A Marvelous Work and a Possession: Book of Mormon Historicity as Postcolónialism

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> *In the discussion period following a January 2003 presentation at BYU, a young Peruvian student named José summed up the dilemma. He told the audience and panelists how he grew up believing he was a Lamanite and now felt "overwhelmed with the surprise coming from science. . . . We don't know where the Book of Mormon took place. We don't know where the Lamanites are. If we don't know who the Lamanites are, how can the Book of Mormon promise to bring them back? It's an identity crisis for many of us that [must] be understood."*[1]

Introduction: 10,000 Parallelomaniacs

Part of this paper deals with a unique and complex book whose authenticity and historicity we are asked to accept on "faith." The book claims to arrive as the secondary translation of some magnificent testimonies con-

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1. Quoted in "Reframing the Book of Mormon" *Sunstone*, No. 121 (March 2004): 9.

taining the story of a family whose intercontinental travel takes them beyond the lands known in the Bible. It speaks of "great wonders." It recounts the story of Adam and Eve (slightly revised, of course). There are bloodthirsty, brutal people who threaten the faith of believers with certain death, thwarted at the last minute by divine intervention. At one point the day actually turns dark. At another, the land becomes "infested by robbers," and the more evil people even participate in cannibalism. It tells of great kings who offer to convert to Christianity. It demonstrates an uncanny knowledge of guerrilla warfare tactics. It has inspired stories of magical salamanders that turn white when placed in fire, and of course it speaks of wonders and magnificence "beyond description." It has even had an indirect influence on the manner in which we refer to Native Americans. But the original text, unfortunately, no longer exists on this earth, and we are left only with the assurances of a "translator" that the testimony contained in the record is "true," although we do not, in fact, have even the complete text as it left the hand of the translator/scribe.

I am speaking, of course, of *The Travels of Marco Polo*,[2] written by one Rustichello of Pisa, a romance-writer who spent time in jail with Marco Polo in 1298 and claims to have recorded Polo's narrative as Polo told it to him. But as I indicate above, there is considerable scholarly debate regarding the authenticity of Rustichello's report. In 1928 Professor L. F. Benedetto produced the first comprehensive version of the Polo manuscripts and, in his introduction, demonstrates that entire passages of the Polo narrative have been lifted verbatim from an Arthurian romance by Rustichello.[3] In Ronald Latham's 1958 introduction to *The Travels*, he addresses a "diversity of opinion" regarding the "actual words" spoken by Polo but concludes that this is "a diversity that need not, however, shake

2. On the "intercontinental travel" of the Polo family, the creation of Adam, and "great wonders," see *The Travels of Marco Polo*, edited by Ronald Latham (New York: Penguin Books, 1958), 33–34. The trial of the faithful (54–59); "bloodthirsty," brutal people (61); day turns dark (64); land "infested by robbers" (65); salamander (which curiously refers in Polo's text to a type of metal) turning white in fire (89–90); guerilla warfare (101); cannibalism (110); the Great Khan offers to convert to Christianity (120); wonders and "magnificence" beyond description (151, 223).

3. *Il Romanzo Arturiano di Rustichello da Pisa*, Edzione Critica, Traduzione e commento a cura di Fabrizio Cigni; Premessa di Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso (Pisa, Italy: Cassa di Riparmio di Pisa/Pacini, 1994); see also Edmund G. Gardner,

our *faith in the authenticity* of the work as a whole."[4] Latham concedes, however, that "although manuscripts of Polo's work exist in most of the languages of western Europe, not even excluding Irish, not one of these can be regarded as complete; and even by fitting them all together like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle, we cannot hope to reconstitute the original text as it left the practiced hand of Messer Rustichello."[5]

Other scholars are even more skeptical. In *Did Marco Polo Go to China?* Francis Wood argues that Polo's narrative is riddled with inconsistencies and inaccuracies.[6] And regarding Polo's service as a "traveling reporter" for the Great Khan, despite the meticulousness of imperial Chinese historians, there is "no record anywhere of such service."[7] Furthermore, Polo fails to mention some of the most obvious and important Chinese landmarks, such as, for instance, the Great Wall.

But, more to the point, why have I introduced this complex medieval narrative in such a way that my readers are compelled to find parallels between Polo's *Travels* and the Book of Mormon? Of course, since I ask why "my readers" are "compelled" to find parallels between the Book of Mormon and the *Travels of Marco Polo,* I am speaking already of a certain horizon of expectations. To present that particular series of details, invoking key words like "faith," "miraculous," "scribe," and "guerilla warfare," while omitting other elements like "Marco Polo," "1298," "China," and "Emperor," I am playing a "trick" on "my readers" that works only because I am already intimately familiar with the discursive parameters of *Dialogue* readership. I am forcing a particular interpretation, based on my objectives within a particular interpretive community.

The Jewish scholar of the New Testament, Samuel Sandmel, has dubbed this type of selective interpretation "parallelomania," a term that Douglas Salmon then borrows to describe the type of Book of Mormon scholarship championed by Hugh Nibley and other scholars at FARMS. Samuel Sandmel's initial use of the term is clearly pejorative, defining it as

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Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing, 2003).

4. Latham, ed., *The Travels of Marco Polo,* 26; emphasis mine.

5. Ibid., 24.

6. Francis Wood, *Did Marco Polo Go to China?* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998).

7. Ibid., 133.

"that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction."[8] Thus, "parallelomania" is defined as largely pathological, connoting excess, as if the delineation of parallels were a kind of clinical condition, a "mania," like a phobia or a mental disorder. It is an "extravagance"; it "overdoes" the "supposed" similarity; it proceeds "as if" the connection were inevitable—all phrases that are intended to delegitimate the *a priori* acceptance of certain patterns within a text.[9]

The problem with the label "parallelomania," however, is that characterizing this process as a sickness implies that there are scholars, somewhere out there, for whom the finding of patterns is not tainted by preconceived notions of a given pattern structure. Such a fantasy is seductive but ultimately elusive. Human beings, by definition, are locked into systems of pattern recognition, whether we like it or not. We are, in effect, hard-wired parallelomaniacs, if you like, mega-powerful pattern-finding machines.[10] I recognize, of course, that not everyone will agree with this proposition and that some will complain that any postmodern rejection of positivist epistemology only opens the door to, at best, the potential le-

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8. Douglas F. Salmon, "Parallelomania and the Study of Latter-day Scripture: Confirmation, Coincidence, or the Collective Unconscious?" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 129–56. The Salmon quotation is on p. 131.

9. Salmon's discussion of the parallelomania in Hugh Nibley is equally critical, implying that Hugh Nibley's methodology always operates already under the predetermined authenticity of Joseph Smith's claims. The overarching assumption is that, for these overzealous apologists, certain interpretive communities (rather than the texts themselves) are what account for the identification of parallels or patterns and that the power of these interpretive communities is so strong that people will be able to find patterns in even the most random, absurdly irrelevant texts. This is also the implicit argument of Robert Patterson, "Hebraicisms, Chiasmus, and Other Internal Evidence for Ancient Authorship in *Green Eggs and Ham*," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 163–68, a parody of parallelomania in which the author satirically points to certain "Hebraicisms" and other ancient qualities in Dr. Suess's classic children's book, concluding with mock certainty that the text "must" (or "obviously") have been a translation of something ancient.

10. I am denying here the rather hard and fast distinction most positivist scholars would make between hard "evidence" and a structural "parallel." The

gitimation of all kinds of crazy theories and, at worst, to intellectual chaos. However, simply recognizing that all knowledge is the product of systems of power and culture is not to dictate that all forms of knowledge are equally acceptable. In fact, no one could accept such a proposition anyway. The fact that we are bound within the complex fluctuations of our own interpretive communities means that we will always find our own parallels more compelling and acceptable than those we find elsewhere.

Some have noticed that, in the debate on Book of Mormon historicity, we are witnessing a kind of battle of the parallels. Robert A. Rees has noted:

> It is fascinating that each group looks at the book and finds its own predictable set of parallels. The naturalists [those who reject Book of Mormon historicity] find parallels with the late decades of the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth centuries, and this convinces them that the book is a product of a modern American mind. Meanwhile the apologists [those who defend Book of Mormon historicity] find numerous parallels with the ancient world and conclude that the book could only have origi-

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problem with the supposed superiority of "evidence" over "parallels" has to do with a refusal to see how all epistemologies rely on the very natural human "feedback loop" of evidence and pattern creation. For a brief and fascinating introduction to this process, see Norbert Weiner, *Human Use of Human Beings* (New York: Avon Books, 1986). The basic positivist argument is that "parallels" are ostensibly inferior because they rely on a *text-to-text* relation rather than a *text-to-object* relation, a distinction that persists in most scientific discourse despite a long tradition in Western philosophy (at least since Kant) that denies the human possibility of comprehending any object "in itself." Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is, of course, where most meta-critical discussions of the debate on Book of Mormon historicity end up. In the May 2004 issue of *Sunstone* alone, there are at least three references to Kuhn's study, even though there are several more interesting and rigorous articulations of postmodern relativity. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and, for a more rhetorical version, Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982). For a trenchant critique of some of these theories, see Christopher Norris, *Against Relativism: Philosophy of Science, Deconstruction, and Critical Theory* (Oxford, Eng.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997); and Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford, Eng.: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

> nated with ancient peoples. One often feels that the discourse concerning the Book of Mormon has been reduced to, "My parallel arguments are more sophisticated, more authentic, and more persuasive than yours!"[11]

I am inclined to believe that Rees is right, although I should confess that (if I were forced to choose between the two), as a scholar I find the ostensibly anti-metaphysical parallelomania of the naturalists more compelling than the necessarily supernatural parallelomania of the apologists. I am not sure, however, that I *am* forced to choose between the two, particularly in the wake of so many creative "third" options, which I will discuss below. But where I stand on the issue is perhaps less relevant to my discussion than the fact that we are currently witnessing an unparalleled proliferation of parallels. In fact, with Brent Lee Metcalfe's characterization of the current Book of Mormon crisis as a "Galileo Event," we have now entered the realm of *meta*-parallelomania—that is, parallels about parallels.

Metcalfe first introduced the phrase "Galileo Event" at the 2000 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium and defined it as follows: "A Galileo Event occurs when the cognitive dissonance between empirical evidence and a theological tenet is so severe that a religion will abandon the tenet, acquiescing to the empirical data."[12] The comparison entered the debate, then, in an effort to characterize the question as one of science versus religion—the connection being, above all, a *parallel.* That is, according to Metcalfe and others, the way in which the Catholic Church modified its doctrine according to Galileo's discoveries in astronomy is *parallel* to the way in which the Mormon Church has modified (and will continue to modify) its doctrine about the Book of Mormon according to recent scientific discoveries about the lands and people of the book's setting.

I personally find Metcalfe's meta-parallel rather provocative and interesting. However, I am somewhat hesitant to reduce the complicated and social issues of Book of Mormon historicity to the simple and "classic" conflict between science and religion. I wonder, in fact, whether in doing so we risk ignoring the important cultural and political consequences of the conflict. Time spent on picking apart the various geo-

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11. Robert A. Rees, "Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the American Renaissance," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 87.

12. Brent Lee Metcalfe, quoted in Thomas Murphy, "Inventing Galileo," *Sunstone,* No. 131 (March 2004): 58.

graphical and textual inadequacies in the Book of Mormon may actually obscure the more important question of what social *consequences* we can expect to see as a result of this particular battle between parallels. What are the consequences of reinterpreting (or otherwise abandoning) Book of Mormon historicity?

Consequences of Book of Mormon Parallelomania: From *Colónializing* Event to *Decolónialization*

Here I hasten to add that it is not my intention to dismiss the drawing of parallels. As I said before, I am convinced that we all operate within a universal human proclivity for pattern finding. And parallels about parallels can allow us to see aspects of a discursive structure that we might not otherwise have seen. In this sense, I am very much intrigued by the linguistic act of labeling our current situation a "Galileo Event." However, I would like to offer a somewhat different meta-parallel that I hope will draw our attention to some of the more political, cultural, and social consequences of abandoning Book of Mormon historicity. To illustrate what I mean, allow me to flex my own meta-parallelomaniacal muscles for a moment and return to my discussion of Marco Polo, whose *Travels*, you will recall, had something to do with the manner in which we refer to Native Americans.

Such a statement may seem counterintuitive. Marco Polo went to Asia, right? What does his account of those travels have to do with Native American Indians? Quite a lot, actually. *The Travels of Marco Polo* played an important part in inspiring Christopher Columbus to begin his voyage to the western hemisphere. Christopher Columbus had read Marco Polo prior to his voyage in 1492 and made "close to a hundred notations in the margins" of his personal copy.[13] So Columbus left the European continent under the influence of the dubious inspiration of Polo and Mandeville, arriving off the coast of Cuba, Jamaica, and Hispaniola in

13. Interestingly enough, these annotations illustrate a preoccupation with the more sensual elements of Polo's tale, since Columbus marked passages on the exotic sexual practices of those encountered by Polo, in addition to passages about trade and other financial possibilities. Jonathan Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 16–17. It is also important to remember that Columbus thought that he had arrived in the "East." According to Stephen Greenblatt, whose book *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 57, "In the late fif-

1492, clearly under the impression that he had landed in the "East." What happened then is well known. The natives living in this "New" World were dubbed "Indians," their lands and possessions were seized, their cultures assaulted, and a campaign of ruthless genocide ensued.

Where, then, are the parallels? How to connect this jumbled mesh of historical events to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon? There are several parallels; and depending on where one stands in the debate on Book of Mormon historicity, one may emphasize a variety of things.[14] First, apologists may find parallels between the geographical confusion of Columbus and that of Joseph Smith. Columbus looked at the American hemisphere, and thought it corresponded to the text(s) he was reading (i.e., Marco Polo, Mandeville), just as Joseph Smith looked at the American hemisphere and thought that it corresponded to the text he was reading/translating (i.e., the

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teenth century that concept [of the "East"] depended principally on Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville, whose books Columbus read and quite possibly carried with him on his first voyage." As I have indicated, Polo's account has been widely discredited, though many scholars maintain that Polo did have some limited contact with the Asian continent; but Mandeville's story of his travels through the Holy Land, Mount Sinai, Babylon, and other places has fared even worse. By the early Victorian era, the authenticity of Mandeville's narrative had been definitively rejected. Mandeville, scholars revealed, was a total sham. As Greenblatt explains: "Intermingled with the extravagant fantasies [i.e., dog-headed men, the gravelly sea, the 'Indians whose testicles hang down to the ground,' etc.] were reasonably persuasive geographical and ethnographic descriptions, but the passages that were convincing seemed to derive from other travelers: William of Boldensele, Odoric of Pordenone, Giovanni de Pian Carpini, Albert of Aix, and others. Mandeville not only failed to acknowledge his sources; he concealed them—'coolly and deliberately,' as his great Victorian editor Sir George Warner puts it—in order to claim that he himself had personally undertaken the dangerous voyages to the Middle East and Asia. He was an unredeemable fraud: not only were his rare moments of accuracy stolen, but even his lies were plagiarized from others" (31).

14. I should note here that I am not the first person to connect Joseph Smith and Columbus. Orson Scott Card, *Pastwatch: The Redemption of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Tor Books, 1997), connects the two in fascinating ways. For an excellent reading of Card's novel as a "radical" critique of issues affecting Mormonism today, see Eugene England "Pastwatch: The Redemption of Orson Scott Card," *AML Annual 2002* (Provo, Utah: Association for Mormon Letters, 2002), 143–56.

gold plates). And, apologists could argue, the fact that Columbus was wrong about which lands were being referred to does not mean that those lands do not exist. The Indians were not from India, but India is, nonetheless a real place. Likewise, Joseph Smith might have been wrong in thinking that the North American Indians were "Lamanites," but that does not necessarily mean Lamanites did not, or do not, exist. We just have to shift our thinking a bit.[15]

And for naturalist scholars of the Book of Mormon, there are parallels too. The appearance ("prophecy") of Christopher Columbus in the Book of Mormon, along with the prophecies of the Revolutionary War, the white settlers' persecution of the Indians, and the protection of the United States as a free land all signal the necessity of reading the book through the lens of a hemispheric geography. The book could not have included all of these hemispheric mythologies, along with the hemispheric language of the "land northward," the "land southward," and the "narrow neck of land," without intending the kind of reading that current DNA evidence would contradict. Indeed, for these critics, the book demands to be read this way.

At this point, then, I have merely used the parallel between Columbus and Joseph Smith to demonstrate what Trent Stephens has already argued in an exchange with Dan Vogel: that the conflict between Book of Mormon apologists and naturalists "comes from the interpretation of texts and data rather than from the texts and data themselves." Stephens's position, which is that "the Book of Mormon story is still true . . . [but

15. Both Columbus and Joseph Smith were convinced that John 10:14–16 referred to the natives they encountered on the American continent. *The Libro de las Profecías of Christopher Columbus*, translated by Delno C. West and August Kling (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), 229–30. Some non-Mormons remain skeptical of the current DNA narrative for the origins of the Native American Indians. Vine Deloria, for instance, in *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997) argues that much of the scientific "fact" regarding a prehistoric "land bridge" between North America and Asia is flawed and that Indian lore provides as many compelling narratives to explain Native American origins. Deloria's postmodern skepticism, read in the context of FARMS scholarship, makes for some rather interesting ironies, although Deloria's radical critique of Christianity in *God Is Red* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Publishing, 1972), 200–201, did not extend to Mormonism, which he praised as closer to the communal, land-centered Christianity of the Amish than the exploitative hypocrisy of Christianity in general.

that] Middle Eastern colonization in the Americas may have been very small compared to the remainder of the population," is most likely infuriating to Vogel and other positivists for whom the retreat to theories of hermeneutic relativity seems facile and disingenuous.

In Vogel's words, "Scientific method was invented to override emotional biases and help us overcome our tendency to make subjective judgments."[16] Thus, Vogel's rather anti-postmodern faith in scientific objectivity leads him to what he believes is the "truth" about the Book of Mormon, while Stephen's apologetic hermeneutic tendencies allow him to maintain what he believes is the "truth" about the Book of Mormon. But there is one point on which both Stephens and Vogel remain virtually silent: the social and cultural *consequences* of their various "truths."

To allow my parallel between Columbus and Joseph Smith to articulate these potential consequences, let's abandon that particular question of scientific "truth" for a moment and turn to the more cultural and social aspects of the debate on historicity.[17] In a letter to Luis de Santangel regarding his first voyage, Columbus wrote:

> As I know that you will be pleased at the great victory with which Our Lord has crowned my voyage, I write this to you, from which you will learn how in thirty-three days, I passed from the Canary Islands to the Indies with the fleet which the most illustrious king and queen, our sovereign,

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16. Trent Stephens, "The Real Conflict," letter to the editor, *Sunstone*, No. 132 (May 2004): 3–4. The question of how DNA narratives have accumulated the kind of transcendental significance they currently enjoy in our legal system is discussed in Sarah E. Chinn, *Technology and the Logic of American Racism: A Cultural History of the Body as Evidence* (New York: Continuum, 2000), chap. 5: "Reading the 'Book of Life': DNA and the Meanings of Identity."

17. In this sense, I suggest that a description of Book of Mormon historicity that takes into account the various social and cultural consequences of such a concept will be more productive than one that remains caught up in simply "proving" the relative "truth" of the book. Inasmuch as the question of evidence in Book of Mormon historicity is a philosophical or literary question rather than scientific one, I agree with Richard Rorty's neo-pragmatism: "A fully humanist culture, of the sort I envisage, will emerge only when we discard the question 'Do I know the real object, or only one of its appearances?' and replace it with the question 'Am I using the best possible description of the situation in which I find myself, or can I cobble together a better one?'" "A Pragmatist View of Contemporary Analytic Philosophy," lecture at the University of California, Irvine, Humanities Center, April 8, 2005; photocopy in my possession.

> gave to me. And there I found very many islands filled with people innumerable, and of them all I have taken possession for their highnesses, by proclamation made and with the royal standard unfurled, and no opposition was offered to me [*y no me fué contradicho*[18]]. To the first island which I found, I gave the name *San Salvador,* in remembrance of the Divine Majesty, Who has marvelously bestowed all this; the Indians call it "Guanahani." To the second, I have the name *Isla de Santa Maria de Concepcion;* to the third, *Fernandina;* to the fourth, *Isabella;* to the fifth, *Isla Juana,* and so to each one I gave a new name.[19]

As Stephen Greenblatt has argued, the legitimacy of the act described here does not depend on cartographic "truths" but rather on a series of linguistic *acts:*[20] "declaring, witnessing, recording" all take place in this brief passage: "The acts are public and official: the admiral speaks as a representative of the king and queen, and [according to the extreme for-

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18. A more accurate English translation here would have been "and I was not contradicted."

19. Cecil Jane, trans. and ed., *Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus,* 2 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1930), 1:2. For another translation of the same passage, see J. M. Cohen, *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 115.

20. I use the phrase "linguistic acts" in much the same way that scholars in philosophy refer to "speech acts." Speech act theory was inaugurated with a series of lectures at Harvard University in 1955 by J. L. Austin, "How to Do Things with Words," 2d ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975). In these lectures Austin makes the simple yet provocative distinction between two different kinds of utterances: "Constative" utterances, Austin says, are those locutions that can be determined to be true or false, in other words, descriptive. For example, "the table is brown," or "the car is big." "Performative" utterances, on the other hand, are those that actually accomplish, "act on," or otherwise transform reality in the moment of articulation, that is, are a speech *act.* For example, to utter, in a marriage ceremony, the promise "I do" is to both describe and *do* the action described; or to say "I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*—as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stem" [sic] (5) is to *accomplish* something beyond a simple utterance. According to Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 9–10, the "effect [of a speech act] upon the referent coincides with its enunciation." Austin's seemingly simple task in *How to Do Things with Words* is to articulate the various conditions under which an utterance can be determined to be either constative or performative, and whether a performative speech act can be considered "felicitous" or "infelicitous." The ensuing debate over Austin's project becomes the catalyst for much of postmodern and poststructuralist theory,

malism of Spanish colonialism] his speech must be heard and understood by competent, named witnesses."[21] Another important aspect of this passage is the rather conscious invocation of the "marvelous." In fact, throughout Columbus's writings, the New World is continually described in terms of "wonder," "marvel," and "magnificence." Indeed, the discourse of wonder becomes the central rhetorical refrain in European descriptions of their encounter with the New World, and the characterization of the natives' wonder is equally ubiquitous. But according to Greenblatt, there is a problem with these particular speech acts: "Why should words spoken in a language the native inhabitants had obviously never before heard be thought to constitute a valid speech act, transferring their lands to those whose utterly incomprehensible visual signs—a cross, two crowns, the letters F and Y—were printed on the Spanish banners? Why should the natives be thought capable, under the circumstances, of assenting or offering a contradiction?"[22]

The answer to that question is that they are *not* thought capable of doing so, and thus, there is a kind of inherent exclusionary logic in the formalism of the act. Furthermore, Greenblatt goes on to argue that Columbus seems to sense the illegitimacy of these acts. There is "an emotional and intellectual vacancy, a hole, that threatens to draw the reader of Columbus's discourse toward laughter or tears and toward a questioning of the legitimacy of the Spanish claim. Columbus tries to draw the reader to-

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particularly with regard to Austin's "bogging down" as he tries to enumerate the various conditions under which a given speech act will be felicitous. See J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001); and Jacques Derrida, *Limited, Inc.* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Northwestern University Press, 1988). For a speech act to be "felicitous," Austin says, "there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect." Thus, "a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend to so conduct themselves, and further, must actually so conduct themselves subsequently" (15).

21. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 57.

22. Ibid., 59.

ward wonder, a sense of the marvelous that in effect fills up the emptiness at the center of the maimed rite of possession."[23]

Now, then, let us summarize and begin to draw some parallels: (1) Based on a rather vague and ambiguous geography, a man, who some consider to be "inspired," gave a name with real social effects to an entire group of people; (2) The agent responsible for this act knew that it would seem illegitimate and so he installed a "discourse of wonder" to "fill up" the vacancy of that act; (3) Certain systems of cultural power were added to that discourse of wonder to validate the original speech act. What I hope this parallel points to is that, whether we accept Book of Mormon historicity or not, the linguistic act by which an entire people are appropriated by a given discourse is not simply a matter of "science," "truth," or "facts." It is a question of power, of culture, and of language. In fact, the possession of a people's identity is rarely a question of truth.

Here, then, it may be useful to label the appearance of the Book of Mormon in the Americas a "*Colón*ializing Event," both because Columbus's name in the original Spanish is *Colón* and because I think the geopolitical implications are interesting.[24] I define such an event as occurring when a series of speech acts are employed in the characterization or taking possession of an entire people—a process that relies for its legitimacy on systems of cultural power. Naturally, the drawing of parallels is never without a degree of tension. One must recognize, of course, that there was an important difference between the militarized greed and racist ambitions of Columbus, and the utopian anti-capitalist, relatively anti-racist visions of Joseph Smith.[25] This difference is also important because it could affect the consequences of what I would like to call de*colón*ialization. De*colón*ialization, as I am using it here, is intended to re-

23. Ibid., 80.

24. Although *Colón* makes for an apt pun, I should point out that the term "colony" did not originate with Columbus's name. "Colony" was a Roman term and referred to an imperial outpost, usually set up for purposes of future settlement. Several scholars of American Studies have employed this pun as well. See, for example, Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, "The Spanish Colón-ialista Narrative: Their Prospectus for Us in 1992," in *Mapping Multiculturalism*, edited by Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 215–37.

25. Of course, Joseph Smith was not an anti-racist in the post-civil rights sense we refer to today, but there can be little doubt that in identifying the Native

flect the scientific, social, and political changes that cause the speech acts of a given *Colón*ializing Event to become gradually less authoritative and secure. According to this formulation, the current arguments to rearticulate Book of Mormon historicity (both critical and progressive orthodox), and the subsequent dislocation of Lamanite identity amount to a call for de*colón*ialization. To put it simply:

1. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon = *Colón*ializing Event, wherein a series of linguistic acts are employed in the characterization or taking possession of an entire people—a process that relies for its legitimacy on systems of cultural power.

2. The current redefinition of Book of Mormon historicity = de*colón*ialization, wherein certain scientific, social, and political changes cause the linguistic acts of a given *Colón*ializing Event to become gradually less authoritative and secure.

Naturally, then, the future use of the Book of Mormon in the LDS Church will involve some form of post*colón*ialism, though it is not easy to predict what that future will look like. Will the relevance of Book of Mormon historicity be abandoned? Will the reinterpretation of the Book of Mormon lead to a new place for historical parallelomania in official Church discourse? Will all references to identities and "birthrights" become entirely metaphorical? And who will the Lamanites be?

Toward an Era of Book of Mormon Post*colón*ialism

My purpose in characterizing the current debate this way is due to what I see as a failure to adequately articulate the kinds of cultural and political consequences that a reformulation of Book of Mormon historicity would entail. The anguish of the young Peruvian student in the epigraph to this paper reflects an aspect of this debate that many Anglo-Mormons involved in the debate have not yet taken into account. In this sense, I

American Indians as "Lamanites" and therefore as literal descendants of the House of Israel, the Book of Mormon offered a radically different vision of a millennial American empire—an anti-racist, multicultural form of Manifest Destiny very different from the capitalist trappings of Jacksonian democracy and also very different, I must point out, from what actually happened. Also, it is important to stress that there is an essential difference between the kinds of military coercion used by Columbus and the *conquistadores* and the more discursive, spiritual influence exercised by Joseph Smith.

would argue that the most important text we have at the moment for understanding the debate on Book of Mormon historicity is neither a textbook on the intricacies of DNA evidence nor the latest FARMS theory, but rather Armand Mauss's *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage.*[26] Mauss's book is important precisely because it emphasizes the historical consequences of identifying—or *de*identifying—a certain group of people as "Lamanites." Using Mauss's book as a springboard for discussion, then, I would like to speculate on some of the potential consequences of Book of Mormon decolónialization, which may help articulate a more accurate understanding of the coming era of Book of Mormon postcolónialism.[27] Of course there would be consequences for both Mormons in general and Lamanite Mormons, though the latter is certainly underdiscussed in the current debate.

What, then, are the possible consequences of Book of Mormon decolónialization for Mormons in general? First, and most obviously, a serious revaluation of the process of translation as revelation may be upon us. Mormons may turn to any number of "third" options for explaining the various historical anachronisms in the book, implying perhaps a redefinition of "scripture." Some of these theories (like those proposed by Blake Ostler and Robert Rees) argue that the Book of Mormon could be understood as *both* an ancient and modern document. Others argue (like Anthony Hutchinson) that the book is not an ancient record, but is nonetheless inspired "scripture." Some have even argued recently (like Jess Groesbeck) that the book is not an ancient history *per se* but that, through the transmission of a meaningful and collective unconscious, it becomes a kind of "symbolic" history.[28]

Second, depending on how thoroughly claims to Book of Mormon historicity are abandoned, claims to religious exclusivity (as the "only true

26. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

27. I emphasize "coming," since I believe the entire debate on Book of Mormon historicity remains outside the sphere, not only of Mormon Lamanites, but also of the general Church population everywhere. There is, of course, a very small group, an intellectual vanguard, if you will, that is currently paying attention to the reinterpretation of Book of Mormon historicity, but most Church members have yet to investigate the subject.

28. Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1987):

and living church") may be also reduced or deemphasized. Or, depending on the degree to which Book of Mormon historicity is maintained (and simultaneously relegated to the realm of irrelevance and speculative erudition), this new position may be simply yet another transformation in a church that continues to move away from its provincial, nineteenth-century beginnings toward a more global status in the twenty-first century, its religious exclusivity intact.

It is worth noting, however, that even if changes like these occur, Euro-American Mormon religious identity will not be greatly altered, mainly because, for these Mormons, the quasi-racial identification with the lineage of "Ephraim" has been important but not crucial to their sense of subjective empowerment. As Mauss argues, Euro-Americans "began without [this identity], made empowering uses of it during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but in recent generations have begun to deemphasize (if not ignore) it in favor of a more universalistic and metaphorical Israelite identity (as descendants of Abraham), like any and all others who embrace the gospel."[29] As Europeans or Euro-Americans, in other words, their sense of cultural power has never relied exclusively on their identification with Israelite lineage, which is why that identity has demonstrated a kind of social plasticity. David H. Bailey has recently written: "I have yet to hear anyone declare that solving the anthropological origin of Native Americans was central to their decision to change their life and accept baptism."[30] As a white, English-speaking, North American Mormon, Bailey is most likely telling the truth. For him, and those around him, such a question hardly matters. But his comments betray an appalling ignorance of how these issues affect indigenous populations and current proselytizing efforts throughout Central and South America.

66–123; Rees, "Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the American Renaissance"; Anthony A. Hutchinson, "The Word of God Is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth-Century Scripture," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, edited by Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 1–20; C. Jess Groesbeck, "The Book of Mormon as a Symbolic History," *Sunstone*, No. 131 (March 2004): 35–45.

29. Armand L. Mauss, email to John Williams, 2005.

30. David H. Bailey, "No Discernible Trace," letter to the editor, *Sunstone*, No. 137 (May 2005): 5.

For the people heretofore identified as Lamanites, the consequences for the disarticulation of Israelite identity are much more far reaching. The more liberal among us may be tempted to feel that all of these transformations would be naturally healthy and progressive for those people formerly known as Lamanites. For example, these Mormon "Lamanites" may be empowered to finally cast off the possessive investment in whiteness (to borrow a phrase from George Lipsitz) that is endemic to receiving the Book of Mormon, rather than attempting to reconcile their own "darkness" with some promised future "whiteness." One wonders, for instance, whether Douglas Campbell's attempts to mythify the racialized color scheme in the Book of Mormon by explaining the use of these colors as "metaphorical" has ever really resonated with someone not identified as "white." How comforting is it, after all, to tell someone with darker skin: "God does not actually think the color of your skin makes you evil. He just likes to use that color as a metaphor for evil"?[31]

There is also the possibility that certain stereotypes about Native Americans in the Church may fall by the wayside. There are, of course, explicit promises in the scriptures about the Lamanites "blossoming as the rose" (D&C 49:24) in the last days; however, the description of the Lamanites in the Book of Mormon as a fallen, uncivilized, shiftless people has held much more weight in the Mormon conception of American Indians. On the contrary, as Mauss's book so carefully points out, the vast majority of white Mormons have considered the Native Americans to be first and foremost Indians and only secondly Lamanites. Even if Joseph Smith's radical utopianism encouraged a "convert-and-civilize" sequence for Mormon interactions with the Indians, Brigham Young and

31. How do nonwhites feel, for example, when reading, "They were as *white* as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus and behold the *whiteness* thereof did exceed all the *whiteness*, yea there could be nothing so *white* as the *whiteness* thereof" (3 Ne. 19:25; emphasis mine). Even in a best-case, most faith-promoting scenario, a nonwhite has to actively metaphorize the passage, ignoring the links between the almost rhythmic repetition of "whiteness" and the modern racialized parlance that would locate their identification as the economic and cultural antithesis to such a formula. Douglas Campbell, "'White' or 'Pure': Five Vignettes," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 119–35.

most Church leaders since then reversed that formula, focusing overwhelmingly on the need for Indian assimilation into white culture.

But Mauss's book also demonstrates that Book of Mormon de*colón*ialization may create a unique set of problems for those people currently and formerly identified as Lamanites. Keeping in mind that most white Mormons have failed to fulfill any special obligations toward the Lamanites that the Book of Mormon requires of them, there have been instances where the identification of Indians as Lamanites has led to more politically progressive possibilities for those Indians. For example, Mauss points out, in 1980 when the Canadian Pacific Railway was about to relinquish its hold on an area in the Indian reserve near Cardston, a controversy erupted between the Blood Indians, who had hoped the area would revert back to them, and some Cardston residents, who claimed to have already purchased part of the land (without the Blood tribe's permission). According to Mauss, Cardston's Mormons accounted for nearly 80 percent of the area's population. In a comprehensive survey among white Cardston Mormons, Mauss found evidence "that looking upon the Indians through a 'favorable' (if condescending) Lamanite label tended to be accompanied by a sympathetic outlook on the Indians' political exertions."[32] In other words, those Mormons who looked at the Indians and saw Lamanites were much more sympathetic to the tribe's political demands than Mormons who looked at the Indians and saw only Indians. One particularly insensitive respondent summed up the latter opinion rather well: "When asked directly if he thought that the Blood Indians were Lamanites, he declared 'Hell, no! These ain't Lamanites. Lamanites are down there in Mexico and Latin America . . . or maybe in Polynesia.'"[33]

There is also some evidence to suggest that the internalization of Lamanite identity among converts in Central and South America has often led to radical affirmations of ethnicity and culture. As Mauss argues, the "New" Lamanites in these areas (as contrasted to the "Old" Lamanites of North America) have converted under much different social circumstances, bypassing the assimilationist rhetoric of American racism, and allowing their identification as "Lamanites" to increase their sense of national purpose. Mauss writes, "LDS converts through-

32. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 125.
33. Ibid., 127.

out Latin America have been able to use the Lamanite identity to claim a special or divine distinction in contrast to both their Hispanic colonial conquerors and their Anglo-Mormon coreligionists."[34] The same could also be argued for Polynesians, Maori, and Tongan Mormons in the South Pacific.

What we are left with, then, is a complex set of social, political, and cultural issues that may all be affected by calls for Book of Mormon de*colón*ialization. The term "Galileo Event," while provocative and interesting, reduces these complex issues to the simple and "classic" conflict of religion versus science—an epistemological or cosmological issue. However, by characterizing the current debate as a moment of de*colón*ialization (forecasting, of course, a future era of Book of Mormon post*colón*ialism), we are forced to acknowledge the complex linguistic, cultural, and political matrix that surrounds such an event. If we are going to focus on one figure in this debate, let it not be Galileo, but Columbus, and the fraught and tortuous legacy he left behind.

34. Ibid., 149.