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Author Attribution Parallels and Stylometry

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2F. Author Attribution Parallels and Stylometry

There are some related areas of study to what I have addressed here in this Introduction. These have to do with author attribution parallels and stylometry.

AUTHOR ATTRIBUTION

A very good summary concerning the basis of these studies and the claims that have been made for, and against the Book of Mormon has been published relatively recently. As I don't claim to be a trained scholar in this area, I will rely on the words of the LDS author of this article. I hope he will indulge me in some lengthy quotes.

In 2013 Benjamin L. McGuire reviewed the methodology of some recent attempts to parallel passages in the Book of Mormon with certain biblical-style works that were published before 1830. He writes [p. 62]:

Over the past two centuries, there have been many lists of rules offered on the process of presenting parallels. . . . Most of these deal with the idea of direct borrowing—of situations where there is a proposed genetic connection between two texts. . . .

I will begin by providing a series of basic definitions.

Verbal Parallels: Words [p. 69]

Parallels identified on the basis of the words used are called verbal parallels. In providing for the widest useful identification of verbal parallels, I have adopted the definition of Jon Paulien:

A Verbal parallel can be defined as occurring whenever at least two words of more than minor significance are parallel between [sources' . . . These two major words may be coupled together in a phrase or may even be separated, provided they are in clear relationship to each other in both passages of the suggested parallel. (*Jon Paulien, "Elusive Allusions," Bible Review 3 (1988): 41-42*)

Verbal Parallels: Shared Phrases [p.70]

Of course, longer strings of identical text (much more than two words) provide a self-evident demonstration of their relationship to each other.

Thematic Parallels [p. 76]

Thematic parallels are parallels in thought, in doctrine, or in practice that go beyond the mere words used to convey that thought. Like words, there can be limitations to the range of these parallels.

Structural Parallels [p. 77]

Structural parallels generally are far more significant in determining genetic connections because they often imply that one text is modeled or patterned on another text. When we see two or more texts that follow a specific and identical pattern—when they both introduce similar language and themes in the same order – we have structural parallels. (note 17) As with the other kinds of parallels, the longer the pattern is sustained, the stronger the parallel becomes. Structural parallels can also include stylized forms (existing in poetic material), aesthetic appearances, and even sequences of sound when read aloud.

[Benjamin L. McGuire, “Finding Parallels: Some Cautions and Criticisms, Part Two.” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 61-104]

In another article, Benjamin McGuire writes [p. 324]:

The history of author attribution is nearly as long as the history of reading and writing. (Harold Love, *Attributing Authorship*, 14-15) Within the field of literary studies, author attribution has developed into a field of scholarship, complete with its own history, its discussions on methodology, and even its own tightly contested difficult questions. This development has resulted in large reference volumes like the *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature* (based on a work first published in 1882-3, and expanded twice to the current publication’s 9 volumes, with the most recent volume added in 1962.

[Yet] as an authority in the field, Harold Love, put it [p. 325]:

Today a phrase can be pursued almost instantaneously through the magnificent online LION archive which covers all fields of English and American drama and of authored volumes of poetry up to 1900, and in many cases beyond, and is rapidly expanding into prose Now that the capacity to multiply parallels – most of which will be misleading – is almost unlimited, intelligent selectivity has never been more important. . (Harold Love, *Attributing Authorship*, 90)

McGuire writes [p.324]:

Scholarly discussion of author attribution . . . is largely unknown within Mormon Studies, whose participants rarely come from a field of literary and textual criticism. This has lent a novel feel to those engaged in statistical approaches [“stylometry”] to the authorship of the

Book of Mormon, even though few of these techniques are really new. Most of the participants seem unaware of the body of scholarly work that already exists which often supports or points out critical flaws in current assumptions.

[Benjamin L. McGuire, "The Late War Against the Book of Mormon." *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013): 323-355]

There is also the incredibly interesting matter of authorial influence on the narrative. According to Joey Green (Mormon Blogsite "Literary Themes in the Book of Mormon"):

The beauty of language is that phrases, words, and concepts are often unique to individuals, demonstrating their creative influence on a particular work. For example, . . . Nephi is the only one to use the construction "plain and precious" – he uses it to refer to the plain and precious things he makes sure to add to his spiritual record (1 Ne. 19:3) after seeing in vision the plain and precious things taken out or held back from another spiritual record (1 Ne. 13:28, 29, 34, 35, 40). (March 3, "Authorial Influence: Introduction")

However, after Green stresses the uniqueness of phrases with Nephi, he then writes about his authorial influence on his brother Jacob:

When Nephi asks to be shown the things his father had seen in vision and to know the interpretation thereof, he is shown the birth of the Son of God to a fair virgin and asked, "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" (1 Ne. 11:16). . .

The concept of the condescension of God obviously impresses Nephi, for he uses it in his own 'Psalm' (2 Ne. 4:26). The only other time this word shows up again in the Book of Mormon is when it is used twice by Nephi's brother Jacob (2 Ne. 9:53; Jacob 4:7). That the word only shows up within the writings of two brothers demonstrates the influence Nephi's teachings must have had on Jacob. (Tuesday, March 4, 2008 "Authorial Influenced: Nephi and Jacob")

Other examples cited by Joey Green of the unique Nephi/Jacob thematic connection are as follows:

"A whore of all the earth"

Nephi: (1 Ne. 14:10-12; 1 Ne. 22:13-14; 2 Ne. 28:18)

Jacob: (2 Nephi 10:18)

"A blessed people"

Nephi: (1 Ne. 14:1-2;

Jacob: (Jacob 3:5-6)

"Nursing" scattering Israel

Nephi: (1 Ne. 21:23 --quoting Isaiah 49; 1 Ne. 22:6)

Jacob: (2 Ne. 6:7 – quoting Isaiah 49; 2 Ne. 10:9)

(Author Attribution Parallels)

In contrast to the concept of “authorial influence,” Marilynne Linford focuses on authorial “uniqueness.” To begin she writes:

By looking up each of the 1,558 words found only one time in the Book of Mormon, I found that more than 450 are found only in the Book of Mormon—not in the Old Testament, New Testament, Doctrine and Covenants, or Pearl of Great Price—meaning the Book of Mormon as an entity has a unique vocabulary. (p. 51)

The book of Lehi is a casualty of the stolen 116 pages In Heavenly Father’s foreknowledge, however, He inspired Nephi to include some of his father’s words in his books. As the Book of Mormon is configured today, the words of Lehi are found mostly in 1 Nephi 8 and 10 and in 2 Nephi 1—4. . . . there are at least twenty-eight [words] that are unique to him. (p. 55-56)

Lehi’s wife, Sariah, is not quoted as using any unique words, but she is quoted as using a unique phrase two times in 1 Nephi 5:8, wherein she bore her testimony: “I know of a surety,” and “I also know of a surety.” (p. 56)

So far in my search, I have found 141 words that are unique to Nephi . . . [yet a] noteworthy aspect of Nephi’s legacy is his phrase, “the tender mercies or the Lord.” (p. 58)

[Laman and Lemuel] use three unique phrases accusing Nephi of “foolish imaginations” (1 Ne. 2:11, 17:20), trying to deceive them with “cunning arts” (1 Ne. 16:38), and calling Nephi a “fool” (1 Ne. 17:17). (p. 59)

(Source: Marilynne Todd Linford, *The Book of Mormon Is True*, 2015.)

A list of related articles on this subject can be found in the “Sources” section, “Part C: A Chronological List of Pertinent Writings on Bible Quotations or Language Uses That Are Part of the Book of Mormon.” As to any conclusions that involve the idea that the Book of Mormon plagiarized some biblically-related work of the time, I will simply repeat what I have said before in the “Bible Quotations” section, that we have the choice of either rejecting the Book of Mormon or accepting it. Hopefully we won’t proclaim, as Nephi prophesied: “A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible.” (2 Nephi 29:3)

STYLOMETRY

According to Wikipedia, “Stylometry is the application of the study of linguistic style, usually to written language.” “Stylometry is often used to attribute authorship to anonymous or disputed documents. It has legal as well as academic and literary applications.”

The idea that certain words or phrases, or the frequency and pattern of such can identify an author has been around for a long time. When computers came into being, the ability to analyze the patterns of unique words and phrases used by an author (“wordprints”) took a great leap forward. However, the quantity of data consumed did not guarantee the quality of the analysis. Thus, proper and sound method became the focus of all future criticism regarding any experimentation involving stylometry. Efforts to improve the quality of stylometry in literary analyses have been at the forefront of this science.

Since a brief or simple explanation of all the technical advances that have taken place in this science is difficult, and since a very well-written and informative 17-page article, “Stylometric Analyses of the Book of Mormon: A Short History,” has already been written and is accessible on the Internet, I will just refer the reader to that article and give a chronological list of expanded sources here (as well as in the “Sources” section—although dispersed) that are relevant to the Book of Mormon and stylometry.

- 1887 Thomas Mendenhall, “The Characteristic Curves of Composition,” *Science* 214 (11 March 1887): 237-246.
- 1888 Conrad Mascol*, “Curves of Pauline and Pseudo-Pauline Style I,” *Unitarian Review* 30 (November 1888): 452-460.
* Conrad Mascol was a pseudonym for William Benjamin Smith.
- 1888 Conrad Mascol*, “Curves of Pauline and Pseudo-Pauline Style II,” *Unitarian Review* 30 (December 1888): 539-46.
- 1893 L. A. Sherman, *Analytics of Literature: A Manual for the Objective Study of English Prose and Poetry*. Boston: Ginn, 1893.
- 1937 Moyle Q. Rice, “Stylistic Differentiation of Authorship” in *The Language and Style of the Book of Mormon*, Master’s thesis. University of Nebraska, 1937, p. 44-53.
- 1958 Glade L. Burgon, “An Analysis of Style Variations in the Book of Mormon.” Master’s thesis. Brigham Young University, 1958.
- 1962 Glade L. Burgon, “The Book of Mormon and the Charge: ‘The Product of One Man of Mediocre Ability.’” *Improvement Era* 65 (January-February 1962): 44-48.
- 1964 Frederick Mosteller and David L. Wallace, *Inference and Disputed Authorship*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1964.

(Stylometry)

- 1979 Wayne A. Larsen, Alvin C. Rencher, and Tim Layton, "Multiple Authorship of the Book of Mormon," *New Era* 9 (November 1979): 10-13.
- 1980 Wayne A. Larsen, Alvin C. Rencher, and Tim Layton, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints," *BYU Studies* 20 no. 3 (Spring 1980):225-251.
- 1981 D. James Croft, "Book of Mormon 'Wordprints' Reexamined," *Sunstone* Issue #26 (March-April 1981): 15-21.
- 1981 Wayne A. Larsen and Alvin C. Rencher, "Response to Book of Mormon 'Wordprints' Reexamined" *Sunstone* 6 (March-April 1981): 22-26.
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- 1983 Brian Curtis Roberts, "Stylometry and Wordprints: A Book of Mormon Reevaluation." M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1983.
- 1984 Raymond C. Treat, "Wordprints: Further Evidence for Book of Mormon Authorship." *Zarahemla Record* 22-23 (Fall 1983 and Winter 1984): 4-5.
- 1984^ Ernest H. Taves, *Trouble Enough: Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1984.
- 1986 John L. Hilton, "Review of *Book of Mormon Stylometry*, by Ernest Taves," FARMS Preliminary Report, 1986, p. 16.
- 1986 Kenneth H. Godfrey, "Not Enough Trouble," review of *Trouble Enough: Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon*, by Ernest Taves, *Dialogue* 19/3 (1986): 139-144.
- 1990 John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship," *BYU Studies* 30 no. 3 (1990): 89-108.
- 1992^ D[avid] I. Holmes, "A Stylometric Analysis of Mormon Scripture and Related Texts," *Journal of The Royal Statistical Society. Series A (Statistics in Society)*, Vol. 155, No. 1 (1992): 91-120.
- 1992 John F. Burrows, "Computers and the Study of Literature," in *Computers and Written Texts*, ed. Christopher S. Butler (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 167-204.
- 1992 John L. Hilton, "Wordprints and the Book of Mormon," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch. SLC: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, p. 221-226.

- 1997 John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, edited by Noel B. Reynolds. Provo, Utah: FARMS, p. 225-253.
- 1997 Louis C. Midgley, "Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Critics and Their Theories" in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds. Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997, p. 101-139.
- 1997 G. Bruce Schaalje, John L. Hilton, and John B. Archer, "Comparative Power of Three Author-Attribution Techniques for Differentiating Authors," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/1 (1997): 47-63.
- 1998 David I. Holmes, "The Evolution of Stylometry in Humanities Scholarship," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 13/3 (1998):112
*Note** *The journal, Literary and Linguistic Computing was established in 1986 by the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing (ALLC). The journal published papers on authorship, style, meaning, text processing, linguistics, and lexicometrics. In 2015, the journal name was changed to Digital Scholarship in the Humanities (DSH), and the journal took into account all digital scholarship in the Humanities in its widest meaning.*
- 2001 Noel B. Reynolds, "Old Wine in Old Bottles," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch eds., Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002, p. 132-135.
- 2005 Jeff Lindsay, "The Hilton Wordprint Study of the Book of Mormon," Mormanity blog, Monday, October 03, 2005
- 2008^ Matthew L. Jockers, Daniela M. Witten, and Craig S. Criddle, "Reassessing Authorship of the Book of Mormon" *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 23/4 (December 2008): 465-491.
- 2011 R. Scott Lloyd, "FAIR: Wordprint Analysis and the Book of Mormon," *Church News / Deseret News*, August 8, 2011.
- 2012 G. Bruce Schaalje, Matthew Roper, and Paul Fields, "Stylometric Analyses of the Book of Mormon: A Short History," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2012): 28-45.
- 2016 Jonathan Cannon, "Book of Mormon Stylometry in Pictures and Tables." RationalFaiths blog. Posted January 18, 2016.
- 2017 "Book of Mormon/Wordprint Studies," FairMormon (<https://www.fairmormon.org>)
- 2017 "Stylometry," Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.