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**Title**

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**Abstract** *Review of The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (1992), by Donald W. Parry.

**Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns*. Provo, UT: F.A.R.M.S., 1992. li + 490 pp. \$18.50.**

Reviewed by Jo Ann H. Seely

*The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns*, by Donald W. Parry, is a literary study which attempts to locate and identify the poetic forms of parallelism and repetition throughout the Book of Mormon. This work follows another study, by Wade Brown in *The God-Inspired Language of the Book of Mormon: Structuring and Commentary*, in which Brown reformats the Book of Mormon in an effort to show that parallelism is found throughout the entire book.<sup>1</sup> The prevalence of these literary devices in the Book of Mormon is significant. Parry's book is divided in two parts; the introduction consisting of two papers written by the author that define and explain parallelism and repetition (pp. i-li) and the entire text of the Book of Mormon reformatted with varying mechanical techniques (bold characters, underlining, indentations, italics, parentheses, spacing, and lower and upper case lettering) to highlight parallelistic forms or patterns of repetition (pp. 1-490). The only other additions are a title page, preface, and table of contents. No bibliography or key to mechanical techniques has been provided. It is a paperback with easy-to-read print. For the student of poetry (ancient or modern) it provides a starting point for evaluation of the Book of Mormon text according to theories of parallelism, and for the typical reader it is most useful as a reference tool for further insight into a particular passage or chapter of the Book of Mormon.

Why so much effort to study parallelism? "Parallelism is the most prominent rhetorical figure in ancient Near Eastern poetry, and is also present, although less prominent, in biblical prose."<sup>2</sup> Knowledge of parallelism has been very helpful in un-

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<sup>1</sup> Wade Brown, *The God-Inspired Language of the Book of Mormon: Structuring and Commentary* (Clackamas, OR: Rainbow, 1988), x + 988 pp. Parry published a review of Brown's book where he made several suggestions for improvement that he follows in his own work. See the review by Parry and a second review by David P. Wright in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 5-17.

<sup>2</sup> Adele Berlin, "Parallelism," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 5:155.

derstanding biblical passages where the reader can compare one line of poetry with another to help identify meaning. Although there has been much discussion, there is no consensus concerning the exact nature of parallelism. Everyone agrees it is there, but exactly what it is and how it can be precisely described has been a matter of debate since Bishop Robert Lowth's seminal works in 1753 and 1778.<sup>3</sup> Parallelism can be defined very generally as a relationship between lines, or words within a line. Some would say it involves repetition of related semantic or grammatical structure, and others say that it involves an intensification or progression between lines placing emphasis on the difference rather than similarity between words or lines.<sup>4</sup>

The study of parallelism in the Book of Mormon presents some challenges. Since the text being studied is in translation and the original text is not available, grammatical and phonological aspects of parallelism are impossible to determine. Another problem arises because it is very difficult to determine the precise length of the poetic line in the Book of Mormon. Scholars have debated this in biblical studies for decades, and there is still much controversy, even when they have text in the original language.

The first paper in the introduction, entitled "Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon" (i-xxxiv), is an overview of the different types of parallelism, including a definition of each, their literary impact, and examples from the Bible and Book of Mormon to illustrate each type. The definitions are clear and supported by experts in the field, but occasionally the quotations are wordy and difficult to follow (such as the quote on p. xxvii by Krasovec). Those parts that have been left out, such as the literary impact of "synthetic parallelism" and "chiasmus" or the Bible example for "detailing" are noticeable.

Parry has combined terminology from a number of scholars and divided parallelism into fourteen different categories (some with subdivisions) including: simple synonymous, extended synonymous, simple alternate, repeated alternate, extended alternate, simple synthetic, extended synthetic, climactic forms, parallelism of numbers, antithetical parallelism, detailing,

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (London, repr. 1835) and *Isaiah. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation and Notes* (London, repr. 1848).

<sup>4</sup> For a concise summary of parallelism, see Berlin, "Parallelism," 155.

working out, contrasting ideas, and chiasmus. The differentiation into so many categories produces confusion rather than clarification. Grouping some of the types of parallelism to provide fewer categories would simplify things for the reader. For example, there is very little distinction between the categories “detailing” and “working out.” Both of these categories involve an initial line which is followed by at least one other line and usually several more that add information or detail, giving the reader a better idea of what is meant in the first line. Both could easily be included in one category. “Contrasting ideas” appears to be “antithetical parallelism” and could appropriately be listed in that category. Another possibility to simplify or reduce the amount of categories would be to group together those that are just variations of the same type of parallelism, i.e., “simple, repeated, and extended, alternate” under one category called “alternate.”

The second paper in the introduction, “Repetition in the Book of Mormon” discusses ten varieties of repetition that can be identified in scriptural language. The literary impact is given for the group as a whole, and then each variety is defined and provided with the technical name and examples. The technical names are used in some cases to identify the different types of repetition in the text and the reader spends more time looking back at the introduction to determine the meaning of the terminology than reading the text. Terms like *anaphora*, *polysyndeton*, *paradiastole*, *epibole*, *cycloides*, *epistrophe*, *amoebaeon* are meaningless to most readers. Repetition also is divided into too many categories and it becomes tedious to distinguish between them—there is little value in differentiating “regular” (*cycloides*) or “random” (*epibole*) repetition.

The main portion of the book reproduces the entire text of the Book of Mormon, leaving the narrative (Parry’s term for those portions of the text where no poetic devices are found) in block print and using the various mechanical means to identify parallelisms and repetitions. For example, chiasms are identified by upper case letters (ABCD DCBA) and by indenting each line a little further until the center of the chiasm is indented the furthest to the right with the paralleled word or words in each line in bold characters. Other types of parallelism or repetition are set apart by underlining, block indentation, spacing, italics, etc. Some of the categories of parallelism and repetition have been stated in parentheses following their appearance, but this is not consistent. The surprising fact is that, although the author states

in the preface that the majority of the Book of Mormon is narrative text, there are only 11 full pages and 3 partial pages without some poetic device noted. In other words, Parry identifies an astonishing amount of parallelism and repetition in the Book of Mormon.

One of the greatest contributions of this work is the identification and illustration of chiasms in the Book of Mormon in a format in which they are visually apparent—that is, the reader can easily see the relationships between the parallel lines and can identify the center of the chiasm. There is a significant amount of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, and chiasms that may have been easily missed jump out at the reader. For instance, in the book of Helaman Parry has marked thirty-two different chiasms of varying lengths. Well-known chiasms formatted this way—like the one in Alma 36—draw attention to the central line of the chiasm and the central message intended by the author and allow the reader to note beginnings and endings of particular units of thought as well as the central point. For example, in Helaman 14:2–8—a passage concerning the signs of the birth of Christ given to the Nephites—those who *believe on the Son of God* (the first and last lines in the chiasm) *shall know* of a surety (the central line) referring to their response to the signs. Likewise, in Helaman 13:5–9 the center of the chiasm is the “glad tidings” available if only the people would repent to avoid destruction.

Another benefit from Parry’s book is that, by pointing out some of the literary devices, it provides additional insight for the reader into the meaning of the text. For example, when the reader is able to recognize the use of “climax,” he or she will be aware of the writer’s attempt to bring him or her along a specific progression of thought. Parry demonstrates this well by indenting and underlining key words in Moroni 8:25–26, showing that there is a progression from repentance to eternal life with the steps of baptism, fulfilling the commandments, remission of sins, meekness, visitation of the Holy Ghost, and being filled with love as necessary to be able to dwell with God.

The author states that this is a working paper and invites comments. There are a few areas that could be improved. This book is not reader friendly in terms of usability. It is hard to look up a reference because there are no chapter identifications at the top of the pages. The numbers beginning new chapters are printed in the same type as the verses before and after and are difficult to find. No reference guide to the mechanical techniques used in formatting the text is offered. Such a guide or key would

be an extremely valuable addition, informing the reader how chiasms are identified by upper case letters and gradual indentation, and noting the types of parallelism and repetition that are specified by spacing, italics, lower-case letters, etc.

The value of identifying some of the categories of repetition is unclear. Repetition is a subset of parallelism, but many of the examples are hardly significant rhetorical devices. There are lots of “ands” in the Book of Mormon and it is not convincing that they are used as a rhetorical device in every case where there are a number of them together. See for example, Parry’s observation of “polysyndeton” or “many ands” in Helaman 5:31–34 or Alma 8:20–23, where the text has been indented and then the lines have been divided so that each begins with the word *and* (which has also been underlined). In addition, it is unclear why some examples of repetition have been identified and others not. For example, almost anywhere a reader opens the text in Parry’s so-called narrative portions, there are numerous examples of the repetition of words like “and,” “yea,” “behold,” and “it came to pass” which have not been identified. Some of these are rhetorically much more significant examples of repetition than the usage of “and” in lists which Parry does methodically identify. For example, in Alma 45:11–12 the term “yea” is used five times introducing a new phrase, but Parry does not identify these as repetition.

So much emphasis is placed on identification of patterns of parallelism and repetition that sometimes their function is lost—one cannot see the forest for the trees, the poetry being obscured by the parallelisms. For example, the Psalm of Nephi (2 Nephi 4:17–35) is presented in small units of simple and extended alternate, exergasia (working out), repetition, and synthetic parallelism, but the poem is lost as a unit. This is also apparent in the Isaiah poetic passages in 2 Nephi where Parry similarly points out the literary devices, but there is no sense of poetic lines or poetry. To get at the meaning of the text parallelism should be seen as subservient to the poetry and not vice versa. Someone interested in the meaning derived from the poetic lines may find a modern translation of the Bible, such as the Revised Standard Version that divides Isaiah into poetic lines, a valuable tool.

Parallelism in the past has been studied from the point of view of how one line relates to another; it is a tool of understanding poetry (and in some cases prose). Parry has only identified parallelism when he can attach a figure to a specific passage. He does not clearly identify poetry or poetic lines, and



he seems to feel that rendering the text in poetic lines would "confuse the issue, as twentieth-century students are not accustomed to reading such texts."<sup>5</sup> But twentieth-century readers do read poetry in lines. Virtually all modern translations of the Bible render poetry in lines.<sup>6</sup> If parallelism is seen as a device of poetry in the Book of Mormon it only makes sense to render the poetry in lines as well as to identify the parallelism. Perhaps we could have both lines and parallelistic patterns identified in the next study of parallelism in the Book of Mormon.

The author has introduced his book as a preliminary report to stimulate further thinking. It accomplishes this task. Parry in many ways has refined the work begun by Brown for the study of parallelism in the Book of Mormon, but this is still only a starting point. Perhaps future studies could include further discussion and analysis of how form affects the meaning of the text. This book is worth having as a reference tool for the serious student of the scriptures for two reasons: it helps us to appreciate the sophistication of the language of the Book of Mormon, particularly in the case of chiasmus, and it provides additional groundwork for research into the language and literary devices used by the writers of the scriptures.

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<sup>5</sup> Parry, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> The King James Version of the Bible indicates the lines by punctuation rather than formatting.