

2F. Author Attribution Parallels and Stylometry

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

AUTHOR ATTRIBUTION PARALLELS

Author attribution parallels are simply those passages in one written work that appear to be the same as passages from some other written work. The study of these parallels, in turn, can lead to a connection between the authors. 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 these areas, I will rely on the words of the LDS author of those articles. 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. Marilynne Linford (*The Book of Mormon Is True*, 2015, p. 85-92) writes the following:

Alma was consecrated to be "a high priest over the church of God" (Alma 5:3). In this responsibility, he delivered many sermons, but two memorable addresses . . . His address in Alma 5 is punctuated by forty question marks. It begins, "Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers?" (Alma 5:6). . . . We could call Alma the king of questions, as there are about 211 question marks in Alma 1-45, averaging 4.9 questions per chapter. He asked questions that pierce the heart and cause introspection, questions that test gospel understanding, and rhetorical questions that stir souls unto repentance. . . .

In Alma 1-45, 271 words are unique to him: [These 271 words are then listed]

The account written by Alma ends in Alma 44. In Alma 45 we find the account written by Helaman, son of Alma. He records a time (Alma 45--63) when Helaman reestablishes the Church (see Alma 45:22-23) and a time of war. A twenty-five-year-old man named Moroni is the Nephite commander and Pahoran is the chief judge. In Alma 63 we find that the records are given to Shiblon, the brother of Helaman.

Captain Moroni's words are found in Alma 44, 46, 54, 59, and 60. Thirty-eight words are unique to him. [the words are then listed]

The chief judge Pahoran's words are recorded in Alma 61. Eight words are unique to him and his situation. [the words are then listed]

Helaman's words are found in Alma 45-62, and 167 are unique to him and to his situation. [the words are then listed]

Shiblon records only 622 words, but there are two unique words: *company* and *launched*.

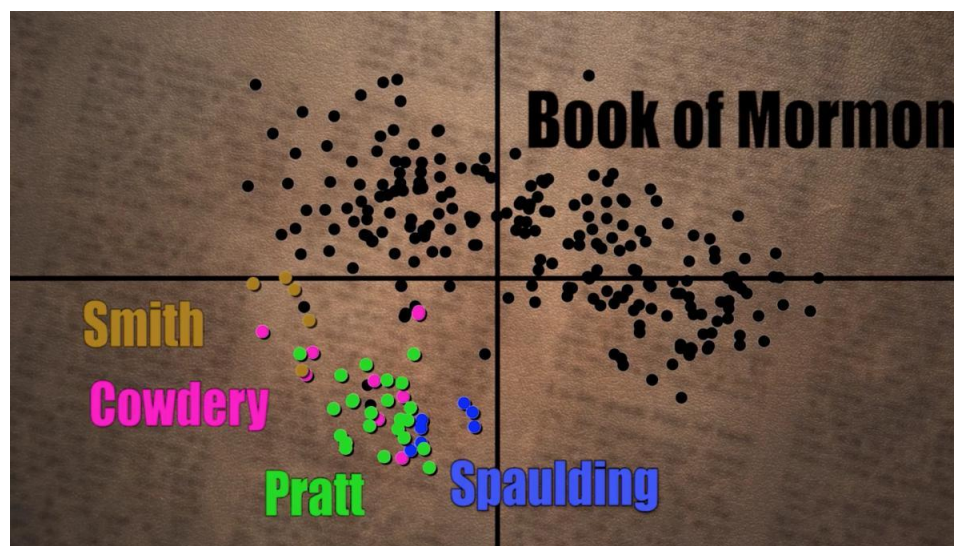
[Author Attribution Parallels]

A list of related articles on this subject can be found in the “Sources” Volume, “Part E: A Chronological List of Pertinent Writings on Author Attribution Parallels and Stylometry. 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.



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In a 2017 Book of Mormon Central article titled “What Can Stylometry Tell Us About Book of Mormon Authorship,” after briefly summarizing a number of stylometric studies (the 1980 “Larsen Study,” the 1985 “Holmes Study,” the 1990 “Hilton Study,” the 2008 “Jockers Study,” and the 2011 “Fields Study”) they conclude:

While these results cannot identify the unknown author(s) who likely wrote much of the text, they do show that it is highly likely that the author(s) were not any of the 19th century candidates who have been conjectured to have written the Book of Mormon . . . In light of the above studies, it can be responsibly concluded that the Book of Mormon’s internal claims about its authorship are consistent with the best stylometric evidence currently available.

Source: Book of Mormon Central, “What Can Stylometry Tell Us about Book of Mormon Authorship? KnowWhy #389 (December 12, 2017).

(Stylometry)

Thus in view of the above cited Book of Mormon Central article, and a more detailed and informative 17-page article (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), both of which are accessible on the Internet, I will just refer the reader to an extensive list of related articles in my "Sources" Volume: Part E: "A Chronological List of Pertinent Writings on Author Attribution Parallels and Stylometry As They Relate to the Book of Mormon."