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Abstract Review of "Voice from the Dust": A Literary Analysis of the Book of Mormon" (1996), by Walter Krajewski; and *A New Witness for Christ: Chiastic Structures in the Book of Mormon* (1997), by H. Clay Gorton.

Walter Krajewski. "Voice from the Dust: A Literary Analysis of the Book of Mormon." Master's thesis, Concordia University, 1996. 112 pp.

H. Clay Gorton. *A New Witness for Christ: Chiastic Structures in the Book of Mormon.* Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1997. 478 pp., with sequential and topical indexes. $27.98.

Reviewed by Richard Dilworth Rust

The "voice from the dust" works convincingly and beautifully as "a new witness for Christ" in part because, in Krajewski's words, "there is a closely integrated relationship between the form and the content of the text." Krajewski's interest is primarily in showing how imagery and typology work in the Book of Mormon. Gorton's, as his subtitle indicates, is in chiastic structures. Both authors implicitly present strong arguments for continuing examination of literary elements in the Book of Mormon.

What struck me most about Walter Krajewski's master's thesis is that he was able to write it for Concordia University's Department of Religion without apology for his belief in the Book of Mormon as an ancient sacred text with an inspired origin. In clear and forthright language, he sets forth the contents of the book and then employs tools of literary analysis to study the work. His main interest is in the writers' conscious use of typology (e.g., Nephi's invoking the exodus and Alma's reference to the Liahona as typifying the word of Christ) and their stress on terms such as *promise, inheritance, choice,* and *liberty*. He further examines the limitations of language, freely acknowledged by the writers, coupled with their desire to present their message in plainness. He ends with applying Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical problem to the Book of Mormon. The problem, in Ricoeur's words, is "to understand, it is necessary to believe; to believe, it is necessary to understand" (p. 103, quoting Ricoeur, *Essays,* 58). Krajewski sees a resolution

of this dilemma as the writers of the Book of Mormon grapple with the process of interpretation as well as affirming their faith.

Some errors of fact slightly mar Krajewski's work. The first, a common error, is to limit the audience of the Book of Mormon to Jews and gentiles (although later Krajewski acknowledges the Lamanites as an audience). He says no one other than Joseph Smith read the plates, although the ninth section of the Doctrine and Covenants indicates that Oliver Cowdery began translating them. Krajewski says that the voices of Nephi, Jacob, and other writers of the small plates have been "subject to Mormon's interpretation of those voices in his edited version of the records." And he identifies the book of Nephi from which Mormon has taken his account (see Helaman 2:14) as 4 Nephi. Still, errors like these do not materially take away from Krajewski's presentation of types and themes.

Large strategic errors, however, do limit Clay Gorton's *A New Witness for Christ: Chiastic Structures in the Book of Mormon.* The book is essentially a collection of chiasms in the Book of Mormon. Gorton implies he has found them all, which allows him to make authoritative statements about percentages and authorship, as in this assertion: "The nine hundred sixty-one chiasma [*sic*] identified in the Book of Mormon comprise 3394 verses out of a total of 6404. Thus, 53% of the verses in the Book of Mormon are of a chiastic structure" (p. 20). He tabulates the authors by percentage of chiasticity and then organizes the main part of the book accordingly, starting with one verse by God the Father, which gives him 100% chiasticity, down to Mosiah, who with one chiastic verse has only 4% chiasticity.

There are several problems with this, though. Any addition to, or subtraction from, Gorton's chiasms would change his percentages. For example, he says God the Father speaks only one chiastic sentence: "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him" (3 Nephi 11:7). What happens, though, if there are other statements by the Father in the book? As I interpret Helaman 5 (a view shared by the editors of the *Book of Mormon Critical Text*), the voice from heaven is that of the Father, especially in his statement, "Peace, peace be unto you, because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world" (v. 47). With

this verse lacking chiasticity, the Father's percentage changes from 100 to 50. Likewise, objections could be made to what seem to be forced chiasms, if they exist at all. For example, Gorton sees 1 Nephi 1:1 as a chiasm with this structure:

I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents,
therefore
I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father;
and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days,
nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days;
yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God,
therefore
I make a record of my proceedings in my days. (p. 83)

A weakness in Gorton's approach arises because his methodology is tied significantly to number of verses (that is, he speaks of "the number of verses that each author wrote"). After all, the manuscript of the Book of Mormon is essentially one continuous flow, and the 1830 edition was broken up into paragraphs by the compositor. It was not until the 1879 edition that Orson Pratt divided the Book of Mormon into our present-day chapters and verses. Another weakness is Gorton's overlooking the important treatments of chiasmus found in Nils Wilhelm Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942); John Welch's work, especially *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (1981; reprint, Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999); and Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992).

Parry treats the opening of 1 Nephi more convincingly. For him, the section from "I, Nephi," to "all my days" is not chiastic, but the part that follows is:

A yea, having had a great <u>knowledge</u> of the goodness and the mysteries of God,
B therefore I *make* a <u>record</u> of my proceedings in my days.
C Yea, I *make* a record in the <u>language</u> of my father,
D which consists of the <u>learning of the Jews</u>

C and the language of the Egyptians.
B And I know that the record which I *make* is true:
and I *make* it with mine own hand:
A and I *make* it according to my knowledge.[1]

Of course informed people can differ in their interpretations of chiasms. James T. Duke remarks that his chiastic analysis of Alma 13:1–9 differs significantly from Parry's.[2] And so it goes.

The discovery of new chiasms in the Book of Mormon continues, with one person seeing a certain structure and another something else—but the first does not necessarily invalidate the second. What is risky, however, is to affirm that one has found them all. Indeed, new ones continue to be discovered (or, in some cases, created), including the Davidic chiasmus in the Book of Mormon posted by Jared Demke and Scott Vanatter on their web page and chiasms found on Jeff Lindsay's web page.[3]

Gorton has put an enormous amount of work into his book on chiastic structures in the Book of Mormon. Some of his examples are excellent, such as the chiasm of Mosiah 4:5–11. And the overall impression one gets from reading his book is that the Book of Mormon is extensively chiastic. However, Gorton's book is not the kind of book I like to read through; it would be like perusing a book filled almost solely with tables and graphs. What I miss is the interpretation. So what is important about Alma 36 being chiastic? John W. Welch has given me the satisfactory answer to my question about Alma 36.[4] The focus, Welch shows, is on the atonement of Jesus Christ as providing the turning point for Alma from pain to joy. Without interpreting it, Gorton places the turning point in the verse, "And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul." In

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1 Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 1.

2 See James T. Duke, "The Literary Structure and Doctrinal Significance of Alma 13:1–9," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 103–18.

3 Jared R. Demke and Scott L. Vanatter, www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3500/index21.html; and Jeff Lindsay, www.athenet.net/~jlindsay/chiasmus.shtml.

4 See especially John W. Welch, "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon,* ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991).

Gorton's work we do not see clearly what we do in Welch's—the perfection and purpose of Alma's chiasm. When I first encountered Welch's treatment of Alma 36, my response was similar to that expressed by Jeff Lindsay on the Internet:

> The beauty and power of Alma's writing here makes this chapter one of the greatest pieces of ancient literature—and contributes to my assessment of the Book of Mormon as one of the greatest works of literature ever. The indisputable existence of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon raises a very big question about its origin: how could it possibly be the product of an early nineteenth-century writer? To me, this piece of evidence alone demands that we take this book seriously as an authentic document from antiquity.[5]

In trying to understand my initial delight in learning about chiasmus in the Book of Mormon and my dissatisfaction with Gorton's book, I think it comes to a matter of layout and purpose. Chiasmus was initially employed for oral transmission of ideas. Printed structures help us visualize the patterns, but they can also get in the way with their accumulated letters, numbers, italics, and so forth. The structural devices are an aid to study but can impede readability. This is especially true if they are void of analysis. Examples of appropriate combinations of these parts are found in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*. Too, since people can come up with various ways of finding and organizing chiasms, I like to see these presentations grounded in the rules of chiasmus, starting with the work by Nils Lund and building on later work by scholars such as Robert F. Smith, Wilfred G. E. Watson, and John W. Welch. And I would recommend Welch's guide, "Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus."[6]

The Book of Mormon truly is a glorious literary work, comparable in its intricacies to a Bach fugue and in its depth of feeling to a Beethoven sonata. It deserves the most careful attention sensitive and respectful critics can give it.

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5 Jeff Lindsay, www.athenet.net/~jlindsay/chiasmus.shtml.

6 John W. Welch, "Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/2 (1995): 1–14.