
Smith’s dissertation consists of nine chapters, with the final chapter being a basic conclusion that summarizes and recapitulates his main thesis. The heart of his book is as the title suggests. Prompted positively by his intuitive recognition that chiastic structures are valid literary forms used both within and outside the Bible, and negatively by the abuse of unjustified and highly subjective proposals of chiasms, he has sought to lay out some objective criteria that would enable the exegete to test various proposed passages in order to validate/invalidate chiastic claims.

Chapter 1 treats the “History of Theoretical Chiastic Studies.” In this chapter he basically discusses approximately 25 published authors who have contributed toward the theoretical development of chiastic analysis. He concludes that the theoretical foundations of this field of study are seriously underdeveloped. Specifically, he identifies three areas where more development is needed: (1) a precise definition of chiasm – which must necessarily grapple with the importance of the “center” of a chiasm; (2) an attempt to understand the figure in its historical context, i.e. whether there are discernable differences between the cross-cultural use of it [his general impression is that there is not but he admits that more study needs to be done in this area]; and (3) the need for a set of reasonably objective criteria. The remainder of his treatise seeks to address these three areas of deficiency. He hammers out a definition in chapter two; the next five chapters (3-7) present his five objective criteria, using ample illustrations throughout. In chapter eight, he applies the entire proposal (both the definition and the five objective criteria) to a test passage, which is Ephesians 2:1-10. The back matter consists of an appendix that charts eight key contributors to chiastic theory in a comparative fashion, seeking to identify where their comments interface or overlap with his own. The final two pieces of end material are Scripture citations and Bibliography.

In Smith’s chapter on “Defining Chiasm of Design,” he first interacts with ancient definitions. He acknowledges that the extant material is very limited and somewhat later than the NT documents (viz. Περί Στάσεως by [Pseudo-] Hermogenes, 3rd-4th c., Rhetorica Anonyma, 3rd c., Scholia In Demosthenem, 6th – 9th c.). Though these sources do not make mention of verbal correspondence, their discussions can be regarded as referring to semantic correspondence. As far as an “explicit center” of an inverted structure, Smith concludes that the ancients do not consistently require such and therefore modern exegetes “ought not presuppose the interpretive significance of an explicit center” (p. 93). For this reason, Smith qualifies this element as a part of his definition of a chiasm. His working definition of a chiasm, then, is stated this way: “a figure consisting of two panels where the units comprising the first panel correspond inversely to the units comprising the second; an explicit center may or may not be present.” He asserts that this definition can serve trans-culturally, since a chiasm, like a simile, is used by every culture, although there may be fine nuances in its application in a given culture. This definition, then, allows him to distinguish between a “false chiasm” and an “accidental chiasm.” The former is false from the interpreter’s perception. In other words, an exegete has perceived a chiasm that does not hold up under more objective scrutiny. This is not just a matter of authorial intent, but there is actually no inverted pattern that can be persuasively objectified. The latter may indeed have the structural characteristics of a chiasm, but there are not enough objective criteria to demonstrate that this particular literary pattern was intended by the author.
In the next five chapters, Smith introduces his five objective criteria for identifying a chiasm. These are as follows:

1. **Coherence with other Structures (Chapter 3).**
   Here he discusses “nested chiasms” and “consecutive chiasms” in contrast to “competing structures.” For instance, if standard scholarship argues for a division of a text of 20 verses at 1-10 and 11-20, a proposed chiastic structure that spans from 8-15 is extremely unlikely and is considered “competitive.” It is possible, however, to have several chiasms in consecutive to one another (a micro-chiasm at verse 1; another at verse 2; another at verse 3); or there may be a “nested chiasm” in verses 5-6 and then again in verses 8-9. In other words, chiastic patterns will complement the overall macro-structure rather than compete with it. This is a very helpful criterion that should serve as a frontline checkpoint for exegetes who believe they have discovered an author-intended chiasm. Smith also offers helpful discussions that address many current abuses in chiastic studies, such as the tendency of many modern practitioners to exclude, rearrange, add foreign material, and allow for source-critical exceptions. In sum, this criterion states that “a chiasm of design will cohere with section boundaries as recognized by standard hermeneutical practices” (p. 149).

2. **Significant Correspondences (Chapter 4).**
   This criterion argues that a chiasm of design will demonstrate correspondence with its parallel counterpart units and that the likelihood of this inverted pattern being intentional will increase relative to the number of correspondences that can be objectified. Here he suggests six levels of correspondence in order of decreasing degree of objectivity. These are (1) Verbal, (2) Syntactical, (3) Form, (4) Scene/Setting, (5) Conceptual, and (6) Phonetic. The last category he admits to being purely theoretical with reference to the Scriptures, but presents it since such a sample may yet be discovered. With each category he discusses their formulation and parameters along with a fair amount of samples to make his point. Then he provides “rules” that govern each of these. For instance, under “verbal correspondence,” he discusses words that have an “objective standard” of correspondence and those that have a “subjective standard.” Of all the levels, the verbal correspondence will exert a controlling influence over all the other levels since intentional chiasms will likely exhibit some degree of verbal correspondence thereby having a “kind of meta-tendency” in this way (p. 183).

3. **Significant Symmetry (Chapter 5)**
   Provided that the passage being analyzed has been properly divided, Smith argues that there will be a prevailing symmetrical balance within the proposed chiasm. Moreover, the assurance that the exegete is working with a true chiasm of design will increase relative to the degree of symmetry that he discovers in the perceived structure. In an attempt to remove subjectivity from the judgment of the exegete as to whether there is essential balance or not, Smith has sought to objectify this in two ways. First, he identifies four loci where the interpreter must seek to measure the level of symmetry: (1) arrangement of units, (2) macro-balance between panels, (3) micro-balance between units, and (4) symmetrical distribution of verbal elements. It is here that Smith introduces a type of componential analysis to chiastic studies—and probably the most original contribution of his dissertation. (For this reason, this review will provide more elaboration on this criterion than on any of the others.) With each of these four loci, he proposed an equation that allows the exegete to mathematically measure...
the variances of the units, panels, or verbal elements (n.b., “units” are those sections of texts that are labeled A, B, B’, A’, etc., which he appears to use synonymously with the term “elements”; “panels” refer to the two halves of the chiasm; “grammatical units” are words and/or particles which cannot stand alone semantically; “verbal elements” are correspondences at the word-level involving cognates, weighted theological terms, synonyms, etc.).

For each of these loci, Smith has introduced a mathematic formula in order to scientifically compute the level of symmetry. For instance, to determine the mathematical likelihood that the arrangement of units is intentionally versus accidentally designed, he offers this formula:

\[
P_C = 2^n(n!)
\]

\[
PA = n! \quad (PA = \text{Possible Arrangements}; n = \text{number of units})
\]

\[
PC = 2n(n!) \quad (PC = \text{Possible Chiastic Arrangements}; n = \text{number of parallel unit-pairs})
\]

In order to judge the variance between the panels, he devises the following formula:

\[
M_v = 1 - \left( \frac{\text{word count of smaller unit}}{\text{word count of larger unit}} \right)
\]

\[
M_v = \text{Macro-Variance}
\]

A similar equation is proposed for each locus. For example, the equation for determining if the size of corresponding units is relatively equal, he proposes the following:

\[
m_v = 1 - \left( \frac{\text{word count of smaller unit}}{\text{word count of larger unit}} \right)
\]

\[
m_v = \text{Micro-Variance}
\]

In order to determine if the corresponding verbal elements occur in a position that is approximate to its counterpart, he proposes this formula:

\[
d_v = \frac{(\text{Position of 1st Occurrence}) - (\text{Position of 2nd Occurrence})}{(\text{Position of 1st Occurrence}) + (\text{Position of 2nd Occurrence})}
\]

\[
d_v = \text{distribution variance}
\]

\[
ad_v = \text{average distribution variance}
\]

\[
Adv = \text{Absolute distribution variance}
\]

\[
Rd_v = \text{Relative distribution variance}
\]

(allowing for key words occupying the beginning clause in one panel and the end of a clause in its mirror panel)

Each equation then is applied to a given sample and the following chart can be produced (which, in this case, calculates the level of symmetry for Romans 10:9-10):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Inverted Parallelism</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probability of Accidental Generation</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro-Variance</td>
<td>52.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symmetry of Number of Units</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Micro-Variance</td>
<td>49.52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Besides identifying four loci at which to seek an objective measurement for symmetry, Smith also seeks to objectify the degree of “free elements” within the structure. These “free elements” are the non-corresponding words and phrases that make up the remainder of the text. This added step is intended to assure that all features are accounted for and that all the numbers trend in the same direction. His equation for this is as follows:

\[
fe = 1 - \frac{\text{repeated elements}}{\text{total elements}}
\]

fe = free elements

One would think that five equations applied to a proposed chiasm would be sufficient objectivity in chiastic analysis. But Smith takes it a step further. In the absence of an extant canon of chiasms, he, in essence, creates his own. In no way is he being presumptuous, but rather is operating from a purely pragmatic basis in order to establish a “baseline for determining statistical significance” (p. 225). His goal here is to provide a standard against which to gauge the viability of a proposed chiasm after they have been analyzed according to his mathematical computations. To accomplish this, he culls more than 40 samples from scholarly works “which seem least likely to broker objection” (p. 225). The criteria for each chosen sample required that (a) they were short, (b) they repeated key terms, (c) there were a high number of repetitions from even the most cursory evaluation, and (d) they had previously been cited by experts in this field of study as being chiastic. He then applies his equations to these samples and computes an average. From this average, he is then able to plot the percentage of a given chiasm on a grid with a four-zoned axis ranging from “highly unfavorable” to “highly favorable.” The termini for each zone are calculated from the various equations he has proposed for each loci identified above.

4. Discernable Function (Chapter 6)

Here, Smith asserts that it is more convincing that the exegete is working with a chiasm of design if the structural function of the chiastic pattern is readily discernable. That is, can the exegete discern how this literary pattern promotes the author’s purpose for writing? In other words, does the chiasm have a communicative purpose that can be recognized with a fair degree of confidence? At this point, Smith taps into the apologetics of Intelligent Design and adapts their arguments for contingency, complexity, and specificity as a basis for postulating a chiasm of design. With these as guidelines, he then identifies four possible functions (presented in the order of increasing objectivity): Mneumonic/Organizational, Aesthetic, Rhetorical, and Semantic. It should be noted that he regards the first two functions to be essentially theoretical and that at the pragmatic level it is virtually impossible to discern these functions—at least in texts where the author is not available to ask his intent. Clearly the most important is the Semantic function, which can be delineated further in terms of (a) semantic emphasis, (b) rhetorical organization or development, and (c) completion of thought or illumination.

5. Discernable Authorial Affinity (Chapter 7)

In this chapter, Smith’s basic point is that a chiasm of design is more likely to be found in the works of authors where it can be demonstrated that they have an affinity toward the employment of the device. Here he is operating on a basic assumption of scholarly opinion. If, say, the book of Ezra registers little to no scholarly postulations of chiasms within that corpus,
then any claim by an exegete that he has discovered a chiastic pattern ought to be viewed somewhat skeptically. Certainly, Smith allows room for the exegete to present his case, but there must be a high level of objective criteria satisfied (along the lines as he has proposed) before one should embrace it as a valid claim. Conversely, if a large number of scholars posit numerous chiastic claims within, say, the book of Isaiah, then one ought to be more open to the possibility of new claims within that literary corpus.

The rationale described in the previous paragraph is perhaps Smith’s second most original contribution in his study. Once again, since there does not exist a canon of chiams, Smith suggests that a good basic starting point is Welch’s *Chiasmus Bibliography*. This book is more than a bibliography of authors who have conducted chiastic analyses and published their theses, but it also includes a list of biblical chiasms deemed such by modern authors. He states his suggestion as follows: “I propose that we use this list to gain a general sense of those biblical books in which *chiasms of design* seem most likely to be prevalent” (p. 307). He then adds:

> the general trend of scholarly consensus would seem to be a reliable, if necessarily rough, indicator of authorial affinity for the figure. For instance, the notion that the author of Isaiah seems to have an affinity for chiastic structure is imminently plausible since Welch’s index lists 80 chiastic structures within the text of Isaiah, proposed by more than 50 different scholars (p. 307).

Smith then testifies that his own investigations have been “generally consistent with Welch’s list” (p. 309). Moreover, he also observes an apparent correlation between the number of proposed chiasms for a book and the plausibility of the proposals. Also, authorial affinity (or the lack of it) appears to hold true across a given author’s literary corpus.

In the final chapter of Smith’s treatise (Chapter 8), he applies his criteria to Ephesians 2:1-10. His choice for this text is that the chiasm seems relatively straightforward and because the traditional exegesis of this passage is relatively uncontroversial. In other words, Smith has no axe to grind or no pet doctrine he is trying to ply according to his own personal bias. His analysis suggests an ABCDC’B’A’ pattern with verse 5b occupying the central element (viz. χάριτι ἐστε σεσώσαμενοι). He works through his set of criteria quite methodically and as a result concludes that the passage is highly favorable toward being an author-intended chiasm, or a *chiasm of design*.

With his final chapter (Chapter 9), he offers some concluding remarks wherein he comments on the relative significance of the criteria that he has proposed. He also offers some helpful suggestions for further study.

**Overall Assessment**: Positively, Smith’s work is impressively comprehensive. He appears to have “left no stone unturned” in his attempt to provide an objective set of criteria for identifying and validating a proposed chiasm. He has wisely kept the balance between science and art throughout his work, thereby allowing room for exceptions or special cases. These, however, are not given a “free ride” as it were, but themselves must have the accompanying justification that is objective in nature. On the negative side, one wonders how the componential analysis for criterion #3 (Significant Symmetry) will take hold. The mathematic
equations certainly offer a much higher level of objective control than the current state of affairs, but it seems very unlikely that exegetes will resort to such complexity in order to determine what seems intuitive to them. To be fair, Smith recognizes the same. On page 207, he states: “It may be remarked by some that this system of analysis is somewhat cumbersome, and I concur. However, I do not intend to argue that every proposed chiasm must be subjected to this particular analysis, at least in its entirety.” Though this may be a drawback for most exegetes, perhaps there will be some “specialists” who will apply this level of complexity in order to establish what Smith calls a “baseline” of sample chiasms against which future chiastic proposals can be measured.

Smith is to be commended for making a significant contribution to chiastic analysis. The strength of his five proposed criteria are not to be found merely in the list themselves, since all but criterion #5 have been proposed previously by several different chiastic practitioners (although not in this precise form and none with this exact list). And certainly criterion #5 (Discernable Authorial Affinity) has been posited in prior writings, but, according to this reviewer impression, it has been more of a passing remark rather than being posed as a separate methodological criterion itself. Thus, his proposed criteria (with the exception of criterion #5) are not unique, but what is unique (and what gives them their strength) is the thoroughness of his explication for each point and the way he nuances each. Perhaps the best way to move forward from here so that his ideas can become standard exegetical practice in chiastic analysis is to condense them and perhaps convey them in a format that will be more applicable to pedagogical platforms as well as become more user-friendly to initiates in this specialized field of study. Over time, then, the use of this method will help to stabilize this field of biblical study.