

THE AUTHOR IN LUKE-ACTS

G P V du Plooy
Centre for Contextual Hermeneutics
University of Stellenbosch

Abstract

The author is a much-debated subject in literary criticism. Half-way through the twentieth century literary critics predominantly approved of the absent author. It is argued here that the authorial meaning cannot be separated from a text. The key in terms of a narrative text is that, in the experience of reading, the reader is confronted with an authorial consciousness which influences the process of reading. The present paper contends that a differentiation of the implied author enables the reader to assess in a more detailed way the ideology of the text. As test-case the prologue, 'we'-sections and speeches of Luke-Acts are considered. The implied author is traced as formal textual structure, and as creator of the value-structure in the total narrative world.

In a previous article in this journal (du Plooy 1988), it was argued that the text of Luke-Acts presents a certain understanding of what God's design amounts to. Subtly the ideological point of view (among others) of the author glimmers through words, expressions and structures related to the tapestry of God's design. The divine purpose is realized in the narrative (cf Tannehill 1985:70). In this contribution the focus will fall on the role of the author in Luke-Acts.

Half-way through the twentieth century literary critics predominantly approved of the absent author. Some theologians still defend the need for knowing what was intended originally (cf Stendahl (1984a:9; 1984b:6). Eagleton (1983:69), however, argues that there is 'nothing in the nature of the text itself which constrains a reader to construe it in accordance with authorial meaning' (1983:69; cf Seung 1982:17,18).

Meaning transpires through the experience of reading, and it is on this level that indications of authorial consciousness should be looked for. Culpepper summarizes: 'We will not ask what the text meant and then try to move to what it means today. Instead, we will ask what it originally means as a narrative text' (1984:475). It is precisely in this field of narrative analysis that a different way of speaking about authors becomes feasible.

The historicist side of the discussion was succeeded by the other extreme, namely the absent author. The New Critics, Formalism, Structuralism, and Existentialists called for the demise of the author (cf Lanser 1981:27; Jefferson & Robey 1982:9). Lanser (1981:48,49) correctly argues:

I would urge that the text as a whole be considered an aesthetic expression of the circumstances in which it was produced, and that not only the 'content' of the work but its formal structures be understood to reflect an authorial view.

When speech has been transformed into writing, quite a modified set of rules come into play. As Ricoeur declares, the relation writing--reading is no longer a particular case of the relation speaking--hearing (1976:29; cf Overdulse et al 1982:125), and Ricoeur rejects both absolute text and absolute author:

If the intentional fallacy overlooks the semantic autonomy of the text, the opposite fallacy forgets that a text remains a discourse told by somebody, said by someone to someone else about something. It is impossible to cancel out this main characteristic of discourse without reducing text to natural objects, i e to things which are not man-made, but which, like pebbles, are found in the sand (1976:30).

The author has returned, though in a different dimension. Booth's 'implied author' served as mediation between obliteration of, and over-emphasis on the author. With some modification the term of Booth may still be retained. Booth defines the implied author:

Our ... problem is the intricate relationship of the so-called real author with his various official versions of himself ... his different works will imply different versions, different ideal combinations of norms ... These differences are most evident when the second self is given an overt, speaking role in the story ... a basic need: the reader's need to know where, in the world of values, he stands--that is, to know where the author wants him to stand ... in this distinction between author and implied author we find a middle position between the technical irrelevance of talk about the artist's objectivity and the harmful error of pretending that an author can allow direct intrusions of his own immediate problems and desires (1983:71,73,75).

In another work Booth emphasizes: 'It is true that the author I am interested in is only the creative person responsible for the choices that made the work--what I have elsewhere called the 'implied author' who is found in the work itself' (1974:11). Scholarship mainly speaks of the manipulating, controlling power of the implied author (cf Combrink 1983:125; Hernadi 1976:376; Sternberg 1978:254; Van Collier 1983:XXV), and its relation to the world of values and norms (cf Rhoads 1982:422; McKnight 1980:129; Yacobi 1981:121; Rimmon-Kenan 1983:86).

A first modification of the concept of Booth comes from Chatman who decides that the implied author has no voice and 'can tell us nothing' (1978:148; Culpepper 1983:16). Rimmon-Kenan (1983:88) supports this view and declares it 'a set of implicit norms rather than a speaker or a voice (i e a subject)'.

Secondly, Lanser (1981:50) underscores the point that the implied author has been too severely divorced from 'any sense of the historical author's responsibility'. She intends to restore this link by utilizing the concept of author as 'textually encoded, historically authoritative voice kin to but not identical with the biographical person who wrote the text' (1981:152).

A third modification of Booth's implied author is that it stands not only for the norm-bound image which the real author construed of himself for the purpose of erecting a particular narrative. Like Lanser's textual voice, it conveys 'not only an individual but a communal authority' (1981:120).

Culpepper (1983:7) mentions some main choices in the narrative through which the implied author is defined: settings, irony, characterization, the handling of time, suspense, distance, 'and all the problematics and potential of narrative writing which must be dealt with in one way or another'.

The image of the implied author in Luke-Acts emerges forcefully because God's design is a dominant theme in the work. In the prologue of Luke (1:1-4), the intriguing Acts 1:1-5, and the 'we'-sections of Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16) the reader attains some overt clues to the structure of the implied author.

Prologue, 'we'-sections and speeches

Lanser (1981:114) describes the implied author (in her terms, the 'narrative voice'). It is a generative authority behind the textual speakers that 'emanates from the authorial person him- or herself'.

The prologue and 'we'-passages of Luke has a long history of investigation (cf Cadbury 1922:489,90; Brown 1975:1,2; Haenchen 1971:489). Cadbury (1956:128) declares: 'Under any interpretation the we passages in Acts remain a problem'.

Critical history (cf Dibelius 1956:106; Haenchen 1971:490; 1961:365; Robbins 1978:230-42; Roloff 1981:61; Conzelmann 1963:98) has not been able to explain the theological significance of the prologue of Luke-Acts and the 'we'-sections. In the present study these two features are regarded as crucial to the construction of the implied author and as a result also to an estimation of structure and theology in Luke-Acts.

First of all the implied author is exposed in the connection between author and narrator in the text. Sternberg (1978:4) finds that although writers may choose to make use of historical sources or revert again and again to the fictive worlds of their own creation, 'each work must contain within itself the reason why it is so and not otherwise. The narrator and implied author are two indispensable narrative strategies which contribute to making the imaginative world what it eventually is. In Luke-Acts the narrator is not a character in the story. The participle *parekolouthekoti* identifies the narrator as masculine. There is a close affinity between him and the implied author, especially in the ideological point of view of the work.

In essence the implied author creates the narrative world of Luke-Acts, while the narrator comments on it and in the process leads the reader on tour through it. Along the way the narrator makes intrusive comments. From the prologue it is learned that he is self-conscious, omniscient and reliable (cf Sternberg 1978:254). He is also omniscient.

Wuellner (1981:65-70) lists four ways in which the implied author is discernable in the Lazarus story of John's Gospel. His categories are implemented here in a simplified fashion, with reference also to Fowler (1981:157-75). The four ways of identifying the implied author are overt comments and covert evidence of the narrator, established norms of the text, the structural design of the whole, and textual means or signifiers. For present purposes the emphasis is on the prologue, 'we'-sections and key speeches of Luke-Acts.

In the prologue of Luke the narrator addresses Theophilus, the narratee, who is promised certainty about the things of which he has been informed (1:4). Some distance is created between narrator and reader (both real and implied) because the person of Theophilus comes between them.

In verse five a different level of narration emerges. Implicitly the words are still meant for Theophilus (half-way through Luke-Acts, at Acts 1:1 Theophilus is still reminded to pay attention), but the 'I' has been eclipsed from the narrative. What happens is that in the prologue the narrator serves as voice for the implied author. Actually the narrator is here conveying communal authority which is given with the implied author (cf Lanser 1981:120).

From 1:5 onwards the peculiarities of the implied author become more concealed although it is still involved by some further overt remarks of the narrator. The fulfilment idea (*pepleroforemenon*) is important because the narrative of Luke-Acts loses much of its significance if it is not understood that the death, and in particular the resurrection of Jesus constitutes God's saving design. In actuality the whole of Luke 1:1-4 may be read as overt ideological commentary of a reliable narrator.

Another group of passages to introduce the implied author through the overt voice of the narrator is the 'we'-sections of Acts: 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; and 27:1-28:16. Apparently in unexplained fashion (Cadbury 1956:129) the narrator shifts from the third person to first person plural narration.

The implied author steps on to the scene in Troas, after Paul has had the vision of the man calling him and his group over to Macedonia (16:9). Again overt comments directed to the narratee are found. As with the prologue, these sections may in their totality be regarded as explicit commentary to the reader.

The 'we'-sections provide some intriguing material. Mostly the reader is quite certain where they begin (16:10; 20:5; 21:1; 27:1), although 20:5 and 27:1 are somewhat less obvious. When it comes to establishing where they end, however, the text leaves the reader much less certain. There is no way to tell whether the implied author still is with Paul after 16:17; 20:16; 21:19; and 28:17. The only viable conclusion is that these fuzzy beginnings and endings in particular are part of a

literary strategy or device by means of which the presence of the implied author is extended.

In the second place the implied author's image is familiarized through the uncovering of the norms which form the basis on which the narrative of Luke-Acts is erected. By 'norms' is meant 'the world expressed in the text' or 'the contextual (i.e. referential) ... means which were selected to let us learn' (Wuellner 1981:67). As Wuellner states, the issue also has to do with character traits and with codes (1981:67). For the moment the latter, as reflected by the text, is of primary concern: cultural, literary, and everyday codes. With Luke-Acts in view, ideological codes are adduced to those of Wuellner.

The vision which Paul had (Ac 16:9,10) is an instance of divine intervention in the narrative. Visions were recognized as part of the non-Christian as well as Christian cultural codes in the first century. The implied author is, like Paul, supposed to have responded positively to the call. If the visionary code originally was a non-Christian one, this passage presents a Christian violation of the code.

Some cultural codes are also present, such as prayer (16:13,16; 28:35), baptism (16:15) meals or breaking of bread (20:7; 28:33-8), and miracles (20:10; 28:3-6).

Finally, in the prologue the code of tradition is introduced, guaranteed by eyewitness and followed by writing to invest the narrative with more authority.

The norms or codes of the text are decisively revealed through textual entities with interpretative or perspectival roles (cf Culpepper 1983:43). In Luke-Acts the voices with such functions are the narrator, the implied author through the narrator, Jesus, and the agents of Jesus who are mainly Peter, Stephen, and Paul.

Direct addresses such as the speeches in Luke-Acts bear a close relationship to the norms of the implied author. The speaking characters are instruments with the function of revealing the implied author's ideological or theological preferences.

During his inaugural address Jesus reads Isaiah 61:1 and 58:6 from scripture and declares: 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' (Lk 4:21)--a reminder to the reader (in the name of the implied author) that God is actually materializing the promised good news.

These examples indicate that the norms or codes in the narrative of Luke-Acts take several forms and are clearly identified in the prologue, 'we'-sections and speeches which at the same time express the structure of the implied author.

The third way in which the implied author is discernable in Luke-Acts is through the design of the narrative as a whole, or through sections of it (cf Wuellner 1981:66-7). In the present study only some relationships of the prologue, 'we'-sections and speeches to the macrostructure of Luke-Acts are considered.

The narrative strategy of the implied author is seen in various thematic sequences. What is at stake is the overall literary structure of Luke-Acts. It is significant how the preface of Luke 1:1-4 has a follow-up in Acts 1:1-5. This sequence is a feature of Hellenistic historiography (cf Robbins 1978:193). Of importance, however, is that the double prologue secures literary as well as thematic continuity for the implied

author. Acts 1:1-5 contains the essential theological matrix needed in order to comprehend which direction the textual codes are apt to take. Jesus and his resurrection, God the Father, the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God, the disciples, and baptism are all introduced once again.

A fourth and final means of becoming acquainted with the implied author which Wuellner lists (1981:66) is the form of textual signifiers, or textual means. With regard to John 11 Wuellner observes:

The Lazarus story shows a wide array of means, such as determiners and quantifiers ... attributive and adverbial complementizers ...; the use of aspects and moods ...; of negations ..., of puns and irony ...; of intensifying and rhetorical questions; of metaphors, and seemingly simple conjunctions and participles.

Wuellner underscores the vision that form and meaning, form and content, cannot be divorced from each other (cf also Lanser 1981:99). Luke 1:1-4 affirms that certainty about the things which God has fulfilled is needed (cf Davis 1982:215,16), and a speech such as Peter's in Acts 2 testifies to the meaning which the name of Jesus has for a repentant heart.

The implied author, it has been learned, is traceable both as formal textual structure, and as creator of the value structure and the total narrative world of Luke-Acts.

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