

Strict Twofold Repetitions in the Gospel of Mark

Understanding Mark's theology as one formed by the biblical, midrashic habits of image and allusion, contradiction and coalescence, makes sense out of his narrative as an integrated whole.

Marie Noonan Sabin, *Reopening the Word* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 169

[In biblical narrative] ...None of the possibilities of repetition—neither verbatim nor variant nor telescoped, for example—is allowed to assume control as the general norm against the background of which any departure gains its perceptibility and meaning. We have here not a single normative (let alone binding and mechanical) scheme but rather a set of equipollent options . . .

Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985), 437

“... lorsque le talmudiste, commentant un texte biblique, renvoie à un autre text biblique—le renvoi serait-il arbitraire—il faut lire soigneusement le contexte du passage cité. Ce n'est pas l'explication du mot qui compte. Il s'agit d'associer un «paysage» biblique à un autre pour dégager de ce jumelage le parfum secret du premier.”

Emmanuel Levinas, *Quatre lectures talmudiques* (Paris, Minuit, 2005 [orig. 1968]), 120

1 The Basic Phenomenon: Description

Very frequently in the canonical form of Mark's Gospel, we find significant *Stichworte* occurring twice and twice only in the course of the Markan narrative. As Mark's use of repetition “is one of the most noticeable literary features” of the Gospel (D+H, 2002:18), the frequency of the phenomenon merits investigation.

2 The Statistics

The *Synoptic Concordance* lists 207 lexemes which occur twice in the Gospel of Mark. These may be classified in the following (mutually exclusive) categories:

A. Strict twofold repetitions	137
B. Twofold in one pericope	42
C Twofold in the one sentence	11
D Twofold in two proximate pericopae (Hinge Word)	8
E Twofold: stylistic (e.g., ελωι ελωι [15:34])	3
F Trivial (e.g., ὑπέρ, ἐρῶ, κἀκεινος)	6

3 Some Examples (from Category A above)

1. σχίζω 1:10 (he saw the heavens torn apart); 15:38 (the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two)

D+H (2002:65): “it foreshadows the “tearing open” of the temple veil at the death of Jesus (15:38), which, as in 1:9–11, precedes the description of Jesus as Son of God (15:39).”

Focant (2004:73): “Le verbe σχίζομαι (« se déchirer ») n'est pas habituel pour parler de l'ouverture des cieux lors d'une vision. Le verbe ἀνοίγω utilisé en Mt 3,16 par. Lc 3:21 est plus usuel (Is 63,19 LXX; Test Lévi 18,6–12). Ce fait corrobore l'idée que Marc a voulu construire une inclusion entre 1,10 et 15,38.”

2. ἔκστασις 5:42 (they were amazed by a great *ekstasis*); 16:8 (trembling and *ekstasis* seized them)

D+H (2002:178): “the phraseology here (lit. “at once they were ecstatic with a great ecstasy”) conveys the extraordinary nature of this miracle.

Focant (2004:217): “Le pléonasme ἐξέστησαν ἐκστάσει repose sans doute sur la construction sémitique de l'infinitif absolu. Ce pourrait être un septantisme (Taylor) our un aramaïsme renvoyant à une source araméenne de cette péricope (Lohmeyer).

Sabin (2002:198): “Within Mark’s Gospel the same word has appeared before to express the feelings of those who have just seen Jesus raising up Jairus’s daughter (5:42).”

Parallels: 5:42 || in Lk 8:56 (*her parents were amazed*) but there is no mention of ἔκστασις
16:8 || in Mt 28:8 and Lk 24:9, but neither has ἔκστασις

Convergences: Jairus Intercalation + Tomb Scene: Young Woman ⇔ Women; Resurrection ⇔ Resurrection; Injunction to Silence ⇔ Telling nobody; σῶμα [5:29] ⇔ σῶμα [15:43]

3. νεανίσκος 14:51 (a young man ... naked) [only Mark]; 16:5 (young man in tomb)

Parallels: 14:51: pericope only in Mk; in the tomb only Mk has a νεανίσκος; Mt 28:1–10 has an angel and Lk 24:1–12 has two men (ἄνδρες δύο) in dazzling clothes.

D+H (2002: 416): “*neaniskos* ... appears again in 16:5, where it refers to the figure (probably an angel) who explains to the women why Jesus’ body is not to be found in the tomb...”

Focant (2004:547): “[L’] interprétation symbolique ... se base sur quelque parallèles verbaux: le mot σινδῶν n’est mentionné ici et lors de l’ensevelissement de Jésus (15,46), le mot νεανίσκος n’apparaît ailleurs qu’en 16,5 et, comme en 14,51, il est περιβεβλημένος”

Perego (2000 (267): “Sullo sfondo di questo ambio contesto [announcing the passion / paschal mystery], è balzata subito agli occhi la forte relazione esistente tra il vocabolario e la stuttura di Mc 14,51–52 e il vocabolario e la stuttura di Mc 16,1–8, cosa che ha implicato una conseguenza immediata: l’episodio del *neaniskos* di Mc 14,51–52 non può essere colto in tutta la sua profondità se si perde il nesso che lega le due scene.”

4. ἠδέως 6:20 (yet [Herod] heard him gladly); 12:37 (the great crowd heard him gladly)

Parallels: neither Mt 14:5 nor Mt 23:1 (par. Lk 20:45) reflect this response.

Convergences: identity of Jesus ⇔ the Messiah as Son of David; Herod’s role in John’s death ⇔ the crowd’s role in Jesus’ death.

4 Historical-Literary Background

The rabbinic rule of *gezarah shawah*, in its ability to permit an analogical combination of two apparently unrelated texts, may have provided one significant model for Mark’s technique.

“... l’analogia si presenta come un ponte de raccordo tra pagine lontane, tra concetti diversi, tra episodi che all’apparenza non hanno nulla in comune, in una sola parola, tra l’antico e il nuovo ...” (Basta, 2006: 36)

5 Conclusion

Sensitivity to the phenomenon of strict twofold repetitions in the Gospel of Mark permits a deeper reading of the Second Gospel, enhances its literary and theological unity and provides a window on Mark’s intentions as writer and redactor.

6 Bibliography

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