MIRACLE DISCOURSE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Society of Biblical Literature

MIRACLE DISCOURSE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

MIRACLE DISCOURSE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Edited by

Duane F. Watson

Society of Biblical Literature
Atlanta

MIRACLE DISCOURSE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Miracle discourse in the New Testament / edited by Duane F. Watson
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-58983-118-6 (paper binding : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-58983-698-3 (electronic format) — ISBN 978-1-58983-788-1 (hardcover binding : alk. paper)
1. Miracles—Biblical teaching. 2. Bible. N.T.—Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Watson, Duane Frederick.
BS2545.M5M57 2012b
225.6—dc23 2012037193

Printed on acid-free, recycled paper conforming to
ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R1997) and ISO 9706:1994
standards for paper permanence.

Contents

Abbreviations

Primary Sources

Adv. Math.	Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*
Alex.	Lucian, *Alexander (Pseudomantis)*
Amph.	Plautus, *Amphitruo*
Ann.	Tacitus, *Annales*
Ant.	Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*
Hel.	Euripides, *Helena*
Hist.	Tacitus, *Historiae*
Inst.	Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*
Nat. d.	Cicero, *De natura deorum*
Od.	Homer, *Odessea*
Part. or.	Cicero, *Partitiones oratoriae*
Poet.	Aristotle, *Poetica*
Resp.	Plato, *Respublica*
Rhet.	Aristotle, *Rhetorica*
[*Rhet. Alex.*]	Aristotle, *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*
Thes.	Plutarch, *Theseus*
Top.	Aristotle, *Topica*
Vesp.	Suetonius, *Vespasianus*

Secondary Sources

AB	Anchor Bible
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung.* Part 2, *Principat*. Edited by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972–.

BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BR	*Biblical Research*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CurBS	*Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*
EPRO	Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain
ESEC	Emory Studies in Early Christianity
EstBib	*Estudios biblicos*
ETL	*Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses*
FCNTECW	Feminist Companion to the New Testament and other Early Christian Writings
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GRBS	*Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*
GRRS	Graeco-Roman Religion Series
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCPS	Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal of the Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
MAA	*Marcus Aurelius Antonnius* in the *Historia Augusta*
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTS	*New Testament Studies*

PGM	*Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri.* Edited by K. Preisendanz. Berlin: Teubner, 1928.
PRStSSS	Perspectives in Religious Studies, Special Studies Series
RGRW	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World
SA	*Sociological Analysis*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWGRW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Greco-Roman World
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SEÅ	*Svensk exegetisk årsbok*
SNTS	Society of New Testament Studies
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra pagina
SR	*Studies in Religion*
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
UTB	Uni-Taschenbűcher
VC	*Vigiliae christianae*
VCSup	Supplements to Vigiliae christianae
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kinde der älteren Kirche

Introduction

Duane F. Watson

The following essays were presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in 2001 in Denver, Colorado. They were presented in the Rhetoric and the New Testament section in a session titled "The Rhetorical Function of Miracles in the New Testament." These essays all interact with Wendy J. Cotter's volume *The Miracles of Greco-Roman Antiquity*,[1] to which Professor Cotter formally responded. These essays and the response have all been recently updated, and an essay on the Pauline Epistles along with an additional, invited response have also been included. Several essays also interact with Cotter's newest book, *The Christ of the Miracle Stories: Portrait through Encounter*.[2]

Clearly miracle discourse has been at the center of the debate between faith and reason since the Enlightenment. Higher-critical scholars have been uneasy in analyzing miracle accounts as they walk the tightrope between faith and scholarship. Form, source, tradition, and redaction criticisms allow analysis of miracle discourse to take place without the necessity of making a definitive claim about the historicity of miracles and make the tightrope walk a lot easier. At the beginning of the last century, form-critical analysis of miracle discourse focused in the work of Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann. Dibelius classified miracle accounts as "tales,"[3] while Bultmann classified these accounts as narratives intended to dem-

1. Wendy J. Cotter, *The Miracles of Greco-Roman Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1999).

2. Wendy J. Cotter, *The Christ of the Miracle Stories: Portrait through Encounter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

3. Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (trans. Bertram Lee Woolf; New York: Scribner's), 70, but see 70–103.

onstrate Jesus' divine power and authority.[4] Gerd Theissen's work greatly elaborated this form-critical work, further refining and reclassifying the miracle accounts. He examined them "synchronically as structured forms, diachronically as reproduced narratives, and from a functional point of view as symbolic actions."[5] Source criticism and tradition criticism enable the interpreter to trace the origins of miracle accounts in early Christian streams of tradition; Jewish traditions like the miracles of Moses, Elijah, and Elisha; and Greco-Roman traditions like those surrounding Asklepois and Isis. Redaction criticism emphasizes how the Gospel writers modified miracle accounts to further their theological agendas, and has long played a major role in the exegesis of the four Gospels. These criticisms compare the miracle accounts to similar forms, sources, traditions, and redaction in miracle accounts in the Mediterranean world.

Through the study of ancient miracle traditions, Howard Clark Kee gave us a better reading of miracle discourse in its original social and cultural contexts—that is, how the audience and author understood these accounts.[6] Recently Wendy Cotter's two volumes have accelerated that effort. She defines miracle accounts as "those narratives in which a wonderful rescue or salvation of someone takes place by the overturning of the 'canons of the ordinary' through the intervention of a deity or hero."[7] They are narratives describing the intervention of the divine in the affairs of humans to alleviate distress, once conditions are met by humans (such as prayer or faith), with the divine power coming through a human intermediary. Cotter's work helps us more fully understand what would be considered miraculous in the first century and to better understand its functions. Her work provides the context for the miracle discourse of the Gospels so that its significance, meaning, and message can be more fully comprehended.

---

4. Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. John Marsh; rev. ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 209–44.

5. Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (ed. John Riches; trans. Francis McDonagh; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 2.

6. Howard Clark Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Sociohistorical Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

7. Cotter, *Miracles of Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 2, in part citing a phrase by Harold Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century* (Patristic Monograph Series 10; Cambridge: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983), 7–26.

The rhetorical approach of this volume investigates form, source, tradition, redaction, history, and theology, not as individual elements, but as interactive elements in miracle discourse. Rhetorical criticism recognizes that topics and arguments are embedded in miracle discourse in the New Testament to create a new Christian paideia, thus creating new functions for the discourse. From this perspective analysis moves beyond traditional criticisms that treat miracle discourse as primarily revealing manifestations of divine power to demonstrate that miracle discourse has multiple functions within the narrative in which it is embedded and in the social and cultural contexts in which that narrative itself is embedded.

The rhetoric of the miracle discourse is discussed in several essays in this volume from the perspective of sociorhetorical analysis as created by Vernon Robbins. In this analytic, Christian discourse in general is understood to be a blend of modes of discourse called "rhetorolects."[8] Robbins defines *rhetorolects* as forms of "language variety or discourse identifiable on the basis of distinctive configuration of themes, topics, reasonings, and argumentations."[9] There are six rhetorolects: wisdom, miracle, apocalyptic, prophetic, priestly, and precreation. The miracle rhetorolect in the New Testament "presupposes that God responds to humans in contexts of danger or disease and that Jesus is the mediator of these benefits to humans," and its common topoi include fear, cowardice, and the response of belief.[10] Miracle discourse and its argumentation is typically composed of a blend of the miracle rhetorolect and one or more of the other rhetorolects. Miracle discourse tells of a

> rehearsal of unusual and dramatic displays of God's power to restore life and health, furnish food, or remove personal crisis. In this discourse, Jesus and holy spirit function as agents of God's power in various contexts in God's created world. The goal of the discourse is to increase the intensity of adherence to belief in God's power as so great that it can,

8. For further discussion of rhetorolects, see Robbins's essay, "Argumentative Texture in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation," in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts* (ed. Anders Eriksson, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Walter Überlacker; ESEC 8; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002), 27–65; Robbins, "The Dialectical Nature of Early Christians Discourse," *Scriptura* 59 (1996): 353–62.

9. Robbins, "Dialectical Nature," 356.

10. Ibid., 358.

> under the right conditions, function unusually and dramatically in the human realm.[11]

In his essay "Sociorhetorical Interpretation of Miracle Discourse in the Synoptic Gospels," Vernon Robbins examines miracle discourse using sociorhetorical analysis. Miracle discourse is one of the six blended discourses or rhetorolects in first-century discourse. These rhetorolects emerged from and functioned in social and cultural spaces, and can be blended to create rhetorical amplification and argumentation. Miracle discourse in the Synoptic Gospels focuses almost exclusively on God's enactment of power in relation to individuals. A considerable amount of miracle rhetorolect in the New Testament is inductive narrative that describes how Jesus and his followers encounter people and heal them, but it also develops into inferential argumentative discourse, often blending with the other rhetorolects to create a dynamic and multidimensional way of thinking.

A large portion of miracle discourse in the Synoptic Gospels is inductive narrative, in which the narrative moves from cases to results without any rationales introducing deductive reasoning and argumentation: Jesus meets a person in need (case) and heals that person (result). With its display of actions, attitudes, and values, miracle rhetorolect is epideictic—it affirms or reaffirms a point of view. Inductive-narrative miracle discourse in the Synoptic Gospels usually amplifies topoi and creates mental pictures without elaborating those topoi into logical argumentation. Ancient rhetorical discourse elaborates topoi in two ways, as amplificatory-descriptive and argumentative-enthymematic. In other words, discourse creates pictures (rhetography) and reasoning (rhetology). Miracle discourse elaborates the topoi of healing an afflicted body pictorially in a way that remains inductive. The case and result of the narrative are not accompanied by a rule, inference, or premise that explains Jesus' miracle. There is no inference of the source of Jesus' power, his identity, or even the need to have faith—just the inference that Jesus is worthy of praise for his ability to heal others. However, sometimes introducing well-known topoi in the narration of a miracle can evoke a particular cultural and conceptual network that helps people make inferences about a miracle. For example, in Matt 15:29–31 the result of Jesus' healing is that the crowd glorifies the God of

11. Vernon K. Robbins, "The Invention of Early Christian Paideia: Sociorhetorical Interpretation of the New Testament," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Nashville, Tennessee, November 17, 2000.

Israel, which allows the reader to infer that the source of Jesus' healing power is God and to speculate about Jesus' identity.

When prophetic rhetorolect blends with miracle rhetorolect, it focuses the discourse on the identity of Jesus as a prophet who transmits God's will and power in the human realm. This blending can be accomplished by Jesus' use of prophetic phrasing, or by the narrator's recontextualizing and reciting prophetic texts. Prophetic and priestly rhetorolects blend in miracle discourse when Jesus' compassion motivates him to pray and utter prophetic reasoning about why he miraculously intercedes for those in need. Priestly rhetorolect is particularly obvious in the healing of a leper, which involves verification by the priests in the temple (Mark 1:44 || Matt 8:4 || Luke 5:14).

Apocalyptic rhetorolect blends with miracle rhetorolect when demons and evil spirits are presented in challenge-riposte with Jesus, who eventually casts them out and heals the afflicted person. This narration evokes a conceptual domain of the broader battle of the God of Israel with demonic powers in which disease is attributed to unclean spirits. This is especially true when the apocalyptic topos of the demons who know the identity of Jesus is blended with the miracle topos of the healing of the body. Inductive reasoning leaves the reader seeking Jesus' identity and the source of his power, a reasoning sometimes negotiated by attributed speech in the narration (e.g., of the demons) or a revelation about Jesus from the narrator. Prophetic rhetorolect blends with apocalyptic and miracle rhetorolects when Jesus is identified, not by the demons in the narrative, but by a quotation of an Old Testament prophet that replaces or overrides demonic identification, or by the narrator, who identifies Jesus using the prophetic expectation of a coming Messiah.

Wisdom rhetorolect blends with miracle, apocalyptic, prophetic, and priestly rhetorolects in the Synoptic Gospels to widen the reasoning about Jesus as a miracle worker. Argumentation can be inductive by narrating of a series of pictures (rhetography) as Jesus is portrayed as teacher, healer, exorcist, prophet, and forgiver of sins without discursive argumentation explaining just who he is (rhetology). However, introducing speech, question and answer, and debate with Jesus into a blend with miracle rhetorolect introduces enthymematic form and inner reasoning. The narrational base of the miracle rhetorolect moves into reasoning characteristic of wisdom rhetorolect—that is, into early Christian wisdom that reasons about the nature of Jesus as a miracle worker. For example, in miracle narratives that feature controversy, like healing on the sabbath, this wisdom rhetorolect

negotiates important life issues like "what is lawful." In these narratives Jesus does not respond with Torah, but wise sayings that dishonor his opponents. Often Jesus' prophetic miracle wisdom is pitted against the priestly wisdom of the authorities. Wisdom rhetorolect blends with the prophetic rhetorolect to show that Jesus' death by his opponents for breaking the law is a judgment against them, not him.

For another example, in controversies about Jesus' healing ability, those healed blend prophetic rhetorolect with wisdom and miracle rhetorolects to identify the source of Jesus' healing power in the God of Israel, while the opposition blends apocalyptic rhetorolect with wisdom and miracle rhetorolects to root the source of Jesus' healing power in the demonic. Wisdom rhetorolect and its use of deductive argumentation is employed to address this controversy because miracle rhetorolect with its inductive narrational argumentation is unable by itself to negotiate the nature of the personages of the realms of good and evil (Matt 12:22–37).

Twelve miracle stories in the Synoptic Gospels include the topos of faith and lack of faith, great faith and little faith. On the one hand, miracles elicit faith from the heart, mind, and body of an onlooker, the places where wisdom typically resides. On the other hand, faith can also motivate Jesus to respond with a miracle. The faith topos blends the wisdom and miracle rhetorolects into Christian wisdom rhetorolect. This blend also nurtures a special kind of priestly rhetorolect, for now those with faith can praise and worship God in both secular and sacred spaces.

In "The Role of Argumentation in the Miracle Stories of Luke-Acts: Toward a Fuller Identification of Miracle Discourse for Use in Sociorhetorical Interpretation," L. Gregory Bloomquist identifies two types of miracle discourse and how they function in the argumentation of Luke-Acts. In identifying miracle discourse, he moves beyond form-critical matters to use sociorhetorical analysis, particularly its concern to place miracle discourse in the broad context of Greco-Roman miracle discourse. As noted above, Robbins identifies six rhetorolects or discourses of the first-century Mediterranean world that are identifiable by their distinctive configuration of topics and argumentation. Miracle rhetorolect is characterized by topoi of fear, cowardice, and faith used in argumentation. In early Christianity, miracle discourse is based on the ideology taken from Judaism that all things are possible for God the creator, sustainer, and redeemer as humans fulfill the prerequisites of faith, prayer, and fasting. In early Christian miracle discourse Jesus is the one through whom God addresses human petitioners and their fears and needs, using Jesus' mouth and hands.

What Robbins has identified as miracle discourse or rhetorolect, Bloomquist considers to be too general. He proposes that two types of miracle discourse need to be differentiated on the basis of the use of different topoi and argumentation. These are "thaumaturgical" and magic or "gnostic-manipulationist" miracle discourse. The former involves petition to the gods to act to meet human need, while the latter involves formulas, pronouncements, and rituals performed in a precise way to coerce the gods to act. These two types of miracle discourse are also distinguished by the topics and argumentation they use and the goals of that argumentation. Thaumaturgical miracle discourse uses inductive or qualitative (paradigmatic) argumentation or rhetography that relies on images, descriptions, analogies, examples, and citations of ancient testimony to persuade. The audience is left with confusion and wonder, and the rationale for the miracle is not always obvious. Gnostic-manipulationist miracle discourse uses deductive or logical (enthymematic) argumentation or rhetology, which relies on tight reasoning from assertions, rationales, clarifications, and counterarguments to be convincing. The audience is clear about why the miracle happened. These two types of miracle discourse can be woven together (e.g., the healing of the woman with the flow of blood in Mark 5) according to the ideology of the author and the local culture in which the discourse is embedded (e.g., Jewish thaumaturgical versus Isis gnostic-manipulationist miracle discourse).

Bloomquist explores the interweaving of thaumaturgical and gnostic-manipulationist miracle discourse in Luke-Acts. In Luke 5:1–11, the miracle of the great catch of fish, gnostic-manipulationist miracle discourse is subordinate to thaumaturgical miracle discourse. There is no rationale given for the miracle and no conclusion offered for why the miracle occurred. The rhetography is primary, as Jesus overturns Peter's rationale for why sinners and holy men should not associate with one another. Acts 3:1–10, Peter's healing of the lame man at the temple gate, is solely thaumaturgical miracle discourse. The miracle is unexpected, and no rationale is given for the healing. Instead Peter preaches on the meaning of the miracle in the broader plan of redemption (3:11–26). The account of the Gerasene demoniac in Luke 8:22–39 contains rhetology in the form of three examples of logical argumentation with rationales typical of gnostic-manipulationist, yet remains predominantly thaumaturgical.

These three miracle narratives leave unanswered questions. Why do many of those involved react with fear? What does Jesus mean for them and they for him? The relationships between action and result could be

answered with the logical argumentation of gnostic-manipulationist miracle discourse. Rather, these questions are being answered by the qualitative argumentation characteristic of thaumaturgical miracle discourse that relies heavily on cultural knowledge and seeks to move people to new understandings without reliance on rationales and logical argumentation. Thaumaturgical miracle narratives "do not so much contain argumentation as they *are* argumentation"[12] and thus bear a strong resemblance to parables. In Luke-Acts Jesus' and the apostle's normative response is thaumaturgical, not formulaic; it moves the audience from a more formulaic and ritualistic approach to the divine, which gnostic-manupulationist miracle discourse creates, to the less-nuanced and divine silence, which thaumaturgical miracle discourse creates. In other words, miracle discourse in Luke-Acts works to facilitate an ideological shift that brings the audience to less rationally assured conclusions that are beyond existing cultural logic.

In his chapter, titled "Res Gestae Divi Christi: Miracles, Early Christian Heroes, and the Discourse of Power in Acts," Todd Penner examines the sociocultural world of narrative texts to see what the miracles performed in them meant to ancient readers and how the language of power and miracle supports, modifies, or overturns their value systems. A central role of miracle in narrative is the creation of character and the manifestation of that character in the narrative. Miracles performed by a narrative character develop patterns of persuasion and amplify key themes. For example, in Roman narratives the Roman emperor is characterized as having political and religious power expressed in word and deed, which makes claims on the loyalty of the reader. Similarly, in Acts the apostles also make claims to power and loyalty through word and deed. These characterizations are part of the sociocultural world encoded in the narrative that is being worked out in the rhetoric.

Partly due to the discomfort of addressing the question of the authenticity of miracles, much scholarship neglects the unfolding of power and miracle in the presentation and performance of the narrative of Acts. Instead, scholarship tends to treat miraculous material in Acts as an element of tradition and focuses on redactional issues of how Luke utilized the miracle tradition. This approach removes the miraculous features of the Lukan narrative from cultural and religious features of its environment,

12. See page 123 below.

and distances them from the magical and supernatural world of antiquity. One contributing factor to this distancing is the desire to separate Acts from similar apocryphal texts, even though the role of miracle in both is similar in form and function. Another factor is the use of comparison from the history of religions approach, which is useful in highlighting patterns of characterization and topics but ignores the function of miracles in the narrative and rhetoric of Acts. As a result miracles in Acts are sanitized and subordinated to other aspects of the narrative, such as the mission to spread of the gospel, rather than explored as manifestations of power that shape the meaning of the text. Luke is understood to emphasize ethics and morality in Acts to keep the reader from being captured by the magical worldview of its Greco-Roman context.

These emphases of current scholarship neglect the central role of miracles in Acts—manifestation of power in narrative form. Power in the ancient world is a complex of relationships that includes the miraculous. Narratives help negotiate these webs of power, and miracles within the narrative help identify where true political and cultural power lies. The politics of miracles in Acts are further obscured by the false dichotomy of magic/pagan versus miracle/Christian. Rather, magic and miracles should be understood as manifestations of the numinous in the ancient world, the former viewed as a negative, deceptive, and illegitimate use of numinous power, and the latter as a positive, true, and legitimate use of such power. In the vying for power and constructing rhetorical strategies, magic is associated with negative characterization involving deception and treachery, and miracles are used in positive characterization involving mercy, faith, and purity.

Luke is writing Hellenistic history, which aims to be plausible for the readers. Thus the manifestations of the numinous in his narrative must correlate with the values of the political, social, and cultural power structures. For example, readers anticipated reading about divine men, that is, the wonder-working philosophers, prophets, and kings who functioned at the intersection of heaven and earth, combining religious and political power. This is especially expected in the presentation of the emperor as a wonder-worker and source of power and beneficence in establishing a political and civic *oikoumene*. Luke's narrative is co-opting Roman imperial rhetoric in order to present Christ as the founder of a new *oikoumene*. Miracles are not in conflict with Luke's narrative, but integral in showing the messengers of the gospel and their deity to be more powerful and beneficent than the emperor and his conquering force. "Analyzing miracle/power discourse

in Acts in conjunction with Luke's emergent political interests reveals a resultant ideology that lays claim to the polis of the Greeks and Romans for Christ and underscores the apostles as heroes for both emulation and adulation."[13] Miracles in Acts are manifestations of power integrated with culturally coded power language, and are a part of the negotiation of power relationships in Acts, making Acts itself a medium of that power.

Miracles in Acts characterize the heroes, the divine men or "wonder-workers" as the loci of divine power in the world. This is especially true for Peter and Paul, whose words and deeds are both manifestations of their power and garner power at the expense of others in the text. Christian heroes demonstrate power over all facets of their culture, that their power is true, and that they are the "ideal founders of the expanding Christian *politeia*."[14]

Miracles in Acts also play a role in the relationship of power and space. The hero of Acts uses word and miraculous deeds to claim the public space of the *polis* for Christ as part of a concerted effort to usurp the Roman *imperium*. The power in the empire resides in the Christian community and its heroes. The representatives of the emperor's divine and political power are bested by the heroes of Christ in Roman space, who prove where real power resides. Miracles in Acts, especially those of healing, also illustrate where the true power to control and claim bodies lies, and facilitate the transfer of allegiance of these bodies from the emperor of the *polis* to the living God of the *kosmos*. Luke appropriates and reconfigures the language of the *polis* and *imperium*, with its blend of the religious and political, to his own ends as he describes Christian heroes laying claim to the empire and its citizens through the name and power of Christ.

In her essay, "Miracle Discourse and the Gospel of John," Gail O'Day moves well beyond the agenda of redaction criticism to look at miracle accounts rhetorically. Redaction criticism tries to isolate sources, like miracle accounts, that predate the Gospels and trace their modification and placement in the Gospels as a way to grapple with the theology of the Gospel writers. Rhetorical analysis looks at history, form, and theology of miracle accounts, often studied separately, as interrelated constitutive elements. Topics and arguments are embedded in miracle stories and create a new Christian *paideia*.

13. See page 149 below.
14. See page 156 below.

Ancient authors felt free to mold miracle accounts to better serve their rhetorical goals. This understanding moves the discussion beyond the identification of the forms of miracle accounts to what these accounts are trying to communicate beyond the obvious manifestation of divine presence and power. This move is anticipated by ancient authors who embedded topics and argumentation in their miracle accounts and gave interpretive comments about the significance of these miracles. This practice suggests that the formal classification of miracle accounts and their rhetorical functions cannot and should not be neatly separated. The miracle account and the narrative in which it is embedded interpret one another. This is the situation in the Gospel of John—the miracle accounts and their interpretive elaboration are blended.

The miracle account of the wedding of Cana (2:1–11) is illustrative of this blend. While it possesses all the key elements of a miracle story in antiquity—setting, need, miracle, and corroboration of the miracle by witnesses—the focus is not on the miracle itself but on the meaning of the miracle within its narrative. Key Johannine topics are embedded in the miracle account to create this meaning. For example, the topic of Jesus' hour ties this miracle account to the story of the entire Gospel, linking the beginning of Jesus' ministry with his death and showing that the miraculous in Jesus' ministry is intrinsic to key christological issues. The narrator's commentary on the miracle in verse 11 embeds three key topics recurring throughout the Gospel: signs, glory, and coming to believe. The miracle and the interpretation are a composite. "The narration of the Cana wine miracle communicates more than the power and presence of the divine at work in Jesus. It also guides the reader in the appropriate response to such a manifestation—belief—and gives this miracle a distinct content by grounding it in the death of Jesus, and provides the reader with a lens for reading the rest of the Jesus story."[15]

While topics may be embedded in miracle accounts, miracle accounts are also embedded in other topics and arguments in the Gospel of John. There is cross-referencing and self-reference about miracles. Jesus and his miracles are a topic of conversation for Jesus and others in which the Gospel characters enact the process of discernment and learning that the readers of the Gospel are invited to imitate. The vocabulary of miracles—such as sign,

15. See page 184 below.

work, works, and working—pervades the speeches of Jesus in the Gospel, providing the rhetorical frame for the theology of the Gospel.

Exorcisms are absent in John because the struggle between good and evil is resolved when people encounter the light and accept it, and evil is decisively conquered at the single point of Jesus' hour of death, resurrection, and ascension. Individual exorcisms are not needed rhetorically to demonstrate Jesus' power over evil when that power is so localized in his hour.

In his essay, "Miracle Discourse in the Pauline Epistles: The Role of Resurrection and Rhetoric," Duane Watson notes that miracle discourse plays a minor role in the undisputed Pauline Epistles and none at all in the disputed Pauline Epistles. Paul refers to his performance of miracles only five times, three directly and two indirectly. He directly refers to them to defend himself as a genuine apostle (2 Cor 12:11–12), defend his gospel (Gal 1:1–5), and legitimize his Gentile mission (Rom 15:17–19); he also refers to them indirectly when he assumes the recipients of his letters know that miracles accompanied his preaching (1 Cor 2:4–5; 1 Thess 1:4–5).

It may seem that Paul is an incompetent rhetor when he uses his ability to perform miracles to defend himself and his gospel, because he concedes that other apostles and those with certain spiritual gifts also perform miracles. How effective for defense is the argument that he performs miracles when others can do the same thing? Paul's forceful proclamation of the gospel as an apostle is the overlooked key to the effectiveness of his argumentation (Rom 15:17–19; 1 Cor 2:4–5; Gal 3:1–5; 1 Thess 1:4–5). Whenever Paul preached he exhibited a combination of forceful proclamation and working of miracles that distinguished him as an apostle from others that proclaimed the gospel and performed miracles.

While Paul refers to his performance of miracles in defense of his apostolic status and his gospel, he does not utilize miracle discourse in his argumentation. Miracles accounts did not help him address the theological and ethical issues his churches raised, nor were they part of a Greco-Roman rhetor's training and public rhetoric. While supernatural oracles were included in rhetorical instruction, their practical use was limited. And while supernatural oracles and miracles were used as *chreiai* in the Gospels for proclamation, Paul could not use them as effectively to address contextual issues, other than as prophetic oracles from the Old Testament. Paul's neglect of miracle discourse is to be expected from a rhetor of his day who was trying to be rhetorically effective in specific rhetorical contexts.

In "Toward a Sociorhetorical Taxonomy of Divine Intervention: Miracle Discourse in the Revelation to John," David deSilva examines Revelation to see if the themes, topics, rationales, and argumentation of miracle discourse are employed. He relies on the definition of the miracle rhetorolect proposed by Vernon Robbins that God comes to the aid of those in danger and suffering from disease, through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and with preconditions met like prayer, trust, and confession of sins. No specific social conflict underlies miracle rhetorolect. DeSilva points out that this definition and understanding of miracle rhetorolect is supported by Wendy Cotter's collection of miracle accounts. These accounts demonstrate a similar pattern of intrusion of the divine in personal affairs, the work of an intermediary in directing divine power to address human need, and preliminary conditions being met on the part of the human recipient.

Revelation is filled with divine intervention in the world and would seem to be a natural source for finding miracle discourse. However, unlike miracle discourse, Revelation is written to address a specific social conflict that will escalate if the audience acts faithfully, as the book advises. It also does not address individual human need seeking God's intervention through intermediaries. Rather, it describes God's judgment against a world that has been unfaithful to God's values. These features explain Revelation's heavy use of themes, topics, rationales, and argumentation of apocalyptic and prophetic discourse rather than miracle discourse. For example, the narratives of God's interventions in delivering his people from Egypt are miracle discourse in their context in Exodus. In their distress the Hebrews pray to God, who acts through the human intermediaries of Moses and Aaron to deliver them from plagues, part the Red Sea, and provide manna and water in the desert. In the recontextualization of these Exodus narratives in Revelation, the plagues are used in judgment upon those who turn from God and persecute God's people, as is common in apocalyptic and prophetic discourse. Also, the two witnesses of chapter 11 perform miracles, but their intent is not to free people from their distress. Rather, it is to move them to repentance, as is common to prophetic discourse. DeSilva concludes that there is no significant miracle discourse in Revelation.

In "Miracle Discourse in the New Testament: A Response," Wendy Cotter responds to all the essays in the volume. In summary, she argues that Vernon Robbins's prophetic, priestly, and apocalyptic rhetorolects are too narrowly defined and predicated on Jewish literature and understandings

to the exclusion of the broader Greco-Roman milieu. She suggests that his categories need to be expanded to include social challenge and restoration and power for this life, which were part of the wider culture's understanding of the prophetic, priestly, apocalyptic, and miraculous. She also finds Robbins's need to trace the power of Jesus' miracles to God and to expect faith to play a role in the miracles accounts to be drawn more from later theological reflection and the redaction of the Evangelists than from the original form of the miracle accounts. Cotter likes Bloomquist's subdivision of miracle discourse into thaumaturgical and gnostic-manipulationist, but suggests that while his analysis accounts for the respective redaction of the Evangelists, he needs to pay more attention to the miracle accounts in their immediate and full Gospel contexts to fully understand their message. She strongly agrees with Penner that miracle accounts in Acts are intended to demonstrate that Jesus' power is superior to Roman imperial power. She adds that because the recipients of miracles come from all walks of life, the miracle accounts also function to break down social categories and create a new social vision of equality and unity of all people as children of God. Cotter affirms O'Day's observation that the miracle accounts in John's Gospel both anticipate the message of the Gospel to follow and are themselves necessary to undergird that message, even though ironically this Gospel promotes faith that is not reliant on miracles. Cotter agrees with Watson that the resurrection of Jesus should be viewed as part of Paul's use of miracle discourse to support his authority and the authority of his message, as well as a way for communities he addresses to confirm the reliability of their faith. She concurs with deSilva that miracle accounts are not present in Revelation because they are not helpful in a context of such cosmic grandeur, but would hope that this book's analysis, using rhetorolects, would work to incorporate more of how a Greco-Roman audience would perceive Revelation's unique mixture of literary elements.

Davina Lopez provides a fitting conclusion to the volume with her response, "Miraculous Methodologies: Critical Reflections on 'Ancient Miracle Discourse' Discourse." She reviews the many versions of Marcus Aurelius's "rain miracle" to make the point that analysis of miracle accounts is as much about the rhetorical aims of their interpreters and their audiences' perceptions of miracle accounts as it is about "what really happened." Studying ancient miracle accounts involves our present ideologies and commitments as we decide what accounts to use or not use, and how to use them and to what ends—more than it involves the ideologies and commitments of those of the ancient past. She underscores

this point with the second-century Column of Marcus Aurelius, which depicts the "rain miracle," noting that the basic instability of miracle discourse lies in the lack of control of the associations that the viewer makes when viewing the column. This reality undermines a major assumption of interpreters of miracle discourse: that the authorial intent and the effects the representation of the miracle in written or artistic form has on an audience are closely aligned. Thus "what really happened" is in the eye of the beholder.

Rhetorical-critical analysis of miracle discourse has three advantages over previous scholarship, which can conflate the supposed reality of miracles with their representations. First, such analysis takes the burden of verifying miracles as historical events and the personal belief in miracles out of the hermeneutical equation. Second, it recognizes the role of ideology and power dynamics in narrative discourse, so that the question is not "what happened" but how the discourse works to strengthen or weaken allegiances, social arrangements and hierarchy, and articulations of knowing and doing. Third, it recognizes that miracle discourse provided an abundance of tropes that New Testament writers could creatively incorporate into many new representations as they negotiated their message in a world saturated with miracles.

Lopez also has three concern about the methodological and discursive assumptions involved in the rhetorical-critical analysis of miracle discourse in this volume. First is the desire to create a false dichotomy between magic and miracle, in part to make claims for the uniqueness of early Christian miracle discourse, and partly to isolate this component of the narrative of the life of Jesus as a pretext for methodological reflection. Second is a lack of the analysis of power in the study of miracles, for such study tends to configure early Christian discourse in differentiation from the "other," perhaps motivated by the desire to maintain Christian texts as unique or superior to those of other religions of the classical world. Third, the term *miracle discourse* may be really more about our discursive constructions of miracle discourse and our interaction with these constructions in isolation from the world around the New Testament. She suggests that this problem can be addressed through comparison with other religions using categories that do not privilege one tradition over another and are more genuinely attuned to the commonality of human experience. Lopez concludes that as interpreters we need to ask what we are seeking to gain and to be or become through our constructs and classifications; to be aware of the frameworks that we create through power configurations and to be responsible for them.