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# Speaking Out of the Dust: Religious Reenactments with the Specific Iconic Identity of Place

Heidi Diane Lewis

*Brigham Young University - Provo*

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“SPEAKING OUT OF THE DUST”: RELIGIOUS REENACTMENTS  
WITH THE SPECIFIC ICONIC IDENTITY OF PLACE

by

Heidi D. Lewis

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Department of Theatre and Media Arts  
Brigham Young University

August 2006

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Heidi D. Lewis

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Eric Samuelsen, Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rodger D. Sorensen

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Amy P. Jensen

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the dissertation of Heidi D. Lewis in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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Date

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Eric Samuelsen  
Chair, Graduate Committee

Accepted for the Department

---

Darl Larsen  
Graduate Coordinator

Accepted for the College

---

Robert T. Barrett  
Associate Dean, College of Fine Arts and  
Communications

## ABSTRACT

### “SPEAKING OUT OF THE DUST”: RELIGIOUS REENACTMENTS

### WITH THE SPECIFIC ICONIC IDENTITY OF PLACE

Heidi D. Lewis

Department of Theatre and Media Arts

Master of Arts

Sometimes, the place where a play is performed is as important as or more important than the play itself. The first known theatrical rituals were performed in spaces which came to hold deep religious significance. Many religious traditions regard certain places as sacred because of spiritually significant events which took place there, sometimes involving the presence of Deity. In an effort to build on that sacrality, sometimes religious cultures bring theatre to these spaces, which, in turn, tend to alter the nature of the theatrical event. This seems especially true in regards to theatre which presents a re-enactment of the events which originally sacralized the performance space. Creating a theatrical performance at the same space, and recreating the same event which made the space sacred in the first place, gives the

theatrical event a reflexive quality which performances in a space designated for theatre do not have.

The Passion of Osiris in Ancient Egypt and the celebrations and commemorations of the early Christian Church are two examples of theatrical reenactments of sacred events in sacred spaces. Although such performances have been uncommon since those of the early Christians, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints offers two comparable performances today (the Hill Cumorah Pageant and the Nauvoo Pageant); they are also reenactments of sacred events framed by the sacred spaces where they originally occurred. The main commonality of my focus is the sacred physical space which frames each of the performances as a sort of ethereal proscenium arch or a silent witness of sacred events.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I am also grateful for David T. Warner and Bonnie Ashby for involving me in the inaugural performance of the new Nauvoo Pageant in 2005. The powerful experiences I had with the Nauvoo Pageant inspired me to write this thesis.

Finally, I acknowledge the sustaining influence of my family: my parents James and April Reed, my brother Christian, and my sisters Inga, Greta, and Lisl, and, above all, my husband, Sam. I am deeply indebted to my parents for taking a genuine interest in my education, and to my husband Sam for his many sacrifices, daily encouragement, and loving compassion.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, the place where a play is performed is as important as or more important than the play itself. This is especially true when the play is a reenactment of religious events performed in the space where those events originally took place.

Victor Hugo, discussing the importance of place in theatre, wrote:

Exact locality is one of the first elements of reality. The speaking or acting characters alone do not engrave on the soul of the spectator the faithful impression of facts. The place where such a catastrophe occurred becomes a terrible and inseparable witness of it, and the absence of this sort of silent character makes the greatest scenes of history in the drama incomplete.<sup>1</sup>

One possible explanation for the origin of theatre is found in ritual. Over time, the space of a ritual becomes sacred to that culture. The first known theatrical rituals were performed in spaces which came to hold deep religious significance. Many religious traditions regard certain places as sacred because of spiritually significant events which took place there, sometimes involving the presence of Deity. An example might be found in Exod. 3:5 AV, where God instructs Moses to “put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is on holy ground.” In an effort to build on that sacrality, sometimes religious cultures bring

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Hugo, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jean Massin, 18 vols. (Paris: Le Club Français de Livre, 1967), 3:63; quoted in Marvin Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 83.

theatre to these spaces, which, in turn, tends to alter the nature of the theatrical event. This seems especially true in regards to theatre which presents a re-enactment of the events which originally sacralized the performance space. These sacred spaces become the *silent characters* of these early performances. Creating a theatrical performance at the same space and recreating the same event that made the space sacred in the first place gives the theatrical event a reflexive quality which performances in a theatrical space do not have. Such an exact locale for portrayal of sacred events from religious history, to return to Victor Hugo's description, "becomes a terrible and inseparable witness of it."<sup>2</sup>

The Passion of Osiris in ancient Egypt and the commemorations of the early Christian church are two examples of theatrical reenactments of sacred events in sacred spaces. Although such performances have been uncommon since those of the early Christians, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) offers comparable performances today; they are reenactments of sacred events framed by the sacred spaces where they originally occurred.

I do not claim that the Passion of Osiris fathered the form of the Christian rituals; nor do I suggest that the LDS pageants performed today are direct descendents of those performed in Jerusalem during the fourth century. However, I do believe that LDS pageants use their particular performance spaces in about the same way as the earlier performances used theirs. I follow here the relational

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

pattern of performance theorist Richard Schechner using a horizontal method, one which allows observation of commonalities and *variations* rather than a vertical method, which points to origination.<sup>3</sup> The main commonality I observe is the sacred physical space, which frames each of the performances as a sort of ethereal proscenium arch or a silent witness of sacred events. Although there are great variations in deities, theatrical devices, and so forth, my main focus is the commonality of these ethereal proscenium arches.

### Structure

The thesis is divided into five parts: an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion, as follows:

#### *Chapter One*

The introductory chapter outlines the theoretical framework, some limitations and delimitations, a review of literary sources applicable to all chapters (sources specific to individual chapters will be addressed therein) including the means by which the texts and/or descriptions of these reenactments were made accessible, and a definition of terms. The following are the terms and principles defined: *the sacred, sacred spaces, the iconicity of sacred space, the iconic stage, and Religious Reenactments with the specific iconic identity of space.*

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2003), 7.

## *Chapter Two*

Chapter two begins with a foundation in performance theory. In connection with the Passion of Osiris rooted in ritual, under the “Performance Theory” heading, I will address the scholarship of Richard Schechner, Victor Turner, and Catherine Bell, which shows how ritual and other religious observances connect to theatre. Richard Schechner’s definitions help describe how the historical rituals of Osiris and the Holy Land celebrations can be considered performance. I will present how the studies and definitions Schechner considers connect closely with the anthropological work of his colleague, Victor Turner. Using Turner’s connections between anthropology and theatre, between life experience and the reenactment of those experiences, I will further define these two groups of performances as Religious Reenactments connecting the present with the sacred events of the past. Catherine Bell, a professor of religion, has produced several works in the field of ritual studies which I will use as additional scholarly insight into religious performance. With the foundation of these various celebrations as Religious Reenactments, I will present a more detailed study of their performances and how their sacred spaces in which they perform—including the audience’s response—comment on the action of the Religious Reenactment.

This chapter focuses and expands on Marvin Carlson’s brief analysis of the ancient Egyptians’ Passion of Osiris and the Christian celebrations during the late fourth century. My analysis will parallel Carlson’s, as it relates to the power of a theatrical space when it holds sacred significance to the performance. This chapter

introduces the concept of performances intended to connect with audiences and performing with a *transcendent Other*. This *transcendent Other* represents the deity that a particular group believes in; the *transcendent Other* is that otherworldly Supreme Being from which the community seeks communication. The concept of *liminality*, a state of transitioning, is also introduced in this chapter. This liminal state often marks a transition from an ordinary place or experience into a spiritual space or experience. A third concept used to interpret the interaction of the audience with the reenacted sacred events is *distance*. There is an aesthetic distance that exists between an audience and the performers they are watching. It is distance which allows an audience to easily distinguish the performance from real life. Occasionally, with the reenactment of sacred events in sacred places, there is a diminishing distance, which allows an audience to become more personally invested in the reality of the moment.

### *Chapter Three*

Chapter three, grounded in Mormon Studies regarding the Book of Mormon,<sup>4</sup> explores specific iconic identity as it relates to the Hill Cumorah Pageant, which is performed in western New York and sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Hill Cumorah Pageant, like the Osiris festival at Abydos and Egeria's participation in celebration in Jerusalem, is performed on what Latter-day

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<sup>4</sup> The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989). The Book of Mormon is considered sacred scripture to the Latter-day Saints, and was integral to the founding of their church.

Saints believe to be a sacred hill. This chapter delves into the sacrality of the Hill Cumorah and how it relates to the events portrayed in the pageant.

This chapter also revisits the concept of *liminality* as it applies to crossing an ordinary physical boundary into a sacred space. In support of my discussion regarding the sacrality of the Hill Cumorah and its relationship to Mormon Studies, I will consult the scholarly works of John L. Sorensen, Jan Shipps, and Terryl L. Givens. In introduction to these works, a short description of the authors and works follows.

Dr. John L. Sorensen is one of the premier Mormon anthropologists currently working in the field and a co-founder of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.), an academic organization associated with Brigham Young University and dedicated to LDS historical research. Sorensen, professor emeritus of anthropology at BYU, has published many articles and several larger works concerned with the anthropology of the Book of Mormon civilizations. Jan Shipps, professor emeritus of history and religious studies at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, is the only non-Mormon to have served as a president of the Mormon History Association. Her book *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* presents a scholarly analysis of significant events relating to the cultural and religious development of Mormonism.<sup>5</sup> Terryl L. Givens, professor of English at the University of Richmond and a Mormon scholar, presents a current

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<sup>5</sup> Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

study of the Book of Mormon in *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion*.<sup>6</sup> I will use his objective insights regarding the LDS Church and the Book of Mormon, along with Shipps's and Sorensen's insights, to ground my analysis in the scholarship of Mormon studies.

#### *Chapter Four*

Chapter four examines the new Nauvoo Pageant—also sponsored by the LDS Church—and how it also relates to the space in which it performs. Some of the dialogue in the Nauvoo Pageant is reminiscent of Egeria's remarks about the Jerusalem celebrations; both performances emphasized to the audience that here is the place where the original events happened. This chapter further analyzes Nauvoo as a *home* to the Latter-day Saints in the early 1800s. I draw from Una Chaudhuri's concept of *home* presented in *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*.<sup>7</sup> In relation to Nauvoo and the stories portrayed in the pageant, *home* seemed to be where the Saints were always being driven from as well as the place they were always striving to establish. This cycle of leaving home and reestablishing home seems to me at the heart of the pageant. In this chapter, I will return to an analysis of the diminishing distance between real life and the performance. In addition to an analysis of the distance between the audience and

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<sup>6</sup> Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).



the performance, I will introduce the possibility of another level of distance relating to the actors and their connection with past sacred events.

### *Chapter Five*

Chapter five, or the conclusion, offers a few thoughts on, and suggestions for, further study.

### Theoretical Framework

As semiotician Daniel Chandler states, “We seem as a species to be driven by a desire to make meanings: above all, we are surely homo significans – meaning-makers.”<sup>8</sup> Semiotics is the study of the meanings we make out of signs, which can be words (written or spoken), images, textures, sounds, and so forth. Anything can be considered a sign if someone applies a meaning to it other than what it is. Theatre semiotics as a practice has been traditionally a tool of analysis applied to the written text of a play, but mostly focusing on the performance text in the final production. Theatre theorist, Marvin Carlson suggests that the traditional approach of theatre semiotics is restrictive, leaving out other aspects of the performance that contribute to the whole. He says, “The physical appearance of the auditorium, the displays in the lobby, the information in the program, and countless other parts of the event as a whole are also part of its semiotic, and it is a rare production indeed that does not build at least some of these into the overall impression it seeks to make

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* [book on-line] (London: Routledge, 2002, accessed 27 April 2006); available from Questia at <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d+108423707>; Internet, 17.

upon its audience.”<sup>9</sup> Carlson focuses on these neglected aspects of the total performance identifying the unique iconic ability of theatre. I will focus specifically on the “auditorium,” or rather, the place of performance. A semiotic study of these performances in regards to the places they are performed will allow me a more specific application of semiotics as a critical theory. Later in this chapter, under Definition of Terms, I introduce Carlson’s concept of the *iconic stage* and how it relates to my analysis of religious reenactments in their originating sacred space.

### Limitations and Delimitations

Some theatrical performances attempt to reenact important nonreligious historical events at the site where the real event took place, like, for example, the reenactment of the battle of Gettysburg. However, I will not address such performances in my thesis as my focus is *religious* performances held in *sacred* spaces. I will review two religious reenactments in their original sacred spaces in ancient history, namely the Passion of Osiris and the early Christian rituals as recorded by Egeria, as well as two contemporary religious reenactments produced by the LDS Church, the Hill Cumorah Pageant in western New York and the Nauvoo Pageant in eastern Illinois. Although I am aware that the places where each of these reenactments were performed may hold other significant histories and sacred qualities not addressed in the named reenactments. I am only concerned with the histories and sacrality as they are presented in these specific performances.

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<sup>9</sup> Carlson, xiii.

## Review of Main Literary Sources

In addition to the theoretical sources previously listed in connection with specific chapters, the major theoretical sources I will consult throughout the entire thesis are from Marvin Carlson and Timothy K. Beal. My main literary sources are the texts or interpretation of texts of the Passion of Osiris, the fourth century Christian celebrations, the Hill Cumorah Pageant, and the Nauvoo Pageant. Following is a paragraph description of each of these sources.

### *Major Theoretical Sources*

In *Theatre Semiotics*, Marvin Carlson argues, “No other art seeks to absorb and convert into interpretive structures so much of the total human experience as the theatre does.”<sup>10</sup> With this mindset, Carlson seeks to explore the many iconic possibilities of the theatre. Using Charles S. Pierce’s definition, “anything whatever, be it quality, existent individual, or law, is an Icon of anything, in so far as it is like that thing and used as a sign of it,” Carlson emphasizes the greater capacity to which theatre deals with iconicity in relation to other forms of art.<sup>11</sup> It is Carlson’s brief analysis of religious reenactments on their originating sacred space that leads me to contribute this more in-depth analysis.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., xviii.

<sup>11</sup> Charles S. Pierce, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931–58), 2, par. 247; quoted in Carlson, 75.

In *Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith*, Timothy K. Beal, a professor of religion, explores the qualities by which a place is sacralized and how a sacred space manifests faith as he visits roadside religious attractions. Beal, as a result of his explorations, suggests that interacting with a sacred space is an invitation to interact with the people who created the sacred space or those who were part of the sacred event which altered that space.<sup>12</sup> An invitation to establish a relationship with those who were present at the event which sacralized a place is a concept which beautifully expands the meaning of the four performances I review in the thesis.

#### *Main Literary Sources*

Much of what is deduced regarding the Abydos Passion Play is from the Iykhernofret stone, a record left by a participant of the passion play named Ikhernofret, as well as pyramid texts, or writings on the walls of the pyramids where pharaohs were buried. Both sources provide the layout of Osiris's life events, but the Iykhernofret stone outlines the events during the actual celebration sometime during the Twelfth Dynasty.<sup>13</sup> A portion of this stela is devoted to Ikhernofret's duties at the Abydos celebrations. As Tom Hare has written: "It is this portion of

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<sup>12</sup> Timothy K. Beal, *Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>13</sup> Tom Hare, *Remembering Osiris: Number, Gender, and the Word in Ancient Egyptian Representational Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 34. Although Hare's career and life's research has been mostly tied to Japanese history and culture, his scholarly interest in Comparative Literature and Cultural History brought him to publish his research on Osiris and other representations of Ancient Egyptian Culture with Stanford University.

the stela that has attracted the most attention from Egyptologists, because it gives the best extant account, from pharaonic Egypt, of the rituals and celebrations of the festival of Osiris.”<sup>14</sup> I will use several scholarly analyses of this stela and other Egyptian stelae and coffin texts to guide my research of the Osiris festival.

Egeria, most likely a nun from Gaul, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land during the late fourth century.<sup>15</sup> She kept a record of the Christian celebrations in each of the holy sites—including details of the various recitations of psalms and prayers, singing of hymns, and the manner in which the catechumens and the faithful were blessed—for the ladies to whom she wrote.<sup>16</sup> Her manuscript was copied out during the eleventh century and subsequently was lost or remained unrecognized in Arezzo until it was rediscovered by the scholar J. F. Gamurrini in 1884.<sup>17</sup> John Wilkinson’s translation seems to be the most recognized English version and the one which I will reference.

The Hill Cumorah Pageant was developed out of a much more informal commemoration of the events leading up to the publishing of the Book of Mormon conducted by members of the LDS Church. The epic-style pageant performed today officially began performances in 1937. Although the scripted text has gone through

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas M. Finn, *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 195.

<sup>16</sup> Egeria writes, “Loving sisters, I am sure it will interest you to know about the daily services they have in the holy places, and I must tell you about them.” John Wilkinson, trans., *Egeria’s Travels to the Holy Land*, rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Ariel Publishing House; Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1981), 123.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 7.

many drafts, I work from the 1989 version still in use today. Even though the script remains unpublished, I received a loose-leaf copy from the former Artistic Director of the pageant, Rodger Sorensen. I will also reference the performance of the pageant as I saw it in 1997 and 1998.

I participated in the Nauvoo Pageant in the summer of 2005 in the capacity of an Assistant Director. This particular script was developed over one year by a team of writers requested by the LDS Church Priesthood Department.<sup>18</sup> Like the Hill Cumorah Pageant, the Nauvoo script underwent several rewrites and was finally approved by the necessary supervising authorities of the LDS Church organization. The unpublished draft of the script I will reference was the most current at the time I received it in February 2006.<sup>19</sup>

### Definition of Terms

As this thesis relies on the usage of what might be considered slippery terms or complex concepts, I have included the following definitions:

#### *The Sacred*

The list of qualifications that make a thing, place, or event sacred are as various as the many religions that exist in the world. However, Timothy K. Beal, a

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<sup>18</sup> Because of the LDS Church's large organization, a delegating of duties to different departments is necessary. Among other responsibilities, the Priesthood Department is in charge of music and cultural arts.

<sup>19</sup> Historically, the Nauvoo Pageant script continues to undergo changes as seen fit by the Priesthood Department of the LDS Church.

professor of religion at Case Western Reserve University, summarizes the general understanding of the word *sacred* by tracing its etymology. Drawing upon its Latin root meaning “set apart,” Beal defines the sacred as “*set apart* in a way that orients it toward and opens it to divine transcendence.”<sup>20</sup> Mircea Eliade argues that it is transcendent communication that separates sacred space from the profane.

“Whence the enormous importance of sacred space in the life of all peoples: because it is in such a space that man is able to communicate with the other world, the world of divine beings or ancestors.”<sup>21</sup>

In the Christian churches of Egypt, a careful separation of the profane and sacred is strictly observed in the treatment of sacred relics. It is a tradition of the Egyptian patrons to kiss the hands which have held a sacred relic instead of kissing the actual relic. In this manner, the patrons have the opportunity for a transcendent experience without depreciating a relic’s sacramental value.

David Brown, a professor of theology at the University of Durham, connects *sacramental*” a word he closely relates to and sometimes uses interchangeably with *sacred*, with the Catechism’s definition of *sacrament*: “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.”<sup>22</sup> Adding the “-al” suffix would then mean that for

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<sup>20</sup> Beal, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona [book on-line] (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1985, accessed 27 April 2006); available from Questia at <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=9865426>; Internet, 107.

<sup>22</sup> David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 5.

something to be sacramental it must have a character similar to a sacrament; also manifesting an inward and spiritual grace. Brown argues in his book *God and Enchantment of Place* that the sacramental ought to be viewed as a means of understanding and “exploring God’s relationship to our world.”<sup>23</sup> In the following chapters I analyze four religious performances that offer such a means.

### *Sacred Spaces*

“Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”<sup>24</sup> As recorded in the Bible, Moses was commanded to remove his shoes in reverence to the holy ground he stood on as he spoke with God. This command suggests a couple of means by which a geographical place would become sacred space. One method of how a place is deemed holy or sacred is through the physical presence of God, whether through a burning bush, a pillar of fire, or His actual presence. Another means suggested in this passage by which a place becomes sacred space is by a human, Moses in this example, experiencing a communion with the extraordinary or supernatural.

As I researched the sacred, I came to realize that it would be helpful to distinguish what we might call a “place” and a “space,” that is to say between earthly “places” and sacred “spaces.” So, in this thesis I define a “place” as a location without any particular religious significance. Although a sacred space exists geographically on this earth, I define a “space” as a location that is set apart

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>24</sup> Exod. 3:5 AD.



from and beyond this earthly realm. Therefore, in my analysis I will address a sacred location as a sacred “space,” carefully reserving the word “place” as it applies only before sacred events deemed it holy or in reference to a specific geographical location.

The transition of a mortal place becoming sacred space is not exclusive to Christianity. The physical presence of any god or Supreme Being anywhere, any place in our human, mortal world defines that space as sacred to the worshippers of that god. A spring at the base of Mount Parnassus in Greece, deemed sacred for its abundance, brought the Mycenaean to worship in its waters.<sup>25</sup> The rewarded plea of a Hindu woman to Death sanctified the precise banyan tree where this intervention to free her husband’s soul occurred.<sup>26</sup> The presence of a tooth of the Buddha creates sacrality within the temple Sri Dalada Maligawa.<sup>27</sup> “How does any space transform itself into sacred space? Simply because a sacrality is manifested there . . . . The manifestation of the Sacred in any space whatsoever implies for one who believes in the authenticity of this hierophany the presence of transcendent reality.”<sup>28</sup>

Brown presents instances where an entire land or country is deemed sacred. He argues that it is not happenstance that “the name for the Christian church in Egypt, ‘Copt’, is the Arabic abbreviation for the Greek name for the land, Aegyptos

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<sup>25</sup> Susan Tyler Hitchcock with John L. Esposito, *Geography of Religion: Where God Lives, Where Pilgrims Walk* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2004), 40.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>28</sup> Eliade, 107.

. . . for numerous legends have helped to bond land and biblical witness.”<sup>29</sup> The land is treated with sacred veneration because it is a validating witness to the legends that the Holy Family lived in Egypt for a time. Removing of shoes before entering a Christian church in Egypt is an icon itself reenacting Moses’ removal of his shoes in reverence to the holy ground on which he stood. The land of Ethiopia is regarded as sacred by Christians of that region because of the presence of a sacred relic, the Ark of the Covenant, which legend has it was moved to Ethiopia shortly after the Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon.<sup>30</sup>

In his book, *Roadside Religion*, Beal records his and his family’s interactions with various Christian religious attractions across the United States. These attractions vary from a recreation of the Holy Land in Virginia to a miniature golf center called the Golgotha Fun Park.<sup>31</sup> These various religious attractions were intentionally created as sacred space with, “the aim . . . to set the space apart from its surroundings, making it a holy world unto itself, governed by its own rules, which are ‘other’ than those of profane space.”<sup>32</sup> These places did not become sacred because of sacred events that transpired there or because a sacred relic existed there.

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<sup>29</sup> Brown, 57.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>31</sup> Beal, 1–209.

<sup>32</sup> Hitchcock, 9.

These ordinary places became sacred spaces because their creators imposed their interest in the sacred upon them.

Although Beal is careful not to assign this “applied sacrality” to all sacred spaces, there are many scholars who argue that sacred space is an entirely human construct. Emile Durkheim, a leading French sociologist in the early twentieth century, argued that a thing, place, or event “becomes sacred only when the community invests it with that meaning.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly William Norton states that, “The meaning that a place has is a human meaning and is dependent on social matters. Humans, as members of groups, create places; in turn, the places created develop a character that affects human behavior.”<sup>34</sup>

Although I acknowledge such opinions of the sacred like those of Durkheim and Norton, I disagree strongly. As a believer, as a Christian, and as a Mormon, I argue that sacred places do exist outside of human construction. To reduce sacrality to a social construct seems to me akin to reducing belief in God to a comforting imagining, or the divine to a projection of human need. I maintain that sacred space is an icon of God’s presence, of an original encounter with the transcendent. I follow David Brown’s argument that “God is found in nature and gardens, in buildings

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<sup>33</sup> Frank W. Elwell, “Emile Durkheim’s Sociology: A Site for Undergraduates,” [site on-line] (Claremore, OK: Rogers State University, 2003, accessed 15 March 2006); available from <http://www.faculty.rsu.edu/~felwell/Theorists/Durkheim/index.htm>; Internet.

<sup>34</sup> William Norton, “Behavior Analysis and the Cultural Geographic Study of Place,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 15 (1995): 6; quoted in Michael H. Madsen, “Mormon Meccas: The Spiritual Transformation of Mormon Historical Sites from Points of Interest to Sacred Space” (Ph.D diss., Syracuse University, 2003), 12.

and place . . . .”<sup>35</sup> The ability of a sacred space to point to an encounter with deity follows in the next definition.

### *Iconicity of Sacred Space*

Sacred space is an icon of deity’s presence, of the original encounter with the transcendent. Brown presents that the purpose of sacramental icons is “not to encourage flight from the [fallen] world but rather transfigure that world so that it becomes diaphanous to the glory of God.”<sup>36</sup> At the same time, Brown suggests that a problem with defining icons in this manner is that it “seems artificially to separate creation and revelation, as though creation was not already a sphere of divine grace simply in virtue of God being its source.”<sup>37</sup> Categorizing creation with revelation suggests that every part of this world is sacred, meaning that the entire earth is an icon of God’s powers of creation. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the sacred spaces presented in the following chapters are given extra-iconicity for they are the places where, after creation, Deity returned. These sacred spaces are icons of Deity’s return, of additional encounters with the transcendent.

### *The Iconic Stage*

The ability of the “iconic stage” to transport the actors and audience to various specific places is a matter on which Carlson spends considerable time.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Brown, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Out of necessity, he separates three levels of iconicity: (1) “simple iconicity” (i.e., a backdrop painted to look like the cave where Jesus’ crucified body was lain) (2) “iconic identity” (i.e., a cave existing in nature used as a performance space representing the place where Jesus’ body was lain), and (3) “specific iconic identity” (i.e., the cave presumed to be the real site of his burial used as a performance space for reenacting the events which transpired there as recorded in the Bible).<sup>39</sup> This third level of iconicity will be the primary focus of my thesis. I plan to examine the reflexive quality in the religious reenactments previously mentioned. Analyzing these reenactments through the lens of “specific iconic identity” will allow a deeper semiotic study of the performance text and audience involvement.

### *Religious Reenactments with Specific Iconic Identity*

The quintessence of theatre itself is a mimetic action set apart from ordinary life, for which it stands as a sign or icon. Similarly, the very nature of religious rituals is that they are set apart from ordinary, everyday life and often incorporate mimetic action. However, much can be said about the differences between contemporary theatre and religious ritual. Religious ritual is always associated with the sacred, and I agree with Schechner’s definition of ritual as a celebratory observance of sacred events or a rite of passage.<sup>40</sup> Contemporary theatre, however,

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<sup>38</sup> Carlson, 75–91.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 84. My examples are based on Carlson’s descriptions.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 229. Here Schechner defines two types of religious ritual: (1) observances and celebrations and (2) rites of passage.

is rarely, if ever, oriented towards the divine and essentially never carries with it the presumption of efficacy that defines religious ritual. Even if a theatrical event has religion as its subject, the ultimate purpose of the event is essentially cultural, not salvic. Of course, in actual practice, the differences between “ritual” and “performance” aren’t always clear cut. Suppose, then, that we create continuum, with “unmistakably secular performance” at one end and “wholly religious ritual” at the other. After all, even within the categories I’ve established, “theatre” and “ritual” can become slippery terms, especially since this thesis is concerned with a performance genre that shares qualities of both. For the sake of this thesis, the category I propose will be called “Religious Reenactments with the Specific Iconic Identity of Place.”<sup>41</sup> Supposing there was a continuum with “theatre” on one end and “ritual” on the other, “Religious Reenactments” would be positioned near the center between the two genres.

The following are the common elements of these Religious Reenactments: (1) They are reenactments of believed actual events; (2) The reenacted events are of a sacred nature; (3) The actual events either involve divine transcendence or provide the opportunity for such transcendence in participation with their reenactment, or both, and (4) The events are performed in a sacred space that holds a visual and presumed presence central to the event reenacted.

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<sup>41</sup> For the sake of avoiding wordiness and as a note of clarification, this genre will mostly be referred to as “Religious Reenactments”—capitalized, so as to clarify this specific genre from all other religious reenactments that are not performed in their originating sacred space.

## CHAPTER 2

### OSIRIS AND EGERIA: ANCIENT RELIGIOUS REENACTMENTS

Marvin Carlson, aware of a connection between religious reenactment and the place of performance, devotes a few paragraphs to theatre evolved from rituals that were performed on holy ground. He names three specific examples: the Ancient Egyptians' Passion of Osiris at Abydos, a Spanish nun's pilgrimage<sup>1</sup> to the Holy Land in AD 381, and the Mormon Hill Cumorah Pageant performed in western New York today.<sup>2</sup> This chapter expands on the former two Religious Reenactments—I will address the Hill Cumorah Pageant in the following chapter. The Passion of Osiris and the celebrations in the Holy Land that Egeria records both utilize their places of performance to create a degree of reality for the audiences. I will also attempt to define how both the Egyptian and Christian Religious Reenactments are connected with ideas of religious transcendence.

Within his investigation of a performance place, Carlson uses Hugo's argument regarding the importance of place in a story to present the iconic possibilities of certain performance spaces. "In literal examples of Hugo's physical

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<sup>1</sup> I will be using terms such as *Passion* and *pilgrim* or *pilgrimage* because they are the terms used by my sources.

<sup>2</sup> Carlson, 85–86.

locations which have been 'silent characters' in historical events, the audience's contact with such locations seems to provide a measure of contact with the reality of the events themselves."<sup>3</sup> Where, as most theorists believe, the earliest known examples of theatre were religious rituals performed in religiously significant spaces, their place of performance provided the participants with a sense of reality of the events they honored.

Norman L. Koonce, vice president and CEO of the American Institute of Architects, explains in his introduction to an AIA issue dedicated to "Sacred Spaces" the connection human beings have with such transcendence. "We acknowledge, by our actions as well as our thoughts, our rooted-ness in the past. . . . As such, we are not only physical beings with physical needs that require accommodation; we are spiritual beings that seek a relationship with a realm above and beyond time."<sup>4</sup> Often religions will dedicate sacred space for such communions involving celebrations and rituals through which humans as spiritual beings can achieve the relationship with the sacred described by Koonce. However, some places are considered innately sacred because of sacred events which happened there. In such

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>4</sup> Norman L. Koonce, "Erasing the Boundary Between the Physical and the Spiritual," *The AIA Journal of Architecture*, July 2005 [journal on-line]; available from [http://www.aia.org/nwsltr\\_aiaj.cfm?pagename=aiaj\\_a\\_20050730\\_from\\_the\\_ceo](http://www.aia.org/nwsltr_aiaj.cfm?pagename=aiaj_a_20050730_from_the_ceo); Internet; accessed 15 March 2006. Although architectural experts such as Koonce are not typically cited in relation to theatre critical studies, I believe his insight regarding the relationship between sacred spaces and the people who visit them is particularly applicable.



cases, religiously minded people will put on a play, in the sacred space, reenacting theatrically the sacred things that happened there.

As Schechner suggests, rites of passage as well as celebrations and observances of sacred events can be considered ritual.<sup>5</sup> The Passion of Osiris was primarily a celebration and observance of sacred events that was believed to bring about fruitful harvest and, therefore, can be considered ritual. The several celebrations in which Egeria participates seem to qualify as rituals in that they also are oriented towards honoring Christ and his life. In this case, where Schechner's classification of "ritual" seems adequate for qualifying "ritual" as "performance," it seems inadequate in the reverse—classifying performances as "rituals." Here, it seems more fitting to define these Christian events as "celebrations." Even though the Osiris rituals and the Christian celebrations seem to emerge from different classifications, I have grouped an analysis of both within the same chapter as they are both considered Religious Reenactments for the sake of this thesis.

### Performance Theory

Richard Schechner suggests that "performance is an inclusive term. Theatre is only one node on a continuum that reaches from . . . ritualization . . . through performances in everyday life."<sup>6</sup> Explaining further, Schechner states that "performance originates in impulses to make things happen and to entertain; to get

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<sup>5</sup> Schechner, *Future of Ritual*, 229.

<sup>6</sup> Schechner, *Performance Theory*, xvii.

results; . . . to collect meanings; . . . to be transformed into another and to celebrate being oneself; . . . bring into a special place a transcendent Other who exists then-and-now and later-and-now. . . .”<sup>7</sup> Turner’s work in the field of anthropology, especially in relation to the performance of culture, has led him to believe that “theatre is, indeed, a hypertrophy, an exaggeration, of jural and ritual processes.”<sup>8</sup> With a broader understanding of performance, both the rituals of the Passion of Osiris in ancient Egypt and the early Christian celebrations in Jerusalem qualify as performances in several aspects—especially in their purposes to collect and present religious *meanings*, especially with the *transcendent Other*. Oftentimes the intended audience for such rituals and religious celebrations included that transcendent Other.

Drawing a connection between meanings and performance, Turner defines ritual as a “prescribed formal behavior for occasions . . . having reference to beliefs in mystical beings and powers.”<sup>9</sup> The Passion of Osiris was a prescribed set of events—involving performances of Osiris’ life—which referenced heavily the Egyptians’ belief in Osiris and his powers of fecundity. In light of Turner’s attendance of other somewhat similar rituals, he may have described—would he

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 156-157.

<sup>8</sup> Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967) 19; quoted in Matthew Deflem, “Ritual, Anti-structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner’s Processual Symbolic Analysis,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30.1 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.cas.sc.edu/soc/faculty/deflem/zturn.htm>; Internet; accessed 3 May 2006.

have the opportunity—the Osiris festival as a *performance* of their culture. This idea of a *performance of culture* seems a natural coupling with the Osiris festival—this is also fitting for the Christian celebrations addressed later in this chapter. Such reenactments evolved from their belief system. In Catherine Bell's *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, she further supports Turner's theory of culture as performance. "Beliefs, creeds, symbols, and myths emerge as forms of mental content or conceptual blueprints: they direct, inspire, or promote activity, but they themselves are not activities. Ritual, like action, will act, express, or perform these conceptual orientations."<sup>10</sup> The rituals associated with the Osirian passion-play turned the myths surrounding his life to iconic action. Similarly, the several rituals in which Egeria participates were the beliefs of the early Christians in the mysteries of Christ recorded by his apostles taken to action.

### The Passion of Osiris

Sir E.A. Wallis Budge was one of the foremost Egyptologists in the early twentieth century and is probably best known for his translation of the Egyptian Book of the Dead. His studies and archeological digs led him to believe as follows:

The central figure of the ancient Egyptian Religion was Osiris, and the chief fundamentals of his cult were the belief in his divinity, death, resurrection, and absolute control of the destinies of the bodies and souls of men. The central point of each Osirian's Religion was his hope of resurrection in a transformed

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<sup>10</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* [book on-line] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, accessed 5 May 2006), 19; available from Questia at <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=91883099>; Internet.

body and of immortality, which could only be realized by him through the death and resurrection of Osiris.<sup>11</sup>

R.T. Rundle Clark, a former professor of Egyptology at Manchester, dedicated his research in *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* to Egyptian mythology and the philosophical implications myths suggest. Clark argues that the Passion of Osiris, performed every year from approximately 2500 BC to 550 BC, had its beginnings as a series of fertility rites.<sup>12</sup> Thousands of Egyptians gathered to the necropolis of Abydos on the Nile delta to see and participate in this ritual which honored the god Osiris. Born to Geb, the earth, and Nut, the sky, Osiris ruled as “a wise and good king, who taught the Egyptians agriculture and gave them laws—the founder of Egyptian civilisation [sic].”<sup>13</sup> His establishment of such justice and peace marked his reign as a sacred time and golden age for Egypt<sup>14</sup>. Osiris’ glorious reign came to a halt when he was killed by his younger brother, Seth, out of jealousy over Osiris’ wife (and sister) Isis. Although there are several versions of how Osiris was killed, the predominant story tells how Seth tore up Osiris’ body and spread the pieces over the land. Isis gathered the pieces and bound them together in linen, the first

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<sup>11</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), vii; quoted in Richard Russell Cassaro, “Do Ancient Egyptian Artifacts Enshrine the Image of Christ?” [article on-line]; available from <http://www.mystae.com/reflections/messiah/deepertruth.html>; Internet; accessed 4 May 2006.

<sup>12</sup> R.T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), 99.

<sup>13</sup> George Foot Moore, *History of Religions*, vol. 1 [book on-line] (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913, accessed 4 May 2006), 191; available from Questia at <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=1497688>; Internet.

<sup>14</sup> Clark, 103.

mummification, to bring him back to life.<sup>15</sup> She could not revive his body, but was able to revive his soul, in which form he would continue to bless the land of Egypt. Egyptians believed that Osiris then became the ruler of the underworld, the all-knowing judge of men's souls, "offer[ing] the possibility of redemption and eternal life to all."<sup>16</sup>

As cultural historicist Tom Hare has argued, the preference of this more popular version of Osiris' death, his slaughter and the scattering of his body parts, suggests that the Egyptians may have been influenced not only by its more "dramatic mythological appeal," but also "geographical factors."<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the belief in Osiris' burial of his god-body in the earth answered the phenomenon of reaping and sowing. His buried body fertilized the soil, and just as his spirit rose out of the earth, crops could also rise out of the earth. A Coffin Text illustrates how connected Osiris was with the fertility of the earth:

I am the plant of life  
which comes forth from Osiris,  
which grows upon the ribs of Osiris,  
which allows the people to live,

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<sup>15</sup> Thereafter upon death, the body of a pharaoh was likewise carefully treated and wrapped in preparation for their souls to be revived to live among the gods. The ritual of mummification was a reenactment of Osiris' story as well as a way of identifying him with and reverencing him as Osiris. "The dead monarch is addressed as 'Osiris, lord of *Dewat*'" as stated in Lewis Bayles Paton, *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity* [book on-line] (New York: Macmillan, 1921, accessed 3 May 2006), 171; available from Questia at <http://www.questia.com>; Internet.

<sup>16</sup>Michael Rice, *Who's Who in Ancient Egypt* [book on-line] (London: Routledge, 1999, accessed 4 May 2006), xxxvi; available from Questia at <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=102896967>; Internet.

<sup>17</sup> Hare, 13.

which makes the gods divine.<sup>18</sup>

In a seemingly less celebrated version of the tale, Seth drowned Osiris in the Nile also endowing Osiris with a significant connection to Egypt's geography: the Nile River. The seasonal inundation of the Nile made the soil of Abydos fertile.

Whether Osiris' body parts were spread throughout Egypt or buried in the Nile, the necropolis of Abydos was home to the festival that reenacted scenes from the myth, what Western scholars have called the Passion, because both versions attested the city to be the final resting place of Osiris' body. "Abydos never was a city having a political importance; it was a religious city, the abode of the god Osiris."<sup>19</sup> The burial of a god set the island apart from the profane world. It was also deemed sacred for the great magic that Isis performed to revivify Osiris' body. Thousands made the pilgrimage to Abydos to walk the sacred burial ground and pay homage to the "god of the common people," to that transcendent Other of the past and present.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps they came with gratitude in their demeanor for the bounteous crops from the previous year's harvest and to secure Osiris' affections for another fertile season. And perhaps, as Koonce suggests, they came to walk in the physical space once inhabited by the gods seeking a relationship with them and their realm above while yet living.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Clark, 118.

<sup>19</sup> Edouard Naville and others, *The Cemeteries of Abydos* [book on-line] (London: Egypt Exploration fund, 1913, accessed 3 May 2006), 11; available from Questia at <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=6864690>; Internet.

<sup>20</sup> Clark, 98.

<sup>21</sup> Koonce, "Erasing the Boundary."

This much celebrated ritual was “an exercise in religious sentiment, the product of a refined culture, not a disjointed relic of some old fertility ceremony.”<sup>22</sup> Some might argue that the Passion of Osiris is not a perfect example of a Religious Reenactment, as I have defined the term, because not all the events portrayed there actually occurred at Abydos. But the portions of his story that actually occurred at Abydos include Isis’ gathering of Osiris’ body, the burial ceremony, and his soul rising from the dead. Although the Passion performed other episodes that did not occur at Abydos, those that did are the focal point of the play, the purpose of the festival. The entire story of the Passion of Osiris likely gained an extra measure of validity because it was performed in the space of Osiris’ supposed burial. It was as if he was speaking from the ground, or perhaps from the underworld, and the landscape was physically present to testify of his presence. The ritual performance grounded itself entirely in its location creating a presumed efficacy.

The celebration, lasting eight days, began on the last month of the Nile’s inundation.<sup>23</sup> According to Hare, Osiris “imparted to the waters of the Nile his own magical fecundity in a yearly cycle without which there would have been no Egypt. So then, the passion of Osiris must come again and again, repeated endlessly, a guarantee of the renewal of life.”<sup>24</sup> One might presume that without Abydos as a

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<sup>22</sup> Clark, 129.

<sup>23</sup> The inundation was “so central to Egypt’s fertility and the emergence of its civilization.” Hare, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

performance space, the Osiris rituals, and, as a result, Osiris' fecund blessings would have lost their efficacy. With proper observance, the rituals brought about the return of Osiris from the dead as the god of fertility. This theme of renewal and rebirth is repeated in similar myths across different cultures. As explained by Cambridge anthropologist Gilbert Murray, Dionysus also held a "connection as an 'Eniautos-Daimon,' or vegetation god, like Adonis, Osiris, [perhaps even Jesus Christ] etc., who represents the cyclic death and rebirth of the earth and the world."<sup>25</sup>

The Passion, divided into a series of episodes, began with a dramatization of the events of Osiris' murder, the great lamentation of his loss, and Isis' search for his body. As recorded in the Coffin Texts, the only remains of the script, Isis and her sister found his remains.

"Ah, Sister!" says Isis to Nephthys,  
"This is our brother,  
Come, let us lift up his head,  
Come, let us [rejoin] his bones,  
Come, let us reassemble his limbs,  
Come, let us put an end to all his woe."<sup>26</sup>

Thereupon begins the triumphal return of Osiris to his temple, a dedicated temple that physically stood in midst of the crowd, representing that he had indeed raised from the dead. Dancers burst from the sanctuary doors expressing their joy in

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<sup>25</sup> Gilbert Murray, "Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy," in Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 341; quoted in Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 2–3.

<sup>26</sup> Clark, 125–126.



movement. The crowds responded with praise and song, even kneeling to kiss the earth during the processional as the priestly actor in the role of Osiris passed them by. "I would be among the crowd following Osiris when he appears in his final form, praising the god."<sup>27</sup>

In relation to the rituals which Richard Schechner explores through the lens of performance theory, the Passion of Osiris similarly transitions from theatricality toward a greater sense of reality. Like Schechner's experience with the ritual at Kurumugl, the Osiris rituals transformed its participants; their reenactment of sacred history "ma[de] happen what it celebrate[ed]."<sup>28</sup> There is a fluid transition, a liminality where some audience members, as they participate in the ritual through praise and veneration, experience the performance as a reality. The crowd at Abydos did not follow the priest playing the part of Osiris, they followed the actual god *Osiris* transformed in their presence. The priest transformed into their god entering the temple which they dedicated to glorify him. It was as if the actor's body was temporarily inhabited by Osiris' soul. Perhaps members of the audience "become less and less aware of the distance between them and their everyday world on the one hand and the actors and their . . . world on the other."<sup>29</sup>

The Religious Reenactment of Osiris' life, with the specific iconic identity of space,

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<sup>27</sup> Clark, 133.

<sup>28</sup> Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 128.

<sup>29</sup> Beal, 45. Beal was speaking in reference to a holy place being replicated in an entirely different place. Holy Land USA in Virginia is a recreation of the sites and experiences of the Christian shrines in Jerusalem. Although Beal is specifically addressing performance in a replication of the original, it only applies more so for performance in the original place.

invites the possibility of the audience to merge the real world with Osiris' world in such a way that the two seem to coexist on a separate level. It is here that the performance becomes liminal, transitioning the several actors and thousands of audience members into one unified re-created past.

To commemorate the end of the festival, a new statue of Osiris was presented and dedicated in his behalf. "The Pilgrims hoped that by erecting little stelae in the outer temple their soul would share for ever in the wonderful things and thus be assured of all comforts."<sup>30</sup> The new statues each year and the continued performances of the Passion were also a way of setting the island apart from the profane world, keeping the legend of Osiris sacred and present.

As is evident by the many tour and travel companies which offer vacation packages to the Holy Land, the Biblical ministry of Christ is also kept sacred and present therein. The latter half of this chapter presents the Religious Reenactments in which Egeria participated in and around Jerusalem. I will discuss how the various Christian celebrations were affected by each of the sacred spaces in which they were performed.

### Egeria's Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

The first recorded Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land was not made until three hundred years after Christ's death and Resurrection. In the late fourth century, shortly after the Emperor Theodosius I ruled Christianity as the sole

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<sup>30</sup> Clark, 133.

religion of the Roman Empire, Christian pilgrimages became more popular. One such pilgrimage, for example, began at a North African port city, Hippo in honor of two African women, Perpetua and her servant Felicitas, who were brutally abused and killed as entertainment because they both violated Roman law in their conversion to Christianity. St. Augustine was the bishop in Hippo during the early part of the fifth century AD, and in presiding over the celebration honoring these two women he cleverly stated, “The only reason . . . why all the martyrs toiled bravely for a time by suffering and confessing the faith in the struggle, was in order to enjoy *perpetual felicity*.”<sup>31</sup> The beautiful picture St. Augustine created here to honor the martyrs is drawn from the meaning of Perpetua’s and Felicitas’s names. He defines *perpetual felicity* as “everlasting happiness.” For Christians, of course, the one who introduced the hope of such everlasting happiness was Jesus Christ.

Egeria, in search of a physical connection with Christ made her pilgrimage to the land of his ministry slightly before St. Augustine’s service as a bishop in Hippo. Although pilgrimages to the Christian sacred spaces in the Holy Land gained greater popularity after Emperor Constantine’s journey to erect churches in Palestine, Egeria’s journey is of particular import because of the detailed record she kept of the sacred spaces she visited and the Religious Reenactments attached to those spaces. In her participation with the various rituals in Jerusalem, she “remarks about how scriptural account, biblical site, and liturgical rite conspire to reenact a

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<sup>31</sup> John Hale, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance* (New York: Atheneum, 1994), 463; quoted in Darrin M. McMahon, *Happiness: A History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006) 96–97.

sacred event narrated in the Bible.”<sup>32</sup> In Egeria’s writings, John Wilkinson remarks that “one of the words most frequently used by Egeria is ‘holy’; she applies it impartially to mountains, buildings, and people, and among the holy men and women to saints of the Old as well as of the New Testament.”<sup>33</sup> The *Holy Land*, Israel, is a sacred space because it is the land in which Jesus Christ lived, preached his gospel, died, and was resurrected to redeem mankind.

All the events of his death and resurrection were foretold by Jesus himself. “He was the promised Messiah—the Christ, in Greek—a leader among Jews who now took his place with Abraham, Moses, and David.”<sup>34</sup> His teachings were spread throughout the lands surrounding the eastern Mediterranean and as far as Rome. Jesus’ ministry, suffering in Gethsemane, Crucifixion, and Resurrection define Christianity. This personal identification of the Christian believers with these events in Christ’s life brought them to Jerusalem in search of a physical connection with their spiritual convictions. The various spaces within the Holy Land offered what Beal calls an “encounter” with God.<sup>35</sup> They are spaces that are “set apart in a way that orients [them] toward and opens [them] to divine transcendence.”<sup>36</sup> For the purpose of encountering God, the Christian pilgrims participated in various festivals

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<sup>32</sup> Finn, 195.

<sup>33</sup> Wilkinson, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Hitchcock, 276.

<sup>35</sup> Beal, 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

and rituals organized to commemorate Christ's life in the sacred spaces in which they occurred. In the remaining paragraphs of this chapter I will review only some of the festivals that Egeria records including the commemorations of the Magi's visit to the Christ child and Lent as well as the several festivals during Easter Week.

The Religious Reenactments described by Egeria, in each of the sacred spaces, goes further in its "specific iconic identity" than the Passion of Osiris. The pilgrims moved from sacred space to sacred space in commemoration of each of the key events of Christ's life at the exact sites to which they originally occurred. In addition to the sacrality of the space, the date also held sacred meaning. These commemorative rituals were performed on the believed anniversary of that event. Much like the Egyptians' commune with Osiris, Egeria and the other believers participating with her in these celebrations sought communion with Jesus Christ. They saw themselves as *spiritual beings* seeking a *relationship* with Christ, their Savior.<sup>37</sup>

The first Religious Reenactment of the calendar year is that of the commemoration of the Magi's visit to the Christ child. Prior to the ceremonial prayers and hymns offered in the sacred space, Egeria describes a formal processional of their large group of people guided by the bishop to Bethlehem, where Luke describes Jesus Christ's birth, whereupon they arrive just as morning breaks. The focus upon the processional portion of the celebration reflects the idea

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<sup>37</sup> Koonce, "Erasing the Boundary." This is a reference to Koonce's discussion on connecting the physical and spiritual realms previously quoted at beginning of this chapter.

presented by historicist Darrin M. McMahon that “movement through time, movement through space, movement as a model for the unfolding of humanity” was a metaphor that began with Moses leading the Children of Israel to the Promised Land.<sup>38</sup> It is in this final destination, whether it is the Promised Land, Jerusalem, or Bethlehem, that “deliverance lies . . . bidding us to set our course in its direction, to walk in its way.”<sup>39</sup>

C. Clifford Flannigan, a professor of comparative literature and specialist in drama and medieval literature, describes organized walks to perform rituals in sacred spaces as performances in and of themselves. Although during the processional there are no designated recitations, the movements themselves are performative because of their collective reverence of the people, their focus on sacred things, and their specific route to the sacred destination. Flannigan attributes such processions to deeply rooted “ideological and acculturating processes” qualifying them as “performative acts, which *constitute* the subject matter to which they point rather than merely *expressing* it.”<sup>40</sup> The celebration processions which Egeria participated in commemorating significant moments in Jesus’ life were not ordinary or haphazardly chosen paths. They were believed to have been the

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<sup>38</sup> McMahon, 78.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 79. In connection with this concept, McMahon cites Ps. 128, which reads, “Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be and it shall be well with thee.”

<sup>40</sup> C. Clifford Flannigan, “The Moving Subject: Medieval Liturgical Processions in Semiotic and Cultural Perspective,” *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Eds. Kathleen Ashley and Wim Hüskén (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2001), 38.

same paths Jesus and his associates traveled to the same destinations. The solemn procession toward Bethlehem constituted, or enacted the welcoming of the Magi and others who came to honor the Christ child at his birth.

Leading up to Easter celebrations, Egeria and her fellow pilgrims participated in a forty-day fast. Lent was, and remains to be, a time of spiritual reflection, repentance and fasting. This collective physical abstention was also a performance *pointing to* and *constituting* the forty-day fast that Jesus kept in preparation for his ministry. Although this *performance* did not occur in the same wilderness Jesus fasted in, it suggests the reverent attitude of the community and the general sacredness of their fast in the Holy Land. Beal summarizes that “for Emile Durkheim, . . . the sacred is that which symbolizes and indeed creates the social and moral coherence of the community.”<sup>41</sup> The very nature of such religious performances is a “transformative experience that goes to the root of each person’s being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared.”<sup>42</sup>

The largest and longest Religious Reenactment in which Egeria participated was Easter Week, commemorating Jesus’ last days, his Crucifixion, and his Resurrection. On the Sunday before Easter, the pilgrims met the bishop at the Eleona Church on the Mount of Olives. When all were gathered, the bishop read the account of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem where he was escorted by the

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<sup>41</sup> Beal, 8.

<sup>42</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* [book on-line] (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1995, accessed 8 May 2006), 138; available from Questia at <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=10268909>; Internet.

people waving palm branches.<sup>43</sup> And in like manner the gathered congregation walked down the Mount of Olives to the city, “carrying branches, either palm or olive, and they accompany the bishop in the very way the people did when once they went down with the Lord”<sup>44</sup> The celebration of Jesus’ triumphal entry includes additional performative elements not previously exercised in other events. The greater involvement of the *audience* reciting the same words spoken by Jesus’ associates, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,”<sup>45</sup> closed the distance between the time of Christ and the audience’s lives in the fourth century. Here, Egeria and her fellow Christians were enabled to more fully inhabit this sacred story. Their bishop took on a more involved role in a representation of Christ in this particular celebration than he could achieve preaching from a pulpit.

In commemoration of Jesus’ suffering in Gethsemane, the Christians gathered at the church on Eleona “which contains the cave which on this very day the Lord visited with the apostles.”<sup>46</sup> Just as Jesus prayed, the congregation prayed in like manner. Following their prayers, the bishop read Jesus’ warning to the apostles to be wary of temptation, after which they pray again just as Jesus had on that day in that very space. In this instance, it was not only the bishop that represented Christ.

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<sup>43</sup> Matt. 21:8–9.

<sup>44</sup> Wilkinson, 133.

<sup>45</sup> Matt. 21:9.

<sup>46</sup> Wilkinson, 135. The “very day” Egeria refers to is the day Jesus prayed in Gethsemane just before being arrested referenced in Matt. 26:36–46.



Each member of the group present participating in prayer represented Christ. This performance went beyond the “encounter” with Deity to a *becoming* one with Deity, a practice encouraged by Christianity. Becoming a Christian is intended to mean just that, becoming Christ, or rather, becoming as *like* Christ as possible.

Having returned to the position of an audience and traveling down towards the city, there was a great “groaning and lamenting and weeping so loud that people even across in the city can probably hear it all.”<sup>47</sup> The sacrality of the moment commemorating Jesus’ betrayal and capture with the original recorded account read within the original geographical space on the very day of its anniversary increased the reality of it all.

The following day, all were once again assembled for Good Friday at Golgotha. Although the cross Jesus suffered on was no longer standing, the bishop utilized “specific iconic identity” in presenting, at the sight of Christ’s crucifixion, a relic, supposed by all to be the remains of the “original cross,” kept in a gold and silver box. The veneration for the “holy Wood of the Cross, that, as every one of us believes, helps us attain salvation” was expressed in the strict and careful presentation of it as well as the individual interaction with it.<sup>48</sup> “All the people go past one by one. They stoop down, touch the holy Wood first with their forehead and then with their eyes and then kiss it, but no one puts out his hand to touch it.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 137.

As this sacred relic directly referenced not only the cross which Christ hung on, but Christ himself, the pieces of wood created a liminality during the ritual in which past and present coexisted.

“The recurring phrase ‘on the same day in the very place’ indicates the importance of the setting to Egeria’s experience.”<sup>50</sup> Literally following Christ’s footsteps in this manner and reciting the very words that were spoken was a way of honoring and reliving his life experiences. According to Beal, a sacred space that is made public is an invitation to have a relationship with whoever made the space sacred, which is, in this instance, Christ.<sup>51</sup> McMahon explains that “the crucifixion . . . was treated by Christians as a triumph and cause for exaltation. . . . The cross was an invitation to participate directly in the passion of Christ.”<sup>52</sup>

Since Egeria’s visit to the Holy Land, there have been many more pilgrimages. Some continue to be as organized as the processions in which she participated like the Mary and Joseph walk on Christmas Eve to commemorate Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem. Others are a less organized, more personal journey. Of course, for many Christians, an actual pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where the roots of Christianity lay, may never be possible. As Beal explains, “Christianity since the Roman era has developed as a fundamentally ungrounded,

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<sup>50</sup> Carlson, 85.

<sup>51</sup> Beal, 11.

<sup>52</sup> McMahon, 95.

landless religion."<sup>53</sup> The Christian faith is spread throughout most of the world far away from its roots. In the following chapter I will present the Hill Cumorah Pageant, which is sponsored by the LDS Church. The Latter-day Saints are unique Christians in that their roots are found not only in Jerusalem, but also in the United States. Where a pilgrimage to the Holy Land may not be possible, many Latter-day Saints in the United States frequent the other, more accessible sacred sites of their roots, including the Hill Cumorah.

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<sup>53</sup> Beal, 211.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AMERICA'S WITNESS FOR CHRIST: THE HILL CUMORAH PAGEANT<sup>1</sup>

Beal found inspiration for his book, *Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith*, in many re-creations of Christian sacred spaces in the United States. He visited such places as Holy Land USA in Virginia, a reconstruction of Noah's Ark in Maryland, and the Golgotha Fun Park in Kentucky. None of these sites was intended as a mockery, but rather a way of bringing the sacred Christian sites closer to home for Americans. For so many Christians, pilgrimages to the actual Holy Land will never be possible. Christianity is "alien to the lands it travels and colonizes. . . . Rather than growing and adapting in relation to the lands its people colonized, American Christianity chose to import another mythical world—the world of the Bible."<sup>2</sup> Christianity stands as a prophetic religion, but one in which God is regarded as having revealed Himself primarily in the past, in Palestine. So, American Christians find themselves "importing" holy sites. This is where members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,

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<sup>1</sup> Title page to "America's Witness for Christ: Hill Cumorah Pageant," Unpublished pageant play script, 1989, Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

<sup>2</sup> Beal, 211.

“Mormons,”<sup>3</sup> are unique. Mormons believe in continuing revelation, and, as a result, their roots are in two places: Israel and the United States, namely upstate New York, Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, and Utah.

Carlson states, “[Atop the] Hill Cumorah in upstate New York, . . . since 1937[,] the Mormon church has presented a huge outdoor pageant on the site where Joseph Smith is said to have found the tablets establishing the Mormon faith.”<sup>4</sup> This long-running pageant is an opportunity not only for Mormons to attend in celebration of their faith, but it also provides an opportunity to visit the Hill Cumorah and the other nearby sacred sites. In this chapter I will address the events that created the sacrality of the Hill Cumorah for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I will further present a semiotic study of the Hill Cumorah pageant, a Religious Reenactment sponsored by the LDS Church, and how it relates to the space of its performance. In addition to Beal and Carlson, I will add the scholarly works of John L. Sorensen, Jan Shipps, and Terryl L. Givens.

### The Sacrality of the Hill Cumorah

The Hill Cumorah is a drumlin, a hill created by drifting glaciers during the last ice age. At the time of Joseph Smith’s call from God to the ministry in 1820, his family’s homestead was situated roughly three miles from the hill in the township of Manchester, New York. In 1823, he recorded a visitation by an angel, an ancient

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<sup>3</sup> Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints receive their nickname “Mormons” from the Book of Mormon, which was instrumental to the founding of their church.

<sup>4</sup> Carlson, 86.

prophet who had buried a sacred record in AD 400 in the hill to be unearthed by Joseph Smith in 1827. Smith, who devout Mormons believe was called as a prophet to restore God's church on the earth again, later translated the sacred record into what is known as the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ, sanctioned as standard scripture by the LDS Church.<sup>5</sup> Terryl L. Givens explores the defining elements of scripture quoting Shlomo Biderman who argued that "to understand scripture is to understand the conditions under which a group of texts has gained authority over the lives of people and has been incorporated into human activities of various important kinds."<sup>6</sup> In application of Biderman's argument to The Book of Mormon, Givens explains that "Mormonism's name, doctrine, and image have been largely dependent on this book . . . ."<sup>7</sup>

The introduction to the Book of Mormon explains that the record engraved on these tablets, or gold plates, describes "God's dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains, as does the Bible, the fullness of the everlasting gospel."<sup>8</sup> Sorensen describes the Book of Mormon as a "lineage history" beginning with a prophet, Lehi, in approximately 600 BC, who was commanded by God to take his family and escape from Jerusalem, which was to be destroyed for its

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<sup>5</sup> The Book of Mormon is named after the ancient prophet Mormon who abridged the many records of his people into the gold plates, which Joseph Smith translated.

<sup>6</sup> Shlomo Biderman, *Scripture and Knowledge: An Essay on Religious Epistemology* (New York: Brill, 1995), 50; quoted in Givens, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Givens, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Introduction to the Book of Mormon.

wickedness.<sup>9</sup> Lehi and his family were guided by God to the Americas. Mormons believe that their coming to the Americas was no chance coincidence; they were “brought by the hand of God.”<sup>10</sup> Christ told Lehi and his family that the land of America was “consecrated unto him whom he [meaning Christ] shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them.”<sup>11</sup> Their civilization in the Americas grew and a record was kept and handed down by the prophets from generation to generation recording the spiritual trials and triumphs of the people. “The crowning event recorded . . . is the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ among the Nephites soon after his resurrection.<sup>12</sup> It puts forth the doctrines of the gospel, outlines the plan of salvation, and tells men what they must do to gain peace in this life and eternal salvation in the life to come.”<sup>13</sup> The book carries the name of the prophet and historian Mormon who abridged the records onto a set of gold plates during a time of great war and destruction among his people. It was his son, Moroni, the sole survivor of the Nephites, who buried the plates in the Hill

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<sup>9</sup> John L. Sorensen, *An Ancient American Setting for The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 50–56. Sorensen identifies the Book of Mormon as a history kept by the “ruling lineage” of which Lehi’s son, Nephi, is the founder.

<sup>10</sup> Book of Mormon, 54 (2 Nephi 1:6).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., (2 Nephi 1:7).

<sup>12</sup> One of the two main tribes was named after their ancestor, the prophet Nephi. The other tribe, the Lamanites, was named after Nephi’s brother, Laman. Generally, the Nephites were followers of Christ and the Lamanites were in opposition to them. At the end of the Book of Mormon, the Nephites were all killed leaving only tribe members of the Lamanites, whose descendents are the American Indians.

<sup>13</sup> Introduction to the Book of Mormon.

Cumorah as instructed by God for safe-keeping until the time should come when God would call another prophet to restore his Church to the earth.

Central to Mormon theology is the notion of “dispensationalism,” a cycle of apostasy and restoration since the beginning of human history, in which God calls a prophet to a civilization of people with the purpose of preaching his word and establishing principles of truth and righteousness, followed by the people eventually abandoning their religious faith founded on God’s word, requiring a restoration of his truths through a new prophet. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that with the death of Jesus Christ’s apostles in the first century, the authority to act in God’s name and perform the necessary rites of the Church for salvation were lost. Smith preached that “it is in the order of heavenly things that God should always send a new dispensation into the world when men have apostatized from the truth and lost the priesthood.”<sup>14</sup> The believers in Christ’s teachings continued to spread his gospel as best they could after his death, but his true doctrine had been altered and lost. A similar apostasy, recorded in the final chapters of the Book of Mormon, took place on the American continent. These apostasies continued until the spring of 1820, when Joseph Smith was visited by God the Father and Jesus Christ. Richard Lyman Bushman, one of the foremost biographers of Joseph Smith, remarks that “a new era in history began at that moment. Joseph’s personal salvation paled in comparison to the fact that the God of

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph Smith; quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith, ed. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 375.



Heaven had set His hand again to open a *new dispensation*.”<sup>15</sup> Smith was later called to be a prophet and restore God’s church. This “radical restoration,” as described by Jan Shipps, “involve[d] a changing of the means of, or the reopening of, communication between divinity and humanity . . . with a new world wherein God [was] actively involved.”<sup>16</sup> Mormon doctrine teaches that The Book of Mormon and the Bible together as companion volumes of scripture aided in re-establishing God’s true Church and teachings with its original organization including living prophets and apostles. Shipps further identifies the centrality of The Book of Mormon in the Mormon restoration as follows:

Because the opening of the record would—so both the text and the book’s title page made clear—reveal to the Indians their true identity as a remnant of God’s chosen people through Ephraim’s rather than Judah’s line, and because it would, at the same time, convince both Jew and Gentile of the truth of the Judeo-Christian scriptures, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was presented therein as the preeminent event toward which all history had been tending, at least since the Resurrection.<sup>17</sup>

Some of the stories contained in this volume of scripture are performed atop the Hill Cumorah in an epic-style pageant during the month of July for nearly ten thousand visitors per performance. But because the events of the Book of Mormon occurred in various places across the Americas, and because nearly all the exact locations are unknown, the Hill Cumorah Pageant is instead performed on the

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<sup>15</sup> Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 57. My emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> Shipps, 72.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

location where the sacred record was hidden for 1400 years. It mostly dramatizes events that did not take place there.

A profane place can ultimately transition to sacred space when it becomes a place where God and man communicate. Because the Hill Cumorah was the place where more communication from God, in the form of a book of scriptures, was found, the hill is a sacred space. Mircea Eliade describes sacred space as “the place where communication is possible between this world and the other world, from the heights or from the depths, the world of the gods or the world of the dead.”<sup>18</sup> Eliade, in relation to the ways in which communication occurs in sacred space, introduces three cosmic zones: “Heaven,” “Earth,” and the “Underworld.” The passage between these three cosmic levels is met through both the sacred relic of the gold plates and the heavenly visitations Smith reported.<sup>19</sup> The Book of Mormon opens communication between our world and the world of God—“Earth” with “Heaven”—as well as between our world and the world of the Book of Mormon civilizations dead and gone—“Earth” with the “Underworld.” And so, the Book of Mormon, sacred scripture, seminal to this radical restoration and place of communication between the three cosmic zones, sacralizes the hill where the sacred relic it was translated from was found. Also at the site of the buried record, Smith recorded he met with and was instructed by this angel named Moroni on several occasions during the span of four years in which he waited to receive the record.

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<sup>18</sup> Eliade, 108.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

These several visitations of the angel on the hill further sacralize the space within the same three cosmic zones. Moroni's visitation, as a prophet from 1400 years prior, to show Smith where he buried the record is the "Underworld" cosmic zone met with "Earth," whereas his physical appearance as an angel from heaven to the Hill Cumorah brings together the cosmic zones of "Heaven" and "Earth," consecrating the earthly place of the hill.

Historically, most Mormons believed the hill called Cumorah, located in western New York, to be the hill of the final battle which destroyed the entire Nephite nation, save Moroni.<sup>20</sup> The clarity of location is important due to the fact that in the Book of Mormon, the final battle takes place at a hill called Cumorah.<sup>21</sup> However, as Sorensen clarifies, "The Book of Mormon never tells us where, nor when the plates . . . were buried by Moroni."<sup>22</sup> The recorded identification of Cumorah as the drumlin where Joseph uncovered the gold plates "was first made by Oliver Cowdery in 1835."<sup>23</sup> However, several histories and documents that recorded the events of the unearthing of the gold plates were written after "Cumorah" was the commonly recognized name for the hill.<sup>24</sup> Recent archeological

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<sup>20</sup> In light of Sorensen's six separate meanings of "Nephite," here the term "Nephite" is used to describe the particular cultural group, many of the direct lineage of Nephi, in contrast with the opposing civilization of the Lamanites. Sorensen, *Ancient American Setting*, 54.

<sup>21</sup> The verses in the Book of Mormon which name Cumorah as the hill of the final battle are found on p. 478 (Mormon 6:2, 4).

<sup>22</sup> John L. Sorensen, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo: F.A.R.M.S., 1990), 362.

<sup>23</sup> Givens, 55.

and religious studies, in which Dr. Sorensen is currently working, suggest alternative, more likely sites for the land of the Book of Mormon history. As Sorensen clarifies, “Strong arguments can be adduced to suggest that [Moroni] did not place [the gold plates] in the hill Cumorah of the final battle. . . . Hence that Joseph Smith obtained the plates from the hill in New York tells us nothing, either way, about where the battleground was.”<sup>25</sup> Sorensen asserts the possibility of two Cumorahs, the battle taking place in Mesomeric and Moroni journeying to deposit the plates in Smith’s Manchester New York.<sup>26</sup>

Because a lack of archeological evidence fails to solidify the whereabouts of the ancient Book of Mormon civilizations, “the perseverance of that identification [meaning the identification of the hill where Smith uncovered the plates] (as well as the church’s official designation of the . . . mount as ‘Hill Cumorah’) led to a common belief among many Mormons—and their critics—that Nephite geography and history must encompass New York state.”<sup>27</sup> This long-standing tradition of the historical Cumorahs being geographically one and the same, the site of the final battle and of the burial of the gold plates, continues to be popular with many practicing Mormons, while others lean towards Sorensen’s theories. Although the hill remains a sacred space for those active Mormons who follow the two-Cumorah

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<sup>24</sup> Sorensen connects this argument to a letter Joseph Smith wrote in 1842 (thirteen years after the Book of Mormon was published), which is the only place in Smith’s personal writings that identifies the hill as Cumorah. Sorensen, *Geography*, 378.

<sup>25</sup> Sorensen, *Geography*, 362.

<sup>26</sup> Sorensen, *Ancient American Setting*, 44–45.

<sup>27</sup> Givens, 55.

theory, for those Hill Cumorah visitors who believe the Hill Cumorah of New York was also the site of the last battle, the hill becomes a witness to the events of that battle.

Setting the argument of one or two Cumorahs aside, the hill still carries the presence of authority for devout Mormons because of their sacred scripture buried there. Moroni wrote in his closing chapter a plea to those who would read the Book of Mormon centuries after he was dead and gone. His plea was to remember the things which he and the other prophets had written, “written . . . as like one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust.”<sup>28</sup> Mormons believe that the authors of the sacred record are figuratively speaking from the dust wherein their bodies now lay. Their repeated message is to repent for all sins and embrace Christ and his gospel with the promise of liberty and great blessings in this life and eternal salvation in the life to come. In addition, the hill represents a sort of memorial that God still speaks to his children today. Standing atop a pillared platform at the top of the hill is a golden statue of Moroni erected in 1935. This statue embodies similar meanings. With the gold plates clutched in one arm and the other arm raised pointing toward God in the heavens, the statue of Moroni’s bodily gesture *physically* represents the story of the Pageant. Neither the Hill Cumorah nor the statue of Moroni is meant to be a shrine for prayer or worship. In 1998, LDS President Gordon B. Hinckley, the current prophet of the LDS Church, offered a dedicatory prayer for the new historical and sacred sites located near the Hill

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<sup>28</sup> Book of Mormon, 531 (Moroni 10:27).

Cumorah. President Hinckley said of the various sacred sites, commemorative statues, and the like, “They’re not shrines. We don’t worship them, but we respect them and honor them and like the common feel of the spirit that’s to be found in them . . . . Our [physical and spiritual] roots are here.”<sup>29</sup> Likewise, the Hill Cumorah Pageant is not a ritual or an ordinance, but it is a performance intended to show respect for the events it portrays as well as a performance in which its producers, contributors, and participants hope that the audience will “like the common feel of the spirit that’s to be found . . . .”<sup>30</sup>

The physical appearance of the hill, with its careful landscaping, paved parking lot, and beautiful visitors’ center, contributes to the atmosphere of respect for the events which occurred there. The hill is offset by city property and other private property, which is less groomed. In their article “A Story on Canvas, Paper, and Glass: The Early Visual Images of the Hill Cumorah,” Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Cameron J. Packer, members of F.A.R.M.S., suggest that the *physical* hill “gives a certain defined boundary to the events of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.”<sup>31</sup> The geography of the hill in comparison to the surrounding properties presents liminality—a transitioning from the ordinary to a revered space. This liminality defines, to cite Shipps again, “the coming forth of the Book of Mormon . . .

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<sup>29</sup> Gordon B. Hinckley, “Palmyra Sites,” *Ensign* (May 1998); available at [http://library.lds.org/nxt/gateway.dll?f=templates\\$fn=default.htm](http://library.lds.org/nxt/gateway.dll?f=templates$fn=default.htm); Internet; accessed 15 May 2006.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Cameron J. Packer, “A Story on Canvas, Paper, and Glass: The Early Visual Images of the Hill Cumorah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13.1 (2004) 6; available at <http://farms.byu.edu/display.php?table=jbms&id=335>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2006.

[as] the preeminent event toward which all history had been tending . . . .”<sup>32</sup>

Holzapfel and Packer’s use of the word *boundary* reflects this spiritual and physical separation of the sacred and profane. The Hill Cumorah as property belonging to the LDS Church is physically separate from the main road belonging to the government and the vacant lot just beyond the road used for mass parking during the pageant. Leonard L. Thompson as a professor of geography at York University contributed to a collection of essays dealing with the geography of sacred space. In his essay, “Mapping an Apocalyptic World,” Thompson identifies boundaries as “essential in the mapping of the world.”<sup>33</sup> In addition to dividing and delineating, Thompson proposes that “boundaries are also places of crossing.”<sup>34</sup> The concepts of liminality and crossing are related in that they involve a transitioning from one thing to another. A family attending the pageant performance will have to cross the boundary from city property to sacred property, its sacrality designated by the LDS beliefs. This view of crossing boundaries further suggests that there is a way of crossing a boundary that involves a transformation.<sup>35</sup> During the week pageant performances, the boundary surrounding the hill is much more defined than at any other time of year. Posted on the opposite side of the road at the entrance to the

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<sup>32</sup> Shipps, 73.

<sup>33</sup> Leonard L. Thompson, “Mapping an Apocalyptic World,” in *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essay in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* eds. Jamie Scott and Paul Simpson Housley (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 116.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

parking area are men and women often referred to as anti-Mormons. Many distribute various forms of literature protesting Mormon beliefs to visitors. This practice of distributing and displaying anti-Mormon literature, not uncommon at large LDS gatherings, also occurs at other LDS pageants, in Salt Lake City during church-wide conferences, and at Church historical sites open for tours. Anti-Mormons are not permitted to hand out their literature on church property, but they are allowed their right to free speech outside its boundaries. As audience members arrive at the hill for the start of the show, most likely they encounter anti-Mormon representatives as they cross the boundary into Mormon sacred space more clearly defining a transformation in the intentions of the separate greeting parties that occupy the two spaces. Once the boundary is crossed into the sacred space of the Hill Cumorah, audience members find themselves in the midst of thousands of visitors who have made that same transition.

### The Hill Cumorah Pageant

The Hill Cumorah Pageant is a pageant play in the truest sense with its spectacle, music, tableaux, and even a grand procession that opens the show. “America’s equivalent of Germany’s Oberammergau passion play, the Hill Cumorah pageant is the country’s largest and oldest outdoor drama. . . .”<sup>36</sup> The Hill Cumorah’s epic-style Religious Reenactment features such spectacles as large waterfalls and an earthquake, and, to reflect the crowning event in the Book of

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<sup>36</sup> Givens, 244.



Mormon, the crowning event in the pageant production is the visitation of Christ in the Americas after his resurrection. To avoid defacing the actual hill a set of seven different stages juts out of it providing level performance space for the 600+ volunteer cast members. The performance follows the chronological lineage history presented in the Book of Mormon, highlighting the main stories surrounding eight prophets from Nephi to Moroni and jumping to Joseph Smith is unearthing the plates. Underscoring music, lights, and costumes aid in the evocation of sacrality. The intention of those who produce the Hill Cumorah pageant is one of spiritual communion, an opportunity to experience the sacred: the stories of the sacred record, especially God's dealings with the people, and what they believe to be the miraculous events that brought about the record's translation and the restoration of God's church.

The intentionally selected site of the pageant, including the particulars of the performance space and the audience seating, relates to Carlson's assertions that a theatre "beyond its basic function of providing a space for a public to watch a performance, will provide many additional connotative meanings to the culture of which it is a part."<sup>37</sup> The performance space is situated on the hill drawing the attention of the audience upward and forward to the approximate area where the plates were found. In his analysis of theatrical settings, chosen for their involvement with the actual events the audience is meant to encounter, Carlson

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<sup>37</sup> Carlson, 43.

asserts that “in semiotic terms, the power of this sort of icon arises from the fact that [the physical space] is also an index, pointing to the absent and distanced historic reality.”<sup>38</sup> Just as the processional to Bethlehem as part of the Epiphany celebration pointed to the birth of Jesus and the Magi that gathered to honor him, the Hill Cumorah as a performance space gains its power from the physical reference it gives to the past, to the stories within the Book of Mormon, and to the meetings between the Angel Moroni and Smith. With the pageant, the “voices speaking from the dust” shift their figurative interpretation a voice slightly more literal when much of the script for the pageant comes directly from the Book of Mormon. In this instance they are “speaking from the dust” from the location where their written words were buried; their performance becomes a physical interpretation of the Book of Mormon text.

For audience members unfamiliar with the originating text, the pageant performance takes its place as the authoritative source of information making the narrator’s reference to “this very hill Cumorah” particularly important.<sup>39</sup> This reference comes within the last several minutes of the pageant, grounding this new information regarding this sacred record to something they can physically see and touch: the Hill Cumorah.

For some Mormons with more traditional geographic beliefs relating to the final battle at the same hill, the scene of the final war weighs heavier with specific

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>39</sup> “Hill Cumorah Pageant,” 35.

cultural meaning. This great war follows two hundred years of a utopian society among the different tribes, which ended due to pride and wickedness. The war itself, both in the Book of Mormon and Pageant performance text, is “unprecedented in [its] scope and ferocity.”<sup>40</sup> Bold red lights casting lots of shadow, flashes of swords and armor, and cries of distress underscored by vigorous music create a thrilling and terrifying scene. Only for those who are familiar with and pause to ponder the original war as it took place on the hill does the scene begin to unearth another level of decoding. This spectacular scene back-dropped by the hill can bring to mind the thousands upon thousands of lives which were lost including women and children. This war wiped out an entire civilization. For an audience sobered by this realization, the words of Mormon weigh heavier on the eve of the final battle as he gives his son Moroni charge of their sacred record:

Moroni, my son, thou knowest that tomorrow will be the last battle of the Nephites. At the place called Cumorah, we shall be destroyed. The world will have no sign that we ever lived, except for the record we have written on these plates.<sup>41</sup>

Even though this devastating war may have not taken place on this same hill in western New York, the reality of the moment in performance is not frustrated. Of course, even believing Mormons might interpret this scene a little differently, depending on which of the competing geographical narratives they find most persuasive. But the impact of differing cultural theories is probably fairly negligible.

The following scenes receive a more widely accepted reception among the

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<sup>40</sup> Givens, 50.

<sup>41</sup> “Hill Cumorah Pageant,” 32.

audience as the theatrical action abandons the theatrical platforms for the real sacred space. After receiving the plates from his father, Moroni travels diagonally across the west slope of the hill to a large stone next to a hole, set dressing matching the description of what Smith found the plates in. The tiered stages disappear in the darkness as theatrical lighting focuses on the hillside where Moroni walks.

Although voiced-over narration explains Moroni's actions, devout Mormons are already nodding their heads in recognition. They know he is going to bury the plates because they've read the book. He pauses along the way speaking excerpts from the Book of Mormon. This is the first time any character has spoken to the audience directly:

You who will receive this book, many years from now, I speak unto you as if ye were present, even though ye are not. . . . And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true.<sup>42</sup>

As he is about to reenact the burying of the record, Moroni's direct address challenges audience members to do as he says, marking a transition in the relationship between the audience and the performance, perhaps it further addresses the relationship between the audience and the Mormon church itself.

Not too many moments later, a young Joseph Smith appears at the same hole and rock where Moroni is now present as an angel. As a reenactment of that sacred moment for Mormon history, the lifting the plates out of the box holds meaning

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<sup>42</sup> "Hill Cumorah Pageant," 33 (original verses from the Book of Mormon are on pp. 483, 529 (Mormon 8:35–38 and Moroni 10:4).

beyond the physical motion and props. For many this simple direction of movement is a *sign* that represents the real moment in history in which Smith received the gold plates. "A vast number of other communications are provided by [the specific iconic identity in its] physical surroundings."<sup>43</sup> It can also signify an audience member's personal interaction with the Book of Mormon, or the realization that this hill is the birthplace of "American scripture which launched a new world religion"<sup>44</sup> or that "after the Bible, this Book of Mormon is the most widely distributed religious book in America."<sup>45</sup>

Although this image of Smith uncovering the gold plates from the hillside may seem to be an appropriate final image for a pageant presenting the stories contained within that record, the Book of Mormon, it does not satisfy one of the missions of the LDS Church to "proclaim the gospel."<sup>46</sup> From young Smith on the hillside, the pageant transitions to Smith as an adult "set[ting] down the plates and lift[ing] up the printed and bound Book of Mormon in his other hand."<sup>47</sup> This is the second time an actor specifically addresses the audience: "For centuries their voices were silent in the dust. Now the Lord will allow the modern world to hear

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<sup>43</sup> Carlson, 87.

<sup>44</sup> Title page to Givens.

<sup>45</sup> Givens, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Spencer W. Kimball, "A Report of My Stewardship," *Ensign* (May 1981) 5. This is one of the three-fold missions of the LDS church.

<sup>47</sup> "Hill Cumorah Pageant," 35. This is taken from the stage directions.

their word[s]."<sup>48</sup> In his direct address to the audience, Smith captures what the audience has just seen. The pageant represents a way in which the modern world can hear the voices of these prophets which were once kept *silent in the dust*. As Smith reads the names of the prophets of the Book of Mormon, whose stories have been portrayed throughout the pageant, their characters step upward onto the stage as if their persons are literally appearing out of the dust of the hill. Quoting the words of Moroni, Smith again challenges the audience to read the Book of Mormon, a challenge in conjunction with this mission to proclaim the gospel.

A blackout immediately follows and all disappears, although we still hear Smith speaking: "The Savior will return. Soon he will be here."<sup>49</sup> When it is difficult in the darkness of this moment to see even one's neighbor, now floating above the multi-tiered stage in striking white light is the character of Christ. Although most audience members are surely aware of the theatrical devices that make this moment possible, the awed response of the audience manifest by the audible gasps and thousands of camera flashes suggests that such an awareness is overridden. The lights, the actor and the pulley system which suspends him mid-air exist "both as realities and ideograms."<sup>50</sup> In addition to the theatrics presented in this moment, these elements are also meant to dually exist as Christ descending from heaven above the hill where the plates that aided in the restoration of his

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<sup>48</sup> "Hill Cumorah Pageant," 35.

<sup>49</sup> "Hill Cumorah Pageant," 36.

<sup>50</sup> Carlson, 96. Carlson is responding to David Cole's representation of the "doubleness" of theatre.

Church were hidden. This power of the theatre to represent the craft of enactment or reenactment as well as real presence seems to exercise its greatest duality when using specific iconic identity of location such as the Hill Cumorah.

The Hill Cumorah during the pageant is an unavoidable silent character simply because of its presence. The Hill is a physical witness for The Book of Mormon, which was buried in its soil, and therefore is a witness of the events recorded in the book and performed in the pageant. The power of the Hill's presence is the same power that Egeria felt in the presence of the Holy Land walking the very path that Jesus once walked. It is the very same power that the Egyptians felt celebrating the rebirth of Osiris where his wife tenderly brought him back to life. These reenactments were strengthened by their sacred space. The following chapter explores this very same connection with the Nauvoo Pageant.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE NAUVOO PAGEANT: "LET ZION IN HER BEAUTY RISE"<sup>1</sup>

There are many reasons why tourists are attracted to Nauvoo, Illinois. Tourists interested in American history are attracted to the town's historical significance as it relates to its early population of Sac and Fox Indians, its contributions to expansion of our country as a frontier town, its importance in the beginnings of a new world religion, the LDS Church, and the establishment of a utopian socialist colony that was established after the Mormon exodus under Etienne Cabet. Additionally, both the LDS Church and the Community of Christ (formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) find in Nauvoo their sacred history as both religions developed from the same roots.<sup>2</sup>

Although the sacrality of the city of Nauvoo is defined by intimately different things to these differing groups of people who resided there in the early and mid-

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<sup>1</sup> This is taken from the opening phrase of an LDS Hymn by the same name, which is sung at the start of the pageant production. "Nauvoo," Unpublished pageant play script, 2005, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 2.

<sup>2</sup> It was in Nauvoo that a portion of the members of the LDS Church, after the death of their Prophet Joseph Smith, rejected the leadership of Brigham Young at the time of their trek westward. They renamed their church the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and later changed their name again to the Community of Christ in April 2000.



nineteenth century, this chapter deals specifically with the sacrality presented in the Nauvoo Pageant as it reenacts selected historical experiences of the Latter-day Saints. The Nauvoo Pageant<sup>3</sup> is an attempt to present only one of the many meanings of Nauvoo—an LDS perspective. Some of the selected reenactments in the pageant performance are drawn from historical events which the Community of Christ also claims as part of their history. I acknowledge that the same historical events—perhaps even the entire story of Nauvoo—are interpreted differently by the LDS Church and Community of Christ. I do not intend to invalidate or diminish the history of Nauvoo as interpreted by the Community of Christ, or any other group, by only addressing Nauvoo’s history from an LDS perspective. However, as this chapter deals with a semiotic study of the LDS Nauvoo Pageant as a Religious Reenactment, I will address the events only as they are interpreted in the performance and as they relate to the space in which they are performed. Only this narrative and its relationship to Nauvoo are the focus of this chapter as it is the narrative told within the pageant performance.

This chapter includes an introduction to the LDS history of Nauvoo followed by a description of the LDS presence in Nauvoo today, ending with a semiotic study of the Nauvoo Pageant performance itself with the aid of the scripted text. In my study of their performance I will address specific scenes presenting the following

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<sup>3</sup> The new Nauvoo Pageant was performed in Nauvoo for the first time during the late summer months of 2005. Prior to this pageant, another production, “The City of Joseph,” was a long-standing tradition performed for a number of years. This thesis is only concerned with the new Nauvoo Pageant.

significant events: the arrival of Saints in Nauvoo, the malaria epidemic and healings, the laying out of the city plat, King Follet's funeral,<sup>4</sup> the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the completing of the temple, and the exodus to the Salt Lake Valley with Brigham Young.

### An LDS History of Nauvoo

Following Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon, the membership of the newly founded Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints quickly grew from six to over twenty thousand from 1830 to 1838. The testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith regarding his experiences with God, the heavenly revelations he continued to receive, and the teachings in the Book of Mormon became a source of great power for the early members of the church. That power would drive them to leave their homes and familiar surroundings to build Zion in Jackson County, Missouri, a city of God, as they attested God commanded them to do.<sup>5</sup> It was to be a place where all the Saints could gather together. Although they eventually ended their journey in the Salt Lake Valley, the Saints' pilgrimage to Salt Lake was not a direct path, nor was it their original destination. Prior to their settlement in Nauvoo, the early Mormon Saints had developed enemies whose "distaste for [the Prophet Joseph's] doctrines became mixed with their fear of his

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<sup>4</sup> "King" was Mr. Follet's given name.

<sup>5</sup> *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Containing Revelations Given to Joseph Smith, The Prophet with Some Additions by His Successors in the Presidency of the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 11 (6:6).

power as believers flocked to him,” as characterized by Mormon historians Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and T. Jeffrey Cottle.<sup>6</sup> Their encounters with persecution were reminiscent of the persecution towards Christians during the Roman Empire shortly after Christ’s crucifixion. Because of “the influx of converts [and] a significant missionary success rate (sometimes whole congregations converted), the Mormons became a threat to the social, religious, and economic stability,”<sup>7</sup> and the mounting religious persecution relinquished all previous attempts to establish Zion in Ohio and Missouri. And following their eviction from Missouri, the next settlement was Nauvoo, Illinois.

The Latter-day Saints made these several moves over nine short years. Each time they were either forcibly put from their homes or desperately fleeing for safety; most were at a loss as to how their Zion could ever be established in a place with so much opposition. Theatre theorist Una Chaudhuri asserts that “homelessness is only the most graphic version of the many displacements that constitute the insistent and pervasive challenges to home.”<sup>8</sup> The cyclical failing efforts of the Saints searching for a Zion and attempting to build it only to be turned out as homeless reflects this displacement coupled with the ideology of *home* addressed by Chaudhuri.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and T. Jeffrey Cottle, *Old Mormon Nauvoo and Southeastern Iowa: Historic Photographs and Guide* (Santa Ana: Fieldbrook Productions Inc., 1991), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Chaudhuri, 13.

Although the displaced Latter-day Saints still regarded Missouri as their Zion, a symbol of heaven on earth, that particular utopia had proven unreliable. After what had essentially become a gross display of violence—“tarrings, whippings, kidnappings, burnings, killings, imprisonments”—in Missouri, the Saints received a compassionate welcome from the people of Quincy, Illinois, and assistance to create a more permanent settlement along the banks of the Mississippi.<sup>9</sup> They purchased a large portion of the land in Commerce, Illinois, and renamed the city Nauvoo. Nauvoo in the 1840s became an icon of rest, hope, and a sort of diaspora for the thousands of Saints (a great many homeless), who wished to gather in one place.

Una Chaudhuri’s acknowledgement of the changing discourse of home reflects the Saints’ evolving understanding of home and the iconicity of Zion. “We begin with the sense of home as a place that exists in some definite relation to the group of people whose home it is; certainly, it is a place in need of adjustments . . . and improvements that would better serve the psychological needs of its inhabitants, but it is a fully recognizable place, known and given. We then move to a deepening uncertainty about the reality of home . . .”<sup>10</sup> The Mormon Saints initially believed Zion, their City of God (as previously noted), was an actual geographical location, in Missouri, a home defined by the Mormon community’s collective faith and goals. In their dealings with rising persecution, the Mormons

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<sup>9</sup> Holzapfel and Cottle, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Chaudhuri, 92.

found the need to adjust their conception of Zion. When the opposition resulted in the abandonment of their Zion, the uncertainty of its reality as an actual place in which to settle mounted. Although the city of Commerce was renamed Nauvoo, a name that Joseph Smith emphasized derived from a Hebrew word meaning “a beautiful place,” the uncertainty of building Zion in Nauvoo continued in light of the nearly uninhabitable conditions.

The Mormon settlement in Nauvoo began as a mosquito-infested swamp with few houses. The majority of the Saints “camped wherever [they] could, in tents and wagons and makeshift huts,”<sup>11</sup> which increased their exposure to malaria and other diseases rampant throughout the encampment on the swampy banks. Many of these early Saints recorded in their journals and letters that in this moment of despair, Joseph went about healing the sick much like the healing miracles of Jesus Christ in biblical times. The Saints would gather power from these miracles, regain their strength, and continue to build a beautiful city of hundreds upon hundreds of sturdy brick and frame homes that would house over 12,000 citizens only five years from their initial arrival. By 1842, Nauvoo, bustling with industry of every kind, grew to the point that it was the largest city in Illinois, rivaled only by Chicago.<sup>12</sup>

Three years after their expulsion from Missouri, Joseph Smith was given a revelation that marked the beginning of a great psychological adjustment in the understanding of Zion as a geographical location; Nauvoo was to be a place for the

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<sup>11</sup> “Nauvoo,” 11.

<sup>12</sup> Holzapefel and Cottle, 12–13.

Saints “to contemplate the glory of Zion.”<sup>13</sup> As they contemplated Zion’s glory, the Saints found the added blessings of freely worshipping their God together and interacting and associating personally with the prophet, who they believed directly communicated with God. “Joseph was the main reason Nauvoo grew.”<sup>14</sup>

Thousands joined the Church from the New England, Atlantic, and Southern States, some hailing from as far as Great Britain. Many new converts sold all they had to journey to their new home with the Prophet Joseph and the Latter-day Saints.

Understanding Nauvoo as a cause dedicated to the work of God and a psychological and physical Zion is integral to understanding why the Saints, under the direction of the Prophet Joseph, sacrificed and labored collectively as a family to build a House of God. The Nauvoo Temple, like the temples of biblical times, was a sacred space for all to commune with God. Most importantly it was a place to perform sacred rituals; one of which bound couples and families on earth and throughout the eternities. Perhaps the greatest mercy of such a ritual was that it had the power to bind together families that had buried a child or a parent; this sealing ceremony promised through righteous living that the entire family would be reunited as a family in heaven.

The position of the temple on the bluff overlooking the city below was to “communi[cate] to all viewers that its walls defined and enclosed sacred space.”<sup>15</sup> It

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<sup>13</sup> *Doctrine and Covenants*, 250 (124:60).

<sup>14</sup> Holzapefel and Cottle, 12–13.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard, 243.

was an exquisite building of fine craftsmanship, a building so beautiful that it could be called a house of God. The demands of building such an edifice were great, and Nauvoo was still in-process as a developing city. New arrivals were living as guests in others' homes, many were only beginning to build homes for themselves, families were working to provide their own livelihood, and yet the Saints gave up one day in every ten to set aside their personal duties to devote their time entirely to the building of the temple. Countless hours and thousands of dollars poured into building the temple over a five-year period. The Mormon Saints tirelessly continued their work on the temple until it was finished and dedicated to the work of God in 1846. The completed Nauvoo Temple was a symbol reflecting their sacrifice for the work of God as well as their desire to perform the rewarding and necessary saving ordinances within. The temple was also a sacred space to commune with God satisfying their longing for a Zion.

Joseph Smith did not live to see the temple completed. While awaiting the trial of false charges of treason in Carthage, the prophet and his brother Hyrum were killed in 1844. More than 1600 years earlier, in another Carthage, this city located in North Africa, was the site of the martyrdom of two women, Perpetua and Felicity previously mentioned in chapter two. Perhaps Joseph and Hyrum Smith, along with the Nauvoo Saints, also "viewed the call to martyrdom [as did Perpetua and Felicity and their admirers] as a direct solicitation from God, a precious

invitation from the ever-present Christ to participate directly in his passion, to suffer and die, as did he.”<sup>16</sup>

The loss of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the founder of the Saints’ church, only increased the symbolic power of the temple. The persecution and hatred that led to Joseph’s death did not end with his death. It continued among all Mormon settlements to an unbearable point. In an effort to continue what they started, a majority of the Mormon Saints continued their pilgrimage in search of another Zion, another home, past the western frontier where they could all gather into one single place.<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to mark the point in time in which *Zion* came to mean more than a physical location, but over time *Zion* came to define more the spirit of a community, a group, and a family as “the pure in heart.”<sup>18</sup> It was their uniting beliefs and their faith in Zion that brought them to Nauvoo. It was that same uniting belief and faith that would allow them to leave their homes, their livelihood, and their precious temple behind and continue the difficult journey west with their fellow Saints. They could build a Zion anywhere if they collectively invested their pure hearts for the Lord’s cause.

Some of the abandoned buildings and homes in Nauvoo remained intact over the years, but many left only traces of a foundation. Even the temple the Saints worked so hard to build was eventually destroyed by arson and storm. However,

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<sup>16</sup> McMahan, 88.

<sup>17</sup> Others, including Smith’s wife and his mother, stayed behind. Time would bring about the formation of the main leadership of the RLDS Church.

<sup>18</sup> *Doctrine and Covenants*, 189 (97:21).



Nauvoo could not be entirely forgotten because it was more than a geographical place. Michael J. Crosbie, Ph.D., editor-in-chief of *Faith & Form: Journal of Religion Art and Architecture*, explains that “these places become sacred only through us, through our presence, as settings for our lives’ most spiritual, challenging times.”<sup>19</sup> In addition to the many blessings the Mormons felt from living in close proximity of their prophet, receiving spiritual instruction and participating in the sacred ordinances in the temple, they also were blessed through the hardships they experienced in Nauvoo. In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, he taught, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven.”<sup>20</sup> The spiritual and challenging experiences, for many of the early Saints, marked Nauvoo as a sacred space for them. That sacred mark did not disappear when those that followed Brigham Young left Nauvoo. It did not disappear with their passing away. That sacred mark was passed down as a legacy to their children and children’s children and spread to the general body of the LDS Church as a milestone in the religion’s history. The geographical place of Nauvoo and the ability of contemporary Mormon Saints to identify with the events that took place there are intertwined “through the figure of roots, roots reaching

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<sup>19</sup> Michael J. Crosbie, “What Makes a Sacred Place?” *AIA Journal of Architecture* [journal online] (July 2005); available from [http://www.aia.org/nwsltr\\_aiaj.cfm?pagename=aiaj\\_a\\_20050730\\_sacred\\_place](http://www.aia.org/nwsltr_aiaj.cfm?pagename=aiaj_a_20050730_sacred_place); Internet; accessed 15 Mar. 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Matt. 5:10–12.

deep into the heart and past"<sup>21</sup> of the city. For the Latter-day Saints today, the depth of these roots is as deep or as intimate as ancestral connections, whether literal, being direct descendents of the original Nauvoo Saints that made the journey west or adopted, through recent conversion, into the history of the Mormon Church and its founders.

### LDS Presence in Restored Nauvoo

To many early Latter-day Saints, Nauvoo was a symbol of rest from persecution before it was even built. During its years of growth and expansion, Nauvoo also grew to be a symbol of successful industry, a blessing as a result of religious convictions. Its iconic power of religious conviction also increased with what Mormons now believe to be miraculous healings from the malaria epidemic, the continued revelations,<sup>22</sup> the influx of new converts, the building and completion of the Nauvoo Temple, and the exodus of the Saints headed West in search of another Zion. With the turn of the following century, many Mormons would return to Nauvoo as a sort of pilgrimage to remember "the example which those people gave to the world of self-reliance, of faith in a just and beneficent Creator, of power to do, to do without, to endure, to conquer."<sup>23</sup> Many returned to commemorate the founding of Nauvoo and the martyrdom of Joseph Smith. With the increased

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<sup>21</sup> Chaudhuri, 98.

<sup>22</sup> Many revelations given to Smith during the Nauvoo era were later canonized as scripture.

<sup>23</sup> Janath Cannon, *Nauvoo Panorama* (Nauvoo, IL: Nauvoo Restoration Inc., 1991), 90.

pilgrimages to Nauvoo, the LDS Church began to purchase historically and religiously significant sites within the city in the early 1900s including the site of the Nauvoo Temple. Today, many of the original homes and shops have been restored with as much historical accuracy as possible, and within the city of Nauvoo is a great missionary effort to provide tours, tell stories, and demonstrate life as it was in the 1840s. Perhaps the greatest shrine of all in this sacred city is the recently rebuilt Nauvoo Temple, which was completed in 2002, situated on the very same bluff where the original Nauvoo Temple overlooked the city below.

Much like the thousands of American tourists visiting Williamsburg, Monticello, the Gettysburg cemetery, and other American history sites to honor their forbears and experience their roots, thousands of Latter-day Saints flock to Nauvoo and other Church history sites in a pilgrimage to similarly honor and experience their roots. Because the early Saints made a home in Nauvoo and then found themselves displaced in 1846, modern pilgrimages of their genetic and spiritual descendents become a return home, following their ancestors' footsteps to experience a "homecoming."<sup>24</sup> In reference to Egeria and similar pilgrimages to the historically significant sites, Carlson suggests that the contemporary sightseer is much the same, "both [with] the desire to visit the place where important events actually occurred."<sup>25</sup> Much like Egeria's pilgrimage, contemporary Mormon

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<sup>24</sup> Una Chadhuri also emblemizes the shift in the discourse of home with the "shift of focus in drama from actions of *leaving home* to *homecomings*" in Chadhuri, 92.

<sup>25</sup> Carlson, 86.

pilgrimages to Nauvoo invite the opportunity to experience the roots of their church. Crosbie demonstrates a possible physical connection with historically sacred spaces: “When you touch the foot [of the statue of St. Peter at the Vatican], you take a few molecules of bronze with you, but you also leave behind a bit of yourself, joining the millions of others who have visited this sacred place.”<sup>26</sup> When the modern pilgrims walk the streets of Nauvoo, sit in a pew in the Seventies Hall, and touch the grave marker where Joseph Smith’s body is buried, they take a few particles with them and leave a bit of themselves behind connected with the thousands who similarly experience this sacred space.

In addition to these newly restored sacred sites of Nauvoo, there has been a great tradition of performance. The many performing groups in Nauvoo include the Nauvoo Brass Band, two musicals (one put on by the Young Performing Missionaries at the LDS Historic Nauvoo Visitor’s Center and the other by the LDS missionaries assigned to Nauvoo), and a large outdoor pageant bringing to life some of the stories of Old Nauvoo. A pageant filled with music and dance, *City of Joseph* was performed every summer near the Historic Nauvoo Visitor’s Center for nearly thirty years until its final performance in 2004. In the summer of 2005, a new pageant opened in its place a little distance north in a newly arranged venue.

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<sup>26</sup> Crosbie, “Sacred Place.”

## The Nauvoo Pageant

Situated among these sacred Mormon spaces, “beyond its basic function of providing a space for a public to watch a performance, [the position of the stage] provide[s] many additional connotative meanings to the [Mormon] culture of which it is a part.”<sup>27</sup> The stage for the Nauvoo Pageant is a graded stage with three inlaid platforms that can slide and lock into different positions much like giant teeter-totters. The actual stage, wood and welded metal, painted black, with “wing space” underneath it, is nothing like and does not have to be like or represent the city of Nauvoo. The stage itself is situated in Nauvoo. The ground the constructed stage sits on is Nauvoo soil. The atmosphere around is the atmosphere of Nauvoo itself. There is no need for the stage to be an icon of the real city of Nauvoo. It is inside the very city the pageant tells the story of. Additionally the contrast of a new stage set upon old soil adopts an iconic significance reminiscent of a contemporary crowd relating to the lives of the historical figures portrayed.

Because the pageant is performed in this single location, and does not travel about the city for the precise location for different scenes, it satisfies the rule of “psychical distance” defined by psychologist Edward Bullough. Bullough explained that a certain distance must be kept between art and its audience for the art to be acknowledged and appreciated as art.<sup>28</sup> Although being situated in Nauvoo lessens the distance between the art and the audience, the physical situation of the audience

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<sup>27</sup> Carlson, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Bullough, “‘Psychical Distance’ as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle,” *British Journal of Psychology* 5 (June 1912), 97; quoted in Carlson, 77.

in relation to a fixed stage is distance enough for “an agreeable tension between the audience’s knowledge of illusion and its appreciation of the illusion’s effectiveness.”<sup>29</sup>

The position of the stage was carefully considered, and its final placement surrounded by religious and historically significant sites intentionally adds weight and validity to the story that plays upon it. It is at the base of the hill that the rebuilt temple stands on. Sitting in the middle section of the audience looking up at the stage, the Nauvoo Temple is visible on its hill hovering just above the center of the stage. As the sun sets at the start of the play, the final moments of the golden sunshine reflect off the white stone of the temple façade. To the west stands a grove of trees where Joseph Smith was known to give religious discourses, possibly including the sermon at King Follet’s funeral, which will be addressed later. To the south is the bank of the Mississippi River and across the river slightly southeast several miles is the town of Carthage. To the east many of the original streets laid out by these early Saints and the homes they built still remain. The view that the audience has looking up at the stage connotes that the temple itself and what it symbolizes is an integral part of the story.

The stories in the Nauvoo Pageant are told through the performance of 20 lead actors and a chorus of 140 families, which divide into 35–40 families cycling in for one week of performances at a time. They are supported by a company

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

consisting of approximately 50 staff members and running crew. Although the leads are trained and skilled actors, the majority of the chorus members are not. Most have had no formal theatre training. The pageant performs for a four-week period starting in July.

Although a team of writers worked on the script for more than a year, it is the sacred space that informed the writing. Theatre practitioner Armand Gatti argues, that it is “the *place*, the architecture that does the writing.”<sup>30</sup> The city of Nauvoo, like Abydos, the Holy Land, and the Hill Cumorah, wrote the original events that are being retold; it is the only existing witness to the events that transpired there. There is no living human survivor to testify of these events, but the literal space was present when it happened, and allows the voices of those since dead and returned to dust to *speak* from the ground. The space allows the voices of the past tell the “story of why we came . . . and how we came together to build a temple on that bluff.”<sup>31</sup>

The pageant begins with a lone man wandering onto the stage whistling a simple melody. This is Parley P. Pratt, who serves as a narrator of this story as well as participating as one of the Twelve Apostles who lived in Nauvoo within the context of the historical events presented in the play. When he begins to speak, he addresses the audience specifically as if he is pleasantly surprised to find 2000+ people who have come to visit him. At the same time he seems to be expecting them

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>31</sup> “Nauvoo,” 3–4. This is dialogue from the pageant jointed together from two separate characters: Leonora Taylor and King Follett.

to come and lend an ear to his story because, he confesses, “we’ve been watching you all day. . . . The truth is we couldn’t be happier to have you here.”<sup>32</sup> Parley, played in 2005 by Paul Walstad Jr. self-consciously evokes iconicity as he identifies surrounding landmarks to the audience while ignoring a gesture specifically to the contemporary stage. As Parley names some of the places the audience members visit, he physically gestures to their actual locations surrounding them. The large majority of the audience has been to visit these places earlier in the day, Scovill’s Bakery, the Brick Shop, and when Parley literally points to each of them, the audience recognizes the surrounding physical locations, and there is an immediate connection with their experiences from earlier in the day at the same time that an embodied Parley urges them to imagine these places during the time of their origination. This idea of the space doing the *writing* permits Parley to make a connection between their experiences at the sites with the people that originally built them. “When you’re here, we’re here also – Because we are in you.”<sup>33</sup> The lives of the early Saints come to life because the individual audience members have come to experience what Parley and the other Saints experienced in Nauvoo.

Similar to the opening procession of the Hill Cumorah Pageant, the cast of the Nauvoo Pageant make their way through the audience and onto the stage. “Boat’s in! Boat’s in! New Saints arrivin’!”<sup>34</sup> Their procession demonstrating their long

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



journey to and arrival in Nauvoo becomes self-reflexive simply as a result of the performance space. The path of the actors traveling through the audience welcomed by the established characters on stage is only an approximate path of the original taken by the gathering Saints as they first entered the city, but the approximation is not key. This theatrically staged path might as well be the original road because the surrounding space of Nauvoo closes the gap between theatricality and reality. During the processional, key characters in history and on stage introduce themselves. These are the voices *speaking* out of the *dust*.

Quickly following the introduction of the Saints into Nauvoo, a key moment in the pageant is the depiction of the malaria epidemic that spread throughout the swampy banks of the undeveloped Nauvoo. Positioned several hundred yards from the Mississippi River, the stage is situated in the exact spot of some of the tents and huts that provided little shelter to so many dying of malaria. The characters on stage are literally reenacting this frightening epidemic where it actually occurred, but this only acknowledges a connection with an *historical* moment. The scene continues further acknowledging the *sacred historical* in a sacred space when the character of Joseph Smith commands the apostles that “the Lord would have us heal these people. Brethren, I want you to go now as the disciples of old and bless the sick in the name of Jesus Christ, healing them by the power of God, through the priesthood you bear.”<sup>35</sup> The performance of these miracles, demonstrated by hands

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 13.

placed on heads in the attitude of offering sacred prayers, sanctifies the space of the actors and audience, not that the reenactment is sacred, but that it points to the originating sacred moments “reinforcing their historical [and sacred] ‘reality.’”<sup>36</sup>

As the number of citizens in Nauvoo seemed sure to grow, the need to organize and lay out a formal city plat grew. Historically speaking, the streets were laid out to be in line with the compass directions running north to south and east to west evenly dividing city lots for housing and businesses, but more importantly reminiscent of the orderly layout of ancient Jerusalem. With the plans of the city layout in hand, the character of Hyrum Smith, Joseph’s brother, announces the various streets gesturing to where they lie. Boys and girls stretch brightly colored pieces of silk across the stage in a grid as the various streets are called. The silk streets are a map of the actual Old Nauvoo city streets, even placed respective to the precise directions of north, south, east and west. This mirroring placement of the streets as they are actually laid out physically within the city surrounding the audience communicates that the space itself is doing the real *writing* in this scene.

While a bustling and dance-like portrayal of building and improving the quality of life in Nauvoo continues throughout a large portion of the pageant, the quickly flowing story pauses to honor the death of King Follet. Although there were many citizens of Nauvoo that lost their lives to disease, old age, and accident, King Follet’s death is significant in the pageant story for two reasons. One reason relates to the cause for which Follet was working at the time of his accidental death. First,

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<sup>36</sup> Carlson, 86.

King was killed while working on a well, an effort to assist in the improvement of civilized life in their new city. The service he was performing was a declaration of the Saints' collective belief in administering to the aid of one another. The second reason this particular man's story is highlighted in the pageant is that at his funeral the Prophet Joseph Smith gave arguably the most significant sermon of his life, including doctrines regarding life after death, the hope of being one day reunited with our families in heaven, and, most importantly, the purpose of life. Directly west of the stage, just steps away from the reenacted sermon, is a grove of trees that may have been the place where Joseph delivered the actual sermon. The grove, plainly visible from the audience, becomes a "silent character" with the power to authorize the original sacrality of Joseph's tender sermon.

How consoling to those of us called to part with a husband, wife, father, mother, child or dear relative, to know that, although the earthly tabernacle is laid down, they shall rise again to dwell in immortal glory. . . . They are only absent for a moment.<sup>37</sup>

The scene continues with the swelling of a hymn echoing Joseph's sermon. As the ensemble raise their voices, the sacrality of this historical event transitions to the present. Sacred music, as recorded in a preface to the LDS hymnal, has the power "to invite the Spirit of the Lord, create a feeling of reverence, . . . and provide a way for us to offer praises to the Lord."<sup>38</sup>

When Joseph Smith was arrested along with his brother Hyrum and two

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<sup>37</sup> "Nauvoo," 58.

<sup>38</sup> *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985), ix.

other men on false charges, they journeyed to the Carthage jail to await trial. As the characters of Joseph and Hyrum exit the stage for this journey, they walk with dignity off the front of the stage and through the audience in the direction of the city of Carthage as a crow flies. Joseph's character recites his last thoughts for the Saints in Nauvoo: "This is the loveliest place and the best people under the heavens."<sup>39</sup> Joseph and his brother Hyrum never returned. They were killed by an angry mob while held in the jailhouse. A painting by Mormon artist C. C. A. Christensen<sup>40</sup> depicting the murder of Joseph and his brother has the caption "The Blood of the Martyrs is the Seed of the Church."<sup>41</sup> The martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith has remained an inseparable part of the foundation of the LDS Church.

Within the pageant, the reenacted loss of the Prophet is not the ultimate climax. The reason is that the Latter-day Saints believe that the hope and future of a Zion people, of building the Kingdom of God on earth, did not end with Joseph's death. In the midst of mourning his loss, the Saints transition to an overwhelming display of hope coupled with a desire to honor their prophet's continual focus on the temple and its blessing. The ensemble who have been constructing a wood

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<sup>39</sup> "Nauvoo," 61.

<sup>40</sup> Christensen was a Danish artist who studied at the Royal Academy of Art in Copenhagen. He later joined the LDS Church and immigrated to the United States. He would eventually use his art as a missionary tool painting panoramas that told the history of the church as well as key events in the Bible and Book of Mormon.

<sup>41</sup> Reprinted in Leonard, 395.

frame representing the temple piece by piece explode in a vigorous and hearty effort to finish it.

Fabric panels, embroidered to look like the façade of the real temple, are raised on a batten flush against the wood frame until the panels are at their full height. The original temple no longer exists. However just as the original temple required the sacrifice of time and energy from the Saints to build it as portrayed in the pageant, the construction of the twenty-five by forty foot fabric temple for the pageant production required the sacrifice of time and energy from many skilled Mormon women during the late spring of 2005. Karol Jean Kasteler Miller headed this large project with the help of eighty women sewing over forty days and forty nights. They used a wide range of stitchery skills from embroidery to crocheting, and many got little sleep until the project was finished.<sup>42</sup> This simple story of love and sacrifice from the women who worked tirelessly to complete the beautiful panels for the production was shared with each cast and crew in the rehearsal process. And although the investment of time and energy spent on the theatrical icon of the temple cannot be compared to the sacrifice of the Mormon Saints' building the original temple, the invested sacrifice for its representation in the pageant creates a shorter distance to the real thing for the actors. Edward Bullough, in relation to the principle of *distance* between an icon in art and the real thing it represents, acknowledges that a smaller gap between the two can result in greater

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<sup>42</sup> Karol Jean Kasteler Miller, "The Nauvoo Temple: One Stitch at a Time," *Ensign* (March 2006), 51–53.

pleasure.<sup>43</sup> This acknowledged pleasure Bullough connects with the audience in relation to the performers. However, in this case, I connect this pleasure in diminishing distance with the actors as the history of the silk temple panels was accessible to them only. Perhaps the secret pleasure of the iconic panels was passed on to the audience. The story of the panels cannot possibly be relayed to the audience. However, the actors' greater commitment to the action of raising the temple in response to their connection with the panels is something that can be relayed to the audience. And whether it be because of the beauty and striking resemblance of the panels to the temple itself or the shorter *psychical distance* relayed by the actors' commitment to the moment, the audience of 2000+ cheered enthusiastically each night as the temple reached its full height. It was a triumphant moment for the Mormon Saints to have finally completed the temple after five years. This triumphant moment was celebrated not only by the people of Nauvoo in 1846, the audience and actors celebrated also.

The celebration of the raised temple is as short-lived as it was for the Nauvoo Saints in 1846. The temple they took so long to build was left behind almost immediately; Brigham Young explains, "Wherever the Lord leads us, we will build another temple . . . that will stand as [a] testimon[y] of our faith in the Savior Jesus Christ."<sup>44</sup> As the characters gather at the edge of the stage facing west toward the Mississippi, they have trunks and baskets, carts and crates representative of what

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<sup>43</sup> Carlson, 77.

<sup>44</sup> "Nauvoo," 66.

little the Saints could take with them on their trek west. It is somewhat reminiscent of the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt. The Hebrews did not wish to remain in slavery by staying in Egypt, but leaving their homes for the unknown was also difficult. The exodus of the Saints from Nauvoo is a sacred moment in a sacred space explained by Eliza R. Snow's character in this way:

To start out on such a journey, in the winter, and in our state of poverty, would seem like walking into the jaws of death. But because of the blessings we had received in the temple, we put our trust in our Heavenly Father and walked down Parley Street – and instead of sorrow, we felt to rejoice.<sup>45</sup>

The path the actors take exiting the stage is towards the Mississippi River where the Nauvoo Saints were ferried across the water for the first leg of their long journey. The attitude of trust in God that Eliza speaks of is a “worthy religious veneration.”<sup>46</sup> Their trust in God to lead them to a new home while leaving behind their beautiful city sacralizes the moment.

At this point, the actual rebuilt temple on the hill is not visible in the darkness of the night surrounding the stage, but this is a conscious choice for the production. As Parley returns to narrate the exodus of the Saints from Nauvoo, he tells of how “time and the forces of nature erased almost all of what we had built here, with so much love and desire.”<sup>47</sup> The temple they built tips back and is slowly lowered behind the stage and out of sight. The darkness of the night keeps everything

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (2000), s.v. “Sacred.”

<sup>47</sup> “Nauvoo,” 67.

surrounding the stage in shadow as if it has all been *erased*. It is at this seemingly dead moment, with nothing but Parley alone on the stage, that life returns. This moment of return is much like the return of the descendents of the early Saints in Nauvoo returned years and years later to visit the sacred space of Nauvoo and remember what happened there. Parley is joined by his family, and we are back at the beginning of the play with the same simple melody playing in the distance. Again he acknowledges that the audience has come to Nauvoo to remember him, his family, and everything that made Nauvoo sacred. As the number of characters on the stage slowly increases, they all turn upstage in response to a voice that is heard. It is the voice of the current Mormon prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. As he speaks, in the distance above the view of the stage, increasing light brings the new Nauvoo Temple slowly into sight once again.

Today, facing west, on the high bluff overlooking the city of Nauvoo, thence across the Mississippi, and over the plains of Iowa, there stands Joseph's temple, a magnificent house of God. . . . In the Salt Lake Valley, facing east to that beautiful temple in Nauvoo, stands Brigham's temple, the Salt Lake Temple. They look toward one another as bookends between which there are volumes that speak of the . . . thousands who made the long journey from the Mississippi River.<sup>48</sup>

It is here that the play is no longer an icon of Old Nauvoo and the temple they sacrificed to build. The play is here and now. It represents precisely the real moment in time. The actors onstage drop their characters and reveal their real selves. They are comprised of many families from all over the nation and a few

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 70.



from other countries. They are current members of the Mormon faith who have come to learn and feel and share this story. The temple behind them is the actual temple that was rebuilt in the same physical space as the original temple. Although it may seem that every iconic device has disappeared closing the gap of “psychical distance”<sup>49</sup> entirely, the audience is aware that there is still a separation between the actors and the audience simply by the physical division of the stage and house seating. At the same time, this diminishing distance takes the concept of Religious Reenactments a bit farther. This transition in the performance from Old Nauvoo to today seems to encourage the audience to seek out their “Nauvoo,” their place of communion with God and spiritual things.

The story told in the pageant, because it is retold in the sacred space it originally occurred in, is as Carlson suggests a “re-creation [where] the boundary between the theatre and reality is reinforced not spatially . . . but temporarily.”<sup>50</sup> This kind of theatrical experience is meant to be a *homecoming*, a temporary stepping back in time for those who may discover their roots there. It is the sacred space which allows the opportunity to experience the past.

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<sup>49</sup> Bullough, “Psychical Distance;” quoted in Carlson, 77.

<sup>50</sup> Carlson, 87.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

When theatre is moved outside of traditional venues, away from the framing of the proscenium arch, Carlson suggests that “the conversion of real space into iconic space, a conversion essential for it to be utilized in theatre, depends precisely upon a person or, more commonly, a group of people choosing not merely to ‘see’ it, but to ‘see it as.’”<sup>1</sup> As discussed in the preceding chapters, Religious Reenactments within the sacred space in which they originally occurred also require this conversion into iconic space even though the performance utilizes the space as itself. The reenactment of past events requires a group of people to see the place as it originally was when the events historically took place.

Phrases similar to “in this very place” are utilized in Egeria’s record of the Christian festivals and the LDS Pageants.<sup>2</sup> “Performance spaces with specific iconic identity relate to their audiences in quite different ways . . . provid[ing] a measure of contact with the reality of the events themselves.”<sup>3</sup> In such performance spaces,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>2</sup> A similar phrase may have been used in the Osiris festival, but the scripted text no longer exists.

<sup>3</sup> Carlson, 85.

these Religious Reenactments take extra advantage of their specific iconic identity by firmly stating “this is where these sacred events actually happened.” Such a statement and such specific locations are intended to reinforce the validity of the reenacted events.

Seeing a geographically sacred space as significant for past events that occurred there is, as Bullough explains, a “change of inward perspective, [where] we are overcome by the feeling that ‘all the world’s a stage.’”<sup>4</sup> With such a perspective, the possibilities of sacred spaces representing iconic stages appear much more numerous and worthy of further study.

As I briefly mentioned in the introduction, a Hindu woman who demanded the release of her husband from Death sanctified the precise banyan tree where this intervention to free her husband’s soul occurred. In addition to freeing her husband, Death granted the woman three wishes, one of which blessed her with giving birth to many sons. Today Hindu women alter that very same banyan tree into an iconic stage when they perform a sacred rite honoring this faith-filled woman. These women come to be a part of this woman’s courage against Death in hopes that they might be similarly blessed with more children.<sup>5</sup>

Outside of Jerusalem, “Genesis Land,” a tourist attraction, is a “biblical farmstead depicting Bible stories and presenting them as a biblical times

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<sup>4</sup> Bullough, “Psychical Distance,” 92; quoted in Carlson, 89.

<sup>5</sup> Hitchcock, 95.

experience.”<sup>6</sup> Tourists have the opportunity to dine and be entertained in an ancient biblical manner that gives them the sense of seeing “Genesis Land” as the ancient land of Abraham. Included in the package is a reenactment of the matchmaking of Isaac and Rebekah as well as Joseph being stripped of his coat of many colors and thrown in the pit. “Genesis Land” is often included in the itineraries of many professional touring companies specializing in Christian pilgrimages because of the unique atmosphere and sense of being transported back to ancient Jerusalem that it provides.

Many sacred spaces do not typically present a reenactment of the originating sacred events or require a customary ritual. The simple reverence of an individual for the originating sacred events which occurred there provides the appropriate perspective to translate varying forms of reverence as another kind of performance. The prayers offered at the Western Wall in Jerusalem are one such example. The Western Wall, the only portion of the original city wall that was not destroyed by Roman soldiers in the first century, is considered to be “the holiest site in Jerusalem for Jewish pilgrims.”<sup>7</sup> Many of the Jewish faithful express their reverence for a wall that they believe is “the closest access possible to the Temple of Jerusalem, . . . as near as possible to God”<sup>8</sup> in the form of uttered prayer or written prayers wedged into the cracks of the wall. Their performance of reverence is evidence of their

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<sup>6</sup> *Genesis Land*, Alon Desert Studies Center; available at <http://www.genesisland.co.il/EngHome.htm>; Internet; accessed on 15 May 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Hitchcock, 234.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

seeing the iconic stage of the Western Wall as it once was, a temple of God. Another example may be found in modern pilgrimages. A sacred mountain in Ireland, renamed to honor St. Patrick and his journey to pray at its summit, welcomes pilgrims as they climb to the top in honor of their patron saint. Many pilgrims make the journey barefoot, as St. Patrick would have done. And nearly all who climb to the summit carry a prayer, which they hope may be answered. Such pilgrimages are performative, in Flanigan's perspective previously discussed in chapter two, because of the collective reverence of the people, their focus on sacred things, and their specific route to the sacred destination.

Another path of further research I suggest is an analysis of "the re-creation of the self as sacred."<sup>9</sup> This is a concept which Beal introduces as part of the process of reenacting past sacred events. Beal argues that "in re-creating time and space as sacred, we re-create ourselves as sacred."<sup>10</sup> The sacrament table in a Christian church is a re-creation of the Last Supper. By participating in the ritual of Communion, a Christian individual is participating in a re-creation of herself as a sacred individual. Beal also gives an example of the architecture of Jewish temples and synagogues.<sup>11</sup> These sacred buildings are often fashioned architecturally after the Jerusalem Temple with the purpose of inviting the Jewish faithful to re-create themselves as sacred individuals in a sacred space. Abbot Suger poetically

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<sup>9</sup> Beal, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

demonstrated this concept of re-creation of self as sacred through personal transcendence in sacred space:

When—out of my delight in the beauty of the house of God—the loveliness of the many-colored stones has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues: then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; and that, by the Grace of God, I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner.<sup>12</sup>

As a Christian, and a Mormon, I seek, and encourage others to seek, experiences like Suger's. Sacred places, rituals, and Religious Reenactments—among others—are opportunities to connect with Heaven. As previously mentioned, Beal suggests that interacting with a sacred space is an invitation to interact with those who created the sacred space or those who were part of the sacred event which altered that space.<sup>13</sup> If sacrality is gained because it was the place where God once communicated intimately with man, perhaps it is a place where, if we visit to remember and celebrate its sacrality, perhaps we will experience a bit of personal communication with God ourselves.

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<sup>12</sup> Abbot Suger, "On the Abbey Church of St. Denis and its Art Treasures," ed., trans., and annot. Erwin Panofsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946); quoted in Philip P. Wiener, ed., "Iconography," *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973–1974), accessed 15 Mar. 2006; available from <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv2-57>; Internet.

<sup>13</sup> Beal, 11.

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