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## CONTRASTS IN SCALE AND GENRE IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL AND SENECA

by *The Rev. Dr. GEORGE K. BARR*

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Scalometric analysis<sup>1</sup> revealed a recurring pattern in the Pauline corpus for which the term 'prime pattern'<sup>2</sup> was coined. An outline of the scale relationships between these patterns in the Pauline epistles is given in *Scale in the Pauline Epistles*, Irish Biblical Studies, Vol. 17 Jan. 1995. Several suggestions have been received from scholars to account for these consistent patterns. It is most frequently suggested that the patterns simply reflect the change in genre from the theological to the ethical which occurs mid-way through at least some of the Pauline epistles. I am indebted to Dr. D.H. Berry, School of Classics, University of Leeds, for the suggestion that there might be interesting comparisons to be made between the epistles of Paul and the letters of Seneca, as Paul sometimes divides his epistles into a theological first half and an ethical second half, while Seneca tends to divide his letters into a narrative first half and a moralising second half. This paper takes up the matter.

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<sup>1</sup> PhD thesis: George K. Barr - *Scale in Literature - with reference to the New Testament and other texts in English and Greek* - University of Edinburgh, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> A particular kind of pattern in a cumulative sum graph expressing sentence length sequences. Prime patterns show unusual consistency and experience suggests that they reflect material which has been thought through and written out or dictated in one operation. The principal prime patterns identified in the Pauline epistles are Romans 1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:1-6:20; 2 Corinthians 10:1-12:19a; Galatians 1:1-5:15; Ephesians 1:1-5:33; Philippians 1:1-4:23; Colossians 1:1-4:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-3:18; 1 Timothy 1:1-5:7 with 3:1-16 omitted; 2 Timothy 1:1-4:22 with 1:15-2:7 placed after 4:5; Titus 1:1-3:15 with 1:7-9,12-16 omitted; Philemon.

## The Pauline Epistles

The structure of the prime patterns of the Pauline epistles is exceptionally strong. Each pattern consists of a first half consisting of longer sentences and a latter half consisting of an equal number of shorter sentences. The hinge lies on a central axis. The division into a theological first half and an ethical second half is not however found in every epistle.

In Romans the hinge occurs at 8:20 with the vision of Creation set free.

In 1 Corinthians 1-6 the hinge falls at 4:5 where Paul turns from considering his own position in the Church and begins to examine the performance of the Corinthian congregation.

In 2 Corinthians 10:1-12:19a the hinge occurs at 11:24 with the list of Paul's sufferings.

In Galatians, the hinge at 3:21b marks a change of attitude in the argument concerning Law and Faith. After the hinge, the argument is directed much more pointedly, and with an element of challenge, towards the recipients of the epistle who are addressed personally as 'my brothers'.

In Ephesians 1:1-5:33 and Colossians 1:1-4:18 there is a much clearer division into the theological and the ethical. Eph. 4:4-6 provides the theological high note - 'One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism...' - followed by the transition to the ethical - 'But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.' The hinge occurs at 4:11 - 'And his gifts were....'

In Colossians the theological climax occurs at 3:4 - 'Your real life is in Christ...' and the hinge is at 3:5 with the transition to the ethical - 'You must put to death the earthly desires....'

In Philippians, the first half ends at 3:1 - 'In conclusion (τὸ λοιπὸν) my brothers, be joyful...' and Paul turns at 3:2, the hinge point, to give warnings and advice. The τὸ λοιπὸν marker in Philippians is significant, and a second marker of this kind occurs at a secondary hinge at 4:8. Similar markers (τὸ λοιπὸν or λοιπὸν οὖν) fall before the hinge points in both 1 and 2 Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:1 and 2 Thess. 3:1) and in each case mark the point at which Paul begins to give direct advice to the recipients of the epistles.

In 1 Timothy 1:1-5:7 with 3:1-16 omitted, the hinge lies very clearly at 4:1. In 2 Timothy, with 1:15-2:7 placed after 4:5, the

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hinge lies at 3:14 - 'But as for you....' In Titus, with 1:7-9 and 12-16 removed, the hinge falls at 3:4 - 'But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour was revealed....' The Pastorals do not have the clear division into theological and ethical sections, yet the structure persists. Even the little letter to Philemon has its hinge point at a crucial verse - 'So if you consider me your partner, receive him....'

It is seen then that the general impression that the Paulines are divided into theological and ethical sections is supported by only a few cases, yet the structure showing the characteristic 'skewed symmetry' is common to the prime patterns of all thirteen epistles. There are, of course, other scale differences which must be taken into account. When the graphs of all thirteen prime patterns are mounted on a common base, as shown on page 19, then some of the common features are apparent. Scales are not shown on these combined graphs as it would require a set of scales for each individual graph. This collection of graphs may be compared with the collage of the graphs of several of Seneca's letters on page 20. It is clear that Seneca employs a great variety of structures and does not show anything like the consistency found in the Pauline prime patterns.

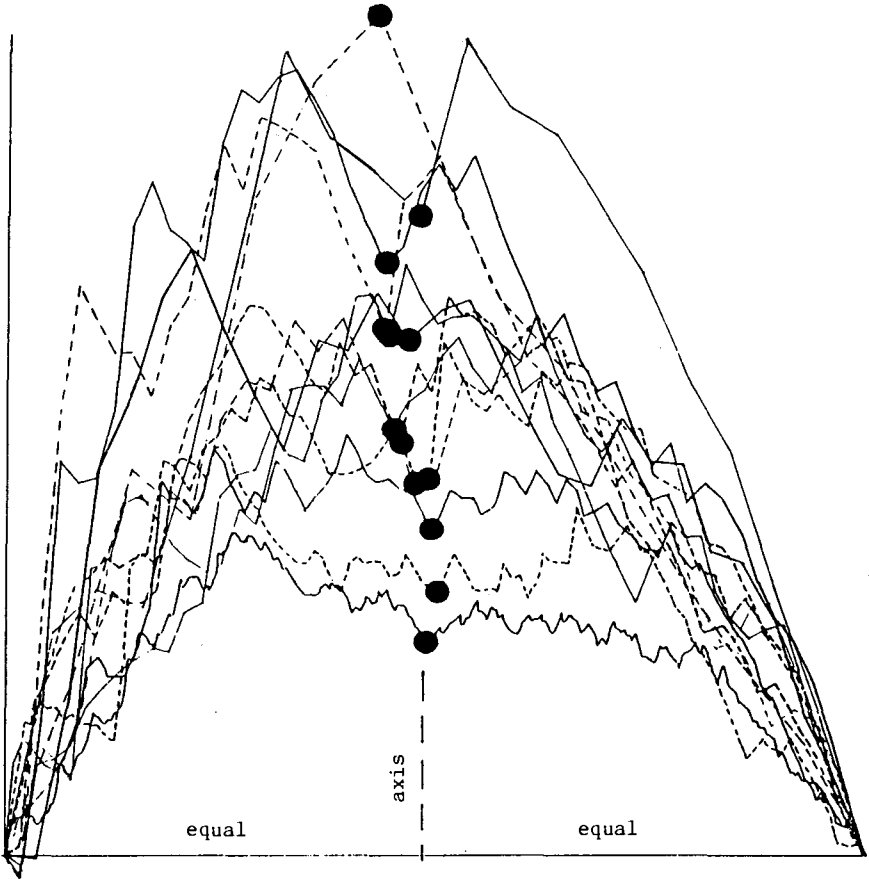
## Seneca's Epistulae Morales

Dr. Berry writes to me in his letter dated 19/3/95, 'Seneca's letters tend to be divided into a narrative first half and a moralising second half'.

Dr. Berry advisedly uses the word "tend" as the tendency is undoubtedly there, but the boundaries are not nearly so clear as they are in the division of the Pauline epistles. An examination of the texts and cumulative sum graphs of all 124 letters reveals that the impression that Seneca's letters are thus divided is given by a number of the longer letters; many of the short letters do not have such a division. In several of the longer letters, however, the change of genre is accompanied by a change in the graphical pattern.

In the Pauline epistles, it was found necessary to group strings of short questions so that they were in scale with their context. This is also necessary in Seneca's letters, and the task has

SENTENCE SEQUENCE GRAPHS

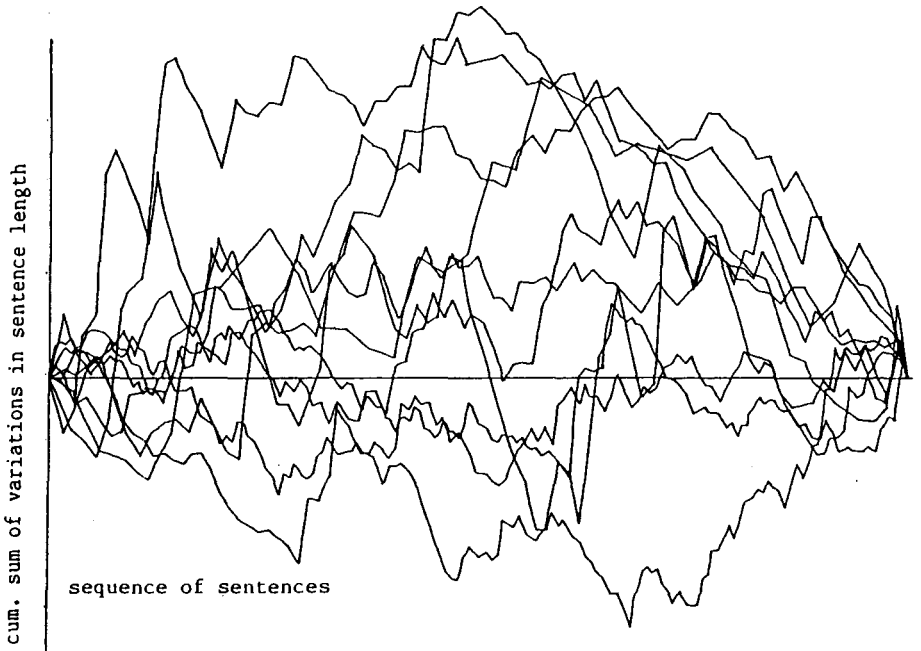


COMPARISON OF PAULINE PRIME PATTERNS

Prime patterns account for 67% of the texts of the Pauline epistles,  
or 88% if the small Corinthian topics are not included.

● PRIMARY HINGE POINTS

SENTENCE SEQUENCE GRAPHS



COLLAGE OF TEN OF SENECA'S 'EPISTULAE  
MORALES'

SENTENCE SEQUENCE GRAPHS SCALED TO A COMMON BASE  
SHOWING GREAT VARIETY OF FORM

been largely accomplished by L.D. Reynolds in his 1965 edition (Oxford University Press). In the Loeb Classical Library edition of 1925 edited by Richard M. Grummere, a sentence might be defined as beginning with an initial word with a capital letter and ending with a full stop or a question mark. Each small question is therefore treated as a separate sentence. Reynolds, on the other hand, groups small questions according to their content, and may place question marks at various points within a sentence. For example Letter 107 begins as follows in Grummere's edition:

Ubi illa prudentia tua? Ubi in dispiciendis rebus subtilitas? Ubi magnitudo? Iam pusilla te res angit? Servi.... (Sentences of 4, 5, 2 and 5 words).

Reynolds, on the other hand, punctuates the passage thus:

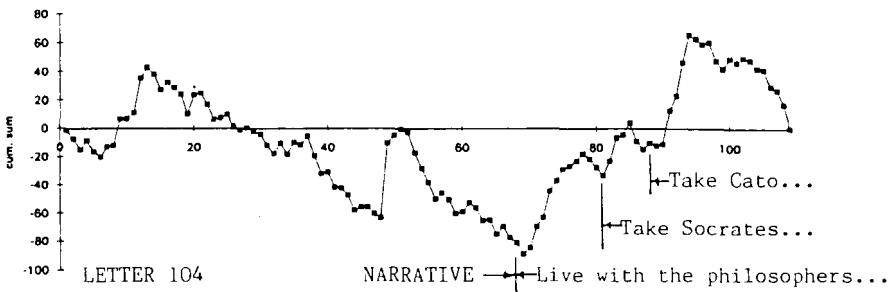
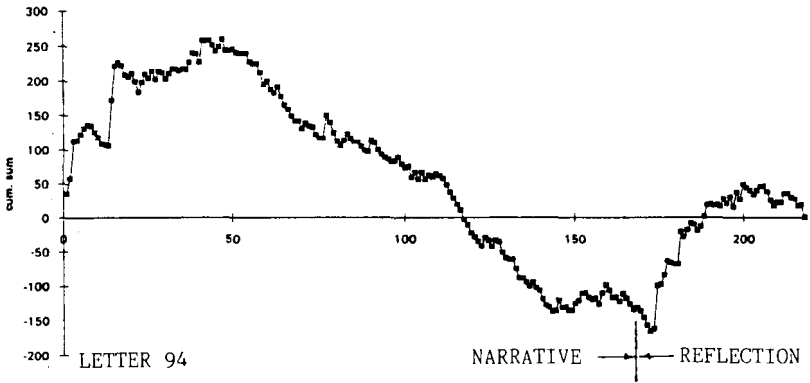
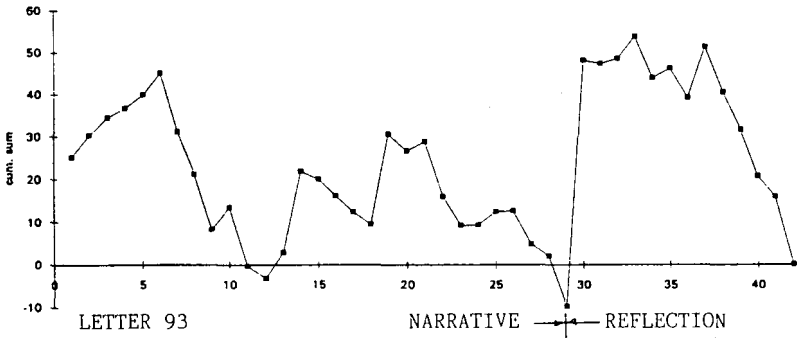
Ubi illa prudentia tua? ubi in dispiciendis rebus subtilitas? ubi magnitudo? Iam pusilla te res angit? Servi.... (Sentences of 11 and 5 words).

It is unlikely that Reynolds had scale in mind; he punctuated such passages according to the content. Nevertheless, in the process he has effectively grouped the questions in scale with their context. Both editions show the change in pattern which accompanies the internal change in genre, but samples will be taken from Reynolds' edition in order to give a comparison with the Pauline epistles in which strings of questions have been treated in a similar way.

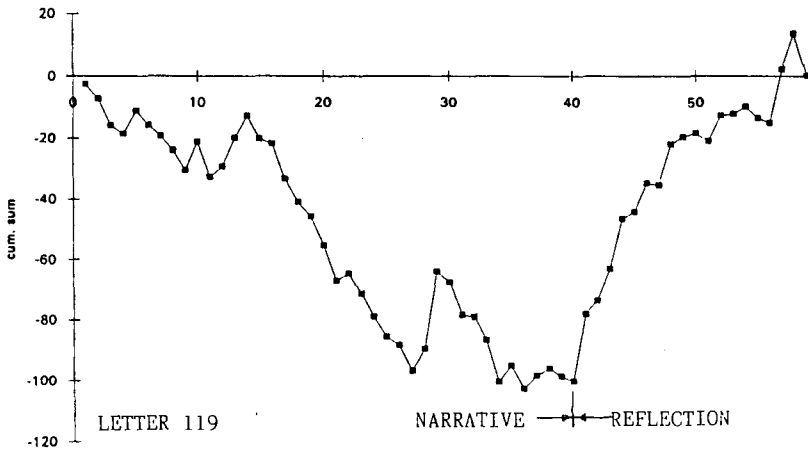
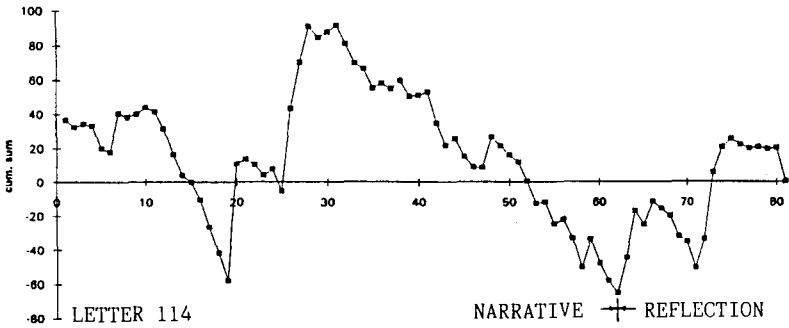
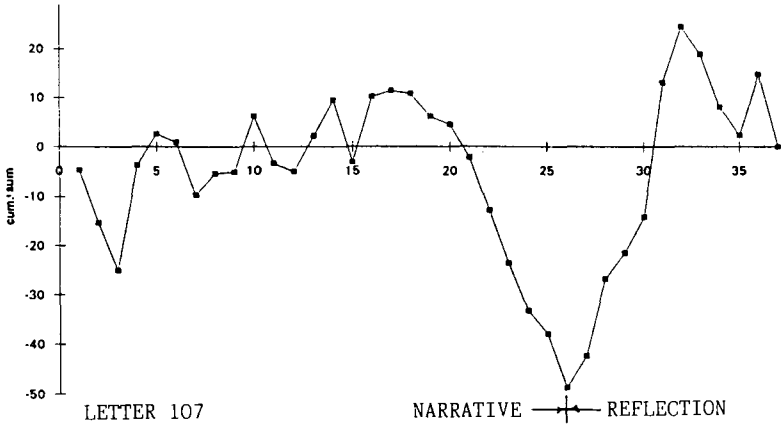
In Paul the division is central, the first half having a similar number of sentences to the second. There is a difference in scale between the two halves, however, and the sentences in the first half are on average longer than those in the second half.

Seneca's letters show great variety of form; this is evident in the collage of graphs on page 20. The graphs of some of Seneca's letters show features which distinguish between the first part which is largely narrative and the second part which is reflective in nature. This is shown in the following instances in which Reynolds' version is used. Graphs of these are shown on pages 22 and 23.

The key is found in Letter 119 - *On Nature as our Best Provider* - where sentence number 40 begins "To sum up...." There follows a surge in average sentence length which is seen in the steep rise in the graph. This is a pattern which is also found in the following letters.







Letter 93 - *On the Quality, as Contrasted with the Length, of Life* - discussion concerning the length of life occupies the first 29 sentences. Then Seneca turns to consider Nature in a reflective passage from sentence 30 to the end.

Letter 94 - *On the Value of Advice* - discussion occupies the first 169 sentences and the hinge occurs at sentence 170 beginning, "We should, therefore, have a guardian..."

Letter 104 - *On Care of Health and Peace of Mind* - discussion occupies the first 68 sentences. The concluding 41 sentences are divided into three clear sections 1) "Live with the philosophers...." 2) "Take Socrates...." 3) "Take Cato....". These sections appear clearly in the graph.

In letter 107 - *On Obedience to the Universal Will* - the first 26 sentences contain discussion about the accidents of life. Sentence 27 begins "And we cannot change this order of things...." and the concluding 11 sentences consist of reflection upon the discussion.

In letter 114 - *On Style as a Mirror of Character* - Seneca discusses in the first 62 sentences a variety of faults which may be found in people's style of speaking. The last 19 sentences contain some reflection on this, beginning at sentence 63, "These and similar faults...."

These examples consistently show a surge in average sentence length at the beginning of the reflective portions of the letters.

## Conclusion

The graphs showing the division into narrative and reflective sections are quite different from the Pauline prime patterns in which there is a central axis with equal numbers of sentences before and after the hinge point. In the Paulines, the scale of the first section is much larger than the scale of the second. In Seneca's letters, the reflective portion at the end of the letter is small in length but generally has a greater average sentence length than the narrative portion. This is reflected in the graphs where it is seen that in the narrative portion of the letter the trace falls to a low point (a falling graph indicates shorter than average sentences). In the closing part of the letter

where the author reflects on his material, the graph rises again to the base line (using longer than average sentences). Only a small proportion of the letters display these characteristics; the remainder show great variety of construction.

It is clear that the Pauline prime pattern does not therefore arise simply from the difference of genre between the two parts, for Seneca shows a comparable difference in genre, yet there is no similarity in the graphical effect. The Pauline prime pattern has bold characteristics, but also shows great variation in complexity as a result of differences in scale between different epistles. These differences, however, are differences in the degree of complexity and not of kind. The prime patterns found in all thirteen of Paul's epistles reflect a highly developed rhythmic sense of a sort which has not as yet been encountered in the graphs of over half a million words covering works by sixteen authors writing in English, Greek and Latin.

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