FICTION AND APOCALYPTIC

J.L. LIGHTFOOT

Abstract. Although they are not generally considered together and have some obvious and radical differences, this paper assumes that there is value in comparing prose fiction with apocalyptic texts. It does so in respect of their treatment of the theme of travel and adventures into the unknown in the quest for knowledge. It explores a number of approaches in the interests of keeping the enquiry methodologically robust (straight, untheorised comparison; diachronic analysis of classical apocalyptic; the exploration of one particular motif, namely the view back to earth; a focused look at the apocalyptic elements in Photius' s summary of Antonius Diogenes, particularly the katabasis and the Moon Sibyl; and the authenticating strategies used by authors of travel and apocalyptic literature respectively). The results are complex but not incoherent, and, it is hoped, an impetus to further study.

This paper attempts to draw together two bodies of material not usually studied together. The basis for doing so is the idea of travel as learning, undertaken out of desire for knowledge – travel in which the person undertaking the journey receives revelations and/or turns them into didaxis for others. For present purposes, "prose fiction" is taken in a very catholic sense. Among classical texts I concentrate, not on the ideal romances, but on the *Wonders Beyond Thule* of Antonius Diogenes (subsequently AD), Lucian's *Verae Historiae*,[1] and beyond that stray into other types of writing – the travelogue or "travel romance", dubious or mendacious voyages, ethnography, and utopias. But push only a little harder and you embark on journeys to heaven and hell, the edges of the cosmos, or both. You are on the heels, for instance, of Plato's Er, who was vouchsafed a vision of the post-mortem dispensation of human souls, and – to strike out into adjacent cultures of the ancient Mediterranean – of Jewish Enoch, who visited Tartarus to communicate with the Fallen Angels

[1] Whose affinity with apocalyptic is already studied by VON MÖLLENDORFF (2005), attributing the similarities to intertextuality in the context of *paideia*.

and subsequently went on tours of the cosmos, visiting the Garden of Eden and portals of heaven.[2] You are, in other words, in the domain of apocalyptic. For what is apocalyptic if not, in some sense, one of the most spectacular conceivable forms of prose fiction?

Now in poorly mapped territory one would like to achieve the greatest possible precision, so with J.J. Collins, the scholar of Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity, I define apocalyptic as:

> *a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal*, *insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world*.[3]

This is initially encouraging. By requiring a narrative framework the definition can in principle accommodate both travel fantasies and apocalypses. But it also imposes rigour. Among classical texts, the revealer/recipient framework almost – but not quite – accommodates the myth of Er (sent back as ἄγγελος to mankind, but not narrating to a specific addressee). It excludes Plato's various eschatological discourses,[4] which are, however, relevant to the theme. It does, on the other hand, include both Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (*Somn.*) and *Aeneid* 6 which, although a genre like apocalyptic cannot be coerced within this volume's timeframe, do fall within it. Various (near-)apocalypses by Plutarch are moreover not far beyond the lower limit. Relevant treatises are *On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance* (*De sera* 563 B-568 A), *On the Genius of Socrates* (*De gen.* 590 A-592 F), and *On the Face in the Orb of the Moon* (*De fac.* 940 F-

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[2] Annotated translation by E. ISAAC in CHARLESWORTH (1983) 5-89; commentary by NICKELSBURG (2001) and NICKELSBURG / VANDERKAM (2012). Its propinquity to travel romance is illustrated by P.Gen. inv. 187, originally identified as a fragment of a novel, even specifically a fragment of Dercyllis' *katabasis* in AD, but which turned out to be from something close to 1 Enoch 17 (BAGNOUD (2016) 130-131; BAGNOUD / COBLENTZ BAUTCH (2020)). For a new attempt to contextualise it within the world of Hellenistic exploration (though at the behest of rulers, not out of individual curiosity), see KOSMIN (2024).

[3] COLLINS (1979) 9.

[4] *Phd.* 107 C-115 A; *Phdr.* 246 A-250 C; *Grg.* 523 A-527 A; *Leg.* 903 B-905 D; [*Ax.*] 371 A-372 A.

945 D), which could be seen as a travel fantasy containing a revelatory discourse.

But there are also major differences between fiction and apocalyptic. The contract with the reader (a point I owe to Stefan Tilg) is quite different. Apocalyptic demands credence, if not in literal truth (of which classical apocalypses are shy), then in the spiritual basis of the disclosures. They reveal a transcendent reality (to borrow Collins' phrase) to which classical travel fictions, if at all, make only a playful claim. The one requires the utmost seriousness; the latter evades it. Indeed, the absence of any earlier attempt to compare fiction and apocalyptic could simply be because the project is fundamentally a non-starter. Yet I do not think it is. Jewish apocalyptic began to flourish at around the same time as various Hellenistic fantasy narratives (the earliest parts of the Enochic corpus go back to the third or even fourth century BC). It is not obvious that shutting off any attempt at comparison *a priori* is preferable to finding a way to model a loose, variegated, and highly complex set. But how exactly does one do that? After much thought I settled on a series of experiments with different approaches. After running through them I evaluate their success, and review the progress made (if any) and the further implications of the project.

Part One. Comparativism

The first approach involved simply setting beside one another texts that involve the themes of wandering, exploration, and enlightenment. For the time being the project is just one of comparison. It does not yet postulate genetic relationships or cultural contact. (There *might* have been: we know from the use of Euhemerus in the third book of the Sibylline Oracles[5] that some Hellenistic pagan travel literature was available to Hellenistic Jewish communities, though 1 Enoch, the first copies of the most relevant part of which – the Book of Watchers – come from Qumran, does not seem to

[5] LIGHTFOOT (2016).

belong to that milieu.) But even if questions of cultural contact remain obscure and frustrating, we can still, by engaging in a comparative exercise, better appreciate what is distinctive about a given text and perhaps the tradition to which it belongs.

Here are some comparanda. First, among classical texts, the traveller is eager for knowledge in AD, Lucian, Iambulus, and almost explicitly in *De fac*. (942 B). Enoch himself is strongly associated with knowledge and wisdom, though in his case he is guided around an otherworldly landscape by supernatural guides.[6] In another text, the Testament of Abraham, the hero positively demands to be taken on a tour of the inhabited earth before he dies, although he is thirsty for spiritual knowledge rather than motivated by mere *Wanderlust* or desire for secular knowledge.

Second, both apocalypses and novels employ first person narratives, with frequent verbs of seeing (ἐθεώρουν, εἶδον, ἴδον). The essential difference between pagan and Judaeo-Christian traditions is between sight-seeing on the one hand (often accompanied by hearing[7]) and dreams in which the visionary receives insight into a divine order. Classical travellers are also more reactive. Lucian expresses wonder, consternation, or disgust, while Enoch mostly simply records what he sees, which are sights of barely graspable solemnity: psychological interest in the viewer and the momentousness of what is seen are in inverse relation. On the other hand, what firmly separates Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic from both pagan "apocalyptic" (Plato, Plutarch) and the novel is the presence of internal narrators in the latter, and the clear distinction between extra- and intra-diegetic narration (for the label μῦθος, see p. 000). Nowhere is the extra- versus intra-diegetic distinction more exaggerated than in Lucian, though the *Wonders Beyond Thule* seem to have been the most complex of all. Photius' summary tramples over AD's elaborate and tiered subtleties, but

[6] 1 Enoch 93:2 "I have learned everything"; NICKELSBURG (2001) 443.
[7] PLAT. *Resp.* 614 D; CLEARCHUS, fr. 8 WEHRLI; PLUT. *De gen.* 590 B; LUCIAN, *Men.* 14, *Ver. hist.* 1, 29; AD 110a37-38, 111a5-6. Not in 1 Enoch (though he both "sees" and "hears" certain presences in 40:3-8).

the internal narratives are not merely given *plausible* narrators: as Stephens and Winkler observed, they actually seem to *elicit* those best placed to tell them.[8]

Third, the content of the revelations. An obvious focus in an admittedly enormous theme is the journey to the edges of the earth, which is a golden opportunity to compare Enoch in the Book of Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36) with AD's hero. Both complete the circuit of the earth in an anticlockwise direction. Deinias goes north then east to the land of the rising sun, then takes a tour of the external sea, ending up in Thule and beyond.[9] Enoch has three itineraries, first to the west and north (17-19), then west to east via Jerusalem (21-33), then anticlockwise from the far east back to the starting point (34-36). Knowledge is a theme in both. Enoch is a visionary who is accompanied (at least part of the way) by angels to answer his questions; Deinias' whole purpose is to garner knowledge. Beyond this we are frustrated by the patchiness of Photius' summary, though the journey was very long and variegated (109a22 ποικίλαις πλάναις). This sounds very different from the schematic minimalism of Enoch, who reduces 23-33 to a series of theme-and-variations on mountains and trees, and 34-36 to cosmic portals at the cardinal points. Yet schematic geography is not absent from some Greek writing, as Enoch's seven mountains, seven rivers, and seven islands can to some extent be compared to the seven islands in Iambulus' utopia.[10]

Another theme is the presence of wonders.[11] At first sight it seems surprising that Photius only uses the word once in his summary of AD, defying expectations aroused by the work's title. But Photius is reflecting

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[8] WINKLER and STEPHENS 1995, 114-118; cf. FEHLING (1989) 93-94 "Precise calculations of what sources can or must know".
[9] Far north favoured in Greek travel fantasies: Aristeas to the far north of the country of the Issedones (HDT. 3, 116, 4, 14), Antiphanes to the frozen north (PLUT. *De prof. virt.* 79 A), Pytheas to Thule, Hecataeus to the island of the Hyperboreans (*FGrH* 264 F 7).
[10] 1 Enoch 18:6-8, 24:2-3, 77:4, 5-7, 8; DIOD. SIC. 2, 58, 7.
[11] Travelogue: *Ver. hist.* 1, 26; 2, 5, 41, 45. Utopias: PLAT. *Criti.* (Atlantis), *passim*; ps.-ARIST. *Mirab. Auscult.* 836 B 32-33; DIOD. SIC. 2, 56, 1; 2, 58, 4; 2, 59, 4. Revelation: PLUT. *De sera* 563 F, 564 A, 564 C, 565 F, 568 A, *De gen.* 590 B, 591 A, *De fac.* 941 F.

the attitude of the most hardened sceptic and so he presses heavily on words like μῦθος, πλάσμα, and parts of ἀπιστ-. His single use of θαῦμα occurs where he quotes the inscription on the coffer containing the inscribed tablets (111b22). In other words, its one use is by an *internal* narrator, who seeks to awaken a sense of guileless amazement, not scepticism. Wonder is a promising topic for a comparative study of pagan and Christian travel narratives and revelations. Presumably the basic contrast would be between the isolated factoids and paradoxa in classical texts and, on the other hand, manifestations that reveal the hand of the Jewish or Christian God, his underlying plan, and his majesty and greatness,[12] although occasional examples sound more like isolated curiosities.[13] The subject requires more investigation.

The relative prominence of what might be called the vertical and horizontal dimensions or axes in these fantasy travels would also reward further enquiry. Both traditions located the places of the blessed in the sky, but classical texts are far more interested in the Moon. And if one sees the Moon as an enclosed space, then one can extend the observation to the horizontal axis and observe that classical texts are also much more interested in islands, the traditional location for utopias (FUSILLO 1990, 12-13). Building on the geography of Plato's Atlantis, Plutarch imagines an island archipelago in the ocean framed by an outer continent which ultimately reduces our world itself to the status of island (*De fac.* 942 B; PLAT. *Tim.* 24 E-25 A); elsewhere, the young philosopher Timarchus sees a vision in which the heavens are converted to a sea with revolving islands (*De gen.* 590 C-E). In Lucian's case the island theme is particularly striking, with an obvious background in the *Odyssey*. Both the Moon and other heavenly bodies are treated as islands accessible from a sea voyage (*Ver.*

[12] Pertaining to, or performed by, God: 1 Enoch 36:4 (picking up 34:1); 2 Baruch 63:8; 4 Esdras 1:14, 2:48, 7:27, 13:57; AUNE on Rev. 15:3 Μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστὰ τὰ ἔργα σου. Often (both singular and plural) synonymous, or combined, with signs (σημεῖον itself is rendered "wonder" in KJV Rev. 12:1, 12:3, 13:13), implying an indication of something further (4 Esdras 9:6), hence often eschatological (STONE (1990) 93, 295; Rev. 15:1). Often visual, e.g. Rev. 17:6 Καὶ ἐθαύμασα ἰδὼν αὐτὴν θαῦμα μέγα.

[13] 2 Enoch 12:1 "flying spirits, the solar elements, called phoenixes and khalkedras, strange and wonderful".

hist. 1, 10), and the places of the dead are located on an island archipelago. In AD there is obviously Thule. Why does the island theme find so much less favour in Jewish texts?[14] Perhaps because it would more or less defeat the point of Jewish interest in cosmic-macro-structure, where an enclosed, insular world would not communicate the message.

Finally one can consider the role of books. On the one hand, they enjoy an exceptionally high regard in Jewish apocalyptic – an attitude duly inherited by Christians. Books are part of what the visionary sees. For Enoch they record human deeds and the judgements on them; they either exist already or are committed to writing as Enoch watches.[15] Books are also created by the visionary himself, who is often a scribe (Baruch; Ezra; Enoch). Some are told to record what they have seen (4 Esdras 12:37), or receive dictation (2 Enoch [Slavonic Enoch] 22:11, 23:3-6), or give dictation to others.[16] The Christian Hermas transcribes a book (*Vis.* 5 [II, 1], 3-4]), and then told to pass it on (8 [II, 4], 3]). It seems to me that classical travelogues and romances reflect a literate culture (in which written records may be deposited in public places, there to generate ongoing oral exegesis[17]), but that the enormous value attached to a book as a written record of learned wisdom manifests differently and somewhat back-handedly in the form of pseudo-documentarism, which is the armature of AD and Dictys, and is deployed several times internally by Lucian.[18] What can be said so far is, first, that while the Judaeo-Christian tradition manifests concern for the work's creation and onward transmission – that is, it looks forward[19] – pagan texts are at least as engrossed by the

[14] Islands on "land" and sea in 1 Enoch 77:8 (NICKELSBURG / VANDERKAM (2012) 498); five islands as Japheth's portion in Jub. 8:29. 2 Enoch 27 concerns God's creation of the seven planets. In the longer recension of this text the chapter is headed "About how God founded the water, and surrounded it with light, and established on it seven islands", i.e. the planetary orbits (transl. F.I. ANDERSEN in CHARLESWORTH (1983) 26; 27 n. 27a), but the title is (so CHARLES (1913) 446) "very corrupt".
[15] 1 Enoch 89:68-71, 76-77. See too Revelation 20:12; Hermas' vision of the church as an old woman with a book (*Vis.* 2 [I, 2], 2; 5 [II, 1], 3 and 8 [II, 4], 1-2).
[16] 2 Baruch 5:5; 4 Esdras 14:24, 37-44.
[17] RUIZ MONTERO (2019) 128.
[18] NÍ MHEALLAIGH (2008) 419-422.
[19] For instance 1 Enoch 68:1, 82:1-2, 92:1, 108:1; 2 Enoch 47:2, 48:6, 54:1, 68:2; JOSEPH. *AJ* 1.70-71; Revelation 1:11.

moment of discovery, typically in a grave or temple (see §5); second, that what underlies this difference is that the pagan texts have a conscience (even if feigned) about authenticity that the Jewish texts barely register (though 2 Enoch does insist on the hand-written status of the document in 33:8, 35:2, 36:1, 47:2); and, third, that while false knowledge and false revelation is a concern of both traditions, falsity in Enoch consists in the disclosure of forbidden secrets and arcane or suspect knowledge (i.e. magic), whereas the novel centres its concerns with falsity in the production, accreditation,[20] and transmission of *texts*. A crucial difference is crystallised by AD (to be explored in more detail in §5). If the Judaica are interested in textual production, that interest playfully manifests in AD in the dizzyingly complicated process by which his story is generated (MORGAN 2009), eventually resulting in one single, astonishing, all-encompassing book. Here is a spectacular contrast with the works of the Enochic corpus, whose authors have zero interest in personal ostentation, but are intensively aware of belonging to a tradition larger than any individual – to the point where they can make their hero refer to it, in the form of 366 books he claims to have written.[21]

These are the kinds of thing one might notice when making a simple head-to-head comparison. The eclectic account I have just given could be vastly improved and nuanced by the accumulation of evidence; but the basic problem with this approach is that it produces a lot of quick wins or superficially arresting points which are hard to take further in the absence of any kind of explanatory framework.

Part Two. **The historical development of a genre**

My second part narrows the focus and adopts a diachronic approach. I take a set in whose coherence I am fairly confident, and trace its historical development. Now, a comparative survey of the entire genre of

[20] Including source citation (taken to extremes by AD). Heavenly tablets are the preferred authority in Jewish or Christian apocalypses. 1 Enoch 77:7 “some say”, a second opinion, is noted as unusual by NICKELSBURG / VANDERKAM (2012) 497.
[21] 2 Enoch 23:6, cf. 68:2.

apocalyptic is very much needed and has long been called for, but apart from being impossibly ambitious in this setting it wanders too off-topic. One might nevertheless focus specifically on developments between Plato and Plutarch's apocalypses, alive to the possibilities of generic interplay with the novel. In the course of that, any affinities with Lucian and especially AD should start to emerge more clearly.

It seems that pagan texts over time come closer and closer to the strict definition of an apocalypse quoted at the beginning. An apocalypse should have a high-status revealer and human recipient, which was not quite the case with Er. But it is better fulfilled by some of Plutarch's imitations of Plato[22] – and within the time-frame of the present volume by Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, where the revealers are the ghosts of Scipio's grandfather and father. The framework becomes more like Revelation, where angels reveal to John, or indeed Dio Chrysostom's first Oration, where the narrator meets a Sibyl-like figure at the witching hour of noon (55-84). One could also compare the visionary in a *katabasis*, such as Aeneas guided round by a Sibyl.

The sixth book of the *Aeneid* falls into a sub-category called the tour apocalypse (HIMMELFARB 1983). Plutarch's *De sera* is an example: its visionary, Thespesios, is given a guided tour of the next world by a kinsman.[23] *De gen.* is not, but the dialogue here between visionary and revealer does open with a τίς question (591 A), perhaps an attenuated version of one of the genre's hallmarks, τίς with demonstrative ("who is this?").[24] In Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic, such questions are followed by answers (οὗτος / *hic*, *iste*), and this is recalled in *Aeneid* 6, with Aeneas asking the Sibyl and his father questions (318-320, 863 *quis*), and being answered with demonstratives (325-326 *haec, ille*, *hi*; 869 *hunc*).[25] It will

[22] The role of the man who told Er about Ardiaeus (*Resp.* 615 D-616 A) is expanded for Thespesios' kinsman (*De sera* 564 C-566 D) and the *daimon* who addresses Timarchus (*De gen.* 591 A-592 E).
[23] BREMMER (2021) 285-289.
[24] HIMMELFARB (1983) 41-67.

emerge that AD included a tour apocalypse in the form of Dercyllis' descent to the world of the dead.

Tours may also go upwards. The ascent motif is complex, and a framework for Lucian's and AD's visits to the Moon is required that is more robust than hand-waving at the motif of the "aerial journey".[26] One basic distinction is between bodily and spiritual journeys. On the one hand, certain texts in the tradition of the Myth of Er employ a visionary who sees the stars larger and brighter than they appear to us. That does not happen in Plato, but does in *Somn.*, *De sera*, and *De gen.* This need not imply physical proximity. Rather, these are visionaries in which the soul has been released from the body, sometimes in connection with liquid metaphors of coming to the surface of the sea.[27] On the other hand, there are various fantasy texts in which the visionary is physically raised up.[28] The motif occurs in the Bellerophon myth, but Lucian's ship caught up in an almighty storm as well as Menippus' ascent on wings (*Icaromenippus*) belong in a tradition of Greek spoof that goes back to Aristophanes. In these cases, the destination is a definite place. AD may have been among the first to make that the Moon,[29] but Photius' summary does not positively confirm that, having reached it, they were able to step over into it, as opposed to regarding it from close up, as was possible, according to Hecataeus, from the island of the Hyperboreans.[30]

Either way, it is certain that the theme of visual spectacle would repay further scrutiny. The prevalence of verbs of vision ("I saw") was noted above. The wealth of the subject and scope for further enquiry could be

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[25] Support for possible Jewish influence in *Aen.* 6 (BREMMER (2009) 188-189). In 808 *quis procul ille* (in Anchises' mouth) the interrogative becomes a rhetorical question.
[26] GEORGIADOU / LARMOUR (1998) 81.
[27] *De sera* 563 E-F; *De gen.* 590 B-C,. In *Somn.* there is an elevated vantage point (11 *de excelso et pleno stellarum illustri et claro quodam loco*) from which the heavenly bodies are magnified and clarified (17).
[28] Enoch swept up by (whirl)winds (14:8, 39:3, 52:1) like Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) (NICKELSBURG (2001) 262; NICKELSBURG / VANDERKAM (2012) 109).
[29] NÍ MHEALLAIGH (2020) 209, 212, reconstructs Varro's *Endymiones* as a flight of the soul, possibly in a dream, not a literal ascent.
[30] ROHDE 1960, 288 n. 2; *contra*, MORGAN 1985, 477-478; 1998, 3317; *contra* MORGAN, SCHMEDT (2020) 173-174; HECATAEUS OF ABDERA, *FGrH* 264 F 7 (§5a).

illustrated simply by looking more closely at its development in apocalypses from the *Myth of Er* to Cicero, Plutarch, and beyond. Whereas in Plato verbs of seeing were fairly sparse, Plutarch treats one hero (Thespesios, *De sera*) to a vision of the empyrean bathed in coloured light, into which rise luminescent souls, and another (Timarchus, *De gen.*) to a vision of islands revolving in the sea representing the stars and planets in celestial motion, and once again bathed in the appropriate colours. The respective visionaries look, or are directed to look, and in Timarchus' case we are even told that his soul has opened up into a single eye (563 F). What they see are tableaux flooded with light, even to the point of dazzlement. This is a visual, pictorial environment with quite a different aesthetic quality (influenced by Orphism?) from the Platonic original, although it is very clear that different traditions have different nuances and investigating them would be a rich, rewarding task (nowhere more so than in Revelation, with its antecedents in the prophetic books). In AD's case, Photius uses verbs of vision (ἰδεῖν, θεάσασθαι) remarkably often. He rarely, however, simply registers *what* the travellers see.[31] More often he uses verbs of vision to invite comparison between different modes of experience: seeing / hearing (110a37-38, 111a6); seeing / experiencing (109b35); seeing / learning from others (109a39-40, 109b8-9); seeing first-hand / theorising (110b40-41). Above all verbs of vision are combined with an expression from Photius himself about (in)credibility.[32] Photius would suggest that AD bound up vision with questions of epistemology and truth.

That suggests one final line of enquiry in this section: narrative voice, and its manipulation to create effects of immediacy or distance. Plutarch employs the tools with which Plato had furnished him, modulating between direct and indirect speech and qualifying his narratives in ways that show him sensitive to Platonic nuance, but there are also signs of a more "apocalyptic" turn. Plato had tended to begin and end his myths with

[31] 110a4 ἐθεάσατο; 111a4 ἰδεῖν, 111b7 θέαμα.

[32] 110a10-11 πολλῶν ἀπιστοτάτων θεαμάτων, 110a37 τεράστια ἰδεῖν, 110b38-39 ἄπιστα θεάσασθαι, 111a5-6 ἰδεῖν καὶ ἕτερα τινὰ τερατεύεται, ἃ μηδεὶς μήτε ἰδεῖν ἔφη μήτε ἀκοῦσαι, 111a9-11 ἴδοιεν ἃ εἰκὸς ἦν ἰδεῖν τὸν τοιαύτην ὑπερβολὴν πλασμάτων προαναπλάσαντα.

qualifications, when Socrates calls them μῦθοι and slyly distances himself from their literal truth.[33] Plutarch sometimes follows this pattern (*De gen.* 589 F, 592 E, F). But *De fac.* begins as δρᾶμα (940 F-941 A) and ends as λόγος (945 D), albeit with a brusque sign-off (below), while *De sera* begins as μῦθος (561 B, 563 B) but ends suddenly, as the visionary is jolted back to life and the reader back into the real world without a narrative frame. Again, Plato had used direct and indirect discourse, direct for Socrates in *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias*, but partly reported speech in *Phaedo* (110 B-111 E), and throughout most of the Myth of Er. Plutarch heeds this convention in *De sera*, switching into indirect speech for the μῦθος (563 B) as if the distancing device goes with the territory. But he tends to prefer the direct form, which Plato had already used in the limited case of Er's relative (615 D-616 A), and which Plutarch now employs for more extended expositions and dialogues.[34] In short, expositions become more self-standing, and have a more *ex cathedra*, demanding, exigent tone. This is in keeping with the more formally apocalyptic character which I argue is emerging by this date.

Part Three. **Tracing a motif**

This is a short section. In it, I choose a motif and trace its diffusion. The gathered instances fall a long way short of a comprehensive or satisfactory account of its dissemination. But it should still be possible to study the particular influence of a famous instance, to gain a sense of its diffusion, and to appreciate some of the manifold ways it is capable of being realised in different genres. My case-study is the view back to earth, deployed by Lucian in *Ver. hist.* 1, 10 and 26 as well as in *Icar*. 11-12, 15-19. (We do not know whether it was in AD.) It seems first attested as an imaginative exercise in Plato's *Phaedo* (110 B, a μῦθον ... καλόν), but in his hands the view downwards (on the earth as a beautiful object) is conflated with the idea of

[33] *Resp.* 621 C 1 (though see also HALLIWELL (2021) 170 on 614 B 2, where Socrates distinguishes it from a "tale of Alcinous"); *Phd.* 110 B 1, 114 D; *Gorg.* 523 A 1-2 and 527 A 5). But the discourse in *Phdr*. heavens vacillates between self-effacement (245 C 1-2, 246 A 2-4) and assertion (247 C 1-2).

[34] In *De fac*. Sulla's narrative (other than 941 A-942 B) and the stranger's discourse (942 D-end); other examples in n. 21.

the impeded view upwards (of a lovelier world above). This confusion sorts itself out in imitators (CLEARCHUS, fr. 8; *Somn.*; *De fac.* 940 E). In Lucian's hands it belongs in the ethnographical rather than philosophical tradition. There are Judaeo-Christian examples, but they are not attested before the centuries AD. They are the Testament of Abraham, first or second centuries; Apocalypse of Zephaniah, *terminus ante quem* Clement; Apocalypse of Paul (*Visio Pauli*), probably last decades of 4th c. AD.[35]

Comparisons between these texts can be organised around various themes.

First, the visionary. All the Judaeo-Christian examples have one, but not all the classical ones do. In Plato it is a purely hypothetical someone who might happen to be looking from above. In Plutarch the vision is speculatively focalised by the Moon men. In Lucian it takes the form of a magic mirror, in other words a technology potentially available to anyone who can get there, and allowing for two-way communication. The visionary's words may be in the first (Lucian; Zephaniah; Paul) or third (Abraham) persons. Reported speech is distinctive of texts that imitate Plato (Clearchus, though himself reported at second-hand by Proclus).

Second, what is seen. The earth's appearance matters to very varied degrees. Plato is short on detail, but big on colour. Perhaps Plutarch was influenced by this, in the passages with visual spectacle discussed above; landscape details appear in Clearchus. On the other hand, the Judaeo-Christian examples are wholly uninterested in the earth's appearance. The classical examples range all the way across a spectrum from the world's beauty (Plato; cf. also Seneca, *Cons. ad Marc.* 18, 4-8) to its unimpressiveness (Plut. *De fac*. 940 E – yet also influenced by Plato) and even nullity (Cicero – yet also influenced by Plato). Insignificance is a point made, if at all, by pagan texts.[36] When Paul contemplates the earth's

[35] Respectively E.P. SANDERS and O.S. WINTERMUTE in CHARLESWORTH (1983) 871-902 and 497-515; ELLIOTT (1993) 616-644, with BREMMER (2017) 296-312.

nothingness (Apoc. Paul 13 “it was as nothing in my sight”), the context suggests the reference is to moral worthlessness.

Thirdly, eschatology. The view-from-above is set in the context of personal eschatology in *some* of the classical examples and *all* of the Judaeo-Christian ones. (If a genealogical approach has any validity, one might suggest that the Judaeo-Christian texts picked up the association with eschatology and then honed in on it obsessively, almost to the exclusion of the earth’s actual appearance.) Those with personal eschatology do not involve looking back from the Moon, which does not figure in the Judaeo-Christian examples. Conversely, those that involve looking back from the Moon do not involve personal eschatology.

Fourth, ethics. This is distinct from eschatology: it fastens on what people are doing *now*, not what happens after their deaths. This is of interest in *all* Judaeo-Christian examples, but only in Lucian’s *Icaromenippus* among the pagan ones. There are tie-ins between *Icar.* 15-17 and the Testament of Abraham, where the visionary sees characteristic activities, good and bad, as well as egregious crimes (10:2-11). There are also links between *Icar*. 20-21 and Apoc. Paul, 4-5. In the latter the Sun, Moon, and stars complain to the Lord about having to look down on human iniquity, and in the former the Moon tells Menippus to carry to Zeus her complaint to similar (if more satirically inflected) effect.

At the end of this short section I would conclude that even where exact lineages cannot be traced, we can, by paying special attention to narrative voice, sensibility, and ethical stance, derive sharpened insights into the *Tendenz* of particular writers and currents of thought, but also apprehend that the cleavage between the Judaeo-Christian and pagan traditons is not completely clean.

Part Four. **Close Reading**

[36] Although BAGNOUD (2016) 143 notes that the comparison of the earth to a drop of water in the Apocalypse of Zephaniah also implies it.

With this fourth experiment, my approach is the most granular. As a philologist and commentator, I ought to be at my most comfortable. But two mainstays of commentary technique are lexical notes and comparisons with other texts, and these face obvious problems in a paraphrase that reduces an original of 24 books to a mere 2000 words. It is possible to chase some lexical patterns in Photius himself, as I did above, with verbs of vision. The vocabulary of wonder and of scepticism are other obvious possibilities. But the recent commentary on AD by SCHMEDT (2020) illustrates some of the problems of the comparative approach. Photius offers so little that a commentator is reduced to the massive accumulation of parallels which at the end of the day are inconclusive for want of confirmation. What follows are remarks on those aspects of the novel relevant to the theme of revelation and apocalyptic. I aim at least to try to draw the noose a little tighter around the text's revelatory elements.

To begin with the basics, the novel involved two main journeys – that of the hero, Deinias, round the outside of the known world,[37] and that of his beloved Dercyllis, round the inner sea, then upwards – which intersect at Thule. Both involve revelations. Dercyllis goes to Hades, while her brother Manti(ni)as has his own set of wanderings which made him knowledgeable about "humans and other creatures" (zoology?), the Sun and Moon, plants and islands.[38] Photius supplies no detail about Deinias' experiences on his circuit of the world, but spends a disproportionate amount of time on the finale in which Deinias went beyond Thule into polar regions, perhaps as far as the Moon (above). So much of the original novel concerned travel, learning, and revelatory experience. Deinias undertook his journey in the quest for knowledge (κατὰ ζήτησιν ἱστορίας), although the siblings were in flight from a pursuer. At least *parts* of this seem to have met the threshold

[37] PHOT. *Bibl.* 109a21; ROHDE (1960) 279 n. 4; ROMM (1992) 207 n. 76.

[38] STEPHENS / WINKLER (1995) 124-125 n. 50 suggest he travelled through "the fabulous regions of Africa". That this is at least feasible is suggested by Iambulus' travel fantasy about the islands of the Sun off the coast of Ethiopia (DIOD. SIC. 2, 55-60), combining ethnography, zoology, botany (including reeds whose growth mirrors the waxing and waning of the Moon, like Astraeus' eyes at an earlier point in Dercyllis' narrative), and matters celestial.

for apocalyptic proper. This is true of the visit to Hades, which involved revelations about a hidden reality mediated by a privileged source (in this case, Dercyllis' dead maidservant Myrto). With Deinias, there is a tantalising correspondence between the Moon Sibyl and Plutarch's *De fac.* The latter is apocalyptic. Whether it qualified in AD depends on factors unknown (who said what in what framework). But very much of the novel was verbal exposition of marvels to those not privileged to have experienced them.

To take first the visit to Hades.[39] The *katabasis* is the commonest type of apocalypse in classical authors (COLLINS (1979) 15). And it does seem to have been a proper katabasis, located in the Bay of Naples. It takes place among the Cimmerians, evoking the original Odyssean Nekyia, and the setting near the tomb of Parthenope points specifically to Ephorus' location of the Cimmerians at Avernus (*FGrH* 70 F 134). Strabo says the oracle was deep in the earth (5, 4, 5; cf. PS.-SCYMN. 240 ὑποχθόνιον μαντεῖον), and it does seem to have involved a literal descent (109b11), in other words was more than a dream.

Dercyllis had someone to teach her (109a40-41 διδασκάλῳ, 109b2 ἀναδιδασκούσῃ). The *Odyssey* had already, in a way, anticipated the theme's apocalyptic potential when Anticleia told Odysseus to return and tell Penelope what he has seen (11, 223-224), but Odysseus did not exactly have his own personal revealer. The fact that Dercyllis does suggests that AD has moved in step with the general direction of travel in apocalyptic literature, and that would be even more true if the maid served as a guide in an underworld journey. That is not the situation presupposed in the *Odyssey*, or in the Myth or Er, but begins to be attested in Virgil,[40] Plutarch (*De sera* 565 E, 566 B), and Lucian (under Christian influence?).[41] Photius does not confirm this, but the fact that Dercyllis was physically present

[39] Narrated by Dercyllis, and hence within the deepest level of the embedding in AD's complex structure. This can be seen as an exaggerated form of the convention already established in the Homeric poems that narrative about the underworld should be in reported speech (SOURVINOU-INWOOD (1995) 14-16).
[40] RADERMACHER (1903) 14-15; BREMMER (2009) 188: perhaps under Jewish influence?

among the Cimmerians and *sees* (ἴδοι) Hades, at the same time as *learning* from the maid, supports it. The contents of the teaching remain elusive. Given the location a Sibyl might have been expected, though a dead maid who was also the victim of Paapis' machinations (PSI 1177) has her own appropriateness. To what extent she purveyed heavy-duty eschatology, even eschatology congruent with the Pythagorean elements later in the novel, I cannot say.

I turn to the Moon Sibyl. Photius almost entirely obfuscates what Deinias and his friends saw. SCHMEDT's commentary (2020) does its best, but Pythagorean elements here are very hard to prove beyond reasonable doubt. Instead I concentrate on the one definite datum, that the Sibyl was located there. This does at least have a discernible background.

From Plutarch's treatise on the obsolescence of the Delphic Oracle we know of a Sibyl who prophesied a three-fold fate after her death.[42] She would become the face in the Moon; her *pneuma* would go into the air and inspire *kledones*; and her body would be eaten by divinatory animals. Phlegon even preserves some of the Sibylline verses from which Plutarch has evidently drawn his legend, though they do not include the lines about the Moon.[43] Conversely, it is the specifically lunar part which is developed both by Plutarch (*De sera* 566 D-E) and apparently also by AD. Plutarch and AD both specifically connect the Moon Sibyl with prophecy and show her engaging in it. But beyond this they are very different. In *De sera* hers is one of three oracles the visionary is shown. He hears her voice as the Moon rushes past, and he is able only to catch it in snatches. In AD, on the other hand, she "resumes" her prophetic art (111a11-12 τὴν μαντικὴν … ἀνέλαβε) after her encounter with the character Carmanes, which

[41] *Ver. hist.* 2, 31 περιηγηταὶ; *Philops.* 25 τὸν ἀγαγόντα με; *Dial. mort*. 6, 1, where Menippus asks Aeacus to guide him around (περιήγησαι) Hades. Note the demonstrative questions and replies (6, 2 οὗτος δέ, ὦ Αἰακέ, τίς ἐστιν; – οὗτος δὲ Κροῖσος; 6, 6 Τίνες δέ εἰσιν οὗτοι οἱ περὶ σέ;), as also in *Menippus* 11 Τίνες οὗτοι, πρὸς Διός;

[42] PLUT. *De Pyth. or.* 398 C-D; re-used by CLEM. *Strom*. 1, 15, 70, 4, who makes her soul the origin of the Moon's face.

[43] PHLEGON, *FGrH* 257 F 37 (V). PARKE (1988) 115-116 takes the lines on the Moon to have formed part of a coda omitted by Phlegon, whose treatise concerns old age.

implies resumption after a lapse[44] – quite the opposite of Plutarch's ὡς οὐδ' ἀποθανοῦσα λήξει μαντικῆς. It is hard to grasp more, but Plutarch's Sibyl, however eccentric, is at least her typical self in *one* respect. That is, she is unbesought: she flings out her prophecies to whoever has ears to hear (PARKE (1988) 7, 10). AD's Sibyl, on the other hand, is unusually responsive to a single individual. In Plutarch, the visionary, in a near-death experience, has the experience mediated to him; in AD, the encounter is novelised, and implicitly more dramatic. In Plutarch, Thespesios catches the voice as the Moon sweeps past, but in AD, the interaction seems to make it likelier that it took place *on*, rather than simply *near*, the Moon (SCHMEDT (2020) 174). Ultimately, this illustrates how very differently the same or very similar material can be appropriated in different genres and authors.[45]

I am not sure how to advance beyond that. This approach has its limitations and frustrations: on top of the dearth of usable lexical data, Photius simply does not give enough away. At the end of the day, despite high hopes for this approach, I feel that I have not reclaimed a great deal more *terra firma* than we had already.

Part 5. **"What is truth?"**

I conclude by widening the focus once again and returning to the volume's big theme – forms and types of fictional narrative that subsist alongside the ideal novel. So far I have been talking about travel fantasies, memoirs, utopias, revelations, and apocalypses. The boundaries between them are porous; they overlap; they may share similar material, but frame it in different ways. My final section concerns these framings – the truth-claims that are made, or evaded; the issue and the rhetoric of authentication.

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[44] ROHDE (1960) 289-290 n. 1.

[45] Another apocalyptic text involving a Sibyl is of course Virgil, who offers vague and drifting comparisons that are hard to pin down – a remote world tenanted by a Sibyl, connected with the Moon to the extent that she is priestess of Hecate as well as Apollo, from which the hero(es) make his/their departure by means of a dream (SCHMEDT (2020) 176-177, 467).

On the one hand, Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic has a repertory of inscenations, some with Old Testament antecedents, such as “the word of the Lord came to”, experiences “in the spirit”, angelic interlocutors and tour-guides, revelations, and dreams (usually narrated in the first person). Not only does this way of proceeding avoid driving a wedge between fantastic report and credence; it occupies a lofty spiritual plane which simply refuses access to questions about veracity.[46] Not so pagan apocalypses and revelations, which are intensely aware of a problematic and the need to address it. Virgil’s gates of ivory certainly do that. (*De facto* they perform a similar function to the use of reported speech for most revelations about the Homeric underworld (n. 39), but go further by actually labelling it false.) Cicero, interestingly, makes Scipio assign his dream to the category which Artemidorus will class as non-predictive, that is, arising from mere daytime experiences, and which Marcus (Cicero’s anti-divination advocate) calls *varia et incerta*.[47] I will shortly explore a complex case in Plutarch.

Credence is a chief issue in classical travelogues. Sometimes it is thematised in the actual title. This was certainly the case in AD,[48] possibly in Antiphanes, and is often picked up in authors that transmit texts that do not survive in the primary tradition, such as Theopompus, by AELIAN (*VH* 3, 18 *sub fin.*); Pytheas, by Polybius (ap. STRAB. 2, 4, 2) and especially STRABO (1, 4, 3; 3, 2, 11; 3, 4, 4); and AD, by Photius.[49] The most extreme example is Lucian, who, purporting to hold himself to strictly veridical standards, crudely sends them up. But it is AD on whom I concentrate, not just as a spectacular instance of authentication by means of pseudo-

[46] Apoc. Paul is a late exception and interesting hybrid, whose author feels the need to mobilise pseudo-documentarism to explain how we have the text detailing Paul’s spiritual experiences. See below.
[47] *Resp.* 6, 10; Artem. 1, 1, 1 (see THONEMANN ad loc.); Cic. *Div.* 2, 128.
[48] On this, and on the novel’s set-up as parody of traditional *Beglaubigungsapparat*, see MORGAN (1998) 3314-3315, (2009) 138 and *passim*.
[49] Less so in Diodorus’ summary of Iambulus (2, 55, 1 τῶν κατ᾽ αὐτὴν παραδοξολογουμένων; 2, 58, 2 ζῷα … παράδοξα; 2, 59, 4 θαυμαστὰ … ἰμάτια and φύσεις … διὰ τὸ παράδοξον ἀπιστουμένας); less still in Proclus’ summary of Clearchus’ imitation of the myth of Er, which involved a near-death experience undergone by Cleodemus of Athens (*In R.* ii. 114, ἱστορίαν … θαυμασίαν).

documentarism[50] – the appeal to fake texts, the rediscovered writing (see §1, p. 000) – but because his subtleties, though acknowledged, probably remain underappreciated. The temptation to gesture at other examples of pseudo-documentarism in literary fiction – as if its presence is conventional, with AD as a merely unusually complex example[51] – should be resisted. Finer discrimination is called for.

The fact that AD's novel is unusual in dealing with *both* the committal of the protagonists' experiences to writing *and* the text's eventual rediscovery is merely the start of it. In some novels (Longus; Achilles Tatius) the perusal of a γραφή or εἰκών in a sacred place is the *impetus* for the retelling of the story.[52] Here, though, the story *precedes* its committal to writing: Deinias tells Cymbas the story and only then exhorts his companion Erasinides to write it down. Oral story precedes text[53] – but once that text has been committed to writing it acquires, if not exactly fixity (MORGAN (2009)), then a status otherwise accorded to sacred treatises. Again, the contrast with other novels is marked: where Xenophon of Ephesus and the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* end with the deposition of paintings or written records in a temple (implying the possibility of ongoing story-telling and a spiralling back to the beginning of yet another narrative), AD reaches for the trope of the text-in-a-tomb that is far more familiar in connection with revelatory literature (sacred laws, oracles, magic, alchemy, Hermetism, star-lore[54]). Indeed if, as Consuelo Ruiz Montero suggested to me, the text came into the hands of AD himself upon rediscovery in the temple in Tyre,[55] this would only strengthen the suggestion of the novel as a text of mystic, revelatory content. Has AD in

[50] SPEYER (1970) 78-79; NÍ MHEALLAIGH (2008) 415-419; MORGAN (2009).
[51] NÍ MHEALLAIGH (2008) 418-419 and n. 42.
[52] A historically plausible scenario: RUIZ MONTERO (2019) 127-132, 136-139.
[53] SUSANETTI (2008) 40 (comparing Plato); BOWIE (2009) 118 = (2023) 678; MORGAN (2009) 132-133; BERNSDORFF (2009) 9, 16, 21.
[54] SPEYER (1970) 110-111 ἱεραὶ βίβλοι.
[55] An explanation is required by the letter to Isidora, although not by that to Faustinus, in which the fiction was exploded. Dictys, otherwise a good parallel for AD, evades the issue: Lucius Septimius writes in the preface that the text simply 'came into his hands' (*nobis cum in manus forte libelli venissent*), not how it did.

fact chosen it for those very associations? The novel's Pythagorean content might have guided his choice.

The closest parallel in literary fiction for the discovery of the text in a grave is the cover-story in Dictys. But the rationale there is perhaps best paralleled by Acusilaus' genealogies (*Suda* α 942; Test. 1 FOWLER) as well as "Manetho"'s Book of Sothis (*BNJ* 609 T 11a), which recounted ancient Egyptian dynasties. In other words, the purpose was to authenticate very ancient history: this in no way undermines my suggestion that AD's choice was guided primarily by its association with sacred texts. In his classic study of the motif, Speyer compared the Numa legend with Dictys and the Apocalypse of Paul to establish the existence of a common scheme,[56] but the (in my view persuasive) conjecture of STEPHENS and WINKLER that the Numa legend (traceable to at least the second century BC) underlies AD's realisation of the motif[57] can perhaps be extended to the rest of the group as well. With other members AD shares an impressive number of details, including the careful notation of the materials of both text and container, and the passing up the chain of command from discoverer to a greater authority figure.[58] At the same time, one watches as a common element is transformed to serve the needs of the text in which it is realised. In the Numa legend, the buried texts were meant to be, and remain, hidden, with the "real" version embodied in the living priests who were orally instructed in their contents (PLUT. *Num.* 22, 2-3). But in AD the idea of a "duplicate" copy[59] is realised quite differently, with the buried version meant to survive, and the text positively inviting rediscovery.[60] Meanwhile Balagros' textual manipulation of the tablets (111b26 μεταγραψάμενος)

[56] SPEYER (1970) 51-65.
[57] STEPHENS and WINKLER (1995) 113.
[58] In AD and Apoc. Paul the text is discovered by a reputable individual, though Hemina ap. PLIN. *HN* 13, 84 already named the *scriba* (as opposed to peasant or shepherd in other sources) who found Numa's grave.
[59] In *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*, Redactio B, 51 (p. 82.25-27) and C, 51 (p. 136.13-15 SCHMELING) one copy of the narrative of Apollonius' *casus* is deposited in the temple of Artemis, the other *in bibliotheca sua* (presumably Apollonius' private library). Double copies are made at the time of transcription in Apoc. Paul (the emperor keeps the original and sends a copy to Jerusalem; or *vice versa*); see BREMMER (2017) 298-299.
[60] Like the Andanian mystery inscription (PAUS. 4, 26, 7-8).

keeps alive the motif of transcription of ancient material – not, however, from an ancient language or script, but in keeping with the work's apparent thematisation of the multi-staged genesis of the eventual text.[61] The "wonder" motif on the inscription accompanying the tablets («Ὦ ξένε, ὅστις εἶ, ἄνοιξον, ἵνα μάθῃς ἃ θαυμάζεις») is a detail unique to this novel.

One last example of complexity, but of a different sort. This is Plutarch's *De fac.*, which ends with Sulla's story of an island in the far west and a continent beyond it, the home of a stranger who will eventually come to Carthage and deliver the concluding eschatological discourse on the Moon and its special affinity for the soul. The source of the complexity is not the intricate deployment of a particular motif (pseudo-documentarism, as in AD), but rather the deliberately mixed messages, inducing perplexity in the interpreter. We might expect a Platonic disclaimer, but Sulla's story begins by calling itself, not a μῦθος (which he uses for the *previous* discourse), but a δρᾶμα (interestingly, a label which can also be used of the novel[62]), with σκηνή and διάθεσις, thereby making himself ὑποκριτής of someone else's composition (940 F-941 A). Whose? It seems unlikely to be the stranger,[63] who has not yet been introduced (942 B ὁ ξένος), and besides, the focalisation of the story is Greek; but otherwise we are in the dark. Plutarch also (in my view deliberately) creates a minor enigma about the source of the stranger's own wisdom, which first seems connected with some rediscovered[64] parchments that had been squirreled away when the previous city of Carthage had been destroyed (942 C), but then turns out to come from the priests of Cronos, ie. his servitors on the utopian Atlantic island where the stranger had himself served for thirty

[61] MORGAN (2009) 134. Texts discovered in temples are more often in need of translation/transcription than those discovered in graves, though an inscription at Alcmene grave's was in Egyptian characters (PLUT. *Gen. Socr.* 577 F). μεταγράφεσθαι is also the verb used when Hermas makes a copy of the βιβλίδιον given him in his vision (*Vis.* 5 [II, 1], 3-4).
[62] PHOTIUS, *Bibl.* 109a7 (FUSILLO (1990) 81 n. 1), and by him credited to AD himself (111a34). Sulla's use of the term gains interest in light of the novelistic register discernible in other Plutarchan embedded narratives (TARRANT (2013) on *De gen.*: *De fac.* might profitably be examined in a similar way).
[63] LERNOULD (2013) n. 357; LESAGE GÁRRIGA (2021) 181.
[64] But not by the God himself (*pace* SPEYER (1970) 78).

years (941 E, 942 B);[65] this leaves us unclear whether the source is Carthaginian, exoceanic, or what. And finally, the tone is uneven. *Vis-à-vis* Plato's myths it is both pitched higher (insofar as the revelatory discourse comes closer to apocalyptic proper) but also has a more crashing return to earth when Sulla concludes with a throwaway remark ("Make of it what you will") markedly more abrupt than Plato's more managed returns to reality. The whole thing looks like a deliberate confection of revelatory discourse and travel fiction – not simply one nested within another, but something that successfully confuses us as to what we are reading, what canons to judge it by, what kind of a beast it actually is.[66]

What to conclude? The huge chasm between the magisterial authority of apocalyptic, on the one hand, and, on the other, lip-service to documentation, to the standards of historiography, all the better to send them up, can nevertheless be bridged and breached by subtle deployments of the available codes. The pseudo-document is borrowed to very different effect by AD and by Apoc. Paul; Plutarch employs it too, only to override it with a still-greater authority which his narrator nevertheless refuses to endorse. To return to the idea of the contract between author and reader, its terms are not always as clear or straightforward as the simple opposition between fiction and apocalyptic might imply, and – particularly in AD's case – require a reader adept and literate in their conventions.

Conclusions

I have sought to locate the novel – at least, one kind of novel – in the context of other kinds of fictional narrative circulating in the late Hellenistic and early imperial periods. To do so I have adopted a number of methods. Each has strengths and weaknesses. Pure comparativism

[65] NÍ MHEALLAIGH (2020) 189-190 n. 125 gives a sympathetic account of the double source.
[66] Note the artful dovetailing of utopia and apocalypse. The island of Cronos is a Utopia, and utopias are usually presented as narrative of the traveller's direct experience. But the stranger's role is deferred (merely 'he said' in 942 B [parenthetical], 942 C) until he can make a still more impressive contribution in the form of his closing eschatological discourse.

(Part 1) is potentially rich – my account has only scratched the surface – but quick wins may be superficial, and this approach needs a lot of philological work and methodological rigour to keep it grounded. The diachronic study outlined in Part 2 shows promise and I felt on firmer methodological ground: one can follow Plato's influence on Cicero and Plutarch and observe developments. Much the same applies to part 3 (variants on a motif), although this worked more as a study of a suite of possibilities than as an evolutionary trajectory. Part 4 was frustrating because of AD's secondary transmission. Photius' summary is both a strength and a weakness: it encourages a schematism which is enticing but hard to see beyond. We do, though, seem to discern vocabulary which distinguishes the various levels of the text in terms of fictionality and the level of reality they claim to inhabit. That led to Part 5, which considers questions of truth and authentication across the particular motif of pseudo-documentarism. (I had originally wanted to write a whole paper called "What is truth?". This is what was left of it.)

So: the subject has an inviting range of possibilities. The gains are in both clarity and complexity. Clarity, because one can begin to trace diachronic developments and discern with increasingly sharpness the contours of an emerging apocalyptic genre and associated motifs. Complexity, because one discerns the presence of multiple genres or modes within texts, the ability of like material to be inflected in different ways, and above all because in so doing one runs up against the perennial problem of how to conduct cross-cultural comparisons. But I feel that I have unwittingly embarked on a book-length project.

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