In this chapter, we explore the four units in the synoptic gospels that feature an assertion that Jesus casts out demons by the ruler (or prince) of demons (Matt 9:32-34; 12:22-37; Mark 3:19a-30; Luke 11:18-28). In rhetorical terminology, these units contain a high degree of epideictic rhetoric. By its nature, epideictic rhetoric is not as clearly defined as judicial and deliberative rhetoric.\(^1\) It is commonly known as the oratory of praise and censure, and it treats members of the audience as spectators or observers rather than judges.\(^2\) The goal is to confirm already held values rather than to call forth a decision about the legality of a past action or the expediency of a future action.

Whereas the dominant tradition of epideictic rhetoric features its positive side (praise, laudation, or encomium), the four units we are analyzing give prominence to a negative view of Jesus and his activity in a setting where many have exhibited a positive view. For the most part, ancient treatises suggest that negative epideictic rhetoric—censure and blame (ψόγος), or invective and vituperation (Greek: κακολόγιον; Latin: vituperatio)—applies the same techniques as praise or encomium for an opposite effect. In certain circles after Aristotle it became fashionable to distinguish between “praise” (ἐπαυος), which expresses the greatness of virtue, and “encomium” (ἐγκώμιον), which programatically displays

---

3. See *Rhet. ad Alex*. III.1440b.5.
noble deeds and qualities of people. Rhetoricians did not distinguish censure from vituperation in a similar manner, because they did not give such detailed attention to negative epideictic rhetoric. Careful use of the short passages and passing comments about negative epideictic rhetoric, however, may advance our analysis and interpretation of the four units in the synoptic gospels that feature an assertion that Jesus casts out demons by the ruler of demons.

The general procedure of epideictic rhetoric is to develop topics through amplification (ἀποφάσεως). This procedure displays good and bad qualities in a framework that confirms generally held values. The most common place for epideictic rhetoric was at a civil ceremony, like a funeral or a birthday celebration. But epideictic rhetoric regularly appears in judicial oratory, and the negative use of epideictic rhetoric easily creates a judicial situation. Also, epideictic rhetoric occurs in deliberative rhetoric to inspire a person or group toward good actions in the future. The flexibility of epideictic rhetoric is observable in the use of topics associated with the Beelzebul controversy in the gospels. This chapter will explore this flexibility through analysis of the common synoptic tradition, the hypothesized earliest version, and each of the synoptic versions.

1. The Common Synoptic Tradition

In accordance with the flexible nature of epideictic rhetoric, the synoptic tradition of the Beelzebul Controversy exhibits less verbatim agreement than it does with a unit containing a significant degree of judicial rhetoric like Plucking Grain on the Sabbath. From the perspective of Theon’s Progymnasmata, the common synoptic ingredients constitute a double chreia (διπλὴ χρεία). That is, a chreia containing statements (ἀποφάσεως) of two characters, either one of which creates a chreia. Theon’s example is as follows:

First chreia:
Alexander, the Macedonian king, stood over Diogenes as he slept and said: ‘To sleep all night ill suits a counsellor’; (Iliad 2.24)

Second chreia:
and Diogenes responded: ‘On whom the folk rely, whose cares are many.’ (Iliad 2.25)

Theon’s example contains two chreiai by individual people. In Hellenistic tradition, however, including the synoptic tradition, a particular group of people (companions, seers, ambassadors, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, crowds) may speak as an individual voice. Through this technique, a narrator creates particular character traits for particular groups of people, and these groups function as role-complements or role-opposites of individual characters. The common synoptic ingredients in the Beelzebul Controversy feature direct speech by scribes, Pharisees, or some people in the crowds. When one of these groups speaks with a single voice, they have uttered a statement (ἀποφάσεως) that may function as an individual chreia. This internal nature of the tradition sheds light on the transmission of the Beelzebul Controversy tradition, since the remark by scribes, Pharisees, or some people in the crowds may be transmitted separately as a chreia tradition or it may be coupled with statements by Jesus. The common tradition has the nature of a double chreia, and the second chreia is a refutation of the first chreia, as follows:

(1) Chreia (in the form of abbreviation: συστέλλειν):
[They] said, “… Beelzebul, … By the ruler of demons he casts out demons.”

(2) Refutation (ἀνασκευάζει) through a second, expanded chreia:
He [Jesus] said to them,
(a) A kingdom divided against itself …
(b) and a house …
(c) and if Satan were divided against himself, [he could not] sta[nd].
(d) If a strong man …

The saying in the tradition that could function like a judicial charge

11. The common synoptic Greek text is as follows:

Chreia in the form of abbreviation:
εἶπον/ἐλεγξ, Βεηζζβοι … ἐν τῇ Ἀρχάτῳ τῶν δαιμόνων ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμονία.

Refutation through a second, expanded chreia:
ἐλεγκ/ἐπίθετοι Ἀντίποις,
(a) βασιλεία μερισθε [passive voice] ἐφ’ ἑαυτὸν καθ’ ἑαυτὸν …
(b) καὶ ψεύδη/ψεύδος …
(c) καὶ εἰ/εἰ καὶ δ’ ἄτανάστη ἐφ’ ἑαυτὸν ἐμπιστοθή … [οἱ] στα[τ].
(d) ἐλεγκ/ἐπίθετοι ἑκατονἐφ’
shows the most verbatim agreement. This part features a slanderous assertion that Jesus casts out demons by the ruler of demons, and this ruler is identified with Beelzebul. According to current scholarly information, the name Beelzebul occurs in no other contemporary Jewish writing. The variant spelling "Beelzubub" comes from assimilation to Baal-zebub in 2 Kgs 1:2, which refers to the god of Ekron and evidently derives from "Lord of Heaven" or "Lord of Temple." The common synoptic tradition takes a decisive swerve as it confronts the name Beelzebul. In truth, the tradition has no way to deal with the accusation as phrased, perhaps because the name means almost nothing to anyone, or perhaps because the Christians who tell the story see the name as a way to make light of the strange things opponents of Jesus said to him.

Instead of working out the implications of associating Jesus with Beelzebul, every elaboration features Jesus rephrasing the title as "Satan." This rephrasing establishes a well-known image, namely an individual personification of "the adversary of God," and the tradition has resources to discredit this adversary. The end result, therefore, is that the initial argument of every elaboration disconfirms an alignment of Jesus with Satan rather than with Beelzebul as the opponents have stated it. But perhaps we should not be surprised at this. We know that chreiai regularly end with a remark for which there can be no adequate response, and the remark of the opponents as featured in the tradition does not leave an open door for disconfirmation. But the common tradition has seen a crack in the door if it is possible to associate Beelzebul with Satan. Through this crack, it opens into a rich arena of understanding concerning "the adversary," the elaboration gets started. Once the elaboration started, the energy focused upon it by early Christians produced alternative disconfirmations of a remark they considered to be a misguided attempt by opponents to expose Jesus once and for all.

Thus, all the synoptic accounts associate Beelzebul with Satan (Mark 3:23; Matt 12:26; Luke 11:18), and they contain an argument for the implausibility of Jesus' alignment with Satan. There is no agreement in the tradition about who accuses Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of demons: Mark attributes it to scribes who came down from Jerusalem (Mark 3:22), Matthew attributes it to Pharisees (Matt 12:24), and Luke attributes it to a group of people in a crowd who saw Jesus cast a demon out of a dumb man (Luke 11:15). No one asserts that Jesus' act was illegal, since the charge is an attack on Jesus' character rather than a legal accusation. The synoptic gospels perpetuate a tradition that Jesus responds to the attack with a sequence of statements about "a kingdom divided against itself," "a house," "Satan not standing if he is divided against himself," and a "strong" man.

In this double chreia material, people say that Jesus casts out demons by the prince of demons, whom they name Beelzebul, but they do not claim that Jesus "possesses" or "has" Beelzebul. Only Mark (Mark 3:22a, 30) and John (John 7:20; 8:48–52; 10:20–21) contain statements concerning Jesus' "having" a demon or Beelzebul. Accordingly, the common synoptic tradition presents an argument about a "kingdom" and a "house" to show the implausibility that Satan would use his evil power against himself and his domain, and it presents an argument about "a strong man" to show that a greater power than Satan casts out the demon. The common tradition, then, contains elaboration in the second chreia which refutes the initial chreia in two steps. The basic logic underlying the two steps may be exhibited in syllogistic form. The logic implied in the initial step is:

- If a kingdom or house is divided against itself, it cannot stand.
- If Satan casts out demons, he, his kingdom, and his house are divided against themselves.
- Therefore, if Satan casts out demons, he, his kingdom, and his house cannot stand.

This is an argument for implausibility (ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου). It is unlikely that Satan would be willing to cast out an underling, because he would be divided against himself, and this division would destroy him and his domain. The argument is made syllogistic by introducing a rationale through analogy. Analogy with a kingdom or house introduces the rationale that any domain containing hierarchies of authority cannot stand if it is divided against itself. The basic argument from implausibility is similar to the example Theon gives, presupposing a situation of association or alliance with one another. It is unlikely, Theon says, that Antisthenes, who was an Athenian, said that he was coming from women's quarters to men's as he was coming from Athens to Lacedaemon. The reason, of course, is that Antisthenes is associated or allied with Athens. Likewise, it is unlikely that Satan, who is allied with demons, would cast one of his own associates or allies out of a possessed man. The common synoptic tradition adds a rationale through analogy (because a kingdom or house divided against itself cannot stand), and this additional component introduces syllogistic reasoning. Theon's example only implies a rationale (something like: because a person who

---

12. Lane, Gospel According to Mark, 141.
14. According to Lane, Gospel According to Mark, 141, the name may be "a passing colloquialism for a demon prince."
15. Fuchs, Die Entwicklung, 19.
lived in Athens knows the meaning of true manliness). Thus, the first step in the second part of the common synoptic tradition is a syllogistic argument for the implausibility of the charge that Jesus casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of demons.

The initial argument in the common tradition is followed by another whose underlying logic is:

To be able to enter the house “of” (or “protected by”) a strong man and plunder his possessions, a person must have the strength to bind (or: must be a stronger man who comes and subdues) the strong man.

If Jesus can cast out a demon whose strength is from Satan, he has the strength to bind (or: is a stronger man who has come and subdued) a demon whose strength is from Satan.

If Jesus has the strength to bind (or: is a stronger man who has come and subdued) a demon whose strength is from Satan, then Jesus’ strength is not from Satan but from a stronger source than Satan.

This is an argument for falsity (ἐκ τοῦ ψευδόου). If Jesus can cast out a demon, he has greater strength than a demon, and if a demon gets his strength from Satan, Jesus gets his strength not from Satan but from a power greater than Satan. Theon presents an argument for falsity with a chreia that asserts that it is untruthful that love of money is the mother city of evil, because intemperance is. It is important in an argument for falsity to provide an alternative. Theon’s example provides the alternative of intemperance for love of money. The common synoptic tradition provides “a stronger power than Satan” for Satan. Again, however, the synoptic tradition introduces syllogistic reasoning by providing a rationale through analogy. It is untruthful that Satan casts out demons, because a strong man must be overcome before a house can be plundered, which means that a greater power must overcome a lesser power before the possessions he is guarding can be plundered.

Each gospel amplifies the common tradition in different ways. Matthew and Luke put the common tradition in a setting where Jesus casts a dumb spirit out of a man. In contrast, Mark puts the common tradition in the setting of a house around which people gather and to which kinsfolk come. The Markan setting and Jesus’ response address three topics: those who are his kinsfolk,” “being possessed by Beelzebul,” and “casting out demons by the ruler of demons.” The Markan version uses the common tradition about a house, a kingdom, Satan, and a strong man to show the implausibility and falsity of an argument that Satan casts out Satan. Then Jesus censures “those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit” and praises “kinsfolk who do the will of God.” In contrast, after the common tradition about a house, a kingdom, Satan, and a strong man, Matthew and Luke share assertions that the sons of Jesus’ opponents cast out unclean spirits, that the kingdom of God has come upon them if he casts out demons by the Spirit or finger of God, and that those who are not with Jesus are against him. After sharing this common tradition, however, Matthew’s version adds sayings that produce rhetorical stasis and conclude with judicial language concerning “justification” and “condemnation.” Luke in contrast, merges the topic of “casting out demons by the ruler of demons” with “seeking signs” to establish a broad epideictic framework for the denunciation of Pharisees and lawyers in the succeeding chapter. Each gospel, therefore, exhibits a different manner of elaborating the common tradition. The association of a basic situation and a series of topics, without extensive agreement on the development of the topics or the conclusion, reflects a tradition that is intrinsically epideictic rather than judicial or deliberative.

2. The Earliest Tradition (Matt 9:32–34)

Some interpreters suggest that the earliest form of the tradition was a short unit in which the saying, “By the prince of demons he casts out demons,” was a response to Jesus’ successful performance of an exorcism. In the version available to us in Matt 9:32–34, the unit ends with a saying that contradicts a laudation by bystanders who observed the action. Using Theon’s perspective, this form of the tradition is a responsive chreia (ἀποκριτικὴ χρεια). A responsive chreia contains some remark (λόγος) to which a response is made. In this instance, the crowd makes a remark to which Pharisees respond with a negative assertion:

Situation:
As they were going away, behold, a dumb demoniac was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the dumb man spoke;

Remark by the crowds:
and the crowds marveled, saying, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel.”

Response by the Pharisees:
But the Pharisees said, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.”

The description of the situation begins with the conjunction δὲ and a genitive absolute (αὐτῶν δὲ ἔξερχομένων) followed by a finite verb (προσήνεγκαν) and an accusative object with a descriptive participle (ἀνθρωπον κωφον δαμωνζόμενον). Then it continues with the conjunction καί, a genitive absolute (ἐκβληθέντος τοῦ δαμωνοῦ), and a finite verb

17. See, for example, Fuchs, Die Entwicklung, 21–26 and Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 13.
with a subject (ἐλάλησεν ὁ κυρίος). This is standard procedure for composing a chreia. The remark and the response begin with καὶ and δὲ respectively, and they continue with direct speech preceded either by the participal λέγοντες or the finite verb λέγω. Such straightforward paratactic composition is characteristic of chreia composition.19

The rhetorical situation in Matt 9:32–34 is epideictic, featuring both praise and censure. Immediately after Jesus has cured the dumb man, the crowds praise Jesus’ activity as beyond comparison to all other acts in Israel’s history:

And the crowds marvelled, saying, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel” (9:33b).

In turn, Pharisees censure Jesus’ activity with a dissenting opinion:

But the Pharisees said, “By the prince of demons he casts out demons.” (9:34)

The situation depicted in this unit has positive and negative dynamics similar to the situation that gave rise to the classic epideictic treatises on the “Praise of Helen.” In a setting where Homeric epic praised Helen of Sparta as a beautiful and charming heroine, a group of poets voiced a dissenting opinion.20 Gorgias of Sicily and Isocrates addressed this situation with Encomia of Helen that made this topic a favorite in the schools of rhetoric.21

It is important to notice that epideictic rhetoric regularly features statements of praise and censure by various people about a specific person rather than statements by that person himself or herself. Thus, in contrast to other synoptic tradition which features a situation to which Jesus responds, the version posited to be the earliest form does not feature a response by Jesus himself. The form of the tradition in Matt 9:32–34 is analogous to epideictic units in Greco-Roman literature that contain two interpretations of an event. An approximate analogy, but it is only approximate since the main character makes a response to the situation, exists in Plutarch, Alexander 31.10–13:

Situation:

Meanwhile the older of his companions, and particularly Parmenio, when they saw the plain between the Niphates and the Gordyean mountains all lighted up with the barbarian fires, while an indistinguishably mingled and tumultuous sound of voices arose from their camp as if from a vast ocean, were astonished at their multitude and argued with one another that it was a great and grievous task to repel such a tide of war by engaging in broad day-light. They therefore waited upon the king when he had finished his sacrifices, and tried to persuade him to attack the enemy by night, and so to cover up with darkness the most fearful aspect of the coming struggle.

Response:

But he gave them the celebrated answer, “I will not steal my victory”;

Remark by some:

whereupon some thought that he had made a vainglorious reply, and was jesting in the presence of so great a peril.

Response by others:

Others, however, thought that he had confidence in the present situation and estimated the future correctly, not offering Dareius in case of defeat an excuse to pluck up courage again for another attempt, by laying the blame this time upon darkness and night, as he had before upon mountains, defiles, and sea.

In this story, one group of people considers Alexander’s statement to be driven by vanity and carelessness, whereas another group considers his statement to be wise and well-calculated. The same kind of division of opinion may appear in a shorter unit that contains no speech by the main character, for example, Plutarch, Alexander 3.5–7:

Situation:

Alexander was born early in the month Hecatombaeon, the Macedonian name for which is Louis, on the sixth day of the month, and on this day the temple of Ephesian Artemis was burnt.

Remark by Hegesias:

It was apropos of this that Hegesias the Magnesian made an utterance frigid enough to have extinguished that great conflagration. He said, namely, it was no wonder that the temple of Artemis was burnt down, since the goddess was busy bringing Alexander into the world.

Response by Magi:

But all the Magi who were then at Ephesus, looking upon the temple’s disaster as a sign of further disaster, ran about beating their faces and crying aloud that woe and great calamity for Asia had that day been born.

In this story, a group of people who have their livelihood endangered by the burning of Artemis’ temple contradict an initial assertion which implied that the goddess Artemis was an assistant at Alexander’s birth. Even in the setting of Plutarch’s more sophisticated style of Greek, the chief grammatical features of the epideictic story in Matt 9:32–34 are present. Plutarch begins the first element with δ’ ὁδῷ, the second component with ἔτη γ’, and the final component with ὅσοι δὲ. The unit emphasizes the speech and action of people other than Alexander, much like Matt 9:32–34 emphasizes the speech of people other than Jesus. In fact,
just as Plutarch refers to Alexander’s birth in passive voice (εγεννησεν) so Matthew refers to Jesus’ action in passive voice (“and when the demon was cast out”), since it is simply a presupposition for the unit rather than its center. In contrast, active verbs refer to the action and speech of Hesegias and the magi, as active verbs refer to the action of the people who bring the demonized man to Jesus, the speech of the man from whom the demon is cast out, the comments of the crowds who marvel at Jesus’ accomplishment, and the accusation by the Pharisees that Jesus casts out demons by the ruler (or prince) of demons. This compositional procedure exhibits the passive epideictic nature of the unit that focuses on praise and censure of Jesus.

Aelius Theon called attention to the passive nature of certain situations in chreiai, and his illustration, interestingly enough, contains a negative judgment on a person’s life:

Didymon the flute-player, on being convicted of adultery, was hanged by his namesake.

This chreia displays a dimension of epideictic rhetoric that interpreters usually overlook. Epideictic rhetoric regularly is about someone, and from this dimension it develops into speech about things like cities, etc. Thus, the classic tradition of the encomium began with speech about Helen of Sparta, and most of the epideictic speeches feature speech about a person being honored on a special occasion. The birthday speech (γενεθλιακον), for example, features speech about a person’s birth.22 As Menander says:

praise the day on which your subject was born. If he was born during a holy month or at some other festival, base the encomium on the circumstances of the day, viz. that he was born in a holy month or at a festival.23

This describes, as the reader will recognize, the kind of content found in the unit quoted above about Alexander’s birth. Accordingly, the prose introducing the situation features basic information about his birth, and the response contains speech by various people about Alexander’s birth. Another well-known epideictic speech is the funeral speech (ἐπιτάφιος).24 Menander Rhetor tells us that:

At Athens, ἐπιτάφιος—funeral speech—is the name of the speech delivered each year over those who fell in the wars. It is so called simply because of its being spoken over the actual grave.25

Since the person is dead, someone else, naturally, must rehearse the person’s activities and praise his achievements. When this situation is put in chreia-form, however, a prose introduction may present a person’s exploits leading up to the situation of death, and the fallen hero may deliver the final line of the tribute. An example is well illustrated in Theon’s expansion of the Epameinondas chreia:

Situation:

Epameinondas, the Theban general, was of course a good man even in time of peace, but when war broke out between his country and the Lacedaemonians, he performed many brilliant deeds of courage. As a Boeotarch at Leuctra, he triumphed over the enemy, but while campaigning and fighting for his country, he died at Mantineia. While he was dying of his wounds

Action and Remark by Friends:

and his friends were particularly grief-stricken that he was dying childless,

Response by Epameinondas:

he smiled and said: “Stop grieving, friends, for I have left you two immortal daughters: two victories of our country over the Lacedaemonians, the one at Leuctra, who is the older, and the younger, who has just been born to me at Mantineia.”26

The opening lines rehearse the valiant exploits of Epameinondas, much like a funeral speech. The chreia form of the tribute, however, puts speech on the lips of the dying general, allowing him to present the climactic line of the tribute. Similarly, the synoptic tradition does not allow the passive nature of Matt 9:32-34 to dominate. Rather, the various synoptic authors compose units that present a situation in which Jesus responds to the divided opinion over his activity in the tradition.

3. The Markan Version (Mark 3:22-30)

The Markan version features a house as the locale, and no one brings a demonized man to Jesus for healing. It embeds the common synoptic material in a sequence that features a segmented response to three issues raised by the situation. The first issue concerns “those akin to Jesus” (οἱ παρ’ αὐτὸν), the second concerns Jesus’ possession of Beelzebul, and the third concerns casting out demons by the ruler of demons. The passage contains an intricate network of structural features that makes it pos-

sible to outline it or display it in various ways. From the perspective of its overall rhetorical form, a situation occurs in Mark 3:20–22 that introduces three topics:

**Situation**

**Introduction**

Then when *those close to him* heard it, they went out to seize him, for people were saying, “He is out of his mind."

**Partition or Division**

**Topic: Kinfolk**

And when *those close to him* heard it, they went out to seize him, for people were saying, “He is out of his mind."

**Topic: Possession**

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He *possesses* Beelzebul,

**Topic: Casting Out**

and by the prince of demons he *casts out* the demons."

First, while Jesus is either “in a house” or “at home” (evidently at Capernaum) and a crowd has gathered so that they cannot even eat, people “akin to Jesus” come to seize him because “people” or “they themselves” were saying Jesus was out of his mind. Next, scribes come down from Jerusalem and make two statements: (a) Jesus possesses (ἐχεῖ) Beelzebul, and (b) by the ruler of demons he casts out demons. Jesus responds to these three topics in three segments of material, beginning with the last topic. First, he argues the implausibility and falsity that Satan casts out Satan (Mark 3:23–27); second, he pronounces future judgment on those who say he possesses some other power than the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28–30); and third, he defines those who truly are his kin (Mark 3:31–34):

**Response**

**Topic: Casting Out**

Quaestio (paraphrase of the scribes’ final remark)

And he called them to him, and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan?”

**Argument for Implausibility from Analogies (ἐὰν παραβολῶν)**

“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."

“And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand."

“And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but possesses an end.“

**Argument for Falsity from a Contrary (ἐὰν ἐπαρρίᾳ)**

“But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house.”

First, Jesus summons the scribes and asks a rhetorical question that introduces the initial topic of his response, which addresses the final topic. Jesus’ rhetorical question “How can Satan cast out Satan?” replaces the scribes’ terms “ruler of demons” and “demons” with “Satan,” and this replacement adapts the scribes’ statement so that the arguments that follow can disconfirm it. Jesus’ question, then, paraphrases the statement by the scribes in a manner that accords with Hermogenes’ recommendation that the first rhetorical act after the recital of the chreia be a paraphrase of the chreia. Secondly, Jesus presents a three-part argument for implausibility containing internal repetitive form through the threefold repetition of “is divided against itself . . . cannot stand.”

The expansion of the third statement in characteristic Markan style places the verb ἔχει (“to have” or “to possess”) emphatically at the end, and this term provides a bridge to the next topic. Before turning to the

27. Since Jesus responds to the issues in reverse order, we may display the structure chiastically:

A  Those akin to him come to seize him. (Mark 3:20–21)
B  He possesses Beelzebul. (Mark 3:22a)
C  By the prince of demons he casts out demons. (Mark 3:22b)
C'  It is impossible that Satan would cast out demons. (Mark 3:23–27)
B'  Whoever says Jesus possesses an unclean spirit blasphemes. (Mark 3:28–30)
A'  Jesus’ kin are those who do the will of God. (Mark 3:31–35)

Since the final scene responds to the first part and since narrative comment divides it from Jesus’ response to the scribes’ charges, we may display the structure as an *intercalation* as Donahue, *Are You the Christ?*, 58 suggests:

Those akin to Jesus (Mark 3:20–21)
Jesus and scribes from Jerusalem (Mark 3:22–30)
The kinfolk of Jesus (Mark 3:31–35).

Since the narrator introduces Jesus’ response to the scribes with προσαλειαγώνος (“having called to”), we may display the structure as a three-step progression as we suggested in Robbins, “Summons and Outline”:

I. The situation into which Jesus comes (Mark 3:20–21)
II. Interaction that calls forth teaching (Mark 3:22)
III. Jesus “calls to” those around him and teaches them (Mark 3:23–35).

28. Perhaps this house is Jesus’ Capernaum home.
Jesus meets censure beyond acceptability with mutual censure. Markan style again is evident in the tripartite structure of the authoritative saying shown above in the three-step quotation. The third line provides the rationale for the saying, and this rationale closes Jesus’ argument against the second topic. With this final statement the Markan version creates a sequence that binds the unit together through three occurrences of ἐχει ("he possesses") in final emphatic position: Beelzebul he possesses (3:21); an end he [Satan] possesses (3:26); an unclean spirit he [Jesus] possesses (3:30). With this sequence, the Markan version deflects the possession of Beelzebul by Jesus to Satan’s possession of an end and to an absurd idea that Jesus could possess an unclean spirit. When the saying juxtaposes “Holy Spirit” with “unclean spirit,” the reader remembers that the Holy Spirit came into Jesus at baptism (1:10) and this spirit gave him the ability to withstand testing by Satan for forty days in the wilderness (1:13). In this instance, then, the language bites, defects, exposes absurdity, and calls previous settings to remembrance. This step in the argument moves through the door opened by the ironic, syllogistic argument for implausibility and falsity to attack without mercy those who dare to articulate such statements.

After addressing the second topic, the unit returns to the initial topic: the coming of Jesus’ kin in response to a belief that Jesus is out of his mind:

Topic: Kinfolk

Argument from Comparison (ἐκ συγκρισιῶς)

And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting about him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, asking for you."

Reply by Jesus

And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"

Conclusion (Judgment with Rationale)

And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother."

The Markan version links the final topic with the initial topic by having Jesus’ mother and brothers “call to him” (Mark 3:31) in a manner reminiscent of Jesus’ “calling to” the scribes (Mark 3:23). In addition, there may be a play on the assertion, in final emphatic position, that Jesus is ἐκείνη ("out of his mind") and that Jesus’ mother and brothers are ἐκείνω στήκοντες ("standing outside"). This suspicion arises, because the episode is charac-
terized by repetition that persists from the beginning to the end. Jesus focuses the topic in the final unit with a rhetorical question in a manner similar to his focussing of the initial topic. The introductory section had referred to "those near to him" (οἱ παρ' αὐτῶν). The introduction (3:31), the speech of the crowd (3:32), and then Jesus' rhetorical question (3:33) change "those near him" to "his mother and brothers." Again the rhetorical technique is tripartite repetitive form. After the rhetorical question, Jesus identifies his true mother and brothers, and ends with a tripartite reference to "my brother, sister, and mother" who do the will of God. For Jesus, the question is whether those who stand outside, who think he is out of his mind, and who call for him (or come to seize him: Mark 3:20) are truly his kin. When Jesus replies that whoever does the will of God is his brother, sister, and mother, he is addressing the initial topic. His true kin act according to the will of God, and this implies that he himself has his mind on the will of God. Thus, instead of being "out of his mind," he and his kin have their minds on God and are seeking to do his will.

Thus, through the juxtaposition of good and bad, Jesus confirms the good and exposes the bad. Toward the end of the second topic Jesus says, "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit does not have forgiveness forever, but is guilty of eternal sin." In contrast, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister, and mother." Judicial language emerges in Mark 3:28–29, and the conclusion in Mark 3:35 has a generally deliberative orientation toward action in the future. But epideictic rhetoric dominates from beginning to end as the topics, which are filled with invective, are met with statements filled both with invective and with praise.

4. The Version in Matt 12:22–37

As we begin the analysis of Matt 12:22–37, it may be good to reflect a moment on Matthew's use of the short version of the accusation that Jesus casts out demons by the ruler (or prince) of demons (Matt 9:32–34), which we analyzed earlier. The short version stands at the end of two Matthean chapters that are well known to interpreters for their presentation of Jesus as the Messiah of Deed (Matthew 8–9) after three chapters that present the Messiah of Word (Matthew 5–7). Matthew introduces the Pharisees to the reader in Matt 3:7 when they come with Sadducees to be baptized by John the Baptist. Then, after the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew formulates what Betz calls his "fourth and final hermeneutical principle" by comparing the righteousness that will make it possible for his disciples to enter the kingdom of Heaven with the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, which is not sufficient for entrance. Then, in the stories that present Jesus' practices and mighty works, the Pharisees object to Jesus' eating with tax collectors and sinners (Matt 9:11), and they fast during times when the disciples of Jesus do not fast (Matt 9:14–17). In other words, the actions of Jesus and his disciples differ from the actions of the Pharisees, and the actions of the Pharisees are not deemed appropriate to provide entrance into the kingdom. At the end of Matthew's portrayal of Jesus' practices and mighty works, the crowds marvel that Jesus' action exceeds any action prior to it in Israel (Matt 9:33). In contrast, the Pharisees attempt to defame his career by assigning his exorcistic power to "the prince (or ruler) of demons" (Matt 9:34). The short version of the Pharisees' attack serves as the conclusion to the section. This means that there is no attempt to respond to the Pharisees' assertion in the section that exhibits Jesus' mighty works and deeds. Rather, Jesus continues his work (Matt 9:35–36) and commissions the Twelve to help him carry out the work (Matt 9:37–11:1). In other words, whereas the Matthean Jesus develops a complete argument to support his understanding of righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount, he does not present a rebuttal to the charge by the Pharisees at the end of the section on his actions and practices. Matthew will not, however, allow the charge to remain unan-

31. Repeated terms in the Markan version are as follows:
καὶ ἐξεῖλεν (vss 20, 31)
οἶκον/οἶκα (vss 21, 25 [twice], 27 [twice]
δύναται (vss 20, 32)
ἐξέφη/ἐξω στῆκεντες (vss 21, 31)
ἐκεῖ (vss 22, 26, 29, 30)
ἐκβάλλει (vss 22, 23)
προσκαλεσάμενοι αὐτῶν/πρὸς αὐτὸν καλοῦντες αὐτὸν (vss 23, 31)
δίνει (vss 23, 24, 25, 26, 27)
Σατανᾶς (vss 23 [twice], 26)
βασιλεία (vss 23 [twice])
ἐφ’ ἑαυτῆ/αυτῶ (vss 24, 25, 26)
μερισθήναι (vss 24, 25, 26)
σταθήσαι (vss 24, 25, 26, and 31)
ἀλλα (vss 26, 27, 29)
ὁ ἴδον (vss 27 [twice])
ἀφθαίρεσιν/ἐκεῖ ἄφησιν (vss 28, 29)
βλασφημίας/βλασφημεί (vss 28 [twice], 29)
ἀμαρτήμα (vss 28, 29)
πενήμα (vss 29, 30)
μάτηρ (vss 31, 32, 33, 34 [twice])
ἀδελφοί (vss 31, 32, 33, 34 [twice])
κόθημα (vss 32, 34)
ἐκ (vss 31, 32)

32. See Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 246–47.
swered by Jesus. We turn now to the unit where Matthew presents Jesus’ response.

In Matt 12:22–37, Jesus responds with a complete argument against the Pharisees. Whereas the basic principles of epideictic rhetoric and elaboration of the treia seemed sufficient for explicating the Markan version, the Matthean version breaks the bounds of these models as it counters—carefully, intricately, and powerfully—the case presented by the Pharisees. Once again, then, we will use Hermogenes’ On Stases to guide the analysis of the Matthean version of the tradition.

From a perspective informed by Hermogenes’ On Stases, the Matthean version of the Beelzebul Controversy has the nature of a political question with an epideictic focus. A political question (πολιτικόν ζήτημα) is a reasoned disputation (ἀμφιβολία λογική) on a particular item from the standpoint of customs arising from ordinary notions of justice (δίκαιον), honor (καλός), or expediency (συμφέρον). In this instance, the question arises from ordinary notions of honor (καλός) and calls forth praise (ἐπαυγεῖ) of the good and censure (ψόγος) of the bad.35 According to Hermogenes, this kind of disputation arises not only from persons (πρόσωπα) but also from deeds (πράγματα). The disputation naturally begins with reference to persons, since “the mention of a person does generally present an object for scrutiny.”36 Moreover, those references “which are specific and definite have the greatest force.”37 A disputant also will use terms indicating relation, like master and slave or father and son,38 and statements that combine a person with an act.39

The beginning of the Matthean version of the Beelzebul Controversy contains the rhetorical features characteristic of a political disputation. The opening clauses introduce Jesus’ healing of a demonized man, and the crowds present a quaestio (“question”) that focusses on Jesus’ personal identity:

Situation:
Then a blind and dumb demoniac was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw.

Quaestio:
And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?”

35. See Aristotle, Rhet. I.iii.5 for the rhetorical sphere of καλός (“honor”).
40. See Duling, “Solomon.”
43. I am grateful to Prof. Morton Smith, Columbia University, for suggesting that I pursue the significance of this comment by the narrator.
analysis, this comment suggests that Jesus knew the essential propositions (ἐνδυνάμωμα) the Pharisees would use to supply the proofs (περιείς) for their definition of his act. Matthew’s choice of Greek is fascinating, since the noun ἐνδυνάμωμα (“thought”) is amazingly close to the noun ἐνδύμαμα (“enthymeme”), which is the rhetoricians’ term for the kind of deductive argument that is most powerful in disputation. Matthew’s comment suggests that Jesus is able to intercept and preempt the Pharisees’ argument, because he knows the essential components of their argument.

After the comment by the narrator, Jesus presents an argument from analogy and quality in common which sets the stage for a counter-definition (ἀνθρωπόμος). The argument moves deftly and intricately through a series of steps to attain this end:

Transitional Comment:
Knowing their thoughts, he said to them,

Argument from Analogies for the Implausibility of the Pharisees’ Definition:
“Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand; and if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his Kingdom stand?”

Argument from Quality in Common (ἡ κοινὴ ποιῶσις):
“And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges.

Counterdefinition (ἀνθρωπόμος):
But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Restatement of the Counterdefinition by Analogy:
Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, if he does not first bind the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.”

With the argument from analogy with a kingdom, a city, and a house, Jesus begins to refute the claim of the Pharisees. Here we see the common tradition in a new form. Instead of presenting three if-clauses (ἐάν, ἐάν, εἰ) in a sequence, the Matthean version presents a *parallelismus membrorum* followed by a simple conditional clause and a rhetorical question. This compositional procedure creates a progressive form that leads to the question: How then will his kingdom stand? Instead of simply changing the language of the opponents from “the prince of demons” to “Satan,” as the Markan version does, the Matthean version moves through the change into language about “kingdom.” This move prepares the way for the counterdefinition that follows (“if I . . . , then the Kingdom of God has come upon you”). But before the counterdefinition, the Matthean version presents an argument from quality in common. Sons of the Pharisees cast out demons. Would the Pharisees suggest that their own sons cast them out by Beelzebul? With this argument, Jesus produces a judicial indictment of the Pharisees by their own kin. According to Hermogenes, an argument from quality in common is used in a second (answering) speech, which this speech is perceived to be in Matthew. The appeal to “sons” is not only a skillful transference of “Son” of David to “sons” of the Pharisees, but, again according to Hermogenes, it attacks whatever advantage the opponents may have by presenting “children, wives, friends, and devices of this kind.” This presentation may draw on the topics of “the lawful, the just, the expedient, the possible, and the honorable.” At this point in the argument, the Matthean Jesus draws on the topic of the just: the Pharisees’ own sons will judge them as unjust, since they would not accuse their own sons of casting out demons by Beelzebul. With the argument from quality in common, the judicial dynamics that began when the Pharisees presented the case against Jesus continue as Jesus presents a counter case against the Pharisees. Jesus reverses the indictment so it applies to the Pharisees rather than himself. This is a form of argument from the contrary, and it opens the way for a counter-definition (ἀνθρωπόμος):

But if it is by the spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Jesus, in contrast to the Pharisees, defines his exorcisms as “Spirit of God exorcism.” This is the proper definition, he argues, whereas the Pharisees’ claim is implausible, inappropriate, and unjust. In addition, the counter-definition refers to kingdom, and its use exhibits the principle that the kingdom of God is not divided against itself, but asserts its power against a strong one that it can subdue, namely Satan and his kingdom.

The counterdefinition is followed by a restatement of it that concludes the section. In other words, since Matthew has already introduced a counterdefinition, the statement about the strong man does not show the falsity of the opponents’ argument, as it does in Mark, but confirms the assertion already made in the counterdefinition. The restatement moves from the analogy of kingdom, which was used in the


first stich of the parallelismus membrorum, to the analogy of house in the second stich. If the casting out of demons by the Spirit of God exhibits the coming of the Kingdom of God, then the strong man has been bound and his house is being plundered.

After the counterdefinition and its restatement in terms of "house" analogy, a series of sayings establishes the counter-case against the Pharisees. According to Hermogenes, a speaker can establish the case by drawing an inference, showing the gravity of the issue, and showing the better alternative through comparison. Matthew adds a judicial feature with a statement of law, then in the tradition of epideictic he presents the comparison that establishes a diairesis between good and bad. In Matthew, then, there are four steps as follows:

Inference (συλλογισμός):

"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

Gravity (ἡ πηλικότητη):

Therefore, I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

Statement of the Law:

And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

Diairesis through Analogy:

"Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit."

In the stasis of definition, according to Hermogenes, the inference draws the definition and the counterdefinition together. In Matthew, Jesus begins with an inference that the Pharisees are "against" him. This use of "against" changes the "against itself" of the parallelismus membrorum to "against me" through inference that emerges from the Pharisees' definition of his action as "Beelzebul exorcism." In other words, since Jesus casts out demons by the Spirit of God, the Pharisees' statement that he casts them out by Beelzebul means that they are "against" Jesus and not "with" him.

After the inference, Jesus describes the gravity of the issue: blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven. This statement begins with πᾶσα ("every") that opens both lines of the first parallelismus membrorum. This time, instead of synthetic parallelism, the lines contain antithetical parallelism:

every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven.

After the statement of the gravity of the issue, Jesus states the law that is operative in the situation. Since he gives the punishment for the act, the statement takes the form of casuistic rather than apodictic law:

and whoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him;
but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him either in this age or in the coming age.

After the statement of the law, the Matthean version presents an epideictic diairesis through analogy, a division between that which is good and that which is bad. This rhetorical figure suggests that there are only two alternatives—a good tree with good fruit and a bad tree with bad fruit—and the analogy suggests that "the tree is known by its fruit." With the inference, the issue becomes "those who are against," and with the statement of the gravity of the offense and the law, it develops into "those who speak against." Then the epideictic diairesis characterizes "those who speak against" as "bad." This progression employs both judicial and epideictic rhetoric to impugn the character of the Pharisees who spoke against Jesus after he had performed a good action. The argument shows that the action of the Pharisees is shameful. It is so shameful that it shall not be forgiven, either now or in the future. Then a new arena of analogy, the tree and its fruit, associates the Pharisees with production of evil that reveals evil character as its source. The conclusion maintains the diairesis between good and evil but shifts the image from production of fruit to "bringing forth treasure":

Conclusion (Heightening Emotion through Direct Attack):

Direct Address:

"Brood of vipers!"

Quaestio:

How can you speak good, when you are evil?

Rationale:

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks; the good man out of his good treasure brings forth (ἐκβάλλεις) good, and the evil man out his evil treasure brings forth (ἐκβάλλεις) evil."

Judgment with Rationale:

"I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter."

"For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."
Now the exhortation has worked through "that which the mouth speaks" to "that which is brought forth (ἐκβάλλει)." At this point a word play takes place on the "casting forth" at the beginning of the unit. How can an evil man cast out evil? The answer is that an evil man may bring forth evil words and deeds, but a good man brings forth good words and deeds. Building on the diairesis ("division") between the good and the bad and the analogy that a tree is known by its fruit, the answer indicted the "heart" of those who speak against Jesus and his deeds. When the Pharisees cast out a word, it was an evil word out of their evil treasures. In contrast, when Jesus cast out (ἐκβάλλει) the demon, it was a good action out of his good treasure.

Direct address that intensifies emotion is a characteristic feature in a conclusion: "Brood of vipers!" Then the questio reiterates the diaries achieved in the previous section: "How can you speak good, when you are evil?" The rationale summarizes the argument that a good person who uses his words carefully in exorcism and in refutation has just made. The judgment is introduced with "I tell you" and is general in character as it speaks in third person about "men" and "they." Then, returning to second person plural, Jesus concludes with a διαίρεσις ("division") containing judicial language: "By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." With this move, the argument leaves the Pharisees as subjects whose words exonerate or condemn them. Epideictic oratory, then, has brought forth highly judicial language. A special touch of the Matthean composition appears in the use of the preposition κατά for "against" throughout the elaboration. The discussion of a kingdom divided "against" itself, a house divided "against" itself, and Satan divided "against" himself leads to an inference about he who is "against me." Then a discussion of "speaking against" the Holy Spirit and the Son of man leads to the concluding statement that "by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be judged against" (καταδικασθητί). The compound verb with κατά stands in final emphatic position at the end of the unit. This leaves the final comment on the negative side of praise and censure, in contrast to the Markan version that ended on the positive side with "my brother, sister, and mother who do the will of God" (Mark 3:35). The Matthean version has not officially pronounced a verdict, but it has made eminently clear the manner in which it will reach the verdict. The author of the Matthean version has lined us up on the side of Jesus against the Pharisees whom Jesus has been addressing.

4.1 Conclusion

When we apply insights from ancient rhetoric to Matt 9:32–34 and Matt 12:22–37, we see not only techniques analogous to the preliminary stage of rhetorical composition but also techniques discussed in advanced stages of rhetorical training. Analysis from the perspective of chreia composition reveals how Matthew has composed a brief epideictic unit to conclude a section that depicts the mighty acts of the Messiah. Alternatively, a chreia may be the beginning point for an elaboration which contains significant dimensions of rhetorical stasis. If the elaboration is designed to defend one person's career and defame another entire group, one will not be surprised to discover that the argument contains most or all of the steps Hermogenes recommends for a complete rhetorical argument.


The internal epideictic nature of the Beelzebul controversy emerges in full form in the Lukan version. In contrast to the Matthean version, which presents a well-organized stasis argument, the Lukan version has a topical organization reminiscent of the Markan principle of organization. Instead of a chiastic tripartite structure like the Markan version, however, the Lukan version strings together a series of units with a topical relationship much like some of the sections in Plutarch's Parallel Lives, where a list of apophthegms occur in a loosely-organized progression. The Lukan version merges the request for a sign with the Beelzebul Controversy, and this prepares the way for a series of units concerning censure, an unclean spirit, praise, and testing. The opening chreia prepares the stage for these developments through four responses to Jesus' action at the beginning:

Situation
Now he was casting out a demon that was dumb;

Topic: Exit
when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke,

Topic: Praise
and the crowds marveled.

Topic: Censure
But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons";

Topic: Test
while others, to test him, sought from him a sign from heaven.

In contrast to the Matthean version that uses aorist tense for Jesus' action in the opening scene, the Lukan version begins with a peri-

phrastic imperfect construction: “Now he was casting out a demon that was dumb” (Luke 11:14). In turn, the demon comes out, the dumb man speaks, and the crowd marvels. The unit begins, then, with direct action by Jesus, the demon, and the crowds. Before the unit ends, however, there are two more actions: (a) some people in the crowd say that Jesus casts out demons by Beelzebul, and (b) others test him seeking a sign from heaven. The end result of this composition is a complex, active situation.

Once the scene is set up in this complex, active way, the Lukan version depicts Jesus in response to the variety of activities going on. First, Jesus responds to the people who say he casts out demons by Beelzebul. This response has the same basic steps as the Matthean version:

Topic: Censure

Transitional Comment:

But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them,

Argument from Analogy for the Implausibility of the Beelzebul Definition:

“Every kingdom divided upon itself is laid waste, and house upon house falls. And if Satan also is divided upon himself, how will his kingdom stand?”

Counterdefinition:

“For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul,

by whom do your sons cast them out?

Therefore they shall be your judges.

But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Argument from Analogy:

“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace;

but when one stronger than he comes upon him and conquers him, he takes away his armor upon which he trusted, and divides his spoil.”

Inference:

“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.”

This section of the Lukan version is similar to the Matthean version. Yet it contains touches that give a slightly different style of integration to the unit. Instead of using κατά for “against” so that “divided against” leads through “he who is against” and “whoever speaks against” to “by your words you will be judged against (καταδιωκάσθησθαι),” the Lukan version discusses a kingdom or a house that dissipates its power “upon itself” and a stronger man who uses his power “upon someone else” and takes away that “upon which” the other person trusted. In addition, the Lukan version of the stronger man does not refer to “entering the strong man’s house.” Rather, the Lukan version focusses on the strong man who “guards” his palace but then is conquered by a stronger person. Since these terms and images re-emerge almost playfully as the elaboration proceeds, the overall composition differs noticeably from the more severe judicial tone of the Matthean version.

After addressing the group which censures his activity, Jesus addresses the activity of the unclean spirit who went out of the man:

Topic: Exit

Argument from Fable (μῦθος):

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest; and finding none he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.”

This little fable (μῦθος) applies the analogy of a house to a man with an unclean spirit. Up to this point the elaboration has explored the possible forces at work in the casting out of a demon. Therefore, the discussion concerned the action in the first clause of the section: “and he was casting out a demon” (Luke 11:14a). In the exorcism itself we were told that the demon went out (Luke 11:14c), but then we were told about the actions of the healed man, the crowds who marveled, some who censured Jesus, and some who tested him. Now we are told about the potential activity of an unclean spirit once he has gone out of a man. First he “seeks rest,” but then he decides to return to “his house” and brings seven other spirits “more evil than himself” into the swept and well-ordered abode. We must see the conception at work here. The house that he left has been well-kept while he was away. In fact, it reminds a person of the house in which the possessions were at peace because they were guarded by a fully-armed strong man (Luke 11:21). It is surprising, of course, that the house is not guarded when the unclean spirit returns with seven others. But instead of pursuing this angle, it seems to be a commentary on “he who does not gather with me scatters.” Those who turn against Jesus will go out and wander around seeking a place of rest. In contrast, those who gather to Jesus will be with him, his kingdom, and his house. When those who have scattered become aware of their situation, they will return home, much like the Prodigal Son returns in Luke 15:17-20. But, instead of being greeted by an overjoyed father, they will find a clean house, go out and bring others more evil
than themselves and put the house in greater disorder than it was at first. This fable appears to relate Jesus’ exorcism to the action of the group who turned against him and will scatter to cause even greater disorder than they presently have caused. With the fable a new term, namely “evil,” appears in the elaboration. We will see this term again before the elaboration ends.

Immediately after Jesus’ statement that associates people who ensure good activity with demons who gather even more evil associates around themselves, a woman in the crowd, representing those who praise Jesus’ activity, raises her voice and pronounces a blessing. The unit is as follows:

Topic: Praise

Eideichte Chreia with Appropriate Redirection of the Praise

As he said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!” But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and guard it!”

The composition of this unit keeps the activity of the scene in motion. While Jesus is speaking, the woman speaks out. Thus, whatever Jesus may have been inclined to say after the fable has been interrupted, now he must address people who praise him. It may appear, at first blush, that Jesus should be happy with the woman’s statement of praise. But auditors in Mediterranean society know the danger of flattery, and Jesus immediately removes any suspicion that he might be susceptible to it. The woman speaks out of the world of blessing she knows. A mother who bore such a capable, gifted, and articulate son would certainly consider herself blessed. Thus the woman praises Jesus through her mother: “Blessed is the woman that bore you and the breasts that you sucked” (Luke 11:27). Jesus responds from the perspective of the adult male role for which he was anointed (Luke 4:18–19). In his view, her statement may encourage him to think about fame and glory rather than the tasks that lie ahead. Thus Jesus directs attention to the word of God, much as he responded to Satan with words of God during the temptations in the wilderness (Luke 4:1–13). In the same mode in which he knew the word of God and kept it in the wilderness, he asserts that those are blessed who “hear the word of God and guard it.” In the Lukan sequence, the wording of this response has an interesting relationship to Jesus’ earlier statement about the strong man: “When the strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his possessions are in peace.” Likewise, “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and guard it.” In the midst of censure, flattery, and temptation, the only safeguard is, as Jesus explained at the end of his paraphrase of the parable of the sower, to “hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15).

In the Lukan version, Jesus’ response to both the censure and praise sets the stage for his response to testing. When tested, Jesus might not only fail by being unable to perform a special sign, but he might be lured into an exhibition of his power that would persuade more people in the crowd to praise him. Thus, Jesus now presents an elaborate response to those who test him by seeking from him a sign from heaven:

Topic: Test

Thesis:

When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, “This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah.”

Rationale:

For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be to this generation.

Argument from Example:

The queen of the South will arise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Argument from Analogy:

Contrary:

No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a bushel, but on a stand, that those who enter may see the light.

Application:

Your eye is the lamp of your body;

Diaeresis:

when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness.

Concluding Exhortation:

Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness.
If then your whole body is full of light, not having any part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.

49. See, for example, Plutarch, On Friends.
Again this section begins with a statement that continues the activity with which the unit began. In the midst of increasing crowds, referred to by a present genitive absolute, Jesus begins to speak to those who wish to test him by seeking a sign from heaven. They shall receive no sign except the sign of Jonah, namely the action and speech of the Son of man that functions like the action and speech of Jonah to the men of Nineveh. This reference provides the opportunity to introduce exemplary people from the past who proclaimed and repented of evils and who embodied and sought wisdom. What those people heard, saw, and did prepared the way for the greater things people hear, see, and need to do now. The argument from analogy suggests that the signs of Jesus’ mission and greatness are clearly visible—on a lamp stand. Thus, it is foolish to seek some other sign. If a person cannot see how Jesus functions, that person is full of darkness. Returning to the image of the house, the elaboration envisions the body of a person as a house that needs to have light in it. Earlier, the house out of which the unclean spirit went was the body of a man who had been healed through exorcism, and the return of the unclean spirit produced a worse state than his first dwelling there. As the body is envisioned as a house at the end of the elaboration, the eye is a lamp, and all who enter see the light when the lamp is put on a stand rather than in the cellar or under a bushel. This leads to the exhortative conclusion.

The unit ends with the observation that if your whole body is full of light, it will be possible for you to see clearly. A true picture of things will reveal that Jesus casts out demons by the finger of God, that he is not susceptible to flattery but keeps the word of God, and that he resists the temptation to seek fame and glory to continue the work for which he was anointed. The elaboration has moved from an assertion about “the finger of God” and the “kingdom of God” to an assertion to “hear the word of God and guard it” like the queen of the South who heard the wisdom of Solomon and the men of Nineveh who repented at the preaching of Jonah. It ends with an exhortation to let the “entire” body be full of light so that any darkness in the body will be replaced by light.

Thus, the Lukan version ends with a positive image which envisions the body as a house. In Mark, the final scene envisioned people sitting in a house, sharing a kinship relation because they do the will of God. In Luke, the image concerns lighting the house. If there is no lamp in the house, it will be dark. In Luke, then, the elaboration ends with attention to the eye as the lamp of the body whereas in Mark it ended with an interest in people who do the will of God and in Matthew it ended with concern about the words that come out of a person’s mouth. From Luke’s perspective, all of the hearing in the elaboration has been seeing. And if the eye is sound, the person will not seek further signs and will not enter into misguided censure or praise, but will see God’s work both in Jesus’ activity and in the activity of Solomon, Jonah, and the queen of the South in the past.

With this sequence, Luke has brought the topics of the casting out of demons and the seeking of signs to a conclusion. He moves to the next topic with the conjunction ἐν (‘and’) and a dative infinitive (Luke 11:37: ἐν δὲ τῷ λαλήσαι), which is one of his favorite constructions. He has been building to a full-scale encounter of Jesus with Pharisees and lawyers. The series that follows establishes a setting where Jesus’ statement about those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit emerges as an authoritative pronouncement against Pharisees and lawyers (Luke 12:10).

6. Conclusion

The shortest version of the Beelzebul controversy is in Matt 9:32–34. Whether this is actually the earliest version is difficult to say, since it functions in Matthew as a conclusion to the section on Jesus as the Messiah of Deed. Outside of this unit, all the synoptic gospels feature a response by Jesus that argues the implausibility of Jesus being aligned with Satan.

The epideictic nature of the tradition suggests that it is perpetuated by people who already know what values are accepted by the Christian community, and they are promulgating those values. Epideictic rhetoric intensifies values we already hold by lining us up on the side of the good against the bad. Through the power of rhetorical composition, the “authors” of these elaborations feature Jesus as “author” of a value system perpetuated within the Christian community at the expense of “opponents” of the community. Who are these opponents? It is not clear. One thing we can see. The tradition perpetuates an ideology of “opponents” to Jesus as a way of intensifying attitudes of the good versus the bad.

The Markan version perpetuates the most exaggerated form of opposition as unnamed people and scribes from Jerusalem say that Jesus is “out of his mind” and “possesses Beelzebul,” and Jesus says that people who say such things are “guilty of an eternal sin.” The Markan version embeds this in a positive epideictic framework, however, as Jesus looks at those sitting around him in a circle and says, “See my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God, this is my brother, sister, and mother” (Mark 3:35). But what does it mean to do the will of God in Mark? This section only tells us it is necessary to have our attitudes and actions on the side of Jesus’ attitudes and actions. And most of the Gospel of Mark proceeds in a similar manner. For the most part, anti-values are nurtured as a person learns not to be scandalized by a message that brings tribulation and persecution (Mark 4:17) and not to be lured by cares of the world, delight in riches, and desire for other things
the reader hears that “the scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat” (Matt 23:2) and that he/she should “practice and observe whatever the scribes and Pharisees tell you” (Matt 23:3). But these things cannot be said apart from the anti-rhetoric, because the anti-rhetoric maintains the identity over against the true transmitters of this social, cultural, and religious way of life.

The Lukan version perpetuates this anti-rhetoric, but in an environment of artistry, mythology, domesticated imagery, and some playfulness. For Luke, many things happen on an active day among the crowds. As you send a demon out of a man, you have to be ready to deal with people who will use your good actions against you, the demon himself who will gather his friends and return to the man, people who will lure you away from your commitments through praise, and people who will seek more from you simply to test you. A person can live in the midst of such activity by nurturing the imagery of a strong man who guards his palace and keeps his possessions in peace, a mythology of unclean spirits who travel around seeking a place of rest, a system of obedience to the word of God that gives greater priority to articulated culture than articulated sentiments of family, a heritage of men and women who knew and sought wisdom and who proclaimed and responded to a call for repentance, and an architecture of the body that makes the eye a lamp that lights up the entire body so there is no dark place in it. The Lukan version provides the seedbed for a Christian culture that uses the resources of human society to live in a complex world. One of the characteristics of such an approach is to let the images play more freely, to let various stories emerge in the midst of a major story, to personify evil characters and let them receive our sympathy for a moment as they wander about seeking a place of rest, to give some female characters a place among male characters, and to imagine our eye as a lamp or our body as a house that can have dark and light places in it. In Luke, Christian rhetoric begins to find a home. In the language of our previous discussion, a Cynic-style rhetoric that leaves people in silence as they stand before unburied dead and muse on the prospects of following a person who has nowhere to lay his head has developed into a domesticated rhetoric where people willingly put their hand to the plow without looking back and attentively guard the word of God with an eye which illuminates their entire body like a lamp brightens every corner of a house.

50. See Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation.