"Genre" and the Revelation of John: A study in text, context and intertext

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ABSTRACT
After a short introduction, current issues in literary theory concerning "genre" are discussed in the light of the underlying epistemologies and the implications for the study of "genre" in the New Testament. The Platonic/Aristotelian legacy is considered, as well as recent developments, including post-structuralist developments. The Revelation of John poses many interesting problems in this regard. In section two these are treated in the light of the current debate on literary theory as well as the debate on the "genre" of the Revelation of John in New Testament research. The essay concludes with a few remarks about the future study of the genre of the Revelation of John.

Every genre ... has multiple distinguishing traits, which however are not all shared by each exemplar. If literature is a genre, the idea of defining it is misconceived. For ... the character of genres is that they change. Only variations or modifications of convention have literary significance (Fowler 1982:18).

Recent analysis of discourse has been dominated on the one hand by formalism which treats the text as an extension of the syntactic and logical structuring of the sentence, on the other hand by an embarrassed empiricism which, in attempting to take into account the role of context and enunciation in the shaping of text, finds itself unable to formalise the infinity of possible speech-situations (Frow 1980:73).

1 INTRODUCTION
Recent discussions of matters concerning the "genre" of the Revelation of John have largely been dominated by the results of the Society of Biblical Scholarship-group directed by Professor J J Collins (cf Collins 1979, 1984; Aune 1986 and Hellholm 1986). The group has developed a typology of the apocalypse genre, based on a thorough investigation of a large corpus of ancient writings in order to establish "...distinctive recurring characteristics which constitute a recognizable and coherent type of writing". The initial undertaking, which focused mainly on aspects of form and content, has been complemented by recent investigations into the "function" of the genre (cf Hartman 1983, Collins 1984, Aune 1986 and Hellholm 1986). I have discussed
some of the merits and the demerits of this approach in another connection where I contended that it is difficult to speak of a "genre apocalypse" and that more attention should be paid to the mode of writing or the way in which material is organised in a discourse. I maintained that so-called apocalypses are, first of all, narratives; if these texts were to be understood, their narrative aspects should be taken seriously. I furthermore maintained that the Revelation of John is a circular letter in narrative form (cf Vorster 1983). In view of new insights into the problems of genre and the role of the interpretive community in defining the data and the beliefs of researchers, I should like to address the problem of the genre of the Revelation of John anew.

2 FROM ARCHITEXT TO INTERTEXT

2.1 Three approaches
The reasons for and the relevance of the study of genre are directly related to views on what texts are and how they function. Generally speaking, there are at least three current approaches to the study of genre in literary theory which have to be taken seriously. These are based on different epistemologies and views of the phenomenon "text", which obviously have implications for the study of the kinds of texts we find in the New Testament. The three approaches range from the traditional analysis of genre, in terms of the classification of texts based on universal characteristics and the literary history of a particular genre, through the emphasis on the texts as signs of communication in different types of situations and their social settings, to the viewpoint that the classification of texts in genres is subverted by the very nature of text. In view of this it seems necessary to establish a frame of reference for the topic of my essay, in order to determine the relevance of the study of genre in New Testament research. It is necessary both on the grounds of the present state of research into types of texts in the New Testament, including the genre of the Revelation of John, and in view of the fact that there have recently been a few shifts in New Testament studies - from the author to the text to the reader - shifts which have implications for the study of genre and the New Testament.

The main differences between the three approaches mentioned above can be viewed in terms of the role of universals and convention in the definition of genre (cf Bal 1981:7ff) and convictions about the nature of texts. While some scholars see genre as something which is based on ontologically determined universal characteristics, others regard it as being fundamentally and historically variable, and conventionally determined.

At the same time, the matter is complicated by the fact that the phenomenon of "text" (and not only literary text) has become a contentious matter. During the past few decades great emphasis has been placed on texts as signs within the context of communication and the associated interaction.
between sign and receiver has brought about a number of shifts which have to be taken seriously.

2.2 Aristotle: universals and convention
It has become conventional in many circles to analyse genre - with reference to the taxonomy of literary texts in particular - on the grounds of universal characteristics. Texts with presumably similar characteristics are classified in genres, subgenres and even subsubgenres, and the history of the different sets is described on the grounds of a comparison of recurring characteristics. This approach is based on the idea of a set of universal transhistoric characteristics, according to which the whole of literature can be classified. Other so-called non-literary texts are, however, treated in a similar manner, as is the case with the classification of New Testament writings. The purpose is mainly to classify objects, namely texts belonging to the same group (cf Hempfer 1973 and Fowler 1982).

The idea that every kind of literature (literary text) can be classified into one of three fundamental types or genres is traditionally traced back to Aristotle (and Plato). Their ideas, and specifically the few opening sentences of Aristotle's *Περὶ Ποιητικῆς*, form the architext or source of a very long tradition in the study of genre within the framework of three basic genres, namely epic or prose, drama and lyric, or poetry. This tradition is, however, basically a misconception of what Aristotle and also Plato maintained about mode of presentation and genre, as Genette (1981:61ff) has shown in a convincing manner. What Plato and Aristotle had in mind was something other than universals, with regard to the classification of texts in the traditional study of genre - especially since the eighteenth century. That does not deny Aristotle's distinction between universal modes of presentation in poetics. In the context of New Testament research we should perhaps remind ourselves of what Plato and Aristotle had to say, to see for ourselves the origins of a very influential theory of genre.

In his *Πολιτεία* Plato uses two kinds of arguments as to why poets should not be allowed in his state (cf Pl Resp 3.392). On the one hand there are the arguments of content or λόγος, what is to be said ὡς δεῖ λέγεσθαι and on the other, arguments of form or λέξις, how it is to be said (ὡς λέκτεσθαι). It is the latter kind of argument which is very often, in addition to the introductory remarks of Aristotle in his *Περὶ Ποιητικῆς*, mistakenly used to substantiate systems of genre based on three fundamental types. Both Plato and Aristotle, each in their own manner, spoke about mode of presentation, not about literary genre in the sense of three fundamental literary types. Because of his views on poets, whom he would not allow in his ideal state, lyric is excluded from Plato's limiting discussion of how things are to be said.

Plato maintains that every literary work (everything said by fabulists or mythologists) is a narration (διηγησίας) about past, present or future things.
This narration can, however, have three different forms. It can be pure narration (ἀπλή διήγησις), narration effected through imitation (διὰ μιμήσεως) as in drama where characters narrate by dialogue, or mixed when narrative and dialogue are alternated. These modes of presentation (λέξεως) in narration roughly correspond with three literary genres: "pure narration" corresponds with the dithyramb, "mixed" with epic, and "mimetic" with tragedy and comedy. The correspondence does not, however, account for the classification of genre in the traditional sense. In fact, the three modes of presentation have to do with the status of the spokesman. In "pure narration" the narrator is the speaker, in drama the characters are the spokesmen on behalf of the author and, in mixed forms, the speaker alternates between the narrator and the narrated spokesmen (cf also Genette 1981:185). Let us now turn to Aristotle.

Aristotle maintains that all kinds (εἰδὴ) of poetry (ποιητικὴ σκιλ. ποιητική τέχνη) - that is, the making (ποιεῖν) of epic and tragic poetry, comedy, and dithyrambic poetry - and most music composed for the flute and the lyre can be described as forms of imitation or representation (μιμήσις, μιμεώμα). In other words literature, that is poetics, is seen in the context of the art of representation or imitation and in contrast to science (cf Empedocles). Aristotle asserts that these forms of imitation can be distinguished because the medium of representation varies, or they represent different things, or the mode of presentation is different (cf Aristot Poet 1). The distinction between medium (e.g. language, dance, singing), object, and mode of presentation forms the backbone of Aristotle's discussion on the art of imitation. Again, it is striking that lyric is totally absent from his discussion of the art of imitation. The criteria he uses (medium, object and mode) in his description of the art of presentation are directly related to the theme of presentation or imitation. Medium has to do with the question "in what?" (e.g. in Greek, in prose, in hexameters, in gestures); object with "what?", and mode with "how?" (e.g narrating or showing).

Within the Aristotelian concept of genre the first two criteria are conventional, not universal. The use of one or another language, style, and so on, is conventional. The same holds true for the object or actors. They are presented in conventional terms: as superior (βελτίονες), mediocre (καθ’ ἰμάδες) or inferior (χειρόνες). They are distinguished in terms of virtue and vice (ἀρετή, κακία). These characteristics have a social dimension. In tragedy and epic drama, the players are of the "higher" social class, while those of comedy come from the common people.

With regard to the mode of presentation, Aristotle has one category less than Plato. By distinguishing between "narrating" and "showing", to use terminology anachronistically, Aristotle did not make provision for the so-called mixed form of Plato. "Epic" corresponds with "narrating" and "dramatic" with "showing" in the Aristotelian presentation. In his view tragedy and comedy are "dramatic" because the players (πράττοντες) are the spokesmen, while epic and parody are in the narrative mode of presentation since
they are told by a narrator. The distinctive criterion between possible genres in the Aristotelian concept is that of the situation of the speaker, the mode of presentation. The material is either presented by a spokesman who tells or by persons who show, and these modes can be mixed. Genette (1981:70) has presented these views very clearly in the following graphic form (my translation):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dramatic</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>tragedy</td>
<td>epic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferior</td>
<td>comedy</td>
<td>parody</td>
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</table>

Bal (1981:18) correctly observes that Aristotle, and for that matter one can include Plato, does not distinguish between three different genres, but he does distinguish three differences between possible genres! Genres can differ in medium, object and mode of presentation. It is noteworthy that these differences are worked out in the semiotic framework of the art of presentation which includes music, painting and poetic texts. His theory of genre is thus multidimensional, a flexible system which leads to a dynamic and very relative limitation of a corpus (Bal 1981:21), and to something very different from a rigid and magical division of literature into three fundamental categories of universal types of texts namely lyric, epic and drama. Mode of presentation is the only universal aspect in Aristotle's theory of genre. It is a very helpful criterion in distinguishing conventional, that is historically and culturally determined, genres (cf Bal 1981:21).

Incidentally it is also a matter of convention to approach the problem of genre with a discussion of the architext on the theory of genre, as Bal (1981:9) has convincingly argued. Even Aristotle's Poetics is but one fallible source on the theory of genre! Nevertheless, from the perspective of the analysis of genre with reference to the New Testament, Aristotle's views are important. In the first place, it seems clear that criteria for establishing genre are of the utmost importance. Aristotle's mode of interpretation is of great significance in the study of the types of texts we find in the New Testament, as we shall see below. Secondly, it appears that the study of genre entails more than taxonomy. The mere classification of texts according to shared characteristics can be interesting, but classification for the sake of classification is of little use. It also follows from Aristotle's theory of genre that there
are different ways of mapping genre, depending on the criteria used in the
process of classification (cf Bal 1981; Fowler 1982). That there is the possi-
bility of overlapping in the classification of the texts is also clear. In the
third place, there is a need to take seriously the problem of the art of pre-
sentation in sacred texts, in the light of Aristotle's views on imitation. Lastly,
the misconception about the origin of the classification of genre into three
fundamental groups, with its long tradition, is an interesting example of the
influence of the interpretive community on the course of scientific investiga-
tion. These matters are of direct importance to the study of the genre of the
Revelation of John.

2.3 Society, text types and the study of genre
The relationship between universal (that is, transhistoric) and conventional
aspects associated with the origin of genres is complex. What is clear,
however, is that new genres originate within society as a reflection of the
social situation, and older ones disappear as a result of social changes. Genre
therefore seems to be cultural convention in a certain sense. In this respect
the questions of the relationship between society and genre - that is, conven-
tion and text - and the function of texts become very important. Sociology (cf
Köhler 1977), text linguistics (Van Dijk 1977) and sociolinguistics (Halliday
1978) have played major roles in recent years to broaden the study of genre
to embrace more than the mere classification of types of texts. Let us start
with a few remarks about "text".

It is probably true to say that very few terms have become so ambiguous
and problematic in literary study as the word "text". In text linguistics and
deconstruction, specifically, there have been developments with far-reaching
implications for our understanding of the connotations of the word "text".

In text linguistics, it is the regarding of text as a unitary object, a sign in
the process of communication or even a communicative activity, or a network
of signifiers (cf Harty 1985:2ff), which has given rise to new possibilities in
the investigation of genre (cf Guelich & Raible 1975; Hellholm 1986).
Because of the inclusion of more than literary texts in the concept of "text",
and the emphasis on textness, or well-formedness (cohesion), and texts as
signs of communication, the scope of the study of genre has widened and the
technical term "genre" has been replaced by "text type". In order to limit my
survey to matters relevant to my discussion, I will outline a proposal for the
study of discourse genres which reflects current views of a text-linguistic and
sociolinguistic nature, without the unnecessary load of formalism which is
found in some text-linguistic studies.

Frow (1980:73) regards genre as "...a conventional institution: a norma-
tive codification of different levels of meaning appropriate to a type of situa-
tion". In this manner the study of genre is related to the semantic, syntactic
and pragmatic aspects of texts within a situation of communication. Both text
and context are sharply defined in terms of linguistic insights and the primary
purpose of texts, namely communication. It is noteworthy that convention, and not "universal characteristics", "text type" and "type of situation", are the catchwords in this approach. Genre is a code like other codes which senders may use in the communication process in a given social context. Following Halliday, Frow (1980:73) regards genre as

"...the configuration of semantic resources that the member of a culture typically associates with a situation type...the meaning potential that is accessible in a given social context..."

both with regard to what is said and how it is said.

It is proposed that the system of genres should be described by specifying the semantic function with reference to the dominance of field (that is, the type of activity in which the text has significant function), tenor (the status and role relationships involved, interpersonal functions) or mode (the symbolic mode and rhetorical channels or textual function) (Frow 1980:74ff). Function thus becomes a very significant aspect of text and also of the study of genre. More important than the actual classification of genre in terms of dominance of field, tenor or mode, or the feasibility of such a classification (cf Fowler 1982:238), is the introduction of the criterion of function as a sociolinguistic category to describe genre. This is an aspect to which I will return.

The advantage of a sociosemiotic approach to genre which is based on text-linguistic insights, is the integration of textual and social aspects as linguistic phenomena. Thus cognisance is taken of both the text and the context of communication as a type of communication situation. A further advantage of the particular approach to genre is the fact that it is not restricted to literary texts alone (cf also Bal 1981:29ff).

One of the major objections to the approach is the epistemological premise of textual autonomy and determinacy. The text is regarded as an object that is knowable,

"...or the conviction that a text has a centre and an edge, and which is recoverable, whole and unblemished, by the skilled reader (Ryan 1985:8)."

With the introduction of the role of the reader in the process of interpretation and the idea of interaction between reader and text, and the reader's contribution to the meaning of the text, which is different from a recovery of the codified meaning of the text, this situation has changed. As Kuenzli (quoted by Ryan 1985:20) maintains:

"Paying attention to the reader is therefore often regarded as a subversive activity which re-opens Pandora's box and undermines our hard-earned "certainties" concerning literary texts. Indeed, a reader-oriented theory exposes our "objective" analyses as sophisticated "subjective" readings."

The relationship between text and reader as a process of actualising the meaning of a sign, which can no longer be regarded as a knowable object that has to be decoded, changes the concept "text" radically, and obviously the
epistemology as well (cf Ryan 1985:20ff). The real break with past epistemo-
logy came with the birth of deconstruction.

2.4 The death of genre and literary history
Deconstruction presents a total break with past epistemologies in literary
studies and has convincingly been compared to the Newtonian revolution of
quantum theory in the natural sciences (cf Brink 1985:10ff). Two categories
which are basic to deconstruction as a literary strategy, and which are of
direct interest for this essay on the study of genre, are "text" and "intertext".

Contrary to views held in text linguistics, text is no longer regarded as an
object. It is a process, which exists only in the activity of production. It is
...no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book
or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring end-
lessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the
text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far...- all the limits, everything
that was to be set up in opposition to writing (speech, life, the world, the
real, history, and what not, every field of reference - to body or mind, con-
scious or unconscious, politics, economics, and so forth) (Derrida
1979:84).

Since texts are texts about texts, within a total network, the idea of the origin
and the centre of texts, which are so important in predeconstructionalist
thought, is totally undermined.

Texts do not have meaning because they are structured, but because
they are related to other texts and their meanings, in a network of inter-
textuality. The meaning of a text is the result of the similarities and dif-
fences between other texts. Intertextuality refers to the fact that one text is
irrevocably influenced by other texts, and that its meaning is determined by
its similarities with and differences from other texts. The source of the mean-
ing of a text is therefore not the mind of the author, the reality outside the
text; texts are their own source of meaning. Ryan (1985:16) summarises the
implications of deconstruction as follows:

The author does not create meaning because meaning is never present,
and has to be sought, without success, beyond the text. As a result, the idea
of "book" becomes hopelessly unstable, because no text is ever singular or
unified. Next, the idea of "interpretation" must be discarded, because
under Derridean scrutiny the term erroneously assumes the explication of a
concealed but nonetheless present meaning. The two grouping concepts,
"genre" and "literary history", cease to have validity, because all texts are
for Derrida a single expression and not a controlled sequence (the literary
historical premise), or capable of being divided into a number of subsets
distinguishable by type (the generic premise).

This represents a totally new paradigm and a totally new epistemology. It is
not simply a shift from the old to the new.
2.5 Genre and the study of the New Testament
For more than half a century New Testament scholars have been occupied with the study of genre in different forms, based on different epistemologies with the assumption that the analysis of genre is in some or other manner relevant. The theory of *Gattungen* (forms) and their *Sitze im Leben*, together with the idea that most of the writings of the New Testament are *Kleinliteratur* (cf Schmidt 1923), dominated the study of the New Testament for the greater part of the century. A new interest in the study of genre has emerged during the past few decades, very much under the influence of the older theory, but taking into account developments in literary theory and linguistics.

In view of the above, it seems to me that any attempt to write on any aspect of genre in the New Testament - no matter whether one holds the view that genres are based on universals, are conventional, or should be described in terms of function - will have to be defined in terms of some theory of genre. The relevance of the study of genre to the writings of the New Testament is directly related to the theory adopted. Since New Testament scholars are normally interested in deciphering the meaning of these ancient texts of religion, the Derridean position on genre can hardly be taken. On the other hand the idea of intertextuality may help us to explain the compositeness of most of the writings, in terms of rewriting.

In the next section I shall pay attention to current views on the genre of the Revelation of John. My own position will be given in terms of critical observations.

3 THE ANALYSIS OF GENRE IN USE: THE REVELATION OF JOHN

3.1 Current views
If anything is clear about the study of the "genre" of the Revelation of John, it is that it is determined by the data beliefs of New Testament critics as an interpretive community, and based reflectively or unreflectively on a variety of assumptions and theories. It has, for example, been described as an apocalypse in the form of a letter (cf Collins 1977; Hellholm 1986), an apocalypse as an autobiographical prose narrative (cf Aune 1986), a circular letter in narrative form (Vorster 1983), a drama (cf Palmer 1943; Bowman 1955; Blevins 1980), liturgy (Shepherd 1960), myth (cf Halver 1964; Gager 1975), and prophecy (cf Kallas 1967; Schüssler Fiorenza 1977). It is unnecessary to explore in detail all the different views. What I have in mind is to discuss the most influential views critically in the light of the information in section one of my essay. Since criteria of form, content and function are mentioned in discussions I will pay attention to these from the perspective of mode of writing, content, and function. I obviously do not contend that how a text is written can be isolated from what is written or why it is written. For the purpose of the discussion each aspect will be discussed separately.
3.2 Mode of writing and the genre of Revelation

The Revelation of John starts with the remark that it is a Revelation (ἀποκάλυψις) of Jesus Christ concerning the things that will happen soon, which God gave to John that he might show it to his servants .... This is the first time in the history of literature, as far as we are aware, that a revelatory message came to be known as ἀποκάλυψις (cf Smith 1983:14). Although the phenomena of transcendental and metaphysical spaces, events and existents were discussed in the Mediterranean world and Near East prior to the Revelation of John (cf Hellholm 1983), it is remarkable that no writing prior to the Revelation of John was called an apocalypse. This remark is not insignificant since it is commonly accepted that the term ἀποκάλυψις in John refers to a genre which had already been in existence prior to this book. It is remarkable that no ancient source dealing with the question of literary types and genre ever referred to such a genre - not even in the sense of some kind of literature dealing with transcendental phenomena (cf, however, Betz 1983). Whether it is a designation of a separate genre with its own literary characteristics is another matter. Furthermore, it is not without importance that the ἀποκάλυψις which John received is referred to as words of prophecy (Rv 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19).

One can easily argue, "what is in a name?" This would be inappropriate in view of a very long and intensive debate and history of research. As a matter of fact, it would be difficult simply to ignore the serious attempt of the SBL group, as well as that of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism in Uppsala during 1979, to argue the existence of a separate literary genre, the apocalypse, of which Revelation of John is presumably an example. Let us instead select another starting point.

One of my conclusions in discussing the views of Aristotle above, was the need for criteria with which to determine literary genres. Despite the controversy between universalists and conventionalists, "mode of writing" seems to be the most important distinctive criterion in the study and classification of genre (cf Bal 1981:21; Van Luxemburg, Bal & Weststeijn 1981:121). It is in other words possible to classify texts according to the type of speaker involved, and the function of the speaker in a particular text. Where there is one speaker, as in poetry, the text is a monologue. When one speaker allows other speakers in a text to speak as well, the text is organised in the narrative mode. Thirdly, there are texts in which a set of actors are the speakers. These are called dramatic texts. There are obviously also other criteria, such as abstract content, theme and physical form (length etc). These can be used to distinguish texts from one another. Events are normally not organised in a logical and chronological way (abstract content) in poems. In addition to the manner of writing this criterion could help distinguish a poem from a narrative or drama (cf Van Luxemburg, Bal & Weststeijn 1981:120ff). The relative importance of each criterion for the analysis of genre is self-evident. Physical
form can help us distinguish between a novel and a short novel as two different text types in terms of levels of classification - for example, type and subtype. The fact that both are written in the narrative mode, however, immediately calls attention to the narrative code as a code of communication.

The distinction between the modes of writing has significant implications, because every mode has its own way of communicating a message. Similar to the dramatic code, the narrative code has distinctive features. It seems a misconception (cf Hellholm 1986; also Hartman 1983) to minimise, or perhaps not realise the importance of the narrative code to the so-called apocalypse genre, by dealing with it in a hierarchy of so-called abstractness and concreteness.

Hellholm (1980 & 1986) uses Hempfer's (1973) systematic hierarchisation of genres (Gattungen) to classify texts written from an apocalyptic perspective within a linguistic text theory. In addition to the criteria suggested by Collins's group, Hellholm also emphasises the role of function in determining genre. We will return to this later.

Hempfer's classification of literary texts in a hierarchy should be interpreted very carefully when applied to the hierarchisation of ancient texts within the framework of a classification which pretends to be of value for the interpretation as well as for the classification of the texts. Hempfer distinguishes between the transhistoric features (e.g. mode and type of writing) and historic realisations of these features (genres and subgenres) in a hierarchy. One has to realise that the different levels are specifications of each other. Starting at the top with narrative as a mode of writing, the next level has a first-person or third-person narrative on the level of a type of writing. "Novel" as genre would be a specification of a type of writing on a lower level, and "picaresque novel" as subgenre a specification on an even lower level (cf also Genette 1981:112ff). Hempfer's hierarchy is in other words an attempt to arrive at a systematic classification of literary texts, taking into account the transhistoric and historic features of texts.

Following this systematic classification, Hellholm maintains that apocalyptic texts can be classified in the following manner:

Mode of writing - the Narrative, the Dramatic, the Epic...
Type of writing - Revelatory writing...
Genre - Apocalypses, Prophetic texts, Discourses...
Subgenre - Apc. with o.- w. journey Apc. without o. - w. journey, Single-texts -....

I would like to draw attention to the second level in the hierarchy. In Hempfer's system one would have expected a specification of the mode of writing, such as first-person or third-person narrative. In the case of the Revelation of John, for example, one would expect first-person narrative and not "Revelatory writing". On the level of genre the question then arises as to whether one should think in terms of a genre "revelatory texts", of which apocalypses and prophetic texts would be subgenres. This is just to show how relative taxonomy is. In addition, it is clear that Hempfer's classification is
not without its shortcomings (cf Bal 1981:25 and Genette 1981:112ff). The relationship between the different levels, in terms of that between transhistoric and historic, is not clear at all because it is based on a single principle of inclusion as Genette (1981:112) has shown. Works fall under kinds, kinds fall under genre, and genre falls under modes and types of writing. Aristotle on the other hand had two principles, namely mode and object, which made it possible to classify each genre in terms of mode and object (theme) at the same time, on the same level of a hierarchy. The relationship between transhistoric and historic is much closer than Hellholm's hierarchy allows for.

From the point of view of the genre code there seems little doubt that the mode of writing of the so-called apocalyptic texts is narrative. In the case of the Revelation of John the text is organised in the form of an autobiographic narrative concerning the visions of a certain John. These he received from God (cf Rv 1:1) on the island of Patmos. He was ordered to write down his vision and send it to the seven communities of Asia Minor (1:11). The command to write down the revelation, and send it to a specific group of readers, is important for two reasons. The publication of revelatory material in written form for a specific public is a common feature of Jewish texts written from an apocalyptic perspective (cf Dn 12:4; 4Ezr 14:24ff; 45f). Because of the importance of the contents of the revelation it should be preserved and nobody may alter or add to it in any way (Rv 22:18f). This written document should be distributed to a group of people to whom the revelation should be read (Rv 1:3). It should be written down because the content of the vision is so important to the recipients (cf also Güttemanns 1983:12). It deals with things that will happen very soon (Rv 1:1,3), of which the recipients should be aware. As to the genre code of the document, it is the vision and the mode of writing which the reader should note - its inscripturation. Do the so-called leiter formulas (cf Rv 1:4ff; 22:21) and the fact that the text includes seven letters to the communities in Asia Minor not change the genre code of Revelation? Is it not a letter? This leads us to the second reason why the command to write down the vision and distribute it is important.

The long tradition of the presumed genre relationship between the Revelation of John and the letters of Paul (cf Berger 1974:204ff) is based on a misconception of genre codes and the way in which the material is presented in Revelation. Letters of the kind we find in the New Testament are argumentative texts, not narrative texts. The mode of writing a letter is thus different from that of a narrative.

The structure of the Revelation (cf Hahn 1979:145-154) is determined by the command related in 1:11. The main segment (Rv 1:9-22:20) is an account of the vision, its content, how, when, and where it was received and what should be done with it. The authority of the message imparted as secret information in a vision is also given here. Revelation 1:1-8 and 22:6-18 form a
frame around the main text (cf Müller 1983:600ff). This frame was made necessary by the command in 1:11. Revelation 1:1-3 is a prologue in narrated form serving as a theme and an introduction to the text which has to be read to the seven communities. Since the author is ordered to distribute his revelation to those mentioned, he uses the introductory formulas and ending for a letter (1:4-8 and 22:21) to present his revelation to his recipients. This letter frame does not, however, change the genre code of the text at all. In fact, the beginning and the end of Revelation are, taken together, the story of the fulfillment of the order given in 1:11. The only correlation in respect of genre, between the so-called apostolic letter and Revelation, is in the letter formula, together with the embedded narrated letters used in Revelation. The mode of writing of Revelation is narrative. It starts with a third person narrative; then the main narrative, which is in the first-person mode, is framed with a letter beginning and end.

What about the fact that it was intended to be read (1:3)? Does this not influence the genre code? I mention this for two reasons. Aune (1986:77ff) has introduced the topic of orality and textuality into the discussion of the genre, and has concluded that the oral reading of texts such as Revelation and the Shepherd of Hermas "... constitutes a unique feature of these two apocalyses" and argues that "... it appears to be an innovative factor in the function of early Christian apocalyses" (1986:78). Firstly, it seems to me that Aune is addressing a problem which is important, but has nothing to do with the genre code. Secondly, Aune's use of function in connection with genre is disputable.

Too little attention is indeed paid by New Testament critics to the fact that the writings of the New Testament were intended to be read aloud to their audience, and to the implications of the construction of meaning. From a reader's perspective this is undoubtedly important. From the perspective of what a text is, and whether one can speak of "a" message in a text, these matters are important. The question of concern should, however, be whether orality or textuality can influence the genre - for example, change the mode of writing from, say dramatic to narrative. This can clearly not be done. Since there are a number of proponents of the idea that Revelation is a drama, let us take up this approach because it has to do with the performance of the text as a drama.

In 1980 Blevins wrote a very interesting article about the genre of Revelation. Basing his argument on previous research, the uniqueness of the theatre at Ephesus, the nature of Greek tragedy and the resemblances between many details of Revelation and Greek tragedy, Blevins claims that Revelation was conceived as a one-actor play (with chorus), with the theatre of Ephesus in mind.

_We conclude that the writer of Revelation adapted the genre of Greek tragedy because it was a vessel through which his community could interpret its experiences in a troubled time_ (Blevins 1980:405).
However attractive this proposal may seem, it is clear that one has to force Revelation into the dramatic genre. This is best seen in the many hymnic elements (cf Nestle-Aland 26; Vielhauer 1975:47; Schüssler Fiorenza 1977:351) that are integrated into the Revelation narrative. These utterances by a variety of speakers can hardly be explained as the lyric role of a chorus in a tragedy, as Blevins argues. They form part of the story of John’s transcendental experience and are the words of different speakers in the narrative, not of the chorus acting in a tragedy. In addition, Revelation is clearly not written in dialogue form. On the grounds of mode of writing alone one can make out a convincing case that Revelation is not "...an innovative adaptation of Greek tragic drama" (Blevins 1980:405). This is not to say that Revelation was not conceptualised in its mode of presentation, and its use of rhetoric, to be read orally. On the contrary!

Various "recurring features" of form have been identified by scholars who argue the existence of a separate "genre apocalypse" (cf Vielhauer 1964:408ff; Collins 1979b:28; Hellholm 1986:23). The problem is that, except for the narrative framework which seems to be the distinctive feature, hardly any of these features can be used as criteria for the distinction of genre. The recurring features on the so-called text-syntactic level (form and style, cf Hellholm 1986:23) which are really text-syntactic, can be found in many macro-texts of a narrative nature. That is why Hellholm’s (1986:43ff) discovery of levels of embedment of communication as "...the most striking macro-syntagmatic feature of the generic concept ‘Apocalypse’" is totally unconvincing. Narrative embedment depends on the number of speakers within a particular narrative, and what they have to say to whom. Matthew 13, for example, is a good illustration that pragmatic embedment of communication levels has nothing to do with a distinctive feature of "the generic concept ‘Apocalypse’". From the perspective of embedment in narrative texts it is not even striking. Obviously the remark about embedment in narrative texts is not interesting from the perspective of the making and structure of the Revelation of John. It is, however, not a feature peculiar to texts written from an apocalyptic perspective.

The Revelation of John does not seem to have any peculiar or distinctive feature as regards its mode of writing, to enable one to classify it in a separate class of texts. It is for the greater part a first-person narrative.

3.3 Content as criterion for the genre of Revelation

Perhaps the most important recurring features of the presumed genre of "apocalypse" are those which can be related to content. Those features are to my mind the dominant characteristics of texts written from an apocalyptic perspective. This is also applicable to Revelation.

It is first of all clear that most of the texts which are classified as apocalypses have to do with some aspect of transcendental reality relating to this world. In other words, texts written from an apocalyptic perspective
normally deal with future matters in relation to the present, and with the revelation of events significantly important to the present and (immediate) future of the world, and to the people in the world. Thematically the texts we are referring to normally deal with transcendental realities, events and existents. This is true of texts from all over the Mediterranean world and the Near East prior to, contemporary with and later than Revelation. How can one speak about these matters other than in terms of visions or dreams, or some form of fantasy. This explains the imaginary presentation of the subject matter. In connection with the problem of apocalyptic genre in Greek and Hellenistic literature, Betz (1983:588) regards μῦθος as the apocalyptic literary genre and maintains that "...mythos can speak in human words about things that go beyond the human world and language". These texts form part of a larger body of fantasy literature (cf Olsen 1986, Güttgemanns 1983).

Muthos, apocalypse and so on are names for texts that speak about the transcendental world from an apocalyptic perspective (cf Vorster 1983 & 1986). These terms are nothing but classificatory tags for a submode of a broader mode of writing. In this sense it seems to be possible to speak of a subgenre, "apocalyptic texts" or "apocalypses", in the way one would speak of picaresque novel as a subgenre of novel. The distinctive characteristic of so-called apocalypses can be described in the light of the apocalyptic perspective of reality.

It is of little use to catalogue characters such as intermediaries or those found in Revelation, or events such as journeys in another world, or narrative techniques such as dreams, visions, and epiphanies, in order to define the genre of "apocalypses" (contra the tendency in the SBL-group, cf Olsen 1986:279). What happens is that the genre code of fantastic literature is described superficially, in terms of a large number of events and existents that occur in many texts of fantasy of this kind. The fact that texts such as Revelation normally communicate "...a transcendent perspective on human experience" (Aune 1986:88), and the promise of restoration and reversal (cf Sanders 1983:458) is a dominant distinctive feature, on the grounds of which scholars can agree to view such texts as a distinctive subgenre in the narrative mode.

"What", as described in the Revelation of John, is to be related to "how" it is described, with regard to the genre of the text. In addition to the narrative code of the genre, the code of imagination or fantasy - which in the case of the Revelation of John has received abundant attention in studies on symbolism, colour, gems, and imagery in the history of research (cf Böcher 1980:26ff; Güttgemanns 1983) - is obviously important concerning "what" is communicated.

3.4 Function and the genre of Revelation
The importance of the pragmatic function of language in sociolinguistics cannot be overrated. In a certain sense New Testament scholars realised this
very long ago. The original use of *Sitz im Leben* as a sociological category (cf Bultmann 1970:4) points in this direction. Unfortunately, "Sitz im Leben" lost its original purpose, and became a means of speculation about a concrete historical situation or context within which a text could have functioned.

I have already pointed out that "function" has become an important criterion in the description of the apocalypse genre. The problem is that function is used in very broad terms - for example, as social function, that is, literature of the oppressed (cf Sanders 1983:456ff); for the purpose of writing, "...intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of divine authority" (Hellholm 1986:27), for authorisation of the message (Hellholm 1986:45, cf also Aune 1986:89ff), or as a literary function, namely

...to shape one's imaginative perception of a situation and so to lay the basis for whatever course of action it exorts (Collins 1984:32).

Most of these scholars are working within a text-linguistic framework and that is why it is important to scrutinise their use of function in the light of the sociolinguistic theory about function.

Although there is a difference of opinion about the importance of "function" in the study of genre (cf Fowler 1982:238), it can be very helpful in forming a conceptual framework of the social context "...as the semiotic environment in which people exchange meanings" (Halliday 1978:111). In this sense function is not an empirical category but a theoretical device. It is, furthermore, necessary to emphasise that social context and communication context do not refer to a particular historical context. However important the original historical situation out of which the text arose and within which it functioned may be for us, this is not what we have in the case of ancient texts. We have before us the contextless text of the Revelation of John and that is why

...the structure of John's literary world is to be found in the interconnectedness of his language, not in correspondence to some external order of reality (Thompson 1986:147).

The intentions of a speaker (that is, the functions for which a speaker uses language - and for that matter the author of a written text such as Revelation used language) are of an ideational, interpersonal and textual nature. Webb (1986:51f) following Halliday, gives a valuable summary of the various functions. *Ideational* refers to relating experiences, providing information ( experiential), indicating the relationship between the events described in texts (logical), and using language to order thoughts (cognitive). *Interpersonal* refers to expressing feelings (expressive), changing the emotional state of the hearer ( emotive), changing the behaviour of the hearer (imperative, persuasive), establishing the speaker's status ( egocentric), changing the status of the hearer ("Your sins are forgiven" - performative) and establishing and maintaining contact ( phatic). *Textual* function refers to the use of language to give a particular form to the message, for example, to signal topic (cf Rv 1:1).
These are the pragmatic functions of utterances and texts which have to be related to the genre code. This approach to the pragmatic function is obviously quite different from the one we have described above, in reference to the views of the New Testament scholars who are interested in defining function in pragmatic terms.

It is furthermore clear that social factors determine the construction of a message, and also that the function of the use of language relates to these factors. Communication between members of a subculture or some sociopolitical, or socioreligious group is determined by the symbols they share socially which are reflected in their use of language (cf Webb 1986:53ff). In order to be meaningful a text such as Revelation presupposes a group of people who share a common system of meaning, thus a closely-knit unit with a strong concern for the beliefs of the group (cf Malina 1986:13ff). It is within this framework that one should regard function in the above sense of the word and relate it to genre.

In our discussion of Frow's conception of genre we referred to his views on dominance of field, tenor or mode, and the classification of discourse genres. We have already said that in texts written from an apocalyptic perspective there seems to be a dominance of content, that is semantic domain (field of discourse). With regard to the semantic process or function of Revelation it seems as though there is also emphasis on the instrumental process, that is persuasion and instruction, as well as on the experiential process of reinforcing (beliefs). This is, however, a tentative observation only.

If any progress is to be made in connection with the definition of the genre of texts written from an apocalyptic perspective in terms of function, these texts need to be studied from a sociolinguistic point of view within the framework of a theory of genre such as, for example, Frow's, which gives attention to these aspects. It seems to be clear that the genre theory of Professor Collins's group is not well enough integrated to take care of the various aspects involved in studying the genre code of texts written from an apocalyptic perspective. Perhaps it is due to the fact that the group has been interested both in establishing and classifying a genre and in demonstrating the relevance of the study of genre for the interpretation of these texts.

4 WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?
The two main options for New Testament scholars regarding the study of the genre of Revelation are either to continue the search for a theory of genre which can accommodate the problems involved in studying genre from the point of view of the interpretation of texts, or to accept the challenge of deconstruction and face the death of genre and the birth of intertextuality. Both options are viable on different epistemological grounds.

It is my conviction that the study of genre should be more than the classification of texts. In order to achieve such a goal a theory of genre which integrates classification and interpretation is needed. This has not yet been
achieved. In this regard it is important that different genre theories should be tested in order to assess the advantages and disadvantages of every theory. Perhaps it would be a good thing to undermine the present dominance of certain views in the interpretive community by testing other possibilities.

The study of the so-called composite character of the text of Revelation in terms of proposed sources, quotations and redaction urgently needs to be studied from a totally new perspective. The idea of intertextuality as the basis for and explanation of the differential network of meaning components in Revelation seems to be challenging. Taken as a text about other texts in a network, a number of intriguing questions posed by past researchers might be handled in quite another way.

In addition, Revelation should be studied as a narrative of fantasy, a submode or subgenre of the revelatory writings. Until recently very little attention has been paid to the narrative character of Revelation. Questions about plot, narrative point(s) of view, characterisation and so on, can help to explore the genre code productively.

I started my essay with two quotations from the writings of Fowler and Frow which have direct bearing on current study of the genre of Revelation. Present investigation of the apocalypse genre has become unnecessarily complicated under the influence of text-linguistic formalism. Authors of other early Christian apocalyptic writings (cf Weinel 1923; Vielhauer 1964) ventured to make use of the narrative genre code to communicate a message in terms of other-world realities, and similarly the author of Revelation wrote a story on the same lines.

WORKS CONSULTED


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