UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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Performing Revelation:

Joseph Smith and the Creation of *The Book of Mormon*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Theater and Performance Studies

by

William Davis

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Performing Revelation:

Joseph Smith's Oral Performance of *The Book of Mormon*

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Doctor of Philosophy in Theater and Performance Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Michael Colacurcio, Co-Chair

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In 1830, Joseph Smith Jr. published *The Book of Mormon* and subsequently founded a new American religion. According to Smith, *The Book of Mormon* represented the English translation of an authentic record, written in "Reformed Egyptian," concerning ancient Israelites who migrated to the Americas in approximately 600 B.C.E. Smith's purported translation of this sacred history, however, did not occur by traditional means. Rather than directly consulting the record and providing an English rendition, Smith employed a method of divination by placing a "seer stone" into the bottom of his hat, holding the hat to his face to shut out all light, and then he proceeded to dictate the entire text of *The Book of Mormon* in an extended oral performance, without the aid of notes or manuscripts. By his side, Smith's scribes wrote down the entire text verbatim in the moment Smith uttered them. As a result, at over 500 printed pages, *The Book of Mormon* stands as one of the longest recorded oral performances in the history of the United States.

This dissertation aims to uncover some of the primary techniques of oral performance that Smith used in the construction of his work. Oratorical skill constituted a critical mode of public and private discourse in the culture of the early American nation; and, as I will argue, the text of *The Book of Mormon* reveals key characteristics of Smith's techniques in oral performance that, in turn, reflect the oratorical training of the age. Drawing on Smith's exposure to a kaleidoscope of cultural institutions that inculcated oratorical skills—focusing specifically on formal and informal education, Sunday school training and revivalism, folk magic practices, semi-extemporaneous Methodist preaching and exhorting, and the fireside storytelling culture of early America—this dissertation will demonstrate how these related cultural streams of oral performance converged in Smith's production of *The Book of Mormon*, providing him with the necessary skills and techniques to produce and recite his massive Christian epic through the medium of the spoken word.

The dissertation of William Davis is approved.

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Introduction: Performing Revelation

On April 7, 1829, Joseph Smith Jr., the 24-year-old future prophet and seer of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sat down with Oliver Cowdery, a young schoolteacher acting as his primary amanuensis, and began to dictate the *Book of Mormon* in an extended oral performance.[1] From eyewitness accounts, a brief description of the nature of Smith's performance emerges. Before proceeding with each dictation session, Smith and Cowdery, along with any observers, kneeled in prayer in order to set the tone for their spiritual work. After imploring God's divine influence, they all rose and reverently took their places within the room, befitting the sacredness of the event. The following account by David Whitmer, a friend of both Smith and Cowdery, as well as a scribe for a small portion of the project, offers one of the best descriptions of the ritualized practice:

> Each time before resuming the work, all present would kneel in prayer and invoke the Divine blessing on the proceeding. After prayer, Smith would sit on one side of the table, and the amanuenses, in turn as they became tired, on the other. Those present and not actively engaged in the work seated themselves around the room and then the work began.[2]

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[1] Other scribes included Emma Smith (Joseph's wife), Reuben Hale (Emma's brother), Martin Harris, David Whitmer, and possibly John Whitmer. Their contributions, however, were minimal; Oliver Cowdery acted as the primary scribe for the majority of the *Book of Mormon*. See Richard Van Wagoner and Steve Walker, "Joseph Smith: 'The Gift of Seeing'," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 2 (1982): 50-53. See also, John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, "Book of Mormon Translation by Joseph Smith," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 210. Regarding the starting date of Cowdery's participation, in a published letter to W. W. Phelps, Cowdery writes, "On Monday the 6th [of April], I assisted him [Joseph Smith] in arranging some business of a temporal nature, and on Tuesday the 7th, commenced to write the book of Mormon. These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the *inspiration* of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom!" Oliver Cowdery, *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, 14.

[2] David Whitmer's account reflects the period when Smith was dictating the *Book of Mormon* in Fayette, New York, at the Whitmer home. The project, however, began in Harmony, Pennsylvania. For Whitmer's description, see Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5 vols., vol. 5 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2003). 153-54 (punctuation modified for clarity). Further references to Vogel's five-volume edited work will be shortened to *EMD*, followed by volume and page numbers (e.g., Vogel, *EMD*, 5: 153-54).

The majority of the dictation took place at the family table in the Smith's small two-bedroom home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, where Cowdery, armed with an inkwell and stack of foolscap paper, busily wrote down every word that Smith uttered, recording the performance verbatim.[3] Across the table, Smith recited the text of the *Book of Mormon* at a steady pace, speaking not word-to-word but phrase-to-phrase.[4] Smith's method of dictation was, however, unlike the common nineteenth-century practice of dictating letters and correspondence, where the author spoke directly to his or her amanuensis, without mediating objects to facilitate the process. Rather, Smith made use of what was for him a familiar and well-practiced form of divination. Adopting an instrument common to both folk magic and occult philosophies, Smith placed a "seer stone"–a mystical object that functioned much like a palm-sized crystal ball–into the bottom of his upturned hat, held the hat to his face to block out all light, peered into the stone for focus and divine inspiration, and then proceeded to speak aloud the entire text of the *Book of Mormon* to his attentive scribes.[5]

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[3] Because of negative family pressure from in-laws, who felt the translation project of ancient gold plates was fraudulent, Smith would relocate to the Whitmer family farm in Fayette, NY, to complete the project. For further information, see Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005). 76.

[4] Based on his study of the original scribal manuscript, Royal Skousen, editor of a massive critical text project on the *Book of Mormon*, theorizes that Smith either saw the words of the *Book of Mormon* on the surface of the seer stone or in a spiritual vision, based in eyewitness reports: "Witnesses seemed to have believed that Joseph actually saw an English text in the interpreters, but it is possible that Joseph saw the text, so to speak in his 'mind's eyes'." Skousen also claims that "Joseph had at least twenty words in view as he was dictating." Royal Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 24-25. Alternatively, phrase-by-phrase dictation provides direct evidence of oral-formulaic composition, where an oral performer constructs and recites narratives with formulaic phrases. For a detailed discussion, see chapter nine of this dissertation, titled, "Storytelling Culture and Oral Formulaic Composition."

[5] My use of "occultism" and "magic" reflects the way Early Modern English-speakers through the early nineteenth century referred to hidden mysteries and secret knowledge of supernatural phenomena. Such usage does not, however, entail modern perceptions that "occultism" is synonymous with "cult" or any form of satanic ritual (indeed, Christian occultism explicitly sought divine knowledge from God and his angels). The negative connotations associated with "cult" make the term unproductive when discussing these new religious movements and their modes of knowledge production. When defining "occult" and "magic," I follow D. Michael Quinn's explanation that, "for many, occult means evil and magic refers to fantasy or sleight-of-hand entertainment. However, those popular definitions distort the more descriptive meanings of these words in historical context and scholarly usage." For Quinn's discussion on the definition of terms, see D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998). xxiii-xxix. For further discussion on the usage and avoidance of "cult"

Along with the use of a mystical seer stone, the circumstances of Smith's production also set it apart from most contemporary compositions. Indeed, from Smith's point of view the work was not his composition at all. Rather, he presented himself as merely acting as a divinely inspired translator (or, according to some Mormon scholars, a transmitter) of an ancient historical record, inscribed on gold plates, which a ministering angel had revealed to him. The seer stone thus operated as a translation instrument, which, by means of spiritual inspiration and divine operations, provided Smith with an English translation from the "reformed Egyptian" of an ancient record.

What Smith did or did not envision in the stone, however, remains a mystery. He never publicly shared the details of this mystic methodology, though numerous accounts from friends, family and neighbors claim that Smith saw the English translation appear on the surface of the seer stone "in bright luminous letters."[6] Furthermore, because the translation occurred ostensibly via this supernatural process, he apparently never needed to consult the gold plates directly during the project. When Smith was dictating the translation, his wife, Emma, observed that the gold plates could be resting on the table "wrapped in a small linen table-cloth," or, as

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in academic discourse, see, for example, James T. Richardson, "Definitions of Cult: From Sociological-Technical to Popular-Negative," *Review of Religious Research* 34, no. 4 (1993): 348-56. And Paul J. Olson, "The Public Perception of 'Cults' and 'New Religious Movements'," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45, no. 1 (2006): 97-106. Regarding the exclusive use of the seer stone in the production of the *Book of Mormon* text, Richard Van Wagoner and Steve Walker indicate, "consensus holds that the 'translation' process was accomplished through a single seer stone from the time of the loss of the [original] 116 pages until the completion of the book." See Van Wagoner and Walker, "Joseph Smith," 53. Smith originally began the project in 1828, but Martin Harris, one of his scribes and his primary financial backer, lost the opening 116 pages. See chapter one for further details.

[6] John Welch and Tim Rathbone note, "at a Church conference in 1831, Hyrum Smith invited the Prophet to explain more fully how the Book of Mormon came forth. Joseph Smith responded that 'it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and. . . it was not expedient for him to relate these things." John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, "Translation of The Book of Mormon by Joseph Smith," in *To All the World: The Book of Mormon Articles from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, S. Kent Brown, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), 2000), 282. For an overview of various theories on Smith's translation process, see Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2011). 147-56. For the description of the translation words appearing on the seer stone "in bright luminous letters," see Vogel, *EMD*, 5: 104, 108. See also Michael Hubbard Mackay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones* (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, with Deseret Book Company, 2016). 225.

Smith's skeptical father-in-law, Isaac Hales, commented sardonically, Smith might be translating in the house "with a stone in his hat, and his hat over his face, while the Book of Plates were at the same time hid in the woods!"[7]

Over the course of ninety days (which some scholars estimate to have been "less than sixty working days"[8]), Smith unleashed a torrential flow of verbal art and narrative creation. Without apparently referring to notes, manuscripts or books (with the possible exception of occasionally consulting a King James Version of the Bible), Smith delivered an extensive biblical-style narrative that told the tale of a group of sixth-century BCE Israelites, who, according to the story that emerged, journeyed from ancient Jerusalem to the Americas and built up vast civilizations, only to be destroyed when the people became wicked and turned away from God.[9] The resulting work of more than 500 printed pages would contain hundreds of narrative episodes, all cohesively linked together into an overarching, epic structure.

The surviving scribal manuscript of Smith's performance would further reveal that he did not return to revise the text for publication, beyond relatively minor adjustments (mostly

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[7] For Emma's account, see Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 539. For Isaac Hales' account, see Vogel, *EMD*, 4: 287.

[8] Welch and Rathbone, "Translation," 283.

[9] Several eyewitnesses, both friendly and antagonistic, periodically observed Smith in the process of oral translation, and none of them observed Smith using notes or texts in the production of *The Book of Mormon*. For instance, Emma Smith, Joseph's wife, would recall, "I frequently wrote [transcribed] day after day [for Joseph], often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat with the stone in it and dictating hour after hour, with nothing between us. He had neither manuscript nor book to read from. If he had had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me." Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 539 (non-relevant authorial markings silently removed). Even so, none of the eyewitnesses, including Emma, claimed to have observed the process every day, from start to finish, which would have arguably allowed Smith occasions to consult a bible or other outside material, either during or between dictation sessions. The *Book of Mormon*, for example, contains many passages borrowed from the King James Version of the Bible, leading many scholars to believe that Smith may have referred directly to a copy of the Bible when incorporating such passages. See Stan Larson, "The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1993), 116. Larson counts Mormon scholars Hugh Nibley, Sidney B. Sperry and B. H. Roberts among those who believe Smith referenced directly a KJV Bible. See also David P. Wright, "Isaiah in the Book of Mormon: Or Joseph Smith in Isaiah," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2002), 157-234. See also H. Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism: 1816-1844* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2005). 141. Regardless of opportunities to reference an outside text, the majority of the *Book of Mormon*, as this study will both argue and demonstrate, was primarily the result of an extended oral performance, rather than a literary project.

spelling and punctuation) from the original outpouring of orally-composed material.[10] In other words, the oral draft was nearly identical to the final printed form, apart from the fact that Cowdery's handwritten manuscript did not include punctuation–a textual characteristic that appears to reflect the fast-paced oral dictation process and further marks a distinction between the production of an oral and literary text. As such, the *Book of Mormon* stands as one of the longest recorded oral performances in the history of American culture, comparable in length and magnitude, as well as method and technique, to the classical oral epics of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined.[11]

Theory and Analysis

Smith's creation of the *Book of Mormon* offers several potential avenues for performance analysis. Perhaps the most obvious approach would be a study of the dictation event itself: by carving out a temporal duration for the performance, an analysis might foreground Smith's dictation process, while isolating it from the surrounding cultural context, and then focus the

[10] Not all changes were inconsequential. For example, Melodie Moench Charles notes, "The evolution of Joseph Smith's beliefs in God is reflected in differences between the original 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon and all subsequent LDS editions. For the 1837 printing Smith made some efforts to remove the overlap and blending of the roles of God the Father, the God of humankind, and his Son, Jesus Christ, who atoned for humankind's sins." Her examples include 1 Nephi 11:19, where Smith revised "the mother of God" to "the mother of *the Son of* God"; 1 Nephi 11:21, "even the Eternal Father" becomes "even *the Son of* the Eternal Father"; 1 Nephi 11:32, "the everlasting God was judged of the world" becomes "*the Son of* the everlasting God was judged of the world"; and 1 Nephi 13:40, "the Lamb of God is the Eternal Father" becomes "the Lamb of God is *the Son of* the Eternal Father." Melodie Moench Charles, "Book of Mormon Christology," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 107.

[11] Grant Hardy, in his "Introduction" to Royal Skousen's *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, observes that the *Book of Mormon* represents "a single, extended oral performance. As such, it is nearly unique among world scriptures." See Grant Hardy, "Introduction," in *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, ed. Royal Skousen (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2009), xx-xxi. The comparison between the *Book of Mormon* and Homer's epics quickly diverges, however, regarding questions of aesthetics, authorship and transmission. Though these works are both orally-derived narratives, Smith's text is the result of a single-authored, one-time attempt at a sustained oral performance. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, however, developed over centuries within a vibrant oral tradition in which performers produced an endless number of variations (multiforms) of the epics. How much of Homer's texts actually belong to the poet Homer (some scholars question if he ever existed), or to generations of poets who may have refined his work, is unknown. For a helpful overview of these issues, see Robert Fowler, "The Homeric Question," in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004), 220-32. Finally, throughout the dissertation, my use of "America" and "American" specifically identifies the nation of the United States of America, using the term that early citizens used to describe themselves. The identity of "Native American," however, refers to the indigenous populations throughout all the Americas, not just those living within the territorial boundaries of the early United States.

discussion on what occurs within that circumscribed outline and what performative characteristics emerge. Thus, the performance framework for analysis would begin with Smith's initial prayer of invocation for spiritual assistance in his project, and then end when the dictation sessions came to a close.

Because Smith's performance involves religious divination and prophetic utterances, the analysis might turn to ritual as a theoretical lens, augmented by an attempt to define what Smith's performance signifies. For example, an analysis of the functionality of the performance might incorporate J. L. Austin's concept of performative language, enhanced by John R. Searle's positioning of such "speech acts" in extended rule-governed linguistic and cultural systems.[12] Further considerations might include an analysis of how the performance act produces a text that represents not only the residue (script) of a performance, but a performative artifact that inscribes prophetic power (tangible evidence of Smith's prophetic calling), and reinscribes prophetic power in future generations of those who hold interpretative, authoritative claims.[13] The analysis might also continue with other related critical issues, such as the identification of the actors and the cultural work they are performing, the dynamics between the performer(s) and observer(s) and how those dynamics construct meaning, the reification of social hierarchies

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[12] Austin's performative sentence, or simply "a performative," is a term that "indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something." In other words, performatives are utterances that *do* something, that *catalyze an action*, rather than linguistic statements or assertions that serve to communicate ideas. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed., The William James Lectures (1955) (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975). 6-7. One of Searle's primary contributions to the study of performatives involves his observation that they are part of rule-governed systems: "The hypothesis that the speech act is the basic unit of communication, taken together with the principle of expressibility, suggests that there are a series of analytic connections between the notion of speech acts, what the speaker means, what the sentence (or other linguistic element) uttered means, what the speaker intends, what the hearer understands, and what the rules governing the linguistic elements are." John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1969). 21.

[13] For the *Book of Mormon* as symbolic artifact of prophetic validation, literary scholar Terryl L. Givens offers a semiotic interpretation of the performativity and materiality of the text, claiming, "In any assessment of Joseph's prophetic stature, the first and greatest evidence of his favor was the Book of Mormon he so miraculously obtained and translated. His role and authority as prophet and seer rested firmly on the validity of those claims. Joseph's own persistent emphasis on the record's origins over its content reinforced the book's role as sign and symbol rather than embodiment of new theology." Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002). 84.

and the distribution of authority throughout a religious system, or any number of critical perspectives.

Such a framework for analysis would certainly be valid. Nonetheless, the proscription of cultural performances within a theatrical framework–i.e., carving out artificial boundaries to isolate a final performance *product* from the surrounding performance *sequence*–hazards the risk of erasing crucial components of the overall event. This danger is particularly apropos with respect to cultural performances, where the boundaries delineating ritualized and ceremonial behaviors might not be rendered as distinct and visible as the beginning and ending, for instance, of a Broadway musical or a literary work.[14]

In his book *Between Theater & Anthropology* (1985), Richard Schechner, one of the founders of performance studies as a field, notes how the exclusive focus on final performance events (the product) can impede a thorough examination of the constituent parts embedded within a performance considered holistically (including the process). Commenting during a period when the study of performance was experiencing increased attention in academia, Schechner observed: "Generally, scholars have paid attention to the show, not to the whole seven-part sequence of training, workshops, rehearsals, warm-ups, performance, cool-down, and aftermath. . . . Just as the phases of the public performance itself make a system, so the whole 'performance sequence' makes a larger, more inclusive system."[15] Schechner further pointed out that, "In limiting their investigations mostly to what happens during the performance itself, scholars are following modern Euro-American theatrical convention: You

[14] For the purposes of this dissertation, I find Jeffrey C. Alexander's definition of cultural performance particularly useful: "Cultural performance is the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation. This meaning may or may not be one to which they themselves subjectively adhere; it is the meaning that they, as social actors, consciously or unconsciously wish to have others believe. In order for their display to be effective, actors must offer a plausible performance, one that leads those to whom their actions and gestures are directed to accept their motives and explanations as a reasonable account. . . . Successful performance depends on the ability to convince others that one's performance is true, with all the ambiguities that the notion of aesthetic truth implies." Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy," *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 4 (December) (2004): 529-30.

[15] Richard Schechner, *Between Theater & Anthropology* (Philadephia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1985). 16.

don't go backstage unless you're part of the show," later adding the warning that the different phases of the performance sequence "are not emphasized equally in all cultures."[16] Indeed, the transmission of cultural knowledge and performance techniques, along with the construction of meaning and identification within networks of social discourse, occurs primarily "off stage" in the preparatory phases of cultural performances.[17]

Schechner is not alone in his critique of the cultural biases that highlight one aspect of the performance process over another. In her incisive discussion on the component of social support in the artistic process and the (myth of) "the autonomy of the art object," Shannon Jackson uncovers further cultural biases, often present as unquestioned assumptions, that attempt to extract a work of art from its creative and socio-cultural context:

> . . . the conventions of the nineteenth-century idealist aesthetic argued that art achieved its greatness to the degree that its representations transcended its material substrate, rising above its raw material and its social apparatus of production. This is one way of casting an early aesthetic opposition between "autonomy" and "heteronomy." Transcendent art achieved that state by appearing to exist independently from its material, that is, it seemed to exist autonomously from the conditions of its making.[18]

Thus, the impulse to define a cultural performance as a "product," with definable boundaries and quantifiable components, potentially exposes the tendencies and default perspectives embedded within a given value system. And, as Jackson indicates, the attempt to frame a production as an autonomous entity further reveals the possible involvement of overt strategies of aesthetic idealism that valorize the performance *product* as a cultural commodity, while actively erasing the performance *process* as an inconsequential element (if recognized at all). With these cautions in mind, the analysis of cultural performances requires particular sensitivity to the social contexts in which the performances occur.

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[16] Ibid., 19.

[17] Schechner observes that, "among Indigenous Australians, for example, the elders will spend hours discussing, arguing, and arranging for what results in a ten-minute performance that is part of a much longer initiation rite." *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002). 238-39.

[18] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011). 31.

These concerns have direct relevance to the study of Joseph Smith's performance of the *Book of Mormon*. Any analysis that constructs artificial boundaries surrounding the dictation event, or limiting the study to his creative product, will fail to account for one of the most central questions and fundamental components of the overall performance: how Smith managed to create and recite such a massive epic in the first place, without the apparent aid of books, notes or manuscripts (again, with the possible exception of consulting a King James Bible for a limited number of passages). Therefore, setting aside, or rather bracketing, the question of sacred inspiration and divine translation through supernatural means, this dissertation will examine the immersive performative culture of Smith's time in order to observe the techniques of oral composition and narrative creation that emerge in Smith's text and that undergird his sustained act of narrative imagination.[19]

Smith's oral production of *The Book of Mormon*, a narrative containing approximately 250,000 to 270,000 words, is a feat that understandably impresses modern readers and writers.[20] Whereas an author might toil over a literary project of similar length for a number of years, Smith's rapid oral production of this text in a three-month period of time seems unusually swift and ostensibly mysterious; and, at least from a modern text-biased viewpoint, a feat perhaps even impossible for a 24 year-old frontier farmer in early nineteenth-century America.

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[19] I am specifically invoking Grant Hardy's strategy of "bracketing," or rather suspending "questions of historicity in favor of a detailed examination of what the Book of Mormon is and how it operates." Grant Hardy, *Understanding The Book of Mormon* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010). xvi. Whether Joseph Smith composed the work, or merely acted as translator for an actual historical and sacred record, ranges beyond the scope of this dissertation. Within Mormon scholarship, there are differing views on the nature of the project. Some believe in a process of "tight control," suggesting Smith acted solely as a transmitter of a pre-translated work (i.e., Smith did not actually translate the text but dictated the words he saw on the surface of the seer stone). Others argue that Smith made use of his own language and conceptions to articulate the text, thus participating as an actual translator according to a spiritually discursive method. Yet others believe Smith had the flexibility to include material not originally engraved on the gold plates. For a summary of these theories in Mormon Studies, see Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon*: 147-56.

[20] Establishing an exact number of Smith's own words is difficult to assess: *The Book of Mormon* contains substantial passages lifted from the Bible, either verbatim or with minor alterations (approximately 27,000 words), which qualifies the higher estimates. Smith's prophetic idiom further incorporates biblical phraseology dependent on biblical antecedents; disentangling such passages for a word count thus becomes subjective and impractical.

The factors surrounding Smith's performance of the work are further accentuated when the text "appears to be a carefully crafted, integrated work, with multiple narrative levels, an intricate organization, and extensive intratextual phrasal allusions and borrowings."[21] Thus, comprehending Smith's production of the text requires an analysis of performance that reaches beyond the artificial boundaries of "performance as product," an arbitrary confinement to dictation sessions, to include the framework of "performance as sequence." This focus, in turn, opens the analysis to the preparatory elements leading up to the dictation.

Once the performance analysis widens to include the cultural context, relevant questions then naturally arise: can the experiences of a man who grew to adulthood in poverty in rural New England and rural New York in the early nineteenth century account for the creation of such a work? If so, what are the specific factors in Smith's life and cultural context that would have contributed to the process of creating such a complex and extended oral composition? These questions are essentially dramaturgical in nature. As Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt argue in *Dramaturgy and Performance* (2008), dramaturgy describes,

> . . . the composition of a work, whether read as a script or viewed in performance. While it is a term for the composition itself, it is also a word applied to the *discussion* of that composition [i.e., pre-performance work]. . . . dramaturgy tends to imply an observation of the play in production, the entire context of the performance event, the structuring of the artwork in all its elements (words, images, sound and so on). It also requires an awareness that theatre is live and therefore always in process, open to disruption through *both rehearsal and performance*.[22]

Referencing Adam Versényi's definition of dramaturgy as "the architecture of the theatrical event, involved in the confluence of components in a work and how they are constructed to generate meaning for the audience," Turner and Behrndt explore the "somewhat

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[21] Hardy, *Understanding*: xvii. The great length and narrative complexities of *The Book of Mormon* are two of the primary issues that many LDS scholars cite as evidence to support Smith's claim that he was translating an actual ancient record, as opposed to creating semi-extemporaneously his own imaginative composition. As Grant Hardy observes in the passage cited here, "a standard refrain in LDS commentary is 'Joseph Smith could not have written this book.'"

[22] Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). 4 (the word "discussion" is emphasized in the original; the additional emphases are mine).

slippery, elastic and inclusive" definition of dramaturgy by observing how "dramaturgical analysis implies a process of interpretation, of looking at the ways in which levels of meaning are orchestrated. Yet by describing the work as a 'theatrical event,' Versényi also makes it clear that *the object of analysis extends beyond the performance itself, to include the context, the audience and the various ways in which the work is framed*."[23] In addition to Turner and Behrndt's use of Versényi's definition for the social context of a work, Versényi explicitly mentions the role of dramaturgical analysis involved in the construction of play texts. In describing how dramaturgy analyzes the way in which plays and playwrights "affect their respective audiences," Versényi indicates that dramaturgical analysis includes the study of "*the manner in which the playwright wrote or how the piece is constructed*."[24] Thus, this approach to dramaturgical analysis turns to the creative process itself, peering into the origins of a work and the mechanics employed in its construction.

Finally, I am turning to the work of R. Kerry White, Turner and Behrndt, who further push the parameters of dramaturgical inquiry to include an analysis of the cultural contexts in which a performance emerges. Because performances are "an expression of and influence on the culture of which it is part," according to White, "social function becomes an integral part of dramaturgical analysis. This involves consideration of the ideological assumptions of the time, the power structure of the society, the purpose art is intended to serve for those who patronize it, fluctuations in taste and in value given to art, and the changing relation of the artist to society."[25] In line with this framework of dramaturgical inquiry, specifically aimed at the

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[23] Ibid., 18. For Adam Versényi's definition of dramaturgy, see Adam Versényi, "Dramaturgy/Dramaturg," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre & Performance*, ed. Dennis Kennedy (New York: Oxford UP, 2003), 386-88.

[24] "Dramaturgy," 387 (emphasis mine).

[25] Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy*: 18. Turner and Behrndt are citing White's definition of dramaturgy, see R. Kerry White, *An Annotated Dictionary of Technical, Historical, and Stylistic Terms Relating to Theatre and Drama: A Handbook of Dramaturgy* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995). 48-49. In terms of social performance, White's definition can be enhanced by Erving Goffman's use of dramaturgy as a metaphor for analyzing social behavior: "The perspective employed in this report is that of the

analysis of the origins of Smith's oral performance and production techniques, this dissertation aims to examine Smith's entire performance *process*, rather than isolating the performance *product* of the dictation event. For this positioning, I will therefore turn to Richard Schechner's discussion on the stages of performance as a model and analytical framework.

For Schechner, a comprehensive analysis of performance involves recognition of "the whole performance sequence," which he describes as a "time-space sequence composed of proto-performance, performance, and aftermath."[26] In other words, the events leading up to a performance, along with the responses that follow a performance, are integral components of the performance product. Furthermore, these antecedent and consequent stages can be just as critical to interpretation as the final "on stage" performance: "Understanding this time-space sequence means grasping how performances are generated, how they are staged in a focused manner, how they are nested within larger events, and what their long-term effects are."[27] Schechner further subdivides the "proto-performance" stage into three phases: training, workshop and rehearsal.[28] For this dissertation, Schechner's phases of "training" and "rehearsal" are particularly significant, as these are the areas that provide a framework for Joseph Smith's cultural training and cultural rehearsals. First, Schechner defines training, noting how such preparation can be "formal" or "informal":

> Training is that phase of the performance process where specific skills are learned. . . . Training may be either informal or formal. In informal training, the novice acquires

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theatrical performance; the principles derived are dramaturgical ones. I shall consider the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may or may not do while sustaining his performance before them." Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959). Preface [xi]. Turner and Behrndt elaborate on Goffman's use of dramaturgy, particularly the historical contextualization of the archaeology of performance, when summarizing how performances emerge: "Goffman suggests that our encounters may be considered as scripts, including not only our words, but also our gestures and actions. Like all scripts, *our social interactions include an element of structure, rehearsal and repetition, enabling recognition and referencing a social order*." Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy*: 5 (emphasis mine).

[26] Schechner, *Performance Studies*: 225.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

> skills over time by absorbing what is going on. . . . This training method can be very effective because what is learned is integrated into the student's overall life. . . . Formal training comes in a variety of methods. Classroom schooling is the prevalent kind of formal training today. But there is also apprenticeship and one-on-one teaching.[29]

Later, Schechner elaborates on the proto-performance by defining rehearsals in the following manner: "Rehearsing is the process of building up specific blocks of proto-performance materials into larger and larger sequences of actions that are assembled into a whole, finished performance."[30] He later adds, "during rehearsals proto-performances are researched, interpreted, absorbed, recomposed, and rewritten."[31] With these phases of proto-performance in mind, the stages of training (formal and informal) and rehearsal for cultural performances necessitate a historical analysis that contextualizes the specific social, political, religious and cultural intersections in which any given performance emerges.

This discussion leads to the central focus of this dissertation: in the chapters that follow, I will be concentrating on the *proto-performance* phases of Smith's oral production of the *Book of Mormon*, rather than the final performance of Smith's dictation event or its critical reception. And though I will analyze the dictation process toward the end of the dissertation, following a synthesis of the cultural training and rehearsal stages, this study will nevertheless devote priority to Smith's lifelong *process* of oratorical training and instruction in order to uncover the cultural context(s) in which Smith produced the *Book of Mormon*. Thus, an examination of Smith's oral performance of the *Book of Mormon* requires a return to early nineteenth-century

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[29] Ibid., 228. Apropos to this dissertation, Schechner illustrates the difference between formal and informal training by quoting Isidore Okpewho's research on African oral traditions. Okpewho's observations regarding informal training deserve mentioning: "Informal training [in oral performance and oral traditions] entails a kind of loose attachment whereby the future artist happens to live or move in an environment in which a particular kind of oral art is practiced and simply absorbs the skill in it as time goes on. . . . since no formal coaching is involved, these novices must look and listen closely and in this way absorb the ideas, the idioms, and the techniques peculiar to the art. . . . And finally, the process of learning entails that the novices use their imagination to select the relevant materials from the large amount they may have acquired and to increase their store of knowledge as time goes on." Qtd. in ibid. For the source, see Isidore Okpewho, *African Oral Literature* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1992). 21-25.

[30] Schechner, *Performance Studies*: 237.

[31] Ibid., 239.

America in order to situate *The Book of Mormon* within the wider context of orality and cultural performance in the nascent republic.

Smith's era and location were marked by a rich variety of oral presentations, shaped by the technologies of the time, the dynamic relationship between orality and print culture, and the role of public speaking in the cultural imagination of the people. Whether at home, school, church, work or any number of various social and civic gatherings, the cultural institutions in post-Revolutionary America taught, developed and encouraged oratorical skills at a level unparalleled in twenty-first century American practices. And though Smith's accomplishments would no doubt position him as an exceptional religious innovator, producing revelations and new scripture on a level that few of his contemporaries would match, the oratorical training he received and the pathways of his development were quite common among his peers.

As such, Smith's life and circumstances provide a cultural lens through which to catch a glimpse of the widespread and extensive role of oratorical training and performance in the cultural milieu of early nineteenth-century America. Accordingly, this dissertation will examine the centrality of oratorical training and the specific formal and informal educational experiences that would have prepared Smith for such an ambitious undertaking.

The Ephemerality of Oral Performance

Finally, I need to remark on the difficulties of reconstructing historical performances, and, especially, in excavating their preparatory stages. Any project that seeks to reconstruct past performances immediately confronts an insurmountable challenge: no matter how much documentation, no matter how many eyewitness accounts, the actual experience of the performance itself–the multisensory and multifaceted knowledge of a living, breathing performance–always eludes the historian. The gap ("chasm" being perhaps a better metaphor) between the written account of a performance and the performance itself only allows the reader of historical documents to reconstruct a mere shadow of the actual event in the imagination. In

her popular novel *Evelina; or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), for example, author Franny Burney captures this conundrum of inadequate and extremely partial reportage. In a letter to the Rev. Mr. Villars, Evelina, the title character of the novel, describes the performance of the famous actor David Garrick in the play *The Suspicious Husband* (1747):

> O my dear Sir, in what raptures am I returned! Well may Mr. Garrick be so celebrated, so universally admired—I had not any idea of so great a performer. Such ease! such vivacity in his manner! such grace in his motions! such fire and meaning in his eyes!—I could hardly believe he had studied a written part, for every word seemed to be uttered from the impulse of the moment. His action—at once so graceful and so free!—His voice—so clear, so melodious, yet so wonderfully various in its tones!—Such animation!—every look *speaks*! I would have given the world to have had the whole play acted over again. And when he danced—O how I envied Clarinda! I almost wished to have jumped on the stage, and joined them. I am afraid you will think me mad, so I won't say any more; yet I really believe Mr. Garrick would make you mad too if you could see him.[32]

In spite of her detailed and enthusiastic catalogue of Garrick's vivacious performance skills, Evelina instinctively realizes that her description does not adequately convey the overall power and affective force of Garrick's performance: "I really believe Mr. Garrick would make you mad too *if you could see him*." And therein lies the rub of historical performance: written accounts, scripts, texts, documentation, observer notes, etc., fall short of providing a holistic, multisensory account of the performance event, much less its preparatory stages. And apart from providing an inadequate account of a full performance, the documentation of such an event, i.e., the "product," creates a potentially misleading framework for analysis. The fixation

[32] Fanny Burney, *Evelina; or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, New Edition ed., 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: W. Lowndes, 1794). 19. Franny Burney was a personal acquaintance of David Garrick's; her account of Garrick's acting skills thus derives from the viewpoint of someone who witnessed many of his performances, as well as his life offstage. Furthermore, Burney's novelized account offers a typical example of the ways in which eighteenth-century observers recorded their impressions of performances: by focusing on the manners and actions of the lead character(s) and how the performances affected their personal emotions and affective responses. In such cases, the play's text, plot, and other characters garner little attention. Burney's account, though embedded in a fictional text, nevertheless reflects another common challenge with representations of performances in the period: determining when the written accounts specifically refer to the text of the performance event or the qualities and characteristics of the performer's mannerisms and interpretations. Evelina clearly does not really care about the play or text, its author or its origins, except as it functions as a vehicle for Garrick's performance and her reaction to it. But, in either case, the representation is quite partial and certainly not holistic.

on the textual residue of a performance–or, in Evelina's case, one performance–oftentimes leads to the construction of a limited and proscribed border surrounding what took place, introducing a textual bias that valorizes the impoverished written accounts over the more visceral and ephemeral–yet no less significant–aspects of a living event.

Such imbalance has prompted performance scholars, such as Diana Taylor, to reconceptualize the role of archival materials in relation to performance knowledge. Taylor's concept of the "scenario," for example, attempts to bring diverse archival materials (resources contained within the archives) together with the acts of cultural performance (practices outside the archives) to recuperate historical knowledge. Critical to her project is the activation of the term *repertoire* as an epistemological source of performative knowledge equal in value to the traditional text-centered *archive*. The repertoire contains the non-textual, non-archival cultural practices that make use of modes of transmission outside conventional documentation via texts, and which enact "embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing–in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge."[33] Certainly, Taylor's theoretical terms, which she utilizes as a framework for analyzing first encounter narratives between European explorers and indigenous Native Americans, provide a conceptual model for discussing the importance of oral culture and oral performance in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America, the world that formed Smith's considerable talents and listened to his oral performances, or, at least, read its textual residue.

Regarding the frequency, creativity, and power of oral performance in the early American republic, Sandra Gustafson also summarizes the pervasive challenges of accessing these historical performances by way of written texts in terms that are particularly salient to this dissertation:

> I have necessarily relied on speech texts and written descriptions of speeches to reconstruct the performances of early American orators. This textually mediated

[33] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). 22.

> approach to an evanescent and radically context-oriented art raises a variety of problems with sources that are different in degree, if not always in kind, from those that scholars examining works of literature encounter. . . . The translation of the elusive performance into textual form creates a stable point of reference that can be misleading if taken as a full and authentic account of the oration as event. . . . Sermons and speeches that were fully composed before they were delivered were commonly revised for publication. Shorthand records of sermons or courtroom proceedings are not always fully accurate. Reconstructed speeches were shaped by memory after some passage of time."[34]

As Gustafson notes, the textual accounts of historical performances can often be unreliable and always partial. For scholars studying the historical performance practices involved in oratorical training, rhetorical delivery and the pervasive sermon culture of the early American republic, texts that document the specific word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase choices of a speaker in the act of performance are extremely rare. Archival records of speeches and sermons are usually entangled in, and obscured by, either incomplete textual evidence or by complex layers of textual production that conceal the original performances.

Related issues emerge in studies examining the role of oral performance and discourse among cultural institutions. For instance, in his influential work, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, & the Culture of Performance* (1993), Jay Fliegelman alludes to this difficulty, which touches on the central thesis of his project, that, "defining independence as a rhetorical problem as much as a political one, much of this book is concerned with recovering the conditions of speaking and writing operative in 1776: *what was assumed, but not spoken, in the domain of action and speech*."[35] In *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America* (1997), an important study of the private discourse occurring in taverns, coffeehouses, salons, social societies, etc., David S. Shields indicates how much of this form of communication observes "a *self-conscious avoidance of print* by participants in certain of these institutions. This avoidance

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[34] Sandra M. Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory & Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: The Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture University of North Carolina Press, 2000). xxiv-xxv.

[35] Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language & the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). 3 (emphasis mine).

of print became at times a condition of communication."[36] Thus, the challenges of recovering texts and reconstructing oral performances are further complicated by cultural assumptions and practices that obscure, rather than reveal, the historical conditions and detailed accounts of speech events.

Among the various manifestations of oral performance, popular religious sermons are particularly problematic when attempting to determine an "authentic" text or performance (i.e., the actual words spoken in the moment of performance). From the colonial period in North America through the formation of the United States and reaching well into the following centuries, a thriving sermon culture existed by way of accounts of sermons circulated among religious communities in the form of pamphlets, books and numerous handwritten manuscripts. The shape and content of printed sermons, both authorized and unauthorized, usually derived from a number of different and often overlapping editorial forces: the elliptical outlines of a minister's sermon notes, texts drawn exclusively from the memory of the preacher and/or audience members, the redactions made by printers and publishers, and the handwritten manuscript accounts constructed from fragmentary auditor notebooks, which varied widely in their fidelity to the original performance (which reflected the idiosyncratic recording habits and the attention span of listeners, as much as the clarity of the thoughts and ideas of the speaker).[37] The eventual printed forms of these sermons usually involved more than one of these stages of textual alteration, further removing the record from the originating performance and certainly from its preparation. And in all cases, the textual records deprive the reader of the full experience of the performance ambiance that surrounded the oral delivery.

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[36] David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters* (Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture and U of North Carolina P, 1997). xxx (emphasis mine).

[37] Meredith Neuman's study of Puritan sermon auditors reveals how "many auditors manage to get down whole, spoken phrases at the beginning of a sermon, but slow down and simply record heads (numbered reasons, uses, and so on) as they get further into the text. Conversely, many auditors seem to get carried away toward the ends of sermons, writing out fairly full applications, for example, while the doctrine explication has been more or less skeletal. Some of these differences of recording are likely related to attention span and interest." Meredith Marie Neuman, *Jeremiah's Scribes: Creating Sermon Literature in Puritan New England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2013). 65.

In an observation about Puritan sermons in colonial New England–an observation equally applicable to the circulation of sermons in the early American republic–Meredith Neuman advises that, "sermon literature in the seventeenth century was primarily oral. Written accounts of that orality, whether in print or in manuscript, serve only as approximations—useful because of their portability but inherently limited in their accuracy."[38] Neuman later adds, "there is no direct line from the orality of the delivered sermon to an authoritative print edition."[39] Because printed sermons almost never reduplicate all the words and phrases of the performed sermon, much less the cadences and emphases of the delivery, or the response of the spectators or auditors, it becomes a near impossible task to recover the exact language and affective responses that emerged in the moment of presentation.

To complicate the study of oral performance–specifically extemporaneous and semi-extemporaneous performances–researchers are confronted with the lack of documentation of any kind for a countless number of sermons and exhortations delivered at revivals and camp meetings. The First and Second Great Awakenings in North America, initially fueled by George Whitefield's preaching tours in the early eighteenth century and reaching to the outpourings of spiritual revivalism well into the nineteenth century, saw a dramatic increase in the popularity of (semi-)extemporaneous sermons. Preachers abandoned (or sometimes pretended to abandon) their preset sermons and notes in order to speak according to the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, whenever and wherever those impulses might lead. The predictable and formulaic sermon templates of the established churches began to suffer competition with extemporaneous and semi-extemporaneous forms that allowed preachers to react immediately to inspiration or to audience responses, providing the orator with the flexibility to expand, condense or newly invent portions of their sermons and exhortations in the very act of

[38] Ibid., 46.

[39] Ibid., 58. See also, Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious culture in Colonial New England* (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1986). 4.

performance.[40] Such so-called "New Light" ministers, along with hordes of lay exhorters and lay preachers, delivered these "impromptu" sermons and exhortations in churches, homes, fields and revival campgrounds. Yet, these performances, at least the vast majority them, have simply vanished, leaving behind no records of what was spoken or their emotive impact. Even more evanescent, or, at least, dispersed, are the cultural practices that led to these oral performances.

Although the "new method" extemporaneous sermons are often mentioned in diaries, letters, sermon notebooks, manuscripts and some published accounts, these same records almost never contain verbatim transcriptions or sustained depictions of entire performances. Sermons and exhortations lasting several hours are usually reduced to a handful of phrases and a few accompanying remarks. A typical example comes from the Kentucky Revivals, a series of revivals that swept through the state and included the famous Cane Ridge Revival of 1801, where young children overcome by the Spirit would speak for hours to audiences. Yet the only record of what some of them actually said (and how they expressed it), for example, is "a short specimen" of biblical-style phrases: "O, the sweetness of redeeming love! O if sinners knew the sweetness of redeeming love, they would all come to the overflowing fountain!"[41] One young boy "spoke for about an hour," but the only record of what he said, or how he said it, is the final phrase of his extended oration: "When his strength seemed quite exhausted and language failed to describe the feelings of his soul, he raised his hand and dropping his handkerchief, wet with sweat from his little face, cried out—'Thus, O sinner! shall you drop into hell, unless you forsake

[40] Neuman cautions against categorizing the extemporaneous sermons of the New Light movements with the Puritan and Congregationalist style: "Puritan ministers often spoke *ex tempore*, a style of delivery that might suggest the enthusiasm and spontaneity associated with later trends in evangelical preaching from the Great Awakening through current-day revivalism, but such comparison is misleading. Puritan *ex tempore* skill in the pulpit was developed through university training in which the memorization of lectures and sermons was standard pedagogical method. . . . The formulaic structure of the sermon served as a kind of vernacular of Puritan preaching." Neuman, *Jeremiah's Scribes*: 14-15.

[41] Richard McNemar, *The Kentucky Revival, Or, A Short History of the Late Extraordinary Out-Pouring of the Spirit of God, in the Western States of America* (Cincinnati: E. and E. Hosford, 1808; repr., Albany). 34-35.

your sins and turn to the Lord.' At that moment some fell like those who are shot in battle."[42] Even here, however, the authenticity of the (often stock and formulaic) phrases of testimony and exhortation cannot be verified, and the affective experiences, clearly as important as the content, remain ephemeral. Accounts of such events are usually memorial reconstructions and inevitable condensations, written after the actual events—and often long afterwards.

Within this archival maelstrom of written accounts that frequently provide unreliable and partial documentation of the original oral performances, Joseph Smith's text of *The Book of Mormon* offers an extraordinary example by which one can observe in detail the specific language of semi-extemporaneous oral production in the political and religious cultural milieus of the early nineteenth century. Unlike the numerous accounts of oral performance that auditors reconstructed at a later time from shorthand notes, Smith carefully dictated the entire book to his amanuenses, pausing after every phrase to ensure that his scribes were recording his performance verbatim in the moment of utterance. The opportunity to study such a historical performance in such exquisite detail is extremely rare. Yet, having such an extensive verbatim manuscript does not, of course, solve all the challenges with reconstructing Smith's creative oral performance of the massive text.

Like the script of a play, the words in the manuscript do not reveal all the dynamics of the performance event itself (or its origins): the ambiance and effect of the performance space (the confining space of a spare two-bedroom cabin, with the oppressive heat and humidity during those spring and summer days of 1829, contrasted by the chill and shadows of candle-lit work in the evenings); the reverent and ritualized atmosphere inherent in translating a sacred record; Smith's pace of dictation, the rhythms and cadences of his voice, along with the words and phrases he emphasized at each stage of a narrative episode; the dynamic but often unspoken exchanges between Smith and his amanuenses, as they honed the practice of recording and the precision of the text; the occasional presence of observers to the process; and many other

[42] Ibid., 25-26.

significant extratextual features, as well. The final text, though important, even paramount, nevertheless remains the residue of a grander, multifaceted performance derived from Smith's lifelong preparation for its creation.

Yet, as ephemeral and transitory as the actual historical performance might be, the textual residue reveals critical information about the *origins* and *process* of Smith's performance. Certainly, the original scribal manuscript of Smith's dictation of the *Book of Mormon* opens an exceptional window into the language of revivalism and creative cultures of spiritual devotion. As this dissertation will observe, Smith grew up in some of the most spiritually dynamic (or spiritually inflamed) regions of the country, where theological innovation and ecstatic experiences dominated the religious landscape. He was born and raised in the Upper Connecticut River Valley, one of the hotbeds of New Light extemporaneous preaching and enthusiastic revivalism.[43] And later, after the Smith family moved to Upstate New York, specifically into the region famously known as the "Burned Over District" for its intense religious fervor and evangelical innovation, Smith would be even more deeply exposed to the extemporaneous forms of lay preachers and exhorters.

Indeed, Smith's experiences, according to his own account, would be particularly influenced by the Methodists, the inheritors of the renowned rhetorical performances of George Whitefield and John Wesley. When reflecting on the religious experiences in his youth, Smith noted, "In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them."[44] According to Oliver Cowdery, a Methodist preacher and

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[43] In addition to a concentrated mass of lay preachers and exhorters, graduates of Yale, as Harry Stout observes, who "generally favored extemporaneous outlines" in the construction and delivery of sermons would upon graduation enter "the homes of New Light pastors for postgraduate study in the new methods of preaching, and from there they poured into the Connecticut countryside and the towns along the Connecticut River Valley." Stout, *The New England Soul*: 220.

[44] Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, ed. B.H. Roberts, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1902). 3. Subsequent references to this multivolume work will be shortened to *HC*, followed by volume and page numbers (e.g., Smith, *HC*, 1: 3); references to the 1948 edition will contain the publication date in parenthesis (e.g., Smith, *HC (1948)*, 1: 3).

"presiding Elder of the Methodist church" by the name of George Lane had inspired young Joseph during a revival tour: "Elder Lane was a tallented [sic] man possessing a good share of literary endowments. . . . Mr. Lane's manner of communication was peculiarly calculated to awaken the intellect of the hearer, and arouse the sinner to look about him for safety. . . and in common with others, our brother's [Joseph's] mind became awakened."[45] Encounters such as this one inspired Smith, who, for a period of time, trained in the extemporaneous and semi-extemporaneous techniques of Methodist exhorters. The future prophet of the Mormon faith participated in a Methodist camp meeting "away down in the woods, on the Vienna road" and "was a very passable exhorter in evening meetings," according to Orsamus Turner, a resident of Palmyra, NY, where Smith spent his teenage years and early adulthood.[46]

Smith's exposure to the language and techniques of revivalism was by no means his only source of oratorical inspiration, training and performance. Smith's approach to composition, coupled with the specific language of the resulting *Book of Mormon* text, reveals a kaleidoscope of cultural influences that informed the production of the work. This array of resources further involves a complex network of social, political, cultural, and religious practices and ideologies: Smith's use of a seer stone, for instance, implicates his performance in the practice of folk magic and the study of occult philosophy; the framework of his narrative structures reflects the emerging pedagogical approaches to composition in home schools, common schools and institutions of secondary education; his sustained performance of a complex epic over an extended period of days, weeks and months suggests the deep influence of storytelling practices

[45] Qtd. in Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*: 23. William Smith, one of Joseph's younger brothers, described Rev. George Lane's influence on the Smith family, recalling, "In 1822 and 1823, the people in our neighborhood were very much stirred up with regard to religious matters by the preaching of a Mr. Lane, an Elder of the Methodist Church, and celebrated throughout the country as a 'great revival preacher.'" Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 494. In a later interview, William described the Smith family's attendance at "a joint revival in the neighborhood between the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians" in which "a Rev. Mr. Lane of the Methodists preached a sermon on 'what church shall I join?' And the burden of his discourse was to ask God, using as a text, 'If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally [James 1:5].' And of course when Joseph went home and was looking over the text he was impressed to do just what the preacher had said." Ibid., 1:513.

[46] Vogel, *EMD*, 3: 50.

of early nineteenth-century oral culture; his themes, such as social inequality, warfare, liberty of conscience, patriotism (with a distinct American perspective) and democratic ideology, reflect the urgent and popular concerns of his age; and his language, saturated in a biblical idiom and filled with a variety of contemporary subjects and theological innovations, reveals his deep and abiding interest in the religious ideologies and controversies of his day.

The confluence of such cultural influences resulted in a linguistic style for the *Book of Mormon* that combined biblical authority with both dramatic and demotic approachability. And while Smith's production of an epic historical narrative was certainly not a common manifestation of such intersecting performance practices, the fundamental oral techniques Smith employed were the same techniques common to storytellers, preachers, trance lecturers and other social and political orators in early nineteenth-century America. Thus, understanding both the structure and form of the *Book of Mormon*, as well as the content and the techniques deployed in its construction, requires positioning such practices within the complex cultural networks of Smith's environment. By locating Smith's performance within a wider milieu of regional and national practices, this dissertation will seek to provide critical insights into the specific oral strategies, spoken aesthetics and verbal techniques that Smith utilized in his creation of the *Book of Mormon*.

Chapter Summary

Chapter One, "Joseph Smith's Changing America," situates Joseph Smith's production of the *Book of Mormon* within the turbulent era of radical social change in the early American republic, with an emphasis on the paramount role of orality in cultural institutions.

Chapter Two, "Religion, Folk Magic and Christian Occultism," extends the historical context to include the dynamic and innovative forms of religious experimentation.

Chapter Three, "Education and the Trope of the Uneducated Oracle," examines the popular religious and secular trope of (self-)representation, in which people often framed the extraordinary accomplishments of certain individuals within (auto)biographical narratives contrasting their humble beginnings with their eventual astonishing achievements.

Chapter Four, "Formal Education: From Schoolbooks to Oral Performance," explores the fundamental training and techniques of oral performance and oratorical delivery that children encountered in common schools.

Chapter Five, "Informal Education," explores the avenues of self-improvement that many early nineteenth-century Americans pursued as a supplement to, or substitute for, their formal education.

Chapter Six, "Memory, Imitation and Composition," explores key techniques in oral performance, focusing on the emphasis of memory in education and the use of patterns in both oral and written composition.

Chapter Seven, "Advanced Rhetorics: John Walker and Hugh Blair," explores schoolbooks that Hyrum Smith, one of Joseph Smith's older brothers, would have studied at Moor's Indian Charity School, along with analyzing how those rhetorics inform the construction of the *Book of Mormon*.

Chapter Eight, “Inspired by the Holy Spirit: Religious and Semi-Extemporaneous Oral Performance,” looks at how oral performance techniques emerged in the cultures of revivalism and religious enthusiasm.

Chapter Nine, “Synthesis: Storytelling Culture and Oral-Formulaic Composition,” pulls together the various cultural streams of oral performance training and techniques to demonstrate Smith’s method of oral-formulaic composition in the production of the *Book of Mormon*.

Finally, the Epilogue addresses key implications of Smith’s oral performance, along with pointing toward avenues for further research.

Chapter One: Joseph Smith's Changing America

Smith's oral performance of the *Book of Mormon* did not emerge as an autonomous eruption of private creativity, self-contained in its origin and devoid of influence from the oral traditions, storytelling practices and oratorical techniques in his cultural context. Rather, Smith produced his work in a time when the spoken word dominated every aspect of life. At home, early nineteenth-century American families read the Bible together, told original and traditional stories around the fireside, read aloud books for entertainment, and listened to children practice oral presentations for classwork assignments. In schools, students developed public speaking skills through the use of "oratorical selections intended to develop elocutionary ability, which was considered to be an important factor in social life under a democratic government."[47] From common schools to colleges and seminaries, students were "immersed in oral culture" where "day in, day out, students stood before their teachers and recited passages they had committed to memory. . . . They also penned and performed essays, dialogues, poems, and songs, which they circulated as manuscripts."[48] Church-goers of all ages attended Sunday schools and used Sunday school libraries to further their education. Children in Sunday schools supplemented whatever public learning they received through reading aloud, memorizing and reciting scriptures and devotional works.[49] To encourage excellence in recitation and declamation, Sunday school leaders, as well as common school teachers, frequently awarded medals or prizes

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[47] Nila Banton Smith, *American Reading Instruction* (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1986). 42.

[48] Mary Kelley, "Introduction: Section III, Educating the Citizenry," in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, *A History of the Book in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: American Antiquarian Society in Association with The U of North Carolina P, 2010), 271.

[49] Edward and Elaine Gordon observe how "children and adults attended Sunday schools because no other formal schooling opportunities were available to them." Sunday school classes were also often patterned on common school formats, which "were divided into four grades: infant, elementary, scripture, and senior." Edward E. Gordon and Elaine H. Gordon, *Literacy in America: Historic Journey and Contemporary Solutions* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003). 89.

to children: copies of the New Testament and John Bunyan's enormously popular book *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) were often favored rewards.[50] Following Sunday school lessons, church attendees would listen to sermons, which, cumulatively in the colonial period (a trend that would continue through the early nineteenth-century), numbered "something like seven thousand sermons in a lifetime, totaling somewhere around fifteen thousand hours of concentrated listening."[51] Outside the walls of the church, camp meetings and revivals exposed participants to countless extemporaneous speeches by pastors and lay exhorters, triggering emotional reactions that caused some audience members to fall into trances, have visions, deliver impromptu sermons and speak in tongues.[52]

Other hubs of public speaking appeared in the form of "gentlemen's clubs, social libraries, and literary coteries devoted to 'polite' forms of culture, and the expansion of taverns, rural stores, and public performances distributing and nurtured on ballads, broadsides, and newspapers."[53] Mutual improvement associations dotted the nation; from urban centers to rural outposts, men and women (often separated by gender) would gather together formally to debate politics, religion, science and literature.[54] Taverns in particular "were Americans' most

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[50] See Anne Dunan-Page, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, ed. Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 2. Emma Mason, "The Victorians and Bunyan's Legacy," in *the Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, ed. Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 152. Norman Vance, "Pilgrims Abounding: Bunyan and the Victorian Novel," in *Reception, Appropriation, Recollection: Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim, *Religions and Discourse* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishers, 2007), 73.

[51] Stout, *The New England Soul*: 4.

[52] For an exceptional analysis of the history of spiritual and psychological responses to revivalism, see Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[53] David D. Hall and Elizabeth Carroll Reilly, "Practices of Reading," in *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, ed. Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, *A History of the Book in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: American Antiquarian Society in Association with the U of North Carolina P, 2007), 379. For a detailed and deeply informative study of orality in such venues, see David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters* (Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture and U of North Carolina P, 1997).

[54] Debate societies were frequently, though not exclusively, associated with schools. Dean Grodzins and Leon Jackson indicate that "every college in this period featured two or more debating societies." Dean Grodzins and Leon Jackson, "Colleges and Print Culture," in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and*

important centers of male sociability," where men came together to tell one another stories, "to hear the latest news from teamsters and travelers or to read the latest newspaper."[55] For entire communities, country stores "were central gathering places that linked households and neighborhoods, community forums and information centers."[56] In all of these places, communal reading and speech-making were common activities, where, for instance, a speaker might read aloud the notes from a sermon, passages from a book, the latest newspaper, a poem, or some important public notice to eager listeners gathered around the reader.[57] In this "diverse milieux" of orality and print culture, Robert Gross emphasizes,

> The spoken word was the primary vehicle of communication, carrying gossip, rumor, information, and opinion from neighbor to neighbor, building folk memories and communal bonds through story and song, ornamenting public events, and upholding authority from the pulpit and the bench and cutting it down in debates of town meetings, the talk of taverns and coffeehouses, and shouts from a crowd. Messages on paper, whether in manuscript or print, served as adjuncts to these ongoing conversations.[58]

In the early decades of the American republic, oral performances further concentrated on the national project of shaping the emerging American identity. Oratory, as Lawrence Buell

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Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, *A History of the Book in America* (U of North Carolina P: American Antiquarian Society in Association with The U of North Carolina P, 2010), 328.

[55] Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840*, ed. Richard Balkin, The Everyday Life in America (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1989). 281-82.

[56] Ibid., 263.

[57] Melville poeticizes this cultural practice of communal reading in the opening stanza of his Civil War poem *Donelson*: "About the bulletin-board a band / Of eager, anxious people met, / And every wakeful heart was set / On latest news from West or South. / 'No seeing here,' cries one—'don't crowd'— / 'You tall man, pray you, read aloud.'" Herman Melville, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War: Civil War Poems* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2001). 68.

[58] Robert A. Gross, "Reading for an Extensive Republic," in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, *A History of the Book in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: American Antiquarian Society in association with the U of North Carolina P, 2010), 518.

observes, "was perceived as socially functional."[59] Such oral performances were anything but passive; from childhood through adulthood, citizens were involved–indeed, *expected*–to engage actively in various forms of oral performance as a way of participating in the ongoing construction of the new democratic society. "Enlightenment intellectuals," Buell continues, "were conditioned to view oratory not just as a graceful accomplishment but as a vital sign of the health of the Republic."[60] Referencing Tocqueville's observations of the early American republic, scholar Sandra Gustafson describes the active democratic involvement of Americans in this formative period: "mimicking the forms of state with their constitutions, debates, and parliamentary procedures, voluntary associations were organized to solve social problems through economic development (agricultural societies and working men's groups), institution building (Bible societies and churches), moral reform and self-culture (temperance, the lyceum movement), and social reform (colonization societies and mission societies)."[61] Organizations emerged to address the various concerns of building communities, and open discussion and debate were the vehicles by which such interactions advanced the various agendas.

Thus, wherever people met together, whatever the pretenses might be, oral performance inevitably played a central role in the proceedings. Within this cultural milieu, with its hybrid rhetoric of religious and political vocabularies, Smith would develop the skills of oral performance that would enable him to produce *The Book of Mormon*.[62] And the process of oratorical training would have started in his childhood.

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[59] Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture from Revolution Through Renaissance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986; repr., 1998). 138.

[60] Ibid., 139.

[61] Sandra M. Gustafson, *Imagining Deliberative Democracy in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011). 4.

[62] For a detailed discussion on the hybridization of religious and political rhetoric, see Christopher Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Forms, and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996). 224-29.

The Origins of Mormonism

The canonical backstory to Smith's creation of *The Book of Mormon* and his future prophetic calling usually begins with the events leading up to what is known today among Mormons as the First Vision, a theophany narrative that adheres to a common pattern of spiritual conversion and visionary events among religious enthusiasts in the early nineteenth century.[63] In his history, Smith recounts how, as a fourteen year-old boy, he was confused about the various sects of Christian faiths and unable to determine which church taught God's true doctrine: "I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?" He decided to turn privately to God to find an answer.

Repairing to a grove of trees, known today as the "Sacred Grove" on the Smith family farm in Manchester, NY, Smith began to offer up a prayer. No sooner did he begin his supplication than a malevolent spirit "from the unseen world" attempted to thwart him: "I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction." At the moment when he thought the satanic force would destroy him, Smith "saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. . . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air." The evil spirit fled at the appearance of God the Father and Jesus Christ; and in the ensuing encounter, Joseph would learn that all the churches on earth were "wrong" and "that all their creeds were an abomination." One of the divine

[63] Smith's story follows a common narrative pattern for conversions and visionary experiences in early nineteenth-century America. For an analysis of Smith's First Vision in relation to Methodist conversion narrative patterns, see Christopher C. Jones, "The Power and Form of Godliness: Methodist Conversion Narratives and Joseph Smith's First Vision," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (2011): 88-114. For a wider survey of conversion narratives in conjunction with visions, see Ann Kirschner, ""Tending to Edify, Astonish, and Instruct": Published Narratives of Spiritual Dreams and Visions in the Early Republic," *Early American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2003): 198-229.

personages further revealed "many other things" that Smith was instructed not to share at that time.[64]

Three years after his theophany, Smith claimed to receive another angelic visitation. Sometime during the night of September 1, 1823, Smith found himself surrounded by a supernatural light. As the light suffused his bedroom, he saw an angelic visitor appear dressed in a loose-fitting white robe, levitating above the ground, "for his feet did not touch the floor," and his "countenance" was "truly like lightening." According to Smith, the angel who appeared to him was the spirit of an ancient Native American prophet, descended from Israelites who migrated to the Americas in antiquity, named Moroni. The Angel Moroni then informed Smith "concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of this country, and shown who they were, and from whence they came; a brief sketch of their origin, progress, civilization, laws, governments, of their righteousness and iniquity, and the blessings of God being finally withdrawn from them as a people."[65] Moroni then revealed how the history of these ancient people, written in an unknown hieroglyphic script called "Reformed Egyptian," was buried in a nearby hill, together with an object called the "Urim and Thummim" (identical to the instrument of divination, also called the Urim and Thummim, of biblical lore), which Smith would use to translate the ancient record into English:[66]

> [The Angel Moroni] said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants; also, that there were two stones in silver bows—and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim—deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these

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[64] Joseph Smith, "Joseph Smith-History," in *The Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1991), 1:10-20 [48-50].

[65] Dean C. Jessee, ed. *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Deseret Book: Brigham Young UP, 2002), 243.

[66] For biblical references to the Urim and Thummim, see Exo. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; 1 Sam. 28:6; Neh. 7:65; and Ezra 2:63.

> stones were what constituted "Seers" in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.[67]

By means of divine power, the Angel Moroni purportedly revealed to Smith the location of the plates, buried in a hill not far from the Smith family farm in Manchester, New York.

The next day, following Moroni's directions, Smith went to the location of the buried plates, known today as the Hill Cumorah, and dug up the ancient text. While doing so, however, Moroni appeared to him and forbade him from removing the plates. Moroni indicated that he would eventually receive the plates in order to translate them into English for the benefit of mankind, but that Smith was not yet ready to take them. Instead, Moroni commanded him to return to the same location every year, on the same day, to receive additional instructions. Four years later, in September of 1827, when Smith was twenty-one years old, the Angel Moroni finally permitted him to retrieve the gold plates.[68]

A series of personal setbacks and disruptions would prevent Smith from translating the record right away, not least of which included the loss of the original scribal manuscript of the opening portion of the book. After completing the first 116 manuscript pages, Smith allowed one of his colleagues, Martin Harris, to take the manuscript and show it to his wife and close friends. Yet, Harris managed to lose the manuscript, which Lucy Harris, Martin's skeptical wife, likely destroyed in an attempt to stop her husband's involvement in the project.[69] Smith resumed the endeavor the following year, in 1829. This time, however, rather than using the Urim and Thummim (the two stones in silver bows, often called "spectacles," which Smith claimed to find

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[67] Smith, *HC*, 1: 12.

[68] According to Smith's description, "these records were engraven on plates which had the appearance of gold, each plate was six inches wide and eight inches long and not quite so thick as common tin. They were filled with engravings, in Egyptian characters and bound together in a volume, as the leaves of a book with three rings running through the whole. The volume was something near six inches in thickness, a part of which was sealed." Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 243.

[69] For an account of the lost manuscript, Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 64-69.

with the gold plates), Smith reverted to his more familiar seer stone to translate the record. He would complete the dictation in 1829 and see the publication of the *Book of Mormon* in 1830.

Several years later, when asked to provide a sketch of Mormonism, Smith summarized the contents of *The Book of Mormon* in the following manner:

> In this important and interesting book the history of ancient America is unfolded, from its first settlement by a colony that came from the tower of Babel, at the confusion of languages to the beginning of the fifth century of the Christian era. We are informed by these records that America in ancient times has been inhabited by two distinct races of people. The first were called Jaredites and came directly from the tower of babel. The second race came directly from the city of Jerusalem, about six hundred years before Christ. They were principally Israelites, of the descendants of Joseph. The Jaredites were destroyed about the time that the Israelites came from Jerusalem.... The principal nation of the second race fell in battle towards the close of the fourth century. The remnant are the Indians that now inhabit this country. This book also tells us that our Saviour made his appearance upon this continent after his resurrection, that he planted the gospel here in all its fulness. . . . that they had apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists; the same order, the same priesthood the same ordinances, gifts, powers, and blessing, as was enjoyed on the eastern continent [Middle East], that the people were cut off in consequence of their transgressions, that the last of their prophets who existed among them was commanded to write an abridgement of their prophesies, history &c., and to hide it up in the earth. . . . For a more particular account I would refer to the Book of Mormon, which can be purchased at Nauvoo, or from any of our traveling elders.[70]

Put more plainly, *The Book of Mormon* contains fifteen books, beginning with a prophet named Lehi, who lived in Jerusalem around 600 B.C.E., and it relates his story along with the stories of his numerous descendants. In a vision, God warns Lehi to leave Jerusalem and take his family into the wilderness. Lehi and his family eventually make their way to the American Continent and established a civilization. Internecine strife, however, tear the family apart into two warring factions: the righteous, light-skinned Nephites and the wicked, dark-skinned Lamanites. Over the course of the next thousand years, the two civilizations engage in constant cycles of warfare.

The spiritual climax of the *Book of Mormon* describes the resurrected Christ appearing to the people in the Americas. Yet, following a period of peace, the civilizations once again fall into battle, and the Lamanites eventually destroy the Nephites. The last Nephite prophet-

[70] The correspondence is often referred to as the "Wentworth Letter." See Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 244.

warrior is named Moroni. Seeing the end of his civilization coming close, he buries the records of their people in the Hill Cumorah, a drumlin in upstate New York situated a few miles south of the Smith family farm. After he dies, Moroni returns as the Angel Moroni to Joseph Smith, revealing the location of the ancient gold plates.

Joseph Smith's Post-Revolutionary America

In order to appreciate the relationship between the narratives contained in the *Book of Mormon*, which are filled with episodes of social upheaval, cyclical warfare and religious fervor, I need to pull back momentarily from Smith's immediate local context, as well as the confines of the *Book of Mormon* text, to situate Smith and his family heritage within the wider context of American history in this period.

On a microcosmic scale, Smith's epic narrative mirrored the complex and shifting dynamics of cultural innovation and change that were occurring within the new republican nation in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War. Many of the current social, political and theological concerns of Smith's world would repeatedly emerge in the content of his ambitious text, though he would refashion them in his construction of an indigenous history of ancient Native American civilizations set somewhere in the New World. America was entering the unknown territory of national independence, which, with perhaps an ironic twist, echoed the early colonial settlers' journey into the "howling wilderness" two centuries earlier. In the first decades following the Revolutionary War, the newly-formed American nation was experiencing radical dislocation and dramatic cultural shifts.

In 1776, "America" was little more than a small constellation of British colonies with their respective commercial hubs dotted along the Atlantic seaboard, each with its own set of laws and local concerns. In spite of the rhetoric of dissent against colonial rule and the affirmations of democracy and republicanism, spurred by the promise of economic prosperity and endless new social possibilities, severing ties to Old England had destabilized certain

traditional anchors of self-perception in both communal and personal ways. The circumstances of the times compelled the first generations of nation-building citizens to reexamine the cultural practices of their history, to dissect and reconstitute syncretic ways of living in their post-colonial present, and to build new and independent national and personal identities for their future. America was still struggling to define itself against its predominantly British heritage.[71]

The war with Great Britain, however, brought the disparate colonies together in a tenuous confederation. Ten years later, the Constitution (1787-1788) would stimulate a sense of national identity.[72] Thus, within a condensed period of time, American residents, once perceiving themselves as members of local colonial communities still inexorably linked to mother Britain, suddenly found themselves part of a much larger conglomeration of post-colonial establishments. They were a new country, a republican nation formulated on the ideals of self-determination and democratic freedoms, and a nation that had the audacity to assume an equal status with the great nations of Europe.

Yet, the shift from colonial to national identification did not proceed without problems. Not everyone in the former colonies wanted a federal government imposing policies on local interests, habits and economic concerns. Political differences and anti-Federalist tensions among former colonies and the cultural regions within the newly-formed American nation threatened to pull the country apart as quickly as it had been formed. The disquiet within the nation, exacerbated by foreign problems with Britain and France, would eventually lead to the

[71] Malcolm Gaskill traces the complex and often competing origins of the American identity to the seventeenth century. See Malcolm Gaskill, *Between Two Worlds: How the English Became Americans* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2014).

[72] Gordon S. Wood explains how the ratification of the Constitution caused many Americans to shift their mentality away from being "thirteen separate republics" to a single country. Quoting Benjamin Rush, Gordon reveals the sentiment of the times: "We have become a nation." Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: a History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*, ed. David M. Kennedy, The Oxford History of the United States (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2009). 7, 36-37.

War of 1812, an event that became a defining moment in the solidification of an American identity.[73]

Read against the turbulent backdrop of American life, the stories Smith wove into *The Book of Mormon* would respond directly and romantically to the social pressures and tensions of the young American nation: the struggle for liberty, religious freedom, political self-determination, the principles of a democratic society, and independence from tyrannical bondage saturated the text.

Running concordantly with broader national concerns, Joseph Smith himself was personally situated within a familial heritage of wars for independence and self-determination.

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[73] The War of 1812 occurred under the presidency of James Madison. Frustrated with trade negotiations and embargos with both Britain and France that threatened national economic stability, further complicated by Britain's practice of seizing American trade ships and enforcing the impressment of American sailors into the British navy–a tacit insistence that Americans were still subject to British whim and rule, in spite of American claims of national independence–Congress declared war in June of 1812. But the move was risky. America's military was far outmatched by Britain's. Were it not for Britain's preoccupation with its own war with France, America, which only had an army "of fewer than seven thousand regular troops" and a navy of "only sixteen vessels, not counting the dozens of gunboats," had little chance of victory against Britain's "regular army of nearly a quarter of a million men and the most powerful navy in the world." Ibid., 659-60. Yet, as Madison correctly suspected, the British were unenthusiastic about a second major war with America. Nevertheless, Madison's problems were not limited to foreign affairs; domestic problems were equally threatening. Not all Americans wanted a war with Britain, and tensions escalated between the northern, southern and western regions of the fledgling United States, threatening to tear apart the young nation. Even if America were successful in fending off Britain's attacks, internal strife could still bring the American experiment in republicanism and democracy to an abrupt end. Presented with such tensions and risks, Madison nevertheless pushed Congress for war. Even though the move was a gamble, winning the war would force Britain to recognize the United States as a nation state equal in political status to Britain and other European nations, a move which in practical terms would greatly enhance America's ability to negotiate treaties and economic agreements. But perhaps more importantly, a victory would legitimize the ideological identification of America as a free republic, where Old World social hierarchies gave way to a nation based on notions that "all men are created equal" and divinely endowed with the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." In short, the War of 1812 was primarily an ideological action that asserted an American identity and sovereignty. Ibid. Gordon S. Wood encapsulates Madison's perspective in concise terms: "He believed war was inevitable because impressment and neutral rights had come to symbolize what he and other Republicans wanted most from Britain–unequivocal recognition of the nation's sovereignty and independence." Ibid., 662. The move was bold, but it was almost short-lived. While it may be tempting to look back on America's victory as being inevitable, contemporaries of the time were anything but certain about success. Those fears would be realized when in August of 1814 British troops captured Washington, D.C., burning the President's House (later to be called the White House), along with "the Capitol and the Departments of State, War, Navy, and Treasury." Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: the Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). 65. Were it not for decisive American victories in the Battle of Baltimore (immortalized by Francis Scott Key's poem, which would form the lyrics for *The Star Spangled Banner*) and the Battle of New Orleans, America's experiment with free and democratic government might have come to an embarrassing close.

Joseph's maternal grandfather, Solomon Mack, served in both the French and Indian Wars and the Revolutionary War; and Asael Smith, Joseph's paternal grandfather, also served in the Revolutionary War. Smith's parents, Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack, were born prior to the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and they grew up during the contentious period in which the disparate colonial centers would coalesce into a single nation. They would later become newlyweds in 1796, when George Washington, the heroic general in America's battles for independence, was about to finish his second term as president. When Joseph Jr. was born on December 23, 1805, Thomas Jefferson was in office, only the third president of the fledgling American nation.

Apart from hearing the stories of his parents and grandparents, Joseph Jr. himself would experience the tensions of war. Following surgery on an infected leg during his childhood, Joseph may have traveled with his Uncle Jesse to Salem, Massachusetts, during the War of 1812.[74] At the time, Salem was a major port of trade and commerce, making it a magnet for British warships during the blockade. If Lucy's account is correct, young Joseph was staying there when the British navy was patrolling the coastal waters, seizing ships, and impressing American sailors into service. The threat of a possible invasion was a constant concern in everyday life. Joseph may well have seen the British warships on the horizon, an ever-threatening presence for the ill-equipped Americans on shore or at sea. By the time Smith published the *Book of Mormon* in 1830, Andrew Jackson–the war hero of the Battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812–had just started his first term in office. Thus, Smith's epic of war found firm grounding in the bellicosity of the times; yet, few modern scholars have offered more than a passing nod to these crucial militaristic dimensions of his epic.[75]

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[74] For Lucy's account, see Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 268. Interestingly, Jesse Smith's extremely detailed and precise business ledger, currently in possession of the LDS Church History Library, does not indicate a trip to Salem during the summer of 1813.

[75] The role of warfare as a formative component of Joseph Smith Jr.'s upbringing is usually given short shrift in biographies about his life, though the slight is understandable. For Mormon and non-Mormon scholars alike, Smith's founding of the Mormon religion places him squarely within American *religious*

Nevertheless, the *Book of Mormon*, along with its doctrinal passages and ancient Christian narratives, emphasizes the central role of national warfare in the teleological progress of righteous and unrighteous civilizations. In a famous passage, Captain Moroni, the general of the righteous Nephite army, fights to save his struggling society from bondage under the wicked Lamanites by creating a banner to rally his troops and his people.[76] Upon the banner, which he calls the "title of liberty," he has written, "In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children." To inaugurate a march throughout the land in order to gain army recruits and nationwide support, Captain Moroni "bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land."[77] Wars defending liberty, religious freedom and representative democracy permeate Smith's narrative, mirroring the psychic strains and catching the interests of Americans who had experienced warfare across

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history, rather than the arenas of national politics or popular culture. There are, of course, exceptions. Nathan O. Hatch's influential work *The Democratization of American Christianity* (1986) offers what is perhaps the most vigorous call to situate Joseph Smith and *The Book of Mormon* in the cultural and political history of the United States. In the wake of Hatch's call, several cultural and political readings of Smith and Mormonism in general have appeared, such as Kathleen Flake's *The Politics of American Religious Identity* (2004), which argues that the controversy over the seating of Utah Senator Reed Smoot helped shape notions of religious liberty in America by framing "the political terms by which increasingly diverse religions would be recognized and accommodated in America for the remainder of the [twentieth] century." Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2004). 1. More recently, J. Spencer Fluhman's book *"A Peculiar People"* (2012) makes the case that "Mormonism has been central in significant transitions in the nation's thinking about religion, both as a window on the history of religion's conceptualization and as a force in the shaping of that history." J. Spencer Fluhman, *"A Peculiar People": Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2012). 1.

[76] More than one character in the *Book of Mormon* is named "Moroni." Captain Moroni, a character in the first century B.C.E., is not the same person as Moroni, the last Nephite prophet in the early fifth century C.E., who would later become the Angel Moroni.

[77] See *The Book of Mormon*, Alma 46: 11-13.

multiple generations and who were still absorbing the shock of the transformation from colonial rule under a monarchy to an independent republic.[78]

In his recent work *The Lost Book of Mormon*, Avi Steinberg notes how the depiction of Captain Moroni would resonate with early nineteenth-century Americans: "Captain Moroni was a spirited patriot, a legend like those from the Revolutionary War generation of Joseph Smith's parents."[79] Yet, in situating the *Book of Mormon* within American literature, scholars often overlook its militaristic aspects and follow the lead of Fawn Brodie, who describes the work as "one of the earliest examples of frontier fiction."[80] Nonetheless, Joseph's formative years in an era of war seem to be reflected in his book's seemingly endless succession of battles. His many military scenes, both tactically and strategically, share many parallels with conflicts that occurred in the French and Indian Wars, the Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812. Furthermore, the warfare in *The Book of Mormon*, with its succession of conflicts tied specifically and overtly to religious tensions, appears to reach even further back in time, reflecting the religious warfare and bloody sectarian disputations of the English Civil Wars. This infusion of incessant battles and the conflation of historical conflicts suggest *The Book of Mormon*, both in its genesis and formation, can perhaps be more usefully understood within the genre of wartime (oral) literature.

[78] A similar transformation occurs in *The Book of Mormon*, where the Nephite culture shifts from a benevolent hereditary monarchy to a more republican system of elected judges. See *The Book of Mormon*, Mosiah 29.

[79] Avi Steinberg, *The Lost Book of Mormon: a Journey Through the Mythic Lands of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Kansas City, Missouri* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2014). 149.

[80] Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History; the Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995; repr., First Vintage Books Edition). 67. Steinberg, whose work contains numerous incisive observations of LDS culture, further identifies a layer of American frontier gothic, specifically in the trope of vanishing Indians and the Romantic and Gothic imagination that filled their absence: "even as native peoples were being pushed away, their specters were emerging in the forests and in the visions of frontier seers like Joseph." Steinberg, *The Lost Book of Mormon*: 178.

The Smith Family Moves West

The end of the War of 1812 brought increasing prosperity to the American economy, followed by the onset of unprecedented geographic expansion. The war had temporarily checked economic growth, but with the cessation of armed conflict the markets resumed their rapid development.[81] And with increased trade came immense geographic expansion, coupled with a radical shift in the population. Peace treaties and the negotiation of territorial borders resulted in steady waves of mass migrations from the coastal regions into the interior of the continent. Joseph Smith's parents and grandparents were part of this westward migration. Not only did this move dislodge them from long-established family networks in Massachusetts and Connecticut, the separation also allowed them to explore new ways of thinking and believing. A brief review of the conditions behind these social changes thus offers further insight into Smith's production of the *Book of Mormon*.

Over several decades, conflicts with the French, Native Americans and British had discouraged the general population from expanding westward. Nevertheless, following the Treaty of Paris (1763), which brought an end to the successive French and Indian Wars in North America, a second Treaty of Paris (1783), which brought a cease-fire between the United States and the northern colonies of British North America, and the Treaty of Ghent (1814), which formally ended the War of 1812, droves of people began to migrate into upstate New York, the Ohio Valley and Mississippi River valleys.[82]

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[81] Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). 19-23.

[82] In spite of the requirements of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, British forces did not fully withdraw from all their strategic positions in American territories. After the Jay Treaty of 1794, however, the British withdrew, opening more territory to the influx of westward migrations. See Wood, *Empire of Liberty*: 131. The Louisiana Purchase in 1803, coupled with the continual removal of Native Americans and the encroachment upon their territories, accelerated the expansion, doubling the size of the young nation in less than two decades of its formal beginnings. The Monroe Doctrine (1823) and belief in American exceptionalism would eventually push the growing nation to the Pacific coast and beyond. With such expansions, the concept of an American Selfhood underwent significant transformations, and mapmaking, an indexical marker of national identity, would reflect what it meant to be an American. "In the context of western expansion," Martin Brückner points out, "geography became a language for instilling, expressing, and enacting the new imperial dynamic of the eastern states. What had enabled a

The people composing these westward migrations were a mixture of the old and the new: new immigrants from Britain and Europe joined the descendants of long-established colonial families, families such as the Smiths, in the movement toward the interior. The flood of settlers was further driven by "a demographic explosion" in which "low mortality and the fecundity of colonial mothers, combining with a new surge of immigrants displaced from the Market's European core, sent population flooding into the interior."[83] For recent immigrants, the promise of securing private ownership of land–an opportunity virtually impossible in their home countries–was an irresistible draw. For the children of colonial settlers, the family farms of the original colonists along the Atlantic coast had been divided and subdivided among each successive generation until the family farms could no longer sustain all the descendants, forcing the rising generations to look elsewhere for land.[84] Furthermore, unlike the long-established towns of New England, where residents had more stable notions of social hierarchy and religious affiliation, the migrating populations experienced dislocations that provoked the

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people to find and define themselves as a republican nation was transformed into expressions of imperial self-identification and actions of territorial annexation." Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by University of North Carolina Press, 2006). 14. See also "Addressing Maps in British America: Print, Performance, and the Cartographic Reformation," in *Cultural Narratives: Textuality and Performance in American Culture Before 1900*, ed. Sandra M. Gustafson and Caroline Sloat (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2010), 49-72. The rapid shift of population and the development of new territories created a dynamic national identity that transformed as rapidly as mapmakers could redraw national boundaries. Gordon S. Wood notes, for instance, that Ohio "was creating so many new towns that Ohioans complained they had run out of names for them" and "Gazetteers in American, it was said, could not keep up with the 'very frequent changes' in the dividing of territories and naming of places." Wood, *Empire of Liberty*: 316-17.

[83] *Empire of Liberty*: 5.

[84] Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987; repr., Illini Books). 5. Charles Sellers observes that "every subsistence family confronted a dilemma after subdividing its land among a generation or two of multiplying sons and grandsons to the point where the remaining paternal farm could support only one heir. At the same time settlement thickened from natural increase and immigration, and land became too expensive to buy with the limited surplus of traditional production." Sellers, *The Market Revolution*: 16. Yet, establishing and reestablishing family settlements was not the sole impetus for movement, nor was farming the only opportunity available to rising generations migrating westward. The expanding economy created new jobs, while the spread to new territories brought a demand for a variety of goods and services in its wake. Towns often formed around the surveyed tracts of land that real estate investors carved out of the wilderness and sold to farmers and businessmen. As the lands were settled, the demand for goods and services quickly followed. Village centers soon became a nexus for competing blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors, masons, teachers, and artisans of every variety to fill the need for services.

destabilization of cultural practices and fueled the competition for social, economic and religious attention. Such was the case for the Smith family.

Joseph Smith's parents, Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack, descended from a long line of New England settlers; Joseph Sr. was born on July 12, 1771, in Topsfield, Massachusetts, a small farming village roughly ten miles north of the port city of Salem–the site of the infamous Salem witch trials (1692-1693). He was among the fifth generation of Smiths to be born there, descending from Richard Smith, one of the first settlers to colonize the area. Joseph Sr.'s father, Asael Smith, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, was the first to leave Topsfield in the hopes of establishing a new family homestead, pursuing opportunities in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, and eventually settling in Tunbridge, Vermont. It was in Tunbridge that Joseph Sr. met his future wife, Lucy Mack. But, Lucy did not grow up in Tunbridge. She was born on July 8, 1775, in Gilsum, New Hampshire and her ancestry primarily originated from Lyme, Connecticut. Her father, Solomon Mack, was the first to leave the family farm in Lyme, following a restless and wandering course in life. Along with fighting in the French and Indian Wars and the Revolutionary War, Solomon pursued work as a "merchant, land developer, contractor, miller, seafarer, and farmer."[85] In the meantime, one of his sons, Stephen, had established a home in Tunbridge, Vermont, and he asked his sister Lucy to come for a visit. While there, Lucy met Joseph Sr. and they eventually married on January 24, 1796.

Following their marriage, Joseph Sr. and Lucy found themselves following the same restless and wandering footprints of their parents. Before moving to upstate New York, they lived primarily in Vermont and New Hampshire. Failed business ventures and poor farming seasons eventually ruined the finances of the young family, and they fell into tenancy and poverty. Their experience, sadly, was not uncommon in this period of rapid economic expansion and change. The new opportunities afforded by this expansion prompted many youths in the

[85] Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Smith, Lucy Mack," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1356.

rising generations to leave the occupations of their parents to pursue new careers, marked by a "widespread willingness to be uprooted, to embark on an uncharted course of action, to take risks with one's resources–above all the resources of one's youth."[86] Yet, for many of this generation, financial "failure–or at least temporary checks–dogged men's lives. With easy credit and inexperienced risk-takers, the economy expanded and contracted with the ease of an accordion, squeezing the unlucky and unwise by turns."[87] In all, Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack would move their growing family no less than eight different times before settling in Manchester, New York.

Along with the economic disruptions and financial needs that drove their migrations in search of newer and better opportunities, the Smiths would encounter fervent evangelical movements that would call into question their fundamental beliefs and open new vista of religious ideologies. Though devotion to God and intense religious yearnings had always marked the Smith family home, the move to upstate New York would intensify their religious exposure and experiences to levels they had never previously known or anticipated: for it would be there, in the vicinity of Manchester, NY, where the Smith family lived on a farm near the border separating Palmyra to the north and Manchester on the south, that their son, Joseph Smith Jr., would receive amazing visions and supernatural experiences.[88]

Joseph Smith's *Book of Mormon* emerges from a specific time and place, informed by the dynamics of new nation undergoing radical changes. The succession of wars; the incessant waves of migrations; the disruptions of established family networks and social orders; the opportunities and upheavals of a growing market economy; the national preoccupations with liberty of conscious, political self-determination and freedom from monarchical rule; and the religious experimentation and innovation that followed, all contributed to the rapid changes that

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[86] Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans*, The President and Fellows of Harvard College ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001). 89.

[87] Ibid., 127.

[88] Shipps, *Mormonism*: 5. Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 19.

destabilized traditional boundaries, predictable futures, and a fundamental sense of national and personal identity.

Within this milieu of disruptions, the oral culture of the age, in a close relationship to the increasing availability of printed material, acted as the primary medium for the circulation and development of ideas. In taverns, shops, coffeehouses, town halls, debate and literary societies, neighborhood word-of-mouth networks and church meeting halls, people exchanged ideas and deliberated over the issues they confronted in their rapidly changing times. The culture was filled with oratorical performances at every level of social interaction, from household fireside stories to public orations at civic events, from classroom practices to revival campgrounds. And tapping into this intense oral exchange of ideas that fueled the zeitgeist of the age, Joseph Smith performed into existence the *Book of Mormon*, an epic Christian narrative that would confront the anxieties of his world by providing religious clarity and focus to the lives of its readers, combined with anchors of faith and promises of eternal salvation in the worlds beyond time.

Chapter Two: Religion, Folk Magic and Christian Occultism

Smith's use of a seer stone and Urim and Thummim in the oral performance of the *Book of Mormon* immediately calls attention to the religious preoccupations of the Smith family, particularly regarding their willingness to search for spiritual enlightenment by means of religious experimentation in both conventional and unconventional ways. While they turned to conventional religious traditions for divine guidance and reassurance, the Smith family members also turned to less conventional traditions of folk magic and Christian occultism to delve deeper into God's mysteries. Such preoccupations were not entirely uncommon in the early nineteenth century. The experiences of the Smith family reflected the pressures of the dynamic religious phenomena of the age, when social disruptions extended beyond economic and political concerns.

The mass migrations of settlers, composed of newly-arrived immigrants and descendants of long-established families, filled the frontier regions of the ever-expanding United States with a complex mixture of differing traditions. One of the consequences of such encounters was a marked destabilization of cultural institutions that had once provided social order for the various groups. This was particularly acute for migrants from New England, the home region of the Smith ancestors, where political and economic control had been governed by localized colonial economies.[89] With geographic expansion, new towns appeared and the layering of commerce and social networks connected local villages to larger commercial hubs within nationwide networks of exchange, facilitating the circulation of new ideas and belief systems. Taverns and inns sprang up to house a population of itinerant workers and travelers, supply stores appeared along the main streets of towns, while successive waves of missionaries and churches from competing denominations followed along the same trails of expansion, sacralizing and dividing the landscape with meetinghouse steeples.

[89] Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*: 127.

With the deterioration of traditional social hierarchies, coupled with the efforts of a new nation attempting to define itself, entrepreneurial pursuits in business were likewise matched with spiritual interrogations of religious beliefs and practices. Relatively homogenous religious cultures of long-established communities gave way to diverse mixture of competing theological systems. Young individuals, cut loose from the immediate watchfulness of extended family patriarchs and pervasive family and local cultures, often questioned the doctrinal boundaries of the religions in which they were raised. Free to examine their beliefs and reformulate their religious identities, many Americans in the generation following the Revolutionary War pushed against the boundaries of established religions and sought for new spiritual experiences and knowledge.[90]

The destabilization of belief systems was further accelerated by the ever-increasing influence of biblical criticism, a relatively new method of analysis in America that was closely aligned with the ideals of scientific rationalism. Rather than accepting biblical stories as literal accounts of historical events, many philosophers and scholars questioned the historical accuracy of religious claims. Through close textual and comparative analysis, researchers began to demythologize sacred narratives in what Frank Manuel describes as "an overwhelming tendency to become matter-of-fact, to eschew wonder, to reduce the fantastic to a commonsense narrative." For these scholars, "the world was obvious, the cloud of past obfuscations had lifted, things were to be seen and described as they were and as they should appear to reasonable people not possessed by romances or religious enthusiasm."[91]

By the early nineteenth century, biblical criticism had grown into a formidable academic field, particularly in Germany. The work of these scholars "shattered the traditional notion of the Bible as the Word of God, a unified text of divine inspiration, and suggested that it be treated

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[90] For a helpful overview of religious exploration, syncretism and development in the early American republic, see Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990).

[91] Frank E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (New York: Atheneum, 1967). 26.

as a composite work, a product of human endeavor whose intricate history of composition may be examined like that of any other ancient text."[92] In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, "the first shock waves of the new trends in German biblical criticism were felt in American intellectual circles,"[93] and the challenges soon spread to the general populace through religious journals, magazines, apologetic texts and word-of-mouth networks of communication. Was it possible that Moses did not write all the books of the Pentateuch? Did Aaron's rod really transform into a living snake by God's power? Was there truly a universal flood that covered the entire face of the earth? Was Jonah literally swallowed by a whale? Did Methuselah really live to the age of 969 years?

The mounting scientific evidence undermining the supernatural divinity of biblical narratives seemed to confirm the claims of modern biblical critics, not to mention critics from prior centuries, such as the famous "heretic" Spinoza, who boldly asserted in his analysis of the Bible, his *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), that "the word of God is erroneous, mutilated, corrupt and inconsistent, that we have only fragments of it, and that the original text of the covenant which God made with the Jews has perished."[94] Biblical criticism not only undermined the supernatural claims of sacred narratives, the criticism undermined the faith and belief of religious adherents, leading to crises of faith, confusion within religions, anxieties about eternal life, and an erosion of, or at least a fracturing of, Christian identity.

Church-goers responded to these pressures of radical change and instability in different ways. Among the numerous strategies taken, some retrenched into fundamentalism and the unqualified, literal interpretation of the Word of God; some embraced atheism or agnosticism; some moved away from literalism toward metaphorical interpretations in order to reconcile

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[92] Ilana Pardes, *Melville's Bibles* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2008). 50.

[93] Ibid., 51.

[94] Benedict De Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* (New York, NY: Cambridge UP, 2008). 163. Spinoza is not rejecting the scriptures outright. He indicates his trust that God has spoken to mankind through the scriptures; yet, he is insisting that the medium (fallible prophets and corrupted texts) have distorted the message.

faith and science; some followed the footsteps of eighteenth-century deists; some withdrew entirely from organized religion; some sought to restore a primitive or pure form of Christianity, untainted by millennia of corruption; and some attempted to reach back to the dawn of time to rediscover the knowledge of mysteries from the foundation of the world, when Adam and Eve lived in a pure and undefiled world.

The resulting tensions of such conflicting religious directions would frequently split congregations into old and new camps of thought, while others broke free to create innovative and syncretic forms of religious expression.[95] For the Smith family, these impulses were felt and expressed with particular intensity in the region where they settled in upstate New York. The area, a hotbed of religious fervor that surged with successive waves of revivalism, would later become known as the "Burned Over District" in a reference to "the prevailing western analogy between the fires of the forest and those of the spirit."[96] The region was rife with mixtures of religious ideologies and intensified religious expression.

For Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack, western New York, with its "people extraordinarily given to unusual religious beliefs," was an ideal environment for their own religious searching.[97] They appeared to investigate different religious ideologies as frequently and as restlessly as they moved from one farm to the next, without taking permanent hold on any of them. They were known as "Seekers," a form of Primitivism, which sought to restore Christ's church and all its

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[95] Harry Stout points to the debates between Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Edwards as a central flashpoint of New Light and Old Light tensions: "By stating their cases for and against the revivals in such extreme, polemical terms, Chauncy and Edwards made it nearly impossible for their supporters to speak with each other. . . . Once substantial numbers of ministers were labeled 'unconverted' or 'Antinomian,' congregations everywhere faced the terrifying prospect that their ministers—historically the prime bulwark against divine desertion—might indeed by wolves in sheep's clothing. . . . Never before in New England's religious history were so many ministers censured by their congregations or removed from office. More frequently, New Light congregations removed Old Light ministers; but the recriminations cut both ways, as some Old Light congregations removed ministers who they found too tainted by enthusiasm to suit their taste." Stout, *The New England Soul*: 207-08. For an overview of the Chauncy-Edwards Debates, see ibid., 202-11.

[96] Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District; the Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1950). 3.

[97] Ibid.

practices to "the primitive or original order of things as revealed in Scripture, free from the accretions of church history and tradition."[98] For the Smiths, this meant that, "both parents had broken out of the standard church orthodoxies while at the same time remaining pious and searching."[99] Over the course of their religious quest, their exposure to various religious traditions included New England Congregationalism, Universalism, Presbyterianism, Methodism, Millenialism and Restorationism. But these were not the only sources of spiritual knowledge the Smiths turned to for greater knowledge of God's ways and mysteries. They also turned to various forms of folk magic and Christian occultism in their search for divine guidance.

The impulse to resist the dogmas and power structures of established religions encouraged eighteenth and nineteenth-century seekers like Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack to look outside the boundaries of traditional Christian denominations, and a smorgasbord of esoteric philosophies and practices awaited the curiosity of those who sought alternative systems of belief, such as hermeticism, mysticism, Swedenborgianism, alchemy, astrology, freemasonry, Kabbalah, Rosicrucisanism, occultism, mesmerism (and related ideas of animal magnetism), folk magic practices, all followed by Spiritualism in subsequent decades.[100] Rather than looking

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[98] The Editors, "Primitivism," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 940-41. Like the term "Puritan," "Seeker" was a label that covered a broad spectrum of belief. As Dan Vogel notes, "In its most narrow meaning, 'Seeker' refers to a small, 'radical' sect which arose out of the mystical and spiritual elements of Puritanism and, more or less, associated with the Independents in mid-seventeenth-century England. 'Seekerism' more broadly refers to a movement or tendency beginning with Luther, momentarily culminating with the Seeker Sect in the Commonwealth (1649-53), and persisting afterwards in the beliefs of various individuals and groups." Vogel further identifies the two main types of Seekerism in the Smith household: "Like other Primitivists, Lucy and Joseph Smith, Sr., were to conclude after years of wandering from church to church that no denomination conformed to primitive Christianity. However, both found themselves at opposite ends of the Primitivist spectrum. While Joseph became moe settled in his Seekerism, Lucy searched for a church where she could find spiritual stability." Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988). 8, 25.

[99] Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 55.

[100] Keith Thomas' profoundly influential study on the relationship between religion and magic in England remains essential reading for contextualizing folk magic practices in early America. See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971; repr., Penguin 1991). For overviews of alternative religious systems and supernatural conceptualizations in America, see Catherine

to contemporary theologians or their immediate antecedents for answers to life's most pressing questions, inquirers after these philosophies reached back to the dawn of mankind "to recover the divine power and perfection possessed by Adam before the Fall, and indeed before Creation."[101] This impulse was driven by a common religious belief that Adam and Eve, while in the Garden of Eden, possessed full knowledge of how the natural world and all the operations of the universe existed in perfect harmony; how the pure Adamic language held the neo-platonic power to accurately name all creatures and substances according to their pure linguistic forms; and how unadulterated celestial knowledge could be harnessed to endow the righteous seeker with the power to foretell the future, exert control over the forces of nature, to summon a variety of miracles, and to communicate to God, either directly or through his ministering angels.

Evidence of this ancient system of greater knowledge littered the Bible, providing Christian occult practitioners with examples of what they might seek to obtain: if the appearance of a star could reveal the birthplace of the Messiah, if Jesus could proclaim that "the sign of the Son of man" would appear in the heavens to foretell his return, then it naturally followed that God revealed the future through astrological phenomena;[102] if Moses and Aaron could become God's instruments in a conjuration duel with Egyptian sorcerers, turning rods to snakes, rivers to blood, or calling forth frogs and lice to cover the land, then a greater understanding of God's mysteries could potentially endow the same power on His righteous inquirers; if Hebrew high priests could utilize a Urim and Thummim, oracular stones with supernatural powers to communicate with God, then magical objects and the righteous power to

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L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007). See also, D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

[101] John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994). 7. Along with Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic* Worldview, Brooke's *The Refiner's Fire* is essential reading for explorations of Joseph Smith's use of magic, hermeticism and Christian occultism in early Mormonism.

[102] *The Holy Bible (KJV)*, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1990). Matt. 24:29-30. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent references will refer to the King James Authorized Version.

invoke them were certainly part of reality, and not fantasy.[103] While the scriptures were rife with passages condemning evil magic, the texts also revealed an opposite form of righteous supernatural power from God, shrouded in mystery, which only the truly righteous could hope to discover. And within this system of knowledge, the history of magic and the accounts of God's miracles intertwined. To be sure, this was not meant to be Satanic occultism, with an aim to bring the powers of darkness into the world; this was intended to be Christian occultism, with the goal of harnessing God's mysteries to achieve exaltation in heaven.

For the lay religious seeker, delving into hidden mysteries offered the opportunity to amalgamate new systems of personal belief that could potentially bring the believer closer to God's ancient undefiled religion, while simultaneously creating a space for liberated expression of faith and self-determination. As David Hall observes, "prophecy and magic were alike in helping people to become empowered, prophecy because it overturned the authority of mediating clergy and magic because it gave access to the realm of the occult force."[104] In post-Revolutionary America, belief in magic was common, though it was not necessarily a socially acceptable practice, particularly when professional conjurors hired out their services in an apparent attempt to avoid hard labor.[105] Indeed, the Smith family was often the target of such

[103] For Moses and Aaron's battle with Pharaoh's priests, see Exodus 7-10; for use of the Urim and Thummim, see 1 Sam. 28:6 and Num. 27:21.

[104] David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1989). 100. For a discussion on the prevalence of magic, attitudes toward practitioners and the cultural context in which such practices proliferated, see Alan Taylor, "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780-1830," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1986). See also Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*: 67-97.

[105] While the rhetoric of hard work and independence was not a uniquely American value, Post-Revolutionary America was particularly sensitive to such virtues during the period of nation building. Money-making preoccupations, if perceived as attempts to circumvent hard work and domestic economy, were met with accusations of indolence. This was particularly true for village conjurors, and the Smith family was frequently charged with magical practices and being lazy, this "despite the Smiths' obvious industry in the early 1820s in clearing sixty acres of heavily wooded land and building a cabin and a frame house," along with building a barn and other outbuildings, as well as the hard labor involved in tilling and farming their land, all complemented by various hired out jobs (working for other farmers, digging wells, making and selling handicrafts, coopering, etc.). See Vogel, *EMD*, 2: 18n1. Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 32-33.

accusations.[106] Common supernatural practices in early America involved divining rods (dowsing rods), seer and scrying stones (also referred to as crystal-gazing or glass-looking), magical treasure-seeking rituals, prophetic dreaming, charms and folk medicine, among many other practices. "Ordinary people," Richard Bushman argues, "apparently had no difficulty blending Christianity with magic."[107] Nevertheless, such latitudinarian attitudes did not prevail when the magicians in question were professional and potentially mercenary.

In describing the tension between rationalism and belief in magic, Bushman identifies Willard Chase as "one of the most vigorous of the Manchester treasure-seekers," who was also "a Methodist class leader at the time he knew the Smiths, and in his obituary was described as a minister." He also mentions Josiah Stowell as "an upright Presbyterian and an honored man in his community."[108] While this suggests the blending of Christianity and magical practices among common people, this should not be interpreted as either social indifference toward or a

[106] Hannah More (1745-1833), an English writer whose popular works were widely sold in America, especially as cheap prints and chapbooks, provides an illustration of the language for stigmatizing and categorizing village conjurors. In *Tawney Rachel; Or, The Fortune-Teller* (between 1801 and 1811), More characterizes a family of magic practitioners in commonplace terms: "Tawny Rachel was the wife of poaching Giles. There seemed to be a conspiracy in Giles's whole family to maintain themselves by tricks and pilfering. Regular labour and honest industry did not suit their idle habits. They had a sort of genius at finding out every unlawful means to support a vagabond life." Hannah More, "The History of Tawny Rachel, The Fortune Teller, Black Giles's Wife," (Philadelphia, PA: B. & J. Johnson, 1800), 3. Critics of the Smith family would invoke the same culturally-inscribed language: "they were not only a lazy, indolent set of men, also intemperate" (Manchester Residents Group Statement); "He [Joseph Jr.], and indeed the whole of the family of Smiths, were notorious for indolence, foolery and falsehood. Their great object appeared to be, to live without work" (Joseph Capron); "they were lazy, intemperate and worthless men, very much addicted to lying. . . . Digging for money was their principal employment" (Parley Chase); "He [Joseph Sr.] and his boys were truly a lazy set of fellows, and more particularly Joseph. . . . the general employment of the Smith family was money digging and fortune-telling. They kept around them constantly, a gang of worthless fellows who dug for money nights, and were idle in the day time. It was a mystery to their neighbors how they got their living" (David Stafford); "they were a family that labored very little—the chief they did, was to dig for money" (Henry Harris). Vogel, *EMD*, 2: 18-19; 25; 47; 56-57; 75. While such statements reveal the cultural perceptions of the era, perhaps most poignantly as charges to stigmatize the poor, under-educated and migrant, they nevertheless obscure the historical reality of the Smith family's domestic life.

[107] Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 50.

[108] Ibid.

general cultural endorsement of such practices.[109] Bushman also relates the following incident in which magic was problematic in religious circles: "One of Emma's uncles preached as a Methodist lay minister, and a brother-in-law was class leader in Harmony [PA]. Joseph was later said to have asked to be enrolled in the class. Joseph Lewis, a cousin of Emma's, rose in wrath when he found Joseph's name. Lewis objected to the inclusion of a 'practicing necromancer' on the Methodist roll. He confronted Joseph and demanded repentance or removal."[110] Even though Emma's extended family did not approve of Joseph, and were likely motivated by personal animosity, it is nevertheless important to note that they attempted to rid Joseph of their company on religious grounds.

Dabbling with folk magic as an amateur curiosity seeker (seer stones, witching rods, treasure-hunting, etc.) was an entirely different matter from hiring out one's services as a professional "practicing" conjuror. Any attempt to normalize such magical practices as mainstream pursuits misrepresents the pervasive skepticism among nineteenth-century Americans toward such fringe beliefs and exercises. Upstanding citizens might be forgiven for innocuous treasure-hunting ventures, but the potential for fraud and deception meant paid professionals were often regarded with deep suspicion. In popular culture, condemnation of wandering conjurors and their gullible clients were common, and school children in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were often warned naïve gullibility in classroom readings.

Caleb Bingham's *The Columbian Orator* (1797), for example, contained a dramatization of the follies of trusting conjurors in the exercise entitled "The Conjurer." In the dialogue, a conjuror comes to town, stirring excitement among credulous citizens, much to the dismay of the wise and rational folks. The magician makes use of a variety of the implements and practices common to village conjurors of the time: a seer stone, a magic wand, a magic book, the

[109] For an overview of magic and occult practices in American religion, see Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*: 67-97.

[110] Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 69-70.

drawing of magic circles, the muttering of spells and charms (in deplorable Latin), astrology, and fortunetelling. The conjuror is eventually exposed as a fraud, the gullible citizens are embarrassed, and Thinkwell, the wise and long-suffering father-figure who has perceived the conjuror's tricks all along, offers a final moral: "I hope the impostor will be brought to justice, and we to our senses; and that after paying this infatuated devotion to vice and ignorance, virtue and true knowledge may have our more serious veneration."[111] This text was one of the most widely used schoolbooks in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century America: "with 200,000 copies sold by 1832, Bingham's *Columbian Orator* was a standard, and widely imitated, text in American secondary school education from the late 1790s to 1820."[112] The readers of *The Columbian Orator*, regardless of their personal beliefs about the efficacy of folk magic practices, would have been exposed to the many tricks that traveling conjurors regularly employed in an effort to amaze their audiences.

Within this liminal milieu of popular culture, mainstream faiths and fringe philosophies, Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack developed their ideas and fostered their personal magical practices. A visitor to the Smith home in 1830 described how "this Joseph Smith, Senior, we soon learned, from his own lips, was a firm believer in witchcraft and other supernatural things; and had brought up his family in the same belief."[113] Thus, for their children as well as themselves, this complex entanglement of religious and hermetic ideologies became the Smith family's way of life, constructing a cultural and perceptual lens through which they would view and interpret the world.

In the 1845 preliminary manuscript of her family history, Lucy Mack would hint at the saturation of magical viewpoints and mystical practices in the Smith home, specifically

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[111] Caleb Bingham, *The Columbian Orator: Containing a Variety of Original and Selected Pieces; Together with Rules, Calculated to Improve Youth and Others in the Ornamental and Useful Art of Eloquence*, 18th ed. (New York: E. Duyckinck, 1816). 184.

[112] Granville Ganter, "The Active Virtue of The Columbian Orator," *The New England Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (1997): 463.

[113] Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 457.

identifying their attempt to "win the faculty of Abrac," along with "drawing Magic circles" and "sooth saying."[114] Her reference, though brief, but certainly not isolated among historical accounts, hints at some of the varied magical practices the Smith family pursued. At the time Lucy was writing her history, the phrase "faculty of Abrac" was a somewhat ambiguous term that could either refer to unspoken Masonic mysteries or simply to the practice of folk medicine that involved charms and amulets made out of parchment to heal such sicknesses as the fever or the ague ("Abrac" being a shortened variant of "Abracadabra");[115] "Magic circles" were tied to the conjuration of and communication with spirits and were coupled with symbols, incantations, astrology and magical implements (swords, daggers, witch hazel rods, magical parchments); and "sooth saying" involved prophesying the future and telling fortunes.

Of all the magical practices the Smith family pursued, treasure hunting dominates historical accounts of their activities. Searching for buried treasure involved more than the pedestrian manual labor involved in excavating sites for possible gold and silver; treasure-digging, also called money-digging, required elaborate mystical ceremonies. With a worldview that saw supernatural forces intermingling with the nature realm, many early nineteenth-century Americans believed that hidden treasures–buried by ancient Native Americans, or Captain Kidd or lost Spanish mines–were protected by powerful spells and guardian spirits.[116] In order to obtain the treasure, the diggers therefore needed to neutralize the spiritual forces protecting them. To that end, treasure seekers would engage any number of magical rituals to

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[114] Ibid., 285.

[115] The "faculty of Abrac" has multiple meanings and associations. Catherine Albanese indicates, "This faculty of Abrac, associated with magical amulets and their powers, was part of the ambience of eighteenth-century Masons." Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit*: 137. John L. Brooke notes, "Lucy Mack Smith. . . suggests a familiarity with Masonic manuals: the 'faculty of Abrac' was among the supposed Masonic mysteries." Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*: 158. D. Michael Quinn provides the most thorough discussion on the shifting meanings of the phrase, indicating that "by the early 1820s 'Faculty of Abrac' was a well-known phrase linking magic and divinity. Medieval and early modern magic manuscripts in England used "abrac" and "Abraca" as one of the names of God in conjurations." Quinn, *Early Mormonism*: 68, 68-70.

[116] Taylor, "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy," 9-10.

counteract the powers of the guardian spirits, turning to astrology, binding spells and charms, magic circles overwritten with various mystical symbols, alchemical potions, witching rods, and religious texts, such as "the Bible, Prayer-book, and [John Bunyan's] Pilgrim's Progress."[117] After the Smith family moved to Manchester, Joseph Jr., often with the aid of his father, was involved in at least eighteen treasure quests "in the Palmyra/ Manchester area, and later at various locations along the Susquehanna River running through Harmony, Pennsylvania, and the southern New York counties of Chenango and Broome."[118]

William Stafford, a neighbor living a mile south of the Smith family farm, recounted his experiences with the Smiths, revealing salient details of their spiritual ceremonies. According to Stafford, the Smiths would time their midnight money-digging operations to coincide with astrological phenomena, such as "the state of the moon," along with the observation that the "new moon and good Friday. . . were regarded as the most favorable times."[119] On one occasion, Joseph Sr. approached Stafford and claimed that Joseph Jr. "had been looking in his glass [seer stone] and had seen, not many rods from his house, two or three kegs of gold and silver, some feet under the surface of the earth." Stafford agreed to help dig for the cache of treasure, and he described how Joseph Sr. commenced the project by drawing

> . . . a circle, twelve or fourteen feet in diameter. This circle, said he [Joseph Sr.], contains the treasure. Then he stuck in the ground a row of witch hazel sticks, around the said circle, for the purpose of keeping off the evil spirits. Within this circle he made another, of about eight or ten feet in diameter. He walked around three times on the periphery of this last circle, muttering to himself something which I could not understand. He next

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[117] Caleb Butler, *History of the Town of Groton: Including Pepperell and Shirley, from the First Grant of Groton Plantation in 1655* (Press of T.R. Marvin, 1848). 256. See also Taylor, "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy," esp. 8-14. For a fictional account reflecting contemporary practices, see "The Money-Diggers" in Washington Irving, *Tales of a Traveller, by Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, vol. II (Paris: L. Baudry, 1824). 227-383, esp. 65-69. See also John Quidor's oil painting *The Money-Diggers* (1832), depicting a scene from Irving's tales.

[118] Dan Vogel, "The Locations of Joseph Smith's Early Treasure Quests," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 3 (1994): 198.

[119] Vogel, *EMD*, 2: 60.

> stuck a steel rod in the centre of the circles, and then enjoined profound silence upon us, lest we should arouse the evil spirit who had the charge of these treasures.[120]

Such ceremonies required several different magical practices to be performed properly, suggesting an advanced interest in multiple esoteric rituals and supernatural gifts. But in the Smith household, the various members appear to have further gravitated toward favorite magical practices: Lucy was known to practice chiromancy, or palm reading;[121] Joseph Sr. made use of a dowsing rod, which, apart from the mundane task of locating minerals or water, could be used for telling fortunes, divining spiritual answers to yes-and-no questions, and locating hidden treasure;[122] Joseph Jr., the most mystically talented child in the family, also used a dowsing rod and read palms, but eventually he focused on his gift of "second sight" and gazing into seer stones.[123] In all, the magical implements and components of the Smith's magical practices involved, "seer stones, astrology, a talisman, a dagger for drawing magic circles of treasure-digging and spirit invocation, as well as magic parchments ["lamens" that were "inscribed with magic words and occult symbols"[124]] for purification, protection, and conjuring a spirit."[125] Thus, taken altogether, the Smith family's investment in treasure-hunting quests and the various magical practices reveal their deep investment in improving their dire worldly

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[120] Ibid., 60-61.

[121] Anna Ruth Eaton claims Lucy "turned many a penny by tracing in the lines of the open palm the fortunes of the inquirer," see Vogel, *EMD*, 3: 147. See also Quinn, *Early Mormonism*: 70, 294-96.

[122] In a letter dated June 17, 1829, Jesse Smith (Joseph Sr.'s brother) writes to his nephew Hyrum, criticizing Joseph Sr.'s use of a divining rod, saying, ". . . your father has a wand or rod like Jannes & Jambres who withstood Moses in Egypt," Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 553. On "Jannes & Jambres," see Quinn, *Early Mormonism*: 32.

[123] Christopher Stafford stated that "Jo claimed to have revelations and tell fortunes. He told mine by looking into the palm of my hand and said among other things that I would not live to be very old." Vogel, *EMD*, 2: 195. Citing a statement by Palmyra neighbor Orlando Saunders, Quinn notes how Joseph Jr.'s use of a divining rod occurred before "his 1819 seer stone and treasure-quest. Therefore, sometimes between age eleven and thirteen (1817-19), Joseph Jr. began following his father's example in using a divining rod," Quinn, *Early Mormonism*: 33.

[124] *Early Mormonism*: 67.

[125] Ibid., 134-35.

circumstances, while simultaneously obtaining unmediated access to God and his greater mysteries.

Joseph Smith's use of a seer stone to produce the *Book of Mormon* offers a view into the economy of ritualism, religious experimentation and spiritual seeking among early Americans.[126] Far from being unique to the Smith family, magical practices aimed at discovering God's secret ways emerged in a variety of forms, ranging from simple charms to ward off sickness to full-scale treasure hunting expeditions, complete with guardian spirits, magic circles and incantations. The practices reflected the convergence of economic displacement and religious destabilization for many families, disrupting traditional forms and refashioning new ideas and religious beliefs. And within the turbulence of the times, young Joseph accomplished more than mere survival: he confronted the times with a new formulation of belief, a syncretic cosmology pieced together from a constellation of destabilized fragments of multiple traditions. Once a lowly village conjuror, Smith would rise above the bleakness of his circumstances and discover a powerful and prophetic voice.

[126] The techniques of American scrying and "crystal gazing" are rooted in British and European folk magic practices. For contextualization in England, see Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*: 255-59.

Chapter Three: Education and the Trope of the Uneducated Oracle

Smith's ability to focus on a seer stone and utter forth a stream of ancient American tales not only points to an imaginative construction of narrative sequences but also suggests a history of preparation in rhetorical delivery. And among the numerous sources of oratorical training in early nineteenth-century America, formal and informal education played central roles. Education, whether by means of formal schooling (common schools, secondary schools, high schools, colleges and universities) or informal networks of training (homeschooling, Sunday schools, apprenticeships, etc.), provided one of the primary sources for the development of oral performance techniques. Although historical accounts indicate that Smith participated in both formal and informal avenues of education, the impoverished circumstances of the Smith household ensured that young Joseph's opportunities would be limited and hard won.

Nevertheless, Smith was not devoid of an education. Though his formal schooling was intermittent, Smith would progress through the curriculum of a common school education during his youth. Even so, while nineteenth-century educational practices offer an important entrance into an analysis of Smith's oratorical opportunities, this line of inquiry immediately confronts a claim in the Mormon cultural imagination: the enduring myth that Smith was uneducated.

Almost immediately following the organization of the Mormon Church, Smith's formal education, or rather his purported lack of it, was quickly appropriated into apologetic argumentation as evidence of divine intervention: Smith's humble education, or almost complete lack thereof, so the argument goes, must surely disqualify him from composing such a complex and miraculous text as *The Book of Mormon*. Smith appears to have encouraged such thinking. In 1832, while dictating an account of his life, Smith claimed of his childhood that his indigent circumstances, "required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the family; therefore, we were deprived of the benefit of an education. Suffice it

to say, I was merely instructed in reading, writing and the ground rules of arithmetic, which constituted my whole literary acquirements."[127] The previous year, in a more direct reference to his lack of education, Smith had drawn a parallel between himself and the uneducated New Testament apostles. In late 1831, Nancy Towle, an itinerant preacher, visited the newly-formed Mormon community in Kirtland, Ohio, the town where Smith and his followers first settled after leaving New York. After observing the dynamics of the community under Smith's leadership, she became convinced that the group was deceived and openly challenged Smith's claims: "I turned to Smith and said, 'Are you not ashamed, of such pretensions? You, who are no more than any ignorant plough-boy of our land. . . . He only replied by saying, 'The gift has returned back again, as in former times, to illiterate fishermen.'"[128] Smith was not the only one who reinforced the claim that he was uneducated. Members of his family would likewise portray him as being uneducated, even to the point of being entirely illiterate.

Smith's mother, Lucy, in a more ambiguous statement than Joseph's, claimed her son "had never read the Bible through in his life," adding that "he seemed much less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children, but far more given to meditation and deep study."[129] In 1879, Smith's wife, Emma, in an interview given nearly thirty-five years after her husband's death, famously described Smith as being virtually illiterate: "Joseph Smith. . . could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter, let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon."[130] Though such statements initially appear to present straightforward

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[127] Smith dictated the account to Frederick G. Williams, one of his scribes. The spelling and punctuation are modernized. Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 26-27. See also Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 10.

[128] Nancy Towle, *Vicissitudes Illustrated, in the Experience of Nancy Towle, in Europe and America*, 2nd ed. (Portsmouth, NH: Nancy Towle, 1833). 157.

[129] Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 296. Lucy provides no clarification on what she means by "deep study," though contextually she may be referring to mental study or pondering, repeating the same idea as "meditation." Without further qualification, the description nevertheless remains ambiguous.

[130] Ibid., 542. A review of Smith's early letters, which are not only "coherent" but often wax eloquent, quickly demonstrates the inaccuracy of Emma's claims. Yet, rather than interpreting her statement as an attempt to dissemble, her emphasis, which is clearly hyperbolic, appears to be her way of emphasizing her disbelief in Smith's ability to compose *The Book of Mormon*.

descriptions, they nevertheless present problematical historical representations that require cautious interpretation.

For centuries, the strategy of downplaying a person's education in order to accentuate the miraculous nature of his or her accomplishments was a common hagiographical trope in religious discourse. Indeed, literary scholars often trace the origins of English literature to the religious narrative of Caedmon's divinely-inspired oral compositions, thereby tying one of the earliest uses of this trope in Anglo-Saxon writing to the inspired creation of oral poetry.[131] The story of Caedmon is well known among scholars of early English literature. The Venerable Bede (ca. 672-735), a monk and one of Britain's first historians, invoked the trope of the uneducated oracle to describe the miraculous skills of Caedmon, an illiterate cattle herder, who, while sleeping in the barn of the Streanaeshalch monastery, was visited by an angel that endowed him with the power to compose divinely-inspired hymns:

> [Caedmon]. . . had never learned any songs. Hence sometimes at a feast, when for the sake of providing entertainment, it had been decided that they [the monks] should all sing in turn, when he saw the harp approaching him, he would rise up in the middle of the feasting, go out, and return home. On one such occasion when he did so, he left the place of feasting and went to the cattle byre, as it was his turn to take charge of them at night. In due time he stretched himself out and went to sleep, whereupon he dreamt that someone stood by him, saluted him, and called him by name: "Caedmon," he said, sing me something." Caedmon answered, "I cannot sing; that is why I left the feast and came here because I could not sing." Once again the speaker said, "Nevertheless you must sing to me." "What must I sing?" said Caedmon. "Sing," he said, "about the beginning of created things." Thereupon Caedmon began to sing verses which he had never heard before in praise of God the Creator. . . [Bede paraphrases the song]. . . . When he awoke, he remembered all that he had sung while asleep and soon added more verses in the same manner, praising God in fitting style.[132]

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[131] According to Robert M. Adams, "Caedmon's is the first English poem we have in full, the first to which we can attach a personal name and an approximate circumstance. A haze of monkish morality hangs over the story (too edifying, perhaps, to be true); but the Hymn itself could not be more fitting as the germ from which a mighty literature was to grow." Robert M. Adams, *The Land and Literature of England: A Historical Account* (New York: Norton, 1983). 31.

[132] Qtd. in Bruce Holsinger, "The Parable of Caedmon's 'Hymn': Liturgical Invention and Literary Tradition," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 106, no. 2, Master Narratives of the Middle Ages (2007): 149-50. Original translation, Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and transl. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1969), 415-417.

While questions regarding the historical authenticity of Bede's account remain unanswered, the story itself nevertheless functioned as an anchor of identity for the Streanaeshalch community. Bede received the story from the Streanaeshalch monks, who, according to Bruce Holsinger, were "consistently invested in promoting its [Streanaeshalch's] unique role as an institutional borderland between the sacred and the secular, the heavenly and the temporal."[133] Holsinger further adds "that Bede's enduringly famous account of Caedmon may be comprehensible less as the story of a man than as the work of a liturgical culture seeking to explain its unique character to a chronicler who promised to perpetuate its institutional memory."[134] Pointing more directly to the disparity between humble ignorance and divine inspiration, John D. Niles reveals how the trope of the uneducated oracle operates: "The contrast between Cædmon's lack of training in the arts of verse and his sudden, brilliant poetic achievement was precisely what made his story miraculous and hence, for Bede, worth telling."[135] Thus, the invocation of this trope, either by an individual or a community, functions to reveal the presence of divine authorization and guidance, which becomes incorporated into the community's traditions, memory, identification, belief system and, ultimately, their cosmology.

This rhetorical strategy of self-proclaimed modesty would remain a near ubiquitous trope across centuries of Western culture, whether deployed in theology, classical rhetoric or political discourse. Specific to the historical context of this study, John Bunyan, the popular seventeenth-century writer whose *Pilgrim's Progress* was universally read in Joseph Smith's day, stands as a prime example of a religious leader using the same strategy both politically and theologically. In his autobiography, *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan also claims that growing up in

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[133] Ibid., 153.

[134] Ibid., 156-57.

[135] John D. Niles, "The Myth of the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet," *Western Folklore* 62, no. 1/2, Models of Performance in Oral Epic, Ballad, and Song (2003): 15.

poverty limited his educational opportunities. Yet, though his parents were poor, they "put me to school, to learn both to read and write; the which I also attained, according to the rate of other poor men's children, though to my shame I confess, I did soon lose that little I learned, even almost utterly."[136] Though Bunyan admits he received some basic education, he tries to convince the reader that he virtually forgot everything he learned.

Yet, in spite of such claims, Bunyan's works repeatedly reveal a lifelong pattern of extensive reading and study, prompting scholars, such as Keeble, to point out that "Bunyan was not in fact as ill-educated or poorly read as he maintains."[137] Bunyan's self-representation as an uneducated preacher allowed him to stake the claim that his spiritual guidance and pastoral authority came directly from God, unmediated by the corrupt hierarchies and doctrinal distortions of the orthodox clergy. As Greaves observes, "an adherent of the basic Protestant tenet that Scripture is understandable to the perspicacious reader enlightened by the Holy Spirit, Bunyan was keenly sensitive to any appearance that he relied on human learning to acquire biblical understanding."[138] Building on that basic premise, the issue of authority thus came into play: untrained, lay preachers like Bunyan claimed direct and unmediated access to God, while formalistic and university trained clergymen were dead to the Spirit.[139] Thus, the assertion of being uneducated in the context of spiritual achievements enfolded several issues: the claim to an authentic and unmediated connection to God, the triumph of the spirit over intellectualism, the validation of religious resistance against corrupt civil law, and the

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[136] Roger Sharrock, ed. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 5, spelling modernized.

[137] N. H. Keeble, "John Bunyan's Literary Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, ed. Anne Dunan-Page (New York: Cambridge UP, 2010), 20. Greaves also responds to Bunyan's claims of being poorly educated by saying, "This, of course, is obviously untrue." Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002). 5.

[138] *Glimpses of Glory*: 5.

[139] Bunyan would defend himself against Judge Foster in the Restoration court by saying, "God hides his things from the wise and prudent, (that is from the learned of the world) and reveals them to babes and sucklings. . . . God had rejected the wise, and might and noble, and chosen the foolish, and the base." Sharrock, *Grace Abounding*, 111.

endorsement of a commoner's spiritual authority over the assertions of the orthodox clergy and of high ranking prelates.

In the nineteenth century, the trope of the uneducated oracle appeared in variations that served religious, economic and political purposes.[140] Within religious movements, the trope frequently appeared among democratically-inclined religious denominations with lay preachers and exhorters, or whenever some remarkable spiritual performance seemed beyond a person's natural abilities. When young children at revival meetings broke out into extemporaneous sermons and exhortations, observers frequented note how the "unlearned" children gave astonishing speeches, heavily dependent on biblical texts, "that could only be inspired from above."[141] The same strategy emerged when Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910), a near contemporary of Smith and a fellow New Yorker, began his career as a trance lecturer. Known as "the Prophet of Poughkeepsie," Davis delivered hours-long extemporaneous oral performances that astonished audiences. In order to emphasize the miraculous nature of his revelations, Dr. Silas Lyon, the editor of Davis' first book, played on the themes of family poverty and limited education: ". . . the boy's school tuition [time in school] was confined to about five months, during which time he learned to read imperfectly, to write a fair hand, and to do simple sums in arithmetic."[142] Davis would become a leader in Spiritualism in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the trope of the uneducated oracle became an important commonplace in the movement. This trope particularly proved useful for women, whose voices were otherwise likely to be excluded or compromised by gender bias.

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[140] A closely related trope, if not in fact a variation of the same core template, is that of the rise from humble and obscure beginnings to the greatest heights of self-made social and political success. Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Jackson became embodiments of the populist American success story in nineteenth-century America. Such narratives continue as a staple of American culture.

[141] McNemar, *The Kentucky Revival*: 34, 26.

[142] Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and A Voice to Mankind* (New York: S. S. Lyon and Wm. Fishbough, 1847). vii-viii.

Cora Hatch (1840-1923), another New Yorker from the town of Cuba (100 miles southwest of the Smith's home in Manchester), became one of Spiritualism's most famous trance mediums, starting her career at the tender age of eleven years. The validation of her extraordinary abilities was enhanced by representations of her rudimentary level of education: "Reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, a small portion of grammar—these were the first, last, and only instructions she ever had."[143] Whereas Hatch's gender might have normally prevented her from pursuing a career in many traditional religious organizations, Cora's status as a spiritual medium endowed her with unorthodox access to spiritual authority. "Mediumship," Anne Braude observes, "circumvented the structural barriers that excluded women from religious leadership. By communicating directly with spirits, mediums bypassed the need for education, ordination, or organizational recognition."[144] Within this destabilization of orthodox hierarchies, the trope of the uneducated oracle–in this case, an innocent, guileless female speaker, an instrument in God's hands–provided the evidence of the miraculous and divine: "sparse qualifications in a trance speaker reinforced the claim that the lecture originated not with the speaker but with the spirits. While men qualified for the public platform by wisdom, education, and experience, trance speakers qualified by innocence, ignorance, and youth."[145] Thus, the varied uses of the trope of the uneducated oracle demonstrated the powerful cultural currency it contained: whether the believer was a child, woman or lower-class male, or any other member of a disenfranchised group, the trope legitimized claims to spiritual authority and provided power to marginalized voices. And in the process of overcoming cultural obstacles, the trope further provided evidence that the uneducated believer's accomplishments, whatever they might be, were divinely authorized and inspired.

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[143] Cora L. V. Tappan, *Discourses Through the Mediumship of Mrs. Cora L. V. Tappan* (London: Progressive Library and Spiritual Institution, 1875). x. See also, Harrison D. Barrett, ed. *Life Work of Mrs. Cora L. V. Richmond* (Chicago: National Spiritualist Association of the U.S.A., 1895), 8.

[144] Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001). 84.

[145] Ibid., 85.

From the very origins of Smith's career as a prophet of God, Smith's followers invoked the trope of the uneducated oracle, pointing to Smith's youth and lack of formal training as evidence of divine intervention. And the persuasive power of the trope has ensured its survival in apologetic defense, as typified by one columnist who recently proclaimed, "this young man, with only about two months of schooling, dictated roughly six to nine pages of today's printed English edition every single day for two or three months."[146] Thus, the discussion of Smith's education becomes fraught with wider implications, where descriptions of Smith's schooling almost always appear, directly or indirectly, in the context of defending the authenticity of *The Book of Mormon*.[147]

Given such circumstances, the historical contextualization of early statements requires the recognition that such depictions rarely, if ever, present uncomplicated accounts of Joseph's life, delivered for no other purpose than the enrichment of posterity. And though such rhetorical strategies enhance institutional traditions and cultural identity, the reduction of Smith's educational attainments to the level of virtual nonexistence unfortunately evacuates the rich complexities of Smith's life, often reducing historical inquiries about his background and training into faith-promoting hagiographies. Believing Joseph was barely educated thus becomes a theological proposition that approaches doctrinal emphasis, interweaving Smith's humble origins with the cosmology of a new faith.

To complicate an accurate understanding of Smith's educational background, representations of Smith's uneducated status have not been limited to religious apologia. Detractors who sought to stain Smith's reputation also disregarded or minimized Smith's level

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[146] Daniel Peterson, "Defending the Faith: Joseph, the Stone and the Hat: Why It All Matters," *Deseret News*, Friday, March 27, 2015 (accessed April 4, 2015).

[147] Emma's comment that Smith could hardly write a letter, for example, occurred in an 1879 interview with her son, Joseph III. Joseph, who was attempting to silence critics of *The Book of Mormon* by obtaining specific details of the translation process from his mother, asked pointed questions regarding the production of the text. The question that prompted Emma's response was "Q. Could not father have dictated the Book of Mormon to you, Oliver Cowdery and the others who wrote for him, after having first written it, or having read it out of some book?" Emma's hyperbolic retort that Smith "could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter" was given in that context. See Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 539.

of education in order to dismiss his works and accomplishments. By portraying Smith as being "a dull scholar," "lazy, indolent," "illiterate" and "possessed of less than ordinary intellect," skeptics could attribute the existence of *The Book of Mormon* to some alternative method or source: maybe Smith actually labored over the book for several years and secretly referenced his manuscript during the three-month "translation" project; maybe one or more of Smith's educated cohorts actually wrote it, like Sydney Rigdon and/or Oliver Cowdery; or maybe Smith plagiarized it from some other writer, like Solomon Spalding and the "lost" manuscript of an unpublished romance novel.[148] The resulting irony, of course, is that both followers and detractors of Smith have invoked Smith's purported ignorance to advance their claims, which has resulted in nearly two-centuries of representations that have glossed over Smith's exposure to formal schooling, as well as the many other sources of education available to children in the early nineteenth century.[149]

Under such circumstances, caution must be taken when analyzing Smith's level of education. The task of untangling mythological tradition from historical actualities remains difficult, given the patchwork of historical records that leave silent gaps in the account of Smith's life, as well as the incorporation of Smith's "uneducated" status into religious apologetics.

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[148] For "a dull scholar," see Christopher Stafford's statement, and for "lazy, indolent," see the Manchester Residents Group Statement, Vogel, *EMD*, 2: 194, 18. For "illiterate," see Pomeroy Tucker's account, and for "possessed of less than ordinary intellect," see Orsamus Turner's account, Vogel, *EMD*, 3: 93, 49. Orsamus Turner's account (1851) further reflects on Smith's education in connection with subsequent theories of authorship: "It is believed by those who were best acquainted with the Smith family. . . that there is no foundation for the statement that their original manuscript was written by a Mr. Spaulding, of Ohio. A supplement to the Gold Bible, 'The Book of Commandments' [Smith's revelations, an early version of his *Doctrine & Covenants*] in all probability, was written by [Sidney] Rigdon, and he may have been aided by Spaulding's manuscripts; but the book itself is without doubt, a production of the Smith family, aided by Oliver Cowdery. . . . The production as all will conclude, who have read it, or even given it a cursory review, is not that of an educated man or woman," ibid., 50-51.

[149] Dennis A. Wright and Geoffrey A. Wright describe the challenges of peering below popular (mis)conceptions in order to discover the historical details of Smith's education: "For those who accept his message, the Prophet's limited education provides evidence of God's hand in his work. . . . From a different perspective, those critical of the Prophet also cite his lack of education as evidence that he could not have written the Book of Mormon. . . . Ironically, both perspectives use the Prophet's lack of formal education to strengthen their respective views." Dennis A. Wright and Geoffrey A. Wright, "The New England Common School Experience of Joseph Smith Jr., 1810-16," in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: The New England States*, ed. Donald Q. Cannon and Arnold K. Garr, *Regional Studies Series* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 237.

Historians typically describe Smith's education as consisting of "less than two years of formal schooling," while some apologists, as noted earlier, push the time even lower, to "only about two months of schooling."[150] Such claims, however, erode under close scrutiny and do not receive support from a detailed analysis of historical accounts in relation to contemporary practices.

Joseph's Formal Education

In an essay titled *Reassessing Joseph Smith Jr.'s Formal Education* (forthcoming 2017), I have provided a detailed analysis of Smith's participation in common schools, so I will only briefly elaborate on his formal education here.[151] Tracing out a year-by-year chronology of Joseph's life, combined with the locations of the Smith family and the circumstances related to formal education opportunities, the essay determines that the amount of Joseph Smith's formal education, in spite of the many interruptions he experienced in his youth, would have equated to approximately seven school years.

To summarize briefly Smith's *formal* schooling, in approximately 1809 Smith began his studies in the town of Royalton, Vermont, where the average age of children starting school was four years (some children started even younger).[152] Accordingly, if he started school at the same age as his peers, Smith would have received either one and a half years of formal schooling or two and a half years of formal schooling in Royalton, depending on the date of the Smith family's departure to their next home in West Lebanon, New Hampshire (1811 or 1812). The point, though ostensibly trivial, is significant in Mormon studies: prior to Joseph's departure

[150] Bushman, *Rough Stone*: xx. Peterson, "Defending the Faith." (Deseret News, Friday, March 27, 2015).

[151] A comprehensive analysis that explores Smith's exposure to schooling from childhood to early adulthood is a tangent too long for this chapter. For a detailed discussion, accompanied with chronologies and tables indicating Smith's likely attendance at common schools, see William L. Davis, "Reassessing Joseph Smith Jr.'s Formal Education," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (forthcoming 2017).

[152] Vermont, *Laws of the State of Vermont; Revised and Passed by the Legislature, in the Year of our Lord, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety Seven* (Rutland, VT: State of Vermont, 1798). 494.

from Royalton, he would likely have already obtained as much formal education, if not more, than historians tend to attribute to his entire lifetime.

The Smith family would subsequently move to West Lebanon, New Hampshire, and then Norwich, Vermont, before heading approximately three hundred miles west to settle in Palmyra, New York. Apart from missing a year of school (1813), while convalescing from a leg operation, Smith would have been able to attend a total of two to three school years during the time the family lived in West Lebanon and Norwich. After moving to Palmyra, NY, the Smiths would eventually split their time between two residences: one on Main Street and another on Stafford Road. They also made preparations to purchase a farm in Manchester, NY, a town immediately south of Palmyra.

According to road lists and tax records, the Smiths did not officially take possession of the Manchester property until sometime between July 1820 and February 1821, which would have made Smith eligible for the equivalent of one and a half or two and a half years of school in Palmyra districts (this does not include summer terms; Smith was likely working summers to help alleviate the family's financial burdens).[153] Former classmates of Smith's in both Palmyra and Manchester would recall attending school with him, which strongly suggests a bare minimum of one term of attendance in each town. It is not known how long Smith attended school in Manchester, though he likely attended intermittently, seeing as how he would eventually attend a winter term (1825-1826) in South Bainbridge, New York, the same year he turned twenty years of age.

The available historical accounts of Smith's attendance at common schools, either by explicit mention or direct implication, results in the equivalent of a bare minimum of two and a half school years. The maximum, on the other hand, results in approximately ten school years. Smith's actual attendance, of course, would have occurred somewhere between those two

[153] Vogel, *EMD*, 5: 391. In order to pay off the debt for the Manchester farm (which the Smiths would eventually lose in foreclosure), all the able-bodied children likely worked during the summer terms to earn money for the family.

extremes. In any event, the claim that Smith's formal education encompassed approximately two months of schooling is untenable. And even the more generous claim that Joseph's formal education consisted of less than two years requires hypotheticals that test historical credibility and lack full support. The historical records specific to Joseph's life, the Smith family's focus on the importance of education, and the contemporary educational practices in New England and New York simply do not sustain such an interpretation.[154]

Joseph Smith's image as the young, unassuming and uneducated farmboy, chosen by God to rise from obscurity to become the prophet of a new religious dispensation, offers a familiar narrative of divine approval and sacred endowment of power. The conscious fashioning and refashioning of Smith's origin story, transmitted through written accounts and oral rehearsals, carries the palimpsestic imprint of sacred biblical narratives in the Judeo-Christian imagination: the bucolic story of young David, the humble shepherd boy, chosen by God to become the King of Israel; young Joseph, sold into Egypt as a slave, chosen by God to save his family from famine and to ensure the survival of the Hebrew nation; Jacob, the younger brother of Esau, chosen by God to become the father of Israel; and even Jesus Christ, born into the humble home of a poor carpenter, chosen by God from the foundation of time to redeem the world. Ensconced within this sacred and pastoral tradition, the lore of Joseph Smith Jr.'s humble uneducated beginnings, played against his subsequent calling by God, remains as captivating as it is venerable; for within Smith's story, which serves as a template of salvation to all of his followers, the reification of sacred narratives ensures that those of lowly circumstances and seemingly inconsequential lives can nevertheless be favored by God and elevated to eternal triumph and success. A farmboy can become a prophet, and the prophet can become a God.

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[154] The estimate of Smith's formal school attendance being less than two school years would mean Smith could only have attended a maximum of only one term of school in Palmyra, one in Manchester and one in Bainbridge (a total of one and a half years of formal education). Any further schooling would amount to the equivalent of two formal years of education, which surpasses the original claim. Thus, records indicating Smith's attendance in Royalton, VT, learning his letters from Jonathan Kinney, a local schoolteacher, would need to be inexplicably ignored. Lucy's claim that she sent her age-appropriate children to school in West Lebanon, NH, would also need to be ignored (school children started at the age of 4 years in West Lebanon, and Joseph was either 5 or 6 years of age at the time).

And as a template of sacred and eternal progression, Smith's life becomes a narrative pattern, a pathway to deification and eternal victory, which becomes available to all.

The power of sacred narratives lies in the clear, uncomplicated representations of a nostalgic past, where historical complexities are evacuated in favor of streamlined, compelling accounts of God's divine providence infused into the lives of his chosen followers. And when those narratives are enlisted in the service of establishing faith and anchoring belief, the stories are further groomed with an eye toward conversion and reassuring faith. Within the Mormon cultural imagination, Joseph Smith's dynamic transformation from an uneducated farmboy to an exalted prophet of God thus becomes entangled in mythical traditions, religious identification, the cosmology of a faith, and the evidences of the historical authenticity of *The Book of Mormon*. Yet, an excavation below the mythology reveals a narrative of Smith's life that is equally compelling for its resonance with the individual struggle for respect and self-determination. Regardless what praise or criticism would be heaped upon his memory, Smith rose to prominence through tenacious determination, persistent hard work and systematic self-improvement. The story, at least in part, would be inspirational, serving as a prime model for Mormon ethics of industriousness and productivity, were it not for the enlistment of Smith's life as evidence of divine manifestations beyond his humble and "uneducated" capabilities. For below the surface of the idealized stories, a persistent pattern of ambitious preparation emerges, revealing the narrative of an individual's yearning to overcome his seemingly insurmountable obstacles to achieve a prominent role in public life and religious leadership. Smith's story truly exemplifies the ideological aspirations and ambitions of the American Dream, though the narrative of his self-motivated ascendance has receded into the background, a casualty of evangelical representations.

Yet, for all of its exceptionalism, Smith's personal life also stands as an often exemplary narrative of the lives and prospects of many Anglo, nineteenth-century American men. Though Smith would practice an amalgamated form of Christianity and magic, found a new and potent

religious movement and further introduce new scriptures to the world, his early development and educational experiences follow patterns that were prevalent throughout the young nation. The outgrowth of his achievements, as the following chapters will further explore, sprang from the same soil and many of the same opportunities: his oratorical training mirrored the education of his peers, his intermittent exposure to formal and informal schooling was typical of his rural contemporaries, his autodidactic pursuits were so common as to be considered standard practice, and his turn to mutual improvement societies were popular social preoccupations. And within this milieu of educational opportunities and learning practices, the roles of oratorical training, preparation and delivery were central to the development of a person's skills and abilities. From this rich environment of myriad forms of oral performance and rhetorical traditions, Smith produced the foundational text and keystone of the Mormon faith: *The Book of Mormon*.

Chapter Four: Formal Education:

From Schoolbooks to Oral Performance

While the historical contextualization of Joseph Smith's oral performance of the *Book of Mormon* offers insight into the layers of nineteenth-century cultural practices in America, the question of *how* Smith actually produced the work–the specific techniques and strategies involved–requires a closer examination of the text in relation to the ways in which people acquired and developed their oratorical skills and narrative techniques. As noted earlier, Smith produced most of the *Book of Mormon* without apparently referencing notes, manuscripts or texts, with the possible exception of consulting a Bible for a limited number of *Book of Mormon* passages.[155] How then does a young man, peering into the dark confines of an upturned hat and focusing his attention on a mystical seer stone, dictate a work of more than 500 printed pages? And what formal and informal training might Smith have received to prepare him for such a task? In order to explore these questions, this chapter will examine the central role of oral performance in classroom practices, followed by an inquiry into the specific texts that Smith likely encountered in his education.

The training that occurred in common schools offers one of the most documented and consequential sources of oratorical training in the early nineteenth century, though the records detailing classroom practices are far from complete. Much of the instruction took place through the ephemeral medium of oral exchange (lectures and recitation exercises), leaving little

[155] In spite of the claims that Smith never used notes or books, textual evidence suggests Smith may have directly consulted a King James Version of the Bible for a number of extended biblical quotes. For a detailed analysis of Smith's reliance on the Bible, along with references to essays on Smith's possible use of a Bible during his composition, see Stan Larson, "The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 115-63, esp. 16, 29.

documentation in the archives.[156] Nonetheless, schoolbooks, teacher instruction manuals, educational magazines and the writings of various education reformers offer detailed descriptions of the centrality of oral performance in classroom practices.

For most children in the early nineteenth century, formal introduction to oral performance techniques began with learning the basics of reading. And it is here, at the very onset of instruction, that nineteenth-century schools began to diverge from the lessons in present-day classrooms. Unlike modern pedagogical strategies, which tend to prioritize the skill of recognizing basic letters and words in print (usually accompanied with basic pronunciation exercises, though little more), nineteenth-century schools went beyond this basic level to develop a child's skill in *performing* the alphabet by focusing on such aspects as clarity, tone, emphasis and volume. When describing this dual textual and oral approach to education, scholar Jean Ferguson Carr observes,

> Learning to read was a *textual* practice: learning to recognize and recite an alphabet, syllables, words, sentences, and texts; to read graphic symbols; and to understand the organization of printed texts. And in the nineteenth century, it was an *oral* practice: learning to pronounce, enunciate, and articulate sounds and sentences; to emphasize and pause; to adjust the body to speech; to declaim and recite.[157]

Whether at home, common school or Sunday school, adults taught children how to read by using the same basic strategies of oral presentation. The pedagogical approach was straightforward enough: children started with the letters of the alphabet, moved to short monosyllabic words, and then increased the complexity to longer words and short sentences. As Noah Webster argued, in his revised version of the enormously popular *New England Primer*, "The order of the words is calculated to assist the progress of the mind; and when a child is once

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[156] Linda Ferreira-Buckley, "Writing Instruction in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Great Britain: Continuity and Change, Transitions and Shifts," in *A Short History of Writing Instruction: From Ancient Greece to Contemporary America*, ed. James J. Murphy (New York: Routledge, 2012), 179.

[157] Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen L. Carr, and Lucille M. Schultz, *Archives of Instruction: Nineteenth-Century Rhetorics, Readers, and Composition Books in the United States* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2005). 81-82 (emphasis in original).

acquainted with all the words in this collection, he may enter upon the common spelling books with more advantage."[158] Lindley Murray, in his popular *Grammar*, offered perhaps the most succinct outline of the progress of reading and writing instruction: "The elementary sounds, under their smallest combination, produce a *syllable*; syllables properly combined produce a *word*; words duly combined produce a *sentence*; and sentences properly combined produce an *oration* or *discourse*."[159] Lessons in schools, however diverse they might be in each school's (or family's) collection of reading material, all developed along this basic line of progress. And as they mastered each level of instruction, children graduated to lessons of ever-increasing complexity, until they learned to imitate the style of celebrated authors in their own spoken and written compositions.

An examination of the schoolbooks in classrooms thus offers a detailed depiction of how children developed the recitation and performance skills that were at the core of reading instruction. When entering school, children began with a primer, which focused on the alphabet and basic reading skills, and possibly a hornbook, a handheld wooden tablet on which the alphabet, the numbers 1 through 10, and often the Lord's Prayer appeared. Next came spelling books, which were essentially glorified primers, expanding upon the earlier primer lessons with a greater degree of complexity. At this stage, children also frequently encountered basic readers, filled with collections of short passages, such as essays, stories, dialogues and speeches. Readers accompanied children through all their school years, ranging in complexity from introductory readers for small children to advanced readers for older youths. Biblical passages, primarily from the New Testament, also served as lifelong religious readers, complementing the reading and recitation material throughout the duration of a child's common school education.

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[158] Noah Webster, ed. *The New-England Primer: Improved and Adapted to the Use of Schools* (Hudson, NY: Ashbel Stoddard, 1801), Preface [i].

[159] Lindley Murray, *An English Grammar*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (York: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme; Darton and Harvey, London; Wilson and Son, and R. and W. Spence, York; Constable and Co., Edinburgh, 1808). 48 (emphasis in original).

As the readers developed in length and complexity, children were exposed to an ever greater variety of vocabulary. Therefore, pronunciation dictionaries often appeared in classrooms, providing instructions for the enunciation of words that did not appear on the vocabulary lists in primers and spellers. Next, advanced readers appeared, which served multiple functions: by reading aloud, youths developed their oratorical skills in articulating complex ideas; the paragraphs in readings were often numbered, which taught youths to observe how writers constructed and arranged their work; and the selection of readings often served as models for students to imitate, as they developed their writing and composition skills. Thus, the combination of primers, spellers, grammars, dictionaries, New Testament passages and readers of various levels of difficulty formed the core of the standard reading and writing curricula found in common schools.[160]

In addition to this core of books, texts on such coursework as arithmetic and geography rounded out a child's education, along with books on American history, or any number of a random assortment of reading texts (depending on the availability of books and whims of local instructors). And even here, oral instruction served as the primary medium of pedagogy in a highly interactive, transactional and performative setting: examinations and exhibitions involved student-teacher dialogues, in which the teacher would ask a question and the student responded verbally. Furthermore, these texts reflected the growing economic times in which they were written. Arithmetics often focused on marketplace math by instructing children on the basics of handling money, calculating interest, forming business partnerships, and understanding weights and measures for barter and exchange. More advanced math books, dealing with geometry and trigonometry, often taught children the basics of surveying land–a

[160] See also Charles Monaghan and E. Jennifer Monaghan, "Schoolbooks," in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, *A History of the Book in America* (Chapel Hill: American Antiquarian Society in association with the U of North Carolina P, 2010), 304-12.

highly sought-after skill in a time of rapid expansion into new territory.[161] American history books told a streamlined story of the origins of the American nation, as interpreted through the lens of nationalism and God's divine providence.

Students who advanced beyond this core program of instruction most often turned to texts on belletristic writing, which introduced them to the basics of classical rhetoric, coupled with increased attention to writing styles and advanced composition techniques. Common schools introduced material on these topics, such as basic rhetorical figures and introductory composition exercises, but the more advanced lessons usually occurred in secondary schools (academies, Latin grammar schools, high schools and colleges).

Regarding early nineteenth-century education, it is critical to observe that these advanced works were not intended exclusively for school use, and it would be a mistake to confine their scope of influence to formal classrooms. The authors of these works often wrote them with an audience of self-motivated readers in mind: individuals studying at home for self-improvement, family households bettering themselves through shared domestic education, and community members forming literary societies and debate clubs in the hopes of upward social mobility. "Self-instruction," Steve Carr reminds us, "was, indeed, a valued activity, cited in school readers as a response to circumstances—like travel, frontier life, seafaring, rural living, or illness—that made formal schooling difficult. Textbooks often advertised their usefulness 'at home' as well as in 'schools and academies.'"[162] John Walker, a popular and influential writer of schoolbooks in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, provides a typical example in the introduction of his work, *The Teacher's Assistant in English Composition* (1808). Writing his directions to "Parents and Preceptors" on how to use his text on elementary composition,

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[161] For a detailed analysis of the role of surveying in colonial and post-Revolutionary America, see Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by University of North Carolina Press, 2006). See also "Addressing Maps in British America: Print, Performance, and the Cartographic Reformation," in *Cultural Narratives: Textuality and Performance in American Culture Before 1900*, ed. Sandra M. Gustafson and Caroline Sloat (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2010).

[162] Carr, Carr, and Schultz, *Archives of Instruction*: 5.

Walker indicates, "It is hoped that the present Work will be found useful, not only to those who are under the care of a teacher, but to those who wish to improve *themselves*."[163] Similar missives in countless educational books serve as a reminder of this widespread culture of self-improvement.

Popular Schoolbooks in Joseph Smith's World

Extant historical records do not reveal a complete list of textbooks that Joseph may have used in school. Yet, in spite of this challenge, a number of clues still emerge that suggest the specific texts Smith likely studied, as well as the typical schoolbooks in his immediate environment. In January of 1844, for example, Smith donated a small collection of books to the newly formed Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute, a mutual improvement society established in the growing city of Nauvoo, Illinois. Apart from religious commentaries, texts on poetry and prose, travel narratives and histories, a few schoolbooks also appeared on his donation list. They included John Brown's *An Appeal from the Present Popular System of English Philology, to Common Sense: Designed to Aid the Introduction of the American System of English Grammar* (1825); John Brown's *An English Syntascope, Developing the Constructive Principles of the English Phrenod, or Language, and Impressing Them on the Memory by Pictorial, and Scenical Demonstration* (1839); and Rev. Charles A. Goodrich's *A History of the United States of America* (1822). Of these books, however, it is likely that Goodrich's *History* was the only text available to Smith in his school years in New York. Brown's *An Appeal from the Present Popular System of English Philology* (1825; rev. ed., 1828), later retitled *An Appeal from the British System of English Grammar* (1836), was an unsuccessful attempt to displace

[163] John Walker, *The Teacher's Assistant in English Composition; Or, Easy Rules for Writing Themes and Composing Exercises on Subjects Proper for the Improvement of Youth of Both Sexes at School* (Boston: J. T. Buckingham, 1810). vii, xv (emphasis in original).

Lindley Murray's immensely popular *English Grammar* (1795), and the text never gained traction in the common school system in New York State during the 1820s.[164]

Apart from the book donations to the Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute, four additional schoolbooks are associated with Joseph Smith. A copy of Thomas Tucker Smiley's *Sacred Geography* (1824), a text "Adapted to the Use of Schools and Private Families" and signed by Joseph Smith, resides in the archives of Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or RLDS).[165] John Henry Evans, author of one of the earliest full biographies on Joseph Smith, adds three more titles: Lindley Murray's *English Reader* (1799), Giles M. DeWolf and Brown's *First Lines in Arithmetic* (1818), and Rev. Ralph Erskine's *Gospel Sonnets: Or, Spiritual Songs* (1726).[166] Yet, in spite of these helpful clues, the titles offer only a limited number of pieces from a larger puzzle.

Most of the schoolbooks mentioned here in connection to Smith are texts that children would encounter *after* they had advanced beyond the basic skills of reading and writing. Thus, apart from not knowing with certainty if Smith actually owned these texts during his school years, research into Smith's educational experiences is still faced with the challenge of piecing together the books Smith would likely have encountered from the beginning of his education,

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[164] Smith's ownership of such texts provides further evidence of his continued study and self-improvement. For the statistics on school texts in the late 1820s and early 1830s, see the paragraph that follows.

[165] The Community of Christ archives are located in Independence, Missouri. For a list of Joseph Smith's books, see H. Michael Marquardt, "Books Owned by Joseph Smith," https://user.xmission.com/~research/about/books.htm (accessed February 11, 2016). If Smith used *Sacred Geography* in school, then the 1824 publication date means Smith could only have used the book in the 1825 or 1826 winter school terms (1825 in Manchester or 1826 in Bainbridge; Smith was likely working during the summer terms). Smith's ownership of Goodrich's *History* (1822) and Smiley's *Sacred Geography* (1824) further suggests that Smith may have attended school, even if only intermittently, during the 1822 through 1825 school years.

[166] According to Evans, "These books were given by the Prophet to a fifteen-year-old boy—Richard Bush—who worked for him on his farm in Nauvoo," John Henry Evans, *Joseph Smith: An American Prophet*, Classics in Mormon Literature (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1989). 33; see also Evans' bibliography notes, 436. For additional information on Richard Bush, see Marquardt, https://user.xmission.com/~research/about/books.htm. The dates for the titles in the parentheses represent original publication dates of each title, rather than the publication dates of Smith's books; the exception is Smith's copy of *First Lines in Arithmetic*, which was published in 1818.

from the moment he entered a schoolhouse as a toddler. As mentioned earlier, children progressed through their common school curriculum along a standard progression of reading texts: primers, spellers, grammars, dictionaries and readers. Smith's existing books for reading and writing only cover the latter portion of this spectrum. Thus, in order to reconstruct a more complete framework of Smith's common school training, and therefore the techniques of oral performance he likely encountered, this study will step back and look at the way schoolbooks figured into a growing, statewide interest in developing consistent standards for education in New York common schools.

New York State Common School System

In the early nineteenth century, New York was a leader among the states in developing a standardized school system. And while some of the most informative developments occurred at the same time Smith was finishing his common school education, the timing of these developments remain close enough to Smith's school years to offer important insights. This is particularly helpful in terms of schoolbooks. In 1826, as part of the effort to create a statewide standard of instruction, legislators required a detailed listing of the main schoolbooks used in classrooms throughout the state.[167] The first report appeared in 1827, covering the 1826 school year (the same year Smith attended his final winter term in Bainbridge, Chenango County). And though they are too late to reveal the specific texts used in Palmyra and Manchester, the annual reports nevertheless imply a clear trend concerning the most popular schoolbooks in the years previous to 1826 (barring an unlikely radical statewide shift in the choice of books).

In spite of a large variety of schoolbooks used throughout the state, the five most popular schoolbooks on reading and writing remain standard in the reports spanning 1826 to 1833:

[167] The 1830 annual report on the common schools indicates the status of efforts toward standardization: "The Legislature has frequently been called upon to adopt some particular book for the use of the schools; or to employ some professional book-maker to devise a set of class books, in order to make all the schools use books of a similar kind. . . . but the attainment of this object is attended with much difficulty" The State of New York, *Legislative Documents of the Senate and Assembly of the State of New-York, Fifty-Third Session* (Albany: The State of New York, 1830). Doc. No. 31. 13.

Lindley Murray's *English Reader* (1799) consistently tops the list as the most popular schoolbook throughout the state, not only among readers but among all the schoolbooks in any other category. Lindley Murray's *Grammar* (1795) comes in second, followed by Noah Webster's *Spelling Book* (1783). Next comes the New Testament, and, finally, John Walker's *Pronunciation Dictionary* (1791). The only non-reading and writing texts among the top seven schoolbooks in this eight-year period are Nathan Daboll's arithmetic manual, *Schoolmaster's Assistant* (1799; rev. 1814), and William Channing Woodbridge's *Rudiments of Geography* (1822).[168]

The cultural influence of these specific books on New York State's educational landscape should not be underestimated. Not only were these reading and writing texts the most popular in classrooms, they also dominated over competitors' schoolbooks. In 1826, for example, 434 towns used Murray's *English Reader*, while 93 towns used the second most popular reader, Caleb Bingham's *The American Preceptor* (1794), and only 21 towns used Webster's *American Reader* (1795).[169] Also in 1826, 389 towns used Murray's *Grammar*, compared to the second most popular work, Greenleaf's *Grammar* (1819), which only 35 towns used. Lyman Cobb's

[168] Daboll's *Arithmetic* jockeys with Lindley's *Grammar* for second place overall, while Woodbridge's *Geography* usually comes in sixth, between the New Testament and Walker's *Dictionary*. For a chart comparing the usage of schooltexts in New York States, see *Documents of the Assembly of the State of New-York, Fifty-Seventh Session* (Albany: The State of New York, 1834). Doc. No. 9, 100. In terms of the variety of schoolbooks, Flagg reveals the lack of a statewide standard curriculum when he observes, "...there are in use twelve different kinds of spelling-books; of arithmetics twelve kinds; of grammars 8; of geographies 13; of dictionaries 8; of readers, histories, and the various other kinds of books, 47—making a total of one hundred different kinds of books used in the common schools." *Legislative Documents of the Senate, Fifty-Third Session*: Doc. No. 31, 13. Yet, in spite of the proliferation of textbooks, the underlying methods of instruction remained basically uniform in theory, though the reading material could be quite different from one textbook to the next, arranged in varying formats. For a description of the variety of formats in more advanced readers and rhetorics, see Carr, Carr, and Schultz, *Archives of Instruction*: 21-22. Such homogeneity in teaching strategies, as well as consistency among the most popular schoolbooks, did not, however, translate to consistent levels of instruction in the classroom. The differences in the quality of education from one school district to the next were usually a reflection of an individual instructor's teaching abilities, rather than access to particular materials. Nevertheless, in terms of Joseph Smith's common school education, the relative uniformity of teaching strategies allow for a few broad observations regarding what his instruction must have included.

[169] In 1829, the towns using Murray's *English Reader* jumped to 584 and remained near or above the 550 mark during the 1826-1833 period, while the towns using Bingham's *American Preceptor* steadily declined to only 17 by 1833; Webster's *American Reader* ranged between 17 and 24 towns in the same eight-year period.

Spelling Book (1821; rev. 1825) is the only serious upstart among reading texts. Competing with Webster's *Speller*, Cobb's work gained widespread popularity by 1829. Yet, Webster's *Speller* remained the speller of choice, appearing in twice as many towns as Cobb's work (in 1826, 209 towns used Cobb, while 417 used Webster; the ratio remained approximately the same from 1829 to 1833). Lastly, John Walker's *Pronunciation Dictionary* (1791) had no serious competitors and remained the leading enunciation dictionary used in classrooms.[170]

In his 1830 annual report, Azariah C. Flagg, the Superintendent of Common Schools for the State of New York, informed the legislators that, "The books most in use. . . are Webster's Spelling-Book, Daboll's Arithmetic, Murray's Grammar, Woodbridge's Geography, Walker's Dictionary, and the English Reader."[171] These efforts to enumerate the various schoolbooks would contribute to the eventual standardization of common school curriculum, a practice that many other states sought to emulate.[172] Furthermore, in this review of books, recall that

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[170] The State of New York, *Documents of the Assembly, Fifty-Seventh Session*: 100.

[171] *Legislative Documents of the Senate, Fifty-Third Session*: Doc. No. 31, 13. In spite of the dominance of these schoolbooks, Flagg reveals the lack of a statewide standard curriculum when he also comments on the wide variety of texts that appeared throughout the state: "...there are in use twelve different kinds of spelling-books; of arithmetics twelve kinds; of grammars 8; of geographies 13; of dictionaries 8; of readers, histories, and the various other kinds of books, 47—making a total of one hundred different kinds of books used in the common schools." Ibid.

[172] The statistics on the general use of school texts throughout the state of New York further reflect the specific texts used in the counties where the Smith family lived. In 1829, when Joseph Smith's younger siblings were still attending school in Manchester, Ontario County, NY, the common schools in Manchester, and in neighboring Palmyra (Wayne County), shared the same preferences in schoolbooks: for Spellers, Webster's *Spelling Book* (1783) was most popular (12 towns in Ontario, 10 in Wayne), followed by Lyman Cobb's *Spelling Book* (1821; 5 towns in Ontario and 7 in Wayne); for Arithmetics, Nathan Daboll's *Schoolmaster's Assistant* (1799) was most popular (11 in Ontario, 11 in Wayne), followed by Tobias Ostrander's *The Elements of Numbers, or Easy Instructor* (1822; 9 in Ontario, 6 in Wayne); for Grammars, Murray's *Grammar* (1795) was most popular (9 in Ontario, 8 in Wayne), followed by Jeremiah Greenleaf's *Grammar Simplified* (1821; 2 in Ontario, 1 in Wayne); for Geographies, William Channing Woodbridge's *Rudiments of Geography* (1822) was most popular (7 in Ontario, 6 in Wayne), closely followed by Jacob A. Cummings' *An Introduction to Ancient and Modern Geography* (1813; 5 in Ontario and 3 in Wayne), and Jedidiah Morse's *Geography* (likely his *Geography Made Easy*, an abridgement intended for use in schools of his *American Universal Geography*, originally published in 1789; 4 in Ontario, 4 in Wayne); for Dictionaries, John Walker's *Pronunciation Dictionary* (1791) was most popular (2 in Ontario, 1 in Wayne), followed by Noah Webster's *Dictionary* (likely Webster's *A Dictionary of the English Language; Compiled for the Use of Common Schools in the United States*, published in 1807; only 1 in Ontario); for Readers, Murray's *English Reader* (1799) was most popular (11 in Ontario, 11 in Wayne), followed by either Ezra Sampson's *The Brief Remarker on the Ways of Man* (1818; 4 in Ontario, 1 in Wayne), the New Testament (2 in Ontario, 6 in Wayne), and Charles A.

Goodrich's *History* is one of the advanced school texts Joseph Smith owned and donated to the Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute. Thus, Smith's ownership of Murray's *English Reader* and Goodrich's *American History* is consistent with the most common advanced schoolbooks used in Ontario and Wayne Counties, where Smith attended school in the latter portion of his education.[173]

Joseph's School Satchel

The review of Smith's books, coupled with the most popular texts in his immediate environment, suggest the following core set of schoolbooks that likely formed the backbone of

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Goodrich's *A History of the United States of America* (1822; 3 towns in Ontario). Though the preceding statistics reflect the 1829 school year, many of these titles likely formed part of the reading the curriculum in earlier years, as suggested by the imprints from local printers. Canandaigua, for example, a town located approximately 12 miles south of the Smith family farm in Manchester, was home to several printers. In particular, James D. Bemis, one of the most prominent local printers and booksellers, not only published a local newspaper, *Ontario Repository*, he also printed a number of schoolbooks that filled the classrooms of neighboring common schools: Lindley Murray's *English Reader* (printed in 1819 and 1822), Lindley Murray's *Grammar* (printed in 1823), Tobias Ostrander's *The Elements of Numbers* (printed in 1823 and 1829), Ezra Sampson's *Brief Remarker* (printed 1821 and 1823), John Walker's *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary*, as edited by Rev. Thomas Smith (printed 1824), and Noah Webster's *The American Spelling Book* (printed 1827 and 1828). Douglas C. McMurtrie, former National Editor of the American Imprints Inventory, observes, "The Canandaigua printers produced, for the most part, material of immediate local interest." Douglas C. McMurtrie, "A Bibliography of Books, Pamphlets and Broadsides Printed at Canandaigua, New York, 1799-1820," *Grosvenor Library Bulletin* 21, no. 4 (1939): 65. James Bemis published several other schoolbooks and works of interest: Oliver Goldsmith's *Roman History* (printed 1820), Isaac Watts' *Plain and Easy Catechism for Children* (printed 1823 and 1827), and an anonymous *Juvenile Spelling-Book and Reading Lessons for Children* (1826). Bemis also printed books the types of books that debate societies incorporated into their essays, recitations, debates and other proceedings, such as *Indian Speeches; Delivered by Farmer's Brother and Red Jacket, Two Seneca Chiefs* (1809; revised edition printed 1811 under the title *Native Eloquence, Being Public Speeches Delivered by Two Distinguished Chiefs of the Seneca Tribe of Indians, Known Among the White People by the Names of Red Jacket and Farmer's Brother*), Timothy Pickering's *Political Essays* (printed 1812), Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man* (printed 1814 and 1817[?]), Richard Baxter's *A Call to the Unconverted* (printed 1818 and 1822), and William Paley's *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1822). For a list of Canandaigua imprints, see ibid. For an extensive discussion on publications available in Joseph Smith's upstate New York environment, see D. Michael Quinn's chapter "Rural New York's Intellectual Life" in *Early Mormonism*: 178-236, esp. 178-94.

[173] Joseph Smith's ownership of Goodrich's *History* (1822) offers a tantalizing clue to his continued attendance at common school beyond his fifteenth year of age. If he obtained a new copy of this 1822 text for class use (the first year the book was published), then Smith would have been in attendance at the Manchester common school for at least one term of the 1823 school year (likely the winter term spanning 1822 to 1823, when hiring out for seasonal work was either scarce or unavailable). This would then suggest that Smith attended school in Manchester for at least the winter in which he turned 17 years of age, and perhaps later; see also footnote 10.

Smith's instruction in reading and writing (whether by direct usage of these specific books or by the study of competing texts that borrowed material and pedagogical strategies directly from them): a primer (most likely *The New England Primer*, first edition ca. 1690), Webster's *American Spelling Book* (1783), Murray's *Grammar* (1795), Walker's *Pronunciation Dictionary* (1791), the Bible (primarily the New Testament in common school classrooms, but both Old and New Testament in domestic and Sunday school education), Erskine's *Gospel Sonnets* (1726), and Murray's *English Reader* (1799), combined with some degree of exposure to Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* (1785) and Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric* (1783). This list is not intended as a comprehensive survey of Smith's exposure to such texts.[174] Nor do I insist that Smith made direct and thorough usage of each text. Rather, this collection aims to identify the schoolbooks Smith used, or likely used, as a point of access into the classroom pedagogies Smith would most likely have encountered in his education.

Putting Books to Use: Oratorical Training and the "Art of Performance"

Having sketched out a general framework of Joseph Smith's literacy instruction in the context of early nineteenth-century educational practices, coupled with a review of the schoolbooks that appeared either directly or indirectly within Smith's compass, I will now turn to the more practical matters of oratorical training: what precisely children learned and how they developed their public speaking skills. Thus, by means of both schoolbooks and classroom practices, this chapter aims to provide an enhanced understanding of the oratorical aspects of Smith's nineteenth-century educational context. Indeed, I need to reiterate the importance of comprehending Smith's education through the critical lens of performance: this chapter focuses

[174] In 1829, Ezra Sampson's *The Brief Remarker on the Ways of Man* (1818) was used as a schoolbook in four towns in Ontario County, NY (the county encompassing Manchester). James Bemis, a printer and bookseller in Canandaigua, NY, began printing this religious reader for local schools in 1821, followed by a reprint in 1823. This is the same period of time when the Smith family relocated to Manchester, Ontario County, NY, and Joseph Smith attended a minimum of one winter term of common school. See McMurtrie, "A Bibliography of Books," 81, 85; and *Legislative Documents of the Senate, Fifty-Third Session*: Doc. No. 31; 52.

on *how* a child learned oratorical skills, as much as *what* the child actually learned. Classroom practices involved daily drills in reading aloud, memorization, public speaking and active listening. Those aspects of classroom practices, however, can easily be forgotten when the focus of a historical inquiry fixates on the textual residue of classroom practices (i.e., the material studied: the written lessons in schoolbooks, notebooks, manuals, etc.), rather than on the ephemeral mode of repetitive oral performance by which the lessons and skills were taught in the dynamics of a living classroom. The incessant classroom oral exercises, even the monotonous repetition of syllables and simple vocabulary words, functioned to develop vocal skills and presentational techniques. And at every step of the way in a child's education, oral performance assumed a central role.

Therefore, rather than offering a cursory review of the texts and techniques in common school classrooms, as is common in historical surveys of nineteenth-century education, this chapter aims to go into greater detail regarding the specific techniques children learned, how they practiced their skills, and how those techniques might later manifest themselves in public speaking, storytelling and composition. The most basic and introductory lessons in common school classrooms laid the foundation for complex oratorical performances in later years. And here, even in the nascent years of oratorical development, traces of Smith's eventual oral production of the *Book of Mormon* begin to emerge.

Primers

For a northeastern family like the Smiths, children usually started their education at home or at school with a copy of the ubiquitous *New England Primer*, possibly proceeded by, or complemented with, a hornbook. As with the more advanced spellers, primers began with one or two pages introducing the child to the various fonts and cases of the letters in the alphabet, usually including examples of lower-case, upper-case, capitals and possibly italic forms. Recognizing and identifying each of the letters was, of course, the first step in learning how to

read. Nevertheless, and equally important, was the task of learning how to read aloud *with poise and clarity*. Next, in order to reinforce the connection between the sound and typographical symbol of a letter, primers offered lists of "easy syllables for Children" to repeat aloud: "ab, eb, ib, ob, ub / ac, ec, ic, oc, uc / ad, ed, id, od, ud," etc. Children recited these lists *ad nauseum*, while teachers monitored their pronunciation and clarity. Thus, the lists served not only as visual symbols to memorize, but as *vocal enunciation drills* to perform again and again. In other words, the exercises aimed to develop the speaking skills of the child, as well as the child's ability to recognize the sounds associated with letters.

From these lists of abstract and simple syllables, the primers moved to lists of monosyllabic words: "age, all, ape, are / Babe, beef, best, bold / Cat, cake, crown, cup," etc. And as they advanced, children would confront words of greater length and complexity, eventually reciting such lists as, "Easy words of Four Syllables, the full accent on the first, and a half Accent on the third": "SE-mi-Na-ry, IG-no-Mi-ny, TER-ri-To-ry, IN-tri-Ca-cy, TES-ti-Mo-ny, MIS-cel-La-ny, CON-tro-Ver-sy, PUR-ga-To-ry," and so on. As children moved from one word to the next, teachers stressed the performance skills of clarity and proper enunciation, as well as elocutionary cadence and the rhythmic flow between words in the recitation lists.

"Learning letters" was not merely limited to learning the alphabet. Primers quickly introduced students to more complex texts, ideas and skills. As Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen L. Carr and Lucille M. Schultz observe, "Even a very elementary book, like a primer, could include surprisingly advanced vocabulary and texts."[175] Memorization, for example, played a central role in learning letters and performing texts. No sooner did children master the letters of the alphabet than they were introduced to texts which they were required to learn by heart and perform in class, such as The Lord's Prayer; Dr. Isaac Watts' *Cradle Hymn*; short prayers for waking, sleeping and blessing food; the Apostles' Creed; and short rhymes associated with the letters of the alphabet, often couched in parallelisms and proverbs to assist the memory, and

[175] Carr, Carr, and Schultz, *Archives of Instruction*: 6.

thereby performance (The letter A is coupled with "A Wise Son makes a glad Father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his Mother"; B with "Better is a little, with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith."). The short rhymes accompanied with small woodcut pictures further encouraged children to memorize the alphabet by associating letters and sounds with visual imagery ("A" is demonstrated with "In Adam's fall, we sinned all," accompanied with a small cut showing Eve offering an apple to Adam, while Satan, as a snake, wraps itself around the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil).[176]

The unusually advanced skills of reading, recitation and memorization at this introductory level of literacy education might best be observed in one of the central assignments of the primers: memorizing a version of the Westminster "Shorter Catechism," which usually consists of more than one hundred answers to theological questions (short answers average 10 to 20 words in length, while long answers average 40 to 50). The memorized responses cover a variety of topics that aimed to inculcate a foundation of essential Christian thought: the nature of God and his works; covenant theology; the Calvinist doctrine of election; the fall of mankind and the necessity of Christ's atonement and redemption; the concepts of justification, adoption and sanctification; the Ten Commandments and moral law, coupled with explanations of each; the ordinances and sacraments, including faith, repentance and baptism; and finally, a series of responses analyzing the Lord's Prayer in detail.

Children worked on memorizing shorter sections of the catechism, learning line upon line by heart, with the expectation that they would eventually commit the entire list to memory in order to perform them with a teacher. Indeed, this memorization project would begin as soon as children entered school. Before they had even learned how to read, children began memorizing the responses to the catechism by means of an oral exchange of questions and

[176] *The New-England Primer, Or, an Easy and Pleasant Guide to the Art of Reading*, (New England: 1801[?]). [11, 7].

answers with teachers.[177] Thus, orality often preceded literacy at the onset of a child's education. Furthermore, the ultimate *performance* of catechetical exchanges provided parents and instructors with tangible indexical markers of the child's success in obtaining a moral education.

Imagery also played an important role. The images in New England primers were not limited to simple woodcuts for each letter of the alphabet. As part of the goal to teach reading skills and religious morals simultaneously, for example, Webster's *New England Primer* introduced a large woodcut of the martyrdom of John Rogers to the child reader. The representations of this historical moment differ from one primer to the next (the *New England Primer* appeared in an extensive variety of formats and versions), yet most woodcuts show Rogers burning at a stake, while his wife and nine children look on with (obvious) great sadness. Accompanying the image is a didactic poem, attributed to Rogers, encouraging children to "Lay up his [God's] laws within your heart."[178] In this multimodal approach, the content of the poem, the task of memorization and the image of Rogers all merged together, reinforcing the spiritual lessons through visual, aural and oral pathways. Thus, imagery and visualization was actively enlisted to aid memorization in performance training.

Finally, a discussion on the process of education would be incomplete without reminding the reader about the role of religious urgency, and how that urgency motivated teachers, parents and children. Since the colonial era in New England, education was viewed as the first step in raising morally upright children. More than learning how to read the newspaper for enjoyment or knowledge, or bettering a child's education for future career opportunities, families and instructors taught children how to read in order for them to read the Bible. Literacy led to scriptural study and a correct understanding of God. And through understanding and

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[177] Even the "Shorter Catechism" could be too long or complex for very young children to memorize. In a reprinted article in *The American Sunday School Teachers' Magazine and Journal of Education*, the writer introduces a simpler catechism for children to memorize, stating, "it is designed for very young children who cannot read." Anon., "On Catechetical Instruction," *The American Sunday School Teacher's Magazine, and Journal of Education* 1824, 115.

[178] Webster, *The New-England Primer: Improved and Adapted*, [35-36].

obedience, the child could grow in righteousness and follow the Lord. "Train up a Child in the way he should go," the caption of an 1801 *New England Primer* frontispiece proclaims, "and when he is old he will not depart from it."[179] As a pedagogical strategy, the fear of spiritual death and eternal damnation provided an endless and vivid supply of motivation.

One of the first dialogue exercises a child would encounter appeared in the *New England Primer*, titled, "A Dialogue between Christ, a Youth and the Devil." This dialogue, which students would have memorized and performed in class and at recitations, recounts a child's fatal errors from listening to Satan's temptations and falling away from Christ. Though the child eventually pleads for salvation, the Lord tells the child that repentance is too late. Then Death enters to take the child away, followed by the moral of the story:

DEATH.
Youth, I am come to fetch thy breath,
And carry thee to the shades of death;
No pity on thee I can show,
Thou hast thy GOD offended so.
Thy soul and body I'll divide;
Thy body in the grave I'll hide:
And thy dear soul in hell must be
With devils to eternity.

Thus end the days of woeful youth,
Who won't obey nor mind the truth,
Nor hearken to what preachers say,
But do their parents disobey.
They in their youth shall go to hell,
Under eternal wrath to dwell;
And do not live out half their days
For cleaving unto sinful ways.[180]

[179] The woodcut shows a mother sitting in the parlor of her home, teaching two attentive children (accompanied by a faithful pet dog) how to read. The inclusions of a domestic scene as the frontispiece of a schoolbook, coupled with the caption from Proverbs 22:6, reveals the overlapping, communal effort from home, church and school to teach literacy to children. *The New-England Primer, Or, an Easy and Pleasant Guide to the Art of Reading*: frontispiece.

[180] Webster's *The New-England Primer: Improved and Adapted*, [49-50].

For a moment, recall that reading, reciting and memorizing these texts occurred at home, school and church. Thus, apart from a local schoolhouse in the daytime, or a Sunday school class at church, countless children would have worked on this very same passage, while sitting with their families around an evening fireside. One can only imagine how the toddlers felt, when reciting or listening to these lines, with little light from the hearth's flames and a host of flickering shadows disappearing into the darkest corners of the room. And when bedtime would come, as it always did, the fires would die down to smoldering coals, the candles would be blown out, and children would slowly feel their way to bed; then sleep would drift into the household, with restless visions of eternal consequence, emerging from the pitch-black darkness of a nineteenth-century night.

Spelling Books

From the perspective of the student, spellers were very similar to primers. Many of the enunciation lessons were, in fact, exact duplicates. Yet, the spellers contained material that catered to the needs of children whose skills had advanced beyond the basic lessons in the primers. Rather than simply containing enunciation drills, for example, spellers provided information about the nature of the sounds, the ways in which sounds combined to create words. "A syllable is one letter. . . . Spelling is the art of dividing words into their proper syllables, in order to find their true pronunciation," offered Webster's exposition on syllables.[181] Through drills that dissected words into their component parts, children were trained in identifying the ways in which sounds mix and match to create words: "A-base, com-pute, de-pute, en-tice, com-plete, de-rive, en-tire." Sunday school spellers often included lists of "Scriptural Names," which further called attention to the ways in which names and words in the Bible could be formed by the arrangement and rearrangement of sounds: "Ca-naan-ite, Ra-ma,

[181] *The American Spelling Book: Containing an Easy Standard of Pronunciation, Being the First Part of a Grammatical Institute of the English Language* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793). 26.

Zeph-a-ni-ah, Ga-bri-el, Je-ru-sa-lem, Man-na."[182] Students were further instructed in the basic parts of speech, such as vowels (long and short), diphthongs, consonants, and placement of stress in polysyllabic words.[183] This detailed focus on the way in which individual sounds could mix and match to create different words offered children insight into the very construction of language: a string of single syllables could combine to form complex words, and complex words could be dissected into their component syllables.

Spellers, however, did not limit their lessons to word lists. As they progressed through the lessons, mastering the articulation of the ever-increasing complexity of words, children encountered practice reading texts that included short stories with moral lessons, (e.g., "Of a Boy that stole Apples," "The Country Maid and her Milk Pail," etc.), simple dialogues, lists of maxims, and often a short introduction to grammar.[184] Many of these practice texts simultaneously acted as scripts for recitations, and strict attention to oral performance skills accompanied all of these exercises.

Children recited these word lists and short readings in specific preparation for public performance. Only in classrooms with inattentive and inexperienced teachers might the exercises fall into the monotonous repetitions with no seeming purpose. Rather, teachers monitored the exercises to ensure that students not only pronounced the words correctly but to do so with enough confidence, clarity and emphasis to be heard clearly *by an audience*. On a weekly basis, children were required to stand in front of the class and recite a short piece, be it a verse of scripture verse, a short poem, a moral maxim, or part of a dialogue. And during final oral examinations at the end of each term, children performed in front of family, friends, neighbors and community leaders. To that end, teachers prepared their students to recite with

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[182] The Sunday and Adult School Union, *The Sunday School Spelling Book; Compiled at the Request of The Sunday and Adult School Union of Philadelphia; Calculated for the Use of Schools in General*, 5th ed. (Philadelphia: The Sunday and Adult School Union, 1822). 41-42.

[183] Webster, *American Spelling Book*: [11].

[184] Ibid., 83, 85, 125, 41.

sufficient volume and clarity to be heard, most often *outdoors*, by an audience of restive onlookers, against the distractions of whispers and conversations from audience members, crying children, and restless animals, as well as disturbances from other recitation day activities. Thus, the daily recitation of word lists and short passages in the classroom functioned as vocal exercises and performance rehearsals, much the same as singers and actors today use vocal warm-ups to improve the quality of sound, develop breath control and enhance projection.[185]

Grammars

In modern educational practices, grammar might not be considered as an exercise closely related to oral performance. Nevertheless, knowledge of proper grammar was considered a key to appropriate delivery and vocal clarity. In the introduction to his *English Grammar*, Lindley Murray quotes Hugh Blair, who in turn argues, "the study of arranging and expressing our thoughts with propriety, teaches to think as well as to speak, accurately."[186] More to the point, Murray later echoes Blair by announcing, "English Grammar is the art of speaking and writing the English language with propriety."[187] Grammars extended the lessons found in spellers, turning attention to the construction of sentences and the analysis of the parts of speech. Just as the primers and spellers dissected words into their component parts, grammars did the same to entire sentences, preparing students for lessons in composition.

With Webster's *Grammar*, for example, students learned how to "parse" a phrase, identifying the differences between "Nouns, Articles, Pronouns, Adjectives, Verbs, Abbreviations or Particles," along with "adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositions," as well as simple sentences,

[185] For a description of oral exams and performances on school exhibition days, see Carolyn Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers: Making an American Public after the Revolution* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009). 29-38.

[186] Murray, *Grammar*, 1: 10.

[187] Ibid., 21. This emphasis on "propriety" also suggests the focus of language on upward social mobility through an awareness of class conventions.

compound sentences, auxiliaries, participles, etc.[188] All the while, memorization played an important role: students studying Murray's *Grammar* were required to memorize and recite to instructors "the more important rules, definitions, and observations" of all the grammatical rules, as they worked their way through the text.[189]

After identifying the basic components of words and sentences, grammars might then instruct students on how "to understand their connection by agreement and government," according to various grammatical and compositional rules.[190] As students progressed in writing and basic composition, introductory matters of style also appeared, such as Murray's introduction to the analysis and composition of proper paragraphs (though students did not usually start composing paragraphs at this stage in Murray's system).[191]

Grammars also taught basic rhetorical figures, such as Webster's introduction of "Ellipsis," defined as "the elegant omission of a word or words in a sentence. . . . judiciously managed, renders language concise, without obscuring the sense," or "Arrangement," which taught students to develop ideas in a logical sequence within sentences (a skill that would extend to multiple sentences in a passage when students encountered readers).[192]

Murray's Grammar also introduced such rhetorical devices as Metaphor, Allegory, Comparison, Metonymy, Personification, Antithesis, Hyperbole, Irony and Amplification.[193] Thus, grammars built upon the foundation of spellers, expanding the child's view of language from the level of words to phrases to matters of style, rhetoric and the basic composition of sentences.

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[188] Noah Webster, *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language... Part II*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Hartford: Noah Webster, 1784). for examples see 6, 105, 10.

[189] Murray, *Grammar*, 1: 6.

[190] Webster, *Grammar*, 2: 51.

[191] Murray, *Grammar*, 1: 396-99.

[192] Webster, *Grammar*, 2: 97, 98-99.

[193] Murray, *Grammar*, 1: 467.

In all these lessons, the development of good oratorical skills remained a primary focus. As children advanced in the development of their reading and writing skills, instructors continued to encourage their students to be highly conscientious in their oratorical delivery. Again, it cannot be stressed enough that the ability to read a sentence and parse it into grammatical units was not sufficient for a proper education. Children needed to go beyond this basic level of literacy to learn how to *speak effectively* in order to function as a citizen and moral person in society. In other words, the focus was not merely on *what* the speaker was saying, but *how* the speaker was saying it. Instruction in the proper techniques of oratory gave special attention to a variety of performance skills: how to emphasize significant words in a sentence; how to stress the proper accents on the appropriate syllables in words; how to deliver the appropriate cadence of tone in the beginning, middle and end of phrases; and how to be precise in differentiating the pronunciation of long and short vowels.

Instructors further reinforced these skills by teaching children how to interpret and perform the punctuation in texts. Unlike today, where punctuation quietly and tersely serves to mark the grammatical features of a sentence, punctuation in the early nineteenth century functioned as rhetorical performance cues that provided explicit directions on how a reader should recite the text aloud. Murray admonishes students on this topic, saying, "Punctuation is the art of dividing a written composition into sentences, or parts of sentences, by points or stops [punctuation marks], *for the purpose of marking the different pauses which the sense, and an accurate pronunciation, require*."[194] And though the systems were not always consistent in their timing and descriptions, they shared a similar set of relative values for punctuation marks.

A comma, for example, usually indicated that the readers should pause in their recitation for the length of one syllable (or one breath, or a short pause); semi-colons represented a double pause; colons doubled the length of the pause yet again to four syllables; a period not only signaled the end of a sentence but required a change in inflection or "cadence"; and the words

[194] Ibid., 369 (emphasis mine).

appearing inside parentheticals called for a difference in rhythm, emphasis, speed or tone.[195] Punctuation thus acted as a notation system for the cadences, rhythms and modulations of oral performance, functioning much the same as the notations in sheet music that cue the performer on how to interpret and perform a musical composition.[196]

The result of this performance-oriented instruction was a class full of students critically attuned to the speaking skills of an orator–not only in themselves but in others. The average child developed a skill set in both delivering *and listening for* pauses, variations in voice, rhythms, emphasis and vocal tones that few students study or practice today, apart from those in such specialized fields as communications, linguistics or actor-training. And such training came in the form of sustained vocal exercises, or even classroom games. Carolyn Eastman observes, "Reports of classroom practices confirm that not only were elocutionary techniques taught extensively, but children learned 'right' and 'wrong' ways of delivering their lessons aloud."[197] Eastman follows her observation with an account of a memoirist, Charles D. Deshler, who describes how one of his instructors, a Mr. Spalding, "turned his students' daily recitations into a competitive sport" by having the students critique each other's oral delivery by way of a game: one student would stand in front of the entire classroom and begin his or her recitation, while the rest of the students would listen to the speech, hoping to identify any mistakes. If any of the listeners believed the speaker made an error in performance, the student could raise a hand and challenge the speaker's delivery. Whereupon, as Deshler's account of his classroom experience reveals, "Mr. Spalding would ask, 'What is the challenge?' The challenger would reply, designating the error of accent, emphasis, inflection, modulation, articulation,

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[195] In his introduction to punctuation, Murray provides a terse explanation of pauses, before treating each punctuation mark in greater detail: "The Comma represents the shortest pause; the Semicolon, a pause double that of the comma; the Colon, double that of the semicolon; and the Period, double that of the colon." Ibid., 369. See also Webster, *American Spelling Book*: 124. Union, *The Sunday School Spelling Book*: 43. Rules appeared in spellers, readers and grammars. See also Webster, *Grammar*, 2: 104-05, 110.

[196] For an analysis of punctuation and diacritical notations, see Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*: 14-15.

[197] Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers*: 28.

pronunciation, or whatever mistake it might be."[198] If the teacher agreed with the little critic's challenge, then the challenger replaced the speaker at the front of the classroom, and the game would continue.

As they advanced in education, children would become further attuned to the overall construction, delivery and effectiveness of orations that occurred at a variety of community gatherings. "Ordinary American youths," Eastman observes, "scrutinized the performances of public orators, from ministers' sermons to Fourth of July speeches; letters and diaries are replete with careful analyses of the speakers they observed, detailed analyses that used extensive elocutionary vocabularies."[199] This rigorous approach to oral performance trained generations of young listeners to identify a speaker's style; word choice; phraseology; arrangement of ideas; cohesiveness in the development of topics; clarity in pronunciation; appropriate use of pauses; different registers of language, such as the "natural" style of colloquial speech to the rhythms and patterns of the King James Bible; and the overall performance of a speaker's delivery, which included an analysis of the proper use of gestures for emphasis.

Pronunciation Dictionaries

In New York common school classrooms, John Walker's *Pronunciation Dictionary* (1791) vastly outnumbered competing dictionaries. This popularity was no doubt indebted, at least in part, to Lindley Murray's favorable comments about Walker in both his *Grammar* (1795) and *English Reader* (1799). When discussing language standards in his *Grammar*, Murray includes a quotation "from the celebrated Walker, author of the 'Critical Pronouncing Dictionary.'"[200] And when specifically advocating pronunciation dictionaries in his *English Reader*, Murray advertises, "Sheridan and Walker have published dictionaries, for ascertaining

[198] Qtd. in ibid.

[199] Ibid., 35.

[200] Murray, *Grammar*, 1: 187.

the true and best pronunciation of the words of our language. By attentively consulting them, particularly 'Walker's Pronouncing Dictionary,' the young reader will be much assisted, in his endeavours to attain a correct pronunciation of the words belonging to the English language."[201] Because of Murray's positive assessment of Walker's critical apparatus and rules of pronunciation, printers in the early decades of the nineteenth century frequently began including a copy of "Walker's Pronouncing Key" in the preface of Murray's *English Reader*.[202]

In terms of practicalities, Walker's *Pronunciation Dictionary* served a two-fold purpose. First, the text expanded the vocabulary of children by providing the definitions of words they would encounter in their reading (i.e., a *textual* project of comprehension); and second, the dictionary showed children how to pronounce the words properly (i.e., a *performance* project of enunciation). Pronunciation dictionaries thus acted as an extension of the limited word lists contained in primers and spellers, teaching children a wealth of vocabulary words that they might encounter in their communities (newspapers, books, public gatherings), churches (biblical names and words) and education (Greek and Latin words lists). In addition, along with reprints of Walker's original text, numerous abridged versions "for the use of schools" appeared throughout America.[203]

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[201] *The English Reader: Or, Pieces in Prose and Poetry, Selected from the Best Writers, Designed to Assist Young Persons to Read with Propriety and Effect; to Improve their Language and Sentiments; and to Inculcate Some of the Most Important Principles of Piety and Virtue* (York: Longman and Rees, 1799). xiii. Murray is referring here to Thomas Sheridan (1719-1788), who, along with several works on elocution, authored *A Complete Dictionary* (1780). Sheridan's son, Richard Brinsley Sheridan is, of course, the celebrated Anglo-Irish playwright and parliamentarian.

[202] See, for example, Jeremiah Goodrich, ed. *Murray's English Reader* (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Smith & Co., 1822).

[203] For this section, I am referencing an abridged version from Boston, titled, John Walker, *Walker's Critical Pronouncing Dictionary, and Expositor of the English Language; Abridged for the Use of Schools; To Which is Annexed an Abridgment of Walker's Key to the Pronunciation of Greek, Latin, and Scripture Proper Names* (Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, Samuel T. Armstrong, and Charles Ewer, 1823). Rick Grunder notes that the edition of Walker's dictionary, printed by James Bemis in Canandaigua, was also an abridged version, prepared "by the Rev. Thomas Smith, London." See Rick Grunder, *Mormon Parallels: A Bibliographic Source*, (LaFayette, NY: Rick Grunder Books, 2014). 1817. As noted previously, Smith owned a copy of Murray's *English Reader* (1799), which suggests another possible connection to Walker's work.

The format Walker employed was relatively easy to follow, although it required students to memorize each vowel sound in relation to Walker's numbering system. The book begins with "A Table of the Simple and Diphthongal Vowels Referred to by the Figures Over the Letters in this Dictionary," which provides examples of how to pronounce vowels in long and short forms, identifying each form of the vowel with a superscript number.[204] Thus, a[1] (with the number printed immediately above the vowel) represents "the long slender English *a*, as in. . . pa[1]-per," while a[2] is "the long Italian *a*, as in. . . fa[2]-ther," a[3] is "the broad German *a*, as in. . . wa[3]-ter," and "a[4]"is "the short sound of the Italian *a*, as in ma[4]r-ry." Following the table, students proceeded to the list of dictionary words, all dissected into their component syllabic parts: "Enthusiasm, e[2]n-thu[1]'zhe[1]-a[4]zm. *s*. heat of imagination; exaltation of ideas. Enthusiast, e[2]n-thu[1]'zhe[1]-a[4]st. *s*. one of a hot imagination; one of elevated fancy, or exalted ideas."[205] Thus, children learned new vocabulary through vocal enunciation, coupled with an analysis of the component parts of words, which encouraged a heightened awareness of the mechanics of language production at the most fundamental levels.

Finally, apropos of Joseph Smith's production of the *Book of Mormon*, Walker's vocabulary lists also include words and variations of words that would later appear in the *Book of Mormon*. Rick Grunder, bibliographer and scholar of Mormonism, observes how "on page 79 alone appear not only the three eldest male members of the leading Book of Mormon family (*Lehi*, "Lah'man" and *Lemuel*), but the Book's first villain as well (*Laban*). . . . Walker's *Key* also provides the unusual reference to the apocryphal name *Nephi*. . . . Of additional interest is a pronunciation rule to which 'Ne'phi' is here referenced, showing the same pronunciation that is used by Mormons today."[206] While Smith never revealed how he derived the often exotic sounding names of his *Book of Mormon* characters and locations, the early nineteenth century

[204] Walker, *Walker's Critical Pronouncing Dictionary*: [4].

[205] Ibid., 147.

[206] Grunder, *Mormon Parallels: A Bibliographic Source*. 1819. For a detailed discussion on Walker's dictionary in relation to *Book of Mormon* names, see ibid., 1817-24.

pedagogical strategies for developing reading and recitation offered a fecund environment for assembling and reassembling sounds to create variant forms of familiar and exotic names, as well as the active ability to construct newly-coined words.

Readers

Among all the schoolbooks children used, "Readers" supplemented educational efforts at nearly every level of literacy instruction, ranging from beginner books to advanced texts. Moran and Vinovskis note that, "After the Revolution and in the early decades of the nineteenth century, readers were among the most popular schoolbooks. They consisted of excerpts from various literary sources and were intended to promote cultural values as well as enhance reading skills."[207] Along with the books specifically designed as readers, teachers made use of the Bible, history books, collections of essays, and other similar works to instruct children in the skills associated with reading and speaking.

Here again, the role of oral performance took center stage. "Readers are textbooks designed to teach reading," observes Jean Ferguson Carr, "which, as a school subject in the nineteenth century, primarily meant reading aloud, or elocutionary performance."[208] Moran and Vinovskis note, "The readers were designed more for teaching speech than assisting in developing writings skills."[209] And Joshua Leavitt, author of *Easy Lessons in Reading; For the Use of the Younger Classes in Common Schools* (1829), described the paradigm of reading perhaps most succinctly: "*Reading is talking from a book*."[210] Rather than being used

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[207] Gerald F. Moran and Maris A. Vinovskis, "Schools," in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, *A History of the Book in America* (Chapel Hill: American Antiquarian Society in association with the U of North Carolina P, 2010), 296.

[208] Carr, Carr, and Schultz, *Archives of Instruction*: 81.

[209] Moran and Vinovskis, "An Extensive Republic," 296-97.

[210] Joshua Leavitt, *Easy Lessons in Reading; For the Use of the Younger Classes in Common Schools* (Keene, NH: J. & J. W. Prentiss, 1829). Preface [v], 14 (emphasis in original). Leavitt's text, which he

exclusively for silent perusal, readers functioned like dramatic scripts: children read the selections aloud to demonstrate their skills in recitation, and they memorized and performed passages in front of audiences to demonstrate their talents of delivery and appropriate gestures. Thus, learning how to *read* a text was indistinguishable from learning how to *perform* the text.

In order to impress their audiences at home, school or in the community, children developed a variety of skills that would simultaneously emerge in the act of performance. The fourth and most advanced Goodrich *Reader* (1839) offers a telling perspective on the complex matrix of techniques students employed. The text contains *nineteen* "Hints to Readers and Speakers," which includes an impressive list of performance concerns: clear articulation, proper pronunciation, suitable tones of voice, rising and falling inflections, vocal modulation, transitions in voice, proper use of accents, appropriate use of emphasis, precise use of pauses, attention to gestures, and the avoidance of artificial mannerisms and vocal monotony. In addition, when reciting poetry and hymns, close observation of the punctuation and meter was required to enhance the measure and rhyme. With the exception of the last "hint" in Goodrich's list, which urges students to know the meaning of each word they say, all of the advice and techniques address methods specific to oral performance.[211] As daunting as this list might initially appear, children incorporated these skills, one-by-one, into their reading and recitation instruction. And with time and repetition, the skills would become second nature, with one technique layering upon another, developing into a wide range of ostensibly natural and effortless skills.

When Joseph Smith attended school, Lindley Murray's *English Reader* (1799) prevailed as the most popular school text, surpassing all other competitors, both foreign and domestic.[212]

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intended, "to be used intermediately, between the Spelling-Book and the English or American Reader," offers an example of how readers could be introduced to school children at the earliest stages in their careers.

[211] S. G. Goodrich, *The Fourth Reader: For the Use of Schools* (Boston: Otis, Broaders, & Co., 1839). 7-14.

[212] See Monaghan and Monaghan, "An Extensive Republic," 309.

Like most other readers in the period, Murray's work primarily focused on religious and moral instruction, in line with his stated goals "to improve youth in the art of reading; to meliorate their language and sentiments; and to inculcate some of the most important principles of piety and virtue."[213] The central role of reading aloud is stressed again, with a specific admonition to engage emotionally with the work in order to produce a naturalistic delivery: "The pieces selected, not only give exercise to a great variety of emotions, and the correspondent tones and variations of voice, but contain sentences. . . which are diversified, proportioned, and pointed with accuracy."[214] Murray's *Reader* begins where his *Grammar* left off: analyzing the style, proper pronunciation and correct construction of individual sentences.

Continuing across this bridge between texts, Murray introduces short essays written by a number of well-known English authors, such as John Milton, Joseph Addison, William Cowper, Alexander Pope, and Hugh Blair, which provided a pedagogical link for children to observe how individual sentences combined to form disquisitions on any given topic. This progression falls in line with Murray's sequence of instruction, where "words duly combined produce a *sentence*; and sentences properly combined produce an *oration* or *discourse*."[215] He further organizes the selections into categories that emphasized rhetorical style and delivery: "Narratives Pieces," "Didactic Pieces," "Argumentative Pieces," "Descriptive Pieces," and "Pathetic Pieces [i.e., appealing to the emotions]." Finally, Murray includes selected sentences (biblical parallelisms, maxims, etc.), brief paragraphs, short stories, public orations, dialogues and poetry to round out and elevate the readings.[216]

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[213] Murray, *The English Reader*: iii.

[214] Ibid.

[215] *Grammar*, 1: 48 (emphasis in original).

[216] See contents, *The English Reader*: xxix-xxxvi. By comparison, Webster's *Reader* contained similar themes, though his work was decidedly nationalistic, focusing a third of the contents on American writers, history, identity and language; see Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers*: 39.

From Texts to Classroom Practices

The basic goal of education in the early nineteenth century, typified by the common phrase of teaching children "reading, writing and arithmetic," involved a particularly intensive focus on the development of oratorical skills. The spoken word was the primary mode of instruction, positioned at the foundation of instructional practices. As soon as they entered the classroom at an average age of three to four years, children began memorizing and reciting answers to catechisms, along with enunciating the letters of the alphabet and numbers with clarity and poise. As they progressed, children analyzed and recited syllables aloud, constructed and deconstructed words into their component parts, and observed how individual sounds formed the building blocks for words, sentences, paragraphs and eventually essays. Next, grammar, taught through the exchange of memorized rules and open recitations, called attention to the ways in which proper sentences should be constructed for both written and oral communication.

Accompanying all these lessons, the practice of reading aloud and delivering recitations were daily exercises, requiring skills that demanded constant attention to the articulation of rhetorical punctuation: when to pause, how to pause, how to use rising and falling inflections, cadences, rhythms, emphasis and gestures. So, too, was the daily skill of active listening, analyzing the reading and speechmaking skills of others to determine if they were "minding their points" (reciting the punctuation correctly), speaking in natural tones, and building arguments in cohesive arrangements. Finally, the performance of memorized pieces–famous orations, catechisms, hymns, poems, dialogues, scriptures–constituted the tangible evidence that demonstrated a child's successful education to peers, teachers, families and community members. Whether or not a child was deemed sufficiently educated was often a reflection of how well the child demonstrated his or her knowledge in an oral performance before an audience.

Yet, in spite of all these practices and performances, the picture of nineteenth-century education is not yet complete. While formal schooling represented a central institution for oratorical training, attending the local schoolhouse was certainly not the only opportunity for such instruction. Informal training outside the classroom complemented formal lessons in school, and alternative avenues for obtaining an education were often as consequential, if not moreso, as the instruction in formal schools. The next chapter will therefore explore some of these complementary avenues of information education in order to situate Joseph Smith's performance of the *Book of Mormon* within the context of education in rural farms and frontier townships.

Chapter Five: Informal Education:
From Home School to Debate Societies

A focus on the development of Smith's oral performance skills and techniques in the production of the *Book of Mormon* require another critical perspective that modern readers often miss: formal schooling was never the exclusive source of education and oratorical training in early nineteenth-century America. Children growing up in this era received instruction from a variety of different sources, with formal schools being only one of them. As education historians Edward and Elaine Gordon indicate, children growing up in this period achieved literacy by means of multiple venues:

> . . . there was a blurring of lines between institutions that supported literacy and the 'schooling' that went on here, there, and everywhere, in schoolrooms, kitchens, shops in towns, barns on farms, mansions, meetinghouses, churches, and even taverns and inns. Students were taught by one and all—schoolmasters, parents, relatives, tutors, governesses, clergymen, physicians, artisans, shopkeepers, lawyers, and even indentured servants.[217]

Because the young nation had not yet developed a nationwide system of education, the responsibility for instructing the youth fell on family networks and local communities. And as a community project, no single institution acted as an exclusive source of instruction. Lawrence Cremin cautions that "one should bear in mind that educational institutions remained small and loosely structured during the nineteenth century and that individuals made their own way through these institutions, as often as not irregularly, intermittently, and indeterminately."[218] Horace Mann, the most famous education reformer of the nineteenth century, received his own childhood instruction in a manner typical of this era, which he derived "primarily at home and in church, preparing himself academically through a characteristic combination of intermittent

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[217] Gordon and Gordon, *Literacy in America*: 5.

[218] Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980). x.

schooling, occasional tutoring, and systematic self-study in the Franklin town library."[219] Mann's experience was not the exception; it was the rule.

Recognizing the diversity of ways in which children obtained an education is therefore essential to understanding the development of literacy and oral performance in the period. Like Horace Mann, Joseph Smith would also receive his education from a variety of social institutions throughout his childhood. Therefore, in order to position Smith's education and style of oratorical performance in the early nineteenth century, a review is necessary of several key cultural institutions that contributed alongside the formal instruction Smith experienced in his youth: domestic education in the form of family devotionals and fireside instruction, attendance at Sunday school and revivals, and participation in a juvenile debate society within the wider culture of mutual improvement societies.

Domestic Education

Of all the educational opportunities Joseph Smith had in his childhood, the fact that his father, Joseph Sr., was a professional schoolteacher was certainly one of his greatest advantages.[220] So, too, was having a mother, Lucy, who had been raised in a household where her own mother, Lydia Mack, had also been schoolteacher.[221] Lydia's influence, in fact, may well have influenced Joseph Jr. directly. Lydia and Solomon Mack lived in Tunbridge, Vermont, where they were in constant close reach of their grandchildren, from the time of Joseph Jr.'s

[219] Ibid., 134.

[220] According to Lucy, Joseph Sr. was already teaching school in Sharon, Vermont, when Joseph Jr. was born, see Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 253; Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 19.

[221] A. Gary Anderson indicates that Lydia was "a young schoolteacher and a member of the Congregational church. She was well educated and from a well-to-do religious family. . . . Lydia took charge of both the secular and religious education of their eight children." Anderson, "Smith Family Ancestors," 1361. Appreciation to historian Connell O'Donovan for contributing this insight.

birth in 1805 to the Smith family's move to Lebanon, NH, in either 1811 or 1812.[222] Education was deemed no less important on Joseph Jr.'s paternal side of the family. In April of 1799, Asael Smith, Joseph Jr.'s grandfather who also lived in Tunbridge, VT, wrote a message to his entire family, admonishing them all to live good lives. In his treatise, Asael urged his family to educate their children: "Make it your chiefest work to bring them up in the ways of virtue, that they may be useful in their generations. Give them, if possible, a good education."[223] Asael's message came two months after Alvin Smith was born, Joseph Jr.'s elder brother, and may have been inspired by the new generation of grandchildren. Moreover, apart from parents and grandparents, older siblings got involved in the education of younger brothers and sisters.[224] After his training at the prestigious Moor's Charity School, for instance, Hyrum, Joseph's second oldest brother, would have been expected to share in the education of his younger siblings. Indeed, Hyrum's commitment to education would result in his becoming both a school trustee and schoolteacher in Palmyra.[225]

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[222] Lydia and Solomon moved to Tunbridge, VT, in 1799. See Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1977). 29. And though the Smith family moved several times from the year of Joseph Jr.'s birth in 1805 to either 1811 or 1812, when the family moved to West Lebanon, NH, "all the moves were in a tiny circle around Tunbridge, Royalton, and Sharon, immediately adjoining towns, and probably never involved a distance of more than five or six miles." Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 19. Thus, the Smith children's education in this period would have occurred under the watchful eye of Lydia.

[223] Qtd. in Hill, *Joseph Smith*: 23 (spelling and punctuation modernized).

[224] For instance, Gordon and Gordon describe the childhood education of Almira Hart Lincoln, who grew up in a home where "the oldest children always tutored the youngest, turning the home into a school." Gordon and Gordon, *Literacy in America*: 83. Education simultaneously involved the inculcation of good moral character "through the processes of imitation and explanation, with adults and older siblings modeling attitudes and behavior and youngsters purposely or inadvertently absorbing them." Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience*: 373.

[225] Richard Behrens claims that following Joseph Jr.'s leg surgery in the winter of 1812-1813, Hyrum became "young Joseph's principal tutor since Joseph could not attend school." Richard K. Behrens, "Dreams, Visions, and Visitations: The Genesis of Mormonism," *John Whitmer Historical Association* 27 (2007): 177. In her Smith family history, Lucy mentions how Hyrum "was one of the trustees" in a Palmyra school district. Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 374. After getting married, Hyrum had moved back to the Smith's former residence in the log cabin on Stafford Road in Palmyra, see Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 47. Mrs. S. F. Anderick, a former resident of Palmyra, claimed "Hyrum was the only son sufficiently educated to teach school. I attended when he taught in the log school-house east of uncle's [the Smith's log cabin on Stafford Road]. He also taught in the Stafford District." Vogel, *EMD*, 2: 208.

The result of this immediate and extended family concern for education was a dynamic where the parents and the older children were actively involved in the entire family's instruction. Lucy would recall how she and her husband acted "together in the education and instruction of our children,"[226] and John Stafford (1805-1904), a neighbor to the Smiths in Manchester, NY, remembered how the Smiths "had school in their house, and studied the Bible."[227] Ever since the colonial period, the task of teaching children how to read and write typically began at home, and the responsibility normally belonged to the mother.[228] And even though Joseph Sr. was a schoolteacher, the cultural expectation of raising educated, moral, upright children would have primarily fallen to Lucy. As Cremin observes, "the new literature on child-rearing involved the vastly expanded responsibilities of the mother," placing special emphasis on raising virtuous and principled citizens.[229] Edward and Elaine Gordon, historians of American literacy, add, "the mother's role as primary tutor was of supreme importance. Though the literature of the period spoke of both parents acting as teachers, most books were written for women."[230] Thus, having both a mother and a father actively involved in his education, young Joseph would have been exposed to greater instructional resources at home than most of his rural peers.

Because the Smith family held school in their home, any formal education Smith received outside the home would have been complemented and reinforced by their domestic education. This would have been particularly advantageous for the times when the Smith children missed portions of school terms, due to sickness, moving to new farms or the demands of summer work: whenever attendance at a formal school was not possible, the educational

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[226] Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 282.

[227] Vogel, *EMD*, 2: 122.

[228] Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience 1607-1783* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970). 128.

[229] *American Education: The National Experience*: 65.

[230] Gordon and Gordon, *Literacy in America*: 83.

focus of the Smith household meant his parents would always be present to fill the gaps. Furthermore, given Joseph Sr.'s experience as a schoolteacher, any instruction young Joseph received at home would have mirrored, both in quality and format, the instruction in the common schools.

The quality of the Smith family's domestic education may well be the reason why Joseph Jr.'s younger brother, William (1811-1893), was not as enthusiastic as other members of his family in proclaiming Joseph's humble ignorance. In a description that suggests an attempt to balance the image of the uneducated but inspired farmboy with a refutation of the prophet's alleged illiteracy, William states, "That he [Joseph] was illiterate to some extent is admitted but that he was entirely unlettered is a mistake. In syntax, orthography, mathematics, grammar, geography with other studies in the common schools of his day, he was no novice; and for writing, he wrote a plain, intelligible hand."[231] The contrast of being "illiterate to some extent," yet being "no novice," reflects the ambiguity in Lucy's claim that Joseph was disinclined "to the perusal of books," yet being given to "deep study." In order to untangle the various and often conflicting representations of Smith's intellectual skills and capacities, a review of statements from friends, family, neighbors and other eyewitnesses will explore the various cultural institutions *outside* of formal common school training that Joseph experienced in the educational economy of the early nineteenth century.

Family Devotionals

Apart from attempting to correct misconceptions surrounding Joseph's level of education, William offered further insights into the educational practices in the Smith family home when he described the religious atmosphere in which the children were raised. During an 1893 interview, William responded to the question of whether or not his parents were "religiously inclined" by stating, "we always had family prayer since I can remember. I well

[231] Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 486.

remember father used to carry his spectacles in his vest pocket. . . and when us boys saw him feel for his specks, we knew that was a signal to get ready for prayer. . . . After prayer we had a song we would sing."[232] Approximately twenty years earlier, around 1875, William had sketched out notes, apparently for a memoir, which offered further details:

> My father's religious habits was strictly pious and moral. . . . My father's religious customs often become irksome or tiresome to me while in my younger days, as I made no profession of Christianity. Still, I was called upon to listen to prayers both night and morning. My father's favorite evening hymn runs this: The day is past and gone / The evening shades appear / O may we all / Remember well / The night of death draws near. Again and again was this hymn sung while upon the bending knees. My parents, father and mother, poured out their souls to God, the donor of all blessings, to keep and guard their children and keep them from sin and from all evil works. Such was the strict piety of my parents.[233]

The practice William described as "family prayer" was also commonly known as "family devotionals" or "domestic worship," and the "strict piety" of his parents suggests the importance of such gatherings in the Smith home.

Along with singing hymns and praying, Smith Sr.'s signal of reaching for his spectacles indicates another indispensable part of such family meetings: Bible reading.[234] Apart from family worship, such sessions allowed parents to instruct their children in moral lessons, while simultaneously furthering their education: "A good book of prayer or devotion, an edifying work written for the improvement of the heart and conduct, the plain intelligible passages of the bible,

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[232] Ibid., 512.

[233] Ibid., 487 (spelling and punctuation modernized).

[234] An 1825 fictional depiction of a pious family's devotional (written with an affected Scottish dialect), complete with the opening ritual of a father putting on his spectacles, offers a more complete description of the cultural practice. The narrator of the story describes the family practice of bible reading in the following manner (not the similarities to William Smith's description of how Joseph Sr. began family devotionals): "Supper being finished, and the table withdrawn, the gudewife [goodwife] desire the Laird [Lord of the household, the father] to perform family worship; he accordingly put on his spectacles, and read two double verses of a psalm, which the whole family joined together in singing. He then turned over the sacred text to a chapter which he selected, and handing the large family Bible to Goslington, directed him to read it. According to custom, the family then arose from their chairs, and kneeled before them on the floor, while the Laird concluded with a short and fervent prayer." Mungo Coultershoggle, *Goslington Shadow: A Romance of the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1 (New York: Collins and Hannay; Collins and Co.; E. Bliss, E. White and W. E. Gilley, 1825). 227.

the psalms of the royal poet, or a narrative of the life of Jesus Christ, is read aloud. The family stands around listening to the reader; and the devotion of all its members is excited,—the understanding of each one is instructed."[235] As William's chagrin suggests, these family gatherings could be more solemn and reverent than a young boy's patience might endure.

The length and intensity of the practices in pious homes varied from one family to another, but they often carried a similar weight of solemnity: "Here the master of the house and the pious mistress become the priest and priestess of the Most High; and the same chamber in which we enjoy the gifts of the Eternal Father. . . becomes a temple of the Lord."[236] These family gatherings took place after the evening meal, or before bedtime, though the routines differed from household to household.[237] In mid-1829, when Joseph was in his process of translating the gold plates, Lucy's manuscript history recalls a conversation between Joseph and Martin Harris that occurred "after attending the Morning service" in the home. In the 1853 published version, Lucy qualifies the manuscript, saying, "The next morning, after attending to the usual services, namely, reading, singing, and praying, Joseph arose from his knees" and

[235] Reverend E. I. Burrow, *Hours of Devotion for the Promotion of True Christianity and Family Worship* (London: C.J.G. & F. rivington, 1830). 25. In addition, "it is the custom of the father to furnish, all that are able to read, with bibles, and to request each of the domestic circle to read [aloud] a portion of the scripture." A., "On Goodness of Heart," *The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine; and Religious Intelligencer* 1808, 100.

[236] Burrow, *Hours of Devotion*: 20.

[237] The Reverend John Murray, Senior Pastor of a Boston Universalist congregation, recalled the routine from his childhood in Ireland, following a daily pattern that was typical for many families in both Britain and America: "at six o'clock [a.m.] the family were summoned, and I, as the eldest son, was ordered into my closet, for the purpose of private devotion. . . . After the family were collected, it was my part to read a chapter in the bible; then followed a long and fervent prayer by my father; breakfast succeeded. . . . and, in the evening, the whole family were again collected, the children examined, our faults recorded, and I, as an example to the rest, especially chastised. . . . the bible was again introduced, and the day was closed by prayer." Reading scriptures or religious texts aloud, attentive listening, discussions, singing, praying, instruction and examinations opened and closed every day of the week in pious households. Rev. John Murray, *Records of the Life of the Rev. John Murray; Late Minister of the Reconciliation, and Senior Pastor of the Universalists, Congregated in Boston* (Boston: Munroe and Francis, 1816). 14.

approached Martin Harris. Lucy's depiction of family worship as "the usual services" suggests the regular practice in the Smith home.[238]

Family Firesides

Family devotionals were not the only form of instruction that took place at home. When evening arrived, families gathered around the hearth and engaged in any number of activities: communal reading of newspapers, accompanied by discussions on the local, national and international events the articles contained; family conferences addressing a variety of domestic issues; storytelling with a wide variety of topics, ranging from narratives of the lives of ancestors to tales of magic and frightening ghost stories; reading instruction for children; and honing of children's oratorical skills by having them memorize and practice their weekly recitation assignments in common school or Sunday School.[239]

Indeed, the communal reading of newspapers was virtually an educational institution of its own. As Cremin observes, "the newspapers printed literature, humor, advice, poetry, and formal instruction in history, geography, and the sciences; in fact, they printed adult versions of the entire curriculum of the schools."[240] The image of a family reading and talking together around the hearth was a commonplace trope that invoked feelings of happiness, contentment, safety and self-improvement. "What a field for enjoyment, for social, domestic enjoyment, is

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[238] Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 393.

[239] Even the poorest of families used the local newspapers, almanacs, the Bible and *The Pilgrim's Progress* as evening reading texts. Regarding family conferences at the family fireside, Lucy relates such experiences in her history: "We all now sat down [shortly after their arrival in Palmyra, New York], and counselled together relative to the course which was best for us to adopt in our destitute circumstances." She would also describe family conversations at these times: "One evening we were sitting till quite late conversing upon the subject of the diversity of churches that had risen up in the world and the many thousand opinions in existence as to the truths contained in scripture." Ibid., 276 and 289.

[240] Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience*: 411. H. Michael Marquardt adds how "one source of wide ranging information was the newspaper, which the Smiths received weekly in Palmyra." Marquardt further observes how Orsamus Turner, a Palmyra resident, recalled how "once a week he [Joseph Jr.] would stroll into the office of the old Palmyra Register, for his father's paper." Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*: 35. See also Orasmus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps & Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester, NY: William Alling, 1852). 214.

open" exclaims the author of an essay lauding the pursuit of literature at home, "to those, who, around the family fireside can read and enjoy together the best works of poetry, history, and romance!"[241] Fireside readers, books filled with collections of short stories for children to read aloud, were popular supplements to schoolbooks in these gatherings. Like the reading material in family devotionals, such instruction simultaneously furthered the goals of instilling moral values and appropriate behavior. "To assist young persons in humble life, in attaining the art of reading; and, at the same time, to impress upon their minds, moral and religious sentiments and principles, and especially a knowledge and love of their peculiar duties" was a common goal of such books.[242]

In the manuscript version of her history, Lucy suggests, albeit indirectly, what a fireside evening might have been like in the Smith family home. When describing how she and her husband worked to support their children's education, Lucy mentions, "laying in for the ensuing winter 100 lbs of candles that we might better pursue our labors."[243] Candles were a luxury in poor households like the Smith's, but the expense was apparently a necessity for their evening projects.[244] One of the side jobs Lucy pursued to make extra money was painting oilcloth for tables, stands and floor coverings; and painting in the evenings would have required extra light

[241] J. H., "Literature in Social Life," *The New England Magazine*, March 1834.

[242] James Humphreys, *Lessons for Young Persons in Humble Life* (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, 1809). v.

[243] Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 260.

[244] Larkin notes that "candles were in fact relatively expensive in terms of the beef tallow and household labor that went into making them. . . . Between 1790 and 1810 [in central Massachusetts], for example, over half of the households owned only one or two candlesticks." Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life*: 136.

for the details.[245] For the Smith family, this meant the light of the family fireside would have consisted of low, flickering blaze from the hearth and, most likely, the flame of a single candle.[246]

Thus, a typical evening at the Smith home would have seen Joseph Sr. working on a project near the hearth, Lucy painting an oilcloth under the light of a candle, one of the children reading aloud a book or newspaper to the family, and the rest of the children sitting in a half circle around the warm flames of the fireplace, listening to the reader and occasionally participating in conversation. Such domestic scenes of home instruction, coupled with working family members, were common. "A winter's evening will pass very pleasantly and profitably," the author of a child's educational fireside reader advises, "if one of the family reads some instructing, amusing book, to the rest; while they are employed in sewing, knitting, or other useful work: and all make, every now and then, such remarks, or inquiries, as they think proper, on what is read."[247] After marrying and starting a family, Joseph Jr. continued the tradition of fireside education in his own home, as suggested in his journal entry of November 11, 1835. Smith recorded how he "returned home and spent the evening, around my fire-side, teaching my family the science of grammar."[248] The scenes envisaged here, common in households from urban centers to rural frontier settlements, situate the home as the hub of nineteenth-century educational institutions, both in teaching the basics of literacy as well as instilling a solid moral and civic foundation in the rising generation.

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[245] Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 26, 31. In her 1853 history, Lucy mentions having painted "oil-cloth coverings for tables, stands, &c." Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 276.

[246] Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 31. Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 276. In terms of the quality of light, A. Roger Ekirch notes, "Whatever the source of domestic heat, hearths gave off limited light, confined to a radius of several feet." A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2005). 103.

[247] Humphreys, *Lessons for Young Persons*: 163.

[248] Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 109. See also Smith's entry for March 6, 1836: "Spent the day at home in the enjoyment of the society of my family, around the social fireside." Ibid., 199.

Sunday Schools and Revivalism

When asked about the time he first became acquainted with Joseph Smith, Lorenzo Saunders, a childhood friend and neighbor of Joseph, replied, "The first time I ever went to Sabbath School I went with young Joe Smith at the old Presbyterian Church."[249] Saunders lived half a mile east of the Smith family's residences located on Stafford Road in Palmyra and the adjacent Manchester farm, which suggests Smith and Saunders were attending Sunday school together between 1819 and 1821, though Smith may have started as early as 1817 in Palmyra. Sometime between 1818 and early 1825, Joseph's mother, Lucy, along with his siblings Hyrum, Sophronia and Samuel, joined the Western Presbyterian Church.[250] Joseph did not join the Presbyterians with them, but he likely attended services with his family during his Sunday school years, due to the requirement that Sunday school attendees also attend the worship services of their own denomination.[251] This would explain why Mrs. S. F. Anderick, a childhood

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[249] Vogel, *EMD*, 2: 127.

[250] See Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 37. Vogel, *EMD*, 5: 396.

[251] Unlike Bishop Hobart's opinion that Sunday schools of the Protestant Episcopal Church should be "strictly denominational," Sunday schools in general, and specifically with the Presbyterian Church, were nondenominational, so that children attending the school from a different faith were not required to attend Presbyterian services. Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988). 14. This format can be observed in an article from the December 15, 1824, issue of Palmyra's newspaper *Wayne Sentinel*, in which the Presbyterians under Rev. Stockton sought to form a "Sabbath School Society" for all children "of all denominations. . . for the purpose of giving them instructions from the word of God without any attempt to build up any peculiar sect or party." Qtd. in Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*: 17-18. The development of proper conduct during church services was an essential part of Sunday school curricula, a component that Sunday school teachers carefully monitored. Therefore, attendance at one's own church services, unless no convenient churches existed (a common problem for new frontier communities), was a mandatory requirement of Sunday school instruction. In the formulation of new Sunday schools, societies in New York often observed or based their own rules on the bylaws of the New York Sunday School Union Society (1816), a society based in New York City, which stipulates "that the managers of the schools shall take particular pains to provide seats for their scholars in places of public worship, and to see that they regularly attend." Sunday School Union Society, *Constitution of the New-York Sunday School Union Society* (New York: Sunday School Union Society, 1816). 8. Bushman's assumption that "Hyrum, Sophronia, and Samuel went to church with their mother, but Joseph Sr., Alvin, William, and Joseph Jr. stayed home," is unsupported. Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 37. Though he kept himself "aloof" from the various churches, Joseph himself claimed "I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit." Smith, *HC (1948)*, 1: 3. Pomeroy Tucker, a childhood acquaintance of Smith, recalled how Smith attended the revivals of various churches in the area: "Protracted revival meetings were customary in some of the churches, and Smith frequented those of different denominations, sometimes professing to participate in their devotional exercises." Vogel, *EMD*, 3: 94. Whether Joseph attended services at the Presbyterian Church, or any other

friend to Joseph's older sister, Sophronia, and frequent visitor to the Smith home, claimed that Joseph had become a member of the Presbyterian faith: "when Jo joined the Presbyterian Church, in Palmyra village, it caused much talk and surprise, as he claimed to receive revelations from the Lord."[252] Nevertheless, Smith did not join the Presbyterians. Rather, according to his history, "I kept myself aloof from all these parties [various churches], though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit. In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them."[253] Anderick's observation, though inaccurate, still reveals how Smith's attendance at the Presbyterian Sunday school was regular enough to convince her that Smith had become a member the church.

When Smith attended Sunday school, the institution was relatively new in the fabric of American culture. The first Sabbath schools in America appeared "in Philadelphia in 1791 under the auspices of a group called the First Day Society."[254] From their inception, Sunday schools were interdenominational; the organizers of this first institution consisted of "Episcopalians, Quakers, and Catholics," along with "a Universalist of Presbyterian background."[255] Nevertheless, the First Day Society's schools, based on a British model formulated by Robert Raikes, declined within the next three decades, only to be supplanted by a distinctly American

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denomination's services, staying home would not have been an option consistent with his participation in Sunday school.

[252] Vogel, *EMD*, 2: 209-10.

[253] Smith, *HC (1948)*, 1: 3.

[254] Boylan, *Sunday School*: 7. "The founders of the First Day Society," Boylan further indicates, "were an ecumenical group who would perhaps have described themselves as enlightened republican gentlemen. They included Episcopalians, such as Bishop William White and the physicians Benjamin Rush and William Currie; Friends [Quakers], such as the merchants Thomas Pym Cope and his uncle Thomas Mendenhall; and a Catholic, the publisher Matthew Carey."

[255] Gordon and Gordon, *Literacy in America*: 90. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience*: 57-58.

form of Sunday school.[256] Whereas the earlier schools focused almost exclusively on literacy, the Sunday schools in America embarked on a distinctly evangelical mission, accentuated by the ongoing revivals of the Second Great Awakening.[257] Riding a wave of revival enthusiasm and overall religious concern, Sunday schools soon began appearing throughout the states wherever established churches existed or new congregations formed; sometimes, in fact, the Sunday schools were the first educational institution in frontier towns, arriving before common schools were established.[258]

Volunteer teachers and administrators formed the infrastructure of the Sunday school systems, teaching rigorous programs of biblical literacy that "placed a heavy emphasis on punctuality, obedience, self-discipline, and order, all values consistent with the requirements of an industrial age."[259] This focus complemented the common schools, which "provided basic literacy and moral education (particularly Protestant based) or character training stressing obedience, self-discipline and honesty."[260] In Palmyra, the Western Presbyterian Church was incorporated on March 18, 1817, and a Sunday school would soon follow. The earliest records of the congregation are lost, but the formal organization of the Presbyterian Church in 1817 suggests Smith may have commenced Sunday school when he was eleven or twelve years of age.[261]

The instruction at Sunday schools also mirrored the instruction in common schools, making the two institutions highly complementary. One of the primary goals of the Sunday

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[256] Boylan, *Sunday School*: 6-7.

[257] Ibid., 11-12. Boylan distills the central differences between the earlier Sabbath School model and the later American Sunday Schools when she described how "they were very different institutions, with different origins, purposes, organization, and appeal. They [American evangelical Sunday schools] grew rapidly, as their predecessors had not, largely because of specific conditions that had developed since the 1790s, notably the rise of Protestant activism during the Second Great Awakening." See ibid., 12.

[258] Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience*: 66.

[259] Boylan, *Sunday School*: 38.

[260] Gordon and Gordon, *Literacy in America*: 90.

[261] See Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*: 15-16.

schools was to teach students to "read distinctly and with facility in the bible," which meant basic literacy was a shared goal between the religious and public schools.[262] This overlapping curriculum prompted the publication of Sunday school spelling books, catechisms, tracts and devotional readers with an evangelical focus intended to complement the Bible. The spelling book for the Sunday and Adult School Union of Philadelphia, for example, contains vocabulary lists sprinkled with words common to religious conversation; short verses or paraphrases from the Bible; compilations of scriptural quotes and paraphrases addressing various topics of good moral behavior in contrast to sin ("Obedience to Parents," "On Lying," "Industry," "Sobriety and Temperance," etc.); famous passages of scripture from the Old and New Testaments ("Creation of the World," "History of Adam and Eve," "Noah's Ark," "Abraham and Isaac," "The Ten Commandments," "History of Christ," etc.); and finally, catechisms addressing doctrinal points, the duties of children, and standards of moral behavior.[263]

Furthermore, these assignments were not merely intended for reading aloud; students were also required to memorize them as a way of instilling the lessons deeply into their hearts and minds. Through this approach, children participating in the Sunday schools not only enhanced the training they received in common schools but were immersed in the language and spiritual framework of Protestant evangelical thought. And though Sunday schools met only once a week, limiting their influence on the development of literacy by comparison to common schools, "the impact of nineteenth-century Sunday schools was dramatic" on the cultural transmission of religious values, ethics and ideals.[264]

In places like Palmyra and Manchester, where the local common school systems were already successful in teaching basic literacy, the instruction in Sunday schools placed a heavier

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[262] Sunday School Union Society, *Constitution of the New-York Sunday School Union Society*: 6. See also Boylan, *Sunday School*: 22.

[263] The Sunday and Adult School Union, *The Sunday School Spelling Book*. See also Boylan, *Sunday School*: 40.

[264] *Sunday School*: 33. Boylan also notes that Sunday schools "became the primary tool of Protestant religious education in the nineteenth century." Ibid., 133.

emphasis on moral teachings, piety and the experience of personal conversion. As a youth who would have already known how to read when he first attended the Presbyterian school, Smith's experience would have consisted of regular and punctual attendance to Sunday school and church services, lessons in moral behavior, reading scriptural passages aloud, weekly memorization assignments of scriptures, recitations and declamations, the call and response of memorized catechisms, and the daily practice of appropriate behavior and moral conduct.

Another important observation for the period of Smith's Sunday school attendance helps to contextualize the institution's influence on religious society and the urgency of the lessons they shared: when Smith was attending Sunday school at the Presbyterian Church, America was in the throes of the Second Great Awakening. Faced with the radical dislocations of family networks, the rapid expansion of economic interests and the restructuring of social hierarchies in the early nineteenth century, people held fierce anxieties over the tumult of modernization. Many people believed the disruptions were signs of the times, the latter days on the verge of Christ's return, when Jesus would usher in his millennial reign on earth. In response, a series of large-scale spiritual revivals erupted throughout the states, and people sought in earnest to achieve true conversion from an unregenerate state in preparation for the end of times. In the Burned Over District, where Smith and his young and impressionable classmates attended school, some of the most acute manifestations of spiritual outpouring occurred. And while such religious fervor was present in the general cultural milieu, Sunday schools nevertheless played a central role in the intensification of these anxieties.

One of the most prominent factors that increased the urgency of conversion in Sunday schools was the group of voluntary teachers and administers who ran the programs. "The organizers of these schools," Boylan observes, "were, first and foremost, dedicated evangelicals, many of whom had only recently experienced religious conversion during the revivals of the

Second Great Awakening."[265] In their newfound religious zeal and evangelical focus, Sunday school teachers and administrators sought to awaken their young scholars from spiritual apathy. One of the key strategies to provoke life-altering changes was to induce the fear of spiritual and temporal death: "designed to reach children through their emotions where, evangelicals believed, true religious experiences took place, stories emphasizing the nearness of death were supposed to touch their deepest emotions by engaging their deepest fears."[266] As the various pedagogical methods among volunteer teachers began to coalesce into standard curricula during the early decades of the nineteenth century, the ultimate goal of spiritual reformation emerged: "preparing students for conversion, attempting to precipitate the event, and planning for revivals."[267] This preparation would, in turn, lead to participation in spiritual revivals and camp meetings, which became another source of popular education.

When they arrived in Palmyra, the Smith family entered a region that had already been experiencing intense religious fervor. The formation of the Western Presbyterian Church of Palmyra in March of 1817 was partially due to the sudden influx of new members during "the great revival of 1816 and 1817, which nearly doubled the number of Palmyra Presbyterians."[268] This would be the same time, according to Bushman, when Smith "began to be concerned about religion. . . in late 1817 or early 1818, when the aftereffects of the revival of 1816 and 1817 were still being felt."[269] This would also be the time when Smith started attending the Presbyterian Sunday school. And the excitement surrounding the revival experience would have extended to the entire Smith family, regardless of denominational inclinations.

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[265] Ibid., 10.

[266] Ibid., 140.

[267] Ibid.

[268] Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 36.

[269] Ibid., 37.

Revivals were community events, which served purposes that extended far beyond religious sermons and dynamic spiritual responses. As Cremin indicates, revival meetings were a hub of popular educational activities, which included "the exchange of information and intelligence, the discussion of social and political as well as theological issues, and the consideration of a potpourri of propaganda and salesmanship" where a family could "listen to lectures on the meaning of the American Revolution, sign teetotal pledges, subscribe to book series, compare everything from methods of growing corn to recipes for cooking it, and sample a vast range of culinary delights. . . . The revival meeting was a commons, a forum, a marketplace, and a fair."[270] Within this ferment of religious intensity and communal activity, spurred on by the Sunday school curriculum and the intense emotional outpourings among attendees of camp meetings and revivals, young Joseph decided that he wanted to become a Methodist exhorter, a position that would call upon his developing skills of oral performance and extemporaneous speech.[271]

Debate Societies and the Culture of Self-Improvement

When describing Smith's participation among the Methodists as "a very passable exhorter in evening meetings," Orsamus Turner linked Smith to yet another forum for education and self-improvement: a local juvenile debate society.[272] "The mother's [Lucy's] intellect occasionally shone out in him feebly," Turner recalled of Smith, "especially when he used to help us solve some portentous questions of moral or political ethics, in our juvenile debating club."[273] In spite of his decidedly antagonistic representation of Smith, Turner's comment offers a

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[270] Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience*: 52.

[271] Becoming a Methodist exhorter involved additional informal training and education. For a detailed discussion, see Chapter Eight, "Inspired by the Holy Spirit: Religion and Semi-Extemporaneous Oral Performance."

[272] See Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 37-38. Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*: 50. Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004). 32-33.

[273] Vogel, *EMD*, 3: 49.

grudging concession. Though portrayed as an intellectually idle youth, Smith nevertheless seems to have contributed sufficiently keen insights on "moral or political ethics" to move the debates beyond deliberative gridlocks. As a result, the image of Smith as an adept and capable member of the juvenile debate society begins to emerge through the distortive lens of Turner's ambiguous disparagement. Thus, in his attempt to discredit Smith's intellectual attainments, Turner inadvertently opens yet another window into Smith's efforts to improve his education and enhance his professional prospects.

Debate clubs in the early nineteenth century formed part of a larger cultural preoccupation with self-improvement and active citizenship. The intersection between the creation of a new national identity, the responsibilities of the citizenship in a democracy, the lack of a national education system and the emergence of new and often precarious economic prospects triggered the explosive growth of voluntary mutual improvement associations. These clubs appeared throughout the young nation, from urban centers to rural communities, and were attended by all classes in society, from wealthy elites to artisans and laborers.[274] In small rural towns like Palmyra, young adults, often inspired by literary and debate societies in regional academies and colleges, gathered together on a weekly basis to engage in a systematic pursuit of advanced learning and career development. In her study of rural mutual improvement societies in Northern New England villages, Joan Newlon Radner stresses how such societies "involved a distinctive intertwining of extemporaneous speech, writing, and reading," along with a focus on activities and topics that were "deliberately miscellaneous":

> The central event was a debate, or "discussion," conducted by assigned speakers and audience volunteers. Surrounding the debates the lyceums deployed other verbal events:

[274] Debate and literary societies historically had a wide variety of exclusive and non-exclusive forms of membership, all depending on the aims of the people involved. In post-Revolutionary America, however, debate societies and the deliberative process they valorized were incorporated into the ideals of a republican nation, where all citizens participated in the process of developing and maintaining democratic ideals. This in turn led to increased participation by people of all classes, particularly among non-elites. Carolyn Eastman notes, "During the early republic. . . belonging to a debating society announced one's *lack* of position more often than the reverse, since these groups promised to further a young man's entry into public life by cultivating his speech, conduct, and relationships." Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers*: 115. See also Gustafson, *Imagining Deliberative Democracy*: 21-27, esp. 26-27.

> declamations, recitations, dialogues, essays, lectures, mock trials, public critiques of the presentations, and oral performances of homegrown, handwritten literary newspapers.[275]

Where common school training alone was not sufficient to prepare students with the proper skill set to navigate the radical social and economic changes, mutual improvement societies often formed a critical bridge for inexperienced young adults to make the transition into professional careers by providing a forum for peer review and critical feedback, as well as building networks for supportive and potentially professional contacts.[276] These societies were

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[275] Joan Newlon Radner, "'The Speaking Eye and the Listening Ear': Orality, Literacy, and Manuscript Traditions in Northern New England Villages," in *Cultural Narratives: Textuality and Performance in American Culture Before 1900*, ed. Sandra M. Gustafson and Caroline Sloat (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2010), 176-77. In her essay, Radner is specifically describing various types of community mutual improvement societies associated with Josiah Holbrook's "lyceum" format, which flourished from the late 1820s to the end of the nineteenth century. Radner notes that "these rural societies were most commonly called 'lyceums,' but they should not be confused with the far more urban and largely antebellum Lyceum Movement that featured subscription lecture series by traveling notables." Ibid., 175. For a more detailed review of the term "lyceum" and its varied applications in this period, see Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2005). 3-6. Holbrook (1788-1854) was an education reformer who saw the value in local mutual improvement societies, and he attempted to improve upon the disparate practices from one group to another by providing a consistent, nationwide model. For a valuable summary of Holbrook's contributions, see Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience*: 311-18. Though he is often credited as the originator of the lyceum movement (which, in the narrowest depiction, might be true in the sense of using of the term "lyceum" to describe a specific *organization* and *movement* among mutual improvement societies), Holbrook was actually systematizing the cultural institution of mutual improvement societies that had already been in existence for more than a century in North America, and even longer in Britain. As one New England contemporary observer noted, "If Lyceums had been called 'Library Societies,' which they might as well, the people of New England, at least, would have felt quite familiar with them; for social libraries have always been known in almost all our villages and townships." Qtd. in Kenneth E. Carpenter, "Libraries," in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, *A History of the Book in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: American Antiquarian Society in Association with the U of North Carolina P 2010), 283. While social libraries might only describe an association of individuals maintaining a library collection, they nevertheless frequently appeared in conjunction with a literary society's efforts to provide resources for their group study and activities, such as communal reading, discussions and recitations. Holbrook's labors nevertheless exerted enormous influence on the culture. Apart from systematizing local improvement societies, Holbrook's work laid the foundation for a network of communication among societies: "a vigorous lyceum movement, born in the 1820's, brought lecturers on every conceivable topic to hamlets and towns in all parts of the country." Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience*: 298. The formal Lyceum Movement and the later Chautauqua movements would emerge from his early efforts. For the lyceum movements, see Ray, *The Lyceum*. For the Chautauqua movements, see Charlotte Canning, *The Most American Thing in America: Circuit Chautauqua as Performance* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2005). 8.

[276] In her study of the Calliopean Society of New York, Carolyn Eastman notes how "these young men created a club to establish the discipline and friendships that would help them advance in business." Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers*: 125.

particularly critical for young adults who came from underprivileged backgrounds. Carolyn Eastman indicates that, "The vast majority of these groups consisted of strikingly young, unmarried men (typically in their teens and early twenties) who, with few exceptions, held no social position and did not come from prominent families."[277] Debate and literary societies therefore functioned as a critical pathway of professional development, compensating for disadvantaged backgrounds and offering members the hope of potential access to greater privileges.

The focus on self-instruction and mutual improvement in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries found an epitome in Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1793). Described by John Demos as "the most famous of all American autobiographical writings," Franklin's memoirs quickly became not just *a* model but *the* model for self-improvement, economic success and upward social mobility.[278] Franklin "began life as one of seventeen children of a Boston candle maker and had scarcely two years of formal schooling," Kenneth Silverman observes, "but was eventually received by five kings and awarded honorary degrees by six universities."[279] Such success and prosperity inspired generations of admirers to duplicate Franklin's system of self-improvement, elevating his life to legendary status and turning his autobiography into a bestseller. "It doubtless helped to introduce an activist educative style into the American vernacular," according to Cremin, "and to give the self-education and self-determined education of the self-made individual a central place in the American imagination."[280]

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[277] Ibid., 115-16.

[278] John Demos, *Circles and Lines: The Shape of Life in Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004). 70.

[279] Kenneth Silverman, ed. *Benjamin Franklin: The Autobiography and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), vii.

[280] Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience*: 257-58.

Within Franklin's system of self-instruction, one of the earliest and most important vehicles he adopted to compensate for his limited education was the creation of "a Club for mutual Improvement, which we called the Junto" in 1727.[281] According to Franklin, the club met weekly on Friday evenings to read original essays by members and to debate issues covering "any Point of Morals, Politics or Natural Philosophy." Group members included "a Copyer of Deeds for the Scriveners. . . . a self-taught Mathematician. . . & afterwards Inventor. . . . a Surveyor, afterwards Surveyor-General. . . . a Shoemaker. . . . a Joiner [carpenter]. . . [and] a Merchant's Clerk."[282] From Franklin's point of view, the club "was the best School of Philosophy, Morals & Politics that then existed in the Province," and had been instrumental in preparing the members for successful professional lives.[283]

The location of the minutes and records of the Palmyra juvenile debate society that Smith attended are currently unknown. The precise topics of the debates, essays by participants, recitations and poetry are lost in time. Nevertheless, the format and procedures for debate and literary societies in local communities during this period were heavily influenced by Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. In post-Revolutionary America, clubs and societies based on Franklin's idealistic format "sprang up by the score during the last decades of the eighteenth century and first decades of the nineteenth, principally in the towns and cities."[284]

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[281] Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1986; repr., 2003). 59. Franklin's idea to form a society was not original. Debate and mutual improvement societies had long existed in Britain. Franklin formed the group shortly after his first trip to London, where he would have witnessed a thriving coffeehouse and alehouse culture, where communal reading, discussion and debates formed a regular part of the social dynamics. For a history of coffeehouse culture and its relationship to popular education, see Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005). See also David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters* (Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture and U of North Carolina P, 1997). Debate societies in the British North American colonies had also existed in connection with colleges and universities, where "disputations" formed part of the core curriculum for schools such as Harvard and Yale. See Cremin, *American Education*: 214-16. Apart from the formal curriculum, students would also organize their own debate societies for additional practice. See Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers*: 122.

[282] Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*: 59-60.

[283] Ibid., 60.

[284] Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience*: 311.

Franklin's self-reliant initiative to rise from poverty to wealth, combined with a cross-class association of likeminded individuals seeking to elevate their socio-economic status, appealed to the principles of democracy and self-determination in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in America. Therefore, in organizational structure and educational intent, founding members of local debate and literary societies used Franklin's work as both a model and an instruction manual for instituting their own organizations. Such widespread embrace of Franklin's writings therefore offers a framework to explore the internal operations of Palmyra's self-improvement societies.

One of the key reasons why the numerous debate and literary societies based on Franklin's could be successful was the culture among members of shared responsibility for instruction. The quality of the learning that members experienced relied exclusively on their preparation and their collective contribution to the process. If a member arrived to the weekly meetings unprepared, the debates and discussions suffered as a consequence. Therefore, in order to discourage casual participation, these clubs and societies adopted "a strict organizational framework," with "an elaborate written constitution, rules, and bylaws and a restrictive system for admitting new members."[285] Strict attendance was required, for instance, due to the organizational structure and procedures. Members rotated positions of responsibility on a weekly basis, where one week might find a participant debating the "pro" side of an issue, the next week he might be on the "con" side, and the week after that he might preside over the debate as the judge. Any absences could throw off the planned group activities.

The "rules and regulations" also frequently outlined a consistent and predictable format to ensure effective use of time. In general, meetings began with a welcome, in some cases an opening prayer, followed by club business and announcements. Individual members might then read an original essay, recite a poem (original or otherwise), perform an oration, deliver a mini-sermon or share a reading. Topics covered a wide range of issues, including but not limited to

[285] Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers*: 118.

national politics, ethics, laws, scientific developments, religious tenets, Enlightenment philosophy and literature. Individual performances were then followed by a debate, often using a format that mimicked a long tradition of "disputations" in college and university curricula.[286] The judge, or moderator, for the debate would divide the group into two teams arguing for or against a proposition, with perhaps a third set of individuals acting as judges. In many cases, the participants did not know if they would be arguing for or against the question at hand, requiring the members to prepare extensively in order to participate on either side of the issue. The debate would then proceed, back-and-forth exchanges were made, and then the judges would eventually vote on the outcome.

Ideally, the debates aimed to expand the understanding of the participants and guide them to the "truth" of a subject, rather than focusing on winning or losing: "Our Debates were to be under the Direction of a President," Franklin instructs his readers, "and to be conducted in the sincere Spirit of Inquiry after Truth, without Fondness for Dispute, or Desire of Victory."[287] Once the presentations and debate were finished, the topics for the following week would be announced. Franklin's memoirs once again provided the model: "our Queries [topics of debate], which were read the Week preceding their Discussion, put us on Reading with Attention upon the several Subjects, that we might speak more to the purpose."[288] Once released from their meeting, the members would then spend the intervening week preparing for the upcoming debate with focused reading, writing and study.

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[286] Franklin's society, along with debate clubs in general, adhered to a basic format derived from higher education, where the pedagogical strategy of engaging in "disputations" motivated students to obtain a comprehensive grasp of topics in order to perform well in classroom debates. Such practices existed among New England colleges and universities from the mid-seventeenth century. According to Cremin, "the disputation was a highly formalized exchange in which a student argued a position on some question introduced by the moderator, while one or more respondents raised objections to his arguments. As the disputation progressed, the participants sought flaws in each other's logic, as well as errors of fact or substance. . . . The exercise ordinarily concluded with a 'dismissal speech' by the moderator, frequently favorable to one or another of the disputants." Cremin, *American Education*: 216.

[287] Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*: 59.

[288] Ibid., 60.

Franklin's description of "Reading with Attention" in order to "speak more to the purpose" offers further insight into the educational value of the debates and the importance of mutual accountability. When studying for the society meetings, members were conscious of the expectation that all of the participants would contribute to the process of teaching one another. These meetings were not only exercises in public self-presentation but active exchanges of new information. With this expectation, participants arguing from their own limited knowledge and opinions, without preparation to support their views with authoritative sources, failed one of the primary goals of the whole endeavor: learning and discussing new ideas by exploring the ideas of leading scholars, commentators and intellectuals.

For example, when Turner describes how the juvenile debate society discussed "moral or political ethics," historian D. Michael Quinn observes how Smith might have prepared for such debates: "young Joseph's precocious insight mirrored the availability of [William] Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, a fact that Turner's reminiscence did not mention."[289] In addition, the pursuit of debating political, philosophical, economic and religious topics would have spurred club members to reference such works as the *Federalist Papers*, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, David Hume's *Philosophical Works*, Bishop Berkeley's *Minute Philosophy*, William Enfield's *History of Philosophy*, Dugald Stewart's *History of Philosophy*, Thomas Brown's *Philosophy of the Human Mind*, Thomas More's *Utopia* and Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia*. All of these works were readily available in the local libraries and bookstores near Smith's home.[290] And because the exchanges

[289] Vogel, *EMD*, 3: 49. Quinn, *Early Mormonism*: 181.

[290] For a survey of local libraries and bookstores in Smith's environment, along with samples of the texts available, see *Early Mormonism*: 178-236. Furthermore, Quinn's "revised and enlarged" work responds to polemicists seeking to minimize Smith's exposure to advanced reading material. Responding to an essay by BYU religion professor Donald Q. Cannon, who argued that most available books in Palmyra were geared toward elementary readers, Quinn pointedly asserted, "To support the myth that Joseph Smith was barely literate with no intellectual curiosity, this publication [*Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint History: New York* (1992)] by BYU's Department of Church History and Doctrine downgraded the intellectual life of everyone in Palmyra." Ibid., 181, see also 490n26. Quinn's study, which detailed Smith's access to esoteric books on occult magic and hermeticism, further charged, "The Mormon prophet's

occurred in an extemporaneous format, simply familiarizing themselves with a topic through casual reading was not sufficient preparation; members needed to grasp the important issues and master them well enough to repeat their insights and discoveries on their feet, without notes. Thus, preparation for the conscientious debate participant involved intense targeted reading, critical analysis that pulled apart arguments into their constituent parts, weighing both the pros and cons of any given issue, and committing salient points to memory.

The result of such group pressure sent many society members scurrying to the stalls of book sellers, local public libraries, Sunday school libraries, private libraries and even small libraries owned by many debate clubs themselves to scour newspapers, pamphlets, tracts and books with relevant information for the week's upcoming debate. And the competitive nature of the debates, in spite of Franklin's idealism to avoid the "Desire of Victory" (or the reverse effect of avoiding embarrassment for lack of preparation) would have provided strong motivation.

Apart from preparing members to debate with greater specificity, the weekly process of targeted and attentive reading had another purpose: to teach lifelong habits of self-education and deliberation. Week after week, month after month, for however long a debate society's session might last, members were writing essays, composing poems, memorizing speeches and preparing for a wide variety of debate topics with intense focused reading.[291] Ideally, such repetition would become the foundation of a systematic process of self-improvement, one that would continue long after the debate club sessions had ended. And this may well have been the case with Smith. For the rest of his life, Smith engaged in a persistent quest for knowledge through the habits of reading, study and deep meditation.

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knowledge of such literature is not a myth. The myth is LDS emphasis on Joseph Smith as an ill-read farmboy." Ibid., 218.

[291] The details of Smith's juvenile debate society are unknown. Many rural debate societies held their sessions during the winter months, when farm work was minimal. But sessions could occur at any time of the year, particularly in towns like Palmyra, where the yearly growth in population and the ever increasing variety of economic opportunities would have sustained a population of young adults who could attend at any time of the year.

Lucy Smith's assertion that Joseph, as a seventeen year-old teenager, "had never read the Bible through in his life" and "seemed much less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children, but far more given to meditation and deep study" is a famous and oft-cited quote among advocates of Smith's uneducated status.[292] But others remembered Smith differently. Philetus B. Spear, a childhood acquaintance of Smith in Palmyra, claimed Smith "had for a library a copy of the 'Arabian Nights,' stories of Captain Kidd, and a few novels."[293] Spear's account was critical of the young prophet; his description of Smith's reading material was intended to depict Smith as an idle youth, connecting his fictional reading material to his magical treasure hunting: "The attention of the people was first called to him by the claims made that Joe could find anything lost or hidden. . . . he claimed to know where Captain Kidd had hidden money in Palmyra."[294] In another critical account, Pomeroy Tucker, a Palmyra bookseller who was uniquely positioned to observe the development of Smith's reading habits over time, both lauded and dismissed Smith's interests:[295]

> Joseph. . . as he grew in years, had learned to read comprehensively [i.e., Smith read on every available topic], in which qualification he was far in advance of his elder brother, and even of his father; and this talent was assiduously devoted, as he quitted or modified his idle habits, to the perusal of works of fiction and records of criminality, such for instance as would be classed with the 'dime novels' or the present day. The story of Stephen Burroughs and Captain Kidd, and the like, presented the highest charms for his expanding mental perceptions. As he further advanced in reading and knowledge, he assumed a spiritual or religious turn of mind, and frequently perused the bible, becoming quite familiar with portions thereof, both of the Old and New Testaments; selected texts from which he quoted and discussed with great assurance when in the presence of his superstitious acquaintances. The Prophecies and Revelations were his special forte. His interpretations of scriptural passages were always original and unique,

[292] Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 296. Mormon scholar Donna Hill qualifies Lucy's claim by describing how Smith, in spite of Lucy's depiction, "had been exposed to the religious beliefs of his grandparents and was under the influence of the devout atmosphere in his home, hearing the Bible read, singing hymns, listening to the earnest prayers of his parents and to their fervent recounting of visions, and for the previous three years, according to his own statement, he had been thinking deeply about matters of religion." Hill, *Joseph Smith*: 47.

[293] Vogel, *EMD*, 3: 130.

[294] Ibid.

[295] See Quinn, *Early Mormonism*: 183.

> and his deductions and conclusions often disgustingly blasphemous, according to the common apprehension of Christian people.[296]

In another account, the clerk of a paper store in Rochester, New York, offers additional details about Smith's reading and study habits. In mid to late 1829, Smith made visits to Rochester in hopes of securing a printer for *The Book of Mormon*. The clerk, identified by historian Vogel as apparently being William Alling of the Alling & Cory Paper Firm, described how Smith

> . . . used to come in on Mondays from his home in Palmyra and spend hours reading and selecting books and talking theology. It was at this time that he was engaged in writing his "Book of Mormon," but the present firm disclaims all responsibility for Mr. Smith's religious conclusions, even if he did buy his books and writing paper from their store.[297]

Eyewitnesses were not the only ones who described Smith's reading habits. Smith revealed his penchant for reading in his own letters and journals. Two years after *The Book of Mormon* was published, Smith was on a trip to New York City in October of 1832. While there, he wrote Emma a letter that revealed how he desired to spend time: "I prefer reading, and praying, and holding communion with the holy spirit and writing to you, than walking the streets and beholding the distraction of man."[298] The following month, on November 28, 1832, he recorded in his journal, "this day I have [spent] in reading and writing; this evening my mind is calm and serene, for which I thank the Lord."[299] For the next several years, Smith periodically described his habits of reading and meditation, using variations of the same formula: ". . . spent the remainder of the day in reading and meditation."[300]

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[296] Vogel, *EMD*, 3: 93-94.

[297] Ibid., 3:397-98.

[298] Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 279 (spelling and punctuation modernized).

[299] Ibid., 21 (spelling and punctuation modernized).

[300] Ibid., 88. October 5, 1835 entry. See also October 6, 1835, ". . . spent the rest of the day in reading and meditation," (89). November 21, 1835, "at home, spent the day in examining my books and studying the

In the same period of time, Smith also complemented his reading with studying the Hebrew language.[301] Smith's December 7, 1835, entry offers a typical description: "Spent the day in reading the Hebrew."[302] Five years later, while on a trip to Washington, D.C., Smith delivered a two-hour sermon to a crowd of people who were curious about the Mormon faith. A New Yorker among them, Matthew S. Davis, described his experience in a letter to his wife, referencing his own impressions and Smith's intellectual self-representations. In a depiction that entangled formal and informal education with a dash of the trope of the uneducated oracle, Davis writes, "I went last evening to hear 'Joe Smith,' the celebrated Mormon, expound his doctrine. . . . He is not an educated man: but he is a plain, sensible, strong minded man. . . . He is by profession a farmer, but is evidently well read. . . . He was but a man, he said; a plain, untutored man."[303] Whether or not Smith's lifelong pattern of reading and study began as a member of Palmyra's juvenile debating club, or even earlier as a convalescing boy laid up for several years from a leg surgery, the eyewitness accounts and journal entry snapshots of his life reveal a man engaged in a lifelong project of systematic reading, self-education and self-improvement.

Apart from reinforcing personal study habits, the discursive practice of debate societies would have revealed the value of collective analysis in the process of discovering greater insights, where multiple viewpoints on an issue could extend beyond the achievements of

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Hebrew alphabet" (119). December 11, 1835, "Spent the day at home, in reading, and instructing," (130). December 12, 1835, "at home, spent the fore noon in reading," (130).

[301] Richard Bushman notes that in the fall of 1835, Joseph Smith and the elders of the Mormon Church "hired Joshua Seixas, a Jewish convert to Christianity" to teach them Hebrew. Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 293.

[302] Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 127. For further examples, see the entries for December 5, 1835, "spent the forenoon in studying Hebrew" (125-126); December 8, 1835, "at home, spent the day in reading Hebrew" (127); December 14, 1835, "Spent the day at home reading Hebrew" (133); December 26, 1835, "commenced studying the Hebrew Language" (146); December 30, 1835, "spent the day in reading Hebrew" (148); January 8, 1836, "Spent the day in the Hebrew school" (154); January 14, 1836, "met the Hebrew class at the school room in the chapel" (159); January 18, 1836, "attended the Hebrew school" (169); January 29, 1836, "attended school and read Hebrew" (181).

[303] Smith, *HC (1948)*, 4:78-79. For further reading on Smith's visit to Washington, D.C., see Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 391-98.

individual study. Such democratic institutions of knowledge production appealed to Smith and his cohorts. Long after they left upstate New York to establish their church in the Ohio Valley, Smith and his followers would continue to participate in debate societies, which remained a popular cultural institution among members of the budding religion.

Smith's formulation for a new religious organization did not appear instantaneously, descending from heaven in a lightning flash of inspiration. Rather, Smith spent the early years of his leadership carefully developing the doctrine and polity of the church. Within this dynamic environment, debate societies played a crucial role in framing the process of assessing ideas, working through challenges, establishing a new religious identity and engaging in open dialogue with early church members. Mormon historian Dean C. Jessee observes, "The lyceum movement—with its lectures, dramatic performances, class instruction, and debates—contributed significantly to the education of adult Americans in the nineteenth century and provided the cultural framework for the Kirtland, Ohio, debates and schools."[304] Smith often recorded his experiences at debates in his journal, commenting on the quality of the arguments or problematic issues involved. Though details about the precise arguments the debaters employed are sparse, the topics nevertheless show a thriving intellectual community that was addressing current theological and political debates of the day.

In his entry for November 18, 1835, for instance, Smith records, ". . . some of the young Elders were about engaging in a debate upon the subject of miracles. The question was this: was or was it not the design of Christ to establish his gospel by miracles? After an interesting debate of three hours or more, during which time much talent was displayed, it was decided by the presidents of the debate in the negative, which was a righteous decision."[305] A closer examination of this entry reveals important clues about the role of deliberative argumentation in the development of Mormon thought and culture.

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[304] Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 131n103.

[305] Ibid., 118. For references to additional debates, see 134, 138 and 140.

The relationship between the nature of miracles and their establishment of Christ's divinity and gospel message was a sensitive topic among New England theologians in 1835. Harvard's Divinity College, one of the leading intellectual hubs of theological debate in America, and a school dominated by Unitarian faculty and students, had been simmering over this issue since the mid to late 1820s.[306] The debate did not come to the forefront, however, until George Ripley (1802-1880), a Harvard-trained Unitarian minister, published in the November issue of *The Christian Examiner* his review of the controversial works of German Enlightenment philosopher and theologian Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803). Regarding "the nature and purposes of the miracles recorded in the New Testament," Ripley indicated that Herder "did not call in question their historical truth." Yet, according to Herder's logic, "we are not, however, to rest the divine authority of Christianity upon the evidence of miracles. Our Saviour himself never regarded them as the criterion of truth. . . . It is in fact impossible, argues Herder, to establish the truth of any religion, merely on the ground of miracles."[307] Ripley's article touched a nerve, eventually exploding into the famous "Miracles Controversy," which involved such noted philosophers and theologians as Unitarian minister Theodore Parker, Harvard professor Andrews Norton, and the famous Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson.[308]

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[306] Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007). 98-99.

[307] Perry Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1950), 96.

[308] On one side of the argument were Unitarians who believed Christ's miracles were supernatural events that proved Christ's divinity and message. For them, supernatural events were fundamentally separate from the natural world; thus, miracles were interventions from the supernatural sphere that penetrated into the natural world. On the other side of the debate, rationalist Unitarians argued that Christ's miracles could not be used as evidence of the divinity of the gospel, because the supernatural and natural worlds coexisted. Hence, Christ's miracles were not supernatural interventions. While the debate ostensibly appears to be theological trifling, the implications were quite serious. Stripping Christ's narrative of miraculous events resulted in a Christian narrative devoid of spiritually confirming evidence of Christ's mission and divinity. And for many concerned Unitarians, the logic inexorably pointed to the conclusion that Christ himself was not a divine being. According to Barbara Packer, "the underlying quarrel concerning 'miracles' had really been about" the deeper issue of Christianity's claim as the one and only true religion: "What miracles offer us is proof that our revelation is *the* revelation, that we are not merely children of God but inheritors of his blessing–Jacobs rather than Esaus. Remove miraculous confirmation from the teachings of Jesus and Christianity becomes merely 'one religion among many'." Barbara L. Packer, *The Transcendentalists* (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2007). 89. For further reading on the

Given the historical context, the debate societies in the young Mormon faith demonstrate the awareness by Smith and his associates of current theological issues in the nation. In the same month Ripley published his review of Herder, sparking a well-publicized debate in the heart of New England religious culture, the "young Elders" of the nascent Mormon faith were debating the same theologically sophisticated issue in the frontier town of Kirtland, Ohio.

Miracles Controversy, see Gura, *American Transcendentalism*: 98-122. Packer, *The Transcendentalists*: 85-93.

Chapter Six: Memory, Imitation and Composition

The training outlined in schoolbook assignments presents only a partial view of classroom, homeschool and self-improvement practices. In the midst of studying primers, spellers, grammars and readers, children also obtained basic skills in writing and composition. Thus, the examination of informal and formal educational practices in early nineteenth-century America would not be complete without a closer look at three critical areas of instruction: the improvement of memory skills, the development of proficient writing techniques by means of imitation, and basic approaches to written and oral composition. Children learned such skills in both formal and informal settings, in the schoolhouse as well as by the family fireside. Thus, in order to comprehend more fully the cultural dynamics of literacy instruction and oratorical training, this chapter will examine how these practices and skills contributed to educational development and greater oral fluency.

Of all the educational practices in early nineteenth-century classrooms, memory development and composition exercises are two of the least documented. Recitation and composition training in this period, both in Britain and America, relied heavily on oral instruction. Thus, the archives only offer a partial glimpse at the pedagogical practices, many of them centuries-old, that teachers and students took for granted. This calls to mind Hugh Blair's discourse on the difference between the permanence of written works and the ephemeral nature of the spoken word, where writing offers "a more permanent method of communication," whereas, "the voice is fugitive and passing; you must catch the words the moment they are uttered, or you lose them for ever."[309]

When Joseph Smith received his education, school children did not yet have books specifically designed for composition, though manuals designed specifically for teachers began

[309] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Philadelphia: Robert Aitken, 1784). 59.

to appear.[310] Thus, trying to determine what composition instruction children received by strictly reviewing the content of common schoolbooks would be particularly misleading. In spite of this absence, however, children regularly engaged in several types of composition exercises, including basic orthography skills, letter writing, short essays and various types of imitation exercises. But unlike composition exercises of today, memory development played a crucial role in writing and oratorical practice. In order to gain a greater appreciation of Smith's ability to compose and recite lengthy passages of text in his production of the *Book of Mormon*, this chapter will therefore review the role of memory and some of the common techniques of writing and composition taught to children in home schools, Sunday schools and common schools.

The Art of Memory

Memorization played a crucial, indeed, central role in early nineteenth-century education, the extent of which often goes underappreciated or underestimated in discussions on classroom pedagogy. Memory and oral performance played a mutually supporting role in classroom practices, and the symbiotic relationship between recitation and literacy instruction inevitably resulted in exercises that required children to memorize and perform a variety of texts, including catechisms, grammar rules, arithmetic rules, answers to questions about geography and history, poems, famous orations, dialogues and essays. In one form or another, recitation of memorized material occurred on a daily basis, often capped by a weekly recitation day in the classroom, where students would perform what they had learned during the week in front of the teacher and their peers. In turn, these exercises acted as rehearsals for the formal "recitation day" performances that occurred at the end of each school term. As Carolyn Eastman observes,

[310] Rhetorical treatises that discussed writing styles and basic composition exercises did, of course, exist. But schoolbooks devoted exclusively to composition and writing had yet to appear. For further information, see the section "Writing and Composition" later in this chapter.

> Virtually every school throughout the Northeast used exhibitions as a means of assessing children's educational progress and teachers' achievements. . . . Their format adhered to a standard scheme. A small number of trustees or school visitors 'examined' the children by having them answer questions in mathematics, spelling, geography, history, and other subjects. Afterward the students 'exhibited' their knowledge and elocutionary polish by performing a variety of memorized texts (plays or short theatrical scenes, poems, and oratory gleaned from their schoolbooks, as well as compositions by more advanced students) before large audiences of parents and community members.[311]

Common schools were not the only site of such classroom and public performances. "Memorization," Anne M. Boylan indicates, "was the central pedagogical technique employed in nineteenth-century Sunday schools."[312] Along with their experiences at common school during the week, children attending Sunday schools participated in weekly recitations of memorized hymns, catechisms, moral essays, scripture verses and paraphrased biblical narratives, which often culminated in monthly or quarterly performances in front of parents and teachers in the congregation. When Joseph attended Sunday school in New York, a number of administrators throughout the state further motivated children by rewarding them with a ticket "for each chapter committed" to memory, along with "punctual attendance, and good behavior."[313] Children could eventually redeem the tickets for a new copy of a Bible, New Testament or other devotional materials.[314]

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[311] Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers*: 30. For recitation activities, see 29-38. Even with such subjects as geography, history and math, oral performance played a central role. For example, as indicated earlier in this chapter, Joseph Smith owned copy of *First Lines in Arithmetic* (1818), an introductory math book aimed at the youngest of scholars, which teaches the basics of arithmetic in a catechetical exchange: "Q[estion]. What is that called, by which we signify number? A[nswer]. A figure, or digit. Q. How many are there of these? A. As many as one's fingers. Q. What are the names we give them in words? A. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, cypher. Q. What does this last figure signify? A. It signifies nothing by itself." Dewolf and Brown, *The First Lines of Arithmetic, For the Use of Young Scholars: Adapted to the Capacities of Children, from the Age of Eight to Sixteen Years* (Hartford: William S. Marsh, 1818). 10.

[312] Boylan, *Sunday School*: 40.

[313] James Eastburn, *The Second Annual Report of the New-York Sunday School Union Society* (New York: Sunday School Union Society, 1818). 7.

[314] For additional information on the reward systems, see Boylan, *Sunday School*: 44, 181n25.

Memorization of scriptural texts was often viewed as an effective strategy to make students internalize the lessons in their hearts and minds. Such memorization became a tangible marker of spiritual success, and Sunday school organizers "proudly reported their accomplishments in school records."[315] These records offer a glimpse into the amount of material some of these students committed to memory, and the sheer volume of their achievements beggars the modern imagination.

In a Sunday school class in Long Island, New York, "one girl recited through [entirely] the Gospel of Matthew, and several chapters in Mark—in the whole 1195 verses. . . . She recited also 67 Hymns of 368 verses, and 30 answers in Catechism."[316] In another school, a boy "not yet seven years of age" memorized 218 verses in a single month; and later, "in the course of a few months had learned [the Gospel of St. John] by heart, consisting of 879 verses, perfectly to the satisfaction of his teacher."[317] In a memory contest lasting two months at another Sunday school, the organizers offered "a Bible and [New] Testament, of considerable value. . . to the two scholars who should commit to memory the greatest number of verses," and when the contest finished, "the Bible was presented by the Rev. Mr. Knox to a coloured adult, and the Testament to a white boy. . . . The former committed to memory 1079, and the latter 968 verses."[318] At the same school, prior to the contest, "a boy, about 12 years of age, committed to memory, in one week, 330 verses, and another was rewarded for repeating 19 chapters in one month; and during the past quarter, the whole number of verses that have been committed to memory (*in a school of about* 60 *scholars*) amount to 3064 [i.e., an average of 51 verses per student], or 102 chapters,

[315] Ibid., 40-44.

[316] Samuel Weed, "Letter to the Secretary of the New-York Sunday School Union Society"," *The Sunday School Repository* 1819, 218.

[317] Anon., "Extracts from the Reports Read at the Quarterly Meeting of the New-York Sunday School Union," *The Sunday School Repository* 1818, 140.

[318] Weed, "Letter to the Secretary," 222.

besides catechisms, hymns, and other suitable pieces."[319] Furthermore, such massive feats of memorization were rather common, as the following summary from *The Second Annual Report of the New-York Sunday School Union Society* (1818) suggests:

> The instances are too numerous to be all noticed—but a few shall be selected. One boy committed no less than 26 chapters in the course of four weeks.—This may be considered as extraordinary. There are few Schools, however, who do not report from 3 to 7 chapters [per student]. One School reports that 54 chapters had been committed by 14 Scholars—16 of which were repeated by one Scholar alone, a boy but 8 years old. . . . in one School, where but 150 Scholars regularly attend, 550 chapters, containing nearly 17,000 verses, have been committed within a period of about six months! [i.e., an average of 113 verses per student] In another School, the highest class had committed 80 chapters in 3 months. A School consisting of 80 Scholars, committed in the last two months 57 chapters, making about 2000 verses; another of 60 scholars had repeated 112 chapters in 3 months.—In a School which does not particularly enumerate [report numbers in detail], they report that the largest number of chapters committed by one boy since the distribution of tickets was 45. The last which we shall name is a School which has always been exemplary for its improvement: the Superintendent reports, that one boy, who had to work at a trade, had, notwithstanding, committed 300 verses in *one week*; and in 3 months, had committed 1000 verses. During the last quarter, 6088 verses had been committed by the different boys.[320]

In both Sunday schools and common schools, the reading and memorization of biblical passages formed an integral extension of reading and writing instruction. In addition to inculcating children with moral lessons, the memorized passages also acted as models for imitation in matters of style, narrative structure and the development of a religious idiom. School assignments, however, would not be the first time children were exposed to such a close examination of the scriptures.

During domestic worship and church attendance, children acquired a familiarity with biblical language and structures long before they started formal schooling. Indeed, in religious homes, children would acquire a familiarity with biblical texts long before they could even read. Whether in everyday conversations, family devotions or written compositions, biblical

[319] Ibid., 222 (emphasis in original).

[320] Eastburn, *The Second Annual Report*: 7.

phraseology, allusions, concepts and structures wove in and out of everyday communication with ease, seamless in the transitions between religious and colloquial registers and second nature to those who employed them. And from the evidence in the text of the *Book of Mormon*, Smith fully participated in the cultural practice of absorbing and memorizing the biblical idiom. "Joseph Smith grew up in a Bible-drenched society," notes Philip Barlow, "and he showed it. Like those around him, his religious conceptions and his everyday speech were biblically informed."[321] Classroom memorization and imitation exercises merely reinforced a register of religious language that was already firmly established in the cultural milieu.

Such a context informed Joseph Smith's production of the *Book of Mormon*. "It imitates the style of the King James Bible," Grant Hardy observers, later adding, "and it is written in the diction of the Authorized Version."[322] Mark Thomas also observes how, "the Book of Mormon contains numerous biblical literary forms and literally hundreds of biblical quotations, expansions, paraphrases, allusions, and verbal echoes."[323] In spite of his familiarity with the biblical language, however, Smith's inconsistent use of archaic forms often sits uncomfortably next to modern and nonstandard phraseology. "Smith cast the book into seventeenth-century prose," Barlow indicates, "though his own vocabulary and grammar are evident throughout. Because Jacobean speech was not his native idiom, he sometimes rendered the style inexpertly."[324] Mistakes and awkward prose notwithstanding, Smith's use of biblical language added an air of authority and familiarity to the text, even if such usage emerged unconsciously

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[321] Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991). 11.

[322] Hardy, *Understanding*: 5.

[323] Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2003). 17.

[324] Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*: 27. It should be noted that the KJV text contains a high portion of pre-Jacobean English. KJV translators regularly and carefully incorporated the 16th-century English translations of William Tyndale (1494–1536), Miles Coverdale (1488–1569), the Geneva Bible (1557-1560) and the Bishop's Bible (1568-1572), see Jon Nielson and Royal Skousen, "How Much of the King James Bible is William Tyndale's?," *Reformation* 3, no. 1 (1998): 49-74, esp. 66.

from years of reading, reciting and memorizing biblical passages. "It is a commonplace," Edward P. J. Corbett observes of early American education and writing styles, "that the book which has had the profoundest effect on the styles of English and American authors is the King James version of the Bible. Passages of that magnificent prose were so deeply ingrained in the memory of earlier generations of English and American readers that when they came to write they unconsciously and spontaneously reproduced much of the rhythm, the phraseology, and the structures of the Biblical passages."[325] Smith's oral performance of the *Book of Mormon*, dictated in a relentless stream of narrative flow, demonstrates how deeply, if imperfectly, the elevated biblical style had informed his upbringing.

Writing and Composition

The extensive training children received in memorization not only applied to performance and recitation practices, but also comprised an integral part of nineteenth-century writing and composition pedagogies. This was especially true for imitation exercises, which required students to emulate a model passage, without directly consulting the work during the course of writing their assignments. Yet, before exploring the relationship between classroom practices and Smith's production of the *Book of Mormon*, I need to address a longstanding misconception about Joseph Smith's writing abilities.

In an 1879 interview, Emma Smith, the prophet's widow, delivered her opinion on whether or not Joseph could have composed the *Book of Mormon* without divine intervention by famously declaring, "Joseph Smith. . . could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter, let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon."[326] Even though Emma's statement, some 40 years after the event, is often interpreted as a literal and objective depiction

[325] Edward P. J. Corbett, "The Theory and Practice of Imitation in Classical Rhetoric," *College Composition and Communication* 22, no. 3 (1971): 247.

[326] Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 542. See also, Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *The Saints' Herald,* 1879), 290.

of Joseph's writing skills, Emma's hyperbolic statement should, in fact, be read with the same tone as, "he couldn't walk and chew gum at the same time," or more specifically, "he couldn't compose at the level of *Dick and Jane*, much less write a whole book."[327] In spite of this dismissive characterization, Joseph could certainly write and dictate coherent letters and texts, as his surviving letters, revelations and journal entries well attest.[328]

Emma's juxtaposition of Joseph's inability to write a "well-worded letter" with the skills required to compose a book of over 500 printed pages, not only demonstrates the quality of her sharp humor but also reveals her shared assumptions with her listeners about a practice of nineteenth-century education: one of the earliest and most basic composition exercises children encountered at home and at school was copying and composing short letters, imitating the style and format of basic correspondence. Thus, in order to emphasize her opinion that Joseph could not have produced the *Book of Mormon*, Emma declared quite facetiously that Joseph could not compose at the level of a child receiving introductory lessons in one of the most elementary forms of writing exercises.[329] Emma's pointed exaggeration, however, should not be interpreted

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[327] As discussed in chapter 3, Joseph's purported semi-literacy is entangled with claims about the divine origin of the *Book of Mormon*, which complicates inquiries into his actual educational practices and training. Treating Emma's description as a literal characterization of Smith's skills, the Gospel Topics section of the official LDS website states, "The angel charged Joseph Smith to translate the book from the ancient language in which it was written. The young man, however, had very little formal education and was incapable of writing a book on his own, let alone translating an ancient book written from an unknown language, known in the Book of Mormon as "reformed Egyptian." Joseph's wife Emma insisted that, at the time of translation, Joseph "could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter, let alone dictat[e] a book like the Book of Mormon." The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Book of Mormon Translation," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, https://www.lds.org/topics/book-of-mormon-translation?lang=eng (accessed March 16, 2016).

[328] For instance, observe the style of the opening section of an October 22, 1829 letter to Oliver Cowdery, Joseph writes, "Respected Sir, I would inform you that I arrived at home on Sunday morning, the 4th, after having a prosperous journey, and found all well. The people are all friendly to us, except a few who are in opposition to everything, unless it is something that is exactly like themselves. And two of our most formidable persecutors are now under censure and are cited to a trial in the church for crimes, which, if true, are worse than all the Gold Book business. We do not rejoice in the affliction of our enemies but we shall be glad to have truth prevail" (spelling and punctuation modernized). For an online review of Smith's written and dictated materials, see The Joseph Smith Papers, http://josephsmithpapers.org/. For the original letter, see The Joseph Smith Papers, "Letter to Oliver Cowdery, 22 October 1829," http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-oliver-cowdery-22-october-1829.

[329] Caleb Bingham's *Juvenile Letters* (1803), perhaps the most popular letter-writing schoolbook of the early nineteenth century, consists entirely of short, easy-to-read letters written by fictional children "from

as an intentional misrepresentation. Her dismissive comment merely serves to highlight her emphatic belief that Joseph could not have created the work without divine assistance.[330] Thus, while Emma's comment provides insight into her character and sense of humor, readers are left to wonder what writing skills Joseph actually acquired in his education. This study therefore needs to return to nineteenth-century classrooms and review how teachers instructed children in writing and composition.

From the moment they started learning their letters, schoolchildren began learning how to write, though the earliest exercises focused on handwriting skills, as opposed to formal composition. "Writing activities in the lives of nineteenth-century children and adolescents," Lucille M. Shultz indicates, "did not begin or end with formal instruction in composition, but, rather, premiered and were practiced in many other sites, including infant schools, common school, and home schools."[331] The scope of these writing exercises, however, is not entirely known. Nonetheless, as Linda Ferreira-Buckley observes of this period, "extant materials—textbooks, instructor lectures, student notes, books on education, university calendars, etc.—provided a reasonable basis for characterizing many practices."[332] To complicate matters, as mentioned earlier in the beginning of this chapter, specialized schoolbooks written specifically

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eight to fifteen years of age." The goal was to teach children the "forms" (proper templates and patterns) of letter writing. See Caleb Bingham, *Juvenile Letters; Being a Correspondence between Children, from Eight to Fifteen Years of Age* (Boston: Caleb Bingham, 1803).

[330] Later in the same interview, Emma states, "my belief is that the Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity—I have not the slightest doubt of it. I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired. . . . It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and, for one so ignorant and unlearned as he [Joseph] was, it was simply impossible." Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 542.

[331] Carr, Carr, and Schultz, *Archives of Instruction*: 151.

[332] Ferreira-Buckley, "Writing Instruction," 179. While Ferreira-Buckley is specifically addressing composition in Great Britain, the same type of documents in America, coupled with the use of the same sets of schoolbooks across the Atlantic, provide the same framework for analyzing composition in early American schools.

and exclusively for composition did not yet exist.[333] Rather, children learned the art of composition through a variety of assignments, including journal writing, the use of commonplace books, copying letters, writing out (and memorizing) scriptural verses, and imitating the works of various authors. And as their reading comprehension grew, so, too, did the writing exercises that accompanied the lessons. As they advanced in their composition skills, "students were expected to learn to write by responding either to single-word topics or by amplifying on apothegms provided by the teacher. Students prepared for the bar or the pulpit by hearing and taking careful notes of lectures, by collecting pithy and useful materials in commonplace books, and by debating and orating in rhetorical and literary clubs."[334] Among all these activities, and residing at the core of composition pedagogy, was the centuries-old practice of imitation.

Imitation

Imitation, as practiced in ancient Greece and Rome, involved such "exercises as learning by heart, translations from one language to another, paraphrase, and emulation."[335] And, as Robert J. Connors argues, this same method forms "a necessary backdrop to any examination of assignments in the teaching of speech and writing in America."[336] The method of imitation, as practiced in schools in the early nineteenth century, followed a basic general outline: teachers provided students with a sample of writing (either orally, by reading a passage aloud, or by giving the student a written text). Students then listened to, or closely read, the passage, while

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[333] Robert J. Connors argues that the abridged versions of Blair's *Lectures*, specifically the versions first published in 1818 that "added questions to the end of each abridged lecture," constituted "the first specifically pedagogical rhetoric books—the first textbooks." Robert J. Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1997). 74, 75. For Connors' distinction between rhetoric books and composition textbooks, see ibid., 70-75.

[334] Ibid., 303.

[335] Ibid., 298.

[336] Ibid., 300.

studying the author's work choices, sentence structure, clarity of thought, progression of ideas, and development of arguments. Then, without being allowed further reference to the text, the students attempted to rewrite the passage in their own words, while simultaneously observing the style of the author and the way the author developed the essay or argument. The amount of latitude students had in such assignments depended on the instructor's preferences: a student might be required to mirror the specific structure and development of the passage in close detail, or a student might have the flexibility to expand and/or adapt the original passage into new variations. When finished, the teacher and student would examine the differences in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the student's writing.[337]

In terms of imitation exercises and actual classroom practices, Hugh Blair's influential *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) played once again a prominent role. And while children in common schools rarely studied directly from his unabridged works, Blair's *Lectures* nevertheless shaped the common pedagogical practices in their classrooms. Regarding format, the lessons were relatively basic. Adopting the same strategies of classical rhetorical studies, Blair advises his readers on how to develop their compositional skills:

> . . . with respect to the assistance that is to be gained from the writings of others, it is obvious, that we ought to render ourselves well acquainted with the Style of the best authors. This is requisite, both in order to form a just taste in Style, and to supply us with a full stock of words on every subject. In reading authors, with a view to Style, attention should be given to the peculiarities of their different manners. . . . I know no exercise that will be found more useful for acquiring a proper Style, than to translate [paraphrase] some passage from an eminent English author, into our own words. What I mean is, to take, for instance, some page of one of Mr. Addison's Spectators, and read it carefully over two or three times, till we have got a firm hold of the thoughts contained in it; then to lay aside the book; to attempt to write out the passage from memory, in the best way we can; and having done so, next to open the book, and compare what we have written, with the Style of the author. Such an exercise will, by comparison, shew us where the defects of our Style lie; will lead us to the proper attentions for rectifying them; and, among the different ways in which the same thought may be expressed, will make us perceive that which is the most beautiful. But. . . I must caution, at the same

[337] It should be noted that the method of imitation was not an attempt to have the student memorize and copy another writer's works verbatim. Rather, imitation involved the close study of an author's style, language and structure, which the students attempted to emulate while using his or her own words.

> time, against a servile imitation of any one author whatever. This is always dangerous. It hampers genius; it is likely to produce a stiff manner; and those who are given to close imitation, generally imitate an author's faults as well as his beauties. No man will ever become a good writer, or speaker, who has not some degree of confidence to follow his own genius.[338]

For late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers of schoolbooks, Blair's depiction of imitation acted as one of the most prominent touchstones for subsequent discussions on composition and performance. When Joseph Smith received his education, the variety of publications (apart from rhetorical treatises) that specifically addressed skills of composition for precollege students was limited to half a dozen prominent writers, all of whom were influenced by Blair's work: John Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* (1785) and *The Teacher's Assistant* (London, 1801; American edition, 1808); David Irving's *Elements of Composition* (1801; American edition, 1803); Daniel Jaudon's *The Union Grammar* (1812); John Rippingham's *Rules for English Composition* (1811; American edition, 1816), and William Russell's *Grammar of Composition* (1823).[339] In addition, a host of cheap booklets based on these works, which were "paperbound and ephemeral, have not survived in large numbers."[340] As all of these texts demonstrate (both by means of open recognition and unacknowledged borrowing), the development of compositional exercises in this window of time occurred along two pathways: one that simply reiterated Blair's advice, and another that expanded Blair's proposals into a system of composition.

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[338] Blair, *Lectures (1784)*: 177.

[339] Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric*: 218. Lucille M. Schultz observes that a "July 1832 issue of *American Annals of Education*" only mentions five composition books used in American schools, though "the writer does not claim the lists are complete, but, rather, useful approximation. . . . David Irving's *Elements of Composition* (London, 1801; Philadelphia, 1803); Caleb Bingham's *Juvenile Letters* (1803); John Walker's *The Teacher's Assistant* (London, 1801; Carlisle, PA, 1808); William Russell's *Grammar of Composition* (1823); and Parker's *Progressive Exercises* (1832)." Carr, Carr, and Schultz, *Archives of Instruction*: 165. Note: Robert J. Connors dates Jaudon's *Union Grammar* as 1811, yet the earliest publication I can locate appears in 1812.

[340] Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric*: 218.

In terms of repeating Blair's method, David Irving's *Elements of Composition* (1801) contains a condensed version of Blair's recommendations, with no further additions.[341] Likewise, John Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* (1785) borrows the same passage from Blair, paraphrasing Blair's work, adjusting words and phrases to his own style.[342] In both of these instances, however, Irving and Walker merely repeat Blair's instructions, without developing Blair's pedagogy. Sixteen years later, however, John Walker would attempt to create a fuller approach to composition.

John Walker and *The Teacher's Assistant*

In 1801, John Walker published *The Teacher's Assistant*, which expanded Blair's advice into an entire system of composition. Walker was not content with using Blair's useful albeit brief advice. So, as is characteristic of many of his works, Walker aimed to fill the gap of instruction between introductory texts and more advanced works. After acknowledging the "practice recommended by Dr. Blair" to imitate celebrated authors, Walker argued that the use of sophisticated and highly literate writing in composition exercises was solely beneficial "for pupils far advanced."[343] Walker then continued with a plea to use simpler models for writing, arguing, "but for the younger class of pupils. . . Mr. Addison's language seems too elegant and (if I may use the expression) too untangible. A regular chain of thinking, and a coarser and more palpable choice of words, seems best calculated for the improvement of beginners in the

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[341] Irving makes no claim to originality, nor attempts to pass off Blair's work as his own. In his Introduction, Irving informs the reader that he is merely compiling the writings of other authors: "In the following pages the reader needs not expect to discover any originality of observation. I desire to be regarded in no other view than that of a mere compiler. . . . For any valuable instructions which this compilation may chance to exhibit, the reader is principally indebted to Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric*, Kames's *Elements of Criticism*, Melmoth's *Letters of Fitsosborne*, and Lowth's *Introduction to English Grammar*." David Irving, *The Elements of English Composition* (Philadelphia:1803). vii.

[342] Compare John Walker, *A Rhetorical Grammar: in Which the Common Improprieties in Reading and Speaking are Detected, and the True Sources of Elegant Pronunciation are Pointed Out*, 3rd ed. (London: John Walker, 1801). 303-04.

[343] *The Teacher's Assistant*: xv.

art."[344] Thus, focusing on an approach that offered age-appropriate material for imitation exercises, Walker developed Blair's advice into a complete system. The full title of his work encompasses Walker's vision: *The Teacher's Assistant in English Composition; Or, Easy Rules for Writing Themes and Composing Exercises on Subjects Proper for the Improvement of Youth of Both Sexes at School; To Which are Added, Hints for Correcting and Improving Juvenile Composition* (1801). By elaborating on Blair's recommendations, Walker provided teachers with a system to shepherd students of all ages in the development of writing and composition skills, and his methods were widely adopted in both Britain and America.

Walker's approach to imitation exercises and composition marked a defining shift in classroom practices, laying the groundwork for a greater variety of exercises and pedagogical practices–practices that would eventually move toward greater individual expression. "Certainly," Robert J. Connors observes, "the seminal book for 'composition' as opposed to 'rhetoric' must be John Walker's *The Teacher's Assistant*, first published in London in 1801."[345] The shift Walker instigated began to spread through schools, and Walker's new ideas did not go unnoticed by competing authors of textbooks. Seeing the advantages of Walker's systematic approach, contemporary writers incorporated Walker's work into their own educational texts, such as Daniel Jaudon's *The Union Grammar* (1812), John Rippingham's *Rules for English Composition* (1811), and William Russell's *Grammar of Composition* (1823). To one degree or another, all of these writers borrowed from Walker's methods. This, in turn, further disseminated Walker's approach throughout school classrooms. Thus, Walker's system, which formed the core of the various spin-offs of his work, became "the exemplar for a whole school of composition pedagogy."[346] And by the time Joseph Smith was attending common school and

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[344] Ibid., xv-xvi.

[345] Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric*: 218.

[346] Ibid., 219.

participating in a debate society, Walker's system of composition (or one of its many derivatives) had become entrenched in classroom practices throughout America.

Walker's *Teacher's Assistant*, however, was not meant to be a regular schoolbook that children would purchase for themselves. Indeed, students rarely owned composition books of any kind in the early decades of the nineteenth century.[347] Rather, as the title indicates, Walker intended his book to be an instruction manual for teachers, as well as for "Parents" who teach their children at home and "to those who wish to improve *themselves*."[348] Walker's system required students to listen closely to a passage, read aloud by their teacher or parent, which they would have to rewrite in their own words. If students studied the book in advance, however, Walker believed they would cheat by memorizing the passages prior to the lesson and mindlessly repeat the words verbatim. This, in turn, would defeat the skills of close listening, memory development and original expression that Walker hoped to instill. Thus, at the outset of his book, Walker admonished instructors, "It need scarcely be observed, that it is of the utmost importance that pupils should not have this book in their posession [sic]."[349] Following this caution, Walker then instructed the teachers, parents and self-taught readers how to proceed with the lessons.

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[347] Though students regularly engaged in a variety of writing assignments, schoolbooks on composition would almost certainly be absent from their shelves. Lucille M. Schultz observes, "While it is true that schoolbook publishing flourished mid-century, it is highly unlikely, for example, especially in the first part of the century, that each student had a book of her or his own, let alone the same book that other students and the teacher had." Carr, Carr, and Schultz, *Archives of Instruction*: 161.

[348] Walker, *The Teacher's Assistant*: vii, xv (emphasis in original). The fact that Walker marketed his book to instructors, rather than students, helps to explain why Walker's *Teacher's Assistant* is rarely mentioned among the schoolbooks that children owned and used in the period.

[349] Ibid., xvi. In his *Grammar of Composition*, William Russell echoes Walker's admonition, which, incidentally, demonstrates how Russell's imitation assignments involved *reading a text*, as opposed to Walker's focus on *listening* to the teacher recite a text: "The book, from which the subjects of the second course of compositions are taken, should be in the possession of the teacher only: it should not be in the hands of the pupil longer than is sufficient to admit of his reading a few times, the paragraph which is to be the subject of his exercise. When the paragraph is read, the book should be returned to the teacher." William Russell, *A Grammar of Composition: Including a Practical Review of the Principles of Rhetoric, a Series of Exercises in Rhetorical Analysis, and Six Introductory Courses of Composition* (New Haven: A. H. Maltby and Co., 1823). 133.

One of the problems Walker observed with traditional imitation exercises was the lack of a systematic approach to help children understand what they were imitating, and why. Children might be able to imitate a passage from the New Testament, for example, but Walker felt the work was useless if the child did not understand the passage itself, or the rules of composition that it contained. To that end, Walker's approach first required students to write down some basic rules of composition, which he provided. In order to help students remember them, Walker also required the students to memorize simple poems that contained all the rules in verse form.[350] After students learned these rules, then the writing assignments began.

Yet, rather than simply giving a text to the child for imitation, Walker advised teachers to read aloud the assigned passage, and then talk with the student "in as familiar a manner as possible" to discuss what the text meant, and to identify how the rules of composition related to the passage.[351] Once the child grasped the rules and the meaning of the passage, the teacher would read the assignment a second time. And only then, following this preparation, would the instructor leave the child "to put it down from memory as well as he is able," by using his or her own words.[352] At this stage, students would write their paraphrased passages on the left-hand side of each blank page in their copybook.[353] When the child finished, the teacher would return to correct the essay, improving on the child's grammar and basic matters of style. The child would then copy the final, corrected version in "fair copy," or final form, on the right-hand pages of the copybook in order to "imprint the corrections in the pupil's mind."[354] In a final oral

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[350] "In the first place," Walker instructs, "the rules in prose must be written out by the pupil, and explained more fully by the teacher. The rules versified must also be copied and explained, by comparing them with the prose; after which, the pupil must get them by heart." Walker, *The Teacher's Assistant*: vii.

[351] Ibid.

[352] Ibid., vii-viii.

[353] "It will be necessary for the pupil to have a book in quarto, like a copy-book, and to write his exercise on the left-hand page." Ibid., viii.

[354] Ibid., viii-ix.

performance component, the student would then read aloud the finished version to the teacher.[355]

In an attempt to develop children's skills in a systematic way, Walker also arranged the style of assignments into an order that he felt would best introduce children to composition. First, especially for the youngest of pupils, he began with "Narrative," or simple stories. "Perhaps the easiest method of training young people to write," Walker advises, "is to begin with Narrative. . . . Nothing so easy to comprehend and retain as a story, and therefore nothing so easy to write down from memory."[356] Walker then divides the study of narrative into three different types of assignments: "Outlines in Narrative," "Sketches in Narrative," and then simply "Narrative." For the first section, "Outlines in Narrative," Walker provides seven introductory passages for the teacher to read aloud to students, such as "Courage and conjugal Affection in a Female," "Courage and Judgement united in Necessity," "Friendship continuing after Death," etc. Walker's ultimate goal was to have the teacher read one of these passages to a child, after which the child would rewrite the passage entirely from memory.

The first section of Walker's book, "Outlines in Narrative," was an optional lesson, aimed at the youngest of children starting composition exercises. For these children, Walker recognizes that the task of writing their own original thoughts and paraphrasing passages in their own words, coupled with learning the mechanics of composition, might be too much work for tender minds (or too bothersome for some pupils who "have an almost invincible repugnance to putting down their thoughts upon paper").[357] Walker thus advises, "we must not expect them to invent matter."[358] Therefore, at this early stage, Walker focused exclusively on the child's ability to reproduce an assignment, rather than also requiring young children to

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[355] "When the pupil brings his exercise to be examined, he should be ordered to read it from the beginning to the end without interruption." Ibid., 246.

[356] Ibid., [26].

[357] Ibid., [26].

[358] Ibid., v.

engage in creative writing. And the teaching aid he proposes for these young beginners is the "outline."

Walker's "outline" functioned as a mnemonic device, which consisted of key words and phrases drawn from the assigned narrative. Walker then advised teachers to give the child this list of key words on a piece of paper "with the leading words of the story written at certain distances, and left for them to fill up."[359] This approach, one of many types of common "elliptical" exercises, provided the student with key words and phrases to jog the memory.[360] Walker then described the memory aid, saying, "This may be called drawing the *outline* of a subject, in the same manner as a drawing-master traces the outlines of a picture, which he leaves for the pupil to fill up."[361] For Walker, this approach of giving numerous hints to students to help them reproduce the story addresses the most basic, most elementary skills needed to perform the exercises. In Walker's words, "Thus we have descended to lowness of parts as low as we can go."[362] In his system of teaching composition, Walker therefore attempts to teach the principles of writing to students before requiring them to work their imagination. The outline acted as both a reference to help prod the children's memory, while simultaneously training the ear to listen for certain key words and phrases to reconstruct assigned narratives. But Walker did not assume that the students would remain at this level of composition: as students advance in their skills, Walker's lessons would require them to go beyond mere repetition.

To demonstrate how these outlines work, Walker's first assignment introduces the short narrative titled, "Courage and Conjugal Affection in a Female," a Roman legend, typical of

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[359] Ibid., [26].

[360] Regarding elliptical assignments, Lucille M. Schultz notes, "beginning students copied alphabet letters and numbers and short words onto their slates; they responded to assignments in school readers. . . and practiced what they learned by 'filling in the blanks' of a passage, a practice often known as 'ellipticals.'" Carr, Carr, and Schultz, *Archives of Instruction*: 151. Linda Ferreira-Buckley describes elliptical exercises as "sentences with some omitted words that the student was expected to supply." Ferreira-Buckley, "Writing Instruction," 180.

[361] Walker, *The Teacher's Assistant*: [26], (emphasis in original).

[362] Ibid., 36.

Senecan stoicism, that tells the story of Arria and her husband, Pætus. In this story, the Roman emperor, Claudius, has condemned Pætus to death by means of suicide, but Pætus has hesitated. Arria then steps forward and, in a moral narrative evoking classical idealism, teaches her husband to have courage by plunging the sword in her own chest, then offering the blade back to her husband:

> Arria, the wife of Pætus, understanding that her husband was condemned to die, and permitted to choose what death he liked best, she went and exhorted him to quit life courageously; and, bidding him farewell, gave herself a stab in the breast with a dagger she had hid under her garment; then drawing it out of the wound, and presenting it to Pætus, she said, "The wound I have given myself is not at all painful: I only feel for that which you must give yourself in following my example."[363]

This story is intentionally graphic, as are all of Walker's narratives. In order to help students remember the assigned narratives, Walker deliberately includes passages with intense visual and emotional imagery. As he notes in the introduction, "The first object... in the following Work, was to convey clear and prominent ideas. . . . to give as much imagery to the thought as possible, that a picture might remain in the mind of the pupil which would enable him to clothe it in words."[364] Following the story, Walker then provides the "outline" for the narrative, which the teacher would provide to those students who needed help remembering the details and sequence of story:

> *The Outline.*
> Arria,
> Pætus,
> condemned to die,
> death he liked best,
> to die courageously;
> farewell,
> breast
> dagger
> presenting
> Pætus,

[363] Ibid., [27].

[364] Ibid., xii-xii.

not at all painful;
feel
you must give yourself
example.[365]

Once children mastered the skill of reproducing a narrative from key words and phrases, Walker then moved to the next stage of narrative production, which he terms "Sketches in Narrative." From Walker's perspective, one of the most difficult challenges young writers face is developing the ability to connect all the sentences together in a cohesive narrative flow; or, as Walker describes it, of "tacking one member [phrase or sentence] to another in a long chain by relatives and conjunctions."[366] In order to remedy the situation, Walker advises that children should write their essays with "short detached members," or a series of individual phrases and sentences that are not connected together "by relatives and conjunctions."[367] These "detached Sentences," as Walker describes them, combine together to form a "sketch" of the narrative.[368] In essence, the children create an "outline" of "detached Sentences," which they learn to combine with conjunctions to create a smooth narrative flow. The first example, "Generosity rewarded," tells the legend of Plancus, a one-time Roman senator who was willing to sacrifice himself for his servants. As an example for teachers and students, Walker illustrated how to write the story might appear "in detached Sentences":

Plancus was proscribed by the Triumvirs, and was forced to abscond.
His slaves were put to the torture, but refused to discover [reveal] him.
New torments were prepared to force them to discover him.
Plancus made his appearance, and offered himself to death.
This generosity of Plancus made the Triumvirs pardon him.

[365] Ibid., 27-28.

[366] Ibid., 38.

[367] Ibid.

[368] In the first narrative example, "Generosity Rewarded," Walker provides the narrative, and then provides the "sketch," which consists of "the same Story in detached Sentences." Ibid., [39].

> They said, Plancus only was worthy of so good servants, and the servants only were worth of so good a master.[369]

Once the children had rewritten their stories in this manner, Walker then advised teachers to show them "how these connectives may be supplied, and, by copying over the exercise thus connected and perfected, he may be led to a use of the connectives by himself."[370] The purpose of this exercise was not, of course, exclusively intended as a way to teach children how to connect one sentence to another with conjunctions. Rather, the assignments fell into a broader pedagogical concern in which Walker prepared texts that were intentionally designed "to arrange these ideas in such a manner as to make one thought suggest another."[371] The goal, therefore, involved teaching children how one sentence led to the next sentence, and then the next and the next, throughout a passage in a cohesive manner of progression.

In Walker's program, these "outlines" and "sketches" are teaching aids to help students learn how to listen attentively to a story, to remember the story (by means of key words and phrases, along with mental imagery), to observe the arrangement and development of ideas, and finally to identify the moralized conclusion in order to reproduce the story in their own words. Nonetheless, these writing aids and skills were not the final goal. Walker sought to develop the student's narrative composition skills beyond this level, composing "without the foregoing assistance, and be induced to write down the story [entirely] from memory."[372] And neither does Walker stop here. Apart from developing a child's ability to hear a story and retain it well enough to rewrite it (without contributing any original material in the shape and construction of a narrative), Walker now introduces a measure of creativity.

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[369] Ibid., 39-40.

[370] Ibid., 38.

[371] Ibid., xiii.

[372] Ibid., [46].

As he moves to the last section on narrative composition, which he simply titles "Narrative," Walker introduces a new skill, which might best be described as "circumscribed creative writing." In this section, Walker explicitly aims to develop the students' imagination by requiring them to take a basic story and expand it: "In order to induce the pupil to exercise his imagination, I would advise the teacher to give him first a short narrative, and, after he had done that, to give him the same story amplified."[373] Walker then offers the stories in *Teacher's*

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[373] Ibid. Walker's use of amplification is not, of course, original. Amplification, or *amplificatio*, had been a common exercise in classical rhetorical pedagogy for centuries. In *The Young Composers*, Lucille M. Schultz argues that "in Walker's pedagogy, students never do get to what Walker calls 'that terrible task of writing their own thoughts." Lucille M. Schultz, *The Young Composers: Composition's Beginnings in Nineteenth-Century Schools* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1999). 49. I would, however, suggest a different reading of Walker's comment. The context of the remark does not indicate that students are not required to write "their own thoughts." Rather, Walker's comment offers a knowing wink and a humorous nod to writing instructors who try to get students to write their own thoughts, in spite of their pupils' resistance. While it is true that Walker does not include personal experience essays or essays with topics of the student's own choosing, the assignments nevertheless require originality in paraphrasing passages, as well as originality in the amplification exercises. Walker's comment occurs in the context of teachers making students perform a task that they do not enjoy doing, rather than a description of what Walker's method does or does not attempt to achieve. In the opening of the same paragraph, Walker states, "But as some pupils have an almost invincible repugnance to *putting down their thoughts* upon paper, every method, and even every stratagem, should be made use of to induce them to try at it [i.e., write their own thoughts down on paper]." In Schultz's defense, however, Walker's meaning of "writing their own thoughts" appears to collapse the distinction between paraphrasing a work and writing original ideas. Even so, Walker then introduces his "outline" in this paragraph as a way to make children write their thoughts, even though they treat the assignment as "that terrible task." Walker, *The Teacher's Assistant*: [26]. Key to understanding Walker's method is the recognition that his lessons are aimed simultaneously at different skill levels of children, a tactic that recognizes the hands-on experience involving teachers in one-room classrooms, circulating among students of different ages and abilities. The lessons therefore contain writing assignments, which students of varying levels will approach differently (if at all). For example, Walker's instruction for "sketches in narrative" reveals how the technique is merely a teaching aid to help students who are having trouble constructing a cohesive paragraph (but not for students who have already developed this skill): "*If* a pupil, therefore, of the lower class [the earliest grades], seems remarkably backward in writing, perhaps it might not be improper to direct him to make his sentences as short as possible, and. . . to relate his subject by short detached members. . . . This may be called, giving a *sketch* of a subject." Ibid., [38]. Thus, use of the technique is conditional upon the child's skill level. Within in this context, Walker's advice to teachers that they "must not expect them [students] to invent matter" refers to the youngest beginner students, but not students across all ages and development. Ibid., v. Elsewhere in the text, Walker makes specific reference to children writing their own thoughts, such as the amplification exercises. Once a student is able to "write [the narrative] down from memory," Walker suggests the student will then have "an ability of proceeding to something more difficult," which involves exercises "to induce the pupil to exercise his imagination." Ibid., [46]. In addition, while children did not choose their subjects for writing, Walker advises teachers to honor the student's thoughts and expressions, except when the student's essays contained obvious grammatical errors or a fundamental misunderstanding of the topic. "Every alteration [every teacher's correction of "thought, the structure of the sentence, the grammar of it, or the choice of words"]. . . should differ as little as possible from what the pupil has written, as giving an entire new cast to the thought and expression will lead him into an unknown path not easy to follow, and divert his mind from that original line of thinking which was natural to him." Ibid., 246.

Assistant as "some examples" of narratives and their corresponding expansions. At the same time, key to Walker's approach is that the lengths, forms, and narrative elements are not intended to be fixed for memorization purposes. Rather, Walker indicates that the examples can, "with very little trouble, be multiplied at pleasure."[374] Walker's attempt to "induce the pupil to exercise his imagination," thus reveals Walker's plan to make children go beyond the task of memorizing the basic, prewritten and amplified versions of a narrative. The examples rather provide models for how children might expand narratives on their own, beyond the limitations of the original stories provided by the exercise. Thus, more advanced students in Walker's program engaged in a form of contained creativity: the narrative was assigned to them (no creative self-selection of topics), but the students had to use their imagination to expand the story. Walker's manual therefore represents a transitional composition text that demands more originality than mere repetition, but less unfettered creativity than later composition textbooks.[375]

To demonstrate how stories might be amplified, Walker provides five different narratives, with samples of their corresponding expansions. Among these stories, "Desperate Fidelity in Friendship unexpectedly rewarded" tells of the legendary friendship of Damon and Pythias, and this sample offers two illustrations on how a student might amplify the story. Walker first provides the narrative in a short passage of 110 words:

> Damon and Pythias were intimate friends. Damon, being condemned to death by Dionysius, the tyrant, demanded liberty to go home to set his affairs in order; and his

[374] *The Teacher's Assistant*: [46].

[375] For example, Russell's *Grammar* (1823) makes more explicit reference to originality in composition. When defining "novelty," Russell declares, "In composition, this term is synonymous with originality of thought, and implies either a selection of objects entirely new [i.e., the student chooses his or her own topics for composition exercises], or the exhibition of familiar subjects in a new light." Russell, *A Grammar of Composition*: 54. Later, when discussing narrative and descriptive essays, Russell advises that "the topics and the method must be suggested by the pupil's own mind. In the didactic class [the didactic essay], which is the most difficult, the pupil may, at first, be allowed to derive assistance from the plan of simple and complex themes, contained in the preceding course. He ought, however, to be incited to give as much variety as possible to his mode of composing, by exercising his own judgment in selecting topics and method which vary from those that have been laid down, but suit the same purpose, by giving clear and impressive views of his subject." Ibid., 142.

> friend offered himself to be his surety, and to submit to death if Damon should not return. Every one was in expectation what would be the event, and every one began to condemn Pythias for so rash an action: but he, confident of the integrity of his friend, waited the appointed time with alacrity. Damon, strict to his engagement, returned at the appointed time. Dionysius, admiring their mutual fidelity, pardoned Damon, and prayed to have the friendship of two such worthy men.[376]

Following this opening version, Walker provides "the same Story amplified," which more than triples the length of the story into a version of 377 words. In the expanded text, two new scenes are introduced: a scene in which Dionysius visits Pythias in prison, and a scene where Pythias addresses the crowds who have gathered to witness his execution. With them, new conversations appear and new speeches are delivered.

After demonstrating the first expansion, Walker goes yet further and introduces "the same Story more amplified," which expands the story into yet another version of 854 words in length. In this last version, the scenes contain additional descriptive detail of the events, along with further elaborations in dialogue. Thus, amplification exercises offer another window into the composition skills children learned. Amplification, by its very nature, required students to go beyond simple memorization and paraphrasing. Expanding a narrative meant adding new material, whether lengthening preexisting story elements (such as doubling the length of Pythias' speeches in the original story) or including entirely new material (such as Dionysius' visit to Pythias in prison and their ensuing conversation, which does not exist in the original shortened version). Thus, children were required to produce new and creative variations and expansions of preexisting texts.

And this ability, in turn, reveals yet another important skill of narrative production that these children learned: the ability to abstract the core narrative from the surface events in a plot. In other words, in order to expand a story successfully, without turning it into an entirely different story, the child needed to have a basic, skeletal idea of how (or why) the story should be

[376] Walker, *The Teacher's Assistant*: 50-51.

told. That core narrative template could then be expanded or contracted at will, depending on the requirements of the situation. For example, a child might know a common folktale, such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, and learn how to tell the story in short, medium or long versions. But in all three cases, the child could retain the same core story pattern. The differences in variations would reflect the way the child chose to flesh out the core narrative, rather (usually) than making fundamental structural variants or alterations to the governing moral message.[377] And while this level of narrative comprehension may seem self-evident, occurring on a cognitive level that is usually second nature and unconscious, the amplification exercises required a student to make a *conscious* effort to add material–locations, events, characters and other story elements–in order to expand that core skeletal structure to complete the amplification assignment.

Walker's next two chapters in *Teacher's Assistant* turned to writing "Regular Subjects" and "Themes." For these sections, Walker adapted classical rhetorical exercises into basic patterns of composition for either descriptive essays ("Regular Subjects") or argumentative essays ("Themes"), which students were required to memorize.[378] For essays on "regular subjects," for example, children were required to define and expound upon a topic according to a predetermined, five-step formula: 1) the "Definition," which defines the topic "or explain it more at large," 2) the "Cause," which shows derivation or origin of the topic, 3) the "Antiquity, or Novelty," which observes or traces the topic in "ancient or modern" times, 4) the "Universality, or Locality," which indicates whether the topic is universal or only related to a specific time and place, and finally, 5) the "Effects," which determine whether or not the topic is

[377] Retaining the overall structure of a story did not preclude variations, even if mildly contradictory. In Walker's 100-word essay on Damon and Pythias, for example, Damon returns on time, "Damon, strict to his engagement, returned at the appointed time." In the following 377-word amplification, however, readers learn that "Damon not appearing at the time appointed, the tyrant had the curiosity to visit Pythias in prison." Ibid., 52.

[378] Walker's method of approaching "regular subjects," for example, relies on the common topics of invention (definition, division, comparison, relationship, circumstances, testimony, etc.). In classical rhetorical pedagogy, specifically in the progymnasmata exercises, students learned how to expound upon subjects by examining their attributes and relationships with these preset categories of invention.

"good or bad" (has a clear and appropriate moral) and examine "the advantages or disadvantages that arise from it."[379]

In the same manner, Walker's "themes" were argumentative essays that focused on "the proving of some truth."[380] These essays followed a seven-step formula: 1) "The Proposition, or Narrative," which shows "the meaning of the Theme, by amplify[i]ng, paraphrasing, or explaining it more at large," 2) "The Reason" for the claim, "where we prove the truth of the Theme by some reason or argument," 3) "The Confirmation," which demonstrates "the unreasonableness of the contrary opinion," 4) "The Simile," where examples from "nature or Art" are introduced "for illustrating the truth" of the claim, 5) "The Example," in which historical events "corroborate the truth of our Theme," 6) "The Testimony, or Quotation," where statements "from good authors" are cited for support, and finally, 7) "The Conclusion," which summarizes the whole argument, showing "the practical use of the theme," coupled with "some pertinent observations."[381] Embedding these ready-made composition templates into the minds of the children was one of the central goals of these assignments.

The purpose of habituating students to ready-made patterns of composition ultimately served to teach children how eventually to compose their own work with greater ease and facility. "Analysis enables the student," Russell informs in his *Grammar*, "to reduce a piece of writing to its component parts, and thus to become acquainted with the nature and use of each, and prepares him to arrange and combine, with effect, the corresponding parts of his own

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[379] Walker, *The Teacher's Assistant*: 64.

[380] Ibid., [112].

[381] Ibid. Walker's imposition of strict formulas for "regular subjects" and "themes" should not be interpreted as an attempt to force children into an inflexible system of composition. Indeed, Walker advises teachers to avoid such dogmatism with struggling students, suggesting teachers require them to limit their essays to one or two points, "without restricting him too rigidly to the several parts, to require of him only what he can collect upon the whole." Ibid., 114. As he reveals in his discussion on the relationship between subjects, themes and easy essays, Walker aims his work (and the order of exercises) "to give a precision of thinking, and to keep the mind from wandering too widely from the subject, which many pupils are apt to do, who have a great facility of expression, but want [lack] a closeness of thinking." Ibid. Walker thus employs the formulaic structures to teach precision and clarity of thought, along with logic in sequencing and arrangement, which will help the students in their later, more mature compositions.

subsequent labors."[382] In his *Rhetorical Grammar*, when discussing the usefulness of similar patterns of composition based on the topics of invention, Walker quotes Joseph Priestley's goal of embedding these templates into the unconscious minds of the students in the same manner "as a person used to the harpsicord, or any other instrument of music, will be able to perform without an *express attention* [conscious attention] to rules, or even to the manner of placing his fingers."[383] Children regularly practiced these writing assignments as a way of imprinting the patterns in their minds. And once imprinted, the patterns would ideally emerge automatically in future written and oral compositions, whether writing an essay or deliberating in a debate club.

Upon graduating from writing themes and regular subjects, children started composing "Easy Essays." And unlike the prefabricated templates for themes and subjects, the "easy essays," as Walker indicates, "cannot be reduced to the same rules as the foregoing Regular Subjects and themes."[384] Knowing that the lack of clearly defined composition template might cause children stress, Walker offers yet another writing aid, which amounts to an advanced version of his earlier "outlines" for narratives. For this strategy, Walker advises the teacher to divide "each Essay into its principal component parts, and giving to each part an abridgment of its contents" in order to "assist the memory, and remedy the want [absence] of rules."[385] In order words, Walker advises teachers to create a one-sentence summary for each separate subtopic in the essay (which often corresponds to the paragraph breaks). Then, while reading aloud the full essay to the student, the teacher tells the student how many subtopics ("heads") occur, along with emphasizing the summarizing sentences that describe the main points of the essay. The student is then asked to repeat the number of subtopics, along with their respective

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[382] Russell, *A Grammar of Composition*: 64.

[383] Walker, *Rhetorical Grammar*: 308 (emphasis in original). For the original passage, see Joseph Priestley, *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (London: J. Johnson, 1777). 24-25.

[384] Walker, *The Teacher's Assistant*: [156].

[385] Ibid., 156.

summaries. Following this verbal exchange, the student was then left to compose the essay from memory, using his or her own words.

Oral performance and memory play a central role in Walker's methodology, a point that cannot be overemphasized. In Walker's exercises, the children *never saw* the printed assignment or the written summarizing sentences. Instead, the child *listened* closely to the teacher recite the passage, while memorizing the primary points of the essay, mentally arranging them in proper order, identifying key words and phrases throughout the passage, and incorporating mental imagery to facilitate memorial reconstruction of the text. The process therefore became a rigorous mental exercise, which demanded constant and intense concentration on *both the form and content* of a passage.

Nevertheless, classroom practices varied, according to the instructor's preferences and talents. Indeed, Walker's imitators did not follow his methods slavishly. Rather than having the teacher read a passage aloud for imitation, for example, William Russell's adaptation hearkened back to Blair's suggestions and had the child read the assigned passage directly from a book.[386] And though children technically were not allowed to take down notes, student notebooks show how some children wrote outlines that contained the main points of essays, along with "hints" to jog the memory.[387]

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[386] William Russell's *Grammar of Composition* (1823) adapts Walker's method by providing the student with a copy of the passage, rather than having the teacher read the text aloud: "Let the pupil take an historical work, and, at the place selected by the teacher, read the first sentence once or twice, according to its length, till the idea it contains is fixed in his memory. Having shut the book, let him revolve the idea in his mind, clothe it in his own words, and commit it to paper." Russell, *A Grammar of Composition*: [66].

[387] In Bordelon, Wright, and Halloran's essay on American writing instruction, Appendix A gives the transcription of May E. Wilkin's writing book from the early nineteenth century, which outlines her essay on music. She starts with a "Definition" of music, followed by six primary subtopics ("points") and several hints for amplification. For example, "Point 4th" addresses "The influence of music," followed by six "hints" to amplify the subtopic: "Hint 1st The favorite recreation of the most refined intellect and most cultivated minds. Hint 2nd The power and charm of a home circle. Hint 3rd It can not be degraded. " 4th It sooths the weary. " 5th It comforts the suffering. " 6th It cheers the afflicted." Suzanne Bordelon, Elizabethada A. Wright, and S. Michael Halloran, "From Rhetoric to Rhetorics: An Interim Report on the History of American Writing Instruction to 1900," in *A Short History of Writing Instruction: From Ancient Greece to Contemporary America*, ed. James J. Murphy (New York: Routledge, 2012), 229.

In a classroom following Walker's pure method, however, all the information was provided in an oral/aural medium, requiring the students to listen closely to the story and the "headings" that organized and arranged the story, while retaining the ideas and the development of the ideas exclusively in their minds. As such, these particular composition exercises were not merely *written* exercises, as they are today. Rather, the act of writing down one's thoughts on paper constituted the final step in a process that was centrally grounded in an oral exchange of information, attentive listening and memorial reconstruction.

To ensure that teachers understood his methodology, Walker provided an example of how a lesson might engage the student by using the first essay prompt of the chapter, "On the Importance of a Well-spent Youth." The essay is 388 words long (including a poetic couplet by Alexander Pope), and Walker divided the essay into four main parts. Walker then summarized each part with a single sentence, or "head," which he printed in the bottom margin of each page. Thus, Walker summarized the entire 388-word essay in four sentences, and he advised instructors to teach students in the following manner:

> I would, therefore, advise the teacher, after he has read the Essay to the pupil the first time, then talked it over, and read it again to him the second time, to repeat distinctly the several heads [summary sentences] of the Essay, as set down at the bottom of the page. Thus, after having read and explained the first Essay, *On the Importance of a Well-spent Youth*, I would have him remark distinctly the number of heads and say, the first head is—"All desire to arrive at old age, but few think of gaining those virtues which alone can make it happy."—The next is—That "Life is a building, and youth the foundation."—The next—"All the latter stages of life depend upon the good use of the former."—The last—"Age, therefore, requires a well-spent youth to make it happy." Perhaps if these abridged contents were to be repeated by the teacher before each head in the second reading, as well as after the whole is read, it might tend to imprint the subject more strongly: I would, however, by no means advise him to suffer the pupil to take them down in writing.[388]

For the essay "On History," a 374-word passage, Walker provided summary sentences in the lower margin of each printed page, which the teacher would read aloud to the student. The

[388] Walker, *The Teacher's Assistant*: [156].

student would memorize these "heads" while listening, and then repeat them back to the teacher (given that students were encouraged to use their own words in the compositions, they most likely repeated the ideas and concepts summarized by the phrases, rather than memorizing them verbatim). Thus, after the teacher left the student to perform the assignment, the child would have the following phrases/ideas memorized as a mental outline, which would cue the student's reproduction of the essay:

> *On History*
> (1) The most useful of human knowledge derived from history.
> (2) History exhibits the different states of society, and the causes of them.
> (3) History gives us a lesson of morality.
> (4) The history of a state and the history of an individual are perfectly parallel.[389]

In order to help teachers and students further identify the relationship between the phrases and the text, Walker also numbered each paragraph in the original essay with the same number associated with each summarizing phrase (or "head"). Thus, the list of four key phrases that children memorized above would correspond with the opening portions of the paragraphs in the original essay, as indicated below:

> *On History*
> (1) History is the foundation of all useful and elegant knowledge: it acquaints us with the transactions and characters of mankind, from the remotest antiquity to the present times. . . . (the full paragraph continues for a total of 82 words). . . .
> (2) What a different picture do the same creatures exhibit, employed in hunting, fishing, and making war on each other with the most unrelenting cruelty; and as we now see them improving life with useful arts, and embellishing it with ornaments and elegancies suited to a state of refinement!.... (this also becomes another 82-word paragraph). . . .
> (3) But history does not only improve the arts and add to the elegancies of life; it is of the utmost consequence to the morals of mankind. . . . (a 56-word paragraph). . . .
> (4) This is not only a useful lesson to communities, but to individuals; for every man, as the Poets have expressed it, is a little kingdom. . . . (a 154-word paragraph).[390]

[389] Ibid., 173-74.

[390] Ibid.

Thus, armed with these four phrases, the student could then reproduce a paraphrased or adapted version of the original 374-word essay. This final chapter on writing "easy essays" therefore reveals Walker's views on the development of composition and his classroom practices to accomplish his goals. Combining the early lessons on "outlines" and "sketches" with the exercises in "amplification," Walker attempted to provide students with the necessary skills to identify the core elements of narrative patterns, to memorize the key topics and events within the patterns, and then to reproduce expanded versions of the stories from condensed skeletal frameworks. Furthermore, by incorporating a numbering system to divide essays into identifiable segments, Walker's system offered a clear and concise methodology for teachers (often poorly prepared and untrained) to teach imitation exercises and composition lessons with greater skill, specificity and confidence.

Walker's use of summarizing phrases and numbered paragraphs was not, of course, a new idea. The division of texts into chapters, summarizing phrases, and numbered paragraphs for both indices and memorization aids existed among the paratextual features in books for well over a millennia in Britain, reaching back to the Venerable Bede's Anglo-Saxon translation of biblical texts (and further still to ancient Greek works).[391] By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, detailed and lengthy chapter summaries, printed in the tables of contents as well as chapter headings, had long been a common convention in narrative and non-narrative texts alike: histories, biographies, commentaries, essays, travel and exploration narratives, scientific inquiries, memoirs and political treatises, to name a few. Thus, Walker's composition techniques reflected conventional practices in his cultural milieu and merely adapted these same features into his pedagogical strategies. And by incorporating these common practices, Walker's

[391] Nicholas Dames, "The Chapter: A History," *The New Yorker*, 2014. http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/chapter-history.

formalization of these simple memory techniques, combined with the popularity of his works, contributed to a growing adoption of such numbering systems in printed school texts.[392]

Walker's System and the *Book of Mormon*

Walker's widely held approach to composition, combined with the specific paratextual features of detailed summaries, provides greater insight into Joseph Smith's composition process. Mirroring the chapter headings of nineteenth-century works, the *Book of Mormon* contains several anticipatory chapter summaries that alert the reader to the events about to take place in the narrative. For example, The Book of Helaman, which takes place in the tumultuous period before Christ's visit to the Americas, contains the following preface:

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[392] The ever-evolving print conventions for schoolbooks also responded to the same classroom techniques, though gradually and inconsistently. And while a direct line of causation cannot and should not be exclusively drawn from Walker's pedagogy to all the printing presses of schoolbooks, the print shops in America nevertheless began to produce an increasing number of school texts with numbered paragraphs after Walker's methods increased in popularity. Approximately a decade after Walker's initial publication of the *Teacher's Assistant* (1801), identifiable shifts in printing conventions for certain elementary readers occurred in America, where numbered paragraphs for easy reference and memorization began to grow in numbers, though the practice was never universally embraced. Lindley Murray's *Introduction to the English Reader* (1801), for example, experienced a shift in printing formats across publishers, particularly as it moved from England to America. Murray intended his *Introduction* to become a preparatory text for his famous *English Reader* (1799), and the first editions of his work were printed and published in York, England, "the city where Murray passed the second half of his life and where he died." Lyda Fens-de Zeeuw, *Lindley Murray (1745-1826), Quaker and Grammarian* (Utrecht: LOT, 2011). 20. The York editions of Murray's *Introduction* contained no numbered paragraphs, and for the first decade of the nineteenth century they were distributed via booksellers in York, London and Edinburgh. Some American publications of Murray's *Introduction*, however, experienced a shift toward numbered paragraphs, though the movement was not consistent. In 1814, George Sherman printed his "First New-Jersey Edition," which followed the York edition by not including paragraph numbering. Lindley Murray, *Introduction to the English Reader*, First New-Jersey ed. (Trenton: George Sherman, 1814). By 1816, however, two of Murray's *Introductions*, both with numbered paragraphs, appeared in Baltimore (publishers Schaeffer & Maund) and New York (Collins and Co.). Others would follow the numbered paragraph system, such as Edwin T. Scott's 1820 Philadelphia printing, *Introduction to the English Reader* (Philadelphia: Edwin T. Scott, 1820). In like manner, some American reprints of Murray's *English Reader* (not the *Introduction*) also began to include numbered paragraphs. James Goodrich's popular *Murray's English Reader* (1822) incorporated numbered paragraphs and was widely printed throughout the northeast, with editions in Saratoga Springs, NY (1822, 1824, 1825); Albany, NY (1829); Boston (1822); Philadelphia (1822); and Middletown, CT (1828), to name a few. For a non-Goodrich version of Murray's *English Reader*, with incorporated paragraph numbering, see publishers White & Reed's *The English Reader* (Haverhill, NH: White & Reed, 1824). The trend in the increased usage of numbered paragraphs, dominated by the earliest introductions to composition, suggests that this technique was primarily aimed at younger students first learning how to compose, rather than more advanced students with prior experience and training.

An account of the Nephites.
Their wars and contentions, and their dissensions.
And also the prophecies of many holy prophets, before the coming of Christ,
according to the record of Helaman, who was the son of Helaman,
and also according to the records of his sons,
even down to the coming of Christ.

And also many of the Lamanites are converted.
An account of their conversion.

An account of the righteousness of the Lamanites,
and the wickedness and abominations of the Nephites,
according to the record of Helaman and his sons,
even down to the coming of Christ,
which is called the book of Helaman, &c.[393]

When Smith dictated the *Book of Mormon*, Oliver Cowdery, his scribe, wrote down Smith's words as they were spoken in the act of performance; and, according to the existing portions of the original handwritten manuscript, this summary appeared within the course of Smith's unbroken narrative production. In other words, these phrases were not later interpolations that Smith added to the *Book of Mormon* after he completed the work. Rather, Smith produced these anticipatory prefaces *during the original performance of the text as part of the narrative flow*. The significance of this process requires a brief discussion regarding the original scribal manuscript.

The original manuscript of the *Book of Mormon* contains anticipatory summaries embedded within the narrative (i.e., delivered in the act of dictation), as well as headings that were added at a later time (i.e., subsequent interpolations). Regarding these later interpolations, Royal Skousen notes, "the scribe normally wrote a short heading at the top of the manuscript page after taking down Joseph Smith's dictation for that page of the original

[393] Helaman 1, Preface. Joseph Smith, *The Book of Mormon (1840)*, 3rd Revised ed. (Nauvoo, IL: Joseph Smith, Jr., 1840). 396. The *text* comes from the 1840, third edition of the *Book of Mormon*. The *printed format* follows Royal Skousen's arrangement, which is intended to reflect the "sense-lines" of a dictated text. For the Book of Helaman preface, see Royal Skousen, ed. *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009), 507. For Skousen's discussion on "sense-lines," see ibid., xlii-xliv.

manuscript."[394] Unlike these later additions of short headings, however, the preface for the Book of Helaman occurs *in the middle* of a handwritten page, immediately following the last chapter of the previous book (Alma 63).[395] Specifically, the Helaman preface, along with the title line, chapter line, and two solid ink lines above and below the preface to offset it from the surrounding text, takes up a total of 11 manuscript lines. In addition, the opening chapter of Helaman begins immediately after the preface. Thus, the economy of space–i.e., the immediate succession of chapter to preface, and then preface back to chapter–indicates that the preface was produced *during Smith's dictation*, and was not a later addition.

Furthermore, if the argument were made that the preface were added *after* the dictation event, then this would require Joseph and his scribe (who was Oliver Cowdery for this portion of the manuscript) to *predict in advance* the precise length of the yet unwritten preface (i.e., 11 lines) in order to leave the exact amount of blank lines necessary for the later addition. The consistent ink flow through the document, however, does not support this possibility (only the number "I" in the heading "Chapter I," is written "with heavier ink flow," revealing a scribe returning to add the number to the text at a later time).[396] Consequently, even if this scenario were true (i.e., that Smith told the scribe to leave 11 blank lines of manuscript in the middle of dictation in order for him to return later and fill in the entire anticipatory preface), this act of skipping a large section of blank lines during dictation would still reveal that Smith knew how long the preface would be before actually verbalizing it.

Thus the preface, in either scenario, demonstrates Smith's advance knowledge of the sequence of narrative events that had not yet occurred in the dictation of the story. In other

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[394] *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, UT: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), 2001), [25].

[395] See ibid., [486-87].

[396] See ibid., [487n17]. Skousen specifically describes this textual phenomenon, indicating, "Apparently as part of the revelatory process, Joseph would from time to time perceive breaks within the text. At those points in his dictation he would tell the scribe to put the word *chapter* into the manuscript but without any numerical specification (the chapter numbers were added later, sometimes months later.)" *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, xl (emphasis in original).

words, Smith knew precisely how the stories would develop and resolve before he actually started to compose them orally. Furthermore, the organic nature of these anticipatory texts within the narrative is revealed by the way in which Smith incorporates them into the story: rather than presenting them as authorial conventions imposed onto the work, Smith attributes the creation of the summaries to the characters within the story. Thus, the summaries become an integral element embedded within the narrative itself, as the Prophet Nephi's detailed (and formally anachronistic) summary demonstrates in the opening of the *Book of Mormon*:

> An account of Lehi and his wife, Sariah, and his four sons, being called, (beginning at the eldest,) Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi.
>
> The Lord warns Lehi to depart out of the Land of Jerusalem, because he prophesieth unto the people concerning their iniquity: and they seek to destroy his life.
> He taketh three day's journey into the wilderness with his family.
>
> Nephi taketh his brethren and returns to the land of Jerusalem after the record of the Jews.
> The account of their sufferings.
>
> They take the daughters of Ishmael to wife.
> They take their families and depart into the wilderness.
> Their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness.
> The course of their travels.
>
> They come to the large waters.
> Nephi's brethren rebelleth against him.
> He confoundeth them, and buildeth a ship.
> They call the name of the place Bountiful.
> They cross the large waters into the promised land, &c.
>
> This is according to the account of Nephi; *or, in other words, I, Nephi, wrote this record*.[397]

Neither was Smith's use of memorized story templates limited to chapter prefaces. Throughout the *Book of Mormon*, the text itself contains embedded summaries (of varying

[397] Rather than following Skousen's "sense-lines" in the formatting of this preface (see previous example), I am applying John Walker's techniques by arranging these lines into a "sketch" or "outline," according to the main story events, or the "headings," for each major stage in the narrative. In doing so, readers observe that the inclusion formed by the opening phrase ("An Account of Lehi and his family. . . ") and the final closing phrases ("This is according to the account of Nephi. . . ") frames a four-part summary of the main narrative segments in "First Book of Nephi." Thus, as a mental narrative template, this brief four-step anticipatory preface maps out a skeletal outline for the entire opening book of the *Book of Mormon*. For the 1840 preface, see Smith, *The Book of Mormon (1840)*: [7].

levels of specificity) that anticipate future actions, constantly informing the reader of events that have not yet occurred. In the Book of Alma, for example, the Nephite prophet known as Alma the Younger speaks to his son, Helaman, in approximately 73 BCE. During his counsel, Alma predicts the coming of Christ and the eventual destruction of the Nephite people: "Behold, I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, in four hundred years from this time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them [i.e., approximately 400 C.E.], shall dwindle in unbelief: yea, and then shall they see wars and pestilences, yea, famines and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct."[398] Thus, the reader knows how the book will end long before the events leading up to the tragic conclusion actually occur in the text.[399]

One of the more detailed examples of Smith's anticipatory summaries occurs in the Book of Mosiah, chapter 7. In this chapter, the leader of the righteous Nephites, King Mosiah, is curious to know the fate of a group of Nephites who had departed from the Nephite lands three generations earlier. The group was attempting to reclaim former Nephite territories, which the wicked Lamanites now owned and ruled. The group, however, disappeared. Wanting to know their fate, King Mosiah sends a search party, under the leadership of a man named Ammon, to find the missing people. Ammon eventually locates the lost group of Nephites in a land called Shilom, where they are held in bondage under the wicked Lamanites. While becoming

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[398] Ibid., 339 (Alma 45:11).

[399] The seventh internal "book" in the *Book of Mormon*, "The Words of Mormon," a section that occurs much earlier chronologically than the Alma 45:11 passage cited above, also reveals the eventual destruction of the Nephite civilization. The Words of Mormon does not, however, represent an example of Smith anticipating the outcome of the entire work at an earlier point in the dictation of the book. Early in the process of the creation of the *Book of Mormon*, Martin Harris, one of Smith's financial backers and one of his earliest scribes, lost the opening 114 manuscript pages of the work. Instead of restarting the project from the beginning, however, Smith continued to work forward through the story. When he reached the end of the *Book of Mormon*, Smith then returned and dictated the opening portion yet again. Today, most scholars believe that The Words of Mormon was the last book that Smith dictated in the *Book of Mormon*. Thus, though the book acts as an anticipatory chapter within the world of the text, the actual production of the work suggests it was a retrospective summation. For further discussion, see Brent Lee Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993).

acquainted, King Limhi, the leader of the missing Nephites, rehearses the sad and troublesome history of his people.

In the course of telling Ammon their story, King Limhi provides a detailed, anticipatory summary of events that the reader of the *Book of Mormon* has not yet encountered. After calling his people together to announce the arrival of Ammon, King Limhi reveals some of the reasons for his peoples' suffering. This speech, in turn, acts as a preview summary and outline of stories yet to come in the *Book of Mormon* plot:

> And behold, it is because of our iniquities and abominations, that has brought us into bondage. And ye are all witnesses this day, that Zeniff, who was made king over this people, he being over-zealous to inherit the land of his fathers, therefore being deceived by the cunning and craftiness of king Laman, who having entered into a treaty with king Zeniff, and having yielded up into his hands the possessions of a part of the land, or even the city of Lehi-Nephi, and the city of Shilom; and the land round about; and all this he did, for the sole purpose of bringing this people into subjection, or into bondage. And behold, we at this time do pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites. . . . For if this people had not fallen into transgression, the Lord would not have suffered that this great evil should come upon them. But behold, they would not hearken unto his words; but there arose contentions among them, even so much that they did shed blood among themselves. And a prophet of the Lord have they slain; yea, a chosen man of God, who told them of their wickedness and abominations, and prophesied of many things which are to come, yea, even the coming of Christ. . . . and now because he said this, they did put him to death; and many more things did they do, which brought down the wrath of God upon them. Therefore, who wondereth that they are in bondage, and that they are smitten with sore afflictions?[400]

Adopting Walker's system of outlines, sketches and summarizing phrases, this portion of King Limhi's speech might be framed the following way:

> Zeniff and his band of Nephites fall into iniquities and abomination
> Zeniff enters into a bad treaty with King Laman, which results in bondage and high taxes
> The Nephites sin against God and refuse to hearken to him
> The Nephites fight with each other
> The Nephites murder a prophet [Abinadi]
> The Nephites do many more wicked things
> Thus, the Nephites are in bondage and suffer sore afflictions

[400] Smith, *The Book of Mormon (1840)*: 166-67 (Mosiah 7: 20-28).

For the first-time reader of the *Book of Mormon*, King Limhi's speech lays out the skeletal history of the Nephites who returned to Shilom to reclaim their ancestral lands. But the actual story does not occur until later in the *Book of Mormon* text. In addition, King Limhi's historical summary leaves several unanswered questions to which the reader will only receive answers after continuing further into the narrative. King Limhi's speech thus provides the reader with an anticipatory outline of what will happen to the Nephites who journeyed to Shilom: they arrived in Shilom, they engaged in a bad treaty negotiation, they fell into bondage, they became wicked, they murdered a prophet, and now, when Ammon arrives, they are suffering in bondage.

Yet, for the time being, the reader only receives a general template of the history of King Limhi's people, with a number of significant details missing. What were the iniquities and abominations that the Nephites committed? What are the events surrounding the treaty negotiations that brought the Nephites into bondage? How were the Nephites refusing to hearken unto God? Why did they start to fight each other? Who was the unnamed prophet they murdered, and why?

Two chapters later, the *Book of Mormon* introduces the reader to "The Record of Zeniff." This record is the account of the lost group of Nephites who traveled into the Lamanite territories, and it provides all the answers to these questions in an amplified history of the Nephites who journeyed to Shilom. And once again, though in a much shorter variation than King Limhi's account, Smith initiates the narrative with a summary heading that tells the reader how the story of Zeniff and his followers ends before the account actually begins:

> The Record of Zeniff.
> An account of his people, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla [the Nephite Capital], unto the time that they were delivered out of the hands of the Lamanites.[401]

[401] Ibid., 170 (Mosiah 9: Preface).

Smith's repeated use of chapter prefaces and embedded outlines reveals important clues about Smith's method of composition. As already described, Smith dictated the *Book of Mormon* in a steady current of verbal creation. He did not go back to revise previous stories, nor did he jump ahead to write narratives beyond his immediate location in the text. Neither did he seem to refer to books, notes or manuscripts in the process, if eyewitness accounts are accurate (again, with perhaps the exception of the Bible). Thus, all the anticipatory prefaces, predictions, prophecies and summaries incorporated into the narrative reveal that Smith embarked on the *Book of Mormon* project with an elaborate mental outline and pattern for the entire work, constructed with a variety of short and medium-length story patterns with a particular (and paternalistic) form of dramatic suspense. From start to finish in the overall arc of the work, the internal evidence repeatedly demonstrates that Smith knew in precise detail how each narrative episode would begin, develop and end, extending from Lehi's departure from Jerusalem to the destruction of the Nephite culture in the Americas.

The continual use of anticipatory prefaces and outlines further reflects Smith's educational background, particularly regarding the writing and performance practices that influenced him to include such anticipatory passages of outline in the *Book of Mormon*. Even though such detailed headings and prefaces were extremely common in nineteenth-century books, Smith's use of them–particularly as outlines embedded within the narrative itself–reveals how these devices functioned on a deeper level than simple imitation of popular printing conventions. These anticipatory outlines establish a pattern in the text that prepares the reader (and writer), as well as the performer (and listener), for subsequent amplifications in the narrative. Not merely a tool for indexical organization, these features serve as *devices for exposition and elaboration*.

More to the point, these anticipatory passages are the textual residue of specific *composition strategies*. They reveal the techniques of arrangement and amplification in Smith's composition process, which mirror the same methods that youths in the nineteenth century

learned to imitate and amplify narratives under Walker's system. Whether for writing school assignments, learning how to compose in domestic education, or preparing essays for debate club meetings and literary societies, youths instructed in composition made use of these same organizational tools to construct their written works: children imbued themselves with the vocabulary, phraseology, structural framework and viewpoint of great writers and notable works by listening to their passages, formulating a mental outlines of the content in the very moment of presentation, and then rewriting the passages in their own words, resurrecting the skeletal core of essays into full blown passages containing their own variations in vocabulary, phraseology and themes. The heightened attention to both form *and* content, coupled with the intensive memorization of vast quantities of material, embedded the structures and styles of the model passages into the students' minds, whether it was one of Addison's *Spectator* essays, a passage by the Prophet Isaiah, or Christ's Sermon on the Mount.

Thus, the educational practices in the early nineteenth century provide a point of reference to compare and contrast the text of Smith's narrative production with classroom strategies for introductory writing assignments. And time after time, systemic throughout the *Book of Mormon*, these common school techniques of composition are on open display. Everywhere, the text reveals clear traces of Smith's childhood education in the construction of anticipatory outlines, the sequencing of key narrative events, and the amplification of passages; everywhere, the text frames the stories of the *Book of Mormon* couched in explicit patterns of moralized tales that adopt the preemptive strategies of religious teleological narratives.

Finally, Walker did not advertise his program as a complete methodology for all ages and skill levels of students, but as principles that "more particularly regard the instruction of youth in their juvenile compositions."[402] Walker did, however, hope the lessons would, at the very least, prove "useful to those who have neither leisure nor capacity for larger and deeper

[402] Walker, *The Teacher's Assistant*: 263.

works."[403] Nonetheless, for students who wished to advance beyond these basic skills, Walker's manual attempted to prepare students specifically for the more advanced belletristic composition and rhetorical training that both he and Hugh Blair advocated.

In the conclusion of *The Teacher's Assistant*, Walker offers advice to students who would pursue their studies further: "Those who wish to see almost every thing that can be said on the subject may consult Blair's Lectures on Rhetorick and the Belles Letters, and the third edition of my own Rhetorical Grammar."[404] Whether or not the Smith children were directly or indirectly exposed to Walker's system of composition, Hyrum Smith would nevertheless proceed in his education along the same lines that Walker suggested to his readers. At Moor's Charity School on the Dartmouth Campus, Hyrum, in accord with Walker's intentions, would receive instruction from both Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* and Blair's *Lectures*. And as a responsible older brother in a poor family struggling to educate itself, Hyrum, according to conventions and standard practices of domestic education in the era, would surely have passed along those valuable and systematic techniques to his siblings. Indeed, in addition to sharing the lessons, Hyrum may well have conveyed the excitement and dignity that such instruction offered to those who were in search of upward social mobility and a better way of life.

[403] Ibid.

[404] Ibid.

Chapter Seven: Advanced Rhetorics:

John Walker and Hugh Blair

When Hyrum Smith entered Moor's Indian Charity School, Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* (1785) was the first schoolbook on rhetoric, oratory and composition that he and his new classmates would have studied in their freshmen year. Next, in the latter part of his sophomore year, Hyrum would continue his studies with Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783).[405] Whether or not Joseph was exposed to Walker's and Blair's works through his brother Hyrum's studies or by means of his own self-improvement remains unknown. Nonetheless, even a cursory reading of Joseph's writings reveals his awareness, even his command, of various rhetorical figures, such as *climax*, *catalogue*, *contraries* and *encomiums*.[406] Though no records indicate when and how he learned these devices, Joseph's

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[405] For details on the use of Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* and Blair's *Lectures* at Dartmouth and Moor's Charity School, see the section titled "Schoolbooks for Advanced Training" in chapter four. For the sake of brevity, I am limiting my exploration of advanced schoolbooks to Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* and Blair's *Lectures*. Yet, two popular readers that Hyrum likely encountered at Moor's (indeed, readers that were popular in common schools, as well as secondary secondary education) are Caleb Bingham's *American Preceptor* (1794) and *Columbian Orator* (1797). Bingham graduated from Dartmouth (class of 1782), and, perhaps out of loyalty to a fellow alumnus, some students appear to have used his work. Nathan Crosby (class of 1820) mentioned how "Caleb Bingham. . . furnished my boyhood's satchel with his 'Young Ladies Accidence,' 'American Preceptor,' and 'Columbian Orator.'" Nathan Crosby, *The First Half Century of Dartmouth College: Being Historical Collections and Personal Reminiscences* (Hanover, NH:1876). Preface [3].

[406] In a June 5, 1844, letter to L. Daniel Rupp, Smith demonstrates his knowledge of encomiums and contraries, writing, "The design. . . of letting every sect tell its own story. . . [has] filled my breast with encomiums upon it. . . . Although all is not gold that shines, any more than every religious creed is sanctioned with the so eternally sure word of prophecy. . . . yet, 'by proving contraries, truth is made manifest,' and a wise man can search out 'old paths,' wherein righteous men held communion with Jehovah." Smith, *HC*, 6: 428. Of interest to this chapter is Smith's use of "contraries." Out of all the schoolbooks in this study that have either direct or indirect ties to Smith's biography, John Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* is the only rhetoric that addresses this device. See Walker's section "Of Invention in general, and particularly of Common Places" in Walker, *Rhetorical Grammar*: 311-20, esp. 15, 18. In a January 4, 1833, letter to N. C. Saxton, Smith includes a textbook example of *climax* (when the idea at the end of one clause becomes the first idea in the clause that follows, thus building a chain of ideas that lead toward a "climax"): ". . . and then add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity (or Love); and if these things be in you and abound, they make you to be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 296. Smith also

writings nevertheless demonstrate that somewhere along the line he clearly studied and incorporated rhetorical devices into his writing and composition.

Joseph's potential exposure to Hyrum's studies is not, of course, the only way in which Joseph might have encountered secondary schoolbooks. Given the historical accounts about his educational experiences (and personal reading habits), Joseph could easily have encountered such works on his own. Indeed, Smith's participation in a juvenile debate society strongly suggests his familiarity with advanced schoolbooks on rhetoric and composition, because such involvement suggests the level of preparation Smith would have needed in order to participate. As a member of this type of mutual improvement society, Smith would be *required* to engage in deliberative oral argumentation, compose essays and other works in varying genres, and critique the work of fellow participants. Such assignments were not optional.

Furthermore, spellers, grammars and readers would not be sufficient preparation for all the juvenile debate society activities. For such skills, young debaters and aspiring writers turned to the works of such authors as George Campbell (1719-1796); Alexander Jamieson (1782–1850); Henry Homes, Lord Kames (1696-1782); John Walker (1732-1807); Richard Whately (1787-1863); and John Witherspoon (1723-1794), among others. Any effort to study the oratorical and stylistic skills needed for participation in a debate or literary society, however, would have inevitably resulted in exposure to the works of the author who, perhaps more than any other, influenced the study of rhetoric in American education: Hugh Blair (1718-1800), a Scottish professor of rhetoric and composition at the University of Edinburgh. Given the influence of Walker and Blair on American pedagogy, Joseph may well have turned to his brother Hyrum for advice, along with consulting his schoolbooks.

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demonstrates his awareness of *catalogue*, or an inventory of related ideas for rhetorical effect, in an August 16, 1834, letter to members of his "High Council of Zion": "I was met in the face and eyes. . . with a catalogue of charges as black as the author of lies himself; and the cry was Tyrant–Pope–King–Usurper–Abuser of men–Angel–False Prophet–Prophesying lies in the name of the Lord–Taking consecrated monies–and every other lie to fill up and complete the catalogue." Smith, *HC*, 2: 144.

Hyrum's curriculum at Moor's Charity School, though only circumstantially linked to Joseph, offers one of the few documented cases of advanced rhetorical training within the Smith family. Though Joseph's library of self-improvement may continue to elude historical inquiry, Hyrum's course of study at Moor's offers concrete evidence of the specific training that at least one of the Smith children received. As such, this chapter will focus on Hyrum's exposure to Walker and Blair, which, in turn, may have informed Joseph's development and ideas.

Such exposure, however, need not be confined to the question of whether or not Hyrum's studies influenced Joseph. Considering the popularity of Walker's several books and the enormous influence exerted by Blair's *Lectures*, whatever material Joseph did study–whether straight from these authors or indirectly through another source–would have nevertheless been influenced and shaped by their works. Therefore, a review of these texts in relation to the wider culture of education and self-improvement opens a window to the types of skills and material that Joseph would have encountered in his quest for self-improvement, regardless whether or not he turned to Hyrum for advice or instructional material.

John Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar*

In the second term of his freshmen year, Hyrum studied John Walker's *A Rhetorical Grammar* (1785).[407] This is the same John Walker whose *Pronunciation Dictionary* (1791) dominated New York common school classrooms. Walker, popularly known by the moniker "Elocution Walker," was an English actor and one-time member of David Garrick's acting company at Drury Lane. He later retired from the stage and redirected his performance skills to

[407] Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* appears on the Dartmouth curriculum as early as 1800, and remains part of the curriculum until at least 1825. See, for example, Dartmouth Dartmouth College, *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Dartmouth College* (Concord: Dartmouth College, 1825). 19.

writing a dozen books on elocution and oral performance, achieving popularity in both Britain and America.[408]

The title of Walker's work, at least from a modern perspective, is misleading. Unlike Murray's *Grammar*, which aimed to develop a command of both written and spoken language by focusing on a descriptive approach to the technical aspects of grammar, Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* redirected the students' attention specifically to effective oratorical delivery and persuasive verbal performance. Walker announces this shift away from traditional curricula of rhetorical instruction in the opening of his work, indicating, "I shall in some measure invert the common order, and at first chiefly confine myself to that branch of it [rhetoric] which relates to pronunciation and delivery."[409] For Walker, having a bookish, intellectual mastery of rhetorical skills meant nothing if the speakers could not breathe life into their words and hold sway over an audience's emotions.

As a former professional stage actor, Walker had a range of performance skills that few other orators could match. While politicians, lawyers and preachers had frequent experience delivering speeches in public venues, actors had additional concerns that expanded the basic range of oratorical skills required of speechmaking: the rigorous repertory system, with its relentless circulation of shows that could require an actor to perform more times in a week than a minister might preach in a month; the demands of bringing different characters to life required constant and significant adjustments in vocal qualities, movement and gestures; the absolute necessity of ensuring that the paying audience hear the dialogue of the play required non-negotiable skills of vocal projection from every actor; and a host of additional talents that

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[408] The Oxford *DNB* notes, "In 1757 he joined Garrick's company at Drury Lane, where he at first played minor characters, such as Angus in *Macbeth*, but was soon promoted to play the second parts in tragedy, and those of a grave and sententious nature in comedy." See Joan C. Beal, "Walker, John (1732-1807), Elocutionist, Orthoepist, and Lexicographer," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Michael Duffy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004). For a list of Walker's works, see Byron K. Brown, "John Walker (1732-1807)," in *Eighteenth-Century British and American Rhetorics and Rhetoricians*, ed. Michael G. Moran, *Critical Studies and Sources* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 233-34.

[409] Walker, *Rhetorical Grammar*: [5].

lay beyond the range of political rants or religious sermons. Walker thus brought a wide range of performance skills to bear in his work.

Sensitive to the critical necessity of effective delivery, Walker marketed his book as an instruction manual, aimed at developing what he felt were long-neglected oratorical skills. Evoking a nostalgic idealism of oratory in classical antiquity, Walker positioned his text as a key instruction manual on how to unlock the power of famous orators of the past. And in doing so, Walker delineated the challenges between the text and its performance, insisting that a script is lifeless and dead until great oratorical skills bring it to life. And though famous orators in history left behind written accounts of great speeches, the texts did not recreate the grand experience of live performance:

> The ancients have left us everlasting monuments [written accounts] of their excellence in this art. . . . but that branch of Oratory which Demosthenes called the first, the second, and the third part of it [i.e., delivery and performance], and which was so assiduously cultivated by the ancients—that, alas!, perished with them, and left their compositions like a lifeless corpse, beautiful in death, but deprived of all that vigour and energy which agitated and astonished their wondering auditors. We hear at this distance but a faint echo of that thunder in Demosthenes, which shook the throne of Macedon to its foundations, and are sometimes at a loss for that conviction in the arguments of Cicero, which balanced, in the midst of convulsions, the tottering republic of Rome.[410]

Walker insists that "this part of Rhetoric," this persuasive power of delivery and gestures, "may be called the Soul of Oratory," and he laments how in his modern times the skill of "Pronunciation or Delivery has scarcely attained a mediocrity."[411] Walker thus presents his text as a solution to the neglect of advanced performance techniques. And while acknowledging his indebtedness to previous authors on the subject, particularly Blair, Walker nevertheless stresses his own contributions in comparison to past authors, "I flatter myself that in Pronunciation or Delivery, which forms the last part of oratory, something more systematical and satisfactory has

[410] Ibid., i-ii.

[411] Ibid., ii.

been offered in the present work than in any that has hitherto been published."[412] For the faculty and administration at Moor's Charity School and Dartmouth College, Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* was an understandable choice: not only did the text provide a bridge for students from their common school instruction to Blair's *Lectures*, Walker's additional information on delivery promised to enhance the performance skills of the missionaries, ministers, lawyers, doctors and politicians who would graduate from the conjoined schools.

Walker's system of oral performance relied on a proper understanding of the activity of "reading." Early in his discussion on delivery, Walker defines the relationship between reading and oral performance to assert his framework: the art of "reading" is "an imitative art which has eloquent speaking for its model, as eloquent speaking is an imitation of beautiful nature. Reading, therefore, is to speaking what a copy is to an original picture."[413] Using eloquent but naturalistic language as a basis for proper enunciation, Walker further expands on his definition of reading by outlining the difference between rhetoric and grammar: rhetoric involves the art of persuasion, while grammar ensures clarity of a speaker's ideas:

> The art of reading is that system of rules which teaches us to pronounce written composition with justness, energy, variety, and ease. Agreeably to this definition, reading may be considered as that species of delivery which not only expresses the sense of an author, so as barely to be understood, but which, at the same time, gives it all that force, beauty, and variety, of which it is susceptible: the first of these considerations belongs to grammar, and the last to rhetoric.[414]

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[412] Ibid., 306. The publisher indicates that Blair's *Lectures* and John Ward's *A System of Oratory* provide students with proper rules for composition, yet Walker's treatment on performance and delivery "is the most perfect of its kind in the language." Ibid., [v].

[413] Ibid., 41. Walker's hierarchy of mimetic modes reflects a common Platonic view, which, relevant to some readers, represents the logocentric assumptions that Derrida would later interrogate. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997). For a more wide-ranging discussion on mimesis in western literature, see Auerbach's classic work on the subject, Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask, First Princeton Paperback ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974; repr., fourth).

[414] Walker, *Rhetorical Grammar*: 41.

Using these definitions as the paradigm for his study, Walker proceeds to address a number of performance issues that are not fully explored in comparable texts on rhetoric: he goes into greater detail than earlier schoolbooks on the nuances of pausing, rhythms and emphases when following rhetorical punctuation marks; he accentuates the use of rising and falling inflections of voice, including novel charts to illustrate how select sentences might be pronounced; he addresses vocal management and development, offering advice and practical techniques to develop higher and lower pitches of voice; and he spends time addressing the audience-speaker relationship, discussing such issues as being aware of the age, social and economic status of the audience, along with paying careful attention to the ways in which orators must be conscientious of how they represent themselves in public addresses.[415]

In another significant departure from standard approaches to teaching rhetoric among contemporary authors, Walker divides the figures of rhetoric into two groups: "rhetorical figures," which "have no reference to delivery, and may be considered as perfect, whether they are spoken or not," and "oratorical figures," which "suppose a pronunciation suitable to each, and without which they have not half their beauty."[416] In other words, Walker identifies how some of the figures of speech require specific *performance* techniques, or a "proper manner of pronouncing them," to realize fully their potential, as opposed to other texts that might simply

[415] Walker's recommendations transgress the line between self-representation that aims to reveal the genuine inner subject and self-representation that aims to construct an artificial persona for the benefit of swaying an audience's opinions. While he does not advise orators to be deliberately deceptive in self-representation, Walker acknowledges that "it is often necessary for the orator to have recourse to art [skills of rhetoric and self-representation, beyond the natural behaviors and dispositions of the speaker], in order to obtain that which otherwise he cannot come at. For this purpose, therefore, it is very serviceable to accommodate his discourse to the temper and inclination of his audience. Nor indeed can any one reasonably hope to succeed in this province without well considering the circumstances of time and place, with the sentiments and dispositions of those to whom he speaks" ibid., 376. In his summary on this section ("Of the Character and Address of an Orator"), Walker observes, "A citizen and a courtier, a merchant and a soldier, a scholar and a peasant, as their pursuits are different, so is generally their turn and disposition of mind. It is the orator's business, therefore, to consider these several characters and circumstances of life, with the different bias and way of thinking they give to the mind; that he may so conduct himself in his behaviour and manner of speaking, as will render him most acceptable, and gain him the good esteem of those to whom he addresses." Ibid., 379.

[416] Ibid., 181.

define and describe the same rhetorical devices.[417] As Byron K. Brown observes, Walker "devoted over fifty pages to the proper delivery of these oratorical figures."[418] Walker's work thus occupied a space that melded academic rhetorics with acting manuals. When describing "Irony," for example, Walker includes a passage from Cicero's Catiline orations, followed by an explanation on how to recite the words:

> *O terrible war! in which this band of profligates are to march under Catiline. Draw out all your garrisons against this formidable body!....* In pronouncing the first of these passages, we should assume an over-acted approbation and such a tone of voice as seems to exclude all doubt of the integrity of the person we sneer at: this tone is low and drawling, and must be accompanied by a lifting-up of the hands, as if it were a crime to think otherwise than we speak.[419]

For "*Ecphonesis*, or *Exclamation*," Walker, in like manner, advises,

> . . . strong passion is not unfrequently expressed by a low tone; for, though both loudness and highness generally accompany any sudden emotion of soul, it is certain that we may cry out in a loud and high tone without much emotion, provided it is not sudden, without being either very high or very loud. The tone of the passion, therefore, must direct the tone of the voice in this figure. Accordingly we find that joy unexpected adopts this figure, which elevates the voice to the highest pitch.

At Moor's Charity School, Hyrum Smith would have employed Walker's system in the practice of sermon styles, classical orations, dialogues, poetry, plays, debates and essays, all of which required different methods of performance. And whether for classroom exercises, commencement celebrations or end of term recitations, Hyrum would have been required to demonstrate his oratorical skills to audiences ranging from faculty instructors at school to family members and villagers from the town. Commencement exercises in particular were

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[417] Ibid., 180.

[418] Brown, "John Walker," 233.

[419] Walker, *Rhetorical Grammar*: 186-87 (italics added). Byron K. Brown notes that Walker "explicitly addressed the canon of style and offered an elocutionary twist on the traditional division of figures of speech by distinguishing between rhetorical figures and oratorical ones. Walker argued that rhetorical figures—generally equivalent to classical tropes, including metaphor, metonomy, and synecdoche—do not depend upon proper pronunciation for their meaning, but oratorical figures—which include many classical schemes—do." Brown, "John Walker," 233.

major events, presenting ample opportunities for the young scholars to demonstrate their skills in front of a crowd. Such gatherings attracted people, both near and far, resulting in a veritable "general holiday for all the country within a radius of twenty miles or more around."[420] Taverns, inns and spare rooms in local homes all filled to capacity, while "all approaches to the village were crowded with vehicles of every description, and numerous foot passengers as well, all hurrying in to see the fun. . . . every available spot along the southern extremity of the square would be occupied with a booth of a trader, and, as the day passed, travelling adventurers swarmed in with their carts and bivouacked on the spot."[421] Young Joseph would most certainly have sat in the audience with his family, watching Hyrum's performances and participating in the surrounding festivities. And whether he studied from his brother's books, or merely observed Hyrum and his schoolmates in action on the recitation stages, young Joseph would have witnessed the dynamic oral performances of those who were trained according to the rhetorical methods of John Walker and Hugh Blair.

From Walker to Blair

As they progressed from their freshmen to sophomore years, the students at Moor's Charity School and Dartmouth College moved from John Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* to Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*. This sequence, conveniently enough, is what Walker had in mind when he composed his *Rhetorical Grammar*. Rather than competing directly with such authors as Blair and Campbell, Walker often aimed to fill in gaps that appeared in the advanced rhetorics, or at least elaborate on principles that he felt received inadequate attention. Walker thus positioned his *Rhetorical Grammar* as a preparatory

[420] John King Lord, *A History of Dartmouth College, 1815-1909: Being a Second Volume of A History of Dartmouth College and the Town of Hanover, New Hampshire, Begun by Frederick Chase*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Concord, NH: The Rumford Press, 1913). 571.

[421] Ibid. For an extended description of commencement exercises, see 571-584.

schoolbook for Blair's *Lectures*, while simultaneously arguing that he provided unique contributions in the area of oral performance and rhetorical delivery.

In matters of style and composition, for example, Walker closely follows Blair's *Lectures*, openly acknowledging Blair's influence: "Thus far, with the most trifling alterations, I have followed Dr. Blair, who, in those parts of oratory called Disposition and Elocution, or a choice and arrangement of words, has exceeded every writer who went before him."[422] Therefore, the use of Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* in Moor's Charity School as an introductory rhetoric to Blair is not surprising: the texts and instructional methods were entangled in the same pedagogical strategies. Walker's work contained lessons more advanced than the grammar books in common schools, yet it also prepared students for the jump to the more sophisticated lessons on rhetoric and philosophical treatises on *belles lettres* found in Blair's *Lectures*.[423]

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[422] Walker, *Rhetorical Grammar*: 306. Walker also recommends Blair's work to students who wish to pursue matters of style in greater depth, referring "the student in rhetoric to the Doctor's [Blair's] excellent lectures, for a more complete view of whatever is necessary to be known." Ibid., 267. See also the introduction, where Walker refers to Blair's *Lectures* as "the best source" for "Rules of Composition." Ibid., v.

[423] In spite of Noah Webster's historical prominence in the establishment of reading and writing instruction in American schools, I am not using his texts to trace Joseph Smith's development. The reasons are specifically situated in Smith's time period and context; Webster's *Grammar* and *Reader* (though not his *Speller*) had fallen out of popular usage by the early nineteenth-century. This shift does, however, provide an opportunity to observe some of the cultural dynamics surrounding the development of a new national identity. In the late eighteenth century, Webster attempted to provide the most complete program of reading instruction. Apart from revising the *New England Primer*, Webster formulated an entire curriculum, which he intended to cover all the necessary principles of reading instruction from a child's entry in school to its graduation. Collectively known as *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*, Webster's grand opus consisted of a *Speller* (1783), a *Grammar* (1784), and a *Reader* (1785): see Monaghan and Monaghan, "An Extensive Republic," 305-08. As his lofty title suggests and in conjunction with popular notions about the history of rhetoric, Webster was invoking Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (ca. 94-95 CE), which had served as one of the primary collection of pedagogical texts on classical rhetoric since the Renaissance. By representing his program in such terms, Webster made an overt attempt to lay claim to the classical heritage of the past, while deliberately elevating the provincialism of American culture and language to equal standing with the international powers of the present. This in turn fueled a sense of purpose in educational efforts: students were not merely learning how to read, they were learning how to identify and differentiate themselves as Americans in a participatory republic. Webster's *American Spelling Book* (1783) first introduced American audiences to the idea of teaching a homegrown education, touting lessons with American (as opposed to British) place names in word lists. Webster is explicit in his project of instructing American children with American texts in the preface to his work, claiming, "The advantage of familiarizing children to the spelling and

With regard to Joseph Smith's education, Walker was not the only writer of schoolbooks who tailored his material to Blair's influential work. Lindley Murray's *English Reader*, the most popular text in the New York common school system, and specifically a text that Joseph Smith once owned, adopted Blair's sermons and essays as models.[424] Murray openly acknowledges Blair's influence on his pedagogical approach in the *English Reader*, indicating, "For many of the observations contained in this preliminary tract, the Author is indebted to the writings of Dr. Blair, and to the Encyclopædia Britannica."[425] In terms of excavating Joseph Smith's potential educational experiences, the exploration of how John Walker's works and Lindley Murray's schoolbooks specifically, and explicitly, prepared students to graduate to Blair's *Lectures* becomes all the more critical. Furthermore, such overlapping lessons and methodologies serve as a reminder of how the authors of schoolbooks in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were acutely aware of one another's works, regularly borrowing instructional material and pedagogical techniques from one another, and contributing their insights to the general reserve

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pronunciation of American names is very obvious, and must give this work the preference to foreign Spelling Books. It is of great importance to give our youth early and correct information respecting the geography of this country. We have a multitude of books which give us the state of *other countries*, but scarcely one which affords us any account of our *own*." Webster, *American Spelling Book*: Preface x (emphasis in original). For a detailed discussion on Noah Webster's project to carve out an American identity by means of differentiating American English and culture from British influences, see Michael P. Kramer, *Imagining Language in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992). 35-63. Webster's speller, further aiming "to promote the interest of literature and the harmony of the United States," achieved enormous popularity: Webster, *American Spelling Book*: Preface x. His spelling book would come to dominate classrooms as "the first American-authored spelling book to achieve a national impact." Monaghan and Monaghan, "An Extensive Republic," 305. Scholars Gerald F. Moran and Maris A. Vinovskis reveal that, "a conservative estimate suggests that approximately 12.7 million Webster spellers were sold between 1783 and 1843." Moran and Vinovskis, "An Extensive Republic," 300. Webster's popularity exerted a tremendous amount of influence on later writers, who often copied his strategies and lessons in an attempt to duplicate his success. And though his *Grammar* and *Reader* would be supplanted by such books as Caleb Bingham's *American Preceptor* (1794) and *Columbian Orator* (1797), which in turn were displaced by Lindley Murray's *English Grammar* (1795) and *English Reader* (1799), Webster nevertheless succeeded in injecting the issues of nationalism, democracy and preparation for citizenship into the cultural environment of American classrooms. For Webster's displacement by Bingham and Murray, see Monaghan and Monaghan, "An Extensive Republic," 308-09.

[424] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2005). xxi.

[425] Murray, *Grammar*, 1: vii.

of schoolbooks in a competitive yet semi-collaborative attempt to construct a complete curriculum.

Whether or not Hyrum shared what he was learning at Moor's Charity School with Joseph remains, of course, a matter of conjecture. Nevertheless, cultural practices surrounding domestic education need to come into consideration. At the time Hyrum started regular attendance at Moor's, Joseph was convalescing from leg surgery (the surgery took place in the winter of 1812-1813). According to Lucy Smith, young Joseph's recovery, at least in its most difficult bedridden stages, appears to have lasted approximately one year. Immediately following her account of Joseph's surgery, Lucy indicates that, "Having passed through about a year of sickness and distress, health again returned to our family."[426] Thus, Joseph appears to have missed the better part of the 1813 school year (winter term 1812-1813 and summer term 1813). Furthermore, if Lucy's statement is accurate, then Joseph could have returned to school (on crutches) sometime in the 1814 school year, picking up where he left off the previous year.

In the meantime, Joseph's education would have been restricted to domestic education in the Smith household. And the responsibility for such instruction, as mentioned in the previous chapter, fell to the parents and older siblings in a family.[427] During this period of Joseph's sickness and recovery, Hyrum took a special interest in Joseph. Lucy Smith, who was overseeing Joseph's care while trying to manage a house full of children and chores, remarked on Hyrum's compassion for his ailing brother:

> Hyrum, who was rather remarkable for his tenderness and sympathy, now desired that he might take my place [watching over Joseph]. As he was a good, trusty boy, we let him do so; and, in order to make the task as easy for him as possible, we laid Joseph upon a low bed, and Hyrum sat beside him, almost day and night, for some considerable length of time, holding the affected part of his leg in his hands, and pressing it between them, so

[426] Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 268. Lucy's earlier manuscript of 1845 reads, "After one whole year of affliction, we were able once more to look upon our children and each other in health."

[427] See Gordon and Gordon, *Literacy in America*: 83. And Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience*: 373.

> that his afflicted brother might be enabled to endure the pain, which was so excruciating, that he was scarcely able to bear it.[428]

Later, according to Richard Behrens, Hyrum "was young Joseph's principal tutor" during the time of Joseph's recovery. Such patterns of domestic education, where parents and the eldest children would participate in the education of younger siblings, would continue in the Smith household through their years in Palmyra and Manchester, New York.[429] Indeed, Hyrum was loyal to Joseph his entire life. Both brothers died together in a jail at Carthage, Illinois, when an angry mob stormed the prison and murdered them.[430] Such lifelong bonds of fraternal love speak to the reliance family members had on one another in an age of rapid change and difficult economic circumstances, not least of which included the concern for each other's welfare. Young Joseph's absence from school and formal education would have been a concern for the entire Smith household, and Hyrum appears to have made an effort to help Joseph compensate. Given these circumstances, Hyrum's deep interest in the welfare of his brother warrants further exploration into the educational assistance Hyrum may have provided. This, in turn, involves a closer examination of Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, the text that followed Walker's *Rhetorical Grammar* in Hyrum's studies.

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[428] Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 264.

[429] Behrens, "Dreams, Visions," 177. Behrens suggests Joseph's recovery prevented him from attending school from the time of the surgery (winter of 1812-1813) to the time of the family's departure to Palmyra, NY (January 1817). Richard Bushman implies a similar situation, describing how Joseph's "convalescence dragged on for three years. . . . From age seven to ten, he was either in bed or on crutches." Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 21. Yet, no historical accounts corroborate the claim of such an extended, three-year absence from school. Though young Joseph would continue to use crutches through the time of the family's move to New York in 1817, Lucy Smith suggests that Joseph's health had otherwise returned after a year: Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 268. Given later efforts to present Joseph as an uneducated farmboy, such an extended absence from school would presumably have been exploited as unassailable evidence. Yet, all records are silent on such a claim. Furthermore, a one-year absence from school would not equate to a lack of education. The Smith parents involved themselves in the domestic education of their children. Recall that Lucy described how she and Joseph Smith, Sr., acted "together in the education and instruction of our children." Ibid., 282. And their neighbor, John Stafford, remembered how the Smiths held "school in their house, and studied the Bible." Vogel, *EMD*, 2: 122.

[430] Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 549-50. For a recent treatment on the final years of Joseph Smith, Jr., see Alex Beam, *American Crucifixion: The Murder of Joseph Smith and the Fate of the Mormon Church* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014).

Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric*

Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), along with George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), figure significantly in the history of rhetorical training, both in Britain and America. Eighteenth-century rhetoric experienced a reorientation in composition towards belletristic performance, and the works of these two Scottish Enlightenment theorists spearheaded the changes.[431] In the process of doing so, Blair and Campbell transformed classical rhetorical studies into useful tools for upward social mobility. Blair's contributions, however, seem to have possibly come from accident, as much as intent. For more than two decades, Blair taught rhetoric at the University of Edinburgh. During that period, Blair's courses became very popular, and, to the apparent chagrin of Blair, students began circulating inaccurate representations his ideas in manuscript form. According to the preface of his work, the publication of his lectures "was not altogether a matter of choice," but rather an attempt to correct "imperfect Copies of them, in Manuscript, from notes taken by Students."[432] Eventually, as the story goes, Blair "judged it to be high time that [his lectures] should proceed from his own hand, rather than come into public view under some very defective and erroneous form."[433] Thus, in 1783, the same year that he retired from his position as Chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, Blair published his *Lectures on Rhetoric*, which, as the title suggests, consists of his collected lessons on the art of composition and rhetorical persuasion.

Blair's *Lectures* became an instant success, not only in Britain but also across the Atlantic in North America. Indeed, Blair's *Lectures* became the single most popular book on

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[431] Blair, *Lectures (2005)*: editors' introduction, xv. Editors Ferreira-Buckley and Halloran further note, "Belletristic rhetoric appealed to a rising middle class who longed for an education commensurate with their increasing economic power and were, like the eighteenth-century Scots, anxious about matters of linguistic decorum. They came to believe that the sort of education rationalized by the belletristic rhetoricians would prepare them to join the cultural elite." Ibid., xlii.

[432] *Lectures (1784)*: [iii].

[433] Ibid.

rhetorical training in the early decades of the American republic. After *Lectures* was published in London in 1783, an American edition, published n Philadelphia, appeared the following year in 1784. From that time forward, until well into the nineteenth century, Blair's *Lectures* stood as the pinnacle textbook on writing style, from which virtually all other academic writers and school instructors over the next several decades took their cue. Indeed, as scholars Linda Ferreira-Buckley and S. Michael Halloran summarize, "The immense popularity of Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* was unrivaled by any language text for a full half-century."[434] Blair's work, either in the original or abridged forms, appeared in the curricula across the entire spectrum of educational institutions, from common schools to universities.[435]

So pervasive was Blair's influence that students who may never have studied directly from his *Lectures* might nevertheless have received instructions based on Blair's models. Blair's monumental success spawned numerous imitators, who, in turn, collectively shaped the methodologies of writing instruction and oral presentation. "Not only were the Blair books the most commonly used rhetorics in America for many years," John Nietz informs, "they set the

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[434] *Lectures (2005)*: editors' introduction, xv.

[435] Even though some common schools in New York used abridged versions of Blair's *Lectures* (typically the Mills abridgment), it was uncommon in the lower-division classroom. Students normally encountered Blair in secondary school settings (high schools, academies, universities), or at home schools and self-improvement societies. Even so, in his 1834 annual report on the common schools, John A. Dix, the Superintendent of Common Schools for that year, refers to a "paper marked I" that indicates how, "Blair's Rhetoric, Blair's Philosophy, Blake's Philosophy, Comstock's Philosophy. . . are used in a number of towns." The State of New York, *Documents of the Assembly, Fifty-Seventh Session*: 25. The report mentions that, "*Blair's Rhetoric* is used in one town in Chenango, and one in Herkimer," during the 1833 school year (see ibid., Doc. No. 31; 1-62. Chenango County, specifically the town of Bainbridge, is where Smith attended school for the 1825-1826 winter term, but records do not indicate which town in Chenango County used Blair's work, or if any town even used the work when Smith attended school there. For the 1826 school year, only one town reported using "Blair's Rhetoric" (the 1830 report does not identify the town). By 1829, four more towns used Blair's work (one town in Delaware County, one in Washington County, and two towns in Herkimer), bringing the total to five towns using Blair's *Lectures* in New York common schools, see ibid., Doc. No. 1; 54, 55, 57, 59. Thus, I would argue that if Smith encountered Blair's work, his exposure to the text would most likely have occurred through his brother, Hyrum, who studied Blair's work at Moor's Charity School, and/or in the juvenile debate club in Palmyra that Smith attended.

pattern for most other authors of rhetorics for many decades."[436] Connors adds that the texts on composition and *belles lettres* in this period "were either reductions of Blair or overwhelmingly derivative of his *Lectures*."[437] Furthermore, as Ferreira-Buckley and Halloran observe, "In addition to the more than seventy complete editions of *Lectures*, they were also reprinted, abridged, adapted, and quoted at length (with and without attribution) in a variety of publications and books—including schoolbooks and readers—throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."[438] Blair's *Lectures* saturated American schools, and his pedagogical strategies set the standard for training in composition and rhetorical performance.

When he encountered Blair's *Lectures* at Moor's Charity School, Hyrum studied directly from Blair's unedited, two-volume work, rather than an edited or adapted version. In addition, Blair's work formed sat at the core of the rhetoric and composition curriculum for students at both Moor's and Dartmouth (indeed, the two schools shared the same faculty in these areas). Records suggest that Moor's students began their study of Blair's *Lectures* in the final term of their sophomore year, the same term in which the Dartmouth students encountered Blair's work.[439]

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[436] John A. Nietz, *The Evolution of American Secondary School Textbooks* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1966). 15.

[437] Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric*: 218.

[438] Blair, *Lectures (2005)*: xvi.

[439] David McClure and Elijah Parish, *Memoirs of the Rev. Eleazar Wheelock, D.D., Founder and President of Dartmouth College and Moor's Charity School* (Newburyport: Edward Little & Co., 1811). McClure conflates the curriculum of Moor's and Dartmouth in his description of the courses of study: "The languages, the arts, and sciences, are studied in the following order: the Freshman class study the Latin and Greek classics, arithmetic, English grammar and rhetoric. The Sophomore class study the Latin and Greek classics, logic, geography, arithmetic, geometry, trigonometry, algebra, conic sections, surveying, *belle letters*, and criticism." The reference to "*belle letters*" is clarified in the annual publications of the *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Dartmouth College*, which indicate that "Blair's Lectures, 2 vols.," was the standard text for more than the first two decades of the nineteenth century. See, for example, College, *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Dartmouth College*: 19. Smith's possible exposure to Blair is not limited to this solitary, circumstantial, fraternal link. When he describes ancient Native American practices in *the Book of Mormon*, Smith uses a specific cluster of words and phrases that are embedded in a specific narrative pattern, which finds a precise parallel in one of Blair's passages (William L. Davis, "Narrative Migrations of Native American Treaty Orations, 1693-

Apart from the two schools' official curriculum, student organizations in the form of literary societies and fraternities (which also included the activities of debate clubs) used Blair's work as reference material, as well as holding copies of Blair's work in their own society libraries.[440] Blair himself encouraged participation in academic mutual improvement societies, arguing that participation offered student a chance to improve their educational experiences, while simultaneously preparing them for "a facility and fluency of expression" in public performances:

> Exercises of speaking have always been recommended to Students, in order that they may prepare themselves for speaking in public, and on real business. The Meetings or Societies, into which they sometimes form themselves for this purpose, are laudable institutions. . . . They are favourable to knowledge and study, by giving occasion to enquiries, concerning those subjects which are made the ground of discussion. They produce emulation; and gradually inure those who are concerned in them, to somewhat that resembles a Public Assembly. They accustom them to know their own powers, and, to acquire a command of themselves in speaking; and what is, perhaps, the greatest advantage of all, they give them a facility and fluency of expression, and assist them in procuring that "Copia verborum," which can be acquired by no other means but frequent exercise in speaking.[441]

From a twenty-first-century perspective, it may be difficult to appreciate fully Blair's pervasive influence on American schools and public life, and, perhaps more specifically, on Joseph Smith's education. Yet, Blair's *Lectures* was not simply one among hundreds of texts on

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1830," *The 11th Conference of the European Society for Textual Scholarship* (Helsinki, Finland 2014), (unpublished paper).

[440] John King Lord, in his continuation of Frederick Chase's history of Dartmouth, details the holdings of the student club known as the United Fraternity. As early as 1787, the club held a copy of Blair's unabridged, two-volume *Lectures*, which students could check out for a period of two weeks. The presence of Blair's work in the library of a school social organization in 1787 demonstrates how quickly Blair's popularity spread. The literary societies and fraternities among the students at Moor's and Dartmouth were highly competitive, often providing more tension and dramatic conflict in the academic setting than school administrators desired. Members were initiated into the societies with secret ceremonies, in which they solemnly vowed to uphold the constitution of their respective fraternity. In 1803, for example, the Social Friends required new members to make a vow of secrecy that "You solemnly affirm you will never divulge anything respecting the constitution, the transactions, or any other secrets of this Society, So help you God." Lord, *A History of Dartmouth College*, 2: 521. For an overview of the student societies, see ibid., 514-38.

[441] Blair, *Lectures (1784)*: 321.

rhetoric and composition; Blair's *Lectures* was *the* book on rhetoric and composition. As Robert J. Connors observes, "American rhetoric was for more than fifty years completely in thrall to the ideas of Hugh Blair."[442] And when Blair's work was at the height of its influence over pedagogical theory and educational practice in America–an influence that spread across the boundaries of individual self-improvement, home schools, common schools, Sunday schools, academies, colleges, universities, literary societies and debate clubs–the Smith family children were attending classes and receiving their education. Thus, even without the direct connection between Blair's *Lectures* and Hyrum's curriculum at Moor's Charity School, the Smith children would still have been exposed, at the very least, to some form of Blair's principles and methodologies during their classroom experience. Hyrum's exposure to Blair's work, however, offers more specific and tantalizing insights into the educational experiences that circulated within and around the Smith household.

Blair's *Lectures*, though "originally designed for the initiation of Youth into the study of Belles Lettres, and of Composition," introduced information that extended well beyond the scope of teaching students how to write with style and eloquence.[443] After opening his work by addressing matters of taste, criticism, sublimity and beauty, for example, Blair anchored his study of language within theories of eighteenth-century historical linguistics, along with tracing the history and development of Greek and Roman rhetoric. Thus, students not only learned how to write with style, but they were taught how the rules of eloquence supposedly originated. And once he focused his attention on composition, Blair covered a wide range of issues and applications. As John Nietz summarizes,

> Attention was given to the finer theories of style, *Belles Letters*, as illustrated in fine literary selections as well as to their application to public speaking, writing, and drama. The first part of the book dealt with such topics as taste, criticism, beauty, style, structure of sentences, figurative language, and the critical examination of various types of writing

[442] Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric*: 72.

[443] Blair, *Lectures (1784)*: [iv].

> and speaking. The latter part dealt with types of eloquence, as the bar, the pulpit, and the conduct of discourse; and with types of writing, as historical, philosophical, and various kinds of poetry and drama. Extracts from the great writers of the Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, and moderns were used to illustrate the best principles and practices of rhetoric.[444]

In relation to Joseph Smith and the *Book of Mormon*, Blair's textbook offers numerous intriguing perspectives on the role of language, style and narrative in the early nineteenth century. And while researchers may not know with certainty whether or not Joseph Smith specifically studied Blair's work, the topics contained in Blair's *Lectures* nevertheless encompass ideas about the origins of language, writing systems, writings styles, and compositional methods that circulated widely in the cultural imagination of early America.[445] A complete analysis of connections between Blair's *Lectures* and Joseph Smith's works is beyond the scope of this chapter. I will thus limit my observations to three relevant passages: 1) Blair's recommendation that students look to the Bible for inspiration on how to write "sublime" compositions, with a special emphasis on the prophecies of Isaiah; this section includes a summary of Bishop Lowth's treatise on Hebraic parallelism; 2) Blair's discourse on the origin of language and writing; and 3) the role of "fictitious history" in communicating important truths and inculcating moral lessons.

The Bible and Sublime Composition

In his lecture on "Sublimity in Writing," Blair informs the student, "Of all writings, antient [sic] or modern, the Sacred Scriptures afford us the highest instances of the Sublime."[446] Students hoping to develop an elevated and magnificent style would do well, according to Blair, to open their Bibles and imitate the prophets. Later, in his lecture on "The Poetry of the

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[444] Nietz, *The Evolution*: 14.

[445] In spite of this cautious stance, I have previously presented evidence of Smith's direct dependence on Blair's *Lectures*; see footnote 439.

[446] Blair, *Lectures (1784)*: 27.

Hebrews," Blair singles out the Prophet Isaiah as the model for prophetic writing, arguing that, "Isaiah is, without exception, the most sublime of all Poets. . . . Majesty is his reigning character; a Majesty more commanding, and more uniformly supported, than is to be found among the rest of the Old Testament Poets. He possesses, indeed, a dignity and grandeur, both in his conceptions and expressions, which is altogether unparalleled, and peculiar to himself."[447] For Hyrum's classmates at Moor's, many of whom were studying to become missionaries and ministers, Blair's advice no doubt prompted many of them to search diligently through Isaiah's writings in the hopes of unlocking the secrets of his majestic style. If nothing else, Blair's popular observations did much to boost the ancient prophet's reputation in the religious milieu of the early nineteenth century.

Whether or not Blair's admiration of Isaiah reached Joseph Smith, the nineteenth-century cultural strain of admiration for the Old Testament prophet appears to emerge in the *Book of Mormon*. The Prophet Nephi, one of the most prominent characters in the text, borrows copiously from Isaiah's passages to illustrate his worldview: "And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah: for my soul delighteth in his words. . . . And now I write some of the words of Isaiah, that whoso of my people shall see these words, may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men."[448] Jesus Christ, while visiting the ancient Nephites in America, shares a similar assessment, proclaiming, "Yea, a commandment I give unto you, that ye search these things [scriptures] diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah."[449] Accordingly, Isaiah, more than any other Old Testament prophet, informs the text of the *Book of Mormon*.

Regarding Isaiah's influence, Victor L. Ludlow notes, "Fully one-third of the writings of Isaiah are found in the Book of Mormon, making Isaiah the most frequently quoted biblical book there. Twenty-two of the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah are quoted in whole or in part. . . (a

[447] Ibid., 391.

[448] Smith, *The Book of Mormon (1840)*: 85 (2 Nephi 11:2,8).

[449] Ibid., 488 (3 Nephi 23:1).

total of 433 of Isaiah's 1,292 verses)."[450] The inclusion of such extensive extractions from Isaiah's passages, along with a number of biblical prophetic texts, would seem to confirm Blair's admonition that, "The language of Sacred Scripture, properly employed, is a great ornament to Sermons. It may be employed, either in the way of quotation, or allusion. Direct quotations, brought from Scripture, in order to support what the Preacher inculcates, both give authority to his doctrine, and render his discourse more solemn and venerable."[451] Apart from such content, however, Blair argues that the power of scriptural texts also appears in the structural forms.

Blair's commendation of Isaiah occurs in his chapter on "The Poetry of the Hebrews," which, in turn, centers on the lectures of Bishop Robert Lowth (1710-1787), a famous divine in the Church of England and Professor of Poetry at Oxford University. In 1753, Lowth, a prominent scholar, grammarian and translator, published a series of his lectures, titled, *De Sacra Poesi Hebræorum* (*The Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*). One of the significant features of the lectures was Lowth's discussion of Hebrew parallelisms, or, as he coined them, *parallelismus membrorum*.[452] The most basic forms of these structures, often succinct in length and precise in content, are easily recognized:

> Seek ye the Lord while he may be found,
> call ye upon him while he is near. (Isa. 55:6)
>
> A wise man's heart is at his right hand;
> but a fool's heart is at his left. (Eccles. 10:2)

Blair summarizes Lowth's observations of biblical parallelisms in the following manner:

> The general construction of the Hebrew Poetry is of a singular nature, and peculiar to itself. It consists in dividing every period [sentence] into correspondent, for the most part, into equal members [phrases], which answer to one another, both in sense and

[450] Victor L. Ludlow, "Bible," in *To All the World: The Book of Mormon Articles from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, S. Kent Brown, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), 2000), 27.

[451] Blair, *Lectures (1784)*: 268.

[452] James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981). 12.

> sound. In the first member of the period a sentiment is expressed; and in the second member, the same sentiment is amplified, or is repeated in different terms, or sometimes contrasted with its opposite; but in such a manner that the same structure, and nearly the same number of words is preserved. This is the general strain of all the Hebrew Poetry.[453]

The significance of Lowth's analysis resonates throughout the *Book of Mormon* text: like the Bible, such biblical-style parallelisms form the structural bedrock of Smith's work.[454] That being said, however, I want to stress that this observation is not an attempt to claim, or even imply, that Smith decided to compose the *Book of Mormon* with parallel structures because of any possible exposure to Blair. Smith would not, in fact, need to read Blair to include such a stylistic choice. Indeed, years before encountering Blair, Smith would have internalized these biblical structural patterns through the intensive repetition of family worship in readings from the Bible, along with the biblically inflected reading, writing and recitation assignments in common school and Sunday school. Thus, the construction and utterance of such forms would have been second nature and automatic for children raised within such cultural practices.[455]

What I am claiming, however, is that Blair's chapter calls attention to the structures of biblical parallelisms in a way that raises a heightened awareness of these forms of expression and their prevalence in, and appropriateness for, sacred texts. For Blair's readers, this chapter would thus have had the potential to make such internalized linguistic habits more fully conscious. And if he did study Blair's lessons, whether by means of Hyrum's studies at Moor's Charity School or some other route of self-improvement, Smith might well have taken Blair's

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[453] Blair, *Lectures (1784)*: 385.

[454] For a sense of the ubiquity of parallelisms in the *Book of Mormon*, see Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2007).

[455] These same parallel structures emerge as one of the most common characteristics of oral epics and orally-derived texts. As John Foley observes, "Like figurative language, *parallelism* is a feature of most poetries, whatever their origin, nature, or audience." John Miles Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2002). 89. To adopt an extreme position for the sake of argument, even if Smith had never read the Bible in his lifetime, this same style of parallelism might nevertheless be expected in his compositions.

advice to heart that, "all writers who attempt the Sublime, might profit much by imitating. . . the Style of the Old Testament."[456] Smith never described how he approached his verbal construction of the *Book of Mormon* text, so any intentionality remains unknown. Yet, the presence and importance of Blair's *Lectures* in Joseph Smith's environment, with its popular notions of the syntactical constructions and stylistic configurations of biblical passages, remains an important consideration when exploring the text of the *Book of Mormon*.

Blair on the Origin of Writing

In the opening chapters of his *Lectures*, Blair contextualizes his work in relation to the very origin of languages and writing systems. Following his depiction of the rise of language from simple "cries of passion, accompanied with such motions and gestures as were farther expressive of passion," to the complex language of advanced societies, Blair turns to the origin of writing systems.[457] For Blair, writing originated in pictures that communicated ideas, and he expounds upon pictorial and hieroglyphic systems in the context of ancient America and Egypt.[458] Note how Blair's description resonates with Smith's claim of obtaining and translating

[456] Blair, *Lectures (1784)*: 386.

[457] Ibid., 45. Unlike many linguists and theologians of his day, Blair interestingly did not believe that Adam was endowed with a fully developed language that deteriorated after The Fall: "But supposing Language to have a Divine original, we cannot, however, suppose, that a perfect system of it was all at once given to man. It is much more natural to think, that God taught our first parents only such Language as suited their present occasions; leaving them, as he did in other things, to enlarge and improve it as their future necessities should require. Consequently, those first rudiments of Speech must have been poor and narrow." Ibid., 44. Blair's theory of language complexity did, however, mirror the belief that "primitive" societies, such as the Native Americans, had limited ways in which to express themselves, for which they compensated with grander forms of natural eloquence. For Blair's perception of Native American language, see pages 47, 50, 123, and 353-354.

[458] Smith had an abiding interest in antiquities and ancient languages. In July of 1835, Smith purchased four mummies and a small collection of Egyptian papyri from a traveling showman, Michael H. Chandler. Upon review of the hieroglyphics, Smith claimed some of the papyri contained lost writings of Abraham, which he subsequently translated into English. The text, known as the Book of Abraham, is a canonical work of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Modern scholars, however, have identified the papyri as common funerary texts, with no connection to Smith's purported translation of an Abrahamic narrative. For a comprehensive analysis of the history and interpretation of Smith's papyri, see Robert K. Ritner, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013).

a historical record of an Israelite nation in ancient America, engraved on gold plates in a language described as "reformed Egyptian":

> We find, in fact, that, when America was first discovered, this [the use of pictographs] was the only sort of Writing known in the kingdom of Mexico [i.e., pre-Columbian Mesoamerica]. By historical pictures, the Mexicans [Native Americans] are said to have transmitted the memory of the most important transactions in their empire. . . . Among the Mexicans, were found some traces of hieroglyphical characters, intermixed with their historical pictures. But Egypt was the country where this sort of Writing was most studied, and brought into a regular art. In hieroglyphics, was conveyed all the boasted wisdom of their priests. . . . Indeed, in after-times, when alphabetical Writing was introduced into Egypt, and the hierglyphical was, of course, fallen into disuse, it is known, that the priests still employed the hieroglyphical characters, as a sacred kind of Writing, now become peculiar to themselves, and serving to give an air of mystery to their learning and religion.[459]

Blair concludes his address on the rise of written language by describing the materials that ancient cultures used: "Writing was long a kind of engraving. Pillars, and tables of stone, were first employed for this purpose, and afterwards, plates of the softer metals, such as lead."[460] Within Mormon Studies, the significance of Blair's statement should provoke a greater appreciation for the types of common knowledge that circulated in the general population. While some Mormon scholars have argued that Joseph Smith could not have known about the ancient practice of writing on metal plates, because such information was purportedly limited to "highly educated specialists," the information contained in Blair's massively popular book demonstrates how such knowledge was actually widespread and readily available.[461]

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[459] Blair, *Lectures (1784)*: 55-56. Again, I merely present this information to demonstrate some of the common ideas that were in circulation in the early nineteenth century regarding the ancient civilizations in the Americas. As mentioned with regard to Hebrew parallelisms, this section does not suggest that Blair's information is the specific source of Smith's ideas. The narrative of angelic visitations from ancient American prophets, the discovery of an ancient record written on gold plates, the use of seer stones and a Urim and Thummim to translate "reformed Egyptian" into English, etc., all point to a much more complex matrix of cultural ideas and practices than the information found in Blair's work.

[460] Ibid., 59.

[461] In his review of Brent Metcalfe's "Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity," in which Metcalfe asserts that Joseph Smith's contemporaries were aware of the fact that some ancient authors wrote on metal places, William J. Hamblin argues that such knowledge was limited to "highly educated specialists," and not rural farmers. "Metcalfe seems to realize," Hamlin stresses, "that

Moral Truth and Fictitious History: Romanticism and Historical Fiction

At a time when novels were out of favor with religious leaders and conservative religious worshippers, Blair ran counter to such cultural attitudes and noted the positive moral effects that such books could have. Recognizing the great popularity of Romance novels (i.e., novels within the genre of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Romanticism), and the unlikelihood of banishing them from the bookshelves, especially among the youth, Blair encouraged writers of novels to produce morally uplifting works: "Imitations of life and character have been made [the novel's] principal object. Relations have been professed to be given of the behaviour of persons in particular interesting situations, such as may actually occur in life; by means of which, what is laudable or defective in character and in conduct, may be pointed out, and placed in an useful light."[462] Blair lauds Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) as the epitome of embedding moral lessons in an adventure narrative: "No fiction, in any language, was ever better supported than the Adventures of Robinson Crusoe. While it is carried on with that appearance of truth and simplicity, which takes a strong hold of the imagination of all Readers, it suggests, at the same time, very useful instruction; by showing how much the native powers of man may be exerted for surmounting the difficulties of any external situation."[463] Blair goes on to justify the use of fictional stories to teach moral truths by appealing to tradition and audience attention. From

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the fact that some highly educated scholars in the early nineteenth century were aware of ancient writing on metal plates is not evidence that it would have been common knowledge among semiliterate frontier farm-boys." William J. Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe's Assumptions and Methodologies," *The FARMS Review* 6, no. 1 (1994): 469. Contrary to Hamblin's claim, the saturation of Blair's works in American education, from common schools to universities, from abridged forms to full unedited works, indicates that knowledge of ancient writings on metal plates was, in fact, quite common in early nineteenth century America. Hyrum's use of Blair's unedited works in his education at Moor's further erodes the assumptions of Smith's purported ignorance. For Metcalfe's essay, see Brent Lee Metcalfe, "Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 3 (1993).

[462] Blair, *Lectures (1784)*: 351.

[463] Ibid.

traditional grounds, Blair argues that couching truths in fictional works is a time-honored practice among ancient authors, who freely and legitimately used fictitious narratives to share knowledge and instruction about moral behavior. And in terms of audience attention, he adds, citing the work of Francis Bacon, real histories often unfold in ways that are too complex, too tangential, or simply too boring, for the audience to derive clear moral lessons and obtain a sense of justice and closure. Thus, "fictitious histories" are often the best vehicles to discover "truth."[464]

Yet, critical to understanding Blair's framework of "truth," and the representation of truth, is to recognize how Blair's concepts of "historical truth," "truth," and "fiction" do not share precisely the same definitional boundaries as modern notions might anticipate. For Blair, certain circumstances can blur the lines between these concepts, without transgressing fundamental truth claims. In some cases, "truth" merely functions as a means to an end:

> There remains to be treated of, another species of Composition in prose, which comprehends [includes] a very numerous, though, in general, a very insignificant class of Writings, known by the name of Romances and Novels. . . . In fact, fictitious histories [i.e., novels] might be employed for very useful purposes. They furnish one of the best channels for conveying instruction, for painting human life and manners, for showing the errors into which we are betrayed by our passions, for rendering virtue amiable and vice odious. The effect of well contrived stories, towards accomplishing these purposes, is stronger than any effect that can be produced by simple and naked instruction; and hence we find, that the wisest men in all ages, have more or less employed fables and fictions, as the vehicles of knowledge. . . . Lord Bacon takes notice of our taste for fictitious history, as a proof of the greatness and dignity of the human mind. He observes very ingeniously, that the objects of this world, and the common train of affairs which we behold going on in it, do not fill the mind, nor give it entire satisfaction. We seek for something that shall expand the mind in a greater degree; we seek for more heroic and illustrious deeds, for more diversified and surprising events, for a more splendid order of things, a more regular and just distribution of rewards and punishments than what we find here: because we meet not with these in true history, we

[464] Blair's genre of "fictitious history" blurs the boundary between modern conceptions of the "novel" and "historical fiction." Blair's discussion, in other words, does not merely describe purely imaginative works but also includes historical treatments with fictional elements consciously embedded in the narratives.

> have recourse to fictitious. We create worlds according to our fancy, in order to gratify our capacious desires.[465]

Blair further clarifies the relationship between fictitious history and moral truths in his advice to writers of epic and dramatic poetry, particularly those who choose ancient times and locations for their work. Here, even when writing "traditionary history," embellishing the truth for the sake of moral instruction is acceptable:

> Antiquity is favourable to those high and august ideas which Epic Poetry is designed to raise. It tends to aggrandise, in our imagination, both persons and events; and, what is still more material, it allows the Poet the liberty of adorning his subject by means of fiction. Whereas, as soon as he comes within the verge of real and authenticated history, this liberty is abridged. He must either confine himself wholly, as Lucan has done, to strict historical truth, at the expence of rendering his story jejune; or, if he goes beyond it, like Voltaire in his Henriade, this disadvantage follows, that, in well known events, the true and the fictitious parts of the plan do not naturally mingle, and incorporate with each other. . . . But for Epic Poetry, where Heroism is the ground-work, and where the object in view, is to excite admiration, antient or traditionary history is assuredly the safest region. There, the Author may lay hold on names, and characters, and events, not wholly unknown, on which to build his Story; while, at the same time, by reason of the distance of the period, or of the remoteness of the scene, sufficient licence is left him for fiction and invention.[466]

While such obvious bending of factual information might be deemed heretical to modern historical sensibilities, the act of embellishing truth for a good cause, or altering facts to create more entertaining stories for moral instruction, was not far removed from the strategies of writing in religious parables and allegories. "Of Parables, which form a species of Allegory," Blair instructs, "the Prophetical Writings are full: and if to us they sometimes appear obscure, we must remember, that in these early times, it was universally the mode throughout all the

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[465] Blair, *Lectures (1784)*: 349. Blair finishes the passage with the following Latin phrase: "'Accomodando,' says that great philosopher, 'Rerum simulachra ad animi desideria, non submittendo animum rebus, quod ratio facit, et historia.' Blair translates the phrase as, "Accommodating the appearances of things to the desires of the mind, not bringing down the mind, as history and philosophy do, to the course of events."

[466] Ibid., 398.

eastern nations, to convey sacred truths under mysterious figures and representations."[467] Thus, transforming "real and authenticated history" into fictitious parables was not far removed from transforming "strict historical truths" into moral truths adorned "by means of fiction." I would therefore argue, given Blair's enormous popularity and influence on early nineteenth-century culture, that an accurate critical lens for interpreting the truth claims of the *Book of Mormon* requires a paradigm that acknowledges the ways in which "fiction," "truth," "historical accuracy," and "historical truth," share decidedly permeable boundaries.

[467] Ibid., 389.

Chapter Eight: Inspired by the Holy Spirit:
Religion and Semi-Extemporaneous Oral Performance

In the previous chapters, my account of the development of oral performance has centered on the oratorical skills that students learned in American classrooms, Sunday schools, homeschools and mutual improvement societies, along with many of the texts in popular usage. Yet, the pedagogical strategies of oral drills, recitations and exhibitions constitute only one segment of a much larger matrix of oral practices. As described in chapter two, eddying within and around this educational core, youths were constantly exposed to a vibrant oral culture. When rural children returned home from school and from working in the fields, the evenings were spent around the family fireside, discussing local news, rehearsing school assignments, and telling stories. Outside the home, in surrounding neighborhoods and towns, youths experienced revivals and religious sermons, public speeches and political harangues, debates and deliberations, tavern and general store mingling, and communal reading of newspapers, all of which occurred in homes, inns, taverns, shops, town meetings, improvement and literary societies, social halls, churches and revival campgrounds.

Furthermore, institutionalized patterns of speech and vocabulary existed among various cultural groups, ranging from artisan classes to ethnic groups to specific religious sects. Thus, in order to grasp more fully Joseph Smith's narrative skills, this chapter will step outside the classroom to examine further the ramifications of Smith's training and participation as a Methodist exhorter, and how the style of speaking according to the impulses of the Holy Spirit informed his oratorical techniques.

Treasuring Up the Word of God

Exploring Smith's participation as a Methodist exhorter would not be complete without returning to his involvement in Sunday school. Sunday school education, as indicated in

chapter five, not only taught children how to read, memorize and internalize the moral teachings of the Bible but also prepared them for conversion and revivalism, pointing them toward the spiritual regeneration of the individual soul. Accompanying this religious education, particularly within the "Burned Over District," the upstate New York region filled with New Light preaching and enthusiastic revivalism, one more layer of oratorical training requires consideration: the exposure that Sunday school children received to the concept of "speaking by the Spirit," or rather, becoming an instrument in God's hands to speak His words according to the impulses and inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

Joseph Smith's books suggest a possible connection between his Sunday school years and his early exposure to the idea of speaking by the spirit. When he donated a collection of his books to the Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute, Smith provided a religious reader that deserves special comment: Erskine's *Gospel Sonnets* (1726). This religious reader contains a collection of much-loved poems written by the Scottish Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Ralph Erskine (1685-1752). It was a popular text to teach children how to read, while simultaneously instilling good moral values.

Gospel Sonnets does not appear to have been used in Palmyra or Manchester common schools, which suggests Smith's attendance at a Presbyterian Sunday school may well have introduced him to this text.[468] By teaching children how to read with poetic texts, instructors hoped children would learn the vocal techniques of handling verse, while the memorable rhyming schemes would simultaneously instill religious ethics. Because of Erskine's popularity, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century publications frequently contained a brief sketch of his life, or "Some Account of the Reverend Mr. Ralph Erskine." Children reading this account

[468] I must, of course, proceed with the caveat that researchers do not know when Joseph first obtained his copy of *Gospel Sonnets*. Nonetheless, given the large number of schoolbooks in the list of his donations, particularly ones in popular usage in Palmyra and Manchester common schools (such as Murray's *English Reader* and Goodrich's *American History*), historians cannot disregard the possibility that these texts may well have been Joseph's own schoolbooks. Regarding his participation at a Presbyterian Sunday school, Smith apparently did not join the faith, though his mother and three siblings were one-time members of the Western Presbyterian Church in Palmyra. See chapter 3, [pages 25-26]; see also, Vogel, *EMD*, 2: 127. Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 37.

would learn of Erskine's techniques behind his renowned religious eloquence, which consisted of diligent preparation and semi-extemporaneous delivery:

> He [Erskine] delivered few extemporary productions [i.e., entirely improvised sermons]. His sermons were generally the fruit of diligent study, and assiduous application. For the most part he wrote all; and kept very close by his notes in the delivery [i.e., he wrote out his sermons in full, and then referred to notes, or an outline, while preaching], except when the Lord was pleased to carry in upon his mind, in time of preaching, some pat ["apt"; sic] and apposite enlargements, whereof he had no previous study [extemporaneous additions], and to which he nevertheless chearfully gave way, as coming from Him, who has *the tongue of the learned*; who knows how to speak *a word in season to him that is weary*; and who says, *It shall be given you the same hour what ye shall speak; for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you*.[469]

This semi-extemporaneous method of preaching, which combined diligent study with a willingness to abandon premeditated scripts and launch into improvised sermons, falls within the same centuries-old tradition of inspired speaking found among such groups as Quakers, Methodists, Presbyterians, New Lights, nonconformists and dissenters of numerous traditions. Erskine's *Gospel Sonnets* serves as a reminder of how ubiquitous such beliefs and practices could be.

No less a focus for New Light preachers, treasuring up God's words became an important concern for children attending Sunday schools, prompting active and regular participating in reading, writing and the performance of scriptural texts. Within the urgent atmosphere of revivalism and spiritual regeneration, the memorization and recitation of sacred passages embedded the language of the Bible into their minds, and countless sermons imprinted the structural patterns of exhortations and biblical narratives. Such intensive instruction, even if never intended as preparation for a career in preaching, could manifest in surprising and unexpected ways.

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[469] Ralph Erskine, *Gospel Sonnets: Or, Spiritual Songs, in Six Parts*, 24th ed. (Edinburgh: James and Andrew Duncan, 1793). 14 (emphasis in original).

With all these years of intense oratorical preparation from multiple cultural sources, it should be no wonder how young children, overwhelmed by the spiritual enthusiasm of revival camp meetings, often broke out into hours-long extemporaneous exhortations. Indeed, such performances of oratorical skill emerged with the first outbreak of enthusiastic revivals in the period known today as the Second Great Awakening. "A boy from appearance about twelve years old," recounts Richard McNemar of the famous Kentucky Revivals at Cane Ridge and surrounding areas,

> retired from the stand in time of preaching under a very extraordinary impression, and having mounted a log at some distance, and raising his voice in a very affecting manner, he attracted the main body of the people in a few minutes. With tears streaming from his eyes, he cried aloud to the wicked, warning them of their danger, denouncing their certain doom if they persisted in their sins, expressing his love to their souls, and desire that they would turn to the Lord and be saved. He was held up by two men, and spoke for about an hour, with that convincing eloquence that could be inspired only from above.[470]

"Such little ones, of eight or ten years old," McNemar later observes, "raised upon the shoulders or held up in the arms of some one, in the midst of vast multitudes would speak in a manner so marvelous and astonishing, that persons of the most rugged passions would dissolve into tears."[471] In contrast to McNemar's admiration of such practices, the Reverend Charles Chauncey expressed his disapproval, citing the case of a teenage girl, "about 15 Years of Age" who lambasted her parents with an exhortation that lasted "about four Hours together."[472] And later, when quoting the letter of a "faithful Friend," Chauncey selected a passage to demonstrate the inappropriate enthusiasm of the itinerant preacher, James Davenport (1716-1757): "at a *Meeting* of many of his People, at his Lodgings, he continued his Speech to them for almost *twenty four Hours* together, 'till he was *quite wild*, and so spent and overcome, that he did not

[470] McNemar, *The Kentucky Revival*: 25-26.

[471] Ibid., 34.

[472] Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the Sate of Religion in New-England* (Boston: Samuel Eliot in Cornhill, 1743). 169. For this example, I am indebted to Ann Taves' work, Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*: 33.

recover his *Strength* and *Calmness of Thought* and *Passions*, 'till after some Days Confinement to his Chamber; all of which, was, with him, the pure Effect of the *mighty Energy of the Spirit* upon his Mind."[473] When they relinquished the fear of failure and trusted in the emotional impulses they ascribed to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, aspiring preachers could open the mysteries of heaven and sermonize for hours on end.

Guided by the Holy Spirit

Apart from his Sunday school lessons and revival experiences, Smith's greatest influence in the development of his semi-extemporaneous style likely originated from, or at least was greatly enhanced by, his training as a Methodist exhorter. As noted in the introduction of this dissertation, Smith's statement that he "became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect" and "felt some desire to be united with them" receives support from several other sources.[474] William, Joseph's brother, and Oliver Cowdery, one of Smith's closest associates and the primary scribe for *The Book of Mormon*, both mentioned the itinerant Methodist preacher George Lane as being influential on the young prophet.[475] Lane, whom Cowdery described as "a

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[473] Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts*: 189 (emphasis in original).

[474] Smith, *HC (1948)*, 1:3.

[475] Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*: 22. William notes of Lane, "In 1822 and 1823, the people in our neighborhood were very much stirred up with regard to religious matters by the preaching of a Mr. Lane, an Elder of the Methodist Church, and celebrated throughout the country as a 'great revival preacher'. . . . After the excitement had subsided, in a measure, each sect began to beat up for volunteers. . . . Joseph, then about seventeen years of age, had become seriously inclined [to join a church], though not 'brought out,' as the phrase was." Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 494-95. William's remembrances, along with the dating of George Lane's revivals in Palmyra, are some of the historical accounts that create problems for the official narration of Smith's first divine experiences. According to the standard official account, Smith received his First Vision in 1820 at the age of fourteen. Yet, road lists, tax records of the Manchester property, statements by Smith himself and others close to him, combined with contradictory chronologies and observations by residents, provide a context to the First Vision that points a date later than 1820. As Vogel insists, "No matter how anachronistic Smith's later story of the revival and his quest for the true church, the sequencing of events remained constant. There was a revival, followed by his family's conversion to Presbyterianism, followed by confusion over which church was right, then a determination to join none of them. This was Joseph's emotional chronology which, when placed in the historical setting of the 1824-1825 revival, enables one to look not to 1820 or 1823 but to 1825 and beyond for the decisive moments when his claims became prohibitive of other sects and he assumed the task of founding the only true church." *The Making of a Prophet*: 63.

talented man possessing a good share of literary endowments," preached in such a forceful and moving style that "our brother's mind [Joseph Smith's] became awakened."[476] Around the same time, according to Palmyra resident Pomeroy Tucker, Smith "joined the probationary class of the Methodist church in Palmyra, and made some active demonstrations of engagedness."[477] Orsamus Turner, another childhood acquaintance of Smith, recalled, "after catching a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting, away down in the woods, on the Vienna road, he [Smith] was a passable exhorter in evening meetings."[478] How extensive Smith's participation was remains unknown.[479] Nevertheless, Smith's pursuit of Methodist-style preaching would have introduced him to the two-part system of preparation that John Wesley encouraged among the lay preachers and exhorters: 1) treasuring up the words of God in the mind, so that the Holy Spirit would have plenty of material to draw on during sermons and exhortations, and 2) speaking according to the impulses of the Spirit, allowing all the preparation and reading to emerge (semi-)extemporaneously, in the moment of speaking.

For his lay Methodist preachers and exhorters, John Wesley had long espoused a program of diligent reading and preparation, which included the study of "Scripture, Greek, Hebrew, texts of the early Church fathers, secular history, science, logic, metaphysics, natural philosophy, mathematics, human nature, and manners."[480] In order to direct lay preachers in such studies, Wesley "edited and published the fifty-volume *Christian Library* with the idea that

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[476] Qtd. in Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*: 23. For Cowdery's full text, see Vogel, *EMD*, 2: 422-25. For more detailed information on George Lane's ministry, see Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*: 22-27.

[477] Vogel, *EMD*, 3: 94.

[478] Ibid., 50.

[479] Marquardt correctly notes, "Joseph did not become a licensed exhorter because such persons had to be members in full standing with the denomination." Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*: 50. This would not, however, prevent Smith from occasionally exhorting in class meetings and revivals. Anyone moved by the Holy Spirit to stand and exhort could do so, whether man, woman or child. The creation of licensed exhorters was an attempt to maintain quality control over exhortations by reigning in the exuberance of lay members who could, and often did, espouse doctrines at odds with the principles of the wider movement.

[480] Vicki Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley's Methodism: Reading, Writing, and Speaking to Believe* (Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2008). 111.

the preachers would read these works volume by volume, thus gaining the background in Christian history and theology they needed for the work."[481] The impetus behind such preparation was no doubt pragmatic: even though preachers are instruments in God's hands, the promptings of the Holy Spirit are meaningless when the vessels are empty. Thus, treasuring up knowledge created a storehouse in the preacher's mind, which the Spirit could use to direct a vividly performed message that would respond to the immediate needs of the audience.

Smith's active involvement in Methodist exhortations offers further insight into the development of his skills in oral performance, as well as the history and development of the semi-extemporaneous style. Methodist exhorters were part of a larger movement of lay exhorters who participated in a variety of Protestant traditions. In general, these lay preachers, when inspired or called by the Holy Spirit, extemporaneously exhorted their listeners on such themes as awakening from the sleep of sin, exercising faith and repentance, getting baptized, keeping the commandments, remembering God's goodness and mercies, and coming unto Christ.[482]

In more formal settings, a preacher and an exhorter might work in tandem: the preacher would deliver a sermon, followed by the exhorter's appeal to the audience to reflect on the preacher's message and to incorporate the gospel principles from the sermon into their lives.[483] During informal gatherings, however, exhorters made their appearance outside the rigid structures of any organized system. As Ann Taves notes, "exhorting was a familiar, yet flexible concept that encompassed a range of extemporaneous performances, from the commonplace,

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[481] Ibid.

[482] *The Book of Mormon* is replete with extemporaneous exhortations, which, in turn, find their stylistic origins in the exhortations of the New Testament. Compare, for example, Mosiah 24:14-18 and 1 Ne. 15: 25 with 2 Tim. 4:2.

[483] Marquardt identifies this pattern in Methodism: "In the Methodist style of worship, a sermon was preached in which points were drawn from a given text or passage from the Bible. After the message, an exhortation was usually given by another speaker who would reemphasize the points made in the preacher's exposition and plead with the people to take seriously the message they had just heard." Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*: 49.

information 'exhortation' of one lay person by another to the public exhortation of a group by a layperson. In the first instance, exhorting was a species of earnest conversation; in the last, it approached, and at times could not be distinguished from, preaching or teaching."[484] If moved by the Holy Spirit, anyone–man, woman or children–could rise up spontaneously and proclaim the words of God, exhorting their fellow listeners to greater piety and righteousness.

While the practice of extemporaneous sermons within the Protestant tradition reached back to the beginnings of the Reformation and was fueled by the concept of the "Priesthood of Believers," the immediate antecedents of the exhortation tradition in Joseph Smith's culture originated from the semi-extemporaneous and impromptu styles of the "New Light" preachers who appeared in the British American colonies a generation earlier, during the First Great Awakening (1730s-1740s).[485] During this time, the colonies experienced a series of religious revivals that would eventually lead to rancorous schisms between congregations in several denominations.

On one side of the divide was an assemblage that became known as the "New Lights," a cross-denominational movement among churches adhering to forms of Calvinist theology.[486]

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[484] Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*: 59-60.

[485] One of the central tenets of the Protestant movement in reaction to Roman Catholicism was the principle of the "Priesthood of Believers," an ideological movement that bypassed the barriers between the authority of church leaders and the self-determination of lay members. One of the key effects of this ideology was the creation of "a new sense of Christian liberty for the ordinary Christian, who felt no longer bound by the authority of extrabiblical traditions or by ecclesiastical hierarchies." In this reaction against the hierarchies of church governance, "each believer has immediate access to God through the one mediator, Jesus Christ. . . . It cut through the tangles of medieval Catholicism that tended to place barriers between the individual Christian and God." W. S. Barker, "Priesthood of Believers," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 939. In terms of the democratic impulse in American Protestantism, Nathan Hatch adds that the members of egalitarian-minded denominations "denied the age-old distinction that set the clergy apart as a separate order of men, and they refused to defer to learned theologians and traditional orthodoxies." Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989). 9-10. Thus, anyone who felt called by the spirit to preach and exhort could do so, regardless of their lack of formal training.

[486] New Light and Old Light responses to revivalism included such denominations as Congregationalism, Presbyterianism, Anglicanism, members of the nascent Methodist movement, Baptists, and various dissenting and separatists groups. Harry Stout indicates, "the term *New Light* emerged in New England during the Great awakening (1740-1743) to describe the evangelical supporters of George Whitefield and the mass revivals he inspired." Harry S. Stout, "New Lights," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed.

New Lights often interpreted powerful emotional responses to religious experiences as outward manifestations of the Spirit of God inwardly converting sinners. Such manifestations often took the form of spontaneous outbursts, singing, crying, moaning, calling out, clapping, speaking in tongues, impromptu exhortations, fainting and visions. On the other side, the more conservative "Old Lights" interpreted such behavior as nothing more than emotional enthusiasm, unrelated to anything from God or the scriptures, and serving no other purpose than to disrupt services and alarm fellow parishioners with their antics.[487]

Among the New Light preachers, George Whitefield (1714-1770), a young itinerant from Britain who helped John and Charles Wesley found Methodism, was certainly the best known and most dynamic. According to Harry Stout, Whitefield's arrival in colonial America with his innovative style of sermonizing became "the most sensational event in the history of New England preaching."[488] Prior to Whitefield's arrival, religious leaders in New England invested a significant amount of time in the preparation of their lessons. Leaning on their seminary

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Daniel G. Reid, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 816. In contrast, Stout further describes how the Old Lights were the 'socially and theologically conservative opponents of George Whitefield" who "denied that the Great Awakening was a work of God, claiming instead that it destroyed the peace and unity of the church by pitting enthusiastic lay people and itinerant preachers against the established clergy of New England." See "Old Lights," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 841.

[487] The three-fold assault of itinerant preachers, hordes of lay exhorters, and the enthusiastic behaviors of revivalism had the effect of galvanizing clergymen and their congregations into identifying with either the New Light or Old Light camps. Within the milieu of theological tensions and debate, Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Edwards emerged as unofficial spokesmen for each side of the debate over religious enthusiasm. The Reverend Charles Chauncy (1705–1787), a Congregational minister in Boston and firmly in the conservative Old Light faction, launched his criticisms from Boston, the urban center of conservative Calvinistic theology. In response, the voice of Reverend Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), one of the greatest philosopher-theologians in American history, a Congregational minister at Northampton, Massachusetts, countered from the frontier wilderness of the Connecticut River Valley, the center of the New Light movement and a hotspot of the religious revivals. The debates between Chauncy and Edwards became legendary, marking not only two symbolic epicenters of opposing theological views but also revealing a gradient of cultural differences across regional bounds. For an analysis of the Chauncy-Edwards debates, see *The New England Soul*: 202-11. For a valuable explication of Chauncy's and Edwards' philosophies on enthusiasm, see Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*: 30-41.

[488] Stout, *The New England Soul*: 189. Religion scholars Jon Butler, Grant Wacker and Randall Balmer argue that "Whitefield made major changes in colonial preaching. . . . He memorized his sermons and spoke without notes. He varied his voice. He gestured, sometimes calmly, at other in agitation. He held audiences in awe and created the model for modern American revivalists, from Charles Finney in the nineteenth century to Billy Sunday and Billy Graham in the twentieth century." Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (New York: Oxford UP, 2008). 120.

training in classical rhetoric, ministers approached their sermons by contemplating the message they wanted to share, utilizing the analytical and performative paradigm of the five canons of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery.[489]

They then assembled their ideas into a pattern typical of Puritan sermons, which usually focused on the interpretation and application of a biblical text.[490] Next, ministers wrote out their sermons, aiming for what was typically an hour-long oration. And when it came time to preach, they would often make use of their notes and manuscripts to navigate their way through the sermon (whether by reading the entire sermon directly from the notes or merely referencing them periodically to aid the memory).[491] Furthermore, in accordance with their rhetorical training, ministers also frequently employed basic hand gestures to emphasize various doctrinal points, while keeping the rest of the body stationary in an attempt to communicate visually the solemnity of their message. Regardless what variations in preaching strategies or embodied practices a minister might employ, the overall structure and presentation of the sermon took a relatively standard form: the minister delivered a premeditated sermon to an audience, and the

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[489] So pervasive are the principles of classical rhetoric in Anglican and Congregational sermons that Harry Stout chose the five canons as "an organizing principle" for his book, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (1986). For his definitions, see Stout, *The New England Soul*: 5-6. For a detailed discussion on the role of classical rhetoric in New England preaching, see Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954). 300-30.

[490] "The Puritan sermon," Perry Miller informs, "quotes the text and 'opens' it as briefly as possible, expounding circumstances and context, explaining its grammatical meanings, reducing its tropes and schemata to prose, and setting forth its logical implications; the sermon then proclaims in a flat, indicative sentence the 'doctrine' contained in the text or logically deduced from it, and proceeds to the first reason or proof. Reason follows reason, with no other transition than a period and a number; after the last proof is stated there follow the uses or application, also in numbered sequence, and the sermon ends when there is nothing more to be said." *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*: 332-33.

[491] While generalizations can be helpful in contrasting Puritan sermons from other denominational practices, it is nevertheless important to recognize the variations within each tradition. The methods of delivering sermons could differ significantly from one pastor to the next: some inexperienced preachers, new to the profession and insecure with their skills, might deliver verbatim a speech they had earlier memorized; others, equally insecure or short of time (or lethargic), might simply read a sermon straight from their notes, with heads buried in their papers; more experienced orators, on the other hand, often made use of nothing more than a brief outline of their sermon, only occasionally referring to their notes to help their memory; and still other experienced pastors might abandon notes altogether, preparing for sermons by meditating on the scriptures and lessons they wanted to share, mentally sketching an outline of their sermon, and then finally delivering the message with ease and spontaneity from the pulpit.

audience sat still and listened. In the decades leading up to Whitefield's arrival, many New England ministers increasingly read their entire sermons directly from their notes, resulting in sermons that were flat, monotone and difficult to endure.[492]

Whitefield's method of preaching differed radically from these soporific sermons. While the structural organization of his speeches reflected both Puritan and Anglican traditions, his delivery was an abrupt departure from standard contemporary methods.[493] In sharp contrast to the staid preaching that dominated New England pulpits, Whitefield's performances were "sensational": he engaged his full body in theatrical gestures and postures normally reserved for stage plays; he fully committed to the affective features of his message, thundering over the audience with God's wrath in one moment, while flooding the pulpit with tears in another; he deployed a penetrating style of direct address that demanded active participation and responses from the audience; he regularly abandoned the use of his notes and spoke extemporaneously, focusing all his attention on the audience; and, perhaps most significantly, he invoked the audience's imagination with intense visual imagery, inviting the audience to conjure up key

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[492] See Stout, *The New England Soul*: 192. In a sermon preached on May 19, 1723, Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729), the most prominent Congregational minister in the Connecticut River Valley, criticized this practice in a sermon he delivered in Northampton, Massachusetts. In his address, published the following year under the title *The Defects of Preachers Reproved in a Sermon* (1724), Stoddard specifically urged fellow ministers to stop reading their sermons, flatly stating that such a practice "is not to be allowed." The problem, he stated, was that "the reading of sermons is a dull way of preaching. Sermons when read are not delivered with authority and in an affecting way. . . . Experience shows that sermons read are not so profitable as others." In contrast, Stoddard further argues, "when sermons are delivered without notes, the looks and gesture of the minister is a great means to command attention and stir up affection. Men are apt to be drowsy in hearing the word, and the liveliness of the preacher is a means to stir up the attention of the hearers and beget suitable affection in them." Solomon Stoddard, *The Defects of Preachers Reproved in a Sermon Preached at Northampton, May 19th, 1723* (New London, CT: T. Green, 1724). 23-24. Stoddard's semi-extemporaneous style was different from the unpremeditated style Whitefield frequently employed: Stoddard's style constrained extemporaneous material within the framework of predetermined sermons, while Whitefield's style often involved sermons spoken on the impulses of the moment, wherever they led. Meredith Neuman further expounds on the differences between the two styles, indicating, "Puritan ministers often spoke *ex tempore*, a style of delivery that might suggest the enthusiasm and spontaneity associated with later trends in evangelical preaching from the Great Awakening through current-day revivalism, but such a comparison is misleading. Puritan *ex tempore* skill in the pulpit was developed through university training in which the memorization of lectures and sermons was standard pedagogical method." Neuman, *Jeremiah's Scribes*: 14-15. For more detailed information related to Smith's own style, see chapter four.

[493] For a comparison on the development of Puritan and Anglican sermons, see Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*: 332-33.

moments in biblical narratives in their minds–a vision-inducing strategy that prompted many spectators to *see* the actual sacred events with the spiritual eyes of their faith.[494]

"*Visions* now become common," the renowned Reverend Charles Chauncey complained of Whitefield's sermons, "and *Trances* also, the Subjects of which were in their own Conceit [imagination] transported from Earth to Heaven, where they saw and heard most glorious Things; conversed with *Christ* and *Holy Angels*; had opened to them the *Book of Life*, and were permitted to read the names of persons there, and the like."[495] Whitefield's mesmerizing style was astonishing. New England had never witnessed such a form of preaching, and thousands flocked to hear Whitefield on his tours throughout the eastern states.[496] Benjamin Franklin, a friend and occasional publisher of Whitefield's diaries and sermons, observed one of Whitefield's sermons in London and famously estimated the audience to be thirty thousand in number. This personal observation caused Franklin to admit that previous "newspaper accounts of his having preached to 25,000 people in the fields" were no doubt true.[497]

Key to Whitefield's preaching was the conviction that the Holy Ghost guided his extemporaneous performances. "I find I gain greater light and knowledge by preaching extempore," Whitefield recorded in his journal, "so that I fear I should quench the Spirit, did I not go on to speak as He gives me utterance."[498] Whitefield was drawing on a tradition that

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[494] For Harry Stout's overview of these characteristics, see Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991). 39-44; see also 93-95. For Ben Franklin's observations, see Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*: 108-09.

[495] Qtd. in Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*: 30. See also Richard L. Bushman, ed. *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745*, Documentary Problems in Early American History (Chapel Hill, NC: Institute of Early American History and Culture and the U of North Carolina P, 1969), 119.

[496] Ben Franklin, an eyewitness to several of Whitefield's performances, noted that "that multitudes of all Sects and Denominations that attended his sermons were enormous." Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*: 105 (spelling modernized).

[497] Ibid., 108.

[498] Iain Murray, ed. *George Whitefield's Journals*, March, 1960 ed. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998; reprint, 7th), 205.

existed among Puritans and other likeminded dissenting and nonconformist preachers who reacted against set forms of prayers and sermons, which they perceived as relics of Roman popery. Repetition of fixed texts was "a sign of spiritual deadness"; thus, by implication, spontaneous utterances derived from emotional and spiritual impulses were signs of life, signs of the Spirit of God, and confirmation that the speaker had been converted, or regenerated.[499] This perhaps circular argument, in turn, authorized the power and authority of the extemporaneous speaker; for if the Holy Spirit were the actual source of the spoken words, then the speaker was merely an instrument in God's hands, a mouthpiece, through which God uttered his mind and will.

Within this conception of spiritual utterance, extemporaneous sermons occupied a liminal space between the prewritten but potentially fallible sermons authored by the human mind and the spontaneous exhortations ultimately attributed to divine sources. Words delivered by inspiration of the Holy Ghost were not simply moral and spiritual lessons; they became direct revelations from God. The Puritans "believed that the Lord spoke through their mouths," Gustafson indicates, "and all their ascetic disciplines of language, mind, and body were designed to make themselves more perfect vehicles for truth."[500] Neither was this ability to channel God's words limited to chosen ministers. Lay exhorters, be they ever so humble or illiterate, could also participate in divinely-guided preaching, destabilizing the power of orthodox hierarchies by appealing to direct, "unmediated access to God's will."[501] Whitefield's effect on his contemporary audiences was spectacular, and the influence he exerted on the religious and political culture of the British colonies would reverberate long after his death.

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[499] Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory & Performance in Early America*: 17.

[500] Ibid., 18.

[501] Ibid., 17. For a discussion on the relationship between language, power and authority, see ibid., 1-39, esp. 12-19, with regards to what Gustafson terms "the self-effacing Puritan ideal." See also Stout, *The New England Soul*: 163-64, 204.

Whitefield's dynamic sermons inspired many New England clergymen to participate in revivals, particularly those of the rising generation who sought to rejuvenate the spiritual climate in North America. Responding to the initial work of Whitefield and some of his close evangelical associates, "a swarm of native-born New England itinerants crisscrossed the region, reaching nearly every parish along the line with their extemporaneous proclamation of the New Birth."[502] No less eager to participate in the spiritual revolution than these itinerant preachers, a vast army of lay exhorters emerged to follow in their footsteps, though often preaching a variety of different doctrines that spanned across the theological spectrum. According to Taves, "The number of lay exhorters rose sharply during the early 1740s—they sprang up, said one minister, 'like *Mushrooms in a Night*'—and bore much of the responsibility for the spread of the revival."[503] For several years, itinerant preachers and exhorters pursued their tireless circuits among cities and towns, but then the widespread fires of revivalism began to subside and the general excitement began to recede once again into the normal routines of daily life. Yet, as Ahlstrom notes, "short-lived flames continued to shoot up in various localities from time to time, especially during Whitefield's later tours."[504] But even these sporadic fireworks diminished with the passing of the "Grand Itinerant." On September 30, 1770, while on his seventh preaching tour of the United States, Whitefield died in Massachusetts.[505]

Whitefield's death symbolically marked the denouement of an era of spiritual revivalism in British North America, as the colonies turned their attention to their struggle for

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[502] *The New England Soul*: 200. Charles Chauncy also makes use of the metaphor of flying insects with exhorters, describing how after Whitefield and Tennet, "*Swarms* of *Exhorters* have appear'd in the Land, and been admir'd and run after, though many of them could scarce speak common Sense." Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts*: 258. Sydney Ahlstrom notes, "The chief events of the awakening were of two sorts: first, the whirlwind campaigns of the 'Grand Itinerants,' Whitefield, Tennent, and the highly unstable Davenport, followed by a large number of lay itinerants and clerical interlopers; second, the intensified extension of the preaching and pastoral labors of the regular New England ministers, now awakened to the power of personal evangelism." Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1972). 286.

[503] Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*: 59.

[504] Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*: 403.

[505] See Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*: 278-80.

independence and the formation of a new nation. But itinerant preachers did not forget Whitefield's style and influence, and neither did lay exhorters cease their evangelizing efforts.[506] When the young American nation emerged from the Revolution, lay exhorters and their fiery extemporaneous messages became the engine for unprecedented growth in their churches. This was particularly true for the Methodists, the denomination that had attracted Joseph Smith Jr.'s attention before he founded the Mormon Faith. Whereas Methodists had been a relatively small and insignificant denomination prior to the Revolution, the organization experienced an explosion in membership in the decades that followed. By 1800, Methodists numbered approximately 64,000.[507] "By 1820 Methodist membership numbered a quarter million; by 1830 it was twice that number."[508] And by 1840, the various Methodist sects reached over 800,000.[509] And though he eventually chose not to join the burgeoning movement, Smith's training as a Methodist exhorter nevertheless informed his understanding of the ways in which the Spirit, or Holy Ghost, could inspire extemporaneous sermons to affect an audience. Furthermore, the same philosophy would emerge in Smith's new religious movement.

Drawing on the lay exhorter tradition of extemporaneous speech, Smith both practiced and encouraged impromptu sermons guided by the Holy Ghost. In an 1829 revelation, given, as Smith claimed, through the inspiration of God, the Lord instructed future leaders of the new faith on how they should preach the gospel message: "And behold, you are they who are ordained of me. . . to declare my gospel, according to the power of the Holy Ghost which is in

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[506] Exhorters and preachers frequently hearkened back to the great evangelical preachers of the First Great Awakening, mythologizing the previous generation for their work and the extraordinary outpourings of the spirit. Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875), one of the greatest evangelical preachers of Joseph Smith's age, described "President Edwards and Whitefield" in glowing terms: "These bold and devoted servants of God came out and declared those particular doctrines of grace, Divine sovereignty, and election, and they were greatly blessed." Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York; Boston: Leavitt, Lord; Crocker & Brewster, 1835). 189.

[507] Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000). 4.

[508] Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*: 3.

[509] Andrews, *The Methodists*: 236.

you. . . . These words are not of men nor of man, but of me [Christ]. . . . For it is my voice which speaketh them unto you; for they are given by my Spirit unto you."[510] In 1832, another revelation to Smith's lay preachers and missionaries instructed them, "Neither take ye thought beforehand what ye shall say, but treasure up in your minds continually the words of life, and it shall be given you in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man."[511] The moment-by-moment inspiration behind extemporaneous sermons was more specifically articulated in an 1833 revelation to Smith and his companion, Sidney Rigdon: ". . . verily I say unto you, lift up your voices unto this people; speak the thoughts that I shall put into your hearts, and you shall not be confounded before men; for it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say."[512] Nevertheless, in spite of drawing on a well-established, centuries-long tradition of speaking according to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, Smith did not confine his conception and application of the process to traditional boundaries.

Along with traditional notions of speaking according to the Spirit (traditions that reached back to the Reformation), Smith adapted and extended the method beyond common practices of the technique. As Lynne Wilson convincingly argues, "Joseph Smith Junior's pneumatology [doctrinal conceptions of the Holy Ghost] was not solely a product of his environment but included a greater breadth and depth than his contemporaries' teachings."[513] Adapting the practice of speaking according to the impulses of the Spirit, Smith extended the concept to a unique application: the revelatory translation of purportedly ancient texts.[514] In

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[510] Joseph Smith, *The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1991). 18: 32-35. All subsequent references to the Doctrine and Covenants will appear as *D&C*, followed by section and verse numbers (e.g., *D&C*, 18: 32-35).

[511] *D&C*, 84: 85.

[512] *D&C,* 100:5-6.

[513] Lynne Wilson, "Joseph Smith's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit Contrasted with Cartwright, Campbell, Hodge, and Finney" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Marquette University, 2010), 6.

[514] The expansion of Smith's pneumatology to include the translation of texts should not, however, be misconstrued as an entirely innovative application of his seer stones. Long before Smith, John Dee and

the course of Smith's production of the *Book of Mormon* (presented as a translation from "Reformed Egyptian" into English), Oliver Cowdery, Smith's primary scribe on the project, asked if he could participate as a translator of the work. In an April 1829 revelation, Cowdery was told how the gift of translation operated:

> . . . you shall receive a knowledge concerning the engravings of old records, which are ancient, which contain those parts of my scripture of which has been spoken by the manifestation of my Spirit. Yea, behold, *I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation*.[515]

Yet, when Cowdery attempted to translate, presumably by duplicating Smith's process of gazing into the seer stone (though he may have also used his own divining rod), nothing happened. Discouraged, Cowdery gave up. Smith then claimed to offer up a divine revelation from the Lord, informing them both of what went wrong:

> Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it [the translation] unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me [i.e., no effort on the part of the translator; passive reception]. But, behold, I say unto you, that *you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right*. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred *save it be given you from me*. Now, if you had known this you could have translated."[516]

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his primary scryer, Edward Kelly, used a seer stone ("showstone") to translate revealed books written in an angelic language, including such titles as, "*48 Claves angelicae, Liber scientiae auxilii et victoriae terrestris, Tabula bonorum angelorum invocationes* [sic], *De heptarchia mystica*, and *Liber Logaeth*." Deborah E. Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999). 39. For Harkness' discussion about these books, along with Dee's magical implements and their relationship to the biblical Urim and Thummim, see ibid., 26-45.

[515] *D&C,* 8:1-3, emphasis mine.

[516] *D&C,* 9:7-10.

Smith never recorded precisely how he "translated" *The Book of Mormon*, though theories would abound.[517] Nevertheless, the previous revelations to Cowdery (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Sections 8 and 9), offer the most direct explanation, articulated by Smith himself.[518] As Ann Taves notes, when describing the first of these revelations (an observation equally applicable to the second), "D&C 8, coming to us directly from the Lord via Smith (or from the recesses of Smith's mind) at the time when Smith and Cowdery were in the midst of producing the Book of Mormon is the closest thing we have to a real-time subjective report."[519] Furthermore, these revelations suggests a dialectical process, rather than a unidirectional endowment of words, in which the "translator" engages his mind in the creation of possible renderings, and then consults his affective spiritual sensations for evidence of confirmation from the Holy Ghost.[520] Indeed, Smith, in a September 6, 1842 letter, made an indirect but telling comment about his understanding of the process of "translation." When expounding on Malachi 4:5-6 of the Old Testament, Smith indicated, "I might have rendered a plainer translation to this [scripture], but it is sufficiently plain to suit my purpose as it stands [as it is written]."[521] Though he was not specifically describing his process of translating the *Book of Mormon*, Smith nevertheless reveals that his definition and conceptualization of the process of "translation" includes a dynamic in which the translator can choose among alternative

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[517] John Welch and Tim Rathbone succinctly state the problem: "Only Joseph Smith knew the actual process, and he declined to describe it in public." Welch and Rathbone, "Translation," 282. For an overview of the translation accounts, see Van Wagoner and Walker, "Joseph Smith."

[518] Because this revelation was directed at Oliver Cowdery (who usually used a divining rod) and not Smith (who preferred the seer stone), some scholars have questioned whether or not this revelation provides an accurate description of Smith's revelatory translation process during the production of the *Book of Mormon*. For Ann Taves' review of these positions, followed by her own analysis, see Ann Taves, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2016). 245-47.

[519] Ibid., 247.

[520] For further discussion on Smith's pneumatology, see Wilson, "Joseph Smith's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," 263-66. For an expanded discussion on "dialogic revelation" within Mormonism, see Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*: 209-39.

[521] *D&C,* 128:18.

renderings of a passage, rather than being limited to a set of fixed phrases revealed from a divine source. In Smith's developing cosmology, speaking according to the impulses of the Holy Spirit thus involved a process in which the inspired mortal contributed to the articulation and shaping of God's words. Rather than being a passive instrument in the hands of heaven, the divinely-inspired speaker appropriated an active measure of mortal agency to participate as a co-author and co-translator in divine utterances.

Chapter Nine: Synthesis:
Storytelling Culture and Oral-Formulaic Composition

In order to understand how Joseph Smith, a nineteenth-century rural farmboy in the northeastern United States, could dictate naturally enough an epic narrative the length of the *Book of Mormon*, this study has reviewed several cultural streams of influence that would have provided Smith with the necessary skills to produce such a work. In education, the rigorous exposure to oratorical performance, combined with the overlapping pedagogical strategies in home schools, common schools, Sunday schools and self-improvement venues, inculcated children with a set of critical language skills, which included focused attention on the nature and construction of language, memorization, narrative analysis, imitation, genre styles, composition and amplification. Concurrent with these educational practices, Smith grew up in a culture where people regularly gathered together around firesides at home and in public spaces to tell stories, exchange news, participate in communal readings, engage in political discourse, debate and barter. And finally, not without least significance, the fraught culture of revivalism, filled with sermons, prayers and exhortations–all governed by the concept of speaking according to the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit—instilled extemporaneous and semi-extemporaneous speaking skills, delivered in a language register that interwove biblical-style English with the idiolect of the speakers. Indeed, in this fertile context, it would be remarkable if Smith had not adopted such a style in his creation of new scripture.

The convergence of these multiple cultural streams of oratorical training would be sufficient to identify the oral traditions and practices Smith utilized in the creation of the *Book of Mormon*. And yet, the examination of his source of influence remains incomplete without the consideration of two additional sources of influence. First, Smith's ability to sustain an epic narrative over a ninety-day composition period reveals skills in narrative creation that point to the storytelling culture of the age. And second, the text of the *Book of Mormon* reveals further

information about its construction: the language does not merely reflect a biblical-sounding style but also incorporates a specific style of formulaic repetition. Therefore, in order to complete this exploration of Smith's production of the *Book of Mormon*, this chapter will therefore explore the art of storytelling in the early nineteenth century, followed by an examination of how the multiple sources of oratorical training in Smith's world, particularly the techniques and strategies of semi-extemporaneous sermons and exhortations, merged into a system of oral-formulaic composition.

Storytelling in Nineteenth-Century America

In a culture where storytelling constituted one of the primary means of entertainment, where countless aspiring storytellers honed their abilities around evening firesides, Smith had a reputation as skilled raconteur among raconteurs. Years before he produced the *Book of Mormon*, young Joe Smith was known for telling a good story. Thus, a return to Smith's childhood is in order to revisit the context in which he would have experienced the art of telling dramatic and captivating stories.

When the evening approached and the candles were lit in the Smith household, the act would have marked a shift from the world of daytime concerns to the culture of the night. The lighting of candles was not merely a routine act in the evenings to provide a small amount of extra working light; "candle-lighting" was the cultural term for the moment when darkness fully descended on the home.[522] Even with the light from the hearth and a solitary candle or two, darkness would have filled the room. "Familiar faces and furniture, as a consequence," Roger Ekirch informs, "took on an altered appearance. Visibility was limited to an object's façade, not its top and sides. Ceilings remained preponderantly dark, and often one could barely see from

[522] Ekirch, *At Day's Close*: 109. In his entry for 17 November 1835, Smith writes, "This has been a fine pleasant day although cool, this Evening at early candlelight I pr[e]ached at the School house, returned home and retired to rest." Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 117.

one end of a room to the other."[523] Within this altered state of space and perception, storytelling, an ancient practice from time out of mind, took center stage: "The spoken word, in the absence of competing distractions, acquired unique clarity at night. Darkness encouraged listening as well as flights of fancy. Word, not gestures, shaped the mind's dominant images."[524] The power of oral narration, in combination with the flickering fire and candlelight, prompted journeys of imagination that reached far beyond the confines of a family farm or rural neighborhood. These nightly sessions catalyzed the imagination to such intense levels of mental visualization that writers like Caroline Bowles Southey compared the internal imagery to actual sight:

> . . . often, often have I looked back with a sickening heart, a yearning tenderness, a bitter joy, to those quiet hours. . . within the walls of that old-fashioned parlour, where the fire-light flashed broad and bright on the warm damask curtains, and I sat on that low footstool by the hearth, at the feet of one who never tired of telling those tales of other days, which I was never weary of listening to. Hers was the true graphic art of story-telling. Her portraits lived and breathed; and while I hung upon her words with mute attention, the long procession of generations gone passed before me—not shadowy phantoms, but substantial forms—defined realities—distinguished, each from each, by every nice modification of characteristic peculiarity. . . . All these, recalled to earth by the enchanted wand, were made to re-act their former parts on the great stage for my especial pleasure.[525]

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[523] Ekirch, *At Day's Close*: 109, 11.

[524] Ibid., 179-80.

[525] Caroline Bowles Southey, "Broad Summerford," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, July 1827, 33. This essay forms the tenth chapter of Southey's two-volume work, later published in 1829: *Chapters on Churchyards*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Edinburgh; London: William Blackwood; T. Cadell, 1829). For further background information, see Edward Dowden, ed. *The Correspondence of Robert Southey with Caroline Bowles* (Dublin and London: Hodges, Figgis, & Co. and Longmans, Green, & Co., 1881), xxv. In a similar description of fireside stories, the reviewer of a new edition of Grimm's fairytales visualizes childhood memories in an effort to recreate the magical environment: "We when were young—and despite our grey hairs and tottering feet, we feel young still over a fairy-tale—we used to sit, per favour, of a winter evening sometimes, and take a story and a sweet dish of brown sugared tea into the kitchen. Those evenings are in our memory as vivid as ever—and we can, in one particular dead fire light, still call them up with all their dark glory and mystery, to make us tremble like children in our old age. There was the square large cell of a fire-place,—and there the long dull grate—with the dull depressing coals—and there the low rush-bottomed chairs—the round deal table, and the single sickly candle, smothering its own light with unmolested wick. And there—there, in that very spot—is our old nurse, with the same gossip voice, telling the story of Bloody Jack, with an earnestness utterly terrific. We see the whole like a *Teniers* of the mind." [The Teniers were a family of Flemish painters who often portrayed realistic scenes from domestic life.] Anon., "Grimm's German Popular Stories," *The London Magazine*, January 1823, 91. Within three

Storytelling around the fireside was a talent that family members nurtured: speakers evoked worlds with their words, while listeners conjured up detailed mental imagery. And among the Smiths, Joseph, Sr., the patriarch of the family, was quite adept at telling stories. In the neighborhood, he had a reputation as "a great storyteller, full of anecdotes picked up in his peregrinations—and possessed a tongue as smooth as oil and as quick as lightning."[526] His oratorical skills, combined with his learning and a lifetime of sitting around family firesides, would have facilitated his abilities. His son William recalled that his father's "occupation in early life was that of a school teacher; he was a man well lettered in the common branches of our English studies," which, apart from increasing his effectiveness as a teacher, would have informed the quality of his narratives.[527] Young Joseph Jr. appears to have benefited from such performances, as he too, from an early age, was known for being a compelling teller of tales. Shortly after announcing the Angel Moroni's visit to him in 1823, Smith Jr. began to relate to his family the "great and glorious things which God had manifested to him."[528] The power of the young prophet's oratory emerges in his mother's rapt description of the evening gatherings that ensued:

> From this time forth, Joseph [Jr.] continued to receive instructions from the Lord, and we continued to get the children together every evening, for the purpose of listening while he gave us a relation of the same. I presume our family presented an aspect as singular as any that ever lived upon the face of the earth—all seated in a circle, father, mother, sons, and daughters ["listening in breathless anxiety," (1845 manuscript)], and giving the most profound attention to a boy, eighteen years of age, who had never read the bible through in his life. . . . During our evening conversations, Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of traveling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their

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months, *The Atheneum* in Boston republished the review, see "Grim[m]'s German Popular Stories," *The Atheneum; Or, Spirit of the English Magazines*, April 1 1823, 20.

[526] Vogel, *EMD*, 3: 284.

[527] Vogel, *EMD*, 1: 489.

[528] Ibid., 294.

> mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them.[529]

According to Wandle Mace, an early convert to the Mormon faith and a friend of Smith family, Lucy further added how entertaining Joseph Jr.'s stories could be: "During the day, our sons would endeavor to get through their work as early as possible, and say, 'Mother, have supper early, so we can have a long evening to listen to Joseph.'"[530] Daniel Hendrix, a one-time resident of Palmyra who worked in merchandising, also recalled Smith's storytelling skills:

> I remember distinctly his sitting on some boxes in the store and telling a knot of men, who did not believe a word they heard, all about his vision and his find. But Joe went into such minute and careful details about the size, weight and beauty of the carvings on the golden tablets, the strange characters and the ancient adornments, that I confess he made some of the smartest men in Palmyra rub their eyes in wonder. The women were not so skeptical as the men and several of the leading ones in the place began to feel at once that Joe was a remarkable man after all.[531]

In a provocative account of Joseph, containing several historical inaccuracies, Thomas Davies Burrall, a landowner in Geneva, New York, claimed the following:

> I knew him [Joseph] well before his book [*The Book of Mormon*] was published. He was then a woodcutter on my farm. . . and worked through the winter in company with some twenty or thirty others, rough back-woodsmen. He and his two associates built a rude cabin. . . with a camp-kettle in front for cooking; and here, at night, around a huge fire, he and his companions would gather, ten or a dozen at a time, to tell hard stories. . . and although there were some hard cases among them, Joe could beat them all for tough stories and impracticable adventures, and it was in this school, I believe, that he first conceived his wonderful invention of the golden plates and marvelous revelations. And as these exercises were rehearsed nightly to his hearers, and as their ears grew longer to received them [more anxious to listen], so his tales grew the more marvelous to please them, until some of them supposed that *he also* believed his own stories. But of this fact there is no proof. . . . in my estimation, [Joseph was] utterly unqualified to compose even such a jumble of truth and fiction as his book contained.[532]

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[529] Ibid., 295-96.

[530] Ibid., 451-52.

[531] Vogel, *EMD*, 3: 212.

[532] Ibid., 363-64.

In a sympathetic account, Newel Knight, a future member of the Mormon faith, described Smith's storytelling skills during the time when Joseph came to Bainbridge, NY, to work for his father:

> During this time we [the Knights and their nearby relatives] were frequently visited by my young friend, Joseph Smith, who would entertain us with accounts of the wonderful things which had happened to him. . . . This chosen instrument told us of God's manifestation to him, of the discovery and receiving of the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, of his persecutions for the gospel's sake, and many other items of his eventful life."[533]

Such accounts enrich our understanding of Smith's storytelling talents and his skills in performance. Smith's fireside entertainments demonstrate his ability to produce captivating oral narratives that reached beyond the boundaries of classroom exercises and connected to his entrepreneurial tales of hidden treasures. And as the script of the *Book of Mormon* would come to show, Smith's expansive imagination absorbed and integrated the narrative structures of the religious, political, historical and cultural experiences of his time.

Converging Oratorical Practices

The displays of semi-extemporaneous oral performance in education, religious revivalism, debate society deliberations, and fireside storytelling techniques, among many other forms, are symptomatic of the overlapping varieties of oral practices among early nineteenth-century Americans. And when surveying the cultural context in which Smith grew up, analyzing the practices of oratorical training at home and in schools, the memorization of a storehouse of written works, the imitation and internalization of language styles ranging from contemporary authors to biblical prophets, the mental construction of narrative patterns and prefabricated rhetorical templates, the skills of amplifying sketch outlines into fully fleshed out narratives of various lengths, the semi-extemporaneous sermons and exhortations in church and at revival

[533] Vogel, *EMD*, 4: 47-48.

meetings (especially lay Methodist preachers and exhorters), and the nightly entertainment of a storytelling culture, a discrete set of techniques emerges in the patterns of performance.

Furthermore, these techniques and patterns leave distinct traces in the text of the *Book of Mormon*, allowing the careful observer to identify the methods of composition that Smith deployed in the construction of the work and how those techniques emerged from Smith's specific cultural milieu. In addition, and perhaps of greater significance to the wider cultural context of Smith's narrative accomplishments, the text of the *Book of Mormon* demonstrates the presence of an oral-formulaic method of composition. And when the full range and potential of these techniques are grasped, and how they manifest in the text of the *Book of Mormon*, the mysteries of Joseph Smith's prodigious narrative production become open to view.

Oral-Formulaic Composition

The text of the *Book of Mormon* reveals an abundance of characteristics that point to well-developed techniques of oral-formulaic composition. The method, of course, is not unique to Joseph Smith. Rather, the style of oral narrative expressed in the *Book of Mormon* derives from an amalgamation of Puritan sermon patterns and New Light preaching techniques.[534] Briefly put, oral-formulaic composition, at least in the specific style Joseph Smith used to produce the *Book of Mormon*, is a process by which a storyteller can create epic narratives in a rapid amount of time by using a number of semi-extemporaneous techniques to create repetition, variation, and amplification.

At the most fundamental level, oral-formulaic composition exploits patterns of repetition and variation. This characteristic, in turn, allows a storyteller to amplify skeletal narrative outlines into fully developed narratives, often of epic proportions. The techniques involved

[534] This is the same tradition out of which Bruce Rosenberg theorizes that the Southern "chanted sermons" finds its roots. Though this "chanting" style reached its full development in the South, Rosenberg points to "the structure of the Puritan sermon" and the "freely expressed passion in divine worship" among New Light preachers and congregations as primary sources. Bruce A. Rosenberg, *Can These Bones Live? The Art of the American Folk Preacher*, Revised ed. (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1988). 18-22. See also, "The Message of the American Folk Sermon," *Oral Tradition* 1, no. 3 (1986).

include, among many others, the repeated use of common stock phrases ("formulas"), an abundance of parallelisms (anaphora being particularly prominent), numerous recycled story patterns (also known by such terms as "themes," "motifs," "type-scenes," "narrative/story patterns," and "composition-schemas"), and ring structures (aka, "inverted parallelism," "complex chiasmus," "envelope patterns"). Many other techniques are also involved, such as the regular use of conjunctions and additive formulas to build successive narrative developments: "it came to pass," "behold," "now," "and," "for," along with their numerous variations, "and now," "for behold," "and behold, it came to pass," etc.).[535] A full review of Smith's oral-formulaic technique would require a monograph, and therefore is beyond the compass of this dissertation. Nevertheless, a brief overview of oral-formulaic theory is critical to understanding how Joseph Smith was able to produce the *Book of Mormon* within a ninety-day period.

In the early 1930s, Milman Parry (1902–1935), a young scholar researching the oral performance techniques used in the construction of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, decided to support his theories about ancient Greek storytelling practices by drawing comparisons with modern South Slavic oral traditions. As he explains in his field notes, Parry felt he needed to observe a living oral tradition in order to reinforce his claims about Homeric verse: "Of the various oral poetries for which I could obtain enough information the Southslavic seemed to be the most suitable for a study which I had in mind, to give that knowledge of a still living oral poetry which I saw to be needed if I were to go on with any sureness in my study of Homer."[536] For two years, from the summer of 1933 to the fall of 1935, Parry, accompanied by his student Albert Lord (who assisted in fieldwork from 1934 to 1935), "recorded nearly fifteen hundred epic

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[535] For a survey of characteristics common to orality, see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Techologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 2002). esp. 31-57. See also, Albert B. Lord, "Characteristics of Orality," *Oral Tradition* 2, no. 1 (1987). On the differences between "theme," "motif," "type-scene" and "narrative pattern/story pattern," etc., see John Miles Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990). 240-47. See also, Mark W. Edwards, "Homer and Oral Tradition: The Type-Scene," *Oral Tradition* 7, no. 2 (1992): 285-87.

[536] Qtd. in John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988). 31.

texts from a wide variety of *guslari* [the Slavic bards]."[537] Accompanying their songs with a *gusle* (a single-stringed instrument with the appearance of an elongated fiddle), the South Slavic bards would chant epic stories for hours and even days on end. And when he analyzed the songs, Parry confirmed the presence of epic storytelling techniques that paralleled his work on Homer's texts. His research, along with further developments by Lord (1912–1991), resulted in the Theory of Oral-Formulaic Composition.[538]

The Formula

At the center of Parry and Lord's work is the notion of the spoken (or chanted) "formula." In the most basic of definitions, formulas are stock phrases that traditional singers and storytellers repeatedly use to express their ideas and guide their narrative construction in the course of a performance. For example, common formulas in western cultures are the opening and closing phrases of fairytales: "Once upon a time" and "lived happily ever after." These phrases alert the listener to the boundary markers of a performance text, or, as Mark Thomas observes, they "serve as markers for the beginning and ending of the form we call fairy tales."[539] Because Parry observed the presence of formulaic phrases in the poetry of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as well as the poetry of the South Slavic *guslars*, he defines these formulas within the constraints of poetic meter: "The formula in the Homeric poems may be defined as a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea. . . . The word-group is employed regularly when the poet uses it without second thought as the natural means of getting his idea into verse" (272). Parry's definition, however, would require constant subsequent revisions.

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[537] Ibid., 32.

[538] For a detailed history of the Parry/Lord theory, along with its historical antecedents, see ibid., 1-56.

[539] Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah*: 13.

As researchers beyond Homeric studies began to apply the oral-formulaic theory to different oral traditions around the world, the variety of formulas extended beyond metrical considerations (some formulas appeared in prose, rather than verse; others were based on alliteration and assonance, rather than grammatical or syntactical frameworks).[540] For our purposes, I will limit the focus on two types of formulas (of many) that regularly appear in the *Book of Mormon*: fixed lexical formulas and generative formulas.

Fixed lexical formulas are phrases that invariably appear in the same way, using the same words, in nearly all their instantiations. The most common formula of this variety in the *Book of Mormon* is the ubiquitous "and it came to pass," or simply, "it came to pass." By contrast, generative formulas are malleable phrases that allow the storyteller to substitute some (or all) of the words in the underlying syntactical structure. Thus, one formula acts as a structural template for the creation of "new" formulas and their variations.

Parry describes this process as "the operation of analogy" in formulaic diction and theorizes their emergence in the following way: "the bards, always trying to find for the expression of each idea in their poetry a formula at once noble and easy to handle created new expressions—in so far as the result was compatible with their sense of heroic style—the simplest way possible: they modified expressions already in existence."[541] For example, most people are familiar with Hamlet's famous line, "to be, or not to be, that is the question." Because this phrase is so well known, it acts as a generative template for humorous variations: "to go to work, or not to go to work, that is the question," or shorter versions, "to clean the house, or not

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[540] Experts do not agree on precise technical definition of the term "formula." For a sample of discussions on the definitions and variant ways in which formulas appear, see Mark W. Edwards, "Homer and Oral Tradition: The Formula, Part I," *Oral Tradition* 1, no. 2 (1986): 189-97. Albert B. Lord, "Perspectives on Recent Work on the Oral Traditional Formula," *Oral Tradition* 1, no. 3 (1986). Merritt Sale, "In Defense of Milman Parry: Renewing the Oral Theory," *Oral Tradition* 11, no. 2 (1996): 380-82. Koenraad Kuiper, "On the Linguistic Properties of Formulaic Speech," *Oral Tradition* 15, no. 2 (2000): 291-96. R. Scott Garner, *Traditional Elegy: The Interplay of Meter, Tradition, and Context in Early Greek Poetry*, American Philological Association Classical Resources (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011). 19-20.

[541] Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987). 68. See also 197, 225, and 323.

to clean the house." The humor of such variations not only derives from the allusion to Hamlet's deep existential musings, but the clever ways in which people substitute words into the template of this ubiquitous phrase. Thus, the structure of generative formula derived from Hamlet's famous phrase can be framed as "to [fill in the blank] or not to [fill in the blank]," with the optional tagline, "that is the question."

Generative formulas are also common devices in folktales, such as Little Red Riding Hood's repeated exchanges with the Wolf, who is disguised as her grandmother ("Grandma, what big [_____] you have"; "All the better to [_____] you with."), or Goldilocks' sampling of items in the home of the Three Bears ("This [_____] is too [_____], and this [_____] is too [_____], but this [_____] is just right." The adaptability of these formulas, along with the numerous variations of formulaic utterances, creates a system of formulaic grammar that oral-formulaic storytellers use automatically in their stories, without giving second thought to the repetition or construction of variations.

One of the most significant properties of formulaic phrases is their economy of thought and their minimal need for active attention or reinvention. In other words, formulaic phrases usually tumble out automatically, without requiring much concentration. When starting a fairytale with the phrase "Once upon a time," for example, most people do not concentration on producing each and every individual word in the phrase. Rather, the phrase operates as *a single unit of thought*, as if it were a compound word: "once-upon-a-time-there-was-a." Because the formula is so habituated and so deeply internalized, this opening formula requires virtually no concentration or attention.

In addition to the automatic nature of uttering formulas, speakers also make unconscious adjustments to the formulas according to the number of main characters in the story, easily sliding between "once upon a time there *was a*. . . " for a single character to "once upon a time there *were*. . . " for two or more characters. This allows the storyteller to speak the

formula, while simultaneously thinking ahead to the next formula, and then the next, and the next, fitting them all into an overall story pattern in the mind. Thus, rather than moving forward from word to word, the oral-formulaic storyteller moves from formula to formula, and, by extension, from formulaic groupings to formulaic groupings, and finally story pattern to story pattern.

Furthermore, these formulas are generally pre-existing, which makes them easy to incorporate into live performance. While storytellers can construct their own personalized formulaic structures out of previously non-formulaic material (as Joseph Smith occasionally does), the oral storyteller never creates an entirely new system out of scratch, producing a new matrix of formulaic phrases in the moment of presentation. Rather, the storyteller makes use of a mental storehouse of ready-made formulas, both fixed and generative, that already exist from prior exposure and experience. This allows the storyteller to draw upon his or her storehouse of phrases to articulate the imagery of a narrative or to modulate preexisting phrases to fit the immediate circumstances.

This strategy is also one of the key differences between the production of an oral-formulaic work and the process of composing a literary text. Whereas the author of a written work might carefully consider the nuances of individual words and phrases in the expression of a particular idea, the oral-formulaic poet will usually select a traditional phrase (or create an adaptation of it) to express a thought with the rapidity and simplicity necessary for a live oral performance.

Writers of literary works also have the luxury of being able to write carefully, with endless opportunities to revise passages: one day, for instance, the writer might rework a passage in an opening chapter, then the next day jump ahead to revise the ending. For the oral-formulaic composer, however, once the performance begins the opportunities for such nonlinear editing and revision are impractical, if not impossible. And though the final written product might look the "same," in the sense that they both might appear as a printed material book, the

mechanics behind the production of the text are often worlds apart. This is one of the challenges of applying literary criticism to evaluate orally-derived texts, in which the fallacy of over-generalization subsequently frames oral texts as literary projects.

In terms of performance, the ease with which a practiced oral storyteller makes use of formulaic phrases cannot be stressed enough. Rather than being an entirely new form of diction, formulaic utterances are part of common idiomatic speech. As Andrew Pawley and Frances Hodgetts Syder argue, in their influential essay on formulaic structures in colloquial language, "fluent and idiomatic control of a language rests to a considerable extent on knowledge of a body of 'sentence stems' which are 'institutionalized' or 'lexicalized.' A lexicalized sentence stem is a unit of clause length or longer whose grammatical form and lexical content is wholly or largely fixed; its fixed elements form a standard label for a culturally recognized concept, a term in the language."[542] Ian MacKenzie later adds that "in naturally acquired languages we internalize a huge number of institutionalized utterances, or lexical phrases, or fixed and semi-fixed expressions, which we use in both speech and writing. . . . Rather than generate locutions from scratch, we routinely employ a vast store of pre-pattered, institutionalized locutions, or adaptations of them."[543] In other words, these "stems" and "locutions" are generic formulaic phrases of varying lengths that native speakers use all the time in everyday language, adapting them to immediate needs and circumstances.

Furthermore, such colloquial formulas are extremely common. According to Pawley and Syder, "the stock of lexicalized sentence stems known to the ordinary mature speaker of English amounts to hundreds of thousands."[544] Speakers use such preset phrases all the time, without

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[542] Andrew Pawley and Frances Hodgetts Syder, "Two Puzzles for Linguistic Theory: Nativelike Selection and Nativelike Fluency," in *Language and Communication*, ed. Jack C. Richards and Richard W. Schmidt, *Applied Linguistics and Language Study* (London: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1983; reprint, 7th, NY: Routledge, 1996), 191-92.

[543] Ian MacKenzie, "Improvisation, Creativity, and Formulaic Language," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 2 (2000): 75.

[544] Pawley and Syder, "Two Puzzles," 192.

making a conscious effort to deploy them. The following list of formulaic and habitually spoken phrases provides a small sample from Pawley and Syder's research:

> Did you have a good trip?
> It's on the tip of my tongue.
> There's no pleasing some people.
> How long are you staying?
> He's not in. Would you like to leave a message?
> Take one three times a day after meals.
> I was just trying to help.
> It's none of your business.
> I'll be home all weekend.[545]

The critical observation to make about these formulaic phrases is how they are *single units* of thought. When using one of these phrases in everyday speech, speakers do not consciously piece them together word-by-word. Rather, they say them spontaneously, focusing on *the idea behind the phrase*, rather than the words of the phrase itself. Thus, each of these phrases functions like a single compound word. "It's on the tip of my tongue" does not require conscious attention to each individual word; rather, speakers conceptualize the idea and utter the phrase as a single lexical unit: "It's-on-the-tip-of-my-tongue." In addition, speakers do not make a systematic study of these phrases. Instead, as Ian Mackenzie notes, speakers learn them "in naturally acquired languages," or in the course of developing their native languages by being steeped in the cultural milieu of our linguistic environments.

Furthermore, such absorption of phrases is not limited to colloquial expressions. For children like Joseph Smith, who grew up in a religious household, where daily scripture reading and memorization prevailed, biblical language would have drenched his linguistic palette from the moment he started to acquire his native English. As Philip Barlow observes, "All their lives the Smiths were a Bible-believing family in a Bible-believing culture. Into such a family. . .

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[545] Ibid., 206.

Joseph Smith Jr., the future Mormon prophet, was born."[546] Such a concentrated exposure to biblical language would have instilled more than simple *vocabulary* into the mind of young Joseph. Along with the register of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English in the King James Version of the Bible, Smith would have absorbed *archaic formulas* and *biblical narrative structures* of the text, virtually making them as automatic as his own native, early nineteenth-century American tongue.[547]

Turning to the text of the *Book of Mormon*, the reader can observe Smith's extensive use of formulaic phraseology, adapted from both biblical and non-biblical sources alike. And while the notoriously common phrase "and it came to pass" offers an obvious example of how fixed formulas appear in the *Book of Mormon*, Smith's actual repertoire reveals a vast storehouse of the more elusive, generative phrases, which he constantly weaves in and out of the overall narrative. For a typical example from the *Book of Mormon*, the following passage comes from the first two verses in the Book of Helaman. At this point in the narrative, Pahoran, the righteous chief judge over the Nephites, has died and his sons are contending over who should succeed him. The following text comes from Royal Skousen's typographical facsimile of the unedited, handwritten manuscript that Joseph Smith dictated to Oliver Cowdery. In addition, I have underlined all the formulaic elements of the passage (the text contains amalgamated and overlapping formulas, which are explained in the footnotes below):[548]

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[546] Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*: 10.

[547] The teams of translators who worked on the 17th-century King James Version (1611) drew heavily on the English translations of earlier scholars. In particular, William Tyndale (1494–1536) was a favorite source. Jon Nielson and Royal Skousen estimate that "nearly 84 per cent of the New Testament and close to 76 per cent of the portions of the Old Testament that Tyndale translated have been transmitted to the KJV just as he left them." Nielson and Skousen, "How Much of the King James Bible," 73.

[548] This short passages contains the following formulaic phrases (words of formulas in parentheses indicate optional words across variations): 1) "And now behold"–this opening formula is part of a wider system of formulaic stems that initiate a change in topic or narrative progression (examples include, "And now," "now," "for," "for behold," "behold," "and it came to pass," etc.); 2) "it came to pass"; 3) "(in) the commencement of the (fill in the blank) year"–this is a non-biblical formula derived from a commonplace phrase in early nineteenth-century English; 4) "it came to pass in the commencement of the (fill in the blank) year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi"–this is a compound formula (an amalgamation of more than one formulaic phrase) that appears verbatim, or near verbatim, in several

> [1]And now behold it came to pass in the commencement of the fortieth year of the Reign of the Judges over the People of Nephi there began to be a serious difficulty among the People of the Nephites [2]for behold Pahoran had Died & gone the way of all the earth therefore there began to be a serious contention concerning who should have the Judgment Seat among the Brethren which were the sons of Pahoran.[549]

Within this passage of seventy-four words, only ten words are not directly part of a formulaic phrase ("serious difficulty," "Pahoran" (twice), "serious," and "who should have the judgment-seat"). Yet, even here, these non-formulaic words fall within the "slots" of the underlying generative templates of the surrounding formulaic structures.

Next, in terms of the length of these phrases, note how the opening amalgamated formula (a complex formula created out of smaller formulaic units) identifies the time period: "And now behold it came to pass in the commencement of the fortieth year of the Reign of the Judges over the People of Nephi." This formula of twenty-five words, with its generative slot to substitute the year in question, appears in its full form in several other locations: Alma 8:3 ("And it came to pass in the commencement of the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi"); Alma 45:20 ("And now it came to pass in the commencement of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi"); Alma 62:12 ("And it came to pass in the commencement of the thirty and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi"); and Alma 63:1 ("And it came to pass in the commencement of the thirty and

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passages in the *Book of Mormon* (for verbatim and near verbatim formulas, see Alma 8:3, Alma 45:20, Alma 62:12 and Alma 63:1; for a sample of shorter variants of this formula, see Alma 2:1, Alma 4:11, 1 Nephi 1:4, and 3 Nephi 1:4); 5) "among the people of (fill in the blank)"–this formula is amalgamated into the previous example; the formula is non-biblical (though a variant appears in 1 Kings 8:53) but is nevertheless a commonplace phrase in early nineteenth-century English; 6) "For behold"; 7) "had died. . . gone the way of all the earth"–biblical formula based on 1 Kings 2:1-2 and Joshua 23:14; 8) "therefore there (began to be). . . "–formulaic cause/effect stem in *Book of Mormon* derived from non-formulaic biblical phraseology, 1 Corinthians 6:7, 2 Chronicles 32:25, and Daniel 2:10; 9) "began to (be). . . concerning"–biblical formula, see Matt 11:7 and Luke 7:24; 10) "contention. . . among (fill in the blank)"–non-biblical formula derived from a commonplace phrase in early nineteenth-century English; 11) "among the brethren"–biblical formula, see John 21:23, Acts 15:22, Num. 27:4, Prov. 17:2, Joshua 17:4; and 12) "which were the sons of / which was the son of"–non-biblical formula derived from a commonplace phrase in early nineteenth-century English ("*who* was the son"); the use of "which" instead of "who" reflects Smith's nonstandard regionalism.

[549] Cf. Helaman 1:1-2; See Skousen, *The Original Manuscript*, 487 (punctuation added).

sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi"). In addition, multiple shorter variations of this same formula also appear throughout the text (see 1 Nephi 1:4, Alma 2:1, Alma 4:11, and 3 Nephi 1:4). Thus, the formulaic phrases appears again and again, with little variation.

In terms of performance, Smith's dictation of these formulaic phrases would have been rapid and automatic, requiring little or no concentration. Furthermore, while Smith's scribe, Oliver Cowdery, would have been trying feverishly to keep pace with the dictation, scribbling each word with a quill pen and ink, Smith would have had the luxury of thinking ahead to the next set of phrases, and how those phrases would fit within the overall story outline.

These formulaic phrases thus provide direct internal evidence of Smith's composition process, along with revealing how quickly and easily he could compose scriptural verses. Instead of composing word-by-word, Smith composed formula-by-formula. Thus, Smith would have spoken the text according to the framework provided by the grammatical junctures between the formulaic phrases. This confirms the research of Royal Skousen, editor of the magisterial six-volume *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* (2004-2009) and also editor of Critical Text Project of the Book of Mormon, who observes that Smith's dictation "was done by phrases and clauses, as evidenced by scribal corrections as well as by those places in the text where one scribe took over for another—always at the end of a phrase or clause."[550] Citing Skousen's analysis, Grant Hardy further notes how "textual evidence suggests that Joseph

[550] *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, xlii-xliii. Based on this evidence, Skousen believes Joseph Smith was dictating a fixed and textually ossified translation, which appeared to Joseph either on the surface of the magical seer stone or by means of an internal vision (i.e., implying Smith merely dictated words presented to him in some form of a mystical vision, rather than actually translating a written work): "Basically, the original text refers to the English-language text that Joseph Smith saw by means of the interpreters and the seer stone. Although I myself believe that Joseph actually saw words of English, it is also possible that the English-language text he saw was in his mind's eye rather than literally in the physical instruments." *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part One, 1 Nephi 1 - 2 Nephi 10*, vol. 4, The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), 2004), 3. *Analysis of Textual Variants: Part One, 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10*, 3. The same evidence, however, equally characterizes oral-formulaic composition. Furthermore, the intense formulaic density in Smith's revelations and blessings, particularly with Smith's non-*Book of Mormon* texts (i.e., not purported translations of another language), resist the notion of a preexisting fixed text and rather point to a process of oral-formulaic composition.

sometimes dictated more than twenty words at a time."[551] When combining this information with the techniques of oral-formulaic storytellers, this segment opens yet another window to Smith's process.

These two opening verses in the Book of Helaman contain a single mental image (i.e., in the fortieth year, Pahoran dies and his sons fight over who will succeed him). In order to articulate this image, Smith used four amalgamated formulaic units, which required only minor modifications to fit the immediate needs of the narrative: 1) "And now behold it came to pass in the commencement of the fortieth year of the Reign of the Judges over the People of Nephi," 2) "there began to be a serious difficulty among the People of the Nephites," 3) "for behold Pahoran had Died & gone the way of all the earth," and 4) "therefore there began to be a serious contention concerning who should have the Judgment Seat among the Brethren which were the sons of Pahoran." By making use of repetitive formulaic phraseology, Smith would have been able to articulate the opening of the story with rapidity and ease, while simultaneously allowing his mind to think ahead to the next sequence of formulaic phrases.

Recycled Story Patterns

Along with a storehouse of stock formulas, oral storytellers make regular use of recycled story patterns. Because the nature and characteristics of the repeated story patterns can differ from one tradition to the next, researchers refer to these patterns with a variety of terms, such as "theme," "type-scene," "motif," and "composition-schema," among several others.[552] Like generative formulas, these patterns provide the storyteller with a collection of generic, prefabricated story templates, which the storyteller can modify and flesh out with different details.

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[551] *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, xv.

[552] See footnote 535.

In addition, formulaic story patterns tend to be very flexible. While some traditions require verbatim repetition of traditional narratives, many others do not and therefore allow the storyteller to make adjustments to the story outlines during performance.[553] For a modern example, Arthur Laurents' use of *Romeo and Juliet* as a base story template to write the musical *West Side Story* demonstrates how significant variations may occur in adaptations, in spite of a shared underlying story pattern. And though neither of these stories is orally-derived, the adjustments of narrative patterns operate in the same fashion, whether as a literary or oral project. In his adaptation, Laurents makes significant changes, including such radical alterations as removing both Romeo's and Juliet's parents from the production, reducing the friar's otherwise significant role to a relatively insignificant shopkeeper, and, in a switch that alters the ending of the play, Maria survives in the final scene, while Juliet, her Shakespearean equivalent, dies.[554] Oral-formulaic story templates work the same way: storytellers have a malleable generic outline of the story in mind, which they flesh out with details during the act of performance, applying the structural templates to create a wide spectrum of variations.

This same technique, it should be noted, formed part of early nineteenth century educational practices, whether at home, school or mutual improvement societies. Apart from Walker's method of amplifying "outlines" and "sketches" with the student's own words, Blair's *Lectures*, particularly the lessons aimed to prepare students for improvisational dynamics of

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[553] Perhaps a helpful analogy for generic story templates is a comparison to the popular "paint-by-numbers" sets sold in art supply stores. These kits make "artistic" painting a relatively easy process: the outline of the image is printed on the canvas, so the artist does not need to create a new image from scratch; and the shapes within the outline contain numbers that indicate which colors the artist should use, so that the artist does not need to worry about how to paint the image. Oral-formulaic systems are similar: storytellers make use of generic story outlines (like the pre-printed images on a canvas), and they fill in the story templates with formulaic words and phrases associated with the story templates (just as the numbers indicate which colors to use). Would-be artists, of course, are not confined to the pre-existing lines on the canvas. They may choose to redraw some of the original lines into a new shape, along with choosing to paint with different colors than what the canvass originally suggests. Thus, even in situations where the artist alters the original plan, the foundational template and the original numbers nonetheless provide reference material that makes the whole process of creating the image much more rapid than producing an entirely new painting from scratch.

[554] For a brief but concise overview of the significant alterations between *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*, see Norris Houghton's Introduction in William Shakespeare et al., *Romeo and Juliet : West Side Story* (New York: Laurel-Leaf Books, 1965). 7-14.

public debate, advises that "every one who speaks, will find it of the greatest advantage to himself to have previously arranged his thoughts, and classed under proper heads, in his own mind, what he is to deliver. This will assist his memory, and carry him through his discourse, without that confusion to which one is every moment subject, who has fixed no distinct plan of what he is to say."[555] He later adds, "The premeditation should be of things [i.e., concepts, stories, ideas], rather than of words."[556] Thomas Grimke echoes Blair's advice in his *Oration on the Duties of Youth* (1832), a book marketed directly to debate clubs. Grimke promotes the skill of "extempore" speaking, which he defines as "delivering our sentiments, not without premeditation, but after much reflection: in other words, delivering our sentiments, after a careful preparation of *thoughts*, but without any preparation of *language*."[557] Finally, Nathaniel Hawthorne, as a professional writer and storyteller in the early nineteenth century, provides what is perhaps the best description of this semi-extemporaneous technique through the voice of one of his fictional narrators, self-described as "a wandering story teller." Here, he not only describes storytelling templates, but the variations that occur in the act of performance:

> I manufactured a great variety of plots and skeletons of tales, and kept them ready for use, leaving the filling up to the inspiration of the moment; though I cannot remember ever to have told a tale, which did not vary considerably from my pre-conceived idea, and acquired a novelty of aspect as often as I repeated it. Oddly enough, my success was generally in proportion to the difference between the conception and accomplishment.[558]

Hawthorne's description of the oral storyteller's craft provides a window into semi-extemporaneous narrative production: the teller begins with a malleable story pattern in mind, and then improvises the words according to "the inspiration of the moment." The technique, of

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[555] Blair, *Lectures (1784)*: 241.

[556] Ibid., 244.

[557] Thomas Smith Grimké, *Oration on the Duties of Youth, to Instructors and Themselves: on the Importance of the Art of Speaking, and of Debating Societies* (Charleston, S.C.: Printed by A.E. Miller, no. 4 Broad-Street., 1832). 13-14 (emphasis in original).

[558] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "A Fellow-Traveller," in *Selected Tales and Sketches*, ed. Michael J. Colacurcio, *Penguin Classics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 85.

course, is not limited to wandering raconteurs. In her book *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (2016), Ann Taves describes a similar technique in relation to Joseph Smith's translation performance, Helen Schucman's spiritual scribing (hearing a mystical voice and writing the words), and the storytelling capabilities of a hypnotized Stanford student participating in a study with psychologist Ernest Hilgard. Taves observes,

> From this three-way comparison, I draw the following possibilities. First, the context of translating and scribing may have cued a different approach to narrating a story in Smith's case or writing a philosophical "treatise" in Schucman's case, much as hypnosis triggered a different approach to storytelling for Hilgard's student. They most likely entered this mode with a sense of what was unfolding, but without specifics, much like the "pattern" from which the storyteller's story unfolded. This is supported by evidence that both Smith and Schucman had some knowledge of the contents of their respective books before they began translating or scribing.[559]

Joseph Smith's narrative production takes this technique of story patterning one step further. By coupling this method with the use of biblical formulaic phraseology, habituated over a lifetime of exposure and memorization, Smith demonstrates a specific style of oral-formulaic composition in which recycled narrative patterns emerge in variant forms, while simultaneously containing stories expressed in a biblical-style idiom.

Recycled story patterns are a hallmark of Smith's composition techniques. As abundantly demonstrated by such researchers as Richard Dilworth Rust, Mark D. Thomas and Brent Metcalfe, these reusable story patterns feature prominently in the *Book of Mormon* text.[560] Exodus narratives, cycles of peace and prosperity contrasted with warfare and social

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[559] Taves, *Revelatory Events*: 253. Taves also quotes the Stanford student's comments about his storytelling experiences, in which he indicates, "In hypnosis, once I create the pattern [story pattern], I don't have to take any more initiative; the story just unfolds. In fact once I start talking I know the main outlines of what is happening." Ibid., 251.

[560] For the most comprehensive works on narrative type-scenes and formulaic elements in the *Book of Mormon*, see Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2003) and Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company and Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), 1997). See also, Brent Lee Metcalfe, "Apologetic and Critical Assumptions

strife, righteous leaders set against atheists and anti-Christs, spiritual manifestations, angelic visitations, battles strategies, exhortations and prophesies, among many other narrative patterns, all appear multiple times throughout Smith's epic. "Repetition appears purposefully within the Book of Mormon narratives;" Richard D. Rust observes, "indeed, it seems that every important action, event, or character type is repeated."[561] Rust continues with an extensive list of narrative repetitions to assert the significance:

> For instance, two wealthy men (Lehi and Amulek) lose their riches as they pursue prophetic callings. Kings Benjamin and Limhi each assemble their people in order to speak to them. Two sons of kings (Ammon and his brother Aaron) speak with kings (Lamoni and his father). Alma the Younger and Lamoni fall into trances in which they appear to be dead. Two detailed accounts are given of prophets threatened within a prison (Alma and Amulek, Nephi and Lehi). Two Lamanite leaders (who are also brothers) are killed by a spear within their tents. And prophets (Abinadi, Alma, and Samuel) are cast out of cities and then return at the Lord's bidding. Further, prophet-leaders (Lehi, Zeniff, and Mosiah) gather people to read records to them. Antichrists (notably Sherem, Korihor, and Nehor) lead people to follow their iniquities. A man named Ammon, living in the time of King Mosiah, is captured and taken before King Limhi—and ends up helping Limhi's people escape from captivity; Mosiah's son Ammon is captured and taken before the Lamanite king Lamoni and helps save Lamoni's people both spiritually and physically. And three prophets, Alma the Younger, Nephi the son of Helaman, and Samuel the Lamanite, depart out of the land and are 'never heard of more,' with the implication that Alma is translated and does not taste death.[562]

Such repetition in story patterns, especially when expressed with formulaic phraseology, further suggests the difference between the mechanics of oral-formulaic storytelling and a writer's literary project. Whereas a writer might slave for days, months or even years over the intricate nuances of expression for climactic passages, an oral storyteller might produce the same amount of text using formulaic phraseology within a matter minutes. And while a writer might carefully anguish over unique plot twists and significantly "new" structural variations in a

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about Book of Mormon Historicity," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 3 (1993). Their writings have spawned a significant body of essays that are reflections of, or responses to, their conclusions.

[561] Ibid., 22.

[562] Ibid. For an additional list of parallels and repetitions, see Metcalfe, "Apologetic and Critical Assumptions," 169-70.

written work, an oral storyteller, armed with a supply of malleable and preexisting narrative templates, can quickly compose new variations of stories of any length and size by simply altering the cosmetic features on the surface of the text (characters, locations, dialogue, time periods, as well as adjustments in plot and structure), while accomplishing the task without the use of notes, manuscripts or any other written cues.

Thus, the processes between the written and spoken forms of composition can be quite distinct, not least of which is the time required for composition. Nevertheless, the length and complexity of such narratives should not be underestimated. Skilled storytellers might amplify a narrative to such an extent that the telling of a tale might require several days or even weeks to complete. Thus, oral-formulaic composition contains a potent set of storytelling skills that can lead to astonishing feats of composition.

In order to comprehend, much less appreciate, the potential magnitude of orally-transmitted stories, the research of Milman Parry and Albert Lord on South Slavic bards proves instructive. As with any performance skill, some oral poets are more experienced and talented than others. But one particularly gifted singer who participated in Parry and Lord's study, Avdo Međedović (1875–1953), had exceptional abilities and experience. In the period spanning June 28 to August 11, 1935, Međedović either sang or dictated a total of fourteen songs in thirty-two working days (thirteen different songs, one of which Međedović both sang and dictated in two separate versions). In these thirty-two days, Međedović produced a total of 78,555 lines of epic poetry (44,902 recorded by phonograph, 33,653 dictated), for a conservative estimate of approximately 350,000 words.[563] In terms of comparing length (but not speed of dictation), recall that the *Book of Mormon* contains roughly 250,000 to 270,000 words (depending on whether or not one counts the approximately 27,000 words borrowed directly from the Bible),

[563] The majority of South Slavic epic poetry averages 4 to 6 words per line. The figure of 350,000 is based on a conservative estimate of slightly less than 4.5 words per line. In addition, all other estimates of word counts for the South Slavic epics in this chapter are based on 4.5 words per line.

which Smith accomplished in a three-month period of time with at an approximate estimate of sixty working days.[564]

Because Međedović's songs were recorded both by phonograph and dictation (scribal dictation obviously being a slower process), a comparison of Smith's and Međedović's dictated works provides a more accurate view of their respective rates of output. Based on an estimated number of working days against the total amount of material, Smith produced the *Book of Mormon* "at the rate of some 3,500–4,000 words per day."[565] By comparison, Međedović dictated five epic songs, all at a faster pace: 1) *The Arrival of the Vizier in Travnik*, which he produced at approximately 11,400 words per day, 2) *The Wedding of Vlahinjić Alija*, produced at some 8,800 words per day, 3) *The Wedding of Meho, Son of Smail*, at 6,900 words per day, 4) *Gavran Harambaša and Sirdar Mujo*, the entire song of some 18,300 words produced in one day, and 5) *The Captivity of Tale of Orašac in Ozim*, an unfinished song of some 16,800 words, also produced in one day.[566]

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[564] Estimates vary among scholars, though a current consensus averages approximately sixty working days within the three-month period of composition. In 1984, W. Cleon Skousen suggested the work "was accomplished in approximately 65 working days." W. Cleon Skousen, *Isaiah Speaks to Modern Times* (Salt Lake City: The Ensign Publishing Company, 1984). 102n65. Three years later, John W. Welch echoed Skousen, saying, "it took Joseph Smith only about sixty-five working days to translate" the work. John W. Welch, "How Long Did It Take Joseph Smith to Translate the Book of Mormon?," *Ensign* 1988, 47. Within four years, Welch revised his figure downward in a co-authored essay with Tim Rathbone, in which they settled on an estimate of "less than sixty working days." Welch and Rathbone, "Book of Mormon Translation," 210.

[565] Hardy, "Introduction," xii. Fawn Brodie, citing Francis W. Kirkham's essay, "The Writing of the Book of Mormon," (*Improvement Era*, June 1941: 341), observes that Smith's rate of production would involve "an average of 3,700 words a day, if one includes the 27,000 words he quoted directly from the bible." Brodie, *No Man Knows*: 62.

[566] Međedović dictated the first part of *The Arrival* on either June 29 or 30, though Lord's notes do not indicate which day. On the other of these two days, Međedović also sang the entire 6,290 lines of *Hrnjica Mujo Avenges the Death of Mustajbey of the Lika*. Therefore, the estimate only includes one of these two days in the total. Međedović completed *The Arrival* on July 4 and 5 for a total of three days of dictation. For the remaining epics, Međedović dictated *The Wedding of Vlahinjić Alija* in three days (July 16, 24 and 25), *The Wedding of Meho, Son of Smail* in eight days (July 5 through 12), *Gavran Harambaša and Sirdar Mujo* in one day (July 26), and the unfinished *Captivity of Tale of Orašac in Ozim* in one day (July 30). See Albert Bates Lord, "Avdo Međedović, Guslar," *The Journal of American Folklore* 69, no. 273 (1956): 322.

Thus, in a total of sixteen working days, Međedović produced a total of 33,653 poetic lines, or approximately 151,000 words. At such a pace, Međedović would have been able to produce stories equal in length to the *Book of Mormon* in less than twenty-nine days, or roughly twice as fast as Smith.[567] Furthermore, if pressed to tell stories as long as the *Book of Mormon*, Međedović certainly would have been able to accomplish the feat. Parry and Lord only recorded fourteen of Međedović's songs, but his repertoire of epic tales included a grand total of fifty-eight.[568]

The production of the *Book of Mormon* within a three-month span of time is truly a remarkable feat. Nevertheless, given the rapid efficiency of oral-formulaic composition, the question that needs to be asked is not how Smith accomplished the task so quickly, but why it took him so long. Yet, by the same token, comparing Međedović, a seasoned professional who repeatedly sang a large and familiar repertoire of songs throughout his life, to Smith, a neophyte who dictated a one-off performance of the *Book of Mormon* narratives, hardly seems fair. Nonetheless, the comparison does provide further insight into Smith's preparations for performance.

For example, the slower speed of Smith's composition further suggests a creative process of oral performance, rather than working from a fully developed text prepared in advance of the dictation. If Smith were merely dictating preset words, reading them from a prepared text, the production of the *Book of Mormon* would have been much faster, and likely devoid of such a high density of formulaic language. At the same time, if Smith were attempting to create an epic sequence of narrative patterns from scratch, without the aid of recycled patterns and formulaic diction, the process would be expected to have taken considerably longer than the ninety-day

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[567] Unfettered from a scribe, Međedović's performances are, perhaps, more astonishing to consider. According to Lord, "the total singing time" for the 44,902 lines recorded on phonograph "is approximately 53 hours." Ibid. These lines equate to approximately 202,000 words, or roughly 3,800 words per hour. At such a pace, Međedović would have been able to perform epic narratives equivalent in length to the *Book of Mormon* in approximately 66 to 71 hours.

[568] Ibid.

window in which Smith produced the work. Thus, the text of the *Book of Mormon* reveals the tension between advanced preparation on the one hand, and improvisation on the other. The presence of prefabricated story templates and anticipatory passages, both in chapter prefaces and as embedded summaries in the narrative, demonstrate Smith's advanced preparation for the work, while the repetition and heavy use of formulaic phraseology suggest Smith articulated the content and phraseology of the story patterns in the moment of performance.

Conclusion

Within the maelstrom of oratorical training and daily practices in Joseph Smith's world, the careful observer can locate all the mechanical techniques of narrative oral production that are evinced in the *Book of Mormon*. Within its pages, the techniques of common school training and composition emerge, the patterns of sermons and exhortations of revivalism appear throughout the text, the practices of sustained storytelling undergird the sweeping epic, the formulaic phraseology, the anticipatory prefaces of looming narrative events, the outlines of recycled narrative patterns, the imitation of biblical styles, and much more–all find their immediate origins in Smith's nineteenth-century cultural milieu. Nevertheless, this does not deny Smith's own significant and creative contributions. The adaptations of source material, the arrangement and rearrangement of narrative patterns, and the selection of language to articulate his ideas and his stories did not spontaneously appear *ex nihilo* but rather arose from the mind of a young man desperate to articulate his spiritual visions of the past in order to reshape the seemingly insurmountable obstacles of his future.

Epilogue

For nearly two centuries, Joseph Smith's ambitious creation, *The Book of Mormon*, has captured the attention of a wide variety of people studying the origins of Mormonism, ranging from scholars to amateurs, believers to non-believers. Yet, in spite of sustained and increasing scholarly attention regarding the genesis of the book, much remains either unknown or unexplored, especially as it concerns the nature of the work as a product of a sustained and ritualized oral performance. This dissertation has sought to contribute to these discussions by enhancing our understanding of the cultural conditions surrounding, and involved in, Smith's creation of the work. By reviewing some of the key locations of oratorical training and performance in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century, I have attempted to demonstrate how Smith, in spite of his limited formal education and experiences, might nevertheless have accomplished such a work. Historical accounts tie Smith to a number of cultural institutions that engaged in intensive training in oral performance, and the textual artifact of his creation—the *Book of Mormon* itself—contains the residue of the medley of oratorical practices that he would have encountered and absorbed in formal schools, Sunday schools, domestic education, New Light (particularly Methodist) preaching and exhortation styles, storytelling cultures, and debate societies and other related self-improvement organizations.

While questions regarding the authenticity of the text as an angel-delivered record, as well as questions about the historicity claims of ancient Israelites migrating to the Americas and establishing New World civilizations, remain beyond the scope of this dissertation, its investigation nevertheless indicates how the *mechanics* behind the construction of the *Book of Mormon*—the fundamental oral *techniques* involved in the creation of the text itself—derive from strategies of oral performance common to Smith's nineteenth-century context. The confluence of oratorical practices in Joseph Smith's world provided him with the skills to

produce his epic narrative, and whether "translating" an actual ancient text or constructing a grand epic from the stories in his mind, the techniques Smith employed to create his massive work trace their origins to the schoolhouses he attended, his homeschool exercises, his evening fireside tales around the family hearth, his memorized recitations at school and at church, his mystical prayers and ritualized instructions during magical treasure-hunting ventures, his deliberative orations and speeches at a local debate club, and his experiences exhorting semi-extemporaneously at Methodist camp meetings.

Nevertheless, in spite of this heightened awareness of Smith's oratorical exposure and background of training, the analysis of his oral performance of the *Book of Mormon* still remains incomplete and several outstanding questions about the origins of the work persist. While Smith's environment provides us with an understanding of the technical mechanics explaining *how* he could produce the work, the issue of *content* still needs to be addressed. After all, a storyteller who has mastered the techniques of performance still needs a story to tell, and the content of that story offers clues to the origins and processes involved in the creation of it.

This question of content inevitably raises the issue of Smith's potential sources, though the issue is fraught with controversy. Joseph Smith represented the *Book of Mormon* as being an actual historical document, so many (though certainly not all) of Smith's adherents understandably reject the notion that nineteenth-century or earlier influences contaminated or shaped the *Book of Mormon*.[569] Nonetheless, the *Book of Mormon* persistently reveals characteristics that situate its production within the culture of the late eighteenth and early

[569] A popular theory that attempts to reconcile the ancient historical claims with the nineteenth-century anachronisms in the text argues that the *Book of Mormon* contains an ancient narrative core, which Smith embellished with contemporary concerns. In a 1987 essay, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," Blake T. Ostler proposes his "theory of the Book of Mormon as Joseph Smith's expansion of an ancient work by building on the work of earlier prophets to answer the nagging problems of his day. In so doing, he provided unrestricted and authoritative commentary, interpretation, explanation, and clarifications based on insights from the ancient Book of Mormon text and the King James Bible (KJV). The result is a modern world view and theological understanding superimposed on the Book of Mormon text from the plates." Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 1 (1987): 66.

nineteenth century. Apart from the language, formulaic diction and a small collection of story templates borrowed from the King James Bible,[570] the *Book of Mormon* contains a number of creative reconfigurations of social, political, theological and literary narratives that saturated Smith's nineteenth-century environment. And though many of these elements circulated in the general cultural ambiance, crisscrossing the boundaries of oral and print culture and thereby making any attempt to pinpoint all of Smith's sources a futile endeavor, the *Book of Mormon* nevertheless demonstrates consistent and sustained references to external texts beyond the Bible that reveal a process of deep narrative influence.

Among these texts, and as a placeholder for future research, I call specific attention to the works of John Bunyan (1628-1688), the seventeenth-century nonconformist preacher in England, whose religious fictional epic *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) became one of the most frequently published, widely read and regularly memorized texts in the early nineteenth century, second only to the Bible in popularity and circulation. To date, the book has never gone out of publication since it appeared in 1678, it has been translated into more than two hundred languages worldwide, and only the Bible has been printed more times than Bunyan's allegory of salvation.[571] And though the memory of Bunyan's popularity has faded with time, his works played a central role in the cultural fabric of early America.

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[570] For an example of biblical antecedents, Lehi's flight from Jerusalem into the wilderness echoes the language and narrative of Moses and the children's of Israel's exodus from Egypt, the story of Alma the Younger's conversion mirrors Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, Christ's Sermon on the Mount emerges nearly verbatim in Christ's visit to the ancient Native Americans, the apocryphal story of Salome dancing for John the Baptist's head emerges in the court of an ancient Native American king, and so on. For a brief and helpful summary of biblical narrative patterns in the *Book of Mormon*, coupled with a summary of apologetic responses, see Earl M. Wunderli, *An Imperfect Book: What the Book of Mormon Tells Us about Itself* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013). 84-95. Speculations on the influence of nineteenth-century works on the *Book of Mormon* usually include Alexander Campbell's *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon* (1831), Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* (1823), Solomon Spaulding's "Manuscript Found" (an unpublished novel about Roman soldiers arriving in prehistoric America), among many other theories. For a brief summary, see Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 88-97. By comparison, see Wunderli's analysis and summary, Wunderli, *An Imperfect Book*: 279-315.

[571] See Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*: 610-19. Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628-1688* (W.W. Norton, 1988). 375. Isabel Hofmeyr, "Bunyan: Colonial, Postcolonial," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, ed. Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge: Cambridge, UP, 2010).

Because of the compelling narrative and accessible language, *The Pilgrim's Progress* became one of the first books children would use to learn how to read, a practice that would not only teach them how to understand spiritual material but one that would build a common ground between family generations, acting as "a link…between the old and the young."[572] Children could share their love of Bunyan's stories with their parents, grandparents and even great-grandparents, because all the generations had read and cherished the same stories in their childhood. Along with reading, children would also reenact favorite scenes from *Pilgrim's Progress*.[573] Alan Trachtenberg observes, "it was commonplace in respectable families for children to "play" *Pilgrim's Progress*, to enact event and plot as do the little people in Louisa May Alcott's perennial best-seller, *Little Women* (1868)."[574] Such games, of course, were not limited to children of "respectable families"; children of all ages and classes reveled in the act of bringing their favorite Bunyan characters and stories to life.

As I will argue in a future study, John Bunyan's works deeply influenced the young Joseph Smith—indeed, as deeply as scripture itself. Given the popularity of *Pilgrim's Progress* and its pervasive employment as a text for reading material, Joseph may well have heard the stories of Christian's journey before he was able to read, while sitting at the family hearth listening to older siblings, who may well have recited aloud from its pages. And, as I will argue, some of John Bunyan's most popular and beloved works–specifically, *The Pilgrim's Progress, Grace Abounding and Holy War*–provided Smith with a storehouse of narrative templates that

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[572] Mary Hammond, "*The Pilgrim's Progress* and its Nineteenth-Century Publishers," in *Reception, Appropriation, Recollection: Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim, *Religions and Discourse* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishers, Inc., 2007), 102.

[573] Reenacting scenes from *The Pilgrim's Progress* were often deemed appropriate Sunday activities for children. In her article "The Children's Sunday" in *Good Housekeeping*, Adele K. Johnson reveals some of the many ways in which children played when she advises, "To play 'Pilgrim's Progress,' that fascinating narrative by the 'Prince of Dreams,' is interesting and helpful. 'Christian at the Gate;' 'The Palace Beautiful;' Escape from Doubting Castle;' 'The Delectable Mountains;' 'Wicket Gate;' 'The Valley of Humiliation;' 'The Land of Beulah, where the sun shineth night and day;' 'The Gate of the Celestial City,' may be represented." Adele K. Johnson, "The Children's Sunday," *Good Housekeeping*, November 1899, 242-43.

[574] Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1982; repr., 2007). 102.

shaped the *Book of Mormon* more than any other source. It may well be no exaggeration to claim that without Bunyan's ubiquitous influence on Joseph Smith, the *Book of Mormon* might never have come into existence.

Syncretism and the Rise of Mormonism

Drawing on the raw materials of early nineteenth-century American society–the political, social and economic upheavals; the culture of warfare and the frontier; the rhetoric of independence, republicanism, and liberty of conscience; the doctrines and polities of multiple Christian denominations; and the magical beliefs and practices of the occult sciences–Joseph Smith would formulate a new syncretic religion. And as the central artifact of that Mormon faith, *The Book of Mormon* would validate the legitimacy of the new church by performing the function of testimonial witness to Smith's divine prophetic calling, providing believers with what Terryl Givens describes as "a concrete manifestation of sacred utterance, and thus an evidence of divine presence."[575] In late March, 1830, in upstate New York, Joseph Smith Jr. held in his hands a copy of the first edition of that testament of "divine presence," the *Book of Mormon*.

Within weeks of the book's publication, Smith officially organized the "Church of Christ," later renamed The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[576] Within the year, he and his small but growing band of followers joined the flood of migrations pushing further into the interior of the continent, where they would establish communities in areas such as Ohio, Illinois and Missouri. According to Smith, now identified (and self-identified) as the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Mormon Church presented itself as Christ's original church, restored through the angelic visitations of John the Baptist, the apostles Peter, James and John, Moses, Elijah, Elias, and the Angel Moroni, all of whom Smith claimed appeared to him, transferring to him and his

[575] Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*: 64.

[576] Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 109-12. See also Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*: 221-27.

designates the original priesthood power and keys of authority of the primitive church.[577] And as the church grew, so did Smith's vision for the future of the organization.

The next fourteen years would witness a series of radical doctrinal developments under Smith's leadership, ranging from the controversial practice of polygamous marriage to new notions concerning the majestic and eternal potential of the human soul. Amidst the political, religious, economic and cultural disruptions of early nineteenth-century America, Smith wove an extraordinary narrative that not only stabilized his followers' worldview, but elevated their status to dizzying heights of eternal significance, pulling them out of the sheer misery of short lives spent in suffering and monotony. At a time in American history when the hopes of prosperous idealism confronted the reality of rural and frontier economic hardship, when the dreams of the proverbial self-made man were undermined by the adversities of unending, often hopeless toil,[578] Smith introduced a new story of the value and significance of each individual person: God's true followers were destined to become kings and priests, queens and priestesses, in eternity. They would progress in faith, knowledge and righteousness until they would "inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths." And then, in an eternal destination unrivaled by any of Smith's competing contemporary Christian sects,

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[577] Bushman, *Rough Stone*: 202-05. In his journal entry for April 3, 1836, Smith records, via dictation to his scribe Warren Cowdery and also describing himself in third person, how "Moses appeared before them [Joseph Smith Jr. and Oliver Cowdery] and committed unto them the keys of the gathering of Israel. . . . After this Elias appeared and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham. . . . After this vision had closed, another great and glorious vision burst upon them, for Elijah, the Prophet, who was taken to Heaven without tasting death, also stood before them."Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 217-19.

[578] Melville characterizes the psychic conflict between American idealism and the struggles of the poor in early nineteenth-century America in his short story, *Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs*, where he writes, "The native American poor never lose their delicacy or pride; hence, though unreduced to the physical degradation of the European pauper, they yet suffer more in mind than the poor of any other people in the world. Those peculiar social sensibilities nourished by our own peculiar political principles, while they enhance the true dignity of a prosperous American, do but minister to the added wretchedness of the unfortunate; first, by prohibiting their acceptance of what little random relief charity may offer; and, second, by furnishing them with the keenest appreciation of the smarting distinction between their ideal of universal equality and their grindstone experience of the practical misery and infamy of poverty–a misery and infamy which is, ever has been, and ever will be, precisely the same in India, England, and America." Herman Melville, *Melville: Pierre, Israel Potter, the Piazza Tales, The Confidence-Man, Tales, & Billy Budd*, The Library of America (Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984; repr., 2nd). 1234-35.

"they shall be gods. . . . from everlasting to everlasting. . . . then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them."[579]

The turbulence of the early nineteenth century jarred loose the foundations of traditional religious institutions, opening fissures that destabilized received notions of hierarchy and order, categorizations of knowledge, claims of religious truth, and the very essence of faith. Within these critical spaces, Smith's construction of a syncretic religious belief system from selected fragments of theological and occult experience, as well as popular culture, resulted in an indigenous spiritual cosmology that could adapt to the pressing issues of the modern age. Thus, Smith's theological interventions renovated the fundamental approach of religious inquiry to contemporary concerns: the search for answers shifted away from backward-looking typological readings of scripture and tradition to forward-looking revelations and divine inspiration.

At the foundation of Smith's new religion, authorizing his prophecies and modern revelations, lay the *Book of Mormon*. At a conference in Ohio on April 21, 1834, Smith taught, "we are differently situated from any other people that ever existed upon this earth; consequently those former revelations cannot be suited to our conditions; they were given to other people, who were before us." Turning to continuing revelation as the key to navigating the modern age, he then spoke "of obtaining and translating the Book of Mormon, the revelation of the Priesthood of Aaron, the organization of the church in 1830, the revelation of the High Priesthood, and the gift of the Holy Ghost poured out upon the Church." Finally, in an effort to stress the centrality of *The Book of Mormon* in his expansive cosmology, Smith declared, "take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none."[580]

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[579] *D&C,* 132: 19-20.

[580] Smith, *HC (1948)*, 2:52.

For Smith, the *Book of Mormon* was "the keystone of our religion," the central stone of an arch that secures all other stones in place and prevents the entire structure from collapsing.[581]

Joseph Smith's positioning of the *Book of Mormon* as the lynchpin of the entire framework of the Mormon faith has persisted into the current time. Ezra Taft Benson, a later prophet of the LDS faith, would extend Smith's metaphor to its logical conclusion: "just as the arch crumbles if the keystone is removed, so does all the Church stand or fall with the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon."[582] Echoing Smith's logic identifying the interdependence of modern revelation, the Mormon faith, and the central role of *The Book of Mormon*, Terryl Givens articulates a chain of interlocking propositions in the steps of Mormon conversion: if *The Book of Mormon* is true, "one is then bound to conclude that the church he [Smith] founded, with its prophetic office, ordinances, doctrines, and teachings, is necessarily 'true.' The book functions primarily, then, as an object for the exercise of faith and the vehicle through which personal revelation confirms a truth larger than the book itself."[583]

Jeffrey R. Holland, former president of Brigham Young University and a current apostle of the LDS Church, couches the argument in even more emphatic terms:

> Not everything in life is so black and white, but it seems the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and its keystone role in our belief is exactly that. . . . Accept Joseph Smith as a prophet and the book as the miraculously revealed and revered word of the Lord it is or else consign both man and book to Hades for the devastating deception of it all, but let's not have any bizarre middle ground about the wonderful contours of a young boy's imagination or his remarkable facility for turning a literary phrase. That is an unacceptable position to take—morally, literarily, historically, or theologically.[584]

Such vehement declarations reveal the vital centrality of Smith's oral performance of the *Book of Mormon* within the LDS faith. Smith's claim to prophetic status, the theological innovations he

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[581] Ibid., 4:461.

[582] Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion" (presented at the General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, UT, October 1986).
[583] Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*: 238.

[584] Jeffrey R. Holland, "True or False" (presented at the Church Eductional System Religious Educators' Symposium, Brigham Young University; Provo, UT, August 9 1994).

developed, and his overarching majestic cosmology–the visions of angels, of resurrected beings, of Jesus Christ and God the Father; doctrines of salvation; the restoration of priesthood powers within a structure of patriarchal hierarchy and governorship; prophecies of all nature and scope; ceremonies, sacraments, and rituals–all balance on Joseph Smith's 1829 epic oral performance of *The Book of Mormon* and his claims of being a divinely chosen transmitter of an ancient and historical text.

The *Book of Mormon* stands as a text that has defied easy categorization and, protected by some of its religious adherents and guardians, suffered from academic neglect. Yet, within its pages, as well as the details of its construction, the contemporary primacy of the spoken word and the unparalleled significance of oral performances emerge as crucial modes of representation. No matter how the book is received and evaluated by its many audiences, whether as a sacred scripture or a material artifact of early nineteenth-century America, the oral residue within the text *Book of Mormon* tells the story of its own creation. And as the script of a complex kaleidoscope of cultural practices, the text reveals critical insights into the role of language, the methods of composition and the cultural significance of oral performance in the early American republic. While the text plays the role of the "keystone" in the Mormon religion, the *Book of Mormon* also stands as a witness to the central role of oral performance in the construction of a new nation, a new religious cosmology, and a new world religion.

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