

IRONY IN MARK'S GOSPEL by Jerry Camery-Hoggatt. *Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 72*. CUP 1992. pp. xii + 219. £30 H/b.

This book has a subtitle, *Text and Subtext*, the latter being defined as 'the underlying connotative meanings.' It is therefore the text before the reader but the text regarded as the author's full and real intention. The author of this book claims that 'Irony occurs when the elements of the story-line provoke the reader to see beneath the surface of the text to deeper significances.' This is an unusual use of the word irony, and it is clear from the very extended first part of the book (about irony in general) that the term can for this author carry very various meanings. Although he considers ancient classical literature, he does not mention the original Socratic irony, the feigning of ignorance to give the impression of drawing truth from an interlocutor. In fact, in this book irony usually means the art of demonstrating the divinely intended meaning through direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious utterances or actions of actors or speakers. In Mark the clearest examples occur in his account of the trial of Jesus: the soldiers mock the true king of the Jews as the king of the Jews. And the author makes well his case that trial language runs also through the early controversies of Mark's gospel, and indeed such 'irony' in his understanding of Mark is everywhere in that gospel.

This is not an easy book to read; as an aid to understanding its aim and purpose we may suggest reading the first pages of *The State of the Question* (pp. 2–3) and then make a new beginning with ch. 5, *The Evidence of Irony in Mark*; here the author shows a thorough knowledge both of Mark and of Marcan scholarship, and his book is worth study for this chapter alone.

The book is indeed stimulating and valuable; but not always persuasive. To take but one example, the author is involved in a hard task when he argues that the pericope about the Syrophenician Woman (Mark 7. 34–30) is an example of irony-writing. It seems far clearer and nearer to Mark's purpose if we take the incident as illustrating the well-evidenced conviction of Jesus that his divine gifts were given him in trust for Israel, that he began therefore with a mission to his own people, and that he learnt to understand that as meant for wider application by such incidents as this, as Matthew in his presentation of the incident (15.21–28) so clearly perceived. Indeed, the reflexion prompts the old, obstinate and long outlawed question, Is that what really happened?

The book is valuable not only for many genuine insights into Mark and his gospel. Its earlier part provides an introduction also to what for many will be an unfamiliar world of thought about the social functions of literature. Indeed it is original enough to bring the reader to look at the gospel in a new and illuminating way.

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