

ATTR Spring Seminar 2020

Fiction and Authority



Speakers, Abstracts, and Readings

JORUNN ØKLAND, Norwegian Institute in Athens: “Truth is a Function of Narrative Shape: Why Acts is the greater authority on the life of Paul than Paul’s own writings”

Abstract:

In many details regarding the apostle Paul’s biography, there are serious discrepancies between the narrative presented in Luke’s work "Acts of the Apostles" and the information given in the letters written by Paul himself. The discrepancies are found in central areas, such as Paul's conversion, his meeting with Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem, and his itinerant activity as a craftsman and teacher.

Scholarship has come to terms with these discrepancies in different ways:
- certain scholars have argued that there is no discrepancy, and used a hermeneutics of harmonisation to fit the different accounts together;

- other scholars have argued that Paul’s friend - or fan of a later generation, Luke, got some of the details wrong.

- historical-critical scholars of a redaction-critical bent have argued that Acts is a volume edited together from several separate accounts. Luke is responsible for narrative framework, but not for content.

Regardless of explanation, Acts functions so persuasively as a story that even critical bible editions up to this day are published with a map over Paul’s missionary journeys as part of the appendices. These journeys are central to the narrative structure in the Book of Acts but are not mentioned as such in Paul’s letters, although the letters make clear that he does travel, as he did before he became a Christian, too.

The paper will discuss why Acts, not only by ordinary readers but also by biblical scholars, tends to be more formative for the understanding of Paul’s life and activities than Paul’s own letters. Most biblical scholars have read Paul through the lense of Acts, as if Paul’s situational letters do not make any sense before they have been processed through a Lukan framework. I will argue that the central concepts of this ATTR conference can explain this scholarly fallacy: fiction and authority. Facts and details are not authoritative in themselves, they need a narrative framework to be found truly convincing. In this vein, the paper will also present som modern attempts to construct a narrative frame within which Paul’s letters can make authoritative sense independently of Acts.

Required reading:

Wheeldon, M. J. (1989). ‘True Stories’: the reception of historiography in antiquity'. *History as Text: The writing of ancient History*. A. Cameron. London, Duckworth: 33-63.

Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Prologue and Chapter 1: Paul our Contemporary, Chapter 2: Who is Paul? Stanford, Stanford University Press: pp. 1-30.

Suggested reading:

“Letter 24: Jesus to his Mother Mary,” in Philip R. Davies (ed.), *Yours Faithfully: Virtual Letters from the Bible* (BibleWorld: London: Equinox), p. 121-126.

Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, Chapter 1: The Distinctive character of Pauline Mysticism. London, A/C Black, 1931: pp. 1-26.

E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, Introduction: Paul and Judaism in New Testament Scholarship. London, SCM Press, 1977: pp. 1-12.

RICHARD WALSH, University of York: “Consequent Authority: Fiction and Authorship”

Abstract:

This talk aims to situate the problem of the novelist’s authority in relation to the semiotic force of narrative, understood as a mode of sensemaking that is fundamental to human cognition. As such, narrative is grounded in the particular-general duality of form, and faces simultaneously in two directions. I will explore these antithetical orientations under the headings of the implicit and the reflexive, and situate the distinctive rhetorical force of fiction within this context. I’ll begin with some of Henry James’s reflections upon the authority of the novelist, but my main example will be Samuel Beckett.

Required reading:

Walsh, Richard. “Narrative Creativity: The Novelist as Medium.” In *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007, pp. 130-147.

Walsh, Richard. “Narrative Theory for Complexity Scientists.” In *Narrating Complexity*, edited by Richard Walsh and Susan Stepney. London: Springer, 2018, pp. 11-25.

Suggested reading:

Benjamin, Walter. “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov.” In *Illuminations*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1970 (1955).

James, Henry. *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, edited by Richard P. Blackmur. New York: Scribner’s, 1962.

James, Henry. “The Art of Fiction.” In *Theory of Fiction: Henry James*, edited by James E. Miller, Jr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972, pp. 27-44.

Turner, Mark. *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

ANDERS KLOSTERGAARD PETERSEN, University of Aarhus: “Is There a Difference between Fictional and Factual Texts, and What Does This Mean in the Context of Mythmaking?”

Abstract:

Located between Jerusalem and Jericho are the remains of a Byzantine monastery dating to the sixth century (Yair Talmon). It is built on the ground, where according to Luke 10 a man fell

into the hands of ruthless robbers. A good Samaritan, however, saved the man's life and provided for him. There is nothing strange about the mapping of textual worlds on to actual territories – in fact, it is a prevalent feature in pilgrimage and the consecration of sacred places - were it not for the fact that Luke does not pretend the story to have taken place in actual history. It is a parable narrated by the recounted figure Jesus. But what about the Gospel of Luke itself? To what extent is it also a narrated parable with no foundation in real history? Many scholars hold Luke to be the historian *par excellence* of early Christ-religious literature. But how do we know that the text pretends to represent fact and not fiction, what are the borders between the two, and to what extent does the binary make sense in terms of the intellectual world of the first century CE? The fact that contemporary readers in some cases take fiction and map it on to actual landscapes points to an ambiguous relationship in assessing textual fictionality and fictionality not only on the part of readers, but also in terms of textual play with the borders between the two. You may visit Lübeck and Mengstrasse to see the house of the Buddenbrooks. Similarly, you may visit Baker Street 221B or Platform 9^{3/4} at Charring Cross Station. As part of their rhetorical strategy, texts may use documentarism to achieve the effect of verisimilitude, but that, of course, does not imply a less degree of fictionality. Much research on the historical Jesus illustratively shows how scholarship fall into the trap of conflating the use of rhetorical documentarism with not only reality, but also claims to represent reality as *bruta facta*. The lecture presented are ruminations on the subject of fictionality and fictionality with respect to both ancient and modern literature to see if any progress can be made in a notoriously moot and contested field of problems intrinsically related to endorsed ontology.

Required reading:

Anders Klostergaard Petersen, "The Difference between Religious Narrative and Fictional Literature: a Matter of Degree Only," in Markus Davidsen, ed., *Narrative and Belief: The Religious Affordance of Supernatural Fiction*, London, New York: Routledge, 2018. pp. 12–32.

Markus Altena Davidsen, "The Religious Affordance of Fiction: A Semiotic Approach." *Religion* 46:4 (2016): 521–49.

Suggested reading:

Carole Cusack, *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction, and Faith*, Surrey, Ashgate 2010.

Markus Davidsen (ed.), *Narrative and Belief: The Religious Affordance of Supernatural Fiction*, London, New York: Routledge, 2018.

Anders Klostergaard Petersen, "The Riverrun of Rewriting Scripture: From Textual Cannibalism to Scriptural Completion," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* vol. XLIII/4-5 (2012), 475-96.

J. GREGORY GIVEN, University of Virginia: "How Ancient Letters Trouble Ancient Fiction"

Abstract:

This seminar will take up the curious literary phenomenon of the ancient "epistolary novel" as a limit case for testing the extent to which modern taxonomies of ancient genres, as well as modern narratological theories, fit the ancient literary landscape. By drawing to the center of our analysis a number of texts that have largely been relegated to the margins of scholarly treatments of ancient letter collections and biographical narratives, we will investigate together the extent to which "epistolary novels" can be successfully distinguished from (non-fictional)

“letter collections.” Literary features specific to the letter genre, I will suggest, trouble our ability to finally distinguish between “real” letters and “fictional” letters, a realization that entails broader interpretive difficulties for ancient “fictional” literature writ large. These difficulties, in turn, necessitate a methodological reorientation towards reception history—or, in the absence of evidence for such ancient reception, a recognition of the potential for variable epistemological status.

Required reading:

Rosenmeyer, Patricia A. *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Prologue (pp. 1–16).

Hodkinson, Owen. “‘Les lettres dangereuses’: Epistolary Narrative as Metafiction in the *Epistles* of Chion of Heraclea.” In *Some Organic Readings in Narrative, Ancient and Modern: Gathered and Originally Presented as a Book for John*. Edited by Ian Repath and Fritz-Gregor Herrmann (Groningen: Barkuis, 2019), 127–153.

Suggested reading:

Gibson, Roy. “On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections.” *Journal of Roman Studies* 102 (2012): 56–78.

Hodkinson, Owen, Patricia A. Rosenmeyer, and Evelien Bracke, eds. *Epistolary Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Jones, Christopher P. “Greek Letter Collections before Late Antiquity.” In *Late Antique Letter Collections: A Critical Introduction and Reference Guide*. Edited by Christiana Sogno, Bradley K. Storin, and Edward J. Watts. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016, 38–53.

Rosenmeyer, Patricia A. *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

HUGO LUNDHAUG, University of Oslo: “Apocryphal Texts as Authoritative Fiction”

Abstract:

This lecture will explore the fluid boundaries between fact and fiction in religious literature, and the role of religious fiction in shaping believers’ religious worldview. I will use Christian apocryphal texts from Egypt, from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, as examples and discuss the effects of this kind of literature on the beliefs and practices of Egyptian Christians. A range of theoretical and methodological issues with wide-ranging applicability will be discussed, and questions of world-building, authority, credibility, persuasion, pseudo-documentarism, pseudepigraphy, authenticity, and deceit will be approached from a variety of perspectives. What distinguishes truth from lies, or fact from fiction, in religious literature? And does it matter?

Required reading:

Ní Mheallaigh, Karen. “Pseudo-Documentarism and the Limits of Ancient Fiction.” *American Journal of Philology* 129 (2008): 403–31.

Oatley, Keith. “Fiction: Simulation of Social Worlds.” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20.8 (2016): 618–28.

Suggested reading:

Brakke, David. “Early Christian Lies and the Lying Liars Who Wrote Them: Bart Ehrman’s *Forgery and Counterforgery*.” *Journal of Religion* 96.3 (2016): 378–90.

- Hansen, William. "Strategies of Authentication in Ancient Popular Literature." Pages 301–14 in *The Ancient Novel and Beyond*. Edited by Stelios Panayotakis, Maaïke Zimmerman, and Wytse Keulen. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- Laird, Andrew. "Fiction, Bewitchment and Story Worlds: The Implications of Claims to Truth in Apuleius." Pages 147–74 in *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*. Edited by C. Gill and T. P. Wiseman. Exeter, 1993.
- Veyne, Paul. *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*. Translated by Paula Wissing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.