

Kasper Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John* (Brill's Paperback Collection; Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2012). Pp. XIV + 266. EUR 42,00. USD 52.00. ISBN 978-90-042-26-883 (Paperback)

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The book is a revision of doctoral dissertation written and defended at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Aarhus, Denmark. It is dedicated to studying recognition scenes and motifs in the Gospel of John. The argument of the book is based on the presumption that recognition type-scenes played an important function in ancient Greco-Roman narrative and drama. The phenomenon of the recognition scene (Greek *anagnōrisis*) was first described well in the Aristotle's *Poetics*. Not only the ancient Greco-Roman literature is pervaded by the recognition motif, but the Biblical books as well. One can detect it for example in the narrative of Joseph's reunion with his brothers (Gen 42–44), in Emmaus narrative (Luke 24) or in the apparition narratives in John 20–21. Kasper Bro Larsen rightly states that in the scholarly debate little attention has been paid to the recognition scenes in the Fourth Gospel (p. 2). That justifies the necessity of engagement in the project that resulted in the reviewed book.

The monography under investigation demonstrates all the features of a well-structured doctoral thesis. The Author starts with a knowledgeable Introduction in which he puts the scholarly problem that he intends to resolve, carefully reviews previous studies in Johannine recognition and demonstrates goal, method and outline of his study. The study has three main objectives (p. 18): 1) it aims to “demonstrate that a considerable number of Johannine encounter scenes thematize the question about Jesus' true identity by playing on ancient recognition-scene conventions”; 2) then the Author wants to explore “how the form of the Johannine recognition scenes change in the course of the narrative”; 3) and finally he intends to “discuss how the type-scene works as an integral medium for the Gospel's communication of its main issue concerning the recognition of Jesus, the stranger from heaven”.

In the first chapter K. Bro Larsen explores theoretical and historical questions concerning anagnōrisis. He initiates the investigation with showing that

this literary device was considered as a *terminus technicus* in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Then he deepens the understanding of the inner characterization of anagnorisis and its Aristotelian typology. On this background he analyzes semiotics of recognition emphasizing above all two things: how recognition is displayed (three marks: showing, telling and whispering) and what is the distinction between "recognition as identification" and "recognition as social recognition" (p. 53). According to Larsen the latter prevails in the Gospel of John. The second part of this introductory chapter is dedicated to the exploration on anagnorisis as a type-scene in ancient literature. One might ask here whether it wouldn't be better to start the investigation with the issue, combining it with examination of Aristotle's *Poetics* and then exploring the semiotics of recognition. Nevertheless, the final result of the investigation performed in the chapter is satisfactory. The Author points out three main functions of ancient recognition scene of which he will make use in following chapters applying the theory to the Fourth Gospel. The three functions are: "(1) It is the primary narrative device, in which hidden identities come to lights; (2) it negotiates social roles and thematizes social expulsion and integration; (3) it culminates in an event of instantaneous presence which eliminates the distance between recognizer and recognized" (p. 72).

Analyses performed in chapters two to four encompass the whole Gospel of John. Larsen rightly states that recognition scenes are embedded in plots and they should be examined with "regard to the internal literary matrix that they appear within" (p. 73). In the second chapter entitled "Anagnorisis and Arrival (John 1–4)". He starts with describing the prominent role of the prologue (1:1-18) that stages the recognition scenes of the whole Gospel and identifies Jesus as its main object of recognition. A very interesting part of the analysis is the comparison between recognition scenes presenting Jesus in the Gospel of John and anagnorises of Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*. Both of them are alike when it comes to their appearance in disguise, but their relation to observers they meet are totally different. Odysseus, when he comes home after many years of wandering, though at first taken as someone else, is a familiar person. Jesus, on the contrary, leaves Father's home and becomes a stranger seeking to be recognized in foreign space. So Jesus meets his recognizers fulfilling the mission at the destination, before returning home.

Following parts of the second chapter are dedicated to the careful diagnosis of narratives present in John 1–4 as anagnorises: Jesus recognized by John the Baptist (1:19-28; 1:29-34); disciples' call narratives as recognition scenes (1,35-51); Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan Woman as anagnorisis (4:4-42). The analyses are well performed and the argumentation is persuasive.

Insufficiency that can be attested in this chapter and in two following is an absence of even a short conclusion that would summarize exegetical activity of the Author.

Chapter three encompasses recognition scenes in the central part of the Fourth Gospel (John 5–19). Unfortunately, exegetical work of the Author is much modest here. He examines only John 5:1-18 as recognition parody, “I am” as recognition formula, John 9, and farewell discourses (John 13–16) along with passion narrative as recognition scenes. All this is done on 41 pages (143-184). This part of the Gospel would demand much more attention, if one wanted to explore thoroughly recognition scenes present in it. As in the previous chapter, lack of the conclusion leaves a reader without clear understanding what are the Author’s exegetical achievements in this part of the book.

Finally, in the fourth chapter Larsen examines recognition scenes in John 20–21. He argues correctly that four recognition scenes included in John 20 constitute a recognition climax of the Fourth Gospel in the story-world. The Author of the book rightly shows that John 21:1-14 being a narrative of Jesus’ appearance to his disciple is a recognition scene that teaches a reader what is a means of the Lord’s new presence among the disciples. The presence becomes manifest in the communal meal at which Jesus is the host. In my opinion Larsen neglected here that another way of the risen Jesus presence is his miraculous activity at their successful fishing that symbolically expresses missionary activity of the Church. The Author is right in explaining another important literary device present in the Gospel: the reader is intended in it not only as a spectator, watching the recounted story, but he is invited into the game of recognition (p. 214).

To sum up, I find the book very interesting and stimulating. It emphasizes a literary device in the Fourth Gospel that was not explained before in a satisfactory way. Reading the Gospel with the dynamic of recognizing the Stranger makes sense because it shows well how new aspects of Jesus’ identity are progressively revealed in the course of the narration.