration of the facts (v. 23) he calls attention to the altar dedicated "To an unknown God," and states his intention: "What therefore you worship ἀγνοῦντες, this I proclaim to you." We are already faced with our second ambiguity.²¹ ἀγνοέω has both a positive and negative connotation. It can mean a straightforward, non-culpable epistemic failure resulting in a lack of knowledge, or a culpable moral failure of acting ignorantly in regard to what is right, to act amiss.²² When the orator says "What therefore you ignorantly worship, this I proclaim to you," does he mean "What you worship unknowingly," or "What you worship improperly/shamefully"?²³ The answer is both/and. The oratees are kept in confusion, unsure whether they are being excused or accused of ignorance, while the narratee's expectations generated by the first example of double entendre are satisfied by a second.

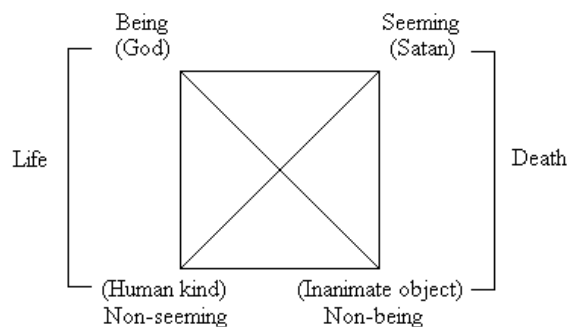
Now the orator comes to the proposition, that which the speaker wishes to prove (vv. 24-25). His convictions are expressed through three sets of oppositions which contrast positive views pertaining to God, which are, of course, the orator's, with negative views belonging to the oratees.

²¹ See Bertil Gärtner, The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation (Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis XXI; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1955), pp. 236-237.

²² See entry ἀγνοέω in LSJ, pp. 11-12.

²³ Fortunately, unlike the first example, this double entendre can be reproduced in English by the use of "ignorantly," which can carry epistemic and/or moral connotations. The RSV (What therefore you worship as Unknown) has introduced a univocality not found in the Greek. Indeed, this translation is grammatically insupportable since ἀγνοῦντες is in agreement with the plural εὐσεβεῖτε, not the singular ὃ whose antecedent is θεῶ.

First, in v. 24 the positive view that God makes a dwelling place for human beings is opposed to the negative view that human beings make a dwelling place for God. Secondly, in v. 25 the positive view that God sustains human beings is opposed to the negative view that human beings sustain God. Verse 26 elaborates on the radical dependence of human beings on God and introduces the idea that God intends for human beings to seek after God. At this point the orator turns the tables on the oratees by constructing his strongest proof from quotations of their own poets. Their poets know that God is intimately close to human beings and that human beings are God's kind. This prepares for the third and final opposition which is a powerful refutation of an opposing view (vv. 28-29). The positive view that human kind are representative of God's kind is opposed to the negative view that inanimate objects (idols) are representative of God's kind. We can illustrate this conviction with a veridictory semiotic square.²⁴



Satan is not mentioned in the speech. This might appear surprising since the actantial mythical model demonstrates the pervasive presence of the role of the opponent throughout Acts. Since the

²⁴ A good introduction to the semiotic square is offered by Ronald Schleifer, *A. J. Greimas and the Nature of Meaning: Linguistics, Semiotics and Discourse Theory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), pp. 25-33. See *Religious Dimensions*, pp. 119-122, for a description of the "para digmatic logic of systems of convictions" as expressed by the squares of the veridictory and thymic categories. Patte's paraphrase, p. 121, is helpful: "in the square of the veridictory category, 'being' should be read as 'being which is felt as really being'; 'seeming' as 'being which is felt as not really being'; 'non-seeming' as 'being which is not felt as not really being'; and 'non-being' as 'being which is not felt as really being.'"

narratee already knows that Satan is the power opposed to God (5:3; 10:38; 13:10), he might wonder why Satan is not now explicitly associated with idolatry. How natural such an association would be is confirmed later in the orator's description of his commission as being sent by Jesus to open the Gentiles' eyes, "that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (26:18). So why is Satan not explicitly mentioned in the Areopagus speech? Satan has been occulted for rhetorical effectiveness. The narrator revels in portraying the orator as a master of ambiguity. One of the functions of this ambiguity is to obscure the offensiveness of his discourse. The very opposite of this strategy would be to have the orator state point blank "You are devil worshippers!" From the narrator's perspective, Paul is far too sophisticated for that.²⁵

The orator's peroration begins with a third and fourth use of double entendre, the former playing on an ambiguity noted earlier, only now with the substantive ἄγνοια (v. 20). Does the phrase "the times of ignorance" refer epistemologically to "the times of misconception" or morally to "the times of culpable error?"²⁶ Once again, the answer is both/and. The fourth double entendre appropriately enough has been "overlooked" in exegesis of the Areopagetica. I refer to ὑπεροράω, a hapax legomenon in the New Testament. This word can mean the neutral "to overlook" or the negative "to despise."²⁷ Is the orator saying "God, having overlooked the times of misconception,

²⁵ Indeed, Paul is far more sophisticated in this respect than any other orator in Acts. This raises the issue of characterization, a technique which is often denied to the author of Acts.

²⁶ See entry ἄγνοια in LSJ, p. 12.

²⁷ See entry ὑπερόρασις in LSJ, p. 1867, and entry ὑπεροράω in BAGD, p. 841. LSJ lists the neutral meaning first and the negative meaning second while BAGD lists the negative first, making it all the more surprising that New Testament scholars have failed to address it. I have done an extensive study of the occurrences of this word in the LXX, Philo, Josephus, and classical authors. My study confirms that if lexical meanings were arranged by frequency of occurrence, BAGD has the correct order. The vast majority of occurrences are of the negative "to despise or disdain." Yet I have also found that many of the occurrences of the neutral "to overlook or disregard" are not neutral at all, but are used of situations where overlooking or disregarding someone or something results in harm to that person or thing. Finally, I note that the Vulgate does not render ὑπεροράω with praeterire or neglegere, the most natural choices to

now commands all people everywhere to change their minds," or "God, having despised the times culpable error, now commands all people everywhere to repent." Not either/or but both/and.

Regardless of which way the oratees hear the orator, the narratee knows that God does not "wink at" idolatry--to quote the KJV. This is not the first speech the narratee has read in Acts that characterized God's attitude toward idolatry. In Stephen's speech (7:1-53) the orator says

And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and rejoiced in the works of their hands. But God gave them over to worship the host of heaven (7:41-42).

Not only does this orator identify enslavement to astral deities as punishment for idolatry, but the exile as well. Both Stephen and Paul are reliable orators in Acts. They can be fully depended on to express views which the reliable narrator approves. Since Stephen's speech explicitly affirms that God punishes idolatry, we can hardly expect another reliable orator in Acts to contradict this affirmation. The oratees at the Areopagus are left guessing whether or not God has overlooked or despised their conduct in the past, although the immediately following call for "change of mind"/"repentance" leaves no doubt as to what his attitude will be from now on. But there can be no doubt in the omniscient narratee's mind as to God's attitude toward idolatry, past, present, or future. The narratee knows which sense of ὑπεροράω expresses the convictions of the orator and the narrator on this subject. Once again the narratee, the insider, knows what the orator is really saying. An oratee must repent and follow Paul before the insider's insight will become possible.

The coup de grace of the use of double entendres is saved for the final clause of the speech where they come fast and furious (17:31). The antithetical meanings of πίστις are well

express "to ignore," but rather *despicere*, "to look down on, despise," a word which is not only similar to ὑπεροράω in construction, but also in its preponderantly negative connotations.

known.²⁸ It can mean, among other things, "faith" or "proof." Does the orator proclaim that God is "supplying proof by raising him from the dead" or "supplying faith by raising him from the dead"? Both/and. The oratees have been identified as philosophers. For them πίστις is a guarantee or a means of persuasion--a proof.²⁹ But the narratee recognizes that the entire peroration is composed of technical insider jargon. Indeed, the narratee is now a gnostic par excellence. In contrast to the philosophically inclined oratees, she knows that μετάνοια is not simply a change of mind (2:38),³⁰ δικαιοσύνη is not simply fulfillment of legalities (13:38), and πίστις is not simply a logical proof (3:16, et al.). These words mean one thing to the philosophical oratees, but quite another to the insider.

HISTORICAL-CRITICAL REFLECTION

Much of the debate over whether the Areopagetic is a Jewish-Christian missionary sermon--a type of speech Paul supposedly could have made--or "a hellenistic speech about the true knowledge of God"³¹--a type of speech Paul supposedly could not have made--ultimately derives from individual reader's/scholar's adoption of the perspective of either the insider or the outsider, the narratee or an oratee. The following excerpts from Gärtner's magisterial study of the Areopagus speech are illustrative.

Μετανοεῖν always implies radical conversion, which involves condemnation of what is being discarded, and a total adoption of something new. To interpret μετανοεῖν as an

²⁸ See entry πίστις in LSJ, p.1408.

²⁹ Bruce, p. 340, notes that "Vettius Valens 277.29f. provides an example of πίστιν παρέχω in the same sense."

³⁰ See also 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 11:18; 13:24.

³¹ Martin Dibelius, 'Paul on the Areopagus', in Mary Ling (trans.), Studies in the Acts of the Apostles (London: SCM, 1956), p. 57.

exhortation to men to correct their mental conception of God seems to me a forlorn effort to rescue a philosophical line of reasoning. . . .

. . . The epithet [δεισιδαίμων] is well chosen, since it can express both blame and commendation, according to the speaker's own attitude to the religion. It is possible that the Athenians took it as a compliment. But, in Paul's mouth, it patently stamps the Athenians' religion as idolatry. It would be quite out of character for Paul or Luke to equate God with what the word δαίμων implies, i.e. evil spirit, Luke 8:27.³²

In both of these excerpts Gärtner implicitly admits the possibility that the words can bear the connotations that opponents of the speech's essential authenticity emphasize, but because he identifies exclusively with Paul rather than the oratees he totally rejects this emphasis. The opponents of the speech's authenticity, by contrast, emphasize the perspective of the philosophical oratees. These interpreters refuse to know Paul in any other way than the oratees know him while interpreting the speech. On the one hand we have readers who view the Areopagética as a Jewish-Christian missionary speech, who identify with the orator, and play up the Old Testament allusions of the speech while playing down the explicit quotations of pagan poets. From their perspective, the orator judiciously chooses pagan quotations which are not incompatible with biblical religion. On the other hand we have readers who view the Areopagética as a hellenistic speech about the true knowledge of God, who identify with the oratees, and play down the Old Testament allusions of the speech while playing up the explicit appeal to pagan poets. For their perspective, the orator judiciously chooses Old Testament allusions which are not incompatible with the best of pagan philosophy.

Both of these readings are inadequate because they fail to adopt the position of the

³² Gärtner, pp. 237-238, italics mine.

implied reader. The reader already knows that the author of Acts is fascinated by the polysemic nature of words and the way a word or expression can mean one thing to the speaker and quite another to the audience (e.g. Jesus and Anastasia as recently as 17:18). Therefore, since the reader has been given fair warning that the author enjoys play on words, when faced with the highly ambiguous δεῖσιδαίμων, she is not strongly tempted to think only one meaning is meant. Since neither of the historical-critical readings described above adopt the position of the implied reader, both readings are insensitive to the intentional ambiguities in the speech. Both readings insist upon either/or rather than both/and.

We may also observe a correlation between these two readings and the delineation of the unit based on either a narrative discourse or a narrative schematic analysis. A reading which views the speech as a hellenistic speech about the true knowledge of God immediately detects a preoccupation with idolatry. I submit that these readers are unconsciously interpreting the unit by a narrative discourse model, the model which foregrounded the change of theme to idolatry at the beginning of the unit. For them, the motif of Jesus and the resurrection is only an afterthought compared to what is really important--the repudiation of idolatry and affirmation of the monotheistic tendency of hellenistic philosophy. In contrast, a reading which views the speech as a Judaeo-Christian missionary sermon emphasizes the proclamation of Jesus and the resurrection. I submit that these readers are unconsciously interpreting the unit by a narrative schematic model, the model which foregrounded the overcoming of a lack of proper understanding of Paul's proclamation. For them, the motif of the true knowledge of God is only a foundation for what is really important--the communication of an accurate understanding of Jesus and the resurrection. The former readers are astounded that the latter can give so much weight to a kerygmatic needle in a Hellenistic haystack. The latter readers are astounded that the former cannot see the Christological forest for the

theological trees. Both readings have some validity, as their longevity testifies, but both are partial-- in both senses of the word.

Nevertheless, the actantial mythical model I have demonstrated to be active in Acts does tip the balance ever so slightly in favor of those readers who favor the emphases of the narrative schematic model. The actantial analysis shows that the Word, proclamation of Jesus and the resurrection, is the paradigmatic object throughout Acts. If it is not the object in the Areopagus speech then this speech is truly exceptional. This is precisely what readers who describe it as a hellenistic speech about the true knowledge of God claim. But our presuppositions should favor consistency unless we find some truly anomalous phenomenon like the complete absence of the usual object.

The semiotic square described earlier also serves as a check. Using it we observed the occultation of Satan as opponent. But a relationship of implication was established on the negative deixes between Satan and idolatry. I also noted that the power of Satan is manifested through ignorance (3:17). Thus it is to the actantial position of opponent, not object, that idolatry and ignorance of the true God belong. Idolatry and ignorance are only obstacles, manifestations of the opponent, that the hero, Paul, must overcome in order to deliver the object, proclamation of Jesus and the resurrection, to humanity.