



Why it was titled *The Gospel According to Mark*

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Abstract

The Gospel according to Mark is a short story written by Argentina writer Jorge Luis Borges. This short story mainly talks about how the protagonist was crucified. However only until the middle of the story, the concern on the gospel finally appeared. From the story, it seems there is no much relation between the content and the title. Then why did the author take *The Gospel according to Mark* as the title of his story? This paper will try to figure out the reasons.

Keywords: espinosa, gospel, stereotype

1. Introduction

Espinosa, a medical student, was invited to spend the summer months out at La Colorada but he was isolated by the flood. While in order to bridge the inevitable after-dinner gap, Espinosa decided to read something to his neighbors Gutters. What only could attract his listeners turned out to be *The Bible*, especially the Gospel according to Mark. At the end of the story, the protagonist was eventually crucified because of his reading of this gospel to his listeners.

From the story, it seems there is no much relation between the content and the title. Even until the middle of the story, the concern on the gospel finally appeared. The biblical elements only typically shows in the final scenery where the Gutres bowed their knees to the stone pavement, mocked at Espinosa, spat on him and finally crucified him, which is very similar with the gospel according to Mark chapter 15 verse 19 in *the Bible*, “they struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him”^[1]. A question, however, would come around: why did the author take *The Gospel according to Mark* as the title of his story? There can be other titles to show the protagonist’s death, such as “Espinosa’s Death” or “The Death of A Medical Student” (just like the death of salesman), since the whole story nearly talks about Espinosa’s life. The author, as the preexister of this story, did let the story go as he wanted. So that’s mean the title is not a coincidence for this story, but the author’s some arrangement. Then why was it titled *The Gospel According to Mark*?

The main characters in this story are Espinosa on the one side and the Gutres on the other side. To them, this title has different meaning. In the following part, this paper will focus on exploring the underlying meaning of the title in this story, and finally display that this title with its content in this story is an irony to the rigid fanaticism.

2. The Gospel is the “Gospel” for the Gutres?

Before spending time in discussing the “gospel”, there is a necessity to find out the characteristics of Gutres. Borges gives some descriptions. “The Gutres were three: the father, an unusually uncouth son, and a daughter of uncertain

paternity^[2]. This is the first impression about the Gutres: Rude and tangle-some sexual relationship. “They were barely articulate.” “...none of whom could read or write.” “The Gutres, who knew so much about country things, were hard put to it to explain them.” “There was a guitar in the kitchen. Someone would tune the instrument without ever getting around to playing it^[2]. They don’t know anything about history and music instrument, which stand for the civilization. From all these descriptions, the author just want to show the uncivilized state of the Gutres. When religion appeared at the very beginning, the mass common people just like the Gutres, uncivilized. They can’t read or write. A few of those who can read and write became the priests in church. The Gutres’ illiteracy establishes the basement for Espinosa’s “preaching”, just as the illiteracy of the common mass for the priests.

To religion, “They lacked any religious faith, but there survived in thier blood, like faint tracks.” “They have been told two stories—a lost ship and a god who is crucified^[2]. Some religious elements did exist in their life. Even though when Espinosa told them of his found of *The Bible*, they actually barely took notice, they did show great interest on his parables of the *Gospel according to Mark*. When they confronted with the flood disaster, they blindly regarded Espinosa as their saver. What happened later actually proved our assumption? That Espinosa treated the pet lamb awakened them. Thus the Gutres obeyed Espinosa’s orders attentively, secretly stealing the crumbs he had dropped on the table. “The gutres, as if lost without him, like following him from room to room and along the gallery that ran around the house^[2]. They even regarded themselves as Espinosa’s disciples. “No longer a stranger now, he was treated by them with special attention, almost to the point of spoiling him^[2].

They just know the lost ship and the crucified God who saved all people. Naturally, the flood makes them “the lost ship”, what Espinosa did make them believe that their God appeared. To them, Espinosa brought the gospel, which give them the faith to stop the raining and saved them from the flood. Thus there is no wonder that they will take action to save themselves by crucifying their “Jesus”.

While that the “freethinker” protagonist Espinosa was treated as the God can be seen as an irony to the rigid fanaticism? The Gutres thought Espinosa brought them the Gospel, do we, as the readers of this story, also regard it as a gospel? Since the Gutres didn’t try to fix the beam, instead, pulled down the beams to make the cross. Can they be saved in this way? What was impressed is that their rigid fanaticism killed an innocent man. This kind of ending reveals the question that the Gospel is really a “Gospel”?

3. The Destiny of Jesus in “The Gospel According to Mark” is the Stereotype of Espinosa’s in This Story?

Borges almost spends a half part pages to tell what kind of person Espinosa is. He has almost unlimited kindness and a capacity for public speaking. He did not like arguing and preferred having his listener rather than himself in the right. He has an acquiescent nature. He is a freethinker. Thus there is a speculation for Borges’ choice of this title. Does the title “The Gospel According to Mark” foreshadow Espinosa’s destiny in this story? Since Jesus was also so kind and did be good at public speaking.

To the Gutres, what Espinosa did actually like what Jesus did. What Espinosa did just like miracles to them. Espinosa gave them a room to live when they suffered from flooding. He treated the injured pet lamb. He read the Gospel in the way of Jesus preaching. And at the end of this story, Espinosa did have the same fate with Jesus, he was crucified. While this is just the similar form, does it really have the same meaning with Jesus’ crucifixion? The answer is negative. Espinosa died because of his reading on the Gospel. While he even a freethinker. Is that an irony for him? If the details in the story were checked very carefully, it could be found that Espinosa’s death actually dues to some accidental events.

The parables about “The Gospel According to Mark” seems only a coincidence. Espinosa decided to read something just trying to bridge the inevitable after dinner gap. He is afraid that he would bore his friend by telling them the story of the Salado flood. Then he “came across an English Bible” [2]. “Leafing through the volume, his fingers opened it at the beginning of the Gospel according to St. Mark.” “Having finished the Gospel according to St. Mark, he wanted to read another of the three Gospels that remained [2]. This seems show that he did not plan to read this Gospel, but happened to read it. No matter what it is, he finally read this Gospel out of so many coincidences. While what bring the final step for his death owed to his answer. “And the Roman soldiers who hammered in the nails—were they saved, too?” “‘Yes.’ Said Espinosa, whose theology was rather dim [2]. His “Yes” reminds another section. “When his cousin Daniel invited him to spend the summer months out at La Colorada, he said yes at once--not because he was really fond of the country, but more out of his natural complacency and also because it was easier to say yes than to dream up reasons for saying no [2]. He is more inclined to say “yes” no matter what the truth is. Then probably his answer “yes” to the Gutres aslo because it was easier to say yes and he did not want to dream up the reasons for no. It’s sarcastic that he lose his life because this inclination. Until the last minute, he even can’t believe he would die like this.

4. Conclusion

From the above analysis, the gospel according to Mark, both for Espinosa on the one hand and the Gutres on the other

hand, is an irony. The former is a freethinker but died of his reading of this Gospel. The gospel the latter believed actually is nonsense but lead them make crime. If it continues raining, they cannot be saved probably since they even didn’t have a roof. Thus the choice of this title actually is an irony to the rigid fanaticism.

5. References

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