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**Abstract** Review of *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon* (1988), by Loftes Tryk.

Loftes Tryk, *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon*. Redondo Beach, CA: Jacob's Well Foundation, 1988. vii + 248 pp. \$7.00.

A Modern *Malleus maleficarum*

Reviewed by Daniel C. Peterson

"Bow-wow," said Mrs. Rattery. "You know you aren't putting your heart into this."

"Oh," said Tony. "Coop-coop-coop."

Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust*

The right honourable gentleman is indebted to his memory for his jests and to his imagination for his facts.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan

Last year, in this *Review*, I examined Peter Bartley's polemic against the Book of Mormon, and termed it "rather worthless."<sup>1</sup> I had not yet read Loftes Tryk's *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon*, which is incomparably worse. For all his many, many flaws, Peter Bartley now seems to me by contrast the Shakespeare, the Michelangelo, the Aristotle, the Einstein of anti-Mormonism. If Bartley's book is no Rolls Royce—if, indeed, it more closely resembles an engineless Studebaker sitting on grass-covered blocks behind a dilapidated barn—it is nonetheless infinitely more sober and respectable than Loftes Tryk's literally incredible volume, a gaudily painted Volkswagen disgorging dozens of costumed clowns to the zany music of a circus calliope.

One of the chapters of *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon* is entitled "A Basic Course in Faulty Logic." That could have served as the title of the entire volume. Time and again, with tears of laughter flowing down my face, between telephone calls to share particularly funny passages with friends, I asked myself, "Can this fellow be *serious*? Does he really believe this?" I actually thought for a while that the book must be a joke. Somebody with the obviously spurious name of "Loftes Tryk" had managed to insinuate himself into the largely humorless ranks of the anti-Mormons, persuading them to

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel C. Peterson, review of Peter Bartley, *Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book, and the Cult*, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1990): 35.

publish a side-splitting satire *of themselves*. It's the kind of thing, my friends can testify, that *I* would give my right arm to have done. Unfortunately, I must now report that the book appears to be—well, after a manner of speaking—serious.

Having admitted that, I face the legitimate question of whether it even deserves critique. Last year, despite our intention that the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* be comprehensive, we decided that Loftes Tryk's book should not be dignified with a review. That I have now changed my mind reflects my perception that, while it is utterly devoid of any intrinsic scholarly or historical or theological merit, *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon* does serve to illustrate an interesting schism—by no means the first—in the ranks of career enemies of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to introduce a new and quirky form of anti-Mormonism which has risen to prominence within the past decade or two.

I call it New Age anti-Mormonism. Perhaps the best way, initially, of explaining what it is is to make clear what it is not. It is not the old-time traditional anti-Mormonism, with which Latter-day Saints have long been familiar, and whose ranks have included such luminaries as Eber D. Howe, Walter Martin, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, and Wesley Walters. Traditional anti-Mormonism, in both its Protestant and its secular variants (and now, as exemplified by Peter Bartley, in its Catholic ones), is content to argue that Mormonism is untrue. Scripturally, it attempts to demonstrate that the Restored Gospel is incompatible with the Bible. Historically, it endeavors to prove that Joseph Smith's environment and his (wicked or pathological) character, perhaps assisted by a co-conspirator or two, are enough to account for Mormonism with no residue left over. There is, in the view of most traditional anti-Mormons, nothing remarkable in Mormonism, little that requires for its comprehension more than an understanding of human depravity and frailty. In recent years, a group of environmentalist reductionists—sometimes still nominally within the Church, always rejecting the title of anti-Mormon—has taken a somewhat more sophisticated version of the same position.)

New Age anti-Mormonism is quite different. (We might think of it as a conservative Protestant variation on the New Age movement proper. Despite their fundamentalist Christian declarations, which include a deep hostility to anything smacking of New Age thinking, these critics of the Latter-day

Saints seem clearly to share virtually all of its assumptions. Almost anything Shirley MacLaine believes in, New Age anti-Mormonism believes in too. With a twist.) It admits the presence of the supernatural in the founding events of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and is quite willing to acknowledge continuous supernatural influence in the life of the Church today. Indeed, it *revels* in the supernatural. Environmental factors and the nineteenth century do not and cannot account for what New Age anti-Mormonism sees in the Gospel and the Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> However, unlike faithful Latter-day Saints, New Age anti-Mormons see the supernatural agencies involved in the founding and progress of the Church as demonic, occultic, diabolical, Luciferian. Theirs is a mirror image, a thoroughgoing transvaluation, of the views of the Latter-day Saints. They can accept virtually every argument advanced against traditional anti-Mormonism by Latter-day Saint defenders of the faith, but remain nonetheless hostile—indeed, grow more so—because they regard anything in the Gospel and the Church that seems to exceed the humanly possible as simply demonstrating its dependence upon supernatural (i.e., Luciferian) power. Advocates of this position—including J. Edward Decker, James Spencer, and William J. Schnoebelen—are literally obsessed with demons. They see them everywhere.<sup>3</sup> Latter-day Saint priesthood ordinances derive,

<sup>2</sup> Thus, Loftes Tryk says elsewhere, "Some of the most serious errors any critic of Mormonism can make are to imagine that Joseph Smith was nothing more than an ignorant farm boy, or that he plagiarized from books of contemporary authors when writing the Book of Mormon." This passage occurs in his article, "Opposition in All Things," in *The Jacob's Well Report* (Spring 1989): 9, as cited in Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Serious Charges Against the Tanners: Are the Tanners Demonized Agents of the Mormon Church?* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1991), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 26, while noting Ed Decker's apparent plagiarism of their work in his book *The God Makers*, point out that it also contains—and this time originally so—his "Luciferian theories concerning Mormonism." Incidentally, the Tanners do not think much of their fellow anti-Mormon. "Ed Decker has chosen the path of sensationalism," they declare, alluding to "his ability to fabricate evidence to support his own opinions" (*ibid.*, 29), "to make up stories" (32). They also cite Bob and Gretchen Passantino's condemnation of Decker's "faulty reasoning" (*ibid.*, 28). In fact, their book *Serious Charges*, like its predecessor *The Lucifer-God Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1988), is a devastating indictment of Decker, Spencer, and

according to this view, from witchcraft and Satanism. These ordinances confer demonic power and bind their recipients to diabolical servitude. Latter-day Saint temples are deliberately designed, with carefully chosen symbols and geometric configurations, to serve as demonic power stations. "The trapezoidal shape" of the spires of the Salt Lake Temple, Bill Schnoebelen has said, "draw[s] demons like fly paper."<sup>4</sup>

What is more, according to New Age anti-Mormons, leaders of today's Church very likely know precisely what it is they are up to.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Bill Schnoebelen claims that one current apostle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints actually admitted to him and his wife, soon after their conversion, that the god of Mormon temple worship is none other than Lucifer.<sup>6</sup> The sharply pointed spires of the temple at Washington, D.C., futhermore, are an open declaration for those with eyes to see, for they represent nails aimed at heaven to crucify Christ again.<sup>7</sup> Within its walls (I have been solemnly informed by more than one New Age anti-Mormon), that temple supposedly has a precise replica of the Oval Office in the White House, from which a Mormon theocracy will dictate its will following a Latter-day Saint coup. (And if you think these

Schnoebelen—although I recommend the two volumes only for those who can endure discussions of sordidness in large doses.

<sup>4</sup> Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 7. The notion of a building whose very architectural design generates demonic power may well have been suggested to Schnoebelen by the popular Hollywood film *The Ghost Busters*, which appeared at approximately the same time that he began to publicize the idea in anti-Mormon circles.

<sup>5</sup> As with the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.) in C. S. Lewis's novel *That Hideous Strength*, or as in medieval legends about Ismā'īlī Shī'ite Islam, there are conspiratorial circles within circles. The deeper into the organization a person goes, or the higher he rises, the more fully he is initiated into the real nihilistic or demonic ideology undergirding the movement. Says Loftes Tryk, "Mormonism is so insidious and such a diabolical plot, that it is actually a form of devil worship, that the head ringleader behind the scenes is Beelzebub, himself, Satan." See Tryk, "Opposition in All Things," cited by Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Tanner and Tanner, *The Lucifer-God Doctrine*, 34-40, offer a highly skeptical account of this story.

<sup>7</sup> Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 7. The Passantinos, responding to this ingenious speculation, justly deride Ed Decker's "sloppy thinking" (cited at *ibid.*, 28-29).



stories a tiny bit weird, consider the tales told by an erstwhile protégé of Ed Decker about racks of human skulls in the Holy of Holies in the Salt Lake Temple and about secret ceremonies centering on the blood of “diamond back rattlers” and the ritual slitting of one’s own wrists.)<sup>8</sup>

A rivalry has long been simmering between New Age anti-Mormonism and the more austere anti-Mormon polemics of the traditional variety. But it is clear that the New Age strain, with its wild claims and its resemblance (in its more respectable moods) to the *National Enquirer*, with its slick movies and its often charismatic demagogues, with its horrifying tales of Satanism and sedition and conspiracy, has far more crowd appeal.<sup>9</sup> Old guard anti-Mormons, with their scriptural arguments and their sometimes rather intricate historical arguments, can hardly hope to compete.

But back to the question of whether the present book merits review. “All men by nature desire to know,” Aristotle rightly says in the first line of his *Metaphysics*. And while New Age anti-Mormonism is far from being the most lofty object of knowledge and contemplation, it is, I think, undeniably *interesting*. (Rather like the circus freaks of bygone days—and, I freely admit, perhaps rather unworthily—it fascinates by its very weirdness.) Loftes Tryk’s book is a particularly vivid and concentrated specimen of New Age anti-Mormonism. (Significantly, it is distributed by Ed Decker’s organization, “Saints Alive in Jesus.”) That, in my judgment, along with the fact that it can be uproariously, screamingly funny—it has to be ranked as perhaps the silliest volume ever published on the Book of Mormon—may perhaps justify its treatment here. (I should note, however, that I have tried to excerpt the funniest parts for the readers of this *Review*.)

Well, on with the discussion. Tryk, who insists that his name is genuine, boasts that his background as a former Latter-day Saint enables him to “understand the complex issues” involved in Mormonism “better than non-members” ever can (p. 3).<sup>10</sup> And better, of course, than believing Latter-day Saints

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<sup>8</sup> On these matters, see Tanner and Tanner, *The Lucifer-God Doctrine*, 8-11. Decker himself has made analogous claims orally with regard to the Masons.

<sup>9</sup> Its mass rallies have been compared—not without justice, in my considered opinion—to the famous Nazi gatherings at Nürnberg.

<sup>10</sup> Another of Tryk’s alleged qualifications for undertaking his study can be inferred from a statement also found on p. 3: “The Book of Mormon

ever will, since, contrary to what common sense would seem to dictate, "the further you can distance yourself from the Mormon Church the clearer you will see the vision of it" (p. 181). Despite his natural advantages, however, he claims to have gone the extra research mile, using "fair caution" along the way, to produce what he hopes will be "recognized as a thorough investigation" (p. 3). For the "secrets" of the Book of Mormon "must be searched out, wrestled with, and uprooted, and with a great expenditure of time and attention to detail" (p. 217). His aim in undertaking such an arduous and demanding task is to increase public understanding of the Book of Mormon, which he characterizes as "an obscure and dark masterpiece" that deserves a leading position among such works as—hold your breath!—Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the Marquis de Sade's *Justine*, and Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (p. 1).

"That research," Tryk informs us at the beginning of his book, "has uncovered some astonishing, perhaps incredible, but vital information that is hidden between the lines of Mormon scripture" (p. 3), including "secret double meanings that have been craftily inserted in a perverse, persistent manner throughout the entire book" (pp. 1-2). "In reality," writes Tryk, who will eventually emerge as a kind of cosmic Joe McCarthy, "the Book of Mormon is a blueprint of persuasive propaganda to use to conquer the heavens and the earth" (p. 2). It is "a tool with potentially devastating destructive force," he says, designed (much like Orwell's *Newspeak*, I suppose) to deny Latter-day Saints even the possibility of independent thought (p. 3).

Such language already hints that this is no ordinary anti-Mormon book, content to argue for the falsity of the restored Gospel.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Tryk is conventional at first. He sees, for instance, no essential defects in the persecutors of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois and instead blames the difficulties there squarely on the Mormons themselves—they "being an audacious, obnoxious people" (p. 134). This thesis is, of course, not original with Loftes Tryk, although he

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... has an occasional wry humor that is intangible unless you are raunchy enough to get the vision of Joseph Smith as he was. We will get to that too, before long." Apparently Tryk possesses the requisite quality!

<sup>11</sup> Tryk himself, as cited by Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 5, has described his book as "revolutionary."



acknowledges no predecessors.<sup>12</sup> And it has been far more plausibly argued elsewhere, with attempts at documentation that are wholly unparalleled in Tryk's brief account.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Tryk repeats the standard anti-Mormon claim that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has suppressed and distorted its own history. There is, he says, "an annoying amount of slight-of-hand [sic]" involved in the Church's account of itself (p. 156; cf. 232-33).<sup>14</sup> Yet it is difficult to know on what basis he makes this claim, for there is not the barest trace in his book of any acquaintance with the large and growing body of historiographical literature on the Latter-day Saints.

Tryk echoes contemporary environmentalist critics of the Book of Mormon in calling it "a psychobiography of Joseph's early life and times" (p. 2), and "an article-artifact which gives evidence, yes, wide-open proof of its own fraud" (p. 4). However, his treatment of these claims is cursory and half-hearted, and he offers nothing new at all along the lines of either traditional anti-Mormonism or modern revisionist environmentalism. He promises much, for example, on the matter of the lost 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon: "You are about to find what happened to those lost pages, at last," he tells us. Yet his explanation—that Joseph Smith himself stole the manuscript in an improbable and unnecessary attempt to extort money from Martin Harris—is offered with hardly an attempt at argument and not a scintilla of evidence (pp. 18-33). On the question of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, Tryk offers his readers the Hobson's choice of either "hypnosis"

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<sup>12</sup> He apparently never does. And it is not only legitimate scholarly work that he fails to note or to consult. He does not even take into account earlier anti-Mormon writing. The Tanners, *Serious Charges*, 5-6, remark that "his book seems to carefully avoid mentioning the names or writings of current Mormon critics or ministries to the Mormons. A cursory examination failed to reveal anything but his own work on the Book of Mormon." I shall return to this issue more than once.

<sup>13</sup> See Kenneth H. Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), for a representative instance of this. My own brief review of Winn's book appears in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30 (March 1991): 127-28, 130. Richard Lloyd Anderson's "Atchison's Letters and the Causes of Mormon Expulsion from Missouri," *BYU Studies* 26 (Summer 1986): 3-47, raises serious doubts about such analysis as applied to the Missouri persecutions of 1838.

<sup>14</sup> Evidently he means "sleight of hand."

or "conspiracy" as an explanation of their testimony; their own explanation is airily dismissed without examination (pp. 34-39).<sup>15</sup>

Tryk furnishes us a list of themes in the Book of Mormon which "were current during the 19th century when it was written" (pp. 152-53). Among these are the book's military aspects, the evident agrarian character of the societies it claims to describe, and the "overwhelming male dominance" reflected in its narrative. One scarcely knows what to make of such allegedly nineteenth-century characteristics. Does Tryk mean to imply that there were no wars in ancient times? That ancient peoples were industrialists? That they did not grow food? Does he imagine Mesoamerica or the Near East—ancient, or modern, or at any point in between—as some sort of egalitarian feminist utopia?

One item that clearly reveals the Book of Mormon's modern origin, according to Tryk, is its use of the concept of divine omnipotence, "a Protestant idea which had originated since the 16th century." Tryk does not explain how this supposedly post-Reformation idea, omnipotence, made its way into Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch. Nor does he make clear how St. Augustine (d. A.D. 430) and St. Thomas Aquinas (d. A.D. 1274), in whose writings the notion of divine omnipotence occupies a central place, are to be considered Protestants. Neither does he account for the deep roots of the doctrine of "the Almighty" in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Apocrypha. And why on earth is this modern Protestant notion present in the fourth-century Nicene Creed? (*Credimus in unum Deum Patrem omnipotentem*, reads the first line of that famous creed in the Latin version attributed to Dionysius Exiguus.) Tryk seems eager to get on to more interesting quarry.

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<sup>15</sup> Uncharacteristically, Tryk does not insist here on a real (Satanic) supernatural event. He seems to have relaxed his usual standards and relied, this time, on his traditional anti-Mormon and environmentalist allies. Once again, however, as in the case of Peter Bartley, I must protest that Tryk discusses the witnesses—and even complains about a supposed lack of "information on their general characters and reputations"—with no reference whatever to Richard Lloyd Anderson's classic study, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), recently reissued in paperback. Analogously, Tryk pokes fun at the supposedly "nebulous geography" of the Book of Mormon (p. 90) while showing no awareness of recent writing on the subject by such scholars as John Clark, David Palmer, and John L. Sorenson.

Tryk promises an examination of “statistical indicators” which will prove that the Book of Mormon has only a single author (p. 3). One of these, it turns out, is the phrase “and it came to pass,” for which he constructs a crude counting test. This he offers as a rebuttal to wordprint studies done by Latter-day Saint and other statisticians—studies which he first claims never to have seen and to know only by rumor, as at p. 42, and for which he then quite inconsistently cites specific bibliographical references on p. 47. He disposes of one published account of these studies by simply declaring that it was “intended to awe its audience with such terms as: *multivariate analysis, cluster analysis, discriminate analysis*, and a “38 dimensional profile”—technical concepts with which he clearly does not care to deal.<sup>16</sup> The other he casually dismisses as “perhaps not intended as a deception.” No real effort is made to deal with the statistical evidence or arguments involved in this question (see pp. 42-47).

The second “indicator” he discusses is the occurrence of the first person singular pronoun “I,” followed by the speaker or writer’s name (e.g., “I, Nephi,” “I, Alma,” and “I, Mormon”). This, too, is said to indicate unitary authorship. More seriously, though, it is said to parody the biblical “I, the Lord” (found at Jeremiah 17:10, and elsewhere) and to foreshadow the alleged Latter-day Saint attempt to put mortal, fallible human beings in the place of God (pp. 48-51), for which he helpfully cites Isaiah 14:13-14. With such accusations, Loftes Tryk begins to leave traditional anti-Mormonism behind, and to enter the strange world of New Age anti-Mormonism, where nothing is what it seems and where the preeminent cultural monument is Ed Decker’s film, *The God Makers*.

Central to Tryk’s efforts is an examination of what he calls “power words,” which he believes are omnipresent in the Book of Mormon and which are designed to manipulate its readers through “subliminal messages” (p. 3). The whole intent of the Book of Mormon is “to gain control of your thinking.” Using the oddly (but typically) irrelevant metaphor of the hobby craft known as “string art,” Tryk warns his audience that, if the Book of Mormon is accepted, “eventual control will be taken of your mind. All you need to do is to string along with it faithfully” (p. 124; cf. 126). (Get it? “String art”? “String

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<sup>16</sup> Except where indicated, all italics in this quotation and elsewhere are present in the original.

along"? And there's more to come!) "The Book of Mormon has a fundamental purpose of accumulating power" (p. 132). "Satan is a liar and a destructive spirit, a master psychologist with a largely unfathomed talent for manipulating us anxious mortals," whose "mode of revelation is typically subliminal, occult, and laced with double meanings" (pp. 136, 223).<sup>17</sup>

Loftes Tryk notwithstanding, psychological research overwhelmingly suggests that "subliminal messages" are ineffective and that concern about them is almost certainly mere baseless paranoia.<sup>18</sup> "Despite a long history of research on subliminal perception and its possible effects in advertising," one group of investigators reports, "there are few hard conclusions concerning effectiveness. Although some studies have shown contrary findings, the bulk of the research suggests that subliminal stimuli are not effective in changing attitudes or behavior." In fact, they comment, academic students of the subject tend to "scoff" at the "lack of scientific evidence" for subliminal influences, despite a virtual obsession with the issue

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<sup>17</sup> Alleged Mormon mind control has become a major theme of New Age anti-Mormonism. Consider Ed Decker's astonishing disclosures in the March 1991 *Newsletter* of his organization, Saints Alive in Jesus: Asserting that Latter-day Saints, in bearing their testimonies, rarely deviate by more than a few words from a rigidly robotic pattern, Decker affects to discern "a subtle *mind-warp*" controlling them. He was able to prove this, he claims, when he once sat with his own face just fifteen inches from a Mormon who was bearing testimony to the truth of the gospel. "As he began his recitation," Decker recalls, "I noticed that his eyes had dilated as though he were hypnotized. . . . I slapped my hands together right in front of his nose. . . . The man bounced back, his eyes slowly returning to normal." "You see," Decker concludes, "what happens at every Fast and Testimony meeting is a form of *group hypnosis*. . . . It is the same method used by torturers on POW's" (emphasis his).

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Joel Saegert, "Another Look at Subliminal Perceptions," *Journal of Advertising Research* 19 (February 1979): 55-57; Eric J. Zanut, J. David Pincus, and E. Joseph Lamp, "Public Perceptions of Subliminal Advertising," *Journal of Advertising* 12 (1983): 39-45; Myron Gable, Henry T. Wilkens, Lynn Harris, and Richard Feinberg, "An Evaluation of Subliminally Embedded Sexual Stimuli in Graphics," *Journal of Advertising* 16 (1987): 26-31; Jennifer Balay and Howard Shevrin, "The Subliminal Psychodynamic Activation Method: A Critical Review," *American Psychologist* 43 (March 1988): 161-74. For a popular account of the question, see Jo Anna Natale, "Are You Open to Suggestion?" *Psychology Today* (September 1988): 28-30.



among "popularizers."<sup>19</sup> Another researcher announces that "empirical demonstration of the behavioral influence of subliminal stimuli has been virtually nonexistent in the consumer-behavior literature." Indeed, he continues, "there simply isn't *any* published literature that demonstrates the effects of subliminal stimuli in a marketing application."<sup>20</sup> Yet another group of investigators concludes that "it is clear that subliminal embedding does not have the power or influence given to it by advocates." Citing an earlier scholar who had termed popular fear of subliminal programming "preposterous, absurd, ludicrous, laughable," they contend that public belief in the "folklore" of subliminal messages, and widespread public fear of subliminal control, should itself be investigated by social scientists.<sup>21</sup>

But Tryk's approach to the question would be bizarre even if the notion of subliminal seduction had some credibility. He appears to have no concept of rigor or logical argumentation and no inclination to sift or evaluate—or even to mention—evidence. "A good technique," he writes, "is to play a word association type of game" (p. 60). And so he does. His reading of Mosiah 1 is, to put it mildly, peculiar. For instance, the "Egyptians" mentioned in verse 4 are linked with the words "gyp" and "Gypsy," while the fact that the Book of Mormon's plates are of gold and the plates of the Old Testament taken from Laban merely of brass is thought "to direct an insult at the Bible" (p. 61).<sup>22</sup> These hidden Book of Mormon messages, Tryk solemnly informs his readers, are "massive deceptions," designed to cloak "surreptitious blasphemies" (p. 65) in a "book of profligate scripture" (p. 3).

Although the Book of Mormon seems outwardly to affirm such crucial Christian doctrines as free agency, resurrection, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, Loftes Tryk is here to inform us that its real, subliminal purpose is to undercut precisely those

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<sup>19</sup> Zanot, Pincus, and Lamp, "Public Perceptions of Subliminal Advertising," 39-40, 43.

<sup>20</sup> Saegert, "Another Look at Subliminal Perception," 55. Italics mine.

<sup>21</sup> Gable, Wilkens, Harris, and Feinberg, "An Evaluation of Subliminally Embedded Sexual Stimuli in Graphics," 28-29.

<sup>22</sup> Compare Tryk on p. 115: "When Nephi has his bands loosened (1 Nephi 7:18), or shocks his brothers (1 Nephi 17:54), or when Korihor is struck dumb as a sign (Alma 30:49-50), we are not looking at righteous power so much as a pack of Gypsy magicians."

ideas (p. 66). Thus, Tryk departs from the venerable anti-Mormon claim that Lehi's description of the grave as a place "from whence no traveler can return" (2 Nephi 1:14) represents plagiarism from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or the "Westminster Confession of Faith," arguing instead that "the more important objection to Lehi's words" is their denial, as he claims to see it, of the resurrection of Christ (pp. 66-67). Similarly, Alma's explanation of the resurrection in Alma 40, with its careful separation of that which the prophet knows from that on which he can only speculate, is designed by the author of the Book of Mormon to inculcate uncertainty and confusion in its readers (pp. 68-70). "Who do you imagine," Tryk asks, "would wish for you to follow a prophet of such inconsistency and doubt? Doubt is Satan's first article of faith" (p. 70).

These "underlying messages of opposition were maliciously premeditated," according to Tryk (p. 70). Thus, when 1 Nephi 4:13 says of Laban that "It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief," using language similar to that of Caiaphas in John 11:50, "the insult that was intended" was an equation of the Savior with a wicked, drunken man (p. 71). Thus, too, the prophecy at Alma 7:10, which has Jesus born "at Jerusalem" rather than, more specifically, in Bethlehem, calls into question the birth or legitimacy of Jesus Christ (p. 72).<sup>23</sup> And the Book of Mormon's account of the destructions preceding the Savior's appearance to the Nephites actually presents us with a "counterfeit destroyer-Christ," while the real Jesus, who walked on the Sea of Galilee, is mocked by Joseph Smith's assertion that "the destroyer rideth upon the face" of the waters (p. 72; compare Matthew 14:26 and D&C 61:18-19). Mosiah's abdication of his kingship in favor of a system of judges is intended to prefigure the Messiah's abdication of his sovereignty in favor of mortal human beings. What the Book of Mormon is calling for here and elsewhere is a denial of the atonement of Christ (pp. 192-93). Similarly, Tryk reads the extended parable of Jacob 5 as a "rude satire" on a competent servant (Satan) and

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<sup>23</sup> A rather different (and much more plausible) explanation of Alma 7:10—and one which affirms the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon—has, of course, long been available. See, for instance, Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3d ed., vol. 6 in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988): 100-102. The first edition of this book was published in 1957.



his weak and incompetent master (Jesus Christ). It is, he says, "a sick, snide slap at our Savior" (pp. 206-7).

By now it should be apparent that, for Loftes Tryk, Satan was the "ghost writer" of the Book of Mormon (p. 76). Tryk sees definitive evidence for this in the phenomenon of chiasmus in the book. Here is a clear difference between traditional anti-Mormonism and the New Age variety. "I must admit," says Tryk, who is evidently just as impressed with chiasmus as any believing Latter-day Saint, "that almost any study of Book of Mormon chiasmi is going to fall short of perfection. The book is packed with them, each one a new source of pride to the Mormons" (p. 81).<sup>24</sup> The Book of Mormon, he says, "was not the product of a 19th century mind." Joseph Smith's admittedly extraordinary intelligence "doesn't explain the unexpected appearance of sophisticated literary forms. Even a very high native intellect would not account for a computer-like selection of images which have been fitted into the story with such knife-edge precision. The closer we examine the Book of Mormon's literary character, the greater burden will be placed on the theory of an unaided creation. There are too many complex uses of symbolism and of sophisticated literary form in it" (p. 82). The linked chiasms he identifies in Alma 42 constitute, he acknowledges, "a formidable piece of writing," perhaps "unequaled in brilliance anywhere else in literature" (p. 84).

However, as we might expect, the recognition of complex chiasms in the Book of Mormon, which Tryk shares with a number of Latter-day Saint scholars—and in which he emphatically parts company with traditional anti-Mormons and environmentalists, who dismiss chiasmus as either illusory or insignificant<sup>25</sup>—does not translate for him into a positive evaluation of the phenomenon. The admission that neither

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<sup>24</sup> "Loftes Tryk," the Tanners snort, "seems to be fascinated with the idea of 'chiasmus' in the Book of Mormon." See Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> The Tanners may be taken as representative of mainstream anti-Mormonism, as well as of environmentalist reductionism, in their dismissal of chiasmus: "We doubt very much that there is any deliberate attempt at chiasmic structure in the Book of Mormon and feel that what has been identified as chiasmus is merely evidence of Joseph Smith's repetitive style of writing." Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990): 31. See the reviews of this book by L. Ara Norwood, Matthew Roper, and John A. Tvedtnes on pages 158-230 of the present volume.

Joseph Smith nor any other nineteenth-century author could by himself have written the Book of Mormon, so central to the arguments of Hugh Nibley and other defenders of the faith, does not lead Loftes Tryk to acknowledge its divine origin. And, for a New Age anti-Mormon, that leaves only one possible author. How chiasmus has been used by our particular New Ager to identify that author is wonderful to behold:

"Since the chiasmus forms an X," Tryk suggests, "let's begin by examining the X as a symbol" (p. 82). Among the uses of the symbol X that, according to Tryk, "may be applied to Book of Mormon symbolism," four (listed on pp. 82-83) are worthy of mention here:

1. "It is used to represent the signature of a person who cannot write."
2. "At the bottom of a letter, it might signify a *kiss* (X O X O = 'hugs and kisses')."
3. "It is a method used to *cross out* written errors, to hide them when they cannot be deleted."
4. "The X may . . . show the mark of *inferior quality* (as in Brand X products)." (Tryk admits that the implication of this symbolism for the Book of Mormon—that it is "inferior scripture"—"may or may not have been intentional.")

The third symbolic usage is directly relevant to Tryk's discussion of Alma 42, which he calls "one of the most important chapters in the Book of Mormon because it names more Christian doctrine than any other chapter in the book." Latter-day Saints, of course, agree that this is an important chapter, and for much the same reason. Even traditional anti-Mormons might grant that it is a fairly good imitation of a Christian text. But not Tryk. For him, its message is precisely the opposite of that noticed by anybody else. He identifies six chiasms in the chapter, and then declares that "if you can picture a large X through each entire chiasmus in Alma 42, you will have X-ed out every [Christian] doctrine" contained in the chapter. Its real theme, he says, is expressed in the words "God would cease to be God," which are repeated three times (Alma 42:13, 22, 25). "Thus repeated, it shows itself to be a subliminal message, as well as Satan's tell-tale way to identify his hand in the work" (pp. 83-84).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> On pp. 87-88, Tryk hints that diabolical chiasms exist even in the New Testament.

Tryk's exegetical approach is even more apparent in the case of the great chiasm of Alma 36, which he discusses on pp. 85-87. "The secret that is going to be exposed here is *who* it is that has been nailing on all those crosses." The central element of Alma 36 is Jesus Christ. In this, Tryk agrees with Latter-day Saint students of the chapter. The difference comes in the evaluation of what that means, for, whereas Latter-day Saints have claimed that the chiasm serves to point to and emphasize the Savior, Loftes Tryk contends that the purpose is to cross him out. "Several symbolic uses of the X can be related to this single chiastic chapter," writes Tryk. "It is the Judas *kiss* that condemns Christ; it nails him to the *cross*. It may represent a mistake that Satan would like to *cross out*. His x-like *signature* is disclosed in its deceitful, subliminal character." Furthermore, Alma 36 is placed between the chiasm of Alma 42 and another, identified by Tryk, in Alma 22. It is thus intended to represent Christ, crucified between two thieves. Those, therefore, who venerate the Book of Mormon as scripture assent to the crucifixion of Christ—which fits the Latter-day Saints especially well, in Tryk's opinion, since, with their pharisaical self-righteousness and their belief that they are modern Israel, they have actually become Christ-killing Jews. "Turning Mormons into Jews was not accidental," Tryk declares. "It is part of a plot to convert them to condemnation."<sup>27</sup> But this is not yet all, for the chapter also twice advises Latter-day Saints to contend against God. Or so says Loftes Tryk. Thus, when the angel advises Alma the Younger that he should give up his persecution of the saints, even if he has no care for his own soul, he says, "If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, *seek no more* to destroy the church of God" (Alma 36:9; repeated, for subliminal seduction, at 36:11). But the real message, according to Loftes Tryk, is not what appears on the surface. "For any who wish *not* to be destroyed, the advice which applies is to *seek to destroy the church of God*."<sup>28</sup> "This chapter, then, is Satan's real

<sup>27</sup> Note the anti-Semitic overtones.

<sup>28</sup> Tryk's astonishing ability to misread scripture is evident also on p. 117, in his strange remarks on 2 Nephi 25:18: That verse, looking into the then-future, declares that "there is save one Messiah spoken of by the prophets, and that Messiah is he who should be rejected of the Jews." "It isn't the reader's place," Tryk comments, "to assume that Joseph Smith intended to use the word *will* or *shall* instead of *should*. As it stands, the word 'should' is making a recommendation to reject the Messiah." (Of course, this "should" is simply the subjunctive mood of the future tense of

masterpiece. . . . It shows how he delights in the crucifixion and would puff himself up by pasting it between the lines of his evil book. Indeed, with no less than five signatures spread over this canvass [sic] of shame, his personal mode of using graffiti messages paints a picture of a disturbed, adolescent mentality.” (On which assertion a reviewer who, like myself, lacks psychiatric training is well advised to withhold the obvious comment.)

Loftes Tryk’s account of chiasmus has been rather dark and depressing. By contrast, his discussion of Book of Mormon proper names—done in complete independence of the prior research of Paul Hoskisson, Hugh Nibley, and John Tvedtnes—is absolutely hilarious. “Much of the hidden meaning in the Book of Mormon can be understood,” asserts Tryk, “by carefully interpreting the name symbols of its characters”—which, naturally, have “subliminal, symbolic value.” “Many of the Book of Mormon name symbols are common enough to locate with the use of a good collegiate dictionary. It will serve as a decoding handbook” (p. 89).

No long and painful study of ancient languages for Loftes Tryk! An English dictionary is all he needs. And the results of his survey have all the profundity and reliability that one would expect from such a method.<sup>29</sup> A few examples, beginning with the Jaredite onomasticon:

the verb “to be”—or alternatively, its potential mood. It carries here no imperative force whatever.) Analogously, on pp. 121-22, Tryk twists D&C 84:117, where early Latter-day Saint missionaries were directed to go out into the world “reproving the world in righteousness [and] . . . setting forth clearly and understandingly the *desolation of abomination* in the last days” (Tryk’s italics) to make it admit that the Restored Gospel *is* the “desolation of abomination.”

<sup>29</sup> Tryk’s method is not even as respectable as that used by Walter F. Prince in his famous article on “Psychological Tests for the Authorship of the Book of Mormon,” *American Journal of Psychology* 28 (July 1917): 373-89. Of those supposedly “rigorous tests,” as Prince himself quaintly described them, the vocal anti-Mormon intellectual Theodore Schroeder remarked that “they seem not at all rigorous nor a valid test of anything, and not even an important contribution to any problem except perhaps to the psychology of Dr. Prince.” Schroeder found Prince’s method “so defective as to leave his conclusions wholly valueless. He reasons around in a circle.” See Theodore Schroeder, “Authorship of the Book of Mormon: Psychologic Tests of W. F. Prince Critically Reviewed,” *American Journal of Psychology* 30 (January 1919): 66-72.



The name "Shule" is derived from "shul," which Tryk correctly informs us is a Yiddish word for "synagogue." And while the point behind that rather obscure subliminal link is never explained, Tryk claims that the purpose of the name "Corihor" is clear beyond dispute. It comes from the French word "coeur," or "heart," plus the element "hor." Thus, its meaning is "whorish heart," and it is designed to insult the Savior. "A whore gives her body cheaply," Tryk notes. "Christ gave his life for something which Satan would seek to devalue, the souls of men." "Coriantumr" in turn undoubtedly means "diseased heart." (Get it? From "coeur" and "tumor," of course.) And when Coriantumr decapitates "Shiz," separating his head from his body, this can only be a Satanic foreshadowing of the "Schiz-m" that will arise through the work of Joseph Smith. Impressed? But the revelations continue! "The name "Kib," Tryk informs us, comes from "*kibbe*, a meal prepared in the Near East. The chief ingredient is finely ground lamb. This is a taunt, aimed at the lamb of God." It also comes from the word "kibe," which denotes "a painful sore (chilblain) upon the heel of the foot" and thus celebrates the enmity between the serpent and the posterity of Eve (alluded to in Genesis 3:15). The fact that the name "Jared" means "descent" in Hebrew leads Tryk to interpret the Jaredites' voyage "across the great deep" as symbolic of Lucifer's fall from heaven.<sup>30</sup> Obviously, Satan is the hero of the tale (pp. 99-100, 162, 228).

My personal favorite among Tryk's Jaredite etymologies is "Ether." Unsurprisingly, he links the name with diethyl ether, "a spiritous substance, an intangible but powerful gas." However, what he does with this linkage is fascinating. He reads the final Jaredite battle not as an account of an actual historical event, but as a prophecy of the last great battle of the apocalypse. "Ether dwelt in the *cavity* of a rock (Ether 13:13-14), suggesting [diethyl ether's] eventual use in dentistry.<sup>31</sup> Ether provides a good representation of Satan, an unembodied *spirit*." Thus, Satan is predicting that he will survive the great

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<sup>30</sup> On p. 115, Tryk comments that, "When we envision the brother of Jared moving a mountain, it is reminiscent of telekinesis, a wizardry that belongs in a Stephen King novel." How telling it is that the ostensibly born-again Loftes Tryk evidently fails to recognize—certainly he fails to mention—the obvious biblical theme of "faith to move mountains" (e.g., at Matthew 17:20; 21:21; Mark 11:23; 1 Corinthians 13:2), preferring to read it as occultic and demonic!

<sup>31</sup> I'm not making this up!

destructions of the last days, which will annihilate all of mankind. "It isn't God's version of what will take place in that last great battle. This is a more pessimistic view of us and is actually Satan's *wishful*, suggestive thinking" (pp. 101-2).

Tryk's Nephite onomasticon is every bit as bizarre. For instance, the smallest unit of Nephite "money"—Tryk incorrectly calls it "coinage"—is the "leah" (Alma 11:17). And, since "Leah" is a woman's name in the Bible, the Book of Mormon signals thereby its low opinion of women (p. 92). "Amulek," on the other hand, is intended to remind us of magic "amulets" (p. 204).

"Ammon" is one of the most important heroes of the Book of Mormon. "Joseph's real-life hero was wealth," according to Tryk, which proves that the name "Ammon" comes from the biblical Aramaic word "Mammon" (p. 94). Similarly, if you remove the "ar" from "Ammaron," you come up with "Ammon" again—so that "Ammaron," too, means "Mammon" (p. 158). "Moroni" comes from the word "more" and the word "onti," which is one of the units of silver measurement—again, falsely described by Tryk as "coins"—listed in Alma 11 (p. 167). Similarly, the name "Mormon" comes from the English words "More Money." Having opened our eyes to this marvelous hidden meaning, Tryk, whose literary style suffers painfully from self-conscious cuteness, comments that "The name is *rich* in symbolism, as anyone can see" (pp. 94-95).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Finances play a major role in the demonology of Trykian anti-Mormonism. "*Profit* is . . . a key word among Mormons" (p. 63, italics his). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he informs his reader, is "basically an economic kingdom" (p. 15). He even brings up the "Gold and Green Ball," noting that these are "Mormon colors" because they symbolize prosperity (p. 19 n. 2). Many examples of Tryk's self-indulgent and self-amused writing style might be cited. However, a few will suffice: His discussion of celestial marriage and the notion of marriage "until death do ye part" concludes with the observation that "Marriage has always been a serious *undertaking*, hasn't it?" (Italics his; p. 197.) Having declared that the Book of Mormon was created under Satanic hypnosis, Tryk then refers to it several times as a "trance-lation" (158). "Imagine the fierce destruction incurred," he suggests on p. 255, "if angry ex-Mormons were to lay waste to [sic] Salt Lake City, thinking it would be suitable or just, in that ' . . . the *salt* have [sic] lost his savor . . . it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.' " (Italics and ellipses in the original.)



Names like "Gidgidoni" and "Giddianhi" come from "gid," a worm-disease that afflicts sheep. "It indicates a taunt, thrown at Christ, as if to say, 'Well, good shepherd, I will infect your other sheep right before your eyes!'" (p. 95) The name "Helaman" represents "a slur on 'Healer-man,' a reference to Christ." Likewise, the "onti" of Moroni's name points to the silver coins offered to Judas for the betrayal of Christ, as well as to the silver offered by Zeezrom to persuade Amulek to deny the existence of God.<sup>33</sup> As Tryk puts it, all these nifty interconnections can hardly be "coincidence"! (pp. 167-68). In the name "Ammoron," we have an anagram for "a Mormon"; thus, when Ammoron is termed a "child of hell" at Alma 54:11, we should distinctly hear Lucifer chuckling over his latter-day dupes (p. 159).<sup>34</sup>

But the funniest explanation of a Nephite name has to be that given for "Amalickiah": "Checking the code book (dictionary) for symbolism in Amalickiah's name, we find that it is a combination of four words: *A*, plus *mal* (a Latin prefix meaning 'bad'), *ick* (from *ichor*, an ethereal blood-substitute which flows in the veins of the gods of mythology), and *iah* (the suffix added to names of five Jewish prophets, including Isaiah, and the Messiah). A loose translation of the name Amalickiah might be rendered: 'a bastard (bad-blooded) god-prophet'" (p. 167).<sup>35</sup>

This is marvelous stuff.

The arbitrariness of Loftes Tryk's "word association type of game" is breathtaking. It takes a real, if shallow and

<sup>33</sup> Perhaps you are asking yourself, "What 'onti' in the name 'Moroni'?" O ye of little faith!

<sup>34</sup> The devil can scarcely stifle his laughter, although only Loftes Tryk seems to have ears to hear it. The Hebrew prophet Hosea's condemnation of unrighteous Ephraim, says Tryk, "was appropriated by Satan as a form of ridicule that openly mocks the Mormons through countless Patriarchal Blessings" (226). Tryk fails to mention the scriptural passages of blessing that apply to Ephraim (of which Genesis 49:22-26 is only the most prominent).

<sup>35</sup> Even granting Tryk his amazing polyglot etymology, to call it a "loose translation" is putting things mildly. Furthermore, Tryk evidently does not realize that the Hebrew suffix *-iah*, far from meaning "prophet," actually represents the first part of the divine name "Yahweh," or "Jehovah." Nor does he seem to know that the "iah" of "Messiah" is no suffix at all, but only appears the same, being in fact part of the root of the word. There are perils in taking an English dictionary as one's only "code book."

perverse, *talent*<sup>36</sup> to misread a text—any text—so spectacularly. There is no discipline in Tryk's analysis. It is literary interpretation as inkblot test. It is onomancy. There are no rules of evidence, and no criteria for proof. Yiddish, English, Latin, misunderstood Hebrew, French, chemistry, Near Eastern cooking, classical mythology, veterinary diseases, a fragment of Greek metaphysical vocabulary,<sup>37</sup> all are stirred into his strange brew. Any random fact or pseudo-fact is liable to be pressed into service if it will make the Book of Mormon appear Satanic.<sup>38</sup> Even unnamed characters are evil symbols, for, "without names, [they] confirm the evaluation of mankind held by the author of the Book of Mormon, and expressed therein: 'O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; even they are less than the dust of the earth.' (Helaman 12:7)" (See p. 95.) Such whimsical readings underlie Tryk's method throughout his book, including the distinctly weird manner in which he locates the "mark of the beast"—the number 666, alluded to in Revelation 13:18—in the book of Ether (pp. 104-7).<sup>39</sup>

Anybody can play this game, of course. Just by looking at the name "Loftes Tryk," for instance, we can easily see that the word "Tryk" is subliminally meant to recall the word "thrice." (Think of your childhood "trike.") Thus, we count the letters in

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<sup>36</sup> *Anybody* can italicize. A "talent," by the way (for those not "raunchy" enough to recognize my subliminal tricks), is a unit of gold or silver coinage in the Bible.

<sup>37</sup> On pp. 167-68, Tryk ties the Nephite name-element "onti" to the technical philosophical term "ontic." He also links it, as we have seen, to a unit of Nephite economic exchange. And why not? In the world of Trykian onomancy, a name can mean anything, or any number of anythings, and who can possibly say nay?

<sup>38</sup> "While we are sorry to have to say this," the Tanners write of Loftes Tryk's New Age anti-Mormon allies Ed Decker and Bill Schnoebelen, "it seems that there are some who will accept any wild story or theory if it puts the Mormons in a bad light. They reason that since they already know that Mormonism is false, it is all right to use anything that has an adverse effect on the system. The question of whether an accusation is true or false appears to be only a secondary consideration." Tanner and Tanner, *The Lucifer-God Doctrine*, 77.

<sup>39</sup> The Tanners are impatient with what they term "these peculiar calculations." "Mr. Tryk's method of achieving the important satanic number," they quite correctly observe in the course of refuting it, "depends on a set of rules which can be modified to fit his own whims." Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 4.

the word "Loftes," and discover that there are six (6). Then, writing that resultant 6 "thrice" or three times, we come up with nothing less than 666, the mark of the beast! And we can confirm that this is indeed the meaning of the name "Loftes Tryk" by simply reckoning the value of its component letters as follows: First, we assign to each letter of the alphabet a numerical value based upon its position in the alphabet. Thus, a = 1, b = 2, and z = 26. If we add these values up for the name "Loftes," we arrive at the sum of 77. For "Tryk," the sum is 74. However, remembering the "three" implied in the word "Tryk," we now subtract three from that latter sum, yielding 71, and then, after multiplying the sums of the two names by three, to reach, respectively, 231 and 213, we combine them. The resultant sum is 444, meaning that, on average, each of the two names is worth 222. Thus, when a hypothetical "third" name is added—remember "Tryk" and "thrice"—the real numerical value of the name "Loftes Tryk" becomes—you guessed it!—666. This discovery is, to borrow Tryk's own words from p. 3, "astonishing, perhaps incredible, but vital." But there is more, much more. It cannot be denied, for example, that the purported name of our author is really intended to direct us to the English word "lofty," meaning "high" or "exalted," and to the German word "Dreieck," or "triangle," which is commonly used as a symbol for the Trinity. Clearly, by calling himself "exalted Trinity," Loftes Tryk has *staked out* a blasphemous claim to deity.<sup>40</sup> But he has also echoed the name or title of the legendary "Hermes Trismegistos," or "Hermes Thrice Great," the founder of hermetic occultism, who is traditionally identified with Mercury and with the Masonic patron saint Enoch. By thus sacrilegiously linking the God of the Bible with an occultic pagan deity, Loftes Tryk has revealed himself beyond question. Furthermore, if we merely alter our accustomed pronunciation of his name, we can unmistakably hear his smug cry of triumph, uttered upon completion of a staggeringly ludicrous book: "Love this *trick!*"

I have often thought that one of the world's truly ideal jobs would be working as a writer or editor for one of the well-known supermarket tabloids. I envision myself in an editorial meeting with co-workers, all of us laughing ourselves under the table while inventing tales of orbiting UFOs, sightings of Elvis

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<sup>40</sup> The expression "staked out" might be read as a clever subliminal reference on my part to the crucifixion. Actually, it means nothing at all.

in Sea World shark tanks, and three-headed calves born to pre-adolescent girls—to say nothing of cheesecake-and-eggnog weight-loss diets. If integrity were of no concern, it would be a good deal of fun. Loftes Tryk has clearly enjoyed his writing, too. But we err greatly if we see him only as a zany madcap with an unbridled imagination. For there is a dark side, dark indeed, to his mythological creations.

The “secret Mormon doctrine of destructive power” (p. 134) is subliminally present, according to Tryk, throughout the Book of Mormon, and it is meant with the utmost literalism. “Mormonism is no theoretical force or dogma only; its doctrines have applicable, practical value” (p. 137). And what a practical value it is! The Book of Mormon is actually a “Militant’s Handbook,” a conspiratorial “operations manual,” designed to prepare the Latter-day Saints for service in an actual war of aggression aimed at suppressing the human rights of their neighbors (pp. 137, 143, 144).<sup>41</sup>

“Your imagination,” Tryk wisely advises his readers in this context, “must serve as a sketch pad” (p. 137). Having thus laid out the totality of his research methodology, Tryk proceeds to describe a future Mormon prophet who “will take the young Mormon men away and send them to war” (p. 137). “Try to imagine the qualities that are likely to be a part of the facade assumed by that upcoming latter-day hero. He’ll probably be tall, broad-shouldered, good looking, and have the voice of a radio announcer. He must fit an image that we’d vote for. He must be dynamic and intelligent enough to be persuasive [sic]—and charismatic enough to carry it off smoothly. He must stand for democracy and freedom, and he’s got to make promises that glitter” (p. 197). All this, of course, in order “to motivate many thousands of young Latter-Day [sic] Saints into armed conflict” (p. 137). Not only young Mormon men but also young women and children will be conscripted, for the Book of Mormon clearly calls for this and justifies it with the message that life is cheap (p. 138).<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the story of Nephi’s killing of Laban will be summoned up to legitimize the assassination of

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<sup>41</sup> Skeptical readers of Loftes Tryk might well point to the quasi-pacifist Anti-Nephi-Lehies, who appear at first glance not to fit his interpretation. But, according to his reading, they were actually inserted into the Book of Mormon for the quite un-military purpose of “denying the cleansing power of the Savior’s atonement” (149). Go figure.

<sup>42</sup> Tryk’s proof-text for this alleged teaching of the Book of Mormon is Helaman 12:7, which of course implies nothing of the kind.



high government officials (p. 139). Prisoners of war will be forced into slave labor, in accordance with the Book of Mormon (p. 147). All of this will occur in the spirit of the secret Mormon doctrine of *jihad*, or "holy war," which will be conducted along racial lines similar to those made notorious by Nazism (p. 140).

Do you find this a bit far-fetched? Don't, warns Loftes Tryk. Consider one of the practical steps already taken by the Mormons toward their goal of world domination: "Didn't Hitler have his Nazi youth wearing uniforms? Can it be mere coincidence that the Mormon Church is the major religious sponsor of the premilitary training provided in the Boy Scouts of America? They wear the uniform and operate with a similar power structure that is organized into packs, patrols, and troops. They make camp, run bivouacs, and march with the nation's flag held aloft. They learn survival methods: map and compass, observation and tracking, knot tying, hiking, camp cooking, and other useful skills. Their merit badges include those for archery, rifle sharpshooting, and first aid. Even a youngster who knows how to operate a camera can be of use to the military" (p. 142).<sup>43</sup>

Readers of this *Review* will certainly be pardoned if such paranoid fantasies remind them of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The distinct similarity between that infamous anti-Semitic forgery and *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon* is one of the very many reasons why I cannot recommend purchase of Loftes Tryk's book, despite its obvious merits as slapstick comedy and its vast potential as a white elephant gift. For it was certainly not intended to be funny, and its evil far outweighs its humor.<sup>44</sup> Books like this should, as a matter of principle, receive no financial support from decent people.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> A sinister group, indeed. In support of Loftes Tryk's Nazification of the Boy Scouts, I might note that, while I myself participated in a non-LDS (indeed, PTA-sponsored) Scout troop, my scoutmaster actually admitted, publicly and in my hearing, that his name was "Schmidt." Just one more piece of disturbing evidence, once you begin to see the big picture.

<sup>44</sup> There is a very real threat that this kind of nonsense (much like that in Ed Decker's pseudo-documentary *Temples of the God Makers*) might incite certain types of people to anti-Mormon violence—whether or not such incitement is consciously intended.

<sup>45</sup> With obviously different concerns in mind, Jerald and Sandra Tanner arrive at essentially the same recommendation: "We felt that because Loftes Tryk's book was filled with unnecessary speculation and questionable

I have previously noted that New Age anti-Mormonism is distinguished from the older variety by its acceptance of supernatural elements in the origin and history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While Fawn Brodie and Wesley Walters tried to show that Joseph Smith's first vision never occurred, Loftes Tryk insists upon it. A "being of great power" did actually visit Joseph in his fifteenth year (p. 159). "An angel of light must have indeed made a dramatic visitation to Joseph," he declares (p. 160). "It was no idle daydream or brilliant imagining. That visit to Joseph was so real, so vivid and physical, that Paul, the apostle, made a prophecy concerning it." But the prophecy to which Tryk refers, and by which he signals his acceptance of the New Age tendency to agree with Latter-day Saint claims of the supernatural while at the same time to transvalue them, is 2 Corinthians 11:14-15. "Somehow during Joseph's fifteenth year, Satan took possession of the young boy's soul" (p. 157).<sup>46</sup>

During that same year, Tryk informs us, Joseph met "a special person, a mystic mentor he code-named Ammoron" (p. 158). We are of course to infer that this "mystic mentor" assisted Joseph Smith in the foundation of Mormonism. It hardly needs saying that Tryk offers no evidence for this, besides his gift of free-association and his assumption that the young Mormon represents the young Joseph Smith. It is clear that Loftes Tryk hates Joseph Smith, "this rank imposter, this leader-astray of so many of [God's] sons and daughters" (p. 175), and that it is his hatred, rather than fact or logic, that dictates his conclusions.

material it would not be wise to give it support." Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> It seems, though, that the young Joseph was evil from the start, for Tryk says that his question as to which church was right was "purposefully asked in a misleading manner." Here, Tryk reveals his authentically Protestant anti-institutionalism: Joseph should rather have asked for "a personal relationship with the Savior." "Somewhere in the past two thousand years," Tryk says, blandly condemning hundreds of millions of Christians in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, "an unauthorized emphasis got placed on the church" (227). Tryk also criticizes those who seek religious wisdom from their neighbors or from Latter-day Saint missionaries—in terms that would make the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul himself rather suspect (230).



Tryk's method of reading Latter-day Saint history and texts is, as we have abundantly seen, to seek for any word play or numerological quirk that he can possibly read into his materials, and to proclaim this arbitrarily reached information—pre-determined, really—as the true meaning of Mormonism. Not surprisingly, he rejects the obvious surface import of both history and text. “Every acknowledgment that Joseph made about the Savior, every confession or witness he gave of Christ's divinity was a red-herring issue and a gambit” (p. 165).

Tryk notes, correctly, that several sections of the Doctrine and Covenants long contained peculiar code-names that had once served to conceal the identities of the persons to whom reference was being made. One of these names, “Baurak Ale,” was applied to Joseph Smith himself. Here, as often, Tryk's commentary is both amusing and informative (although, frankly, not about Joseph Smith or Mormonism). “*Barak* is a Hebrew term for *lightning*. . . . Ale is the common English transliteration of *El*, the Hebrew word for power, almighty, or God. Joseph was ‘*Lightning God*.’ ” “Alternatively,” he says, the name “Baurak Ale” “may have identified a home-made brew sometimes known as white lightning, a slightly ribald reference to Joseph's occasional heavy drinking” (p. 171).<sup>47</sup>

It is at moments like this that my resolve to review Loftes Tryk begins to falter. Do speculations like this merit refutation? Do they deserve notice? Having come this far, though, I intend to push on to the end. I must nonetheless admit that I am powerless to refute Tryk's alcoholic fantasy about “white lightning.” Refutations require *arguments*. One does not “refute” a question, or an expletive, or—more to the point in this case—a joke. But the “Lightning God” etymology does, by contrast, imply something vaguely resembling an argument. Let us see how it holds up.

The first thing that any student, even a beginning student, of Semitic languages would notice about the name or title “Baurak Ale” is that it cannot possibly mean “Lightning God.” This is so for the simple reason that (non-predicate) adjectives in Semitic languages *follow* the nouns they modify. They do not

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<sup>47</sup> Against the charge that (especially the young) Joseph Smith was given to heavy drinking and similar habits, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised,” *BYU Studies* 10 (Spring 1970): 283-314; Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980): 118.

precede them, as Tryk's purported translation would require.<sup>48</sup> Thus, even if "Baurak" were taken to mean "lightning"—"Ale" indisputably means "God"—the phrase could only be a Hebrew "construct" (Arabic *iḏāfa*) meaning "Lightning of God." (I pass by without elaboration the fact that a hypothetical Hebrew adjective "lightning" would be clearly distinct from the noun "lightning," despite the coincidence that the English term is the same in both instances. Contrary to Tryk's assumptions, they would not be interchangeable.) A sharp observer would also notice that the phrase "Baurak Ale" seems to have been transliterated according to the Sephardic or Spanish-Portuguese pronunciation of Hebrew. This points manifestly to the influence of Joshua Seixas, who taught the language to Joseph Smith and a number of early Latter-day Saint leaders at Kirtland, Ohio.<sup>49</sup> Once we understand that we are dealing with Seixas's Sephardic pronunciation, it becomes possible to determine what the word "Baurak" really means. In fact, the Jewish Hebraist Louis Zucker, speaking of our very phrase, has observed that "the form 'baurak' is not actually found in the Bible but is a perfectly valid hypothetical form." And Prof. Zucker implicitly approves the translation of "Baurak Ale" as something like "God bless you" or "God blesses."<sup>50</sup>

Information such as this was readily available to Loftes Tryk. But an innocent and even edifying interpretation of the title "Baurak Ale" would not have served Tryk's dark purposes. He insists—without evidence where possible, against the

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<sup>48</sup> This is an important point, because it invalidates one of the frequently heard arguments of New Age anti-Mormons—an analogously philological one, based again on arbitrariness and misunderstood Hebrew—for the allegedly diabolical character of Latter-day Saint temple worship. I will not enter into the details, but I will suggest that those who would argue philological points must possess a knowledge of grammar and syntax as well as a dictionary.

<sup>49</sup> See, for more of this style of transliteration, J. Seixas, *Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners*, 2d ed., 1834, Reprint (Salt Lake City: Sunstone Foundation, 1981).

<sup>50</sup> See Louis C. Zucker, "Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew," *Dialogue* 3 (Summer 1968): 49. The relevant forms (for "baurak") may be found at Seixas, *Manual Hebrew Grammar*, 29, 77. The translation "God bless you" was offered by Elder Orson Pratt on 16 August 1873. See *Journal of Discourses* 16:156. My Hebraist friend and colleague Prof. Stephen D. Ricks suggests that the intention may have been "Blessed of God."

evidence when he has to—that every detail in Mormonism, and every element in Joseph Smith’s career, must bear the mark of Luciferian domination.

“There is,” Tryk tells us, “an astonishing bit of evidence in the Book of Mormon that Satan really did have control over Joseph’s life.” It is “a mathematically precise clue” that yields “an uncanny prediction of the length of Joseph’s life.” This is how it goes: “Perhaps,” says Tryk, “we can consider Coriantumr a symbol of Joseph Smith.” (Perhaps indeed! Coriantumr could, of course, equally well symbolize Mahatma Gandhi, or the Los Angeles Dodgers, or the Great Wall of China, or nothing at all, so why not Joseph Smith?)<sup>51</sup> Thus, when we read at Omni 1:21 that Coriantumr survived among the Nephites “for the space of nine moons” after their discovery of him, we know immediately to take those 270 “prophetic days” and divide them by seven, the number of days in a week. The result is 38, with a remainder of 209. Joseph Smith, Tryk reveals, lived 38 years and 187 days. This is within the allowable prophetic margin of error (pp. 162-63). Wow. Who could fail to be convinced? But Tryk is not finished. “Note that Amalickiah died in the 26th year of the reign of the judges (Alma 52:1-3), and that his brother became king. Joseph’s brother Alvin died at the age of 26, providing another Book of Mormon/Smith family parallel” (p. 167).

Loftes Tryk will not allow even Joseph Smith’s death at the hands of a murderous mob to escape service as a tool for his condemnation. This is especially clear in an instance where he insists on a supernatural incursion into the career of the Prophet which has been rejected even by believing Latter-day Saints: The occasion is the story, familiar to many, told by a certain William M. Daniels about the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith. According to Daniels, a “ruffian” approached the body of the Prophet with a bowie-knife, intending to decapitate him. However, just as the “ruffian” was about to strike, a bolt of lightning burst from the heavens paralyzing him and several other members of the mob. Of course, students of the events at Carthage jail, then and now, Mormon and non-Mormon, have

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<sup>51</sup> To be fair, Tryk thinks he has clinched the Joseph Smith = Coriantumr equation: “Remember,” he says, “that [Coriantumr] represents a diseased heart” (p. 162).

raised serious questions about this tale.<sup>52</sup> But if a baseless story serves Loftes Tryk's New Age anti-Mormon purposes, it is necessarily true. "Mr. Daniels was correct in his recounting of events; it wasn't merely an over-reaction to a terrifying scene. That paralyzing bolt of light had been an intimate part of Joseph's life ever since the spring of 1820 when he was held bound by a force that baffled his powers of description. It was none other than Satan, an angel of light, as he passed from the lifeless body of his late host, Joseph Smith, Jr., alias Baurak Ale" (p. 177).

In claiming, as he does near the end of his book (p. 222), that "Mormon Church leaders are aware of much, if not all, that has been discussed and brought into question here," Loftes Tryk might seem at first glance merely to repeat the charge, common to several strands of traditional anti-Mormonism, that the leadership of the Church is and has long been involved in a systematic cover-up of the truth about its past. But he is not. The carefully concealed Satanism of Tryk's fantasies is far different from the suspicious imaginings of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, or of the late Wesley Walters. It situates him unmistakably in the New Age camp. He himself recognizes this when he gently chides his erstwhile allies for having too limited a grasp of the Book of Mormon's sinister nature: "Anti-Mormons appear to be too polite, calling it a book of false scripture. It is fully the most direct, concrete literary creation of Satan that is present upon the face of the earth" (p. 222).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Tryk acknowledges this himself, referring to B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 2:332-34. B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978), 7:163, remarks of William M. Daniels that he produced "a sensational pamphlet detailing many miraculous occurrences in connection with the martyrdom which discredited him as a witness and did much towards making the murderers of the Prophet farcical." B. H. Roberts died in 1933. For a more recent but equally negative Mormon view of Daniels's testimony, see Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975): 87-90, 96 n. 60, 125-36, 164-68, 172, 173, 180, 183.

<sup>53</sup> The Tanners, seeming a bit astonished, complain that they have recently come under attack "from critics of the Mormon Church who feel that we are being *too soft* on the Mormons." See Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 1.

Lately, however, the chasm between traditional anti-Mormonism and its New Age cousin has been revealed in garish detail. Jerald and Sandra Tanner have recently accused Ed Decker and Bill Schnoebelen and Jim Spencer of fraud. "Their unsupported and sensationalistic claims," the Tanners charge, "[are] going to do serious damage to the responsible work of many who have labored to bring Mormons to Christ."<sup>54</sup> Schnoebelen and Spencer and other allies of Ed Decker have countered with the accusation that the Tanners (and others who venture to criticize New Age anti-Mormon absurdities) are demon-possessed.<sup>55</sup> Loftes Tryk has entered the fray with the claim that the Tanners are actually agents in the service of the satanic Mormon conspiracy. He points to their allegedly "deceptive image of deep sincerity," which masks—what else?—"their disposition toward conspiratorial methods."<sup>56</sup> Jerald Tanner, far from being the dedicated career anti-Mormon he has long seemed to every observer, is for Tryk "actually a Mormon double agent, an apologist, another fake."<sup>57</sup> The Tanners respond by noting that their problems with Loftes Tryk apparently began when they "failed to endorse or give attention to" his volume on *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon*. "We looked over the book and concluded that it contained too much speculation to be of value for those working with Mormons."<sup>58</sup> A dangerous conclusion to reach. "It appears," the Tanners conclude, "that anyone who takes a strong stand against the extreme ideas advocated by these people is

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<sup>54</sup> Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Blaine Hunsaker, Randi Hunsaker, Donald Meyer, and Gwenda Meyer, *The Tanner Problem*, cited by Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 2. On p. 12, the Tanners cite the pamphlet by the Hunsakers and the Meyers as attacking Craig Hawkins, an associate of the late "Dr." Walter Martin and a principal figure in the so-called Christian Research Institute. Hawkins had questioned certain claims of Schnoebelen, Spencer, and Decker, and so his past involvement in the martial arts was dredged up as proof of his subservience to occult forces.

<sup>56</sup> Hunsaker et al., *The Tanner Problem*, cited by Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 2; Tryk, "Opposition in All Things." This mania for detecting satanic plots, and plots within plots, is apparently characteristic of Loftes Tryk's thought generally: The Tanners (*ibid.*, 2) cite (and quote) an earlier draft of Tryk's article that suggests "the possibility that Ed Decker himself might be part of the Mormon conspiracy."

<sup>57</sup> Tryk is cited at Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 3, 4.



liable to be accused of being influenced by the occult or of being in league with the Devil."<sup>59</sup>

Quite so. Perhaps they can now understand, to at least some degree, what Latter-day Saints feel when confronted with the wild claims of anti-Mormonism's New Age zealots.

The situation is simultaneously predictable, amusing, and pathetic. It raises again a very old question: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?" (Matthew 12:25-26.) The answer is clear, and divinely given: "If Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end" (Mark 3:26). "Ye shall know them," said the Lord Jesus, "by their fruits. . . . A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit" (Matthew 7:16, 18).

But there are other questions posed by the book under specific consideration here: What do you get when you cross Philastus Hurlbut with Salvador Dali? A cut-rate Fawn Brodie with Stephen King? Loftes Tryk may well have written the worst volume ever published on the Book of Mormon. His arbitrary textual readings, his wholly unjustified dogmatism, his Luciferian obsessions, his rambling and impressionist style, his lack of interest in anything that can truly be termed evidence, the utter absence in his book of rigor or discipline, all of these appear to put him in a class with the infamous fifteenth-century manual for the persecution of witches, the *Malleus maleficarum*. Tryk is a living refutation of the oft-repeated claim that there is nothing new under the anti-Mormon sun, that contemporary critics of the Church merely recycle arguments that have been around from the beginning. He is genuinely original—and a spectacular illustration of the perils of innovation. (Even in anti-Mormonism, tradition may well have a legitimate place.) While Loftes Tryk raises few if any real theological or historical issues, the publication of his book in a time of mounting concern about the world's forests does pose serious ecological ones.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 12.