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**Abstract** Some critics of the Book of Mormon have suggested that Joseph Smith produced the book through a process known as “automatic writing,” a rapid flow of language claimed to be generated through paranormal means such as trance-like states or claimed communications with spirits. This paper presents an overview of some prominent claims of automatic writing and examines the historical and scientific evidence for the authenticity of at least some of these cases. After discussing the similarities between these works and the Book of Mormon, the paper outlines a number of features in the Book of Mormon that clearly differentiate it from any known case of automatic writing, features such as the presence of Near Eastern and Mesoamerican geographic, cultural, and linguistic details that were unknowable to anyone in 1830. Based on this and other evidence, the Book of Mormon does not fit the profile of automatic writing but is best explained by Joseph’s own account of its ancient and divine origins.



THE BOOK OF MORMON AND

# *Automatic Writing*



Oliver Cowdery served as scribe while Joseph dictated from the plates.

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*The Lord has a hand in bringing to pass his strange act,  
and proving the Book of Mormon true in the eyes of all the people. . . .  
Surely “facts are stubborn things.” It will be and ever has been, the world  
will prove Joseph Smith a true prophet by circumstantial evidence,  
in experimentis, as they did Moses and Elijah.*

—TIMES AND SEASONS, SEPTEMBER 1842<sup>1</sup>

HAVING EXHAUSTED THE MORE BIZARRE and byzantine explanations of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (written by Joseph Smith, plagiarized from Solomon Spaulding or Ethan Smith, written by Oliver Cowdery or Sidney Rigdon, dictated under the spell of epileptic seizures, etc.), some naturalist critics have postulated what appears to be a more rational explanation<sup>2</sup>—it was the product of “automatic writing.” That is, by some mysterious process, “psychic forces,” “angelic voices,” “discarnate personalities,” “goddesses of wisdom,” or other sources dictate a rapid and voluminous flow of words that somehow turns out to be coherent, inspiring, and often amazing in its brilliance and inclusion of esoteric facts, some of which may be beyond the author’s knowledge. In this paper I examine the proposition that the Book of Mormon can be explained as a product of automatic writing.

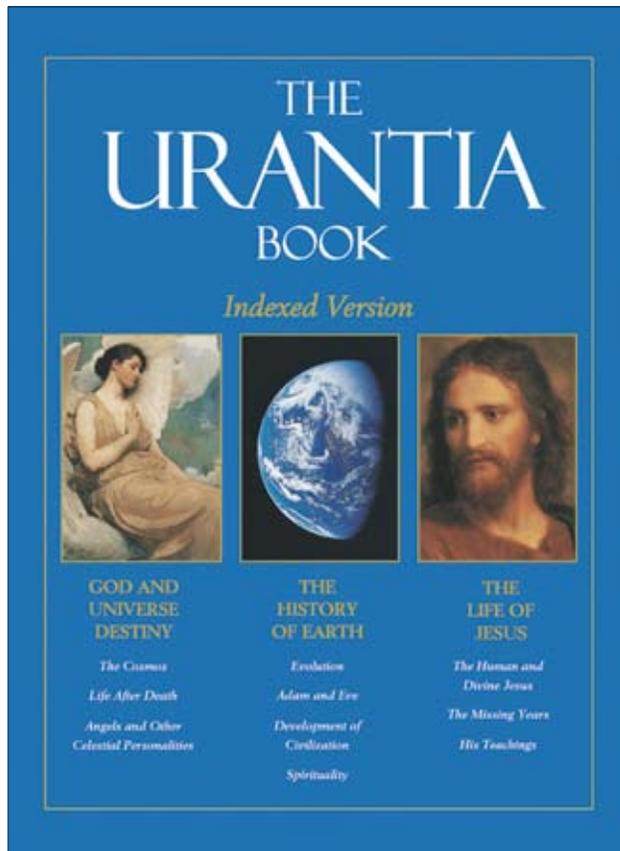
Automatic writing, also called at times “spirit writing,” “psychography,” “abnormal writing,” “direct writing,” “trance writing,” and “independent writing,” is a term used to explain a self-induced flow of language from the unconscious or a form of writing the source of which supposedly comes from outside the conscious or subconscious mind of the person receiving the communication. In other words, the “author” is merely a conduit for some other intelligence, an amanuensis for ideas and

expressions from another source. This latter definition is the one addressed in this paper.

Claims about the existence of automatic writing have existed since at least the 19th century, although some contend that “records of its occurrence are found in the most ancient works on the subject [of psychic phenomena], and it was perfectly familiar to those early and mediaeval students of occult phenomena whose researches throw so much light on that which we now find so perplexing.”<sup>3</sup> Automatic writing of this kind is normally classified as paranormal.

### Challenges of Evaluating Automatic Writing

One problem with exploring this phenomenon is that it covers such a wide array of experiences. Some human “conduits” of communications from another realm use Ouija boards on which the communication is spelled out letter by letter; others use crystals or stones in which words and sentences appear; and still others merely listen to, see, or understand the messages being sent (sometimes in visions, dreams, or trance states). Scribes for these communications may use pens (sometimes writing in shorthand), typewriters, or computers to quickly record what is being dictated or revealed; or they may dictate messages to a recording device. Some communications take place during a single period



*The Urantia Book*, first published in 1955, claims to be a revelation from celestial beings to planet Earth (Urantia) via an anonymous group in Chicago who received the dictated text over a period of years. One-third of the nearly 2,000-page book is a unique account of Christ's earthly ministry. Photo courtesy of the Urantia Book Fellowship.

with a flurry of “communication”; others, like *A Course in Miracles*<sup>4</sup> or *The Urantia Book*,<sup>5</sup> which are well known to adherents of automatic writing, take place over a period of years.

Complicating the matter is the fact that the communications claim to come from a wide and unusual (and in some instances even strange) array of personalities. These include historic figures like William James and Oscar Wilde; unknown personalities like Patience Worth, a 17th-century English Quaker; creatures from other planets like “an Orvonton Divine Counselor, chief of the corps of superuniverse personalities,” who revealed the *Urantia* (earth) chronicles; previously unknown prophets from the past like Tahkamenon, Seth, and Levi; and even Jesus Christ.

The task of evaluating these various communications is even more complicated and challenging

because some contradict others. The portrayal in Patience Worth's *The Sorry Tale* (hailed by some contemporary critics as a “fifth gospel”) of the last days of Christ along the lines presented in the New Testament is contradicted by *A Course in Miracles*. The latter claims to have been dictated by Christ himself, yet it rejects the central Christian doctrines of the atonement, crucifixion, and resurrection, a position that is in turn at variance with *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, an account of the “lost” 18 years of Christ's life that the “author” (Levi Dowling) also claimed was dictated to him by Jesus Christ. While the account of Christ's life in *The Urantia Book*, as “supplied by a secondary midwayer who was onetime assigned to the superhuman watchcare of the Apostle Andrew,” is essentially the portrayal of Christ that one finds in the Gospels, it contradicts that original account in some important particulars, including the claim that Christ's



Automatic writing is often attributed to spirit communications from historical figures such as Irish playwright, poet, and novelist Oscar Wilde (1854–1900). Hester Dowden (1868–1949) achieved sudden fame after publishing, in 1924, Wildean material that she attributed to Wilde, then dead for 23 years. © British Library/HIP/Art Resource, NY.

physical body was not resurrected but rather that he came forth out of the sealed tomb “in the very likeness of the morontia personalities of those who, as resurrected morontia ascendant beings, emerge from the resurrection halls of the first mansion world of this local system of Satania.”<sup>6</sup> The problem becomes even more challenging if one includes in the category of automatic writing the account of Jesus Christ found in the Book of Mormon.

Skeptics of psychic experiences, including automatic writing, tend to explain such phenomena as clever frauds, unconscious processes, or “dissociation,” which the dictionary defines as “the separation of whole segments of the personality (as in multiple personality disorder) or of discrete mental processes (as in the schizophrenias) from the mainstream of consciousness or of behavior.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, these communications are produced as conscious deceptions, unconscious delusions, or subconscious dissociations.

As one examines the wide range of texts claimed to have been received through the process of automatic recording of communication from another realm, it is difficult, if not impossible, to conclude that all such communications are authentic and legitimate. This is an arena in which some writers of automatic texts seem to record information from their subconscious memories and in which magicians and others have used trickery or manipulated data to produce the illusion of automatic writing.

While some such phenomena can be explained as the skeptics suggest, other phenomena apparently cannot. What, for example, does one make of the reported cases in which the communicant begins conversing in a language that, although unknown to the medium or scribe, is recorded with linguistic precision? Examples include communications in a variety of languages, including Greek, Welsh, Hungarian, and, in one of the most interesting cases, a Chinese dialect not spoken in China for centuries. As an observer of this last case, Dr. Neville Whyment, lecturer in Chinese at Oxford University, reported, “The Chinese to which we were now listening was as dead colloquially as Sanskrit or Latin.” To test the authenticity of the speaker, who identified himself as Confucius, Dr. Whyment recited the first and only line he knew of an obscure and difficult ancient Chinese poem and asked its meaning. He reports, “The voice took up the poem

and recited to the end” using intonation characteristic of archaic Chinese.<sup>8</sup>

There are other instances in which the medium who was the conduit of the automatic writing performed tasks that seem impossible to explain as the result of conscious, unconscious, or subconscious processes. That is, these individuals received historical facts and used linguistic styles that were not available in their information environment,<sup>9</sup> and they expressed them in language and forms that were far beyond their expressive talents. One of the intriguing and most widely studied automatic writers was Pearl Curran, a St. Louis, Missouri, housewife who claimed to have received an enormous volume of material from a spirit personage over a 10-year period. According to Curran, the personage identified herself as Patience Worth and said she had lived in 17th-century England.



Automatic writer Pearl Curran (1883–1937) rapidly dictated novels and other literary works purportedly received from a spirit entity who identified herself as Patience Worth from 17th-century England. Photo from the frontispiece of *The Case of Patience Worth*, by Walter Franklin Prince (1964).

It is interesting to speculate about the possibility of a variety of communications coming from beyond the veil—some inspired and some not, some truthful and some not, some rational and some not. That is, since mortals, having free will, can communicate with one another in ways that are manipulative and deceitful as well as in ways that are open and truthful, since communications range from the brilliant to the dull and from the clear to the incoherent, and since they express conscious as well as unconscious material, might it not be possible that those in the spirit world can communicate with the living in the same ways? This runs counter to our general assumption about the spirit world, but since “whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life . . . will rise with us in the resurrection” (Doctrine and Covenants 130:18), then it may also be that other aspects of our personality and character follow us into the next world and influence our communication with the living, if indeed such communications are possible.

## Asserting a Connection

What if anything does all of this have to do with the Book of Mormon? In an article entitled “Automaticity and the Dictation of the Book of Mormon,” Scott C. Dunn argues that the Book of Mormon is an example of automatic writing. He contends that “a number of parallels exist between Joseph Smith’s production of scripture and instances of automatic writing.”<sup>10</sup> He uses the case of Pearl Curran to make his point. Curran claimed to receive communications from Patience Worth through use of a Ouija board, communications that she in turn dictated to various scribes. One of the most curious aspects of these communications is that they were given, Dunn writes, in “an antique and archaic figurativeness,” in an amalgam of dialects from earlier English periods, and in a diction that was 90 percent Anglo-Saxon (as compared to 42 percent for the Declaration of Independence). According to linguistic experts, the dictated text contained no modernisms. Over the decade of these communications, Curran recorded history, fiction, poetry, proverbs, and prayers. Those who knew her intimately and those who studied her carefully, including some of the leading psychologists and literary and linguistic scholars of the time, were convinced that there was nothing in Curran’s back-

# THE BOSTON PLANCHETTE

From the Original Pattern, first made in Boston in 1860.



Within a few months past there has been brought before the community a little board variously noted in the papers; the *BOSTON TRANSCRIBER*, of May 21st, describes it as follows:

**AN ASTOUNDING NOVELTY IS “PLANCHETTE,”**

Which is only a little board in shape like a heart, placed on wheels or castors, with a pencil in front. When the fingers are gently placed on Planchette, in a few moments it becomes animated, moves along of its own accord, answers mental or written questions, talks with you and does many wonderful things. In November 30th number of *Every Saturday*, the wonder workings of Planchette are described by an English writer.

As Planchette has been extensively noticed in most of the leading papers of the day, it is unnecessary to say further of it than the following from the *Boston Traveller*:

Is PLANCHETTE A HUMBO?—On this point there is a great difference of opinion. That Planchette is full of vagaries there is no question of doubt; with some it is as stubborn as Mr. Mallowney’s pig, with others it is docile and quick to answer questions, interpret the thoughts of lookers on, and not only tell of past occurrences unknown to the operator, but will also give the note of warning for the future. All in all, Planchette is a wonderful institution, full of fun, puzzle and mystery and a pleasant companion in the house.

Have Planchette in the family, by all means, if you desire a novel amusement.

After various experiments to produce a wheel as a substitute for the Pentagraph, which of necessity caused Planchette to be sold at so high a price, a very neat, tasteful and durable wheel has recently been applied, which reduces the cost of Planchette one-half the former price, and for which the subscriber has exclusive control under the Patentee and manufacturers, and is now ready to fill orders with promptness.

Planchette, black walnut board, neatly finished, . . .	\$1.00
Rosewood, handsome fretted work, . . . . .	2.00
Hollywood, beautifully painted, . . . . .	3.00

FOR SALE BY  
**G. W. COTTRELL,**  
36 CORNHILL, BOSTON.

Mass-produced in the United States beginning in the 1860s, the planchette was a writing device said to facilitate mediumship by responding to magnetic forces passing through the medium’s body. Used by permission of the American Antiquarian Society.

ground, study, or experience that could account for this material.<sup>11</sup>

Dunn compares Curran’s experience to that of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon: “Like believers in the Book of Mormon, followers of Patience Worth adduced linguistic evidence to show that the writing dictated through Pearl Curran did indeed belong to antiquity. Although some of the language was more ungrammatical than archaic [which, by the way, one might expect of a

person of Patience Worth's purported education and background], there appear to be occasional uses of genuinely obsolete English words which Curran would probably not have known." Dunn continues, "Another startling thing about the works attributed to Patience Worth is their accuracy on factual details that Curran apparently could not have known, a defense often applied to writings given through Joseph Smith."<sup>12</sup>

Extending his argument, Dunn writes, "Like Joseph Smith, Pearl Curran appears to have lacked the education necessary to produce such works. . . . Just as Joseph Smith eventually began to dictate revelations without the aid of a seer stone, so Curran began to dictate the words of Patience Worth without any physical object. Curran 'simply saw the pictures and the words in her head and called them out, as coming from the hand of Patience Worth.'" According to Dunn, "Pearl Curran is like Joseph Smith in still another way: for both, available evidence militates against the likelihood of conscious fraud."<sup>13</sup>

Dunn then asks, "But beyond these general parallels to the experience of automatic writers, what is the evidence that Joseph Smith's translation is an example of this phenomenon?" Dunn's answer: "To begin with, the content of automatic texts is often similar to that of the Book of Mormon: Examples include multiple authorship, use of archaic language, accounts of bygone historical figures, accurate descriptions of times and places apparently unfamiliar to the writer, narratives with well-developed characters and plot, accounts of various ministries of Jesus Christ, poetics, occasionally impressive literary quality, doctrinal, theological, and cosmological discussions, and even discourses by deity."<sup>14</sup>

Dunn also argues that the manner in which the Book of Mormon was produced "bears strong resemblance to the process of automatic writing," including "the speed and ease with which Smith worked" on his translation.<sup>15</sup> After countering the arguments of some critics who feel the Book of Mormon is not a good example of automatic writing, Dunn concludes, "It is clear that Smith's translation experience fits comfortably within the larger world of scrying, channeling, and automatic writing. Indeed, the automatic processes . . . provide the best model for understanding the translation of the Book of Mormon."<sup>16</sup>

## The Extent of Common Ground

To what extent are Dunn's observations accurate? To begin with, if one takes all of the texts that might fit into the category of automatic writing, a great number of books, many of which make no claim to have been written or dictated by anyone other than the author, might also be said to have content similar to automatic texts. Indeed, the works identified as automatic texts have very little in common with one another. They range from the absurd to the inspired, from the mundane to the esoteric, from short story to voluminous chronicle, from realistic narrative to what could best be described as speculative fiction. And their styles are as varied as their subject matter. So while it may be true that the Book of Mormon "fits comfortably within the larger world of . . . automatic writing," it also fits comfortably within the larger world of narrative fiction and the narrower world of sacred literature.

It is surprising that Dunn seems to take at face value the claims of other automatic scribes about the source of their manuscripts but doesn't seem to accept Joseph Smith's own account of his sources as valid. That is, if Dunn uncritically accepts the witness of writers of automatic texts regarding the processes by which they received their material, why question the source Joseph Smith claimed for the Book of Mormon?<sup>17</sup> Joseph was clear and specific about the manner in which he received the ancient record he claims to have translated. As Terryl L. Givens summarizes: "His self-described excavation of the plates, repeated secreting of them in bean barrels, under hearthstones, and in smocks, his displaying of them to eight corroborating witnesses, and his transcription of them into hieroglyphics and translation of them into English—this continual, extensive, and prolonged engagement with a tangible, visible, grounding artifact is not compatible with a theory that makes him an inspired writer reworking the stuff of his own dreams into a product worthy of the name scripture."<sup>18</sup> Nor, one could argue, is it compatible with the theory that he was an automatic writer in the sense in which that term is generally understood.

What is true of Dunn's argument is that there are many similarities between the processes described by automatic writers and that described by Joseph Smith and his various stenographers of

Nephite history. Joseph receiving information from some source outside himself, seeing words in the seer stone (or in his mind's eye), dictating a sort of stream-of-consciousness narrative, being able to pick up dictation/translation after interruptions and delays with no break in the narrative flow, producing a large body of material over a short period of time, and leaving the final text essentially unrevised—all of these have similarities to the producers of some automatically written texts.

But if one postulates that some automatic texts or some sacred literature really is the product of

personages such as Moroni, Elijah, Moses, John the Baptist, and Peter, James, and John could appear to Joseph Smith, as he claimed and as Mormons believe, then it is easy to accept the possibility that revelations from Nephi, Mormon, Alma, and others could have come to him as well. In fact, it is interesting to speculate, as some early scholars of the Book of Mormon did,<sup>20</sup> that these figures actually appeared to Joseph and told their stories in the same way that the authors of some automatic texts claim past prophets and historical figures appeared to or communicated through them.

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*If one accepts the possibility that Jehovah could reveal his law to Moses and that Jesus could reveal to John the strange and wonderful things contained in the book of Revelation, surely one must accept that the Lord could reveal the record of his New World peoples to Joseph Smith. How he would do so seems much less important than that he could do so.*

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communication beyond the veil, then one would expect some correspondence between such texts and a text that the translator claimed was given to him by an angel, assisted in its translation by use of the Urim and Thummin,<sup>19</sup> and inspired by the Holy Ghost. That is, if communications do come from the spirit world, it seems likely that they may come in different ways and for different purposes. A communication that purports to be the scriptural record of ancient Israelites and a second testament of Jesus Christ makes a bold and important claim for our consideration and should be of great interest to us.

For those who believe that the veil between the mortal and immortal worlds is penetrable by those who have special gifts or sensitivities, it is not difficult to believe in the possibility of automatic conveyance or of inspired/revealed translation. If one accepts the possibility that Jehovah could reveal his law to Moses and that Jesus could reveal to John the strange and wonderful things contained in the book of Revelation, surely one must accept that the Lord could reveal the record of his New World peoples to Joseph Smith. How he would do so seems much less important than that he could do so. And if

## A Look at Scientific Evidence

What evidence exists that such communications from the spirit world actually take place? While there is good reason to doubt the authenticity of some, if not most, texts claimed to be the result of automatic writing, not all examples of such writing can be explained as the result of naturalistic influences or causes. Obviously, this is a landscape on which believer and skeptic have contended for centuries—and will continue to contend, since at present we seem to lack the scientific tools and technology to establish incontrovertibly the existence of communication from another sphere, including what is sometimes referred to as “the spirit world.” Nevertheless, respected researchers are probing this possibility, some with support from the National Institutes of Health. One such researcher is Dr. Gary E. Schwartz, professor of psychology, medicine, neurology, psychiatry, and surgery at the University of Arizona and director of the university’s Human Energy Systems Laboratory.

For the past decade, Dr. Schwartz and his associates at the University of Arizona have been conduct-

ing scientific research on communication between the living and the dead. In the book *The Afterlife Experiments*, Schwartz reports on studies using established mediums (people who seem to have a gift for spirit communication) whose integrity they had come to trust. Schwartz and Dr. Linda G. Russek set up controlled, double-, and triple-blind laboratory experiments in which the mediums were asked to communicate with the spirit world on behalf of people unknown to them. In one experiment the mediums averaged an 83 percent accuracy rate in identifying information ostensibly communicated from the spirit world, as compared to 36 percent average for the control group.<sup>21</sup> Dr. Schwartz concludes, “The statistical probability of this difference occurring by chance alone was less than one in ten million.”<sup>22</sup> Of their latest and most scientifically rigorous experiments, Dr. Schwartz reports, “We performed statistical analyses indicating that the results could have occurred by chance fewer than one in a 100 trillion times.”<sup>23</sup>

In reviewing their experiments and evaluating them in light of what they consider their own high standards for scientific integrity, their own skeptical safeguards, and the challenges of nonbelieving critics, Dr. Schwartz concludes, “I went through all the experiments—each and every [psychic] reading, both within and beyond the formal data collection periods—and examined it all on the basis of eleven key points that form the core [of the experiments]. I can no longer ignore the data and dismiss the words. They are as real as the sun, the trees, and our television sets, which seem to pull pictures out of the air.” His conclusion: “In the experiments, information was consistently retrieved that can best be explained as coming from living souls. . . . The data appear to be as valid, convincing and living

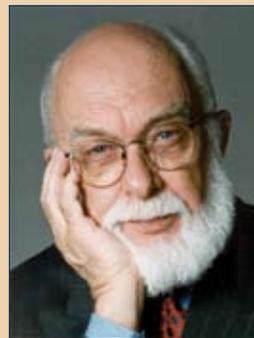


For Latter-day Saints, angelic visitations and communications to the Prophet Joseph Smith and his associates were among the divinely authorized and orchestrated events necessary for the restoration of the gospel. *John the Baptist Appearing to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery*. © 2000 Del Parson.

as the mediums, sitters, skeptics, and scientists themselves. That’s what the experimental data unmistakably show.”<sup>24</sup>

Obviously, such findings are controversial and, as one would expect, not without challenges from the scientific community. Some scholars have questioned Dr. Schwartz’s methodology as well as his professional integrity. Among Schwartz’s most vigorous critics is James Randi, the founder of the James Randi Educational Foundation and a professional debunker of things paranormal. Randi and Schwartz have had a lively exchange on the subject that can be viewed on the Internet.<sup>25</sup>

Another body of research that seems to have some bearing on the subject of “spirit communication” is that conducted by the Institute of HeartMath on intuition and epigenetics. Epigenetics is defined as the “science that studies how the development, functioning, and evolution of biological systems are influenced by forces operating outside the primary DNA sequence of the genome (i.e., intracellular, environmental, and energetic influences).”<sup>26</sup> Based on research studies conducted under rigorous, conservative conditions on “how the body receives and processes prestimulus information about a future event,”<sup>27</sup> HeartMath scientists conclude that “*both the heart and brain* appear to receive and respond to information about a future emotional stimulus prior to actually experiencing the stimulus.”<sup>28</sup> Although differing in some aspects of their



James Randi, debunker of paranormal and pseudoscientific claims. Photo courtesy of the James Randi Educational Foundation.

methodology, these studies confirm earlier studies by Dean Radin, senior scientist at the Institute of Noetic Sciences.<sup>29</sup>

These and additional studies by the Institute of HeartMath on intuition and the heart<sup>30</sup> provide “strong evidence for the idea that intuitive processes involve the body accessing a field of information that is not limited by the constraints of space and time. More specifically, they provide a compelling basis for the proposition that the body accesses a field of potential energy—that exists as a domain apart from space-time reality—into which information about ‘future’ events is spectrally enfolded.”<sup>31</sup>

Whatever scientific evidence or lack thereof for communication beyond the veil, one has to consider the possibility that at least some of the cases of automatic writing might indeed be authentic communication across the liminal threshold that divides the mortal and immortal worlds. In view of this decidedly speculative conclusion, Joseph Smith’s claims as to the source of the Book of Mormon and the process by which he translated it must be accorded at least some validity given the elaborate explanations that must be marshaled as evidence that, alternatively, the book came out of his mind, experience, and imagination. In other words, if communication from the spirit world can produce even fragments of information, and if texts can be written that cannot be explained as the result of naturalistic causes, then it surely may be possible for someone to be the conduit of a book as complex and original as the Book of Mormon.

## Countering the Connection

Having said that, I would like to illustrate ways in which I think the Book of Mormon does not fit the usual model of automatic writing.

### Different Sources

To begin with, other writers of automatic texts (such as those discussed earlier in this paper) aver that their information comes from specific personages who often have names, come from specific epochs, and have definite personalities. Unlike these mediums of extra-mortal communication, Joseph Smith never claimed that anyone was dictating to or communicating through him. While he saw specific words and phrases, he did not identify them as

coming from a source beyond what was recorded on the gold plates.

Another way in which Joseph Smith’s claim differs from the producers of automatic texts is that he is the only one of whom I am aware who claimed to have an actual tangible text from which his dictation was derived. The gold plates revealed by Moroni and placed into Joseph’s hands constitute the source of the record he claims to have translated. At least 11 other witnesses attested to the existence of the plates.<sup>32</sup>

### The Book of Mormon: Uniquely on Target

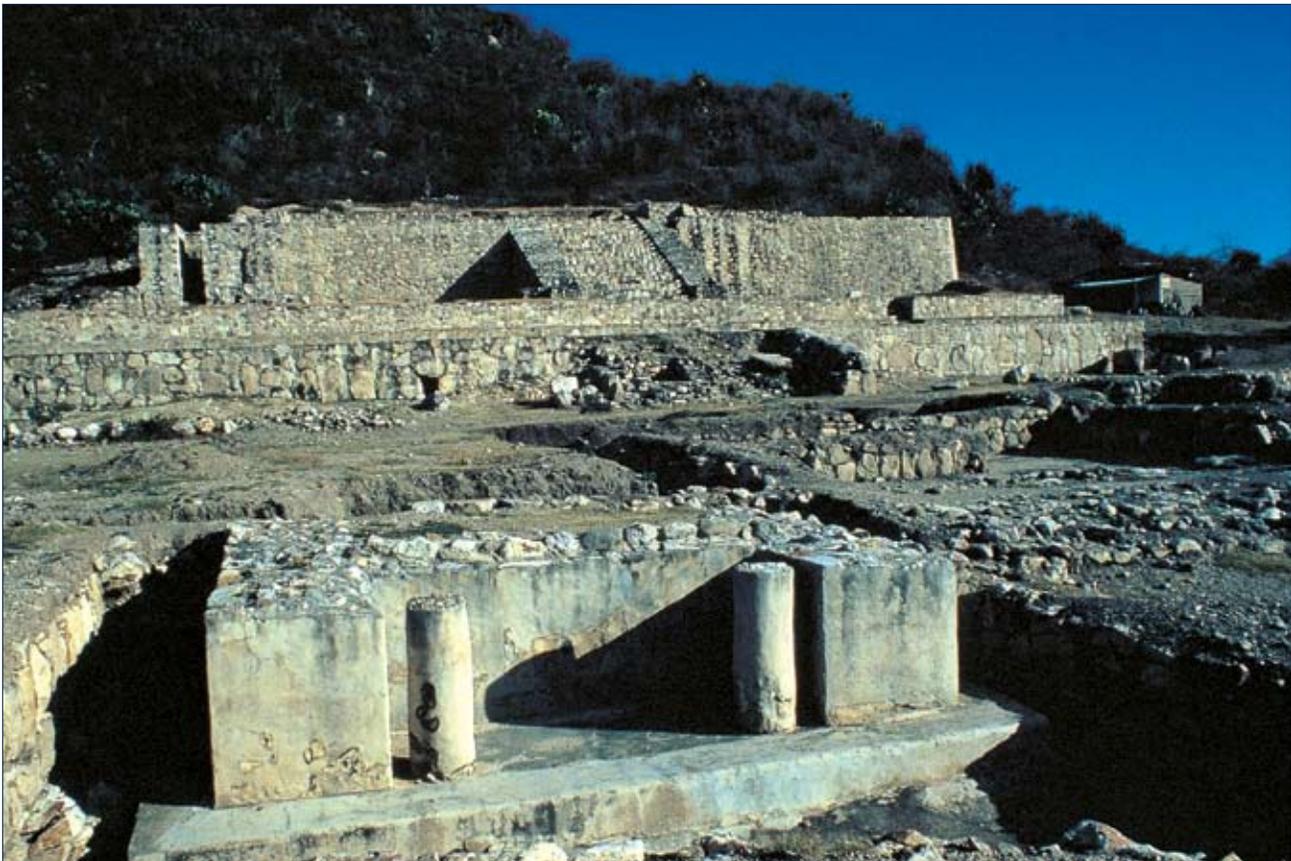
Joseph Smith, as far as I can tell, is unique in including in his text information that was not available anywhere in his or anyone else’s information environment during the time he produced his text. While Patience Worth spoke highly specialized English dialects and used archaic vocabulary that seem impossible for her medium, Pearl Curran, to have known, the fact remains that such dialects and vocabulary were available in the English-speaking environment of certain districts of England contemporaneous with Curran. The same could be said of Patience Worth’s use of topical information about the Holy Land in *A Sorry Tale*, her fictional narrative about Jesus. As one critic noted, “While the scenes are mainly in Palestine, it touches Rome occasionally, and it deals not only with Jews but with Romans, Greeks, and Arabians, revealing an intimate and accurate knowledge of the political, social and religious conditions of the times, the relations of each of these peoples to Rome, and their essential differences of character, custom and tradition.”<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, this information could have been found in sources extant at the time of the dictation.

*Ancient travel.* In contrast, the Book of Mormon contains information that, as far as can be determined, was not known to anyone in the world at the time it was published. For example, Eugene England pointed out that the route that Lehi and his people took across the Arabian Desert was counter to what all the travel guides of the 19th century described or advised. England summarizes, “For Joseph Smith to have so well succeeded in producing over twenty unique details in the description of an ancient travel route through one of the least-known areas of the world, all of which have been subsequently verified, requires extraordinary, unreasonable faith in

his natural genius or his ability to guess right in direct opposition to the prevailing knowledge of his time.”<sup>34</sup> S. Kent Brown adds a number of items to England’s list of details about Lehi’s route that were not known anywhere in the 19th century.<sup>35</sup>

*Mesoamerica.* Another example of material in the Book of Mormon that was unknown and unknowable in 1830 is the vast amount of detail about Mesoamerica. As John L. Sorenson, one of the leading authorities in this field, states, “At point after point the scripture accurately reflects the culture and history of ancient Mesoamerica. . . . Where did such information come from if not through Joseph in the manner he claimed? Literally no person in Joseph Smith’s day knew or could have known enough facts about exotic Central America to depict the subtle and accurate picture of ancient life that we find as background for the Book of Mormon.”<sup>36</sup> Sorenson cites such things as geographical consistency, the pattern of cultural history (which

was “totally unknown in 1830,” for “not even the best-informed scholars in the world at that time, let alone Joseph Smith, had any notion of a pattern behind ancient American history that would come to light over a century later”), language (“How remarkable that the record keepers of the Book of Mormon allude again and again to their writing systems and, even more remarkable, that the Book of Mormon statements fit so well with what we know about the primary type of script in use in early Mesoamerica”), Nephite political economy (“Nothing Joseph Smith could have known in his day about ‘the Indians’ or the biblical Israelites would have prepared him to dictate such a consistent picture of Nephite and Lamanite government and society as he actually did. Only in recent decades have scholars learned enough to describe these ancient Mesoamerican power mechanisms that prove to have been so much like what the Book of Mormon portrays”), elements of material culture (“No one in the



This ruined city at Dainzu, Oaxaca, dates to between 200 BC and AD 200. The ruins of the temple in the foreground show extensive use of cement construction. Photo courtesy of David A. Palmer.



Recently discovered burial mound at Nehhm, an ancient site in Yemen evidencing the authenticity of the Book of Mormon since the name and the Nihm tribe associated with it—both unknown in America in Joseph Smith's day—correspond so closely to Nephi's mention of a "place which was called Nahom." Photo courtesy of Justin Andrews.

nineteenth century could have known that cement, in fact, was extensively used in Mesoamerica beginning at about . . . the middle of the first century B.C."), and warfare (only during the "the last quarter century [has] a tide of new studies" validated the Book of Mormon's portrayal of war).<sup>37</sup>

*Ancient languages.* Similarly significant is the Book of Mormon's inclusion of words and rhetorical practices whose meanings and very existence have been discovered since 1830. A striking example is the word *Hermounts* (identified in Alma 2:37 as "that part of the wilderness which was infested by wild and ravenous beasts"). As Hugh Nibley pointed out, this word is almost identical with "Hermonthis," a land named after the Egyptian god of wild things and wild places.<sup>38</sup> And Gordon Thomasson argues persuasively that the word *Mormon* itself, which is first presented in the Book of Mormon as a place infested by wild beasts, has the same Arabic root, *RMN*, as

*Hermounts*.<sup>39</sup> Other Egyptian elements appear in the names Korihor, Pahoran, and Paanchi, the last of which is a 7th-century-BC name (i.e., contemporary with Lehi) not known in the West until the end of the 19th century.<sup>40</sup> Nibley also suggested that the Book of Mormon's use of Hebrew names, many of which are nonbiblical, "preserve[s] the authentic forms of the Hebrew names of the period as attested in newly discovered documents."<sup>41</sup>

A further example of Book of Mormon language unknowable to Joseph Smith is the place-name Nahom (1 Nephi 16:34), where Nephi's people buried Ishmael and mourned his passing. As various scholars have pointed out, this word seems related not only to the Arabic root *NHM*, which means "to sigh or moan" (suggesting grief) but also to a recently discovered ancient burial site, Nehhm, which lies very close to the area where Ishmael was buried. As Givens argues, "Found in the very area

where Nephi's record locates Nahom, these altars [votive altars from the Bar an temple site in Yemen dating to the sixth and seventh centuries BC and inscribed with the tribal name NHM] may thus be said to constitute the first actual archaeological evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon."<sup>42</sup>

While some automatic texts claim to have been dictated by biblical figures, and therefore have in common with the Book of Mormon the literary, religious, and cultural background of the Hebrew scriptures, none has come close to matching the Book of Mormon's reflection of the complex rhetorical style and stylistic patterns of Hebrew literature

more significant, I believe, is the substantive richness of the Book of Mormon's message. While many automatic texts contain inspirational literature and some contain specific doctrine (Christian and otherwise), none in my estimation matches the Book of Mormon's doctrinal density, nor its theological consistency with the Bible.

## Concluding Thoughts

One might cite many more examples of things in the Book of Mormon that were unavailable in Joseph Smith's information environment or com-

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*If, as some critics contend, Joseph Smith somehow absorbed all of this or intuited it from his familiarity with the Hebrew scriptures, he accomplished something that no other author in the history of the world has. The sheer complexity of the Book of Mormon narrative is far beyond that of any automatic text of which I am aware.*

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or its ritual patterns. The Book of Mormon is replete with stylistic elements characteristic of Hebrew speech and thought patterns, including adverbials, cognate accusatives, compound prepositions, pronoun repetition, simile curses, climactic forms, and various kinds of biblical parallelisms, among them complex and intricate examples of chiasmus.<sup>43</sup> If, as some critics contend, Joseph Smith somehow absorbed all of this or intuited it from his familiarity with the Hebrew scriptures, he accomplished something that no other author in the history of the world has.

*Literary complexity, doctrinal richness.* The sheer complexity of the Book of Mormon narrative is far beyond that of any automatic text of which I am aware. As Givens notes, there are some 2,000 authorial shifts in the narrative.<sup>44</sup> And while it is true that some automatic texts contain more than one authorial style and some spirit communicants speak in more than one voice (one thinks particularly of Patience Worth), none that I know of contains the number (two dozen or so) of distinctive authorial styles found in the Book of Mormon. Even

pletely foreign to his experience. The chances that Joseph Smith could have guessed at even one of these, let alone hundreds, are astronomical. No naturalist critic of whom I am aware has come close to explaining their presence in the Book of Mormon. I believe this constitutes a significant refutation of Dunn's statement "There does not appear to be anything of a historical, theological, philosophical, or literary quality in the scriptural writings of Joseph Smith that has not been matched by those well outside the Mormon tradition."<sup>45</sup>

As someone who trusts both spiritual and empirical processes in the search for truth, I have tried honestly and fairly to evaluate the data and arguments presented by both apologist and naturalist critics of the Book of Mormon. Naturalist critics, to my mind, raise important issues about the origin and nature of the text. I honor their efforts when they derive from a sincere attempt to come to terms with the book using the best tools for intellectual inquiry and rational exploration. Some of the challenges they present are legitimate and deserve serious consideration.

On the other hand, apologist critics also make invaluable contributions to the dialogue, and their work, when it is based on rigorous scholarship and on responsible spiritual witness, should also be taken seriously. For the most part, I have found such scholars to be people of integrity who are using their best intellectual and spiritual abilities to understand and explain the Book of Mormon. When they defend the book on a purely spiritual basis, they must understand that they enter a realm

about Pearl Curran, “The subconscious has a larger store of information than the conscious part of the mind, but it has no objective knowledge not acquired by individual experience, it has no objective impressions that are not made through the senses. It knows nothing externally, that is to say, that it has not learned by seeing, hearing, touch, tasting or smelling. . . . No objective knowledge is in any part of Mrs. Curran’s mind that has not been acquired through her own sensory experi-

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*The point is that if one contends, as do some naturalist critics, that the rich tapestry of narrative we know as the Book of Mormon came from the mind and imagination of Joseph Smith, one has to account for the process by which it did so. No one in my opinion has offered a more satisfactory or more convincing explanation than the one Joseph Smith himself gave.*

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where few naturalist critics are willing to follow. However, when they combine their empirical inquiry with rigorous spiritual standards (including the integrity to honestly test their spiritual convictions against the best considered knowledge), they should be given respect for their conclusions.

I believe that the evidence suggested by some automatic writing, as well as the intuition studies of the Institute of HeartMath and the afterlife experiments of Gary Schwartz and Linda Russek, presents a compelling argument for the possibility of communication from the immortal to the mortal world. As Schwartz says of his findings in testing “the living soul hypothesis”: “Scientists and nonscientists alike are experiencing a test of faith—in this case, whether we can put our belief in the scientific method itself. Because if we are to put our faith in the scientific method, and trust what the data [we have produced] reveal, we are led to the hypothesis that the universe is more wondrous than imagined in our wildest flights of fancy.”<sup>46</sup>

It is important to remember that the material in the Book of Mormon had its origin in some locus. In order for it to have come from Joseph Smith’s conscious or subconscious mind, it had to have gotten there somehow. As Casper S. Yost observed

ence.”<sup>47</sup> Perhaps Yost’s observation should be revised to read that the mind contains no objective *terrestrial* knowledge that has not been received through the senses. This leaves open the possibility that memory and knowledge may have some other locus of origin, such as premortal experiences or revealed dreams and visions. The point is that if one contends, as do some naturalist critics, that the rich tapestry of narrative we know as the Book of Mormon came from the mind and imagination of Joseph Smith, one has to account for the process by which it did so. No one in my opinion has offered a more satisfactory or more convincing explanation than the one Joseph Smith himself gave.

Some naturalist critics speculate that all of the information contained in the Book of Mormon came from Joseph Smith’s 19th-century environs. In citing the example of an automatic writer who apparently “picked up and stored material that was in her field of vision as she worked [a] crossword puzzle,” Scott Dunn says, “It should not be surprising, therefore, to find Smith’s scriptural productions repeating things he may have heard or overheard in conversation, camp meetings, or other settings without any concerted study of the issues.”<sup>48</sup> Dunn would be hard-pressed to show that anyone could

have overheard the material presented earlier in this paper at camp meetings or anywhere else in the Palmyra area during the time the Book of Mormon was translated. The remarkable thing about the Book of Mormon is that there is not a single fact, character, or allusion that can be tied exclusively to 19th-century America. Most parallels that environmentalist critics find between the book and Joseph Smith's cultural environment are of such a general and superficial nature that they could be found at many times and in many cultures.<sup>49</sup> As Richard L. Bushman contends, the milieu of the Book of Mormon has much more in common with ancient Hebrew culture than 19th-century America. He summarizes his analysis by saying that the Book of Mormon is "strangely distant from the time and place of its publication."<sup>50</sup> Along the same line, Givens concludes, "In sum, there is simply little basis for arguing that the worldview of Joseph's era had any influence on the make-up of the Book of Mormon itself."<sup>51</sup> As a specialist in the literary his-

tory of the period in which the Book of Mormon emerged, I can state categorically that it is unlike any book written in the entire scope of American literature.

In conclusion, while I do not find the Book of Mormon a credible candidate as an automatic text, I believe it is more closely related to automatic writing than, say, normative narrative fiction, the former (in some instances) coming from someplace outside the author's mind and imagination and the latter coming entirely from within him. That is, on the basis of what I rationally accept as evidence, there seem to be supernatural forces at work in some written communications, automatic or otherwise. Just as I accept the fact that Pearl Curran could not be the author of the Patience Worth manuscripts and that some of the communications recorded by Drs. Schwartz and Russek could not be the products of the mediums they engaged in their experiments, so I don't believe that Joseph Smith was or could have been the author of the Book of Mormon. ■■

## ENDNOTES

### The Book of Mormon and Automatic Writing

Robert A. Rees

1. *Times and Seasons*, 15 September 1842, as cited in Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 118.
2. By “more rational” I mean that to the extent one can make a case for the existence of automatic writing (a reasonable possibility to entertain since there are so many examples of the phenomenon and such a wide variety of styles), then this theory becomes a more plausible explanation for how the Book of Mormon was produced than many other explanations that, when seriously considered, prove to be either ridiculous or without credible evidence.
3. W. Stainton Moses, *Direct Spirit Writing (Psychography): A Treatise on One of the Objective Forms of Psychic or Spiritual Phenomena* (London: Psychic Book Club, n.d.), 19. Stainton Moses was himself a famous medium and recorder of automatic writing during the height of the Spiritualist movement in England and the United States. See “The Mediumship of Stainton Moses,” members.tripod.com/cryskernan/mediumship\_of\_stainton\_moses.htm.
4. According to the official Course in Miracles Web site (www.acim.org), through a process called “inner dictation,” *A Course in Miracles* was “dictated” by Jesus to Dr. Helen Schucman, a clinical and research psychologist and tenured associate professor of medical psychology at Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons, in New York City. The course of study is defined as follows: “This is a course in miracles. It . . . does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught. It does aim, however, at removing the blocks to the awareness of love’s presence, which is your natural inheritance. The opposite of love is fear, but what is all-encompassing can have no opposite. This course can therefore be summed up very simply in this way: ‘Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God.’” *A Course in Miracles* has been translated into many languages and is used as a course of spiritual study throughout the world.
5. “*The Urantia Book*, first published by the Urantia Foundation in 1955, was authored by celestial beings as a special revelation to our planet, Urantia. The book’s message is that all human beings are one family, the sons and daughters of one God, the Universal Father. It instructs on the genesis, history, and destiny of mankind and on our relationship with God. It also presents a unique and compelling portrayal of the life and teachings of Jesus, opening new vistas of time and eternity, and revealing new concepts of Man’s ever-ascending adventure of finding the Universal Father in our friendly and carefully administered universe” (Urantia Foundation, www.urantia.org). The Urantia text was a “revelation” dictated to and “transcribed” by an anonymous group living in Chicago. Like *A Course in Miracles*, *The Urantia Book* has been translated into many languages and is studied in many countries.
6. *The Urantia Book* (Chicago: The Urantia Foundation, 1955), 2021–22.
7. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “dissociation.”
8. Robert Almeder, *Beyond Death: Evidence for Life After Death* (Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas, 1987), 60–62. Obviously, such anecdotal reports are not the same as controlled scientific studies, and yet the number of such reported incidences offers at least the possibility that some may be reliable.
9. A term coined by Gordon Thomasson in “‘Daddy, What’s a ‘Frontier?’”: Thoughts on the ‘Information Environment’ That Supposedly Produced the Book of Mormon,” unpublished manuscript in my possession, p. 18. Thomasson provides the most detailed account yet as to what information might have been available to someone living in eastern New York in the late 1820s.
10. According to Thomasson, “There are two types of critical tests which can be made on Book of Mormon data: [1] The first type involves subjects about which an information vacuum can be shown to have existed in 1830—and about which the Book of Mormon takes a position which can be compared to new data revealed by contemporary scholarship (textual comparison of the Book of Mormon with otherwise unparalleled Qumran and/or Nag Hammadi documents might fall in this category). [2] The second class of tests includes those cases in which the information environment of 1830 can be shown to have documented a particular position which the Book of Mormon took exception to—and these two conflicting ideas can be compared to current scholarly opinion. These are tests which the Book of Mormon can pass or fail—taking into consideration the open-ended dialogue which is true scholarship. These are tests to which it generally has not been subjected.”
11. Scott C. Dunn, “Automaticity and the Dictation of the Book of Mormon,” in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 26.
12. See Stephen E. Braude, “Dissociation and Latent Abilities: The Strange Case of Patience Worth,” *The Journal of Trauma and Dissociation* 1/2 (2000): 13–48. See commentaries on Braude by Jean Goodwin and Jennifer Radden in the same issue.
13. Dunn, “Automaticity,” 27.
14. Dunn, “Automaticity,” 29.
15. Dunn, “Automaticity,” 30.
16. Dunn, “Automaticity,” 30.
17. Dunn, “Automaticity,” 33.
18. I believe Dunn may be disingenuous when he states, “It may be argued that automatic writing is God’s true means of giving revelations and translations (in the case of Joseph Smith)” (“Automaticity,” 36).
19. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 177–78. In an online review of Givens’s book (www.solomonspalding.com/Lib/givn2002.htm), Dale R. Broadhurst identifies automatic writing as one of the possible explanations of the Book of Mormon. “For those deciding not to join the Mormons, and thereby eliminating the explanation that the book is what it says it is, there are three remaining options for further investigation. These possibilities are: (A) Smith wrote the text almost entirely upon his own, whether by design or through a process something like automatic writing; (B) the text was produced by some person(s) other than Smith, and Smith only joined the process shortly before its publication; or, (C) the book was produced by Smith and one or more other contributors working together.”
20. Although at times Joseph used the term *Urim and Thummim* to refer to this ancient device included with the gold plates as well as to the seer stone, he used both instruments to translate the Book of Mormon. See Richard Van Wagoner and Steven Walker, “Joseph Smith: ‘The Gift of Seeing,’” *Dialogue* (15/2, Summer 1982); updated and reprinted in Bryan Waterman, ed., *The Prophet Puzzle: Interpretive Essays on Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 87–112.
21. See Dunn, “Automaticity,” 38n11.
22. “Working with his research partner, Dr. Linda G. Russek, Dr. Schwartz devised experiments that, as best they could, would eliminate the possibility of cheating or fraud of any kind. They were able to enlist the cooperation of such well-known mediums as John Edward, Suzanne Northrup and George Anderson, who to their credit placed no conditions on the experiments; they would participate exactly as directed by the scientists. . . . In this situation, the medium sits facing a ‘sitter,’ whom he or she has never met, and proceeds to apparently receive information from a deceased friend or relative of the sitter. The medium is often able to relay initials, names, dates and

specific incidents relevant to the sitter and the deceased. In Schwartz's tests, each medium had a session with the same sitter, and the experiment was repeated with several sitters. The sitters were instructed to reply to any questions from the mediums with either a yes or no, with no elaboration. All 'messages' from the deceased were carefully recorded—videotaped. . . —and then later analyzed, point by point, for accuracy. Accuracy was scored on a hit-or-miss scale in the range of -3 to +3 [-3 = a complete miss, -2 = a probable miss, -1 = a possible miss, +1 = a possible hit, +3 = a definite hit].

"How well did the mediums do? The results showed that the mediums ranged from 77 to 95 percent accuracy! Their average for +3 hits was 83 percent! . . . Similar experiments were conducted with students, who have no claim to psychic abilities, in the medium position, and they were able to achieve only 36 percent accuracy. So are the mediums just better at it, or are they experts at doing 'cold readings,' as the skeptics suggest, taking cues from the sitters' voice inflections and body language?"

"To eliminate this possibility, Schwartz and Russek's experiments became more and more stringent, to the point where the mediums were not allowed to see or even directly hear the sitters. All answers were relayed to the medium through Schwartz. Even with the tightest controls, the mediums' accuracy was above 90 percent" (<http://paranormal.about.com/library/weekly/aa093002b.htm>).

22. Gary E. Schwartz, *The Afterlife Experiments: Breakthrough Scientific Evidence of Life After Death* (New York: Pocket Books, 2002), 121. See also Gary E. R. Schwartz and Linda G. S. Russek, *The Living Energy Universe* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 1999); and related information available on the Web site [veritas.arizona.edu](http://veritas.arizona.edu).
23. Schwartz, *Afterlife Experiments*, 222.
24. Schwartz, *Afterlife Experiments*, 257, 266.
25. See Randi's "Gary Schwartz

Is Back," in the 13 February 2004 edition of Swift (the online journal of the James Randi Educational Foundation). Schwartz's responses to Randi can be seen at <http://survivalscience.50megs.com/torandi.htm>, and a review of the exchange, "The Randi /Schwartz episode," is reviewed by Montague Keen at <http://www.survivalafterdeath.org/articles/keen/randi.htm>. Another skeptic of Schwartz's work is Ray Hyman. See his "How Not to Test Mediums: Critiquing the Afterlife Experiments," in *Skeptical Inquirer* (January–February 2003), which can be accessed at [www.csicop.org](http://www.csicop.org). Schwartz's response to Hyman can be seen at [www.enformy.com/Gary-reHyman-Review.htm](http://www.enformy.com/Gary-reHyman-Review.htm). See also [www.dailygrail.com/node/1311](http://www.dailygrail.com/node/1311), [www.randi.org/jr/03-23-2001.html](http://www.randi.org/jr/03-23-2001.html), and [www.psycounsel.com/marius/dearjames2.htm](http://www.psycounsel.com/marius/dearjames2.htm).

26. "Emotional Energetics, Intuition, and Epigenetics Research," The Institute of HeartMath. See "Research overview" at <http://www.heartmath.org/research/research-intuition/overview.html>. At the same Web site, see also Rollin McCraty, "The Energetic Heart; Bioelectromagnetic Interactions Within and Between People."
27. Rollin McCraty, Mike Atkinson, and Raymond Trevor Bradley, "Electrophysiological Evidence of Intuition: Part 1. The Surprising Role of the Heart," *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 10/1 (2004): 141.
28. Rollin McCraty, Mike Atkinson, and Raymond Trevor Bradley, "Electrophysiological Evidence of Intuition: Part 2. A System-Wide Process?" *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 10/2 (2004): 334. In another study, HeartMath researchers conclude, "Even more surprising was our finding that the heart appears to receive this 'intuitive' information before the brain. This suggests that the heart's field may be linked to a more subtle energetic field that contains information on objects and events remote in space or ahead in time. Called by Karl Pribram and others the 'spectral domain,' this is a fundamental order of potential

energy that enfolds space and time, and is thought to be the basis for our consciousness of 'the whole'" (Rollin McCraty, Raymond Trevor Bradley, and Dana Tomasino, "The Resonant Heart," *Shift: At the Frontiers of Consciousness* 5 [Dec. 2004–Feb. 2005], 15–19).

29. See Dean I. Radin, "Unconscious Perception of Future Emotions: An Experiment in Presentiment," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 11/2 (1997): 163–80; and his *The Conscious Universe: The Scientific Truth of Psychic Phenomena* (San Francisco: HarperEdge, 1997).
30. [www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org).
31. McCraty, Atkinson, and Bradley, "Electrophysiological Evidence," 334.
32. Dan Vogel attempts to discredit these witnesses and to undermine their testimonies of the existence of the plates by seeing their experiences as hallucination, hypnotism, or "induced visionary experiences" ("The Validity of the Witnesses," in *American Apocrypha*, 79–121). Vogel's piece is so shot through with subjunctive qualifiers (*if, probably, perhaps, seems, might, assuming that, likely, probable, possibility, etc.*) that it is difficult to take his argument seriously.
33. Casper S. Yost, "The Problem of Knowledge," in Walter Franklin Prince, *The Case of Patience Worth* (Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1964), 380.
34. Eugene England, "Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?" *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1982), 153.
35. S. Kent Brown, "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 55–125.
36. John L. Sorenson, "How Could Joseph Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?" in *Echoes and Evidences*, 261–62.
37. Sorenson, "Ancient American Civilization," 269, 281, 286, 287, 292.
38. See Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in*

*the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 192.

39. See Gordon Thomasson, "Book of Mormon Language, Names, and [Metonymic] Naming," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 1–27.
40. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 192–93.
41. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 194.
42. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 120.
43. See Dennis Largey, ed., *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 182–86, 321–26.
44. See Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 156.
45. Dunn, "Automaticity," 36.
46. Schwartz, *Afterlife*, xxiii.
47. Yost, "The Problem of Knowledge," in Prince, *Patience Worth*, 369.
48. Dunn, "Automaticity," 35.
49. As Gordon Thomasson states, "Upon finding a possible parallel between the Book of Mormon and some bit of early American history, it is all too often assumed that the source for the idea has been found and further study is neglected or even ridiculed. Such an at best naïve, reductionist approach ignores the fact that where parallels occur they almost invariably relate to what are perennial questions—themes which recur in countless religious histories—and which are by no means unique to the Burned-over District in space or time, and/or may correlate even more significantly with ancient evidence than it does with the more recent" ("Frontier," 9).
50. Richard L. Bushman, "The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution," in *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 47–64, esp. 57. Bushman states: "The Book of Mormon was an anomaly on the political scene of 1830. Instead of heroically resisting despots, the people of God fled their oppressors and credited God alone with deliverance. Instead of enlightened people overthrowing their kings in defense of their natural rights, the common people repeatedly raised up kings, and the prophets and the kings themselves had to persuade the people of the inexpediency of

monarchy. Despite Mosiah's reforms, Nephite government persisted in monarchical practices, with life tenure for the chief judges, hereditary succession, and the combination of all functions in one official" (57).

51. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 169.

**Prophecy and History: Structuring the Abridgment of the Nephite Records**

Steven L. Olsen

1. In this paper the terms *small plates* and *large plates* initially appear in quotation marks to identify usage among Latter-day Saints today. This shorthand distinction between the verbatim account of the prophets, beginning with Nephi, and the bulk of Mormon's abridgment does not exist in the Book of Mormon, which refers to both accounts as the "plates of Nephi."
2. See, for example, Ezra 7:28–9:15; Nehemiah 1–13; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1; Ezekiel 1–2.
3. Most frequently, direct editorial comment in the Hebrew Bible orients readers contemporary with the narrator to cultural or geographical references in the text. See, for example, Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 113n2, 123n50, 182n33, 270n34, 273n11.
4. Two studies that inventory several explicit editorial statements in the Book of Mormon as evidence of the text's complexity and the manner of its compilation are John A. Tvedtnes, "Mormon's Editorial Promises," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 29–31; and Cheryl Brown, "I Speak Somewhat Concerning That Which I Have Written," in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1990), 55–72.
5. Prior studies of the editorial role of Book of Mormon authors include S. Kent Brown, "Nephi's Use of Lehi's Record," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 3–14;

Grant R. Hardy, "Mormon as Editor," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 15–28; and John S. Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants as Authors," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 52–66. Grant R. Hardy's *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003) is a fuller treatment of this theme.

6. The identity of biblical narrators has captured the attention of several biblical scholars, whose conclusions are based on inferences from the narrative itself more than on explicit breaks in the narrative's third-person omniscient point of view. See Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985), 58–83, for a critique of the efforts to ascribe authorship to narrative books of the Old Testament.
7. Leading studies of this approach to the Bible include Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), and *The Five Books of Moses*; David Noel Freedman's *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); and particularly Sternberg's *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*.
8. Among the earliest and best-known studies of the explicit crafting of the Book of Mormon narrative are Bruce W. Jorgensen, "The Dark Way to the Tree: Typological Unity in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981), 217–31; George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief*, 245–62; and John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10 (Autumn 1969): 69–84.
9. Relevant structural studies of sacred texts include Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in his *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 206–31; Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (Lon-

don: Jonathan Cape, 1969); Michael Lane, ed., *Introduction to Structuralism* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 11–39. For a detailed structural study of a sacred Mormon text, see Steven L. Olsen, "Joseph Smith and the Structure of Mormon Identity," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14/3 (Fall 1981): 89–99.

10. See the similar direction of the Lord to Nephi in 1 Nephi 14:28 and to Moroni in Ether 13:13.
11. As a matter of convenience, I refer to Lehi's dream-vision as a dream and to Nephi's vision as a vision. In so doing, I do not mean to diminish the significance of Lehi's experience, since dreams in ancient times were considered viable means of divine communication.
12. Earlier examinations of the complementary nature of Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision are Courtney J. Lassetter, "Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision: A Look at Structure and Theme in the Book of Mormon," *Perspectives: A Journal of Critical Inquiry* (Winter 1976): 50–54; and Robert L. Millet, "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 161–76.
13. On the interpretive value of repetition in the Hebrew Bible, see Alter's *Five Books of Moses*, 349n21, and *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 88–113; and Sternberg's *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 365–440.
14. Among the prophecies included in both the small plates and Mormon's abridgment are the following (this list includes selected citations of prophecies, the first of which come from the small plates, followed by those, as appropriate, from Mormon's abridgment): the destruction of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 1:4, 13, 18; 2 Nephi 1:4; Alma 9:9; Helaman 8:20–21); finding and settling the promised land (1 Nephi 2:20; 18:23); the curse upon the Lamanites (1 Nephi 2:23; 2 Nephi 5:21; Alma 17:15); the Nephites as rulers in the promised land (1 Nephi 2:22; 2 Nephi 5:19); the mortal ministry, atonement, and resurrection of Christ (1 Nephi 11; Mosiah 3–4; 14–15; Alma 7;
- 34; Helaman 14); the resurrection of all mankind (2 Nephi 9–10; Alma 11; 40–41; Helaman 14); the "wars and contentions" of the Nephites (1 Nephi 12:1–5; 2 Nephi 26:2; Enos 1:24; Omni 1:3; Alma 50:1); the ministry of the resurrected Christ among the Nephites (1 Nephi 12:5–10; 2 Nephi 26:1; Enos 1:8; 3 Nephi 11); the four generations of righteousness (1 Nephi 12:11–12; 2 Nephi 26:9; 3 Nephi 27:31–32); the annihilation of the Nephites (1 Nephi 12:13–17; Alma 1:12; Alma 45:1–14; Helaman 15:17); the abject baseness of the surviving Lamanites (1 Nephi 12:20–23; 15:13; 2 Nephi 26:15; Helaman 15:11–12; Mormon 5:15); the conditions of apostasy among the Gentiles in the latter days (1 Nephi 13; 2 Nephi 26; 3 Nephi 16:9–11; 21:10–21; 30:1–2; Ether 12); the migration of the Gentiles to the promised land (1 Nephi 13:12–20; 21:5–7; Mormon 5); the conversion of the house of Israel and the Gentiles in the last days (1 Nephi 14; 2 Nephi 25:17–18; 3 Nephi 15:22; 20–21); the gathering of Israel and establishment of Zion in the last days (1 Nephi 13:37; 15: 19:16; Mosiah 12:21–22; 3 Nephi 16; 20–21; 29); the judgment of all mankind (1 Nephi 22:21; Mosiah 27:31; Alma 12:27); and the second coming of Christ and founding of the millennial kingdom of God (1 Nephi 22:26; 2 Nephi 12:12–13; 30:18; 3 Nephi 24–25; Ether 13).
15. The following prophecies are initially uttered and fulfilled within Mormon's historical narrative (the first citation is the prophecy and the second is its fulfillment): Abinadi foretells the tragedy to befall the people of Limhi (Mosiah 12:1–2; 21:1–4), the fiery death of King Noah (Mosiah 12:3; 19:20), and the cruelty of Limhi's rebellious descendants (Mosiah 17:1; Alma 25:5); Alma predicts the destruction of the city of Ammonihah (Alma 10:23; 16:2–3) and the movement of Lamanite armies (Alma 43:24; 43:49–54); and Nephi reveals the secret murder of the chief judge and the identity of its perpetrator (Helaman 8:27; 9:3–38).
16. Whether Mormon included a comparable editorial aside at