

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 perseveration¹
 or echolalia.²
 When dis-fluent people do it, it's stuttering, or stammering.
 When orators do it, it's epizeuxis, plice, anadiplosis,
 polypoton³ 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. Aitchison⁶

Repetition, repetition, repetition. Is it annoying or artful? *Readers Digest* has published a version of the Bible⁷ 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 repetition⁹, 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 Reckert¹¹ 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 Merritt¹⁷ 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 Sherzer²³ 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 Kelly²⁴ 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 logocentric 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.