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## Introduction

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# Introduction

*Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch*

This book comprises fourteen of the papers presented at “Chiasmus: An Open Conference on the State of the Art,” held at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, on August 15–16, 2017. That date marked the fiftieth anniversary of events in Germany and Austria which soon grew into the publication of *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), edited by John W. Welch. Generated forty years ago, that widely-cited volume with a preface by David Noel Freedman featured contributions by authors including Yehuda T. Radday, Jonah Frankel, Bezael Porten, Wilford G. E. Watson, John W. Welch, and Robert F. Smith, about chiasmus in Ugaritic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and other literatures.

This present volume now reflects and assesses the current state of the art regarding the use of chiastic analysis in an equally wide-ranging body of languages and texts, including the Hebrew Bible, Babylonian epics, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and even Mayan inscriptions. Overall, the academic state of chiastic affairs is productive, insightful, innovative, wide-spread, expanding, and well established. The bibliography at the conclusion of this collection lists only the most useful and reputedly recognized studies published since 1981, thus updating the bibliography found in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*. For the most comprehensive, consolidated chiasmus bibliography, together with indices, resources, and archived materials dealing with chiasmus, one can visit the non-profit website, [chiasmusresources.org](http://chiasmusresources.org). In addition, videos of all the presentations and panel discussions from this 2017 conference, including all

but two of the papers contained in this volume, are conveniently posted on <https://chiasmusresources.org/chiasmus-open-conference-state-art>.

The papers from this conference feature detailed textual analyses, striving to identify inverted structures and seeking for meanings that can be derived from these features of these texts. The articles in the main part of this book, “Textual Analyses: Structures and Meanings,” explore many uses of chiasmus in Genesis (with contributions by Gary A. Rendsburg and Steven R. Scott), Leviticus (Jonathan Burnside), Deuteronomy (Bernard M. Levinson), Isaiah (Donald W. Parry), and Jeremiah and Deuteronomy (David Rolph Seely); in the Book of Mormon (papers by John W. Welch and Noel B. Reynolds); in the Gospels of Matthew (H. Douglas Buckwalter) and John (Wayne Brouwer); and in Mayan texts (Kerry Hull).

The second part of this book, “Criteria: Findings and Reflections,” adds three studies dealing with past and current criteria used in determining the presence of chiasmus (Neal Rappleye), in measuring intentionality (Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards), and in functionally analyzing ideas, words and phrases in macro-chiasms (Stephen Kent Ehat).

The following synopsis introduces this fascinating collection and also gives a current sense of the present state of academic uses of chiasmus, why it is used, how it is judged, when it is recognized, and what insights it yields.

### **Textual Analyses: Structures and Meanings**

Gary A. Rendsburg, “Chiasmus in the Book of Genesis,” examines three sweeping chiastic structures in the following Ancestral Narratives of the text of Genesis—Abraham (Gen 11:27–22:24), Jacob (Gen 25:19–35:22), and Joseph (Gen 37–50). For each of the three structures, Rendsburg points out the various elements that constitute the chiasmus—the focal point and the mirrored elements that exist on each side of that focal point. Mirrored elements include both narrative themes and specific lexical items. The three chiastic structures are identified and developed in Rendsburg’s book *The Redaction of Genesis*. In this 2017 proceeding, Rendsburg presents new material, arguing that the major themes of the focal points of the three chiasms for the Ancestral Narratives are, respectively, the covenant (Abraham Cycle), the land of Caanan (Jacob Cycle), and the people of Israel (Joseph Cycle). The same three major themes, proffers Rendsburg, create the essential message of the Hebrew Bible.

Steven R. Scott, “Chiastic Structuring in the Genesis Flood Story: The Art of Using Chiasm as an Effective Compositional Tool for Combing

Earlier Chiastic Narratives,” argues contrary to David Wenham, who argued that the presence of a chiastic structure for the whole of the flood story points to the story being composed by a single author, that careful structural analysis of the text actually upholds the two-source theory. He finds evidence for two chiastic structures created independently by the Yahwist (J) and Priestly (P) authors, which were later combined by a Redactor (R). He concludes that chiasm as a compositional device was well known by the authors of the various elements of Genesis, and such knowledge aided the final editor(s) to combine effectively two authoritative traditions into a virtually seamless whole while remaining faithful to both.

Jonathan Burnside, “Exegesis or Eisegesis: Does Chiastic Analysis Help Us to Understand Leviticus 20?” argues that a chiastic structure not only governs Lev 20 but reveals several complexities in the text. “In fact, Lev. 20 is characterized by a high degree of internal structure, even by the standards of biblical law.” The key to comprehending the chiastic structure of Lev 20 is to recognize the various penalties that are attached to proscribed acts, especially those of a sexual category. The penalties, introduced with various formulas, for example, “shall be put to death,” “shall be cut off,” plus others, are exacted by human agents (see vv. 2, 9–16, 27) or by God (see vv. 3–6, 17–21). The chiasm’s center in Lev 20 consists of verses 10–16, which sets forth six complex “binary oppositions,” such as adultery “outside family/inside family”; “heterosexual intercourse/homosexual intercourse”; and prohibited sex “man initiates/woman initiates.” After explaining several purposes for the use of chiasmus in Lev 20, Burnside affirms that “all claims regarding the existence of chiasmus must overcome the charge that the argument is rather more a matter of eisegesis rather than exegesis.”

Bernard M. Levinson, “At the Intersection of Scribal Training and Theological Profundity: Chiasm as an Editorial Technique in the Primeval History and Deuteronomy,” argues that ancient Israelite scribes were gifted writers who “were well-trained in a wide range of technical devices associated with the composition, copying, transmission, editing, collation, revision, reworking, and interpretation of texts.” Such individuals were not only scribes; they were also to some degree editors and authors who reworked texts using a number of literary techniques and strategies, including the figure of chiasm. To emphasize the scribes’ abilities to transform ancient traditions and earlier texts, Levinson presents four case studies: “1: Narrative Complexity in the Primeval History (Genesis 1 and 6)”; “2: Integrating Law and Narrative

(Deuteronomy 11:32 and 12:1)”; “3: Deuteronomy’s Renewal and Transformation of Israelite Religion (Deut 12)”; and “4: Reimagining the Nature of Divine Justice (Deuteronomy 7:9–10).” Rather than examining chiasms merely in static or aesthetic terms, Levinson explores these literary figures to determine what they “can tell us about the compositional history of a text: how it came to be written or edited.” He sums up, “The chiasm thus is more than simply a technical scribal device; in the skilled hands of the editors of ancient Israelite literature, the device was also an agent of the theological imagination, literary and religious creativity, and cultural change.”

Donald W. Parry, “Chiasmus in the Text of Isaiah: MT Isaiah versus the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>),” examines textual variants in sixteen randomly selected chiastic structures in the book of Isaiah. His objective is to determine whether textual variants belonging to 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> or the Masoretic Text (MT) of Isaiah impact the structure or clarity of one or more of the particular chiastic elements in each example of chiasmus. He concludes that many of these variants are consequential, consisting of various content words, changes, pluses, and minuses; other variants are minor and pertain to conjunctions, articles, prepositions, the paragogic *nûn*, the directional *hê*, and the like. Furthermore, some of the variants are identifiable as scribal errors (e.g., haplography, harmonization, dittography, confusion of graphic sets, plus others), while one is a well-known euphemism, and several constitute indeterminate readings. In sum, it becomes evident that ten of the sixteen structures present textual variants that impact the clarity and significance of the chiasmus.

David Rolph Seely’s paper, “Chiasmus in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah: ‘With strong hand and with outstretched arm’ (Deuteronomy 4:34); ‘With outstretched hand and with strong arm’ (Jeremiah 21:5),” examines instances of chiasmus and inclusio—both of which deal with the principle of repetition—in the texts of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah. Seely provides multiple examples of how these two literary techniques interplay in these scriptural texts. A famous example is in Deuteronomy, “with strong hand and with outstretched arm” (Deut 4:34), which is inverted, creating a chiasmus, in Jeremiah, “With outstretched hand and with strong arm” (Jer 21:5). Seely finds four distinctive categories of chiasmus in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah: “1. Chiasmus of the Speaker; 2. Chiasmus in the Position of Completing a Unit of Text; 3. Particles Create Semi-chiasmus in Middle Two Cola of 4-Cola Units; and 4. Occurrence of Rhetorical Questions in the Middle of a Chiasmus.” After presenting examples of these four categories in the Bible, Seely

demonstrates the presence of the same four types of chiasms in the Book of Mormon, a text that can be read productively in conjunction with the words of Jeremiah.

John W. Welch, “Narrating Homicide Chiastically: Why Scriptures about Killings Use Chiasmus,” examines eight chiastic structures that pertain to homicides—three legal texts and five homicide narratives. The legal texts include “The Case of the Blasphemer (Leviticus 24:13–23)” and “The Law of Homicide (Numbers 35).” The narratives include “Abimelech’s Killing of Seventy of His Brothers (Judges 9:56–57);” “The Case of Phinehas (Numbers 25);” and “The Slaying of Laban (1 Nephi 4:4–27).” Welch concludes that these eight structures assist readers in recognizing the broader context of each homicide passage and “to discern the key central point on which the case turns.” Welch’s paper also contributes on a further level by cataloguing thirteen possible reasons why authors employed chiasmus when narrating a homicide. These purposes include, “propelling logic and persuasiveness,” “creating order,” “restoring equilibrium,” “processing circumstances,” “probing relevancy,” and “reinforcing memory.”

Noel B. Reynolds, “Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts: Second Nephi as a Case Study,” reviews the work of scholars regarding rhetorical criticism in biblical studies, especially with regard to rhetorical structures that give prominence to parallelism and repetition. Many structures consist of large chiasms that contain subordinate units (smaller, inner chiasms or extended parallelisms of some form), and these subordinate units, in turn, “may contain their own subordinate units.” According to some scholars, these formations may be composed of eight levels, especially when one considers corresponding philological or grammatical elements. After reviewing biblical rhetorical criticism, Reynolds examines, as a case study, the book of 2 Nephi in the Book of Mormon. He demonstrates that this book features one macro-chiasm with thirteen subunits labeled, A-B-C-D-E-F-G-F'-E'-D'-C'-B'-A'. Each of the subunits, in turn, consists of smaller subordinate units, some of them demarcated with repetitive units, such as *inclusio*. Reynolds then focuses on the pivotal G element, constituting 2 Nephi 11:2–8, which is Nephi’s witness of Jesus Christ.

H. Douglas Buckwalter, “Jesus and the Roman Centurion (Matthew 8:5–13): A Window to Chiasmus and Apostolic Pedagogy,” examines Matthew’s account of Jesus Christ’s interaction with the Roman centurion (Matt 8:5–13). Buckwalter finds that this account consists of a six-part chiasmus—an A-B-C-C'-B'-A' structure—with the centurion’s “great faith” serving as the focal point. This six-part chiasmus, Buckwalter



observes, is placed in the greater context of Matt 8:1–11:1, which consists of nine miracle episodes set in clearly demarcated structures, with the narrative of the centurion and his servant being the second of the nine miracles. Buckwalter concludes that his study contributes “in five ways to understanding apostolic pedagogy in relation to structured text,” namely (1) the apostle’s teachings were designed to be understood by lay persons; (2) the text’s structure was created to facilitate memorization by individuals who lacked their own personal scriptures; (3) the text’s structure was designed to provide practical lessons to its readers; (4) memorization of the apostles’ writings allowed Christians to possess God’s word in various parts of the known world where written texts were rare or even nonexistent; and (5) memorization of the text would have encouraged Christians to take God’s word “to heart” and to apply it to one’s life.

Wayne Brouwer, “The Chiastic Structure of the Farewell Discourse in the Fourth Gospel,” examines the parallel and repetitive elements of John 13–17, which form a macro-chiasm. The chiasm’s pivotal point is Jesus’s Discourse of the Vine and the Branches, with the repeated expression *abide in me*. Recognition of this pivotal point provides a better comprehension of the remaining parts of the macro-chiasm. For example, the mirrored elements “foot washing scene” (13:1–35) and Jesus’s Intercessory Prayer (17:1–26), are both to be “understood as parallel explications of the central theme: ‘Abide in me!’” Brouwer’s presentation comprises a new understanding of the Farewell Discourse which strives to solve several certain scholarly challenges.

Gabriella Gelardini, “From ‘Linguistic Turn’ and Hebrews Scholarship to *Anadiplosis Iterata*: The Enigma of a Structure,” uses scholarship about the Epistle to the Hebrews as a case study amid the broader history of linguistics and hermeneutics. Building on three key insights developed by Hebrews scholars—concentric structures, homiletic forms, and covenant theology—this paper shows that argumentation in Hebrews operates at a concentric macro-structural level, while its thoughts unfold as concentric circles or symmetries at the micro-structural level. This result helps readers to appreciate the bi-level elegance of the Epistle to the Hebrews, to draw meaningful connections between and comparisons with sister paragraphs, and to understand this important New Testament text as a coherent whole. Methodologically sound, this study shows how Hebrews scholars today can enlist chiasmus as an effective tool of literary-rhetorical analysis.

Kerry Hull, “Mirrored Poeticity: Chiastic Structuring in Mayan Languages,” demonstrates that Mayan hieroglyphic texts feature various poetic devices, including parallelisms and coupleted forms. According to Hull, “parallelism forms the rhetorical backbone for Mesoamerican indigenous poetry.” Ancient, indigenous Maya authors and scribes also employed chiasmus, a form that features parallel lines. Hull establishes that “ancient Maya scribes incorporated chiasmus into hieroglyphic texts and particular moments of emphasis as a means of highlighting key narrative events.” In fact, these scribes engaged in “rhetorical stacking,” meaning they employed multiple rhetorical components into larger poetic units, including large, developed chiastic structures. Poetic devices and rhetorical forms that are attested in the Late Classic period, circa 250 to 900 CE, continued to thrive during the colonial period, and these forms persisted into Modern Mayan writings and languages.

Other papers and the panel discussions presented at the August 2017 gathering can be viewed on <https://chiasmusresources.org/chiasmus-open-conference-state-art>. For example, the every elaborate and erudite presentation given by George Mlakuzhyil, S.J., “Chiasmus in the Gospel of John,” examined various literary and rhetorical elements in John’s Gospel, including numerous chiastic structures, as he revisited and updated his monumental volume, *The Christocentric Literature Structure of the Fourth Gospel*, Analecta Biblica 117 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1987). Allowing room for multiple criteria, Mlakuzhyil’s intricately interwoven graphical presentation samples many chiastic/concentric structures of all sizes within the overall Christocentric literary drama of the Gospel according to John. For example, the larger units include John 2–4, John 5–10, and John 18–20, while other units such as John 13–17 consists of a “concentric structure,” and the introduction (John 1:1–2, 12) and conclusion (John 20:30–31) are chiastically organized into an A-B-C-C’-B’-A’ pattern.

### **Criteria: Findings and Reflections**

In part 2 of this volume, three final contributions deal with issues regarding the criteria to be used in identifying and evaluating proposed chiastic structures. Neal Rappleye’s “Chiasmus Criteria in Review” should become a standard resource for comparing and coalescing the main scholarly attempts to create standards or criteria for determining the chiastic qualities and “merits”—what may be called the “chiasticity”—of any proposed chiasm. He conveniently charts and meticulously



examines mainly the writings of ten scholars—Nils Lund (1942), David Clark (1975), Craig Blomberg (1989), Ian Thomson (1995), John Breck (1994), John Welch (1995), Mark Boda (1996), David Wright (2004), David Dorsey (1999), James Patrick (2016)—who have presented sets of criteria. Lund, for example submitted seven “laws governing chiastic structures,” Clark introduced five “criteria types,” and Welch presented a list of fifteen criteria, which include *objectivity, purpose, boundaries, density, mavericks*, plus others. While no precise consensus exists regarding the conceptual formulation of such criteria, six most commonly agreed factors have emerged. Rappleye identifies them as: “1. Chiasms should conform to natural literary boundaries. 2. A climax or turning point should be found at the center. 3. Chiasms should display a relatively well-balanced symmetry. 4. The structure should be based on major keywords, phrases, or themes. 5. Chiasms should manifest little, if any, extraneous repetition or divergent materials. 6. The chiastic order should typically not compete with other strong literary forms.”

Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards, in their “Truth or Cherry Picking: A Statistical Approach to Chiastic Intentionality,” use a statistically-based methodology for determining chiasmus created by authorial intent as opposed to the existence of “inadvertent” chiasms. As a case in point, they examine a “chiastic” structure from a physics abstract that has an A-B-C-D-E-E'-D'-C'-B'-A' pattern, which mirrors the elements *flow, chemical reaction fronts, propagation, solutions, and gaps*. But on closer look, other repeated content words also exist in the abstract that were ignored, such as two additional occurrences of *flow*, the double attestation of *direction*, and the existence of *advects* and *advection*, which disarrange the mirrored lines. There was no authorial intent to create this particular chiasm and “cherry picking” content words thus creates falsifiable chiasms. Edwards and Edwards summarize that “ignoring elements that do not fit the form gives misleading chiastic patterns and meaningless statistical results, and can lead to false conclusions regarding intentionality. Including these elements gives truthful chiastic patterns, valid statistical results, and reliable conclusions regarding intentionality.”

Stephen Kent Ehat, “The Roles of Words, Phrases, and Ideas in Macro-Chiasms,” examines the capacity and function of words and ideas in scriptural chiastic structures. As test cases, he examines several large chiasms—in Psalm 23; the entire book of Genesis; Leviticus 24:13–23; Ezekiel 20:3–31; Luke’s Travel Narrative (Luke 9:51–19:27) in the New Testament; and Alma 36 in the Book of Mormon. His objective

is to shed “light on the interrelated roles that words, phrases, and ideas play in chiasmic analysis.”

Concluding this volume is a bibliography listing the main works cited in this volume along with other numerous significant books and articles dealing with chiasmus that have appeared since the publication of *Chiasmus in Antiquity* in 1981. This bibliography distills the much longer bibliographic catalogue found on the web at <https://chiasmusresources.org/chiasmus-bibliography>. Dedicated efforts in working on these bibliographies by many assistants, including Neal Rappleye, Tyson Yapias, Jared Riddick, and Daniel McKinlay, are very gratefully acknowledged. This book then concludes with a list of contributors to this volume, as well as an index of primary texts cited and analyzed, and an index of authors and subjects discussed herein.

### **Where Might the Art of Chiastic Studies Go from Here?**

What might come next? From the early nineteenth century through much of the twentieth century, chiastic studies focused primarily on identifying, outlining, and classifying chiasms in ancient literature. Indeed, the main focus of *Chiasmus in Antiquity* was “defining and demonstrating the presence of chiasmus in selected ancient literatures” (15). In recent decades, chiasmus scholarship has firmly established the use of this literary phenomena and methodologies have now moved much farther beyond only identifying chiastic structures toward probing why a writers, scribes, or redactors would have chosen to use this particular literary form rather than other narrative forms. One wonders more intently, how does chiastic construction add meaning, understanding, and context to narratives, laws, rituals, or sacred expressions? What can be learned from a text as a result of its chiastic structures that would be missed if this feature were overlooked? Why and how is the presence of chiasmus in a text significant?

In recent years, scholars and investigators have developed multiple academic tools and digital resources that no doubt will impact future chiastic studies significantly. Such resources, now becoming quite readily available for most bodies of literature, include fully integrated and computerized collection of texts. These reference libraries for the Hebrew Bible, for example, are tagged to reveal morphological, lexical, or grammatical elements, and with tagged texts, users can search very specific content, including inflected or lexical forms, lemmas, verbal aspects, and grammatical parts of speech. Some tagged texts allow users

to identify linguistic components, such as vocatives, suffixal endings, exclamations, paragodic forms, subjects and predicates, and so forth. Researchers can define and limit searches by the range of texts (e.g., search literary units, pericopes, parallel or synoptic texts), and search options allow users to design sophisticated word or phrase searches for all or selected forms of any words, including wildcard searches. Computerized digital resources also permit users to create charts based on word attestations or groupings, to aid in determining syntactical relationships and in conducting collocation studies. For example, users can now parse or diagram particular texts in order to determine word or phrase groupings and their functions within respective pericopes. Such breadth and detail is only one way in which future investigations will certainly require and afford greater specificity and sophistication.

Massive electronic databases now also enable researchers to access texts in ways not possible through other means. Linguistic comparisons across large bodies of diverse literatures allow scholars who are conducting chiasmic studies to ascertain individual word frequencies and to identify rare vocabulary combinations that may bear on conclusions regarding relationality and intentionality in arrangements pertinent to their literary studies. Preliminary efforts have also been made to use matrix theory to chart word placements in order to display graphically repetitive patterns that may aid in the detection or confirmation of proposed chiasmic structures.

Bibliographies are now readily available which can be linked to books and articles accessible online. As in every academic pursuit, these resources will greatly facilitate comparative studies, visual inspection of previous graphic portrayals, and awareness of novel approaches that one had not even thought of entertaining. For example, many creative and imaginative applications of the idea of concentric literary patterns or inverted word orders spring to mind. As this book's bibliography shows, chiasmus has been pressed into service in comparing competing methods of historical and modern literary criticism (Baden), appreciating the art and meaning of narrative and prose (Bar-Erfrat, Boers, Breck), identifying poetically parallel word pairs (Barney), detecting inverted quotations (Beentjes), explaining theological reversals (Beker, Bilbro), sensing rhetorical dynamics, strategy, and cohesion (Berlin, Bliese, Ceresko), distinguishing sources from redactions (Branick), recognizing numerological arrays (Christian), explicating spiritual themes and conflicts (Clarke), as well as guiding translators (Zogbo), inspiring

worshippers (Wolfe), and in musing about the place of chiastic inversions “in social interactions, cultural creation and, more generally, human thought and experience” (Wiseman and Paul, 1)—to name only a few such ingenious applications found in various entries at the beginning and ending of the selected bibliography in the back of this book.

All of these new and expansive results affirm that studies utilizing chiasmus continue to yield good results. Of course, refinements and course corrections will always be needful, but going forward now with a developed sense of consensus regarding controlling criteria for the identification of chiastic patterns, scholars can be confident as they continue to advance well-reasoned interpretations that take cognizance of chiasmus. With thanks to many workers and supporters at BYU Studies, Book of Mormon Central, and our 2017 conference host Brigham Young University, the authors of the diverse studies found in this volume hope to have added to the scholarly momentum of this well marked line of reasoning and remarkable field of vision.