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Stylistic Levels in Hebrews 1.1−4 and John 1.1−18

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Abstract

This article presents the ancient concept of stylistic levels as a means to approach the question of how New Testament writings were delivered in antiquity. It is argued that the levels of style affected both composition and delivery and that therefore an analysis of the remaining texts is the first step towards understanding how they were once delivered. The levels of style are presented and the stylistic features of Heb. 1.1−4 and Jn 1.1−18 are analysed and interpreted within this system. It is seen that the style of New Testament writings can be profitably examined, and aspects of their composition revealed, with the help of the levels of style. Against many commentators, it is argued that the prologue of John does not contain poetry interspersed with prose passages. Instead, the stylistic intensity is steady all through at least Jn 1.1−13.

1. *Introduction*

Orality studies have become a common feature in New Testament exegesis. Within this larger field, more and more attention has been focused on the dynamics of oral performances and the last decade has seen the emergence of performance criticism as a specialized discipline.[1]

This fresh interest in the performance of New Testament writings has taken many forms. Among them are contemporary performances by actors and exegetes alike. While these have a significant role to play in the life of the churches, and indeed have provided the scholarly world with fresh interpretations, they lack detailed discussion concerning how performances were carried out in antiquity. Only a few attempts have been made to fill this gap of knowledge. Whitney Shiner has taken us further in our understanding of first century performances of Mark through a study of ancient

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[1] Rhoads 2006a; 2006b; 2009.

sources, mainly rhetorical treatises, which describe or discuss delivery.[2] William David Shiell has made use of the same sources and shown how they can be further informed by comparisons with art depicting performers in action.[3]

Despite the studies of Shiner and Shiell, many questions are still unanswered. The rhetorical treatises have more to tell us about the conventions of delivery at the time, especially regarding how literary style and delivery style interacted. The ancient levels of style affected both composition and delivery and created congruence between them. When Shiell touches upon the levels of style, however, he calls them 'styles of delivery' and does not focus on their role in composition. He presents them as different ways of delivering a text or a speech, almost regardless of the object being delivered.[4] Ultimately, they play no role in his analysis of Acts. Shiner asserts that ancient performances were bombastic and emotional.[5] Although he is aware of the levels of style, he determines the style of Mark without further analysis of its composition. What defines the stylistic level in Shiner's view seems to be whether the text 'is intended primarily as instruction or as drama, as addressing the intellect or the emotions.'[6]

The consequence is a limited view of style (and in fact a reduction of the available styles, into two opposites) that does not do justice to the evidence found in the rhetorical treatises. If we wish to stand on firm ground, we need to study attentively the testimony of the rhetorical treatises. Only then can we consider how style and performance may have interacted in the delivery of New Testament texts. Using the abundant information on delivery and performances found in ancient Greek and Roman rhetorical treatises, I approach the New Testament with the assumption that the delivery of these texts followed the same conventions that applied to other kinds of writings at the time.

Therefore, an issue of vital importance is to understand the rhetorical conventions (in relation to delivery) of the Greek and Roman society of the first century CE. The

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[2] Shiner 2003.

[3] Shiell 2004.

[4] Ibid., 44–47.

[5] Shiner 2003: 5, 83, 88.

[6] Ibid., 89.

ancient sources show that when people learned how to read and write they did so by reading texts aloud, by changing vocal tone according to character and topic, by interpreting the texts and probably also by employing appropriate gestures.[7] Reading as such was closely connected to delivery. Some would say that reading *was* delivery. Learning to read meant learning the rhetorical conventions of the time. One interpreted writings within this framework and used it even to understand texts written hundreds of years before.[8]

The rhetorical conventions of delivery cannot be described and argued for in a few pages, however. Therefore, this article focuses on how we can use *one* part of these conventions—namely, the levels of style—to understand important aspects of New Testament texts, in this case Heb. 1.1–4 and the prologue of John. As will be clear, the levels of style affected not only the composition but also the delivery of texts. Therefore, analysing the composition of a text in terms of its stylistic level(s) is a fruitful way of approaching the performance of New Testament writings. I will test this hypothesis through an analysis of the composition of Heb. 1.1–4 and of Jn 1.1–18. While providing fresh insights about these texts, such an analysis also helps us begin to understand how they were once delivered.

2. *Style*

Style concerns the expression of ideas, how a message is conveyed. In relation to ancient texts, style is usually understood as meaning *literary* style, how an idea or a message is embodied and expressed in the text. This is of course true. However, I assert that style in general and the levels of style in particular in the Greek and Roman world dealt not only with literary composition but also with how to convey a message in both written texts and delivery.

It is important to remember, however, that style did not have the same connotation in antiquity as it does today. We often think of style as something unique to the individual and use it in metaphorical expressions as 'lifestyle' and 'leadership

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[7] Shiell 2004: 21−22. Quintilian (*Inst.* 1.8.1; 1.11.14) and, it seems, Dionysius Thrax (*Teknē grammatikē* 1−2) emphasizes this.

[8] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for example, uses the conventions of his time to categorize and analyse authors as Lysias, Plato and Thucydides (*Dem.* 2, 5).

style'. In Greek and Latin, the terms for style (λέξις, φράσις, *dictio* and *elocutio*, among others) are usually related to words used for writing and speaking and have no metaphorical extension. In addition, styles had more to do with archetypes than unique individuals. Authors and their writings were used to exemplify especially good (or bad) renditions of a style—always being interpreted in terms of the existing styles— rather than to show their uniqueness.[9]

From Theophrastus (ca. 300 BCE), the rhetorical treatises present style as comprising four virtues: correctness, clarity, ornamentation and propriety. Correctness focuses on the importance of using accurate word forms and a pure language. Clarity deals with the need for a clear and easily understood discourse. Ornamentation concentrates on the many ways to please the listeners and make them attentive and positively inclined towards the speaker and the subject. Propriety, finally, has to do with how to adapt the style to the circumstances. Thus, it partially covers the other virtues and deals with how and when the elements of these should change to fit the situation. Propriety prescribes which of all the word forms, combinations, figures etc., set forth by the other virtues, should be used in a given situation.[10]

The virtue of propriety thus focuses on making stylistic choices that adapt the discourse to the circumstances.[11] The rhetoricians presented how one should make these adaptations: '[P]reserve propriety, whatever the subject; or in other words, use the relevant style.'[12] The styles that Demetrius is referring to are related to the virtue of propriety and they originate in the view that different types of texts and speeches require different kinds, or levels, of style. Therefore, when writing a text or speech one was not left without guidance in choosing the stylistic design best suited to the circumstances. The levels of style provided directions for varying degrees of stylistic intensity.[13]

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[9] Russell 1982: 130−31.

[10] Kennedy 1963: 274−76; Rowe 1997: 121−24, 154−56.

[11] Cicero, *De or.* 3.210–12.

[12] Demetrius, *Eloc.* 120 (Innes, LCL).

[13] Rowe 1997: 155.

3. *The Levels of Style*

The history of the levels of style can be traced as far back as the fifth century BCE. The system with three levels of style, which was predominant in the first centuries BCE and CE, seems to be late Hellenistic in origin. It is most thoroughly described in the Latin treatises, but also presented by Dionysius of Halicarnassus. The three different levels of style represent increasing stylistic intensity, from 'plain' to 'middle' and 'grand.' These three are all considered agreeable (although most of the rhetoricians present one stylistic level as their favourite) and different styles should be used in different circumstances.[14]

Which, then, are the most important factors in determining what stylistic level to use in a given instance? When touching upon this issue, the treatises put forward function as well as content. When discussing function, Cicero adapts Aristotle's theory on the three artistic modes of persuasion: logos, ethos and pathos.[15] He introduces three functions or duties (*officia*) of the orator: to prove, to please, and to sway or persuade. 'For these three functions', he says, 'there are three styles, the plain style for proof, the middle style for pleasure, the vigorous style for persuasion.'[16] Quintilian describes it in a similar manner:

> One style is defined as plain … a second as grand and robust … and to these has been added a third, called by some intermediate, and by others flowery … The guiding principle, more or less, is that the first supplies the function of giving information, the second that of appealing to the emotions, and the third […] that of pleasing or, as others say, conciliating. (*Inst.* 12.10.58–59 [Russell, LCL])

Beside these elementary functions, content or matter is another deciding factor in the choice of stylistic level. The longer version of the quote from Demetrius, mentioned above, reminds us to 'preserve propriety, whatever the subject; or in other words, use the relevant style, slight for slight themes, grand for grand themes.'[17] He continues

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[14] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 70, 74; Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.10.69–71.

[15] Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.1.1–4.

[16] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 69 (Hendrickson, LCL).

[17] Demetrius, *Eloc.* 120 (Innes, LCL).

with the following short examples, one good and one bad, of attempts to use an adequately simple style to correspond to the matter of a small river:

> [J]ust as Xenophon does when he describes the small and beautiful river Teleboas, 'this was not a large river; it was beautiful, however.' [οὗτος δὲ ποταμὸς ἦν μέγας μὲν οὔ, καλὸς δέ·] Through the conciseness of the construction and the final position of 'however' [δέ], he makes us all but see a small river. Contrast another writer who describes a river similar to the Teleboas, saying that it 'rushed from the hills of Laurium and disgorged itself into the sea,' [ἀπὸ τῶν Λαυρικῶν ὀρέων ὁρμώμενος ἐκδιδοῖ ἐς θάλασσαν] as though he were writing about the cataracts of the Nile or the mouth of the Danube. (*Eloc.* 120 [Innes, LCL])

Thus, the levels of style combine content, function and shape. These features should always, following the virtue of propriety, be congruous. A low, or simple, matter is dressed in a plain style and the text is then delivered accordingly; in a plain style. The content and function determines what stylistic level to use, which in turn provides the shape. Again, this is a testimony to the importance of propriety.

Here the interdependence of orality and textuality is made clear. The style of a performance should reflect the style of the text, and the style of the text should reflect its content and function. Because of this congruence, one can approach the question of how New Testament writings might have been performed in antiquity by analysing their style, within this system of stylistic levels.

The descriptions of the levels vary somewhat, although they all present the levels as increasing in stylistic intensity from plain to grand. Before moving on to the New Testament, I will give a brief presentation of the three levels of style.

3.1 Plain style

The most thorough depiction of any of the styles is given by Cicero in *Orator ad M. Brutum*, where he portrays the orators using the plain style. He introduces them by saying that they are 'to the point, explaining everything and making every point clear

rather than impressive, using a refined, concise style stripped of ornament.'[18] Later on he lists at least fifteen features of the simple style. Among them are pure language, plainness of style (using ordinary, yet eloquent words), many *sententiae*,[19] restraint in the use of stylistic embellishment and figures of speech, maintaining a subdued voice as well as a controlled delivery, avoiding all ornamentation, and employing humour and irony.[20] Portrayed is a person who is controlled in both writing and delivery. He uses a plain, but not unsophisticated, language. He avoids almost all aspects of a more intense style, or applies such aspects with restraint. And he adds relevant maxims and 'sprinkles' the speech 'with salt,'[21] i.e. makes use of humour and irony.

3.2 Middle style

Quintilian describes the middle style as smooth, polished and sedate.[22] It is 'richer in metaphors, rendered more pleasing by figures. With the prettiness of its digressions, its well-structured composition, and its seductive *sententiae*, it is like a gentle river, clear but shaded by green banks on either side.'[23] Cicero compares it to the plain and grand styles and finds it lacking in comparison.

Although he finds the middle style somewhat lacking, Cicero points out that it is a low-risk option, easier to use than the other two styles. When it comes to its characteristics, he presents it as an intermediate style ('somewhat more robust than the simple style … but plainer than the grandest style'), one that makes ample use of charm, proceeds calmly and is yet varied with metaphors and 'borrowed words', one that uses all kinds of figures of speech and thought, and is 'a brilliant and florid, highly coloured and polished style in which all the charms of language and thought are intertwined.'[24]

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[18] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 20 (Hendrickson, LCL).

[19] *Sententiae* are maxims or short, pithy sayings.

[20] Ibid., 75–87.

[21] Ibid., 87.

[22] Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.44.

[23] Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.10.60 (Russell, LCL).

[24] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 91–96.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus describes it as a true mean between the simple and grand styles and deems it the best of the three.[25]

3.3 Grand style

Dionysius of Halicarnassus describes the grand style as a 'striking, elaborate style … remote from normality and … full of every kind of accessory embellishment.'[26] Quintilian, who prefers it over the other two styles, calls it the most powerful. Whereas he compared the middle style to a gentle river, he portrays the grand style as 'the river that can roll rocks along, 'scorn the bridge', and create its own banks.'[27] He also describes some of the ways through which the style is attained:

> An orator like this will even raise the dead … in him, his country will cry
> out loud, or on occasion address <the speaker> personally. He will raise
> the tone of his speech by amplifications, and rise to hyperbole … He will
> almost bring the gods down from heaven to meet and talk with him. (*Inst.*
> 12.10.61–62 [Russell, LCL])

Cicero says the orators using the grand style show 'splendid power of thought and majesty of diction,' are 'forceful, versatile, copious and grave, trained and equipped to arouse and sway the emotions.'[28] Among the things he emphasizes in the grand style is thus its forcefulness. Later on he adds that it also should be altogether polished and elegant: 'Every part of the speech, to be sure, should be praiseworthy—no word should fall from the orator's lips that is not impressive or precise.'[29] In *De Oratore*, he lets Crassus describe the grand style in more detail, noting, among other things, that one should have ornament and charm, employ new, rare and metaphorical words, and achieve a sort of rhythm and cadence in delivery.[30]

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[25] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp.* 22; *Dem.* 3.

[26] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Dem.* 1 (Usher, LCL).

[27] Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.10.61 (Russell, LCL).

[28] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 20 (Hendrickson, LCL).

[29] Ibid., 125.

[30] Cicero, *De or.* 3.53, 3.103, 3.152–54.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus states that Thucydides and Lysias are the best exponents of the grand and simple styles and then compares the two (thus comparing the styles). According to him, the grand style 'has the power to startle the mind' (whereas the plain soothes it), 'can induce tension and strain' (whereas the plain induces relaxation and relief), 'can express violent emotion' (whereas the plain conduces to moral character), has the properties of 'forcefulness and compulsion' (whereas the plain can deceive the listener and conceal the facts from him), 'is characterized by daring originality' (whereas the plain is conventional and conservative), 'is overtly exquisite, elaborate and artificial' (whereas the plain is apparently unstudied), and it 'achieves perfection of its kind … tending to depict things as larger' (whereas the plain depicts things as smaller than life-size). Both styles, however, are described as 'artistically contrived'.[31]

4. *Approaching the New Testament*

I have tried to give a notion of what style and the specific levels of style meant in the first century CE. One way of approaching the issue of performances of New Testament writings is to analyse their style. As I have shown, style was explicitly linked with both composition and delivery and it had more to do with approximating an ideal than with expressing one's individuality. Reading and delivery were closely connected and one interpreted and delivered texts with the help of these conventions.

An important feature of the conventions, especially with regard to the delivery of texts, was the stylistic levels. The three levels of styles present varying degrees of stylistic intensity and combine content, function and shape. Which stylistic level to choose is mainly determined by the content and function of the discourse (be it a text or speech). The stylistic level then implies a specific shape, through which the discourse is expressed in a way that is well-suited to its function and content.

The virtue of propriety that calls for such congruence in all aspects of a discourse requires additional adjustments. Thus, propriety first calls for a stylistic level that is well-suited to its content and function. Then propriety also demands that the shape given by the chosen level of style is varied in accordance with the audience and

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[31] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Dem.* 2 (Usher, LCL).

speaker.[32] Although there are three archetypal levels of style, in details they may (and should) be altered in order to make them suitable to the specific situation. In preparation for delivery, a text was then interpreted as written in a plain, grand or middle style (or altering between two or three of these) and delivered accordingly, since delivery should always correspond with the text being delivered.[33] It would be improper to deliver a text written in the plain style with a 'grand' delivery. The levels of style, then, could be described as the link between composition and delivery. They guided the stylistic shape of the text, as well as the delivery of it.

This knowledge of style and stylistic levels is enough to approach the New Testament. Stylistic variations within the New Testament can be interpreted in terms of the levels of style. It does not mean that most New Testament writings met the criteria set up by the rhetoricians; they probably did not. In fact, most ancient writings failed in their view. Indeed, in some of the treatises faulty counterparts to the levels of style are even described. Accompanying each style is one that does not meet its standards.[34] The treatises also abound with references to faulty style and faulty delivery. Even when they judged the authors to have failed, the rhetoricians still used the levels of style to interpret their works. Hence a text did not have to be perfect in the eyes of the rhetoricians in order to be delivered. Whether or not the stylistic treatment of it met the standards of the rhetoricians, it would nonetheless have been delivered in correspondence with its perceived level of style.

5. *Stylistic Levels in Heb. 1.1−4*

Biblical scholars sometimes mention different stylistic levels within the New Testament, usually without clear references to the ancient rhetoricians. Stylistic variation within and between the different New Testament writings have been identified, however. It seems clear, for example, that Hebrews is written in another style altogether than Mark. Similarly, there is a marked difference between parts of the prologue of John and the rest of the gospel. Can these stylistic differences be

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[32] See, for example, Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 88, 123, and Quintilian, *Inst.* 11.1.31–36, 45–47.

[33] Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.12.10; *Rhet. Her.* 3.24.

[34] *Rhet. Her.* 4.15–16.

understood within the system of the levels of style? Or, by extension, can they function as a gateway towards an understanding of the performance of the texts? Before moving on to an analysis of the prologue of John, I will consider these questions. The epistle to the Hebrews, the perhaps most stylistically elaborate writing of the New Testament, provides a good starting point. If the levels of style cannot be used to understand it, then they probably will not shed any light on writings less meticulously executed stylistically.

This litmus test of the stylistic levels consists of an examination of the first part of the *exordium*[35] of Hebrews. It shows some similarities with the prologue of John, e.g. that it introduces a longer text at the same time as it, from the very beginning, paints the Son of God with truly magnified brushwork. More important, it is obviously consciously worked through stylistically and it has been described as bearing '[f]eatures of the grand style'.[36] If this is true, then New Testament writings undoubtedly can be comprehended within the system of levels of style.

The rhetorical treatises describe the plain and grand styles as a contrasting pair, with the middle style in between. Therefore, trying to ascertain if this text really is written in the grand style, one can test it not only against what the treatises say about this style, but also by examining if it disagrees with (is the opposite of) what is said about the plain style. Both these approaches are used here, partly because such an approach provides more points to test against and partly because some of the treatises do describe the plain style in more detail. The exordium of Hebrews is often defined as 1.1–3 or 1.1–4.

The first four verses of Hebrews are made up of one long sentence, bristling with rhetorical features.[37] Below, some of these features are indicated in the Greek text with the help of underlining, bold type and frames:

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[35] *Exordium* being one of the rhetorical terms for the introduction of a discourse, where one makes the listeners attentive, receptive and well-disposed.

[36] Koester 2001: 93.

[37] Although I agree with Koester (ibid. 174–175) that the exordium includes 1.1−2.4, I will only analyse 1.1–4 in this section, in order to move on to the prologue of John.

1 ¹ Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι

ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις

² ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων

ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ,

ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων,

δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας·

³ ὃς ὢν *ἀπαύγασμα* τῆς δόξης

καὶ *χαρακτὴρ* τῆς *ὑποστάσεως* αὐτοῦ,

φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ,

καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος

ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς,

⁴ τοσούτῳ κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων

ὅσῳ διαφορώτερον παρ' αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα.

The first verse opens with at least three strong rhetorical features: *homoioteleuton*, alliteration, and the use of unusual vocabulary. *Homoioteleuton* is a figure of repetition or parallelism (or both) and consists of similar endings in adjacent or parallel words (marked above with underlined endings). In Heb. 1.1 the words πολυμερῶς and πολυτρόπως both end with -ως, thus repeating the sound. Since both words are adverbs Heb. 1.1 thus combines *homoioteleuton* with *homoioptoton* (the repetition of similar case endings),[38] following the recommendation of the treatises to link these two figures.[39] Alliteration (marked above with frames around each initial p-sound in the first verse) is the repetition of initial sounds. Five of the first twelve words begin with a p (π). This creates attention and heightens the style. According to the treatises, alliteration must not be used in excess. *Rhetorica ad Herennium* presents examples where five out of seven words, or seven out of eight, begin with the same letter.[40] Heb. 1.1 does, however, stay well clear of that kind of concentration.

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[38] Although adverb is not a case as such (*homoioptoton* in strict definition is the repetition of similar case endings).

[39] Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.3.77–80; *Rhet. Her.* 4.28.

[40] *Rhet. Her.* 4.18.

Furthermore, the opening line is amplified as it develops beyond alliteration with the repetition of πολυ- (and not just π-) in πολυμερῶς and πολυτρόπως. The third feature of the opening verse is the use of unusual vocabulary (these words are marked with bold type). πολυμερῶς is not found anywhere else in the New Testament and πολυτρόπως is neither found elsewhere in the New Testament, nor anywhere in the Septuagint.[41]

In 1.2c–3b there is a powerful *anaphora* with a possible *hyperbole*. *Anaphora* is a figure of repetition, in which each line or clause begins with the same word or group of words.[42] In this case three lines begin with the relative pronoun ὅς, in different cases. They are being used with reference to the Son of God (υἱῷ, in 1.2b) and they launch three almost rhythmical lines that expand and intensify the portrayal of him. The power of the *anaphora* can be easily discerned when it is presented clause by clause in English:

> [God] has spoken to us by a Son
>> *whom* he made heir of all things,
>>
>> *through whom* he also made the universe;
>>
>> *he who* is the radiance of his glory
>>
>>> and the impress of his substance

The author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* describes the figure of *anaphora* as having 'not only much charm, but also impressiveness and vigour in highest degree' and recommends it for both the embellishment and the amplification of style.[43] As I mentioned, there is also a possible *hyperbole* in 1.2d. Quintilian describes *hyperbole* as 'a bolder kind of ornament', which is 'an appropriate exaggeration'. Although he describes the hyperbole as a kind of lie, he says that it is properly used 'when the thing about which we have to speak transcends the ordinary limits of nature. We are then allowed to amplify, because the real size of the thing cannot be expressed.'[44] This fits rather well with the use in Heb. 1.2d, where the Son of God is described as

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[41] Ellingworth 1993: 13.

[42] Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.3.30, 36; *Rhet. Her.* 4.18.

[43] *Rhet. Her.* 4.18.

[44] Quintilian, *Inst.*8.6.67, 74, 76 (Russell, LCL).

the one 'through whom he [i.e. God] made the universe', thus being described as pre-existent, a bold statement indeed.

The employment of unusual words, noticed in 1.1 above, recurs in 1.3. Three words in that verse, ἀπαύγασμα, χαρακτήρ and ὑποστάσεως, are all examples of words not found in the New Testament outside of Hebrews.[45] Metaphors can also be found in 1.3, where the Son of God is called 'the radiance of [God's] glory' (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης), and where God is called 'the Majesty on high' (ἡ μεγαλωσύνη ἐν ὑψηλοῖς).

Finally, there is only one instance of hiatus in Heb. 1.1–4 (in 1.2d, where καί meets ἐποίησεν). Hiatus usually means the clash of two vowels, when one word ends with a vowel and the next begins with one.[46] Too many such clashes creates a jerky, uneven style, as you need to make a brief pause between the words creating a hiatus. In the plain style, that was not a problem. When describing the plain style, Cicero says that 'the clash of vowels has something agreeable about it and shows a not unpleasant carelessness on the part of a man who is paying more attention to thought than to words'.[47] In the grand style, however, one should usually avoid hiatus in order to attain a smooth flow of words without interruptions. Some instances of hiatus (namely, where a long vowel or a diphthong met a long vowel or a diphthong) was despite this considered to create grandness.[48] The almost complete absence of hiatus in Heb. 1.1–4 is quite striking. Heb. 1.5–13, which consists of a chain of Septuagint quotes, abounds with occurrences of hiatus. One possibility is that the author of Hebrews made sure that the opening lines did contain as few instances of hiatus as possible; in order to sustain an elevated style even though the following verses provided many occurrences of them. In support of such a theory, one could point out that the end of the exordium, 1.14–2.4, contains only two occurrences of hiatus and

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[45] Ellingworth 1993: 12−13.

[46] Compare with how one in English changes the form of the indefinite article from *a* horse to *an* ass, in order to avoid hiatus. Trying to pronounce 'a ass' gives you an understanding of why avoiding hiatus was important in attaining a smooth style.

[47] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 77 (Hendrickson, LCL). Quintilian agrees (*Inst.* 9.4.37) and gives an example of how hiatus in Latin can even produce a certain splendour through long, rich syllables and a slow pace: *Pulchra oratione acta iacta te.* ('Show pride in yourself, having delivered a beautiful speech'.)

[48] Demetrius, *Eloc.* 73; *Rhet. Her.* 4.18.

that there are examples of elisions in 1.2 (in ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου and δι’ οὗ) and 2.2 (in δι’ ἀγγέλων), made in order to avoid hiatus.

This is enough information to compare with the descriptions of the levels of style found in the rhetorical treatises. The treatises can also reveal other style-specific features to search for in Heb. 1.1–4. As mentioned above, the treatises present the most detailed information on the plain style. This is mainly due to the fact that Cicero explains it in some detail.[49]

First of all, Cicero points out that the person using plain style employs restrained and plain language while still being more articulate than those who are not eloquent at all (*infantes sint*).[50] Heb. 1.1–4 certainly goes beyond this and uses rare and bold words such as 'radiance' and 'impress'. Cicero also points out that the plain style should avoid all kinds of rhythm and stay clear of smooth word arrangement. It should be 'loose but not rambling', use hiatus and 'show a not unpleasant carelessness'.[51] Again, Heb. 1.1–4 goes far beyond this. It avoids hiatus in every instance except in 1.2d, shows hints of rhythm in the opening line and in the *anaphora* in 1.2c–3b, and it is all but loose in its long, complex structure, using only one sentence for the whole passage. Cicero continues by stating tersely that 'all noticeable ornament … will be excluded.'[52] With the use of alliteration and *homoioteleuton*, Heb. 1.1–4 can hardly be defined as being void of 'all noticeable ornament'. The language should further be pure, clear and plain, according to Cicero.[53] The language in Heb. 1.1–4 is pure, not strictly clear (with a few uncommon words and metaphors), and certainly not plain. In a longer passage, Cicero points out that anyone employing the plain style should be restrained in the use of figures of speech and in stylistic embellishments of all sorts (and he 'will not be bold in coining words, … sparing in the use of archaisms' and he only uses 'the mildest of metaphors' etc.).[54] Again, Heb. 1.1–4 cannot be said to have a restrained use of figures, or only

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[49] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 75–90.

[50] Ibid., 76.

[51] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 77–78 (Hendrickson, LCL).

[52] Ibid., 79.

[53] Ibid., 79.

[54] Ibid., 79–85.

mild metaphors, although it does not coin any new words.[55] Further, Cicero says that plain style means using 'an abundance of apposite maxims [*sententiae*] … this will be the dominant feature in this orator'.[56] No such maxims are found in Heb. 1.1–4. Cicero also declares that the discourse should not include any instances of *prosopopoeia* (a personification of something lifeless as speaking)[57] and there are none in Heb. 1.1–4. This is the first point where Heb. 1.1–4 agrees with Cicero's instructions for the use of plain style. Continuing, Cicero states that one should not crowd a long series of iterations into a single period.[58] The observation that this 'requires stronger lungs' seems to suggest that Cicero is not describing repetitions, but rather the crowding of too many clauses in one period. This is what we find in Heb. 1.1–4, since the whole passage consists of a single, long period. After commenting about the delivery in the plain style, Cicero finishes with stating that in this style one should use humour and irony.[60] This is not found in Heb. 1.1–4.

With the exception of *prosopopoeia*, which Cicero says that one should avoid in the plain style (and which is not present in Heb. 1.1–4), Heb. 1.1–4 departs from Cicero's instruction on every point. When it comes to *prosopopoeia* one could also point out that from Heb. 1.5, the text lets God function as the speaker up until 1.13.[61] When Quintilian describes the grand style, he says that the orator using this style will use *prosopopoeia*, raise the tone of the discourse through amplification, rise to hyperbole and inspire anger and pity.[62] While Heb. 1.1–4 does not inspire anger and pity, it does use amplification and hyperbole. *Rhetorica ad Herennium* describes the grand style as consisting of 'a smooth and ornate arrangement of impressive words',[63] a good description of Heb. 1.1–4. In the discussion of appropriateness, the treatises

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[55] In Heb. 2.4, however, it uses μισθαποδοσία, a word that is not found in the New Testament, nor in the Septuagint or anywhere in Greek literature before its occurrence in Hebrews (Ellingworth 1993: 13).

[56] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 79 (Hendrickson, LCL).

[57] Ibid., 85.

[58] Ibid., 85.

[60] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 87–89.

[61] Koester 2001: 197.

[62] Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.10.61–62.

[63] *Rhet. Her.* 4.11 (Caplan, LCL).

point out that the grand style is used for the most important or weighty issues.[64] The fact that Hebrews presents just such an issue in its exordium, the importance and superiority of the Son of God, is the final link in the conclusion that Heb. 1.1–4 indeed is written in the grand style. It has a grand theme, word choices and word arrangements that matches it (and it avoids all occurrences of hiatus, save one), impressive figures and an even more elevated first verse (using uncommon words and combining risky alliteration with elegant *homoioteleuton* and *homoioptoton*).

Thus, stylistic differences in the New Testament can indeed be understood within the system of the levels of style. The analysis of Heb. 1.1–4 has shown that the treatises contain enough information on the stylistic levels for it to be used fruitfully in evaluating New Testament texts. The road ahead is thus open. An analysis of the prologue of John's Gospel will examine if work on linguistically considerably less intricate writings will yield equally good results.

6. *Stylistic Levels in the Prologue of John*

How does the prologue of John (1.1–18) fit in with the levels of style? On the one hand, one might easily think that it is an example of grand style, as it seems to have a grand theme—the pre-existence of the Word—and as it often is described as containing poetic passages. On the other hand, it might also be plain style, as it uses a much less elaborate language than Hebrews 1.1–4.

The prologue starts with a theme as grand as the one in Heb. 1.1–4. The Word is being portrayed with references to the creation and, surprisingly, the story begins even before the creation. One commentator indeed says that the description of the Word 'is elevated to such heights that it almost becomes offensive.'[65] Such a grand theme would certainly call for a grand style, as in Hebrews. Let us see if that is the case.

Starting with hiatus, or clash of vowels, I have shown that this was acceptable in the plain style, but that it should be more or less avoided in the other styles. A few clashes were almost inevitable, however, and Quintilian points out that obsessiveness

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[64] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 100; Quintilian, *Inst.* 11.1.3.

[65] Haenchen 1984: 109.

in avoiding hiatus might sometimes be worse than carelessness.[66] Other clashes were actually, according to Demetrius, approved of in the grand style, such as the clash of a long vowel or a diphthong with a long vowel or a diphthong. In Jn 1.1–18 one finds a rather large amount of hiatus. I count forty-six such clashes of vowels, for the most part evenly distributed. If the text would be found to use the grand style, only eleven of the clashes would still be sanctioned according to the exceptions stated by Demetrius, leaving thirty-five instances of hiatus; much more than just a few.

Getting into a more detailed analysis, Jn 1.1–5 includes a hyperbole, a possible *conduplicatio* (repetition for effect), and two figures of *climax* (repetition of a word from the preceding line at the beginning of the next line), with a strong culmination in 1.1.

> 1 ¹Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν <u>ὁ λόγος</u>,
>
> καὶ <u>ὁ λόγος</u> ἦν πρὸς <u>τὸν θεόν</u>,
>
> καὶ <u>θεὸς</u> ἦν <u>ὁ λόγος</u>.
>
> ²οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.
>
> ³πάντα δι᾽ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,
>
> καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἕν
>
> ὃ γέγονεν.
>
> ⁴ἐν αὐτῷ <u>ζωὴ</u> ἦν,
>
> καὶ <u>ἡ ζωὴ</u> ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων·
>
> ⁵καὶ <u>τὸ φῶς</u> ἐν <u>τῇ σκοτίᾳ</u> φαίνει,
>
> καὶ <u>ἡ σκοτία</u> αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

Above, the text of Jn 1.1–5 is represented with underlining marking the instances of *climax*. Several lines are connected through the repetition of the last or most important word of the preceding line (the connecting words are underlined in the text above).[67] The rhetorical figure of *climax* is used for amplification and in its original form it consists of the repetition of the last word from the previous line at the beginning of

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[66] Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.4.35.

[67] This was first presented in modern scholarship by Alfred Loisy, in 1903. However, Loisy may have overstated the case when he suggested connecting words in every line of Jn 1.1−5. (McHugh 2009: 80) Furthermore, he did not connect the repetitions with the rhetorical figure of *climax*.

the next. In Jn 1.1 and 1.4–5 the words are not always the first or the last (the figure was not exclusively used with the last and first words of each line[68]).[69]

Quintilian says that *climax* 'has a more obvious and conscious art about it, and accordingly [it] should be employed less often.'[70] Thus, it would not be fit for use in the plain style.

In both of these two instances of *climax*, in 1.1 and 1.4–5, the repetition of key words creates amplification and a heightened style. As often is the case with *climax*, they also reach a sort of climax (referring now to its meaning in English), climbing up the ladder of connecting words:

> 1.1   In the beginning was the Word
>
> and the Word was with God
>
> and the Word was God (or, maintaining the *climax* structure of the Greek: and God was the Word).

> 1.4–5   In it [or: 'in him'] was life
>
> and the life was the light of humankind
>
> and the light shines in the darkness
>
> and the darkness cannot suppress it.

In 1.1a the Word is presented, in 1.1b we get to know that it was together with God, or in God's presence. In 1.1c, reaching the top of the ladder, we are presented with the fact that the word *is* God himself, a truly remarkable statement. This is what caused Haenchen to call it 'almost … offensive'.[71] Thus, in this climax of the *climax* there may be a hyperbole (as in Heb. 1.2d, where the Son of God was described as the one through whom God made the universe). Jn 1.4–5 also intensifies as one climbs up the ladder, going from the statement that there was life in the Word (in 1.4a), to declaring

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[68] Consider, for example, these lines by Shakespeare (*Richard II* 5.1.66–68), showing an example of a *climax* that does not strictly confine itself to the first and last words of a line:

> The love of wicked men converts to fear,
>
> That fear to hate, and hate turns one or both
>
> To worthy danger and deserved death.

[69] Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.3.54–57; *Rhet. Her.* 4.34.

[70] Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.3.54 (Russell, LCL).

[71] Haenchen 1984: 109.

that this life is the light of humankind (in 1.4b), to revealing that the same light shines in the darkness (in 1.5a), and, finally, that the darkness cannot suppress (or, alternatively, 'understand') it (in 1.5b). Jn 1.4–5 presents a heightening and deepening of the presentation of the Word, although without such an astonishing end as in 1.1.

Having identified a hyperbole and two instances of climax, the analysis of 1.1–5 will end with the recognition of an additional possible *conduplicatio*. The figure of *conduplicatio* consists of the repetition of one or more words for the purpose of amplification or appeal to emotions.[72] In Jn 1.3 there is a triple use of the verb γίνομαι (marked with frames in the text below). It co-operates with a possible *mesodiplosis*, i.e. repetition of the same word in the middle of several lines, of the personal pronoun αὐτός (marked with underlining below), which is referring to the Word in 1.1.

> πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,
>
> καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἕν
>
> ὃ γέγονεν.

Moving on to Jn 1.6–13, it will be evident that this section is also filled with rhetorical figures that produce a somewhat elevated style. In 1.7–9 there are two intertwined instances of *polyptoton* (repetition while changing the form of the word). These are marked with underlining and frames in the text below:

> ⁷οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν,
>
> ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός,
>
> ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι' αὐτοῦ.
>
> ⁸οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς,
>
> ἀλλ' ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός.
>
> ⁹Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν,
>
> ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον,
>
> ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον.

The figure of *polyptoton* means the repetition of a word in differing forms, creating amplification and a pleasant effect that Cicero describes as alien to the plain style.[73]

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[72] *Rhet Her.* 4.38.

[73] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 84.

The author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* even warns against the use of this figure in actual causes 'because their invention seems impossible without labour and pains.'[74] In Jn 1.7–9, the noun μαρτυρία ('witness') is alternated with its related verb μαρτυρέω ('give witness'). Interwoven with this is a variation between the noun φῶς ('light'), in changing cases, and the related verb φωτίζω ('shine'/'lighten'). If one translates these words into English terms with the same kind of relation to each other as the Greek terms, then both a pleasant effect and a laboured appearance are quite easily discerned:

> He came as a witness
>
> to give witness about the light
>
> so that through it [or: 'him'] all might believe.
>
> He was not the light
>
> but [he came] to give witness about the light.
>
> The true light,
>
> that lightens every human being,
>
> was coming into the world.

In Jn 1.9–10, then, there is another case of *polyptoton*. This time the noun κόσμος is repeated four times in three different cases (marked with underlining below):

> ...ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον.
>
> ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν,
>
> καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,
>
> καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω.

Possibly, it is combined with *mesodiplosis*, as three of the four occurrences are in the middle of the lines. This is made even more plausible by the fact that the first instance, in 1.9, ends that sentence. In 1.10, a new sentence begins with three clauses and in the middle of each of these κόσμος occurs. The κόσμος in 1.9 then functions as an introduction, presenting the next key word while at the same time linking the coming *polyptoton* to the two previous ones. To the hearer, 1.7–10 would stand out as a strong series of lines, linked and amplified through the repetition of a few key

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[74] *Rhet. Her.* 4.30−32 (Caplan, LCL).

words. The result is not really rhythmical, however, and does not diverge from the use of common words.

In 1.11 another high-risk figure is found, *paronomasia*. This figure consists of using a word and then adding another one that sounds almost the same, yet carries another meaning. The author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* cautions against *paronomasia* in the same way as against *polyptoton*. Cicero describes it in connection with how to use equivocality as verbal witticisms.[75]

> εἰς <u>τὰ ἴδια</u> ἦλθεν,
>
> καὶ <u>οἱ ἴδιοι</u> αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον.
>
> He came to <u>his own [home]</u>
>
> and <u>his own [people]</u> did not receive him.

Here, the play of words is between τὰ ἴδια and οἱ ἴδιοι (marked by underlining above). Altering the neuter case to masculine case shifts the meaning of the words from 'his own home' to 'his own people'. One easily thinks that such a sad statement could not contain any witticism, but it might accommodate irony as it uses verbal witticism to point to a sad fact.[76]

Moving on to Jn 1.12–13, one finds an intense *anaphora*. After describing that all who received Jesus and believed in his name was given the authority to become God's children, in 1.12, the text launches into the *anaphora*. It consists of four lines describing the nature of these children of God, repeating οὐκ ἐξ or οὐδὲ ἐκ and finishing with ἀλλ' ἐκ:

> [12]ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν,
>
> ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι,
>
> τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,
>
> [13]οἳ <u>οὐκ ἐξ</u> αἱμάτων
>
> <u>οὐδὲ ἐκ</u> θελήματος σαρκὸς
>
> <u>οὐδὲ ἐκ</u> θελήματος ἀνδρὸς
>
> <u>ἀλλ' ἐκ</u> θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.

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[75] Cicero, *De or.* 2.256; *Rhet. Her.* 4.29, 32.

[76] Compare, for example, with how Rhoads *et al.* (1999: 60−61) describe and analyse irony in Mark.

After repeating οὐκ ἐξ or οὐδὲ ἐκ for three lines, building up to a culmination, it all turns on the ἀλλ' ἐκ. As mentioned above, *anaphora* was thought of as having 'not only much charm, but also impressiveness and vigour in highest degree.'[77]

Moving on to 1.14–18, it is clear that there are many fewer rhetorical figures in these verses, compared to 1.1–13. A metaphor is found in 1.14b, in ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν. The Word is said to have 'pitched his tent among us'. The metaphor activates a somewhat rustic, ordinary image (pitching a tent with the meaning of making a dwelling), which is in line with the use of metaphors in the plain style.[78] On the next two lines, there is a repetition of δόξα, although it does not seem to be a figure as such. Rather, the second instance is an epexegesis functioning as a relative pronoun would. In 1.15 there is a more interesting feature:

Ὁ <u>ὀπίσω μου</u> ἐρχόμενος

<u>ἔμπροσθέν μου</u> γέγονεν,

ὅτι <u>πρῶτός μου</u> ἦν.

He who comes <u>after me</u>

has become <u>before me</u> [in dignity]

for he was <u>before me</u> [in time].

This play on the prepositions 'after' and 'before' (with different connotations) is amplified by the fact that they are all accompanied by the personal pronoun μου. This might be an example of the rhetorical figure *paradox*, being self-contradictory while seeming to evoke something truthful. However one categorizes it, it does carry a certain force.

In Jn 1.16–18, there does not seem to be any clear rhetorical figures. A comparison is evident in 1.17, where it is said that the law was given through Moses, while grace and truth came through Jesus. It might be an example of the figure of *antithesis*. *Rhetorica ad Herennium* describes *antithesis* as something that 'occurs when the discourse is built upon contraries'[79] and there is a certain contrast between

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[77] *Rhet. Her.* 4.19 (Caplan, LCL).

[78] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 81–82. The metaphor may also refer to the tabernacle portrayed in Exodus, in which case the image may be thought of as less rustic and ordinary.

[79] *Rhet. Her.* 4.21 (Caplan, LCL).

the two lines. However, the second line could also be understood as a continuation or addition to the first and thus not as standing in contrast to it.

Having conducted a brief analysis of stylistic features in Jn 1.1–18, it is time to move on to Cicero's detailed description of the plain style. As with Heb. 1.1–4, I will compare Cicero's description with the stylistic features found in Jn 1.1–18. On the surface, the prologue of John does indeed have several features in common with the plain style, yet at the same time it uses so many and such excessively risky figures that it simply cannot be described as plain.

Cicero's first point was that the plain style uses restrained and plain language. This is certainly true of Jn 1.1–18, which do not contain any rare, bold or grand words, although the ordinary words are used to portray a grand theme (the pre-existence of the Word). The plain style should also avoid all kinds of rhythm. The prologue of John does not completely follow this, as the *anaphora* of οὐκ ἐξ, οὐδὲ ἐκ and ἀλλ' ἐκ in 1.13 creates a certain rhythm. Further, Cicero speaks of avoiding smooth word arrangement and using hiatus in 'a not unpleasant carelessness'. Jn 1.1–18 certainly contains many occurrences of hiatus; it occurs at least forty-six times. The word arrangement cannot be called smooth, yet the use of *anadiplosis* in 1.1 and 1.3–5 provide one example of how the text contains sections that are more thoroughly executed. Then, 'all noticeable ornament' should be excluded from the discourse. Again, Jn 1.1–18 gives a mixed impression. It is not as obviously ornamented as Heb. 1.1–4 and still it employs some features that were thought of as especially risky on account of their conspicuousness and laboured appearance (e.g. the example of *paronomasia* in 1.11 and the several instances of *polyptoton* in 1.7–10). Further, Cicero points out that the language should be pure, clear and plain. This is very much the case with the prologue of John. Then, restraint should be shown in the use of figures of speech and in all sorts of stylistic embellishments (including not coining new words and only utilizing 'the mildest of metaphors'). In the prologue of John there are no new words and the metaphor in 1.14 seems to be of the everyday type suitable to the plain style (although the use of σκηνέω may be a way of referring to the tabernacle, cf. note 77). It does not show restraint in the use of figures and stylistic embellishments, however, especially not in 1.1–13. Cicero describes the abundant use of maxims in the plain style, but that is certainly not found in Jn 1.1–18. Further, there

should not be any occurrences of *prosopopoeia*, which on the other hand cannot be found either. In the plain style, one should not crowd a long series of iterations into a single period. The prologue of John consists of rather uncomplicated and not very long sentences, so in this respect it corresponds with the plain style. Finally, the plain style makes use of humour and irony. This is not found in Jn 1.1–18, with the possible exception in 1.11, where a *paronomasia* on τὰ ἴδια and οἱ ἴδιοι may indicate irony and a form of verbal witticism.

When it comes to Quintilian's description of the grand style, he says that the orator using this style will use *prosopopoeia*, raise the tone of the discourse through amplification, rise to hyperbole and inspire anger and pity. As mentioned, Jn 1.1–18 does not contain any case of *prosopopoeia*, or any clear case of appeal to the emotions. There are many instances of amplification, however, and a hyperbole can be found in 1.1.

In sum, the prologue of John includes aspects of both plain and grand style. It seems to be a mixed case when it comes to the levels of style. It fits well into a few of Cicero's points about the plain style, for example the ample use of hiatus, the avoidance of *prosopopoeia* and ordinary language. On the other hand, it does use many of the more advanced features of style that should be employed only sparingly, or not at all, in the plain style (e.g. the many rhetorical figures in 1.1–13) and it addresses a rather grand theme. For the most part it also avoids some of the hallmarks of the plain style, such as the abundant application of maxims and the use of humour and irony.

Indeed, this mixed case, with features of both plain and grand style, may well be an example of the middle style. Quintilian describes the middle style as 'richer in metaphors, rendered more pleasing by figures', and having 'well-structured composition and … seductive maxims'.[80] Thus far, I have only identified one metaphor and no maxims at all. However, there are a few more possible metaphors especially in the vivid descriptions of 1.1–13 (e.g. the use the 'the Word' and the portrayal of the life as 'the light of men'). The composition is also meticulously structured in places (e.g. 1.1, 1.10 and 1.13) and, as I have shown, it employs many

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[80] Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.44 (Russell, LCL).

figures indeed. The middle style is often described as 'intermediate' and 'well-blended', between the plain and the grand styles. In fact, these following pointed remark about the middle style, made by Cicero, make up a quite apposite account of the prologue of John, in comparison with for example Heb. 1.1–4 (written in the grand style) and Lysias (the Athenian orator who wrote in the plain style): '[It] uses neither the intellectual appeal of the latter class [i.e. plain style] nor the fiery force of the former [i.e. grand style]; akin to both, excelling in neither, sharing in both, or, to tell the truth, sharing in neither.'[81]

The alleged poetic qualities of Jn 1.1–5 are often emphasized by commentators.[82] Interpreted within the context of the levels of style one might therefore think that Jn 1.1 starts in the middle style, leaves it in 1.6 as it becomes prose (in the plain style), perhaps picks up middle style again in 1.14 (with its important theological statements) and finally drops it in 1.19, where the ordinary narrative gets under way. Another possibility, however, is that it maintains the middle style all through to 1.13, although imperfectly executed by a stylistically less learned author. Only from 1.14 do the rhetorical figures appear more and more seldom. The discourse does no longer drown the simple language and the ample use of hiatus in layers of some very bold figures. If one continue reading 1.19 and onwards, the style becomes even plainer and it is hard to find concentrations of figures.

All this might imply a rather sophisticated application of middle style in the beginning of the gospel. If this should be the case, then there is no 'poetry' in 1.1–5, but an elevated prose teeming with rhetorical figures (which is the very thing that gives modern readers a feeling of poetry, while on the contrary it is the figures that create a sense of rhythm and flow; and yet that rhythm and flow is not at all flawless). To get a clearer picture of how much 1.1–13 stands out in comparison with other parts of John, more information on the style of these other parts is needed. Such an analysis will also provide an indication on how one should understand 1.14−18; if these verses have more in common, stylistically, with the rest of the prologue or with the rest of the gospel. It is a fair assessment, however, that the prologue of John−regardless of

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[81] Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 21 (Hendrickson, LCL).

[82] Beasley-Murray 1999: 3; Haenchen 1984: 101.

how stylistically aware its author was−would be interpreted by an early Christian lector, who was preparing to perform the gospel, as an example of the middle style.

7. *Conclusion*

Different types of texts require different levels of style. The style of performance reflects the style of the text, just as the style of the text reflects its content and function. Due to this prevalent idea of congruence, a crucial part of the answer as to how New Testament writings were performed in antiquity can be found by analysing their style. The analysis of Heb. 1.1−4 and Jn 1.1−18 has shown that there are stylistic differences within the New Testament and that they can be comprehended within the system of levels of style.

Using this knowledge provides a key to understanding the delivery of New Testament writings. Much work remains, however. We need to examine New Testament writings again and analyse their styles within the system of stylistic levels. Furthermore, we have to produce a more thorough description of what the ancient levels of style entailed with regards to delivery. Combining the results of these efforts will open up a road ahead. It will be possible to present more secure statements about the performance of the New Testament writings and connect us with ancient conceptions of how texts were composed and delivered.

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