

THE RHETORICAL ROLE OF REITERATION IN THE SUFFERING SERVANT POEM (ISA 52:13–53:12)

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The suffering servant poem (Isa 52:13–53:12) is one of the most familiar portions of the Hebrew Scriptures. "All we like sheep have gone astray" is recognized as readily as "The Lord is my shepherd." Although couched in a context of his ultimate success, "the most striking feature of the passage is the unparalleled sufferings of the Servant."¹ A portrait par excellence of Yahweh's humiliated and exalted servant, the poem is also a literary *chef-d'œuvre*. Various reiterative, rhetorical techniques are employed to structure the poem around the servant's sufferings and supremacy and to impress upon the reader or listener the nature and extent of his humiliation and exaltation.²

The question of the poem's parts is debated. It is often advised that the poem is composed of five stanzas of three verses each: 52:13–15; 53:1–3, 4–6, 7–9, 10–12.³ Such a division is usually defended on thematic grounds, since the first and last stanzas speak of the ultimate exaltation and successful mission of the suffering servant, and the middle three, distinguished by subject matter, delve into the depths of the servant's humiliation. Thus the poem, so divided, would have three major sections: the servant's future exaltation (52:13–15), his sufferings (53:1–9) and his ultimate triumph (vv. 10–12). A

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¹ J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters XL–LXVI* (London: Cambridge University, 1906) 120. The vast majority of scholars, since B. Duhm in 1892, designate the literary unit 52:13–53:12 as the fourth servant song. A. Feuillet states: "À la différence des précédents [i.e. the three preceding servant poems], il ne pose pas de problème en ce qui concerne ses limites exactes, car il se détache aussi nettement que possible, et de ce qui précède, et de ce qui suit" ("Les Poèmes du Serviteur," *Études d'exégèse et de théologie biblique Ancien Testament* [Paris: Gabalda, 1975] 132). In addition the structuring role of repetition within the pericope reinforces, in our view, the majority position concerning the poem's limits.

² As is generally the case in textual studies, a rhetorical analysis probes both structure and content. We agree with A. Wilder who speaks of the "inseparable relation of form and content in all texts" (*Early Christian Rhetoric* [Cambridge, 1971] xxii) and with B. Fiore who adds after citing Wilder: "In short, what is said cannot be separated from how it is said, whether in writing or in oral speech" ("Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism, NT Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism," *ABD* 5.717).

³ Cf. C. R. North, *The Second Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964) 234–246; F. D. Lindsey, "The Career of the Servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12," *BSac* 139 (1982) 313–314; P. R. Raabe, "The Effect of Repetition in the Suffering Servant Song," *JBL* 103 (1984) 77–78; A. R. Ceresko, "The Rhetorical Strategy of the Fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13–53:12): Poetry and the Exodus—New Exodus," *CBQ* 56 (1994) 50–51 n. 32.

literary classification of the poem's parts supports an overall threefold division. Two divine "my servant" proclamations or announcements envelop the central report or confession concerning the servant's suffering. This refinement also points toward a more satisfactory answer to the question concerning where the second divine proclamation begins. Accordingly vv. 10–11b continue the report since Yahweh, rather than speaking, is still spoken of (v. 10), as is the case elsewhere in the report (vv. 1b, 6c). Then commences the second "my servant" announcement (v. 11c).⁴ These stanzas would then consist of two divine proclamations declaring the final triumph of the suffering servant (52:13–15; 53:11c–12) framing the report of confession of those who are the object of his humiliation (53:1–11b).

If the poem is heard from the vantage point of voice or speaker, one hears the narration about the servant from what "I" says (52:13–15), then what "we" say (53:1–6), followed by what someone else says (vv. 7–11b), returning to what "I" says (vv. 11c–12).⁵ As we shall demonstrate below, the structuring role of recurring words reinforces this overall four-part voice schema. Reiteration also marks the same division of the central section (53:1–6, 7–11b). As such, the first and last stanzas (52:13–15; 53:11c–12) are voiced in the first person and declare in Yahweh's words the supremacy and accomplishments of "my servant" who "will be greatly exalted" (52:13b) and "will justify many" (53:11c). The center concerning the servant's sufferings also has two stanzas: the first voiced in the first person plural "we, our" (53:1–6), the second narrated in the third person "he" (53:7–11b). Also, the two central stan-

⁴ We agree for rhetorical reasons and voice alternation (cf. ensuing discussion and n. 5 *infra*) with those who find the beginning of the second divine utterance or the final stanza in the clause proclaiming "my servant"; cf. C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 255–256; R. N. Whybray, *Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet: An Interpretation of Isaiah Chapter 53* [JSOTSup 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1978] 123–126, 163 n. 3; P. Grelot, *Les poèmes du Serviteur, de la lecture critique à l'herméneutique* (LD 103; Paris: Cerf, 1981) 52–53, 98; W. Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978) 223; R. J. Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading: An Interpretation of Second Isaiah* (New York: Paulist, 1984) 175. In our view, as mentioned above, vv. 10–11b continue the report on the servant's sufferings; v. 10b, still speaking of his humiliation (cf. vv. 10a, 11a), is either a temporal or conditional (protasis) clause: "When/If his life is rendered" (v. 10b, notwithstanding the problem of person and gender) followed by a series of results: "then he will see . . . be satisfied" (vv. 10c–11b). On the difficulties posed by this section cf. Whybray, *Thanksgiving* 63–66.

⁵ A fourfold stanza division by three voices is advocated by P.-E. Bonnard: the voice of God (52:13–15; 53:11–12), that of the people (vv. 1–6) and that of the prophet (vv. 7–10; *Le second Isaïe, son disciple et leurs éditeurs, Isaïe 40–66* [Paris: Gabalda, 1972] 269). As mentioned above, what is voiced in the poem is said chiefly of the servant. One can also say that the first and fourth stanzas include what Yahweh says about "him" (the servant) and about "them" (the objects of his ministry), the second stanza is what we say about "him" and about "us" and "Yahweh," and the third stanza is what someone says about "him" and about "Yahweh." Cf. the "four personæ" view of D. J. A. Clines, who examines the rhetorical relationships between "I," "he," "we" and "they." His sixfold division of the poem is similar to our stanza and strophic breaks except that his final part includes only v. 12, v. 11c–d being included with the fifth part (vv. 10–11; *I, He, We and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* [JSOTSup 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1976] 11–13, 37–49). As concerns the voice or speaker, one should bear in mind that the second and fourth personæ do not say anything in the poem, whereas "I" and "we" do.

zas can be rhetorically divided into two smaller sections each of four strophes.⁶ The first strophe (53:1–3) expresses “our” former rejection of the suffering servant (“we did not esteem him,” v. 3d), and the second (vv. 4–6) now confesses his vicarious suffering because of “our” sins (“but he was pierced for our transgressions,” v. 5a). This rejection/recognition contrast is echoed in the two strophes of the following stanza (vv. 7–11b) where first (vv. 7–9) someone reports the ill treatment of the innocent servant (“he was oppressed and afflicted,” v. 7a) and then (vv. 10–11b) tells of Yahweh’s recognition of the servant’s sufferings (“yet Yahweh was pleased/purposed to crush him,” v. 10a). The poem, in four stanzas distinguished by voice, can thus be chiasmatically represented as follows:

- A. “My servant’s” success and exaltation (52:13–15)
 - B₁. “We” considered him insignificant (53:1–3)
 - B₂. “Our” recognition of his sufferings for “us” (53:4–6)
 - B’₁. “He” suffered and died, though innocent (53:7–9)
 - B’₂. “His” sufferings according to Yahweh’s will (53:10–11b)
- A’. “My servant’s” accomplishments and reward (53:11c–12)

The focus on the servant’s humiliation and exaltation is not only sharpened by thematic, structural and voice alternation. His sufferings and following glory are also underscored by a rhetorical device: word repetition. Of the poem’s 202 words (196 excluding the functional *ʿet*), 40 words are found more than one time, yielding nearly 120 recurrences.⁷

I. RHETORICAL VARIATIONS

There are at least five rhetorical variations of reiteration used to emphasize the servant’s sufferings and splendor: alliteration, assonance, recurrence of synonymous parallel word pairs, paronomasia, and simple repetition. It is our purpose to present all occurrences of the latter three reiterative types, which provide the 40 repeated words. So an example of the former two will suffice.

⁶ We follow W. G. E. Watson’s designation of the greater and lesser parts of a poem as stanzas divided into strophes (*Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* [JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1984] 160–162).

⁷ Raabe, “Effect” 77–81, has called attention to the extent of recurring words in the poem and their rhetorical role, particularly in phrases contrasting the servant’s humiliation and exaltation. Our purpose is to examine the rhetorical role of reiteration in context throughout the poem. Also our tabulation differs somewhat from that of Raabe, who finds 36 recurring vocables resulting in 118 repetitions. We include two that he excluded (*ʿāšer*, *lōʿ*); we add *zrʿ* (paronomasia; 53:1, 10), *hll* and *šdq* (paronomasia; 53:11); and we combine *marʿeh* and *rʿh* into a single vocable *rʿh*. Thus we arrive at 40 recurring vocables. We do not include, as does Raabe, *lāmō* (53:8) with *lō*, *pānīm* (v. 3) with *lipnē*, or *hhly* (v. 10) with *hōlī*. These latter three exclusions do not affect the number of repeated words (40) since the terms themselves with which they are associated by Raabe are repeated. On *lāmō* cf. J. D. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1987) 226; F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1975) 326.

1. *Alliteration.* The poem contains 40 words that contain the consonant *mem* (which has the numerical value of 40), or 72 individual occurrences of *mem* including the prefixed preposition and the suffixed endings, or 76 total if counting those with the doubling *dagesh*. The rhetorical effect may be that one must remain silent before the majestic servant-martyr⁸ like the monarchs: “Kings will shut their mouths because of him” (52:15b; cf. 53:7b, e).

2. *Assonance.* The vowel *u* is repeated 26 times in the second strophe (53:4–6) of the second stanza (53:1–6). This assonance is achieved by 15 pronominal repetitions, seven substantives (one is repeated) and three occurrences of *w* before labials. The pronouns are: *hû*²/*-hû* (“he, him”) and ²*ʾānahñû*/*-nû* (“we, our, us”). The substantives are *nāgūa*^c (“stricken”), *mukkeh* (“smitten”), *mē^cunneh* (“afflicted”), *mēdukkā*² (“crushed”), *mūsār* (“punishment”), *ḥāburātō* (“his scourging”), *kullanû* (“all of us” [twice]). The rhetorical effect may be onomatopoeic—in this case, connoting sorrow—concerning the servant’s sufferings for “our” sins.⁹

3. *Synonymous parallel word pairs.* We limit the presentation to recurring word pairs. Curiously each pair reappears in a different stanza or strophe and inverted order. There are five such pairs.¹⁰ In order of appearance they are: *mar²eh*//*tō²ar* (“appearance//form,” 52:14bc; “form//appearance,” 53:2cd), *mak²ōbôt*//*ḥōlî* (“sorrows//grief,” 53:3bb; “griefs//sorrows,” 53:4ab), *nś²//sbl* (“bear//carry,” 53:4ab; “carry//bear,” 53:11d, 12e), *ḥll*//*dk²* (“pierce//crush,” 53:5ab; “crush//pierce” [*ḥll*, 1QIsa^a],¹¹ 53:10a), *pš^c*//*ʿāwōn* (“transgressions//iniquities,” 53:5ab; “iniquities//transgressors,” 53:11d, 12d, f). The rhetorical effect of the inverted repetition of these pairs will be suggested in context.

4. *Paronomasia.* Our presentation is restricted to a certain type of word-play—namely, words having a common root recurring in a different sense or form.¹² There are 14 roots employed paronomastically.¹³ Listed in order of

⁸ There is a fairly high incidence of gutturals and the palatal *kaph*; e.g. the first stanza has 7 *kaphs* and 12 *alephs*. This number of *alephs* is matched in the strophe 53:1–3. The following strophe (vv. 4–6) has 10 words with *aleph* (12 *alephs* total), 7 with *kaph* (8 *kaphs* total) and 7 with *ayin* (or 8 *ayins*). Verses 7–11b have 12 words with *heth* and 12 *ayins* (not including *bēda^ctō*, which we place, following the traditional accentuation, with what follows; see n. 21 *infra*). Eight *ayins* in 7 different words are found in the final stanza (vv. 11c–12).

⁹ Cf. N. K. Gottwald, “Poetry, Hebrew,” *IDB* 3.835, who mentions 15 “oo” sounds in vv. 4–7 from the pronominal forms *hû*² (“he”) and *-nû* (“we”), which strengthen the contrast between the innocent sufferer and the guilty confessors. In vv. 4–7 we count 16 pronominal “oo” sounds.

¹⁰ C. R. North mentions the inversion of the first two pairs presented here (*The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study* [London: Oxford University, 1948] 124, 176). Ceresko speaks of the third and fourth examples (“Rhetorical” 52).

¹¹ Cf. n. 20 *infra* on *ḥll* (“pierce”) in 1QIsa^a 53:10.

¹² On this and other types of paronomasia cf. E. L. Greenstein, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” *ABD* 6.968–971. Some examples given above also involve polysemy. Not included above are 7 forms that have only a singular/plural distinction or a difference of person (*ʾiš*, *peh*, *ḥōlî*, *pš^c*, *ʿāwōn*, *māwet*, *ḥlq*).

¹³ Some of these are also used in or as part of parallel pairing; cf. above *nś²//sbl*, *ḥll*//*dk²*, *r²h* (> *mar²eh*).

first occurrence and by root they are: *ns*^ʔ (“be lifted up, exalted,” 52:13b; “bore,” 53:4a, 12e); *r^ʔh* (“appearance,” 52:14b; 53:2d; “see, look,” 52:15c; 53:2d, 10c, 11a); *šm*^c (“heard,” 52:15d; “message,” 53:1a); *zr*^c (“arm,” 53:1b; “offspring,” 53:10c); *yd*^c (“acquainted,” 53:3b; “knowledge,” 53:11c [b, *BHS*]); *sbl* (“carried,” 53:4b; “will carry,” 53:11d); *ng*^c (“stricken,” 53:4c; “blow,” 53:8d); *nh* (“afflicted,” 53:4d; “afflicted,” 53:7a); *hll* (“pierced,” 53:5a; “pierced,” 53:10a [hll, 1QIsa^a]¹⁴); *pš*^c (“transgression[s],” 53:5a, 8d; “transgressors,” 53:12d, f); *dk*^ʔ (“crushed,” 53:5b; “to crush,” 53:10a); *pg*^c (“fall upon,” 53:6c; “intervene, intercede,” 53:12f); *hps* (“please, purpose,” 53:10a; “pleasure, will,” 53:10d); *šdq* (“just,” 53:11c; “justify,” 53:11c).

5. *Simple repetition.* 22 of the poem’s 40 repeated vocables do not involve synonym pairing or paronomasia. A word may reappear anywhere from two to ten times, yielding a total of 70 recurrences.¹⁵

Since recurrence—simple, synonymic pairs, paronomastic—plays such an important rhetorical role in the poem,¹⁶ we will present the 40 repeated words in their stanzaic and strophic context.¹⁷ In the passages quoted below, the recurring vocables are transliterated and found in parentheses. In addition, simple reiteration and paronomasia are marked by the italicized translation. The sequence of the stanzas and strophes will be followed in order to demonstrate the structuring and other rhetorical facets of recurrence. In short, reiteration—far from redundancy—is used to mark the poem’s boundaries, to delimit its stanzas and strophes, and to reinforce the structure of the poem’s parts and whole. By calling attention not only to the repeated words but also to the rest of the phrase where they occur, recurrence also serves to underscore and thereby heighten the antithesis of the servant’s sufferings and splendor, to advance the message movement, and to unite the entire poem around the inextricably related themes of the servant’s humiliation and exaltation.

¹⁴ If the *hll* reading does not restore the original, and if the MT form is derived rather from *hlh*, the paronomasia would invoke “he made sick” or “full of grief” (53:10) and “griefs” or “sicknesses” (53:4); cf. n. 20 *infra*.

¹⁵ The 22 simple repetitions that involve 70 recurrences are *ʿebed* (52:13; 53:11), *ʿal-* (52:14, 15; 53:5, 9), *rabbim* (52:14, 15; 53:11, 12 [twice]), *kēn* (52:14, 15), *ʾiš* (52:14; 53:3 [twice], 6), *peh* (52:15; 53:7 [twice], 9), *kī* (52:15; 53:8), *ʾāšer* (52:14, 15 [twice]; 53:12), *lō*^ʔ (52:15 [twice]; 53:2 [thrice], 3, 7 [twice], 9 [twice]), *mī* (53:1 [twice], 8), *ywh* (vv. 1, 6, 10 [twice]), *lipnē* (vv. 2, 7), *ʿereš* (vv. 2, 8), *lō* (vv. 2, 12), *bzh* (v. 3 [twice]), *hšb* (vv. 3, 4), *hū*^ʔ (vv. 4, 5, 7, 11, 12), *kullānū* (v. 6 [twice]), *māwet* (vv. 9, 12), *pth* (v. 7 [twice]), *nepēš* (vv. 10, 11, 12), *hlq* (v. 12 [twice]).

¹⁶ On the rhetorical role of repetition cf. J. Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *JBL* 88 (1969) 1–18; cf. R. Menet, *L’analyse rhétorique* (Paris: Cerf, 1989) 177–196, for the kinds of relationships between repeated words and pp. 197–300 on the structuring role of recurrence; cf. further Watson, *Classical* 274–299; E. S. Gerstenberger, “The Lyrical Literature,” *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* (ed. D. A. Knight and G. M. Tucker; Chico: Scholars, 1985) 416–423. For a recent survey of rhetorical criticism cf. P. Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 5–84; T. B. Dozeman, “Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism, OT Rhetorical Criticism,” *ABD* 5.712–715 (cf. n. 2 *supra*).

¹⁷ The sole exception is the recurrence of *kī* (52:15; 53:8).

II. FIRST STANZA: "MY SERVANT'S" SUCCESS AND EXALTATION (52:13-15)

¹³ Behold, my servant will act wisely;

he will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.

¹⁴ Just as on account of (^c*al-*) you many (*rabbîm*) were astonished—

so (*kēn*) his appearance (*mar²êh < r²h*) was marred more than any man's,

and his form (*tô²ar*) beyond human likeness—

¹⁵ thus (*kēn*) he will sprinkle many (*rabbîm*) nations;

kings will shut their mouths on account of (^c*al-*) him.

For what (²*ăšer*) had not (*lô²*) been told them they will see (*r²h*),

and what (²*ăšer*) they had not (*lô²*) heard they will understand.

The first stanza and first divine proclamation are framed with two sapiential terms: *škl* ("act wisely, instruct"¹⁸) and *byn* ("understand, ponder"). Whether through his wise actions or instruction, many will comprehend the exalted servant's mission of humiliation.

The chiasmic repetition of the sequence ^c*al-*, *rabbîm*, *kēn* (v. 14)—*kēn*, *rabbîm*, ^c*al-* (v. 15) enveloping the central parallel pair "appearance//form" draws attention to the stupor of the Gentiles (nations and kings) at the disfigured suffering servant. The repetition of ²*ăšer* and *lô²* leads to the stanza's conclusion and emphasizes that the initial ignorance of the Gentiles will be dispelled. Though his "appearance" (< *r²h*) was marred, they will recognize ("see," *r²h*) and understand the servant's sacrificial sufferings.

III. SECOND STANZA (FIRST STROPHE):

"WE" CONSIDERED HIM INSIGNIFICANT (53:1-3)

¹ Who (*mî*) has believed our message,

and to whom (*mî*) has Yahweh's arm been revealed?

² For he grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of parched ground;

he has no form (*tô²ar*) or majesty that we should look (*r²h*) upon him,

no appearance (*mar²eh < r²h*) that we should be attracted to him.

³ He was despised (*bzh*) and forsaken by men (²*îšîm*),

a man (²*îš*) of sorrows (*mak²ôbôt*)

and acquainted with grief (*hōlî*);

and like one from whom one hides his face

he was despised (*bzh*), and we did not esteem him.

¹⁸ Cf. the last stanza and final divine proclamation, which also opens with a wisdom term preceding "my servant": "By his knowledge (*bēda²tô*) my servant will justify many" (53:11). Feuillet ("Poèmes" 137) translates *da^cat* here as *enseignement* ("doctrine")—that is, the servant's teaching. For the translation of *yaškil* ("instruct") cf. Ps 32:8; Pr 16:23; 21:11; 1 Chr 28:19; Neh 9:20; Dan 9:22 and especially 12:3; cf. n. 22 *infra*.

The beginning of this stanza is stitched to the end of the preceding one by the use of *šm^c* (“heard,” 52:15; “message,” 53:1). The paronomasia serves to underscore the contrast between the Gentiles, who had not “heard” at first but will come to understand the mystery of the glorious servant’s sufferings, and Israel,¹⁹ who had heard the “message” but at first refused to believe.

The initial incredulity of the people and their rejection of the servant is emphasized by the repetition of *mî* at the beginning of the stanza and the chiasitic recurrence at the end of *bzh . . . ʔišim—ʔiš . . . bzh*. Two parallel pairs (“from//appearance,” “sorrows//grief”) point to the stumbling stone: The servant, judging from his appearance and sufferings, did not meet the people’s expectations. What they saw did not coincide with their view of Yahweh’s servant, especially a majestic servant. His sufferings were therefore inconceivable.

Ironically, his “appearance” (< *r^h*)//form” (52:14) marred more than any other “man’s” (*ʔiš*, 52:14) leads the Gentiles to “see” (*r^h*, 52:15) the servant, whereas the same “form//appearance” (< *r^h*, 53:2) of the “man” (*ʔiš*, 53:3) of sorrows hinders Israel from “seeing” (*r^h*, 53:2) the servant. The repetition—in particular, the use of *r^h* (“appearance”/“see”) and the inversion of the synonymous-pair word order—serves to sharply contrast the Gentiles’ and Israel’s reactions to the servant presented in the first stanza and the first strophe of the second stanza.

IV. SECOND STANZA (SECOND STROPHE):

“OUR” RECOGNITION OF HIS SUFFERINGS FOR “US” (53:4–6)

⁴ Surely our griefs (*hōlî*) he (*hû^ʔ*) bore (*nš^ʔ*),
and our sorrows (*mak^ʔōbôt*) he carried (*sbl*);
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.

⁵ But he (*hû^ʔ*) was pierced (*hll*) for our transgressions (*pš^c*),
he was crushed (*dk^ʔ*) for our iniquities (*ʕwōnôt*);
the punishment for our peace fell upon him,
and by his scourging we are healed.

⁶ We all (*kullānû*) like sheep have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;

¹⁹ The problem of identifying the speakers of 53:1 ff. is “the most vigorously debated question arising from the last Song” (North, *Suffering* 150–152); cf. Clines, *Literary Approach* 29–31. The “we, our” of the second stanza is, in our opinion, either the voice of faithful Israel (Delitzsch, *Isaiah* 309–310; Lindsey, “Career” 313; cf. “my people,” v. 8 [“his people,” 1QIsa^a]) or that of the prophet identifying with or as representative of the believing remnant (E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972] 3.340). Others maintain that the crowd of Israelites of which the prophet is part is in view (Grelot, *Poèmes* 51) or the Gentiles (nations/kings) of the preceding stanza (J. Muilenburg, “The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66,” *IB* 5.614) or Second Isaiah’s disciples (Whybray, *Thanksgiving* 172, 176). Paul based his missionary activity to the Gentiles on Isa 52:15 (cf. Rom 15:21). John (12:38) and Paul (Rom 10:16) quote Isa 53:1 to speak of the unbelief of many of their Jewish contemporaries.

but Yahweh has caused to fall on him
the iniquity (*ʿāwōn*) of us all (*kullānū*).

The use of two parallel pairs (“griefs//sorrows,” “bear//carry”) at the beginning, and the simple verse-initial and -final repetition of *kullānū* at the end, delimit the second strophe of the second stanza. The reversed order of the word pair “griefs//sorrows” (cf. “sorrows//grief,” 53:3) accentuates the people’s change of opinion concerning the sufferings of the servant. This is also underlined by several interstrophic chiasmic repetitions (for example, *yhwh*, *ʾiš*, *ḥšb* [vv. 1–3]—*ḥšb*, *ʾiš*, *yhwh* [vv. 4–6]). Yahweh (v. 1) revealed his saving arm in this man (*ʾiš*, v. 3) of sorrows, but we did not esteem (*ḥšb*, v. 3) him. In fact, we had esteemed (*ḥšb*, v. 4) him as stricken by God. Even though each one (*ʾiš*, v. 6) had turned to his own way, Yahweh (v. 6) made our iniquity fall upon him.

The magnificent exchange, “he” for “us,” is now recognized. The servant was not punished for his own sins but for “ours,” a point that is made all the more apparent by two other pairs in the center of the strophe: He was “pierced//crushed” for our “transgressions//iniquities.” The concentration of simple repetition and the use of four word pairs repeated elsewhere in the poem add to the sober hues of the portrait of the vicariously suffering servant.

V. THIRD STANZA (FIRST STROPHE):

“HE” SUFFERED AND DIED, THOUGH INNOCENT (53:7–9)

⁷ He was oppressed and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth (*lōʾ yiptaḥ pīw*).

Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
so he did not open his mouth (*lōʾ yiptaḥ pīw*).

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
yet who of his generation considered
that he was cut off from the land of the living,
for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due?

⁹ His grave was assigned to be with wicked men,
with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no (*lōʾ*) violence,
nor (*lōʾ*) was there any deceit in his mouth (*pīw*).

This strophe, which speaks of the servant’s ill treatment at the hands of the people, is marked at the beginning by the repetition of three words (*lōʾ yiptaḥ pīw*, v. 7) and at the end by *lōʾ . . . lōʾ . . . pīw* (v. 9). The recurrence, while underlining the silence and innocence of the servant, thereby also serves to call attention to the perversity of those who so maltreated him.

VI. THIRD STANZA (SECOND STROPHE):

“HIS” SUFFERINGS ACCORDING TO YAHWEH’S WILL (53:10–11b)

- ¹⁰ Yet Yahweh (*yhw^h*) purposed (*ḥps*) to crush (*dk^ʔ*) him;
 he pierced (*ḥll*, 1QIsa^a) him.²⁰
 If his life (*napšô*) is rendered as a guilt offering,
 he will see (*r^ʔh*) offspring and prolong his days,
 and the will (*ḥps*) of Yahweh (*yhw^h*) will prosper in his hand.
^{11a–b} After the anguish of his soul (*napšô*),
 he will see (*r^ʔh*) and be satisfied.²¹

The strophe is tightly knit together by four words recurring in nearly the same order: *yhw^h*, *ḥps*, *napšô*, *r^ʔh* (v. 10a–c)—*ḥps*, *yhw^h*, *napšô*, *r^ʔh* (vv. 10d–11b). The use of *ḥps* (“purpose, will”) and the inverted order of the parallel pair “crush//pierce” (cf. “pierced//crushed” [v. 5], to expiate for sins) emphasize Yahweh’s satisfaction with the sacrifice of the servant, a divine recognition that, if or when the servant gives his life, will insure he will live again to “see” the fruit of his humiliation.

Having pointed out the repetitions within each of the four strophes of the two central stanzas, we will now present the repetitions that delimit and unite the larger sections (stanzas 2 and 3). The two are nearly equal in word number (excluding the functional *ʔet*), the former stanza having 70 words and the latter 62.

The boundaries of both stanzas are marked by initial and terminal recurrences. The “we, our” confession (vv. 1–6) begins with *mî . . . mî* (v. 1) and ends with *kullānû . . . kullānû* (v. 6). The “he” narration (vv. 7–11b) opens with the twice-occurring three-word expression *lô^ʔ yiptaḥ pîw* (“he did not open his mouth,” v. 7) and closes with the double use of *r^ʔh* (vv. 10–11).

These two stanzas share 14 separate words that yield a total of 40 recurrences. The juxtaposed simple, synonymic and paronomastic repetitions are

²⁰ “He pierced him.” This reading perhaps does not differ from the consonantal MT, which is usually translated “to make him sick/grieve” or the like. According to M. Dahood, that the root *ḥll* (“to pierce”) underlies MT *hhly* is inferred from the pair *ḥll//dk^ʔ* (“pierced//crushed,” v. 5) and from the reading of 1QIsa^a (“and he pierced him”; “Phoenician Elements in Isaiah 52:13–53:12,” *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright* [ed. H. Goedicke; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1971] 71). This opinion is shared by, among others, Grelot (*Poèmes* 60–62) and Ceresko (“Rhetorical” 46 n. 17, who cites Dahood). Cf. Mulenburgh (“Book” 614), who finds Dahood’s suggestion worthy of serious consideration. The rhetorical pattern of inverse pair repetition adds, in our view, support to this conclusion. If on the other hand the reading “to make him sick/grieve” (*ḥlh*) is original, the word pair *ḥll//dk^ʔ* would be broken and then mixed with a term (*ḥôli*) from another pair (*mak^ʔôbôt//ḥôli* [53:3–4]). See the discussion on the last stanza, where an instance of breakup and *melange* is attested.

²¹ If the LXX and 1QIsa^{a,b} reading (“he will see light”) restores the primitive text, *bēda^ctô* would doubtless be joined to the preceding verb (as in LXX, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion), thus reading, contrary to the Masoretic accentuation, “be satisfied by his knowledge”; cf. Raabe, “Effect” 80 n. 16; North, *Suffering* 126; Whybray, *Thanksgiving* 81–84. *BHS* also links *bēda^ctô* with what precedes.

mî (vv. 1, 8); *zêrôa^c* (“army,” v. 1) . . . *zera^c* (“offspring,” v. 10); *lipnê* (“before,” vv. 2, 7); *²ereš* (“ground,” v. 2; “land,” v. 8); *lô^²* (vv. 2, 7, 9); *r^²h* (vv. 2, 10, 11); *hû^²* (vv. 4, 5, 7); *ng^c//^cnh* (v. 4; cf. *ⁿnh* [v. 7], *ng^c* [v. 8]); *hll//dk^²* (vv. 5, 10); *pš^c//^cāwôn* (v. 5; cf. *ⁿāwôn* [v. 6], *pš^c* [v. 8]); *ⁿal-* (vv. 1, 5, 9); *yhw^h* (vv. 1, 6, 10).

VII. FOURTH STANZA:

“MY SERVANT’S” ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND REWARD (53:11c–12)

11c-d By his knowledge my servant, the righteous one (*šdq*), will justify (*šdq*) many (*rabbîm*);

he (*hû^²*) will carry (*sbl*) their iniquities (*ⁿāwôn*).

¹² Therefore I will allot a portion (*hlq*) to him with the great, and he will apportion (*hlq*) the booty among many (*rabbîm*), because he poured himself out to death and was numbered with the transgressors (*pš^c*);

he (*hû^²*) bore (*ns^²*) the sin of many (*rabbîm*) and intervened for the transgressors (*pš^c*).

A cluster of reiterative, rhetorical devices is used in the culminating stanza. First, the framing effect (inclusio) of the two divine proclamations (52:13–15; 53:11c–12), while thematically evident, is enhanced through recurrence. The prologue and epilogue are headed by a “my servant” (*ⁿabdi*, 52:13a; 53:11c) introduction, each couched in a phrase containing seven different words.²² “Many” (*rabbîm*) appears twice in the first stanza (52:14–15) and three times in the final stanza (53:11–12). *Ns^²*, used paronomastically, is found in the two divine declarations (“lifted up,” 52:13; “bear,” 53:12; cf. v. 4). The three repeated words, each in its turn, accentuate the divine origin and grandeur of “my servant,” the “many” Gentiles and Israelites who benefit from his sufferings, his terrestrial trial of “sin-bearing” and his celestial “elevation.” Rhetorically, the inclusio underscores the ultimate dramatic reversal of the servant’s condition portrayed in the central stanzas.

Second, five words are repeated (*šdq*, *rabbîm*, *hû^²*, *hlq*, *pš^c*). The limits of the stanza are marked by the reiteration of *šdq* in the opening line and the twofold occurrence of *pš^c* at the end. The contrast drawn by the repetition is telling: The servant is “righteous” (innocent), and those for whom he suffered and intervened are “transgressors” (guilty). The triple use of *rabbîm* draws attention to the extent of the servant’s accomplishments: “Many” will

²² In each case *ⁿabdi* is preceded by a hiphil imperfect verb: *yaškil* (52:13), *yašdiq* (53:11). Cf. Dan 12:3 where the *maskilîm* (“teachers, wise”) and the *mašdiqê hārabbîm* (“those who lead many to righteousness”) are reminiscent of the servant who will “act wisely, instruct” (*yaškil*) and “justify . . . many” (*yašdiq* . . . *lārabbîm*). Cf. J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927) 472; Grelot, *Poèmes* 119; Whybray, *Thanksgiving* 66–71. Debated is whether *yašdiq* should be understood as an external causative (“he will justify”) or as an internal causative (“he will show himself to be righteous/innocent”; cf. *ibid.* 70–71).

be justified and “many” will share in the portion of the servant, for he bore the sin of “many.”

Third, the recurrence and inversion of two word pairs (“carry//bear” [vv. 11–12] and “iniquity//transgressors” [vv. 11–12]), drawn from the “our” confession (“bear//carry” [v. 4] and “transgressions//iniquities” [v. 5]), serve as a reminder of the vicarious sufferings of the servant upon which are based both his reward and his prerogative to justify.

Fourth, these two word pairs are no longer used in parallel. The pairing is broken, and the words appear widely separated one from the other. This pair-splitting frames the center, thus drawing attention to the servant’s own reward (“portion”) for his self-sacrifice unto death (v. 12).

Fifth, there are two rhetorical *melanges*. One involves the use of *ḥt*⁷ (“sin,” v. 12) for the first and only time in the poem. Its position in the stanza’s chiasmic structure marks its relation to *ʿāwôn* (v. 11), thereby forming a new synonym pair. The other *melange* is found in the same lines. It consists of the appearance of “iniquities” with “he will carry” and “sin” with “he bore.” In the confession we hear: “He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows” (v. 4). These *melanges* rhetorically combine “griefs//sorrows” with “iniquities//sin” and emphasize that the servant, in “carrying//bearing” them, will heal (cf. v. 5) and forgive.

Sixth, there are five cases of paronymic repetition: (1) *yd*^c (“knowledge,” v. 11;²³ “acquainted,” v. 3); *šdq* (“righteous one,” “justify,” v. 11); *pš*^c (“transgressors,” v. 12; “transgressions,” v. 5 [cf. v. 8]); *nš*⁷ (“bore,” v. 12 [cf. v. 4]; “lifted up,” 52:13); *pg*^c (“intervened,” v. 12; “fall,” v. 6).

Seventh and finally, the most striking rhetorical feature of this stanza and the entire poem is the concentration of recurring terms that are drawn from each of the preceding stanzas. In fact, the final stanza virtually consists of repeated words. Of the 28 words composing the stanza (excluding *ʾet*) there are 20 repetitions (see the words in quotation marks below) involving 14 different words (transliterated below) of which 12 are drawn from other stanzas of the poem (numbered below).²⁴ Just two repeated words, *šdq* and *ḥlq*, are found only here.

11c–d By his “knowledge” (*yd*^c; 2d stanza) “my servant” (*ʿabdî*; 1st), the “righteous one,” will “justify” (*šdq*) “many” (*rabbîm*; 1st); “he” (*ḥû*⁷; 2d, 3d) will “carry” (*sbl*; 2d) their “iniquities” (*ʿāwôn*; 2d).

¹² Therefore I will “allot a portion” (*ḥlq*) “to him” (*lô*; 2d) with the great,

²³ “By his knowledge” is understood by Raabe, among others, as “by his experience”—that is, his experience of vicarious suffering: “The contrast with 53:3 makes it clear that the content of the servant’s knowledge is his sickness and suffering” (“Effect” 80 n. 16). Cf. also Clines, *Literary Approach* 14, and nn. 5 and 18 *supra*.

²⁴ If *taḥat ʾāšer* (“because,” v. 12) is included (cf. *kaʾāšer* [“just as”], 52:14), these figures would be increased by one.

and he will “apportion” the booty among “many” (1st),
 because he poured “himself” (*napšô*; 3d) out to “death”
 (*māwet*; 3d)
 and was numbered with the “transgressors” (*pš^c*; 2d, 3d);
 “he” (2d, 3d) “bore” (*nš^c*; 2d) the sin of “many” (1st)
 and “intervened” (*pg^c*; 2d) for the “transgressors” (2d, 3d).

The concentration and distribution of repeated terms, combined with the breaking, repositioning and *melange* of parallel pairs, add up rhetorically to conclude the poem in a grand and climactic fashion. Juxtaposed are the innocent servant’s suffering for many transgressors. Highlighted are his singlehanded accomplishments for many, their justification and reward. Suffering and success, so incongruous—and yet the two are so inextricably woven together that to remove the strand of one would unravel the textual tapestry depicting Yahweh’s humiliated and majestic servant.²⁵

VIII. CONCLUSION

The mystery of the paradoxical success of the servant is solved. Yahweh led his servant through trial to triumph. It is clear how the NT writers understood this suffering servant poem. Luke reports that Jesus, in terms of this enigma, queried his incredulous disciples: “Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” (Luke 24:26). The apostles recognized Yahweh’s servant in Jesus. They summarized the poem as they wrote about “the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Pet 1:11) and spoke of Christ “taking the form of a servant. . . . Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place” (Phil 2:7–9).²⁶ The servant’s mission is crowned with success. Though brought down by his suffering, the servant Christ is elevated to the highest position. From there he will apply his efficacious ministry. He will justify the people, his offspring and reward, for whom he gave himself unto death.

²⁵ The use of 40—the poem’s 40 repeated words, 40 words that contain the consonant *mem*, 40 repetitions shared between the two stanzas portraying the servant’s humiliation—calls to mind, for example, the period of 40 years of wilderness wanderings and the 40 days and nights Jesus spent in the wilderness, periods of trial during and through which Yahweh accomplished his salvific purposes.

²⁶ According to H. M. Shires, the suffering servant poem is quoted or referred to more frequently in the NT than any other OT passage of comparable length. He finds that all but two of its verses are cited in full or in part in ten books and in approximately 58 verses (*Finding the Old in the New* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974] 43, 74–75). Jesus and the apostles frequently draw from the servant’s humiliation and exaltation to portray the passion of Christ and the glories that would follow. For a thorough treatment of the NT and other early Judaic use of this poem see Grelot, *Poèmes* 77–224. Cf. also R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) 110–132; Bonnard, *Le second Isaïe* 280–284.