

FROM ROME TO CONSTANTINOPE

Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron

edited by

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APOCRYPHA AND THE LITERARY PAST IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Scott Fitzgerald JOHNSON¹

1. INTRODUCTION

In the third chapter of her pioneering Sather Classical Lectures – *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1991) – Averil Cameron took up the question of the popularity of non-canonical stories and legends about Jesus, Mary, and the apostles in early Christianity and Late Antiquity. She titled this chapter ‘Stories People Want’ (pp. 89-119), emphasizing the role of these texts for the formation of early Christian ‘world-views’, alongside and often in contradiction to the canonical stories or ‘myths’ of the Gospels and other New Testament books². These popular apocryphal (hidden or secret) texts had a defining ‘elasticity’ which largely helped them survive the attempts to suppress apocryphal literature in subsequent centuries³. The elasticity of the apocrypha, particularly the varied corpus of Apocryphal Acts, allowed the creation of a ‘symbolic universe’ which later catalyzed or solidified a mode of Christian discourse⁴. As Cameron notes, one can see the long term vitality of the apocrypha in the work of the eighth-century theologian John of Damascus, who wrote an authoritative trilogy of

1. I would like to thank David Elmer and Charles Weiss for reading an earlier version of this paper and suggesting changes. I am also grateful to Hagit Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romeny for inviting me to be a part of this volume celebrating the career of Professor Averil Cameron, whom I am fortunate to count as a teacher, mentor, and friend.

2. See pp. 89-90: ‘The Christian stories were stories with meanings – let us call them myths. They were mostly evangelistic. But they were also just stories.’ I know from private conversation that she would no longer claim the term ‘world-view’ *per se*, but, in the context of her chapter, ‘world-view’ is well placed to emphasize the imaginative worlds opened up by the creative interaction of Canon and Apocrypha.

3. Cameron here is careful about making the notion of ‘popular literature’ bear too much weight in discussion of these texts: in other words, it is not so easy to say that apocrypha thrived simply because they were ‘popular’. See Averil Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 108: ‘The ready use of the term “popular” rests on a multitude of preconceptions... It might be better to give it up for the time being in relation to this topic.’ I would only add to this that the ‘popularity’ argument usually neglects literary analysis of the texts.

4. Averil Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 93.

sermons on the Dormition (κοίμησις, 'going to sleep') of the Virgin Mary⁵. These sermons rely upon apocryphal texts, such as the second-century *Protoevangelion of James*, which, though it does not itself relate a Dormition story, certainly fertilized the writing of fifth and sixth-century Dormition narratives in Greek and Syriac⁶. The tradition of Dormition narratives was a part of a larger project in the early Christian and late antique worlds, that of filling in the gaps of the Gospel narratives with regard to the lives and experiences of biblical figures⁷.

What Cameron exposes above all in the chapter 'Stories People Want' is the *persistence* of Christian apocrypha throughout the early Christian and late antique worlds (2nd through 6th centuries, primarily). In this paper I shall explore this theme of Cameron's work in further detail by considering the modes of reception for these texts in Late Antiquity. It will be helpful, by way of introduction, to start at the end of the process, in Byzantium, and work backwards to the earlier period.

To begin, it is no secret that Christian apocrypha of the second and third centuries CE are extremely well attested in Byzantine manuscripts, and these manuscripts continue to receive attention by editors and translators⁸. Scholars such as Constantin von Tischendorf and R.A. Lipsius inaugurated the modern interest in editing apocryphal texts in the late nineteenth century⁹. However, Tischendorf was hardly the first to have sought to collect these important texts and present them in a comprehensive manner.

5. Averil Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 103. See the convenient collection of translations in B. Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* (Crestwood, NY, 1998), pp. 183-246. For the Greek texts, see the edition by B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes Damaskus 5* (Berlin, 1988), pp. 461-555.

6. On the Dormition texts in general, see now S.J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford, 2002). On Mary's role in late antique and early Byzantine Christianity, see Averil Cameron, 'The Early Cult of the Virgin', in M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Athens-Milan, 2000), pp. 3-15, and eadem, 'The Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Religious Development and Myth-Making', in R.N. Swanson (ed.), *The Church and Mary* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 1-21.

7. Averil Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 105.

8. See the volumes in the Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum (CCSA), such as the new edition of the *Acts of John*: E. Junod and J.D. Kaestli (eds.), *Acta Iohannis* (CCSA 1-2; Turnhout, 1983); and the edition of the fourth-century *Acts of Philip*: F. Bovon, B. Bouvier, and F. Amsler (eds.), *Acta Philippi* (CCSA 11; Turnhout, 1999). On the complex process of editing the Apocryphal Acts from Byzantine manuscripts, see F. Bovon, 'Editing the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles', in F. Bovon, A.G. Brock, and C.R. Matthews (eds.), *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: Harvard Divinity School Studies* (Religions of the World; Cambridge, MA, 1999), pp. 2-35.

9. C. von Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha* (2nd ed.; Leipzig, 1876; repr. Hildesheim, 1966, 1987); R.A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* (3 vols; Leipzig, 1891, 1898, 1903; repr. Hildesheim, 1959).

Symeon Metaphrastes (died c.1000), compiler and redactor of apocrypha and saints' Lives, stands as the pre-eminent example of an internal Greek tradition of mining, collecting, and refining the texts of the past – indeed preserving and refining the past itself in physical form – for the purpose of presenting them to present and future readers.¹⁰ Recently scholars have noted that Symeon was himself working in a tradition: his predecessors include the writers Leontios of Neapolis and Sophronios of Jerusalem, who already show signs in their works of early Byzantine 'antiquarianism' in the seventh century¹¹. My own work has attempted to push the origins of Christian antiquarianism further backwards into Late Antiquity (4th to 6th centuries), and I have claimed that this tendency towards redaction, collection, and republication is endemic to late antique literature generally¹².

Received texts are almost ubiquitously treated as sites for the (essentially cognitive) processes of rewriting, organization, and re-presentation¹³. I consider the initial process to be one of reification, that is, of an inkling of the physical past that makes the collector or redactor aware of the need to preserve the documents at hand¹⁴. The ephemeral commissioning of the work varies, of course – in Symeon Metaphrastes' case it seems to have been a collection imperative initiated in the middle of the tenth century by the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos – but the literary relics of the mental processes at work appear the same across time, culture, and even religion¹⁵. Thus, I would like to argue that the antiquarian tendency with regard to early Christian apocrypha – this intense, conscious reception and reworking – is a fundamental aspect of Late Antiquity: both in terms of creating the imaginary worlds that Averil Cameron has written about, but also in terms of having an important impact on literary history.

10. On Symeon see now C. Högel, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting and Canonization* (Copenhagen, 2002).

11. C. Rapp, 'Byzantine Hagiographers as Antiquarians, Seventh to Tenth Centuries', *Byzantinische Forschungen* 31 (1995), pp. 31-44.

12. S.F. Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla, A Literary Study* (Hellenic Studies 13; Washington, DC-Cambridge, MA, 2006), Chapter 2.

13. On cognition and textuality, see D.R. Olson, *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading* (Cambridge, 1994).

14. I take inspiration from the important book in the Sociology of Knowledge, *Tradition* (Chicago, 1981) by Edward Shils.

15. See the Pahlavi collection of Sasanian-Zoroastrian lore, the *Denkard* (*Denkart*), produced in the early ninth century: M.J. Dresden, *Denkart: A Pahlavi Text – Facsimile Edition of the Manuscript B of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, Bombay* (Wiesbaden, 1966); see also J. de Menasce, *Le troisième livre du Denkard* (Paris, 1973); and E.W. West, *Pahlavi Texts 4* (Sacred Books of the East 37; Oxford, 1892), Introduction.

Recent attempts at assessing the reception of Christian apocrypha in Late Antiquity offer convenient access points into the methodology and practice of late antique studies. I examine closely below three contributions to the field which make new inroads into understanding the complex reception history of early Christian literature. These three studies are important precisely for their differing – one might say competing – methods of trying to trace and explain the ‘afterlife’ of early Christian texts in Late Antiquity. Also, all three books in their own ways address the currently fashionable ‘disjunctive’ model of early Christian and late antique literature. This model posits a variety of literature available in the earliest Christian period which was subsequently suppressed and destroyed under the authoritarian regime of the Constantinian and post-Constantinian Christian empire¹⁶.

There are a number of problems, as I see it, with the disjunctive model of Christian literature, not least of which is the continuity of literary form between the early Christian and late antique worlds¹⁷. To be sure, there is discontinuity as well: unlike the erudite poet Nonnos in the fifth century CE, no second-century Christian is writing elegant paraphrases of the Gospel of John in dactylic hexameters¹⁸. However, even in Nonnos’ case the continued value of the Gospel of John as a site for innovative Christian literary endeavour is evident, and there is an underlying literary continuity in his case which is not simply religious, institutional, or socio-cultural: it is literary above all and deserves to be considered from a literary, or

16. E.g., B.D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford-New York, 2003); idem, *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did not Make it into the New Testament* (Oxford-New York, 2003); E. Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York, 2003), esp. Chapter 5. One could also note (outside the academy) the *Da Vinci Code* phenomenon which states the disjunctive thesis in the starkest of terms; and compare B.D. Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code: A Historian Reveals what We Really Know about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Constantine* (Oxford-New York, 2004).

17. I have commented on this elsewhere: see S.F. Johnson, ‘Late Antique Narrative Fiction: Apocryphal Acta and the Greek Novel in the Fifth-Century *Life and Miracles of Thekla*’, in idem (ed.), *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity: Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 189–207.

18. For Nonnos’ *Paraphrase of John*, see the standard critical text of A. Scheindler (ed.), *Nonni Panopolitani Paraphrasis S. Evangelii Ioannei* (Leipzig, 1881). A team of Italian scholars under the direction of Enrico Livrea is producing an important new edition with commentary, chapter by chapter: E. Livrea (ed.), *Nonno di Panopoli: Parafrasi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni, Canto XVIII* (Naples, 1989); idem (ed.), *Nonno di Panopoli: Parafrasi del Vangelo di San Giovanni, Canto B* (Biblioteca Patristica 36; Bologna, 2000); D. Accorinti (ed.), *Nonno di Panopoli: Parafrasi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni, Canto XX* (Pisa, 1996); G. Agosti (ed.), *Nonno di Panopoli: Parafrasi del Vangelo di San Giovanni, Canto quinto* (Florence, 2003); C. De Stephani (ed.), *Nonno di Panopoli: Parafrasi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni, Canto I* (Eikasmos 6; Bologna, 2002); C. Greco (ed.), *Nonno di Panopoli: Parafrasi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni, Canto tredicesimo* (Hellenica 12; Alessandria, 2004).

literary historical, point of view, rather than an ideological one. The three books considered below – on the *Acts of Peter*, the figure of *Doubting Thomas*, and the *History of Early Christian Literature* – all make important, challenging attempts at revising the standard literary history of early Christian literature, and taken together they point to new avenues of investigation and persistent stumbling blocks in the field of late antique studies.

2. MULTIFORMITY

The first contribution I would like to consider is a book by Christine M. Thomas, entitled *The Acts of Peter, Gospel Literature, and the Ancient Novel: Rewriting the Past* (Oxford, 2003). In this book Thomas attempts to nuance the literary relationship between the apocryphal *Acts of Peter* and the Ancient Novel. In the process she addresses the very important issue of textual fluidity among early Christian texts and offers something of a new model of textual transition in Late Antiquity based on oral folktales. As Thomas admits, she is not the first to turn to patterns of oral composition as a lens through which to view the variety of Christian texts – Virginia Burrus, Kate Cooper, and others had done this before her¹⁹ – but the fluidity of early Christian stories is usually discussed *between* texts and not *within* texts²⁰. In other words, previous scholarship concentrated on differing story-patterns between Apocryphal Acts and Gospels, but Thomas intriguingly applies theories of oral transmission to the internal history of one text in particular, the second-century *Acts of Peter*²¹. In this way Thomas can map the changes made to a text over time and discuss more cogently the context of reception. Changes to the text (oral or written) bespeak contemporary concerns more than original ones, so later editions and translations of the *Acts of Peter* are crucial for explaining the meaning of a text diachronically.

19. V. Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of Apocryphal Acts* (Studies in Women and Religion 23; Lewiston, NY, 1987); K. Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

20. Thomas, *Acts of Peter*, p. 11: 'The focus on the *Acts of Peter* as a single Apocryphal Act diverges from usual approaches to the Apocryphal Acts, which have been treated as a corpus in the history of research.'

21. Thomas does not rely too heavily on an imagined oral milieu; her only concern is that models of oral elaboration can be effectively used in discussions about the malleability of early Christian texts (pp. 69-71). I have argued something similar regarding the fifth-century *Life and Miracles of Thekla* and the ancient genre of paraphrase in general (Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, pp. 67-78).

Thomas's most challenging arguments stem from her commitment to genre as an indispensable heuristic for early Christian literature²². From the beginning Thomas acknowledges her prior perplexity at scholars' persistent association of Christian apocryphal Acts with the Ancient Novel: as she says, 'these elegant products [the Greek novels, or romances] seemed worlds apart from the unsophisticated and clumsy Greek prose of the Apocryphal Acts'²³. What she discovered, however, was the shared narrative fluidity between texts of the *Acts of Peter* and historical novels such as the *Alexander Romance*²⁴. As Thomas notes, 'The search for the "original" version must be abandoned from the start'²⁵. She considers this fluidity, or 'multiformity' as she terms it, to be evidence of the emergence of a distinct genre²⁶.

In considering the context of reception, Thomas demonstrates that it is not just the 'original' Greek text of the *Acts of Peter* that shows narrative fluidity, but the late antique translations, paraphrases, and epitomes of the text that also show fluidity within their own transmission history²⁷. In other words, if attempts at reconstructing a critical urtext of the Greek *Acts of Peter* are fraught with difficulty, any attempt to solidify the multiple late antique versions of the *Acts* is even more so. The *Actus Vercellenses*, which is the earliest surviving Latin translation of the *Acts of Peter* (c.359-385 CE), underwent numerous editorial redactions and epitomations after publication. Moreover, when the *Actus Vercellenses* is compared with other later texts related to the *Acts of Peter*, such as the so-called 'Linus text' (4th-5th centuries CE), it becomes clear that these Latin translations are

22. Compare an attempt to claim the tool of genre for Byzantine literature: M. Mullett, 'The Madness of Genre', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992), pp. 233-43.

23. Thomas, *Acts of Peter*, p. vii.

24. Richard Pervo has argued for the *Alexander Romance*, the *Life of Aesop*, and Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* to play an elevated role in discussions of the genre of the Apocryphal Acts: R. Pervo, 'The Ancient Novel Becomes Christian', in Gareth Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World* (rev. ed.; Leiden, 2003), pp. 685-711, at p. 689. See also his arguments for reading the Gospel of Mark in this context: idem, 'Early Christian Fiction', in J.R. Morgan and R. Stoneman (eds.), *Greek Fiction: The Greek Novel in Context* (London, 1994), pp. 239-54. See further L. Wills, *The Quest for the Historical Gospel: Mark, John, and the Origins of the Gospel Genre* (London, 1997).

25. Thomas, *Acts of Peter*, p. 10.

26. Thomas, *Acts of Peter*, p. 11. See also p. 89: 'The narrative fluidity of these stories, their existence in multiple translations, redactions, abridgments, and expansions, is evidence of successive performances of a narrative such as the *Acts of Peter* and should be viewed as a positive characteristic of this category of literature, rather than the terror of the editor.' The term 'multiformity' appears also in A. Lord, *Singer of Tales* (2nd ed.; Cambridge, MA, 2000) and G. Nagy, *Homeric Questions* (Austin, 1996).

27. Thomas, *Acts of Peter*, p. 41.

dependent on separate Greek versions of the *Acts of Peter*²⁸. Taken together, the Greek *Acts of Peter*, the Latin *Actus Vercellenses*, and the Latin 'Linus text'²⁹ testify to the active manipulation and reworking of these texts, in multiple languages, and over a long expanse of time – an expanse which unites the early Christian period (1st-3rd centuries CE) and Late Antiquity (4th-6th centuries CE).

To return to Thomas's methodological argument – that the fluidity (or multiformity) of these texts should be considered a marker of genre – it will be helpful briefly to consider how she relates the *Acts of Peter* (and its literary aftermath) to the Ancient Novel. According to Thomas one of the best *comparanda* for the *Acts of Peter* is the older 'historical' novel of the *Alexander Romance* (even though some fluidity also appears in the papyri of the five 'ideal' Greek Novels)³⁰. The five Greek recensions of the *Alexander Romance* constitute essentially five different textual iterations of the same *fabula*, or underlying story³¹. Many of the episodes (in what are essentially 'episodic' texts) circulated independently and were only gathered together as discrete works in later periods. Moreover, numerous translations were made of various Greek editions (some now lost): a Latin translation was made around 300 CE by Julius Valerius, and the Syriac and Ethiopic translations both appear to be rather early³². One can see immediately the parallel in the *Acts of Peter*, and Thomas notes briefly

28. Thomas, *Acts of Peter*, pp. 41-43. See also *ibid.* for the date of the Linus text, which is contested.

29. Not to mention all the various other works which deal with the life, deeds, and broader persona of the apostle Peter, such as Pseudo-Hegesippos's Latin translation of Josephus' *Jewish War* or the rich Pseudo-Clementine literature. On Pseudo-Hegesippos, see Thomas, *Acts of Peter*, pp. 43-44; on the Pseudo-Clementine literature, see M.J. Edwards, 'The *Clementina*: A Christian Response to the Pagan Novel', *CQ* 42 (1992), pp. 459-74.

30. Admittedly, the fluidity of the text of an ideal novel like that of Achilles Tatius is on a more literal level: see Thomas, *Acts of Peter*, pp. 74-76 and, more generally, S. Stephens and J. Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels: The Fragments* (Princeton, 1995). On the contested category of 'historical novel' or 'historical romance', see Thomas's discussion on pp. 87-105.

31. 'Text', 'Story', and 'Fabula' are the trio of technical terms which Thomas borrows from Narratology, specifically from Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2nd ed.; Toronto, 1997).

32. On the Greek manuscripts and Latin translations of the *Alexander Romance*, see R. Stoneman, 'The Metamorphoses of the *Alexander Romance*' in G. Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World* (rev. ed.; Leiden, 2003), pp. 601-12. On the Syriac, see E.A. Wallis Budge, *History of Alexander the Great: Being the Syriac Version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes* (London, 1889). On the Ethiopic, see *idem*, *History of Alexander*, pp. lxxxix-cix, and *idem*, *The Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great: Being a Series of Translations of the Ethiopic Histories of Alexander by the Pseudo-Callisthenes and Other Writers* (London, 1896). On the Arabic: Faustina Doufikar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus: zeven eeuwen Arabische Alexandertraditie* (dissertation Leiden University, 2003).

other texts which could be included among this fold, such as the *History of Apollonius, King of Tyre*, the two surviving recensions of which date to the fifth and sixth century CE³³.

Thus, one way of viewing the reception of early Christian apocrypha in Late Antiquity is through the structural features of the textual form. Whether or not one wishes to categorize the Apocryphal Acts as novels, there is an important continuity in the way that stories and episodes from the lives of the apostles take on new forms that are continuously recycled, rewritten, translated, and republished throughout late antique Christianity³⁴. The intensive manipulation of received texts from the early Christian world, whether in an oral or a written context, should be considered to be a defining characteristic of Late Antiquity as a whole.

3. 'PSYCHOLOGY'

The second recent work of scholarship which I would like to consider is the book *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge, MA, 2005) by classicist Glenn W. Most. In the book Most surveys both the primary sources (the Gospels) and the *longue durée* secondary trajectories (textual and visual) for the persona of the apostle Thomas. His argument is subtle, emphasizing the 'plurality of potential dimensions of meaning' offered in the account of 'Doubting Thomas' in John 20³⁵. In Most's words his analysis is 'rhetorical', 'literary', and 'psychological', rather than 'theological' (by which he means an attempt to delineate the 'only true meaning of John's text')³⁶. Despite his commitment to plurality, in the first half of his book, Most does offer his own (innovative) interpretation of the Doubting Thomas figure, an interpretation which provokes the second half of the book, the survey of Thomas's reception.

Of the three categories of analysis which Most claims to have employed, the 'psychological' is the most prominent, especially in connecting early texts about Thomas with later ones³⁷. He argues that the narrative of

33. G.A.A. Kortekaas (ed.), *The Story of Apollonius King of Tyre: A Study of its Greek Origin and an Edition of the Two Oldest Latin Recensions* (Leiden, 2004); idem, *Commentary on the Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* (Leiden, 2007).

34. Thomas, *Acts of Peter*, p. 81: 'The reuse of the *Acts of Peter* in so many documents is evidence of the continued reading of them over a span of centuries.'

35. Most, *Doubting Thomas*, p. 7.

36. Most, *Doubting Thomas*, pp. 7-9. Most's use of the term 'theological' here is unacceptable in that it insinuates that theologians are unaware of the multiplicity of meanings that a text can create in the context of its reception.

37. I keep 'psychological' in quotation marks throughout because Most has not made it clear how this term relates to the (now venerable) tradition of psychological literary

John 20 (and often elsewhere in the Gospels) suppresses irrelevant details and permits 'apparently divergent, discrepant, or even incompatible versions' to stand next to each other without offering the reader a guide to sorting through them or unifying them³⁸. These gaps in narrative consistency open the text to 'psychological' or imaginative reconstruction by readers. He thus invokes the discipline of Source Criticism (*Quellenforschung*) to draw attention to the gaps and inconsistencies in the narrative structure of the Gospel. However, source criticism as practiced by Rudolf Bultmann and others appears to him to be 'looking for the wrong answer to the right question': that is, we should not take narrative gaps to be simply evidence of compilation from various source texts, but rather the gaps are the necessary 'virtues of this lacunary style', providing for readers 'fascinating challenges' and which 'may have been designed for this very purpose'³⁹. It is the readers' active engagement with these challenges, in forging links between narrative pieces, that exposes the 'psychological motivations and reactions' essential to the construction of meaning in the Gospels⁴⁰.

Let us look more closely at the text in question from the Gospel of John, which provides the subject and title of Most's book, *Doubting Thomas*. In John 20 the first person to meet the risen Jesus is Mary Magdalene, after she has told Peter and 'the disciple Jesus loved' that the tomb was empty (20:1-18)⁴¹. This is, of course, the famous scene in which Mary thinks Jesus is the gardener (20:15)⁴², and he refuses to let her touch him, once she has realized who he really is (20:17). Just following this recogni-

criticism or to the practice of modern psychology in general. Though compare the following: 'A psychological interpretation of the kind I undertake aims to link actions and incidents by ascribing to narrative agents plausible motivations and reactions; the term "psychological" as I am using it is not at all intended to connote anything like sentimentalism, banalization, or a doctrinaire form of Freudian (or any other) psychoanalysis' (Most, *Doubting Thomas*, p. 11).

38. Most, *Doubting Thomas*, p. 9.

39. Most, *Doubting Thomas*, pp. 9-10.

40. This approach has the unmistakable virtue of reading late antique literature *qua* literature: for a literary appreciation of *Doubting Thomas* see the review by Frank Kermode, 'Blackening', *London Review of Books* 28.1 (5 January, 2006).

41. Many readers naturally assume that 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' is the apostle John himself (also the author of the Gospel according to 21:20-24, though this chapter is probably a later addition). However, James Charlesworth has recently argued at length that the 'beloved disciple' is Thomas himself: J.H. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge, PA, 1995). Charlesworth's book does not appear in Most's bibliography (cf. *Doubting Thomas*, pp. 233-34), but (if the argument were accepted) it could contribute to an even more complex picture of Thomas's persona in the Gospel of John.

42. Most suggests this is an 'unwitting reference' to the Garden of Eden (*Doubting Thomas*, p. 37).

tion scene comes another, with very little narrative to connect them, when Jesus appears to the disciples (20:19-23). However, Thomas is not present at this meeting, and when they tell him they have 'seen the Lord', he refuses to believe and declares, 'Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe' (20:25, RSV). Eight days later, according to the text, Jesus appears again among them and addresses Thomas directly, instructing him to put his finger in Jesus' hands and side and 'do not be faithless, but believing' (20:27). Immediately, Thomas answers 'My Lord and my God!', and Jesus replies cryptically 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe!' (10:28-29).

Passing by many of Most's comments on the literary nature of John 20⁴³, I would like to highlight in particular Most's conviction that Thomas never touched Jesus' side between verses 27 and 28⁴⁴. He contends that the verb 'he answered' (ἀπεκρίθη) at the beginning of verse 28 syntactically requires that no action occurs between Jesus' exhortation and Thomas's believing reply: 'The very grammar of John's language means that it is not only superfluous but in fact mistaken to posit that Thomas touches Jesus even if the text does not say that he did: Thomas's speech is motivated by Jesus' speech not by any action on the part of Thomas.'⁴⁵ For Most, the fact that this event is never addressed in detail causes the reader mentally to imply that Thomas touched Jesus' wounds: the narrative holes in the text promote the imaginative reconstruction of the event, both in the readers' minds and, eventually, on paper. This is precisely the 'psychological' element of the text:

Just as on the pages of the Hebrew Bible only the consonants are written out and the words cannot be understood unless readers supply the vowels by infusing the written characters with the life of their own breath, so too the lacunary and discontinuous actions and events these Gospel narratives recount can only be understood if they are brought to life by their readers' introjection into them of the kinds of motivations and reactions, including above all psychological ones, that seem plausible to them on the basis of their own experience of literature and life⁴⁶.

Uniquely of the characters in John 20, Thomas insists that only by *touching* Jesus will he believe the Lord has risen from the dead. Other characters believe by *seeing*, such as the disciples (though they are invited

43. Such as the discussion of Jesus' prohibiting Mary to touch him: μή μου ἅπτου (John 20:17; Most, *Doubting Thomas*, pp. 39-40).

44. Most, *Doubting Thomas*, pp. 57-62.

45. Most, *Doubting Thomas*, p. 58.

46. Most, *Doubting Thomas*, p. 10.

to touch in Luke 24:39) or Mary Magdalene (though she is allowed to touch in Matthew 28:9)⁴⁷. Nevertheless, in the conclusion of the chapter, Jesus' comment that Thomas has believed because he has seen (20:30, ὅτι ἑώρακάς με πεπιστευκάς) reinforces the idea that Thomas also believed only by sight and not by touch⁴⁸. Thus, according to Most, we assume wrongly that Thomas actually did touch Jesus, since the text explicitly prohibits the conclusion that he did. 'Not only does John not assert that Thomas touched Jesus' body: he has gone to considerable trouble to make it quite clear that Thomas did not do so.'⁴⁹ John 20, therefore, is a coherent argument for belief by sight (or by hearsay, 20:29) rather than by touch: no one, in fact, seems to have touched Jesus post-resurrection in John's original conception of his Gospel.

By contrast to this reading of John 20, the tradition that Thomas had his doubts relieved by touching the physical body of Jesus ('an unforgettable yet intolerable image') is well known from texts and visual art from the second century onwards⁵⁰. In the second half of his book, Most surveys the early apocryphal texts, including the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (end of 2nd century CE), the *Gospel of Thomas* (mid 2nd century), the *Book of Thomas the Contender* (2nd-3rd centuries), the *Acts of Thomas* (3rd century), and the *Apocalypse of Thomas* (earlier than 5th century)⁵¹. In Most's 'psychological' view these texts are important precisely because they are 'enormously sensitive, indeed hypersensitive' to narrative lacunae in the New Testament⁵². The various post-apostolic iterations of Thomas's persona are indeed fascinating: Thomas the twin brother of Christ in *Thomas the Contender*; Judas Thomas the dark avatar of esoteric gnostic doctrine in the *Gospel of Thomas*; Thomas the apostle to India and

47. There is, of course, a contrast between Jesus refusing to allow Mary to touch him and inviting Thomas to touch him later in the same chapter. Is this evidence of latent misogynism? Not to Most, who sees this as a literary pairing, a bipartite 'symbolon' as he terms it (*Doubting Thomas*, p. 41): Mary has already believed by sight, so it is unnecessary for her to touch Jesus; the invitation to Thomas is in reality a challenge to believe, which Thomas completes by sight and not touch. Thus, in this interpretation the apparent slight against Mary is actually approbation of a sort. Another possible interpretation is that Jesus has, as he presaged to Mary, 'ascended to the Father' (John 20:17) between his appearance to Mary and his appearance to the disciples and then to Thomas, though this is not made explicit in the text.

48. See Most, *Doubting Thomas*, p. 62: '[Doubting Thomas] first establishes criteria for according an epistemic belief but then adopts what seems to be a nonepistemic belief without having satisfied those criteria.'

49. Most, *Doubting Thomas*, p. 69.

50. Quotation from Most, *Doubting Thomas*, p. 73.

51. For bibliographical information about each of these texts, see Most, *Doubting Thomas*, pp. 88-90 and 240-46.

52. Most, *Doubting Thomas*, p. 102.

founder of the Syriac church in the *Acts of Thomas*. Whereas the gnostic texts conspicuously never mention that Thomas touched Jesus – no doubt because there was no material body to be touched⁵³ – other trajectories are almost wholly consumed with Thomas's physical encounter with the risen Jesus.

Most makes a convincing case that the apocryphal *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* transfers Thomas's finger to the midwives of Mary, Zelomi and Salome, who probe Mary's vagina to confirm she is still a virgin after the birth of Jesus: Zelomi examines her first and praises God in response; however, Salome doubts Zelomi's testimony and checks Mary again, only to find upon withdrawal that her hand has shriveled⁵⁴. This scene, though not explicitly about Thomas, is certainly drawing on the broader resonance of the story and his need for empirical justification of the miraculous, and crucially with the physical finger as a locus of knowledge. Later manifestations of Doubting Thomas take up the theme in earnest: these manifestations are beyond the scope of this article, but it suffices to observe that Thomas's touching of Jesus' wounds, to counteract his own doubt, is a vibrant theme in medieval, Renaissance, and early modern visual art⁵⁵.

53. Most, *Doubting Thomas*, pp. 104-105 and 240-46. Most is very good at problematizing the gnostic-heavy interpretations of Christian origins and is not unaware of the complications involved in the term 'gnostic' itself: see pp. 241-42. He also provides (pp. 242-44) a brief critique of Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, emphasizing the following specific points: 1) *contra* Pagels, few scholars date the *Gospel of Thomas* as early as the first century CE; 2) John as 'refutation of *Thomas*' is unlikely on the evidence she cites; and 3) Thomas as 'inclusive' and John as 'exclusive' is antithetical to the gnostic argument of *Thomas* as a whole. In Most's words, 'To support her position, Pagels must systematically distort the meaning of passages she quotes from the *Gospel of Thomas*' (p. 243). See also *Doubting Thomas*, pp. 92-93 on the complex relationship between John and the *Gospel of Thomas*.

54. *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* 13, ed. C. von Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, pp. xxii-xxxi and 51-112; Most, *Doubting Thomas*, pp. 113-14.

55. Most, *Doubting Thomas*, pp. 155-214 and 250-56. The frontispiece of *Doubting Thomas* is a photograph of the holy relic of St. Thomas's finger preserved in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome. At one point Most very nearly (but not quite) notices the irony of the founding of that church to celebrate the Discovery of the True Cross in Jerusalem by Constantine's mother, St. Helena (pp. 219-21). The irony (to me at least) is that both relics are housed in the same location and both are fabrications based on secondary features of the Gospels: Thomas's finger on a lacuna in John, and the True Cross on the absence of any discussion of its afterlife in the New Testament. Contrast this with the elaborate discussion of Jesus' body in the Gospels (e.g., Matthew 27:57-60), and the subsequent (and very early) interest in the bodily remains of martyrs (e.g., *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17-18). Whereas the later 'psychological' parallel is more direct (and common), it seems that Santa Croce in Gerusalemme became (from Late Antiquity on) a special home for 'lacunary relics' from secondary traditions.

Most thus takes a particular stance on the transition from early Christian to late antique Christian literature which differs somewhat from that of Christine Thomas. Rather than textual fluidity, the primary marker of later Christian literature is the felt need to fill the 'psychological' gaps with new narratives that expand the imaginary landscape of apostolic Christianity. Nevertheless, in agreement with Thomas, Most emphasizes the investment of intellectual and literary effort that connects rather than disjoins early Christian and late antique literature. Late antique writers were 'hypersensitive' to the gaps left in the canonical texts. He claims at one point that 'without what later came to be termed the Apocrypha there would not have been a canon of the New Testament as such in the first place'⁵⁶. It could be noted that in his own analysis the reverse is also true: apocryphal texts, particularly those written from the third to sixth centuries, depend explicitly on the narratives from the New Testament. This heightened awareness of apostolic histories, legends, and personae is characteristic of late antique Christian literature and is dramatically revealed in Glenn Most's delineation of Thomas's literary afterlife.

4. LITERARY HISTORY

The final book I would like to consider is the inaugural *Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (hereafter *CHECL*), edited by Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth (Cambridge, 2004). This book is comprehensive in scope, covering texts from the first century to the sixth century, and as such I can hardly do justice to the entire work in summary terms. However, a thorough review of the book is not necessary here. Rather, I am interested in its methodological aims and how those aims are carried out. As is clear from its more programmatic sections, the editors of the *CHECL* have consciously attempted to write a history of *literature*, as opposed to an encyclopaedic cultural or social history of the period⁵⁷.

56. Most, *Doubting Thomas*, p. 85. In historical terms, it seems that the canonical Gospels in particular had a wide circulation (and tacit canonical authority?) before the writing of most of the apocryphal texts which have survived (i.e., mid to late 2nd century). It is more helpful perhaps simply to demonstrate (as Most does *passim*) that canonical and apocryphal literature circulated side-by-side and mutually established reading and writing practices in the early Christian centuries. If anything, lists of proscribed books such as the sixth-century *Decretum Gelasianum* demonstrate that apocryphal texts continued to have a readership and currency long after the canon had solidified.

57. *CHECL*, p. xii. Elsewhere Young suggests that the *CHECL* stands in direct opposition to historical criticism of early Christian literature which hinders reading the texts as 'works' (p. 105).

Frances Young cites as encyclopaedic *comparanda* for their project Angelo di Berardino's *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (Cambridge, 1992) and Everett Ferguson's *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (2nd ed., New York, 1998). However, the true theoretical *comparandum*, it seems to me, is not the traditional encyclopaedia genre but the absence of literary history at all. In the past century the discipline of literary history has been under a dark cloud, at least since the advent of New Criticism in the 1920s and especially amidst postmodernity, in which meta-narratives of any sort have been dismissed as necessarily oppressive⁵⁸. This new attempt, therefore, at narrating the history of early Christian literature first and foremost cuts against the grain of contemporary literary theory.

What may be striking to a reader from outside the field of Patristics is the very idea that one can write a literary history of (what I have been calling) 'early Christian literature' (first to third centuries) and 'late antique literature' (fourth to sixth centuries) together in the same volume and without justifying the chronological span of the enterprise. Such a span runs counter to the disciplinary and departmental divisions between scholars who work on New Testament literature (or 'Christian origins') and those who work on Late Antiquity proper, whether historians, classicists, or scholars of religion or Near Eastern studies. This span of coverage also runs counter to what I have been calling the disjunctive model of early Christian and late antique literature. However, Patristics is a discipline which covers both periods under the same tent, and it appears to be from that discipline that the editors of the volume have taken their chronological cues⁵⁹.

I do not want to suggest that this choice is in any way naive. First, there is the remit of the series to consider⁶⁰. Second, the editors have attempted

58. See, e.g., D. Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore, 1992); H. White, 'Literary History: The Point of It All', *New Literary History* 2.1 (1970), pp. 173-85; and idem, 'The Problem of Change in Literary History', *New Literary History* 7.1 (1975), pp. 97-111. Contrast the still relevant defense of literary history in R. Wellek, 'The Theory of Literary History', *Travaux du cercle linguistique de Prague* 6 (1936), pp. 173-91, where Wellek is responding to the seminal work of the Czech structuralist Jan Mukařovský. Regarding theoretical terminology in the *CHECL*, several times in programmatic sections Young uses the term 'postmodern' (positively) to describe generally what the *CHECL* is attempting to do (e.g., p. 7). However, in the sense that postmodern criticism evinces a horror of literary history, especially when chronologically arranged, Young's use of the term is perhaps not very meaningful.

59. Patristics has not fared well in recent discussions of late ancient Christianity: see E.A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), pp. 169-85.

60. Recent editions of various 'Cambridge History of [X]' series have met with mixed reviews in other quarters, often precisely on this question of narrative history. For instance,

to break up the literary historical narratives, which they label 'Literary Guides', with analytical sections, which they entitle 'Context and Interpretation'⁶¹. This is a helpful division and provides the reader some qualitative purchase on the straightforward, less annotated narrative sections⁶². Third, in my opinion an accessible history of Christian literature, *qua* literature, is a *desideratum* for the patristic period, and this volume goes a long way towards filling that gap⁶³. Nevertheless, there are certain issues with which this volume does not contend, and it will be helpful to consider these in light of the previous two books discussed.

The corpus of early Christian apocrypha gets only eight pages in the first section ('Apocryphal Writings and Acts of the Martyrs', pp. 28-35), not including a separate eight pages devoted to 'Gnostic Literature' (pp. 20-27)⁶⁴. The reception of the apocrypha in Late Antiquity (translations, epitomes, etc.) gets no coverage at all, nor do the new apocryphal-style works authored in Late Antiquity, such as the *Acts of Philip* (fourth century), *Xanthippe and Polyxena* (fifth century), the *Life and Miracles of Thekla* (c.470), the *Acts of John* by Pseudo-Prochorus (fifth-sixth centuries), and the late antique Dormition narratives (late fifth and sixth centuries)⁶⁵. Likewise, while there are two excellent articles by Sebastian Brock on Syriac literature (pp. 161-71, 362-72) there is nothing of substance on Armenian, Coptic, or Ethiopic, three of the most important languages for the transmission of apostolic legends and apocryphal narratives⁶⁶. In

witness Fergus Millar's scathing review of *Cambridge Ancient History* 13 in the *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 13 (2000), p. 752-62.

61. There is one set of these two sections for each of the three parts of the book. Part One is entitled 'The Beginnings: The New Testament to Irenaeus' (*CHECL*, pp. 5-111); Part Two, 'The Third Century' (pp. 117-245); Part Three, 'Foundation of a New Culture: From Diocletian to Cyril' (pp. 251-494).

62. To be fair, some narrative sections are very well annotated, such as David G. Hunter's essay on 'Fourth Century Latin Writers: Hilary, Victorinus, Ambrosiaster, Ambrose' (*CHECL*, pp. 302-317).

63. Consider two recent attempts in other fields to resuscitate the practice of literary history: P. Odorico and P.A. Agapitos (eds.), *Pour une nouvelle histoire de la littérature byzantine: Problèmes, méthodes, approches, propositions* (Paris, 2002); and D.E. Wellbery, J. Ryan et al. (eds.), *A New History of German Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

64. These two sections are written by Richard A. Norris, Jr.

65. Robert Markus briefly notes the existence and popularity of apocrypha in Late Antiquity: 'Apocryphal literature also catered for a wide readership and tended to reinforce ascetic worldviews' (*CHECL*, p. 409).

66. The only acknowledgments of these literary corpora appear sporadically, for example, in articles by Norris (*CHECL*, pp. 33, 34) and Andrew Louth (pp. 279, 286, 374). On apocrypha in Armenian tradition, see M.E. Stone, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha with Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition* (Leiden, 1991). On apocrypha in Syriac tradition, see now M. Debié et al. (eds.), *Les apocryphes syriaques* (Études syriaques 2; Paris, 2005).

short, the mass of 'sub-literary', fictional, or novelistic literature (however one wishes to term it) in late antique Christianity is almost wholly ignored, tilting the literary historical balance firmly in the direction of the major theological works of the 'Church Fathers', excepting only two short sections on 'Hagiography' (pp. 358-361) and 'The Literature of the Monastic Movement' (pp. 373-381). Even if the editors wanted to refrain from pretending to be 'The Cambridge History of Late Antique Literature' (cf. p. xi), surely the 'sub-class' of 'Christian literature' in this period is much broader and thicker than what is represented here.

A few critical factors pose insurmountable problems for so traditionalist an approach. First, scholarship has been asking questions for a while now that do not neatly fit into the accepted categories of the *CHECL*. To take two examples, what constitutes a text in late antique literature? What constitutes an author? The *CHECL* deals in *known* authors who write *known* texts (mainly in Greek and Latin) which have been (or at least can be) readily edited and translated. What of the *Acts of Peter* and its constantly fluctuating literary tradition, as discussed by Christine Thomas? What of the role of the 'pagan' Greek Novel in providing the tools of genre which a multitude of anonymous Christian authors exploited?⁶⁷

Second, the *CHECL*'s remit for comprehensiveness hamstrings by necessity any attempt to trace closely the late antique elaboration and expansion of early Christian literature, traits which Glenn Most has shown to be fundamentally characteristic of post-apostolic and late antique texts. Apocryphal narratives appear ingrained in the imaginations of many late antique writers, and this cognitive element of literary history is very difficult to expose in broad strokes⁶⁸.

Third and finally, the *CHECL* does very little in the end to combat the disjunctive model of early Christian and late antique Christian literature. This is so despite the fact that the *CHECL* has the superficial benefit of covering the entire patristic period, including the earliest Christian and the latest late antique (early Byzantine/medieval) literature. I would argue that the reason behind this failure is the *CHECL*'s commitment to chronology as a heuristic. The literary forms and genres shared between early Christian and late antique literature first need to be examined synchronically rather than diachronically, and across religions and languages

67. Norris has one brief mention of the role of the novel (*CHECL*, p. 31), as does Brock (p. 167). Brock notes elsewhere that the *Clementine Recognitions* was one of the first non-biblical works translated into Syriac (p. 370).

68. Brock notes the 'psychological tensions' in single verses of the Bible which are exploited by Syriac writers in ekphrastic dialogue poems, the *soghyatha* (*CHECL*, p. 368).

as well⁶⁹. To be sure, the division of the *CHECL* into three definable sections helps the situation: the book does not offer simply one long narrative but pauses occasionally to analyze and take stock. Nevertheless, the model is an assumed one of evolution and change, without the analytical space to justify that assumption. Were the evolution couched in terms of qualitative description, or even literary evaluation, the result would have been more positive⁷⁰.

As it stands, however, the *CHECL* only confirms the model of disjunction by forbidding early Christian literature to converse with the literature of Late Antiquity. This is so despite the evidence that many Christian writers in Late Antiquity were engaging early Christian literature (both canonical and apocryphal) at a root level. As demonstrated by Christine Thomas and Glenn Most, late antique writers were constantly attempting to imitate the earlier literature, translate it, adjust it, and, in some measure at least, were trying to wrench away its literary hegemony over apostolic personae.

5. CONCLUSION

To reiterate, the three scholarly works discussed in this article offer access into the changing discipline of late antique studies. Particularly with regard to the question of literature in Late Antiquity, they are highlighting an opportunity for research that has been neglected of late⁷¹. The fundamental question underlying all three of the books discussed above is the following: How does one move from early Christian literature to late antique Christian literature? This question concerns the actual history of the literature as much as it does the ways in which scholars segment these texts into distinct periods. Of course, the two processes can hardly be so neatly separated from one another since our decisions about periodization affect the manner in which we read the texts, and how we read the texts (or the purpose *for which* we read the texts) alters the historical categories

69. See the introduction to S.F. Johnson, *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity*, esp. pp. 5-8.

70. Young tantalizingly mentions the theoretical concept of 'value' at one point but does not pursue it further (*CHECL*, p. 106), perhaps out of concern that Late Antiquity has too often been *devalued* in such discussions. However, 'value' as a concept in the modern period has a strong theoretical heritage among the Prague structuralists, who do not use it in the denigrating manner of nineteenth-century classicists. See J. Striedter, *Literary Structure, Evolution, and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Reconsidered* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

71. Compare, however, the collected papers in S.F. Johnson (ed.), *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity*.

in which we place them⁷². This is the modern dilemma of the discipline of 'literary history', to which all three contributions discussed above speak in one way or another. How we define our literary history says much about what we think of the texts and what we perceive our own scholarly endeavours to be.

In a number of published articles, Averil Cameron has singled out the biographical and panegyric literary modes as touchstones for characteristic ways of thinking and writing in Late Antiquity⁷³. Likewise, in the chapter 'Stories People Want' from *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, she attempted to forge a connection between the rise of saints' Lives in the fourth century and the continued vibrancy of Apocryphal Acts. In her words, 'From the fourth century on and into the medieval period, the sheer bulk of hagiographical material is so vast that we tend to overlook this apocryphal literature as a serious influence on its origins'⁷⁴. The comparatively small corpus of apocryphal texts from the second and third centuries had an enormous impact on the flowering of Christian narrative in Late Antiquity. This flowering includes not just the new Christian genres – such as saints' Lives, narrative homilies, dialogue poems, and the like – but the numerous translations, paraphrases, epitomes, and other literary redactions that took place within the apocryphal tradition proper. Contrary to the disjunctive model of early Christianity, apocryphal literature flourished in every corner of Late Antiquity and should secure a prominent place in Christian literary history.

It is disappointing, then, that authoritative reference works like the *CHECL* have thus far not attempted to make plain the broader impact of apocrypha in Late Antiquity. In particular, the *CHECL* leaves in place a dichotomy (both institutional and ideological) which needs to be removed – and this despite the ostensible value of Patristics for a unified periodization. The two books by Christine Thomas and Glenn Most, by contrast,

72. See Averil Cameron, 'The Long Late Antiquity: A Late Twentieth-Century Model?', in T.P. Wiseman (ed.), *Classics in Progress* (British Academy Centenary Series; Oxford, 2002), pp. 165-91.

73. E.g., Averil Cameron, 'Form and Meaning: The *Vita Constantini* and the *Vita Antonii*', in T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 2000), pp. 72-88.

74. Averil Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 119. See also pp. 113-15: 'Like these Christian Lives in the fourth century and later, the stories in the apocryphal Acts had an important part to play in the creation of a Christian universe of myth... The canonical Gospels had left many loose ends and required expansion from an early date; since they themselves constituted stories – at least in part – this expansion also naturally took story form. That it frequently resulted in multiple or contradictory versions was a considerable help in achieving the elasticity that proved in later years to be such a strength.'

openly espouse an interest in reading beyond this dichotomy, Thomas through examining the various streams of textual tradition and Most merely through reading the Doubting Thomas tradition as literature. To be fair, it is a great strength of the *CHECL* that its editors allowed genres of theological writing (so neglected as literary forms) receive the lion's share of attention⁷⁵.

What is still lacking, however, is precisely an attempt at formulating what is 'literary' about early Christianity. Thomas defines this, in the context of the reception of early Christian apocrypha, as 'multiformity' and 'fluidity', by which she means the fluidity of the given text itself, into and out of other languages, cultures, and periods. Most defines the literary as 'psychological' or 'lacunary', by which he means the late antique engagement with early Christian literature on the imaginative or cognitive level, resulting in a plethora of new texts and interpretations. To return to Averil Cameron, her definition (in 'Stories People Want') revolves around the concept of elasticity: there is a flexibility to the early Christian stories, both evangelistic and narrative, which encouraged their persistence in later tradition. To a great degree Cameron's definition encompasses the others. Whether within one textual tradition or (expansively) outside it, apocryphal texts summon the apostles into the world of the reader and contribute to the formation of imaginary worlds across multiple cultures, languages, and epochs.

Given the books examined above, what might be added to Cameron's definition of elasticity is the recognition of a need for a literary history of Christian literature based more on analysis than on periodization. For apocrypha in Late Antiquity, this project could fall under the discipline of *Rezeptionsästhetik*⁷⁶, which (in more than one incarnation) demands that literary works be analyzed synchronically before diachronic judgments are made regarding periodization⁷⁷. Late Antiquity as an academic field has not yet received its Ernst Robert Curtius or Erich Auerbach: although both of those scholars spoke about late Latin literature, their sights were firmly

75. On theological genres, see Averil Cameron, 'How to Read Heresiology', in D.B. Martin and P. Cox Miller (eds.), *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography* (Durham, NC, 2005), pp. 193-212; and eadem, 'New Themes and Styles in Greek Literature, A Title Revisited', in S.F. Johnson (ed.), *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 11-28.

76. Variously translated as 'reader-response criticism', 'affective stylistics', etc. See Paul de Man, 'Introduction', in Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (trans. T. Bahti; Minneapolis, 1982), p. viii.

77. See Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', in idem, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, pp. 3-45. See also René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (London, 1993 [1963]), Chapter 19, 'Literary History', pp. 252-69.

fixed on the western Middle Ages⁷⁸. The texts of medieval Europe (in Latin and the numerous vernaculars) have greatly benefited from mature literary scholarship which does not shrink from reading 'high' and 'low' literature side by side but rather exults in the productive *diglossia* or *polyglossia* (à la Bakhtin) evident in that process and in the texts themselves⁷⁹. From a late antique point of view, the various (constantly expanding) corpora of apocryphal Lives, Gospels, and Acts provide the ideal realm in which such a literary history could thrive.

78. E.g., among many publications, E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (trans. W.R. Trask; New York, 1953 [1948]); E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (trans. W.R. Trask; Princeton, 1953 [1946]) and idem, *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (trans. R. Manheim; New York, 1965 [1958]). I am aware that Jauss distances himself from Curtius (in particular) in defining literary history (Jauss, 'Literary History', p. 9). Nevertheless, both are concerned with a scholarly practice which (even if variously defined) has not been applied in a sophisticated way to Late Antiquity.

79. On Bakhtinian *polyglossia*, see M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist; Austin, 1981), p. 61 and *passim*.

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