Say it Again, Sam

A literary and filmic study of narrative repetition in 1 Samuel 28

Grenville J.R. Kent

Ⓛ

Say it Again, Sam

Say it Again, Sam

A literary and filmic study of narrative repetition in 1 Samuel 28

Grenville J.R. Kent

Ⓛ
The Lutterworth Press

The Lutterworth Press
P.O. Box 60
Cambridge
CB1 2NT

www.lutterworth.com
publishing@lutterworth.com

ISBN: 978 0 7188 9271 5

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A record is available from the British Library

First published by The Lutterworth Press, 2012

First Published, 2011

This edition is published by arrangement
with Pickwick Publications

For Carla, antipodean opposite of the woman of En-Dor.
וְהָאִשָּׁה טְוֹבַת־שֵׂכֶל וְיִפַת תֹּאַר (1 Sam 25:3b, but not c)

For our children.
May they know Yahweh by his Spirit and walk before his Anointed.

And for Saba, George Lynden Kent, 1928–2010,
who heard and loved and taught (Deut 6:4–9).
May his memory be for a blessing.

Contents

Foreword

The question of how we should interpret the narratives of the Old Testament continues to be a matter of some importance. In the 1980s there was a creative outburst in the interpretation of such texts through the work of pioneering scholars like Alter, Sternberg, and Bar-Efrat. What these authors did was make us realize the importance of appreciating how narratives work as texts. In doing so, they drew especially on the key literary theorists of their time, though often with a fairly light touch so that not all who appreciated their work realized the extent to which it was formed by such concerns. Their work was pioneering twenty or thirty years ago, but has now become more or less a standard point of reference. Yet the theory of narrative has not ossified at that point, and we are increasingly aware that much more work needs to be done, work that pays close attention to the features of the text itself while also drawing in new voices from other disciplines. At the same time, and without always being expressly concerned with narrative, a number of scholars have recently sought to engage in an interdisciplinary reading of the Old Testament through the hermeneutical lens of film. What has been lacking is a serious attempt to integrate these two areas.

It is for this reason that I believe that this book is an important contribution to Old Testament studies. As an Old Testament scholar with an interest in narrative, and also a film maker, Grenville Kent is well qualified to explore the interface between these disciplines and to show the fruitfulness of bringing them together in both theory and practice. It is, I believe, an innovative work that integrates narrative film theory with narrative poetics in the Old Testament, in this case investigating the use of repetition in narratives, resulting in a number of new insights into his sample text of 1 Samuel 28. Since he takes this as a

sample text, the insights developed could be applied more broadly, and the work indicates this. Moreover, the use of film theory (as opposed to an impressionistic use of film) represents a new hermeneutical model for the interpretation of narrative texts within the Old Testament that as far as I am aware has not been used elsewhere. We are thus treated to a fresh exploration of a potentially rich area of theory that can underpin the study of Old Testament narrative that is worked out in dialogue with wider areas of theory and carefully applied to a text. With this foundation laid, I hope that Grenville Kent and others can continue to develop this field for us.

David G. Firth
St John's College, Nottingham

Preface

This study is based on my PhD thesis, which was submitted to the University of Manchester in January of 2008. It examines the phenomenon of verbal repetition as a versatile narrative tactic, and uses literary theory and narrative film theory to analyze repetitions involving 1 Samuel 28.

Chapter 2 outlines how biblical scholars have considered repetition, revealing progress but also large gaps. Chapters 3 and 4 summarize literary theory and narrative film theory on various types and effects of repetition, applying these to biblical examples and concluding that biblical studies should appropriate these theories. Chapter 4 also considers theological analyses of film, but finds that few if any have applied narrative film theory to reading the biblical text.

Chapter 5 notes theological studies of 1 Samuel 28, but does not find any that utilize literary theory to potential, that study repetition, or that utilize film theory. It finds that more recent literary studies use a narrow range of theoretical tools, or use under-developed theories, or apply no theory but intuitive approaches.

Chapter 6, after translating 1 Samuel 28:3–25, applies film theory alongside literary theory to perform a synchronic exegesis, exploring the web of repetitions involving this pericope. It considers the repetition of sounds, elements of *mise-en-scène*, entire scenes, and keywords; mysterious repetition; repetition, and non-repetition in characterization; inter-textual repetition of Deuteronomic warnings; repetition in prophetic fulfillment; focalized repetition; repetition producing expanding symbols; and repetition in foreshadowing. It shows that repetition is part of the artistry that helps create ideology in biblical narrative. It also

demonstrates that applying film theory to biblical narrative yields a range of fresh insights into characterization, plot, structure, and themes.

The study concludes that narrative film theory, like literary theory, offers to biblical studies a wider repertoire of tools, new questions, and techniques promising fresh textual understandings, and that it should be utilized to full potential.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to a number of people for helping to make this study possible.

It was a privilege to have Dr David Firth as my "Doktorvater." His catalytic teaching at Morling College in 2000–01 developed my love for close literary study of the Old Testament, and I greatly appreciate his mentoring in teaching and in much else.

Dr Pete Phillips, my co-supervisor, provided stimulus and encouragement, and Dr Adrian Curtis and Dr Eric Christianson made my viva examination an enjoyable occasion.

Appreciation to Dr Robin Parry of Wipf and Stock for his kind expertise as editor (and for being a superb tour guide in the Malvern Hills).

Dr Elizabeth Magba, Dr Dirk Jongkind, Dr Bruce Winter, Dr David Baker and Dr David Instone-Brewer of Tyndale House helped to make my time in Cambridge enriching. Mrs. Theresa Phillips showed unflappable efficiency and kindness at Cliff College, and other staff and students enhanced my stay. I appreciated the hospitality of Lynne Firth and Jonathan, Rhiannon, and Ben.

Dr Laurence Turner deserves special thanks. As a Theology undergraduate in the 1980s, slumped in the back row and expecting more textual dismemberment, I sat up when the new lecturer began with the daring suggestion that we treat the Old Testament as a work of literature, and ask what its final form meant and what it means.

Thanks to Eliezer Gonzalez, Cecily Syme, and Neroli Hills-Perry for proof-reading, and to Scott Lane for computer backup.

I am very grateful to the Australian Union Conference, especially Pr Chester Stanley and Pr Graeme Christian, and to the Greater Sydney Conference, especially Pr David Blanch, who supported my study.

At Wesley Institute, thanks go to Dr Jim Harrison, my head of department, for his fatherly encouragement, and to Robyn Tolley the charming librarian for her help in finding articles.

A mere 81,032 words would only begin to express my love and thanks to Carla, my wife. Our children Zoe, Marcus, and Ethan left me alone for the whole morning and then, religiously at 2pm, carted me away to a swimming pool or the park. This is for you and for Thomas and Jeremy, who arrived since. Yes, you're welcome to wear the hat until you get your own.

Above all, homage to the ineffable God for speaking grace and truth into the world in endlessly fascinating ways. "The secret things belong to Yahweh our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may keep all the words of this *torah*" (Deut 29:29).

Abbreviations

BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
DtrH	Deuteronomic History
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KB	Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*
MT	*Masoretic Text*
NIV	*New International Version*
NRSV	*New Revised Standard Version*
OED	*The Oxford English Dictionary*
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamenliche Wissenschaft*

1

Introduction

When parrots do it, it's parroting.
When advertisers do it, it's reinforcement.
When children do it, it's imitation.
When brain-damaged people do it, it's perseveration[1] or echolalia.[2]
When dis-fluent people do it, it's stuttering, or stammering.
When orators do it, it's epizeuxis, plice, anadiplosis, polyptoton[3] or antimetabole.[4]
When novelists do it, it's cohesion.
When poets do it, it's alliteration, chiming, rhyme, or parallelism.
When priests do it, it's ritual.
When sounds do it, it's gemination.[5]
When morphemes do it, it's reduplication.

1. "The mechanical and involuntary repetition of a motor or verbal response, despite a change of stimulus, as a result of brain damage or organic malfunction." Simpson and Weiner, *Oxford Dictionary,* vol. XI, *ow-poisant*, 593.

2. "1a.*Path.* The meaningless repetition of words and phrases. B. *Educational Psychol*. The repetition of words and phrases by a child that is learning to speak." Simpson and Weiner, *Oxford Dictionary*, vol. V, *dvandva-follis*, 55.

3. "A rhetorical figure consisting in the repetition of a word in different cases or inflexions in the same sentence." Ibid.*,* vol. VIII, *Poise-Quelt,*74.

4. Ibid., vol I, *A-Bazouki*; ibid., 526.

5. "The immediate repetition of a word or phrase, or the using of a pair of synonymous expressions, for the purpose of rhetorical effect." Ibid., vol VI, *follow-Haswed*, 425.

> When phrases do it, it's copying.
> When conversations do it, it's reiteration.
> J. Aitchison[6]

Repetition, repetition, repetition. Is it annoying or artful? *Readers Digest* has published a version of the Bible[7] edited "to eliminate its redundancy." This suggests how common repetition is in the Bible, but also reveals a "negative folk attitude" towards it. In Western culture, the word "redundant" is a criticism,[8] yet repetition can be appealing. Write down the lyrics of a popular song and it soon becomes apparent. Children enjoy simple tales built on repetition[9], perhaps because the chorus structure tames diverse life experiences into a form that feels contained and secure. And if repetition is the mother of learning, it is the great-grandmother of advertising, where mediocre ideas compete, through sheer weight of bought repetitions, for an enduring place in the meme pool. Especially for a non-caring or "low involvement" audience, repetition reinforces a message and builds salience.[10]

What then is an appropriate scholarly response to the phenomenon of repetition in the Bible? This study will argue that repetition should be understood as a versatile rhetorical device in biblical narrative, and that theory drawn from the study of narrative film offers richer understandings of the various types of repetition and their possible effects in various contexts. It will demonstrate this by examining repetition involving 1 Samuel 28.

1.1 Methodology

A broad question of methodology immediately arises. What is repetition and how does one identify it? Indeed, does it even exist? Stephen Reckert[11] playfully argues that strictly speaking there is no such thing as repetition, because the repeated element is slightly altered by its relationship with the preceding material and so it is actually original. From

6. Aitchison, "Say, Say It," 15.
7. Metzger, *Readers Digest Bible*.
8. Johnstone, "Introduction," 206.
9. One classic is Eastman, *Are You My Mother*?
10. Sutherland and Sylvester, *Advertising*, 164.
11. Reckert, "Play It," 1998.

another perspective, he claims that writers do not create *ex nihilo*, but only compose, reusing the existing resources of a language, and so "'creation,' in the arts, really means nothing more than the artful combination of signifiers . . . selected from among 'les mots et les choses' that make up our mental and physical environment."[12] Words are "provided by the language we write in (or the form of it appropriate to the genre, period, or audience concerned, which admits some and not others depending on stylistic decorum . . .)."[13] Of course, a writer's own coinages would be an exception to this, but even many coinages are rearrangements of existing words from one's own languages or roots from another. Other literary theorists have, as already mentioned, questioned whether repetition is technically possible.[14] Yet even in establishing this technicality, Reckert's point is that what is called repetition can be anything but annoyingly repetitive, and is a creative resource of writing and other arts.

1.2 Challenges in Analyzing Repetition

Measuring verbal repetition is not simple and straightforward. The following list of challenges is based on the work of linguist and rhetorician Barbara Johnstone.[15]

1.2.1 Formal Identification

"If I say 'hello,' is there any repetition there? When you say 'hello' back, is that the first case of repetition? . . . What about if you say 'hello' and I say 'hi'? Or what about multiple uses of the word 'the'?"[16]

Linguist Marilyn Merritt[17] proposes a pragmatic means to identify repetition. First, "select a locus of observation." In this thesis we will

12. Ibid., 4.

13. Ibid., 7.

14. Barbara Johnstone, "Introduction," 211, writes: "Repetition is never exact . . . [with the exception of *déjà vu*]; it always involves some sort of similarity and some sort of difference, whether the difference be linguistic, as in alliteration or syntactic parallelism, or contextual, as when the same thing is said in different situations." Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 193, calls repetition "an abstraction" because it ignores what is different, including context.

15. Johnstone, *Discourse*.

16. Ibid., 4.

17. Merritt, "Repetition," 23–36.

examine 1 Samuel 28, but within the context of 1 Samuel and more broadly the Former Prophets and the canon of the Old Testament. Second, Merritt locates something "formally identifiable" within that locus. We will examine examples of verbal repetition. Third, she tries to analyze the function(s) of that form within that setting. This will be our focus in chapter 4, where examples from across 1 Samuel will be analyzed using film theory. Fourth, she looks for other forms that satisfy the same function(s). We could examine other literary techniques that produce similar effects to repetition, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis. Fifth, she look for patterns in the functions; speculate on larger generalizations and test these against other data.[18] This will also be our focus in chapter 4 and particularly chapter 6.

1.2.2 Difficulty of Exact Counting

"When we're counting repetitions, when do we count, and where do we count?"[19] What is a unit? If a sentence is repeated, do we count "one" or the number of phrases or words?

While there is no standard unit of measurement, an author could at least aim for internal consistency of method. And the question, while interesting, need not trouble us in practice because most analysis is qualitative rather than quantitative. For example, one can make the case that there are quite a number of repetitions between two scenes (see section 6.3.3 below) without needing to debate the size of each unit and thus the exact number.

1.2.3 Proving Whether the Prior Text Was in Fact Prior.

Discourse of any sort can be interpreted only in terms of the prior texts it evokes, many of which may not in fact be present at all. Every text has been constituted by other texts, so that it is inherently intertextual.[20] Without common-sense limits, one could claim a text repeated parts of almost any text which went before.

18. Ibid., 25.
19. Johnstone, *Discourse*, 5.
20. Ibid.

As a sensible limit on this, Johnstone suggests a dimension of "localness,"[21] which has various axes: recent versus ancient (though ancient and honored or canonical texts could be assumed to be very present), and geographical closeness versus distance. To claim to have identified repetition, one would need to demonstrate that the prior text was sufficiently "local."

Of course, some subjectivity is possible here, but the concept has great relevance for biblical studies, where provenance and redaction are often debated. While source critical debates are intriguing, this thesis will limit itself to final form analysis, a choice which greatly simplifies this question because one can follow canonical history. For example, Judges comes before Samuel. And so when Saul the Benjamite from Gibeah galvanizes national attention by sending a bloody bovine body part to each tribal capital, this awakens echoes of a very similar move using human flesh, a call to civil war blamed on barbaric actions in Gibeah (Judg 19–21). These echoes place early question marks over Saul.

This theory will be further applied in section 6.3.7.3 below.

1.2.4 Subtlety

"Does repetition work the same way on all levels, on the level of sound, meaning, grammar, literary themes?"[22]

Anthropologist Joel Sherzer[23] notes that performances contain repetitions on structural, grammatical, intonation, musical, and social-interactional levels, observing that each can introduce complex nuances to the inter-relationships of ideas. Linguist Katherine Kelly[24] observes that speech is not the only sign-system used in the theatre, studying gesture, setting, and scenery, and other "non-literary theatrical signs."[25] Some theatre theorists have even played with the idea of a "nondiscursive oneiric [dream-like] language that would circumvent logic" and give words a secondary status to visuals, as in some constructions of dreams.[26]

21. Ibid..
22. Ibid., 11.
23. Joel Sherzer, "Kuna Discourse," 37–52.
24. Kelly, "Staging Repetition," 58.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 56.

Written narrative is a verbal medium which can also create visual, symbolic, and some other "non-literary" effects (though, of course, they are described in words). Yet biblical narratives are not given to scenic description, being based largely on speech, and are thus perhaps the most verbal of written narratives. Culturally, this may be related to the Jewish use of words, as opposed to graven images, in worship. Jacques Derrida has written about text-centered drama as a logoentric or "theological" space. He asserts: "The theatrical practice of cruelty, in its action and structure, inhabits or rather *produces* a nontheological space. The stage is theological for as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance . . . an author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over . . . the meaning of representation."[27]

Yet biblical narrative can at times use visual symbols in ways that are the more powerful for their rarity. This will be explored by examining repetition of sounds (see section 6.3.1 below); visual elements and *mise-en-scène* (6.3.2); scenes, which include visuals and actions and settings (6.3.e); and actions and their opposites (6.3.11 and 12).

These considerations form a theoretical basis from which we shall proceed in analyzing repetition as a narrative tactic in 1 Samuel 28.

1.3 Outline of Research

This study comprises six chapters. This introductory chapter is followed by chapter 2, a historical survey of how various biblical scholars have dealt with the phenomena of repetition in the Bible. It will demonstrate that a good start has been made in recognizing repetition and beginning to analyze and classify its types and effects, but will argue that the discipline of biblical studies has not yet appropriated all the repetition theory which exists in other disciplines.

Chapter 3 will examine what contemporary literary theory, informed by various cross-disciplinary studies, has done with the phenomenon of repetition. It will list and critique useful dimensions in analyzing repetition, and will make the first moves towards compiling a taxonomy of the types of repetition and their possible effects. Where possible it will analyze examples from 1 Samuel, beginning to make the

27. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 265.

case that repetition is a creative narrative tactic in Samuel and that literary theory has theoretical insights which should be appropriated by biblical studies.

Chapter 4 will introduce film theory into the study of biblical narrative. It will first survey and critique a representative sample of contributions from the new field of comparative studies of the Bible and film. It will give a rationale for the use of narrative film theory in the study of biblical narrative, a practice rarely if ever attempted so far. It will survey a range of film scholarship on the ubiquity and versatility of the repetition of various elements in film, specifically narrative film. It will begin a draft taxonomy from film theorists of the types and effects of repetition, and give examples where possible from 1 Samuel, continuing the case that repetition is a useful and flexible narrative tactic in Samuel and beginning the case that film theory has a unique contribution to make in analyzing it, which should be recognized by biblical studies.

Chapter 5 will then detour somewhat into a survey of theological studies of 1 Samuel 28, sketching key debates and issues relevant to the text. (A full exploration of these issues is outside the scope of this present work, and questions will be left unanswered.) The next section will examine the few literary studies of Samuel and the useful insights they offer, but will establish that no systematic study of repetition in 1 Samuel 28 has yet been attempted using literary or film theory, and thus the way is clear for this study to make a unique contribution to knowledge.

Chapter 6 will apply film theory in conjunction with literary theory in an exegesis of 1 Samuel 28. It will explore repetitions and examine linkages both forwards and backwards from this narrative to a chain of artful and theologically rich repetition structures. It will demonstrate that analysis using film theory generates more insights than previously possible, and will argue that biblical studies should consider insights from film theory.

Finally chapter 7 will draw conclusions about the findings and suggest areas of possible further research.

Repetition is a flexible rhetorical device in biblical study. Well may Israel say,[28] repetition is a flexible rhetorical device in biblical study, but there is still much more to be said about it.

28. My prior texts are Pss 118:1–2; 124:1–2; 129:1–2, written some 30 centuries prior and on the other side of the world from me, but nonetheless very "local" and canonical.

2

Repetition in Biblical Narrative

In recent decades, scholars have begun noticing the phenomenon of repetition in Old Testament narratives, and have gradually made progress in describing it. This chapter offers a brief outline which is organized chronologically in order to chart the progress within this discipline, and inductively so as to present previous efforts on their merits rather than try to judge them by today's theory. This survey seeks to demonstrate, however, that the theoretical basis from which many biblical scholars have considered repetition needs to be widened, and also that there are major gaps in their analyses of the forms of repetition and particularly of their functions or possible rhetorical effects.

Early scholarship tended to ignore repetition altogether or merely to tolerate it. For example, Ibn Ezra observed repetition with variations in biblical writing, but commented: "Know that words are like the body, and the meaning is like the soul, so that a word is only a vessel for the meaning. Therefore it is the custom of sages in every language to preserve the meaning, but not to question a change in the wording as long as the meaning is the same . . . The rule is that in all variant repetitions, like Pharaoh's dream (Gen 41:1–24) and Nebuchadnezzar's (Dan 2:1–45), and many others like them you will find different words but the meaning remains the same."[1] Similarly Kimchi wrote that "we cannot give any reasons for the numerous omissions and additions . . .

1. Ibn Ezra on Exod 20:1, quoted in Savran, *Telling,* 1.

These are only changes in wording; the meaning remains the same. This is the way of Scripture when it reports things: The meaning is preserved, but not the wording."[2]

Modernist scholarship tended to label repetition as "repetitiousness," perhaps explaining it as "good Oriental style"[3] or the genre of "saga,"[4] without looking closely at its types and effects. However more recent scholarship, particularly in the rhetorical or literary school, has investigated the rhetorical purpose of repetition[5] in its various forms.

2.1 Muilenberg, 1968

In his epoch-making address advocating scholarly legitimacy for rhetorical criticism, form critic James Muilenberg[6] noted the presence of repetition and pioneered an explanation of it as one of the rhetorical features of Old Testament literature.

Like previous scholars, he explained its provenance partly as "the speaking mentality of the ancient Israelite" and the "spoken provenance of the passage" or "its employment in cultic celebrations." Yet, importantly, he saw the repetitions as "rhetorically significant," and argued that their locations were strategically chosen as part of style.[7]

Muilenberg particularly noted the role of repetition in creating structure. He saw "ballast lines" producing a climax which indicated the end of a pericope, "where the opening words are repeated or paraphrased at the close, what is known as ring composition, or . . . the *inclusio*."[8] He found lines repeated in the "construction of parallel cola or parallel bicola, or in the structure of the strophes, or in the fashioning and ordering of the complete literary units."[9] Thus keywords could yield the structure of a literary unit, which in turn revealed its focus and helped in the interpretation of its themes.

2. David Kimchi on Gen 24:39, quoted ibid., 2.
3. Montgomery, *Kings*, 348.
4. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 459.
5. Long, *2 Kings,* 12.
6. Muilenberg, "Beyond," 1–18.
7. Ibid., 17.
8. Ibid., 9.
9. Ibid., 17.