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Paul's Interlocutor in Romans 2

Function and Identity
in the Context of Ancient Epistolography

RUNAR M. THORSTEINSSON

Abstract

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Romans 2 has long been a *crux interpretum*. Among matters of dispute is the function and identity of Paul's interlocutor(s) in the chapter. While scholars agree that the individual addressed in 2:17–29 is a Jew, there is no such consensus with respect to the identity of the person addressed in 2:1–5. On the one hand, the scholarly majority holds that this person is depicted as a Jew and that the same interlocutor is involved throughout the chapter. A weighty minority, on the other hand, argues that the individual addressed in 2:1–5 is a gentile and that there is a shift of interlocutor in 2:17. The former interpretation largely fails to do justice to a linear reading of the letter, whereas the latter appears to neglect the continuous and progressive flow of Paul's discourse in chapter 2. A fresh approach is needed in which these shortcomings are addressed.

This study seeks to allow the larger context and framework of Romans to be of help in assessing the function and identity of Paul's interlocutor(s) in chapter 2. The epistolary structure and setting of Romans is first investigated in order to determine what factors relating to that structure and setting may inform us about the relationship between Paul and the Roman recipients. The identity of the people to whom Paul wrote his letter is then considered. The utilization of interlocutors by Greco-Roman epistolographers is also assessed and compared to Paul's use of a dialogical style in Romans 2–11. In view of these aspects of the larger context and framework of the letter, an attempt is made to ascertain the function and identity of Paul's interlocutor(s) in Romans 2.

It is concluded that Paul wrote Romans to a particular group of people in a specific, contemporaneous situation. The letter's message arose out of the relationship between Paul as an apostle to the gentiles and the Roman audience as subject to this commission of his. Paul wrote the letter exclusively to people of non-Jewish origin. His use of a dialogical style in Romans 2–11 has parallels in other letters from Greco-Roman antiquity, in which fictitious interlocutors normally represent or speak for the letter's recipient(s) and remain the same throughout the discourse. A linear reading of Romans 1–2 strongly suggests that Paul's interlocutor in 2:1–5 is a gentile, and that the address to this very person is resumed in 2:17. Contrary to common opinion, the imaginary individual addressed in 2:17–29 is not a (native) Jew, but a gentile who wants to call himself a Jew. The Roman readers are meant to correlate their own views with the gentile interlocutor's.

Key Words

Preface

"'His letters,' they say, 'are weighty and powerful'" (2 Cor 10:10). Though "absent in body," Paul the apostle has been "present in spirit" (1 Cor 5:3) for little less than twenty centuries through his weighty and powerful letters. This doctoral dissertation is the result of my wrestling with Paul's most fascinating, influential, and yet intricate text—his letter to the Romans.

A number of people have added to the quality of this study and made its publication possible. It is a joy to have the opportunity to express my thanks to them in writing. Above all, I wish to thank my supervisor, Prof. Birger Olsson (now em.), whose experienced scholarship, open-mindedness, and constant encouragement has proved to be invaluable to me during both the preparation and composition of this dissertation. A wholehearted man, he has been a true *Doktorvater*. For that I am deeply grateful.

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To Silla

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Chapter Two

Introduction

> *The relationship between Paul and the con-*
> *gregation at Rome seems to be other than*
> *scholars have assumed, and no simple re-*
> *adjustment of our old notions is likely to bring*
> *it into focus. . . . [S]omething in our usual in-*
> *terpretation of Romans is wrong.*[1]

1. Paul's Interlocutor(s) in Romans 2: The Scholarly Debate

As "one of the most puzzling pieces of Pauline writing,"[2] Romans 2 has
long stood up to scholarly efforts to explain both its meaning and presence
in Paul's letter. Because it does not easily "fit the system,"[3] this "stumbling-
block for the Lutheran interpretation of Paul"[4] and "Achilles heel of
schemes on Paul and the Law"[5] has repeatedly been set aside in Pauline
studies. In his survey of the history of interpretation of the chapter, Klyne
R. Snodgrass remarks that "even where this text has been discussed, more
time has been spent explaining the text *away* than explaining it."[6] This is

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[1] Mullins, "Greeting" (1968) 426.
[2] Segal, *Paul* (1990) 258.
[3] See Snodgrass, "Justification" (1986) 72–73.
[4] Watson, *Paul* (1986) 109. Cf. Boyarin, *Jew* (1994) 87: "a stone ignored by the
     builders of Reformation Paulinism."
[5] Wright, "Law" (1996) 132.
[6] "Justification" (1986) 73 (emphasis his). Snodgrass also notes: "An important cri-
     terion by which any explanation of Paul's thought or of Romans can be judged is
     the question 'What does the explanation do with the pieces that do not fit?' The

the case, for example, in E. P. Sanders' influential work *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* in which he treats Romans 2 separately in an appendix, viewing it as a non-Pauline synagogue sermon incompatible with the rest of Paul's thought. "[W]hy is the chapter in Romans at all?" he wonders.[7] Many a commentator on Paul's letter pays no more than obligatory attention to its second chapter which, as Snodgrass complains, "has often been lost in the shuffle as people move quickly from the description of human sin in 1.18 f. to the proclamation of the righteousness of God in 3.21 f."[8] Or, as Stanley K. Stowers puts it, "[c]ommentators are so clear about their destination at 3:9 ('all are sinners in need of Christ') that they tend to fly over chapter 2 quickly and at a high altitude, seeing only the message of 3:9 being worked out."[9] No wonder N. T. Wright calls Romans 2 "the joker in the pack."[10]

The problems encountered in Romans 2 are diverse. Not only does the chapter contain viewpoints which have widely been regarded as incongruous both with other parts of the letter and with "Pauline thought" at large, but the presence of a conversational partner or partners whom Paul addresses directly in the chapter has also given rise to an unsettled scholarly debate. The way in which this or these interlocutors were meant to function for Paul's audience, the relationship between the person addressed in

pieces that do not appear to fit are telling criticisms of the inadequacy of our 'systems'. When pieces have been omitted, other components of the 'system' are stretched and overworked, and as a result various problems emerge because the whole 'system' is thrown off balance" (p. 72).

[7] *Paul* (1983) 123–35 (quotation on p. 131). More specifically, Sanders takes 1:18–2:29 to constitute such a sermon. According to him, there are not only "internal inconsistencies within the section" but "chapter 2 cannot be harmonized with any of the diverse things which Paul says about the law elsewhere" (p. 123). Further, there is "no distinctively Pauline imprint in 1:18–2:29, apart from the tag in 2:16. Christians are not in mind, the Christian viewpoint plays no role, and the entire chapter is written from a Jewish perspective" (p. 129). In other words, "in Romans 2 we are dealing with a point of view which at no point reflects specifically Christian thinking" (pp. 131–32).

[8] "Justification" (1986) 72.
[9] *Rereading* (1994) 126.
[10] "Law" (1996) 131.

2:1–5 and the one addressed in 2:17–29, and especially the identity of this or these individuals is currently a matter of dispute. While all facets of Romans 2 are textually interrelated, the present study will mainly be concerned with the function and identity of Paul's interlocutor(s) in the chapter.

Until recently, most readers of Romans have been comfortably content with the centuries old Christian tradition of taking chapter 2 as Paul's cutting critique of Jews and Judaism. C. H. Dodd, for instance, claimed in his comments on Romans 2 some seventy years ago that there is "evidence enough of the terrible degradation of Jewish morals in the period preceding the Destruction of the Temple."[11] Several decades later, Herman Ridderbos spoke of Romans 2:1–3:20 as "the great indictment of Judaism," the section in 2:1–12 being a "telling accusation."[12] Even today, one may come across the view that Romans 2 is "perhaps the most extensive and direct critique of Jews and Judaism in the letters of Paul."[13] However, due to an enriched knowledge of Second Temple Judaism and growing awareness of Paul's own Jewishness as well as greater acknowledgment of his mission being aimed (primarily) at non-Jews, scholars are now gradually beginning to recognize the inadequacy of such readings.

And yet, old perspectives still prevail. Although few would consent to Dodd's unfounded claims about pre-70 C.E. Jewish morality, a number of scholars tend to read Romans 2 through the lens of Jesus' censure of "hypocritical Pharisees" recorded in Christian writings of a later date, which by generalization is then applied to Jews at large. Thus, James D. G. Dunn holds that Paul's interlocutor throughout Romans 2 is "the typical Jew . . . that is, the Jew per se," whose views are largely "applicable to the sort of attitude among the Pharisees already criticized within the Jesus tradition." Paul is attacking "what he sees to be a typically Jewish attitude," viz. that of the pre-Christian Paul himself, "Paul the unconverted Pharisee."[14] Similarly, Wright asserts that "[i]n addressing 'the Jew' [in 2:17]

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[11] *Romans* (1932) 39.
[12] Cited in Sanders, *Paul* (1983) 124.
[13] Carras, "Romans 2,1–29" (1992) 185.
[14] *Romans* (1988) 1.80, 90–91, 109. See further Ch. 4 sec. 2.2.1 below.

Paul was, of course, talking to his own former self."[15] The image of the "self-righteous Jew"[16] is so fixed that even a prominent scholar such as C. E. B. Cranfield finds it only "natural to assume that Paul is apostrophizing the typical Jew in 2.1ff," considering it "clear" also that Paul is addressing such a "typical Jew" in 2:17–29.[17] But if this has seemed clear to commentators, the question whether the Jewish interlocutor was meant to represent the Jewish nation as a whole or just a portion of it has not. Indeed, how some of Paul's charges against the interlocutor in 2:17–29 could either have applied to Jews at large or to specific Jewish groups or to certain individuals is a well-known point of controversy.

Whereas opinions differ on the representative function of the interlocutor in 2:17–29, all seem to agree that this person is depicted as a Jew. What is disputed is whether or not this "Jew" is already in view in 2:1–5. The scholarly majority holds that, subsequent to the indictment (mainly) of gentiles in 1:18–32, Paul addresses a Jewish interlocutor in 2:1, the identity of whom becomes explicit in 2:17 with the word Ἰουδαῖος.[18] A weighty minority, however, argues that the person addressed in 2:1–5 is not a Jew but a gentile, and that it is first in 2:17 that Paul aims his words at a Jewish interlocutor.[19] The main problem with the former approach is its neglect of reading the text linearly, neither providing any adequate explanation of the logical connection between 2:1 and the foregoing nor offering legitimate reasons for reading the "Jew" of 2:17–29 back into 2:1–5. The latter approach, on the other hand, fails to account for the relationship between the persons addressed in 2:1–5 and 2:17–29, largely overlooking the continuous and progressive flow of the text. Neither approach pays sufficient attention to the wording εἰ δὲ σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ἐπονομάζῃ in 2:17 within its immediate context. I will attempt to meet these flaws in my reading of Romans 2 in this dissertation.

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[15] "Letter" (2002) 445. Cf. Wilckens, *Römer* (1978) 1.151; McKnight, *Light* (1991) 105, 153 n. 21.

[16] Barrett, *Romans* (1957) 55.

[17] *Romans* (1975) 1.137–38.

[18] So most standard commentaries. The scholarly discussion will be presented in more details in Ch. 4 below.

[19] See esp. Elliott, *Rhetoric* (1990); Stowers, *Rereading* (1994).

But interpretations of Romans 2 are not only entangled by certain pre-suppositions about Jews and Judaism and polarized approaches to the text. They are further complicated by widespread disagreements about the form and function of Paul's letter as a whole, its occasion and purpose, and its intended audience. Furthermore, although interpreters customarily note that Paul is utilizing the literary technique of the Greco-Roman "diatribe" in chapter 2, few pay much heed to the question what that in effect means for Paul's discourse, for what purposes this technique was used in antiquity, and how it was employed in letters specifically. All these features relate to the function and identity of Paul's interlocutor(s) in Romans 2 and must therefore be attended to. Since the functional aspect has been well treated by others,[20] and because the scholarly debate centers upon the question of identity, it is chiefly the latter that will be under scrutiny in this study.

2. A Macrostructural, Author-Audience Relational Approach:
The Context of Ancient Epistolography

In my approach to Romans 2, the letter's larger context and framework are allowed to carry considerable weight. That means that features such as the letter's macrostructure (i.e. the way in which the letter functions as a whole), the letter's original setting, its intended audience, and specific liter-ary traits are taken into account as decisive for determining the function and identity of Paul's interlocutor(s). In other words, the part focused upon is taken to be largely conditioned by the whole,[21] the latter of which per-

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[20] Esp. Stowers, *Diatribe* (1981). See further Ch. 3 below.

[21] Of course, one has to be conscious of the circular processes inevitably present in readings of ancient texts like Rom. For instance, while the text's parts must be un-derstood in terms of the whole, an understanding of the text as a whole is depend-ent upon the parts. Such "hermeneutical circles" or, more accurately, "spirals" can never be fully avoided, but it is important to be aware of their potential effect on the course of reading. See further the fine discussion in Dunn, "Exposition" (2003) 153–55. He concludes: "As readers of biblical texts which are also histori-cal texts . . . we need not despair over the hermeneutical circle but can hope to

tains not only to the text itself but also to the historical and literary context within which it was written. This study is therefore a study not only of a single chapter in Romans but of many aspects of the letter as a whole as well.

In general terms, as soon as any given author has chosen a particular literary genre, he or she has created or, more accurately, entered an environment that affects the form, function, and content of the text. This is because "[g]eneric structures are not merely a matter of convention, but exhibit a rationale which allows one to recognize certain elements as appropriate in relation to others."[22] The readers, in turn, recognize the genre concerned and its boundaries, and expect the text's more specific details to be relevant to its larger framework. These expectations heavily influence their understanding of the text's constituent parts. As E. D. Hirsch observes, the readers' "notion of the meaning as a whole grounds and helps determine [their] understanding of details."[23] According to Hirsch, communication between the text's author and readers is made possible by a system of expectations. In order to understand the text as the author wanted it to be understood,[24] the readers must proceed under the same system of ex-

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find that the reality of a historical-critical, self-critical, community-critical scrutiny of these texts can and does provide a growing appreciation and understanding of why they were written, what they must have conveyed to their first auditors and readers, and how they may still be expected to function today" (p. 155).

[22] Buss, "Principles" (1980) 77. Cf. Reed, *Discourse* (1997) 153: "[S]tructure creates predictability, allowing the reader to recognize the type of discourse being spoken of and, in turn, to use other similar discourses as a schema for interpreting the immediate one."

[23] *Validity* (1967) 72.

[24] With respect to Paul's letter, I agree with Dabourne that "[w]hile authorial intention can be placed low in considering the meaning of literary texts, it is much more important for letters, like Romans, which are direct communication from one person to particular others" (*Purpose* [1999] 80). Her earlier, more general observation that "[t]he author created a text consisting of these words in this order in the process of carrying out a particular purpose" (p. 42) is well to the point for a text like Rom. In his discussion of "the intentional fallacy," Dunn states that "it is neither desirable nor necessary to dispense with the concept of authorial intention, but the realistic goal is the authorial intention *as entextualized*. . . . It is the text as

pectations as the author. This shared generic conception is a structural necessity in communication, viz. "that sense of the whole by means of which an interpreter can correctly understand any part in its determinacy."[25]

In his discussion of the literary environment of New Testament writings, David E. Aune underlines not only this conditioning of the part by the whole but also the social implications inherent in conventional literary genres and constituent forms:

> Literary genres and forms are not simply neutral containers used as convenient ways to package various types of written communication. They are social conventions that provide contextual meaning for the smaller units of language and text they enclose. The original significance that a literary text had for both author and reader is tied to the genre of that text, so that the meaning of the part is dependent upon the meaning of the whole.[26]

"Genre" can be a tricky term, to be sure, not least because of its various applications in scholarly works.[27] Furthermore, as Harry Y. Gamble points

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embodying that intention, as a communicative act between author and intended readers/auditors, to which attention is to be given" ("Exposition" [2003] 151; emphasis his). As Buss, "Principles" (1980) 76, rightly remarks, "there is an inner or logical connection between what is said and what the speaker seeks to accomplish in a situation presupposed."

25 *Validity* (1967) 86.
26 *New Testament* (1987) 13.
27 While it is not of immediate interest for the present study to engage in the scholarly discussion of the term, the analytical advantage of defining genre in broad terms and making a primary distinction between literary genres and literary forms may be noted. For instance, whereas the NT contains four major literary genres (gospels, acts, letters, and apocalypse), each one of these genres may include variety of literary forms; cf. Doty, *Letters* (1973) 53: "[T]he largest category we take to be the genre, as 'the epistolary genre.' Within the genre are various stylistic traits, characteristic forms, and recurring types." So also Aune, *New Testament* (1987) 13; Pearson and Porter, "Genres" (1997) 134; Reiser, *Sprache* (2001) 92–97. Differently, e.g., Bailey and Vander Broek, *Forms* (1992), who speak simultaneously of, e.g., ancient letters, specific types of letters, the so-called "paraenesis," the Greco-Roman "diatribe," the author's "visit plans," letter openings, salutations, and doxologies, as "literary forms" (see pp. 15–16, 23–26, 28, 38–39, 62–63, 72–75).

out, genre "can only be inferred through literary analysis and comparison of the texts themselves, and even this rarely produces a clean definition." However, Gamble is right in his subsequent assessment:

> Nevertheless, genre is presupposed in the act of writing and in the act of reading, and though they may not correspond absolutely, the aims of writing and reading can meet only if recognizable generic signs are provided either in the text or in the situation where the text is received and read, or both. A sense of the genre of any particular text is essential to its comprehension: the reader must be able to judge what sort of writing is being read.[28]

The epistolary genre constituted a common form of medium in Greco-Roman antiquity, primarily serving as a written communication between two or more individuals who were separated by distance[29] or by social status.[30] Basically, the letter's purpose was to a) make, enhance, or maintain contact, b) to provide information, and c) to make requests or to give instructions or commands.[31] Purposes such as these could easily overlap and each one of them was dependent on the relationship between the sender(s) and recipient(s). The nature of this relationship was cardinal for epistolary communication in general.

When Paul penned his message to the Roman recipients he entered a literary milieu in which certain conventions of structure were regularly followed, and within which formulaic expressions were characteristically employed to convey the message concerned and to give it a proper literary as well as social framework. The way in which conventional epistolary formulas were used was often an expression in itself. Not only could the author's use of such fixed language facilitate the reading and reception of the letter's message but also affect the relationship between the correspondents. Furthermore, employments of epistolary formulas often disclose the nature of

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[28] *Books* (1995) 38.

[29] Cicero states: "That there are many different categories (*genera*) of letters you are aware. But the most authentic, the purpose in fact for which letter-writing was invented, is to inform the absent of what it is desirable for them to know, whether in our interest or their own" (*Fam.* 48.1). Cf. *Quint. fratr.* 1.37.

[30] As rightly pointed out by Aune, *New Testament* (1987) 158.

[31] Cf. Dahl, "Letter" (1976) 539; White, "Greek Letters" (1988) 95.

this relationship as presupposed by the author. Few literary genres register the relationship between an author and a reader so well as letters normally do. Uses of common epistolary expressions are also informative of the specific setting in which a letter was written,[32] and of the immediate epistolary situation.[33] That setting and situation, in turn, can provide further clues about the connection existing between an author and an audience, as well as the letter's occasion and purpose.

Every component part of Paul's message in Romans is more or less affected by the letter's larger context and framework, and especially by Paul's relationship with his audience. Paul's own identity, as it is presented in Romans, and his choice and use of specific literary forms within the letter are interrelated. To be more specific, Paul's application of certain fixed phrases, whether they were considered obligatory or optional for the epistolary medium, and his preference for certain forms of expression rather than others are all potential indicators of his actual or claimed status vis-à-vis the audience. It is precisely this status which decides both the choice and use of such expressions. The identity of the audience is even more important. No matter if it concerns the letter's form, function, or content, it must con-

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[32] Epistolary settings in Greco-Roman antiquity were basically of three kinds: 1) normative, 2) extended, and 3) fictitious, differing "according to the degree to which the correspondents and the contexts move from reality to imaginary construct" (Stirewalt, *Studies* [1993] 1–2). Briefly speaking, the first category applies to genuine letters, written to and meant to be read by a particular audience whose identity is explicitly notified in the letter; the second includes those by which the author intends to communicate with a wider audience than those explicitly identified in the letter; the third category pertains to pseudonymous letters with little or no contemporary relevance. See further in Ch. 1 sec. 4.2 below.

[33] While the two are closely related, the term "epistolary situation" is here used somewhat more narrowly than "epistolary setting" (see the previous n.), the former being more historically oriented: "In its widest sense it denotes the entire historical background in which writer and addressee are united. In its strictest sense it denotes the specific problems existing between and uniting the sender and the recipient in a unique and exclusive relationship. The letter is then the specific means through which these specific problems are being dealt with" (Schubert, "Form" [1939] 376).

tinually be kept in mind that Romans is necessarily contingent upon and shaped by the identity of those to whom it was written.

All this is of significance for the reading of Romans 2. The question both of function and identity of the interlocutor(s) in the chapter is largely defined by such broader aspects as the letter's epistolary structure and setting, and the relationship between Paul and his intended audience. These aspects may provide some answers—or at least limit the scope of potential answers—to the questions why and for what purpose Paul chose to address a certain individual or individuals in Romans 2, and who this or these persons were. Hence, before focusing specifically upon chapter 2 in the letter, it is useful, if not requisite, to attend first to some basic features relating to the letter's larger context and framework, which then are allowed to be of help in ascertaining the function and identity of Paul's interlocutor(s) in Romans 2. That is what I intend to do in the present study.

3. The Procedure of the Study

The following study will proceed from the whole to the part.[34] More specifically, within the range of focus specified above, the subject of the study will be gradually narrowed from the larger context and framework of Romans to one of the letter's more particular elements, namely, Paul's interlocutor(s) in chapter 2.

Chapter One deals with the largest category concerned, viz. the epistolary genre and Paul's letter to the Romans within that context. After a survey of epistolary structure in Greco-Roman antiquity (sec. 1), the question whether Paul divided his letters formally into three, four, or five parts is briefly discussed (sec. 2). In section 3, which occupies the bulk of the chap-

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[34] Although differing in many details, the approach taken here has some basic commonalities with the "top-down" approach recently advocated by some discourse analysts. Cf. esp. Reed's study of Paul's letter to the Philippians (*Discourse* [1997]). Reed observes: "If possible, the analyst is better off identifying the genre of the text before moving to an analysis of its parts, that is, starting from the top and then working downwards" (p. 28).

ter, Romans is analyzed in terms of its epistolary structure, and conventional epistolary expressions investigated with respect specifically to the question what these may inform of the relationship between the letter's sender and recipients. This relationship is also in view in the final main section (sec. 4) where the epistolary setting of Romans is determined and weighed.

Chapter Two focuses upon the question with whom Paul intended to communicate by his letter. The chapter includes two main sections. In section 1 the scholarly discussion is scanned, and certain presuppositions prevailing in studies of Paul's audience, mostly based on external evidence, are confronted. In section 2 the information provided by Romans itself about its audience is brought to light and assessed.

In Chapter Three the scope of inquiry is demarcated to Paul's use of a dialogical style in Romans 2–11, which closely resembles the Greco-Roman "diatribe." The first section presents some basic characteristics of the "diatribe" style and discusses some difficulties involved in identifying "diatribal" interlocutors in lectures and speeches as compared to letters. In section 2 the dialogical nature of the epistolary medium is considered, and in section 3 some of the ways in which interlocutors were employed in Greco-Roman letters are explored, both with regard to form, function, and identity. In that light, and as a prelude to the final chapter, section 4 addresses the question of the macrostructural significance of the dialogical style in Romans 2–11.

Chapter Four constitutes the kernel of this study and the point at which the preceding chapters are aimed, namely, a detailed discussion of Paul's interlocutor(s) in Romans 2. First to be analyzed is the text's coherence and argumentative flow (sec. 1). Section 2 offers a linear reading of Romans 2 in which the identity of Paul's interlocutor(s) is the central issue. While the question of function is not always easily separated from that of identity, and thus also addressed in section 2, section 3 focuses specifically on the functional aspect. The final section (sec. 4) draws attention to some of the implications of the present study on Romans 2 for Paul's discourse in subsequent chapters of the letter.

Each of Chapters One to Four begins with an introduction of the issue under discussion. Concluding summaries are given at the end of Chapters

One to Three, whereas Chapter Four is summarized in the general Conclusions. When necessary, certain key terms will be discussed or defined as they appear.

Chapter One

The Epistolary Structure and
Setting of Romans

Introduction

As a surrogate for oral communication the epistolary medium was some-
times likened to an actual conversation between people,[1] and could prop-
erly be described as a "written means of keeping oral conversation in mo-
tion."[2] Letters were normally—but not always—read aloud in Greco-
Roman antiquity,[3] a procedure which may have strengthened the notion of
letter reading as a "speech event."[4] This oral character of letters makes
many of them open for rhetorical analysis. Indeed, it has been claimed that
most, if not all, forms of literature in antiquity were deeply influenced by
rhetorical theory and practice.[5] Recent analyses of letters like Paul's in
terms of rhetoric, whether ancient or modern, have also yielded many use-
ful results.

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[1] See further Ch. 3 sec. 2 below.

[2] White, "Documentary" (1981) 91.

[3] See Achtemeier, "*Omne*" (1990) 9–19. His discussion of the practice of reading in
antiquity, however, must be corrected by Gilliard, "Silent" (1993). As Gilliard
shows, Achtemeier's assertions that "the general—indeed, from all evidence, the
exclusive—practice was to read aloud" (p. 15), that "even solitary readers, reading
only to themselves, read aloud" (p. 16), and that reading was therefore "oral per-
formance *whenever* it occurred and in whatever circumstances" (p. 17; his italics),
do not speak for the evidence.

[4] Keck, "*Pathos*" (2001) 77–87, with respect to Paul's letter to the Romans.

[5] So, e.g., Schneider, "Brief" (1954) 570; Aune, *New Testament* (1987) 158; Ken-
nedy, "Genres" (1997) 43-50.

However, rhetorical analysis of ancient letters should not be pressed too far. Letters were letters and not speeches. There are several signs of correlations between the two modes of communication, especially in matters of style,[6] but the effect of rhetoric on letter writing appears to have pertained to function rather than to form. In other words, while epistolographers may have adapted functional features from rhetorical theory and practice, they did not write their letters according to formal arrangement (*dispositio*)[7] of rhetorical speeches.[8] Exceptions to this are notably rare.[9] As Stanley K. Stowers observes,

> [l]etter writing remained only on the fringes of formal rhetorical education throughout antiquity. It was never integrated into the rhetorical systems and thus

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[6] See Classen, "Paulus" (1991); idem, *Rhetorical* (2000) 1–28; Porter, "Theoretical" (1993); Stamps, "Rhetorical" (1995) 141–48; Reed, "Epistle" (1997) 182–86, 190-92. For examples and overview of theories of style in classical rhetoric, see Rowe, "Style" (1997). Cf. also Russell, *Criticism* (1981) 129–47. For examples of stylistic features in the Pauline letters as potential parallels to those found in the ancient rhetorical handbooks, see Porter, "Paul" (1997) 576–85.

[7] The Latin term *dispositio* is normally used in scholarly discussions of classical rhetoric. The ancients, however, used several terms for rhetorical arrangement. Most frequently, the Romans used *dispositio*, *compositio*, or *ordo*, corresponding to διάθεσις, οἰκονομία, and τάξις among the Greeks. See Wuellner, "Arrangement" (1997) 51–52.

[8] While the areas of rhetorical argumentation (*inventio*/εὕρεσις) (see Eriksson, *Traditions* [1998] 30–72) and especially style (*elocutio*/λέξις) (see n. 6) can be helpful in analyses of Paul's letters, attempts to analyze them according to rhetorical *dispositio* are methodologically suspect. See esp. Reed, "Epistle" (1997). Cf. also idem, "Using" (1993); idem, *Discourse* (1997) 156–65; Stamps, "Rhetorical" (1995) 147–48; Kern, *Rhetoric* (1998) 30–34; Klauck, *Briefliteratur* (1998) 176–80; Porter, "Epistolographer" (1999) 226–34; Classen, *Rhetorical* (2000) 23–27; Weima, "Epistolary" (2000) 328–29. Similar observations are made, e.g., by du Toit, "Persuasion" (1989) 193–96; Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul* (1995) 77–86; Anderson, *Rhetorical* (1996) 100–109, Müller, *Schluß* (1997) 36–54; Dabourne, *Purpose* (1999) 87–90; Mitternacht, *Forum* (1999) 156–68; Nanos, *Irony* (2002) 323–31, with respect to Paul's letters specifically.

[9] Among possible exceptions are Demosthenes' *Epp.* 1–4; see further Reed, "Epistle" (1997) 186–90; Anderson, *Rhetorical* (1996) 105–8.

does not appear in the standard handbooks. This means there were never any de-
tailed systematic rules for letters, as there were for standard rhetorical forms. The
rules for certain types of speeches, however, were adapted for use in correspond-
ing letter types.[10]

The somewhat distinct settings of letters and rhetorical speeches, as well as
the basically different communicative mode involved, can partly explain the
above fact. Rhetorical speeches were mainly intended for courtrooms and
political or public assemblies, involving immediate contact between par-
ticipants. Letters, on the other hand, served as a means for verbal exchange
between individuals or groups of people unable to communicate face to
face. Thus, the fourth century C.E. rhetorician, Julius Victor, advised:
"[A]void obscurity more assiduously [in letters] than you do in speeches
(*oratione*) and conversation (*sermocinando*). For while you can ask someone
who is speaking unclearly to elucidate his point, it is altogether impossible
in correspondence when the party is absent (*in absentium epistolis non da-
tur*)."[11] Even Demosthenes, "the true model and exemplar of oratory,"[12]
pointed up this difference between the presence and absence of the author.
In a letter to the Athenian council and assembly, he wrote:

> It is a difficult thing, I know, for advice conveyed by letter (ἐπιστολῆς) to hold
> its ground, because you Athenians have a way of opposing many suggestions
> without waiting to understand them. In the case of a speaker (λέγοντι μέν), of
> course, it is possible to perceive what you want and easy to correct your misap-

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[10] *Letter* (1986) 34. Cf. on p. 52: "The classification of letter types according to the
three species of rhetoric [i.e. judicial, deliberative, and epideictic] only partially
works. This is because the letter-writing tradition was essentially independent of
rhetoric." Cf. also Malherbe, *Epistolary* (1988) 2: "Epistolary theory in antiquity
belonged to the domain of the rhetoricians, but it was not originally part of their
theoretical systems. It is absent from the earliest extant rhetorical handbooks, and
it only gradually made its way into the genre." A useful summary discussion of the
three species of rhetoric (and others) may be found in Kennedy's "Genres" (1997).

[11] *Rhet.* 27.

[12] Pliny, *Ep.* 9.26.8.

prehensions; but the written page (τὸ δὲ βιβλίον) possesses no such aid against those who raise a clamour.[13]

While the use of letters originated in administrative practices—and this is perhaps the clearest example of common settings for letters and rhetorical speeches[14]—the letter was eventually adopted as a common genre also of familial and personal correspondence.[15] Moreover, the fundamental difference between oral and written communication should not be overlooked,[16] even though letters were usually read aloud and frequently likened to actual dialogues. This difference is recognized, for instance, in Demetrius' *De elocutione*, the earliest extant rhetorical work that discusses letter writing.[17] Responding to the view of Artemon, the editor of Aristotle's letters, that "a letter ought to be written in the same manner as a dialogue (διάλογον)," Demetrius urges that the letter "should be a little more studied (ὑποκατεσκευάσθαι) than the dialogue, since the latter reproduces (μιμεῖται) an extemporary utterance (αὐτοσχεδιάζοντα), while the former is committed to writing and is (in a way) sent as a gift." Subsequently, Demetrius notes that it is "absurd to build up periods [in letters], as if you were writing not a let-

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13 *Ep.* 1.3; cf. *Ep.* 3.35. Cf. also Seneca, *Ep.* 38.1; Diogenes, *Ep.* 17. Interestingly, according to Paul, he was accused of being a bad speaker (i.e. when present), whereas the letters sent in his absence were considered "weighty and powerful" (2 Cor 10:10).

14 Cf. Stirewalt, *Studies* (1993) 9.

15 See White, "Greek Letters" (1988) 85–88; Stirewalt, *Studies* (1993) 4–15.

16 Cf. Aune, *New Testament* (1987) 159; Stowers, "Typification" (1988) 79. Classen, *Rhetorical* (2000) 7, observes that "[o]bviously, a fundamental difference was felt in antiquity between a speech or even a poem or another type of composition on the one hand and a letter on the other."

17 The exact date of this work, erroneously ascribed to Demetrius of Phalerum (4th cent. B.C.E.), is uncertain. Most suggestions range from the 3rd cent. B.C.E. to the 1st cent. C.E.; see Thraede, *Grundzüge* (1970) 19–25; Malherbe, *Epistolary* (1988) 2, 17; Anderson, *Rhetorical* (1996) 44–45; Kennedy, "Historical" (1997) 27. Doty believes that Demetrius based his rules for letter writing on earlier authorities, and that his discussion in many ways "summarize[s] the theory of letter writing in Greek and Roman literary circles that prevailed for several centuries" (*Letters* [1973] 9).