Chapter 10

Late Antique Narrative Fiction: Apocryphal Acta and the Greek Novel in the Fifth-Century *Life and Miracles of Thekla*

Scott Fitzgerald Johnson
Harvard University

'The popular demand in fiction is always for a mixed form.'[1]

I. Introduction

When it comes to the question of Christianity and narrative fiction, one is frequently presented with the apparent dilemma of faith and falsity. If one believes that the Gospels are true, or that the Lives of the saints are essentially true, then this often prohibits an analysis of the form of the texts—out of concern that treating them as literature implies that they are *merely* literature. On the other hand, if one is convinced such texts are substantially false, then it is often the case that they are deemed unworthy of concern for the history of literature—perhaps because they often do make claims about reality and history. Both approaches assume their beginning with the quest for verifiable truth. However, whether the Gospels and the Lives of the saints are verifiably true or false has no necessary bearing, I suggest, on the literary techniques which their authors chose to employ in writing them.[2] Moreover, I would claim that it is less likely that a reader will be able to

[2]   However, the question of verifiable truth has much to do with how one chooses to interpret them: see Frank Kermode, 'The Argument about Canons', in idem, *An Appetite for Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1989), pp. 189–207. Cf. Glen Bowersock, *Fiction and History: Nero to Julian*, Sather Classical Lectures 58 (Berkeley and Los Angeles), p. 123: 'The material in the Gospel narratives, as well as in the Acts of the Apostles, constituted a kind of narrative fiction in the form of history (ἔν εἴδει ἱστορίας, as [the emperor] Julian was to say) that was essentially new to the Greco-Roman world.' This is an important statement, but I disagree that the Gospels are *sui generis* in their blending of history with fictional narrative: they are preceded by older biblical narratives in this vein (Daniel, Esther, etc.) and also

understand the story, argument, or achievement of the text (truth claims or no) unless he or she has taken the time, first and foremost, to seek to understand how the texts were written, and why they have the effects that they do.

Scholarship on the Gospels has come to terms over time with this important question of literary first principles. In this article I take cues from the field of New Testament studies and am indebted to certain scholars in particular who have appropriated with success the tools of Redaction Criticism (*Redaktionsgeschichte*), Narratology, and Reader-Response Criticism.[3] However, my interest in this chapter is temporally later than that of these scholars, and I am not as closely tied to a specific theoretical school as they. My interest is in the historical reception of early Christian literature and the literary techniques passed on to later generations. The second-to fourth-century Apocryphal Acta—narrative texts dealing with the lives and afterlives of early apostles and saints—had a profound impact, I contend, on the formation of Greek saints' Lives in late antiquity (fourth-to-sixth centuries), and it was through them that the literary techniques of the Greek Novel can be seen to work in these Lives.[4]

I take as my test case the sophisticated and experimental *Life and Miracles of Thekla* (c. 470; hereafter *LM*) because the first half of that work is a paraphrase of the second-century *Acts of Paul and Thekla* (c. 190; hereafter *ATh*), a text which has long been seen as the archetypal early-Christian attempt at novelistic writing.[5]

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by substantial intertestamental Jewish literature (e.g. Tobit, Judith, Artapanus' *On Moses*, the *Tobiad Romance*). In the sense that the Gospels achieved an unprecedented level of dissemination in the Greco-Roman world (for novelistic texts), I am in full agreement.

[3] Redaction Criticism: Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: 1969); idem, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: 1974); Werner Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: 1979). Narratology: Elizabeth Struthers Malborn, 'Narrative Criticism: How Does a Story Mean?', in Janice C. Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (eds), *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: 1992), pp. 23–49; Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels* (New Haven: 1989), chapters 1–5. Reader-Response: Robert M. Fowler, 'Reader-Response Criticism: Figuring Mark's Reader', in Anderson and Moore, *Mark and Method*, pp. 50–83; Moore, *Literary Criticism*, chapters 6–8. See also the collection edited by Elizabeth A. Castelli et al., *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective* (New Haven: 1995).(NB: many more references could be cited in each of these categories; I have only listed representative, introductory studies for each.)

[4] I would hesitate, however, to depend too heavily on a chronological model for this phenomenon. I will conclude below with some thoughts on the *continuity* of Christian literature from the New Testament through late antiquity, and I believe shared dependence on novelistic forms underscores that continuity, across genres and across religious, social, or doctrinal divisions.

[5] Thomas Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1983), chapter 6; Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1996), pp. 50–56. For the *Life and Miracles of Thekla*, see the critical text of Gilbert Dagron, *Vie et miracles de Sainte Thècle: Texte grec, traduction, et commentaire*, Subsidia Hagiographica 62 (Brussels: 1978).

The *LM* provides a bridge, therefore, between the early Christian (second-century) world and the late antique (fifth-century) world. The literary goals of the *LM* are manifold, and on close examination it proves to be a very complicated work of narrative Greek writing.[6] The main goal of the text, however, is to attempt to connect Thekla's early, popular legend to her fifth-century pilgrimage and cult site in southeastern Asia Minor, at Seleukeia on the Kalykadnos river. To achieve this goal the author of the *LM* (who remains anonymous throughout) adds to his paraphrase a large collection of 46 miracles which Thekla worked just before and during the composition of the collection itself. Indeed, she is depicted as caring intensely about the propagation of her own miracles and the increase of her fame in the region. In the process of writing the *LM* its author connects his career to Thekla's fame, and the *LM* as a whole begins to take on the dual-purpose role of promoting Thekla and, in turn, promoting his own literary and ecclesiastical ambitions in the region. Since space is limited, in this article I shall concentrate my analysis on the aspects of the *LM* which demonstrate an acquaintance with the techniques of novelistic writing, and I will seek to provide comparative examples from the ancient Greek novels which can place these techniques in a literary-historical context. I will nevertheless seek to draw on some of the broader themes of the work to provide a sense (in short compass) of how it works as a whole.

II. Late Antiquity in the History of the Novel

It is well known that middle-Byzantine writers took to the novel with aplomb and produced excellent examples of a genre that they consciously recognized as classical (even specifically Roman or Second Sophistic) in origin. Medieval Greek texts such as the 'epic' or 'proto-romance' *Digenes Akrites* (written around 1100), the four Greek romances of the twefth century, and the five vernacular Greek romances of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries continued the novel tradition, incorporating Christian elements in various creative ways while generally attempting at the same time to maintain the standard set by the five major classical novelists whose texts have come down to us more or less extant: Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus, Achilles Tatius, Longus, and Heliodorus. Roderick Beaton has demonstrated as much in his book on the *Medieval Greek Romance* (London: 1996), so there is no need to go into detail here.

It is, however, the intervening period—from the *Aithiopika* of Heliodorus (whether we place that work in the third or the fourth century)[7] until the twelfth century—that is at issue, and, in particular, it is the late antique transition into what Ramsay MacMullen and others have effectively labeled the 'dark ages' of Greek

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[6]   For a detailed analysis of this work, see Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla, A Literary Study* (Washington, DC and Cambridge, Mass.: 2006).

[7]   See Bowersock, *Fiction and History*, appendix B, pp. 149–160.

fiction which I intend to address here.[8] The question of whether a taste for the novel (at the very least) continued into the fourth and fifth century can be answered in the affirmative for three reasons. First, Egyptian papyri of various Greek novels have been found to date from this period, indicating that a readership continued.[9] Second, there is no question that the Apocryphal Acta, which are rightly read as part of the novelistic literary milieu, remained popular throughout the fourth and fifth centuries: during late antiquity many Acta were either rewritten (e.g. the *Acts of Paul and Thekla* or the *Acts of John*), written from scratch (e.g. the *Acts of Philip*), or translated (e.g. into Latin or Syriac).[10] Third, the *LM* seems to employ devices from the novels in a manner which betrays an awareness of their literary value for the novelists—the topic of the present paper. Therefore, in strict chronological terms I would argue that MacMullen and the others have overlooked a great deal of evidence that is problematic for a strict ending to novelistic writing. While I will readily admit that nothing on the artistic level of Heliodorus was produced in late antiquity (assuming *Theagenes and Charikleia* itself is not late antique!), it is

[8] In his 1986 article, 'What Difference Did Christianity Make?' (*Historia* 35: 322–343), Ramsay MacMullen states explicitly that Christian morality and taste (or lack thereof) in late antiquity brought about the death of classical forms of literature such as the novel. He writes, 'There were demonstrable changes in literature, too. Nothing similar to Heliodorus', Apuleius', or Petronius' novels could be published, nor poetry like Catullus' or Ovid's. *There* was a difference!' (p. 342; emphasis original). MacMullen is unfortunately not a lone voice on this question. Other similar claims have been made by specialists in the novel: Ben Edwin Perry, *The Ancient Romances: A Literary-historical Account of their Origins*, Sather Classical Lectures 37 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1967), p. 124; B.P. Reardon, 'The Greek Novel', *Phoenix* 3 (1969), p. 294 (but compare idem, *The Form of the Greek Romance* (Princeton: 1991), pp. 167–168); Judith Perkins, 'Representation in Greek Saints' Lives', in J.R. Morgan and Richard Stoneman (eds), *Greek Fiction: The Greek Novel in Context* (London: 1994), p. 257; Roderick Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (2nd ed., London: 1996), p. 54. Despite Glen Bowersock's critique of MacMullen's assertion in *Fiction as History* (esp. p. 142), the tide is not turning: compare the massive collection of articles on ancient novels recently edited by Gareth Schmeling—*The Novel in the Ancient World* (rev. ed., Leiden: 2003)—which includes only one article on the period between the ancient world and Byzantium: Richard Pervo, 'The Ancient Novel Becomes Christian', pp. 685–711. Pervo himself only discusses (briefly) one text written after the third century (*Xanthippe and Polyxena*, fourth or fifth century; see below), thus leaving a gap of some seven centuries—up to the twelfth-century Byzantine novels— that remains completely unexamined (and tacitly condemned) by Schmeling's collection.

[9] Susan Stephens and John Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels: The Fragments* (Princeton: 1995), pp. 481–482. Admittedly, these scraps are from trash heaps in Oxyrhynchus and the Fayum area.

[10] *Acts of John*: Eric Junod and J.-D. Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis*, Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum 1 and 2 (Turnhout: 1983). *Acts of Philip*: F. Bovon, B. Bouvier, and F. Amsler, *Acta Philippi*, Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum 11 and 12 (Turnhout: 1999). Latin translations: Christine Thomas, *The Acts of Peter, Gospel Literature, and the Ancient Novel: Rewriting the Past* (New York: 2003). Syriac translations: William Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols, Hildesheim: 1990 [1871]).

misleading to suggest that Christian writers of the period were neither interested in the novel nor able to incorporate novelistic literary techniques.[11] It hardly needs reiterating that Augustine had read Apuleius or that the *Confessions* and the *City of God* both reveal the hand of a gifted storyteller.[12]

Much more, however, could be said about the role of narrative in the imaginative world of early Christianity. If Frank Kermode's engaging study of the Gospel of Mark, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Harvard, 1979), has not produced a Kermode-school in New Testament scholarship, his and Robert Alter's contributions to the understanding of religious narrative, Christian and Jewish, still stand as tantalizing windows into the thought processes of confessional writers steeped in received, authoritative texts.[13] The hagiographers of late antiquity are hardly different from the biblical authors in their attempts to interpret narrative with more narrative. In the same vein as contemporary late antique *midrash* or *targum*, the writers of Greek saints' Lives acted as interpreters on earlier traditions, bringing disparate strands from the hoary apostolic past to bear on contemporary holy figures. To borrow from Kermode: 'By *midrash* the interpreter, either by rewriting the story or explaining it in a more acceptable sense, bridges the gap between an original and a modern audience.'[14] That these late antique hagiographers chose as their mode of interpretation the genre of the ancient novel should not surprise us. The novel was not only still very popular, but its 'popular' element was the very fact that it could be applied to a variety of stories in a variety of religious and secular contexts, and has been read as exegesis in its own right.[15] The viability of the form was entangled with its success in a

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[11] I have not sought here to bring to bear the third-century Pseudo-Clementine texts, the *Homilies* and the *Recognitions*, which have been profitably read amongst the ancient novels: see Mark J. Edwards, 'The *Clementina*: A Christian Response to the Pagan Novel', *Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992), pp. 459–474. From the perspective of the present chapter, these texts could be situated either as pinnacle examples of the oeuvre of Apocryphal Acta or, more suggestively, as precursors to the narrative hagiography that begins in earnest in the mid-fourth century with the *Life of Antony*: for the latter view, see Averil M. Cameron, 'Form and Meaning: The *Vita Constantini* and the *Vita Antonii*', in Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau (eds), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 2000), p. 74.

[12] Stephen J. Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* (Oxford: 2000), p. 1 (with references) and p. 179. I am indebted to Richard Dobbins for many delightful conversations about the literary aspects of the *Confessions*.

[13] For an introduction to their ways of reading biblical literature, see Frank Kermode and Robert Alter (eds), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1987). A recent study in their mould is Glenn W. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2005).

[14] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1979), p. x.

[15] Consider, for example, the demonstrable popularity of the Jewish novel in the Hellenistic and Roman periods: Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2002), chapters 5 and 6; Laurence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca, NY: 1995).

complex and inextricable manner. In other words, narrative fiction's ability to be 'mixed' with religious concerns of the utmost importance to the writer and audience was certainly not a hindrance to its success (as one might be tempted to say if one is offended by the often heavily stylized character of the Christian examples). Rather, the mixed form attests to the attractiveness of the novel (or romance) genre among pagan, Jewish, and Christian writers alike.

Let us turn now to the text I have chosen as an example of this form, the fifth-century *Life and Miracles of Thekla*, which serves in numerous ways as a prime example of the continuity and vitality of novelistic writing in late antique Christianity.

III. A Late Antique Novel?

Each half of the *Life and Miracles*, the paraphrase and the collection, is heavily dependent on its literary form for the presentation of content and ostensible meaning. The effect of the juxtaposition of these (somewhat discordant) tones is difficult to measure unless one sits and reads the entire work together. However, in terms of the novel, these tones can be said to identify certain positions taken on how the author has set himself the task of telling a story or stories. First, the paraphrase retains a tone of nostalgia for the past, and in this sense it could be called a 'nostalgic history' of the apostolic period. The historical novels, classical and Byzantine, as Beaton and others have explained, also retain this characteristic, and the sense of recreating a past world, is very strong in these texts. Thus the sense of bringing the past into the present (in the words of sociologist Edward Shils) is pre-eminent in the *Life*, much more so than in the *ATh*.[16] However, as historian David Lowenthal has noted, nostalgia is always more about contemporary meaning than ancient, no matter how antiquarian it may seem.[17] Therefore, I would suggest that paraphrase essentially represents an interpretative mode, a kind of exegesis on the source text, and is routinely read as such by historians of Jewish interpretation like Geza Vermes and James Kugel.[18]

The miracle collection, as a complement, retains a tone of the 'golden age' in the pastoral sense, and in this way resembles much more Longus' novel *Daphnis and Chloe*, as well as the Theocritean or bucolic ideal on which that work draws. The endings of all the novels, moreover, point towards an untroubled (albeit un-described) future: for instance, when Anthia and Habrocomes return to Ephesus at the end of Xenophon of Ephesus' novel, the narrator remarks that, 'the rest of

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[16] Edward Shils, *Tradition* (London: 1981), p. 77; see also Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, pp. 16–18.

[17] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: 1985).

[18] Geza Vermes, *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies* (Leiden: 1975); James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1998), p. 23 and passim; see also Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, pp. 78–86.

life was one long festival' for the lovers and their families (5.15). I would argue from this point of view that the lack of structure and overarching narrative in the *Miracles* actually reveals its literary character and generic associations. The impression of what Jacques Derrida called the 'provisional indetermination' of the archive—that is, the inability of the archivist ever to complete his archive and the archive's vulnerability to infinite interpretations—is at the forefront of Thekla's *Miracles* and it drives what there is of narrative.[19]

To put it in summary terms, the overarching theme of the *LM* as a whole is one of 'memory', and the persistent reiteration of the memories—both the paraphrase of an 'apostolic' text and the individual miracle-stories—proves very successful in its construction of Thekla's nostalgic presence in Seleukeia. In the original *ATh* the saint is said to die in Seleukeia at the end of her teaching career; however, in the *LM* she does not die, but descends into the ground alive—emphatically *not* dying—and works miracles in Seleukeia forever, as captured by the second half of the work. Thus, her rewritten death—rewritten into a non-death—provides the author his opportunity to create and establish his vision of a spiritual landscape, in which Thekla moves and works—'haunts' (ἐπιφοιτάω) is, in fact, his favorite word to describe her miraculous activities. The focus of the collection as a whole is therefore on the future, not simply on the past *Life*, and not simply on the present *Miracles*. The linguistic movement of the collection constantly returns the starting point of memory, or memorializing: a rhetorical tool that projects the indeterminacy of the archive, or the bucolic ideal, far into the future.[20] There is no sense that Thekla will ever stop working miracles, nor is there a sense that there will ever come a time when someone who has been healed or helped by her will not be able to tell of it.

This 'indetermination' of the collection (and indeed of the *LM* as a whole) comes to a crescendo at the end of the *Miracles* when the author prays to Thekla that she would grant his work a positive reception (*Mir.* epilogue 9–15).[21] In his words, this is the 'one further miracle' that he wants her to work on his behalf. This appeal for success and permanence in the burgeoning canon of Apocrypha and Lives is necessarily indeterminate and confirms the essential literary characteristic of his work. It also confirms the relationship he has constructed between himself and the saint throughout the text. She has been his patron and he has been her publicist, but ultimately it is up to her whether his work gets the fair hearing it deserves. Intriguingly, he also leaves it up to her whether he will be professionally accepted by his peers:

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[19] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. E. Prenowitz (Chicago: 1996 [1995]); see also Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, pp. 216–217.

[20] See Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, pp. 115–116 on the paratactic style and memorializing in Herodotus and the *LM*.

[21] See Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, p. 12 and pp. 219–220.

> Along with these things, Virgin [Thekla], grant that...I may be seen again to bring to harvest (κομιζομένους) that which I am accustomed to harvest, namely, the persuasion (πειθώ) of my listeners, respect (αἰδώ), the progress (προκοπήν) of the congregation, and the increase of faith and piety (τῆς εὐσεβείας). For, as you know, I was confident of the supremacy of that gift of teaching which came because of you (διὰ σέ), and that it is also because of you (διὰ σέ) that applause and acclamation has come to me, as well as having a reputation among the orators, who are as many as they are amazing (θαυμασίοις). (*Mir.* epilogue 31–41.)

The language in this passage is very significant. The author is associating himself with the succession of apostolic teachers to which Thekla herself belongs. The word εὐσέβεια ('piety') is the central theme of the entire text, serving as it does in the *Life* to solidify Thekla's dependence upon the apostle Paul and, eventually, her apostolic status. Likewise, the phrase 'because of you' is one we will see again shortly: at the end of the *Life* Thekla claims that it is 'because of you [Paul]' that she has achieved the status of martyr and apostle. With this internal resonance in mind, it becomes clear that the author of the *LM* is asking that Thekla grant to himself something like apostolic succession, as Paul granted to her in Myra (*Life* 26).

Thus, in order to understand the conclusion of the *LM*, we must venture back to the beginning, to the *Acts of Paul and Thekla*. I intend on the basis of the summary analysis just presented to demonstrate that the (novelistic) relationship between Paul and Thekla plays a crucial role for this late antique hagiographer, not only as the mode of apostolic nostalgia, but as a pattern of religious narrative and authorship.

IV. The Apostle Paul in the *Life and Miracles*

The novelistic aspect of the *LM* which I would like to consider after having set up this broader framework is the use made of the character of Paul in the first half of the *LM*. In the *Life* the two foci around which Paul and Thekla's relationship revolves are 1) romance and 2) training (or education) in 'piety' (εὐσέβεια); these two elements are only touched on in the *ATh* (the source text), but they are brought to the fore in the *Life* (the paraphrase) and made to bear a great deal of argumentative weight.

Let us begin with romance. From the first time that the two characters meet in the *Life*—in the prison at night in Iconium—their romantic, forbidden liaison is highlighted. Thus, Thekla's secretive entry into the prison is described as an adventure fraught with danger, with gates to be passed and jailers to be bribed. The narrator emphasizes Thekla's uncommon daring:

> [Thekla] conceived and carried out a deed very rash for a young girl, very courageous for an older woman, and even very zealous for a Christian initiate (*Life* 8.15–17).

Paul's speech to Thekla in the jail, not present in the *ATh*, highlights further aspects of her unyielding attraction to the apostle. He says, for instance, that she has been 'inflamed' (ἀναφλεχθῆναι) by the 'small and indistinct spark (σπινθῆρος) of my words' (9.14–15). This theme of young lust is here transformed into a lust for Paul's teaching and for the 'evangelistic course' (τὸν εὐαγγελικὸν δρόμον) that has compelled her to renounce her mother, her family reputation, her wealth, her fiancé and to 'take up the cross' (echoing Matthew 16:24). Paul's recounting of these difficult barriers through which Thekla has come serves to focus the reader's attention on her incomparable desire for the apostle himself. Furthermore, after this recapitulation by Paul of Thekla's deeds thus far—a device not uncommon in the novels, as we shall see—the apostle transitions into a prediction of her future trials and success:

> [The devil] will indulge countless vain fancies against you, through words, through deeds, through promises, through whips, through flattery and fawning, through fire, beasts, judges, *demes*, and executioners. However, if he recognizes even the slightest bit of your vigor and power in Christ, he will make a speedy retreat and will escape faster than speech; he will flee you more than the famous Job, to whom the devil granted victory (against his will), when he attacked him with a thousand evils. (*Life* 9.30–38)

Thekla's romantic drive is linked in this passage to her upcoming training and inevitable victory: Paul predicts the very details of the story to come. In fact, he goes so far as to predict at the end of his speech her reputation after the closing of the original story:

> For you will teach many others and you will lead them to your bridegroom, like Peter, like John, like each of we apostles, among whom you yourself will certainly be counted, I know this well. (*Life* 9.77–80)

Paul's premonition is reminiscent of the closing words of the *Miracles* (quoted above) in which the author prays to Thekla for a positive reception of his work. Thus it is fair to say that the author uses Paul's character in the *Life* as an authorial voice in his attempt to bring out the greater significance of these first steps of Thekla's 'course'. He does this through the literary techniques of foreshadowing and what could be called 'pre-capitulation', foreshadowing in explicit details (already known by the reader). Paul does not have so significant a role in the *ATh*, yet the *LM* appears to have taken the opportunity of this not-fully-fleshed-out Paul to incorporate creatively a new voice, an authorial voice which employs novelistic techniques. Moreover, Paul's role here in the *LM* de-emphasizes the mystery of what will happen to Thekla in the rest of the story—a side effect that could be interpreted as perhaps anti-novelistic. However, as I will show in a moment, this type of rhetorical device may actually reveal his acquaintance with that tradition.

Skipping ahead to the end of the *Life*, Thekla's romantic relationship with Paul is again couched in terms of her training; this time, however, it is her theological

education that is at stake. When Thekla surprises Paul at Myra, in the final stage of her journey before going on alone to Seleukeia, her training seems finished and the rashness she revealed by coming into the jail at Iconium is now described as a perfected part of her character: '[Paul] marveled (ἐθαύμασε) at the virgin for her endurance, her perseverance, and her courage' (*Life* 25.38–39). Thekla's response to Paul likewise speaks of the accomplishment that she has achieved through the course of the story. She begins with a summary of what Paul has meant to her: 'Teacher, the things that have accrued to me through you and your teaching are manifold and greater than speech' (26.1–2). She then proceeds to recount a litany of technical Trinitarian formulae which are much more Cappadocian than Pauline in terms of their vocabulary.[22] For example:

> And I learnt through you the ineffable (ἄφραστον), inaccessible (ἀποριστόν), unchangeable (ἀναλλοίωτον), incomprehensible (ἀκατάληπτον) nature of the power (δυνάμεως) that is in the Trinity (Τριάδι). (*Life* 26.8–10)

Then, at the end of this litany, she closes with a key phrase that she makes to stand for the whole of Paul's teaching: 'Simply put, I have learned through you the prizes and honors that come to those who love the whole piety (εὐσεβείας) and way of life (πολιτείας) in Christ' (26.43–45). 'Way of life' (πολιτεία) is, of course, a programmatic term for late antique and Byzantine saints' Lives, but the word 'piety' represents the key programmatic term for the *Life of Thekla* as a literary unit.[23]

Paul's response at Myra to Thekla's declaration of faith is one of satisfaction. He sends her off to Seleukeia with nothing more to teach her.

> You now lack nothing for apostleship and inheritance of the divine preaching (πρὸς ἀποστολὴν καὶ διαδοχὴν τοῦ θείου κηρύγματος). Therefore, go away, teach the word, complete the evangelistic course (τὸν εὐαγγελικὸν δρόμον), and share my zeal for Christ. On account of this Christ chose you through me (δι᾽ ἐμοῦ), in order that he might move you into apostleship (εἰς ἀποσολήν) and might put in your hands certain cities yet uncatechized (τῶν ἔτι ἀκατηχήτων πόλεων). For it is necessary for you to multiply your talents. (*Life* 26.61–67; cf. Matthew 25:14–29)

This prophetic passage closes the face-to-face relationship between Paul and Thekla, but the virgin still longs after him after they have separated. She returns to Iconium on her way to Seleukeia and visits, like a pilgrim, the site in her neighbors'

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[22] On the Trinitarian language in the *LM*, see Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, pp. 32–35.

[23] On πολιτεία, see e.g. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony*, 14; Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *History of the Monks of Syria*, 1; Palladius, *Lausiac History*, preface 33; *History of the Monks in Egypt*, preface 10. While πολιτεία in this sense is characteristically late antique and Byzantine, the word had taken on its basic Christian sense from an early point: e.g. *1 Clement* 2.8; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 13.2. There are, however, no uses of the word in this sense in the New Testament. See BDAG (definition 3) and Lampe (definition 3d), s.v. 'πολιτεία'.

house where Paul first taught her about εὐσέβεια. In a prayer at the site she promises God never to cease to fight 'on behalf of the piety and faith (εὐσεβείας καὶ πίστεως)' which was revealed to her through Paul (27.18–19).

When looked at as a narrative whole, the *Life*'s picture of the relationship between Paul and Thekla is constructed from an awareness of what Thekla later becomes (historically) and from a desire to emphasize her apostolic stardom from the beginning. This latter effect is achieved through Paul's premonitory voice which, again, is not present in the original *ATh*. Paul pushes Thekla through a training which he presupposes she will complete with flying colors. In his various invented speeches he both re-capitulates the story thus far and pre-capitulates (or foreshadows explicitly) the details of what is left, including her future reception into the company of apostles. Thekla's speech at Myra, full as it is of Trinitarian formulae, is directly imitative of a final speech Paul gives before the judge at Iconium (*Life* 7), which I have not quoted but which is also Cappadocian in character. The general rhetorical effect of the characterization of their romantic student-teacher relationship is, of course, further to attach Thekla to the unassailable reputation and memory of Paul—perhaps because her own status had come under attack in late antiquity (though this happened mainly in the West).[24] From a literary point of view, however, this effect is achieved through the use of certain novelistic devices: such as, the use of suspenseful narration for Thekla's infiltration into the prison at Iconium; the illicit, young-lust character of Paul and Thekla's secret liaison and their discovery in the morning; Paul's recapitulations; and, finally, Paul as an authorial voice. Those elements just mentioned that are present in nascent form in the *ATh* are clearly written-up in the *Life*, and those that are invented from scratch, such as several of Paul and Thekla's speeches (particularly the ones containing Trinitarian language), all contribute to a view that the author is well acquainted with the techniques of the Greek novel or novelistic literature generally.

V. A Brief Comparison with the Greek Novel

This association between the *Life* and the novels can be confirmed through brief examples from the ancient novels themselves. First, the playful romance between Paul and Thekla and, in particular, the exaggerated drama of their illicit, secretive liaison in the Iconian prison, is reminiscent (just to take one example) of Leukippe and Clitophon's attempt to consummate their secret affair in Book 2 of Achilles Tatius. The latter two lovers conspire with the help of their servants Clio and Satyros to meet one night in Leukippe's bedroom, a daring affair which is written in a tone of high suspense and which is only accomplished through deceit and under cover of darkness:

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[24] See Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, pp. 3–5 and pp. 221–226.

> As [Satryos] was speaking, we arrived at the doors guarding my beloved. He remained outside while I entered, Clio admitting me without a sound. I felt a double tremor, of simultaneous pleasure and fear: my fear of the danger was perturbing the hopes of my soul, while my hope of success was overwhelming my fear with pleasure; thus the hopeful part of me was terrified and the anxious part ecstatic.[25] (2.23)

Once this scene is set, and just at the moment when Clitophon slips quietly into her bed, Leukippe's mother Pantheia, having been disturbed by a nightmare, bursts into the room anxious to see that her daughter is safe and sound. The pattern which is shared by both the *Life of Thekla* and *Leukippe and Clitophon* is the following: first, a heightened sense of suspense and danger, which is caused by an illicit (and apparently sexual) meeting at night; second, the actual meeting of the lovers; third, the sudden interruption of the affair by the entry of a figure of authority—in Thekla's case her fiancé Thamyris. In Achilles Tatius the lovers admittedly get away with it and are not actually discovered, but the ultimate effect of the liaison is the same: the couple is forced to flee and is ultimately separated, specifically because of the attempted consummation. Furthermore, the assumption that Paul and Thekla's nocturnal meeting was primarily sexual (as assumed by Thamyris, her mother, and the townspeople) is not made explicit in the *ATh*, as it is in the *Life* (further confirming that the author of the *Life* was playing up the novelistic elements).

Second, the use of invented speeches within historical narrative, a device familiar from ancient historiography, is found in all of the major Greek novels: for example, there are two court scenes with rhetorical speeches at the end of Achilles Tatius (7.7–12; 8.8–11) and one in Persia at the end of Chariton's novel (5.4–8). The speeches of Paul and Thekla mentioned above are only a few of the many speeches in the *Life* that are either significantly extended from their *ATh* form or written afresh. Most of these are speeches at a court or in front of a magistrate, and a few include excurses on the natural world in the manner of Heliodorus or, again, Achilles Tatius.[26]

Third, the use of recapitulation by Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus, and Achilles Tatius has been thoroughly analyzed by Tomas Hägg and does not need to be rehearsed here.[27] It will be enough to quote a characteristic use of this device by Chariton, who includes two main recapitulations at the beginning of Book 5 and the beginning of Book 8:

> How Chaereas, suspecting that Callirhoe had been handed over to Dionysius and desiring to revenge himself on the king, had deserted to the pharaoh; how he had been appointed

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[25] Trans. Tim Whitmarsh, *Achilles Tatius: Leukippe and Clitophon*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: 2001).

[26] Shadi Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel: The Reader and the Role of Description in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius* (Princeton: 1989).

[27] Tomas Hägg, *Narrative Technique in Ancient Greek Romances: Studies of Chariton, Xenophon Ephesius, and Achilles Tatius* (Stockholm: 1971), chapter 7.

admiral and gained control of the sea; how after his victory he captured Aradus, where the king had secluded his wife and all her retinue, Callirhoe included: this has been described in the preceding book.[28] (8.1)

Paul's recapitulation of Thekla's success at renouncing her family, wealth, and fiancé (as mentioned above) is very similar in form and function to the recapitulations in the novels. They serve to highlight for the reader the significant elements of the story, often in simplified and direct language; and they can be emotionally tinged, in the sense of bringing to mind again the more difficult aspects of the journey thus far.

Fourth, it has been suggested that the theme of the education or training of the lovers is central to the conception of the ancient novel, particularly in the sense that some authors seem to have modeled their works on, or at least taken inspiration from, Xenophon of Athens' *Education of Cyrus* (fourth century BC). Longus' pastoral *Daphnis and Chloe* and Apuleius' Latin *Metamorphoses* have both been read as following a course of education for its central figures, leading to a point of conversion, either religious, sexual, or both.[29] It is not necessary here to recount or evaluate the arguments for specific novels but only to point out the obvious importance of this theme for every novel on some level, as well as for the *LM*. Thekla's education is effected through the character of Paul who could be read, perhaps, as a lover—who is educated by Thekla about her own successes—or a version of Lycaenion in *Daphnis and Chloe*, the woman wise in the ways of sex who tutors Daphnis, or as Eros himself, who in one way or another catalyzes the education of the lovers in all the novels.

Fifth and finally, foreshadowing the events to come is also a common device in the Greek novels, usually in the form of cryptic predictions, such as dreams or oracles. To take an instance again from the beginning of Achilles Tatius' novel, Clitophon is engaged to marry his half-sister Calligone but grows eager to avoid this marriage because of his love for Leukippe. One night, a year before his marriage—and just before he first meets Leukippe—Clitophon has a prophetic dream that his lower parts are fused with those of his bride, while their upper bodies are still separate and individual. Suddenly, a 'huge and terrifying' woman appears and chops off his bride's trunk with a sickle (1.3). Upon waking from the nightmare, Clitophon does not offer an initial interpretation, but coming as it does between the discussion of his upcoming marriage and his first meeting of Leukippe, the first opportunity

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[28] Trans. G.P. Goold, *Chariton: Callirhoe*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: 1995).

[29] Most education-conversion interpretations of the ideal novel depend (in one way or another) on R. Reitzenstein, *Hellenistische Wunderzählungen* (Leipzig: 1906), where it is argued that Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* more accurately transmits the original Ur-Novel, which was essentially a conversion narrative; see also R. Merkelbach, *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike* (Munich: 1962), R. Beck, 'Mystery Religions, Aretalogy, and the Ancient Novel', in Schmeling (ed.), *Novel in the Ancient World*, pp. 131–150, and N. Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius' Metamorphoses* (Ann Arbor: 1996).

for narrative fulfillment of the nightmare is at the breakup of Clitophon and Calligone's engagement when she is felicitously abducted by Callisthenes in 2.18, leaving Clitophon free to marry his true love Leukippe. This would be a natural interpretation by the reader, considering the narrative thus far. However, what the nightmare really seems to predict comes at 2.23: the abrupt separation of Clitophon and Leukippe during their attempted sexual encounter, as just described above.[30] Thus, for the innocent reader, this dream foreshadows Calligone's abduction, but, as the story progresses, a surprise is offered, perhaps in the manner of a modern detective story. The correct interpretation of a nightmare is not a happy one, but a truly nightmarish interpretation of a nightmare, because of Clitophon and Leukippe's eventual separation due to their attempted consummation. Of course, their separation is not final, but the nightmare, rightly interpreted, provides the impetus for the bulk of the novel and its final resolution. If the first interpretation had been correct, the novel would certainly have been a short one. The duplicity of Clitophon's nightmare in the context of narrative revelation and reader-response is not a unique example; many such oracles open to misinterpretation can be found, especially in Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus, and John Winkler has shown in detail how the process of consistent misinterpretation of oracles by the character Kalasiris in Heliodorus' *Aithiopika* is used by the author to propel the narrative to its (successful and happy) resolution.[31]

It might be suggested, on this basis, that my argument—that Paul's predictive pre-capitulations in the Life of Thekla are novelistic techniques—is missing the point. Is it not the case that the attempt by Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus to play with the reader's assumptions is what the Greek Novel (at its height) is really all about? In responding to this question, I would emphasize that the author of the *LM* does not appear ignorant of narrative misdirections of this sort. In particular, in a passage from the prologue to the *Miracles*, the author explains that he is unwilling to engage in what he calls 'oracular tricks'. Citing the Delphic prophecy that 'in crossing the Halys river Croesus will destroy a great kingdom' (*Mir.* preface 50; cf. Herodotus 1.53), he claims in a mode of deprecation that 'in puzzles and riddles lies the whole honor of the oracles' (preface 36–37). He next proceeds to compare these devious oracles to the 'healings and oracular sayings (ἰάματα καὶ θεσπίσματα)' of the saints, which he says are 'wise, true, complete, holy, perfect, and truly worthy of the God who has given them' (preface 75–77).

Would it be wise of us to suspend the hermeneutic of suspicion in this case? While this programmatic passage is couched in emulation of Herodotus, in literary terms these comments could equally be applied to the novels. Perhaps in using the character of Paul to predict (so blatantly) the future events of the *Life* and Thekla's

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[30] Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel*, p. 87.

[31] John Winkler, 'The Mendacity of Kalasiris and the Narrative Strategy of Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*', in Simon Swain (ed.), *Oxford Readings in the Greek Novel* (Oxford: 1999 [1982]), pp. 286–350. See also Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, chapter 4.

subsequent career at Seleukeia, the author of the *LM* is being intentional about his use of narrative foreshadowing. Perhaps he is being *intentionally* transparent, following upon his ideas about the ethics of devious oracles. To put it another way, the foreshadowing which seems to remove the mystery of the upcoming events of the story is his way of self-consciously separating himself from a mode of writing that he finds morally reprehensible (while making use of the novel for the critique). Of course, this specific case has much to do with the chosen form, in the sense that any paraphrase presumes to some degree a basic knowledge of the underlying story. The key, however, is that both the form and the mode of narration are conscious choices which have repercussions for how the story is told. In the case of the *LM* an awareness of novelistic techniques is evident both in the techniques the author has chosen to employ and in those he explicitly condemns or has modified for his own purposes.

VI. Conclusion

The role of Paul in the *LM* provides a way of seeing the assumptions of the novel at work in Greek hagiography. As Mark Edwards has noted with regard to the Pseudo-Clementine texts of two centuries earlier, a Christian acquaintance with the ancient novel can often lead to a sophisticated reworking of the assumptions of the genre.[32] Paul's pre-capitulations could thus be seen as anti-novelistic in their transparent foreshadowing of future events. At the same time, however, I would like to add that the enhanced character of Paul in the *LM* brings the *ATh* back into line with the balance of hero and heroine typical of the novel: the devaluing of Paul that occurs at multiple points in the *ATh* is consistently revised in the *LM*, and Paul's character is made more central to the argument of the whole work, as shown above.[33] The parallel adventures of Paul and Thekla, as a couple indissolubly linked, provide now the opportunity to discern the model of the novel lurking in the background of the *LM*.

The versatility of the novel form—ideal, historical, or otherwise—is also evident in the *LM*, particularly in its ability to mix elements of biography, Gospel, exegesis, and even panegyric into an essentially fictional-narrative structure. This combination can be seen also in the *Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena*, a two-part work (most likely) from the late fourth or fifth century that bears similar marks of the Christian appropriation of the novel. This text's bipartite structure

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[32] Edwards, 'The *Clementina*', p. 474: 'The *Clementina* acknowledge, without obeying them, the constraints of a pagan genre'.

[33] On the negative portrayal of Paul in the *ATh*, see Melissa Aubin, 'Reversing Romance? The *Acts of Thekla* and the Ancient Novel', in Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance, and Judith Perkins (eds), *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative* (Atlanta: 1998), pp. 257–272. On the revision of Paul's character in the *LM*, see Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, pp. 42–45 and 45–48.

presages early Byzantine saints' Lives in its discordant (if standard) combination of *Bios* in the first half with *Praxeis/Politeia* in the second.[34] The imposed unity of a conventional conversion story with a 'goings and doings' episodic narrative is not insignificant for the present argument: this exact structure is shared by the first-century Jewish novel *Joseph and Aseneth*, the canonical Acts of the Apostles, and the *LM* itself. A bipartate structure is, of course, not shared with ideal novels such as those by Chariton and Achilles Tatius, who employed eight books for their narratives (likewise, Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*). However, the meta-generic association (with the novel) of the Christian texts is clear enough, even if they have developed a formal tradition-within-a-tradition that changes/mixes the narrative structure for its own purposes.

Eventually more will need to be said about the *continuity* between early Christian and late antique literature. It has been fashionable for some time to emphasize the discontinuity between the disparate, often (enticingly) 'heretical' early Church and the conventional, authoritarian late antique Church.[35] This dichotomy may retain some truth in terms of socio-cultural development, but when the question of literary form is taken up in earnest, much more striking than any discontinuity are the shared tools and techniques of Christian story-telling across the centuries, and between Christians, Jews, and 'pagans' alike. Kermode and Alter have emphasized in their *Literary Guide to the Bible* (and in various individual studies) that the ability to interpret narrative with more narrative is characteristic of biblical literature throughout the canon. Geza Vermes and James Kugel have said as much for intertestamental, Qumranic, and rabbinic literatures.[36] It will be important in the future for scholars of Christian literature to explore further how malleable forms like the novel provided opportunities for saints' Lives and other 'popular' genres, such as the sermon, to imitate earlier forms, such as the Gospels, and thus participate in a cross-generational literary tradition of great importance for the development of ancient thought and literature.

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[34] See Pervo, 'Ancient Novel Becomes Christian', pp. 707–708. On the date of *Xanthippe and Polyxena*, see Eric Junod, 'Vie et conduite des saintes femmes Xanthippe, Polyxene et Rebecca', in Damaskinos Papandreou, Wolfgang A. Bienert, and Knut Schäferdiek (eds), *Oecumenica et Patristica: Festschritf für Wilhelm Schneemelcher zum 75. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: 1989), 83–105.

[35] Witness the *Da Vinci Code* phenomenon and more scholarly books such as Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: 2003).

[36] Vermes, *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies*; Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*. See also the review of Kugel by Kermode, 'The Bible as it Was', in idem, *Pleasing Myself: From Beowolf to Philip Roth* (London: 2001), pp. 153–166 [first published as 'The Midrash Mishmash', *New York Review of Books* 45.7 (April 23, 1998)].

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