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Slow Sailing in Acts: Suspense in the Final Sea Journey (Acts 27:1–28:15)

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In the narrative of Acts, the sea journey of 27:1–28:15 has long been a puzzle. While it resembles other sea-journey stories from antiquity, its relevance to the narrative is far from clear. Though most interpreters emphasize particular symbolic meanings discernible in the story, these emphases sidestep the most distinctive features of the passage: its length, vivid detail, and location near the end of the narrative. I seek to correct this oversight by drawing attention not simply to what the story says but also to what it does to the reader. Located where it is, the Final Sea Journey builds anticipation concerning Paul's fate, raises doubts about whether he will arrive and testify in Rome, slows the pace of the story dramatically, and suspends questions about the story's outcome in ways that provoke tension and expectation. In these ways, the "slow sailing" of Acts 27:1–28:15 gives an experiential dimension to the final two chapters, provokes the reader to engaged reflection, depicts openness and uncertainty as prime places for witness, and draws attention to the journey itself as sacred space for divine activity.

"This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last."[1]

In the narrative of Acts, the Final Sea Journey (27:1–28:15) has long been a puzzle.[2] Certainly the story is engaging, rivaling some of the most exciting sea journeys of ancient novels. Yet the passage takes up fifty-nine verses—about 6 percent of the entire book—to relate a story whose direct relevance to the larger narrative is hardly clear. The fact that Paul arrives in Rome is undoubtedly important, but does that justify a travel narrative more than four times longer than any other in Acts? Luke Timothy Johnson expresses the question pondered by many a reader:

[1] Gwendolen, in Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* (London: Leonard, Smithers, 1899), 146.

[2] For brevity's sake, throughout this article I refer to Acts 27:1–28:15 as "the Final Sea Journey."

"Why does [Luke] spend so much time and care on what was after all only a voyage?"[3]

Many scholars have proposed solutions to this puzzle. Advocates of the narrative's historicity propose that the Final Sea Journey is so long and detailed because it reflects actual events, recorded as the personal memoirs of the author. The "personal memoirs" interpretation has a long line of prominent supporters, from Irenaeus to Henry J. Cadbury and to this day.[4] This theory, however, often presumes that the Sea Journey's first-person references ("we") imply a firsthand witness as author. Scholars in recent decades have challenged this assumption based on the functions of such references in Acts and in ancient literature, showing at the very least that such accounts may reflect diverse motives.[5] In short, it is far from clear that the Final Sea Journey comprises the author's personal memoirs.

A second proposal for the distinctive length of the Sea Journey is expressed by Martin Dibelius: "Luke"[6] incorporated a preexisting story of voyage and shipwreck, into which he inserted his story of Paul.[7] Though interesting, this theory

[3] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, SP 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 450.

[4] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.14.1; Henry J. Cadbury, "We and I Passages in Luke-Acts," *NTS* 3 (1956): 128–32. J. B. Lightfoot is another who would almost certainly have been a supporter (see *The Acts of the Apostles: A Newly Discovered Commentary*, ed. Ben Witherington III and Todd D. Still, Lightfoot Legacy 1 [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014], 61–66). Other supporters are Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 66–67; Colin J. Hemer, "First Person Narrative in Acts 27–28," *TynBul* 36 (1985): 79–109; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 16–22; Jürgen Wehnert, *Die Wir-Passagen der Apostelgeschichte: Ein lukanisches Stilmittel aus jüdischer Tradition*, GTA 40 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989). See also Ernst Haenchen, "Acta 27," in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Erich Dinkler (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1964), 235–54; Brian Rapske, "Acts, Travel and Shipwreck," in *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting*, ed. David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf, BAFCS 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 1–47; J. M. Gilchrist, "The Historicity of Paul's Shipwreck," *JSNT* 61 (1996): 29–61, https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064x9601806102; Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, KEK 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 612–14; Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 727–28.

[5] Vernon K. Robbins, "The We-Passages in Acts and Ancient Sea Voyages," *BR* 20 (1975): 5–18; Susan Marie Praeder, "The Problem of First Person Narration in Acts," *NovT* 29 (1987): 193–218, https://doi.org/10.1163/156853687x00083; Dennis R. MacDonald, "The Shipwrecks of Odysseus and Paul," *NTS* 45 (1999): 88–107, esp. 89; Samuel Byrskog, "History or Story in Acts—A Middle Way? The 'We' Passages, Historical Intertexture, and Oral History," in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, ed. Todd C. Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, SymS 20 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 257–83; William Sanger Campbell, *The We Passages in the Acts of the Apostles: The Narrator as Narrative Character*, SBLStBL 14 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007). See also A. J. M. Wedderburn, "The 'We'-Passages in Acts: On the Horns of a Dilemma," *ZNW* 93 (2002): 78–98.

[6] I use "Luke" in this article simply as a shorthand reference to the author of Luke and Acts.

[7] Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Heinrich Greeven, trans. Mary Ling

implies that Luke was incapable of using sources in ways that are nuanced and subtle; there is very little in Acts to support this idea. If source-critical studies of Acts in the early twentieth century showed anything, it was a remarkable lack of agreement on where—if anywhere—there is evidence of the narrative as a patchwork of traditions.[8] In other words, incorporation of a preexisting narrative in the Sea Journey cannot be clearly demonstrated. More recently, scholars have nuanced this proposal further: Luke's Sea Journey reflects not *incorporation* but *imitation* of a preexisting journey story. Dennis MacDonald, for instance, suggests that the Final Sea Journey imitates scenes from Homer's *Odyssey*.[9] Indeed, classic and conventional shipwreck stories from ancient literature may well have influenced Acts 27:1–28:15, since perilous sea journeys were common in literary tradition. But evidence for such direct influence is not overwhelming—at least not enough to justify the passage's distinctiveness within the larger narrative of Acts. Most important of all, the proposals noted above sidestep questions of exegetical meaning: they explain and justify Acts 27:1–28:15 more than interpret its function and significance.

Richard Pervo has judiciously observed that discerning the meaning of the Final Sea Journey is inextricably bound to three factors: its length, its position in the narrative, and the symbolisms associated with sea voyage in ancient literature.[10]

(New York: Scribner's Sons, 1956), 204–6. Dibelius simply developed older suggestions, e.g., of Julius Wellhausen (*Kritische Analyse der Apostelgeschichte*, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen: Philologish-historische Klasse 15.2 [Berlin: Weidmann, 1914], 2) and Paul Wendland (*Die urchristlichen Literaturformen*, 2nd ed., HNT 1.3 [Tübingen: Mohr, 1912], 324 and n. 4). Similar arguments, with various nuances, are issued by Ernst Haenchen (*The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. Bernard Noble et al. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 709), Hans Conzelmann (*Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 221), J. Roloff (*Die Apostelgeschichte*, NTD 5 [Göttingen; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981], 358–60), Alfons Weiser (*Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2 vols., ÖTBK 5 [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1981, 1985], 2:390–91, 659–60), and Gerhard Schneider (*Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2 vols., HThKNT 5 [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1980–1982], 2:387).

[8] F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Henry J. Cadbury summarize: "The truth seems to be that although there is a *prima facie* probability for the use of written sources in Acts…, the writer wrote too well to allow us to distinguish with certainty either the boundaries of his sources or the extent of his own editorial work" ("The Internal Evidence of Acts," in *The Acts of the Apostles*, part 1 of *The Beginnings of Christianity*, ed. F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, 5 vols. [London: Macmillan, 1920–1933], 2:133).

[9] Dennis R. MacDonald, "Shipwrecks of Odysseus." Many interpreters—not just MacDonald—have observed that the language of "beaching the ship" (ἐπέκειλαν τὴν ναῦν) in Acts 27:41 reflects language from Homer's *Odyssey* (9.148, 546; 13.113–114). Susan Marie Praeder, "Acts 27:1–28:15: Sea Voyages in Ancient Literature and the Theology of Luke-Acts," *CBQ* 46 (1984): 683–708, here 701; Kenneth L. Cukrowski, "Paul as Odysseus: An Exegetical Note on Luke's Depiction of Paul in Acts 27:1–28:10," *ResQ* 55 (2013): 24–34.

[10] Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 648.

Emphasizing the third of these factors, Pervo and many others highlight one of the following particular symbolic meanings for the Final Sea Journey: divine providence, death and resurrection, salvation for all peoples, a model for navigating the Roman imperial world, or Paul's vindication.[11] All of these interpretations advance particular insights about the passage, but their emphases tend to avoid the story's most distinctive features: its length, vivid detail, and location in the narrative. As Johnson points out:

> If the author's point was so patently allegorical, we have even less understanding of why the pedestrian elements of the story were retained. Why did Luke distract us with so much detail, if the detail was supposed to be ignored in favor of the overall pattern?[12]

Johnson may exaggerate the nature of allegory, but his point stands: interpretations that emphasize symbolic meaning generally overlook the Sea Journey's most distinctive qualities—its length and position in the narrative. Striving for a worthy goal (discerning symbolic meaning) results in an unfortunate imbalance, which calls for renewed attention to the overlooked factors (the passage's length, detail, and position). The question is this: given the position and length of the Final Sea Journey, how does it impact a reading of Acts on a *literary* level?

The Final Sea Journey makes up 80 percent of the final two chapters of Acts, which Loveday Alexander calls the "narrative epilogue."[13] At this juncture, questions

[11] For divine providence, see Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Reading the New Testament (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 223–25; Talbert and J. H. Hayes, "A Theology of Sea-Storms in Luke-Acts," *Society of Biblical Literature 1995 Seminar Papers*, SBLSP 34 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 321–36; and Bock, *Acts*, 726–47. For death and resurrection, see Pervo, *Acts*, 652–54, 666–67, 677; cf. Talbert and Hayes, "Theology of Sea-Storms," 335–36; and see n. 40 below. For salvation for all peoples, see Floyd V. Filson, "The Journey Motif in Luke-Acts," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on His 60th Birthday*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 68–77; Praeder, "Sea Voyages," 683–706; and Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986, 1990), 2:336–37. For a model for navigating the Roman imperial world, see Warren Carter, "Aquatic Display: Navigating the Roman Imperial World in Acts 27," *NTS* 62 (2016): 79–96. For Paul's vindication, see Garry W. Trompf, "On Why Luke Declined to Recount the Death of Paul: Acts 27–28 and Beyond," in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 225–39; David Ladouceur, "Hellenistic Preconceptions of Shipwreck and Pollution as a Context for Acts 27–28," *HTR* 73 (1980): 435–49; and John C. Clabeaux, "The Story of the Maltese Viper and Luke's Apology for Paul," *CBQ* 67 (2005): 604–10.

[12] Johnson, *Acts*, 457.

[13] Loveday C. Alexander, "Reading Luke-Acts from Back to Front," in *The Unity of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. Verheyden, BETL 142 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 419–46, here 424. So also Daniel Marguerat, "The Enigma of the End of Acts (28.16–31)," in *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles,'* trans. Ken McKinney, G. J. Laughery, and Richard Bauckham,

about Paul's fate are of paramount importance: his arrival at Rome has been anticipated since chapter 19 (19:21, 23:11, 25:12), and since then threats to his life (21:27–36, 23:12–35, 25:1–12) and omens of his death (20:17–38, 21:1–26) have only increased. Surprisingly, then, the Final Sea Journey slows down the pace of the story dramatically—with nautical details and extensive length—at a point so close to the ending. In this way Acts 27:1–28:15 suspends the story's outcome in ways that generate tension and anticipation. The Final Sea Journey of Acts suspends in order to provoke and, in the process, casts a new vision of hope for apostolic witness and the spaces where it takes place.

I. Defining Suspense

Stated simply, suspense is the act of fostering in an audience (or reader) a prolonged anticipation of what follows.[14] As for what fosters suspense, we take our cue from ancient rhetoricians and authors, who knew well the rhetorical impact of suspense. According to many ancient writers, plots of great stories must generate a sense of organic completion. Aristotle held that "well-constructed plots" must neither begin nor end "arbitrarily" but create the sense that nothing afterward occurs (*Poet.* 1450b30–35; cf. 1452b–1454a).[15] Likewise, Dionysius of Halicarnassus writes that an ending must "draw together the action so that nothing else seems needed" (*Thuc.* 10.830; see also 12.837, 16.847). Referring to history writing, Diodorus Siculus gives one of the fullest descriptions of literary completion:

> In all historical writings it is proper for authors to include in their books occurrences of states or rulers that are complete in themselves from beginning unto the end. For I think history done in this way is most memorable and most intelligible to the readers. Incomplete occurrences, since they have no continuity between the beginning and ending, interrupt the interest of the engaged reader. In contrast, occurrences that have narrative continuity include a full report of events unto its completion [τελευτή]. (16.1.1–2)

This sense of completion, Diodorus suggests, maintains "the interest of the engaged reader" by its focus and unity. In other words, writings that foster a sense of completion best engage readers' interests. In addition, ancient authors indicate that certain forms of writing are associated with particular expectations—like conflict and resolution in tragedy (Aristotle, *Poet.* 1455b) or an end to conflict in a history about

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SNTSMS 121 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 216–21, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511488061.

[14] Cf. Eric S. Rabkin's definition: "An anxious uncertainty about what is going to happen, especially to those characters with whom we have established bonds of sympathy" (*Narrative Suspense: "When Slim Turned Sideways..."* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973], 60).

[15] All translations of ancient texts in this article are my own unless otherwise noted.

war (Dionysius, *Pomp.* 3.769–771). Sometimes these expectations are fostered not by genre conventions but by the narrative itself. For instance, Dionysius of Halicarnassus criticizes Thucydides because he "promises to set forth all" of the Peloponnesian War but does not—leaving his work flawed and apparently "unfinished" (*Thuc.* 12.837; *Pomp.* 3.711). Whether expectations stem from genre conventions or narrative cues, they foster anticipation of events yet to come that will generate completion. This *anticipation* (or "expectation") of future events is the first and primary component of suspense.

A second primary ingredient to suspense is *deferring* (or "suspension," or "prolonging"). In the *Poetics*, Aristotle names two essential components of the tragic plot: conflict (δέσις) and resolution (λύσις). With conflict he associates events outside of and within the story, "from the beginning to the furthest point before changing to prosperity or adversity" (1455b). His expansive definition of conflict suggests that a story's central conflict is what primarily drives the story, whereas resolution allows for a fitting point of cessation. The art of composing fine tragedy, Aristotle notes, is to balance worthy conflict with an adequate counterpart in resolution, since "many writers handle the conflict well, but the resolution badly" (1456a).[16] Quintilian associates "deferring" in his *Institutes of Oratory* (ca. 95 CE) with the practice of *sustentatio* ("suspension"): to engage one's audience for a time on one trajectory, only to alter the development toward a different end (*Inst.* 9.2.22–23).[17] The practice entails plot reversal, but the core rhetorical effect stems from delaying—or suspending—fulfillment of the audience's expectations. Although Quintilian writes in Latin in the late first century, his ideas build upon Aristotle's ancient concepts of περιπέτεια ("reversal") and ἀναγνώρισις ("recognition").[18] But only with Quintilian do we get the specific language of "suspension" (*sustentatio*) along with its clear description. His notion constitutes an apt definition for "deferring" or "suspension."

A third component that fosters suspense is *uncertainty* (or "raising doubts"). Since a sense of completion was widely expected for virtually all forms of writing in antiquity, uncertainty about whether such completion will happen generates tension. In the earliest surviving composition exercises, the *Progymnasmata* of Aelius Theon (first century CE), the rhetorical practice of "raising doubts" (ἐπαπορεῖν) is named as an engaging way to vary the composition of narrative

[16] Aelius Theon also observes the balance between things distressing to hearers and those more pleasing and ultimately encourages favoring the latter (*Prog.* 80).

[17] See also Quintilian's concepts of παράδοξον ("paradox") and *inopinatum* ("surprise") (*Inst.* 9.2.23–24).

[18] That is, altering ("reversing") a long-standing plot trajectory with a sudden illumination ("recognition") of truths that beforehand were obscured (*Poet.* 1452a–b). In Aristotle's mind, the two concepts are linked: "the finest recognition [ἀναγνώρισις] is that which occurs simultaneously with reversal [περιπέτεια]" (*Poet.* 1452a).

(87–88).[19] Quintilian describes a parallel notion in Latin: *dubitatio* ("uncertainty" or "hesitation"): giving the impression that an intended outcome is threatened or uncertain (*Inst.* 9.2.19). He explains that in oral speech *dubitatio* occurs when the speaker conveys uncertainty about how to proceed:

> Uncertainty [is] when we pretend to question ourselves, where to begin, where to end, what may possibly be said, or what is to be said at all. All [speeches] are full of just such examples, but one suffices for now: "moreover, as for myself, I do not know where I might turn. Should I deny that there was a scandalous report that the jury had been corrupted?" (*Inst.* 9.2.19; see also 9.1.35, 9.3.88–89)

Both Aelius Theon and Quintilian describe what seems to have been a well-established rhetorical practice, judging from the number of rhetoricians who refer to it (Rutilius Lupus 2.10; Rhet. Her. 4.40; Apsines, *Ars rhet.* 258.10, 328.15).[20] Most of these authors are concerned with the context of oral presentation, but the idea still applies well to written narrative: uncertainty is when a narrative (vs. an orator) gives the impression that an expected outcome will not take place, typically because of insurmountable threats or situations of peril. Such circumstances "raise doubts" about anticipated events in ways that parallel the oratorical practices of ἐπαπορεῖν and *dubitatio* but pertain to the nature of narrative. For example, at the start of the last book of Chariton's novel, the author toys with the idea of more intensified perils:

> So Fortune intended to render something not only paradoxical but moreover cruel: Chaereas, although having Callirhoe in his possession, would not recognize her and would take other wives on board his ship to carry them away but leave his own wife behind … as spoils of war for his own enemies. (8.1.2)

At this point the author suddenly redirects the novel's course:

> But Aphrodite thought this too harsh.… Aphrodite had mercy upon him, and, after having harassed through land and sea the lovely couple which she at the start had brought together, she again desired to reunite them. And I think that

[19] Cf. George A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, WGRW 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 88: "The speaker seems in doubt because, while a questioner seeks an answer, one in doubt does not quite do so but only addresses himself as at a loss."

[20] The anonymous Rhetorica ad Herennium (first century BCE) discusses *dubitatio* (4.40) using an example that Quintilian later uses (*Inst.* 9.3.88–89), but the Rhetorica does not discuss the topic as extensively as Quintilian. Publius Rutilius Lupus (first century CE) abridges ideas from Gorgias of Athens in discussing the practice of *aporia* (ἀπορία): raising doubts (*On the Figures of Speech* 2.10). The third-century CE *Art of Rhetoric* by Apsines of Gadara names διαπορήσις ("being at a loss") as a worthy rhetorical tactic but without substantial discussion: "Also useful in them are διαπορήσεις: 'What ought I do? Be silent or speak?'" (258.10 [27]; see also 328.15).

> this final chapter will be most pleasurable for my readers, for it is a cleansing of the cruelties earlier on. (8.1.3–4)

The implied author's explicit deliberation (through Aphrodite's feelings) parallels the orator's tactic of "raising doubts," showing both an example of uncertainty in narrative prose and the use of rhetorical practices in various contexts (oral and literary).

A final contributor to suspense is *empathy.* While empathy for narrative characters may transpire by various means, it is essential in order for suspense to be experienced. For instance, Aristotle states that the "superior poet" (ποιητής ἀμείνων) must generate fear and pity in an audience, "so that the one who hears the events transpire experiences trembling and pity at what takes place" (*Poet.* 1453b).[21] Fear and pity are interesting selections, since tragedy might easily generate many other emotions. But G. R. F. Ferrari rightly observes that fear and pity, for Aristotle, are the finest paths to an audience's "sympathetic fear for the hero and his impending fate."[22] For the context of oral speech, Quintilian describes an analogous tactic: *communicatio* ("consultation")—to consult or include one's audience in the thought process of a speech (*Inst.* 9.2.20; cf. 9.1.30; see also Cicero, *De or.* 3.204).[23] Quintilian gives an example from the defense of Cloatilla by Domitius Afer:

> She is in such confusion that she knows neither what is permitted for a woman nor what is becoming for a wife. It may be that chance has brought you into contact with the unhappy woman in her helpless plight. You, her brother, and you, her father's friends: what counsel do you give her?" (*Inst.* 9.2.20–21)

In oral speech, *communicatio* is a form of "codeliberation," which entails addressing the audience directly. But the context of written narrative is different: in most cases the outcome is already written, and direct address is rare. Whereas an orator might "codeliberate" directly with an audience, a literary work achieves the same goal through fostering empathy—whether by fear and pity (so Aristotle) or other narrative techniques.[24] Aristotle readily admits in his discussion of audience empathy that his discoveries have come more from "chance" (τύχη) than by deliberate method (τέχνη) (*Poet.* 1454a). His observation only underscores the fact

[21] Aristotle discusses at length what generates this effectively in tragedy, focusing especially on sufferings and sinister acts that occur in family relationships (*Poet.* 1452b–1454a, esp. 1453b–1454a).

[22] G. R. F. Ferrari, "Aristotle's Literary Aesthetics," *Phronesis* 44 (1999): 181–98, here 196.

[23] Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.2.20: "when we take our opponents into consultation."

[24] Ferrari agrees: "After all, the orator's task is to move his audience to action, and to that end he must make them fear for themselves. The dramatist's task is rather to engage his audience in the fiction, to bind them with its spell. The principal means by which he achieves this effect is to make them care enough about the hero to fear for him, that is to say fear on his behalf" ("Literary Aesthetics," 195–96).

that audience empathy may stem from various factors but ultimately yields an emotional engagement with the plight of story characters.[25]

To summarize, the following four components reflect what ancient authors and orators viewed as central contributors to narrative suspense:

1. Anticipation (expectation): the expectation that particular events are yet to come, whether generated by literary conventions or by allusions or forewarnings within the writing itself.
2. Deferring (suspension; cf. *sustentatio*): a delay in fulfilling the audience's expectations, thereby "suspending" them in a state of anticipation.
3. Uncertainty (raising doubts; cf. ἐπαπορεῖν, *dubitatio*): casting doubt on whether an expected outcome will occur—typically by insurmountable obstacles or situations of peril.
4. Empathy (cf. *communicatio*): increased engagement by the audience with the events of the narrative and the plights of its characters.

Where anticipation generates interest, suspension prolongs it, uncertainty intensifies it, and empathy enhances its emotional impact on the audience. According to the discussions among ancient authors, these are the most essential ingredients to narrative suspense.[26]

II. A Tale of Suspense: The Final Sea Journey (Acts 27:1–28:15)

Sea journeys were relatively common in literature of antiquity. Like car-chase scenes in modern action movies, they constituted a conventional type-scene in ancient literature that many readers presumably found engaging. Its origins are at

[25] Related to this notion is that of narrative credibility or plausibility, which Aelius Theon discusses at some length (*Prog.* 84–87).

[26] Both Rachelle Gilmour and Ralf Junkerjürgen have similar notions of suspense, but Gilmour includes the concept of a "macrostructure" of shorter episodes, and Junkerjürgen emphasizes narrative positioning to a greater degree as well as the conditioning of the reader (Gilmour, "Suspense and Anticipation in 1 Samuel 9:1–14," *JHebS* 9 [2009]: 5–8; Junkerjürgen, *Spannung: Narrative Verfahrensweisen der Leseraktivierung; Eine Studie am Beispiel der Reiseromane von Jules Verne*, EHS.FS 261 [Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2002], 62). For more on narrative suspense, see Peter Vorderer, Hans J. Wulff, and Mike Friedrichsen, eds., *Suspense: Conceptualisations, Theoretical Analyses, and Empirical Explorations* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996); Rabkin, *Narrative Suspense*, 7–69. Other studies of suspense in biblical texts are Normand Bonneau, "Suspense in Mark 5:21–43: A Narrative Study of Two Healing Stories," *Thf* 36 (2005): 131–54; Charles H. Cosgrove, "Rhetorical Suspense in Romans 9–11: A Study in Polyvalence and Hermeneutical Election," *JBL* 115 (1996): 271–87, https://doi.org/10.2307/3266856.

least as old as Homer (*Od.* 4.499–511; 5.262–463; 12.402–425).[27] In time, the type-scene became prevalent enough to stimulate satire (Juvenal, *Sat.* 12.17–82; Lucian, *Merc. cond.* 1–2) and parody (Lucian, *Ver. hist.* 1.5–6). The ingredients were standard enough to call them conventional.[28] Sea-journey stories were entertaining and therefore were especially common in prose fiction, among other genres.[29] But they were not simply entertaining; they could also serve as fitting venues for moral lessons on subjects such as pride (Polybius, *Hist.* 1.37), greed (Juvenal, *Sat.* 12.17–82), wealth (Phaedrus, *Fables* 4.23), friendship (Lucian, *Tox.* 19–21), and facing crises (Lucian, *Peregr.* 43–44; T. Naph. 6:1–10).[30] In general, sea-journey narratives—more specifically, their outcomes—could serve to indicate those whom divine beings favored. Those who survived the perils of the sea were evidently aided by divine powers—or at least not sufficiently hindered by them.[31] Likewise, the Final Sea Journey of Acts offers divine testimony of Paul's innocence, just as earlier chapters offered human testimony of his innocence (23:12–26:32).

There is more to Acts 27:1–28:15, however, than simply using a conventional form to make a single theological claim. Pervo observes astutely:

> The keystone to the arch of issues through which all interpreters of Acts 27 must pass is its length. Why did the author devote sixty verses (c. 6 percent of the text) to the story of Paul's transfer to Rome? This is central to the question of meaning, and all discussions of text, source, and form must address it or risk the charge of irrelevance. This is, without doubt, a good story that contributes to the portrait of Paul's character and provides an additional demonstration of divine providence in operation, but those factors do not justify its length.[32]

[27] Homer's sea-journey narratives were imitated in various later works, e.g., Virgil, *Aen.* 1.34–179; Aelius Aristides, *Oration* 48.65–68; Livy 21.58.3–11; Seneca, *Ag.* 465–578; Lucan, *Bel. civ.* 4.48–120. See also n. 9 above.

[28] Talbert and Hayes list the following common elements: (1) a warning not to sail, (2) sailing in a bad season, (3) unusually chaotic winds, (4) darkness during the storm, (5) horrendous waves, (6) sailors scurrying about, (7) throwing cargo or tackle overboard, (8) relinquishing control of the ship to the winds and waves, (9) the ship breaking up, (10) abandoning all hope, (11) shipwreck on rocks or shallow beach, (12) drifting ashore on planks, (13) swimming ashore or to another ship, and (14) helpful natives on shore ("Theology of Sea-Storms," 322–23). See also Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 50–57, esp. 50–54; Pamela Lee Thimmes, *Studies in the Biblical Sea-Storm Type-Scene: Convention and Invention* (San Francisco: Mellen, 1992).

[29] For example: Chariton, *Chaer.* 3.3.9–18; Achilles Tatius, *Leuc. Clit.* 3.1–5; Xenophon of Ephesus, *Ephesiaca* 3.2.11–15; Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 1.22.3–5; 1.5.27; Petronius, *Satyricon* 114. Northrop Frye observes that in the Greek novel "the normal means of transportation is by shipwreck" (*The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976], 4).

[30] These and many other examples are named in Talbert and Hayes, "Theology of Sea-Storms," 323–34.

[31] On this, see ibid., 324–25; Pervo, *Acts*, 644–54.

[32] Pervo, *Acts*, 644.

First of all, many ancient writings show that a sea-journey narrative did not need to be so long. Paul summarizes a shipwreck experience in five words (2 Cor 11:25). Josephus narrates a sea voyage to Rome that entails shipwreck, a night adrift at sea, and rescue by divine initiative (*Vita* 14–16) but uses less than a tenth of the length of Luke's Sea Journey.[33] Certainly there are examples in ancient literature that are comparably long (or longer), but Luke's story is longer than many.[34] From Homer's era to Luke's day and beyond, the general tradition of sea-journey narratives *allows* for the length and detail of Acts 27:1–28:15 but by no means *calls for* it. Homer and many others narrated sea journeys briefly (*Od.* 4.499–511)—why Luke waxed so eloquent at this point is not clear. More interesting, among comparable examples of sea-journey narratives in antiquity, none other occurs so close to the ending of the work. Most often these accounts appear somewhere in the midsection of the narrative, as in Greek novels.[35] That Luke writes a sea-journey narrative of such caliber is not unprecedented; that he places it at this particular juncture is another matter entirely. Collectively, these factors raise the question, what is the significance of Luke's Final Sea Journey, given its length, detail, and location in the narrative?

What the Sea Journey of Acts does at this juncture of the narrative is generate considerable suspense about what is to come—an effect that profoundly influences the reader's experience of the final chapters. First, a central feature of suspense is anticipation, and anticipation riddles the last ten chapters of Acts. From the nineteenth chapter onward, the narrative repeatedly states that Paul will bear witness in Rome. This begins at Acts 19:21 with Paul's explicit resolution: "Now after these things had been fulfilled, Paul resolved by the Spirit to go through Macedonia and Achaia, and then to journey to Jerusalem. He said, 'Afterward it is necessary [δεῖ]

[33] Josephus uses sixty-two words for the journey proper (LCL) and Acts 27:1–28:15 uses 746 words, by my count of the Greek texts (NA[28]).

[34] The following sea-journey narratives, for example, are considerably briefer than the Final Sea Journey of Acts: Homer, *Od.* 4.499–511; Aeschylus, *Ag.* 647–666; Polybius, *Hist.* 1.37.1–10 (chiefly 1–6); Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 9.68; Euripides, *Tro.* 77–86; Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argon.* 2.1093–1121; Xenophon of Ephesus, *Ephesiaca* 2.11; 3.2.11–15; Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 1.22.3–5; Lucian, *Ver. hist.* 1.5–6; 2.47; *Merc. cond.* 1–2; *Peregr.* 43–44; Josephus, *J.W.* 1.14.2–3 §§279–280; *Vita* 2–3 §§12–14; Jonah 1:3–17; T. Naph. 6:1–10. Other sea-journey narratives more comparable in length are Homer, *Od.* 5.262–463; 12.402–450; Herodotus 7.188–192; Euripides, *Iph. taur.* 1391–1489; Virgil, *Aen.* 1.34–179; Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.23–24; Seneca, *Ag.* 456–578; Statius, *Theb.* 5.360–421; Lucian, *Tox.* 19–21; Petronius, *Satyricon* 114; Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 5.27; Chariton, *Chaer.* 3.3.9–18; Achilles Tatius, *Leuc. Clit.* 3.1–5. Synesius of Cyrene narrates one of the longest sea-journey narratives in antiquity (longer than Luke's), which takes up most of his *Letter 4*, but it stems from the late fourth century CE at earliest.

[35] E.g., *Chaer.* 3.3.9–18; Achilles Tatius, *Leuc. Clit.* 3.1–5; Xenophon of Ephesus, *Ephesiaca* 3.2.11–15; Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 1.22.3–5; 1.5.27; Petronius, *Satyricon* 114. One sea-journey narrative that occurs just before the end is Lucian's *Peregr.* 43–44, but the author gives an explicit reason for this choice: "I shall add one more thing before I stop, in order that you may be able to have a good laugh" (43). Lucian's sea-journey story also spotlights a specific dishonorable character, which differs from Acts 27:1–28:15.

for me to see Rome'" (Acts 19:21). The language of necessity (δεῖ) and the presence of the Spirit both imply that Paul's travel interests have divine origins.[36] Some translate the phrase "Paul resolved by the Spirit" (ἔθετο ὁ Παῦλος ἐν τῷ πνεύματι) as "Paul resolved in his own spirit,"[37] but this goes against good judgment. Not only does Acts 19:21 use a characteristically Lukan expression for divine providence (δεῖ), but Luke also rarely uses πνεῦμα ("spirit" or "Spirit") elsewhere to refer to a person's state of mind (see Acts 17:16; Luke 1:17, 47). Further, the word πνεῦμα occurs often in Acts without the modifier ἅγιον ("holy") yet clearly refers to the Spirit of God (Acts 6:10; 8:18, 29; 10:19; 11:2; see also 11:28; 20:22; 21:4). Most importantly, Luke regularly draws attention to the role of the Spirit in Paul's ministry, making it odd that he would now assume jurisdiction over his travels (especially in light of 20:22–24 and 16:6–10). Just as Jesus "set his face toward Jerusalem" in Luke 9:51 as part of God's larger purpose, so Paul in Acts 19:21 sets his sights on Rome under divine jurisdiction.

The next scene of significance is Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian elders (20:17–30), where he foresees ominous threats and no return to Ephesus (vv. 22–25). The speech's genre, tenor, narrative location, and length imply that Paul's next journey will be his last.[38] Furthermore, thirteen verses later Paul expresses a willingness to die: "For I am prepared not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (21:13). Two chapters later, just after a rescue from violence (23:6–10), the narrative reiterates the importance of Paul's journey to Rome. In a night vision, the Lord stands near Paul and announces, "Take courage, for just as you have testified to the things concerning me in Jerusalem, so is it necessary for you also to testify in Rome" (23:11). As with 19:21, this passage associates Paul's journey to Rome with divine destiny. Like the forewarnings of Jesus's death in Luke's Gospel (9:22, 44–45; 18:31–33), these passages in Acts generate early anticipation about Paul's fate in Rome.

Paul's trial scenes in Acts 22–26 continue to foster anticipation of Paul's fate in two ways. First, various points of conclusion emphasize that Paul will be tried by the emperor (25:10–12, 21, 25; 26:32). It begins with Paul's appeal to Caesar issued to Festus (25:10–11), whose council ratifies the appeal in ominous words:

[36] On language of divine necessity in Luke-Acts, see Luke 2:49; 4:43; 9:22; 12:12; 13:14, 33; 17:25; 19:5; 21:9; 22:37; 24:7, 44; Acts 1:16, 21; 3:21; 4:12; 5:29; 9:6, 16; 14:22; 15:5; 16:30; 19:21; 20:35; 23:11; 25:10; 27:24, 26. See also Charles H. Cosgrove, "The Divine ΔEI in Luke-Acts: Investigations into the Lukan Understanding of God's Providence," *NovT* 26 (1984): 168–90.

[37] E.g., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 652; C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 2:919.

[38] See Jan Lambrecht, "Paul's Farewell-Address at Miletus (Acts 20, 17–38)," in *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, redaction, théologie*, ed. Jacob Kremer, BETL 48 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979), 307–37; Geeske Ballhorn, "Die Miletrede: Ein Literaturbericht," in *Das Ende des Paulus: Historische, theologische und literaturgeschichtliche Aspekte*, ed. Friedrich W. Horn, BZNW 106 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), 37–47, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110877212.37.

"You have appealed to the emperor; to the emperor you will go" (25:12). The appeal's importance is emphasized again later as Festus brings it up twice (25:21, 25), and Agrippa deems it a binding verdict for Paul (26:32). Second, there are extensive parallels between the journey of Paul to Rome in Acts and that of Jesus to Jerusalem in Luke's Gospel—especially in their trial scenes: both foresee fateful events in Jerusalem (Luke 18:31–33; cf. 9:21–22, 44; Acts 20:22–25; 21:11–13); both are "handed over [παραδίδωμι)] into the hands [εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων] of others" (Luke 9:44; 18:32; 24:7; Acts 21:11; 28:17); both are condemned with the imperative Αἶρε ("Away with," Luke 23:18; Acts 21:36; 22:22); both are imprisoned in Jerusalem and accused by religious authorities (Luke 22:66–23:25; Acts 22:30–23:10; also 25:1–7; cf. 24:1–9); both appear for trial on four occasions (Luke 22:66–71; 23:1–5, 6–12, 13–25; Acts 22:30–23:10; 24:1–23; 25:6–12; 25:23–26:32; cf. 24:24–25); both are heard by "Herod" (Luke 23:6–12; Acts 25:13–26:32); both are deemed innocent (Luke 23:4, 14–15, 22, 47; Acts 23:29; 25:25–27; 26:31–32); both are evaluated favorably by a centurion (Luke 23:47; Acts 27:3, 43); and the Romans ostensibly wish to set both free (Luke 23:16, 22; see Acts 28:18).[39] These parallels foster anticipation that Paul will meet a fate in Rome similar to Jesus's in Jerusalem.[40]

Building on this anticipation, the Final Sea Journey features a third and final forewarning of Paul's fate in Rome. Like the third of Jesus's three passion predictions in Luke's Gospel (9:22, 44–45; 18:31–33), it occurs much closer to the expected events—little more than a chapter from the end. At a point of despair, Paul shares with fellow seafarers a message he received:

> [23]For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve. He said, [24]"Do not fear, Paul; it is necessary [δεῖ] for you to stand before the emperor. And note that God has granted you all those sailing with

[39]On the parallels between the journeys and trial scenes of Paul and Jesus, see M. D. Goulder, *Type and History in Acts* (London: SPCK, 1964), 52–64; Talbert, *Literary Patterns*, 15–65, esp. 16–18, 20–22; A. J. Mattill Jr., "The Jesus-Paul Parallels and the Purpose of Luke-Acts: H. H. Evans Reconsidered," *NovT* 17 (1975): 15–46, https://doi.org/10.1163/156853675x00103; Walter Radl, *Paulus und Jesus im lukanischen Doppelwerk: Untersuchungen zu Parallelmotiven im Lukasevangelium und in der Apostelgeschichte*, EHS.T 49 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1975), 103–267; Robert O'Toole, "Parallels between Jesus and His Disciples in Luke-Acts: A Further Study," *BZ* 27 (1983): 195–212.

[40]Based on these parallels, some argue that the Final Sea Journey of Acts parallels Jesus's death and resurrection in Luke's Gospel so much so that Acts 27 becomes Paul's "death" and 28:1–10 his "resurrection" (Glenn R. Jacobson, "Paul in Luke-Acts: The Savior Who Is Present," *Society of Biblical Literature 1983 Seminar Papers*, SBLSP 22 [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983], 131–46; Goulder, *Type and History*, 61; Radl, *Paulus und Jesus*, 222–51; Talbert and Hayes, "Theology of Sea-Storms," 334–35). But this stretches the parallels far beyond viability: reading Acts 27:1–28:15 so simply through the lens of Jesus's passion ignores the passage as its own distinctive narrative.

> you." [25]Therefore cheer up, men! For I trust God that it will be exactly as I have been told. (27:23–25)

Three features of Paul's words underscore the importance of his arrival at Rome. First, an angel of God conveys the message (vv. 24–25), and there is no reason to think Paul misrepresents it. Second, the angel's promise uses characteristic language for divine necessity in Luke-Acts (δεῖ).[41] Third, Paul verifies the angel's promise with added emphasis: "For I trust God that it will be exactly as I have been told" (v. 25). In many ways this final forewarning—with divine origins, characteristic language, and added emphasis—crystallizes the sense of anticipation mounting since chapter nineteen: Paul must arrive at Rome (19:21; 23:11; 27:24) in order to bear witness (23:11) and be tried by the emperor (23:11; 25:10–12, 21, 25; 26:32; 27:24). Like the last iteration of a building chorus, Paul's word in the Final Sea Journey sounds out a final forewarning of things presumably soon to come.

Yet the Final Sea Journey does not simply build anticipation. It also fosters uncertainty about anticipated outcomes—another ingredient of suspense—through a host of threats. First, the story takes place at sea—a context rife with danger, according to ancient literature. Both Jewish and Greco-Roman literary traditions portray sea travel as perilous, especially during winter.[42] In Terence's *Hecyra* (second century BCE), the servant Sosia words this sentiment well: "By Heracles, Parmeno, words cannot express how troublesome a thing it is to travel by sea" (416–417).[43] Second, more than any other travel narrative in Luke-Acts, the Final Sea Journey features ominous hazards: the risks of winter (27:9, 12), forewarned peril (27:10), loss of direction (27:14–20), prospects of shipwreck (27:27–29, 39–44), potential crew desertion (27:29–32), prisoner execution (27:42–44), and deadly serpents (28:3–6). The sheer length of Acts 27:1–28:15 allows for more extended preoccupation with the perilous. Third, "safety" language pervades the Final Sea Journey narrative (σώζω, διασώζω, σωτηρία, 27:20, 31, 34, 43, 44; 28:1, 4) so as to highlight its absence—and its desirability.[44] These seven "safety" references

[41] See n. 36 above.

[42] In Jewish literature the sea represents the waters of chaos (Gen 1:2, Pss 74:13, 93:3–4, 104:6–9, 107:23–30, Isa 27:1, 51:9–10, Ezek 26:19–20, T. Naph. 6:2–10, y. Ber. 9:1), an association rooted in broader myth traditions of the ancient Near East (cf. Enuma Elish and the Ugaritic Ba'lu Myth). In Greco-Roman literature, sea travel is conventionally dangerous (see Achilles Tatius, *Clit. Leuc.* 5.9.2; Euripides, *Iph. taur.* 1413; Lucan, *Bel. civ.* 5.453–455; 636.37; Ovid, *Trist.* 1.2.23; Apuleius, *Metam.* 7:6; Juvenal, *Sat.* 12.17–82; Lucian, *Ver. hist.* 1.6), and during winters months the Mediterranean was widely deemed a *mare clausum* ("closed sea"; see F. Vegetius Renatus, *De re militari* 4.39; cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.10.5 §203; E. de Saint-Denis, "Mare clausum," *REL* 25 [1947]: 196–214). See Talbert and Hayes, "Theology of Sea-Storms"; Pervo, *Acts*, 644–54, esp. 644–45; Praeder, "Sea Voyages," 692–93.

[43] Terence, *Hecyra* 416–417: non hercle verbis, Parmeno, dici potest tantum quam re ipsa navigare incommodumst.

[44] This is not unique to Luke's Final Sea Journey. Since sea travel was widely perceived as threatening, arrival on land was naturally a return to safety. See Diodorus Siculus 3.40.1;

in Acts 27–28 draw attention to the uncertainty of safe haven for the narrative characters involved: "When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no tiny tempest besieged us, then every remaining hope of our being saved dissipated" (27:20). All told, the Final Sea Journey yields a more sustained and intense focus on threats to expected outcomes than any other segment in Acts.

Along with anticipation and uncertainty, the Final Sea Journey enhances empathy with narrative characters in two subtle ways. First, Paul is the human character of greatest interest in Acts from the thirteenth chapter on. The sheer volume of narrative dedicated to his journeys draws the typical reader into a substantial investment in his fate. Second, first-person narration ("we") reappears for the entire Final Sea Journey. Although reasons for this phenomenon are debated, on a literary level the use of an internal persona as narrator has the potential to enhance empathy with the events at hand. In most cases, storytelling through the voice of a narrative participant ("we") can increase not only the narrator's credibility (depicting the narrator as an eyewitness) but also the perceived immediacy of the events.[45] Whatever "Luke's" intentions with first-person narration in Acts 27:1–28:15, its presence can foster the sense of a more immediate representation (mimesis) of events.[46]

While anticipation, uncertainty, and empathy all contribute to narrative suspense, perhaps the most fundamental ingredient is prolonging (or "suspension"), and this is what Luke's Final Sea Journey does best of all. First, the story is remarkably long. Despite the prevalence of Paul's journey narratives earlier in Acts (14:21–28; 16:6–10; 18:18–23; 20:1–6, 13–17; 21:1–6 [cf. 7–16]), all of them combined barely compare in length with this final counterpart.[47] No precedent or convention in Acts or elsewhere demands such length, especially at this juncture. Second, the Final Sea Journey reads at a slow pace. Gérard Genette uses the language of narrative "pace" to describe the ratio between the length of narrative text ("narrative time") and the chronological duration of the story ("story time").[48] For instance, Genette describes four categories of narrative pace (or "speed"):

Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.118–119; Josephus, *Vita* 3 §14; Longus, *Daphn.* 2.24.1; Strabo, *Geogr.* 2.3.4. On this topic, see Praeder, "Sea Voyages," 692–93.

[45] Related to this, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan highlights the distinctions between "intradiegetic" (within the story) and "homodiegetic" (participating in the events) voices (*Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd ed. [London: Routledge, 1983], 96–97).

[46] Aristotle valued mimesis ("showing, representing") over diegesis ("telling") in literature, since it allows for a more precise contemplation by the audience (*Poet.* 1448b).

[47] In NA[28], the Final Sea Journey is 746 words (59 lines), whereas the other travel narratives of Paul combine for 607 words (36 lines)—or 794 words (46 lines) if including all of 21:7–16. This same comparison also shows that the Final Sea Journey generally uses words that are longer and more complicated, making for an average 12.64 words per line—versus the average 16.86 words (17.26 if including 21:7–16) per line in other travel narratives in Acts.

[48] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 87.

1. *Descriptive Pause*: where narrative text is present but without a progression of story time. Example: an elaborate description of several events happening simultaneously at the moment of the atomic bomb explosion at Hiroshima.
2. *Scene*: where narrative text and story time are conventionally equal (as in dialogue). Example: a dialogue scene from Dostoyevksy's *Brothers Karamazov.*
3. *Summary*: where narrative text swiftly covers a longer period of story time. Example: sections of Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* that summarize quickly the travels of Phileas Fogg and Passepartout.
4. *Ellipsis*: where story time progresses but without any corresponding narrative text. Example: a chapter begins with "Two years later" without stating what occurred in those two years. [49]

Over the course of Acts, the travel narratives generally follow a progressive deceleration in pace—with the Final Sea Journey being the "slowest" of all. All of the journey narratives in Acts reflect a "summary" pace, but no other travel narrative is as slow as the Final Sea Journey, in which just a few days of story time correspond to multiple verses of text (27:1–4, 5–8, 9–12, 13–20, 27–32, etc.; cf. 20:13–17; 21:1–6). In fact, the Final Sea Journey approaches the slow pace of "scene" at several points in Paul's interpolated speeches (27:9–12, 21–26, 33–38). Prior journey narratives occasionally approach this pace (14:22–23; 18:19–21; 21:4–6, 8–14) but not in so regular and sustained a fashion. Only during this final journey do both travelers and the reader find themselves "sailing slowly [βραδυπλοοῦντες] and with great difficulty for quite some time" (27:7). The closer Acts comes to its ending, therefore, the slower the narrative progresses.[50]

A third way that the Final Sea Journey "suspends" matters is by its abundant references to time: 27:3, 7–8, 9, 14, 18, 19, 20, 27, 33, 39; 28:11, 12, 13, 14; cf. 27:22, 23. Phrases like "for many days" (27:7), "when substantial time had passed" (27:9), "as it was the fourteenth night" (27:27), and "today is the fourteenth day" (27:33) occur often. The regularity of such references serves to put the passage of story time at the forefront of the reader's mind. In this way, the Final Sea Journey draws attention to how progressively story time ticks away as it uses up the little remaining narrative text of Acts.

The length, slow pace, and abundant time references of Acts 27:1–28:15 all contribute to a feeling of "slow sailing" for the final two chapters. As expectations of Paul's fate in Rome mount with increasing intensity (from 19:21 on) and the perils of sea travel threaten with uncertainty, the Final Sea Journey travels toward

[49] Ibid., 93–112. The examples are my own.

[50] For more on "deceleration" and "acceleration" of narrative speed, see Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 53–56. Junkerjürgen also emphasizes that typically the closer an episode is to the ending, the more elevated the sense of suspense (*Spannung*, 62).

anticipated outcomes at a plodding pace, placing the reader in suspense in subtle but marvelous ways.

III. Conclusions

If the Final Sea Journey fosters suspense, what is the significance of this for reading Acts?

First, the suspense generated by the Sea Journey gives an experiential dimension to the final two chapters of Acts. Suspense serves primarily to enhance anticipation of final outcomes, which affects the reader on an experiential level. J. R. Morgan gives apt words to this experience:

> We read a novel from a desire to know its ending, for it is only at the end of a novel that its meaning is complete. Yet the pleasure that we derive from following a plot resides in the tensions, uncertainties and thrills that we are made to experience.... And an author can prolong the pleasure of his text by deferring the consummation of his plot.[51]

The earliest readers of Acts were not textual analysts as much as they were hearers of a story. The important question, therefore, about the "slow sailing" of Acts 27:1–28:15 is not simply what the text *says* but what it *does* to the reader. While the story entails theological meaning, the reading of it also generates a distinctive experience of its own. As the narrative heightens anticipation for how and whether the ending will fulfill expected outcomes, the reader is subjected to prolonged tension and uncertainty—which itself constitutes a form of "pleasure," according to Morgan. In contrast to other journey narratives in Acts and in ancient literature, Luke's Final Sea Journey generates a palpable experience of suspense just verses before the ending, and this sets the reader up for experiencing the ending on a more empathetic level. Like Aristotle's "superior poet," who deliberately generates fear and pity in audiences, Luke gives his concluding chapters a heightened experiential dimension "so that the one who hears the events transpire experiences trembling and pity at what takes place" (*Poet.* 1453b). However superficial this experiential quality may be to some readers today, it was hardly lost on the ancients.

The upshot of this experiential dimension is increased engagement with the ending. This leads to a natural follow-up question: what kind of ending is Acts 28:16–31? Many deem the ending inconclusive. Pervo, for instance, writes:

> Luke was not loath to regale his readers with adventure, and he understood the value of retardation, but from this perspective the effort [of the Final Sea Journey]

[51] J. R. Morgan, "The Story of Knemon in Heliodoros' *Aithiopika*," *JHS* 109 (1989): 99–113, here 102–3.

> was a failure, for the sequel [i.e., Acts 28:16–31] is anticlimactic, repetitious, and disappointing narrative.[52]

Earlier authors had similar experiences. Adolf von Harnack observed, "The place where the narrative now breaks off is as unsuitable as it possibly can be. The readers are kept upon the rack."[53] Much earlier, John Chrysostom famously noted that Luke "leaves the hearer athirst for more" (*Hom. Act.* 55; *NPNF* 1/11:326). Most interpreters find the ending abrupt, as if the larger story of witness to the end of the earth seems unfinished. The two narrative segments of epilogue (Acts 27:1–28:15) and ending (28:16–31) are together partners in the same crime: a deliberately open-ended conclusion. The ending denies decisive closure to particular questions (e.g., regarding Paul's fate), and the Final Sea Journey only accentuates them by its dramatic build-up beforehand. In these ways the entirety of Acts 27–28 functions together to suspend definitive resolution, making the ending of Luke's narrative read less like a final period and more like an unexpected ellipsis.[54]

Acts 27:1–28:15, therefore, does not use ancient rhetorical practices of suspense simply to frustrate; along with the ending (28:16–31), the Final Sea Journey suspends in order to provoke the reader's reflection. After all, as one of the earliest commentators on the ending of Acts points out, "to know everything makes the reader dull and jaded" (John Chrysostom, *Hom. Act.* 55). Whereas neat and tidy closure may satisfy "dull and jaded" human interests, Luke's ending blazes a different trail: it stimulates reflection on how God's activity is in fact present and at work amid uncertainty (threats, obstacles, challenges). Modern literary theorists Frank Kermode and Alice Kuzniar have advocated that, whereas readers generally long for meaningful structure in literature (i.e., closure), actual life experiences often thwart such meaningful resolution.[55] According to Kermode and Kuzniar, lack of closure may reflect reality more accurately than simplified forms of resolution. Lack of closure, however, need not simply convey pessimism about the human experience (à la Kermode); it may also convey hope amid an open-ended future. In the case of Acts, the ending entails frustration (28:17–28) but also glimmers of hope. The work of proclamation and witness continues "in an unhindered manner" despite looming threats (28:31). Whatever particular questions remain about Paul's

[52] Pervo, *Acts*, 644.

[53] Adolf von Harnack, "The Conclusion of the Acts of the Apostles and Its Silence concerning the Result of St. Paul's Trial," in *The Date of the Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels*, trans. J. R. Wilkinson, Crown Theological Library 33 (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1911), 97 and n. 2.

[54] For more on the ending of Acts, see Marguerat, "Enigma of the End"; Troy M. Troftgruben, *A Conclusion Unhindered: A Study of the Ending of Acts within Its Literary Environment*, WUNT 2/280 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

[55] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction, with a New Epilogue*, new ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Alice A. Kuzniar, *Delayed Endings: Nonclosure in Novalis and Hölderlin* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

fate, the narrative concludes on the note of bold and unhindered witness that presumably persists outside the narrative's end—even "to the end of the earth" (1:8). In this case, the final two chapters of Luke's second volume promise its first hearers no naïve resolutions to earthly troubles, as might please the "dull and jaded" reader. Instead, these chapters acknowledge uncertainty about the future but also profess confidence that the narrative's divine actors are still at work as the book concludes. The message issued to the narrative's earliest hearers is one of qualified but authentic hope: no matter the threats, omens, or uncertainties experienced by Jesus's witnesses, the divine actors of the narrative will not cease their activities of saving, including, redeeming, and proclaiming. On this provocative note, the narrative suddenly ends.[56]

In addition to provocation, the suspense of the Final Sea Journey draws attention to openness and uncertainty as prime places for witness. The passage enhances the reader's overall experience of openness and uncertainty throughout Acts 27–28, which in turn spotlights these characteristics as venues for apostolic witness and God's saving activity. In fact, the slowed pace of Acts 27:1–28:15 draws attention to the journey *itself* (vs. the destination) as a place of significant activity, making the Final Sea Journey more than merely a sideshow to the ending. Like the chapters dedicated to Paul's trials beforehand (Acts 22–26), the plodding pace of the Sea Journey slows down Paul's march to Rome. While narrative cues reiterate the need for Paul to bear witness in Rome (23:11; cf. 19:21; 27:24), the prolonged experience of the journey compels him to bear witness already in various ways and settings. Within the Final Sea Journey narrative, Paul speaks prophetically (27:10, 21–26, 31, 33–34), encourages the dispirited (27:22–25, 33–34), feeds the hungry (27:33–38), heals the sick (28:8–9), and ultimately speaks and acts on behalf of God (27:23–26). He exercises authority and command in the journey, is experienced favorably by many (27:43; 28:7–10; cf. 27:31–32), and is finally vindicated as one favored by God (28:3–6). All this among travelers heavily preoccupied with attaining "safety"—or "salvation" (σωτηρία).[57] In these ways, Paul bears authentic witness to the message of Jesus in word and deed while navigating uncharted waters. Matthew Skinner rightly identifies Paul's settings in custody as places "of possibility, not of restriction," since they counterintuitively offer new locations and audiences for

[56] Donald Harrisville Juel has a similar interpretation of the ending to Mark's Gospel, *pace* Frank Kermode, for reasons similarly rooted in the activity of divine actors: "The story gives good reasons to remain hopeful even in the face of disappointment. The possibilities of eventual enlightenment for the reader remain in the hands of the divine actor who will not be shut in—or out" ("A Disquieting Silence: The Matter of the Ending," in *The Ending of Mark and the Ends of God: Essays in Memory of Donald Harrisville Juel*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Patrick D. Miller [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005], 1–13, here 11).

[57] Even though "salvation" language (σώζω, διασώζω, σωτηρία) in this context (27:20, 31, 34, 43, 44; 28:1, 4) likely means "safety" from threat, the original audiences would have readily heard other nuances.

witness.[58] The Final Sea Journey is also precisely this—a place of possibility for ongoing witness. The slowed pace of the journey only draws out and draws attention to the potential for uncertain expanses to become venues for proclamation. In this way, the account of the Final Sea Journey says something significant about the nature of witness: it is not limited to sacred moments or particular audiences but instead takes place freely among strangers, at all times, and in the most foreign places. As something inspired and empowered by God, bold witness is neither hindered by human restrictions nor truly threatened by cosmic forces or natural threats. In the Final Sea Journey, Luke's narrative redeems and transforms the significance of a context traditionally associated with threat, hostility, and fear (the sea). The narrative gives the reader the clear impression that, whether on land or at sea, proclaiming the reign of God and the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ will continue "unhindered" (28:31). Within the story's global movement of witness (Acts 1:8), spaces and places of all shapes and sizes can be venues for God's purposes and activity.

In terms of apostolic witness, then, the extensive nature of Acts 27:1–28:15 draws attention to the journey itself, not the destination. The Final Sea Journey hinders a potential sprint to Rome so that the path of travel will not be overlooked in the process. In this way the slow sailing of Acts 27:1–28:15 would have implied to its original hearers something sacred about traveling "on the way." Here and throughout Acts, those who belong to "the Way" (9:2; 18:25; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) normally serve as Jesus's witnesses in transit—in motion, going from place to place, en route between one destination and another. In other words, those belonging to "the Way" are most often themselves traveling "on the way" (geographically) in response to divine initiative. In this way, Luke's narrative gave to his early audiences an image of journey as a multifaceted and comprehensive metaphor for what Luke believed the apostolic way of life was truly and most centrally about. As the Final Sea Journey shows, the narrative of Acts recasts and reimagines for the reader the notion of journey itself as sacred space for unhindered witness and God's saving activity.

[58] Matthew L. Skinner, *Locating Paul: Places of Custody as Narrative Settings in Acts 21–28*, AcBib 13 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 109; see also 151–89.