PROLEPSIS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

by

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As far as the present writer is aware, M.-É. Boismard is unique in having included prolepsis in his list of Johannine style features.¹ The fact that prolepsis is clearly not one of the most evident style features of the Gospel of John can already be discerned from a simple glance at Boismard’s classification thereof: he locates prolepsis in the final category (namely F) as the last but one (F37) characteristic of his list of 416.² Prolepsis can be designated with the frequency formula 8/8(+1): eight times in the Gospel of John (4:35; 5:42; 7:27; 9:8, 29; 11:31; 14:17; 16:4),³ eight times in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 1:24; 7:2; 11:32; 12:34; Matt. 6:28; Luke 13:25; 24:7; Acts 13:32) and one synoptic parallel (Luke 4:34 = Mark 1:24). This implies that the characteristic occurs in the Gospel of John in half (50%) of the aforementioned instances.⁴ Given that Boismard offers no precise grammatical description of the style feature “prolepsis,”⁵ the present contribution will begin

² In category F, the Gospel of John is only compared with the Synoptic Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. The category includes style features, the proportional occurrence of which in the Gospel of John lies between 50% and 74.9%. Cf. Boismard & Lamouillé, L’évangile de Jean (n. 1), p. 491a.
³ According to Boismard, the use of prolepsis in John 9:29 and 16:4 has its roots in Jean II-A. The remaining occurrences are from Jean II-B. Boismard compares 7:27 with 9:29 on page 221b: “Au v. 27, la phrase ‘mais celui-ci, nous savons d’où il est’ se retrouvera, mais au négatif, en 9,29: ‘mais celui-ci, nous ne savons pas d’où il est’.”
⁴ The synoptic parallel is not accounted for in the calculation of the percentage of occurrence. Cf. Boismard & Lamouillé, L’évangile de Jean (n. 1), p. 491b.
⁵ In his commentary he simply refers to “la prolepse” in relation to 4:35 (cf. Boismard & Lamouillé, L’évangile de Jean [n. 1], p. 134b), to “la construction grammaticale appelée
with a survey of the descriptions thereof found in some important grammars (I). We will then try to ascertain the extent to which “prolepsis” can be considered a Greek linguistic feature (II). To conclude our contribution we will endeavour to determine whether prolepsis should indeed be included among the Johannine style features (III).

I

The term “prolepsis” can be defined in both rhetorical and grammatical terms. In the context of literary rhetoric, “prolepsis” (πρόληψις “anticipatio”) is used for “the proleptic defensive anticipation of the opponent’s argument.”⁶ Although F. Blass does not mention the term in his grammar,⁷ his successors, A. Debrunner and F. Rehkopf,⁸ offer a clear definition: prolepsis is “the anticipation of the subject (object) of the subordinate clause by making it the object of the main clause.”⁹ Debrunner and Rehkopf distinguish a variety of instances of prolepsis. In the first place they refer to the “anticipation of the subject with

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⁹ Rehkopf, moreover, offers an even more limiting description. He does not include