Introduction

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When Nils Lund, the scholar who has probably done more than any other to bring the study of chiasmus to life in the twentieth century, was first introduced to what was then being designated as the „inverted order" in 1908, he had many legitimate reasons for being initially skeptical. Such studies were not far advanced at that point, and the form itself appeared somewhat unlikely. While forging ahead to apply the principle of chiasmus to the study of the Bible, Lund had no way of knowing where such studies might lead and how they would ultimately be received.

When the present writers were first introduced to chiasmus, over half a century later, at least the need for skepticism had been removed. Directly available was a score of plausible chiastic scriptural analyses, particularly those in Lund's own volume on *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill: 1942). Further pursuits did not need to be directed toward answering the threshold question of whether chiasmus exists, but rather to the evaluative questions of what its presence means and how often it can be said to occur.

Without overstating its importance, it can now be said that one of the most salient developments in the study of ancient literature over the past few decades is the growing awareness of the presence of chiasmus in the composition of ancient writings. This development has been especially notable in the field of biblical studies, but it is also manifest in the study of ancient prose and poetry generally. The length of the bibliography at the end of this volume alone is indicative of the vast number of recent treatises and scholarly articles which have employed chiasmus at one stage or another in their analyses of ancient texts. The early trickle of chiastic commentary, beginning with some initial observations by Johannes Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (Tübingen, 1742), John Jebb, *Sacred Literature* (London, 1820), Thomas Boys, *Tactica Sacra* (London, 1824), and then by John Forbes, *Symmetrical Structure of Scripture* (Edinburgh, 1854), first grew to a steady flow of productive commentary through the efforts of Nils Lund from 1930 to 1955, and recently has increased dramatically, in both quantity and diversity. One of the primary purposes of the present undertaking is to draw together, consolidate and extend as much of this development as possible. This shall be accomplished partly by means of representative expositions of how chiastic analysis may be employed in the study of selected ancient writings, and further by means of tables, indices and bibliographies to aid in the further examination of chiasmus in antiquity.

Initially, it would seem reasonable to offer a definition of chiasmus. Basically, chiasmus is inverted parallelism. Yelland's *Handbook of Literary Terms* captures the essence of the form in the following definition:

> A passage in which the second part is inverted and balanced against the first. Chiasmus is thus a type of antithesis. A wit with dunces. and a dunce with wits. (Pope). Flowers are lovely, love is flowerlike. (Coleridge).[1]

Critical here are *balance* and *inversion*. The „antithesis" involved need not necessarily be more than a formal one, since the second half of a chiasm can be complementary as well as antithetical in content to the first half of the structure. In modern times, chiasmus has been exposited under the names of *epanodos*,[2] introverted parallelism,[3] extended introversion,[4] concentrism,[5] the *chi*-form,[6] palistrophe,[7] envelope construction,[8] the *delta*-form,[9] recursion,[10] as well as simple, compound, and complex chiasmus.[11] But for the most part, each of these titles conceptualizes the same phenomenon described above: namely, the appearance of a two-part structure or system in which the second half is a mirror image of the first, i. e. where the first term recurs last, and the last first.

But chiasmus is also much more than simple inversion or repetition, an A–B–B'–A' pattern. As the structure expands in number of elements, the abrupt repetition by which the last elements of the first of the system become the first elements of the second half can draw unusual attention to the central terms, which are repeated in close proximity to each other. This is observable, for example, in the case of an A–B–C–D–E–E'–D'–C'–B'–A' arrangement. An emphatic focus on the center can be employed by a skillful composer to elevate the importance of a central concept or to dramatize a radical shift of events at the turning-point. Meanwhile, the remainder of the system can be used with equal effectiveness as a framework through which the author may compare, contrast, juxtapose, complement, or complete each of the flanking elements in the chiastic system. In addition, a marked degree of intensification can be introduced throughout the system both by building to a climax at the center as well as by strengthening each element individually upon its chiastic repetition.

An instructive illustration of all of this is Psalm 3:7–9 (KJV 3:6–8), following the translation of M. Dahood for the most part:

> A   I do not fear the arrows of people Who have set themselves against me round about. B   Arise C   O YHWH, B   Save me, C   O my God! D   May you smite E   All my enemies F   On the cheekbone! F'   The teeth E'   Of the wicked D'   May you break! C' O YHWH, B'   Salvation! A'   Upon your people is your blessing. *Selah*

The balance, inversion, and intensification within this passage are at the same time precise, extensive, and elegant. This portion of the psalm follows a development from reassurance in the face of encircling enemies, to a central prayer for victory over them, and lastly turns to exaltation of the power and the blessing which Yahweh provides. The chiastic features of the psalm have reached a noteworthy stage of sophistication, manifesting a sustained inversion and also climactic intensification with each of the six chiastic complements. Not only is the central prayer for relief the focus of attention, but also each term is strengthened and fulfilled by its parallel part. Observe how the "arrows of people" become the "blessing of your people;" "save me," a personal entreaty, becomes "salvation," a national triumph; "smite" becomes "break;" "my enemies" become "the wicked;" and the passive "cheekbone" becomes the aggressive "teeth." With meticulous composition, it is little wonder that this passage, and others like it, convey intense emotions and concise thoughts in a minimum number of verbal expressions.

Psalm 3:7–9, one will readily observe, is both a relatively short passage and also a section of poetry. This immediately raises two significant questions concerning the utility of chiasmus: First, are there limits on how large a chiastic system can become? And second, is chiasmus only a poetical device or does it also operate in prosaic narratives as well? Consider the second question first. Modern minds, particularly ones which have grown accustomed to pragmatic uses of literature and to languages which depend to a large extent upon syntax rather than upon inflected word endings to determine meaning, naturally conceive of a device such as chiasmus as one which functions strictly as a poetical novelty. In antiquity, however, chiasmus was widely employed with equal fluency in both prose and poetry. The functional analysis of chiasmus in either context is essentially the same, as we hope to have amply illustrated below. This holds true despite the fact that in the past, perhaps inadvertently, chiasmus has been studied separately in prose and in poetry. Once it has been recognized, however, that chiasmus operates fluently in prose, it becomes evident that chiasmus may give order to thoughts as well as to sounds, and that it thus may give structure to the thought pattern and development of entire literary units, as well as to shorter sections whose composition is more dependent on immediate tones and rhythms. This implies that the scope of chiasmus is limited only by the size of the unit within which the chiasm occurs. We hope to have shown that chiasmus is therefore a significant ordering principle within, not only verses and sentences, but also within and throughout whole books and extensive poetical units, whose dimensions are indeed virtually unlimited.

Although it must be observed that chiasmus appears in short verses and single sentences as well as in longer configurations, the focus of our attention has not been upon short grammatical chiastic patterns, for several reasons: on the one hand, the shorter passages for the most part speak for themselves, so that once attention has been drawn to the fact that a verse is chiastic, not much remains to be said of the chiasm itself (although this is not to diminish the value of other technical, philological or interpretative implications which often become observable only thereby). In addition, most grammatical chiasmus has virtually no counterpart in any English translation of the same ancient passage, and therefore the simpler types of chiasmus do not always lend themselves to casual display. Simple chiasmus must rather be studied, as a practical matter, in conjunction with a strictly grammatical, syntactical, and stylistic commentary on each particular text. For the sake of completeness, however, the indices provided at the end of this study catalogue, where possible, most chiasms which have evoked comment to date.

The more interesting and challenging observations regarding chiasmus are in respect to complex structural applications of the form. Here the form becomes more than a mere literary device, and more than a skeleton upon which thoughts and words are attached. When chiasmus achieves the level of ordering the flow of thoughts throughout an entire pericope, or of a sustained unfolding of an artistic verbal expression, the character of the form itself merges with the message and meaning of the passage. Indeed what is said is often no more than how it is said. Analyzing this phenomenon and the tendency which certain authors manifest to utilize given forms extensively and naturally is by no means simple. But the task of understanding the meaning of a writing is never complete until its formular aspects as well as its thought contents have been grasped.

Clearly, then, there is good reason for the persistently increasing amount of recent scholarly attention which has been directed toward analyzing chiastic techniques and in proposing ways in which the resultant structural perceptions of ancient writings can be applied in efforts at textual explication. For many reasons chiasmus has held sustained attention: It is significant that the form appears frequently and is often executed with noteworthy precision. The form can be aesthetically very pleasing, due in part to its vast potential to coordinate rigorous and abrupt juxtapositions within a single unified literary system, all while focusing on a point of central concern. The form is exegetically significant, often providing the basis for cogent alternatives to other text critical interpretations which have called for a drastic fragmentation of certain basic texts. But perhaps most of all, the gravamen of chiastic analysis has driven home, in many minds, the penetrating realization that several twentieth-century assumptions (whether expressed or implied) about the state of the ancient mind and about the composition of ancient writings may unwittingly impute too much modern mentality to the ancient author. A similar realization was brought home by the revolutionizing understanding of Homeric composition contributed by Lord and Parry. Despite the barriers which will inevitably prevent us from reconstructing precisely what the ancient mind consciously thought, perceived, intended or designed, we can acutely perceive that their thoughts are not necessarily our thoughts, and our designs rarely theirs.

It should be apparent that ancient rhetoric and modern prose do not strive to achieve the same ideals. Modern style demands, for example, that an author write more or less linearly, following a line of syllogistic or dialectic reasoning, or developing a continuous flow of ideas. Circuitousness and repetitiveness are shunned in most circumstances. In many ancient contexts, however, repetition and even redundancy appear to represent the rule rather than the exception. Parallelism thrived. Indeed, repetition once served several valuable purposes. It had express pedagogical functions, and double structures carried moral implications for the ancient mind as well: „For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not" (Job 33:14). Moreover, since the ordering of terms is a helpful tool in memorization, chiasmus conveniently afforded inherent mnemonic capacities. "It is a poetic form which is impressive, which will last, and will be easily remembered and literally remembered," Hans Kosmala has observed,[12] and Paul Gaechter has for this reason labeled chiasmus "die traditionelle, höhere Lehrform."[13]

Memorable writing was also of special significance to the ancient world, where for many people literature was transmitted orally; thus it is not happenstantial that ancient art forms developed in accordance with the needs of oral tradition. Furthermore, chiasmus afforded a seriously needed element of internal organization in ancient writing, which of course did not make use of paragraphs, punctuation, capitalization and other such synthetic devices to communicate the conclusion of one idea and the commencement of the next. Finally, ancient religious literature frequently served liturgical purposes, and the structure of chiastic writing made it suitable for use in ritual settings and may well have been affected on certain occasions to facilitate alternate recitation, e.g. by the opposite divisions of the choir in Jewish worship.[14] These practical considerations, along with many other aesthetic and linguistic qualities of the form, seem to have made chiasmus a pleasing, as well as functional, literary form in many ancient contexts.

Since the modern mind is not rehearsed in the use, appreciation or even the recognition of chiasmus, a most important question arises over what criteria must be met before it becomes reasonable to speak of chiasmus, let alone of a particular chiastic arrangement, within a given text. If any aspect of chiastic analysis is to produce rigorous and verifiable results, the inverted parallel orders, which create the chiasms upon which that analysis is based, must be evidenced in the text itself and not imposed upon the text by Procrustean design or artifice of the reader. Therefore, one's predominant concern is over objectivity. In striving for objectivity, it is reasonable to require significant repetitions to be readily apparent, and the overall system to be well balanced. The second half of the system should tend to repeat the first half of the system in a recognizably inverted order, and the juxtaposition of the two central sections should be marked and highly accentuated. Longer passages are more defensibly chiastic where the same text also contains a fair amount of short chiasmus and other forms of parallelism as well. Key words, echoes, and balancing should be distinct and should serve defined purposes within the structure.

Nevertheless, the objective criteria alone do not tell the whole story. Evidence of chiasmus is not entirely objective and quantifiable. For example, chiasmus operates by definition within literary units. Yet defining what constitutes such a literary unit and determining where it begins and ends is often a predominantly subjective matter, especially where multiple structures operate simultaneously or where a single system is composed of separated bicola. Furthermore, wherever synonyms, cognates, antitheticals, or logically proximate terms appear in a chiastic system, substantial subjective judgment is again involved in the process of deciding which terms in the first portion of the system match (if at all) with particular terms in the second portion of the system. One also recognizes that any significant chiasm must embrace each of the predominant words and concepts appearing in the system (for what is omitted from a diagrammed arrangement is often as critical as that which is included, in terms of evaluating both the ancient author's creative success and the modern exegete's conceptual clarity in respect to any proposed chiasm). But here again, subjectivity is inevitably involved in deciding which elements are in fact predominant and must, therefore, be judged indispensable.

Recognizing the subjective as well as the objective aspects of identifying chiasmus, our purpose in presenting this collection of studies is not to advance every chiastic arrangement herein displayed as an absolutely rigid demonstration of a mandatory perception of the formal structure of any given composition. In some instances, the chiasmus may approach that degree of certitude. But as for the others, they are proposed as what appears to be the most natural and meaningful analysis of the text under study. In the absence of a more attractive alternative analysis, it is proposed that these arrangements afford the most coherent and effective perspective on these and many other ancient texts.

Where the objective criteria, such as the repetition, the balance, the inversion, the focus or shift at the center, and the density of parallel forms in the setting, are all readily apparent, there is, of course, no difficulty in designating a certain passage as chiastic and proceeding to scrutinize the text in that light. Even where the objective criteria are less than perfect, it may still, in certain circumstances, be desirable to draw attention to ways in which the text tends toward inverted order, or to focus on a particular sense of balance or symmetry which seems foundational to the text itself. Here, too, it is possible to speak of chiasmus in a looser sense of the term, for chiasmus, like poetical or artistic forms generally, lends itself to a variety of applications and arrangements which may on some occasions only approximate its ideal composition Where the inversion is less than perfect, some might contend that this is evidence that no inversion was ever intended by the writer at all. Rather, this might better be explained as evidence that the author simply took some liberty with the form, not adhering mechanically to the form for its own sake, but still choosing to operate within the general framework of an overall chiastic or related scheme. In such instances, the analysis becomes much more complex and, depending to a large extent on what is to be proved thereby, may become controversial.

This is not the only way in which controversy may arise. Perhaps completely aside from the residual problem of assuring verifiable objectivity in the application of the concept of chiasmus, there may arise other lingering hesitancies which understandably must be confronted before one stakes reliance upon principles of chiasmus. One wonders, for example, how such arrangements could have escaped serious notice for several thousand of years, if indeed they are ancient creations and not merely modern fabrications. Yet upon reflection one realizes that far greater and astonishing bodies of ancient culture have been lost to successive generations than simply the knowledge of chiasmus. In fact, culture is incredibly fragile, requiring only a few neglectful generations to break the continuum of awareness of entire languages and civilizations. More directly, there is significant evidence that inverted parallelism was expressly observed in antiquity, for example by Cicero, Atticus 1, 16, 1 and the Roman commentators Servius and Donatus (under the name of *hysteron proteron*), by the Scholiast Aristarchus, Scholia A on Odyssey 56, and the Scholia Euripides Orestes 702 (*prothysteron*), and by the Scholia Euripides Phoenissae 887 (*hysterologia*).

One wonders, further, how primitive cultures could produce complex literary creations founded upon extensive organizational principles such as those which chiasmus demands. But what is this but a conceit on the part of the modern interpreter! For it is not modern man alone who lays a legitimate claim to being recognized as sophisticated. Indeed, the libraries discovered at Ugarit and now at Ebla and other archeological sites reveal the existence of an acute awareness of languages, of high proficiency with the translation process, of quadralingual textbooks, and many other indications that the ancient concern for language and its features in many periods may have far surpassed our own modern verbal skills. Whereas the primary concern of an ancient writer, and especially a biblical writer, was certainly not to create chiastic compositions for their own sakes, skilled writers would have no difficulty applying this form and artistic composers would seize upon such an opportunity under suitable circumstances to take great advantage of the powers which the form itself affords. Beyond that we may observe that the general use for formal patterns was far more prevalent in ancient than in modern composition – – witness simply the demanding requirements of epic poetry or of Elegiac couplets and the like. More then than now, beauty was synonymous with form.

Nevertheless, we shall probably never know exactly how many chiasms were intentional and how many are mere accidents (perhaps even unobserved accidents) in ancient writing. In the final analysis, our study ends where it begins: with the ancient text in hand. The features which it ultimately manifests are largely determined by what features the text is observed as manifesting. What a text says, or looks like, or stands for, is fundamentally a matter of what it says to its readers. Certain points of view on the meaning or structure of a given text may be more or

less persuasive. What one ultimately sees in a text is only limited by, not determined by, potential criticisms which render a view more or less attractive.

It is difficult to go much further by way of introduction. These introductory remarks are only that. They do not purport to prove the validity or importance of chiasmus, for its proof is only in its perception and for that we must turn to the demonstrations below.

What is proved by the existence of chiasmus is also difficult to say. Those who see evidence for cultural diffusion in antiquity may find further support for that hypothesis in the similar chiastic arrangements in the diverse literatures sampled here. Others may see in the widespread use of chiasmus merely a reflection of the commonality of man, as indeed many nursery rhymes and mundane proverbs are chiastic. But wherever chiasmus demonstrably exists, its potential impact on interpretation and textual analysis stands to be profound. Since chiasmus is studied predominantly in religious texts, its contribution to theological exegesis and the spiritual appreciation of sacred literatures is often highly significant, and the implications here are easily much farther reaching than space or skill will allow the present authors to cover completely.

The scope of this work is therefore necessarily limited, for the most part being confined to the task of defining and demonstrating the presence of chiasmus in selected ancient literatures. Much of the material presented here appears for the first time, although the authors are deeply appreciative especially to the editors of *Ugarit-Forschungen*, *Linguistica Biblica*, *Beth Mikra*, and *Brigham Young University Studies* for their generous assistance and permission to use materials already having appeared in their publications. While limiting the scope of this work, we can only hope that its full purpose will nevertheless be served by promoting a general awareness of chiasmus among all those engaged in reading, studying and enjoying ancient literature. Since, in principle, chiasmus is relatively easy to apply, our task may well have ended as soon as the reader himself sets out to observe chiasmus on his own.

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FOOTNOTES

1 Yelland, Jones, and Easton, *Handbook of Literary Terms*, p. 32.

2 Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, Glossary, "Epanodos," utilized in Jebb, *Sacred Literature*, pp. 53, 57, 70.

3 Jebb, *Sacred Literarure*, p. 53; Forbes, *Symmetrical Structure of Scripture*, pp. 35-41; M. Casanowicz, "Parallelism in Hebrew Poetry," *Jewish Encyclopedia* 9:521; Golenischeff, in Glanville, ed., *Studies Presented to F. Ll. Griffith*, p. 88.

4 Anderson, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, pp. 129, 136.

5 McCarthy, *CBQ*, 27:336-47; Pesch, *Biblica*, 47:577-81; cf. Brown, *Gospel According to John*, p. 644, mentioning the "parabolic curve" concept.

6 Treated in Hebrew as *Kiut* by Segal, *Introduction to the Bible*, I, cited by Radday. "On the Chiasm in Biblical Narrative," *Beth Mikra*, 20-1:50.

7 McEvenue, *Narrative of the Priestly Writer*, pp. 29, 77, 163.

8 Boismard, *Prologue de Saint Jean*, p. 107.

9 Radday, *Beth Mikra*, 20-1:48-72.

10 Clark, *Linguistica Biblica*, 35:69

11 Welch, "A Study Relating Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon to Chiasmus in the Old Testament, Ugaritic Epics, Homer, and Selected Greek and Latin Authors," pp. 6-17.

12 Kosmala, *VT*, 16:425; Lund, *AJSL*, 46:112.

13 Gächter, *Literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium*, p. 7.

14 See Jebb, *Sacred Literature*, p. 60; Gordon, "Homer and Bible," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 26:65ff.