A Hermeneutic of Sacred Texts: Historicism, Revisionism, Positivism, and the Bible and Book of Mormon

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A Hermeneutic of Sacred Texts: Historicism, Revisionism, Positivism, and the Bible and Book of Mormon

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Introduction

When Jesus was asked for a simple definition, "Who is my neighbor?", his response was to tell the parable of the good Samaritan. His listeners may have wanted a simple definition, perhaps even a theological exposition; his modern readers may even look for definitions to problems such as neighborliness in quantitative definitions (your neighbor lives within three-quarters of a block of you). But Jesus gave us a parable, a story.

A story is what I want to tell. Stories make different truth claims on us than do doctrines. In the case of the good Samaritan, Jesus' story has a universalizing effect: your neighbor is anyone you meet, even those you may have reason to hate. Doctrines and quantifications are a form of positivism that tend to narrow, to specify. What I want to do in reading the Book of Mormon is read it as a narrative, not to find a collection of doctrines or to search for possible sources. Such other activities may be useful (in spite of reservations), but I think the narrative is primordial.

The narratives I want to read are not simple stories. They are complexly interwoven texts that would strain the best of readers. I bring to the task particular interests. I view the Book of Mormon as a canonical work which is at the same time an ancient document. Given such a starting point, I am prone to analyzing the text using insights from biblical criticism, particularly criticism of the Hebrew Bible.

Within biblical studies two approaches tend to predominate: historical criticism attempts to find the historical background of the text and literary criticism tends to focus on the narrative. Historical biblical criticism approaches the text with the presupposition that the text we have is an accretion of texts; the job of the historical critic is to find the time and circumstances that produced
each segment of the text. Historical criticism tends to fragment the text, attempting to find the *Sitz im Leben* of divisions within what have traditionally been accepted as unified works, dividing even individual verses into fragments from different centuries.

Literary criticism of the Bible is less prone to discuss sources and tends to focus on meaning (not that the two ventures are mutually exclusive). Literary critics may accept historical criticism as a starting point, but their approach to the text is much different. Rather than attempting to reconstruct hypothetical predecessor texts, literary critics of the Bible accept the text as we have it; the text we have is the only text we have. They assume a unified text that made sense to some "author" in its present state. What the historical critic sees as a defect in the text and as evidence of a long period of redaction, the literary critic is more likely to see as an intentional complication of the text by the author. What the historical critic is likely to see as a confused conjunction of disparate sources, the literary critic is likely to see as sophistication, artistry.

A historical approach to the Bible contains within it a certain ontology and epistemology, as does a literary approach. I prefer the philosophical position that exposes these assumptions to examination by the reader. By no means is hermeneutics the only philosophical approach that focuses on the assumptions that produce a particular reading, but it is the philosophical position I take up. Those who study either literary criticism or philosophy recognize how closely connected the two fields are. Not only are these two fields closely connected, but they are having a broad impact on all other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. This thesis draws from both fields.

My project is actually the beginning of a much larger project; what I here combine in one thesis is two separate (but I think closely related) projects. Because absolute truth claims are made in contemporary Mormon culture about
the meaning of the Book of Mormon text (both the truth claims and the readings are ones I question), I feel the need to explore the philosophical basis of truth claims made while reading the Book of Mormon text before I actually read the text myself.

What I and others term "revisionist" readings of the Book of Mormon have within the past thirty years attempted to explain the Book of Mormon as a product of Joseph Smith's environment, as an American frontier novel rather than an ancient document, which the book claims to be. This attempt to revise the understanding of the Book of Mormon from within the community of Mormons aims to expose the text to "to the scrutiny of reason and empirical research" (Ham 16). All I want to do is subject the scrutiny itself to reasoned inquiry.

The literary position I take up is that of a literary approach to biblical texts. The philosophical position I take up is hermeneutics. Although what is called hermeneutics in biblical criticism (meaning essentially "interpretation") and what is called hermeneutics in philosophy have common roots, the latter is much more fully developed in philosophical circles—I use the word as it is used by philosophers. Hermeneutics opposes the truth claims frequently made in revisionist discussions of the Book of Mormon. Specifically, the claims my hermeneutical approach opposes are those that assert that they can tell us precisely what the text means, free of interpretation and bias. To establish the position and ideological interests of the commentator is necessary before we grant authority to the interpretation that follows.

I first examine some of these truth claims; call them positivism or historicism, they are the same to me. The theoretical issues I discuss in the first chapter, I apply in the later ones. I want my own truth claims about what the text means to be exposed to the same criticism that I expose others to.
In addition to discussing the interpretive issues of positivism, historicism, and hermeneutics, I also intended to read particular passages in the Book of Mormon and subject them to a hermeneutical critique. Thomas Alexander advocates a historicist position; I intend some time in the future to explore the philosophical difficulties of such a position in more than a theoretical sense by reading his "Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine" article. I intended as part of this project to examine his attempt to explain how contemporaries would have understood what he claims to be a repudiation of the doctrinal content of the Book of Mormon by Joseph Smith in his later life. I intended also to examine Michael Quinn's book, which makes similar historicist claims about the possibilities of seeing things as people in an earlier age did, about magic and early Mormonism, particularly about the Book of Mormon. Finally, I intended to examine Anthony Hutchinson's claims about the Book of Mormon and other scripture. None of these projects have I been able to complete as part of this thesis.

As part of my own reading of the Book of Mormon, I also intended to cover much more ground. I have examined four narratives from the book: the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites narrative, the broken bow incident, the Nahom narrative, and the building of the ship narrative. I originally intended much more; I intended to write about the other narratives in First and Second Nephi: the obtaining of the brass plates story (although I do discuss this narrative somewhat) and the tree of life vision. I began, for example, analyzing the tree of life passages: but after seventy pages of commentary and having analyzed only twelve verses of text, I concluded that the section was too extensive to complete for this project. Such projects await other opportunities. I want, and still hope, that my analysis of the Book of Mormon text complements my theoretical discussion about interpretation.
I am caught in a dilemma; I favor a literary approach to biblical and Book of Mormon texts and a radical hermeneutical position, but the positions I take up in this study adhere more closely to a conservative hermeneutics and a historical analysis of biblical texts. In certain ways, the historical and conservative hermeneutical positions are, I think, primordial. Where I feel the work hasn't been done in these areas by others, I have taken up the issues myself.

One last note of caution: because this is a project I have been working on for a number of years and have discussed with a number of people, I sometimes hear my project described as a "deconstruction of the Book of Mormon." I wouldn't even know what to make of such a term or a project. I guess if I could perform such a project; it might look something like this:

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**The Awkwardness of Our Hands**

Plato denigrates the power of writing. The Western intellectual tradition has always had a bias against writing because writing is seen as a form of absence, when full presence is desired. This bias against writing is embodied in the texts Western societies view as normative. The Hebrew Bible denigrates the written word. The New Testament writings clearly do (as Derrida demonstrates), as does Rousseau and many others. But Plato's texts also became normative for Christian society during the Medieval and Renaissance periods, notice the great lengths Sidney has to go to in justifying the poet only because the school of abuse claimed that because Plato banned poets from his ideal city, poetry is evil. Plato's thought was fused with Christian thought by Augustine so his ideas have had a powerful influence, even today.

Sidney's deconstructive method in responding to the school of abuse was to show how Plato surreptitiously borrowed what he banned—Plato was himself a poet. The poison Plato
banned, he used liberally in creating his ideal city because he created the Myth of Er, the Allegory of the Cave, the Allegory of the Line, etc. Plato was himself a maker, a creator.

I'll just briefly illustrate how a normative document for our Mormon culture also in its double session writes with one hand and erases with the other. Notice how the first writer in the Book of Mormon devalues the power of writing compared to speech:

And now I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people; neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking; for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men. But behold, there are many that harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit, that it hath no place in them; wherefore, they cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things of naught. (2 Ne. 33:1-2)

Notice how the full presence of the voice allows the Holy Spirit to speak more powerfully; notice also that when Nephi speaks of rejecting the word and the Spirit, he speaks only of rejecting written language. Writing is seen a subsidiary, supplementary.

Likewise, also, the last writer in the book expresses similar sentiments:

And I said unto him: Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing; for Lord thou has made us mighty in word by faith, but thou has not made us mighty in writing; for thou hast made all this people that they could speak much, because of the Holy Ghost which thou has given them; And thou has made us that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands. Behold, thou has not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them. Thou has also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words. (Eth. 12:23-25)

Later Moroni tells why he writes few of the things he knows:
And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he
told me in plain humility, even as a man tolleth another in mine own language, concerning these things;

And only a few have I written, because of my weakness in writing. (Eth. 12:39-40)
The words as they are accompanied by the voice are powerful. The face to face words of Jesus
are better than the written word.

This phrase “face to face” perhaps needs explanation. Moses was seen as the ultimate of
Hebrew prophets because he talked to God face to face. When Miriam and Aaron rebel against
Moses they say: “Hey, we receive God’s word just as much as you do.” But when God strikes
Miriam with leprosy the charge is that Moses is greater because he has talked to God face to
face. Moses then must intercede for Miriam. The face to face power of language is more
valued, is seen as more powerful. Moses is a great prophet because he talked to God face to
face; even though Moses at one point does say that he wished all the people were prophets,
something sets the face to face encounter apart from all others.

Notice that Moroni says that his spoken words are too powerful to be written down and
still retain their power. The claim that the Nephite writers can’t write everything down is a
convention in the book and tells us about the incapacity of the written language. When
Moroni does admit that writing can be powerful, that power is projected into a long lost past.
a golden age of writing. Notice also that we have little or none of that powerful writing in the
book we read today (Eth. 4:3-5). The powerful writing has been transformed (as Moroni
touches up the record) into Moroni’s less powerful writing.

Although the writers devalue the power of writing, they are faced with a dilemma:
Moroni’s words cannot endure unless written down. After leaving Jerusalem the Lehi group
must risk all to return to acquire written records:

And behold it is wisdom in God that we should obtain these records, that we may preserve unto our
children the language of our fathers; And also that we may preserve unto them the words which have been
spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets, which have been delivered unto them by the power of God,
since the world began, even down unto this present time. (1 Ne. 3:19)
Let me point to this attitude as consistent throughout the record. The written word is weak, but paradoxically is the only way to preserve the power of the word delivered to the prophets. But ultimately the written record will have power because it speaks with a voice (in full presence). Moroni closes his record by previewing what God will say (speak face to face) to the reader at the judgment day:

Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust? (Moro. 10:27)

Ultimately, in spite of the privileging of speech, writing and speech tend to merge. The binary opposition breaks down and the full complexity of the problem of language becomes apparent. We need to accept the complexity of life and not try to reduce it to the simple, for if there is one thing the complex is not, it is not the simple.

This attitude is consistent not just in Plato, the Bible, and the Book of Mormon. Spoken language is taken to have priority; the power of the spoken word is dispersed, disseminated, as it is written down. Derrida challenges this privileging of speech. Although Derrida makes the argument that writing is prior to spoken language, he doesn’t really mean it. What he is saying is that we need to overturn the privileged part of the binary opposition. If powerful cultural forces advance the priority of speech in the speech/writing opposition, then we need to promote the scapegoated half. We do this not only to deny that we have found the origins of language or whatever; we do it because language is power and when we feel that we have gotten to the origins we have solved the problem of its power. Derrida wants to restore the complexity to the problem we have simplified.

Such a reading seems to me to be of questionable value, even artificial; others have done it with other texts and with better results. If my project is to be described as a deconstruction, then it is a deconstruction of other readings of texts. Ultimately, I will attempt as much to examine the truth claims made by a particular reader of the Book of Mormon and see if those claims themselves, along
with the reading, will stand up to a reasonable standard of truth as I will attempt my own reading of the text.
Chapter 1—History and Its -isms

Questions of method are entangling more and more disciplines. Especially in the human sciences, the questions of method and interpretation are particularly vexing. In terms of literary and historical research the question becomes: in what ways does a particular method influence the interpretation that results? Historicism, positivism, hermeneutics, value-laden interpretations, theory-laden explanation, the received view, empiricism, post-empiricism, post-modernism, post-positivism: a discussion of literary criticism, historiography, and method requires the adoption of a whole new vocabulary from philosophy. Historiography and literary criticism aren't the only disciplines in which traditional approaches are being questioned. Virtually all the social and humanistic disciplines face the prospect of having long-standing approaches questioned and overthrown.

Within the Mormon intellectual community the process of questioning methods and approaches has led to vociferous polemic about how the past is to be interpreted. Who is authorized to the interpret the past? Personally, I prefer the approaches that question positive and determinate statements about what the past means. While I subscribe to a position sometimes called a radical hermeneutics, the position I take throughout this study tends more toward a conservative hermeneutics. The epistemological claims being made by some establishment historians who claim to tell us what actually happened in the past are rather simplified versions of issues that have been controversial in other areas of study but have proven difficult to defend, have even been abandoned for the most part outside the parochial field of Mormon studies. I don't, then, deploy all the rhetorical tools made available by a radical hermeneutics (also at times called
\textit{deconstruction}) now. Let me begin with the reactionary attacks on a pseudo-
hermeneutical position and use that to help me define what a real hermeneutical
position would be.

Recently, objections have been raised in the Mormon intellectual media to a
hermeneutical approach. Successive issues of \textit{Dialogue} recently contained
attacks on Louis Midgley's and David Bohn's hermeneutical evaluations of
Mormon historical writings. The first was Thomas Alexander's extended \textit{ad
hominem} attack on the "traditionalists" ("Historiography"). The second was Kent
Robson's article, which attempted to salvage some notion of objectivity against the
hermeneutical position ("Objectivity"). Ironically, the two attacks on the
hermeneuts in the BYU Political Science Department are diametrically opposed;
additionally, these two positions show evidence of a failure to recognize the true
depth of a hermeneutical critique and the challenges it poses for their own
readings; for the very assumptions they make in their responses to Midgley and
Bohn are the very ones brought into question by either a conservative or radical
hermeneutics. My hermeneutical approach may well be different than either
Bohn's or Midgley's; I feel no compulsion to restrict myself to the range of
questions they raise nor do I feel the need to defend either of the positions these
two have taken. My critique is quite independent of theirs because I view my
position to be different from theirs.

Alexander's response claims that Bohn and Midgley are absolute absolutists;
they allow their religious and philosophical convictions to determine their
explanations. Robson's criticism of the hermeneutical approach is that it is
absolutely relativist. But let's start with a more extreme position on hermeneutics.
Positivism

In a letter to *Sunstone*, Ron Priddis attacked the editor for offering what might be construed as sympathetic statements about hermeneutics and phenomenology: Peck seemed to be subtly chastising the LDS historical department for not providing public access to the papers of prominent Mormons and to be encouraging Mormon publishers who are committed to scholarship. But at the same time the editorial seemed to approve of hermeneutical phenomenology—or to side with Messrs. Midgley and Bohn, et. al. in the ongoing dialogue about the writing of Mormon history. Peck called for "gracious honesty," "charitable history," and "tolerance" in examining the past—all of which are admirable except as buzzwords for validating indifference on the part of the historians to data which may, in their minds, tarnish the image of cherished individuals and organizations. ("Charity" 2)

Priddis continues with his attack on hermeneutics by launching an *ad hominem* attack on Heidegger. One need hardly point out that Heidegger's Nazi connections do not invalidate his philosophy (even when one understands the nature of his personal history or his philosophy):

It seems that what is being justified is a reverence for leaders and history which glamorizes the accomplishments of the elite. Just as Heidegger supported Hitler in his interpretation of history, so too this kind of approach can only encourage people to look the other way when, for example, the LDS historical department instigates the most restrictive policies ever and the *Church News* reports these changes under the headline, "Historical Records Now More Accessible" (25 April 1987). Historians in the Church need to overcome the temptation to write about history as they would like it to have been, or to court the favor of those in positions of authority to the detriment of candid disclosure—or to give support to a philosophical position which encourages authoritarianism and hero worship. ("Charity" 3)

This letter, as an attack on hermeneutics, is interesting in a number of ways. It is odd and dogmatic in extreme to dismiss all of hermeneutics because of Heidegger's personal life. In fact, Priddis so greatly misunderstands both Heidegger's
personal life and his philosophy that I suspect that he is referring to Hutchinson's Heiddeger, not Martin Heidegger. I am not sure what historical approach can justify Priddis's indifference to the historical evidence about Heidegger. Hermeneutics doesn't take a position about what evidence should be included and excluded in a historical account (just as historicism as a philosophical positions doesn't); as a philosophical theory, hermeneutics is about more fundamental questions than that. If you were to ask a hermeneut about this question of honesty, he would agree with Priddis that the historian should present all the relevant evidence so the reader can evaluate the interpretation fairly and completely. I do. To claim that hermeneutics advocates dishonesty and hero worship is not only to misrepresent it, such a claim also mixes a few red herrings in the soup, to obscure the flavor of the soup so that some might think it is herring stew.

All the historical material I have read indicates that Heidegger rather reluctantly participated with the Nazis, became a member of the Nazi party, and became rector of the university for three reasons: (1) he thought he, a famous philosopher, might be able to mold the movement to become a force against the technological degradation of man, (2) he thought he saw a similarity between the Nazi emphasis on blood and ground (German rootedness in the soil) and his own philosophical emphasis on groundedness (for more about the political implications of Heidegger's thought, one should start with Karsten Harries's "Heidegger"), and (3) he hoped to protect the university from intellectual encroachment by the Nazis.

Heidegger later recognized his naiveté in believing that he could accomplish any of these things. During his term as rector of the university, Heidegger refused to cooperate with Nazi demands (Otto Pöggeler speaks of Heidegger's resistance to the Nazis both during and after his rectorship). After ten months,
the Nazis realized that Heidegger's philosophical position had little in common
with theirs so they dismissed him because of his resistance. The final months of
the war saw Heidegger being sent as a prisoner to the Russian front to dig
trenches. Hannah Arendt, a Jew and a pupil of Heidegger's whom he convinced to
flee Germany to save her life, claimed that Heidegger showed more bravery (in
spite of the "error" involved in misunderstanding the true depth of the Nazi
threat) in staying behind and trying to confront Nazism than those who fled the
country to safety:

The point of the matter is that Heidegger, like so many other German intellectuals, Nazis and anti-
Nazis, of his generation never read Mein Kampf. This misunderstanding of what it was all about is
inconsiderable when compared with the much more decisive "error" that consisted in not only
ignoring the most relevant "literature" but in escaping from the reality of the Gestapo cellars and
the torture-hells of the early concentration camps . . .
This escape from reality turned out to be more characteristic and more lasting than all the
Gleichschaltungen of those early years. (Heidegger himself corrected his own "error" more
quickly and more radically than many of those who later sat in judgment over him—he took
considerably greater risks than were usual in German literary and university life during that period).

(302)
If Priddis read the relevant philosophical biographical texts, then such a wildly
variant reading is one more evidence of the radical underdetermination of
theories (that there are no facts, historical or otherwise, that "speak for
themselves" and a single set of facts can rationally be interpreted a number of
ways). I eagerly anticipate his further published studies outlining how
Heidegger's philosophy promotes authoritarianism and hero worship.

Priddis's charge that hermeneutics (the identification of Heidegger with all of
hermeneutics is too simplistic; too many brands are on the market, many of which
are traceable to Heidegger and many are reactions against Heidegger)
"encourages authoritarianism and hero worship" almost convinces me that he is speaking ironically. I would be hard pressed to produce an argument more authoritarian than the one that claims that historians cannot use a particular method (especially when the argument is buttressed only by faulty data and personal attack). In rebuttal I present Martin Marty. Marty would hardly be my choice as a historian sympathetic to Midgley and Bohn. Yet Marty has done some reading in hermeneutics; that reading is evident in his writing. Marty speaks of the great promise the hermeneutical approach holds for Mormon historians:

A third approach, not yet fully developed but rich in promise, is the hermeneutical. This version of "interpretation theory" helps Mormon intellectuals make the passage from primitive naivety, or from belief before criticism to belief through criticism and interpretation. It also helps both Mormons and non-Mormons in the historical profession understand each other and do some justice to the generative events without being mired in the prophet/fraud polarity or posing. (13-14)

While Marty holds great promise for a hermeneutical approach to Mormon history, Priddis decries it as "a philosophical position which encourages authoritarianism and hero worship"; in pointing to the type of critical analysis that allows the historian to move beyond primitive naivety, Marty points directly to a lack such as Priddis's in not being able see that he hasn't moved beyond the naivety, in not being critical about his own assumptions and ideologies. These two claims about authoritarianism and hero worship are interesting in a couple of ways; the letter I have been citing was published in July 1987. In a letter published shortly thereafter, Priddis wrote defending Michael Quinn's book:

Anderson's approach to history is to align sources in ways that best support preconceived concepts, using the most lenient standards to evaluate data he finds useful and the most narrow allowances for sources which contradict his views. Anderson's training as a lawyer is evident.
Quinn, on the other hand, has scrupulously followed sources wherever they have led, letting history speak for itself. Who is taking liberty with sources? (Letter 4)

A particular privileging occurs in positivist arguments. We see in this second letter why Priddis can't allow hermeneutics any credibility. To do so Priddis would no longer be able to privilege his own position as he does in this letter. I define positivism as the claim that "facts can speak for themselves," independent of our interpretations. In claiming that only historians he disagrees with support preconceived notions about the text and historians he agrees with let the facts speak for themselves, Priddis is also following positivist assumptions. Positivism claims access to brute facts. Positivism cannot deal with differing interpretations (how can there be two rational explanations of one phenomenon if no interpretation is involved?). Priddis deals with the problem in a familiar way—anyone who disagrees with his position is dishonest. Hermeneutics obviously has nothing to do Priddis's claim that "this kind of approach can only encourage people to look the other way" when church leaders restrict access to documents. Priddis indicates that some historians are motivated by the desire "to court the favor of those in positions of authority."

Most striking about this letter stuck in the postal system is the blatant intrusion of authoritarianism and hero worship. Hermeneutics will no longer allow Priddis to maintain that he and his heroes stand on a pedestal far removed from mundane things such as interpretation; for this reason Priddis must eradicate the threat hermeneutics poses. Although Priddis doesn't appreciate the humor in his claim that Heidegger's philosophy promotes authoritarianism, the irony is that the more conservative philosophy of the early Heidegger and the more radical philosophy of the later Heidegger are both sufficiently anti-authoritarian to counter Priddis's positivism, Alexander's historicism, Robson's relativism of the community, and any other system that sets itself up as the sole
arbiter of reality or the past. Derrida has responded to charges about
deconstruction that are similar to Priddis's charges about hermeneutics. "We can
easily see on which side obscurantism and nihilism are lurking when on occasion
great professors or representatives of prestigious institutions lose all sense of
proportion and control; on such occasions they forget the principles that they
claim to defend in their work and suddenly begin to heap insults, to say whatever
comes into their heads on the subject of texts that they obviously have never
opened or that they have encountered through a mediocre journalism that in
other circumstances they would pretend to scorn" ("Principle" 15). Any
elementary reading of the relevant literature would indicate that radical
hermeneutics is so radically anti-authoritarian that more traditional scholars in
literary criticism, history, law, biblical criticism, anthropology, and a host of
other disciplines have attacked it as a "cultural terrorism" that questions the
legitimacy of their own enterprise, because it questions their own claims to
authority and all such claims: that posits that such claims to authority are mere
linguistic and ideological conventions intended to privilege their own social and
intellectual positions.

Priddis's claim about history speaking for itself is explicitly a positivist
position, in spite of Alexander's denial that positivism is possible in any other
than the natural sciences.

I read Priddis's position to be rather close to Alexander's. Rather than
considering differences to be evidence of underdetermination of thesis, the
historian must impute dishonesty to those who disagree with his or her
interpretation. In his own *ad hominem* attack on the "traditionalists," Alexander
accuses them of willful dishonesty and misrepresentation: "While these
traditionalists have insisted that they would like to carry on a dialogue with the
New Mormon Historians, their actions belie their assertions. They accuse the New
Mormon Historians of disloyalty to the Church and steadfastly refuse to discuss the actual views of those they criticize. They insist instead on critiquing their own paraphrases, quotations out of context, and misrepresentations" ("Historiography" 44). Alexander calls on the "traditionalists" to cease the "tactics that not only violate the canons of scholarly discourse but also the spirit of truth-seeking and fairness that should characterize all disciples of the Master we jointly profess to serve" ("Historiography" 46). Alexander does not leave open the possibility that two honest people could read the same texts (histories in this case) and come to conclusions different from his own.

My own position is an attempt to focus not on issues of faith and who might be construed as destroying it (such a focus is regrettable and makes the issues more personal than they need to be, unless approached with extreme caution). My opinion is that even the unbeliever's claim that the Book of Mormon is a "human invention" is a position that begins from faith and in many respects is unsupportable by evidence or rationality; I want instead to focus on the philosophical and evidential claims made in the debate about the Book of Mormon. I tend to agree that there is, at least in the revisionist historical writings about the Book of Mormon, a very broad positivist consensus. I am focusing my attention on those revisionist works that deal specifically with the Book of Mormon. We should keep in mind that it would be possible for Alexander to maintain that Priddis and other Mormon historians who deny the historicity of the Book of Mormon and make positivist claims are not New Mormon Historians. Such a position would carry with it the appearance of an ad hoc apology; any historian who appeals to brute facts is by definition not a New Mormon Historian, i.e., any historian who disagrees with another's interpretation and claims that the other is looking for evidence to support preconceived notions, while those with whom they agree work from brute facts to theories. I tend to group these
revisionist writings about the Book of Mormon under the umbrella of the New Mormon History. It is, however, possible for Alexander to claim that such researchers are not New Mormon Historians, or that they are not even historians at all. I think that the minimum Alexander would have to admit is that many historians writing about the Book of Mormon are positivists. The problem with having a title so nebulous as the "New Mormon History" is that one can include or exclude anyone at will.

Alexander raises the stakes by insisting that no New Mormon Historian has ever proposed anything similar to positivism. Such absolutism tends to put more at stake than really is. I think Alexander would have better concluded that some Mormon historians have advanced positivist claims and have now repented. Alexander defines Mormon historians under three labels; this classification scheme makes it rather convenient for Alexander's ideological purpose—the three classes are the Secularists, New Mormon Historians, and Traditionalists. What makes this classification scheme so self-serving is that when someone makes a positivist statement he or she is a Secularist, not a New Mormon Historian. Given these rather convenient divisions, we might expect Alexander to give a definition of positivism favorable to his classification scheme, so none of the historians under the New Mormon History division fall into that category. But let me, once again note that I am restricting myself to the more narrow group of historians who have interpreted the Book of Mormon, rather than Mormon historiography that takes up colonization of the West or other topics. I believe that one could apply the same criticism to the more general field of New Mormon History as I do to Book of Mormon revisionists; I leave that task to someone else.

I have already given my definition of positivism, which is, of course, an interested definition. Alexander's definition is also interested, and I will also cite revisionist claims that clearly fall into the positivist category. My definition is
this: positivism claims the possibility (and the execution in their own case) of acquiring access (at least in principle) to a realm of uninterpreted brute facts. An appeal to explanation free of interpretation is positivist. Alexander even goes so far as to assume that no historical explanation can be positivistic because history is a human science and positivism is possible only in the natural sciences: "It is my belief that most New Mormon Historians, although they differ considerably in their views, would perceive their work as a part of the human studies rather than as a part of the natural sciences under which positivism would fall" ("Historiography" 31). Later Alexander writes, "Bohn seems to have begun with the theory that he was dealing with positivism or something close to it based on assumptions from the natural sciences." And in the next paragraph, "In some cases, he left contradictory evidence out of consideration. For instance, he cited James Clayton as believing in the objectivity of the positivist. In reality, as I read Clayton, he meant the objectivity of the human studies" (42). This rather eccentric definition of positivism precludes by definition not only any New Mormon Historian from being a positivist, but also any "Secularist": for these historians are not positivists but merely historians who attempt "to move it [New Mormon History] more toward positivism" (Alexander, "Historiography" 31).

A claim that positivism isn't possible in the human sciences cannot go unchallenged.

To demonstrate how eccentric Alexander's claim is that there can be no positivism in any of the human sciences isn't difficult. Many researchers in many disparate fields connect positivism with the social sciences.¹ What is so odd

¹While I have never seen anyone who would support Alexander's claim that positivism belongs only in the realm of the natural sciences, I have read many who claim that positivism is a particularly recalcitrant problem in the social sciences. Contradictions to Alexander's claim abound. As Aronowitz says, "Today,
about Alexander's definition of objectivity is his claim that appeals to objectivity in the social sciences are different from such claims in the natural sciences. I start, again with Martin Marty:

The ethics of the profession calls historians to do careful research, not to hide evidence, to be suspicious when handling sources, and then to be fair. People used to say they should be "objective," but objectivity seems to be a dream denied. This means that historians have to be reasonably aware of their assumptions, the viewpoints they bring, the thought worlds of the people they are representing at second hand. What results, all thoughtful historians agree, is not reproduction of reality, which cannot even be grasped by people on the scene during events, but "a social construction of reality." The historian invents. (4-5)

Note here that Marty says that in times past (even in times present) historians have claimed the type of objectivity that is no longer tenable. The objectivity that Marty identifies as having been claimed by historians is the one that claims to tell us about a reality independent of any interpretation. This passage is evidence of the hermeneutical approach Marty advocates. Hermeneutics requires that the historian let his or her assumptions be explicit so they can fully inform the interpretation that follows: hermeneutics denies any claim to reveal an objective, value-free, theory-free reality or to penetrate the world and thought of previous ages. So, historians have, in the past at least, claimed the type of objectivity

most investigative social scientists practice normal science, working in one or another positivist paradigm" (278). (See also Taylor, "Neutrality," 25-26.) I mention a few researchers and philosophers who point to the pervasiveness of positivism in the human sciences: in political theory see Bernstein (Restructuring, especially 5); in economics, Myrdal (4-5); in biblical studies, Sternberg (16), Bal (240-41), and Polzin ("Literary" 100-101); and in literary studies, Eagleton (144) and Tompkins (244). Given a broad consensus across a number of disciplines that positivism is not only possible in the social sciences, but also the norm, anyone (such as Alexander) who claims that the human studies do not employ positivism have a strong burden of proof, a burden Alexander has not taken up.
Alexander claims is evident only in the natural sciences: "part of the natural sciences under which positivism would fall." Marty later says, "In the nineteenth century, the age of modern critical history, the crisis of historical consciousness became intense and drastic. Now no events, experiences, traces or texts were exempt from scrutiny by historians who believed they could be value-free, dispassionate. Today, of course, no one sees them as being successful in their search. They were tainted by radical Hegelian dialectics, neo-Kantian rigorisms, or the biases of a positivism that thought it could be unbiased. We may see these critical historians as naive in this respect" (6). It is also rather naive of Alexander to deny that this same sort of objectivity has been claimed by social scientists and historians.

Every person is willing that people whose ideas are different from his or her own are interpreting the data; the real test is to see who will admit that his or her own explanations are interpretations also, rather than maintaining that his or her own position is timeless, universal, brute reality. The extent to which the researcher will admit the interpretive basis of his or her own enterprise (and not, therefore the way the real world is what actually happened the real phenomena etc.) is the beginning of a position that avoids positivism.

Economics, political science, educational research, literary criticism, history—even history is strongly influenced by positivism. "The most winning approach to history developed in the nineteenth century was that of the positivists, or the philologians. In the famous formulation of L. von Ranke, the historian aimed 'to discover how it really was.' All the evidence had to be gathered, and minutely sifted, every detail ascertained. Then the talented historian could construct a universal history" (Halpern 19). Note that the term positivism wasn't formulated by Ranke but by Comte. See how easily the term slides over and covers new territory. If a commitment to the Rankean ideal that the historian must describe
the record "wie es eigentlich gewesen," as it actually was, is a form of positivism, then historians such as Richard Poll would have to be described as positivists. After voicing reservations about the fragmentary nature of the evidence left us from the past, Poll says: "Still, I believe that the competent historian can get close enough to *wie es eigentlich gewesen* to generate provocative, often profitable, sometime perilous knowledge." (17). Even such areas as composition theory were broadly influenced by positivism: Knoblauch speaks of "the naive positivism that occasionally afflicts their recent efforts to adopt a 'scientific' ideology—the belief (which no reflective scientist is likely to hold) that we need only observe 'what happens,' without philosophical perspective, in order to achieve a 'knowledge' of composition; the belief that investigative conclusions are unaffected by frames of reference, tacit or acknowledged assumptions, or well- or poorly stated hypotheses" (Knoblauch 27).

Not only has positivism had a powerful influence on the social sciences (and continues to even now), but "positivism continues to exercise an impact on modern mass culture. It leads us to view reality as made up of an infinite number of raw 'facts,' with all the connections between the facts seen only as a secondary and artificial scaffolding" (Brother John 25 fn. 3). The major difference between positivist explanation and post-positivist explanation is the recognition that we never explain historical data "as it actually happened," or in Alexander's terms, "how certain doctrines have in fact developed" ("Reconstruction 24). Or in Hutchinson's terms, "if we are not to 'deny the spirit of prophecy' as it has been actually lived out in the community, and is now being lived out, we must reevaluate our understandings, and make them conform to what we actually know" ("Prophetic 20): this position doesn't recognize that what we really know is shaped by our interests, prejudices, and ideologies. What we know isn't a reified body of human knowledge, a universal, timeless truth. What we know is shaped
by particular intellectual communities we belong to and the interests we share with a number of disparate communities. Hutchinson takes the stronger positivist position on the same page when he tells us that prophetic prediction "does not exist in the real world"; such a position doesn't reveal what happens in the "real world," it reveals a theological understanding that excludes certain possibilities a priori.

A post-positivist understanding would have to acknowledge that our explanations of reality are shaped by the concepts (ontological, epistemological, theological) we bring to the data with us—history doesn't speak for itself. Brother John says that a positivist "historical account" imagines reality "to be a 'film' of 'what really happened,'" forgetting what every filmmaker knows, that a film is not a mirror of 'raw facts' but the result of a complicated process of editing, involving clear choices between a countless number of alternatives" (Brother John 25 fn. 3).

While Alexander must draw a firm distinction between claims to objectivity in the natural and social sciences in order to deny any trace of positivism, such a claim cannot hold up. Since science became the only model of knowledge (replacing such other bodies of knowledge as religious, alchemical, meditative, and others) acceptable in the Western tradition, all other forms of knowledge attempted to model themselves on the natural sciences. After natural science passed through an empirical, positivist stage, all forms of knowledge did the same. That historical development is the reason the claims to objectivity in the social and historical sciences were also positivist. Ironically, such positivist claims are now passé in the natural sciences. The natural sciences recognize that all explanations of natural phenomena are interpretations: "And yet as the reign of method took over all the disciplines, a paradox emerged: the natural sciences themselves began to enter a postpositivist stage" (Tracy 33). All the social
sciences appealed to the natural sciences as the model of truth (all the
"mainstream" scientists in the social sciences, that is [Bernstein, Restructuring
106]; in all fields some scientists resisted positivism). Natural scientists no longer
see themselves as operating "from the detached point of view of the
uninfluencing spectator" (Toulmin 103-104). Their expectations and
preunderstandings shape the data. But "as long as there has been a social science,
the expectation has been that it would turn from its humanistic infancy to the
maturity of hard science, thereby leaving behind its dependence on value,
judgment, and individual insight" (Rabinow and Sullivan 1). It is disingenuous to
suggest that claims to objectivity (and thereby positivist positions) in history are
different in kind from those made in the natural sciences.

From within Alexander's own discipline, Novick has written that "for
historians—as for those in every other discipline, as for the man in the street—the
natural sciences had always been the bedrock upon which the idea of objectivity
was founded.... Though 'objectivity' had various facets and dimensions, science
was the supreme exemplar of all of them" (524). Novick goes on in the chapter to
detail how all the social sciences, until 1960, were enthralled by positivism (546-
78). Positivism still exercises a dominating influence in popular culture, the
social sciences, history, and the natural sciences in spite of its discredited stature
as a philosophical position.

So when Alexander states that a positivist position is somehow excluded from
the human sciences ("It is my belief that most New Mormon Historians, although
they differ considerably in their views, would perceive their work as a part of the
human studies rather than as a part of the natural sciences under which
positivism would fall") we should recognize that he is offering a definition of
positivism that could never apply to any New Mormon Historian, any Old,
Progressive, or Venerative Mormon Historian, any literary critic, any political
scientist, any economist, any educational researcher: indeed, any social scientist or humanist.

Ironically, Alexander's denial of positivism relies fundamentally on positivist assumptions. Positivism insists that unless a distinction precisely classifies, it is no distinction at all. When Alexander insists on a clear demarcation between objectivity in the natural sciences and the social sciences, he is relying on positivist assumptions. What Alexander needs to acknowledge is that the objectivity of the social sciences is modeled on the objectivity of the natural sciences; in fact, social scientific thought has been the location of an entrenchment of positivism while the natural sciences have moved toward an interpretive understanding of the explanatory enterprise (see Mary Hesse's work and the Toulmin article for an indication of this movement). As an example of this type of positivism I offer a snarling rebuttal. J.D. Searle, ostensibly while reviewing Jonathan Culler's book but continuing his attack on Derrida, offers the ironic classification of many American deconstructionists as positivists:

When I have lectured to audiences of literary critics, I have found two pervasive philosophical presuppositions in the discussions of literary theory, both oddly enough derived from logical positivism. First there is the assumption that unless a distinction can be made rigorous and precise it isn't really a distinction at all. Many literary theorists fail to see, for example, that it is not an objection to a theory of fiction that it does not sharply divide fiction from nonfiction, or an objection to a theory of metaphor that it does not sharply divide the metaphorical from the non-metaphorical. On the contrary, it is a condition of the adequacy of a precise theory of an indeterminate phenomenon that it should precisely characterize that phenomenon as indeterminate; and a distinction is no less a distinction for allowing for a family of related, marginal, diverging cases. (Searle 78-79)

Alexander would be better off being tendentious than trying to make such a distinction. We ought to recognize that there are many ways of lapsing into
positivism and that all of us are positivists of one sort or another, at one time or another. Schneidau says: "Of course one falls into a certain kind of positivism simply by writing here and now, in the accepted mode. But one does not wish to acquiesce further in it: it is better to be tendentious than to be a positivist" (Sacred xii). Positivism is so pervasive in all aspects of culture, not just in historical and textual explanations, that only a ruthless examination of our own truth claims can even begin to avoid it. Rather than trying to distinguish clearly between the positivism of the natural and the social sciences, we would do better to realize that positivism is a cluster of notions, with a family resemblance between the clusters. One cluster insists that all data be empirically verifiable; one cluster insists on clear-cut distinctions between categories—such as Alexander does (the very form of positivism I am trying to avoid by talking about family resemblances); one cluster insists on explanations free of interpretations; one cluster insists that all data be subsumed under general laws before it can be called scientific. Positivism is a range of ideas and any denial of it must take into account the differing ways it is used:

"Historical objectivity" is not a single idea, but rather a sprawling collection of assumptions, attitudes, aspirations, and antipathies. At best it is what the philosopher W. B. Gallie has called an "essentially contested concept," like "social justice" or "leading a Christian life," the exact meaning of which will always be in dispute.

The principal elements of the idea are well known and can be briefly recapitulated. The assumptions on which it rests include a commitment to the reality of the past, and to truth as correspondence to that reality; a sharp separation between knower and known, between fact and value, and, above all, between history and fiction. Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation: the value of an interpretation is judged by how well it accounts for the facts; if contradicted by the facts, it must be abandoned. Truth is one, not perspectival. Whatever patterns exist in history are "found," not "made." Though successive generations of
historians might, as their perspectives shifted, attribute different significance to events in the past, the meaning of those events was unchanging.

The objective historian's role is that of a neutral, or disinterested, judge. (Novick 2)

Positivism isn't a simple phenomenon that can be dismissed by simply pronouncing by fiat that it is only an aspect of natural scientific explanation. Alexander's appropriation of positivism in denying positivism is nothing if not ironic. But such an attempt to avoid being called a positivist is understandable. Positivism is a philosophy without any self-professed adherents. It is merely a term someone uses to brand opponents (Stockman 3-15). It is a word that is rarely clearly defined (and perhaps clearly defining it is to lapse into positivism). I think a discussion of positivism is useful even if we were to reject the term because it is so amorphous. Whether claims are made to have revealed the "real world," let history "speak for itself," tell us how things "actually happened," see the "real phenomena"; whether you want to label such claims a naive realism, positivism, objectivism, or by some other term, what I want to question is not the term but the concept of value-free, interpretation-free, brute explanation.

Alexander claims that when Mormon historians use the word objectivity, they mean "empathy." "I know of no historicist who believes that objectivity is anything more than a sympathetic attempt to understand objects outside his or her own mind, including the ideas of others" ("Historiography" 38-39). I would like to see this claim documented. About the larger field of American historiography, Novick tells us (in his preface) what objectivity means. "Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation.... Truth is one, not perspectival. Whatever patterns exist in history are "found,' not 'made.'" In addition, "the objective historian's role is that of a neutral, or disinterested, judge.... One corollary of all this is that historians, as historians, must purge
themselves of external loyalties: the historian's primary allegiance is to "the objective historical truth," and to other historians who share that value (2). Novick's 640 plus page book traces the "objectivity question" in the United States. Never does he mention the word as being used to refer to empathy. Novick calls this the "objectivist creed." He goes on to tell how many historians have abandoned this creed. "There is somewhat less talk, though still a good deal, of approaching the past 'without preconceptions' and 'letting the facts speak for themselves'; increased tolerance for hypotheses, and a greater emphasis on interpretations being tested by facts, instead of derived from them.... But despite these recent modifications, older usages remain powerful, and perhaps dominant. The basic outlines and guidelines of the original program have remained remarkably enduring" (2). Perhaps Mormon historiography has remained outside of American historiography to the extent that objectivity means "empathy." Those Mormon historians who have taken up the Book of Mormon have, however, used the same claims to objectivity that Novick connects to objectivism and I connect to positivism. There is still talk within discussions of Book of Mormon criticism of explaining the text without preconceived notions: "As the Book of Mormon is examined without any intention solely to amass data to support preconceived notions about it, certain problems concerning traditional understandings of the book stand out" (Ham 16). There is still discussion of letting the facts speak for themselves: "Anderson's approach to history is to align sources in ways that best support preconceived concepts, using the most lenient standards to evaluate data he finds useful and the most narrow allowances for sources which contradict his views. Anderson's training as a lawyer is evident. Quinn, on the other hand, has scrupulously followed sources wherever they have led, letting history speak for itself" (Priddis, Letter 4). Novick chronicles the prevailing idea of American history, "the founding program of the American historical
profession: the scientific and detached search for impartial, objective historical truth" (250). I find it difficult to avoid the conclusion that Alexander is simply wrong when he talks about objectivity and positivism.

So (keeping in mind that Alexander could claim that these historians who write about the Book of Mormon are not New Mormon Historians) let us review some other claims they make about objectivity. We shall see if they use the word *objectivity* to mean "empathy." For one thing, I think that historians would have no need to privilege their interpretations if they did indeed mean "empathy." All I am trying to establish is that claims can be made in historical research to the type of objectivity Alexander relegates to the natural sciences. Consider Ernest Taves' claim that as Mormon historians are "objective" their histories will anger Church leaders.

Consider the plight of young Mormon historians examining the early history of the church. To the extent that they carry on their research with the objectivity expected as a matter of course in historical research generally, and to the extent that their published work reflects that objectivity, they incur the condemnation of high church authority. (262)

To Taves, objectivity is in no way connected to empathy: it is connected with truth. "In Packer's view, the Mormon historian who seeks truth is doomed" (262). Objective history is connected to truth because it is naturalistic; that is, it denies supernatural claims: "Scholarly exploration of Mormonism's origin and history has also been condemned by Ezra Taft Benson, who is also an apostle and, indeed, stands next in line to ascend to the presidency of the church. He comes down hard on the humanistic approach, with its tendency to underplay the importance of revelation and to examine the humanity and frailty of the prophets" (Taves 262).

Another historian (long before anyone ever referred to the New Mormon History) also made classical positivist claims:
The development of my personal views has given me an intellectual detachment concerning the Mormons and Mormon history. It is in this that I consider myself especially fortunate, and more than usually well-fitted to examine Mormon history: I have an emotional understanding of the Mormon way of life, and an intellectual detachment concerning that life that enables me to examine it with what I feel to be a scientific attitude. (Dale Morgan 44)

No theory about Joseph Smith can have the least validity about him except insofar as it may be measured against the facts of his life. One may start with a theory and marshal facts to support it, but as you are well aware, the only historically valid method is to marshal facts and see what they add up to. (Dale Morgan 94-95)

The motivation [Brodie's, for writing her book] is not greatly dissimilar in my own inquiries into Mormon history. It is a challenge to me to try to tread objectively between warring points of view, to get at the facts, uncover them for facts, and see what the facts have to say to a reasonable intelligence. (Dale Morgan 121)

I find it rather difficult to believe that this last quotation refers to objectivity as "empathy." Objectivity is getting at the facts—brute facts. To Morgan these "facts" are quite naturally based on a naturalist methodology:

From this outline of my views, it will be understood that my approach to Mormon history is what we might call naturalistic, i.e., disbelieving in the concept of God, I do not accept ideas about Mormon history that are fundamental to the Mormon viewpoint on that history—the immediate intervention of God in Mormon affairs. While for my part I think that my examination of Mormon history will be "objective" and "unbiased," I realize that from the Mormon point of view this examination will exhibit bias in a basic characteristic—the disinclination to accept the idea that the evidence in Mormon history confirms the intervention of God in this history. However, as a practical historian, one must take the standpoint that causes and effect proceed directly out of human behavior, that men's difficulties are occasioned by human inadequacy, not by any special favor or disfavor granted to individuals by "God." (Dale Morgan 43)
Morgan doesn't mean "empathy" when he talks about objectivity: he means "lack of bias." This is a positivism that falls very clearly in the human sciences. The claim to objectivity in the social sciences is the same claim made about objectivity in the natural sciences. Bernstein makes it clear that social scientists imported the same notions from the physical sciences. In fact, researchers in the natural sciences over the past forty years have recognized the impossibility of this naive objectivity and have increasingly moved toward an interpretive theory of natural science. During this time it was the social sciences in which the positivist ideal reigned supreme.

But other Book of Mormon critics have used the word *objectivity* in a way inconsistent with Alexander's *empathy*:

Perhaps less is known about Joseph by more people who think they know him, than any other great American. In the view of his disciples he sits on the right hand of God. In the view of his detractors he sits somewhere in the netherworld. It is hard to find historians of his time who could write objectively of him and without bias. (Jones 88)

Of course, Jones is going to give us that objective and unbiased perspective. Similarly, Holley gives an idea of his concept of objectivity:

In the past, research on Spaulding's writings has been hampered by many false claims and incomplete studies. Research on any theory should follow a reasonable conjecture until it can be seen whether or not it qualifies as a working hypothesis. If it does, then the research that follows should be as objective and unbiased as possible until the hypothesis is proven right of [sic] wrong. (Holley 10)

Let me give one more example before I turn back to Alexander's critique. Wayne Ham, in the spirit of positivism, is only going to subject the Book of Mormon "to the scrutiny of reason and empirical research." Only naturalistic explanations are going to be allowed. One quite naturally understands the desire to stake out a rhetorical position that makes claims to being scientific and,
therefore, claims to being empirical. I have to wonder in what way Ham thinks his study is empirical. His study is positivistic both in insisting that all knowledge must be reduced to empiricism and in insisting that he himself goes beyond interpretation by not working from preconceived notions:

Because the temper of our times is such that no movement nor institution nor book can forever remain impervious to the searchlight of scholarly inspection, our times demand that all the rudiments of religious faith be subjected to the scrutiny of reason and empirical research. As the Book of Mormon is examined without any intention solely to amass data to support preconceived notions about it, certain problems concerning traditional understandings of the book stand out. (16)

Here, once again, is the positivist appeal to brute, uninterpreted facts.

Alexander is accurate in trying to make some distinction between positivism in the natural and human sciences. But that distinction works against Alexander, not for him; rather than being impossible in the human studies, positivism is more broadly conceived by those in the humanities and social sciences than it is in the natural sciences, gains a wider application and definition. To the natural scientist positivism is normally a technical term referring to the insistence that all claims be empirically verifiable or that all data be explained by resorting to general law-like statements to be subsumed under even more general laws. Later, as it became evident that such an insistence itself was devoid of empirical content, the requirement was modified so that some metaphysical concepts were to be allowed, but all metaphysical concepts had to be grounded in empirical observations (Kockelmans 15). Even this requirement has now been abandoned; but the natural scientist still uses the term to refer to this reduction of everything to the empirical or to nonmonological (law-like) statements. To the social scientist and the humanist, positivism refers more generally to any attempt to uncover a brute reality than can't be referred to as an interpretation:
"Reality" is the one word that should always appear within quotation marks. The collapse of both positivism and romanticism has created those quotation marks. The dream of positivism was to discover a reality without quotation marks: a realm of pure data and facts, red spots "out there" and sharp pains "in here." This realm—"science" it was named—gave us reality. Other realms—art, morality, religion, metaphysics, and common sense—gave us merely interpretations. But interpretations are not reality. (Tracy 47)

Any postpositivist understanding of Mormon history will have to recognize this understanding: our explanations of the past do not refer to what actually happened or the way things "really" happen in the world—all our explanations are interpretations based on prejudices and ideologies as we encounter the data left to us from the past. We judge the historical evidence as we see it, not as it actually is: "The positivist sought to describe things as they are, not as they are seen or judged to be" (Bredo and Feinberg 15-16).

The pre-judices we hold are productive: they allow us a familiar base from which to judge the unfamiliar. To borrow Gadamer's metaphor: a judge has an entire tradition of common law that sets precedents and helps the law adapt to new circumstances. The judge must pre-judge a matter based on what he or she already knows about the law. This tradition guides the judge in the type of questions to be asked (and, therefore, the type of answers to be received). Such a hermeneutical position that insists that interpretation is an action all humans always engage in is contrary to the positivist position that insists that explanation can go beyond interpretation by describing what actually happened: "This positivistic view of science is, however, deceptive: scientists always approach their investigations with specific problems in mind and view the phenomena or processes that they study with the hope of shedding light on those problems. As a result, scientific discoveries are typically arrived at not by generalizing from preexisting facts but by providing answers to preexisting questions" (Toulmin
101). The point is that particular judges can rationally come to different conclusions given identical evidence. Neither judge comes to a judgment that tells us "how things actually happened" or "how things operate in the real world." The judge comes to a conclusion that is influenced both by his or her temporal position and the evidence.

Those of us in the social sciences and humanities tend to conflate positivism and objectivism, the latter of which Bernstein claims is "a doctrine which in its primitive or sophisticated forms is shared by many mainstream social scientists": "'objectivism' is a substantive orientation that believes that in the final analysis there is a realm of basic, uninterpreted, hard facts that serves as a foundation for all empirical knowledge. The appeal to these 'facts' presumably legitimizes empirical claims about the world" (*Restructuring* 111-12).

The indefensibility of positivism became apparent when the natural sciences moved into a hermeneutic stage, insisting that all observation is theory- and value-laden, never neutral and objective (Tracy 47). As hermeneutic ventures, the natural sciences acknowledged that "'fact' means not an uninterpreted 'already-out-there-now real' but a verified possibility; the acknowledgement that all data are theory-laden and all inquiry is interested. The result is clear: Positivism, the last intellectual stronghold against interpretation, could not hold. Despite its still undeniable power as a force in the culture as a whole, positivism as an intellectual interpretation of science is intellectually bankrupt" (Tracy 47-48). In its more subtle and insidious form, positivism insists that it examines the brute facts—the "real phenomena." A post-positivist position recognizes its own claims as being influenced by a particular time and place; it is always put to particular ideological uses and recognizes that if someone else took up the same evidence, a different interpretation might result. A particular reading is perspectival. So,
contrary to Grunder's claim that his reading is founded on reason and the "real phenomena," it isn't:

Too many detractors from Mormonism have suggested that Joseph Smith literally copied doctrine and Book of Mormon history from specific contemporary printed and manuscript sources.

Mormon apologetic response has then typically descended to picayune details or obtuse shades of meaning which equally obscure the real phenomena at hand. (Grunder viii)

A post-positivist understanding would require that we admit that we never "see" the real phenomena. The phenomena are always shaped by our understanding of how the world is. In this case, the preunderstanding would preclude from the beginning any possibility that the Book of Mormon is anything except a product of Joseph Smith's environment.

Let me state what a positivist approach to biblical and Book of Mormon criticism would claim. Our analysis of these texts doesn't tell us how anything operates in the real world, what actually happened, or how a person in such-and-such an age would have understood a particular piece of evidence. In biblical criticism we never deal with the text itself, only our own understanding of the text. A positivist position must claim that it has uncovered the external reality, the true meaning of the scriptural text, free of any interpretation. Such a claim maintains that it has arrived at the universal truth of the text. Its own position is uninfluenced by its own time and place—this position Schneidau refers to as positivism: "From technology it borrows the assurance that the latest 'state of the art' is the best, forgetting the tendency of all eras to take their own ways of thinking for granted" (Sacred 248).

So, what are we to do about Alexander's claim that positivism's territory lies only within the realm of the natural sciences: that the social scientist's claim to objectivity is radically different from the positivist's? Very clearly, the claim to objectivity in the social sciences is a positivist claim; this holds true especially for
the revisionist explanations of the Book of Mormon I have referred to. Only since
the BYU hermeneuts have pointed to the untenability of such claims and given
positivism and objectivism questionable status, has the need arisen to go back and
revise the definition of objectivity so that none of the human sciences can be
positivist. The arguments about the definition of positivism and objectivity are
crucial to Bohn's argument; likewise for Alexander's:

Perhaps the weakest portion of David Bohn's critique of the New Mormon History is his discussion
of objectivity. The position he defends is crucial for his argument since, in order to establish that
historians are positivists, he must show that they believe in objectivity as defined by the positivistic
natural sciences. ("Historiography" 36-37)

On this point Alexander's, not Bohn's, argument is deficient. If we were to accept
Alexander's definition of a category mistake, we would have to say that
Alexander's discussion of positivism clearly falls within this category.

**Historicism**

Because Alexander wants to avoid the perils attendant to any trace of
positivism, he falls back on a historicist position: "I believe that the New Mormon
History is an aspect of the historicist tradition within the human studies"
("Historiography" 31). To the hermeneut, the historicist position Alexander takes
up is little different from the positivist position. Perhaps this helps to explain
Alexander's exasperation at Mormon historians being labeled positivist when he
perceives their position to be very different from positivism. But what the
hermeneut finds faulty about the positivist argument, he or she also finds in
Alexander's historicist position.

Hermeneutics faults positivism because it cannot account for the fore-
structures (the preunderstandings, assumptions, prejudices) that make any
understanding of the past, of a text, or of any phenomenon possible. The
positivist claims to reveal brute, uninterpreted facts—to tell us what brute reality or "the real world" is like. The hermeneut accepts this naive realism as unreflective. The hermeneut wants to explore the temporal position of the researcher, for the researcher must necessarily make certain assumptions about the world, value judgments—assumptions that cannot be defended, logically or empirically, assumptions based on values and ideological interests.

Mormon historians may think that the hermeneuts devote an inordinate amount of print and time to an examination of these fore-structures of understanding. But to the hermeneut, these fore-structures are what make the interpretations that follow a possibility. The fore-structures are foundational, primordial. That is why I have examined the the assumptions of Book of Mormon revisionists; the naturalism, positivism, and reductionism are manifestations of an ideology and it is only through a privileging of their own position that the revisionists can pass them off as conclusions that follow naturally from the facts. ("One is led to the likely conclusion that the Book of Mormon should not be regarded as a historical account of ancient people who inhabited the Americas." [Russell, "Historicity" 197]. I would merely change the word conclusion to assumption; revisionists begin with this assumption, so it would be little surprise if they ended with the same conclusion.)

Positivism cannot account for the prejudices that make the interpretation possible. In fact, positivism can only deny these prejudices, and to the hermeneut the denial is more serious than the blindness to the prejudice. This failure to account for the temporal location (and how that temporal location inevitably determines the nature of the explanation that follows) of the historian is the deficiency shared by Alexander's historicism. This is the position:

By examining particular beliefs at specific junctures in Church history, this essay explores how certain doctrines have in fact developed. I have made every effort to restate each doctrine as
contemporaries most likely understood it, without imposing later developments.

("Reconstruction" 24)

This statement reveals the naivét of the historicist. The hermeneut asks, "Explain to me how you can understand 'as contemporaries most likely understood it.'" Show me where the actors in history, such as Joseph Smith, said they were imposing later developments on earlier events. Here is a category imposed on the subject by the historian—it is a "later development" itself added by the historian. Such additive concepts used by the historian are necessary; I only object that the historicist makes the naive claim that he or she can see things "as" the actor saw them. Ultimately the historicist makes the naive claim that this "is" the way things really are. This same claim arises in the positivist insistence of a complete truth correspondence between their explanations and brute reality. Alexander is going to tell us exactly "how certain doctrines have in fact developed." There is no qualification of the claim to the effect that this is how the historian understands the doctrines to have developed; it is an appeal to brute facts—how they have in fact developed.

This appeal to the correspondence between the historian's interpretation and "what actually happened" is exactly the assumption hermeneutics brings into question in both positivism and historicism. If the historicist were willing to inform the reader that he or she is filling certain gaps in the record and is bringing the assumption of evolution to the project, then I would not quarrel with historicism (except for its strong relativistic tendencies). But this brand of historicism isn't willing to present the fore-structures of its own understanding; it instead claims to tell us "how certain doctrines have in fact developed." I will be the first to admit that when Alexander talks about historical method he refers to the impossibility of objectivity and that the historian can "use his biases as an aid in interpreting the past" ("Faith" 62). But in his article about the Mormon
theology. Alexander doesn't admit that this evolutionary framework is a bias; he only claims to inform us "how certain doctrines have in fact developed." I am not denying that there was development in Mormon theology; all I am saying is that the historicist needs to confess the notion that the framework is a bias, something added by the historian and not a part of the way Joseph Smith saw things.

To demonstrate that this quotation from Alexander's "Reconstruction" article is rather more typical of his naive historicist claims, let's review similar claims he makes elsewhere.

Apparently he [Midgley] takes the quite unacceptable position that he understands my thought better than I understand it myself. He said that my representation of my views was like saying that 2 plus 2 equals 3. I explained to him that the matter was more complex than that, and I told him that I believe it essential that any interpretation of the views of another person must interpret the person's thought as he himself would interpret it. It was clear from our conversation that he does not accept this view. ("Notes" 2)

That one can, let alone must, "interpret the person's thought as he himself would interpret it" is exactly the assumption brought into question by hermeneutics. Ultimately, the historicist must claim to understand the thought of the historical actor as he himself understood it: even better, for the historian adds other concepts that the actor never uttered (evolution, for example). If Joseph Smith never claimed that later pronouncements provided theological notions that repudiated the earlier ones in the Book of Mormon, then how can the historicist claim that such ideas are as the actor would have understood them? The hermeneut sees little difference between this claim and the positivist's claim to objectivity:

At one time it was thought that the concept of horizon could be accounted for by assimilating it to the methodological rule of placing oneself in the other's point of view: the horizon is the horizon of the other. It was thus thought that history had been aligned with the objectivity of the
sciences: to adopt the other's point of view while forgetting one's own, is that not objectivity? Yet nothing is more disastrous than this fallacious assimilation. For the text, thus treated as an absolute object, is divested of its claim to tell us something about something. This claim can be sustained only by the idea of a prior understanding concerning the thing itself. Nothing destroys more the very sense of the historical enterprise than this objective distancing, which suspends both the tension of points of view and the claim of tradition to transmit a true speech about what is. (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics* 74-75)

Alexander cannot understand events as the actor did because Alexander lives in a different time and place, and it is only by first admitting the ways in which his interpretation is informed by his temporal position (and in the process denying that this is how the actor saw things) that the historian can deal with the otherness of the historical record. "What naive, objectivist historicism has never understood is that the process of interpretation is itself inherently a finite process that in itself is as historical as the historical phenomena it tries to explain" (Kockelmans 248). The historian continually avoids responsibility for the conclusions he or she comes to by claiming that the account is only telling "how certain doctrines have in fact developed," or how he or she thinks a person in the nineteenth century most likely viewed things.

Thomas Alexander cannot understand anything the way Joseph Smith, Wilford Woodruff, or anyone else did, and I worry less about early Mormons imposing "later developments" on events that I do about Alexander's doing so. Alexander speaks of his attempt to apply his new-found historicist approach while doing research on Wilford Woodruff: "After conducting the research, I began to search for a way to interpret those experiences. Concluding, with Berkhofer, that I must try to understand them as Woodruff did, I believed also that I needed to interpret them for a late twentieth-century audience." ("Faith." 63). Alexander apparently sees no contradiction in claiming both to see things the way the actor did and at
the same time interpreting them. To claim otherwise is to ignore or play down the prejudices that require the historian to fill in the many gaps in the historical record. The historian doesn't just take up the objective record and present it to the audience; he or she adds to the record concepts (such as evolution and theological notions) that the actors would never have considered; he or she makes connections the actors never made; in Marty's terms, he or she "invents." The historian invents, tells a story, invents a story based on the historical record. The positions positivism and this type of historicism share are more important to the hermeneut than are their differences:

This understanding that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust. By the light of this insight it appears that historicism, despite its critique of rationalism and of natural law philosophy, is based on the modern enlightenment and unknowingly shares its prejudices. And there is one prejudice of the enlightenment that is essential to it: the fundamental prejudice of the enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which deprives tradition of its power. (Gadamer, *Truth* 239-40)

The hermeneutical approach merely requires the historian to inform the reader what assumptions inform his or her doing of history—not deny them and claim that everything is coming straight from the historical actors. We may not even understand all our assumptions at work when we do history; so we ought to be tentative about our conclusions. We have to understand that a historical explanation is a thing independent of what "actually happened" in the past, that the historian's role is productive and informed by his or her temporal location.

The naïveté of so-called historicism consists in the fact that it does not undertake this reflection, and in trusting to its own methodological approach forgets its own historicality. We must here appeal from a badly understood historical thinking to one that can better perform the task of understanding. True historical thinking must take account of its own historicality. Only then will it not chase the phantom of an historical object which is the object of progressive research, but
learn to see in the object the counterpart of itself and hence understand both. The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship in which exist both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding. (Gadamer, Truth 266-67)

I defer for the moment the complete discussion of historicism except to reiterate that the hermeneut doesn't see the radical disjunction between positivism and historicism that the historicist does. Igers's comment about the close historical relationship between historicism and positivism is a point of view shared by the hermeneut: "The historicist stress on the neutrality of values has, however, survived relatively intact, and has been shared by many scholars close to the classical positivist tradition as well" (Igers). A historicist position can avoid the close connection to positivism but it must surrender claims to penetrated the worldview of the historical subject. D'Amico's historicism does this by historicizing itself as an interpretation. Without such a careful argumentation, historicism appears to be little different from positivism: "We argue that positivism and historicism are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive alternatives—that both stem from the same metaphysical assumptions, assumptions that are themselves questionable" (Faulconer and Williams 1179). When the positivist claims objectivity, to tell us how things really are or actually happened (to "let history speak for itself"), and when the historicist claims to have penetrated the "worldview" (to use Quinn's language) of the historical actors or tell us that they have thought the evidence through as the historical actor would have, the hermeneut sees this as essentially the same claim because it doesn't account for the productive influence of the historian; it moves responsibility from the historian who is making certain assumptions that are privileging some explanations and excluding others.
Alexander has recently attempted to insulate his position from criticism by claiming that only insiders deserve the right to discuss the issue:

In order to enter into a discussion of historical methodology, a participant needs to show that he or she understands the literature of the historiography that underpins a particular point of view.

Bradford’s essay makes it abundantly clear that he has little understanding of modern historiography. ("No Way" 5)

As Bradford points out, Alexander clearly makes mistakes when he goes outside his field and into philosophy. Alexander claims the right to go outside his field

2Although Alexander’s denial of positivism in the human studies is the most apparent and misleading philosophical position, Bradford also points to Alexander’s misunderstanding about what a genetic fallacy is (144) and what a category mistake is. Alexander, in his response to Bradford insists that he has Ryle’s category mistake correct when he says: "A discussant needs to show an understanding of the clear use of terms. Contrary to Bradford’s assertions, Gilbert Ryle gives four examples of category mistakes that all result from an unfamiliarity with the subject matter. In each example, Ryle shows how the uninitiated observer is unable to relate the concrete constituent part to the abstract concept that characterizes the whole: for example, colleges libraries, museums, etc. to a university; battalions, batteries, squadrons to a division; bowlers, batsmen, and fielders to team-spirit; and ‘the connections between the Church of England, the Home Office and the [abstract concept of the] British Constitution.’" (Alexander, "No Way" 5). The difficulty with this response is that we already have a category into which we dump claims that are made (such as the definition of a genetic fallacy) without knowing enough about the subject. We call it "not knowing the subject matter." The category mistake is useful because it makes another distinction for us. Alexander’s position is similar to my claiming that the distinguishing characteristic of a car is that it is painted. A car is painted, indeed, but so are houses, bikes, fence posts, and many other items. To make the distinction useful, we shouldn’t collapse it into other distinctions. The category mistake is a mistake in classification: not knowing enough about the subject matter is not knowing enough about the subject matter. Ryle’s point is exactly that people who are competent to make distinctions between categories, people who know the subject matter, are likely to make category mistakes: "The theoretically interesting category-mistakes are those made by people who are perfectly competent to apply concepts, at least in the situations with which they are familiar, but are still liable in their abstract thinking to allocate those concepts to logical types to which they do not belong" (17). Those category mistakes Ryle is interested in are precisely those made by philosophers who know the subject, specifically philosophers since Descartes who should know better than to revert to talk about the ghost in the machine as though the ghostly substance is material but in a different way than physical material. A category mistake is a logical problem, not an evidential one; it is an illustration of what can
but insists that only historians or philosophers of history can criticize him. This would be similar to my claiming that I can't be criticized by any except those who have read the combination of philosophy, literary theory, political theory, and biblical criticism that have gone into the readings preparatory to my writing this thesis. I could accept Alexander's attempt to inoculate himself from criticism if the issues of positivism and historicism were exclusive to the discipline of history. But these problems are general in all disciplines in the social studies.

In his own book about historicism that doesn't make the claim to see the world as people in another age did, D'Amico begins his study with a discussion of a recent debate in a music journal. The simple question about whether or not Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" is tonal or nontonal prompted a debate among musicologists: "The two scholars clashed over whether a musical composition should be studied as a part of some historical and cultural context, in which that piece would be 'reconstructed' as the expression of those conditions, or as a specifically musical object, and as such subject only to specifically musical laws and conventions" (D'Amico ix). The charge emerging from the discussion was the charge of historicism and relativism against the musicologist who wanted to study the piece as a part of a historical context. D'Amico cites Henehan citing these musicologists, and I now cite D'Amico as saying that the issues extend well beyond the study of music, or history:

In fact the debate suggests directly a central issue of philosophy that has haunted modernism since Hegel and is conveyed by the term "historicism." A feature of a good philosophical

happen when language goes on holiday. Uninitiated observers may make category mistakes, but the mistake is in the logical application of categories, not in being uninitiated. Whether or not Alexander is initiated in the philosophy of mind, he has made a category mistake by assigning a logical and linguistic distinction to the category of evidential and educational concerns.
problem—which of course does not mean a solvable problem—is that it can be generated from the serious intellectual disputes of any discipline. The difficulties Forte and Taruskin have stated so sharply, the nature of objectivity, the distinctiveness of science, and the assumptions needed for inquiry, recall many recent clashes in philosophy and theory of knowledge. Recent trends in literary criticism, historiography, and the continuing debates about the role of classic texts in the educational curriculum may be more familiar examples to the reader than the above dispute about between music theory and musicology. (x. Italics added)

We have a good philosophical problem here in the debate about positivism and historicism in Mormon historiography because it can be generated from a number of disciplines and we can all benefit from a discussion by participants in a number of fields. These same problems and the same historicist and positivist claims Alexander makes are made in all the social scientific fields. For example, could not the anthropologist take up Alexander's historicist position and claim the he or she has succeeded in "seeing" the world as an Australian aborigine would? From the "native's point of view?" (See Clifford Geertz's article by that name in Local Knowledge. Geertz refers such understanding to the hermeneutical circle.) Or as Geertz argues further, the genre lines Alexander wants to draw so firmly are being broken down and scholars need to accept criticism and ideas from the disparate areas from which they come: "It is not interdisciplinary brotherhood that is needed, nor even less highbrow eclecticism. It is recognition on all sides that the lines grouping scholars together into intellectual communities ... are these days running at some highly eccentric angles" (Geertz 23-24).

If I as a literary critic were to write a biography of Oscar Wilde, could I not claim to understand his literature "as he most likely understood it"? Isn't the political debate in America over strict construction of the Constitution a parcel of this same issue? The intent of the founding fathers about the right to bear arms is merely a discussion of what they thought of constitutional issues from their
own point of view. Biblical critics sometimes attempt to understand the book of Isaiah as he himself would have understood it. The issues are widespread in all disciplines.

Some cogent criticisms have been leveled against Alexander, and rather than falling back on a position that claims his invulnerability to criticism from outside his discipline, a defense of that position would benefit all involved in the discussion: not referring generally to Collingwood or others, but defending specifically his claim to tell what happened "from the native's point of view." For example, what does Alexander mean when he claims to understand things "as Woodruff did"? Does that mean that only one possible interpretation exists of what Woodruff thought? If someone else comes up with another reading and claims that this second reading is actually what Woodruff thought, who is right? How do we resolve the differences? Is resolving the differences a value worth promoting? Does the historical data have a univocal meaning? Is what Alexander claims that Joseph Smith thought what Joseph thought or what Alexander thought? When we claim to have discovered what a person in the nineteenth century would have thought, how strong is the abstraction? In Alexander's "Reconstruction" article, which contemporaries do we select to represent all the people of the time, how "contemporaries most likely understood it"? Do we conflate Mormon texts and anti-Mormon texts from the time under the one term understanding? Are the understandings of the age so monolithic? Aren't some positions from the age radically different and even contradictory? How can they both be subsumed under the rubric how "contemporaries most likely understood it"? Is not the very notion of how "contemporaries most likely understood it" itself an interpretation, and not how they understood it? If the historian is first interpreting the understanding and using that interpretation to interpret the data, in what way can this be said to be how "contemporaries most likely
understood it”? If we are claiming to describe how the historical actor "thought," what do we do when we must go beyond the evidence and apply economic or evolutionary theses to the data; the characters themselves didn’t describe their religious experiences in these terms, so in what way can we really ascribe this kind of thought to them as their own thoughts?

What we would likely find is that historicism, just like positivism, is a disputed concept. We probably wouldn’t even be surprised if some versions of historicism are contradictory. Some historicists (the ones Popper criticized) would define historicism as a teleological movement: an attempt to describe the future toward which the present is moving; others as an attempt to explain how a person in a particular time and place would have understood a particular phenomena. Another type of historicism considers all events to be a part of a historical context, all events are historically conditioned (Faulconer and Williams 1179-80). A researcher might, of course, hold more than one of these theses at the same time. And in Alexander’s case, the claims to interpret the data (to use biases and prejudices) and to understand as a contemporary would have are even contradictory, and the contradiction might not even be overcome with careful argumentation.

The real question about Alexander’s historicism is to what point will it acknowledge interpretation. To give itself any power, Alexander’s historicism must accept a fairly strong objectivism. Scruton points to the "paradoxical consequences" of a historicism that insists that ideas from the past must be understood only within the ideas current at the time: "for how can I understand conceptions of a former time except by translating them into conceptions of my own?" (203). Before Alexander can interpret any evidence from the past, he must interpret the way a person in that epoch would have understood it. If the first interpretation is Alexander’s, then how can it be said to be the way a person in
that epoch would have understood it? If the first interpretation is Alexander's, how can the second which is based on the first be the historical actor's? Alexander must first exempt his own position from historicist rules; if Alexander's reading is bounded by particular historical circumstances, then how can it be a nineteenth century condition? One way to escape this historicist dilemma is for Alexander to claim that his reading is not an interpretation—it is the truth. But an escape to positivism would only entangle the historian in indefensible assumptions of positivism. Gadamer speaks of the "naive assumption of historicism, namely that we must set ourselves within the spirit of the age, and think with its ideas and its thoughts, not our own, and thus advance towards historical objectivity" (Gadamer, Truth 264). The rule historicism must exempt itself from is the insistence that all understandings are part of a historical context and can't be wrenched out of that context. To claim that he understands the past as Woodruff would have, Alexander must claim that his own understanding is not part of his own twentieth century context, but an earlier one. D'Amico's historicism doesn't make such expansive claims:

Consider, for example, the quote in which Popper says: "The historian's task is, therefore, so to reconstruct the problem situation as it appeared to the agent, that the actions of the agent become adequate to the situation." The reconstruction does not simply describe actions, but aims to make the actions understandable. Understanding means an account "adequate to us." What the historical participant who is being studied once found adequate is dismissed as psychological or cultural. But the historical participant's standards are not given a fair hearing since they are dismissed for not having survived, by the natural selection of conjectures and refutations, into the present. As can now be seen, the reconstruction assumes that the distinction between psychological and rational in the third-world sense is fixed simply by adopting the present as the unchanging reference point. I am not suggesting that Popper could fix such a distinction by some
other argument. The point is that the best that rational reconstruction can provide is a provisional and perspectival understanding. (D'Amico 117)

The historian must tell us more than the historical actor did; the historian must tell us what the evidence means. Such meaning comes as much from the historian's understandings and prejudices as it does from the historical evidence; it is perspectival—it takes up the evidence and explains it according to modern needs and ideologies, not the earlier period's.

A historicist position that doesn't make the strong privileging claim to understand as a contemporary would have would recognize its own character as an interpretation and not as a contemporary would have understood it. D'Amico speaks of the sceptical strategy of historicism that subjects its own reflections to the same scepticism it subjects others to. Such a more plausible historicism would recognize that it is itself a reconstruction of the evidence and ideas of another age: "And philosophical reflection, for the historicists, is no exception to these historical limitations. Consistently, historicism treats its own reflections as bounded by interests, assumptions, and context. Even its own patient reconstructions are provisional claims to be reworked from new perspectives and interests" (xi-xii). Early Mormons may well have reconstructed Mormon doctrine, but Alexander will have to admit that the essay that attempts to demonstrate that reconstruction is his own, not theirs. Someone with a different perspective would reconstruct the evidence in a different way; the "historian invents." If historicism is, as D'Amico insists, "a position about the limits of knowledge, how human understanding is always a 'captive' of its historical situation" (x), then Alexander must yet explain how he is able to get inside another historical situation.

An ancillary question remains about the extent to which Alexander's reading is the correct one. If his is one among a number of rational readings of the
evidence, how can it claim to be the way a contemporary would have understood such-and-such an event? "Historicism provides no answer for what are the correct readings of document and texts, it assumes that there will be and must be indeterminacy. No understanding is a direct and unmediated contact with reality" (D'Amico xiii).

Ultimately, Alexander's acknowledgment that his readings are interpretations is contradictory to his claim to understand as a contemporary would. A more tenable position would be to admit that the historian is the one providing the meaning of a particular event or series of events from the past. Rather than presenting the evidence as a contemporary would have, Alexander is imposing his own understanding on the text: "it isn't only the Mormons who can posthumously baptize their ancestors" (Hatlen 791), all of us baptize the dead when we attempt to understand the past. All of us interpret.
Chapter 2—A Text of Texts

The Bible has recently returned to the forefront of literary criticism. With the help of literary scholars, a new dimension has also been added to traditional historical biblical analysis. Scholars such as Robert Alter, Northrop Frye, and Frank Kermode (whose primary training is not in biblical criticism but other bodies of literature) have focused our attention back on the Bible as the primary literary accomplishment in history, in addition to being the primary tradition from which Western literature continues to draw.

With the recent recognition (which actually isn't very recent) that the Bible contains the finest of literature, we Latter-day Saints have an opportunity to apply those insights not only to the Bible but also to the Book of Mormon. My opinion is that we will find in the Book of Mormon a similarly profound and complicated text. We Latter-day Saints are in a position to accept the Bible and the Book of Mormon not only as literature but also as scripture and history. To insist that the text is only one or the other of the alternatives is to diminish it; to insist that the book has no power to transcend our own understanding or expectations about the book constrains us to what we think at the moment, without recognizing possibilities for growth. An openness to the book may also require that we leave open the possibility that the we also should be open to further ways the text may reveal itself to us.

Revisionism, the Bible, and the Book of Mormon

To dismiss all of biblical criticism also tends to surrender ground that I think is well worth defending. Certain recent developments in Mormon historiography attempt to revise traditional understandings of the Book of Mormon. Such approaches explain the book as a work of fiction written by Joseph Smith, who
attempted to resolve his own theological quandaries by writing a novel. Some of these revisionary endeavors look to Joseph Smith's environment for parallels to confirm their theory that a text such as the one produced by Joseph Smith cannot be an ancient text. Other approaches look to biblical criticism to demonstrate that conditions that gave rise to the biblical text could not be the same conditions out of which the Book of Mormon emerged. I firmly believe that given

\[3\] I will list only a few of the references: Hullinger, Robert N. *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon.* (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1980).
Quinn, Michael D. *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View.* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987).

sufficient determination and research, environmental parallels could be found to claim that the Book of Mormon would fit into any epoch and location. So it is the latter of the two main approaches that I take up here, reserving the right to address other questions at some other time.

(1)

A popularized and simplified version of biblical criticism sometimes filters into revisionist explanations of the Book of Mormon. For example, Mark Thomas points to Lehi's dream as an apocalypse (Thomas, "Lehi's"). Thomas's purpose in doing so is an ideological one—to persuade people to believe that the book is a modern one. Let me quote the passage that makes his point:

Now we must clearly face the consequences of recognizing 1 Nephi 8:16:6 as a Judeo-Christian apocalypse. Jewish oracles were added to the prophetic writings down to about 200 B.C. After that, prophesy was believed to have ceased. Apocalyptic began in this intertestamental period and lasted for several hundred years. But in order to get a hearing they had to use the pseudonyms of former prophets and wise men. They claimed to be ancient texts that were sealed up to come forth in the last days when the real author lived. Since Lehi lived 400 years before the first apocalypse was believed written, it is the task of Mormons to demonstrate the authentic antiquity of this tradition, as Nibley has recently attempted with the books of Enoch. The non-Mormon must explain the incredible ability of Joseph Smith to place ancient forms in a modern context and to explain his affinity to apocalyptic. (94)

This is the type of prooftexting and simplistic thinking that does more to confuse the issue of explaining the Book of Mormon text than it does to clarify it. Thomas has taken an extremely complex relationship (that between Hebrew prophecy and apocalyptic) and condensed it to this morsel of misrepresentation. Part of Thomas's problem is that he goes to the most simplistic texts to find the evidence he requires for his ideological purpose. Thomas cites as the source for this passage D. S. Russell's The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic.
Apocalyptic arises first in the intertestamental period? Even Deutero-Isaiah, Trito-Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah and other documents scholars assign to the exilic and post-exilic periods contain apocalyptic sections. Exiling apocalyptic to the intertestamental period puts Thomas about 400 years off schedule. Merely because a second wave of apocalyptic swirled through Palestine 400 years after the Babylonian domination of Judah surely doesn't mean that apocalyptic originated during and following a period of Hellenistic control over the region.

Thomas approaches Lehi's vision by simplifying it to this proposition: apocalyptic wasn't written until after 200 B.C., so such a form would have been unavailable to Lehi; the obvious conclusion is that Joseph Smith adapted the form in his "human invention" (Thomas, "Revival" 24). The difficulty with this approach is that it sacrifices the ambiguity and layering of life for the certainty of simplification. This is Hanson's response to the reduction of the complex to the simple:

The origins of apocalyptic cannot be explained by a method which juxtaposes seventh- and second-century compositions and then proceeds to account for the features of the latter by reference to its immediate environment [which is, by the way, the same method used by Book of Mormon revisionists, using different centuries of course]. The apocalyptic literature of the second century and after is the result of a long development reaching back to pre-exilic times and beyond, and not the new baby of second-century foreign parents. Not only the sources of origin, but the intrinsic nature of late apocalyptic compositions can be understood only by tracing the centuries-long development through which the apocalyptic eschatology developed from prophetic and other even more archaic native roots.

That method we have been describing fails to understand also the intrinsic nature of apocalyptic is seen in the descriptions of apocalyptic given in the handbooks, descriptions consisting of long lists of random features gleaned from various apocalyptic works. The picture with which one is left is not only confusing, it is also misleading, for no given apocalyptic work comes close to
incorporating all of the listed features. To illustrate, we offer a list found in D. S. Russell [the same work central to Thomas's analysis] which draws heavily upon J. Lindblom ... [I have skipped over the list to save space here.]

Among the adverse results of the above-mentioned method are the following: (1) the sources of apocalyptic are misunderstood, (2) the period of origin is centuries off the mark, meaning that the resulting typology of apocalyptic literature is grossly inaccurate, (3) the historical and sociological matrix of apocalyptic is left unexplained, (4) the essential nature of apocalyptic is inadequately clarified. (6-7)

Hanson places apocalyptic as a development of pre-exilic prophecy; the main difference between the two is that prophecy is intended as an earthly message and holds hope for historical salvation. Apocalyptic is pessimistic about historical redemption and is intended as a revelation of the cosmos—not necessarily intended for man's benefit. Hanson posits events occurring just before the exile and the exile itself as crucial events in the development of apocalypse. Thomas resorts to biblical criticism but does nothing to explain the relationship between prophecy and apocalyptic. "Almost all students of the subject are agreed that prophecy contributed significantly to the emergence of apocalyptic. Some have maintained that all the essential characteristics of apocalyptic were inherited from prophecy" (Nicholson 191). If, as Nicholson tells us, scholarly opinion is divided about which biblical book to classify as the first apocalyptic (some scholars argue "that it emerged as early as the sixth century B.C." while others claim that Daniel is the first apocalypse [Nicholson 211]), then to abandon the field to the mediocre version of biblical criticism provided by this revisionist explanation of Lehi's dream is to yield on points not only worth defending, points that may increase our understanding of the Book of Mormon text, but points on which Thomas is plainly wrong and superficial. While Thomas views biblical criticism as a natural ally of his ideological position, a more nuanced view of biblical criticism would reveal a
complex situation with few determinate matters. I don't pretend to provide final answers to the question: I merely want to point to the complexity of the situation that Thomas attempts to answer superficially and to urge additional study, taking in a range of possibilities and positions from biblical criticism.

The hermeneutical point is that Thomas' approach to the Book of Mormon text begins with particular questions: the answers to those questions are predetermined before he even begins to examine the text. He has pre-judged the matter. He examines the evidence and either finds or reports only the evidence that supports his own position.

(2)

Others have noted what seem to be anachronisms in the Book of Mormon. Appealing to biblical criticism to fix the date a particular term entered the biblical text might indicate an exilic or post-exilic date for a particular term or concept, while Lehi and his group left Palestine before the exilic period. For example, Russell complains that the synagogue is an anachronism:

There is also a problem with what might be called "institutional anachronisms." Specific problems lie in the references to "church" and "synagogue." In the opinion of most Old Testament scholars, the synagogue was an institution developed after the exile to cope with the problem of separation from the temple at Jerusalem. Thus Lehi would not have known of such an institution. (Russell, "Further" 23)

Persuitte registers a similar objection to the Book of Mormon:

There are many other anachronisms and incongruities in the book. For example, its characters leave Palestine before the Babylonian Captivity and then build synagogues in the New World "after the manner of the Jews." But synagogues did not arise in the Old World until after the Babylonian Captivity had begun. (Persuitte 91)

Fraser makes a similar claim about synagogues in the Book of Mormon:
The synagogue did not become an established institution until the Jews were dispersed and the temple was not accessible to them.

Nephi and his successors in America could have known nothing of synagogues either as a gathering or a building, as they were not known until long after Nephi is supposed to have left for the New World. (Fraser 70)

While it is true that most biblical scholars believe that the synagogue was an exilic or post-exilic institution, the question is not answered by a simple resort to such a position. To give a more complete idea of the synagogue question we must ask ourselves on what basis most scholars found this hypothesis. The question isn't as simple as these three commentators suggest.

The origin of the synagogue is unknown and, unless we are graced by some new discoveries equal in magnitude to the Dead Sea Scrolls, unknowable. The widely accepted theory that the synagogue originated during the Babylonian exile as a replacement for the Jerusalem Temple which had been destroyed in 587 B.C.E. is, I admit, plausible and attractive, but it is also unsubstantiated and overly simplistic. It is unsubstantiated because it is supported by nothing whatsoever, not a bit of evidence. (Cohen 152)

The question is not as uncomplicated as any of the three tell the reader, whether they phrase it without qualification or by putting the statement in the mouth of the majority of biblical scholars. Even if a majority of experts agree on the answer to a question, the reader is still justified in asking for the grounds for such a belief. In this case, the answer is grounded on conjecture and the reader ought to be informed of that. "The origins of the Synagogue... is shrouded in mystery" (de Vaux, Religious 343). de Vaux goes on to present the alternative explanations: (1) the synagogue could be a substitute for the temple, originating during the exile, (2) the synagogue could be an institution that developed in Palestine after the return, or (3) the temple could be "an institution of Palestinian origin, and pre-exilic; they would then be a result of the reform of Josias." These
three revisionists quite naturally present only the information that is in their interest to present. But for assertions grounded in an abyss, the best approach is not to be dogmatic about the conclusions drawn. When biblical scholars hold their conclusions tentatively, the layperson ought to be even more careful in the conclusions he or she makes from those tentative answers. Otherwise, the reader risks the uncritical acceptance of a position that should be exposed to close examination.

(3)

From an institution shrouded in mystery we move to the word church. Russell comments that the word synagogue is an anachronism and "even farther [sic] removed from Lehi's conception would be the Greek term translated 'church,' which represents the association of followers of Jesus" (Russell, "Further" 23). A similar point is taken up by other revisionists: such words as Bible, Jews, Gentiles, church, synagogue, baptize, priestcraft, adieu, and names Sam and Timothy are taken as anachronisms by Ham (20). Fraser claims that "neither could these early Americans have known the Greek word 'synagogue' of [sic] the Anglo-Saxon word 'church' or, for that matter, the latin word 'sanctuary'" (70).

The problem with these claims about, for example, the word church is that the arguments are viciously circular. The argument must first assume that the text is not a translation before it can assume that the words are anachronisms. The assumption that the Book of Mormon is not a translation is a corollary of the assumption that the Book of Mormon is not an ancient book. For example, if the same word were used in the Septuagint (it is, by the way), its use would be seen as a translation difficulty at most; the translator uses a familiar word to designate a concept his or her readers would understand. But the presence of such words in the Book of Mormon is seen as a defect because the a priori position is taken that the text is not a translation, that the language of origination is English.
Such a position is only one of a number of positions a reader could take up. I have no complaint that a revisionist might take this position; I only wish the revisionist would examine the issue more closely and show the reader how complex the question of etymology and translation is.

Nibley claims that the Qumran community had a word that scholars have translated church or church of anticipation. Nibley claims that the words church and synagogue were designations of the community of believers and the Book of Mormon usage is exactly correct (Since 187-88). Turner says that the word church refers to those "called out of the world and into the kingdom of God—a 'peculiar people'" and applies the word to Dt. 14: 2 as well as to 1 Pet. 2: 9 (100). Sorenson applies a similar analysis, pointing out that the words we have in our ancient text refer to concepts, not words. A concept can be translated a number of ways, including into words that didn't exist at the time:

Several Old Testament terms signify "congregation" or "assembly" or the meeting place for such a group, the terms overlapping in translation. One of those words has come to be translated "synagogue," but anciently words like synagogue, ekklesia, kenishta, and 'eda were translated quite freely as though they were equivalent. (Ancient 236)

Robinson notes that the term church (which he equates with the Hebrew qahal and the Greek ekklesia) didn't have the narrow meaning we moderns tend to associate with the word. It refers to an assembly or congregation with particular loyalties. The term was not exclusively one referring to religious congregations, but was used in addition to refer to Athenian legislative assemblies ("Early" 178). Speaking of the word translated congregation, Vine et. al. claim that "this word may have etymologically signified a 'company assembled together' for a certain purpose, similar to the words sunagogue and ekklesia, from which our words 'synagogue' and 'church' are derived" (74). Munck says that the Greek word translated church is the same word used in the Septuagint and means "Israel as a
congregation." He speculates that the Christian church appropriated this Jewish concept for their own congregations (41). We wouldn't be surprised by such an appropriation by the Christian community because Boles refers to the first uses of the word in Christian writings (Acts 5: 11, Mt. 16: 18) as references to all believers in Christ. But the same word is used elsewhere to refer to local assemblies (Mt. 18: 17). The same word is used in Acts 7: 38 to "designate the whole congregation of Israel" (81).

A question such as the one raised by Russell/Ham/Fraser is not solvable by a simple appeal to the English word church. Such an appeal is too simplistic. Each of the critics has decided the issue without ever resorting to any of the texts involved.

(4)

I will begin to lay out my major criticism of Russell's claims about the Book of Mormon. In a section of his article titled "The Thought of Preexilic Israel" (Russell, "Further" 22-24), Russell makes a series of claims about how he thinks the Book of Mormon does not fit the pattern of ancient Israelite thought. I am criticizing some of those claims; the others require analysis also but must await other opportunities. In that section Russell makes ten numbered claims about how the Book of Mormon does not fit pre-exilic thought. Within each of the numbered claims Russell makes a number of points: for example, Russell's claims about the words church and synagogue are made in one numbered paragraph. Yet for such a long series of claims, we have great difficulty tracing Russell's grounds—he provides so few references to the biblical criticism he claims to represent. The biblical criticism Russell resorts to is a faint journalistic copy of the complex issues within biblical criticism. In all Russell's analysis of the Book of Mormon and pre-exilic Israel, he refers twice to selections from the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, once to the Interpreter's Bible, and once to a
book called *Segregation and the Bible*. Lack of grounding or resorts to popularized versions of biblical criticism are fine, in other contexts. Russell pays a price for his shallow exposure to biblical criticism: his analysis ends up being superficial:

In preexilic Israel thought there was no cosmic struggle between good and bad gods—called God and Satan or the devil or whatever. Neither is there a hell for those who back the wrong god. There is no resurrection of the body in the Old Testament. Yet all these elements of the apocalyptic Christian world view found in certain New Testament writings like the Book of Revelation are alleged to have been held by the original Nephites when they had just left an Israel which knew not such strange doctrines. (Russell, "Further" 23)

Of course, the theme of cosmic struggle was one of the most common of characteristics pre-exilic Israel held in common with other cultures in the ancient Near East. But a discussion of this theme is one I will defer in preference for this claim about death and resurrection. Russell further goes on to claim that "the Book of Revelation and the Book of Mormon believe in life after death. The Israelites before the Exile had no such concept. God rewards the righteous in this life."

Simply put, the notion that pre-exilic thought contains no notion of life after death and resurrection might require modification. Greenspoon's extensive and closely argued article has changed the view of this subject; every scholarly reference I have seen to Greenspoon's article concedes the point to him. As he traces the issue (using the Bible as his main source), Greenspoon finds that a "concept of bodily resurrection of the dead is expressed in Biblical material that ranges in date of composition from the ninth to the second centuries B.C.E. Expressions of this belief are most prominent in the ninth and eighth centuries (especially in Northern Israel) and the sixth century" (319). We should keep in mind in reading Greenspoon that Sorenson has traced a strong connection
between Northern Israelite traditions and the Book of Mormon ("Brass"). Even a
text such as Ezekiel's Vision of the Dry Bones contains a number of messages:
certainly the vision is an expression of "hope for national restoration," but
Greenspoon says that scholars are too restrictive when they don't see another
message that affirms "the 'literal' resurrection of God's righteous people" (293).
Greenspoon also maintains that Ezekiel's (whose text is exilic) reference to the
resurrection is so familiar to his audience that he can take for granted that they
understand the dual reference to national and physical resurrection(294).

I assume that addressing the question of resurrection also addresses the
question about life after death. Russell's exploration of the relevant texts is too
superficial. If a researcher is to make such definitive claims about the meanings
of texts, then he should be willing to explore the complexities of the issue. In this
case, Russell should refer to biblical passages about death and resurrection (as
Greenspoon does in his 74 page essay), the Book of Mormon, and the relevant
biblical criticism. Criticism that ignores all the relevant texts can hardly bear the
name of criticism.

(5)

Continuing the anachronism theme, Russell continues to be enraptured by his
own biases about the text. Russell assumes time and again that the book is not a
translation. By not exposing this prejudice to analysis, Russell continues to write
without ever engaging the relevant texts.

Another aspect of this problem is the references in the Book of Mormon to "the Jews." Even if it
could be established that the term "Jews" was applied to the Israelites as early as 600 B.C., why
would the Israelite Nephi, very early in the Book of Mormon, refer to his own people as "the Jews"
in a way that assumes that he is talking about another people? ("Further" 22)
Even in an inadequate library, such books as Nibley's An Approach to the Book of
Mormon should be available to anyone who comments on the Book of Mormon.
There, Nibley says that in pre-exilic times the word wasn't used to refer to all Jews, just those who were citizens "of the state of Judah, and it is in that sense that the Book of Mormon specifically uses it" (Approach 79). If Nephi and his group had separated themselves from the political entity called Judah and the word Jew refers to citizens of that entity, then perhaps a term such as the Jews is precisely the right term. The subject deserves further exploration.

In 691 B.C.E. (or 701, depending on who dates it) Sennacherib, in a letter describing his siege of Jerusalem, refers twice to "Hezekiah, the Jew" (as translated by Winton Thomas 66-68; in a footnote, Thomas provides a more literal translation as "Hezekiah the Judaean"). Pritchard translates the same letter in the same way (200). Now I am not a specialist in historical criticism of the Hebrew Bible; I don't speak the original languages of these texts. I should, therefore, hold any conclusions tentatively. But I think that these texts give us reason to believe that Russell has not engaged the texts. In an article specifically about the word, Zeitlin refers to the separation of the two kingdoms. The king in the north was called the King of Israel and in the south called the King of Judah. From this distinction the "inhabitants were designated Judaean. When the prophet Jeremiah advised the king, Zedekiah, to submit to the Babylonians, he replied, 'I am afraid of the Judaean that are fallen away to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand and they mock me.' Thus, we see that the inhabitants of Judaea were called Judaean" (366). Does Zedekiah "refer to his own people as 'the Jews' in a way that assumes that he is talking about another people?"

Russell's claims skip over any contrary evidence without providing any to support his position. It also ignores that Nephi claims to be from a tribe from the Northern Kingdom. After the destruction of Samaria, many refugees from the North settled around Jerusalem. Could the references to "the Jews" and especially "the Jews at Jerusalem" reflect the usage of an Israelite who had recently
departed the environs of Judah, referring to citizens of the Southern Kingdom? Russell doesn't address any of the issues raised by his claim.

These few examples of how biblical criticism is more complex and as yet unexamined by the revisionists could linger on for pages and chapters. Rather than focusing on a negative critique of revisionists as they clumsily take up the text, I would rather read the text as it reveals itself and as I reveal it as a sophisticated narrative, worthy of the reverential approaches we reserve for the best of the world's literature (such as the Bible and Shakespeare). I see such a venture as drawing on some excellent scholarship (largely ignored by the revisionists) about the book that has emerged in the past twenty years. I draw from such scholarship, but in many ways my reading is a departure from it.
Chapter 3—The Stealing of the Daughters of the Lamanites

The rich tapestry of Book of Mormon narrative contains a story I will take up as an example of the typological reading the book itself asks us to give it. As usual, my own reading of the narrative I compare with a foil—revisionist readings of the same narrative—to point out the hermeneutical possibilities of the text. My point in doing so is not to preclude the possibility that a revisionist reading is valid, but to reveal the inadequacy of current revisionist readings of the narrative. Someone may come along and provide us a rich revisionist reading of the story I call "The Stealing of the Daughters of the Lamanites."

I will outline the story shortly. To do so is to engage the text, something the revisionist readings fail to do; so I postpone such engagement until I provide my own reading of the text. A text requires context: my reading of the Book of Mormon indicates that a close examination of the fabric of the text reveals an intricate and complexly structured texture. The metaphor I choose to describe reading would allow a number of rational readings of the text, because the fabric and the texture of a reading is made both of thread and gaps, alterity and spacing. A reading must necessarily fill those gaps, and gaps can be filled in different ways. By day the reader (whom I name Penelope in keeping with the general feminist perspective that informs my reading) weaves together a reading, but any reader must remember that ultimately the cloth being woven is a death shroud. By night the fabric is unwoven and the reader must once again take up the task of seeing again a pattern in the text.

My point in comparing revisionist readings to my reading is not to say that revisionist readings are a priori inadequate; my point is that the revisionists readings we have are inadequate because they never engage the text. I think that one thing all of us who read the Book of Mormon can agree upon is that an
interpretation that doesn't explain the text is inadequate. With this introduction, let me now turn to the three neophytes who would be our guides through the labyrinth of interpretation that is the narrative of the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites.

**Revisionism Revisited**

The standard feature of revisionist readings is an attempt to reduce the Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith's environment. The problems of this type of reductionism are, I think, rather obvious: but I will point a difficulty out nevertheless. When a text can never mean what it says because the interpretive theory will never allow such a circumstance, then the reader ought rather to explore alternative theories. When the book claims that Nephi's brothers were constantly at odds with him over leadership rights and we insist on categorizing all these stories under the general classification which says that "The struggles between brothers and races in the Book of Mormon become much more clear when set against the antebellum American origins of the Book of Mormon and the internal family struggles between the Smith family brothers themselves" (Hutchinson, Word), then Penelope ought to pause to consider the violence this does to the text. The text that never means what it says is open to a vast range of interpretations, a free-play of signifiers and signified. A text that never means what it says is never grounded in a literal reading that would then allow allegorical or figurative readings.

I choose Hutchinson's reduction of the stories of Nephi's conflict with his brothers because I will later in this project return to those same stories. Note the harmonizing tendency accompanying this reduction. The stories of conflict mean nothing more than Joseph Smith didn't get along with his brothers. Naturally the reader asks, if this is the meaning of the stories, for evidence of the
adequacy of such a reading. Show me some evidence of conflict between Joseph and his brothers. Now, I am not a specialist in early Mormon history, but for a layman I have done a fair amount of reading in the area. I do know that Joseph Smith had conflicts with his brother William, but I fail to see how such parallels can illuminate the Book of Mormon since such conflicts came long after the book was published. I think the reader is justified in asking Hutchinson to produce evidence of the adequacy of his reading. Otherwise, I feel that Hutchinson falls into the same harmonizing he abhors in others.

Allow me to present some other objections to this kind of interpretation. A revisionist could say that we know that all brothers have conflicts; therefore, we know that Joseph and his brothers must surely have had arguments. The stories in the Book of Mormon then, belong to the same category of stories as would necessarily have happened in the Smith family. The difficulty with such a position is that it would shift the parallel from a direct one between Nephi and his brothers and Joseph and his brothers to an archetype. The reading that says that these stories fall in the same archetypal pattern removes the privileged direct parallel between Joseph and Nephi. As particular instances the two stories (one a hypothetical text and the other from the Book of Mormon) have no close connection.

In another sense, Hutchinson's interpretive leap of faith explains the series of Book of Mormon stories only in the most general of terms. The stories of conflict almost always emerge around the theme of the younger brother surpassing the elder. As I analyze the stories later, we will see that the most common thread through the patriarchal narratives is the theme of conflict between brothers as the younger acquires leadership, the birthright, or ascendency in the family. If we ask Hutchinson's theory to explain this theme in terms of conflict between Joseph and his brothers, and the only attested conflict is between Joseph and
William, then we have difficulty because Joseph is the elder brother and William the younger. The Book of Mormon stories are clearly more sympathetic to the younger brother. Hutchinson's reading breaks down when applied at any level other than the most general.

Notice also the pattern of conflict within the story of Nephi and his brothers. The movement is toward greater violence and harm. The first story of conflict has Laman and Lemuel growing angry with both Nephi and Sam, speaking harshly to them and hitting them with a rod (2 Ne. 3:28-29). The next story has Laman and Lemuel tying Nephi up and intending to leave him in the wilderness "to be devoured by wild beasts" (1 Ne. 7:16) after the brothers retrieve Ishmael and his family; the format of this story is similar to the story of that other Joseph whose brothers intend to put him into a pit and leave him there to die, rather than killing him outright and have his blood on their hands. The next story shows the brothers to be angry with Nephi because he broke his bow (1 Ne. 16:18); although no threats of violence are mentioned, the text shows the brothers and even Lehi "murmuring" against God. After Ishmael dies, Laman and Lemuel explicitly propose to kill Nephi (and Lehi) so that he cannot become their "ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren" (1 Ne. 16:37). When Nephi proposes the building of the ship, Laman and Lemuel propose to rid themselves of their troublesome brother by throwing him into the sea (1 Ne. 17:48). During the sea voyage the elder brothers tie Nephi up and refuse to release him until they fear that the ship will sink (1 Ne. 18:20). After Lehi dies, Nephi separates himself and his people from his elder brothers because "their anger did increase against me, insomuch that they did seek to take away my life" (2 Ne. 5:2). As far as I know Joseph Smith's brothers never attempted to kill him. At this general, amorphous level Hutchinson's parallel works, but as an explanation of specific stories the theory fragments. I think the discourse community that reads the book would
agree that that theory is best which can explain at both a broad and a specific level. Hutchinson’s explanation takes up the story as generality.

The three revisionists who take up the story in Mosiah 20 do so only as a generality. Fawn Brodie gives us an example of this type of acontextual textual analysis:

Many stories he borrowed from the Bible. The daughter of Jared, like Salome, danced before a king and a decapitation followed. Aminadi, like Daniel, deciphered handwriting on a wall, and Alma was converted after the exact fashion of St. Paul. The daughters of the Lamanites were abducted like the dancing daughters of Shiloh; and Ammon, the American counterpart of David, for want of a Goliath slew six sheep-rustlers with his sling. (62-63)

Notice the unstated assumption that if any similarity exists between the Book of Mormon and the Bible, the meaning of the similarity is that Joseph Smith plagiarized from the Bible. This assumption needs to be defended because it is the very assumption I will bring into question. I would gladly take up all of these examples; but that project will have to await another opportunity. Now I am concerned with what Brodie calls the "abduction of the Lamanite daughters" and I call the "stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites." I think my preference of titles will be evident when I read the story in its context. Notice that Brodie gives us neither the context of the Book of Mormon story nor the biblical narrative from Judges. This high level of generality about both texts makes possible the claim that the meaning of the repetition in the Book of Mormon is that Joseph Smith copied the story.

Similarly, Wayne Ham in a section of his article labeled "The use of biblical scripture and ideas as sources" for the Book of Mormon makes the same claim in a footnote to the section:

Other apparent biblical allusions in the Book of Mormon include Alma’s conversion in a similar fashion to Paul’s; Ammon, like David, slaying six sheep rustlers with a sling; the daughter of Jared,
like Salome, dancing for the king in return for a decapitation; Jesus' blessing of the children; and
an abduction scene similar to that involving the daughters of Shiloh. (22 fn. 8)\(^5\)

Once again, no argument is presented for the claim that a repetition = plagiarism. Ham
takes an explicitly positivist position in this article when he claims that "As the Book of Mormon is examined
without any intention solely to amass data to support preconceived notions about it, certain problems concerning traditional
understandings of the book stand out" (16). The problem with this claim that Ham
doesn't approach the text with preconceived notions, is that he never analyzes the
story in its context, so he could do nothing but allow preconceived notions about
the text full rein.

The hermeneutical criticism I propose claims that all of us always approach a
text with preconceived notions; the question is whether or not after we have
entered the hermeneutical circle already knowing the meaning of the text
beforehand, will we allow the text to change our preconceptions if required by
the evidence? If Ham doesn't examine the story of the stealing of the Lamanite

\(^5\)Curiosity causes me to wonder that if we were to apply the principle that
similarity in passages indicates only one thing—plagiarism—then what would we
say about Brodie's and Ham's passages since no attribution is given? Especially
when Ham explicitly states the interpretive principle: "All of this may raise the
same kind of question as might appear in a teacher's mind when one student's
project shows a marked resemblance to a project submitted previously by another
student. To what extent was the author (or editor, or compiler) of the Book of Mormon
dependent upon the King James Version, and why?" (19). I probably
don't need to point out that not only is Ham holding the Book of Mormon up to a
standard higher than he is willing to submit his own writing to, but he also is
measuring the book against an explicitly modern standard. Quite naturally
ancient books wouldn't measure up well against a modern bias such as this, as we
shall see that the Bible itself wouldn't. A point Ham never considers is this: if the
book were an ancient book would the author be fastidious about the modern
concerns Ham expresses? If the author were fastidious, then this very
fastidiousness would be evidence of its modern origin. If the author were not
fastidious, then the book is also condemned for not being modern. In either case
the interpretive rule puts the book in a situation in which it cannot win.
women in context, how could he do anything but force his preconceived notions on the text without any possibility that the prejudices might be modified?

Book of Mormon interpretation provides a classic example of the hermeneutical circle. Everyone always has preconceptions, prejudices with which we always approach the object of study. Those prejudices are productive; they allow us a familiar context with which we can start analysis of something alien, other. In our example of this story from the Book of Mormon, Ham must assume a source for the book before he can attribute a meaning to it. He assumes the source is a modern one. Let me give an example before I return to Ham's analysis.

If I were studying the text of Isaiah I would have to assume a source before I could determine any meaning. If I assumed that because Isaiah 48 mentions a return to Israel from Babylon, the text was written during the exile, then the assumption of a source would then allow me to come to a determination of what the chapter means. If, on the other hand, I assumed the source to be pre-exilic, then the text would mean something very different to me. The source must be determined before the meaning is.

Likewise with the Book of Mormon, Ham cannot determine that the text means that Joseph Smith copied stories from the Bible until after he holds the preconceived notion that the book is a modern text. If Ham held different preconceptions, such as I do, the meaning of the stories would be something other. Everyone amasses data to support preconceived notions, and Ham provides a particularly poignant illustration of the principle in spite of his claims to the contrary. The question is whether or not we are open enough to allow our preconceived notions to be modified when the evidence demands. Ham's failure to analyze the story of the stealing of the Lamanite daughters in its context either in the Book of Mormon or the Bible means that his preconceived notions cannot be
modified by evidence and, therefore, he cannot do anything with regard to the story but indulge his preconceived notions.

A third revisionist reading of the same text gives a different source for the Book of Mormon story. Vernal Holley doesn’t suggest that the story of the stealing of the maidens came from the Bible; instead he suggests that Solomon Spaulding’s novel also contains a story about daughters being stolen and marrying their companions (19). When given the determination to find a source, one will always find the data to support a theory. I bring this other explanation to point to the multitude of sources claimed for the Book of Mormon. The candidates include: a magic worldview, Solomon Spaulding’s novel, the Bible, an amorphous entity called the American frontier, Joseph Smith’s own reaction to the skepticism of the times, liberal democratic theory, Ethan Smith’s writings, Joseph Smith’s visions, the religious revivalism of the times, Fox’s *Book of Martyrs*, and others. Allow me to add one other candidate to the field. Robert Smith suggests that the story of the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites is actually much closer to a story from *Plutarch’s Lives* than to the story in Judges ("Patterns" 153). Smith does this not to fashion a claim that the book is a modern one, but to show that it fits neatly as an "example of a pattern common to Romans, Greeks, and Canaanites—the latter as prototype for what is in Judges just possibly an etiological account of a mass-mating festival" ("Patterns" 150-51).

Plutarch tells us the story of Romulus. Lacking the women to make his settlement successful, Romulus invites some locals to a feast. When the Sabine people came to the festival, Romulus and his people, at the sign given by the founder of Rome, "ravished away the daughters of the Sabines," thirty to be exact. Significantly (as I will point out when I turn to the Book of Mormon narrative), Romulus was quick to point out that only one married woman was taken, and she by accident, "Which showed that they did not commit this rape wantonly, but with
a design purely of forming alliance with their neighbors by the greatest and surest of bonds" (33). The nobility of the cause of Rome somehow makes up for this rape.

Plutarch points out that the "Rape of the Sabine Women," as the incident became known (especially in the history of art), happened at the time of a regular festival, "on which the solemnities of the Consualia are kept" (34). Once again the intention was for no other purpose than to effect a marriage and the possibility of an alliance. The rape wasn’t a crime of overwhelming passion or violence as we moderns tend to view rape. The rape was a political tool, a forced marriage to provide safe haven in a hostile location. The fathers and brothers of the kidnapped women determine to avenge themselves and come to battle against the Romans (note that the babies in the arms of the raped women do not permit the revenge to be an expeditious one). After the combatants had battled for a time,

The daughters of the Sabines, who had been carried off, came running, in great confusion, some on this side, some on that, with miserable cries and lamentations, like creatures possessed, in the midst of the army and among the dead bodies, to come at their husbands and their fathers, some with their young babes in their arms, others their hair loose about their ears, but all calling, now upon the Sabines, now upon the Romans, in the most tender and endearing words. Hereupon both melted into compassion, and fell back, to make room for them betwixt the armies. (37)

Needless to say, the women complain of their abduction and their fathers' delay: "You did not come to vindicate our honour, while we were virgins, against our assailants; but do come now to force away wives from their husbands and mothers from their children" (38). The intervention of the women effects the alliance the Romans hoped for.

Here we have a story that not only has an abduction scene (as the Judges story does) but also a scene in which the women reconcile their husbands and fathers
and the groups merge. The second part of the story has no parallel in the Bible. If this story from Plutarch belongs, as Smith claims, to a widespread pattern of such stories in the Levant, what are we to do with Brodie's and Ham's claim that the meaning of such a repetition is plagiarism? Do we apply the same analysis to Plutarch and Judges as these two do to the Book of Mormon? Did Plutarch copy from the Deuteronomist or was the dependence the opposite way?

Both Brodie and Ham have oversimplified the argument and the text. In opposition to the revisionist analysis I offer my own. I consider mine to be contextual rather than acontextual, based on the text.

The Benjamin Trilogy

The story of the abduction of the daughters of Shiloh is the final story in Judges; it is part of a larger context. Even within the book of Judges it is one of three stories about the tribe of Benjamin. Just as the story of the priests of Noah belongs in a context, I will establish the context of the story to which Brodie and Ham refer.

(1)

I will give the standard reading of the story of the Levite and his concubine; Bal's reading is radically different and explains aspects of the story better, but I refer now only to the standard interpretation. The standard reading begins in Judges 19. Significantly the story begins with a the pro-monarchial statement (I will explain the significance when I put the Book of Mormon story in context). "And it came to pass in those days when there was no king in Israel..." (Judg. 19:1). The third story ends not only the three stories about the tribe of Benjamin, but the book of Judges with a similar statement: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21:25). These three stories are framed with these statements about social disintegration and
wickedness. With this framing we would expect to see the three stories illustrate the principle that the Israelites were doing what was right in their own eyes but wrong in the Lord's.

A Levite's concubine "played" the harlot and returned to her father's house in Bethlehem. As with many of the women who are objects of violence and rape in Judges, this woman is given no name; she is known only by her relationship to the men in her life. Following Mieke Bal's lead I will call her Beth, after her home in Bethlehem. Beth returns to her father's house and four months later the Levite goes to Bethlehem to try to retrieve her (he sweet talks her, or speaks "friendly" with her). The father-in-law rejoices to see his son-in-law and entertains him for three days, during which time the Levite convinces his concubine to return with him. On the fourth day the Levite arises, intending to leave. The father-in-law detains the group long enough that the Levite decides to stay another night. The father-in-law detains the Levite, Beth, and the servant long enough on the fifth day that the day is spent, but the Levite leaves in spite of the lateness of the hour.

As the hour is late the group approaches Jebus (Jerusalem) and the servant proposes that they find lodging there. The Levite rejects the suggestion because Jebus is not an Israelite city; they travel on to Gibeah, a city of the tribe of Benjamin. Finally, only one old man (an Ephraimite, therefore away from home also) will take the travelers in. As the travelers and the host make "their hearts merry," the men of the city gather outside and demand that the host bring the Levite outside so they can rape him. The host protests this violation of the law of hospitality and offers his own virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine as a substitute. Apparently it is a "vile thing" (24) in the host's eyes to rape the Levite but not so bad to rape the women. The Levite instead grabs Beth and offers her to
the mob (pushes her out actually), who "abused her all night until the morning" (25).

At dawn Beth lay on the doorstep. The Levite, after a good night's sleep, arises and blithely prepares to finish his journey. As he steps outside he sees Beth fallen on the doorstep with her hands in a supplianting position at the threshold. He commands her to get up and go with him. The Masoretic text leaves ambiguous whether or not Beth is dead. The translators of the Septuagint apparently couldn't take the ambiguity and inserted the statement that she was dead, as do many modern translations and interpreters. The ambiguity in the Masoretic text leaves it up to the reader to decide if the men of Gibeah are the murderers or the Levite is. When Beth doesn't answer the Levite's command, he puts her on the ass and returns to his house.

(2)

The second story tells of Israel's revenge against the tribe of Benjamin. After returning home, the Levite takes Beth and cuts her body into twelve parts to send to the twelve tribes. The twelve tribes receive the message and convene. At the congregation the Levite tells only part of the story and falsely claims that the men of Gibeah were going to kill him. He says that they raped his concubine and she is now dead (leaving the responsibility for the murder still ambiguous). The congregation vows to take the members of the tribe of Benjamin who committed this crime to execute punishment. When the Benjaminites refuse to deliver the men, the rest of the tribes go to battle against the entire tribe. After three day's fighting the Israelites prevail and destroy 25,000 men of the tribe of Benjamin. Six hundred Benjaminites escape into the wilderness.

(3)

Having vowed that they will not give their daughters as wives to the Benjaminites, the Israelites realize that one of the twelve tribes is in danger of
extinction. The people of Jabesh-gilead did not answer the call to assembly. The Israelites destroy every man and woman of the city (all the women except the virgins). Four hundred virgins are collected to become wives to the Benjaminites. A shortage of virgins requires that the Israelites provide some other source for the 200 wifeless Benjaminites. A yearly feast at Shiloh provides the opportunity the Israelites need. As the daughters of Shiloh gather for a yearly feast, the remaining Benjaminites lay in wait in the vineyards. The girls dance and the Benjaminites abduct their wives.

**Intrabiblical Narrative Relationships**

Here with the ending of the spiraling stories of rape and violence in Judges we are to make the connection with the Book of Mormon story. Before I suggest the connections we could make with the Book of Mormon, I need to analyze the three stories from Judges more completely.

(1)

In biblical literature is the fact that one story is repeated evidence of plagiarism? The answer depends on the presuppositions the reader brings to the text.

The first story of rape in Gibeah is obviously similar to the story of Lot and his two divine visitors in Sodom. In both stories the guests are taken in, the inhabitants of the cities threaten a homosexual rape, and the host offers two women as substitutes to spare the men. Biala offers these two stories as parade examples of stories of rape in the Bible; these stories are exceptions in that in these two stories the object is not sexual gratification but violence. "If we

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6Every scholar who studies the passages makes the connection, but let me cite a few examples. Lerner 172-73. Niditch, "Sodomite" 376. Lasine 40.
compare the two accounts we find many literary similarities, suggesting that the
two accounts were fashioned to resemble one another to accentuate their impact
as stories of ultimate human barbarism" (Biale 239).

Obviously we are meant to see a relationship between the two stories. We
might be guided in our reading of the abduction stories in the Bible and the Book
of Mormon by the kind of reading biblical scholars give stories that bear a similar
resemblance to each other. What do scholars say about the relationship between
the stories of rape in Sodom and Gibeah?

Niditch suggests that Judges 19:1-11 is both prior to and better than Genesis 19
("Sodomite" 376). Trible surveys the possible relationships and suggests three
alternatives: (1) Judges 19 depends on Genesis 19, (2) Genesis 19 depends on Judges
19, and (3) the two stories are examples of type-scenes (Texts 90 fn. 44).

Perhaps the notion of a type-scene requires explanation. Robert Alter
compares the biblical type-scene to the American western. In the western movie
the sheriff always draws his gun faster than the outlaws, the bad guys wear black
hats, etc. (Narrative 48). These types are necessary for the telling of the story.
When we as viewers understand the convention, we are able also to understand
deviations from the convention. When we see a western in which the sheriff has
a withered arm, can't draw faster than the outlaws, and therefore depends on a
rifle, we take pleasure in the departure from convention. Likewise, we have
biblical type-scenes. The wooing at the well is an example. Abraham sends his
servant to engage a wife for Isaac. The servant meets Rebekah at the well; she
draws water and the servant recognizes her as the appropriate choice. A
generation later Jacob flees from his brother's wrath and meets Rachel at the
same well and recognizes her as the appropriate choice for him. When Moses
flees Pharaoh's wrath he meets the daughters of Reuel at the well. This time
Moses draws the water and ends up marrying one of the daughters (my
explanation is extremely abbreviated and inadequate; the interested reader should refer to chapter 3 of Alter's book on biblical narrative). These are type-scenes, stories the readers should recognize both for their convention and departure from convention. As one of my students pointed out, the Bible also contains what seems to be an anti-type to the wooing at the well. Elijah meets not a nubile woman at the well, but a widow who draws water for him. The meeting depends not on fertility and promise but death and separation, the death of her son. The visitor stays throughout not a time of prosperity, but a time of famine.

That Tribble could suggest that these two examples of rape are type-scenes will be significant for my analysis of the Book of Mormon. Perhaps the two stories are meant to be read side-by-side.

In my opinion Lasine gives the best account of the relationship between the two texts. Lasine calls the relationship an example of "'one-sided' literary dependence" (39-40). The reader is meant to read Judges 19 in light of Genesis 19. Genesis 19 can easily be read with no awareness of Judges 19, but to read Judges 19 in any complete way the reader must see the connection to Sodom. The Levite as a visitor appears in an unfavorable light when compared with the divine visitors to Lot. The visitors to Sodom effect a divine rescue while the Levite throws his own concubine out to be raped, then cuts her body in parts as a grisly sacrifice. In both stories the "topsy-turvy" ethical world of Judges becomes apparent in the aftermath of the attempted rape and the rape:

In both cases the eventual destruction of the host's town motivates bizarre attempts at "repopulation." While Lot's daughters use trickery to lie with their father in order to "keep seed alive" (Gen. 19:32), the Israelites use cunning to circumvent their oath against giving their daughters to repopulate Benjamin by kidnapping the girls dancing at the feast of Yahweh in Shiloh (Judg. 21:16-23). Taken in their total contexts in Genesis and Judges, it is clear that the
narrators do not approve of these stratagems. In terms of the aftermath, both episodes show the
topsy-turvy way in which problems are "solved" when divine aid is noticeably absent. (Lasine 40)
None of these scholars oversimplify the problem of dependence by saying that one author merely copies another. The text is complex and requires a more complex analysis than such a simplistic reduction would permit.

(2)

As both Lasine and Josipovici point out, of the three stories about the tribe of Benjamin, the story of lack of hospitality and homosexual rape is not the only one of the three stories that depends on another narrative for a complete reading. The story of the Levite's cutting up of Beth's body depends on a number of other parallels. As Josipovici points out, the book of Judges begins with a story of dismemberment (114). Adoni-bezek is a Canaanite king who flees from the Israelites after losing a battle. After being caught, the Israelites cut off his thumbs and toes and he dies (Judg. 1:5-7). The book of Judges returns to where it began. But the more important parallel is to a story which follows Judges in our Bible:

If the cutting up of the concubine evokes echoes of Adoni-bezek, it alerts us also to the fact that both parts of the story of the Levite have their counterparts elsewhere in the Bible. The first part reminds us of Genesis, 19, when two angels come to Sodom and are given hospitality by Lot; the second reminds us of how Saul cut up a yoke of oxen into twelve pieces and sent them to the twelve tribes to urge them to rally to him against the Ammonites. Indeed, so close are the parallels that scholars have often seen the stories as versions of one another.

However, if one is not obsessed with the search for sources what strikes one is precisely the difference between what happens here and what happens in the other two stories. Stuart Lasine is one critic who has seen this clearly: "Judges 19 uses Genesis 19 to show how hospitality is turned upside down when one's guests are not angels, and one lives in an age governed by human selfishness" he says bluntly....
That the narrator of Judges is profoundly critical of the Levite is confirmed by the way in which the second half of the story makes use of the parallels with Saul and the oxen. It is important to notice that the nexus of towns is the same in both cases. The outrage of the Levite's concubine takes place in Gibeah, Saul's city; when the Israelites gather to discuss what should be done to the Benjamites the only group not to join them is from Jabesh-Gilead, and these men are then put to the sword for not joining them. In the parallel story Saul, the newly established king of Israel, cuts up a yoke of oxen and sends a portion to each of the twelve tribes to rally them to him so that he may relieve the besieged city of Jabesh-Gilead. Why does he send the message in this form? Because "Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen" (1 Sam. 11:7). The message is understood, the tribes rally round, the city is saved from the enemy and Saul is firmly established as king. (116-17)

When seen in the light cast by the Saul story, we begin to understand the Levite's message more clearly; he was threatening that if the people didn't rally round their concubines would be cut up in like manner. We also understand the pro-monarchical message at the end of the book of Judges: a king is needed to rally the people round righteous causes and prevent the unrighteous ones we have just read about. Saul cuts up the body of the oxen to move the people to social cohesion. The Levite's offering and dispersal of the body is evidence of the social disintegration illustrated from the dismemberment of Adoni-bezek to that of Beth. Hammond points out that the narrative of the Levite and the concubine "is playing off the Book of Genesis with great care" (Hammond 11). He points not only to the story of Lot in Sodom (which automatically tells the reader what the fate of the offending city will be), but also the story of Abraham and Jacob. The man travels with his servants, an ass, and a sacrificial victim. The rare word describing the sacrificial knife is used in both these stories. Here we have another example of one-sided literary dependence, perhaps a story meant to be read as a parallel to a number of other stories.
We have three stories from Judges; the first two are written assuming that we will connect them with other stories, either as an interpretive guide or as a type-scene. "The three chapters form one complete narrative, framed by the narrator's reminding of us that such things happened when there was no king" (Hammond 5). Not only are the three stories closely connected to each other, they are also parallel to other stories in the Bible. Why could we not rationally connect the third story in the trilogy in a similar way, not as the story being compared to an antecedent narrative, but the prior story meant to be compared?

The Stealing of the Daughters of the Lamanites

Does the fact that the "Rape of the Sabine Women" narrative constitutes a closer parallel to the Book of Mormon than the story of the Benjaminites at Shiloh complicate the explanatory task or simplify it? That depends on the presuppositions the reader brings to the text. The revisionist could shift allegiances and cite this story as Joseph Smith's real source. But I think the fact that ancient Mediterranean cultures widely report this story of abduction and rape actually makes the revisionist explanation more implausible (Robert Smith points correctly to the Greek myth of Persephone, among other stories, that still is widely reported in our own culture ["Patterns," 152]. Hades needs a wife so he goes up and steals one). Gerder Lerner takes up the stories from Genesis 19 and Judges 19-21 as examples of the larger movement in the Near East away from matriarchy and toward patriarchy (her chapter 8 is entitled "The Patriarchs," 161-179). If such stories are typical, common, could we not say that the presence of the motif in the Book of Mormon is intended to permit us to read the book with the tapestry of ancient Near Eastern antecedents as a backdrop? Couldn't this insight tell us that the story is included in the Book of Mormon, precisely because
of the antecedents? A shift in presuppositions permits radically different interpretive possibilities.

Both stories of abduction from the Book of Mormon and the Bible are set within ritual contexts:

Then they said, Behold, there is a feast of the Lord in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Beth-el, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-el to Shechem, and on the south of Legonah. Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards; And see, and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. (Judg. 21:19-21)

Now there was a place in Shemlon where the daughters of the Lamanites did gather themselves together to sing, and to dance, and to make themselves merry. And it came to pass that there was one day a small number of them gathered together to sing and to dance. (Mos. 20:1-2)

In both stories the virgins become the wives of the abductors. The Bible clearly mentions the incident as a yearly ritual. The Book of Mormon mentions it as a regular occurrence, not telling us how often ("one day"). Oesterley mentions this festival connection from Judges 21:19ff:

That it was a vintage feast is implied by the reference to the vineyards in which the Benjaminites hid themselves. At this feast it was the custom for the young girls to come out and dance: "When the maidens of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances"; and see verse 23. It is worth noticing how the dancing is mentioned as a recognized custom. The spot must have been a familiar one as the feast took place annually. (Oesterley 142)7

Bloch refers to four aspects of this Jewish festival: it was (1) an agricultural holiday, (2) a holiday in which the youths chose spouses, (3) a temple holiday, and

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7A FARMS newsletter compares it to a modern annual, national festival: "Just as the month of February means Valentine's Day (and sometimes Bachelor's Leap Year Day) to many Americans, the 15th of Av had significance to the ancient Israelites" (FARMS, "Dancing").
(4) a national holiday (Bloch 215). Bloch further points out that the agricultural aspects of the holiday were closely associated with the matrimonial aspects in this very ancient of festivals: "The conclusion of the wood-chopping season freed many young people from their chores in the forest and provided the occasion for the more pleasant task of bride-hunting. The dance of the maidens was designed to meet that end."

The matrimonial aspect of the feast was the reason the Israelites sent the Benjaminites to Shiloh to find brides (Bloch 216). Not only was the festival both agricultural and matrimonial, but it was also religious. Because Shiloh was a religious center the festival was held nearby; when Jerusalem became the religious capital of Israel the dances moved there (Bloch 216). Both Bloch and de Vaux refer to later talmudic writings which shed light on this festival. de Vaux not only claims that the Fifteenth of Av was an occasion for the rejoicing, dancing, and matrimonial matching of the Israelite virgins, but extends the analysis to the Feast of Tents and the Day of Atonement. On these days the "young girls of Jerusalem went out in white clothes, newly washed, to dance in the vineyards and to sing: 'Young man, raise your eyes and see whom you are going to choose. Do not look for beauty, but for a good family'" (de Vaux, Religious 496). Lapson indicates also that the holiday was an occasion for finding a mate; and not just on the Fifteenth of Av but also on the Day of Atonement:

The book of Judges (ch. 21) in describing the annual feast in Shiloh tells of the bride-choosing ceremonies. The story of the capture of brides by the surviving men of the tribe of Benjamin indicates that choosing brides during vineyard dances was a recognized practice in Israel.

According to the Mishnah, R. Simeon b. Gamaliel declared, "There were no holidays for Israel like the fifteenth of Av and the Day of Atonement, on which the daughters of Jerusalem went out in white dresses which were borrowed so that no one need be ashamed if she had none. (Lapson 1263-74)
All of this opens the Book of Mormon text to many new possibilities. The important thing is to remember that the priest of Noah "being ashamed to return to the city of Nephi, yea, and also fearing that the people would slay them, therefore they durst not return to their wives and children" (Mos. 20:3) needed substitute wives. The fact that when the narrative returns to the story of Amulon and his fellow-priests the daughters of the Lamanites are now called "their wives" (Mos. 23:33) brings with it at the least the implication that the abduction carried with it matrimonial implications.

Allow me to bring out one other point about this matrimonial festival before I go on with the Book of Mormon. Eliade points to this festival (which at one time, before a calendar change, was the Jewish New Year) as a time for dancing and amusement and the arrangement of marriages. "But it was also the day that freedom was allowed to a number of excesses, sometimes even orgiastic, which remind us both of the final phase of the akitu (also celebrated outside the town) and of various forms of license that were the rule almost everywhere in the frame of New Year ceremonials" (Eternal 61). The stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites is nothing if not a sophisticated narrative that seems to fit the pattern of matrimonial dancing festivals as well as any example from the Bible.

The daughters of the Lamanites regularly go to Shemlon to sing, dance, and be merry; on a particular day a "small number" (20:2; "but few" the text says in verse 5) of the virgins are gathered at Shemlon. The priests of King Noah are afraid to return to their wives and children. They "discover" where the daughters dance and lay in wait. Just as in the biblical text, the abductors, like voyeurs have to wait and watch the spectacle:

The visual aspect of the scene is stressed, this time twice: "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, and see, and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards and catch every man his woman of the daughters of Shiloh" (21:20-21). Not only do
we recall the encounter between Jepthah and his daughter/bride/victim, whose spectacle as dancer entailed the desperate realization of her nubility, but this "merry" scene also extends the scopophilic relation between marriageability, availability, and seeing to the more familiar modern-day relation between voyeurism and rape. Voyeurism, dramatized in the explicit order to the still-unprovided-for sons of Benjamin that they hide and look, is emblematic of the dissymmetry of power.

The sequence of actions, and the accompanying positions, deserves analysis. First the men hide and watch. Then the girls come out and dance. See and behold: catch. The order to capture the women comes as the consequence of the girls' dancing, rather than of the men's watching without being seen. The girls, like all victims of rape, seem to provoke their abduction. They dance, they are to be watched, and: behold. The memory of military slogan *veni, vidi, vici* imposes itself nicely. (Bal 70-71)

I cite this long quotation about the visual aspects of the abduction to demonstrate that the same aspects are part the abduction at Shemlon. The wicked priests find the place where the girls dance, then "they laid and watched them." (4). We know explicitly that the men hid because in the next verse they "came forth out of their secret places" and kidnap 24 of the dancing maidens. Not only is the watching stressed in both stories, but so is the lying in wait. This certainly isn't a crime of passion, but one of premeditation.

The priests of Noah then carry their prizes off into the wilderness. The narrative returns to the story of Limhi and his people because the Lamanites blame this group of Nephites for the disappearance of their daughters.

Before the narrative returns to the story of the priests of Noah/people of Amulon, one small mention is made during the Limhi narrative that is important to consider. The record indicates that Limhi had his people keep watch for the wicked priests "that by some means they might take those priests that fled into the wilderness, who had stolen the daughters of the Lamanites" (21:20, cf. 20:17-18).
At first the wording seems strange and it took me a while to discover why. The priests "stole" the virgins. Why "steal" rather than "abduct" or "kidnap"? You steal objects but kidnap people.

Actually the word is the precisely correct word if biblical law enlightens the text at all. Bal translates the reference to the young girls in Judg. 21:12 (the 400 virgins from Jabesh-gilead given to the Benjaminites) as a young woman between virgin and wife. The woman is still considered the property of her father but ready to become property of a husband. Bal refers to this phase as particularly dangerous for the woman—she hasn't proven capable of bearing children but holds the potential to do so; she has potential both as a gift and an exchange for a gift (48). The virgins are valuable property precisely because of their virginity: "The Book of Judges is full of virgins, collective virginity is at stake in the bride-stealing scenes at the end of the book" (Bal 69). The point in this story in the Book of Mormon is that the daughters of the Lamanites have no individual identity: they are always referred to as the "daughters of the Lamanites" or the "wives" of the wicked priests (23:33). Just as the virgins of Jabesh-gilead aren't consulted about their choice of mates, the daughters of of Shiloh are handed over as possessions from father to husband: "Abduction in war is followed by abduction in peace. This second 'selection' scene enhances the moment of virginity when the girl is handed over from father to husband" (Bal 70).

The value of a daughter is in her virginity. The Benjaminites must have wives and these wives must be "pure" of any defilement from sexual intercourse. Bal compares these brides of the Benjaminites to the earlier story from Judges of Jephthah. Jephthah vows that if the Lord grants him victory in war against the enemies of Israel, he will sacrifice the first things that comes through his door. Unfortunately, the first creature to come through his door is his daughter, dancing. He sacrifices his daughter because of his vow. The sacrifice is more
valuable because she is nubile, virgin (her virginity is mentioned three times in three verses, 11:37-39 [Bal 51]).

Assuming that biblical law has something to tell us about the dancing daughters of the Lamanites, these girls are valuable and vulnerable because they are at the stage to be given to a husband, but not yet given. This explains why the Lamanites attacked the people of Limhi so ferociously, thinking that these Nephites had "stolen" their daughters. This is why the Lamanites intend to kill the people of Amulon when they finally discover them with their stolen daughters.

When discovered, the wicked priests send "their wives," the "daughters of the Lamanites" (23:33) to plead for their lives; the double identification is important because it shows the way the two groups are going to be reconciled. At this point I am puzzled and disappointed by the FARMS newsletter. It says: "The Hebrew idiom of 'lying in wait' usually connotes premeditation and planning, implying that the priests may well have known of this place and knew that the girls would be there. Indeed, the girls became the priests' wives willingly enough that none of them tried to escape and all of them pled with their brothers and fathers not to kill their husbands (23:33)" (italics in original). The point is not that the women willingly went along with their abduction; this just perpetuates the notion that rape victims are willing victims. The point is that under biblical law the woman had no say about her condition, what Bal calls the dissymmetry of power—the fathers or husbands had all the power of the daughters or wives. The girls became the priests' wives because they had no control over their circumstances; that was all dictated by the men in their lives. When a young woman is no longer a virgin, she has no value.

If there is one thing Gerda Lerner's book attempts to establish, it is the understanding that in ancient Near Eastern society a raped woman had no value
except to the man who raped her—that is why he raped her in the first place. As in the story of the Sabine women, the women's fathers and brothers didn't attempt to redeem their virginity: they wanted revenge for their lost value. The woman would have retrieved a high price from a groom or was valuable in joining two families in marriage. Even if the young women had returned to their fathers' houses, they would be nothing but outcasts. Their best lot was to reconcile their fathers and their husbands: only in that way could they have any status. It is not that the young women willingly agreed to anything; they just chose to effect a reconciliation because it was the only option that held any promise for them. That is why when the Israelites destroyed the city of Jabesh-gilead, they killed "every male, and every woman that hath lain by man. And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male" (Judg. 21:11-12) whom they gave to the men of Benjamin, because the women who were not virgins had no value as wives.

Once raped, the formerly nubile woman would only have lived a life of desolation, unless the rape-for-marriage could be socially validated in marriage. After Amnon had raped his sister Tamar, he sends her away. Her response is, "This evil in sending me away is greater than the other that thou didst unto me. But he would not hearken unto her" (2 Sam. 12:16). McCarter refers to the relevant laws in the Pentateuch (Ex. 22:15-16 and Deut. 22:28) to the obligation a man had who had raped a virgin to marry her, without the right to divorce her. This "sending away" is a technical term used to indicate that a man is divorcing his wife. "It is true that Amnon and Tamar are not married, but Tamar implies that they must now become married in view of what has happened and that Amnon has forfeited his right to send her away" (McCarter 324). Consequently, Tamar must live out the rest of her days in isolation, having none of the promise a woman in her society valued: marriage, children. "So Tamar remained desolate in
her brother Absalom's house" (2 Sam. 12:20). "Tamar knows that rape dismissed is crime exacerbated. Yet she speaks to a foolish and hateful man who cares not at all for truth and justice" (Trible, Texts 48). Tamar leaves when Amnon dismisses her, "and she had a garment of divers colours upon her: for with such robes were the king's daughters that were virgins apparelled" (18). "Sadly, what the robe proclaims Tamar is no longer. Filial and royal language has never attended this daughter of the king, and now the word virgin applies no more" (Trible, Texts 49).

In reading this story we also must disabuse ourselves of our modern notions of rape. "In the Halakhah [the Jewish law including the Torah and the Talmud] we find a complex view of rape. Rape is generally seen as a forced act fueled by sexual urges (even between husband and wife) or alternately as a man's way of forcibly acquiring a wife by sexually possessing her" (Biale 239). In the case of a rape of a betrothed virgin,

Rape was not seen as a crime of sexual assault against a random woman because she is female, but rather as a calculated attempt by a man to acquire a woman as his wife against her and her parents' wishes. Thus rape is analogous to illegal seizure. No man in his right mind would try to seize a married woman since he would know that she is forbidden him. (Biale 241)

The fact that the wicked priests end up not only married to the daughters of the Lamanites, but also in favor in the eyes of the king of the Lamanites is also explained by biblical law: "Rape might also be a way of compelling a woman into marriage when she is available (single and unbetrothed) but she or her father do not consent to the match. This is why it is conceivable that the rape would be followed by marriage" (Biale 254). But always we should keep in mind that the crime is not against a person. It is a property crime: "In biblical law the crime is primarily against the woman's father, who incurs a financial loss" (Biale 240).

The normal procedure in this case is to force the man to marry the unbetrothed
virgin and pay the father 50 shekels; if the woman was a betrothed virgin, the crime is more serious and the man is to be stoned to death (Biale 242).

Lerner attempts to demonstrate that the Western idea of private property developed in the ancient Near East when men found that they could dominate women: women became the first private property:

The passage in Judges further corroborates the historical evidence... for the origins of slavery. Even in an internecine war between the tribes of Israel, the men are slain, while the women are enslaved and raped. But the story of the Benjamite war also demonstrates how wars are ended and enemies pacified by matrimonial arrangements, which are entirely under the control of the men of the tribe. One might regard the matrimonial exchange of the women of Jabesh-Gilead as the usual enslavement and trading of the women of defeated enemies. But what of the daughters of Shiloh, dancing at the feast of the Lord? They were not enemies, nor were their men conquered. They simply became pawns in a politically motivated effort at the pacification of a conquered enemy. (175-76)

Notice how in the Book of Mormon narrative a similar thing happens. The priests of Noah steal wives. The Lamanites nearly kill the priests in revenge. But the two groups are reconciled through the marriage of the young women and the Amulonites become an integral though distinct part of the Lamanite people. The people of Amulon can have no commerce with the Nephites, whom the texts says try to capture and punish them (21:20). The alternative is an alliance with the Lamanites. The Lamanites conquer both the people of Limhi and the people of Alma, but both groups escape. But the Amulonite faction of Nephites is assimilated through marriage into the Lamanites.

**Meaning and Narrative**

Whenever Penelope walks away from the weaving, the very act of weaving or unwravelling has to mean something. In the case of Penelope the meaning is a
deferral of meaning, a postponement of closure. Penelope hopes to postpone the closure that a forced marriage to one of the suitors would entail.

Brodie and Ham attempt to impose closure on this Book of Mormon text, to tell us finally and ultimately that the text means that Joseph Smith plagiarized the Bible. But I cast my vote against closure. My own reading is not final in any way; the conversation, the debate needs to continue. The text has no single meaning. Like all complex texts, the Book of Mormon resists our attempts to claim that we know what God means, finally and completely. In spite of the fact that revisionists will dislike a reading of the Book of Mormon that reveals it as a sophisticated text, I will receive no patriarchal blessing for a feminist (I don't think of the reading as feminist, but humanist, humane, human) interpretation.

But now that I have woven together a tapestry (or a shroud if you will) I will stand back and read the story the pattern tells.

If, as I believe, the narrative of the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites is an example of one-sided literary dependence, then what would the narrative tell the reader in light of the Judges stories?

Judges contains a series of stories that shows what happens when people do what is right in their own eyes and wrong in God's eyes. Lasine connects these sight images: when the Sodomites attempt to assault the visitors and the men of Gibeah attempt to assault the visitor, both hosts offer the women and invite the men to "do what is good in your eyes." "This phrase has extra significance in the book of Judges, which describes a period in which every man does what is right in his eyes" (40-41). Lasine also says that "in the book of Judges there is a shift in emphasis from doing what is evil in Yahweh's eyes (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1) to doing what is right in one's own eyes (14:3; 17:6; 21:25). The topsy-turvy world described in Judg. 17-21 demonstrates that doing what is right in one's own eyes is often the same thing as doing what is evil in Yahweh's eyes" (Lasine 55 fn. 19).
After Amulon and his people are subordinated to the Lamanites, the record claims that "Amulon did gain favor in the eyes of the king of the Lamanites" (24:1). In gaining the favor of the Lamanites, these wicked priests of Noah lose favor in God’s. When Abinadi is taken before King Noah "the eyes of the people were blinded" (11:29), just as the eyes of the Sodomites are blinded by the divine messengers (Gen. 19:11). Isn't there a note of disapproval in the narrator's voice when he says that the people of Amulon not only find favor in the eyes of the king of the Lamanites, but also that the king appoints these men to be teachers over all his people (24:1)? As teachers, these priests teach the Lamanites the language of the Nephites (4), "nevertheless they knew not God; neither did the brethren of Amulon teach them anything concerning the Lord their God, neither the law of Moses; nor did they teach them the words of Abinadi" (5). As Susan Tabor suggests, we are to read the Book of Mormon comparing characters to others: the book sets up a good example so we can compare that example to a bad one. Tabor doesn't make the connection that this device of comparing characters is a characteristic of Hebrew narrative, but it is. Kort extends Alter's point about the first dialogue a character makes reveals his or her character. "It may be possible to continue from Alter's point on the interrelation between the characters to observe that another feature of characterization in the art of biblical narrative is the use of two figures who sharply contrast in the course of their lives. We have this, of course, in the contrasting line of development between Saul and David. A similar pattern can be seen in the contrast between Abraham and Lot. The separation between them establishes these two as representing contrasting styles of life. Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha—there are enough pairs and contrasts to suggest a reliance of biblical narrative on this device to reveal contrast and continuity between characters" (93). While Amulon and his people teach the Lamanites
about commerce, record-keeping, and plunder, Alma (another of the former priests of Noah) "taught the people many things" (25:17). Most notably Alma taught the people how both the followers of Limhi and Alma were delivered by God out of bondage (10, 16). He also taught them "repentance and faith on the Lord" (15) as he organized them into congregations.

The text goes out of its way to say that the priests of Noah didn't teach the Lamanites the words of Abinadi. It also goes out of its way to claim that Alma did: Alma "went about privately among the people, and began to teach the words of Abinadi" (Mos. 18:1). The reader needs to see the parallel lives, not just of Alma and Amulon, but both the people of Limhi and the people of Alma compared to the people of Amulon. Alma and Amulon enter the narrative as priests of Noah. Upon hearing the words of Abinadi, Alma repents. Alma teaches the words of Abinadi surreptitiously at a place called Mormon (where "pure waters" are accompanied by trees, both symbols of the water and tree of life). Amulon and his priests refuse to teach the words of Abinadi to the Lamanites. Both Alma and Amulon lead colonies into the wilderness: Alma and his people, when Noah's soldiers discover their "movement," "took their tents and their families and departed into the wilderness" (18:34). Amulon and his followers also flee into the wilderness, but at the command of Noah they leave their wives and children behind (19: 11-23).

Clearly the text disapproves of all Amulon and his brethren do. Citing the parallel case from Judges of doing what is right in man's eyes is only one way of showing this disapproval. The wicked priests abandon their wives and then go about trying to find substitute wives, for King Noah "commanded that all the men should leave their wives and their children, and flee before the Lamanites," (19:11) which the priests do. But many would rather perish than leave their wives and children behind (12). Those who remained behind (just as the Amulonites later do) "caused that their fair daughters should stand forth and
plead with the Lamanites that they would not slay them" (13). The daughters invoke "compassion," for the Lamanites "were charmed with the beauty of their women" (14). Clearly the text is setting up parallel examples the reader should compare to later events. These Nephites then send men out to find those who fled their children and wives: "all save the king and his priests" (18) had vowed that they would return to their wives and children or die seeking revenge if the Lamanites have killed them (19). The parallel stories of sending the two sets of "daughters" to beg for mercy from the Lamanites should tell the reader something:

The two most distinctively biblical uses of repeated action are when we are given two versions of the same event when the same event, with minor variations, occurs at different junctures of the narrative, usually involving different characters or sets of characters.... The recurrence of the same event—the sameness being definable as a fixed sequence of narrative motifs which, however, may be presented in a variety of ways and sometimes with ingenious inventions—is what I have called "type-scenes," and it constitutes a central organizing convention of biblical narrative. Here one has to watch for the minute and revelatory changes that a given type-scene undergoes as it passes from one character to another. (Alter, Narrative 181)

When we compare the people as the text invites us to, we contrast the care the men of Limhi show for their wives and children to the abandonment by the priests of Noah. All of these things show the wicked priests very badly in the reader's eyes and the fact that the king of the Lamanites is willing to countenance the stealing and raping of the daughters of the Lamanites by welcoming the Amulonites into his kingdom speaks badly of the Lamanite king. The people of Limhi, on the other hand, "fought for their lives, and for their wives, and for their children" (20:11). These are the "minute and revelatory changes" that reveal not only the character of the priests of Noah who abandon their families
rather than fall into the Lamanites' hands but also of the Nephites who decide to face death with their families rather than abandon them.

When the people of Limhi flee their bondage the Lamanites follow them but get lost and stumble across the two parallel colonies in the wilderness: that of Amulon and Alma (24:25-34). Amulon and his men send their wives out to plead for their lives and are spared, just as the earlier people of Noah did (33-34). After stumbling across the people of Alma, the Lamanites also promise these people that they will be spared if they show the Lamanites how to get home. The Lamanites violate the promise and enslave the people of Alma. The king of the Lamanites installs Amulon as a "king and a ruler" over Alma and his people (23:39). Here we read another Exodus type that deserves further analysis.

After the people of Alma and the people of Limhi are delivered from bondage, the very children of the Amulonites renounce their fathers as their fathers had abandoned them. I assume that these children are those abandoned by the Amulonites and not children born to the Amulonites and their new Lamanite wives. The text doesn't, however, give us enough information to decide between the options. "Those who were the children of Amulon and his brethren, who had taken to wife the daughters of the Lamanites, were displeased with the conduct of their fathers, and they would no longer be called by the names of their fathers, therefore they took upon themselves the name of Nephi" (25:12).

The text is clearly unsympathetic to the people of Amulon and the one-sided literary dependence between the two stories of abduction appears to me to be a hint from the author that their actions are reminiscent of a time when the Israelites followed God's law not at all, but did what was right in their own eyes. The priests are portrayed as indifferent to God, in spite of their position which should make them more zealous as advocates of God.
Now, to turn back to the interpretive patterns in the fabric. Brodie and Ham present a tapestry that I think hardly requires unweaving. I admit it as a bias of literary critics, but one possible principle of comparison between two explanatory theories can be that the theory which explains the text in greater detail and shows it in its complex manifestations is the better theory. I could hardly imagine that anyone would argue that the simplistic theory that treats a text in the most cursory and superficial manner possible is more adequate. If I see the text as subtle, filled with complex design and pattern constantly shifting through a labyrinth of meaning, and another sees it as monochrome, plain fabric, then my response is likely to be that the reductive meaning is made possible by color blindness on the part of the reader. My response is that Brodie and Ham have not found an adequate interpretive principle with which to make sense of the text.

The basic tension underlying revisionist readings of the Book of Mormon is that they require that the book be shallow, a mere reflection of Joseph Smith's environment. But plain or shallow the book is not:

Now I don't see how you can possibly explain the complex in terms of the simple without having your very success used as a charge against you. When you get through, all that your opponent need say is: "But you have explained the complex in terms of the simple—and the simple is precisely what the complex is not." (Burke 262)

The point of a radical hermeneutic is to return the perspective that life is a complex experience, complex and contradictory. Any interpretive principle that cannot allow for complexity is suspect.

I have woven my own design in the margins of other tapestries. Now as I prepare to unweave my day's work the last few threads I want to tie up are about closure. We have a tremendous desire to make final statements about the meaning of texts. The point is that we ought to hold our readings of texts tentatively in our
hands. We need some negative capability, to stop groping after fact. Facts are what we make them; not only what we make them, but they are what we make them. When sophisticated texts do something, we ought to apply the principle of charity. Rather than concluding the Joseph Smith is simply copying the Bible, we ought to allow the possibility that similar stories are meant to be similar and the similarity is evidence of the author's artistry. This allows the text to speak to us in a meaningful, nonreductive way.

Biblical criticism has for more than a century attempted to find the sources behind the narratives, to reduce the text to some earlier, hypothetical Ur-text. Gerald Hammond's "The Bible and Literary Criticism—part II," shows how such a method fails to adequately approach the story in Judges 19. Frank Kermode's The Genesis of Secrecy analyzes specifically the story of the naked young man in the garden at Jesus' betrayal (Mk. 14: 51-52) and how fully assumptions that the passage is a defect indicating redaction or confusion on the writer's part makes any comprehensible interpretation of the narrative impossible. Josipovici shows how the mysterious man in the field directing Joseph to his brothers who promptly put him in a pit is a problem for scholars who assume that the text is historical rather than narrative and such elements are deficiencies (279). Frei points to the inability some scholars have in taking up biblical narrative as narrative; their constant attempts to separate sections of the text into fragments don't allow them to see the wholeness of the text. They take up the text as information, not as narrative. This is the problem with Ham and Brodie's claims about the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites: they reduce the text to a simplistic statement about copying. But the assumption that a repetition is a deficiency is a value-laden evaluation that doesn't even approach the text. Biblical critics (especially literary critics) are beginning to rethink their
assumptions, especially assumptions that assign anomalies in the text to the realm of error, rather than looking for assumptions that will do justice to the text.

Ham's and Brodie's explanation of the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites is a tightly circular argument in that its premise is also its conclusion.

If the Book of Mormon has stories that are similar to the Bible, then such similarity is evidence that Joseph Smith copied the stories from the Bible. The abduction story is similar to a story in the Bible. Therefore, Joseph Smith copied the stories from the Bible.

All I am saying is that these assumptions are not necessary and the Book invites us to give it a typological reading, which makes it possible to say that the coincidence of stories is not evidence of deficiency, but is actually the meaning we are meant to derive from the story. The forced marriage of the explanation and the text doesn't fit and we ought to find other interpretive approaches. The repeatability of a story plot is itself the meaning that myth critics (as Kort calls them) look for in the text. Similar stories are not necessarily evidence of plagiarism but are evidence that story patterns are interdependent, that Hebrew narrative relies on eternal return (98).
Chapter 4—Bows and Broken Bows

The story seems simple enough; Nephi breaks his bow, his brothers' bows lose their springs, the party can't obtain food, they complain, the Lord provides a way for the group to obtain food. But such a simplicity is deceptive; the brief story is quite sophisticated.

As with the standard form of Hebrew narrative, the story begins and ends with a change of scene. The Lehi party travels through Shazer and through the most fertile part of the Red Sea region (1 Ne. 16: 14). The story ends when the group travels to a place called Nahom (33-34). If biblical and ancient Near Eastern symbolism is ever to illuminate narratives from the Book of Mormon, this is the narrative.

The group travels through the wilderness, and the wilderness is fertile. The wilderness provides all the food the group might need. The group travels for "many days" obtaining much food with their "bows and our arrows and our stones and our slings" (15). Something more than just a story about obtaining food is going on in the text; the group is entirely able to obtain their game with weapons other than the bows and arrows. They also have their slings and stones. Why then, is the loss of the bows so important that the group "could obtain no food" (21)? Why would the loss of the bows cause such a crisis if the group also has slings and stones? The bow was symbolically significant in ancient Near Eastern societies. The story deserves a place in the sacred story because it reveals a symbolic reality that tells us something about these people and their God.

8A similar discussion of this narrative is contained in the introduction (written by Alan Goff and John W. Welch) to Nahum Waldman's "The Breaking of the Bow" in its reprint form issued by FARMS.
After traveling then stopping to rest and obtain food, "as I, Nephi, went forth to slay food, behold, I did break my bow, which was made of fine steel" (18; those who insist on historical criticism will want to refer the FARMS reprint of the broken bow essay to see if steel is an anachronism or a translation). After Nephi breaks his bow, the group can't get food. Nephi's brothers angrily return with him to their families who are suffering from hunger. Not only are Nephi's brothers angry, but upon returning Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael "murmur exceedingly, because of their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness" (20). Even Lehi begins to murmur, the only incident in the record when Lehi does.

This Lehite exodus is a repetition of the earlier Israelite exodus from Egypt. These Israelites too suffer privation while wandering in the wilderness. These Israelites too rebel against the Lord and against their leader: "The motif of murmuring provides a major theme of the wilderness wanderings. Although the basic form of the complaint against Moses and Aaron is quite stereotyped (cf. Ex. 17:3f.; Num. 20:2ff.), the specific content of grumbling relates to some need which is dealt with within the story" (Childs 284). In the broken bow narrative the brothers are angry with Nephi and murmur against the Lord (18, 20). The specific need is the lack of food, and it is dealt with in the story. Szink compares 1 Ne. 16: 19-20 to Ex. 16: 2-3, 8, noting the following similarities:

1. Both the children of Israel and the Lehi group are traveling in the wilderness.

2. Both groups murmur against their leaders (Moses and Nephi).

3. Both groups complain of hunger.

4. Both groups murmur against the Lord.
5. Both groups are fed through divine assistance (with manna in the case of the children of Israel and with the bow Nephi is able to make and the directions he receives from the ball). Szink also notes that the use of the word *murmur* is rare both in the Book of Mormon and the Bible (64-65). Lists of the repetitive aspects of wilderness rebellions in the Pentateuch are common because the Pentateuch contains so many stories of rebellions in the wilderness. Many typologies of these wilderness stories have been drawn up because the story is a standard feature. Another such list might as easily describe the Nephite narrative as it does the exodus:

1. The Hebrew epic of the exodus doesn't praise the hero, but God.
2. It portrays human weakness rather than strength.
3. The hero doesn't deliver the people, God does.
4. The hero is reluctant, uncertain about his leadership.
5. Instead of physical battle, "spiritual rebellion against God frequently replaces the conventional theme of armed conflict between nations."
6. Epic formulas praising strength and virtue are attributes of God, not the hero (Ryken, *Words* 132-33).

Most nations go through a heroic period at the foundation of the people. We have Greek epics, Sumerian epics, Germanic epics, Scandinavian epics, and many more. These epics have standard features. Although scholars dispute whether epic terminology should be used to describe the Israelite heroic period, the patriarchal and exodus stories are clearly heroic. Ryken is merely outlining some of the differences between an epic such as the *Iliad* and biblical epic. The Book of Mormon constantly looks to two periods of Israelite history for repetitions and patterns to interpret their own circumstances: the patriarchal period and the exodus. The story follows the classical rebellion in the wilderness formula. After
reproving his brothers because of their "hardness of their hearts" (22), Nephi is able to make both a new bow and arrow.

The bow isn't just a tool or a weapon in biblical culture. The bow was a symbol of strength and leadership. The broken bow is, on the other hand, a symbol of submission (Waldman 82). Broken bow imagery was a standard feature of vassal treaties in which one king pledged obedience to another. Waldman cites examples from Babylonian and Akkadian treaties that make use of the imagery, in addition to biblical passages. Psalms 37: 14-17 illustrates the use of the symbolism:

The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their heart, and their bows shall be broken. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.

For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous.

As the symbolism is used in treaties, the biblical usage indicates dependence, especially on the Lord (other biblical references include 1 Sam. 2: 4; Ps. 18: 34; Ez. 39: 3; Hos. 1: 5; 2: 18; Jer. 49: 35; 51: 56). The message of the broken bow is that the Lord's people can't rely on the arm of flesh but must rely on the arm of the Lord.

The broken bow text clearly indicates the message that Lehi's group must depend on the Lord. Nephi goes to the ball to find where he must go to obtain food. After returning with the food necessary for survival, "they did humble themselves before the Lord, and did give thanks unto him" (32). Dependence on the Lord is a staple of the exodus stories under Moses' leadership and the broken bow imagery conveys the same message in the Book of Mormon. As a "poetic symbol of strength" (Anderson and Freedman 185), the bows all become impotent at the same time. Why didn't the group use their stones and slings? Such a question ignores the importance of the symbolism. Symbolically, the group was unable to provide for themselves. The story is included in the narrative because the symbolism informs the reader of the group's dependence upon the Lord.
throughout the wilderness experience. The figurative qualities of the narrative inform us of the physical dependence: "For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. In God we boast all the day long and praise thy name forever" (Ps. 44: 6, 8).

But the bow is also a symbol of leadership, of kingship. That Jonathan recognizes the kingship of David rather than his own claim to follow his father as king of Israel becomes evident when Jonathan turns over to David the symbols of kingship: robe, garment, sword, girdle, and bow (1 Sam. 18: 4). The bow is important in suzerainty treaties precisely because it symbolizes strength (usually military) and leadership.

Laman and Lemuel have already been told by the angel that Nephi will rule over them (3: 29). It isn't surprising then that the Nahom incident ends with Laman and Lemuel accusing Nephi of attempting "to make himself a king and a rule over us" (16: 38). Just as Laman must fail at leadership in the plates of brass story and Nephi succeed (3: 11-14; 4: 1-33) to foreshadow the future leadership roles, Nephi must himself take up the symbols of leadership. Nephi's bow, the composite metal bow, is the best possible weapon before it breaks; likewise, Nephi is the only one the text says who was able to replace the broken and springless bows. Nephi himself constructs the symbol of leadership. After making the bow, Nephi takes up the leadership role by calling the group to repentance (including his father), asking his father to look at the ball to know where to hunt, going to the top of the mountain, and obtaining food.

The broken bow incident works at the literal level as a story of hunger. But at a symbolic level, it continues to reveal the tensions about leadership that are a part of the story from the beginning and will continue long after Nephi, Laman, and Lemuel die: the tradition of the Lamanites over 400 years after leaving Jerusalem is that their fathers were "driven out of the land of Jerusalem because
of the iniquities of their fathers, and that they were wronged in the wilderness by their brethren, and they were also wronged while crossing the sea; And again, that they were wronged while in the land of their first inheritance, after they had crossed the sea, and all this because that Nephi was more faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord—therefore he was favored of the Lord, for the Lord heard his prayers and answered them, and he took the lead of their journey in the wilderness" (Mos. 10: 12-13). (This passage suggests that natural phenomenon that the Lamanites told a radically different version of the stories than were contained in the Nephite records.) The wilderness narrative before the sea crossing contains only a few stories that could qualify as the wrongful actions of Laman and Lemuel's brothers: the plates of brass narrative, the broken bow incident, the Nahom story (where Laman and Lemuel accuse Nephi of attempting to usurp the leadership), and the story of the building of the ship (which also contains a similar accusation). In all these stories Nephi "took the lead of their journey in the wilderness"; Lehi didn't take the lead in the wilderness and neither did Laman and Lemuel.

The stories of complaints about Moses' leadership during the exodus recur again and again. Szink compares this narrative from the Book of Mormon to the story of the provision of manna. The leader's position requires that he provide food for the group. When the Israelites are hungry they "murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (Ex. 16: 2). The story belongs "to a series of stories about the carpings and grumblings on the part of the people at the miserable conditions of wilderness survival," ignoring the great works the Lord has already done, especially the miraculous deliverance at the Sea of Reeds (Sarna 118-19). These murmurings are seen not just as complaints against Moses and Aaron, but also against the Lord (Ex. 16: 8). Likewise also, the families in the Lehite group "suffer much for want of food" (19). Having previously been angry
with Nephi (18), the group now murmurs against the Lord: "And it came to pass that Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael did begin to murmur exceedingly, because of their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness; and also my father began to murmur against the Lord his God; yea, and they were all exceedingly sorrowful, even that they did murmur against the Lord" (20). Sarna's second point about the manna story is that in spite of "the people's ingratitude and lack of faith, God still showed his concern for the hungry, and in His compassion provided for their needs" (112-13). Likewise, in the Nephite narrative, Nephi receives the Lord's direction about where to find food. Nephi returns with all the food the group needs and they humble themselves and give gratitude to the Lord for providing for them (32).

Coats refers to the pattern of these murmuring stories in the Bible. The pattern follows roughly the following steps:

1. A crisis faces the Israelites. In this case, a crisis of hunger and starvation.
2. The people respond by challenging Moses' leadership.
3. The Israelites announce the desire or the intention to return to Egypt (this element doesn't arise in the broken bow narrative but it does in the Nahom narrative that follows). Such an intention is seen in the text as a desire to "reverse the exodus" and all that the Lord has already performed.
4. Some of the stories contain a defense of leadership by Moses or the Lord.

The challenges are themselves challenged or the people are punished. Coats continues to state that such wilderness rebellion stories use the verbs *to murmur, to rebel, to complain*, or other synonyms (Coats, Moses 109). The feature same is true of Nephi's story of rebellion in the wilderness; he uses the words *murmur* (20, 25) and *complain* (22) to describe the people's reaction to their predicament.
We need to see in the story the same thing scholars see in the exodus wilderness rebellions. The wilderness is a place of testing and the Israelites fail the test of faith. Ryken sees the pattern as a crisis, a failure of the test when the people murmur, Moses intercedes with the Lord to deliver the people, the Lord provides salvation, and the Lord either chastises the people or reveals something to them (Words 130-131). The Lehite group also faces the crisis of starvation, they complain, Nephi intercedes, the Lord rebuked them through the ball (provides a new revelation in the words in the ball), and the Lord provides food for them. Nephi's role as intercessor becomes particularly apparent in this narrative: he must call even Lehi to repentance: "they had humbled themselves because of my words" (24). The voice of the Lord tells Lehi to look at the ball and when he does he fears and trembles along with the entire group (27). We know that the trial in the wilderness is explicitly a trial of faith because as Nephi goes on to describe the purpose of the ball, he says that it "did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them [the pointers]" (28 and 29). Nephi follows the directions on the ball and goes to the mountain top.

Childs tends to divide the wilderness rebellion stories into two categories (258): one follows from a physical need to complaint and intercession, followed by miraculous assistance (Ex. 15 22ff.; 17: 1ff. and Num. 20: 1-13 are the clearest examples). The other type begins with a complaint followed by the Lord's punishment, which precipitates Moses' intercession and the Lord's retracting his anger (Num. 11: 1-3; 17: 6-15; 21: 4-10). This Lehite rebellion in the wilderness is clearly the first pattern. "The majority of the stories of this pattern relate to the miraculous gift of food and water and thus reflect the most pressing problem of sustaining life in the wilderness" (Childs 258). The Nahom story that follows the broken bow narrative more clearly follows the second pattern.
Chapter 5—Nahom

Following hard upon the broken bow incident (which itself carries powerful, but concealed, symbolic overtones) we read of the death of Ishmael and his burial at Nahom (1 Ne. 16:34). The narrative mentions the place-name without translating the Hebrew into English, and then continues immediately with another story of rebellion in the wilderness. Not explicit in the text are the many connotations of the word *Nahom*, which integrally connect the rebellion against Lchi and Nephi with earlier biblical traditions. Let me break down the narrative and show some interconnections with the patriarchal and Exodus traditions:

And it came to pass that Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom.(1 Ne. 16:34)

The connection with the Hebrew verb *naham* is explicitly made in the 1981 edition footnotes to the Book of Mormon. The meaning here is "to mourn or to be consoled." But there is actually a much stronger connection with the biblical tradition; this connection unfolds in the narrative that follows. Damrosch speaks about the use of this word:

It appears twenty-five times in the narrative books of the Bible, and in every case it is associated with death. In family settings, it is applied in instances involving the death of an immediate family member (parent, sibling, or child); in national settings, it has to do with the survival or impending extermination of an entire people. At heart, *naham* means "to mourn," to come to terms with a death; these usages are usually translated (e.g., in the RSV) by the verb "to comfort," as when Jacob's children try to comfort their father after the reported death of Joseph ....

From this basic meaning of regret following the death of a family member, the term becomes applied to other cases of regret or change of heart ("repentance" in the RSV), almost always when the repenter is meditating murder. "Repentance" then involves either the decision to kill, or conversely, the decision to stop killing. The term can be used in quite ignoble circumstances, as when Esau comforts himself for the loss of his birthright by deciding to kill Jacob (Gen. 27:42), but
usually it is God who repents, either negatively or positively; negatively, by deciding to destroy his people; positively, by commuting a sentence of destruction .... (Narrative 128-29)

It is obvious how the denotation of the word is played out in verse 34 in the idea of mourning. What isn't as obvious is how Nephi uses the connotations of the word naham in the story of rebellion following this verse.

And it came to pass that the daughters of Ishmael did mourn exceedingly, because of the loss of their father, and because of their afflictions in the wilderness; and they did murmur against my father, because he had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, saying: Our father is dead; yea, and we have wandered much in the wilderness, and we have suffered much affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue; and after all these sufferings we must perish in the wilderness with hunger. (16: 35)

At Nahom Ishmael's daughters mourn, not only because of their father's death but also because of the difficulty of life in the wilderness. Then this technical term, "to murmur," comes up again, exactly as it comes up in all the stories of rebellion in the wilderness, whether in the Exodus under Moses or under Lehi.

Nephi sees this journey as a typological reworking of the original Exodus; he is constantly casting the story in terms of the Exodus motifs and parallels of an earlier age. Eliade's entire project shows that archaic man felt that life was real when it was archetypal; the repetition of the events occurring at the foundation of the nation are "real" events and ordinary events merely mundane; real events must be reenacted (this is the "myth of the eternal return"). What would surprise us most, then, would be for Nephi not to cast his narrative in the Exodus language and tradition. "This verb 'to grumble, murmur' is often employed in the stories of trials in the wilderness, and always with the same intention (Ex 15:24; 16:2, etc.; cf. John 6:41). Outside of this context the word is only found twice in the entire Bible" (Brother John 48 fn. 8).
So Nephi now uses this technical term to describe yet another rebellion in the wilderness (this happens earlier in the broken bow incident when even Lehi begins "murmuring against the Lord" 16:25). The complaint brought against Lehi and Nephi is that they have led the daughters of Ishmael into the wilderness "to suffer much affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue" and after that "to perish in the wilderness with hunger."

The plight of the children of Israel was to "wander in the wilderness" (Num. 14:33; 32:13), 40 years in fact. The daughters of Ishmael complain that they have had to "wander much in the wilderness." The economy in the text is admirable; with this little phrase Nephi is able to recall the primary image of Israelite typology—the Exodus. Later generations recall the image and apply it to their own circumstances. The Book of Job proclaims that all people are in God's hands, for "he taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way" (12:24). The Psalmist also recalls God's power over all the earth by saying that God "poureth contempt upon the princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way" (107:40). All of God's children, his redeemed, have "wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way" (107:4) until God delivers them. The entire 78 Psalm dwells on the great deeds God performed for the children of Israel while they wandered in the wilderness, and yet "how oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert?" (40). The wandering happens when the way can't be found. The daughters of Ishmael can't speak of wandering in the wilderness without recalling this archetype.

And thus they did murmur against my father, and also against me; and they were desirous to return again to Jerusalem. (16:36)

This murmuring, of course, reminds us of an earlier incident. "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the
wilderness" (Ex. 16:2). Just as the daughters of Ishmael yearned to return to Jerusalem, the children of Israel castigated Moses for removing them from the security of Egypt. "And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Ex. 16:3). It is difficult not to hear the echo, "And after all these sufferings we must perish in the wilderness with hunger ... And they were desirous to return again to Jerusalem" (1 Ne. 16:35-36).

So the daughters of Ishmael mourned at Nahom. But Laman and Lemuel had a different complaint and consolation for their injuries.

And Laman said unto Lemuel and also unto the sons of Ishmael: Behold, let us slay our father and also our brother Nephi, who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren. (16: 37)

The Israelites rebelled against Moses in the wilderness under the leadership of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Korah brings an ecclesiastical charge against Moses, Dathan and Abiram bring this political charge); these men complain that Moses had taken too much of the leadership for himself (Num. 16:3). "Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?" (Num. 16:13). This charge resonates from the earlier time in Egypt when the Hebrew slave brings the accusation against Moses, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" (Ex. 2:14). The charge is the same.

Laman and Lemuel find consolation at Nahom (just as Esau found consolation in the thought that he could kill his brother) in the thought of killing both Lehi and their younger brother. But this theme of the younger brother surpassing the elder is not only the most dominant motif in the early part of the Book of Mormon,
it is also the recurring thread that unifies the patriarchal narratives. As early as Cain and Abel and down to Ephraim and Manasseh, the younger brother finds favor not only in the father's (sometimes the mother's) eyes but also in God's—Abraham favors not his "only son Isaac" but actually the younger son, Jacob, wrestles the birthright and the blessing from elder brother and father as well as from the stranger at Peniel, Joseph arrays the dream of obeisance from his elder brothers and parents in his many-colored robe, (after the birthright falls to Joseph) Jacob crosses his hands to give the blessing to Joseph's youngest son Ephraim, in spite of the fact that Joseph had arranged Manasseh on Jacob's right side (where the birthright should have fallen). This theme continues in the story of David; Samuel examines all Jesse's sons and thinks any of the seven might appropriately be a king. But God had not chosen them. "There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep" (1 Sam. 16:10). Solomon, though a younger son, becomes King of Israel. This resonance we should hear in the Book of Mormon text. The indictment Laman invokes (the emphasis is so explicit in the Book of Mormon and so unrelenting that we can't help but hear the repetitions from the Hebrew Bible) is two-fold: Nephi wants to usurp the authority of the elder brothers and he lies to them about being guided by God. The second charge follows:

Now, he says that the Lord has talked with him, and also that angels have ministered unto him. But, behold, we know that he lies unto us; and he tells us these things, and he worketh many things by his cunning arts, that he may deceive our eyes, thinking, perhaps, that he may lead us away into some strange wilderness; and after he has led us away, he has thought to make himself a king and ruler over us, that he may do with us according to his will and pleasure. And after this manner did my brother Laman stir up their hearts to anger.(16: 38)

In spite of the fact that Laman has witnessed angelic intervention and heard words from the angel proclaiming Nephi's eventual rule (1 Ne. 3:29), he claims
that Nephi is unrighteously trying to rule over them. Joseph, the patriarch the Nephites look to as their forefather, too had dreams. His brothers respond, "Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet more for his dreams, and for his words" (Gen. 37:8). This prediction of dominion causes the sons of Israel to plot Joseph's death in the wilderness as he "was wandering in the field" (15). "And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh" (18-19); the term is derogatory—the master of dreams. Laman and the others also conspire to kill both dreamers, for Nephi is "like unto our father, led away by the foolish imaginations of his heart" (1 Ne. 17:20). Earlier they "did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a visionary man, and had led them out of the land of Jerusalem" (2:11). ("We shall see what will become of his dreams," say Joseph's brothers [20].) Joseph's brothers too repent; they sell him as a slave rather than slaying him. Nephi's confrontation with his brothers results in their repenting also:

And it came to pass that the Lord was with us, yea, even the voice of the Lord came and did speak many words unto them, and did chasten them exceedingly; and after they were chastened by the voice of the Lord they did turn away their anger, and did repent of their sins, insomuch that the Lord did bless us again with food, that we did not perish. (16: 39)

So the narrative ends and returns once again to the Nahom theme. Chapter 17 begins with the group departing Nahom. Readers sensitive to Hebrew narrative recognize that a change of scene is also an end to one story and a beginning of another (the Nahom narrative begins when the group arrives at this desert location; the story is framed by these changes of scene). Just as Esau repents of (regrets) his murderous desire, just as Joseph's brothers repent of their conspiracy to kill him, at Nahom "they" "repented" and "were chastened."

Damrosch refers to the "ignoble circumstances" of the desire to kill and the
subsequent "repentance," the decision to not kill. The Lord "did turn away their anger."

Notice also the excess in the story. The Lord chastened them "exceedingly." This intensification of the chastisement counterbalances nicely the excess from the beginning of the narrative: the daughters of Ishmael mourned "exceedingly" (35). Not only is the pairing of the excess a nice complement in this story but the excessive nature of suffering, sinning, rebellion, and repentance serves to tie this story in with the ones preceding and following. Commenting after the explanation of the tree of life vision, Nephi claims to have been blessed "exceedingly" (16:8). After the bows are broken Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael are "exceedingly sorrowful" that they are hungry and they "murmur against the Lord" (16:20); not only does they murmur, but they "murmur exceedingly." Nephi and the party find it "exceedingly difficult" to obtain food (16:21). After complaining and repenting and during this episode, Lehi looks on the Liahona and trembles "exceedingly" (16:27), as do the rest of the murmurers. Following the Nahom incident, the group were "exceedingly rejoiced" when they arrive in Bountiful at the seaside (17:6). Nephi soon ends up being "exceedingly sorrowful" (17:19) when Laman and Lemuel refuse their labor in building the ship. During the sea voyage the rebels resort to "exceeding rudeness" (18:9) which prompts Nephi to "fear exceedingly" (10). During the storm the travelers begin "to be exceedingly frightened" (13) because the storm is "exceedingly sore" (14). Nephi is tied up and his ankles begin to be "exceedingly sore" and swollen (15). Except in the first example I have cited, all these incidents contain two instances of excess: the excesses are paired and frequently opposites (murmur exceedingly and sorrow exceedingly versus tremble exceedingly in repentance, mourn exceedingly versus chastened exceedingly in repentance, rejoice exceedingly versus sorrow exceedingly because of sin, and exceedingly rude
versus exceedingly frightened because of the tempest). The excess in First Nephi is clustered around the tree of life vision and these stories of rebellion during the journey to the promised land. In these rebellion stories the excess serves to connect the stories to one another.

At Nahom God delivers the entire group from death. This national setting ("it has to do with the survival or impending extermination of an entire people" according to Damrosch) also illustrates God's deliverance of his people "again" from death by starvation. The "again" refers to the broken bow incident in the same chapter, which incident is at least as typologically structured and symbolic as the Nahom incident.
Chapter 6—Creation and Dissemination—Interpretation and Curious Workmanship

Recently the Primary children presented a program about the Book of Mormon to my ward. Our ward consists entirely of married college student families and we have few children older than two years. Because only four children were in the Primary, the adult leaders did a good deal of the presenting of the material during the program. As an illustration of God's providence, one of the children presented the story of Nephi's broken bow. As an adult read the story, a child put cut-out pictures on a flannelboard. Curiously enough, when God provided salvation for this group of outcast Jews by enabling Nephi to build a bow and some arrows to replace all the disabled bows, and also instructed the group through the Liahona where to find game, what went up on the board was a picture of Nephi taking aim at a pig. The thought of having these Jews hunting pigs in the Arabian desert caused one other member of the congregation to chortle.

Whether the child or the adult had chosen the species of game to be hunted, the little child shall lead them in demonstrating the hermeneutical principle. We always understand the past, a text, another person from a particular context—our own. We Mormons have no compunction about eating pork; why should the Jews? When we become hermeneutical adults we begin to realize that our own temporality is not universal, that the world is filled with radical otherness. While we must always begin from our own temporal position (we always enter the hermeneutical circle knowing what the text says; when we are adults we hold those conclusions tentatively and hold the possibility that our preconceptions will need to be modified), we also know that there is nothing necessary about our
assumptions and when we engage the otherness of the text we are willing to modify our explanations, to expand our horizons.

I am going to move on to a story just following the broken bow incident. But before I do, let me stay with this pork example a bit longer. I want to illustrate how thoroughly our assumptions determine the readings that come out of the other end of the interpretive machinery. This incident about Nephi hunting pigs takes me back to a commentator who has asked us about Jewish dietary laws in the Book of Mormon: "If the Mosaic law were so important, why are we told in II Nephi that the law is dead? And if the law is so important, why do we find almost nothing from the Pentateuch in the Book of Mormon? Where are all the dietary and ritual laws? Where is the mass of legislation on matters we would consider trivia today?" (Russell, "Further" 23). Russell uses these questions to support his notion that the Book of Mormon is not an ancient document. He indicates that "I believe that Latter Day Saints who want to take both the Book of Mormon and historical scholarship seriously need not despair" ("Further" 25-26), for they can begin to see the book as a novel written by Joseph Smith but inspired by God. This idea trails a whole train of assumptions that Russell hasn't even examined, let alone informed his reader of.

For example, Russell assumes that the reader cannot take "historical scholarship" seriously while at the same time reading the Book of Mormon as an ancient document. Because this is an unexamined assumption, Russell himself holds to a dogma too rigid to allow him to take either scholarship or the book seriously. Let's briefly explore this claim about about levitical laws. Since 1876, when Wellhausen switched the order of the documentary hypothesis and proposed that the Priestly writer composed his material last, this hypothesis has been the major interpretive scheme biblical scholars have used to read the Pentateuch. The documentary hypothesis basically proposes that the books which
in our Bible claim to be written by Moses were written in much later periods and by many writers. The Jawhist (J) and the Elohist (E) wrote their material in the eighth and seventh centuries. The Deuteronomist (D) then augmented these materials with his own writings, with some stories coming from independent sources. The Priestly (P) writer then added more material and redacted the existing material:

The Priestly Document (P), which contains all the laws and customs that go to produce the religious system we know as "Judaism," was unknown until after the Exile. Neither the earlier histories nor the pre-exilic prophets show any awareness of the distinctive P material. It is not until the Chronicler that we find evidence that Jewish institutional life was modelled on the ideals that P sets before its readers. Israel before the Exile knew nothing of complex rites of atonement, nothing of food laws and regulations about ritual purity, and little, indeed, of the transcendent monotheism that Jews and Christians were later to take for granted. (Robert Morgan 82)

By not examining his own assumptions Russell has shown how thoroughly a person can be captivated by his or her own preconceptions and not allow the text to speak in its otherness. If we adopt other assumptions in response to Russell's claims, then the lack of ritual law in the Book of Mormon could actually be evidence that the document is ancient: for Lehi (the book claims) left Jerusalem before the exile, before the institution of the complex codes contained in Leviticus, if we accept the documentary hypothesis. The reader always finds what he or she expects to find in a text because the reader must carry a blueprint to the text: a blueprint that in advance specifies what will count as evidence. Russell merely assumes that "historical scholarship" is an influence that will naturally support his position. I see this assumption as evidence that scholarship is always put to ideological uses. By taking neither biblical scholarship nor the Book of Mormon seriously, by not examining his own preconceived notions and prejudgments about the text, Russell falls into the most simplistic kind of textual
eisegesis. Perhaps the child was correct after all in showing these Jews hunting pigs.

**After the Manner of Men**

Whether or not we like to admit it, we all build our theories after the manner of men. The manner of man is to live temporally. All our theories of explanation arise from particular temporal positions. Russell's temporal position assumes from the beginning that the claims the Book of Mormon makes cannot be true. His conclusions are therefore determined by his assumptions. While Russell, along with other revisionist readers, turns the book into a shallow exercise in novelistic prose, I read the book as a deeply structured, sophisticated narrative. The assumption of shallowness in the text is itself the pre-text which makes the following shallow interpretation possible. My intention is two-fold. I want to reveal some of the complexity of the book while at the same time demonstrating how different interpretive methods will produce different readings when applied to the same text. The interpretive methods are, of course, some of the assumptions we bring to a text with us. We have to assume that the text will be amenable to certain types of analysis. We assume that texts do certain things. For example, Russell assumes that because the Book of Mormon is history-like (the terminology is Hans Frei's, from *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*), then it must conform to our modern notions of history. If the book doesn't contain a complete account of all cultural practices, then the text is deficient. If there were complex Jewish dietary codes and the book didn't record them, then the book is not historical. Frei has clearly demonstrated that before the rise of modern historical consciousness in the seventeenth century, people had different notions about history. If we cannot allow ancient texts such as the Bible speak to us in ways different from those arising from modern assumptions, then we are forever cocooned within our
own ownness—we can never experience the otherness that seems to make up most of the world.

In spite of the positivist claims made by some Mormon historians to explain "how certain doctrines have in fact developed," in the attempt to "restate each doctrine as contemporaries most likely understood it, without imposing later developments" (Alexander, "Reconstruction" 24. Italics added), to "approach this earlier world view through the lenses of those who may have shared it" (Quinn, Early x), to "scrupulously [follow] sources wherever they have led, letting history speak for itself" (Priddis, "Letter" 4), to examine the Book of Mormon "without any intention solely to amass data to support preconceived notions about it" (Ham 16), such projects are delusive attempts to transcend human understanding. We can't see things as past cultures saw them. We can't approach texts without preconceived notions, unless we make no attempt to understand them. We can't let history speak for itself; history requires a voice, the historian's voice. History might be personified as a literary device, but as a historical interpretive scheme to be taken literally, such a project is destined to fail. When each of us puts hands to the historical project we must recognize that the building materials themselves will not make an edifice. The wood and bricks sit there in piles until we take out our tape measures and saws and craft a reading of the evidence left us from the past. When a reader claims that the impersonal forces of history have erected such-and-such a building, we should feel it our critical responsibility to ask to see who applied for the building permit. Our theories about the world (ontological), about human understanding (epistemological), about human nature, about God, about man, and a thousand other things determine which explanations we will allow as possibilities. These and other hermeneutical choices establish the length and breadth of the building and every room in it.
Because such positivist claims are made about the construction of some buildings, I will set out on a deconstructive endeavor. When I test the support given by a few joists and look at the craftsmanship of some dormers, I am not doing so just to destroy. I may conclude that the building isn't safe for occupation, but only to show what I think to be a safer way to construct. The word deconstruction does, after all, have two prefixes: one requires a building down, but only so something can be constructed again—both a destruction and a construction. Nephi may tell us that he builds "after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me," and "not after the manner of men" (1 Ne. 17:2): I, however, make no such claims. I am not even a finish carpenter; I am a framer and I am concerned about structural issues. Perhaps I will later be able to come into the house and do some fine crafting; now is the time for roughing in the frame.

Methodology

Methods are no mean concerns. To select a methodology to illuminate a text is to select an ideology also. A method will determine in advance which answers will be acceptable and which will be considered non-answers. I don't want to resort to simplistic reductions and say that methodologies and ideologies are synonymous. A particular methodology can be put to a number of ideological uses. Russell, for example, assumes that one can take historical biblical criticism seriously only by rejecting the Book of Mormon as a historical work. I happen to believe that biblical criticism can also be put to use in exploring the book as an ancient document. Apparently some who believe in the work hold a belief similar to Russell's: that biblical scholarship is necessarily opposed to a belief in the Book of Mormon. McConkie and Millet have written:

As to the world's scholarship, it ought to be observed that the best of man's learning, as it has been directed toward the Bible, has not resulted in an increase of faith in that holy book. Indeed,
one of the primary purposes for which the Lord gave us the Book of Mormon was to defend the Bible and its teaching against the siege of the supposedly wise and learned. Scholars are far too wont to sift the sands of faith through screens of their own making, and in doing so often find themselves left with nothing but the rocks of their own unbelief. Similarly, with some concern we sense among many Latter-day Saints a preoccupation with "evidences" to "prove" the Book of Mormon. (McConkie and Millet, 1988 xiii)

I believe that any method, any approach can be put to differing ideological uses. Ultimately, belief about the Book of Mormon or the Bible is a matter of faith: the believer has faith that the book is what it claims to be and the unbeliever has faith that it cannot be. That faith is the presupposition from which both begin; biblical criticism can be put to either ideological use. McConkie and Millet's hyperbole belies my experience, for I know many scholars whose faith in the Bible has been strengthened by their critical study of it. It is too easy to dismiss another's faith because it doesn't correspond precisely to your own, just as it is far too easy to dismiss texts you have never read and to assume that a venture such as biblical criticism is a monolithic building with common assumptions and ends held by all who engage in it. McConkie and Millet don't hold out the possibility that the sands of faith hold any particles larger than sand that aren't rocks; perhaps biblical scholars can actually find something of value as they sift the sand. All of us are the "supposedly wise and learned" and the beginning of wisdom and learning is to realize that we are all "fools before God" (2 Ne. 9: 42).

In the sense McConkie and Millet use the word, I don't view my project as an attempt to "prove" the Book of Mormon. Mine is a more modest attempt to uncover as much meaning in the text as I can. I believe that approaches and ideas used in biblical criticism can help in that ideological project. The following examples are attempts to illustrate methods different from McConkie and Millet's homiletic method in examining the book. Each method is not a neutral choice. Each method
illuminates the text in a different way. The story of the building of the ship at Bountiful is a rich story amenable to analysis in a number of ways. To apply one method is to focus on particular features of the story and to exclude others—to uncover is also to cover. The choice of a method is value-laden; it is to decide which features of the text are important and which are unimportant.

**Historical Approach—Many Waters**

The narrative continues with the Lehi group finding their way safely to the coast and to a place "we called" Bountiful. Unlike at Nahom, the group names this place rather than accepting a previous name. Likewise also they name the body of water—Irreantum. Nephi is even careful enough to give us a translation; he says this, "being interpreted, is many waters" (1 Ne. 17:5). With Nephi's assiduous care in giving this name to his readers, the readers ought to consider if this is a clue of more importance than just a simple place-name. Nibley claims the name is Egyptian (*Lehi* 78). I am much less interested in the etymology of the word than in the cosmic connotations: the place is called "many waters." Ackermann cites many of the passages describing the cosmic significance of "many waters:"

When Moses strikes the rock, "many waters" (Num. 20:11)—a term almost invariably having cosmic associations—come forth to quench Israel's thirst. The Psalms often depict these waters as hostile to YHWH, typifying a chaotic world that threatens to engulf the worshipper. Yet as in other Near Eastern cultures, God's victorious cosmogonic struggle had established the divine dwelling place over the many waters, transforming them into fructifying agents. ("Numbers" 84-85)

Ackermann also refers to the destruction of the golden calf (Ex. 32:20), the people being able to drink bitter water at Meribah, the trial by water of suspected adulteresses (Num. 5:11-13), and Psalms 106:32-33, once again describing the ordeal by water at Meribah. In all these narratives the people are tried by the
many waters. May refers to Isaiah 17:12-13 which puns about the "many waters" and the "many peoples," soon to be rebuked by God. These same seas are the enemies of God in Ps. 89:10-11. The enemies of Israel here are not only associated with "many waters," but also with the Rahab—the primordial sea monster Jahweh defeated to gain control of the chaos (May cross references this to Hab. 3 [11-12]). "The enemies are manifestations of the intransigent elements which had to be quelled by Yahweh before creation could begin, and which must ever be defeated by him as he continues his activity in history." May points to a typological interpretation of this symbol, for all of Israel's enemies were reincarnations of this cosmic enemy, Rahab: "for there continues throughout history the kind of conflict which is posited at creation when Yahweh's wind blew over the watery abyss.... In this sense, Yahweh's conquest over the enemies of Israel, whether at the Red Sea, or in the present, or at the beginning of the new age (cf. Isa. 27:1) is a victory over cosmic evil and wickedness, over the demonic, or more properly the dragonic" (12). This mention of the Red Sea is significant. At these waters Yahweh delivered the children of Israel from the forces of chaos and destruction; God triumphed over the waters. Cross also refers to the Red Sea in discussing Hab. 3:8. He points to the fact that in this passage the struggle against the sea and the river merge: the Reed Sea becomes the River Jordan (Canaanite 140).

The merging of the Red Sea with later instances as a typological retracing of Israel's history is important for these occurrences at Irreantum. Nephi specifically appropriates Red Sea imagery here at these many waters. Although the term many waters can merely mean "abundant waters" (as it does in other passages in the Book of Mormon; see Mos. 8:8; Mor. 6:4; Eth. 2:6; 6:7; 1 Ne. 13:10, 12, 13, 29; 14:11, 12), such references usually depend on cosmic associations to the deep and the dragons in them (May 12).
Michelle Mitchell refers not only to the Israelite journey through the water as a trial by water, but also to the Lehite voyage (22-25). She also sees that even before the journey, "before Nephi and his family faced their trial by water, Nephi's brothers wanted to expose him to an impromptu river ordeal: 'And now it came to pass that when I had spoken these words, they were angry with me and were desirous to throw me into the depths of the sea [1 Ne. 17:48]" (Mitchell 23). This incident was, of course, prompted by Laman and Lemuel's conviction that the longer ordeal by water of the sea voyage was impossible to pass: "Our brother is a fool, for he thinketh that he can build a ship; yea, he also thinketh that he can cross these great waters" (17:17). These fears later prove prophetic, but only through Laman and Lemuel's own volition; they begin to revel during the voyage and tie Nephi up when he objects. Using typical Hebraic patterns of poetic intensification, Nephi recounts that "there arose a great storm, yea, a great and terrible tempest" (18:13). The storm drives the ship back for three days, even four days. Three times Nephi mentions the imminent possibility of being "swallowed up" by the sea (18:10, 15, 20). This personification of the chaotic forces of the sea connects the depth even more clearly with the cosmic connotations implicit in the word *irreantum*. In spite of this danger the Lord "preserved [Nephi] upon the waters of the great deep" (2 Ne. 4:20).

This reference in what is called the Psalm of Nephi to the deep is part of a poetic repetition:

My God hath been my support;
He hath led me through mine afflictions
In the wilderness;
And he hath preserved me
Upon the waters of the great deep.

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9The "great waters" are equivalent to the "many waters." (Anderson, *Creation* 107). In Ex. 15:10, Hab. 3: 15, and Ps. 77: 19-20 the words are translated either way in different translations.
The poem refers to the completeness, the wholeness of the God who has saved Nephi both on land and on sea. Two of the three major obstacles around which the narrative in 1 Nephi revolves are the exodus through the wilderness and the ordeal by water. In the larger context of Canaanite literature upon which the Hebrew Bible draws, the theme of the cosmic struggle between the forces of chaos and creation is a frequent one: Day mentions that one of the names of the sea monsters used in such contexts as the struggle between God and chaos is Tiamat, "the deep." Day connects these biblical passages (Ps. 77:16-17; 104:6; 33:7; Is. 51:10; Hab. 3:10; Gen. 1:2) with the monster of chaos in Enuma elish (7) as does Schwartz: "The Bible opens with a reference to the subdued Tiamat, Tehom, the deep over which the spirit of Elohim broods, and it closes with the final defeat of the Dragon, heralding a new heaven and a new earth when the sea shall be no more (Rev. 21: 1). In between, the myth has been historicized: the battle is fought for Israel's liberation from human oppressors, for the creation of the nation instead of the cosmos. Leviathan is replaced by Pharaoh and the Deep by the Red Sea." Later on the same page Schwartz says: "Allusions to the slaying of the dragon of the Deep grow more insistent in later prophetic references to the exodus. Here, even as Deutero-Isaiah invokes the exodus to herald a new redemption, he describes that exodus in terms of the ancient victory over chaos (Is. 51: 9-11)" (Remembering 29).

In symbolism from a story that would be familiar to many readers, Jesus demonstrates his divinity, his control over the forces of chaos by calming the raging waters (Mt. 8:23-27; Mk. 4:37-41; Lk. 8:22-25). The symbolism for the early Christian Jews would have been irresistible; here is the creator who commands even the waters, the seas of chaos to obey him. Nephi connects his story to the story of the Hebrews at the Red Sea:
Now ye know that Moses was commanded of the Lord to do that great work; and ye know that by his word the waters of the Red Sea were divided hither and thither, and they passed through on dry ground. But ye know that the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea, who were the armies of Pharaoh. (1 Ne. 17: 26-27)

In these stories of deliverance from the sea, the armies of evil and chaos both from Exodus and 1 Nephi fit into a larger pattern of miraculous deliverances throughout Hebrew literature. Alter refers to the "anachronistic character" of the third strophe of the Song of the Sea (Ex. 15: 1-18); it doesn't seem to fit. Scholars are troubled because it doesn't seem to have much to do with the story of deliverance from the troops of Pharaoh. But Alter points out that this is not so:

The theological-historical point, however, embodied in the narrative art of these verses is precisely to project out of the stunning experience at the Reed Sea a larger pattern of God's powerful—one might say "heroic"—acts in history. I would suggest that purposeful transition is brilliantly effected at the very beginning of the last strophe with the phrase "the earth swallowed them." This obviously refers to the drowning of the Egyptians, a meaning reinforced, as I have noted, by God's repeating Moses' gesture of stretching out his hand over the sea, and also by the term 'eretz [earth], which sometimes refers to the underworld rather than to the earth and so makes the substitution of "earth" for "sea" less problematic. But being swallowed up by the earth is reminiscent as well of the punishment of Korah's rebellious crew in one of the most memorable of the Wilderness stories and may also point forward, metaphorically rather than literally, to the fate of the Canaanites. In any case, whereas the first and second strophes begin and end with evocations of the sea, the last stanza begins by prominently introducing the word 'eretz—"earth, underworld," and, most important for the end of the strophe and of the poem, "land." One might think of this transition as the application on a larger structural scale of the technique of overlap we have seen used between versets and between lines. God the destroyer of the Egyptians at the Reed Sea becomes in a single scarcely perceptible step the guide of His people through the
wilderness and into the Land, and He strikes with terror their enemies who would block their entrance into their promised inheritance. (Poetry 53-54)

I ask the reader's indulgence for citing this long passage because it contains so many points pertinent to a discussion of the Lehite exodus and deliverance. Just as Alter sees in the Song of the Sea a larger pattern of God's heroic acts of deliverance for the Hebrews, I want to point to the fact that the writer of 1 Nephi also saw this pattern and saw it being repeated for the Lehite group.

Pharaoh and his people, Korah and his people, Laman and Lemuel and their people put themselves in opposition to God. Nephi rebukes them on the seas, but the "Lord did suffer it that he might show forth his power, unto the fulfilling of his word which he had spoken concerning the wicked" (18:11). What wicked? Nephi has just finished a sermon to his brothers in which he identifies the Canaanites the Israelites drove out of the land of promise as wicked (17: 32-38), the children of Israel in the wilderness as wicked (41-42), the contemporary Israelites in Jerusalem as wicked (43-44), and he identifies Laman and Lemuel with these wicked people a number of times (verses 41 and 44 compare Laman and Lemuel both to the children of Israel in the wilderness and to the contemporary Jews). "We have already seen that the imagery of the primordial battle surfaces in references to the exodus; a hostile deep also appears in the contexts of apostasy, injustice, and the punishment for 'turning away from God'" (Schwartz, Remembering 34. Schwartz cites Jonah as an example here). Laman and Lemuel tie Nephi up in the boat. The forces of chaos are extended until Laman and Lemuel fear "being swallowed up in the depths of the sea" (10, 15, 20), when they release him.

Just as the rebellious Egyptians are swallowed up by the sea, just as Korah and his apostates are swallowed up by the earth—the underworld—the entire crew of the boat fears being swallowed up by the sea (Nohrnberg says specifically that
the swallowing up of Pharaoh's army "prefigures the swallowing up of the evil
generation in the wilderness, and the swallowing up of Dathan and Abiram in
terms that echo those of the Red Sea" [Num. 16: 1-35]. 43), and more explicitly the
underworld theme emerges when Nephi states that his parents were not only sick,
but "were brought near even to be carried out of this time to meet their God; yea,
their grey hairs were about to be brought down to lie low in the dust; yea, even
they were near to be cast with sorrow into a watery grave" (18). The parallel
poetic images of dust and the watery grave merge here as a symbols of death; once
again we find a poetic repetition of the symbols of the underworld. The word
Sheol is translated "grave" when Jacob mourned the loss of his youngest son. "To
read Joseph's descent into the pit as a descent into the underworld is not at all
strained. When his father, Jacob, grieves over Joseph, he speaks of going down to
Sheol ["grave" in the KJV], where he will mourn his son. The Hebrew word used
for descent throughout the narrative, yrd, is also the psalter's term of choice for a
descent into the underworld" (Schwartz, "Joseph's" 116). Anderson refers to May's
study and points out that the descent to Sheol is a descent through chaotic,
subterranean waters and only deliverance from Yahweh can save the suppliant
from the waters, from death (Creation 97).

Just as God conquered the monsters of the deep and established a new creation,
Nephi is released and he prays to God, "and after I had prayed the winds did cease,
and the storm did cease, and there was a great calm" (21). Immediately upon
being released, Nephi takes up the compass. This compass, the circle or ball as it
is sometimes called, is another image of God's taming of the chaos. God
circumscribes the chaos in his creation: some interpreters "add the image of the
compass to Proverbs 8: 27, underscoring the sense of delimiting: 'When he
established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the
deep'" (Schwartz, Remembering 12), or as the KJV translates it: "When he
prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth." In spite of those who smile when the Book of Mormon mentions the compass, the image seems to be correct here; the compass is a circle. This is the first place the Liahona is called a compass: previously Nephi referred to it as "a round ball" (1 Ne. 16: 10) or just "the ball" (16: 26). Appropriately, when Nephi prays and takes the compass in his hands, the great waters stop storming and become "a great calm" (18: 21). Once again God exerts control over the forces of chaos. "Whether the primordial battle is invoked with reference to creation, the exodus, or the new creation, it signals salvation" (Schwartz, Remembering 30).

The cosmic implications are too obvious to require much explanation; Nephi makes all the connections for us. Just as God controlled the waters and imposed order on the world to create land and a people to occupy the land and make it fruitful; just as God saved the Israelites; taking them through the water and their enemies to a land of promise, the Lehi group sails on toward the promised land, disembarks, plants seeds, and imposes order on their new land, their own promised land.

**Structuralist Approach—Descents into the Grave**

To a structuralist certain stories that have the same structure emerge time and again in a book such as the Bible. Although these stories have different characters, the stories unfold in the same way and with the same result. The stories of Joseph and Moses are such stories that share a similar structure.

We could sketch the story of Joseph. We would find that three times Joseph is forced into crises that threaten him with death. (1) His brothers decide to be rid of their arrogant little brother so they lower him into the pit. In the one strand of the story, a band of Midianite traders come along and Joseph, instead of dying in the wilderness, is sold as a slave and taken to Egypt. (2) Egypt is another
symbol of death into which Joseph goes down as into a grave. After the attempted seduction by Potiphar's wife, he goes (3) down into another symbol of the grave—prison—from which he later emerges. In each case "the symbols of death and evil are transformed into means of deliverance" (Ackermann, "Literary" 118. All the following analysis of the Joseph and Moses stories follows Ackermann closely.). Joseph is delivered from death by being raised out of the pit, from the grave of Egypt Joseph is able to save the lives of all Jacob's family, coming out of the prison Joseph saves all Egypt from the famine. If we were to graphically portray the story of Joseph and his descent into the underworld and emergence from it, the story would look something like this:

Similarly, in the story of young Moses, three times the fledgling leader of his people descends into abysses representing death but emerges to give life to the Israelites. Rather than pit/Egypt/prison, the pattern is river/Egypt/wilderness. The symbol of death is Egypt. "in Exodus 1-2, Egypt, the pit of Sheol, becomes the
womb which gives birth to Israel; the 'death' of bondage precipitates a crisis in which the Hebrews are fruitful and multiply and which leads to the creation of a nation" (Ackermann, "Literary" 118). In the specific case of Moses, the midwives are commanded to drown the Israelite boys in the river. But "the waters, a traditional symbol of evil and death, especially in the context of Pharaoh's command, become the means by which the future deliverer of Israel is borne up" (Ackermann, "Literary" 118). Later, Moses escapes from the grave of Egypt, but a grave that has suckled the boy in the palaces of power, by fleeing into the wilderness after he killed the Egyptian taskmaster. But the wilderness, traditionally a symbol of death and foreboding, leads Moses to the life-giving power of YHWH when he finds the God on the mountain. If we traced the story of the young Moses it might look like this (Frye's *Great Code* traces the entire Christian Bible using these patterns of descent or apostasy and ascents or restorations.):
The pattern repeats itself in Moses' later life: three times he descends into the underworld and three times Jehovah delivers him and his people to life. God sends forth plagues and a final plague of death upon Egypt: the country becomes a grave for all who do not obey Jehovah. But the Israelites are delivered from death. When the children of Israel are trapped next to the sea, the Lord delivers them from the grave; they pass through the tomb of water to safety on the other side; instead, the forces of Pharaoh venture into the grave. For forty years Jehovah guides the children of Israel through the deadly wilderness: those who don't follow Jehovah are literally buried in the wilderness, some are swallowed by the earth:

In all three cases the narratives are joined by the verb "yarad, 'to go down,' in Genesis 46:4 and Exodus 3:8 which structure the differing perceptions of God in these juxtaposed Egypt-waters-wilderness sequences" (Ackermann, "Literary")
In each of these stories the protagonist descends, "goes down," into the grave and emerges again delivering life to himself and his family.

This narrative structure works primarily because "the story of Joseph serves as a prototype for Israel's understanding of her experience in the Exodus" (Ackermann, "Literary" 117). Notice here that similarity in narrative structure is not thought to be a liability, a defect of the narrator. The repetition of the pattern is not only a qualitative improvement, it also is a large part of the meaning of the narratives. Could, then, the story of Joseph serve also as a prototype for other stories?

Noel Reynolds traces a large chiastic outline of the entire book of 1 Nephi. In that outline he matches the stories of Nephi's obtaining of the plates of brass and the story of Nephi's building the ship as parallel incidents: both referring back to Moses' leadership ("Outline" 69-71). This pairing is natural because in both cases Nephi compares his situation with that of Moses' and the children of Israel (1 Ne. 4:2-3; 17:22-30).

The two features Reynolds points to are only two-thirds of the main structures in the 1 Nephi narrative. The three examples of Nephi's heroic stature and deliverance by God are (1) the departure from Jerusalem and the subsequent retrieval of the plates of brass, (2) the journey through the wilderness, and (3) the building of the ship and the crossing of the many waters.

Contrary to Russell's revisionist claim that no Jew would ever think of leaving Palestine, the evidence doesn't seem to support his position:

It seems remarkable that an Israelite in 600 B.C. would dream of abandoning and fleeing Yahweh's chosen land—without even a fight—and reestablishing a chosen land elsewhere.

Indeed, even though the Babylonian Captivity occurs shortly after Lehi's alleged departure from Jerusalem, the conviction of the Old Testament writers is that Yahweh was chastening Israel in
allowing the Babylonian conquest. After Israel was properly chastened, Yahweh allowed the
faithful to return to the land which he had given them. ("Further" 22-23)
Russell's confused claims present some difficulty because he provides no sources
to support his point of view. His claims also seem counter to some rather simple
and widely agreed upon historical occurrences, disputed by none that I know of.
The most basic is that during the Second Temple period it was the Jewish
community in Babylon that financed the return to Israel and the rebuilding of
the temple. Even during the time the Book of Mormon began, Jeremiah urged the
Jewish community to build houses and remain in Babylon, to become a part of the
civic and business life of the city (Jer. 29: 7). This Jewish community in Babylon
became the cultural and intellectual center of Judaism and produced the cultural
and religious institutions that later became characteristic of Judaism. They did all
this without a fight and the community was quite satisfied to remain outside
Palestine until long after the Romans dispersed the Jews from their homeland
centuries later.
Russell's claim also ignores a community such as that at Elephantine. Occupied
by a Jewish garrison as early as the 8th century, during the fifth century the
Jews there had established a permanent colony and requested permission to
rebuild their temple, which had been destroyed by Egyptian priests (Grant 270-71).
Not only did the Jews at Elephantine maintain their own temple and
community outside Palestine without a fight, but "what is indubitably true is that
the temple of Elephantine is just one of a number of Jewish temples that were in
existence throughout the period of the Second Temple" (Stone 85). I should note
that the main body of Jews who fled to Elephantine did so after the destruction of
Jerusalem, the same cataclysmic event Lehi and his group left Jerusalem to avoid.
Whatever the nature of the Elephantine community, Russell's claims assume a
monolithic attitude toward the Palestinian promised land that he has made no
attempt to demonstrate existed. Would all Jews feel the way Russell claims? Would any? Would remnants from the Northern Kingdom who fled south (the Lehite group claims to be part of the tribes from the North; many such refugees settled around Jerusalem after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom) after the Assyrian conquest feel the same way? Russell has been too superficial in not addressing any of the most basic questions required by the position he takes.

This comment also ignores the claim that the Ten Tribes decided that they would keep the law that they never kept in their homeland (2 Esdras 13:40-45). They left Assyria and departed to the east (not back to Palestine in the west) and were never heard from again. Whether or not we view the book of 2 Esdras as historical is not the main point. The point is that Israelites not only could conceive of Israelites departing from their promised land and the temple, giving it up without a fight, but this action was actually attributed to the Northern Kingdom. Russell's claim puzzles me because he provides a claim without any grounds for our taking that claim seriously; Russell provides no "good reasons" for us to believe his claims.

In fact, what we see in the Book of Mormon is a reversal in which Jerusalem becomes identified with Egypt as a place of wickedness and bondage. The comparison is precipitated by Laman and Lemuel when they protest the god-fearing nature of the Jews: "And now we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord and all his commandments, according to the law of Moses" (17:22). Against this claim of righteousness and mention of Moses, Nephi launches into an extended three-way comparison between the children of Israel under Moses, the Jews at Jerusalem, and Laman and Lemuel.

The children of Israel are "brought out of the land of Egypt" (17:40) and "brought out of bondage" (25). "Bringing them out" and "bringing them up" are
technical words, *leitwörter*, and their frequent use throughout the early parts of
the Book of Mormon is not incidental:

These two causative verbs of movement also become technical terms to describe the Exodus.
"To bring out," also employed for the liberation of a slave or a prisoner, is a synonym for "to
rescue, redeem;" it is found countless times in the account of the Exodus, often in legal formulas.
It even becomes an element of the divine name. The Decalogue, the heart of the Law given on
Mount Sinai, begins with these words: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out
of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me..." (Ex. 20:2-3; cf. Lev. 22: 31-33;
25:55; Gen. 15:7 [Abraham!]) The other verb, "to bring up," emphasizes the link between the
Exodus and the gift of the promised land; it is found predominantly in the early prophets and
liturgical texts. (Brother John 32. The brackets are Brother John's.)

Nephi promises that just as the children of Israel were "brought out of Egypt" and
"brought out of bondage," the Lord will provide a promised land for this Lehite
group. Quoting the Lord, Nephi says: "I, the Lord, did deliver you from
destruction; yea, that I did bring you out of the land of Jerusalem" (14). The
formula is the same: being brought out of the land of Egypt and being brought out
of the land of Jerusalem (the formula occurs often in the Book of Mormon; I will
mention a few instances: 2 Ne. 1:1, 9, 24; 25:20; 1 Ne. 10: 3; 16: 35; Mos. 1: 11). In the
boat narrative, the bringing is two-fold: a bringing out of captivity or bondage
and into a promised land. The children of Israel are "led away out of the hands of
the Egyptians" and "led out of bondage" (23-24). In spite of Laman and Lemuel's
claim that the Jews at Jerusalem are righteous, Nephi says that "they have become
wicked... that they must be destroyed, save a few only, who shall be led away into
captivity" (43). Nephi and his group, on the other hand, are told: "After ye have
arrived in the promised land, ye shall know that I, the Lord, am God; and that I,
the Lord, did deliver you from destruction; yea, that I did bring you out of the land
of Jerusalem" (14). The theme even continues in other times because Nephi
predicts that the Jews at Jerusalem will be taken captive into Babylon, but at some point will be "brought out of captivity" (10:3). The two themes of being brought out of the land and out of captivity are explicitly linked even in later generations of Nephites as Alma claims that "our father, Lehi, was brought out of Jerusalem by the hand of God." The typological comparison is expanded as he claims that the fathers were "delivered by the hand of God out of the land of Jerusalem, by the hand of the Lord... [and have] been brought out of bondage time after time" (Alma 9: 9, 22).

Nephi equates being "brought out of the land of Jerusalem" (17: 14) with being brought "out of the land of Egypt" (40). Nephi goes through a long series of arguments to point out that that "the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God" (35). Throughout this passage Nephi points out that the Israelites inherited their promised land only because they were more righteous than the Canaanites who previously inhabited it (34). But he goes on to point to the fact that the children of Israel hardened their hearts in the wilderness "even as ye [Laman and Lemuel] have" (41). Now, the people at Jerusalem are wicked again, wicked "nearly unto ripeness; and I know not but they are at this day about to be destroyed, save a few only who shall be led away into captivity" (43). Being brought out of Jerusalem is equivalent to being brought out of Egypt because both are deliverances from captivity and death. In this typological reworking of the Joseph and Moses stories, Jerusalem replaces Egypt as the symbol of death and the underworld: We also have a three-fold pattern of descents into death in the Nephi story:
The excursion to retrieve the plates of brass from Jerusalem is filled with symbols of death. Laman enters Laban's house and requests the plates: Laban responds that "thou art a robber, and I will slay thee" (3: 13). But Laman flees from the house of death and wants to return the wilderness, another symbol of death. Nephi convinces the group to try again; they gather their riches and return to Laban's house. Laban keeps their property and sends his servants to kill them (25). To escape this death, the brothers flee "into the wilderness, and the servants of Laban did not overtake us, and we hid ourselves in the cavity of a rock" (27). These two symbols of the underworld clearly combine as symbols of death, but a death that nurtures and saves. Nephi is able to emerge from them after delivering the message to his brothers that their situation is like that of Moses and the children of Israel:

Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea.

Now behold ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you;
wherefore can ye doubt? Let us go up [out of the grave]; the Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians. (4:2-3)

Unequivocally here, Nephi puts their situation in parallel with the children of Israel, and Laban is the parallel figure for Pharaoh. The situation at Jerusalem is a deliverance comparable to the one at the Red Sea. Nephi then goes into the city of death and kills Laban. In disguise, his brothers think he is dead when he returns outside the city walls. The story is pervaded by the symbols of death.

Jerusalem is the first symbol of death. The second is the wilderness. Frequently, the group goes from the high elevation at Jerusalem down into the wilderness (2: 5-6; 3: 4; 7: 5). The wilderness is a place of many trials and victories over death. While bringing Ishmael and his family, Laman and Lemuel tie Nephi up and decide to leave him to be devoured by wild beasts (7: 16). But Nephi is delivered by the Lord. All the bows become useless and the group hasn't the ability to acquire food; but Nephi fashions a new bow and arrows and becomes "an instrument in the hands of God, in bringing us forth into the land of promise; for were it not for him, we must have perished with hunger in the wilderness" (2 Ne. 2: 24). Ishmael dies and is buried in the wilderness and Laman, Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael decide they will kill Lehi and Nephi (1 Ne. 16: 37-38), but God delivers them again.

The sea is the third symbol of death. Laman and Lemuel attempt to kill Nephi before he even begins building the ship. After the ship is built, Lehi and his group "go down" into it (18: 5). I have already recounted the death symbolism during the voyage.

The narratives of Joseph, Moses, and Nephi have the same structure. Each is involved in an exodus with the three-fold structure of taking them down into the underworld. But in each case the grave becomes a symbol of life. Out of Jerusalem Nephi emerges to bring his family to a new and promised land. The
wilderness presents many dangers to the group but God provides light and food and prepares "a way" for them that they can inherit their promised land (17: 13). Going down into the sea, the group is taken nearly to the point of death by the forces of chaos, but the Lord delivers them again and the passage takes them to the shore of their promised land.

Archetypal Approach—Exoduses in the Wilderness

The exodus archetype stands as the supreme figure by which the people of the book understand their relationship to God. It is no coincidence that Isaiah saw the return of his people from exile in terms of a second exodus, that Matthew saw Jesus as a second lawgiver leading his followers to a promised land, that the American Puritan colonists went into the wilderness to build their promised land, that Brigham Young organized his exodus using the same administrative structure Moses had been urged by his father-in-law to institute.

Nephi explicitly compares his exodus with the earlier exodus. The many waters become once again the intransigent elements of chaos needing to be calmed, as at the Red Sea. Nephi goes to the mountain to receive the divine pattern of the ship, as Moses goes to the mountain to talk to God and receive the pattern for the tabernacle. The Lehite group has been wandering in the wilderness in search of their promised land.

When Nephi goes to the place the Lord has directed him to find ore to make tools, he does the unusual—he makes fire: "For the Lord had not hitherto suffered that we should make much fire, as we journeyed in the wilderness; for he said: I will make thy food become sweet, that ye cook it not" (17: 12). The miraculous provision of food in the wilderness stands in parallel with the Lord's providing food for the children of Israel in the wilderness. But Nephi tells us something of what he understands to be the exoduses' relationship to the other:
And I will be your light in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments; wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall be led towards the promised land; and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led. (1 Ne. 17:13)

And notwithstanding they being led, the Lord their God, their Redeemer, going before them, leading them by day and giving light unto them by night and doing all things for them which were expedient for man to receive, they hardened their hearts and blinded their minds, and reviled against Moses and against the true and living God. (1 Ne. 17:30)

And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people. (Ex. 13: 21-22.)

Very specifically, the purpose of these passages is to demonstrate that the Lord himself led the children of Israel through the wilderness: Nephi says specifically to provide light, in this case for this band of Israelites (Szink has briefly commented on the comparison between 1 Ne. 17: 13-14 and Ex. 6: 7-8 and 13: 21. Both are delivered by the Lord, both are chosen by the Lord, both are led to a promised land.) Nehemiah also recounts Yahweh's great works in leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness. He also refers to the light that leads them through the wilderness.

I could start earlier with another exodus: Abraham's. Weingreen refers to the choice of the word translated "bringing out" in Gen. 15: 7 and Nehemiah 9: 7. The word is formulaicly used to indicate divine intervention in bringing Abraham out of Mesopotamia (214). This salvation history stands in parallel to the children of Israel being brought out of Egypt. Weingreen refers to the rabbinic traditions of Abraham's destroying the gods of his father and requiring divine deliverance by God from Nimrod, suggesting that these rabbinic sources may be as ancient as any in the Bible. God brings Abraham out of the land of Ur of Chaldees to the promised land. Little wonder that Nehemiah sees the bringing out of Abraham and of Moses to be parallel incidents, archetypes:
Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham; And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and hearest their cry by the Red sea; And thou didst divide the sea before them, so they went through on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest in to the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters. Moreover thou ledest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go. (Neh. 9: 7, 9, 11-12)

The purpose of the Lord's giving light in the wilderness is to show the people the way they should go. Clearly Nephi is appropriating exodus language to describe his own exodus.

Fokkelman says that the pillar of fire and column of smoke appears in the biblical exodus at crucial points in the narrative: when the children of Israel leave Egypt, at the Red Sea, at the theophany at Sinai/Horeb, and at the anointing of the tabernacle (60-61). Here in the Book of Mormon the pillar of fire emerges at a crucial time in the narrative when Nephi is comparing the Lehite situation with that of Moses and the children of Israel, when Nephi is building a ship after a divine pattern, when Nephi has finished his exodus through the wilderness, when Nephi is preparing to embark on his sea voyage.

When Nephi claims to have been "brought out of Jerusalem," he is calling on a specific exodus tradition of divine deliverance. The word translated "to bring out" is prevalent throughout the exodus, especially in the formulation of social laws. Daube claims that its frequency in later Israelite history derives from its prominence in the exodus:

Evidently it owes its prominence to the enormous importance the narrators attach to the saving activity of God, be he acting in person or—as some texts have it—through Moses (e.g. "I will send thee unto Pharaoh that thou mayest bring out my people" [Ex. 3: 10ff; 14: 11; Dt. 9: 12]) or Moses and Aaron (e.g. "These are they to whom the Lord spoke, Bring my people out of Egypt" [Ex. 6: 13, 26ff; 16: 3, 6]). (Daube 33)
Nephi compares the bringing out of his group with that of the children of children of Israel from Egypt:

Yea, and the Lord said also that: After ye have arrived in the promised land, ye shall know that I, the Lord, did deliver you from destruction; yea, that I did bring you out of the land of Jerusalem. (17:14)

And he loveth those who will have him to be their God. Behold, he loved our fathers, and he covenanted with them, yea, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and he remembered the covenants which he had made; wherefore, he did bring them out of the land of Egypt. And he did straiten them in the wilderness with his rod; for they hardened their hearts, even as ye have... (17: 40-41)

Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. (Ex. 6: 6-7)

Nephi recounts the mighty works of God from the earlier exodus so he can also make a case for the mighty works of God in this later exodus, so Laman and Lemuel will know that the Lord is God: "and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led" (17: 13), Nephi quotes the Lord as saying. That "after ye have arrived in the promised land, ye shall know that I, the Lord, am God; and I, the Lord, did deliver you from destruction; yea, that I did bring you out of the land of Jerusalem" (14).

Likewise, the earlier exodus also witnessed that the Lord was God and brought the people out of Egypt: "And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians" (Ex. 6: 7).

Keeping with the pattern of the children of Israel soon forgetting the mighty works the Lord has performed for them, Laman and Lemuel reject implicit comparison with the children of Israel; with this rejection they also maintain the archetype. "They began to murmur against me," Nephi claims, just as the children of Israel murmured against Moses and God. "And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, how long shall I bear with this evil congregation,
which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me (Dt. 14: 27). This murmuring is a technical term also associated with the hardening of the hearts of the followers. Coats connects the murmuring and the hardening of the hearts in the exodus tradition, indicating that as Pharaoh hardened his heart against God and Moses and the children of Israel later do a number of times in the wilderness, God will punish the people for their apostasy:

Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness:

When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways (Ps. 95: 8-10). (Coats also cites Dt. 2: 30; 9; 13; Jer. 7: 26; 19: 15; Ez. 2: 4; 3: 7; Ex. 32: 9; 33: 3; and 34: 9. Coats, Rebellion 69.)

The disobedience and apostasy associated with "hardening one's heart" has "a generalizing and spiritualizing connotation" (Coats, Rebellion 69) that, as the citation from Psalms indicates, casts a long shadow through Israelite perceptions of the exodus motif: Israel constantly rebels, hardens the heart, murmurs against God.

And now it came to pass that I, Nephi, was exceedingly sorrowful because of the hardness of their hearts ... (17:19)

And they did harden their hearts from time to time, and they did revile against Moses, and also against God ... (17:42)

But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, And refused to obey, neither were mindful of the wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks ... (Neh. 9: 16-17)

Laman and Lemuel then offer up their evaluation of the situation; they "murmured against me, saying" (17: 17):

Our brother is a fool,
   For he thinketh that he can build a ship;
Yea, and he also thinketh that he can cross these great waters. (17: 17)
In response to this claim of his foolishness, Nephi rebuts with a marvelous bit of characterization: "And thus my brethren did complain against me, and were desirous that they might not labor" (17: 18). According to Nephi's account, written much later in his life, Laman and Lemuel cloak their refusal to help in the building of the ship because they are lazy: while giving high-minded reasons about the lack of divine sanction for the project. Laman and Lemuel refuse to believe both that Nephi can build the ship and that he is called of the Lord to do it (18). Then (as Coats connects the two traditions in the exodus and throughout the Hebrew Bible) Nephi connects the murmuring tradition with the tradition of the hardening of the hearts: "And now it came to pass that I, Nephi, was exceedingly sorrowful because of the hardness of their hearts; and when they saw that I began to be sorrowful they were glad in their hearts" (19). The hardness of their hearts leads Nephi to sorrow, and Laman and Lemuel to gladness in their hearts because of it. The brief description gives a fairly comprehensive view of the conditions of all the hearts involved:

We knew that ye could not construct a ship, for we knew that ye were lacking in judgment; wherefore thou canst not accomplish so great a work. (17:19)

Now ye know that Moses was commanded of the Lord to do that great work; and ye know that by his word the waters of the Red Sea were divided hither and thither, and they passed through on dry ground. (17:26)

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses. (Ex. 14: 30-31)

Laman and Lemuel use the same terms used to describe Nephi's attempt to cross the great/many waters as Nephi uses to describe Moses' "great work," the same words used in the exodus tradition to describe the same event.
But Israel soon forgets God's great work in delivering them out of the hands of the Egyptians. Constantly these wayward children need to be called into remembrance of the great works because they revert to what Childs calls the stereotyped question: "Why did you bring us out of Egypt?" (Childs, Book 285). Laman and Lemuel also air their complaints; just as Laman and Lemuel in Nephi's characterization are "like unto them [the Jews]," these two say that Nephi is "like unto our father, led away by the foolish imaginations of his heart" (20). Nephi measures his brothers by the condition of their hearts and they do the same to him. Then Laman and Lemuel catalogue their complaints against Nephi and Lehi:

Ye, he hath led us out of the land of Jerusalem,  
And we have wandered in the wilderness for these many years;  
And our women have toiled, being big with child;  
And they have borne children in the wilderness  
And suffered all things, save it were death;  
And it would have been better that they had died before they came out of Jerusalem than to have suffered these afflictions. (17: 20)

Laman and Lemuel's complaint, at least as written down by Nephi, reiterates the claim that they see their time in the wilderness as a period of wandering, as a repetition of the exodus archetype. The stereotyped complaint is followed by the stereotyped claim that death would have been better than the suffering in the wilderness.

It would have been better that they had died before they came out of Jerusalem than to have suffered these afflictions. (1 Ne. 17: 20)  
And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness. And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? (Num. 14: 2)

During an earlier rebellion in the wilderness, some of the women involved in the Lehite exodus begin murmuring against Lehi; thereafter the complaint is taken up by Laman and Lemuel. About the women's complaint the text says:
And they did murmur against my father because he had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, saying: Our father is dead; yea, and we have wandered much in the wilderness, and we have suffered much affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue; and after all these sufferings we must perish in the wilderness.
And thus they did murmur against my father, and also against me; and they were desirous to return again to Jerusalem. (16: 35)

Just as Moses is "accused of causing the death of the nation by leading them out into the wilderness," so also is Lehi, and Nephi is like unto Lehi. "In times of adversity it is a natural emotion to regret having ever undertaken such an enterprise. 'Surely we had it better in Egypt' (Num. 11: 18)" (Childs 285).

Nohrnberg refers to the exodus experience, which held great power over later generations of Israelites, as a time which gave the nation an identity, "a prolonged version of an initiatory 'rite of passage.'" "Confessional texts show us that both later generations and individual Israelites not only believed in the redeeming power of the exodus, but also the sustaining power of the wilderness-experience (Ex. 15: 22-Num. 36)" (41-42).

Whether you believe that the book is a modern or ancient production, I think the text insists that we read it as saying that the author saw this experience as an exodus experience, appropriating the important themes and language to apply to his own circumstance. I think the text is also insistent that we see this as a complex weaving of the themes from the two exoduses.

The complaint Laman and Lemuel bring against Nephi and their father is that he has led them away from the comfortable life at Jerusalem to suffer the privations of the wilderness. "Behold, these many years we have suffered in the wilderness, which time we might have enjoyed our possessions and the land of our inheritance; yea, and we might have been happy" (21). Possessing their belongings in comfort might be allusion to the children of Israel who wanted to return to Egypt to enjoy the luxuries there (Walzer calls this the standard reading
of the Israelites' desire to return to Egypt [33]): "The Israelites saw what came, later on, to be called decadence, a high culture that had gotten too high: overripe, tainted, corrupt, and, at the same time, rich and alluring" (Walzer 38-39). Nephi does claim that the people at Jerusalem had "become wicked, yea, nearly unto ripeness" (43), contrary to Laman and Lemuel's claims that they are righteous.

Laman and Lemuel are the ones to first explicitly mention Moses. They claim the Jews at Jerusalem are righteous: they keep the law of Moses (22). They complain that Nephi and Lehi have unjustly judged the people in the land of Jerusalem. Once again that they did "murmur and complain" against the exodus leaders. The murmur *Leitwort* comes up again.

Nephi then begins his extended comparison of Laman and Lemuel with the children of Israel. This historical review allows Nephi to demonstrate that the history of righteousness among the children of Israel is one of short-lived repentance and long-lived rebellion. But the moments the Israelites do obey God allow him to make the same appeal to Laman and Lemuel. Nephi begins in Egypt. The children of Israel "hearkened unto the words of the Lord" (23) and Moses and were led out of captivity. Nephi then recounts this miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea: "Now ye know that Moses was commanded of the Lord to do that great work; and ye know that by his word the waters of the Red Sea were divided hither and thither and they passed through on dry ground. But ye know that the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea, who were the armies of Pharaoh" (26-27).

The deliverance at the sea archetype became the primary symbol by which Israel interpreted its relationship with Jahweh. An Israelite faced with another sea crossing would naturally look back to the Red Sea event to interpret his own because even in circumstances that weren't as similar as Nephi's was to the original event, Israelites saw this particular event as being repeated many times throughout their history:
It was not by chance that the episode at the sea was chosen as symbolic of Israel's redemption and creation as a community. Theoretically, other episodes might have been selected just as well as this one, say the march from the southern mountains into the new land, a favorite theme of old Israelite poetry, or the Conquest proper of Canaan. Nor is it by coincidence that, with the recrudescence of myth late in Israel's history, myths of creation, especially the battle with the sea, came to be identified with the historical battle in which Yahweh won salvation for Israel. In choosing the event of the sea, Israel drew upon available symbols and language which retained power and meaning even when the old mythic patterns which gave them birth had been attenuated or broken by Israel's austere historical consciousness. (Cross, Canaanite 137-38)

Cross continues in this passage to show how the crossing of the Jordan into the promised land was not just a reenactment of the crossing of the Red Sea but a fusing: "Exodus and entrance, the sea-crossing from Egypt and the river-crossing of the Conquest were ritually fused in the cultic acts, followed then by the consummation of the covenant which created the community at Sinai and established them in the land of Gilgal." Here as Nephi is about to cross these many waters he calls to mind these two incidents: "ye know that by his word the waters of the Red Sea were divided hither and thither, and they passed through on dry ground" (26) and "after they had crossed the river Jordan he did make them mighty unto the driving out of the children of the land" (32). Laman and Lemuel use the same words to deny that Nephi "can cross these great waters" (17). This type of cultic fusing of separate crossings of bodies of water that Cross discusses is evident in a Psalm such as 114:

When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back. The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs. What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou was driven back? (Ps. 114: 1-5)
Nephi calls these two crossings of water to mind to remind his brothers that what
the Lord has done in the past he can do for them also; to ritually fuse the incidents
with their own story about to be enacted. The lesson (from a different ideological
point of view) is long remembered, for later in the book a Nephite chronicler
recounts the stories told by the Lamanites about how their fathers were wronged
by Nephi. They claim to have been "driven out of Jerusalem because of the
iniquities of their fathers, and that they were wronged in the wilderness by their
brethren, and they were also wronged while crossing the sea." (Mos. 10: 12).

Nohrnberg claims that Moses' life established a pattern for the children of
Israel to follow. The crossing of the Red Sea is only one part of that pattern. This
pattern isn't just a reading into their own story the story of the exodus, much like
the Puritans did as they came to colonize the new world: "This pattern is one more
of the prescriptive paradigms that God showed Moses in the mountain"
(Nohrnberg 40-41). Israel's life in the wilderness is patterned after Moses' life in
the wilderness. I will continue to quote Nohrnberg in the left two columns while
the material in the right column is mine:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moses is born in Egypt, where he seeks to intervene for his countrymen there.</th>
<th>Israel finds itself in Egypt, where it is ministered to my Moses, who intervenes with Pharaoh.</th>
<th>Lehi seeks to intervene with his people, to call them to repentance so they won't be destroyed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moses departs from Egypt as a fugitive.</td>
<td>Israel departs form Egypt in haste, or is expelled.</td>
<td>After returning to Jerusalem to acquire the plates of brass, Nephi kills Laban and convinces Zoram to go into the wilderness with them because &quot;we were desirous that he should tarry with us for this cause, that the Jews might not know concerning our flight into the wilderness, lest they should pursue us and destroy us&quot; (1 Ne. 4: 36).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses sojourns with the priest in Midian.</td>
<td>Israel wanders with Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.</td>
<td>Lehi and Nephi lead the group through the wilderness: they &quot;did sojourn in the wilderness. And we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness&quot; (17:3-4).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moses is called by God at the mountain of God.</td>
<td>Israel is called by God at the mountain of God.</td>
<td>Nephite visits the mountain to receive instruction about how to obtain food (16:30) and is specifically called up to the mountain to receive the divine pattern for the ship (17:70). In addition, Nephite is caught away to a high mountain where he sees a vision of the tree of life (11:1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses parts form his father-in-law in Midian.</td>
<td>Israel parts form Moses' father-in-law after covenaniting with God at Sinai.</td>
<td>Nephite's father-in-law dies and is buried in the wilderness. This scene precipitates a rebellion in the wilderness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses returns to rejoin &quot;Israel&quot; and to intervene with Pharaoh in Israel's behalf.</td>
<td>Israel sets out from Sinai to return to the land of Israel after Moses intervenes with God on its behalf.</td>
<td>Nephite becomes an intercessor. Only after his intervention are they able to obtain the plates of brass (4:1-5), acquire food (16:22-24), build a ship (17), and cross the great waters after another rebellion (18:20-22).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses works signs before Pharaoh and precedes to plagues culminating in the death of Egypt's first-born.</td>
<td>Israel is plagued by God for bad faith and is ultimately destroyed by God in the form of the elder generation.</td>
<td>The group is threatened with death in the wilderness but the threat is never executed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses and Israel enter on the wilderness before the Red Sea, and pass through the Red Sea where Pharaoh and his captains and his army all die.</td>
<td>Israel leaves the wilderness and passes through enemy territories unharmed and undefeated, and enters the Trans-Jordan where Moses confirms Joshua captain of Israel and dies.</td>
<td>The Lord provides a way for the group to pass safely through the wilderness (17:2, 12) and they arrive eventually at their promised land (18:23-24).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses and Israel enter on the wilderness beyond the Red Sea, where God feeds his people on manna.</td>
<td>Israel crosses the Jordan and enters a land flowing with milk and honey.</td>
<td>God provides for the sojourners in the wilderness (17:2) and leads them to a promised land where their crops &quot;did grow exceedingly&quot; and they &quot;were blessed in abundance&quot; (18:24).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The story of the Lehite exodus shows some striking similarities to the primary foundational event that gave the children of Israel their identity throughout the coming ages.

Nephi continues with his recitation of the history of God and his chosen people. After bringing out the story of salvation at the sea, Nephi recounts the other miracles in the desert: the Lord provided manna in the wilderness (17: 28) and water from the rock (29). In spite of the fact that the people rebel against Moses and against the Lord, he provides food and water for them. Laman and Lemuel's complaints ignore the saving acts the Lord has performed in providing for them. Nephi has just recounted God's mercy in providing food for the group while they were in the wilderness (2-3); the children of Israel also received these miraculous provisions and still they "hardened their hearts and blinded their minds, and reviled against Moses and against the true and living God" (30).

Their failure to trust is thus forgiven, but not forgotten: it will stand forever as a reminder of the Lord's mercy despite the ingratitude of his people, remaining alive by being incorporated into the nation's worship:

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah (Quarreling), as you did that day at Massah (Testing) in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. (Ps. 95: 7-9)

This short account of one of the trials in the desert sums up the entire experience of the children of Israel on the road. They constantly refuse to pass through the narrow gates of trial and yet God does all he can to clear the road before them.... (Brother John 40-41)

The wilderness is a place of trial and Israel refuses to accept the trial (Brother John 37-39), as Laman and Lemuel do also. But the wilderness is also a place of miraculous deliverance.

The wilderness road is punctuated by attentive gestures of God's loving kindness, as he gives his people to eat and to drink.
The divine presence is also manifested in more explicit signs, which always keep an itinerant character: the pillar of cloud and of fire, the Tent of the meeting and the ark of the covenant. Here, the permanent presence of the deity and a provisional existence as wayfarer are in no way seen a mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the one makes possible the other; the pilgrim God leads those he has called and saved. (Brother John 42)

Nephi finishes his summary of the exodus with two verses that express the same sentiment Brother John has pointed out: the Lord led the children of Israel through the wilderness, led them by day and provided light by night, provided everything for them, and yet they rebelled against him (30-31).

Nephi then takes up the next stage of God's history of salvation: the conquest. The major message these verses conveys is that the children of Israel were able to dispossess the Canaanites, the "children of the land" (32), only because the Israelites were more righteous. God doesn't choose people just to play favorites: he chooses them based on righteousness. "Behold, the lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God. But behold, this people had rejected every word of God and they were ripe in iniquity" so the Israelites are blessed with the land (35). The sentiment is similar to that in Deuteronomy. Polzin traces two voices in Deuteronomy (especially chapter 4): one that emphasizes Israel's unique status and one that threatens retribution for disobedience. Deuteronomy 4 emphasizes that Israel's uniqueness is based on its obedience (Polzin, Moses 41-42). Moses first address (Dt. 1-4) emphasizes Israel's uniqueness at the same time it downplays it. For example, chapter 2 (5, 9, 19) points out that the Lord also gave the land to other people: the children of Esau and Lot. "These texts tend to diminish the uniqueness of Israel as the elect of the LORD, whereas in 4: 32-34 Israel's unique status is dominant" (Polzin, Moses 38). Deuteronomy 9: 4-5 goes on to say that Israel is allowed to drive the inhabitants of the land out because of their wickedness.
Likewise, the Nephite view of the chosen people is similar to that of the Deuteronomist: the chosen people are chosen because of their righteousness. "Do you suppose that our fathers would have been more choice than they if they had been righteous? I say unto you, Nay" (24). The lesson for Laman and Lemuel is that they cannot rely on their being Israelites to receive God's blessings. The Abrahamic covenant serves only those who obey the Lord's voice as Abraham did. Both the Jews at Jerusalem and Laman and Lemuel fail on this point.

Moses' first address is dominated by these two voices. One emphasizes Israel's unique status as the Lord's chosen people. The other voice focuses on the necessity of obedience in retaining that unique status. This same emphasis (especially in regard to the obtaining of the promised land, which is the subject of Moses' speech also) is evident in Nephi's recapitulation of Israelite history. Throughout Moses' address the emphasis on you, us, and the covenant made at Horeb focuses on obedience. The emphasis on your fathers and our fathers emphasizes mercy and grace (Polzin, Moses 46-47).

The Book of Mormon author also sees the need to emphasize grace and mercy by referring to the covenants made to the fathers. "And he loveth those who will have him to be their God. Behold, he loved our fathers, and he covenanted with them, yea, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and he remembered the covenants which he had made; wherefore, he did bring them out of the land of Egypt" (40). The emphasis in Deuteronomy is similar:

And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not.... Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. (Dt. 6: 10, 12)

Nephi gives us the same emphasis on obedience and mercy, chosenness and wickedness.
Nephi begins his recital of the Lord's history of salvation with the exodus, especially as manifested at the Red Sea. But Moses isn't the only pattern to serve as a prototype to later generation of Israelites. Sacred history begins for the Israelites with the patriarchs. Exodus and genesis are intimately connected in the Hebrew Bible. Not just exodus and genesis but everything in between, especially the patriarchal period, the line of being called out, chosen carries through from Adam and the patriachs to the children led out of Egypt. "Exodus and Creation belong together. That is why, in the story of how Israel was finally and definitively set apart from her Egyptian pursuers, that the parting of the Red Sea opens on the primeval abyss, even while revealing the original dry land and the foundation of the firmament" (Nohrnberg 44). The reader of covenant history can begin with Genesis, but the consciousness of Israel's special role in history begins with the exodus. But as Levenson points out, some passages (such as Joshua 24) take a larger view. Sacred history begins with the migration/exodus of Abraham from Mesopotamia. "Most recapitulations of the sacred history begin, like Joshua 24, some time in the Patriarchal period. 'An Aramean about to perish was my father,' begins one little summary (Deut. 26: 5) in an allusion to Jacob/Israel, from whom the nation took its name, and it is the descent into Egypt by the eponymous ancestor which tends to function there as the trigger for the action of the whole history of redemption, what German scholars call Heilgeschichte" (Levenson, Sinai 40).

Nephi calls to memory the image of the children of Israel. But such remembering is in response to the Lord's own remembering "the covenants which he had made" (40). Nephi's memory connects this passage through the sea with the earlier memory in recalling the covenants made to the patriarchs. The ectypes are connected to a series of archetypes by memory. The Lord remembers and his children do also. The patriarchs enjoy divine protection; Moses and the
children of Israel enjoy divine protection; Nephi and his group enjoy divine protection:

Before Egypt there lies the Patriarchal story, and the call-story of Moses (Exodus 3) credits him with reviving the memory of the divine protection enjoyed by the fathers of old. As we have shown, there are good reasons to think of the Joseph story as having a purposeful post-Patriarchal and pre-Mosaic narrative position in the Canon, which supplies a Mosaic "antetype" and so links the Patriarchal narrative to the Mosaic one. Such a literary device is also imitative of the keeping and transmitting of history: the attempt to bring a past story up to date, and to bring the present back to its beginning. (Nohrnberg 49-50)

Nephi brings the history of Israel to mind in the attempt to remind Laman and Lemuel of the divine protection their ancestors enjoyed. The remembering is only necessary because they have previously forgotten what the Lord could do for them. "Ye are swift to do iniquity but slow to remember the Lord your God" (45).

This verb is not an incidental word in the text. Remembering is one of the primary themes in the Bible; it is indeed one of the primary purposes of the text. When in the exodus "God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Ex. 2: 24), the remembrance leads us specifically back to the promises made the patriarchs. The new theme is the one of deliverance from Egypt; the old theme is the recollection of protection in Genesis: "The old theme is that of the covenant which God had made with their ancestors. The connection between the two is made by the verb 'to remember': 'God remembered the covenant'" (VanDevelder 39-40).

Remembering is the main theme of a book such as Deuteronomy. Moses commands the children of Israel to remember the exodus; he tells the story again. The telling is itself a repetition. He commands the Israelites to repeat the story in future generations (Schwartz, Remembering 5 [Dt. 6: 6-15]): "Repeating is linked to remembering in the Bible, where both assume the sacred context of ritual
commemoration. Such commemoration does not begin after an event; rather, ritual repetition becomes parts of the event itself" (Schwartz, Remembering 3).

Nephi's own retelling of the exodus is itself part of the repetition. To remember is to re-live. When the Lord remembers the covenants made to the fathers and brings his children out of captivity, the purpose is to connect the line of re-petitions to foundational events, to archetypes. Nephi's recitation is no different; he re-counts all the miracles the Lord provided for the children during their sojourn in the wilderness so that they are applicable to his and his brothers' circumstances. "And now, if the Lord has such great power, and has wrought so many miracles among the children of men, how is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?" (51). The past is in a way the present when it is repeated and re-membered.

Nephi's claim that his brothers are slow to remember their Lord (45) is the same as the theme throughout the Hebrew Bible. Remembering is inextricably connected with forgetting:

As to re-member presupposes that something has been dismembered, or lost, or forgotten, so, too, to repeat suggests that what is repeated is somehow discrete, and hence repeatable, instead of a mere continuation. One of the ironies that inhere in the notion of repetition is that only those things that are in some sense finished can be repeated. Biblical repetition, then, suggests at once discontinuity and continuity: discontinuity, because there must be a break to enable something to be repeated, just as something must be lost to be recovered, forgotten to be remembered; and continuity, because the fact of repetition, recovery, memory, ensures a living-on. (Schwartz, "Joseph's" 122)

Remembering is as important to the Book of Mormon text as it is to the Bible. Nephi and his brothers must return to Jerusalem to obtain the plates of brass so the colony might remember the language and covenants of their ancestors. Indeed, the group seems to know little of their genealogy until they "found" it on
the plates of brass (5: 14). The book later gives us an example of a group who journeyed to the promised land without records: they had forgotten their language and their religion (Omni 1: 17-18). These records are so important to the Nephites because they represent memory. Conversely, the Lamanites attempt to destroy the records for the same reasons, because they do represent a memory the Lamanites want to suppress (Enos 1: 15). Nephi twice recounts the story of Moses at the Red Sea so that they too can "be strong like unto Moses" (4: 2). The call to repentance in Nephi's record is a call to remembrance, for "they did forget by what power they had been brought thither" (18: 9). Any time Laman and Lemuel rebel they do so specifically because they had forgotten: "ye have forgotten that ye have seen an angel of the Lord," that "ye have forgotten what great things the Lord hath done for us in delivering us out of the hands of Laban," that "ye have forgotten that the Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him?" (7: 10-12). Nephi relates the tree of life vision to his brothers so they can remember: "I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God and remember to keep his commandments always in all things" (15: 25). Laman and Lemuel's descendants will be preserved to stir Nephi's descendents "up in the ways of remembrance" (2: 24). To read the Book of Mormon text is an exercise in memory. The book ends with the injunction that we modern readers "remember" all the great works God has done for his children through history: "I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things ... that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things and ponder it in your hearts" (Moro. 10: 3). Reading the book is an exercise in repetition, in all foundational events from the
creation. The subject of memory in the Book of Mormon deserves a fuller
treatment of the subject than I can give it here.

The exodus story is itself an exercise in memory. God remembers Joseph, a
Pharaoh arises who doesn't. God remembers his covenants with the patriarchs
and frees Israel. Israel forgets all that the Lord has done for them and must
remember through affliction (Nohrnberg 48-49). Certain texts from the Bible act
specifically as tools for remembrance:

The Red Sea event suggests the creation and birth of Israel. The same event is a crucial datum in
Israel's coming-to-consciousness. Paradoxically, this birth of consciousness is discernable in
precisely the charge that Israel forgot the mighty acts of the Lord in Egypt, even before the
people were delivered at the Red Sea (Ps. 106: 7), before it was divided (Ps. 78: 11-13), or else in
the wilderness (Ps. 78: 42-44). Both of the Psalms in question are histories of Israel's
forgetfulness, and so it is not surprising that they find their subject everywhere. Nonetheless,
these texts suggest that Moses has a role in bridging a void in Israel's historical explanation of
itself: a void between a legendary pre-Israel of the Patriarchs and the covenanted Israel of the
tribal league. (Nohrnberg 47)

The Bible narrative is itself a story about forgetting and remembering. A losing,
an apostasy, is always matched by a finding, a restoration of the lost memory
(Schwartz, "Joseph's" 117). Joseph is lost to his family's memory, but then is found
again. Moses is constantly calling the Lord's mercy to the memory of the children
of Israel, but they are children with a child's memory. The same pattern is
represented in the Book of Mormon: "And I, Nephi, have written these things unto
my people, that perhaps I might persuade them that they would remember the
Lord their Redeemer" (19: 18).

Regina Schwartz attacks typological analysis of the Bible, the type found in
Frye's analysis of the text. She wants to substitute for typological analysis a focus
on forgetting and remembering. Rather than the type that looks forward to
future fulfillment, Schwartz wants to focus the discussion of repetitions in the
text on memory and how it appropriates the past: rather she wants to "avoid the
language of 'fulfillment' altogether, to opt for a sense of textuality more
compatible with rabbinic, psychoanalytic, and post-modern thinking" (Schwartz,
"Joseph's" 116). Schwartz want to deny the Christian notion of typology because it
turns every passage in the "Old Testament" into a prooftext for the "New
Testament." Schwartz doesn't like the forward thrust of typology that sees a
fulfillment in an event unanticipated by the actors in the story: an tendency
even more pronounced in the Book of Mormon than in most readings of the Bible.
In the Joseph story a focus on remembering would amount to no longer talking
about descents and ascents, but to memory. Refreshingly we read someone who
forthrightly tells us she prefers a particular approach because it conforms to her
own way of reading texts rather than claiming to tell us that she knows precisely
how the Biblical writers thought.

Bringing Schwartz into this project tends to undermine my own typological
approach. This undermining is not only good, but necessary. Rather than
resorting to an academic fundamentalism that claims to have exposed the "real
truth," the "facts of the matter," the "way a person in such-and-such a century
and place would have seen things," to tell us the univocal meaning of the text, this
allowing of contrary and multiple voices to emerge out of the text focuses
attention on the tentativeness of the conclusions, the frailty of a particular
reading. If the Bible is a typological text, then the same would be true a fortiori of
the Book of Mormon. The book itself lays out the typological principle intended to
guide a reading of it in a way the Hebrew Bible never does (2 Ne. 11: 2, 4, 8; 25: 20,
24; Jac. 1: 7; Mos. 3: 14-15; 13: 10; 17: 15-19; Alma 25: 15-16; Eth. 13: 6-12). Whether
you view the book as an ancient or a modern record is a matter of faith and
assumption: but clearly the text asks us to read it typologically. If the Book of
Mormon is susceptible to typological analysis, it is just as susceptible to analysis in terms of forgetting and remembering as the Bible is.

Both the Joseph and the Moses stories are stories about forgetting and remembering. In spite of Moses' injunctions to remember and retell (Nephi is keeping the Deuteronomic injunction when he retells the exodus narrative: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" [Dt. 8: 2-3]), his listeners still forget. Typology and remembrance are both ways of giving the present meaning in context of the past: "Like typology, memory reconfigures events from the past, but its motive is more humble. It is not a drive to interpret authoritatively; the motive of memory is simply to preserve, and preservation, by its very nature, does not end. Once a type is fulfilled, there is no need to remember; once we incorporate the body of Christ, there is no need to recall the text" (Schwartz, "Joseph's" 121. Schwartz overstates her case because fulfillment still requires memory, but her point is still important. We configure a text the way we want it to read.). The Bible deals with disruption by referring to the past, remembering. The Bible is "imperiled, lost over and over. And so it must be remembered, recovered, rewritten, and rediscovered over and over, in a perpetual activity that defies the grand designs of fulfillment constructed by typology" (Schwartz, "Joseph's" 117). Nephi in this narrative is certainly calling to remembrance.
Formalist Approach—A Righteous Nation

The narrative begins once again with a change of location, a typical Hebraic narrative pattern indicating the end of one story and the beginning of another. The group arrives at Bountiful and names the many waters. This is a time of birth and creation. The previous narrative (17: 1-4) is merely a prologue to the events at Bountiful. But these four verses are closely tied to the ones that follow.

Discussing the journeys and afflictions in the wilderness, Nephi comments that "our women did bear children in the wilderness" (17: 1). But children are not all that the women bore: the Lord blessed them and "they began to bear their journeyings without murmuring" (17: 2). To Nephi the bearing of children in the wilderness and the bearing of afflictions are both blessings and are more manifestations of God's grace. God blessed the women that in their trials they were made strong and able to nurse their children.

This little transitional narrative is closely connected to the one following it because Laman and Lemuel make the same use of the verb to bear in the same way, except that to them the same bearing is not a sign of God's movement in human affairs: the bearing is an affliction better avoided. "Our women have toiled, being big with child; and they have borne children in the wilderness and suffered all things, save it were death" (17: 20), and even that is preferable to the suffering. But Nephi turns the doublet around. In his first passage the women bore children and then bore afflictions. In this second doublet Laman and Lemuel complain about their bearing children and Nephi turns the topic back to the children of Israel and the afflictions they bore: "Now ye know that the children of Israel were in bondage; and ye know that they were laden with tasks, which were grievous to be borne; wherefore, ye know that it must needs be a good thing for them, that they should be brought out of bondage" (17: 25). Once again the bearing of afflictions is positive because it moves toward salvation—
Heilgeschichte. The first doublet uses the same progressive form of the verb *to bear*. The second doublet uses the same past form (*borne*)—to refer back to the difficulty of the Lehite women bearing children and the laborious tasks of the Israelites born into slavery.

The chapter is full of parallel incidents: in this case the women finally began to be strong "even like unto men" (2) and bore their difficulties without "murmuring." In the same chapter Laman and Lemuel fail the manly test for they soon began to "murmur and complain" (22).

Immediately upon finishing their wilderness journey, the group fixes place names to two geographical features. The land "we called Bountiful" and the sea "we called Irreantum" (5). The entire group is "exceedingly rejoiced" (6) when they arrive at Bountiful, but soon Nephi is "exceedingly sorrowful" (19) at the hardness of his brothers hearts (which in turn makes Laman and Lemuel "rejoice"). The chapter contains a number of "like unto" equations. Laman and Lemuel complain that Nephi and Lehi are parallel figures: "thou art like unto our father, led away by the foolish imaginations of his heart" (20) and "our brother is like unto him" (22). Laman and Lemuel don't, however, mean this as a compliment. Therefore, when Laman and Lemuel complain that Lehi has unjustly judged the Jews, and led the group into the wilderness because "we would hearken unto his words" (22), Nephi immediately turns the comparison around by asking what would have happened if the children of Israel had not "hearkened unto the words of the Lord" through Moses (23).

This comparison between Laman and Lemuel and the children of Israel then brings us back to the major structural feature of this narrative and allows for a more systematic analysis of the rhetorical structures of the passage. The chapter uses a good deal of parallelism, and like much Hebrew literature, subtly swings back and forth between poetry and prose. I am not sure exactly what distinction
to make between Hebrew poetry and prose; therefore, I don't make much
distinction between the two in this passage.

Laman and Lemuel accuse Nephi and Lehi of leading the family out of
Jerusalem on false pretenses—the Jews at Jerusalem are not, after all, wicked as
Lehi claimed:¹⁰

A. We know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people;
  B. For they kept the statutes
  =  B. And judgments of the Lord,
  =  B. And all his commandments,
  >  C. According to the law of Moses;
  =  A. Wherefore, we know that they are a righteous people;
      D. And our father hath judged them,
      {}  D. And hath led us away because we would hearken unto his words;
      {}  D. Yea, and our brother is like unto him.

(17: 22)

The synonymous parallelism restates in other terms an equivalent idea. The
statutes, judgments and commandments of the Lord are not only equivalent, they
are also part of Hebraic formulaic patterns. The laws are specified in the line
relating the commandments to the law of Moses. The actions Lehi takes are
complementary: they are not equivalent because they are different actions, but
they are different actions flowing out of the same conclusion. After hearing
Laman and Lemuel "murmur and complain" in this manner, Nephi then launches
into the extended comparison between Laman and Lemuel, the children of Israel
during the wilderness years, and the Jews at Jerusalem. Laman and Lemuel are

¹⁰I will label some of the repetitions using Alter's categories, Poetry, p. 29. I
will briefly explain each symbol the first time I use it. For a more full discussion,
refer to Alter's book. I include the follow table as a reference:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tr>
<td>»</td>
<td>consequence</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt;</td>
<td>heighten, specify</td>
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<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>synonymous</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td>antithetical</td>
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portrayed speaking in parallelism to heighten the effect of their claims. Notice how the final synonymous claim about the Jews keeping the commandments becomes all-inclusive when Laman and Lemuel claim that the Jews keep "all" God's commandments. The tension caused by this claim is also one of the strongest messages of the Hebrew Bible; the destruction of Israel and later of Judah comes specifically because the people are not righteous, do not keep God's commandments. The message of the prophets was that Jerusalem would be destroyed because of its wickedness. Laman and Lemuel's claims here run contrary to the widespread perception of wickedness the Jews saw in their history looking back on pre-exilic Israel from the vantage point of Babylon.

Nephi's response asks Laman and Lemuel to remember all the miracles the Lord has accomplished for their ancestors. The exodus is a natural place to start. "Do you believe that our fathers, who were the children of Israel, would have been led away out of the hands of the Egyptians if they had not hearkened unto the words of the Lord?" The very words used to condemn Lehi and Nephi in the previous verse are placed in a historical context that condemns Laman and Lemuel's rebelliousness.

A. Yea, do ye suppose that they would have been led out of bondage,
B. If the Lord had not commanded Moses that he should
   A. Lead them out of bondage?
   (17: 24)

Once again, Laman and Lemuel's words are brought back against themselves. The pattern is set here from the beginning of the passage. The word of the Lord is

| » | consequence |
| > | heighten, specify |
| = | synonymous |
| ≥ | synonymous with verbatim repetition |
| {} | complementary |
| ≠ | antithetical |
efficacious in itself and a word of command is followed by a report that the word has been executed as commanded; this is the creation pattern. The complaint is advanced about their father having "led us away." Now Nephi discusses what would have happened if the children of Israel had not been led out of bondage.

A. Now ye know that the children of Israel
   B. Were in bondage;
   > B. And ye know that they were laden with tasks, which were grievous to be borne;
   » A. Wherefore, ye know that it must needs be a good thing for them,
   = B. That they should be brought out of bondage.
   (17: 25)

The first claim that the children of Israel were in bondage is specified in the second parallel line: the specific nature of their bondage is enumerated; they were laden with tasks grievous to be borne. Previously, Laman and Lemuel had rejoiced when Nephi began to be sorrowful. They took it as a sign that Nephi "could not construct a ship, for we knew that ye were lacking in judgment; wherefore, thou canst not accomplish so great a work" (19). The great work is to build a ship and cross these "great waters" (17). Nephi once again turns the charge around; he immediately begins to talk about another "great work" and another instance of the children of Israel's crossing of great waters that is also a time of dividing, of allotment:

A. Now ye know
   B. That Moses, was commanded of the Lord
   C. To do that great work;
   ≥ A. And ye know
   = B. That by his word
   > C. The waters of the Red Sea were divided hither and thither,
   () C. And they passed through on dry ground.
   ≥ A. But ye know
   B. That the Egyptians

| » | consequence |
| > | heighten, specify |
| = | synonymous |
| ≥ | synonymous with verbatim repetition |
| () | complementary |
| ≠ | antithetical |
C. Were drowned in the Red Sea
A. And ye also know
B. That they were fed
C. With manna in the wilderness.

A. Yea, ye also know
B. That Moses, by his word according to the power of God which was in him,
C. Smote the rock, and there came forth water,
D. And notwithstanding they being led
E. The Lord their God,
F. Their Redeemer.
D. Going before them,
D. Leading them by day and giving light unto them by night,
D. And doing all things for them which were expedient for man to receive,
F. They hardened their hearts
F. And blinded their minds,
F. And reviled against Moses
F. And against the true and living God.

This passage emphasizes Laman and Lemuel's knowledge: they know how God has worked in the past and he continues to work in the present in the same way. Moses' worked seemed impossible to accomplish, but God provided a way to perform the impossible. The pattern is repeated throughout the wilderness sojourn: the Lord feeds the Israelites in the wilderness, the Lord provides water, the Lord leads them and provides light for them, the Lord does "all things for them which were expedient for man to receive." But in response to this marvelous provision the children of Israel reject what the Lord has done for them, even as do Laman and Lemuel. The arraignment specifies four counts, the first two of which are parallel and the second two are also: they harden their hears, blind their minds and they reject Moses and the Lord.

Laman and Lemuel also are portrayed hardening their hears, blinding their minds, and rejecting the promise offered by the Lord through both Lehi and
Nephi. They also refuse to believe that the Lord can deliver them through these mighty waters as he delivered the children of Israel.

A. And it came to pass that
B. According to his word
C. He did destroy them;

B. And according to his word
C. He did lead them;

B. And according to his word
C. He did do all things for them;

B. Save it were by his word.

(17: 26-31)

The emphasis on God's acts in history and his acting by the power of his word is not only a reference to the creation ("And God said, Let there be light: and there was light"), but will also refer to Nephi's ability to accomplish this great work according to God's word. Notice in the last three lines I have cited that I have labeled the construction a synonymous parallelism. Actually it is an antithesis but not of the sort most call antithetical when referring to biblical poetry. This antithesis is a restatement in negative terms. "He did all things for them; and there was not any thing done save it were by his word." This is a type of litotes: a negative definition that is positive in being all-encompassing in maintaining the Lord's salvation for his people.

The recital of God's mighty works of salvation during the exodus ends and the conquest of Canaan begins. In response to Laman and Lemuel's charge that Lehi had "led us away because we would hearken unto his words" (22), Nephi responds with the parallel situation: what would have happened to the children of Israel had they not been led? Except Nephi is clear that this leading and hearkening are

| » | consequence |
| > | heighten, specify |
| = | synonymous |
| ≥ | synonymous with verbatim repetition |
| () | complementary |
| ± | antithetical |
not done by Moses, but the Lord. The parallel he is drawing also implies that the Lord is leading Lehi and the group. In fact, the Lord has said as much earlier in the chapter: "Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall be led towards the promised land; and he shall know that it is by me that ye are led" (13).

After reciting the history of deliverances from Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, Nephi begins with the same discussion of the conquest. But all the grounds he brings up at this point are relayed only to prove that God helps the righteous. Just as Moses and the children of Israel had to act, to follow God's word, the Lehi group must act.

A. And after they had crossed the river Jordan
B. He did make them mighty unto the driving out of

1. A. The children of the land,
   B. Yea, unto the scattering them to destruction.
   C. And now, do ye suppose that
      D. The children of this land,
      D. Who were in the land of promise,
      D. Who were driven out by our fathers,
   C. Do ye suppose that they were righteous?
   E. Behold, I say unto you, Nay.

2. A. Do ye suppose that

3. A. Our fathers would have been more choice
   F. Than they if they had been righteous?
   E. I say unto you, Nay.
   F. Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one;
   F. He that is righteous is favored of God.

4. A. But behold, this people had rejected every word of God,
   F. And they were ripe in iniquity;
   F. And the fulness of the wrath of God was upon them;
   F. And the Lord did curse the land against them,
   F. And bless it unto our fathers unto their obtaining power over it.

(17: 32-35)

Throughout the discussion of the conquest, Nephi constantly compares the Canaanite inhabitants of the promised land to the children of Israel. The only
thing that qualifies one to take the land is righteousness. Later, Nephi will claim that the Jews are wicked and have, therefore, forsaken that right to the land (43); the Canaanites were ripe for destruction and the Jews at Jerusalem are also. Laman and Lemuel now must qualify for a new land of promise by being righteous.

The next passage has been previously analyzed as an example of biblical chiasmus. Notably, Nephi begins to explicitly apply creation language to the process of acquiring promised lands.

A. 1. Behold, the Lord hath created
   2. The earth
      3. That it should be inhabited;
A
B. 1. And he hath created
   2. His children
      3. That they should possess it.
B
A 1. And he
   2. Raiseth up
      3. A righteous
         4. Nation, and
         2. Destroyeth
            4. The nations
            3. Of the wicked.
A
B 1. And he
   2. Leadeth away
      3. The righteous
         4. Into precious lands,
         3. And the wicked
B
A 1. He ruleth
   2. High in the heavens,
Nephi starts with the creation; the Lord created the earth for his children (whom he also created) to enjoy. He then moves to the more specific but parallel example of the righteous inhabiting the precious parts of the earth. The example is as applicable to the children of Lehi as it is to the children of Israel. With Laman and Lemuel associating themselves with the Jews at Jerusalem, and therefore with the righteousness they claim for them, Nephi counters by recounting the long history of wickedness and apostasy in Israel. Just as the children of Israel needed to learn to obey Moses in the wilderness to inherit a promised land, this group must also be righteous to inherit their promised land.

A. And he loveth those who will have him to be their God.

> A. Behold, he loved our fathers,
>   B. And he covenanted with them,
>   > B. Yea, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;
>   ≥ B. And he remembered the covenants which he had made;
> {} ≥ A. Wherefore, he did bring them out of the land of Egypt.
>   C. And he did straiten them in the wilderness with his rod;
>   D. For they hardened their hearts,
>   = D. Even as ye have;
> ≥ C. And the Lord straitened them because of their iniquity.
> > C. He sent fiery serpents among them;
> {} A. And after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed;
>   E. And the labor which they had to perform was to look;
> ≥ E. And because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished.
> ≥ D. And they did harden their hearts from time to time,
> > D. And they did revile against Moses,
> {} D. And also against God;
> {} A. Nevertheless, ye know that they were led forth by his matchless power into the land of promise
> ≥ D. And now, after all these things, the time has come that they have become wicked,
> = D. Yea, nearly unto ripeness;
> = C. And I know not but they are at this day about to be destroyed, save a few only
C. Who shall be led away into captivity.

> A. Wherefore, the Lord commanded my father that he should depart into the wilderness;

> B. And the Jews also sought to take away his life;

> C. Yea, and ye also have sought to take away his life;

> D. Wherefore, ye are murderers in your hearts

> D. And ye are like unto them.

(17: 40-44)

The passage begins with a witness of God's love for his children. Nephi then goes on to specify what that love entails: it entails not only a deliverance but also punishment, followed by a healing. The claim is applicable to Laman and Lemuel because they have recently murmured about the hardships of the wilderness journey (they didn't happen to mention the salvation the Lord provided in the wilderness). Besides the comparisons of the mercies extended to the Israelites by God and the catalogue of offenses committed by the children of Israel, the Jews, and Laman and Lemuel, the time progression moves the narrative through history. The children of Israel have apostatized "from time to time," although Nephi mentions the most outstanding examples. But the time progression telescopes until we arrive "at this day": the time has come for the pattern to be repeated by the Jews at Jerusalem. This movement of time becomes more important for Nephi because in identifying Laman and Lemuel with the rebellious Jews he also cites the fact that they have heard the voice of an angel "from time to time" (45) also and have rejected it.

But examining the patterns of repetitions isn't the only way to examine the text without referring to external material such as biographical information. The reader can also examine the subtle identification of Laman and Lemuel with the

| > consequence |
| > heighten, specify |
| = synonymous |
| ≥ synonymous with verbatim repetition |
| () complementary |
| ≠ antithetical |
rebellious house of Israel in the wilderness and the promised land. The movement of pronouns especially ties Laman and Lemuel into the pattern of repetitions:

And they did harden their hearts from time to time, and they did revile against Moses, and also against God; nevertheless, ye know that they were led forth by his matchless power into the land of promise.

And now, after all these things the time has come that they have become wicked, yea, nearly unto ripeness; and I know not but they are at this day about to be destroyed; for I know that the day must surely come that they must be destroyed save a few only, who shall be let away into captivity.

Wherefore the Lord commanded my father that he should depart into the wilderness; and the Jews also sought to take away his life; yea, and ye also have sought to take away his life; wherefore, ye are murderers in your hearts and ye are like unto them....

O, then, why is it, that ye can be so hard in your hearts?

(17: 42-46)

The they pronouns predominate not only in talking about the children led through the wilderness by Moses, but also in referring to their children—the contemporary Jews. "They have become wicked" and are soon to be destroyed. These they are those who have attempted to kill Lehi, and Laman and Lemuel are closely associated with these Jews at Jerusalem because they have attempted the same thing: "ye are like unto them." Now the narrative can move, with a backdrop of apostasy and wickedness throughout the history of the children of Israel, to the specific case of Laman and Lemuel, which is just a repetition of the history recently recounted:
A. Ye are swift to do iniquity
B. But slow to remember the Lord your God.
> A. Ye have seen an angel,
B. And he spake unto you;
B. Yea, ye have heard his voice from time to time;
B. And he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice,
C. But ye were past feeling,
C. That ye could not feel his words;
B. Wherefore, he has spoken unto you
D. Like unto the voice of thunder,
D. Which did cause the earth to shake as if it were to divide asunder.
E. And ye also know that by the power of his almighty word
F. He can cause the earth that it shall pass away;
E. Yea, and ye know that by his word
D. He can cause the rough places
D. To be made smooth,
D. And the smooth places
D. Shall be broken up.
C. O, then, why is it, that ye can be so hard in your hearts?
C. Behold, my soul is rent with anguish because of you,
C. And my heart is pained;
F. I fear lest ye shall be cast off forever.
G. Behold, I am full of the Spirit of God,
G. Insomuch that my frame has no strength.

The word of God itself is efficacious. It is powerful enough to create the world. But in spite of the fact that the word is sufficiently powerful to create the world or to divide it asunder, Laman and Lemuel cannot feel this word. They have heard the word uttered both as a still small voice and as the voice of thunder: in whatever condition the word is spoken, they cannot feel or hear it. We even get a chiastic pattern in the middle of this passage that tells us the power of this word:

a. He can cause the rough places
b. To be made smooth,
   b. And the smooth places
a. Shall be broken up.

---

> consequence
> heighten, specify
= synonymous
≥ synonymous with verbatim
repetition
[] complementary
≠ antithetical
But in spite of the power of the "almighty word" to move the elements of the earth, the word can't move a hardened heart to repentance unless the heart softens from the inside. As a consequence of Laman and Lemuel's hardened heart, Nephi also tells us the condition of his own heart: his heart is "pained," "rent with anguish" because of his brothers' hardened hearts. The section ends with Nephi's acknowledgment that he, in contrast to the power of the word, has no strength. This admission seems to belie the claims made in the next passage; there Nephi exhibits a great deal of strength but qualifies the difference: before he had no strength, later he is "filled with the power of God":

A. And now it came to pass that when I had spoken these words
B. They were angry with me,
> B. And were desirous to throw me into the depths of the sea;
= B. And as they came forth to lay their hands upon me
≥ A. I spake unto them saying:
   C. In the name of the Almighty God,
   D. I command you that ye touch me not,
   E. For I am filled with the power of God.
> E. Even unto the consuming of my flesh;
≥ B. And whoso shall lay his hands upon me shall wither even as a dried reed;
> B. And he shall be as naught before the power of God.
= B. For God shall smite him.

17: 48

As in the passage that follows, here a command is spoken. Nephi commands his brothers not to touch him. Previously the angel had spoken to Laman and Lemuel, now Nephi speaks the word of the "Almighty God." The narrator switches here from first person present tense to first person past tense, as if the previous material must be presented verbatim and the following material can be summarized. The material before this quotation is summarized in past tense and
the narrative returns to the same after-the-fact recording, but Nephi must quote the significant words at this crucial juncture.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{A. And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto them that} \\
\text{F. They should murmur no more against their father;} \\
\text{F. Neither should they withhold their labor from me,} \\
\text{D. For God had commanded me that I should build a ship.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{A. And I said unto them:} \\
\text{D. If God had commanded me to do all things I could do them.} \\
\text{D. If he should command me that} \\
\text{G. I should say unto this water,} \\
\text{G. Be thou earth:} \\
\text{G. It should be earth;}
\end{align*}
\]

A. And if I should say it,

E. It would be done.

E. And now, if the Lord has such great power,

E. And has wrought so many miracles among the children of men,

E. How is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?

A. And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said many things unto my brethren,

B. Insomuch that they were confounded and could not contend against me;

B. Neither durst they lay their hands upon me

B. Nor touch me with their fingers,

B. Even for the space of many days.

B. Now they durst not do this lest they should wither before me,

E. So powerful was the Spirit of God;

E. And thus it had wrought upon them.

A. And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me:

H. Stretch forth thine hand again unto thy brethren,

H. And they shall not wither before thee,

H. But I will shock them,

A. Saith the Lord, and this will I do,

I. That they may know that I am the Lord their God.

A. Even according to the word which he had spoken.

(17: 49-54)

Here Nephi goes through a series of command/execution formulas. He commands his brothers not to touch him, they don't. If the Lord commands him to build a ship, he could. If the Lord commands him to turn water into earth, he would only
have to issue the word and it would be done. Finally, the Lord commands Nephi to stretch forth his hand and shock his brothers; Nephi executes the command and his brothers are convinced by the power of the word.

All of this the Lord does to let Laman and Lemuel know that "I am the Lord their God." The salvation history from the exodus to the present is a series of miracles unto the children of men to let them know that Jehovah is the Lord God. Laman and Lemuel get the same lesson.
Typological Approach—A Genesis

What might account for stories in the Bible and Book of Mormon having similar plots, similar patterns of deliverance? As my discussion of the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites indicates, we could call such repetitions a defect, evidence that the Book of Mormon isn't an ancient document. Ham and Brodie make such claims. As I have also shown, this approach requires selective application of the principle to the Book of Mormon, ignoring that the Bible operates on the same typological principle. Such a biased approach ignores that the Bible is fundamentally typological; repetitions within the Bible might then be seen as evidence that ancient Hebrew writers saw their own circumstances as reworkings of earlier patriarchal and exodus stories while the same patterns in the Book of Mormon are evidence that Joseph Smith plagiarized the Bible.

Eliade gives us good reason to believe that archaic people saw the unfolding of history differently than do modern people. Archaic people looked to events from the past to guide the interpretation of contemporary events. Not only did past events serve as interpretive guides, the people thought of themselves as reliving those events—I call this repetition, using Kierkegaard's term intentionally for all the reasons he outlines. Particularly, archaic people looked back to foundational events, creational events: events that served as the beginning of time for their people. Referring to archaic man, Eliade says:

What he does has been done before. His life is the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others. This conscious repetition of given paradigmatic gestures reveals an original ontology.

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12 The last thing I want to do is use derogatory terms to refer to archaic people. When I use the terms archaic and modern I don't want to imply that archaic people were primitive. We moderns tend to subscribe to evolutionary and progress theses that imply that anything modern is ipso facto better than something in the past. This assumption is, in fact, one that I want to question.
The crude products of nature, the object fashioned by the industry of man, acquire their reality, their identity, only to the extent of their participation in a transcendent reality. The gesture acquires meaning, reality, solely to the extent to which it repeats a primordial act. (*Eternal* 5)

A primordial act is one effecting change by occurring at the creation of the world or the creation of a people: such as the founding of the children of Israel through a series of patriarchs or an escape from captivity during the exodus. During times of repetition the participants are lifted out of profane time and are transported through sacred time: "there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of 'history'; and he who reproduces the exemplary gesture thus finds himself transported into the mythical epoch in which its revelation took place" (Eliade, *Eternal* 35).

Eliade points specifically to ancient Greece, Iran, India, and Judea as the loci of the idea of eternal return: these are cycles of Golden Ages being followed by ages of degeneration and regeneration (*Eternal* 112). Anderson cites Eliade and then makes a distinction between Israel and other archaic people: Israel did maintain a distinction between the sacred and profane but historicized it. "In Israel's faith the realm of the sacred was located in the midst of history, not in some mythical twilight zone, for Israel experienced the reality of God in 'concrete events and interpersonal relations.' Instead of cultically imitating actions of the gods in 'the olden days' beyond historical recall, Israel remembered the celebrated events that happened in a definite place and time" (*Creation* 31). Eliade points out that this notion of history is different from a modern view of history. Moderns tend to think that events happen once and are finished and that is the meaning of them, "but exemplar history [is that] which can be repeated (regularly or otherwise), and whose meaning and value lie in that very repetition" (*Patterns* 430).

This need to prove the truth of myth also helps us to grasp what history and "historical evidence" mean to the primitive mind. It shows what an importance primitive man attaches to things that have
really happened, to the events which actually took place in his surroundings; it shows how his mind hungers for what is "real," for what is in the fullest sense. But, at the same time, the archetypal function given to these events of illud tempus give us a glimpse of the interest primitive people take in realities that are significant, creative, paradigmatic. (Patterns 431)

These repetitions of the cosmogony are particularly important at times of new beginnings: Eliade points specifically to times when man "creates something (his 'own world'—the inhabited territory—or a city, a house, etc.)," but also when a new king is being consecrated, the crops are imperiled, in times of war, or "a sea voyage" (Sacred 81-82).

Given a notion that repetitions are meaningful specifically because they are repetitions, Ham, Brodie, Russell, Vogel, Marquardt and other revisionist readers of the Book of Mormon might need to reconsider their conclusion that because the Book of Mormon contains some repetitions from the Bible, Joseph Smith merely plagiarized the book.

I have examined some of these revisionist claims in regard to the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites. I have pointed out that the revisionist argument (at least in Ham's and Brodie's incarnation) requires that the repetitions from the Bible found in the Book of Mormon be extremely shallow copies. I am demonstrating that it is possible to actually read the stories and find a deeper form of the story and show the sophisticated nature of the narrative. Once again I take up a repetition, this time one the revisionists have never pointed out.

Nephi says he is going to build a ship. This event qualifies in a number of ways as Eliade's time of primordial creation. The group is about to embark on a sea voyage; the ideological battle over who will be the ruler has been taking place and will continue; the group sees itself as independent of the Jews at Jerusalem (a new people) and will soon take the eponymous names of Nephites, Lamanites, etc.; the group has undergone a typological exodus through the wilderness. This is a
time of creation that re-lives the creation of the world, just as the building of
Noah's ark and the tabernacle in the wilderness re-lived the cosmogony.

When Nephi is at Bountiful he hears the Lord's voice:

Arise, and get thee into the mountain. And it came to pass that I arose and went up into the
mountain, and cried unto the Lord. (17:7)

Actually, what I should do is arrange the passage in its rhetorical pattern.

Arise,
And get thee into the mountain.

And it came to pass that I
Arose
And went up into the mountain,
And cried unto the Lord.

This pattern of biblical repetition is what Alter calls hidden repetition: "The first
word in the first verset, usually a verb, governs the parallel clause in the second
verset as well" (*Poetry* 23-24). Notice the matching action in the verbs of
command and response, with the synthetic action caused by the addition of
another verb: Nephi arises, goes up, and cries unto the Lord. The journey to the
mountain is too common a motif in biblical literature to require additional
comment. What I should note is that Moses receives a similar command to "come
up to me into the mount," where Moses stays for forty days and nights and
receives the tablets of the law and a divine pattern for the tabernacle (Ex. 24: 12;
25: 9). The text is clear that the pattern for the earthly dwelling of the Lord is not
of earthly origin: "According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the
tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make
it" (Ex. 25: 9).

Notice also that once Nephi has climbed the mountain, he is commanded: "Thou
shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that I may carry
thy people across these waters" (17: 8). The same "thou shalt" command is given to
Moses regarding each item in the tabernacle (Ex. 25: 10-27: 9 and more). In the middle of all the commands is the order once again for Moses to "look that thou make them after the pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount" (Ex. 25: 40). The heavenly pattern is essential:

It is clear that the tent that Moses had built is a copy of the heavenly tent in accordance with the ancient religious principle, "like is like." The similarity in form between the earthly dwelling of the god and its heavenly prototype brings about the presence of the deity. In Israel, of course, the presence of Yahweh was subject to a number of conditions, yet the principle of "like is like" seems imperative here, too. (Clifford, Cosmic 123-24)

Nephi is clear throughout his narrative that the pattern for the ship is divine: he worked the timbers not "after the manner which was learned by men, neither did I build the ship after the manner of men; but I did build it after manner which the Lord had shown unto me; wherefore, it was not after the manner of men" (18: 2).

The mountain is the place the holy man communes with God; for Nephi "did go into the mount oft, and I did pray oft unto the Lord" (18: 3). The like is like principle doesn't apply only to temples: a heavenly pattern is needed for any cosmogony. I have mentioned the tabernacle; Kearney provides an extended comparison of the P material in Exodus 25-40, comparing the building of the tabernacle to the creation narrative in Genesis. Noah built his ark after the pattern the Lord gave him (Gen. 6: 14-16) in a specific re-creation of the earth; Holloway compares Noah's ark with Utnapishtim's ark in the Gilgamesh epic. Each is specifically a re-creation of the world. "I would argue that the flood stories in Atrahasis and Gilgamesh re-enact creation in the same manner as the Genesis account, and that the seven-day span of the deluge or the period prior to the opening of the ark in the Mesopotamian stories is a reverse analog to the seven days of creation in Genesis chapters 1-2' (7). David delivers the divine
pattern for the temple to Solomon to execute (1 Chr. 28: 11-12); Holloway advances the claim that in ancient Near Eastern cultures, any time God "commands a human being to construct a building, that building is a temple" (9). He includes the ark in this category because the ark has the same dimensions as and in many ways is portrayed in the Bible as a ziggurat, or temple. Nephi explicitly appropriates this divine pattern in building his temple in the promised land (2 Ne. 5: 16). It does seem rather odd for me to compare the divine pattern in tabernacle and temple to this ship. But the comparison isn't mine:

Shortly after the episode of the Tower there is another episode which has a bearing on our theme. The building of the Ark by Noah provides us with what is perhaps the closest parallel to the later making of the elaborate tent. The initial command comes from God: "Make thee an ark" (Gen. 6:14). There follow precise instructions about the size and shape of the boat, and these Noah takes care to execute to the letter. When it is finally done we are told: "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (6:22). (Josipovici 98-99)

The divine pattern is essential to the building of both boats. Josipovici continues to compare the tower of Babel incident with the golden calf incident. In both cases the wicked take it upon themselves to construct an object of worship after a human pattern. In both the flood and the tabernacle narratives, the people glorify God by following his pattern. Nephi is also insistent that we understand that he is following the divine pattern, not constructing a work to human folly:

And the Lord did show me from time to time after what manner I should work the timbers of the ship. Now I, Nephi, did not work the timbers after the manner which was learned by men, neither did I build the ship after the manner of men; but I did build it after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me; wherefore, it was not after the manner of men. (18:1-2)

Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of … (Gen. 6:14-15)
The voice of the Lord came unto me, saying: *Arise, and get thee into the mountain.* And it came to pass that I arose and went up into the mountain, and cried unto the Lord. And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: *Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee,* that I may carry these people across these waters. (17: 7-8)

"And the Lord said unto Moses, *Come up to me into the mount,* and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone and a law ..." (Ex. 24: 12). The narrative continues with Moses staying on the mount for forty days and receiving the pattern for the tabernacle. "And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. *According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle,* and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it." (Ex. 25: 8-9)

Josipovici continues by commenting that medieval artists knew what they were doing when they associated Noah's ark with the Christian church sailing on the stormy waters of earth. "They read better than later scholars, who have been so busy matching instructions to archaeological evidence that they have failed to understand the larger function of these buildings within the unfolding narrative."

Josipovici continues by commenting on the execution of the divine pattern. Moses looks on the work of the tabernacle and pronounces it good (Ex. 39: 42-43):

The linguistic parallels too between God looking at what he had done and Moses looking at the completed Tabernacle are striking: "And God saw every thing that he made, and, behold, it was very good (Gen. 1:31)"; "And Moses did look upon all the work, and behold, they had done it as the Lord had commanded, even so had they done it" (Ex. 39: 43). "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished" (Gen. 2:1); "Thus was all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation finished" (Ex. 39: 32). "God ended his work which he had made" (Gen. 2: 2); "So Moses finished the work" Ex. 40: 33); and God blessed the seventh day" (Gen. 2: 3); "And Moses blessed them" (Ex. 39: 43).

Of course none of this escaped the ancient commentators. Already in antiquity, as my earlier quotation from Josephus demonstrated, the Tabernacle was seen as a model of the cosmos or the heavens. And there are many examples from the ancient Near East of the temple of the god facing his heavenly dwelling and mirroring it. (102)
Nephi also seems to be aware of the cosmological connections between his ship and other earthly copies of the divine pattern. Nephi explains that he has executed the pattern as he has been commanded, just as Noah and Moses did:

And it came to pass that after I had finished the ship, according to the word of the Lord ... (18:4)  
Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he. (Gen. 6:22)  
Thus was all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation finished: And the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so did they. (Ex. 39:32)  
And he reared up the court round about the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the hanging of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. (Ex. 40:33)  
Thus were the heavens and the earth finished. (Gen. 2:1)

This "execution formula" ("the Lord's servant did according to what the Lord had commanded him to do") appears time and again in three general locations in the Hebrew Bible, especially as a conclusion formula: (1) the creation, (2) the building of the tabernacle, (3) the dividing of the land among the tribes of Israel (Blenkinsopp 60). But Blenkinsopp also notes that the formula appears "regularly throughout the history" ranging from the building of Noah's ark to the allotment of residences for the Levites. The completion formula we have here in Nephi's record (the finishing of the work) is more specific than the execution formula. The completion formula marks a new stage in history: for the Israelites the finished creation marks the beginning of time, the tabernacle marks the culmination of the Abrahamic covenant, and the apportioning of the land to the tribes and to the Levites marks the completion of the conquest. In Nephi's story the completion formula marks the new beginning of the people as they set out irrevocably toward the promised land (Blenkinsopp 61).

Just as God beheld his work and pronounced it good at the end of his creation, Moses, Noah, and Nephi also pronounce their work good. Except in Nephi's case,
ironically, Nephi's rebellious brothers, who believed he could not build a ship, look on the work and pronounce it good:

... my brethren beheld that it was good, and that the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine... (18:4)

According to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so the children of Israel made all the work. And Moses did look upon all the work, and behold, they had done it as the Lord had commanded, even so had they done it: and Moses blessed them. (Ex. 39:42-43)

And God saw every thing that he made, and, behold, it was very good. (Gen. 1:31)

All of the work of the building a ship or tabernacle follows the same cycle: the Lord gives the pattern and the command, the order is executed exactly, the finished result is viewed and pronounced good. Brisman suggests that the formula "as the Lord directed Moses" (Ex. 40: 16-33) and the formula "Moses finished the work" suggests the creation story when God also finished his work. The Priestly writer re-creates the creation narrative in the dull business of recording the construction of the sanctuary, infusing the idea "that the 'work' of the tabernacle is an image of the 'work' of Creation. Both nature and worship are given mythological origins, representations of when they first occurred" (106). This analysis depends on the notion of eternal return, of repetition. The Book of Mormon narrative fits the pattern as well as the narratives from the Bible do.

The final note about the creation reenactment from 1 Nephi requires explanation. Nephi later relates the pronouncement that the workmanship is "good" and "exceedingly fine" (18: 4). But it isn't just that the workmanship is good, it is also unusual:

We did work timber of curious workmanship. And the Lord did show me from time to time after what manner I should work the timbers of the ship. Now I, Nephi, did not work the timbers after the manner which was learned by men, neither did I build the ship after the manner of men. (18: 1-2)

See I have called by name Bezaleel.... And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship. (Ex. 31: 2-5)
In this microcosm of the cosmos and the creation, the workmanship of the hands of the creator must be varied, variegated. Josipovici says that the translation "to devise cunning works" could alternatively be translated "to make makings," "to encunning cunningness" when it refers to craftsmanship. He equates it with the Homeric translation "dappled," "cunningly wrought," and the Latin "artificial," "adorned," "variegated" (105). The cunning workmanship of the tabernacle, the many-colored fabric, represent the variegated nature of the creation—the animals in all the varieties. Nephi's creation also has its own curious workmanship.

But the ship as a cosmogonic work isn't the only bit of curious workmanship in the Book of Mormon. I have already mentioned that during the sea voyage Nephi resorts to the compass to still the waters of chaos. Nephi followed no human pattern in building his ship—consequently, the ship is a work of curious workmanship because it is built after a divine pattern. Likewise, also, when Lehi walks out of his tent as the group is about to begin their exodus through the wilderness, he finds "a round ball of curious workmanship" (16: 10). Explicitly, in later generations, the Nephites connect the curious workmanship with the divinity of the pattern: Alma speaks to his son Helaman saying, "concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director—or our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it. And behold, there cannot any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship. And behold, it was prepared to show unto our fathers the course which they should travel in the wilderness" (Alma 37: 38-19). The ball, circle, compass is a symbol of the cosmogony. At the beginning of the Lehite people, when the group has severed all relationship with the Jews at Jerusalem, when God creates this new people by leading them through an exodus through the wilderness, God gives them this circle/compass. When Nephi is endangered by the chaotic forces of the sea, he takes out his compass and prays to the creator. Small wonder the Liahona
is one of the symbols of kingship prized by later generations of Nephites (Thomasson 4): the plates of brass, the sword of Laban, and the "ball or director, which led our fathers through the wilderness, which was prepared by the hand of the Lord" (Mos. 1:16). Thomasson's analysis of the ball imagery points to it as a symbol of the earth, the globe. The bit of curious workmanship parallels the one fashioned after a divine pattern by Nephi.

The cosmogonic imagery in this narrative is not only essential at the creation of the new people, but it is closely connected to the exodus just preceding it. Anderson locates the main "fulcrum of Israel's faith" in the exodus rather than the creation. He suggests that the first creation is the exodus and then we should read backward to the creation: "The creation accounts at the beginning of the Bible are written from the standpoint of the meaning disclosed in the event of the Exodus. The history that is now recorded forwards must be read backwards, so to speak, through the faith of the believing community" (Creation 35). The purpose of biblical creation is the latter creation of the children of Israel, "From the Exodus, Israel looked back to the creation, confessing that the God who was active at the beginning of her history was likewise active at the beginning of the world's history" (Anderson, Creation 38). We shouldn't be surprised to see the exodus and creation symbols linked also in the Book of Mormon.

Among the cosmic connotations of the many waters and the sea voyage, Nephi is also telling us something about the journey to the promised land. "Settlement in a new, unknown, uncultivated country is equivalent to an act of Creation" (Eliade, Sacred 65). Eliade cites the Scandinavian settlers of Iceland as an example. "Their enterprise was for them only the repetition of a primordial act: the transformation of chaos into cosmos by the divine act of Creation" (Eternal 10). To settle in a new land is to repeat the cosmogony (Eliade, Sacred 65). This act of creating is exactly what the Lehi colony does. We should not be surprised then
when the settlers finish their sea voyage and begin fulfilling the creation injunction to subdue the earth:

And it came to pass that we did begin to till the earth, and we began to plant seeds; yea, we did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem. And it came to pass that they did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance. (18: 24)
The creation of the earth ends with the command that man go forth on the earth, multiply and be fruitful (Gen. 1: 28); Blenkinsopp’s parallel incident of the conquering of the promised land and the subsequent partitioning of it (Josh. 18:1, 19: 51) also ends with the same subduing (Blenkinsopp 68). Noah and his group are commanded likewise to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 8: 17). "The image of the 'seed of all living' issuing from the bowels of the arks is the primary expression of abundance and prosperity in the Deluge stories. A minor concretion of the same ideology in Gilgamesh is probably reflected in the cargo and skills of the individuals admitted into the ark" (Holloway 18). Nephi’s cosmogony ends with the going forth on the land, planting the seeds (they had carried with them from Jerusalem) in the earth as God did, and exercising dominion.

Patterns of Divinity—Patterns of Interpretation

Nephi may receive divine instructions about where to go to make his tools or a divine pattern for his ship; the literary or historical critic can claim neither. Neither the tools he or she applies to the text nor the end result can claim a divine pattern. Both the ore and the lumber wait there for us to fashion them into useable tools and ships. Each explanation of a text is itself a construction. Each of us works after the manner of men, not of God.

When we recognize the temporal nature of our tools—the tools I have used to explain the building of the ship passage are either fashionable now or were
fashionable within the past 40 years; those that are currently fashionable will be undermined and have fallen into disrepute within 40 years—we recognize that a method is only a place to begin. When we use a human tool we should determine its quality by whether or not it helps us arrive at an adequate explanation, founded on good reasons. The methodological tools we use don't deliver us into the presence of Truth.

To be sure, one ought to eschew all ethological tyranny, including that of historical criticism. The view that one cannot "really" understand a text until one has determined the "original" meaning intended by the author located at a discrete place and time—even if all such matters could be ascertained with complete accuracy—has never been valid. The rise of alternate methods is to be welcomed precisely because they relativize the absolutist claims sometimes put forward on behalf of historical criticism.... Methods are, after all, refined tools, modes of inquiry developed in order to learn something in a disciplined way. Methods are inherently complementary because a text is both an event in time (thus eliciting inquiry into genetic relationship—diachronic or historical-critical study) and an internally coherent work with a life of its own. (Keck 123)

Likewise also, an ideology is a place to begin. The place you end up in regard to the Book of Mormon depends a great deal on where you begin. Strikingly enough, or obviously enough depending on how you look at it, the three stories related by Book of Mormon revisionists about how they came to disbelieve in the book, all relate that they dismissed the book before ever having read it (Ostler's interview with Sterling McMurrin clearly indicates this circularity; Russell. "History:" Hutchinson. Word). This should tell us something about the circularity of all arguments. Not only do our arguments establish in advance what will be the preferred explanation, they also dismiss certain possibilities altogether. We always give the data meaning; evidence doesn't speak for itself. In spite of Priddis's claim that Quinn "has scrupulously followed sources wherever they have led, letting history speak for itself" (Priddis, "Letter" 4), or Persuitte's claim that,
"In writing this book, I have chosen to make full use of the documentation and let the evidence speak for itself. If I did otherwise, I would be merely repeating the mistakes that earlier writers on Mormonism have frequently made" (Persuitte 3), such claims are evidence of the delusion under which the historian writes until he or she recognizes that along with the ideologies and methods that are used, the explanatory results are limited and temporal. The problem of self-congratulation aside (Kenneth Godfrey's review of Persuitte's book only begins to show how inadequate Persuitte's attempt is), these claims are dangerous because they conceal the ideologies that make an interpretation possible. The explanations of the Book of Mormon are quite simply as much a product of the historian or literary critic's assumptions and ideologies as they are of any historical data. The historian who doesn't recognize this is forever scrutinizing the hotel room, convinced that the search has uncovered every possible fragment of evidence; but the purloined letter continues to sit on the writing-table, invisible because it is too obvious. Our theories, ideologies, and assumptions are too frequently at hand, too obvious for us to notice them.

Because the revisionist critics I have questioned in this study assume that the Book of Mormon is a shallow novel, their interpretations end up demonstrating a superficial book. This shallowness is as much a result of the superficiality of their own approach as it is of anything in book itself. Such criticism is Poe's Prefect of Police who can't step back far enough to see that the assumptions guiding the search for evidence are inadequate to the case. The hermeneutical assumptions need to be flexible enough to examine the text and allow the assumptions to be modified if the text requires; otherwise, they are Procrustean torture beds: "The measures, then,... were good in their kind, and well executed; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case and to the man. A certain set of highly ingenious resources are, with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed,
to which he forcibly adapts his designs. But he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow for the matter at hand" (Poe 215). An interpretation always contains an ideology because it claims that such-and-such is the way to interpret the past. The reader must accept some interpretive scheme in understanding the past and he or she who determines that scheme determines in large part how the present is to be understood. The virulent criticism by New Mormon Historians such as Alexander, Priddis, and Hill is as much about the present as it is about the past. The New Mormon Historian asks the reader to believe him or her about matters of disputed interpretation rather than, say, the Church Historian. This ideological struggle about the past requires that the reader be as critically aware about the New Mormon Historians' writings as they are about the Church News. All sides in the argument have ideologies and interests to protect. I believe that a position that honestly presents the ideology rather than trying to cover it by appealing to brute facts is the more acceptable approach.

My analysis of the Book of Mormon falls under the same criticism. My interpretation is guided by assumptions about what the text is, ideologies about what history is and who should be allowed to interpret it, judgments about what methods best illuminate the text.

What I propose is that we accept a positive pluralism in method and ideology. All of us necessarily use a method and an ideology when we read texts. We ought to recognize that every method and ideology is inadequate to the matter at hand; each reading covers as it reveals. The test of a reading is not whether it reveals the True Meaning or whether it Proves such-and-such a position; the test of a reading is how adequate it is in explaining the text.

We would then no longer go around telling others that they can't build a ship with particular tools, that they can't use tools different from our own. Each of the methods I used in reading the boat narrative reveals partially; it takes those
sections of the text it can more adequately explain. The same method ignores other parts of the text. But the method is not the only factor at work in determining an interpretation. You will notice that underlying all the different methods I use, the readings contain a certain uniformity. Even when I do a formalist reading, certain characteristics of that reading are similar to the archetypal reading. Like others, even I would have difficulty explaining the difference between the typological and archetypal approaches; I suspect Northrop Frye would also.

Other problems with my application of various methods to the Book of Mormon text would immediately become apparent to those acquainted with the theory of each approach. For example, a committed structuralist would say that what passes for a structuralist analysis is at best a half-hearted, and probably less than a quarter-hearted, attempt at a vulgarized structuralist criticism combined with a canonical approach: especially because structuralist approaches to the Bible and secular literature are so fully developed. Such criticisms would be valid. My point in using different approaches is merely to show how each one reveals only a small part of the text it examines. I would apologize to the structuralist and ask for indulgence only because our ideological purposes are similar, to bring the reader to an awareness of the fact that assumptions determine in large part how a reader will treat a text:

One of the great functions of structuralist analysis is to deprive us our innocence as readers: to make us see that the range of an author's possible meanings and of a reader's possible understandings is not infinite nor even very large, but limited by very strict constraints.

Structuralism does not itself answer the question what a text means, or how it should be read. But it can keep alive in our minds an understanding of what it is to ask questions like these, and of the need to specify what sorts of answers we are looking for. (Barton 136)
Given the understanding that a reader will find what he or she wants to find in the Book of Mormon and that the reader ought to be aware and wary of this tendency, I would accept such criticisms of my "structuralist" reading. Because we approach texts already knowing what they mean to us, we search for evidence to support those presuppositions and ideologies.

Not only is a method at work in my reading, an ideology is also. That ideology assumes that texts such as the Book of Mormon and Bible are meant to be read typologically. It assumes that interpretation of texts shouldn't be the exclusive province of experts, such as historians. It assumes that God can operate in the world and has in certain specific ways. I believe that a sophisticated text, such as the Book of Mormon, manifests itself in many different ways: a profitable reading can come from a literary or biblical critic as well as from a historian. Because a consistent ideology is at work behind all my readings, a consistent interpretation emerges. Perhaps if I were more committed to a single method, that particular approach would predominate in my work. Part of my ideology is that methods are fragmentary; I am a methodological pluralist.

I am not claiming that methods and ideologies are arbitrary. The choice of tools isn't arbitrary. But then it isn't necessary either. I have tools that I like, that I use often. I am familiar with them and I tend to talk with other shipbuilders who use tools similar to mine, to shipbuilders who build ships after blueprints similar to mine. But I also want to insist that methodologies and ideologies are not absolute. Just because I like a particular tool doesn't mean everyone must.
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A Hermeneutic of Sacred Texts: Historicism, Revisionism, Positivism, and the Bible and Book of Mormon

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Abstract

As methods by which texts are to be understood, positivism and historicism have a long tradition and continue to exert wide influence in all academic disciplines. Other approaches to textual concerns have recently emerged to challenge the dominance of these two approaches. Foremost among these new approaches are hermeneutics and deconstruction. Both of the latter approaches recognize that interpretation is inescapable. The latter challenges even the possibility of determinate meaning. A theoretical discussion of historicism and positivism uncovers questionable and troublesome difficulties. Hermeneutics in its conservative or radical variations overcomes the difficulties of interpretation that positivism and historicism can't explain. As an example of the problems of positivism and historicism, several narratives from the Book of Mormon illustrate how readings by revisionist Mormon readers—those who believe it is a modern work of fiction rather than an authentic ancient document—find exactly the evidence sought, largely without consulting the text they attempt to explain. Using biblical criticism with the assumption that it will illuminate the Book of Mormon text, especially of the literary rather than the historical variety, the narratives are complex and sophisticated works. Four narratives (the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites, the broken bow, the Nahom incident, and the building of the ship narrative) illustrate the texture of the Book of Mormon as a set of complicated narratives that draw strongly from biblical archetypes of the exodus and patriarchal narratives.

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